

## Podcast Belgium: how to stay inclusive

### Intro

Hello, today we would like to introduce you to the project Include3. It is an Erasmus+ project and co-funded by the European Union. Include3 is an international project involving five countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Lithuania and Slovenia. Include is about the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the primary labour market. The aim of the project is to find a method of making this inclusion run smooth and successful.

### Introduction

My name is Ursula Meyer, I am a philosopher, I come from Germany and live now in East Belgium. To learn more about the working situation of disabled people in my new home, I am now in conversation with Liliane Mreyen project manager at the VHS-Ostbelgien, hello Liliane. The VHS is involved as Belgian partner in the Include3 project.

I would like to know how people in need of support are made fit for the labour market. The VHS is currently very active in the Include3 project and that's why you, Liliane, are particularly familiar with the situation in Belgium. There is a detailed report on this and I have a few questions about it.

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## Main Part

Ursula: In East Belgium there is the service for self-determined living, called DSL, which is responsible for the needs of people in need of support. It offers various ways to facilitate the transition of people with disabilities into the primary labour market. The report describes two main variants: one is called AIB training in the company. Is this a proper education, as it is open to all young people or are there differences for people with support needs?

Liliane: In principle, this is a normal training, a three-year training that takes place directly in the company. One difference is certainly that the trainees do not necessarily have to be young, but can also be older. The purpose of training people in need of support is not only to learn the job, but also to find out whether the cooperation with colleagues works. More emphasis is placed on this, only then inclusion can work for all parts. The AIB is a very practical way to test this. The trainee is trained for certain activities in a company and the goal is to be able to continue to be employed afterwards. What distinguishes this training from normal training is that the trainee can drop out at any time and return to the DSL. It will try to find another employer. Or, if the person does not want to do that, he or she can work in another training measure or even in a sheltered workshop.

Ursula: The sounds great and actually there is hardly any difference to a training as you know it. What about the payment? Does this also work through the DSL?

Liliane: The payment is fixed and taken over by the company. There is a remuneration in the first year of 375€ per month, which increases to 675€ by the third year. In addition, there is reimbursement of travel expenses and other additional services. It is also possible to provide assistance through the service.

Ursula: That's really a nice possibility. Liliane, you said at the beginning that there are two different possibilities. What is the second?

Liliane: The second is an internship, it is called AP training internship and is also arranged through the department. It is an offer for people in need of support and for companies that are considering hiring someone. If they do, they can receive up to 40% subsidy on wages. The internship is a good test run. The contract is concluded for a maximum of one year. During this time, people in need of support

can try out whether they can do the work in the primary labour market. The company can test whether the person meets the requirements and find out how the cooperation with colleagues works. The employment is handled by the service so that there is no risk for people in need of support if the job does not work out as one would like.

Ursula: That is really a great concept to get a taste of it and see how a job in a company can work. Suppose the person can't make it or it's too stressful and would rather go to the sheltered workshop, where the working conditions are much more moderate than on the open market. What is the process?

Liliane: There are also different possibilities and different support variants. In the so-called BW you also start with an internship. This means that the person passes through all areas of production. BW in Eupen, for example, offers shipping solutions, i.e. packaging or sending documents, and companies can also order fine work there, and glue plug connections or labels. In addition, small parts are also assembled in production. In other BWs, the quotation may look different. Perhaps another hint, because this distinguishes Belgium from many other countries: those who work in the production of a BW receive a normal employment contract with the generally accepted minimum wage and not just pocket money.

Through the internship, you first want to find out what skills and abilities the person has. Then you can determine whether working in production is a possibility. If the production does not go for the person with support needs, one can remain in the internship area and do light work that arises in the company. Here, too, there is the possibility of entering the primary labour market, in so-called external groups. This means that the people are officially under contract with the BW and are practically sent to carry out work in the private sector or with a public employer. These can be very different activities, cleaning or storage work, perhaps even simple work on machines, things that would otherwise not be able to be handled in the company or that robots would have to take over, which of course would be associated with high investments. Thus, a low-threshold entry into the labour market is possible. The advantage for people in need of support is the security of being employed by BW. In case the outdoor job does not work, you can always come back, but you are also part of the normal economic work process.

Ursula: There are really many possibilities. Is there any further advice if problems arise at work?

Liliane: DSL is responsible for that. They work closely with the companies and the trainees or the people in need of support, checking whether everything is running to the satisfaction of both sides. Every 6 months there is an interview in which both the company and the employees can express their concerns and needs. Otherwise, there is of course a constant possibility of exchange in more urgent cases. The DSL also looks after the organization at the workplace itself, asks which technical adjustments are necessary and also regulates the financing, if conversions or other things are needed.

### **Closing**

Ursula: That all sounds great. In sum there are three main routes for people in need of support into the labour market: the DSL offers the AP, a training internship lasting 3 months, and the AIP, a three-year training contract with the prospect of being taken over by the employer in the private sector. In addition, the BW also offer the opportunity to work in external groups at such a company. I think we have now learned a lot about what East Belgium offers to make it easier for people with support needs to enter the primary labour market. Liliane, thank you for talking to us.

### **Outro**

Dear listeners. Thank you for taking the time to address this important issue. For more information, visit our website, [www.include3.eu](http://www.include3.eu) and follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.