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Employment of Youth with Disabilities-Needs Assessment Study

REPORT

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Authors and Contributors

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Foreword

The Needs Assessment Study on Employability of Youth with Disabilities was conducted as part of the EU's Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility Program with the aim to expose the present-day situation in the labor market in terms of employment of youth with disabilities, as well as to identify the challenges, needs and opportunities in this regard.

This report presents the research findings – on the one hand, identifying the youth labor market needs, and, on the other hand, the employers' attitudes and perceptions with regard to employment of persons with disabilities. The report formulates recommendations developed on the basis of views and opinions of youth with disabilities and employers.

Introduction

Realization of the labor rights of persons with disabilities is a major challenge facing the present-day world and Georgia is no exception. Infrastructural barriers and stereotypical attitudes, stigma that persons with disabilities face on a daily basis, lead to their exclusion from active lifestyle. In such realm, challenging issue is that State doesn't collect needs based statistics on the persons with disabilities and thus, is unable to address their needs based on evidence. Only the state social package recipient persons with disabilities are visible for the system of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Person from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (115,065¹ people in 2021), however, this 'visibility' narrows down to gender, age, geographical area (UN Women 2021:15)² and other needs-based data are not collected. Besides, there is no precise statistics on unemployment rates for persons with disabilities. Information is fragmentary. The only data available is the number of jobseekers registered with the state employment portal (a total of 12,292 persons with disabilities as of 2021)³, though this data does not show a complete picture.

The number of persons with disabilities employed in the public sector is suggestive of their low employment rate. According to the data as of 2021, civil servants with disabilities make just 0.6% of the total number of the employed (excluding MoI, and 0.3% - including MoI).⁴ Furthermore, according to the data for the past three years, the employment rate growth tendency among persons with disabilities was observed only in the local self-government bodies, as for the rest of the institutions, the number of employed persons with disabilities has either dropped or slightly increasing (Autonomous Republics of Adjara and Abkhazia +5; Courts +1). Besides, over the past 5 years, there has not been any significant increase observed in employment of persons with disabilities through state employment support programs (103 persons employed in 2017 and 115 in 2021).⁵

Scarcity of the statistical data and needs assessment studies on persons with disabilities further complicates the process of evidence-based policy making and effective realization of the rights of persons with disabilities. This report introduces the needs, challenges and recommendations of youth with disabilities, presented by them in the course of the research. In addition, the document provides analysis of the employers' perceptions, readiness and motivation to cooperate with persons with disabilities.

¹ Above 18

² Mapping Gender and Disability Data in Georgia: Recommended Indicators and Actions, UN Women, 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3H72ORN>

³ Public Defender's Office, 2022, Right to Work and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, available at <https://bit.ly/3ZUj6e3>

⁴ Consolidated data on professional civil servants with disabilities and contract employees with disabilities. <http://csb.gov.ge/media/3308/statistics-in-civil-service-2021.pdf>

⁵ Public Defender's Office, Right to Work and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 2022:28 available at <https://bit.ly/3ZUj6e3>

Research Methodology

Research goal

The purpose of the needs assessment study of employability of persons with disabilities was to explore the labor market condition of persons with disabilities. Particularly, to examine to what extent youth skills match the labor market requirements; To identify what are the needs/challenges facing the youth, on the one hand, and employers, on the other hand.

To achieve the abovementioned goal, following questions were outlined:

- How do the available skills of persons with disabilities match the labor market requirements?
- What are the barriers that youth with disabilities face in the job search process?
- What are the barriers that youth with disability face in the employment process?
- What experiences do youngsters have regarding the employment support programs and to what extent do they apply to such services for assistance?
- What is the extent of employers' readiness to hire persons with disabilities in the labor market?
- How motivated the employers are to hire persons with disabilities in the labor market?
- What knowledge and experience do the employers have about the state employment support program?

Research objectives

The following objectives were defined for achieving the research goal:

- to study and identify the barriers and difficulties facing youth with disabilities in the job search and employment process;
- to study and identify the needs of youth with disabilities for realization of their right to work and employment;
- to identify employers' readiness and attitude towards recruitment of persons with disabilities as a labor force;
- to identify youth and employers' knowledge and recommendations on engagement in the state employment support program and facilitation of employment of youth with disabilities.

Research design

A mixed-model design (quantitative and qualitative) was selected for the research. 306 employers were interviewed through quantitative technique in Tbilisi and three regions of Georgia – Adjara, Imereti and Kakheti. A quantitative survey questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was defined as an assessment tool. Both, the employers of persons with disabilities, as well as the respondents with no experience of cooperation with persons with disabilities, were interviewed. The duration of interview was

25-30 minutes. Three focus group sessions with employers (17 employers with no experience of cooperation with persons with disabilities, 6 employers who recruited persons with disabilities) were conducted as part of the qualitative research. In addition, 12 young people with disabilities and 6 field experts from governmental and non-governmental units supporting the employment of persons with disabilities, were surveyed through a semi-structured interview technique. Interview duration ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Research limitations

The scope of youth respondents' representation in the research was limited in terms of diversity of the types of impairment. For example, the research featured predominantly respondents with physical impairments. As for the sensory impairments, only the persons with visual impairment were represented in the research. Therefore, the research findings are based not on individual needs, but rather on the common challenges facing persons with disabilities, in general. In addition to those data, it is necessary to take into account the importance of individual needs.

The research does not claim for data representation at the regional level. In the regions, the employers were surveyed for the purpose of recording the differences in the research objective trends.

Research participants

Employers' profile

A total of 306 employers in Tbilisi and three regions of Georgia – Adjara, Imereti and Kakheti, participated in a quantitative survey conducted through a face-to-face interview technique. Representatives of the organizations with high level of awareness of /decision-makers on company's employment issues were selected as survey respondents. The geographical distribution of the respondents was as follows: Tbilisi - 206, Adjara - 30, Imereti - 40, Kakheti - 30 organization representatives.

Location	Number
Tbilisi	206
Adjara (Batumi)	30
Imereti (Kutaisi)	40
Kakheti (Telavi)	30

Table #1 Quantitative distribution of respondents in geographical terms

Organizations were selected based on the 2018 data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia. The selection criteria were as follows:

- ✓ Organization size (based on the number of employees);
- ✓ Organization’s legal form (private, public, non-governmental/international);
- ✓ Organization’s economic status (based on the organization’s activity);

The size of the organizations selected as part of the survey was distributed approximately in the following proportion: small - 50%, medium - 30% and large - 20%. The table below shows the percentage distribution of the respondent organizations by the number of their employees.

Number of employees	Organizations’ Percentage Share
Up to 5	18%
6-10 persons	35%
11-30 persons	16%
31-50 persons	12%
51-100 persons	11%
100 and more	8%

Table #2 Percentage distribution of organizations by the number of people employed

The majority of organizations participating in the survey were the joint stock companies and limited liability companies.

Organizations’ Legal Form	Organizations’ Percentage Share
Non-governmental organization (NNLE)	2%
Individual entrepreneur (I/E)	2%
Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL)	9%
Limited Liability Company (LLC)	38%
Joint Stock Company (JSC)	49%

Table #3 Percentage distribution of organizations by legal form

Youth profile

Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 12 persons with disabilities were conducted in Tbilisi and Adjara region. The respondents were selected through a Snowball sampling technique – survey participant youth were selected based on the recommendation of the representatives of NGOs working in the field, as well

as the respondents themselves. Both, the employees and jobseekers were interviewed as part of the survey.

	Location	Sex	Age	Disability Type	Social Status	Education
1	Tbilisi	Female	31	Physical	Jobseeker	Higher
2	Tbilisi	Male	40	Physical	Employed	Basic general
3	Tbilisi	Male	24	Physical	Jobseeker	Student
4	Adjara	Female	22	Physical	Intern (as part of the project)	Basic general
5	Adjara	Male	25	Physical	Employed	Higher
6	Tbilisi	Female	24	Physical	Employed (with NGO assistance)	Vocational
7	Adjara	Female	29	Physical	Jobseeker	Complete general
8	Adjara	Female	42	Physical	Self-employed (grant as part of the project)	Complete general
9	Tbilisi	Male	24	Sensory	jobseeker	Student
10	Rustavi	Male	24	Sensory	Jobseeker	Higher
11	Tbilisi	Male	25	Sensory	Jobseeker	Student
12	Adjara	Female	23	Neurological	Employed (as part of the project)	Complete general

Table #4 Demographic data of survey participants

The majority of survey participants had different types of physical impairment. Youth with neurological and sensory impairments were also interviewed. At the time of conducting the survey, there were 4 employed respondents, 1 self-employed respondent, 1 intern and 6 jobseekers. The respondents were interviewed remotely, through various platforms that survey participants found convenient.

Key findings

Youth

Low quality and availability of education	<p>Low quality of delivery of general education and accessibility problems were identified among youth who could not attend school and were homeschooled with a special education teacher's assistance.</p> <p>Low quality of teaching foreign language was named by youth as a problem existing at the education stage, both at the general and higher education levels. They wished they could learn this subject better.</p>
Lack of flexible jobs	<p>In the job search process, the young people often face a lack of flexible jobs, a deficiency of both, remote and part-time jobs.</p>
Stigma and stereotypes in the job search process	<p>The research revealed that youth often face stereotypical attitudes in the job search process. Their skills and performance capacity are assessed by potential employers based on their medical condition, rather than based on their knowledge.</p>
Low level of awareness of the existing services	<p>Youth awareness of the available employment support services was rather low. The majority of respondents were absolutely unaware of the existence of such services.</p>
Low level of awareness of professional orientation and career development	<p>Experts engaged in the employment support services emphasized jobseekers' misconceptions about personal skills and labor market requirements, which is basically manifested in two forms: <i>i</i> low motivation and self-esteem; <i>ii</i> lack of relevant skills, and, despite this, willingness to be employed in a specific professional area.</p>

Low awareness of and stereotypical prejudice towards persons with disabilities

The quantitative research revealed a lack of comprehensive information about the condition of persons with disabilities among employers. Those who have experience cooperating with persons with disabilities are unaware and/or find it hard to answer the question as to the status of a person with disability who is /was employed by them. It also revealed that most of them are unaware of the reasons an employee with disability left the job/quitted cooperation.

Research also exposed employers' prejudice towards persons with disabilities. There is a focus on medical condition, rather than on knowledge and skills, and also, there are doubts about performance capacity of a person with disability in certain areas (e.g. finances, communication with people, relationship with patients).

Low awareness and interest in the issue of employment of persons with disabilities

The employers did not show high interest and motivation to employ persons with disabilities. It was revealed that in most cases they had not even reflected on this issue. The employers expect the government to take responsibility and ensure employment and/or improvement of job opportunities of persons with disabilities.

Low awareness of the available state-run services

The employers have little information on the state supported employment services, as well as on possible benefits to be obtained in case of employment of persons with disabilities. Only few of them benefited from this program in the past, while the majority have never heard about it. Focus group discussions revealed that employers show more interest in infrastructure adaptation rather than in a wage subsidy component.

Infrastructural barriers as an obstructive factor

The survey revealed that the majority of employers refer to infrastructural barriers as being the major challenge for employment of person with disabilities. They expressed wish that the state could ensure adaptation of employers' work environment. In addition, the employers themselves show intention to invest funds in adaptation, ranging within GEL500-1000 budget.

Findings

Employer's requirements, knowledge and attitudes with regard to employment of persons with disabilities

Employer's requirements and labor market specifics

The majority of survey participant organizations (51.8%) operate in Tbilisi, 31.5% - countrywide, while 12% - locally. The fields of their activity are as follows: education - 16.1%, production - 13.1%, food facilities - 11.5%, economic activity - 10.8%, agriculture - 8.9%, healthcare - 8.5%, trade - 8.2%, construction - 7.5%, tourism - 6.2%, transport -4.6%.



Figure #1. Percentage distribution of organizations by field of activity

Profile data on workforce employed in organizations was collected with the aim to identify the labor market requirements and further determine potential vacancy areas. Most of the organizations (24.8%) noted they do not have professionals in a single, specific field, saying they employ them sporadically, and in some instances, employees are trained on the ground. It was revealed that the majority (20.2%) of those organizations that have singled out important professions for their activity, employ people on the position of worker/specialist. Teachers are employed by 16.1% of organizations, economists - by 10.8%, doctors – by 10.2%, consultants - 6.9%, operators, drivers and lawyers – by 1%.

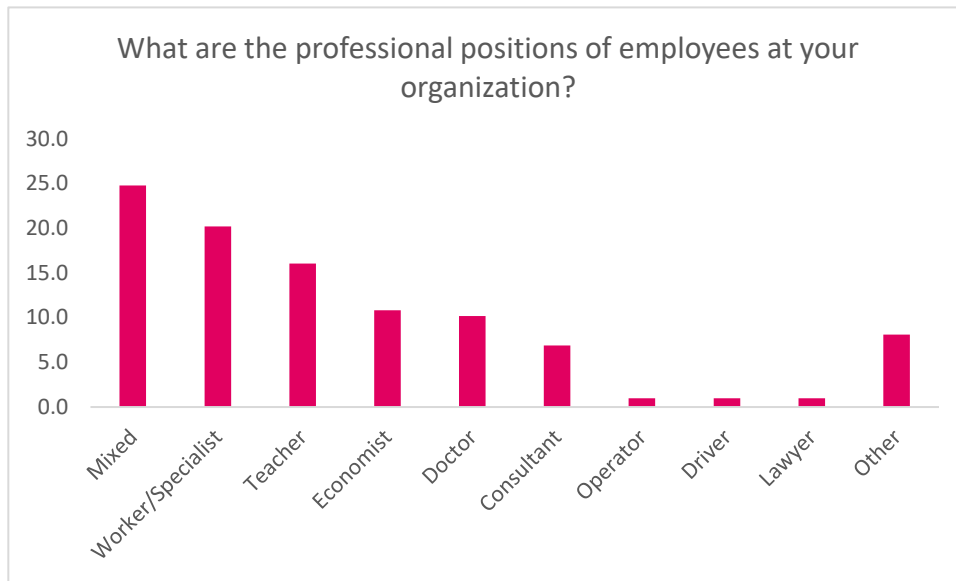


Figure #2. Percentage distribution of organizations by employee area of expertise

For the research purposes, it was interesting to study employers' requirements in the personnel recruitment process, as well as the selection criteria applied. In addition to the general work experience, which was most often referred to by employers (105%), practical skills (65%) and knowledge of foreign language (44%) were also named among the advantages. Also, the focus was on knowledge of specific computer programs (24%) and office programs/computer skills (15%). As can be seen, along with experience, employers prefer those skills and knowledge that are used in practical activities. It is interesting that personal skills remain out of the spotlight. In addition, the focus was also made on the knowledge of specific software (24%) and Microsoft Office/Computer literacy skills (15%). As it could be seen from the research, along with experience, the employers also prioritize the skills and knowledge that could be applied in practical activity.



Figure #3. Personnel selection criteria

It was revealed that 52% of organizations recruited one or more employees over the past 5 years, while 24% of companies are expected to announce job vacancies in future.

Professional qualification of the employees recruited by the organizations over the past year varied, with lawyers (18.5%) and financiers (11.1%) being on top of the list. It was found that employers had problem recruiting specialists only on few occasions and it was mostly due to a lack of relevant qualification/knowledge (fully or partially) and a lack of personnel in the labor market (partially). Reaching agreement on terms and conditions of employment contract was also mentioned as being problematic in some instances.

What is the qualification of employees recruited by your organization?		Was it difficult or not?		If personnel recruitment was difficult what was the main reason for that?		
		It was difficult	It was not difficult	Scarcity/lack of applicants in the labor market	Applicants lacked relevant knowledge/qualification	Employment contract terms and conditions
Reporter	3.7%	25%	75%		50%	50%
Sales specialist	3.7%	15.4%	84.6%	50%	50%	
Teacher	7.4%	18.2%	81.8%		100%	
Advertisement service	3.7%		100%			
Technologist	7.4%		100%			
Technical personnel	3.7%		100%			
Sales manager	3.7%	55.6%	44.4%	20%	40%	40%
Librarian	3.7%	42.9%	57.1%		100%	
Lawyer	18.5%		100%			
Legal expert	3.7%		100%			
Office manager	3.7%	33.3%	66.7%			100%
Cash desk operator	7.4%	25%	75%	50%	50%	
Loan expert	7.4%		100%			
Sales consultant	3.7%		100%			
Security engineer	3.7%	50%	50%	50%	50%	
Agronomist	7.4%	33.3%	66.7%		100%	
Vet	3.7%	55.6%	44.4%	50%	50%	
Financier	11.1%	55.6%	44.4%		100%	
Foreign languages	3.7%	100%				100%
Specialist	3.7%	20%	80%		33.3%	66.7%
Administration specialist	3.7%		100%			

Inspection specialist	3.7%	100%			100%	
Public law	3.7%		100%			
Vocational education worker	3.7%	55.6%	44.4%	50%	50%	
Driver	3.7%		100%			
Guide	3.7%	50%	50%	50%	50%	
Call operator	3.7%	20%	80%		100%	
Architect	5.4%	50%	50%		100%	
Psychology	7.8%	42.9%	57.1%	50%	50%	
Gardener	3.7%	20%	80%		100%	
Other	6.4%					

Table #5 Qualification of hired personnel and their recruitment process

Organizations that during the research had announced and/or were expected to announce job vacancies in future found relevant personnel with the following qualification: law (22.2%), finances, banking and insurance (21.7%), lawyers (20.9%), foreign language specialist (20.0%). In addition, there was a demand for marketing and advertising specialist (18.3%), IT specialist (16.5%); management and administration professionals (15.7%), workers/specialists (different crafts) (15.7%).



Figure #4. Preferred fields of expertise for available and future job vacancies

Employers search new employees through various communication channels. Most of them request their colleagues working in the field to provide information about personnel (36.1%), use employment platforms (jobs.ge; hr.ge) (32.4%) and informal ties (23.7%).

Employment patterns for persons with disabilities

It was revealed that by the time of conducting the survey, persons with disabilities were employed by 29 out of the total 306 organizations surveyed, while 26 employers have had employees with disabilities in the past. A total of 39 persons with disabilities were employed by the time of conducting the survey. The majority of employers (89.7%) had one person with disability employed and only 3 companies reported having 3 and more (4 and 6) employees with disabilities.

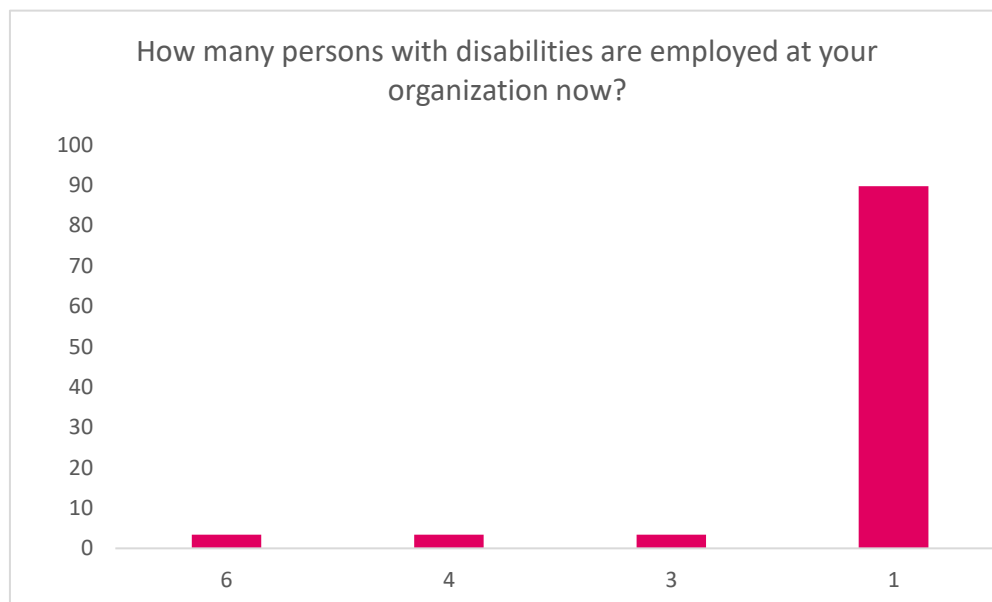


Figure #5. Percentage distribution of organizations in terms of employment of persons with disabilities

In terms of employer activity areas, the majority of persons with disabilities were employed in such areas as: economics, banking, finance (21.2%) and manufacturing (20%). Construction (13%), education (10.2%), transport (7.1%) and hospitality industry are also distinguished in this regard. It is noteworthy that manufacturing and construction are the areas distinguished not only by today's relatively high rate of employment of persons with disabilities, but also by its past experience in this regard. The highest employment rate for persons with disabilities in the past was reported in the trade sphere (28%). Figure #7 given below shows organizations' experience in terms of employment of persons with disabilities by fields of activity.

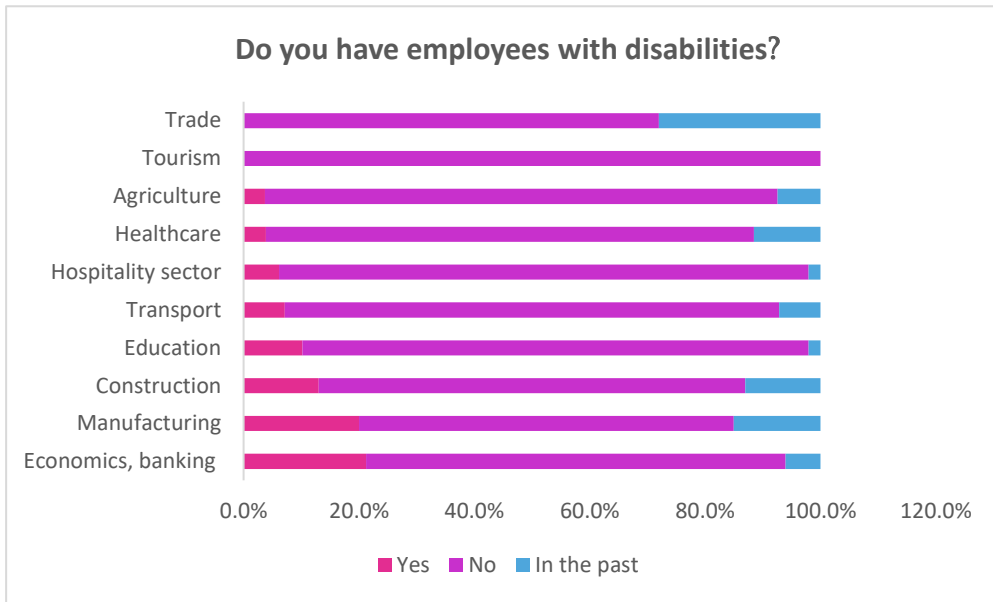


Figure #6. Organizations' experience of employment of persons with disabilities by fields of activity

As for the employment profile of persons with disabilities, the data are rather diverse. The majority of persons with disabilities are employed on the position of worker/specialist (40%), followed by consultant (18.2%) and economist (16.4%).

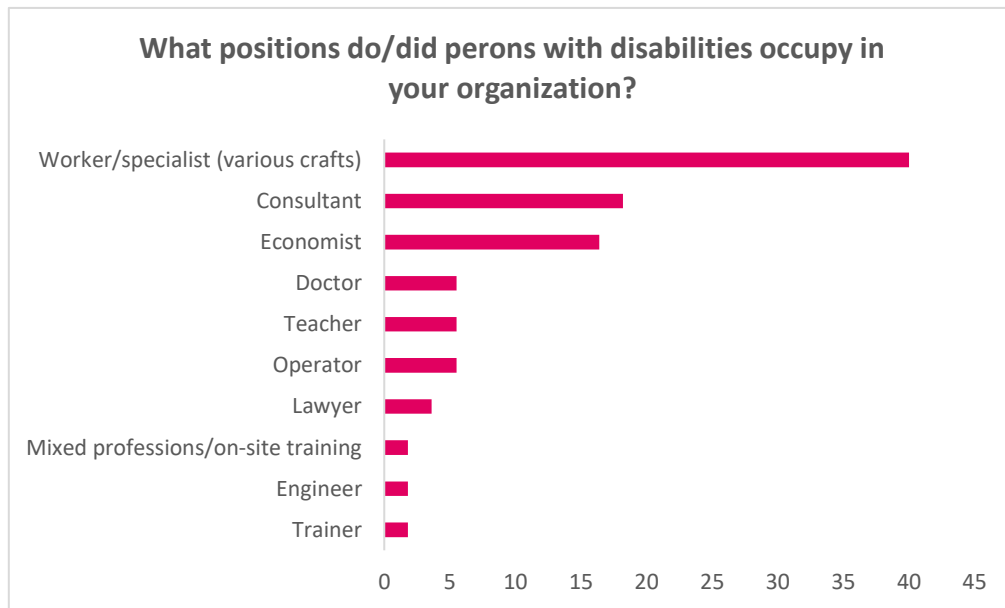


Figure #7. Positions occupied by employees with disabilities in the organization

The research revealed that employers had scarce information about the needs of persons with disability employed by them and there was also a low level of awareness of the existing types of impairment. For example, respondents found it hard to identify their type of impairment, they had a general idea about

the health condition of persons with disabilities and they basically did not know, whether the persons employed by them had a status of person with disabilities or not.

For a full-fledged implementation of the labor rights of persons with disabilities it is important to know their needs. Raising awareness, especially for adapting the workplace according to the principle of "reasonable accommodation", is particularly important in this regard. When asked about the type of impairment of the persons with disabilities employed with their organization, most of the respondents focused on physical impairments. and their answer was: "Of course, physical". 24% of respondents noted they have or previously had employees with speech impairments, 7% mentioned intellectual/cognitive impairments, while 3% said, they had employed persons with behavioral and emotional disorders.

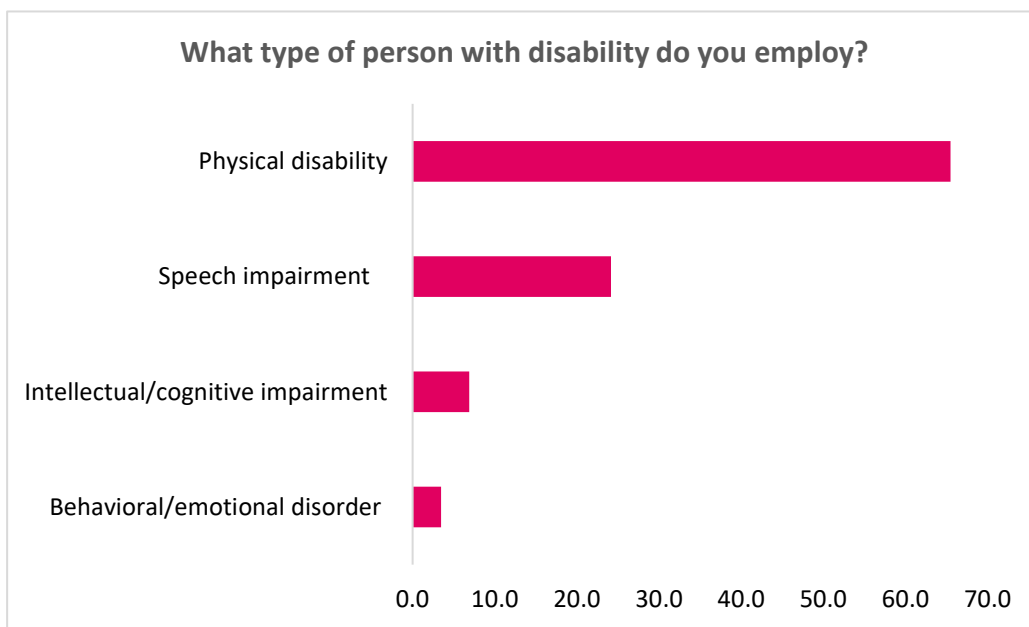


Figure #8. Positions of persons with disabilities in the organization

As mentioned above, the majority of persons with disabilities employed by the respondents have physical impairments. The overall picture of employment by spheres shows that manufacturing proved to be the only sphere featuring a variety of types of persons with disabilities. According to the respondents, the majority of those employed in the sphere of economics, banking, and finance, had speech impairments, while the other part experienced mobility limitations. These two areas were also mentioned with respect to persons with disabilities employed in the education sphere, though this time, persons with physical disabilities outnumbered those with speech impairments. Speech impairments were revealed among the trade sphere employees, while persons with intellectual/cognitive impairments were reported to be employed in the transport sphere in the past.

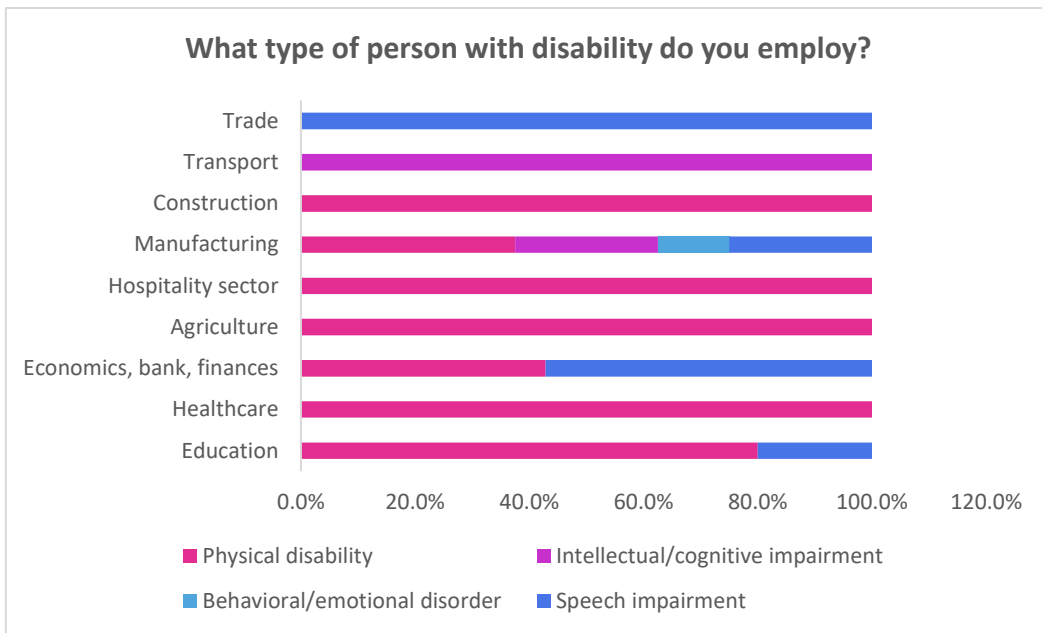


Figure #9. Types of employee disability in terms of employers' activity area

Employer's perceptions and attitudes towards employment of persons with disabilities

For the research purposes, we got interested in the recruitment process of persons with disabilities and therefore collected relevant information from the employers. Most of them noted that persons with disabilities applied for a vacancy and were recruited based on relevant skills and knowledge. According to 29% of respondents, persons with disability themselves were very active, expressing intention to take a job and, against the background of relevant skills, the employers, on their part, decided to cooperate with them. Only 4 out of the total number of respondent organizations turned out to be engaged in the state-run employment support program for persons with disabilities.

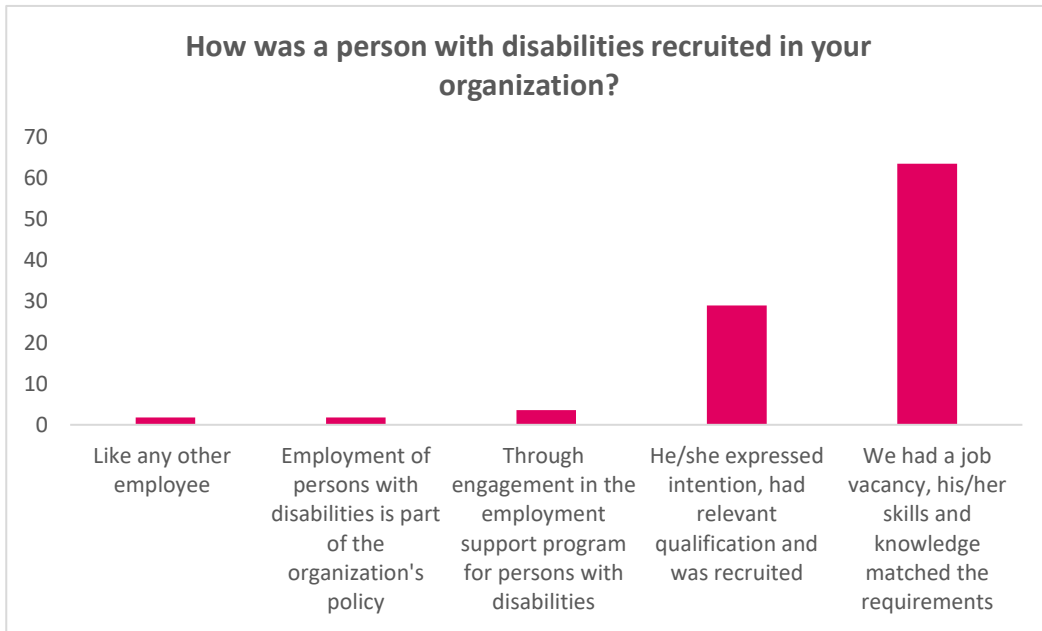


Figure #10. The process of recruitment of persons with disabilities

Representatives of the organizations with no experience employing persons with disabilities point to a lack of interest on the part of persons with disabilities themselves (87%). Alike the majority, 7% of respondents emphasize the initiative of persons with disabilities as an important factor, though adding that they are ready to employ persons with disabilities in case the latter possess relevant qualification. 6% of responds say they are willing to employ persons with disabilities, but they don't know how to facilitate them.

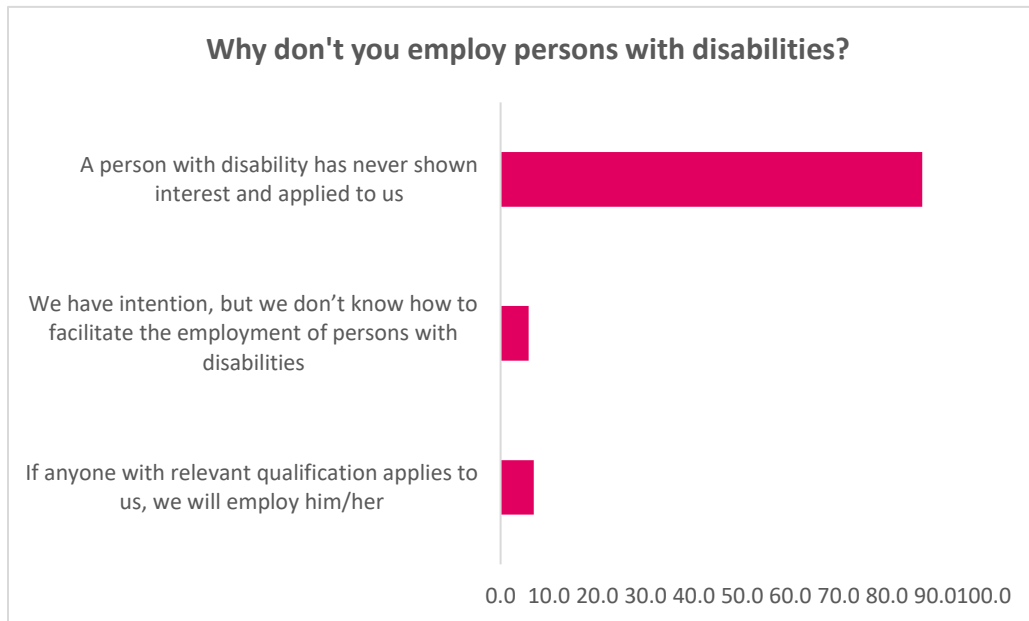


Figure #11. Reasons for not having employees with disabilities

The majority of employers who had employees with disabilities in the past, but no longer have them now, find it difficult to say what was the reasons behind termination of cooperation with them. More than half of the respondents don't know the reason, why persons with disabilities are no longer employed with their organization. The research revealed a tendency among employers that they are less interested in the condition of employees with disabilities, and their outflow from their workplaces does not deserve much attention. Part of the employers noted that employees with disability quitted their job in their organizations due to transfer to another job (19%), while another part pointed out that the terms and conditions of employment contract offered by them proved to be unsatisfactory (11%). Quitting job for family reasons was named by 8%, inappropriate conditions (8%) and performance problems due to non-adapted workplace environment (2%) were also cited among the reasons persons with disabilities quitted their job.

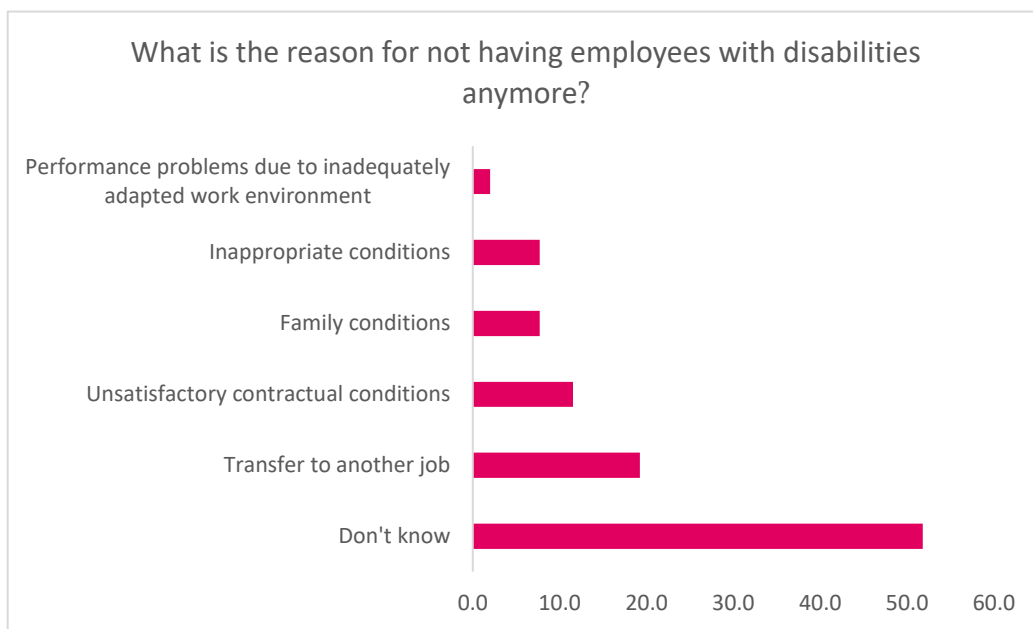


Figure #12. Reason for termination of cooperation with person with disability

The research objective was to identify the extent of employers' motivation and readiness for cooperation with persons with disabilities, as well as the cases when they would consider employment of persons with disabilities. More than half of the surveyed respondents (51%) noted that their organizations do not have job vacancies at this stage, though there are cases when employment of persons with disability is absolutely admissible. The number of respondents who did not/could not answer the question was rather high (35%). At the time of conducting the survey, 6% of respondents were planning to announce job vacancy and considered the possibility of employing persons with disabilities. 4% of the respondents considered it acceptable to employ persons with disabilities in case the latter possessed relevant qualification. 4% of the organizations said they were not interested in hiring persons with disabilities, referring to the specifics of their activity.

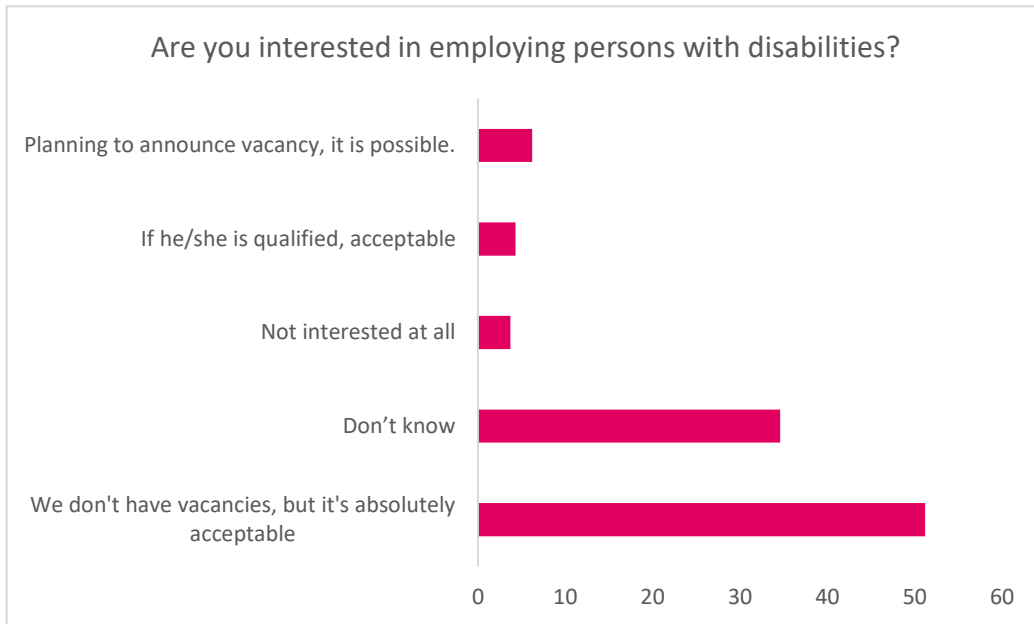


Figure #13. Employer's readiness for employment of persons with disabilities

As it was revealed in the research process, readiness for employment of persons with disabilities was rather low. Although the employers focused on the admissibility of employment of persons with disabilities, but they didn't show any motivation and the number of respondents who refrained to answer the question was rather big, which probably indicates low level of motivation.

It was interesting to identify what the employers considered to be an additional motivation for the employment of persons with disabilities. 78% of respondents noted that environment adjustment on part of the government would serve as a motivation for them to employ persons with disabilities. Raising awareness about the employment of persons with disabilities and promotion of this issue turned out to be the second most frequent answer (12%). The respondents also mentioned state subsidies (7%) and creation of vocational schools (2%).

As it turned out, the employers mostly consider the state and its incentives and support tools to be a motivating factor. On the other hand, activation of persons with disabilities themselves, as well as promotion of their issue, was also named. None of the respondents referred to employer's role in realization of the labor rights of persons with disabilities.

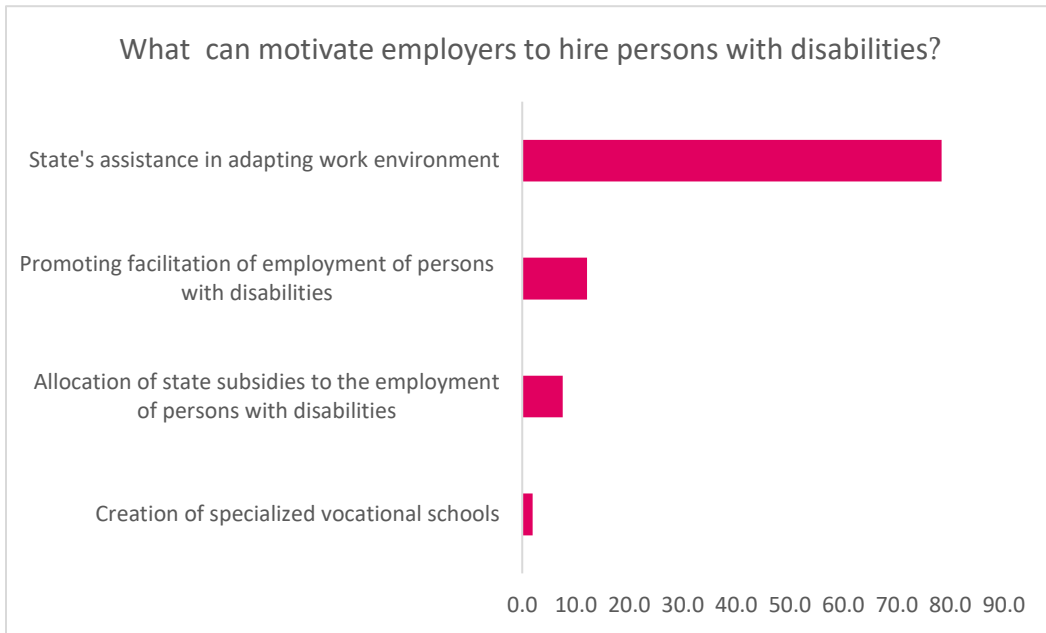


Figure #14. Employer motivation regarding the employment of persons with disabilities

To better study employer expectations towards the state, information was collected on the benefits encouraging the respondents themselves to employ persons with disabilities. The majority of those interviewed (83%) expressed willingness to employ persons with disabilities provided that the state would facilitate the adjustment of environment. Promotion of realization of the labor rights of persons with disabilities (5%) and activeness of persons with disabilities themselves (7%) is still an important precondition for their employment to some of the respondents. 5% of respondents noted the importance of subsidies.

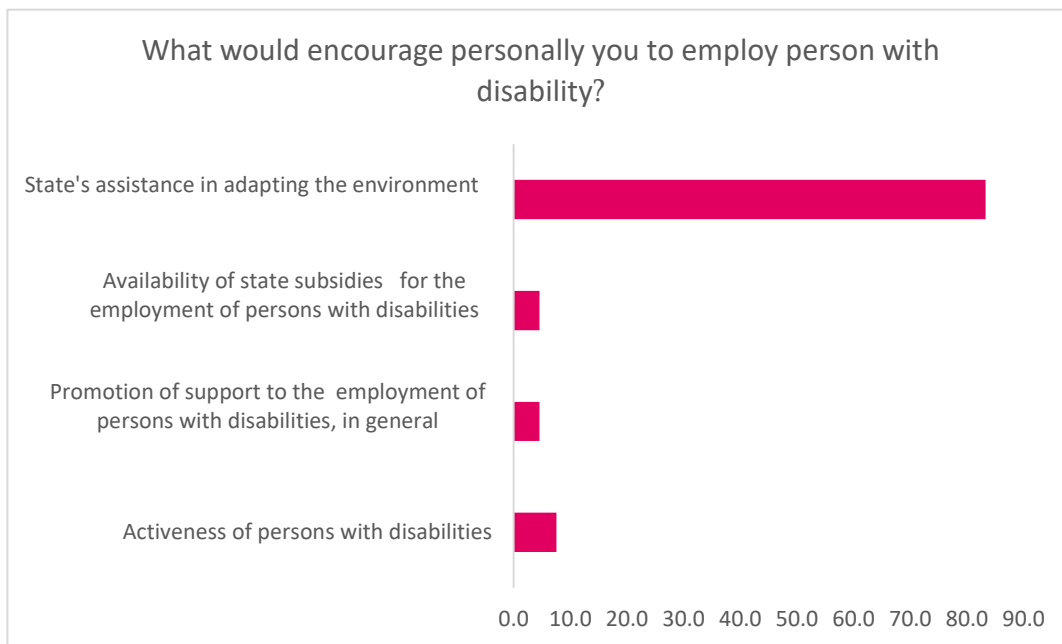


Figure #15. Employer motivation for employment of persons with disabilities, the government's role

The research shows that adaptation (adjustment) of workplace environment is a precondition for employment of persons with disabilities by employer. Workplace environment adapted to human needs is indeed important for the realization of their labor rights. When collecting data on adaptation of the survey participant employers' working environment, it was revealed that most of the employers (67%) do not offer adapted workplace environment. 28% of the respondents noted that their workplace environment was adapted and 5% said, their workplace environment was only partially adapted.

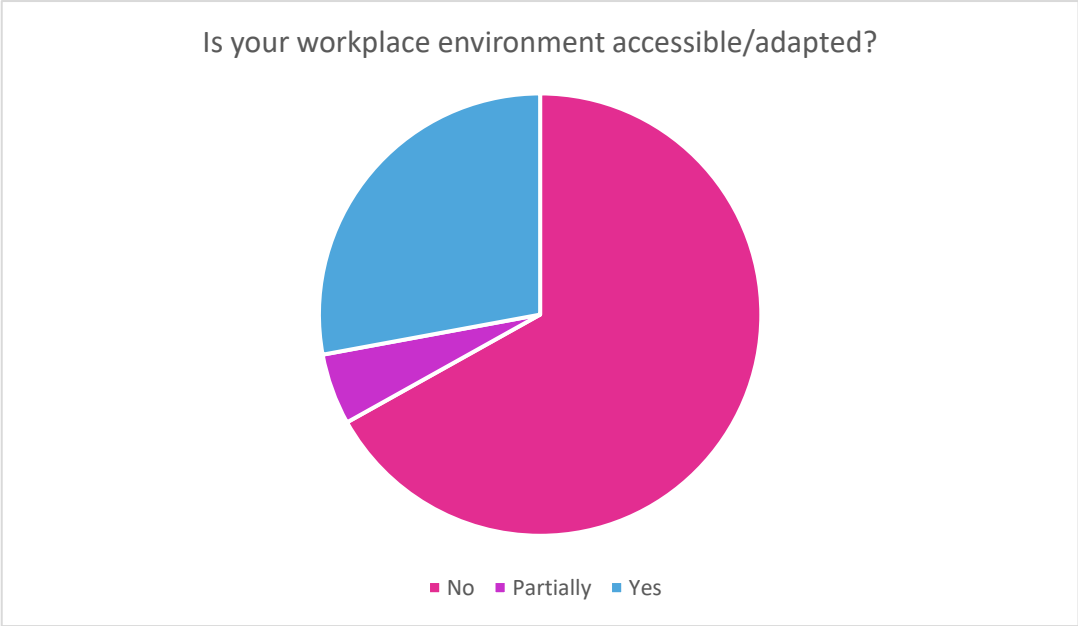


Figure #16. Percentage distribution of employers with adapted workplace environment

The absolute majority of employers (99%) reported having a workplace environment adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.

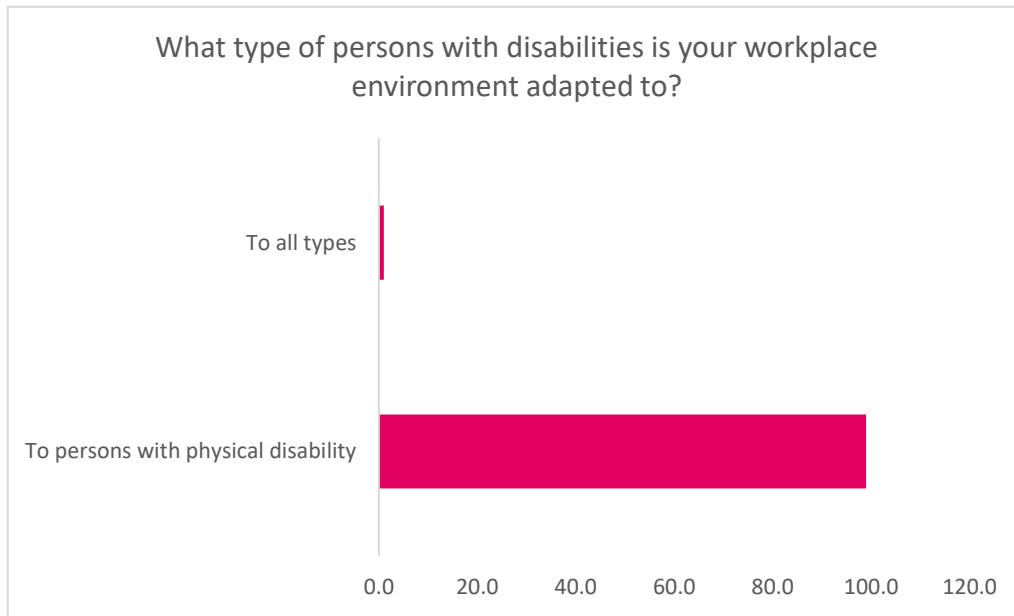


Figure #17. Appropriateness of employers' adapted workplace environments according to the types of disability

All the respondents who reported having an adapted workplace environment noted, that they have wheelchair ramps. However, the situation is different, when it comes to other means necessary for adapting workplace environment, i.e. elevators, wheelchair turning space, adapted WCs. Only few respondents named them as being the components of adapted workplace environment.

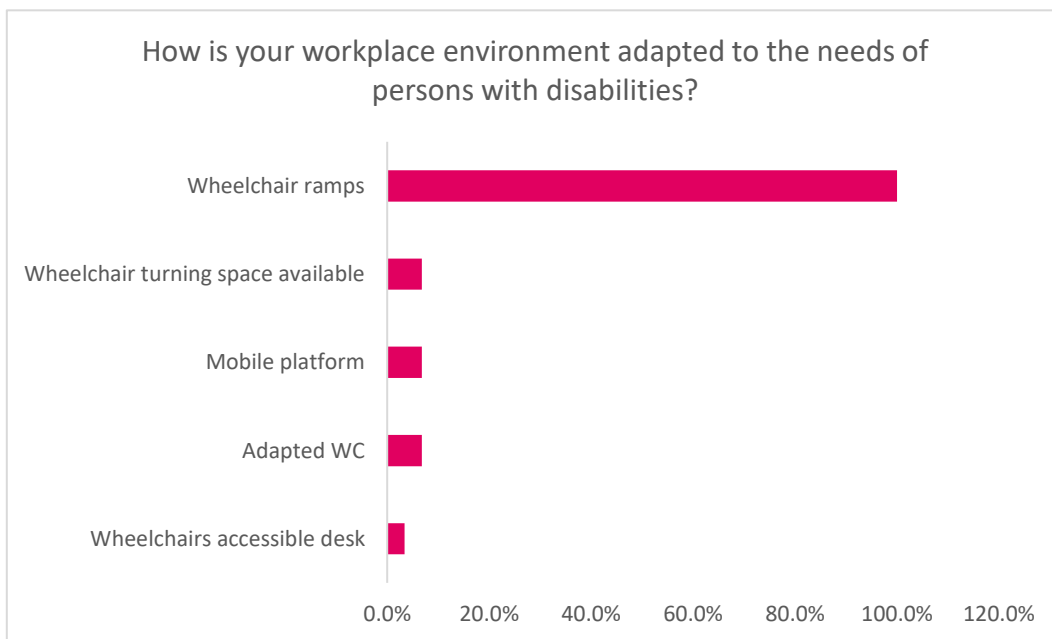


Figure #18. Employers' adapted workplace environment

The majority of the surveyed employers show low level of awareness of the state-run employment support programs and have little experience of engagement in the employment program. Only 6 out of the total surveyed employers have past experience of participation in the program. At the time of conducting the research, none of the employers were involved in the program. 67% of the respondents have not heard about the program at all, while 22% have heard about it, but are not familiar with its details. Only 10% noted, they were well-informed about the employment support program.

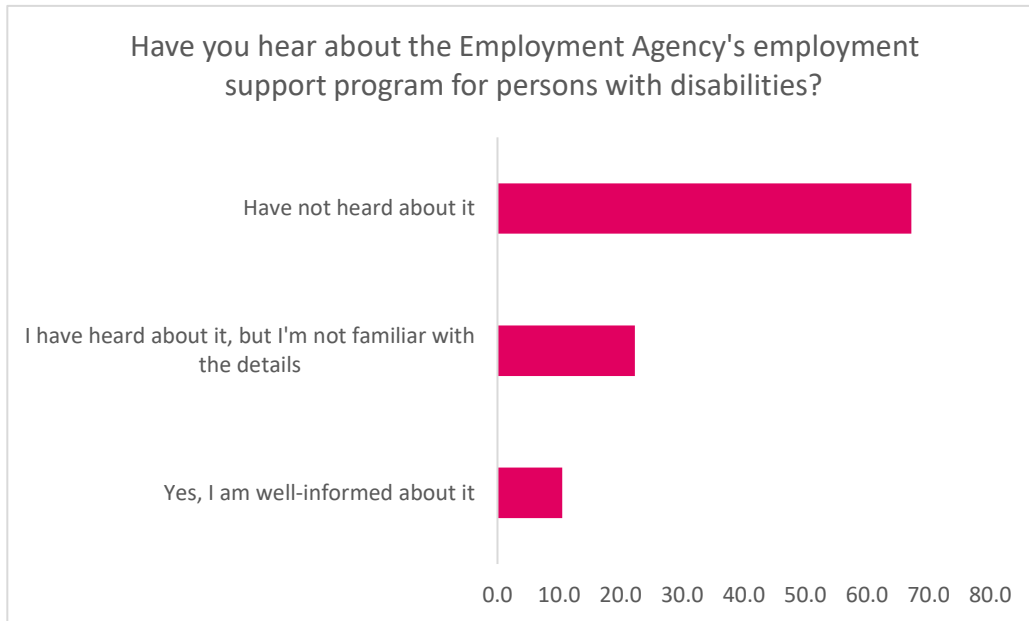


Figure #19. Employer awareness of the state-run employment support program

Although 10% of the respondents said, they were well-informed about the state-run employment support program, but it was revealed that most of the employers did not possess detailed information on various program components. They named only some of the program components and showed little interest in this program, in general. The respondents who were fully or partially informed about the state-run employment support program mostly possessed information about the program's subsidy component (52%).

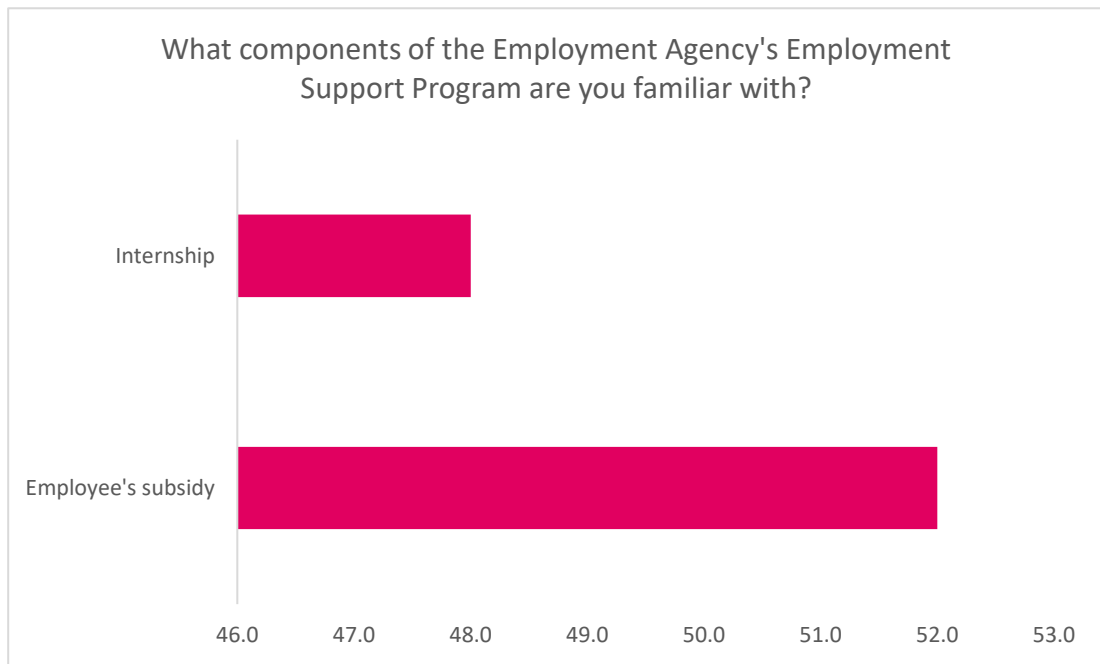


Figure #20. Employer awareness of the state-run employment support program components

The research showed that the adjustment of workplace environment was named by the respondents as one the components when answering to readiness and motivation-related questions. Of particular interest is to find out, how willing they themselves are and to what extent they are ready to invest funds in the development/adjustment of infrastructure. The majority of the respondents (88%) expressed their intention to invest in infrastructure (Figure #21) and most of them (77%) are ready to make financial contributions ranging from GEL 500 to GEL 1000 (Figure #22).

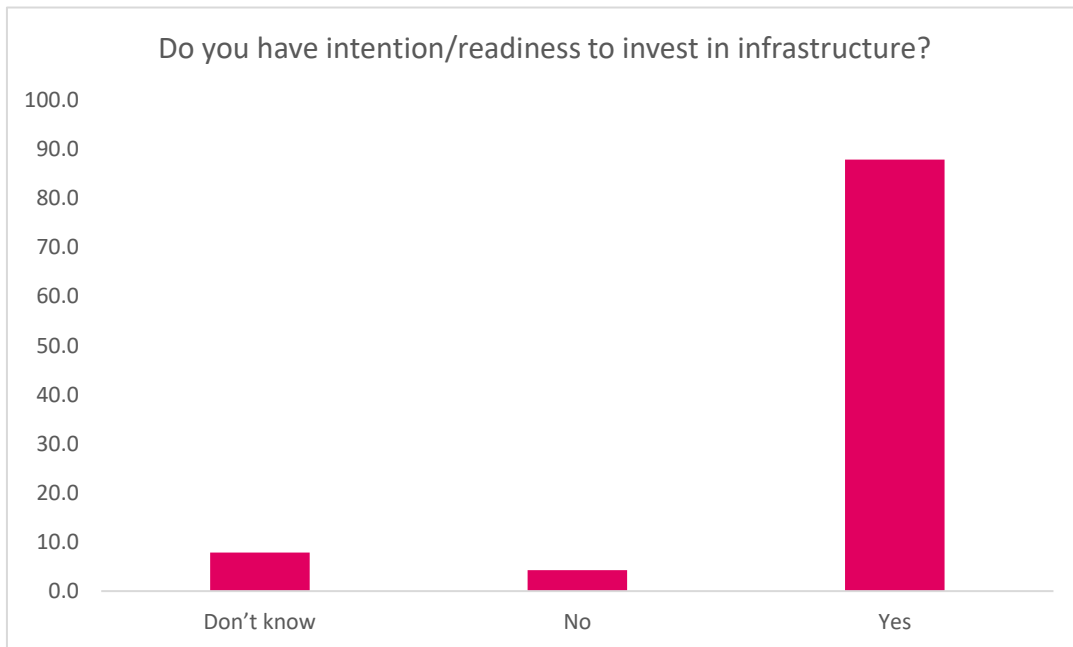


Figure #21. Employer readiness to invest in infrastructure

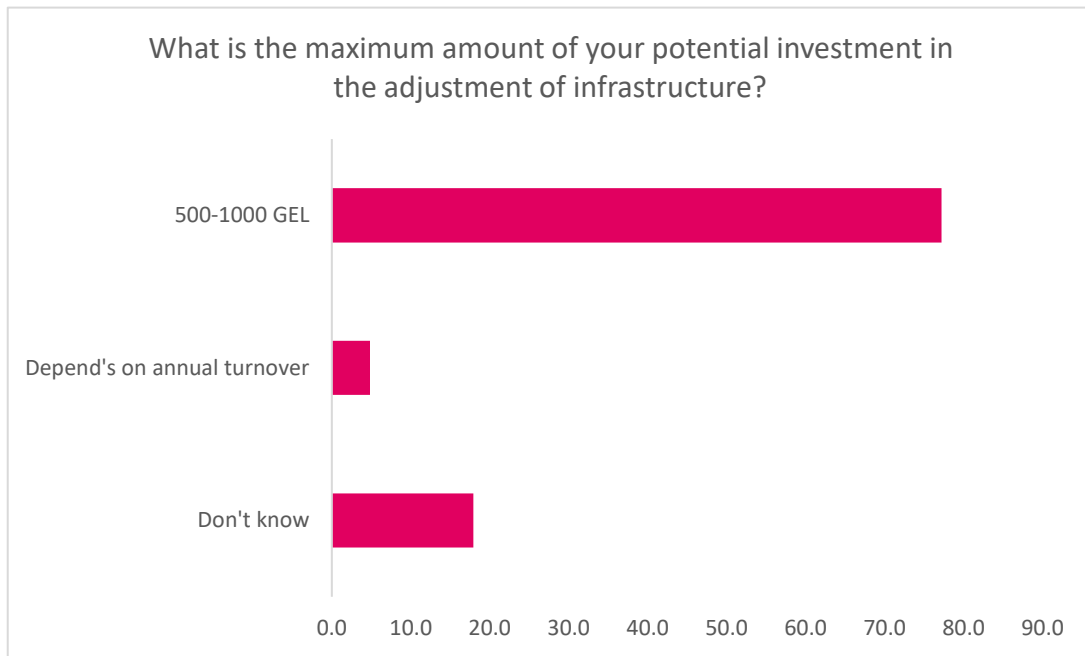


Figure #22. Employer readiness to invest in infrastructure in financial terms

The trends revealed in the quantitative research was more in depth discussed during the focus group interviews. Respondents with no experience of cooperation with persons with disabilities named to main factors preventing their cooperation: non-adapted working environment and inappropriate conditions for people with disabilities; The passivity of the latter, no interest shown about vacancies and employment possibilities from their end. Employers considered the state to be the main responsible actor for the increase of PwDs labour market participation. Respondents revealed that employment of persons with disabilities could be on the agenda once the state adapts their working environments. Adapting the infrastructure on state’s expense was named as the biggest motivation for employing people with disabilities.

Focus group interviews revealed that employers with no experience of cooperation with persons with disabilities had prejudices and stereotypical attitudes towards them, considering various types of disability as a factor affecting productivity and performance capacity. Some perceptions were discriminatory. For instance, assuming that it would be awkward to employ the person with “defect” in service sector, or regardless the type of disability, “it would be difficult to expect professionalism form a disabled person “Opposite attitudes were revealed among employers who had experience working with persons with disabilities. They did not express any doubts about the skills of their employees. Conversely, they noted a positive experience of cooperation. This shows that alienation and stereotypical attitudes can be mitigated and to do so, it is necessary to raise the awareness of employers about the issues of people with disabilities.

Youth with Disabilities – Needs and Challenges

Education, professional orientation and career development

Interviews with youth conducted as part of the research exposed the problems in terms of quality and accessibility of education in the general education system. The respondents involved in inclusive education, who were homeschooled due to health conditions, unanimously stated that general education was just a formality for them. They pointed to the low quality of delivery of classes by special education teachers, insufficient involvement, frequent absences. In some instances, the school administration directly demanded that a respondent should quit the school:

“I didn’t want to quit the school after the 9th grade, but I was urged to do it by the school administration. The Deputy Principal came to me on the instruction of the school principal and directly told me that I should leave the school and quit my education. It was too hard for me and I didn't want to accept it. I didn't even go to school to sign the documents, so they signed them on my behalf and then sent them to the ministry.”⁶

On some occasions, a negative experience gained at the general education stage served as a prerequisite for the respondents not to continue education, feeling pessimistic about their personal capacities:

“I don’t think that the education I gained at school will allow me to study in higher education institution, perhaps I can do it in a vocational school.”⁷

Against the background of such experience, the respondents most often relied on themselves and their family, as the most reliable pillar system.

Challenges related to the availability of infrastructure and access to learning materials were identified among the youth involved in the higher education system. However, in general, they positively characterized the environment, noting the support on part of schools/teachers. When asked about the changes they would possibly make at the stage of receiving education, most of them said they would improve the quality of education and would focus on in-depth study of foreign languages.

No specific professional orientation or career development path was identified among the surveyed youth. There was only one young person employed in the field of his major, while the rest of the surveyed were either employed in different fields or were looking for a job in different fields that matched their skills. The surveyed youth expressed intention to be employed in the areas they are majoring in and/or have undergone various training courses. However, an in-depth discussion of the issue revealed that they would agree to work in different areas as well. There may be different explanations to it. On the one hand, the general education system is less focused on student orientation, and youth do not have any concrete idea of what they would like to do in the future. On the other hand, due to the exclusion from

⁶ Respondent #4

⁷ Respondent #7

the labor market, youth with disabilities agree to take a job whenever such opportunity arises, irrespective of whether it is a favorable area or not.

Job search motivation

The work experience of the surveyed youth was not diverse. Only one respondent had a previous record of employment at different place and time period. Two respondents referred to a negative work experience (unreimbursed and/or unable to get along with an employer). At the time of conducting the research, most of the respondents either have never worked anywhere or have been employed for the first time. Only two of the employed youth managed to take a job on their own, while the rest had the experience of starting a job through the assistance of various non-governmental organizations and projects.

Those young people, who were unemployed at the time of conducting the research, were highly motivated to find a job. They used different job search techniques, sending CVs mostly from the employment platforms (jobs.ge; hr.ge; LinkedIn). In addition, once they received information about the job opportunities from different organizations, they took a chance and underwent registration. Most of the respondents reporting having several years of job search experience.

Problems faced in the labor market

Several challenges in the job search process were identified by the surveyed youth. The majority of them pointed to a lack of flexible job positions, noting the problems finding both, remote and part-time jobs.

Availability of flexible job vacancies is important for the realization of the labor rights of persons with disabilities. The workplace environment offered by most of employers is not adequately adapted, which is a factor obstructing the employment of persons with physical and/or sensory impairments. A remote mode of work will certainly mitigate this challenge. A lack of adapted workplace environment is hardly the only factor leading to the labor market exclusion of persons with disabilities. The survey revealed that part of the respondents cannot take full-time jobs due to their physical condition, which does not allow them to spend entire day in one position. Therefore, even amidst a well-adapted infrastructure, it is of no less importance to ensure availability of a flexible work schedule.

The majority of job seeker respondents have been actively sending their CVs to employers, though few of them reported the cases of receiving any feedback or invitation to a job interview. Most of them point to the problems associated with the requirement for having several years of work experience. Employer's expectation of knowledge of foreign languages was also revealed, which is yet another obstacle for young people.

Employer attitudes

The respondents participating in the research were unanimous in the opinion that employers were showing stereotypical attitude towards them, considering various types of disability as a factor affecting their productivity and performance capacity. In this regard, a respondent with short-sightedness mentioned a lack of mutual understanding with his employer:

“There was an employer, cooperation with whom ended due to misunderstanding. I worked as a massage therapist and he used to tell me that if I were blind, I was supposed to wear glasses. I am short-sighted and I was telling him that I didn't need any glasses. He, in turn, was saying that I would look much more beautiful with glasses while doing massage to a client. Massage and glasses have nothing to do with each other, do they?”⁸”

Young people noticed employer attitudes in the interview process as well:

“Whether I will be able to take responsibility if employed to this position and whether I will be able to do the job is always particularly emphasized. This absence of confidence could be felt in conversation. You are not directly told that you won't be employed because you are a person with disabilities, but it can be felt in questions and attitudes.”⁹”

Interviews revealed that there were attempts on part of some unscrupulous employers to deceive persons with disabilities. According to the respondents, in some instances they were cheated by employer and were made to work without remuneration on the positions intended for persons with disabilities. The majority of youth participating in the research had the experience of working in poor labor conditions and getting low-paid job offers.

Alongside the problem of employers' stereotypical attitude, according to the respondents, the employer's goals and disposition towards the employment of persons with disabilities also represent a challenge. Youth who formerly participated in various employment forums or attended state-mediated job interviews, reported that employers most often talked to them formally and were not actually interested in their employment.

Use of the state and non-governmental employment services

Only two of the research participants possessed information about the state-run employment support program for persons with disabilities. Both of them said, they were registered with the program and received job offers, though they did not find them to be suitable:

“I have attended such job interviews where vacancies were completely inconsistent with my condition. The agent did not profoundly study the employer's requirements laid down in the job description.”¹⁰”

⁸ Respondent 11

⁹ Respondent 1

¹⁰ Respondent 1

*“I applied to the state program, but they couldn’t help me so far. I need a remote job, but what they offered me was not a remote one. I was told that negotiations were underway, but there haven’t been any results so far”.*¹¹

One of the respondents took digital competency courses as part of professional skills enhancement sub-program, which he evaluated positively. However, he expected to get an internship, but it did not work out. He hasn’t receive any response either from the service provider or the state employment agency, and therefore, he couldn’t tell the reason, why he couldn’t undergo the internship.

By the time of conducting the research, the majority of employees and interns were employed through the assistance of the non-governmental sector. This research is not aimed at comparing the state-run and non-governmental programs/services and the sampling method does not allow to compare the awareness of the services provided by those sectors, but the tendency among the research participants is that they have scarce information about the state-run program, and the non-governmental sector does not provide detailed information to beneficiaries either.

Recommendations

When asked about recommendations for increasing access to employment for persons with disabilities, the surveyed respondents focused on several issues: adoption of quota policy and a commitment to employ certain number of persons with disabilities per year, proper dissemination of information about the available services on part of the state and its delivery to each party concerned; raising employer awareness about persons with disabilities; creation of flexible job opportunities; quality control of offered vacancies and protection of employees' rights.

Conclusion and recommendations

Youth with disabilities are facing various barriers in the job search and employment process. In addition to the problem of quality and availability of general education, there is also the need for raising the awareness of professional orientation and career planning, as well as the need for flexible jobs in the labor market - remote mode and part-time jobs. Youth often face stereotypes and misconceptions about their abilities, when they are assessed based on their medical condition rather than on their knowledge/experience. Therefore, there is a need for advocacy of the issues of employment of persons with disabilities. A low level of awareness about the employment support services and the need to improve communication with persons with disabilities was also identified.






As far as employers are concerned, they showed low level of awareness of the issues of persons with disabilities, as well as stereotypical attitude towards their skills and misconceptions about their performance capacity. Despite that, at the empathy level, the employers’ solidarity is obvious and they believe that persons with disabilities should have employment opportunities. All the above-mentioned

¹¹ Respondent 3

suggests that employers have little experience dealing with persons with disabilities and, against this background, there is a low level of awareness, which could be eliminated through active communication with them and advocacy of the issues of persons with disabilities.

Employers' expectation is that the state itself would assume responsibility for the environment adjustment and employment of persons with disabilities. During the quantitative survey, the employers expressed their intention to adapt the infrastructure, though most of them said, the amount of investment in infrastructure adaptation would range within GEL 500-1000 budget. An expanded focus-group discussion on this issue revealed that adapting the infrastructure for employers is associated with high costs and they obviously expect the state to ensure the adjustment of environment. The survey also revealed that employers have low awareness of employment support services and most of them are unaware of the measures taken by the state to encourage employers.

Given all the aforesaid, the following recommendations have been developed:

 To the Ministry of Education and Science	<p>To control the quality and access to education for students involved in inclusive education, through continuous monitoring and assessment of students' needs.</p> <p>To adopt career development module in inclusive education system.</p>
 To the State Employment Agency	<p>To conduct supported employment information campaigns; to disseminate information through TV, radio and print media. In addition, to develop a communication strategy, based on which the service-related information will be substantially provided to both, persons with disabilities and employers.</p> <p>To train persons with disabilities for the job couch positions within the state-run employment support program and thus to make them inspire their peers as well as change attitudes and prejudice of employers through partnership and cooperation.</p>
 To employers	<p>In order to overcome misconceptions and prejudice towards persons with disabilities, to test the conformity of their skills with job duties; to sincerely communicate with persons with disabilities so as to adequately identify their needs and eliminate the risk of misinterpretations.</p>
 To persons with disabilities	<p>In the job search process not to limit oneself to job vacancies available on the employment platform, but rather to directly contact employers, provide CVs and inquire about the possibility of employment.</p>
 To non-governmental organizations	<p>To actively advocate for the issues of employment of persons with disabilities in general public; to carry out public and employer awareness-raising campaigns.</p>



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