Creating inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities in Belarus

Through my volunteer assignment I support and develop workplaces for people with disabilities. Fundamentally, my goal is to remove barriers to employability for disabled people in Belarus, by educating employers on how to create accessible and inclusive working environments.

Belarus signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September 2015 and committed to the creation of an inclusive community. Despite this undertaking, progress has been slow.

"Only 20 per cent of working-age disabled people in Belarus are employed and many face significant barriers to employment, including discrimination. Many employers are ill-equipped to promote access and inclusion for people with disabilities, perpetuating stereotypes and restricting participation. --Aliaksandr (Sasha) Audzevich, UN Volunteer Inclusion and Disabilities Officer with IOM,"
Belarus

We know that barriers to inclusion in the workplace take both physical and cultural forms, so I work through these two fronts in my assignment.

Firstly, I help to educate workplaces on how to make the physical work environment suitable for disabled people. We help them to understand what facilities they may need to provide such as accessible toilets, resizable desks and ramps. By creating work environments that can practically support people with disabilities, we open more opportunity and remove functional barriers to inclusion.

Secondly, we work with employees in the workplace to build a culture of understanding. We find that many people have not had experience of people with disabilities and so their understanding of what it means to be disabled can be limited. We run workshops and hold discussions to help dispel myths and send reinforce the message around inclusion.

My work as is very rewarding, and I am happy to work in the interests of people with disabilities and break down barriers to employment. Inclusion is our future!

Aliaksandr (Sasha) Audzevich has been fighting for Belarus to be more inclusive of those with disabilities for the last seven years. In 2017, he started **Inclusive Barista** is a barista training programme aimed at people with both visible and non-visible disabilities hoping to change the way coffee shops in Belarus hire, educate and design their cafés.

*This article was prepared with the kind assistance of Online Volunteer Helen Maccan.*
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