

**TRENDS IN THE ATTITUDE OF EMPLOYERS TO HIRE PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES**

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**Abstract**

In recent decades in our country there has been an intensification of policies to include people with disabilities in society through work. At the governmental level, a number of normative acts regulate the opportunities for training, qualification and provision of real employment to persons with disabilities.

The present study traces the readiness of Bulgarian and foreign employers to offer work to disabled people and to assist in the processes of social integration of this vulnerable group by creating conditions for employment.

The survey, conducted through anonymous inquiry on electronic and paper carriers in October - December 2019, involved 120 Bulgarian and foreign business representatives. Respondents answer questions with different orientation: socio-demographic profile of the respondents; sphere of business; causes of unemployment among people with disabilities; reasons why employers would or would not hire disabled people; business readiness to invest in the qualification of disadvantaged employees; incentives for employers to hire people with disabilities.

The data were processed using the program SPSS Statistics 17.0.0 WinWrap Basic, Copyright 1993-2007 (SPSS Statistics, 2007 - 17) and are visualized in tables and charts via Excel 14.0.7237.5000, Ms Office Pro Plus 2010 ©.

Demonstrating their corporate and social responsibility, employers perceive access to the labor market of people with disabilities as a process that requires coordinated action between government institutions, businesses and disadvantaged people.

**Key words:** *attitude of employers; labor market; people with disabilities;*

In recent decades in our country there has been a significant change in the attitude to the problems of people with disabilities and in particular to the opportunities for their active inclusion in society through employment. At the governmental level, after a public discussion, important changes were made in a number of laws, regulations and programs aimed at providing training, qualification and real employment opportunities for people with varying degrees of disabilities in order to overcome their social isolation and their full integration into society through work. The increased level of public awareness about the problems and opportunities of the disabled has led to overcoming the negative stereotypes regarding the labor potential of this vulnerable group. The implementation of the overall policy regarding the labor integration of people with disabilities is accompanied by legislative changes and the development of measures to encourage entrepreneurs to hire unemployed people with disabilities, providing them with appropriate working conditions, decent pay and opportunities for independent functioning in the community.

This publication analyzes the role of employers as one of the factors favoring the social integration of people with reduced working capacity through their participation in the labor market in our country for the period 2018 - 2019. In structuring the survey of employers, on which the empirical study is based, the author proceeds from the following concepts: 1) Current changes in legislation and regulations based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (1) are a prerequisite for creating conditions for the labor integration of disadvantaged people; 2) The effectiveness of policies for the labor integration of people with disabilities is hampered by the lack of a generally accepted definition of key concepts such as 'disability' and 'people with disabilities' and related terminology. The World

Health Organization (WHO) in its International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) distinguishes between the concepts of insufficiency (loss or violation of psychological, physiological or physical structure or functions) and disability (restriction or loss of ability to perform an activity) in a manner or to an extent considered normal to the person without disability). (2); 3) The attitude of people to the labor process is different. For some people, work is a value in itself (the self-centered approach); for others it is a means of achieving material well-being (the instrumental approach); there are also people for whom work is a "necessary evil" (the punitive approach). 4) The different attitude to the labor capacity of the employees in the labor process. Proponents of the so-called Dichotomous Categorization divides people into "able-bodied" and "incapable", into "capable" and "incapable", into "able" and "incapable". In this context, the marginalization of disabled people, due to both the unfavorable social environment and the passivity and dependence on the institutions of some of them, has a demotivating effect on their employment activity; 5) Distinguishing the concepts of working capacity / incapacity for work. Working capacity can be defined as the balance between health status, functional abilities, competence and skills, value system, attitudes and motivation of the individual. The maintenance and promotion of working capacity is influenced by the synergy between legal regulation, social policy, technical security and infrastructure, the relationship between workers and employers. (3)

In the Insurance Law with regard to the labor resources of persons with disabilities, the notion of working capacity is the antithesis of the notion of incapacity for work. Disability is defined as a temporary or permanent inability of an individual to perform work activities due to deteriorating health status or deviations from normal physical and physiological condition. 6.1) The labor market as a specific phenomenon, which from an institutional point of view is based on legal norms governing the distribution and use of labor, and in economic terms balances the interests of those who offer jobs and those who seek jobs. The labor market is a complex space in which the worker offers the employer for a fee his knowledge and work skills, which the latter uses to make a profit. Both the potential of the employee at the time of hiring and the perspective for his development in order to increase the efficiency of the production process and the company's revenues are essential for the job provider. As far as the employee, incl. the disabled employee, is hired for a long time, the employer is expected to create favorable working conditions and invest in his professional training. For the employer it is important the ability of the employee to adapt to the requirements of the production process and the psychoclimate of the workplace, and through his work to help increase the image of the company; 6.2) Globalization processes favor labor market mobility domestically and internationally and provide opportunities for both parts to establish themselves where they can create or find jobs; 6.3) The dynamics of the labor market is determined by the main sources of labor. The priority for the current study is the attitude of businesses to hire unemployed people with varying degrees of disabilities who have retained their working capacity.

Current statistics show that people with disabilities are still poorly represented in the labor market and the job positions for them are extremely insufficient. According to the National Statistical Institute (NSI) as of 2018 (4) there are over 465,000 people with permanent disabilities in working age in Bulgaria. Only 31% of them work, and only 5 - 6% are registered as unemployed, ie 70% of these able-bodied people are not employed. Economic activity among people with disabilities is about 35%. Research shows that our country has the potential to increase their employment by 30%, ie. 120-130 thousand people can join the labor market. The number of disabled people included in the employment programs from 2015 to 2017 has increased from 8179 to 10 742. According to the Employment Agency (EA), the downward trend in the number of unemployed disabled people continues in 2018. As a result of the intensive work of the teams of the Employment Agency on the implementation of the active

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policy during the year, more people with disabilities have sought the mediation services of the labor offices for access to the labor market. On an annual basis, the number of registered people with disabilities increased by 12.3% from 12,878 people at the end of 2017 to 14,460 at the end of 2018. At the same time, the transitions in employment in this group have increased from 5.7% in 2017 to 7.9% in 2018. (5) According to the criterion of education, the persons with secondary education and secondary vocational education have the largest relative share (58.9%). The share of the unemployed with permanent disabilities without qualification and specialty is also high. (39.3%). The vision of the National Action Plan for Employment of the MLSP for 2018 and 2019 provides for a workforce with qualifications and skills not only in view of the future needs of the country, but also in accordance with the demand for business. Among the priority target groups for joining the labor market are the unemployed with permanent disabilities. (6)

In 2019, in parallel with the programs and measures for employment of people with disabilities, the implementation of the new legislation concerning this group of our society began. The National Program for Employment and Training of People with Permanent Disabilities provides a full subsidy to employers, which is why the increased interest on their part is combined with that of the unemployed. The program requires hiring unemployed people with permanent disabilities for a two-year period, which guarantees the majority of them a secure income and is the only opportunity for their employment. Priority is given to persons with and over 71% reduced working capacity; military invalids; persons with sensory and mental disabilities, as well as employers who have concluded a contract for financing under Art. 25 of the Law on Integration of People with Disabilities to ensure access to workplaces and to adapt and / or equip workplaces for people with disabilities. The Employment Promotion Act (Art. 36, para. 2, Art. 51, para. 2 and Art. 52) stimulates entrepreneurs to hire unemployed persons with permanent disabilities registered with the Employment Agency up to the age of 29 on a full-time or part-time basis. In 2019, the amount of funds for supported employment under Art. 43 (a) of the EPA for an unemployed person with permanent disability has been increased to BGN 700.

In order to guarantee the employment of people with permanent disabilities with Art. 38 of the Law on People with Disabilities a quota principle has been introduced. This principle obliges employers with 50 to 99 employees to hire one person with permanent disabilities, and employers with 100 and over 100 employees –to hire 2% of employees. Employers are exempted from these obligations under certain conditions: a) the presence of factors in the work environment that prevent the employment of people with permanent disabilities; (b) the absence of people with permanent disabilities referred by employment offices or other employment agencies; c) application by employers of alternative measures for employment of people with permanent disabilities, determined by the regulations for application of the law. However, paragraph (6) of the Law on People with Disabilities provides for sanctions for non-compliance with the quotas, under which the employer owes a monthly compensation payment of 30% of the minimum wage for the country for each unoccupied job for a person with permanent disability. Although the quota principle has been discussed in the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation and has been supported by the Ombudsman institution, business representatives, the trade unions, business organizations such as the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Association of Industrial Capital in Bulgaria (BICA), the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce (BIA), the setting of quotas has been perceived as administrative coercion, and the expected effect of them has been considered minimal. Referring to the experience of a number of developed economies in Europe and North America and the results of the practical introduction of quotas for the employment of people with disabilities in our country back in

1989, opponents argue that this approach does not solve the problem of labor employment of disabled people.

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

#### *1. Subject of research*

The subject of this study are the trends in the attitudes of Bulgarian and foreign employers operating throughout the country to offer work to people with varying degrees of disability and their willingness to assist in the processes of social integration of disabled people by creating conditions for employment.

The empirical study was conducted in the period October - December 2019 through voluntary and anonymous surveys on paper and electronic media. For foreign employers, both versions of the surveys are offered in English. The surveys have the character of an individualized interview. They include 11 questions that aim to ascertain the personal opinion of the respondents at the time of the survey. Some of the questions suggest more than one possible answer, due to which the total sum of percentages of the answers to these questions exceeds 100%.

#### *2. Target group*

The choice of the target group of employers developing their business throughout the country is determined by the fact that the changes in the legislation concerning the labor integration of people with disabilities and the encouragement of entrepreneurs to employ disabled people concern not only them, but also the interests of the whole society. Moreover - in many cases the same participants in the survey, develop their activities in different areas and in different regions of the country, respectively the same foreign businessman operates not only in Bulgaria but also abroad. The opinion of 120 participants was studied and analyzed, of which 54 of them filled in the paper version of the survey. The other respondents indicated the answers in the electronic form of the survey. Both options are preceded by a Declaration of Informed Consent.

#### *3. Statistical processing*

The complex analysis of the information determines the methods and techniques for its collection, on the basis of which the statistical data processing is carried out. The methods of descriptive statistics, as well as one-dimensional and two-dimensional frequency analysis are used for the distribution of the variables and the description of their possible categories. For this purpose, the number of units belonging to a given category is determined and the corresponding absolute or relative frequencies are calculated (Veleva, 2019-15) (7); Veleva, 2019-16 (8) ). The empirical data were processed through the program for processing and analysis of sociological data SPSS Statistics 17.0.0 WinWrap Basic, Copyright 1993-2007 (SPSS Statistics, 2007 - 17). Their visualization in tables and charts via Excel 14.0.7237.5000, Ms Office Pro Plus 2010 © (18) aims for better visibility and comparability of results, as well as summarizing the information.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The above arguments determine the main aspects of the survey. The participants in the study answered 11 questions with the following focus:

#### *1. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents:*

	Respondents	Relative Share (%)	Number of Persons
<b>Gender</b>	Men	45,8	55
	Women	54,2	65
<b>Age</b>	From 25 – 40 years	37,5	45
	From 41 – 60 years	42,5	51
	Over 60 years	20	24
<b>Education</b>	With higher education	74,2	89
	With secondary education	25,8	31
<b>Nationality</b>	Bulgarian	<b>90</b>	108
	Foreigner ( with Bulgarian citizenship or Bulgarian business visa)		12
		10	

**Table №1 Socio-demographic profile of the respondents**

The data include information on the age, gender, education and nationality of the respondents and are summarized in Table 1. As can be seen the participants in the survey aged between 41 - 60 years old (42.5% - 51 people) prevail over those aged 25 - 40 years old (37.5% - 45 people); 20% (24 people) of the respondents are over 60 years old.

According to the data the share of women and male employers, who participated in the survey, is almost equal, respectively 54.2% (65 people) of the respondents are women and 45.8% (55 people) are men. The percentage of employers with higher education (74.2% - 89 people) prevails those with secondary education (25.8% - 31 people).

According to the criteria "nationality" and "citizenship" 90% (108 people) of the respondents are Bulgarians, and only 10% (12 people) are foreigners with Bulgarian citizenship and / or Bulgarian business visa. The assumptions are that the socio - demographic profile of the respondents reflects on the answers from the following sections of the survey.

*II. Business area:*

This part of the survey, visualized in **Fig. 1**, covers the main areas of business in our country such as material production (technology, energy, electrification, IT technologies, food industry, etc.); trade and economy; construction and architecture; tourism; hotels and restaurants; medicine, agriculture; animal husbandry, intangible sphere (justice, culture, art, education); defense, security, aviation; wide range of services. Some of the surveyed employers noted that they operate in more than one business area. One of the foreign employers, who is a doctor by education, is a successful construction entrepreneur and a tour operator. Among the participants in the survey, the number of employers from the spheres of trade and economy prevails (20.8% - 25 people); 16.7% (20 people) are entrepreneurs in various medical fields; close to this result is the percentage of employers in the intangible sphere (15.8% - 19 people); 13.3% (16 people) of the respondents develop their business in the field of services; 10.8% (13 people) is the share of employers in material production; 8.3% (10 people) of the respondents are engaged in construction business; managers in the field of tourism, hotel and restaurant

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business are 5.8% (7 people); agriculture and animal husbandry develop 6.7% (8 people); only two of the respondents (1.7%) run companies in the field of defense, security and aviation.

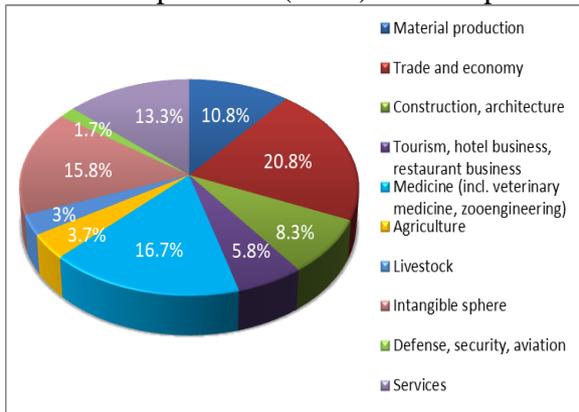


Fig. №1 **Business area** of the employers

### III. *Opinion of employers on the quota principle when hiring people with disabilities:*

The results of this part of the survey, presented in Fig. 2, confirm the ambiguous attitude of the business to the changes in the Law on People with Disabilities in its part for determining quotas for hiring disabled people. Although 49.2% (59 people) of the respondents approve of the quota principle, a significant share of employers (45% - 54 people) do not share this opinion; 5.8% have no information on the issue. The study confirms the status quo of resistance on the part of some business representatives against the obligation to hire disabled people under threat of sanctions. Although the topic has been the focus of public attention for years, the debate between government institutions and employers is not over and the contentious issues in the application of the quota principle have yet to be clarified.

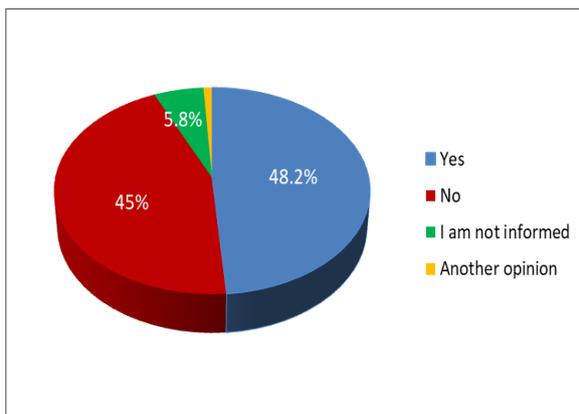


Fig.№2 Approval of the quota principle for employment of people with disabilities

### IV. *Reasons why, according to employers, a significant proportion of people with disabilities are out of work:*



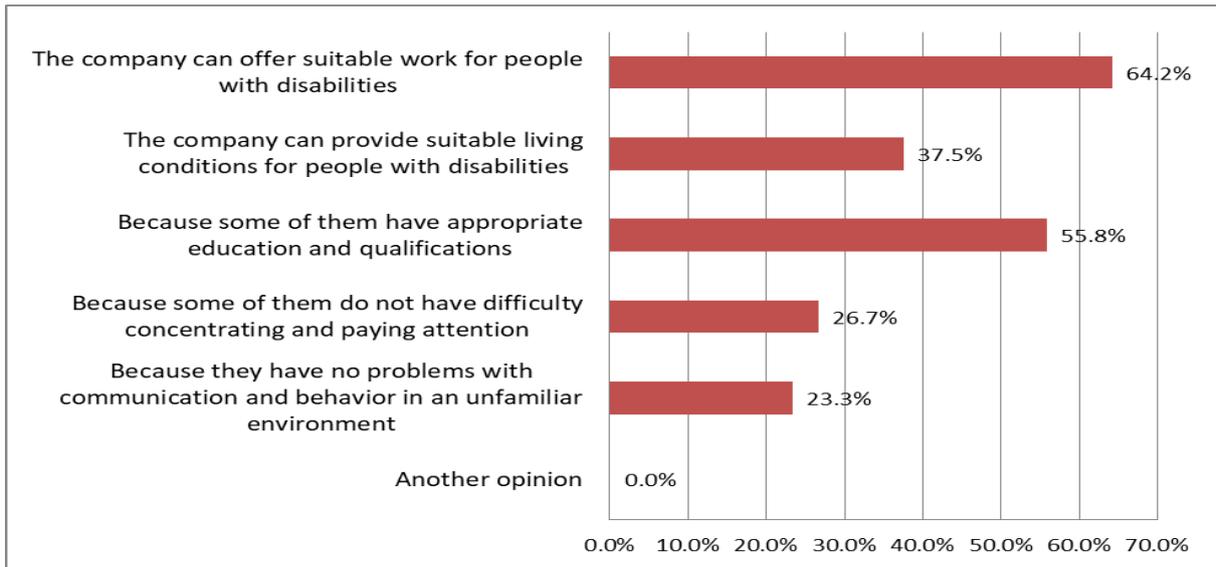
**Fig. №3 Reasons why according to employers a significant proportion of people with disabilities are unemployed**

The answers to this question from the survey give an idea of the degree of awareness of employers about the reasons why a significant proportion of people with disabilities are outside the labor market. According to (67.5% - 81 people) of the respondents, the most important reason for the labor marginalization of persons with reduced working capacity is the lack of incentives for jobseekers to hire such persons; for 71 of them (59.2%) the reason is the inaccessible infrastructure, the lack of specialized transport and appropriate living conditions, tailored to the specific needs of people with disabilities. Very close are the data in the answers of the employers, who see the reasons for the high levels of unemployment among this vulnerable group in the difficult adaptation to the load in the production process (27.5% - 33 people), in the lack of appropriate education and qualification for business purposes (26.7% - 32 people) and in the communicative and behavioral manifestations in an environment not typical for the disabled persons (25.8% - 31 people). For 17.5% (21 people) the reasons are the difficulties in the assimilation of innovations in the production process by people with disabilities.

The path to mutual acquaintance between the employer and the person with a disability goes through overcoming the negative stereotypes and distrust of the intellectual and work potential of the persons with disabilities.

The next questions of the empirical study aim to establish respondents' understanding of their corporate and social responsibility in deciding whether to hire or not to hire disabled people and the complex set of factors that business must consider when offering employment to disadvantaged people.

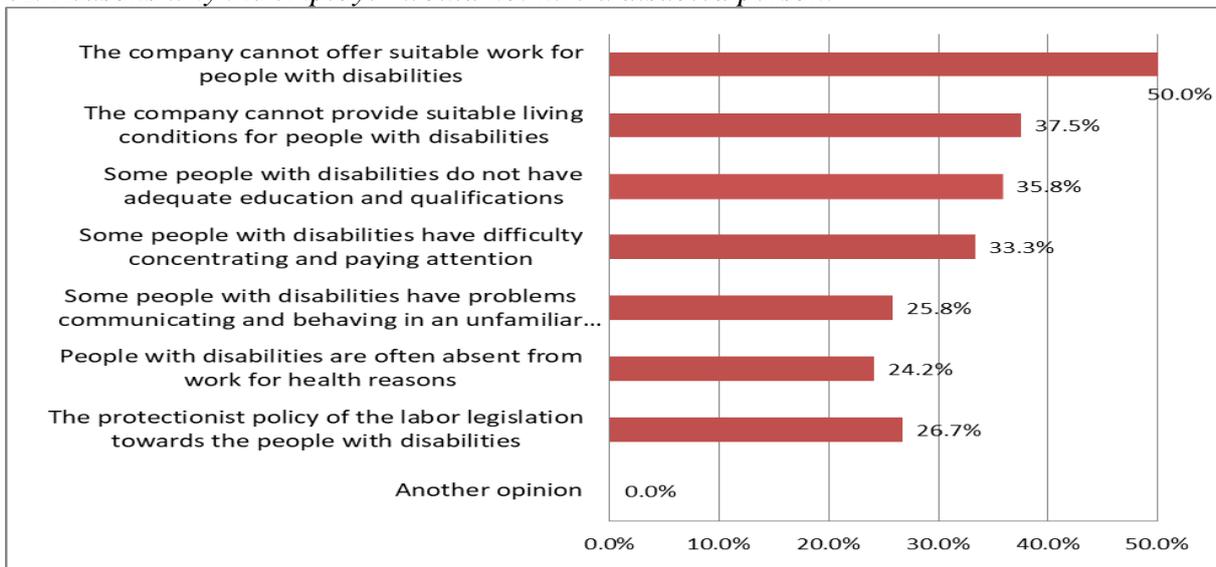
*V. Reasons why the employer would hire a person with a disability:*



**Fig. №4 Reasons why an employer would hire a person with a disability**

The analysis of the results from Fig. 4 show that a significant part of the surveyed employers are ready to take their responsibility and apply the quota principle not as an obligation imposed by a law, but as a result of a decision taken in view of material circumstances relevant to the labor process. The number of employers who would hire a person with disabilities, because the company can offer him a suitable job, prevails (64.2% - 77 people). For 55.8% (67 people) the education of the disabled person, which must be adequate to the job offered, is important. In third place 37.5% (45 people) respondents put the opportunity to create appropriate living conditions for employees with special needs. For 26.7% (32 people) of the respondents their ability to concentrate and adapt to the specifics of the production process is decisive when hiring people with disabilities. Factors of emotional - communicative nature are significant for 23.3% (28 people) of the managers.

*VI. Reasons why the employer would not hire a disabled person:*



**Fig. 5 Reasons why an employer would not hire a person with a disability**

The additional options in the answers to this question in the survey rearrange the priorities of entrepreneurs in deciding not to hire a person with a disability.

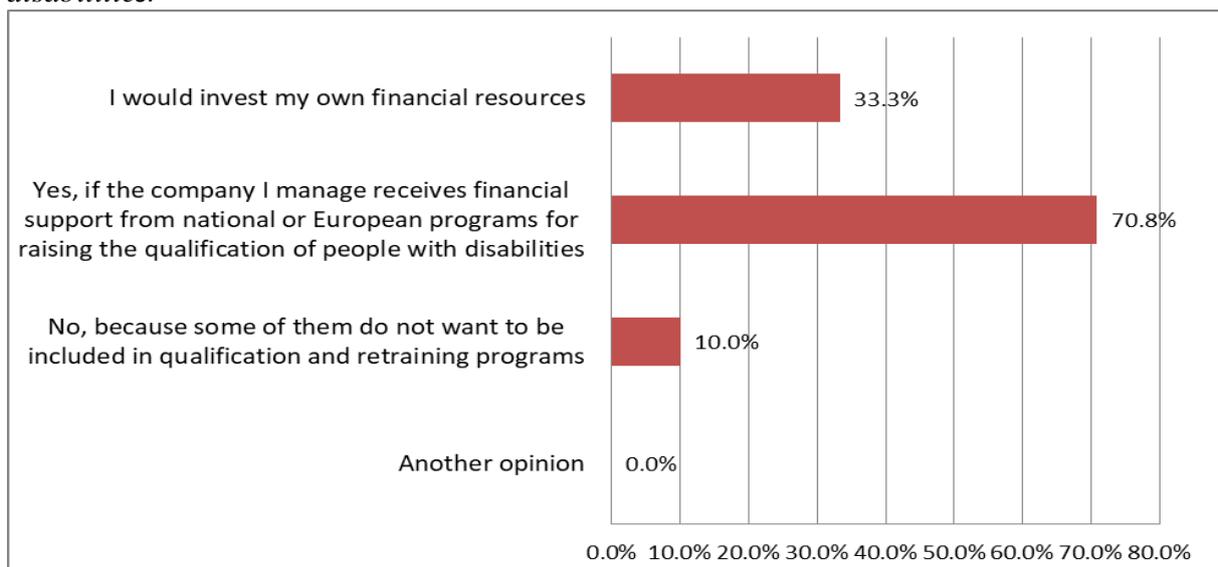
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Half of the respondents point out the impossibility to provide a suitable job position as the most important reason not to offer a job to a person with a disability. For 37.5% (45 people) of them the inability to provide appropriate living conditions for disabled people is an essential reason not to hire them; in the third place among the motives of 35.8% (43 people) of employers to refrain from hiring people with reduced working capacity is the lack of appropriate education and qualifications for the job offered. Forty of the respondents (33.3%) have doubts about the ability of the disabled to concentrate and keep his attention on the production task. The protectionist policy of the labor legislation is an important argument for 26.7% (32 people) of the respondents to refrain from hiring people with disabilities. In the paper version of the survey, three of them added that they prefer to pay the legally required monthly compensation installment of 30% of the minimum wage for each unoccupied job for a person with a permanent disability, instead of being forced to leave him at, due to the impossibility to terminate his employment contract. The share of employers who would not hire a disabled person due to potential behavioral and communication problems exceeds, although insignificant, the number of entrepreneurs who would not offer work to vulnerable persons due to their frequent absences, related to health reasons (respectively 25.8% - 31 people, compared to 24.2% - 29 people).

The results of the answers to the last two questions lead to the conclusion that a significant part of the surveyed employers do not perceive people with disabilities as a burden on the social system of the country and tend to offer them jobs, taking into account the specifics of their disability. On the other hand, however, the respondents stated that they would not hire injured persons only for humanitarian reasons. From disadvantaged people the business expects education, suitable for the offered position, motivation for work and professional development, ability to adapt to the microclimate of the company.

Important problems for any business, along with turnover and labor shortages, are the lack of qualified and motivated staff. One of the possible solutions is the investment in the development of the staff, including the employed people with functional deficits. The next two questions aim to identify factors that would encourage businesses to hire people with disabilities and willingness to give them a chance to improve their employment potential.

*VII. Willingness of employers to invest in qualification and retraining of employees with disabilities:*



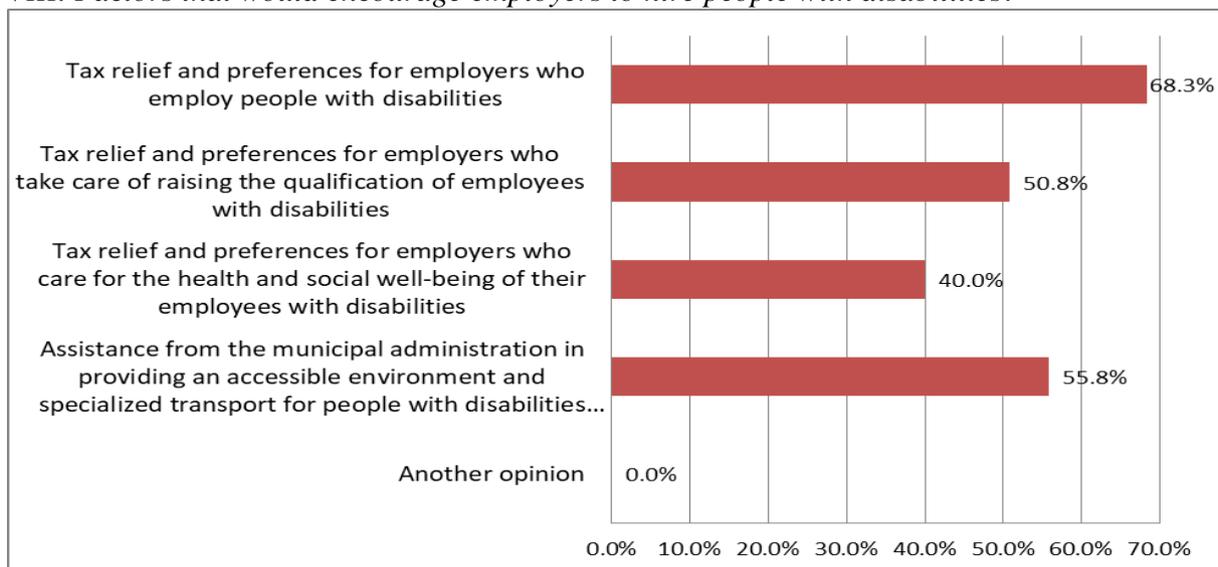
**Fig. 6 Willingness of employers to invest in qualification and retraining of employees with disabilities**

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The data in Fig. 6 show that 70.8% (85 people) of the respondents would invest in raising the qualification of their employees with disabilities, provided that the company is subsidized by national or European programs for raising the qualification of people with disabilities; 33.3% (40 people) stated that they would invest their own financial resources in the qualification of employees with disabilities; only 10% (12 people) believe that self-marginalization (self-exclusion from society due to personal decision, psychological or social reasons) makes the investment in qualification and re-qualification of people with disabilities unprofitable.

Employers also have expectations for support from the state.

*VIII. Factors that would encourage employers to hire people with disabilities:*



**Fig.7 Factors that would encourage employers to hire people with disabilities**

Regarding the incentives for businesses to hire people with deficits, it is noteworthy that the surveyed employers give priority to tax relief and preferences from the state in different circumstances: a) in case they hire disabled people (68.3% - 82 people); b) provided that they take care of raising the qualification of employees with disabilities (50.8%) (61 people); if they take care of the health and social well-being of their employees with disabilities (40% - 48 people). However, half of the respondents rely on the assistance of the municipal administration, from which the business expects to build an accessible architectural environment and to help in organizing specialized transport to the workplaces of disabled.

## CONCLUSION

The data from the survey show that the majority of respondents are willing to contribute to the processes of demarginalization of people with disabilities by providing jobs tailored to the specifics of their disability. Business is aware that not all people with disabilities are incapable of work and that they can only be assigned basic and low-skilled tasks. Another study by the author confirms the fact that more people with disabilities not only have education and qualifications that allow them to develop their intellectual and work potential, but also demonstrate their desire for further improvement and career development. Declaring readiness to promote the labor integration of disabled people, however, the surveyed employers perceive access to the labor market for people with disabilities as a multilateral process, as a partnership between government institutions, businesses and disadvantaged people themselves.

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