On the path to an inclusive labour market

A central theme at REHACARE 2023 in Düsseldorf will be how inclusion can succeed on the labour market. Running from 13 to 16 September 2023 the trade fair's motto reads "Self-Determined Living". Numerous exhibitors wish to present supportive options to help more people with disabilities to get into the regular workplace – against the backdrop of a new law that promotes an inclusive labour market.

Georgia Harea loves her job. She has been given a large screen for her home office as well as a special keyboard she finds easy to use. "A language assistant translates my words into text – I learnt how this works on a special training course," says the office clerk working in the communications team at German Statutory Accident Insurance Fund DGUV, she prepares campaigns and events. "This is like winning the jackpot with extra icing on the cake," raves Georgia Harea – because she knows things can often be different: "When employers see the wheelchair, as a rule you quickly find they've decided in favour of another applicant."

New law to aid job searches

Not only activists like Raúl Krauthausen point out how hard it still is for people with a disability to find a suitable job – this is also shown by current figures from the Inclusion Barometer 2022 of 'Aktion Mensch': While it is true that some 173,000 companies in Germany are required by law to award at least 5% of their positions to people with disabilities – only 40% of the companies fill all these mandatory vacancies. 25% only pay the so-called compensatory levy instead. A survey by the Federal Employment Agency shows that the unemployment rate among severely disabled people in Germany stood at 11.5% in 2022. The percentage of people without a disability amounted to 5.3% over the same period (until November 2022). After a decision by the German Government, however, this situation is now set to change as a result of a recently adopted bill (see box) – also against the backdrop of growing skilled labour shortages.

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Growing interest in companies

“The issue of inclusion is something companies now understand – I get many calls from executives seeking training in this field,” says Petra Wallmann, employed at the Office for Inclusion at Work at the Westphalia-Lippe Regional Council (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe – LWL). At a joint stand with the Rhineland Regional Council (Landschaftsverband Rheinland), the LWL will give advice on participation in working life for interested parties at REHACARE 2023 (Hall 6, Stand E15) – in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency (Hall 6, Stand D 11).
Other themed counters of the regional councils are dedicated to the specialist integration service as well as social participation while on the stage of the REHACARE Forum digital assistance systems will be showcased. At Stand D 11 in Hall 6 the experts of the Federal Labour Agency will provide consultancy on professional rehabilitation – considering the personal situation and accounting for skills, career wishes and interests. Furthermore, they will provide information on individual support options.
Support and participation is also the major topic at DGUV, Georgia Harea’s employer: hosted at its joint stand in Hall 6, D21 will be a mobility concourse where visitors can try out moving safely around in a wheelchair or with a prosthetic limb. ‘DGUV job’ is a state-mandated service provided by the Employers’ Liability Insurance Bodies (Berufsgenossenschaften) aiming to help motivated applicants looking for a career change after an accident at work or seeking integration into the labour market.

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Georgia Harea is currently seeing just how well this can work in her job: “Previously I wrote piles of applications for years and thought at some point that was nothing suitable for me.” The lack of accessibility in many companies was also one of the reasons for her lack of success in finding work. Then she started working at the DGUV – first in the Department for International Relations, now in the Communications Department: “They even waited for me there for months because some insurance issues needed to be solved first with the Federal Labour Agency. I have an

unlimited employment contract and can telework most of the time. With many efforts I have also achieved that a driving service takes me to the office from time to time." To allow her to better "negotiate" the high-pile floor carpeting there, she was given a push assist for her wheelchair: "This is something I once spotted at REHACARE and then proposed it as a device for me at work. Successfully so!"

Kasten/Box Law is aimed at promoting employment

The Law on the Promotion of an Inclusive Labour Market foresees that employers who fail to comply with the mandatory employment of severely disabled persons will have to pay a higher compensatory levy in future. Special rules will continue to apply for smaller employers. Revenue from the compensatory levy is to be used completely for promoting employment of severely disabled people on the general labour market. In addition, approval processes will be speeded up and labour costs subsidised for the long term.

The Law was adopted in May 2023 by the German parliament and will largely enter into force on 1 January 2024, individual regulations of it even earlier.

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For more information visit the German government portal bundesregierung.de, under the heading, 'Arbeit und Soziales, Der Arbeitsmarkt soll inklusiver werden' (Labour and Social Affairs, The Labour Market is Set to Become more Inclusive).

Author: Natascha Plankermann, journalist specialised in health and medical subjects

Info REHACARE 2023

"Self-determined Living" is the motto of the REHACARE 2023 trade fair: from 13 to 16 September 2023 a unique community of people with disabilities, their families, carers and supports as well as companies who have adapted to the needs of these persons will meet in Düsseldorf. REHACARE provides an international platform for networking with experts

as well as like-minded people. There are numerous possibilities to make new contacts and learn about current developments and trends. These include both digital and analogue mobility solutions, aids and care and therapy offers but also sports and leisure activities.

For more information on Rehacare 2023 including the list of exhibitors and events, please visit the official website of the trade fair:
www.rehacare.de

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