

How do Romanians perceive the integration of persons with disabilities in society?

A study on attitudes, perceptions and social barriers,
part of the national campaign A Family of Millions

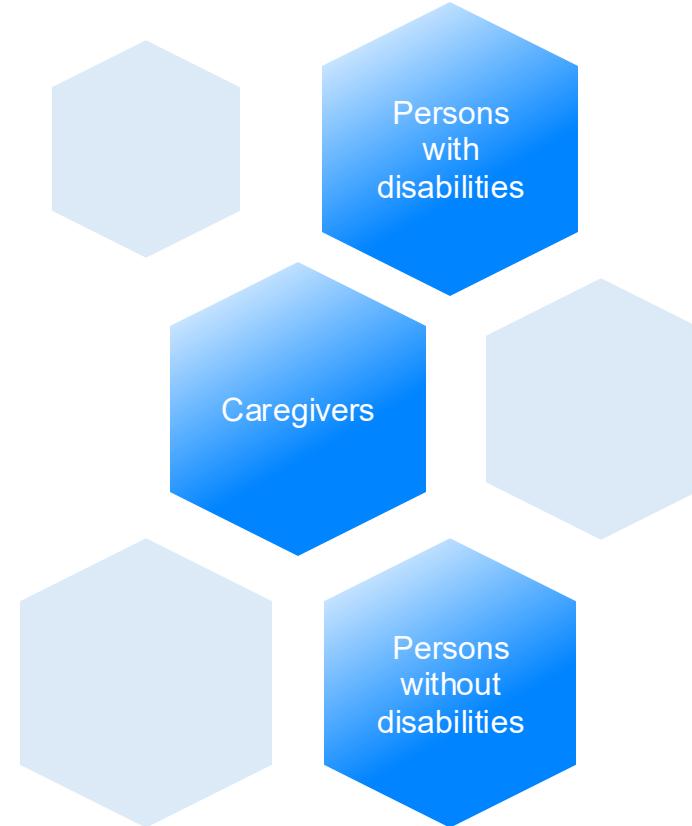
According to the data from the Ministry of Labor, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity, as of December 31, 2024, in Romania there were **960,428** persons with disabilities registered, representing **4.22%** of the population. However, we should expect that, in reality, this number is likely higher.

There are numerous studies and research regarding the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in different contexts: prejudice, lack of access to technical training, to equitable education, vocational rehabilitation, employment opportunities, and leisure time.

At the end of 2024, we aim to better understand this reality through an initiative that explores in depth both the needs of persons with disabilities and the societal barriers limiting their integration.

¹ [Developments in the field of protection of persons with disabilities, Dec. 2024](#)

We launched the first study that addresses the issue of social inclusion of persons with disabilities from 3 perspectives:



Why this strategy? To ensure we gain a comprehensive understanding of the context without risking stereotypical approaches and to facilitate a balanced understanding between internal perceptions (of those directly involved) and external perceptions (of other members of society); and to identify common points and barriers between these groups.

Study Methodology

The research among **persons without disabilities** was conducted on a sample of **1,042 persons**, representative of the urban population, aged **18-65 years**. Data collection was conducted online.

The research among **persons with disabilities and caregivers** was conducted on a sample of **58 caregivers** and **116 persons with disabilities**. Data collection was conducted online.

A photograph of a father and son sitting together outdoors, laughing and looking at a smartphone. The father is holding the phone and they are both smiling. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and sunlight.

Key findings

Fear of causing offense is the biggest obstacle in communicating and interacting with persons with disabilities, but advice directly from persons with disabilities is seen as helpful in this context.

There is a significant gap between society's perceptions and the real needs of persons with disabilities. **While society emphasizes institutional support, persons with disabilities want to have an active social life.**

Most persons without disabilities express a positive and constructive attitude toward persons with disabilities. However, they often do not see their role in fostering accessibility and inclusion.

Both persons with disabilities and caregivers believe that the labor market is not prepared to employ persons with disabilities and that the education system does not adequately prepare them for the job market. There is, however, a strong desire for more active involvement in society, which employment opportunities can fulfill.





Persons with disabilities also feel the need for persons without disabilities to learn how to interact appropriately with them. This is an opportunity to transform passive feelings of pity into an active focus on integrating persons with disabilities.

Lack of knowledge about disabilities is considered the most important of the identified challenges. Therefore, a guide on interacting with persons with disabilities is seen as extremely useful.

To address these challenges, CED Romania Association and Accenture, with the support of European Accessibility Resource Centre (AccessibleEU), one of the key initiatives of the European Commission within the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are launching **A Family of Millions campaign – a national initiative to raise awareness about the needs of persons with disabilities, which aims to extend the family of persons with disabilities beyond their biological relatives and encourage society to support their integration** becoming an active part of their lives.



Understanding disabilities

Among persons without disabilities:

There is a limited and stereotypical understanding of what disability means in Romanian society.

54% of persons without disabilities underestimate the number of persons with disabilities in Romania, while recognition of different types of disabilities focuses predominantly on apparent disabilities.

Less than half of respondents include conditions such as rare diseases, learning difficulties, cancer, epilepsy, or diabetes in the disability category, indicating a narrow view of the disability spectrum.



95%

identify physical disabilities (paralysis, amputations, neuromuscular conditions)



88%

recognize severe visual impairments



85%

identify Down Syndrome and intellectual disabilities

21%

of persons with disabilities say they face some form of discrimination or marginalization on a monthly basis

This limited understanding among persons without disabilities directly affects the social lives of persons with disabilities.





Visibility and interaction

with persons with disabilities

How many Romanians know personally or have interacted with persons with disabilities in the last 12 months?

35% know personally 3 or more persons with disabilities

27% have interacted with 3 or more persons with disabilities

37% know personally 1-2 persons with disabilities

37% have interacted with 1-2 persons with disabilities

28% don't personally know any person with disabilities

36% haven't interacted with persons with disabilities



The data reveals a counterintuitive relationship: persons without disabilities who know fewer persons with disabilities actually report higher levels of interaction with them.



When asked to define how they interacted with persons with disabilities in the last 12 months, persons without disabilities responded that:

45%

talked/spent time with them in a group or during an activity

41%

have a person with disabilities in their family

36%

helped a person with disabilities in a specific context

20%

have a colleague with disabilities at work

Only 8% of persons without disabilities stated that they observed very frequently or that the presence of a person with disabilities caught their attention in public, social, or workspaces in the last 12 months

28%

Stated they have **FREQUENTLY** noticed persons with disabilities in public, social, or workspaces in the last 12 months

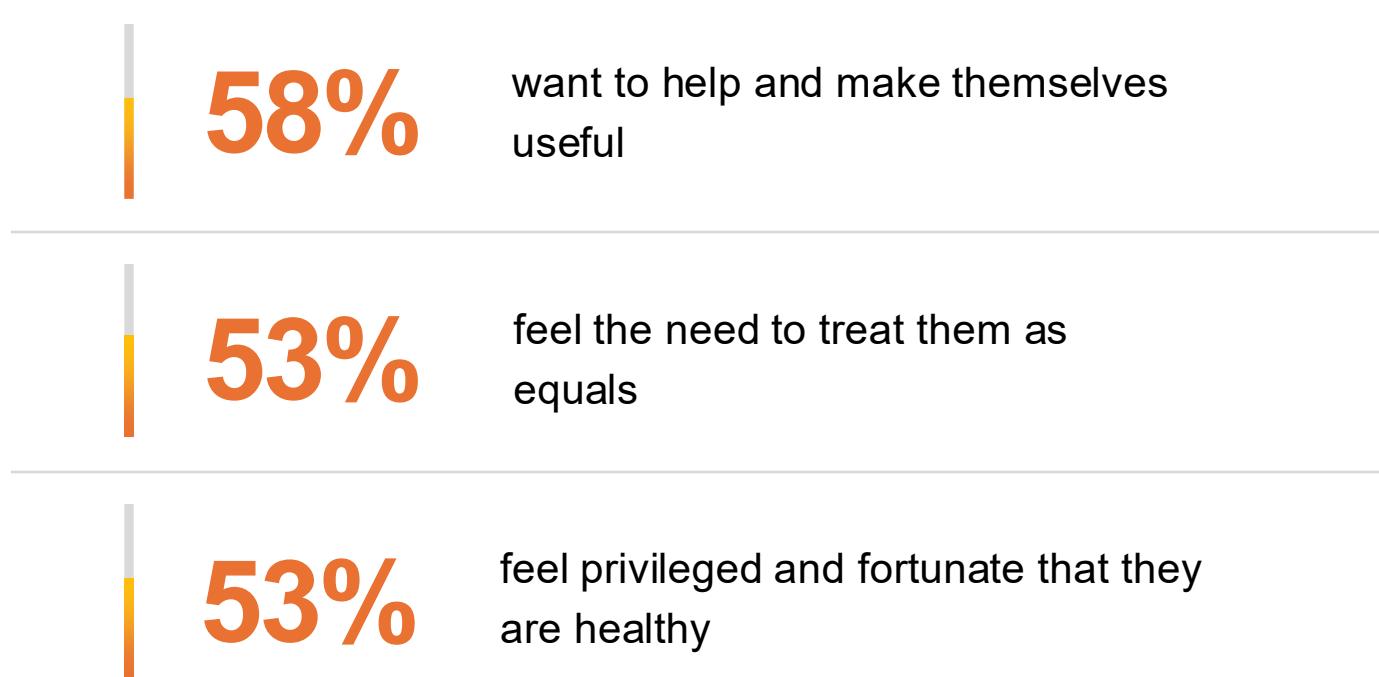
35%

Stated they have **RARELY** noticed persons with disabilities in public, social, or work spaces in the last 12 months



Women and people from smaller communities are most likely to observe them.

The reactions of persons without disabilities when they meet a person with disabilities are predominantly positive



Despite these positive attitudes, 66% of persons without disabilities express fear of not offending persons with disabilities during interaction, while feelings such as shame, discomfort, or uncertainty are reported by less than 11% of persons without disabilities.

The perspective of persons with disabilities shows the same reaction: uncertainty in interaction from persons without disabilities



71%

say that persons without disabilities seem unsure about how to interact with them

However, there are also constructive reactions:



53%

say that persons without disabilities try to help them in various situations, even when help is not requested



53%

say that persons without disabilities are open to learning more information about disabilities

What are the barriers to social interaction identified by persons with disabilities and caregivers?

Lack of experience in interaction and knowledge about disabilities is considered the main barrier in interaction by **68%** of persons with disabilities and **43%** of caregivers. Lack of experience in interaction is also reported by **46%** of persons without disabilities.

Prejudice was mentioned by **56%** of persons with disabilities and **47%** of caregivers.

Incorrect assumptions about disability were mentioned by **46%** of persons with disabilities and **41%** of caregivers.

Expression of pity by persons without disabilities was mentioned by **38%** of persons with disabilities and **43%** of caregivers.



In this context, persons without disabilities express their openness to learning and adaptation

57%

consider that advice about ways to interact coming directly from persons with disabilities would be helpful

51%

would value more general information about different types of disabilities

44%

are interested in examples of best practices

42%

feel the need for guidelines on interaction with persons with disabilities

65% of persons with disabilities and caregivers believe that an interaction guide for persons without disabilities would be useful to overcome social barriers

What do persons with disabilities consider essential to include in such a guide?



78%

general information about different types of disabilities



78%

methods for efficient communication with persons with disabilities



74%

ways to offer support correctly and relevantly



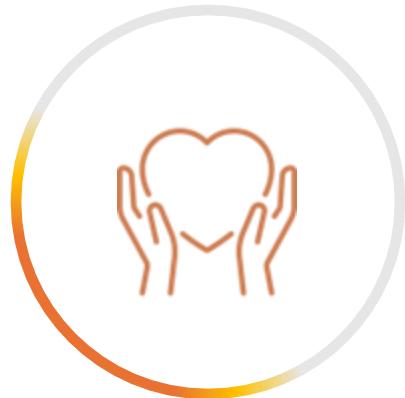
65%

ways to create an inclusive environment



Social responsibility
and community support

When it comes to the responsibility of supporting persons with disabilities, 85% of persons without disabilities consider that the state should be the main responsible party



Only 33% of persons without disabilities consider that society in general has a responsibility in supporting persons with disabilities.

Regarding involvement, society tends to look first at others' responsibility rather than analyzing what can be done by each individual.

The entire hierarchy of responsibilities in the opinion of persons without disabilities is interesting:

71% consider the family of persons with disabilities to be at the top of responsibilities. With similar high percentages we find specialists in different types of disabilities or NGOs. Extended family appears with a percentage of **47%**, and colleagues with **39%**.



The willingness to support persons with disabilities is higher in small communities, while people with high incomes show a lower level of involvement.

Additionally, although the main responsibility is attributed to the state and public institutions, 92% of persons without disabilities consider that companies should also be more involved in supporting persons with disabilities.

We found that persons without disabilities think companies should support persons with disabilities, even if they are not part of the company, almost as much as they support their own employees.

74% of persons without disabilities consider it more important to invest in developing the skills and independence of persons with disabilities, rather than just offering financial/material help.

Persons with disabilities strongly advocate for community involvement in inclusion efforts

66% of persons with disabilities consider that companies should be more involved in supporting them

47% of persons with disabilities highlight the need for greater allyship and inclusion efforts from persons without disabilities



Caregivers are even more vocal in this regard:

72% support the need for increased support from the community



The study brings to light gaps in perceptions.

Perhaps most important refers to the needs of persons with disabilities: what are those activities or social needs that are important for persons with disabilities?

Although they prioritize social activities, outdoor relaxation, cultural activities, sports, wishing these activities to be much more present in their lives, persons without disabilities classify them as last priority needs.

Persons without disabilities

69% believe that lack of infrastructure prevents persons with disabilities from having a normal life

68% believe it's more important for persons with disabilities to receive more support from the state.

68% believe it's more important for them to benefit from psychological counseling

65% believe it's more important for them to benefit from moral support and encouragement

Persons with disabilities

Only **27%** believe that accessibility should be a priority for society

72% consider outdoor relaxation activities important

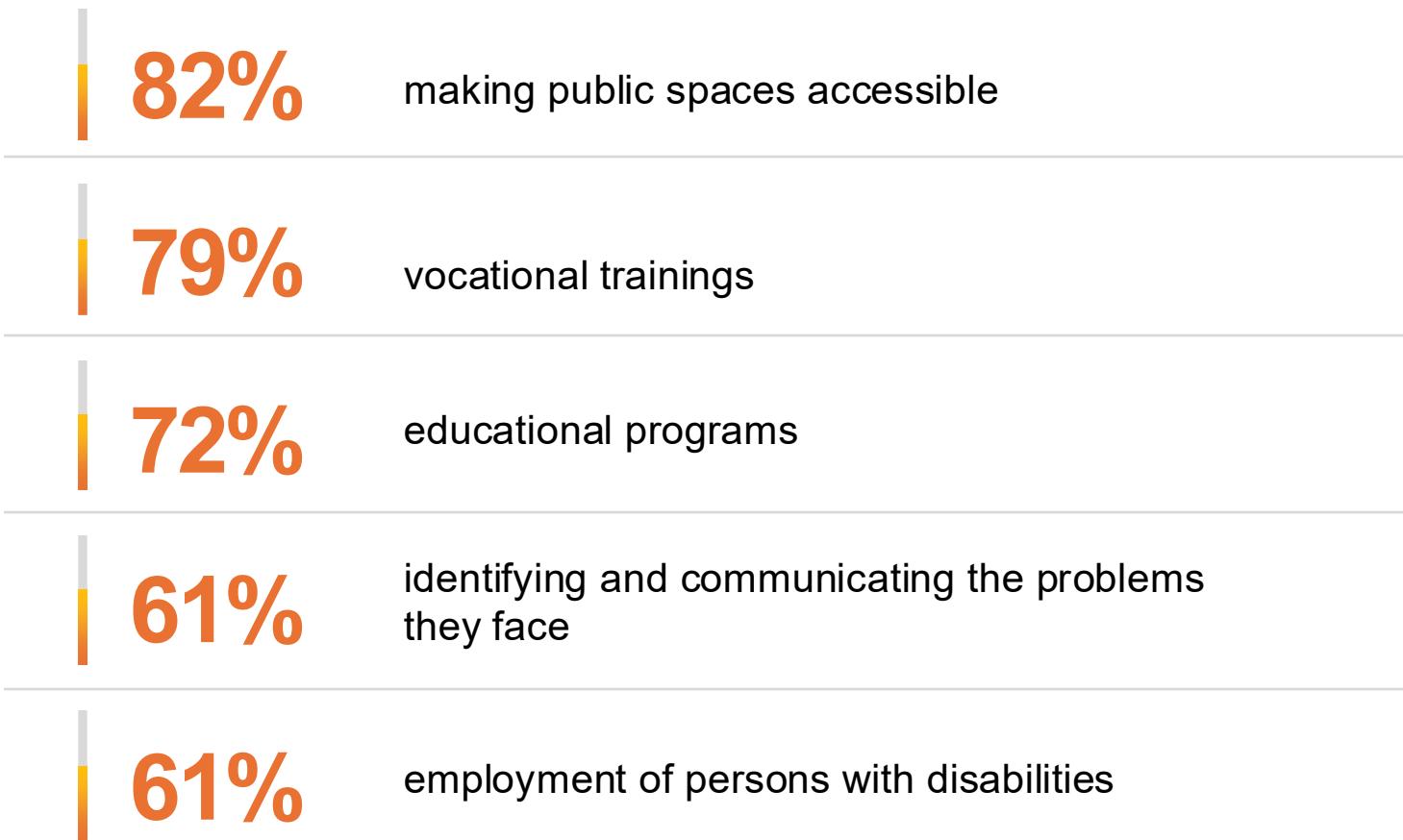
72% consider cultural and recreational activities important

82% consider social activities essential for a quality life

Only 40% of persons without disabilities consider that access to work opportunities is important for persons with disabilities

Meanwhile, **72%** of persons with disabilities consider access to work important

In the opinion of persons with disabilities, what would be useful for their community?





Attitudes

in the professional environment

Persons without disabilities would react positively if they encountered persons with disabilities in a work environment

68%

would be impressed that persons with disabilities work despite their disabilities

56%

would like to get to know persons with disabilities better



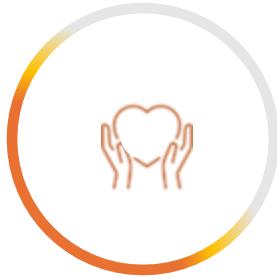
Regarding team integration,

41% of the interviewed persons without disabilities stated that they are very open to being the first to offer help to persons with disabilities, while

46% are partially open to doing this.



46% of interviewed persons without disabilities would feel comfortable having a leader with disabilities



The majority of persons without disabilities would accept services provided by a person with disabilities, the main reservation, mentioned by **51%**, is the fear that they don't know how to best communicate or interact.



At the same time, **it is important that 61% of the interviewed persons without disabilities would not be concerned by the employment of persons with disabilities in the company they work for.**

The perspective of persons with disabilities confirms new barriers

- 78%** Have not participated in any professional activity in the last year and have not been informed about employment opportunities
- 65%** Consider that the job market is not prepared to integrate them
- 67%** See the educational system as inadequate for their professional training

The existence of barriers in interaction is natural if there are no contexts for interaction. Social and attitude barriers prove to be more restrictive than the lack of infrastructure in integrating persons with disabilities into the job market.

Therefore, education and training, increasing awareness of the problems they face, generating jobs, and creating opportunities for persons without disabilities to support persons with disabilities can be solutions that would generate real change.

A photograph of a group of people standing on a beach at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the ocean and the silhouettes of the people. The sky is a gradient from blue to orange and yellow. The people are of various ages and are standing in a line, facing the camera.

Organizations behind this report

Center for Excellence through Diversity (CED)

Through innovative tools and projects created together with persons with disabilities, CED Romania Association Centre of Excellence through Diversity facilitates improving access and participation of persons with disabilities or special needs in educational, social, economic activities, health, culture, sports and leisure time, including in the online environment.



AccessibleEU

The European Accessibility Resource Centre AccessibleEU was established by the European Commission with the aim of creating a single European-level central hub for information, knowledge and expertise in the field of accessibility, thereby supporting the participation of persons with disabilities on equal terms with others in all aspects of life.

Accenture Romania

Accenture is a global professional services company that uses technology and human ingenuity to help organizations optimize their operations and accelerate digital transformation.

The company constantly collaborates with non-profit organizations to support persons with disabilities. With this project, it aims to raise awareness on the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and to encourage society to get to know and interact more with them. This project joins other successful initiatives such as SeeYou (2020) - the first application in Romania that connects persons with visual impairments with volunteers for support in daily activities.



Supporting NGOs

