



## Ex-ANTE ANALYSIS REPORT

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## Introduction

Across the EU, 51.3% of persons with disabilities are employed, compared to 75.6% of those without disabilities (2022), and so the mean disability employment gap across the EU reaches 24 p.p. The lowest disability employment gaps are found in Italy, Latvia, Denmark and Portugal (15-18 pp). In Poland, it is significantly higher, at 31 p.p. The employment rate of persons with disabilities is 43%, compared to 74%<sup>1</sup>.

The disability employment gap is smaller for young people, reaching 11 pp for people aged 20-29 in the EU. This may sound encouraging, but it stems from the fact that fewer young people are in employment. 47% of persons with disabilities aged 20 to 29 were employed in 2019, compared to 58% of those without disabilities in the same age group<sup>2</sup>. While this is in part due to ongoing education, young people with disabilities often complete their education later and drop out at twice the rate of their peers. As a result, they start their careers later in junior roles. Only 29% of people with disabilities obtain a tertiary education, compared to 44% for people without disabilities<sup>3</sup>. Earlier research suggests that higher education is crucial to employment for people with disabilities<sup>4</sup>.

There are 172,000 NEETs with disabilities in Poland<sup>5</sup>. In 2023, 11 % of 15-29 year-olds in the EU were neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs). In Poland 9% of 15-29 year-olds are NEETs. 30% of young Europeans with disabilities are NEETs. In Poland this percentage reaches 51%<sup>6</sup>.

In this report, we explore the main drivers and obstacles faced by young people on the labour market. To this end, we performed a quantitative analysis and a qualitative study. The quantitative study is based on the data gathered by Fundacja Aktywizacja, where project participants' labour market activity was monitored up to 18 months after the project. The qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews with young people with disabilities, job crafters, and employers.

The report is structured as follows. First, we present the results of the quantitative analysis. In the second part key messages from the qualitative study are presented. In the final part we present conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> European Disability Forum (2023). *The Right to Work: The employment situation of persons with disabilities in Europe*, pp. 30-31. [Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>3</sup> European Council (2025). *Disability in the EU: facts and figures*. [Link](#)

<sup>4</sup> Albinowski, M., Magda, I., & Rozsyczka, A. (2023). The employment effects of the disability education gap in Europe. *Education Economics*. [Link](#)

<sup>5</sup> Own calculation based on Eurostat disability statistics. [Link](#)

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat (2025). *Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training*. [Link](#)

## Quantitative analysis

The Fundacja Aktywizacja gathered the data for this analysis as part of project monitoring in 2022-25. The projects were evaluated at 3, 6, 12, and 18 months after ending. We keep the last entry for the project participant in the dataset. Project participants were contacted on the phone and responded to questions about continuing employment in the same (or other) workplace, reasons for ending employment, working conditions, satisfaction with work, skills development at work, and the influence of work on social relations. The respondents answered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("definitely not") to 5 ("definitely yes").

### Sample description

There were 2,143 participants in the final sample, 54% of whom were women. A little under 20% of respondents were aged 15-29. Almost 89% of the participants lived in urban areas. More than 40% of individuals were tertiary educated. As regards the degree of disability, 68% of project participants had a moderate disability, 21% a light disability, and 11% a severe one. Almost half of the respondents experienced a physical disability, 23% a mental health condition (Table 1). 14% had a visual or hearing disability, while 11% had a chronic condition. This classification follows the one used by CenterKontura.

There were 418 participants aged 15-29, with almost the same number of men and women. The share of tertiary and secondary educated individuals was higher by about 3-5 p.p. than in the total sample. In turn, younger respondents had vocational education less often. A higher share of young participants had a severe disability, 14% compared to 11% in the total sample. Physical disabilities were the most common, at 43%, but this share is lower than in the total sample (49%). Mental health conditions were also reported less often, by 18% of participants, compared to 23% overall. The share of chronic illnesses was similar, at 10%. More younger participants experienced an intellectual or developmental disability, 8% compared to less than 3% overall (Table 1).

245 participants lived in rural areas. The distribution of age and gender was similar to that of the total sample. More individuals living in rural areas had vocational education, 27% compared to 20% in the whole sample. The composition by degree of disability was similar to that of the total sample. The share of participants with physical disabilities was slightly higher, at 54% compared to 49%, and the share of people with mental health conditions was lower, at 20% compared to 23% (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample descriptive statistics: number of observations and share (%).

Total	Age		Area	
	15-29	30 or more	Urban	Rural
<b>Age</b>				
15-29	418 (19.51%)	-	-	369 (19.44%) 49 (20.00%)
30 or more	1,725 (80.49%)	-	-	1,529 (80.56%) 196 (80.00%)
<b>Area</b>				
Urban	1,898 (88.57%)	369 (88.28%)	1,529 (88.64%)	- -
Rural	245 (11.43%)	49 (11.72%)	196 (11.36%)	- -
<b>Gender</b>				
Women	1,154 (53.85%)	213 (50.96%)	941 (54.55%)	1,023 (53.90%) 131 (53.47%)
Men	989 (46.15%)	205 (49.04%)	784 (45.45%)	875 (46.10%) 114 (46.53%)
<b>Education</b>				
Primary or lower	123 (5.74%)	19 (4.55%)	104 (6.03%)	108 (5.69%) 15 (6.12%)
Secondary	713 (33.27%)	161 (38.52%)	552 (32.00%)	642 (33.83%) 71 (28.98%)
Tertiary	882 (41.16%)	188 (44.98%)	694 (40.23%)	790 (41.62%) 92 (37.55%)
Vocational	425 (19.83%)	50 (11.96%)	375 (21.74%)	358 (18.86%) 67 (27.35%)
<b>Degree of disability</b>				
Light	460 (21.47%)	81 (19.38%)	379 (21.97%)	405 (21.34%) 55 (22.45%)
Moderate	1,448 (67.57%)	277 (66.27%)	1,171 (67.88%)	1,281 (67.49%) 167 (68.16%)
Severe	235 (10.97%)	60 (14.35%)	175 (10.14%)	212 (11.17%) 23 (9.39%)
<b>Type of disability</b>				
Mental health conditions	495 (23.10%)	77 (18.42%)	418 (24.23%)	447 (23.55%) 48 (19.59%)
Intellectual or developmental	56 (2.61%)	32 (7.66%)	24 (1.32%)	50 (2.63%) 6 (2.45%)
Chronic illnesses	234 (10.92%)	42 (10.05%)	192 (11.13%)	205 (10.80%) 29 (11.84%)
Physical disabilities	1,059 (49.42%)	181 (43.30%)	878 (50.90%)	926 (48.79%) 133 (54.29%)
Other: visual & hearing	299 (13.95%)	86 (20.57%)	213 (12.35%)	270 (14.23%) 29 (11.84%)
<b>N</b>	2,143	418	1,725	1,898 245

Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.

## Between-groups comparisons

Two-sample t tests with unequal variances and Welch's degrees of freedom were performed to explore the differences between younger vs. older project participants, and participants based in urban vs. rural areas. The questions covered working conditions (risks to health at work, working overtime, workplace safety and hygiene, possibility of remote work, employer taking care of needs arising from one's health situation), satisfaction with work and salary, skills development (both possibility and participation at work and after work, possibility of promotion at work, work autonomy), social relations with co-workers and clients, and the influence of work on social relations outside of work.

Participation in skills development differentiates younger from older project participants. The young declared more often that they want to upgrade their skills,  $t(716)=5.16$ ,  $p<.000$ . They also had more courses offered at work,  $t(660)=4.62$ ,  $p<.000$ . Furthermore, they participated in courses more often at work,  $t(650)=4.91$ ,  $p<.000$ , and after work,  $t(639)=4.59$ ,  $p<.000$ . They also rated their opportunities for development and promotion at work higher,  $t(650)=4.88$ ,  $p<.000$ . As regards the comparisons between areas of residence, workers from urban areas declared more often that they want to upgrade their skills,  $t(293)=2.90$ ,  $p=.004$ , but no other differences were found.

Younger workers rated their working conditions similarly to their older colleagues, and workers from rural and urban areas also described their working conditions similarly. The only significant difference was that participants based in rural areas worked overtime less often,  $t(337)=-2.52$ ,  $p=.012$ . Job satisfaction was also similar between groups, except for younger workers being more satisfied with their income,  $t(661)=2.57$ ,  $p=.010$ . Social relationships were also rated similarly. Only participants from rural areas found that they could pursue hobbies or other meaningful activities thanks to working more often,  $t(328)=2.51$ ,  $p=.013$ .

## Econometric modelling

First, we modelled being employed in project jobs or otherwise with the following explanatory variables: disability type, disability degree, gender, education, area of residence. We also control for the monitoring month. We performed separate logistic regression models, interacting all variables with young age in the first model and with residence in a rural area in the second model.

In the second step, we examine how age and residing in rural areas correlate with job satisfaction. The explanatory variables include working conditions, skills development at work, and the influence of work on social relations, and the control variables are the disability type, degree of disability, gender, education, monitoring wave, and staying employed in the project job. We perform separate linear regression models, interacting all variables with age 15-29 years in the first model, and with residence in a rural area in the second model.

## Results

### *Staying in employment*

Younger project participants were as likely to work as their older counterparts, and there was no difference in the employment of participants from rural and urban areas. Similarly, education and gender did not matter for staying employed (Table 2).

Participants with severe disabilities were more likely to stay employed by 6 p.p., compared to participants with a moderate disability. Participants with mental health conditions were less likely to stay employed by about 9 p.p., in comparison to participants with physical disabilities (Table 2).

Having a tertiary education or a severe disability meant a higher probability of continuing employment for young project participants by 8-10 p.p. in comparison to older participants (Table 3). For rural-area-based participants, no such relationships were found (Table 3).

**Table 2. Marginal effects of continuing employment models**

	Model with age interactions	Model with rural area interactions
<b>Age</b>		
15-29	0.012 (0.022)	0.005 (0.021)
<b>Area</b>		
Rural	0.025 (0.025)	0.027 (0.025)
<b>Gender</b>		
Women	0.004 (0.016)	0.007 (0.016)
<b>Education</b>		
Primary or lower	-0.056 (0.038)	-0.044 (0.037)
Tertiary	0.013 (0.019)	0.017 (0.019)
Vocational	-0.012 (0.023)	-0.007 (0.023)
<b>Degree of disability</b>		
Light	-0.041 * (0.021)	-0.038 (0.021)
Severe	0.062 * (0.026)	0.066 ** (0.025)
<b>Type of disability</b>		
Mental health conditions	-0.088 *** (0.021)	-0.096 *** (0.021)
Intellectual or developmental	0.050 (0.055)	0.021 (0.048)
Chronic illnesses	0.009 (0.026)	0.000 (0.026)
Other: visual & hearing	0.009 (0.024)	0.007 (0.024)

Note. Reference categories: age > 30, urban area of residence, men, secondary education, moderate degree of disability, and physical disabilities. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05.

Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.

**Table 3. Marginal effects of young age and area of residence on continuing employment, depending on demographic variables**

	Marginal effects of young age (Based on the model with age interactions)	Marginal effects of rural area (Based on the model with rural area interactions)
<b>Age</b>		
15-29	- -	0.024 (0.029)
30 or more	- -	0.041 (0.054)
<b>Area</b>		
Urban	0.010 (0.023)	- -
Rural	0.023 (0.059)	- -
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	0.018 (0.030)	0.036 (0.037)
Women	0.006 (0.029)	0.019 (0.034)
<b>Education</b>		
Primary or lower	0.045 (0.099)	-0.017 (0.102)
Secondary	-0.080 (0.035)	-0.002 (0.048)
Tertiary	0.080 * (0.029)	0.063 (0.037)
Vocational	0.018 (0.059)	0.017 (0.050)
<b>Degree of disability</b>		
Light	-0.028 (0.048)	0.098 (0.049)
Moderate	0.011 (0.026)	0.001 (0.032)
Severe	0.106 * (0.043)	0.044 (0.071)
<b>Type of disability</b>		
Mental health conditions	0.065 (0.045)	0.044 (0.058)
Intellectual or developmental	-0.061 (0.092)	-0.169 (0.168)
Chronic illnesses	-0.022 (0.060)	0.041 (0.068)
Physical disabilities	-0.014 (0.032)	0.053 (0.032)
Other: visual & hearing	0.040 (0.044)	-0.072 (0.071)

Note. Adjusted for multiple comparisons with Bonferroni corrections where applicable. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05.

Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.

## Job satisfaction

Demographic variables did not correlate with job satisfaction (see Appendix A1). There were, however, significant relationships of job satisfaction with working conditions, professional development, and social environment of work.

Participants whose work puts their health at risk were less satisfied. At the same time, safe working conditions and having employers take care of needs arising from one's health situation correlated with higher job satisfaction. Being able to work remotely also contributed to job satisfaction. Having to work overtime was not a significant factor in this respect (Table 4).

Having courses offered at work, possibilities for promotion and professional development, and autonomy in performing one's tasks are related to higher job satisfaction. Participating in courses after work (paid by the individual) indicated being less satisfied with the job, while taking part in courses at work did not matter (Table 4).

Relationships with management at work mattered for job satisfaction, but that was not the case for relationships with co-workers or clients. Moreover, participants who felt that they could afford hobbies or other meaningful activities thanks to working were more satisfied with their jobs (Table 4). In case of individuals aged 15-29 there was no variation from the pattern described above.

No interaction terms were significant for young workers with disabilities (Appendix A2), which means we find no differences in their job satisfaction patterns. There are some such differences for project participants from rural areas, however. Job satisfaction decreased with the desire to improve one's skills for participants from rural areas. There was no such relationship for workers from urban areas (Figure 1). In a similar vein, the more courage to meet new people participants from rural areas gained, the less satisfied with their jobs they were (Figure 2). Also, participating in courses after work increased job satisfaction for workers from rural areas (Figure 3). Unlike for participants from urban areas, good relationships with co-workers were important to the job satisfaction of workers from rural areas (Figure 4).

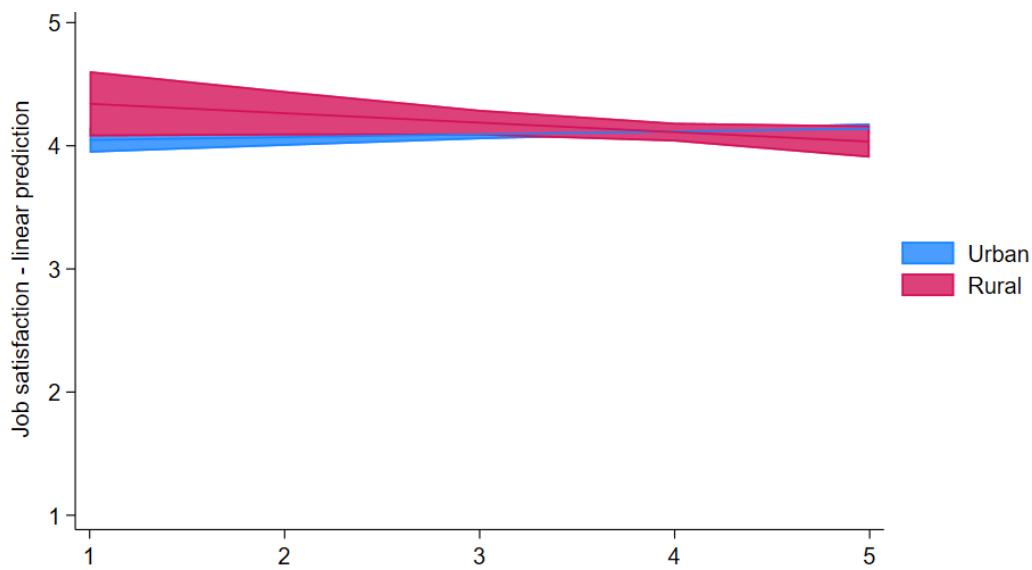
**Table 4. Correlates of job satisfaction, controlling for demographic variables**

	Model with age interactions	Model with rural area interactions
<i>Part-time work</i>	0.021 (0.044)	-0.023 (0.040)
<i>My work involves risks to my health</i>	-0.057 ** (0.019)	-0.051 ** (0.018)
<i>I work beyond my weekly work time limit</i>	-0.012 (0.017)	-0.007 (0.016)
<i>High workplace safety and hygiene</i>	0.100 ** (0.031)	0.106 ** (0.030)
<i>The employer takes care of health needs</i>	0.153 ** (0.032)	0.117 ** (0.030)
<i>I can work remotely</i>	0.022 (0.019)	0.048 * (0.019)
<i>I want to upgrade my skills</i>	0.010 (0.017)	0.023 (0.017)
<i>I have opportunities to participate in courses at work</i>	0.049 (0.028)	0.077 ** (0.026)
<i>I participate in courses at work</i>	-0.010 (0.027)	-0.025 (0.025)
<i>I participate in courses after work</i>	-0.047 ** (0.015)	-0.055 ** (0.015)
<i>I have opportunities for promotion at work</i>	0.085 ** (0.019)	0.078 ** (0.018)
<i>I independently decide on how to perform my work</i>	0.113 ** (0.016)	0.109 ** (0.016)
<i>I have good relationships with co-workers</i>	-0.014 (0.041)	-0.032 (0.037)
<i>I have good relationships with supervisors</i>	0.300 ** (0.039)	0.358 ** (0.036)
<i>I have good relationships with clients</i>	0.014 (0.030)	0.000 (0.028)
<i>I have better relationships with my family since I started working</i>	-0.064 (0.033)	-0.039 (0.030)
<i>I have better relationships with friends since I started working</i>	0.065 (0.037)	0.015 (0.033)
<i>I am more active and go out of the house more often</i>	0.010 (0.028)	0.005 (0.025)
<i>I have gained the courage to meet new people and places</i>	0.039 (0.028)	0.045 (0.027)
<i>Thanks to work, I have the means to pursue hobbies or other activities that are important to me</i>	0.070 ** (0.023)	0.061 ** (0.021)
<i>N</i>	2142	2142
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.46	0.46

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ . For remaining results see Appendices A1-A2.

Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.

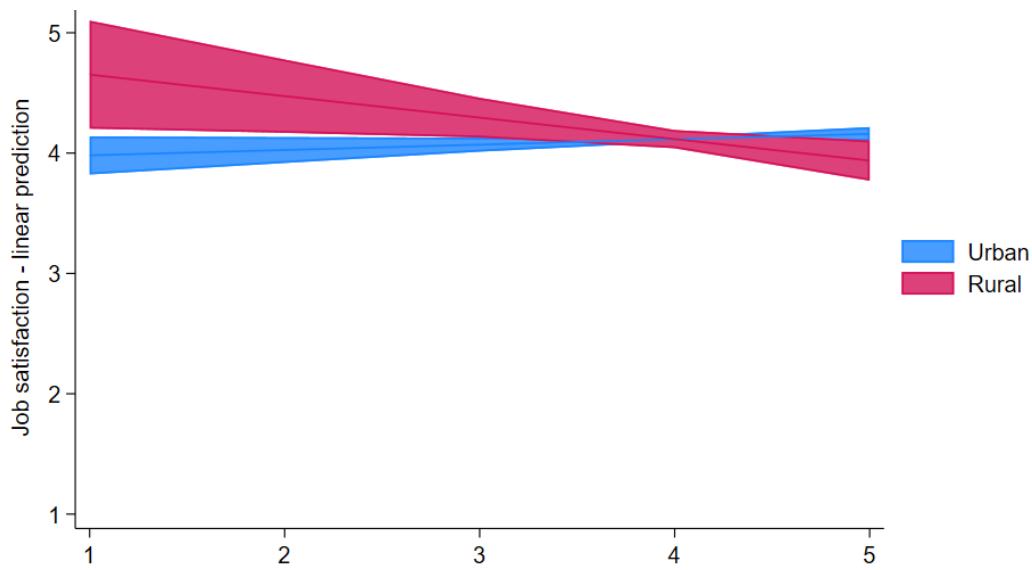
**Figure 1. Job satisfaction depending on wanting to upgrade one's skills and residing in a rural area**



*Note. Responses on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("definitely not") to 5 ("definitely yes").*

*Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.*

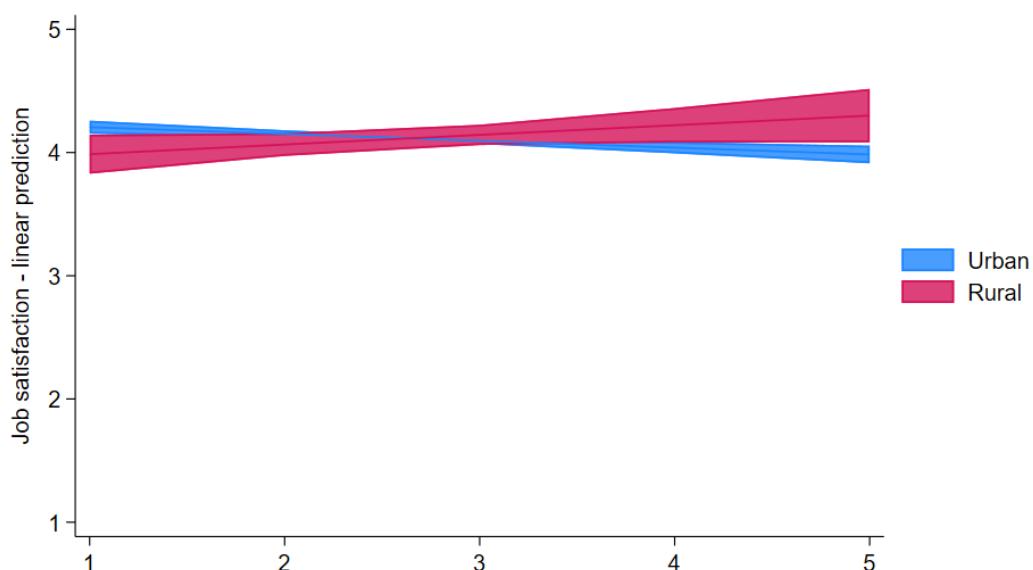
**Figure 2. Job satisfaction depending on gaining the courage to meet new people and residing in a rural area**



*Note. Responses on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("definitely not") to 5 ("definitely yes").*

*Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.*

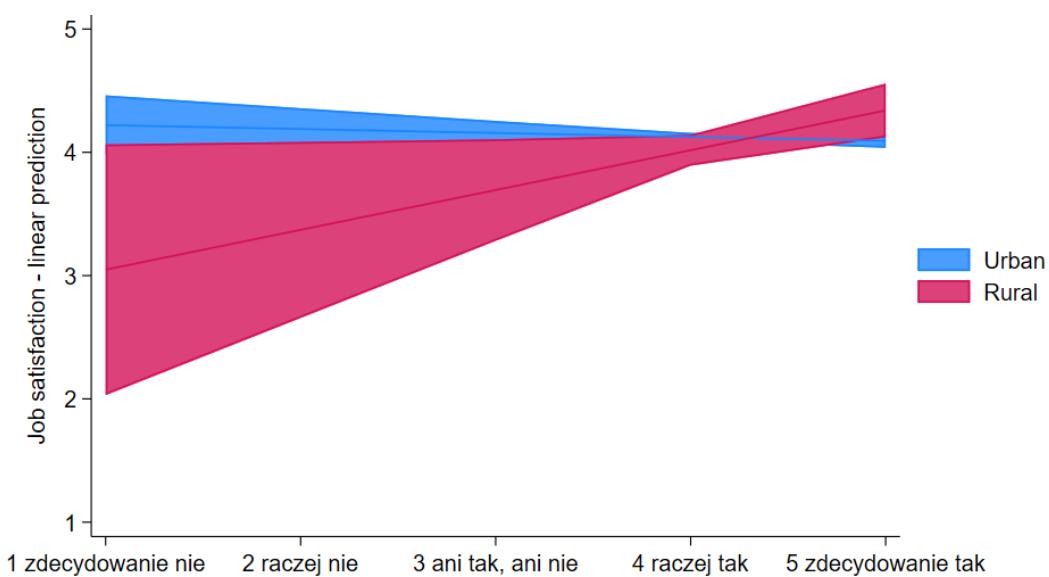
**Figure 3. Job satisfaction depending on participating in courses after work and residing in a rural area**



*Note. Responses on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("definitely not") to 5 ("definitely yes").*

*Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.*

**Figure 4. Job satisfaction depending on the relationship with co-workers and residing in a rural area**



*Note. Responses on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("definitely not") to 5 ("definitely yes").*

*Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.*

## In-depth interviews

We conducted a qualitative study to define challenges and explore the experiences of young people with disabilities while searching for a job. In addition, we examine the experiences of Job Crafters, asking about the organisation of their work, the competencies required to perform this role effectively, and the nature of their relationships with persons with disabilities. Furthermore, we learn about the experiences of employers employing young people with disabilities. The results will be used to adapt the job crafting tool to the needs of young people in the *NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities* project.

In-depth individual interviews (IDIs) were conducted via telephone using a pre-prepared interview script. Five young people with disabilities who had participated in projects run by the Aktywizacja Foundation and received support from a Job Crafter, five individuals serving as Job Crafters in the Aktywizacja Foundation's projects, and five employers who hire young people with disabilities were interviewed. Detailed notes from the interviews, along with quotes from the participants, are included in Appendices B1-B3.

## Young people with disabilities

Work is important to young people with disabilities, and they see it as more than just a way to make money. Work is a source of motivation to act, and it provides meaning to getting up in the morning and helps organize their daily routine.

Despite having completed secondary or higher education, the participants either had no work experience or only very limited professional experience. They explore their career paths through a trial-and-error approach, and they are open to changing professions and trying out different forms of employment. Practical training and workshops were found particularly useful, especially when focused on specific job roles (e.g., Excel, payroll, archiving). The motivational support they received as part of various projects was also appreciated, as young people with disabilities often exhibit self-doubt and difficulty in asking for help. This happens especially in interactions between a person with a disability and an employer. They are also susceptible to stress, especially under time pressure or in unclear interpersonal communication.

All in all, the following aspects of work are fundamental to young people with disabilities: being appreciated and receiving feedback, having opportunities for learning and self-improvement, receiving clear instructions, and support in stressful situations. The main barriers and challenges identified by the study group include: difficulty with self-organisation and career planning without external support (a need for mentoring), fear of failure (particularly strong during initial encounters with the job market), low level of preparedness for relations with employers (difficulties in discussing their needs, salary expectations, and possible challenges), risk of exclusion due to

employers'/colleagues' biases (concerns about perceived lower productivity and limited availability). For more details, see Appendix B1.

### ***Key findings from interviews with young people with disabilities***

1. Job Crafting is a source of real support and motivation, which proved crucial for individuals at the beginning of their career paths. Job Crafters were identified by participants as key professionals, on par with career advisors, in supporting people with disabilities in entering the labor market. Respondents emphasized the positive role of these professionals not only in job searching but also in building self-confidence and focusing on career goals. Participants indicated that the support of a Job Crafter significantly accelerated their path to employment, as the process was selective and targeted at employers open to hiring people with disabilities, rather than based on random applications for available positions.
2. Work is a significant factor in personal and social change – participants highlighted that starting a job had a major impact on their daily functioning and motivated them to undertake further initiatives. They also noted a shift in their hierarchy of needs after gaining employment. The opportunity to earn an income opened up new perspectives, such as financing further education, taking vacations, making personal purchases, or becoming financially independent from their immediate families.
3. Cooperation with a Job Crafter strengthened their sense of agency and professional competence. Thanks to working with the Foundation, participants gained the confidence to take initiative, develop skills, and plan their career paths. They emphasized the importance of conversations, consistent contact, and a genuine interest in their progress – all of which fostered a sense of empowerment and willingness to engage in various initiatives. Many noted that, on their own, they would not have been able to identify disability-friendly employers, manage formalities, or obtain necessary workplace accommodations. Despite a generally lowered sense of self-worth in the group, participants stated that collaboration with the Job Crafter increased their confidence and openness to employer interaction.
4. Personalized and flexible support was highly valued – interviewees appreciated that the assistance was tailored to their individual needs rather than imposed. Participants mentioned that they were able to propose their own ideas for job offers, which were then jointly discussed and analyzed with the Job Crafter.
5. Young people with disabilities need support in maintaining employment. The interviews showed that these individuals experienced difficulties in relationships with coworkers and felt unprepared to initiate conversations with employers about changes to their work conditions. Respondents reported that staying in touch with the Job Crafter during the employment period had

motivational value, and helped them analyze and prioritize difficulties and barriers in the employment process, as well as find ways to address them.

6. Having professional experience was a key factor in enhancing their competitiveness on the job market. Respondents indicated that completing an internship strengthened their position in the labor market and allowed them to find employment more quickly.

## Job Crafters

In the project context, a job crafter is a specialist who helps people with disabilities find and maintain satisfying employment. They support individuals in developing the ability to independently adapt (self-craft) their work environment, encourage self-education, and inspire engagement in additional activities. Their role involves cooperation with both job candidates/employees and employers, assisting in aligning mutual expectations and needs. Importantly, a Job Crafter's work involves a highly individualized approach—there is no universal path or template. The process begins with getting to know individuals with disabilities - their story, limitations, dreams, and fears - and continues throughout job searching, recruitment, starting a job and maintaining it. The Job Crafter supports the person at every stage, often also serving as a source of psychological support and motivation. All Job Crafters interviewed have higher education, mainly in pedagogy, psychology, or human resource management. Some have professional experience in corporations, employment agencies, education, or social work. Key competencies essential for the profession of a Job Crafter, as indicated during interviews, included empathy and flexibility, intuition, relationship-building skills, multitasking, and orientation on development. For more details, see Appendix B2.

### *Key conclusions from the study, based on working with young people with disabilities*

1. Effective work with the group of young people with disabilities requires building relationships based on trust and openness. Often, the foundation and the Job Crafter are the first places where these individuals feel comfortable sharing their struggles, fears, and dreams. Job crafting and building the relationship is a long-term process that may extend beyond employment, for example while maintaining the employment or post-project support.

2. Interviewed Job Crafters emphasized that job crafting is a universal method applicable to other groups facing labor market difficulties (e.g., mothers returning to work, people needing reskilling). With the group of young people with disabilities, the stages remain the same: job search preparation (CV writing, interview simulation), workplace adaptation (monitoring early employment and resolving difficulties), and job maintenance (maintaining motivation).

3. One of the most important aspects of the Job Crafter's work is identifying not only a person's with disabilities strengths, but also health and psychological conditions that may limit her/him in taking up specific jobs
4. Support during job interviews preparation is essential - many have never attended one and don't know how to prepare. Job Crafters simulate interviews with young people, review job offers, practice answers, and coach appearance and behavior.
5. Both Job Crafters and young people with disabilities emphasised the importance of proper interview preparation for building self-confidence and successful self-presentation. The more experience young people have with interview practice, the more confident they become.
6. Adaptation and job maintenance are also key. Young workers may not understand workplace norms, be surprised by expectations, or struggle with team dynamics. The Job Crafter mediates with the employer, provides emotional support, and helps resolve conflicts.
7. Job Crafters pointed out that challenges faced by young people with disabilities are not only physical or experience-based, but also psychological, social, and communicational.
8. Unrealistic expectations and social skills deficits are the biggest obstacles among young people with disabilities. Job crafting often involves fundamental work on adjusting expectations, developing professional maturity, and fostering responsibility for one's career. In this sense, the Job Crafter's role is advisory, educational, and therapeutic.
9. Most young individuals prefer online or phone contact, often even announced via SMS. They feel intense discomfort in direct situations such as face-to-face interviews or group meetings. This stems from social anxiety, shyness, autism spectrum issues, or a lack of interpersonal experience. Job Crafters often accompany them to interviews for this reason.
10. Their working style reflects the digital world's influence and existing social/psychological barriers. They enjoy technology but often lack strategic digital skills or teamwork abilities. There's a clear difference in how younger vs. 40+/50+ individuals use technology - young people are more responsive and preferring job offer links via email rather than phone calls.
11. Young people with disabilities prefer independent tasks with clearly defined scopes. Group work involving negotiation, cooperation, or division of roles often triggers anxiety or leads to withdrawal
12. Job Crafters highlighted the need for tailored tools—e.g., strengths/weaknesses assessments, interview simulations, application creators.
13. Working with young people motivates Job Crafters to explore new work methods and techniques - using modern technologies or platforms (e.g., YouTube videos) to share knowledge.

## Employers

Employers participating in the study expressed positive, open, and socially responsible attitudes toward hiring young people with disabilities. They highlighted the need to support self-confidence and communication skills in these employees, while also recognising their strong potential for growth. Employers often adapt to the needs of young people with disabilities by offering flexible work arrangements and inclusive environments. Although the industries varied, all shared a practical, values-driven approach to recruitment, focused on the person, not just formal qualifications. For more details, see Appendix B3.

### *Key insights from employers on working with young people with disabilities*

1. Young people with disabilities often lack self-confidence and independence. At the same time, employers indicated that starting a job and gaining professional experience usually leads to increased self-esteem and greater autonomy at work.
2. Although many young people believe their disability certification reduces their chances of employment, due to internalised stigma or perceived discrimination, employers stressed that the certificate is only relevant to ensuring workplace accessibility. Moreover, no special actions are required at all.
  - Young people with disabilities are characterized by a willingness to learn and flexibility. They tend to handle learning new tasks more effectively, even if they initially lack experience. Employers identified key skills for young people, such as interpersonal communication, asking for help, time management, and independence. For those without prior work experience, proficiency in hard skills such as Excel, Canva, English language, and MS Office was also considered useful.
3. Employers often perceive young people with disabilities as more engaged and having greater development potential than older workers. However, these differences are typically personal rather than age-related, depending on prior experiences, onboarding support, and personality.  
Employers were also asked in which areas they see the potential for support from external organizations, such as foundations focused on the professional inclusion of people with disabilities. The following responses aim to clarify the role and scope of Job Crafters' support in relation to employers (Table 3).

**Table 5. Supporting actions from external organizations that may address challenges experienced by employers**

Identified challenges	Suggested support
<b>Candidate search</b>	
Difficulty finding the right candidate in a short timeframe.	Fast and flexible candidate recommendations tailored to specific recruitment needs.
Concerns about whether the candidate's competencies and personality match the team and the position.	Pre-selection of candidates based not only on qualifications, but also on adaptability potential and attitude.
Lack of understanding of which health-related limitations truly impact job performance.	
<b>On-boarding</b>	
Lack of systemic support for integrating a person with a disability into the team.	Training for managers and teams on communication, sensitivity, and collaboration with people with disabilities.
Lack of tools or knowledge on how to effectively support the adaptation process.	Option to provide an external coach, advisor, or job trainer to support the employee with a disability and their supervisor during the initial months of employment.
Communication difficulties and psychological barriers on the part of the employee.	
<b>Work</b>	
Candidates often lack digital skills or are unfamiliar with office tools.	Organizing pre-employment training: Excel, Word, Canva, email usage, team communication.
Lack of preparedness for the employee role (communication, punctuality, work organization).	Mock job interviews, workshops regarding self-presentation and building self-confidence.

Source: Own elaboration based on the IDIs with employers.

## Conclusion

The results from the quantitative and qualitative studies converge on young peoples' need for professional development. In the qualitative study, both young people and employers found that the support provided by job crafters is essential to young people with disabilities finding employment. They underlined the role of help in individualised job/candidate search and job interview preparations. Job crafters' role is crucial in starting and maintaining dialogue between employers and workers with disabilities. Employers find out what accommodations are necessary, and workers learn how to communicate their needs effectively. Job crafters themselves emphasise the role of providing support and motivation to young people with disabilities who are seeking employment. In the quantitative study, young age did not correlate with being employed, staying in the project job, or ending employment when controlling for other variables. However, younger project participants declared more often that they wanted to upgrade their skills and participated in more courses. While younger workers rated their working conditions similarly to their older colleagues, they were more satisfied with their income.

Living in a rural area also did not correlate with being employed, staying in the project job, and ending employment when controlling for other variables. In rural areas, young workers were less satisfied with their jobs overall. Participating in courses after work increased job satisfaction for workers from rural areas, and good relationships with co-workers were important to job satisfaction. Project participants from rural areas more often found that they could pursue hobbies or other meaningful activities thanks to working. However, workers from rural areas wanted to upgrade their skills less often than participants from urban areas.

## Appendix A1. Job satisfaction regression - demographic variables

	Model with age interactions	Model with rural area interactions
<i>Age 15-29 years old</i>	-0.097 (0.361)	0.021 (0.032)
<i>Rural area of residence</i>	0.043 (0.042)	-0.223 (0.486)
<i>Women</i>	-0.005 (0.027)	-0.015 (0.025)
<i>Primary education</i>	0.062 (0.059)	0.074 (0.057)
<i>Tertiary education</i>	0.002 (0.032)	-0.003 (0.029)
<i>Vocational education</i>	0.047 (0.037)	0.037 (0.036)
<i>Monitoring wave</i>	0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)
<i>Light disability degree</i>	-0.025 (0.033)	-0.008 (0.031)
<i>Severe disability degree</i>	0.067 (0.045)	0.037 (0.041)
<i>Mental health conditions</i>	-0.007 (0.033)	-0.005 (0.032)
<i>Intellectual &amp; developmental disabilities</i>	0.076 (0.113)	0.002 (0.080)
<i>Chronic Illnesses</i>	-0.052 (0.043)	-0.019 (0.042)
<i>Other disabilities: visual &amp; hearing</i>	0.015 (0.042)	-0.012 (0.038)
<i>Still employed at the project job</i>	0.106 ** (0.032)	0.122 ** (0.030)
<i>Age 15-29 years old # Rural</i>	-0.109 (0.095)	-0.221 * (0.100)

Note. Reference categories: age > 30, urban area of residence, men, secondary education, moderate degree of disability, physical disabilities. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05.

Source: Own elaboration based on the survey data.

## Appendix A2. Job satisfaction regression – interaction terms

	# Age 15-29 years old	# Rural area of residence
<i>Part-time work #</i>	-0.177 (0.091)	0.004 (0.127)
<i>My work involves risks to my health #</i>	0.026 (0.041)	-0.088 (0.057)
<i>I work beyond my weekly work time limit #</i>	0.014 (0.037)	0.012 (0.059)
<i>High workplace safety and hygiene #</i>	-0.006 (0.076)	-0.025 (0.094)
<i>The employer takes care of health needs #</i>	-0.148 (0.081)	0.104 (0.105)
<i>I can work remotely #</i>	0.104 (0.055)	-0.091 (0.059)
<i>I want to upgrade my skills #</i>	0.022 (0.047)	-0.100 * (0.049)
<i>I have opportunities to participate in courses at work #</i>	0.088 (0.062)	-0.119 (0.080)
<i>I participate in courses at work #</i>	-0.112 (0.060)	-0.006 (0.079)
<i>I participate in courses after work #</i>	0.028 (0.036)	0.134 ** (0.046)
<i>I have opportunities for promotion at work #</i>	-0.019 (0.042)	-0.003 (0.056)
<i>I independently decide on how to perform my work #</i>	-0.046 (0.040)	-0.098 (0.053)
<i>I have good relationships with co-workers #</i>	0.112 (0.092)	0.355 * (0.160)
<i>I have good relationships with supervisors #</i>	0.085 (0.097)	-0.241 (0.147)
<i>I have good relationships with clients #</i>	-0.039 (0.069)	-0.021 (0.091)
<i>I have better relationships with my family since I started working #</i>	0.056 (0.070)	0.049 (0.111)
<i>I have better relationships with friends since I started working #</i>	-0.087 (0.072)	0.163 (0.110)
<i>I am more active and go out of the house more often #</i>	0.056 (0.056)	0.153 (0.093)
<i>I have gained the courage to meet new people and places #</i>	-0.091 (0.065)	-0.223 ** (0.080)
<i>Thanks to work, I have the means to pursue hobbies or other activities that are important to me #</i>	-0.014 (0.054)	0.042 (0.078)
<i>Women #</i>	0.012 (0.064)	0.049 (0.078)
<i>Primary education #</i>	-0.151 (0.151)	-0.330 (0.182)
<i>Tertiary education #</i>	0.013 (0.071)	0.042 (0.097)

<i>Vocational education #</i>	-0.071 (0.100)	-0.048 (0.106)
<i>Monitoring month #</i>	0.000 (0.005)	0.008 (0.007)
<i>Light disability degree #</i>	0.090 (0.079)	0.039 (0.093)
<i>Severe disability degree #</i>	-0.034 (0.093)	0.089 (0.138)
<i>Mental health conditions #</i>	0.113 (0.089)	0.129 (0.103)
<i>Intellectual &amp; developmental disabilities #</i>	-0.072 (0.159)	0.180 (0.275)
<i>Chronic Illnesses #</i>	0.166 (0.109)	-0.031 (0.124)
<i>Other disabilities: visual &amp; hearing #</i>	-0.011 (0.085)	0.186 (0.126)
<i>Still employed at the project job #</i>	0.004 (0.070)	-0.116 (0.086)
<i>Intercept</i>	0.557 ** (0.148)	0.540 ** (0.140)
<i>Number of observations</i>	2142	2142
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.46	0.46

## Appendix B1. Detailed notes following in-depth interviews with young people with disabilities

Between April 1 and 30, a qualitative IDI (in-depth individual interview) study was conducted with young people aged 22–26 with various types of disabilities who had participated in projects run by the Aktywizacja Foundation and received support from a Job Crafter. The study included five individuals with disabilities and was conducted via telephone using a pre-prepared interview script. The aim was to define challenges and explore the experiences of young people in the process of job searching and their participation in vocational activation projects supporting entry into the labor market. The results will be used to adapt the job crafting tool to the needs of young people in the NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities project.

A Job Crafter, in the project context, is a specialist who helps people with disabilities find and maintain satisfying employment. They support individuals in developing the ability to independently adapt (self-craft) their work environment, encourage self-education, and inspire engagement in additional activities. Their role involves cooperation with both job candidates/employees and employers, assisting in aligning mutual expectations and needs.

### Research findings concerning the profile of the studied group of people with disabilities:

As a result of the conducted IDI interviews with young people with disabilities who are actively participating in the process of vocational activation, the psychosocial characteristics of these individuals relate to the following traits:

1. High self-reflectiveness – the respondents were able to talk about their difficulties, competencies, and aspirations, although often with considerable caution.
2. Low self-esteem – the respondents exhibited self-doubt, fear of judgment, and difficulty in asking for help, especially in situations involving interactions between a person with a disability and an employer.
3. Strong need for meaning and impact – for the respondents, work is perceived not only as a source of income but also as evidence of full agency. The awareness of being needed and the engagement in tasks awaken energy and motivation to act.
4. Emotional sensitivity – in situations involving evaluation, time pressure, or unclear interpersonal communication, the respondents demonstrated susceptibility to stress.

With regard to issues related to the educational and career paths, the studied group was characterized by the following features:

1. The participants had completed secondary or higher education, and either had no work experience or only very limited professional experience.
2. The participants are exploring their career paths through a trial-and-error approach – they are open to changing professions and trying out different forms of employment.
3. The participants value practical training and workshops, especially those focused on specific job roles (e.g., Excel, payroll and HR, archiving), as well as the motivational support they received as part of various projects.

Their attitudes toward work can be described as follows:

1. They see work as a means of achieving independence, social integration, and personal growth – it is more than just employment.
2. Work gives structure to their day and builds a sense of self-worth. It provides meaning to getting up in the morning and helps organize their daily routine.
3. The following aspects of work are especially important to them:
  - a) being appreciated and receiving feedback,
  - b) opportunities for learning and self-improvement,
  - c) clarity of tasks and instructions,
  - d) support in stressful situations.

The main barriers and challenges identified by the study group include:

1. Difficulty with self-organization and career planning without external support (a need for mentoring). The participants recognized the broad role of the Foundation's support in helping them enter the labor market.
2. Fear of failure and the unknown – particularly strong during initial encounters with the job market.
3. Low level of preparedness for employer relations – difficulties in discussing their needs, salary expectations, and challenges.
4. Risk of exclusion due to employers'/colleagues' biases – concerns about perceived lower productivity and limited availability.

## Key findings from the study:

1. Job Crafting is a source of real support and motivation, which proved crucial for individuals at the beginning of their career paths. Job Crafters were identified by participants as key professionals, on par with career advisors, in supporting people with disabilities in entering the labor market. Respondents emphasized the positive role of these professionals not only in job searching but also in building self-confidence and focusing on career goals. Participants indicated that the support of a Job Crafter significantly accelerated their path to employment – the process was selective and targeted at employers open to hiring people with disabilities, rather than based on random applications for available positions.
2. Work is a significant factor of personal and social change – participants highlighted that starting a job had a major impact on their daily functioning and motivated them to undertake further initiatives. They also noted a shift in their hierarchy of needs after gaining employment – the opportunity to earn an income opened up new perspectives, such as financing further education, taking vacations, making personal purchases, or becoming financially independent from their immediate families.
3. Cooperation with a Job Crafter strengthened their sense of agency and professional competence. Thanks to working with the Foundation, participants gained the confidence to take initiative, develop skills, and plan their career paths. They emphasized the importance of conversations, consistent contact, and a genuine interest in their progress – all of which fostered a sense of empowerment and willingness to engage in various initiatives. Many noted that, on their own, they would not have been able to identify disability-friendly employers, manage formalities, or obtain necessary workplace accommodations. Despite a generally lowered sense of self-worth in the group, participants stated that collaboration with the Job Crafter increased their confidence and openness to employer interaction.
4. Personalized and flexible support was highly valued – interviewees appreciated that the assistance was tailored to their individual needs rather than imposed. Participants mentioned that they were able to propose their own ideas for job offers, which were then jointly discussed and analyzed with the Job Crafter.
5. Young people with disabilities need support in maintaining employment. The interviews showed that these individuals experienced difficulties in relationships with coworkers and felt unprepared to initiate conversations with employers about changes to their work conditions. Respondents reported that staying in touch with the Job Crafter during the employment period had motivational value, and helped them analyze and prioritize difficulties and barriers in the employment process, as well as find ways to address them.

6. Having professional experience was a key factor in enhancing their competitiveness on the job market. Respondents indicated that completing an internship strengthened their position in the labor market and allowed them to find employment more quickly.

### Quotes from interviews

- „*What helped me the most was that I also had job offers suggested and prepared by the Job Crafter. And that before going to an interview, the Job Crafter prepared me for it — how to answer, what to say, what's better not to say, and so on.*” – on the role of the Job Crafter before employment.
- „*For me, work had a huge impact because when I got up in the morning, went to work, I had something to do, I had a goal — something to engage in instead of just sitting at home watching TV. I function completely differently when I go out among people, when I'm somewhere doing something, something is happening — not just zoning out in front of the TV.*” – on the role of work in the life of a person with a disability.
- „*I think it's someone who helps match a person to certain criteria and, in doing so, find the right job where they can best use their skills and personality in the tasks they perform.*” – on who a Job Crafter is, according to a participant.
- „*At the beginning, when I joined the project, it helped to figure out what mattered to me at that point, what I was actually looking for. It kind of opened my mind to which direction I might want to go. So that first interview was really great — and later ones too. The Foundation and I also agreed that I should take an active role in the project, searching independently alongside the Foundation staff. I remember that one great part was that when I found an internship, the Foundation had the ability to convert it into a formal vocational internship through the project.*” – on the role of the Foundation and the Job Crafter in the job search process.
- „*The Job Crafter also provided strong mental support — I remember she would call often, ask how things were going. She always reminded me that if any issues came up, I could reach out calmly. So it was really nice to know that if anything happened, there was someone I could call for help or support.*” – on the supportive role of the Job Crafter.
- „*There are situations where I get stressed — like there's this one lady with a big sense of humor. And I often don't know when she is joking or being serious. So sometimes I feel a bit tense around her.*” – on difficulties in relationships with coworkers.
- „*A bit, yeah, like I don't deserve it, because I haven't been working long. I get these thoughts that others are doing harder work. I don't know, I just have low self-esteem.*” – on the topic of a raise or promotion.

## Appendix B2. Detailed notes following in-depth interviews with Job Crafters of the Aktywizacja Foundation

Between April 1st and 30th, a qualitative study using IDI (in-depth individual interviews) was conducted with individuals serving as Job Crafters in the projects of the Aktywizacja Foundation. These individuals work daily with people with various types of disabilities across different age groups. The study included five Job Crafters and was conducted via telephone, based on a pre-prepared interview guide.

The aim of the study was to gain detailed insight into and analyze the experiences of individuals working in the role of Job Crafter. This included examining the organization of their work, the competencies required to perform this role effectively, and the nature of their relationships with persons with disabilities. Particular emphasis was placed on capturing the practical aspects of job crafting in the context of supporting young people with disabilities in the process of job searching and entering employment.

The study also aimed to identify the main barriers, challenges, and needs of the group of young people, as well as to formulate recommendations to support their professional inclusion.

The findings from the study will be used to adapt the job crafting tool to the needs of young people within the **NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities** project.

### Findings of the study regarding the profile and characteristics of a Job Crafter:

#### Education and experience

1. All Job Crafters interviewed have higher education, mainly in pedagogy, psychology, or human resource management.
2. Some have professional experience in corporations, employment agencies, education, or social work.

#### Key competencies essential for the profession of a Job Crafter, as indicated during interviews:

1. **Empathy and flexibility** – in working with people with disabilities, who often face exclusion or have low self-esteem, empathy helps build trust and a relationship that forms the basis for the entire professional inclusion process. The respondents emphasized the effectiveness of an individual approach and the lack of one-size-fits-all solutions for this type of cooperation. Flexibility allows Job Crafters to change direction, adjust communication, the scope of support, or the pace of work.

2. **Intuition** – respondents highlighted the importance of intuition, which helps them understand the needs and difficulties of those they support.
3. **Relationship-building skills** – a Job Crafter operates between two worlds: the person with disability and the employer's. Therefore, it's crucial to be able to mediate expectations, ease misunderstandings, and facilitate communication—especially when a person with a disability has social or language difficulties.
4. **Multitasking** – the role involves combining elements of a career counselor, job coach, and mentor. It requires skills such as: planning, documenting, and balancing "soft" (relationship-based) and "hard" (formal) activities.
5. **Development orientation** – Job Crafters need to stay up to date with labor market trends and changes in the support system for people with disabilities in order to effectively guide those they support through the professional inclusion process.

### Who is a Job Crafter, according to the respondents?

A Job Crafter connects different worlds - the world of a job seeker, often burdened with disability-related issues or life challenges, and the world of the employer with specific needs and expectations concerning employees. A Job Crafter strives to understand both sides and find a mutually beneficial solution.

Importantly, a Job Crafter's work involves a highly individualized approach—there is no universal path or template. The process begins with getting to know individuals with disabilities - their story, limitations, dreams, and fears - and continues throughout job searching, recruitment, starting a job and maintaining it. The Job Crafter supports the person at every stage, often also serving as a source of psychological support and motivation.

### Key findings regarding young people with disabilities on the labor market:

1. Main challenges identified through interviews include: insufficient work experience, low motivation and a "somehow it will work out" attitude, lack of knowledge and skills related to job interview preparation and self-presentation, low awareness of strengths/weaknesses and career development opportunities and limited understanding of the labor market.
2. Job Crafters consistently pointed that young people with disabilities are a very diverse group, but often share common traits and challenges.
3. Many of these young people are just entering the labor market - they lack experience and have a limited understanding of job realities. Low self-esteem, lack of confidence, self-presentation difficulties, and anxiety in social situations are common. They often struggle to identify their own skills, prepare application documents, or articulate their expectations for future employment.

4. Many experience anxiety disorders, depression, social phobias, or autism spectrum symptoms, further complicating their entry into the workforce. They often avoid direct contact and prefer remote work. Some come from unsupportive or overly protective family environments, both of which can affect their ability to make responsible decisions.
5. This group tends to have low independence and engagement in job-seeking or retention activities. Interviews revealed they often require job crafters to monitor their job application progress, accompany them to interviews, help negotiate workplace difficulties, and motivate them to complete tasks like “homework” related to job readiness.
6. At the same time, Job Crafters see enormous potential in these young individuals—they are eager to learn, open to new experiences, and willing to take courses or trainings (e.g., graphic design, floristry, IT, virtual assistant roles). However, they need proper guidance, direction, and encouragement.
7. Many young people with disabilities, despite limited experience, hold unrealistic expectations of employment - wanting easy, well-paid, remote jobs with minimal demands and constant support.
8. Respondents noted a lack of skills related to problem-solving, decision-making, and coping with failure. When difficulties arise—such as workplace conflict or misunderstandings—their typical response is quick withdrawal. They lack habits of seeking alternatives or dialoguing with supervisors and tend instead to retreat or give up. Without prior job experience, they also lack role models for how to handle such situations constructively.
9. Young people are more willing to change jobs in the face of difficulties compared to older generations, reflecting greater flexibility in their career paths.

### Key conclusions from the study, based on working with young people with disabilities:

1. Effective work with the group of young people with disabilities requires building relationships based on trust and openness. Often, the foundation and the Job Crafter are the first places where these individuals feel comfortable sharing their struggles, fears, and dreams. Job crafting and building the relationship is a long-term process that may extend beyond employment, for example while maintaining the employment or post-project support.
2. Interviewed Job Crafters emphasized that job crafting is a universal method applicable to other groups facing labor market difficulties (e.g., mothers returning to work, people needing reskilling). With the group of young people with disabilities, the stages remain the same: job search preparation (CV writing, interview simulation), workplace adaptation (monitoring early employment and resolving difficulties), and job maintenance (maintaining motivation).

3. One of the most important aspects of the Job Crafter's work is identifying not only a person's with disabilities strengths, but also health and psychological conditions that may limit her/him in taking up specific jobs
4. Support during job interviews preparation is essential - many have never attended one and don't know how to prepare. Job Crafters simulate interviews with young people, review job offers, practice answers, and coach appearance and behavior.

### Final conclusion from interviews with Job Crafters and young people with disabilities:

Both sides emphasized the importance of proper interview preparation for building self-confidence and successful self-presentation. The more experience young people have with interview practice, the more confident they become.

5. Adaptation and job maintenance are also key. Young workers may not understand workplace norms, be surprised by expectations, or struggle with team dynamics. The Job Crafter mediates with the employer, provides emotional support, and helps resolve conflicts.
6. Job Crafters pointed that challenges faced by young people with disabilities are not only physical or experience-based, but also psychological, social, and communicational.
7. Unrealistic expectations and social skills deficits are the biggest obstacles among the group of young people with disabilities. Job crafting often involves fundamental work on adjusting expectations, developing professional maturity, and fostering responsibility for one's career. In this sense, the Job Crafter's role is advisory, educational, and therapeutic.
8. Most young individuals prefer online or phone contact—often even announced via SMS. They feel strong discomfort in direct situations such as face-to-face interviews or group meetings. This stems from social anxiety, shyness, autism spectrum issues, or lack of interpersonal experience. Job Crafters often accompany them to interviews for this reason.
9. Their working style reflects the digital world's influence and existing social/psychological barriers. They enjoy technology but often lack strategic digital skills or teamwork abilities. There's a clear difference in how younger vs. 40+/50+ individuals use technology - young people are more responsive and preferring job offer links via email rather than phone calls.
10. Young people with disabilities tend to prefer independent tasks with clearly defined scopes. Group work involving negotiation, cooperation, or division of roles often triggers anxiety or leads to withdrawal
11. Job Crafters highlighted the need for tailored tools—e.g., strengths/weaknesses assessments, interview simulations, application creators.

12. Working with young people motivates Job Crafters to explore new work methods and techniques - using modern technologies or platforms (e.g., YouTube videos) to share knowledge.

### Selected interview quotes:

- *"For me, it's a kind of modification. Modification at every stage—before starting the job, during work. The ability to influence change. To make the work environment most suitable for the person, adapting conditions, affecting their surroundings and the tools they use to make their job the best it can be." — on what job crafting is.*
- *"There's a big gap in preparation for interviews. We've noticed young people can't manage them, have trouble expressing themselves, showing strengths, and self-presentation in general." — on barriers for young people with disabilities.*
- *"They quit so quickly when problems arise. Instead of trying to talk or solve the issues with supervisors or colleagues, they give up. That's why support from a Job Crafter is vital—to show them that quitting isn't the only option." — on characteristics of young people with disabilities.*
- *"Much depends on health conditions and the family environment. Even with our support, families can negatively influence how someone views themselves in the workplace, sometimes even discouraging them from staying at a particular job." — on the family's impact.*
- *"Young people mostly need psychological support—someone to listen, understand, and show acceptance. To show that their disability doesn't define them. That their employment chances depend more on their skills than their disability." — on their needs.*
- *"This generation is a bit entitled; they think things will be better somewhere else..."*

## Appendix B3. Detailed notes following in-depth interviews with employers hiring young people with disabilities

Between April 1st and 30th, qualitative research in the form of in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) was conducted with employers who hire young people with disabilities. The study included five employers and was conducted via telephone using a pre-prepared interview guide. The purpose of the research was to gain in-depth knowledge about employers' experiences in employing young people with disabilities, and to identify the key needs, barriers, and challenges these young individuals with disabilities face when entering the labor market. The study aimed to gather insights that would enhance understanding of recruitment mechanisms, employers' attitudes and expectations, and to identify areas requiring support in the professional integration process of young people with disabilities. The findings will be used to adapt the job crafting tool to the needs of young people within the *NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities* project.

### Findings regarding the profile of the surveyed employers:

1. The interviewed employers represented various industries: refrigerated transport, gas, FMCG, automotive, and retail.
2. They were representatives of companies employing between 35 and 600+ people, mainly in operational, office, or sales departments.
3. Respondents included companies operating at the local or national level. Two employers represented companies with international operations.

### Key findings regarding employers' attitudes:

Employers participating in the study expressed positive, open, and socially responsible attitudes toward hiring young people with disabilities. They highlighted the need to support self-confidence and communication skills in these employees, while also recognizing their strong potential for growth. Employers often adapt to needs of young people with disabilities by offering flexible work arrangements and inclusive environments. Although the industries varied, all shared a practical, values-driven approach to recruitment - focused on the person, not just formal qualifications.

1. Employers unanimously stated that hiring people with disabilities was not motivated by compulsion or financial benefit, but instead by:
  - local engagement and social responsibility,
  - belief that these individuals are valuable employees,
  - a desire to "give someone a chance" and apply an individualized approach.

2. Employers reported no difference in onboarding and adaptation processes between employees with and without disabilities. All new hires go through the same stages, and if a person—regardless of disability—needs more time, they are given it. This reflects a broader individualized approach to onboarding rather than a disability-specific policy.
3. Where workplace adaptations/adjustments are needed (e.g., remote work for autistic individuals or ground-floor access for those with mobility limitations), companies show flexibility. However, many employees with disabilities require no special accommodations at all.
4. Soft skills were considered by employers to be as important—or in some cases more important—than hard skills. Key soft skills highlighted include:
  - interpersonal communication skills – the ability to ask questions, express needs, respond to feedback, and collaborate effectively,
  - independence and resourcefulness – especially in dynamic environments where initiative is valued,
  - time management and prioritization skills – essential in administrative and office roles,
  - openness to development and change attitude – highly valued in young candidates entering the workforce
5. Employers noted that soft skills are more difficult to develop in the workplace, and individuals who possess them tend to adapt more quickly to new responsibilities and environment.
6. They also emphasized that extra-curricular activities—such as volunteering, hobbies, training, or internships - serve as key indicators of a candidate's attitude and engagement. Such experiences suggest empathy, responsibility, and the ability to work within structured environments, easing the transition into professional roles.
7. Employers praised informal education as a means of building competencies. They encourage their teams to attend free webinars, listen to podcasts, watch instructional YouTube videos (e.g., Excel tutorials), and follow relevant literature.

### Key findings on working with young people with disabilities:

1. Young people with disabilities often lack self-confidence and independence. At the same time, employers indicated that starting a job and gaining professional experience often leads to increased self-esteem and greater autonomy at work.  
Joint conclusion from interviews with both employers and young people with disabilities: many young people believe their disability certification reduces their chances of employment, due to internalized stigma or perceived discrimination. Yet, employers stressed that the certificate is only relevant in terms of ensuring workplace accessibility—and often, no special actions are required at all.

2. Young people with disabilities are characterized by a willingness to learn and flexibility -they tend to handle learning new tasks more effectively, even if they initially lack experience. Often without prior work experience, employment represents a step into adulthood and greater independence for them. Although work may provoke fear and various concerns, those who have previously engaged in activities outside of work - such as volunteering or developing hobbies - are noticeably more open to change and less afraid of it. Such an attitude reflects their developmental potential.

3. Key skills identified by employers for development among young people:

- interpersonal communication and asking for help,
- time management and independence.

For those without prior work experience, hard skills such as **Excel**, **Canva**, **English language**, and **MS Office** proficiency were also considered useful.

4. Employers often perceive young people with disabilities as more engaged and having greater development potential than older workers. However, these differences are typically personal rather than age-related, depending on prior experiences, onboarding support, and personality.

### Areas in which employers see potential for support from external organizations

Employers were asked in which areas they see the potential for support from external organizations, such as foundations focused on the professional inclusion of people with disabilities. The following responses aim to clarify the role and scope of Job Crafters' support in relation to employers.

Challenge identified by employers	Supporting actions from external organizations that may address the challenge
1. Difficulty finding the right candidate in a short timeframe. 2. Concerns about whether the candidate's competencies and personality are a good match for the team and the position	Fast and flexible candidate recommendations tailored to specific recruitment needs.  Pre-selection of candidates based not only on qualifications, but also on adaptability potential and attitude.

3. Lack of understanding of which health-related limitations truly impact job performance.	
1. Lack of systemic support for integrating a person with a disability into the team. 2. Lack of tools or knowledge on how to effectively support the adaptation process. 3. Communication difficulties and psychological barriers on the part of the employee.	Training for managers and teams on communication, sensitivity, and collaboration with people with disabilities.  Option to provide an external coach, advisor, or job trainer to support the employee with a disability and their supervisor during the initial months of employment.
1. Candidates often lack digital skills or are unfamiliar with office tools. 2. Lack of preparedness for the employee role (communication, punctuality, work organization).	Organizing pre-employment training: Excel, Word, Canva, email usage, team communication.  Mock job interviews, workshops regarding self-presentation and building self-confidence.

### Selected quotes from interviews:

- *"The only difference in hiring a person with a disability is the need the right tools. We had to purchase a larger monitor for someone with visual impairment. That was it—just proper equipment. Everything else was the same." – on adapting the workplace.*
- *"These are often young people starting their careers or entering a new field. What matters is their attitude and willingness to learn. If we see someone eager to work and gain experience, that's all we really need. Managers will handle the rest." – on expectations for new employees.*
- *"We tend to associate disability with being blind, deaf, or having mobility issues. But there are many invisible disabilities. These individuals have experience in their field but were sidelined by life events. It's not their fault—and they deserve another chance. I try to encourage managers to stay open and not judge based on appearances." – on inclusive hiring.*

- *"Soft skills are very important. We should focus more on communication, recognizing emotions and feelings—because these are necessary in daily work." – on essential soft skills.*
- *"I think it's important to familiarize management with this topic, show them that every case is unique, and avoid generalizations. But it takes time—one workshop won't be enough. We have to keep talking with our supervisors." – on challenges faced by employers.*
- *"Sometimes we hire people straight out of school. We pay close attention to their attitudes. Often, we recruit people who did internships with us. If we've had a chance to observe them, we're more confident. For us, attitude is just as important as skills—because we can teach skills, but attitude and values are harder to change." – on recruitment priorities.*