



Best practice for inclusive employment

(Fundación Docete Omnes)

Title of the best practice

Integrated Ecosystem for the Inclusive Employment of Blind and Low-Vision Professionals: From Assistive Technology to Commercial Success

Executive Summary

Spółdzielnia NPN (Warsaw, Poland) has developed a self-sustaining, integrated ecosystem designed to bridge the "independence gap" for blind and low-vision professionals. Moving beyond standard vocational support, the practice focuses on creating a high-performance commercial environment where disability is secondary to professional expertise.

The core of the innovation lies in the cooperative's "Tech-First" approach. By maintaining a dedicated Training Centre and an in-house technical team, NPN develops bespoke applications and accessibility "bridges" that allow employees to use otherwise inaccessible professional software, such as CRM. Since April 2020, this has been further enhanced by a formalised hybrid and remote working model, impacting 20 employees and ensuring that workplace accommodations are as effective at home as they are in the office.

With an average accommodation turnaround of 7–14 days and a flexible, case-by-case budgeting model (typically 501 € - 2,000 € per person), the practice proves that inclusive employment is commercially viable. The success of their professional Call Centre and Recording Studios serves as a proof-of-concept for the wider labour market, demonstrating that with the right leadership mandate and technical commitment, visually impaired professionals can achieve a higher level of autonomy and productivity in high-value service sectors.

Company context

Size: Small-to-Medium Enterprise (SME) with **11–49 employees**.

Sector: A multi-disciplinary social economy entity operating across **IT/Tech, Manufacturing, and Professional Services**. Key business units include:

- **Tech/Manufacturing:** Development of the "Czytak" (accessible audiobook players).
- **Media:** Professional recording studios (5 cabins) for voice-over and podcasts.
- **Services:** Professional Contact/Call Centre.



- **Social/VET:** Occupational Therapy Workshops (WTZ) and a specialised Training Centre.

Locations: Headquartered in **Warsaw, Poland** (ul. Eugeniusza Romera 10, lok. B6), with integrated **remote/hybrid** working models for employees.

Diversity Governance: Given the company's size, diversity governance is handled directly by the **Managing Board**. The organisation is mission-driven, where inclusion is not just a policy but the core business model, with leadership (including the President) directly overseeing accessibility and inclusion issues.

Partner Network: NPN cooperates with different bodies. They benefit from the support provided to similar organisations supporting the blind and visually impaired, such as PFRON in Poland, which gives support to vocational rehabilitation and workplace adaptations.

Problem and motivation

The Problem: Digital Exclusion and the "Independence Gap": The primary problem addressed by this practice is the persistent digital exclusion of blind and low-vision individuals within the modern labour market. While many companies are open to inclusive hiring, they often rely on professional software—such as CRM systems, project management tools, and advertising platforms (e.g., Meta Business Suite or Google Ads)—that fail to meet basic accessibility standards.

This creates an "independence gap": even a highly skilled blind professional may be unable to execute their tasks without constant sighted assistance. This lack of autonomy discourages employers from hiring and undermines the confidence and professional growth of the individuals.

Signals for Change:

- **From Individuals:** Visually impaired professionals and job seekers reported a high level of frustration with "accessible-in-theory" jobs that became impossible in practice due to non-compliant software. There was a clear demand for workstations that go beyond standard screen readers to include bespoke technical adaptations.
- **From Industry:** There is a prevailing industry misconception that blind employees are only suited for manual or low-complexity roles. However, the modern service economy (especially call centres and digital marketing) has a high demand for talent. The "signal" was the need for a proof-of-concept that shows blind professionals can handle complex, client-facing, and technical roles independently.

Motivation: The core motivation of Spółdzielnia NPN is to maximise the professional independence and job satisfaction of blind people. By transitioning from a "support" mindset to a "workstation-optimisation" mindset, the cooperative aims to prove that when the environment and technology are correctly adapted, the disability becomes secondary to the



professional's skill set.

Governance & ownership

Executive Leadership: The governance of Spółdzielnia NPN is structured according to the Polish Social Work Cooperative model, which emphasises democratic management and social objectives. The executive responsibility lies with the **Management Board (Zarząd)**, currently led by **Krzysztof Teśniarz** (President) and **Magdalena Anna Wągrowaska Płachta**. This leadership team acts as the primary "Executive Sponsors" for all-inclusive employment initiatives, ensuring that business operations (such as the call centre and recording studios) remain aligned with the cooperative's mission.

Oversight and Accountability: Strategic oversight is provided by the **Supervisory Board (Rada Nadzorcza)**, which includes 5 representatives. In the context of a work cooperative, it is the General Assembly that decides how any financial surplus is reinvested into the social and vocational reintegration of members, specifically people with visual impairments, or distributed as profit among the cooperative's members.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Management Board:** Responsible for commercial viability, legal compliance, and the strategic integration of assistive technologies into the workplace.
- **Supervisory Board:** Monitors the social impact and ensures the cooperative adheres to the democratic principles of the "Social Economy Act".
- **Specialised Department Leads:** Specific roles are assigned to the management of the **Centrum Szkoleń (Training Centre)** and the **Workshops (WTZ)**, who are responsible for the day-to-day vocational rehabilitation and the transition of trainees into the cooperative's commercial workforce, although this happens only a few times, according to the organisation's spokesperson.

Volunteer and Internal Support: While NPN operates as a professional commercial entity, it maintains a strong internal "peer-support" culture. Because many of the employees and members are themselves blind or low-vision, they serve as informal internal consultants for accessibility testing and the onboarding of new colleagues, effectively functioning as a built in "Diversity and Accessibility Committee".

Compliance & policy

Legal Framework and Anti-discrimination: The cooperative strictly adheres to the **Polish Labour Code**, which prohibits any form of direct or indirect discrimination based on disability, gender, age, or religion. Beyond mere compliance, NPN's internal policies are designed to be "inclusion-by-default." This means that anti-discrimination is not just a reactive measure, but



a proactive standard integrated into the recruitment and promotion processes.

Data Protection and GDPR: Given that NPN works extensively with "sensitive categories" of data (specifically health and disability status), **GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)** compliance is a critical priority.

- **Consent-Based Processing:** All data regarding an employee's specific impairment or health status is processed only with explicit, voluntary consent and is used solely for the purpose of providing necessary workplace accommodations.
- **Data Minimisation:** Only essential accessibility-related information is stored. Personal health records are strictly separated from general HR files and are accessible only to authorised personnel.
- **Security:** As a technology-focused cooperative, they employ high standards of digital security to protect the privacy of their staff and the visually impaired users of their "Czytak" devices.

Health, Safety, and Accessibility Standards:

- **Workplace Adaptation:** The cooperative complies with stringent **Health & Safety (BHP)** regulations, tailored for visually impaired staff. This includes the physical layout of the five recording studios and the call centre, ensuring that evacuation routes and workstations are safe and navigable without sight.
- **Procurement and Accessibility:** NPN follows a "Procurement for All" policy. When purchasing new software (like CRMs or office tools) or hardware, accessibility (compliance with **WCAG 2.1** or **EN 301 549**) is a mandatory requirement. If a tool is commercially necessary but inaccessible, NPN applies its own technical expertise to create the required bridge or adaptation. However, these third-party tools cannot often be fully adapted.

Social Economy Accountability: As a registered **Work Cooperative**, NPN is subject to the **Law on Cooperatives**. Their governance model ensures that commercial success is always legally and ethically bound to their social impact.

Practical approach

What was changed (Processes, Roles, and Technologies): The core of NPN's approach is the transition from using "off-the-shelf" software to a custom-adapted technical environment.

- **Technology & Infrastructure:** The cooperative shifted from standard workstations to highly specialised setups. This includes the deployment of **Screen Readers**, **Speech to-Text** software, and **Magnifiers**. Crucially, NPN developed **bespoke internal applications** and accessible intranet tools to replace inaccessible third-party software, ensuring that employees can manage CRM and some administrative tasks independently.



- **Processes:** A significant shift occurred in the work delivery model. The cooperative permanently introduced **remote and hybrid working models**. This process change was supported by digitising all training and operational materials into accessible formats (readable PDFs, high-contrast digital interfaces, and alt-text policies).
- **Roles:** While the core vocational roles (Call Centre Consultant, Audio Engineer, Voice over Artist) remained, the *nature* of these roles was redefined. Employees are now trained as "accessibility-aware professionals" who not only perform their primary tasks but also participate in **UX accessibility testing** for the cooperative's own products, such as the *Czytak* audio player.

Timeline: While the Training Centre has been operational since 2004, the specific modernised practice described—focusing on hybrid work and bespoke digital environments - was formalised on **1st April 2020**. This timeline coincides with the global shift towards remote work, which NPN leveraged to create a more flexible and accessible employment framework.

Impacted Employees:

- **Total Number:** 20 employees are directly impacted by this inclusive practice. At present, 5 people work remotely. Hybrid work is possible on request whenever needed and feasible.
- **Types of Disability:** The majority are **visually impaired** (blind or low-vision), but the practice also supports **hearing-impaired** staff through the use of assistive hearing technologies and adapted communication protocols.

Physical & Digital Environment:

- **Physical:** The Warsaw facilities include accessible restrooms, high-contrast wayfinding, and a specialised evacuation plan tailored for non-sighted or low-vision staff.
- **Digital:** Beyond keyboard navigation and contrast standards, the cooperative maintains an "Accessible Intranet" where every tool used by the staff has undergone rigorous accessibility testing.

Reasonable accommodations process

Request Procedure: The process is initiated by the **Department Manager**, rather than placing the administrative burden solely on the employee. When a need for an accommodation is identified —whether during onboarding or due to a change in job requirements— the manager submits a formal request detailing the specific technical or physical adjustment required (e.g., a new screen-reader licence or a specialised ergonomic workstation).

Approval Workflow: To ensure both operational relevance and financial sustainability, the approval follows a two-tier "Double-Check" system:



1. **First Level:** The **Direct Supervisor (Department Manager)** reviews the request to confirm its necessity for the employee's specific role and tasks.
2. **Final Level:** The **Managing Board** provides the ultimate approval, ensuring the request aligns with the cooperative's overall budget and accessibility standards.

Timeline and Fulfilment: The cooperative prides itself on efficiency, with an average fulfilment time of **7 to 14 days** from the initial submission to the implementation of the accommodation. This rapid turnaround is largely due to their in-house technical expertise and existing inventory of assistive technologies.

Budgeting and Costs:

- **Budget Model:** NPN employs a "**Case-by-Case**" budgeting model. This flexibility allows them to address unique individual needs (such as bespoke software development) that a fixed per-person budget might not cover.
- **Average Cost:** Most accommodations fall within the **501 € – 2,000 €** range. This reflects the high-tech nature of the assistive software and hardware required for blind professionals to work at a commercial level of productivity.

Terms and Conditions: Accommodations are provided as a fundamental right of the employee to perform their duties. They are subject to regular reviews during performance evaluations to ensure the technology remains effective and up-to-date with current software versions (especially regarding screen-reader compatibility with new CRM updates).

Accessibility

Physical Accessibility (Offices, Evacuation, Workstations): The physical environment in Warsaw is designed specifically for the safety and autonomy of visually impaired staff.

- **Infrastructure:** The office features accessible restrooms and high-contrast wayfinding systems to assist low-vision employees in navigating the corridors.
- **Workstations:** Each station is adapted to the specific needs of the user, whether they require Braille displays, ergonomic layouts for low-vision, or sound-insulated booths for audio production.
- **Emergency Protocols:** There is a specialised **evacuation plan** in place that accounts for non-sighted staff, ensuring that emergency exits are identifiable through tactile markers, and that "buddy systems" or specific roles are assigned for emergency scenarios.

Digital Accessibility (Applications, Intranet, Testing): NPN operates as its own "tech lab," ensuring its digital ecosystem is fully navigable.

- **Internal Tools:** They maintain an **accessible intranet** and, where commercial software fails, they **develop their own custom applications** to ensure staff can perform tasks like CRM management and UX testing.



- **Standards:** Their digital policy includes a strict **Alt-text policy** for all internal and external communications and ensures all documents (PDFs, manuals) are screen reader friendly.
- **Testing:** They conduct regular **UX accessibility testing** on their internal products, using their own employees as expert testers to ensure compliance with **WCAG 2.1** standards.

Organisational & Process Accessibility (Rules, Shifts, Flexibility): The cooperative's culture prioritises flexibility to accommodate the lived realities of disability.

- **Hybrid/Remote Work:** Since April 2020, NPN has formalised **remote and hybrid working models**, which reduce the "commute burden" for visually impaired staff and allow them to work in their own pre-adapted home environments.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** Meeting norms and shift patterns are designed to allow for the medical or rehabilitation appointments that staff may need to attend.

Learning & Development (L&D): As a registered Training Centre, L&D is a core strength.

- **Alternative Formats:** All training materials—from onboarding manuals to vocational courses—are provided in multiple accessible formats, including Braille, high-contrast digital text, and audio via accessible computer software (screen-readers).
- **Bespoke Training:** They offer specific courses on using screen-reader-enabled computers, Microsoft Office with assistive tech, and vocational training for call centre roles, ensuring that learning is never a barrier to promotion.

Assistive Tech (Hardware/Software Maintenance): Maintenance is handled as a mission critical business process.

- **Inventory:** The cooperative manages a suite of hardware, including **Screen Readers, Speech-to-Text software, and Magnifiers.**
- **Technical Support:** Because they develop assistive tech (the *Czytak* player), their internal IT support is uniquely qualified to maintain and troubleshoot specialised accessibility software, ensuring minimal downtime for employees.

Recruitment, onboarding & career progression

Pipeline and Sourcing: NPN benefits from a unique "internal pipeline." Their **Training Centre (Centrum Szkoleń)** serve as a pre-employment hub. By the time a candidate applies for a role in the Call Centre, they have often already received foundational training in assistive technology and office software within the NPN ecosystem.

Inclusive Recruitment & Job Ads:

- **Accessible Postings:** Job advertisements are crafted to be screen-reader compatible



and are distributed through specialised networks for the visually impaired (such as the Polish national networks for the blind).

- **Skills-First Language:** Ads focus on specific competencies (e.g., "proficiency in JAWS/NVDA screen readers" or "voice-over experience") rather than generic physical requirements that might unnecessarily exclude candidates.

Interview Formatting: Interviews are adapted to remove environmental stress. Candidates are invited to demonstrate their skills using their preferred assistive technology. If the interview is conducted in person at the Warsaw office, clear instructions on the physical accessibility of the building are provided in advance to ensure the candidate arrives with confidence.

Onboarding Support: Onboarding is treated as a collaborative technical setup. New hires are paired with a **technical mentor** who ensures their specific workstation—whether remote or in-office—is perfectly calibrated with the necessary screen readers, magnifiers, or bespoke internal apps. This phase includes a "digital walk-through" of the company's accessible intranet.

Mentors and Internal Support: NPN utilises a **Peer-to-Peer Mentorship** model. Given that a large portion of the staff are blind or low-vision, new employees are often mentored by experienced colleagues who share the same disability. This provides not only technical guidance but also psychological support and professional role-modelling.

Internships & Apprenticeships: The cooperative offers structured **internships and vocational apprenticeships** specifically for adults with disabilities who are looking to reenter the labour market. These roles are often funded through national social economy grants, providing a low-risk "trial period" for both the employee and the cooperative, which sometimes leads to permanent employment.

Career Development: Career progression is not limited to entry-level roles. Employees are encouraged to move from vocational roles (e.g., Call Centre Consultant) into more technical or managerial positions (e.g., Accessibility Tester or Team Leader). The cooperative provides ongoing training in advanced digital skills, ensuring that visual impairment is not a "glass ceiling" for professional growth.

Results

The Call Centre Team: Professional Service Delivery

- **The Result:** The Call Centre has evolved from a training environment into a fully-fledged commercial business unit. It provides high-quality services, including database verification, information hotlines, and sales.
- **Evidence of Success:** The team has maintained a stable workforce of trained consultants with visual impairments who deliver services to external commercial clients. This proves that with accessible CRM interfaces and adapted workstations,



the team can meet the same Service Level Agreements (SLAs) as any mainstream call centre.

The Audio Production Team: Recording Studios

- **The Result:** NPN operates five independent recording studios where low-vision professionals with their sighted colleagues work as audio engineers.
- **Evidence of Success:** The studios successfully produce complex audio content, including radio plays, podcasts, and language courses. The "result" here is the high technical quality of the output, which is indistinguishable from that of sighted-led studios. This team demonstrates that technical roles in media are highly viable for visually impaired professionals when provided with accessible software.

The "Czytak" R&D and Manufacturing Team

- **The Result:** A dedicated team manages the development and distribution of the "Czytak" accessible audio player.
- **Evidence of Success:** This team acts as a bridge between the user community and the manufacturing process. Because the staff themselves understand the barriers faced by the target audience, the product has become a market leader in Poland for accessible literacy tools. The commercial success of the product is a direct result of having an inclusive workforce involved in the design and testing phases.

The Transition to Hybrid/Remote Work (Post-2020)

- **The Result:** Across all offices, **20 employees** transitioned to a hybrid or fully remote model. At present, 5 employees work in a hybrid/fully remote model and other members of the staff, whenever needed and possible, are allowed to telework.
- **Evidence of Success:** Despite the shift away from the physical Warsaw office, productivity remained consistent. The "independence gap" was bridged by ensuring that the bespoke digital tools developed in-house were equally accessible from the employees' home environments. This has significantly improved the work-life balance for staff who previously faced long or difficult commutes.

Outcome indicators (0, 6, 12, 24 months)

Specific Metrics and Timelines:

- **Accommodation Turnaround (Target: 7–14 days):** This is a primary indicator of operational efficiency. The goal is to ensure that from the moment a manager submits a request, the necessary tool or adaptation is fully functional within two weeks. This is tracked from Month 0 of an employee's start date.
- **Retention Rate (12–24 months):** NPN tracks the long-term stability of its workforce. High retention rates among the **20 employees** currently impacted by the practice serve as an indicator of the effectiveness of the hybrid work model and the bespoke



technical support.

- **Hiring and Integration Rate:** While a specific "time-to-hire" figure is not provided, the cooperative monitors the transition rate of individuals from their **Training Centre** and **Occupational Therapy Workshops (WTZ)** into employment.
- **Engagement and Productivity:** Productivity is monitored through the commercial output of the Call Centre and Recording Studios. Engagement is assessed through the successful execution of tasks by blind professionals who, despite previous software barriers, now work independently due to custom "bridge" applications.

Monitoring & Documentation:

- **Who collects it:** Data is collected at two levels. **Department Managers** track daily productivity and technical requirements, while the **Managing Board** (specifically the President and board members) oversees the financial and social impact indicators.
- **Preservation and Storage: * GDPR Compliance:** Documentation regarding specific accommodations is preserved in a secure, centralised digital system.
 - **Data Isolation:** Personal health data is strictly omitted from general HR and productivity reports. Only the technical solution (e.g., "Screen-reader licence upgrade") and the associated costs are documented for audit purposes.
 - **Audit Readiness:** As a work cooperative, this documentation is maintained to meet the requirements of the **Polish Act on Social Economy**, which mandates proof of vocational reintegration activities.

Cost efficiency

Direct Costs per Adaptation: The average investment for a workplace accommodation typically ranges between **501 € and 2,000 €**. These costs primarily cover high-specification assistive software (such as screen-reader licences), hardware (like refreshable Braille displays or FM systems), and the development of bespoke technical "bridges" to make standard commercial software accessible.

Budgeting Model: NPN utilises a "**Case-by-Case**" budgeting model. This allows for financial flexibility, ensuring that the specific technical needs of a role (e.g., an audio engineer versus a call-centre consultant) are met with the most effective, rather than the cheapest, solution.

Observed Savings: While the cooperative does not provide a single currency figure for total savings, they track several qualitative indicators that contribute to financial sustainability:

- **Reduced Turnover:** By providing a fully accessible and supportive environment, the cooperative retains highly skilled blind and low-vision staff, avoiding the significant recruitment and retraining costs associated with high staff turnover.
- **Fewer Sick Days:** Accessible workstations and the flexibility of hybrid/remote work (introduced in April 2020) have led to a decrease in absenteeism.
- **Faster Time-to-Productivity:** The integrated pipeline from their own Training Centre



ensures that new hires are already proficient in the necessary assistive technologies, significantly shortening the onboarding period.

- **Fewer Incidents:** The specialised physical adaptations and evacuation protocols have led to a reduction in workplace incidents and related costs.

Return on Investment (ROI): A specific ROI percentage is formally calculated, and the "return" is evidenced by the **commercial success** of the cooperative's business units. The Call Centre and Recording Studios are competitive commercial entities; the investment in accessibility is therefore not a sunk cost, but the essential capital expenditure required to enable a productive and revenue-generating workforce.

Success factors

The effectiveness of this practice is not attributed to a single department, but to the alignment of leadership vision with technical execution.

1. Leadership Mandate (Primary Enabler): Ranked as the **number one enabler** by the cooperative, the leadership mandate from the Managing Board is the foundation of the practice. Inclusion is not treated as a peripheral HR initiative but as the core business model. This ensures that when technical or financial barriers arise (such as an inaccessible CRM), the leadership provides the necessary mandate to invest in custom solutions rather than compromising on the employee's independence.

2. Tooling and Process SLAs: Ranked as the **second most important factor**, the cooperative's ability to develop its own apps and "bridge" software is a critical success factor. By establishing clear "Service Level Agreements" (SLAs) for accommodation turnaround (**7–14 days**), NPN ensures that technical barriers are removed swiftly, allowing employees to remain productive and engaged without prolonged downtime.

3. External Partnerships: The cooperative's success is bolstered by its robust network of **NGOs and social economy partners**. These partnerships provide a steady pipeline of candidates and a platform for sharing best practices in vocational rehabilitation. Collaborating with state funds (such as PFRON) also allows the cooperative to offset some of the costs associated with high-end assistive technology.

4. Staff Training: Continuous learning is embedded in the culture. Because NPN operates its own **Training Centre**, they have immediate access to specialised pedagogical expertise. Staff are not only trained on how to use assistive tech but are also involved in the development and testing of new tools, creating a cycle of continuous internal improvement.

5. Clear Budgeting and Case-by-Case Approval: The flexible "**Case-by-Case**" budgeting model ensures that the right resources are allocated to the right problem. By avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" financial approach, the cooperative can approve higher-cost adaptations (up to 2,000 €) when they are deemed essential for a specific professional role, such as in the recording studios or marketing department.



Challenges & solutions

While the cooperative has established a successful model, several significant hurdles had to be overcome through technical innovation and strategic financial management.

1. Attitudes and Industry Perceptions

- **The Challenge:** There is a persistent industry misconception that blind employees are unsuitable for complex, technical, or client-facing roles, particularly in digital marketing and professional services.
- **The Solution:** NPN addresses this by operating as a high-standard commercial entity. By delivering quality results in their **Call Centre** and **Recording Studios**, they provide a "proof-of-concept" that challenges existing biases. The success of their employees acts as the most effective tool for changing employer attitudes.

2. Logistics and Workplace Access

- **The Challenge:** Physical commuting and navigating a standard office environment can present daily logistical hurdles for visually impaired staff.
- **The Solution:** Since April 2020, the cooperative formalised a **hybrid and remote working model**. By ensuring that the same bespoke assistive technologies used in the office are available at the employees' homes, they removed the "commute barrier" and allowed staff to work in environments already tailored to their needs.

3. Budgetary Constraints

- **The Challenge:** The cooperative noted that while they receive support from the **National Fund for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities (PFRON)**, these funds are often insufficient to cover the high costs of specialised equipment and job maintenance.
- **The Solution:** To achieve financial sustainability, NPN maintains a dual focus. They constantly strive to expand their commercial client base for their products (such as the *Czytak* player) and services. This **commercial revenue** cross-subsidises the social mission, ensuring they are not solely dependent on state grants.

4. Technical Procedures and Software Barriers

- **The Challenge:** As highlighted in the data, a major challenge is the **lack of accessibility in standard commercial software** (e.g. CRMs and advertising platforms like Meta or Google Ads), which prevents blind marketing professionals from working independently.
- **The Solution:** Rather than accepting these limitations, NPN's technical team **develops its own bespoke applications and internal "bridges"**. This allows employees to bypass inaccessible interfaces and execute their tasks autonomously, maintaining the "Independence Gap" at a minimum.



5. Data Protection and Sensitive Information

- **The Challenge:** Managing an inclusive workforce requires handling sensitive health and disability data, which carries high risks under GDPR.
- **The Solution:** The cooperative implemented strict **data isolation procedures**. Only technical accommodation needs are recorded in HR files; personal health histories are kept in separate, highly secure systems accessible only to authorised personnel. This ensures that the focus remains on the "functional solution" rather than the medical diagnosis.

Sustainability

The sustainability of Spółdzielnia NPN's inclusive employment model is built upon three pillars: commercial independence, legal compliance, and continuous technical evolution.

Financial Maintenance & Budgeting:

- **Case-by-Case Budget Model:** Sustainability is maintained by avoiding a static "inclusion budget." Instead, the cooperative applies a case-by-case model that treats each accommodation as a strategic investment. This allows for the high-cost procurement of specialised devices (like the *Czytak* or Braille displays) when they are essential for revenue-generating roles.
- **Commercial Cross-Subsidisation:** As a work cooperative, NPN can reinvest (if the members of the cooperative decide to do so) the profits from its commercial arms (Call Centre, Studio, and Tech manufacturing) back into the professional development and workplace maintenance of its staff. This reduces reliance on external grants and ensures that job maintenance is tied to business success.

Training & Skill Maintenance:

- **Internal Continuous Learning:** Because NPN operates its own **Training Centre**, the staff have permanent access to up-to-date vocational training. This ensures that as software versions change (e.g., updates to CRM systems or Windows), visually impaired staff receive immediate reskilling to maintain their independence.
- **Technical Support:** Maintenance is not just about equipment but about software scripts. The cooperative's technical team provides ongoing maintenance for the bespoke "bridges" and screen-reader scripts that allow blind staff to use otherwise inaccessible professional platforms.

Annual Monitoring & Accessibility Audits:

- **Regulatory Compliance:** Since the 2022 **Polish Act on Social Economy**, the cooperative undergoes structured annual monitoring. This includes the development and review of



Individual Reintegration Plans for employees at risk of social exclusion, ensuring that their professional growth and accommodation needs are tracked yearly.

- **Regular Accessibility Audits:** Digital and physical environments are not static. The cooperative conducts regular **internal accessibility audits**, using its own employees as expert UX testers. This ensures that the intranet and physical facilities in Warsaw (e.g., high-contrast wayfinding and evacuation routes) remain compliant with evolving standards (WCAG 2.1).

Partnership & Ecosystem Maintenance:

NGO & Social Networks: By maintaining an active presence in networks for the blind and visually impaired, NPN ensures a constant exchange of knowledge regarding the latest assistive technologies. This "ecosystem approach" prevents the practice from becoming outdated and ensures a steady pipeline of new talent.

Transferability

1. Minimum required conditions to replicate: To replicate the NPN model, an organisation must move beyond "compliance" and towards "technical integration." The following conditions are essential:

- **A "Tech-First" Mindset:** A willingness to bypass or adapt inaccessible commercial software rather than excluding candidates when a tool is not WCAG-compliant.
- **Executive Sponsorship:** As indicated by NPN's ranking of "Leadership Mandate" as their top enabler, the initiative must be driven by senior management who view inclusion as a strategic business goal.
- **Specialised Technical Knowledge:** Access to expertise in assistive technologies (screen readers, magnifiers, and FM systems) is non-negotiable.
- **Collaborative Culture:** A workspace where employees with disabilities are involved in the UX testing and design of their own tools.
- **Strategic Advisory for Unprepared Employers:** For organisations lacking prior experience in inclusive hiring, it is strongly recommended to appoint or hire a dedicated disability or accessibility expert. This specialist serves to lead the management team through the technical, physical, and procedural transitions required to create an accessible environment. Expert knowledge is essential to achieving sustainable results and ensuring that workstations are properly calibrated. Furthermore, such organisations should explore national and European Union funding programmes, which frequently provide financial support specifically for the expertise and infrastructure needed for workplace inclusion.

2. Key steps and resources:

- **Workplace Audit:** Conduct a thorough audit of current physical and digital barriers



(e.g. testing the intranet for screen-reader compatibility).

- **Establish an Adaptation Pipeline:** Create a process for "Reasonable Accommodations" that is fast (7–14 days) and funded on a case-by-case basis.
- **Identify "Bridges":** Where software barriers exist, invest in or develop technical "bridges" (bespoke apps or scripts) to ensure employee independence.
- **Flexible Work Policy:** Formalise a hybrid or remote work model to reduce logistical barriers for staff with disabilities.
- **Partnership Building:** Connect with local NGOs or social economy entities to create a talent pipeline and access state subsidies (like PFRON in Poland).

3. Resources required:

- **Financial:** A flexible budget allowing for investments between **501 € and 2,000 €** per individual accommodation.
- **Human:** A technical lead proficient in accessibility standards (WCAG 2.1) and a dedicated mentor for new hires.
- **Hardware/Software:** Licences for JAWS/NVDA, refreshable Braille displays, and FM systems for hearing-impaired staff.

4. Risks to monitor:

- **Software Updates:** Third-party software updates can "break" custom accessibility scripts. Continuous monitoring by the IT team is required to ensure tools remain functional.
- **Dependency on Individual Champions:** If the practice is driven by only one leader, it may fail if they leave. The mandate must be institutionalised within the company policy.
- **Financial Instability:** For smaller SMEs, the cost of high-end assistive tech can be a burden. This risk is mitigated by leveraging national social economy grants and commercial revenue.
- **Data Privacy:** Handling disability data requires strict GDPR compliance. Organisations must ensure a clear separation between an employee's medical data and their technical accommodation records.

Sources & contacts

Organisation Details:

- **Name:** Spółdzielnia NPN
- **Address:** ul. Eugeniusza Romera 10 lok. B6, 02-784 Warszawa, Poland • **Website:** <https://nnp.com.pl/>
- **General Enquiries:** biuro@nnp.com.pl | +48 22 55-909-23

Public Sources and Links:



- **Vocational Training Services:** Detailed information on the NPN Training Centre and specialised courses for the visually impaired: <https://npn.com.pl/szkolenia/>
- **Occupational Therapy Workshops (WTZ):** Context on the pre-employment and rehabilitation ecosystem: <https://npn.com.pl/wtz/>
- **Assistive Technology (Czytak):** Information on the developed hardware that supports literate accessibility: <https://npn.com.pl/czytak/>
- **Legal Framework:** The practice aligns with the **Polish Law on Cooperatives (1982)**, which governs the operation of work cooperatives.

Professional Contacts for the Practice:

- **Executive Sponsor:** Krzysztof Teśniarz (President of the Management Board)
- **Process Oversight:** Magdalena Anna Wągrowaska Płachta (Management Board Member)

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