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BRIDGING THE EXPECTATION GAP AS A MECHANISM OF BARRIERS IN INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT: A SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT METHODOLOGY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES*

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Abstract. Despite the expansion of regulatory frameworks and employment support programmes, inclusive employment of persons with disabilities remains limited. Existing research provides extensive evidence on individual and institutional barriers to employment; however, considerably less attention has been paid to the misalignment of expectations among key actors involved in the employment process. This study conceptualises the expectation gap between employers and persons with disabilities as an independent mechanism reproducing barriers to employment sustainability. The study adopts a qualitative research design and draws on in-depth interviews with persons with disabilities and employers engaged in inclusive hiring practices, including social enterprises. The findings reveal systematic differences in how employment barriers are interpreted: while persons with disabilities predominantly describe barriers through experiences of stigmatisation, unequal treatment and lack of trust, employers tend to frame the same processes in terms of organisational risks, productivity uncertainty and managerial costs. This divergence contributes to labour market segmentation and constrains transitions to sustainable employment. Based on the empirical findings, the article proposes and substantiates a supported employment methodology grounded in a dual logic of support. Unlike individual-centred approaches, the proposed methodology simultaneously addresses the needs of job seekers and employers' risk perceptions by standardising workplace adaptation procedures, structuring support mechanisms and clarifying the roles of actors across the employment process. The study contributes to the literature by advancing the concept of the expectation gap as an analytical framework for inclusive employment and by offering a practice-oriented, reproducible approach aimed at enhancing employment sustainability for persons with disabilities.

Keywords: inclusive employment; persons with disabilities; supported employment; employers; expectation gap; employment sustainability

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JEL Classifications: J14

1. Introduction

Inclusive employment of persons with disabilities has been recognised over recent decades as a key priority of social and economic policy in many countries, including Kazakhstan (Morwane, Dada & Bornman, 2021; Liao, 2021; Adibayev & Susi, 2023; De Souza Fernandes et al., 2023; Helena, Magnus & Carin, 2023; Piccone et al., 2024; Kearns et al., 2025; Tuhin et al., 2025). Despite the expansion of regulatory frameworks and the implementation of state and quasi-state employment support programmes, the level of sustainable

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labour market integration of persons with disabilities remains limited. In many cases, employment is fragmented and does not lead to long-term job retention, indicating the presence of structural and practical barriers that extend beyond formal regulation.

Contemporary research highlights the multifactorial nature of barriers to inclusive hiring, including stigmatisation, insufficient workplace accessibility, and employers' concerns related to perceived costs, risks and uncertainty of production processes. In response to these challenges, a range of supported employment models have been developed in international practice, including supported employment, job coaching and reasonable accommodation practices. However, despite the proven effectiveness of individual elements of these approaches, their practical implementation often encounters limitations associated with the lack of reproducible procedures, standardised tools and mechanisms for adaptation to specific institutional and organisational contexts.

A critical dimension of this process is the gap between the expectations and interpretations of key actors involved in inclusive employment. Persons with disabilities tend to interpret employment barriers through the lens of lived experiences of stigmatisation, distrust and unequal treatment, whereas employers are more likely to frame the same processes in terms of managerial risks, productivity uncertainty, additional organisational burdens and responsibility. This expectation gap reduces the effectiveness of formal employment support measures and constrains employment sustainability even in contexts where positive attitudes towards inclusion are explicitly declared.

In the academic literature, this aspect remains insufficiently systematised. Barriers to inclusive employment are typically analysed either from the perspective of job seekers or from the perspective of employers, without detailed examination of the mechanisms through which these perspectives are aligned during recruitment and workplace adaptation. Moreover, in countries with emerging or developing employment support systems, there remains a lack of empirical studies offering practice-oriented and reproducible supported employment models grounded in the analysis of real-world cases and organisational-level implementation.

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to identify key barriers to inclusive employment through an analysis of the perspectives of persons with disabilities and employers, and to develop and pilot a supported employment methodology oriented towards enhancing employment sustainability and reducing uncertainty for all actors involved. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following objectives:

- 1) to analyse barriers to inclusive employment based on qualitative research;
- 2) to identify differences and points of convergence in the interpretation of these barriers by job seekers and employers;
- 3) to develop a supported employment methodology grounded in a dual logic of support;
- 4) to operationalise the proposed methodology through a reproducible set of procedures and applied tools;
- 5) to pilot the developed approach within social enterprises.

The scientific contribution of the article lies in conceptualising the expectation gap between persons with disabilities and employers as an independent mechanism reproducing barriers to inclusive employment, as well as in the development and empirical validation of a practice-oriented supported employment methodology. Unlike existing approaches, the proposed methodology is oriented not only towards supporting job seekers, but also towards reducing employers' managerial risks through process standardisation and the application of a set of applied tools.

2. Theoretical background

Recent research on inclusive employment consistently highlights that barriers to labour market participation of persons with disabilities are multi-layered and extend beyond individual functional limitations. Large-scale empirical evidence from low- and middle-income country contexts indicates that disability-related stigma and discrimination remain widespread and structurally embedded, with employment outcomes significantly associated with gender, type of disability, and labour market status (Jeyam et al., 2025). At the same time,

several studies underline the importance of institutional and organisational contexts in shaping employment outcomes. Profiling approaches that classify unemployed individuals based on employment barriers rather than socio-demographic characteristics enable more targeted and cost-effective employment support, particularly for socially vulnerable populations. Similarly, research on entrepreneurial intentions and labour market participation demonstrates that education, institutional support, infrastructure, and policy environments play a decisive role in enabling sustainable employment trajectories (Hathroubi et al., 2025).

A growing body of literature emphasises the importance of participatory and relational approaches in addressing these barriers. Involving people with intellectual disabilities as co-evaluators of services has been shown to enhance trust, empathy, and the quality of evaluation outcomes, while simultaneously creating meaningful employment opportunities and challenging professional assumptions rooted in deficit-based models (O'Brien et al., 2025). These findings align with research on psychological and support services, which shows that inclusive practices often require the involvement of broader support networks, introducing additional ethical, organisational, and relational complexities that necessitate structured decision-making and professional training (Surley et al., 2024).

From a policy perspective, systematic reviews and policy-oriented studies reveal persistent limitations in disability employment frameworks. Employment policies remain fragmented and predominantly focused on formal regulatory instruments and individual capacity-building, while insufficiently addressing systemic discrimination, employer attitudes, and the coordination of support mechanisms across the employment process (Myshbayeva et al., 2022; Lawrence et al., 2025). Evidence from policy evaluations further suggests that coordinated labour market interventions can yield measurable macro-level effects, such as reductions in unemployment rates, yet these effects do not automatically translate into sustainable employment for socially vulnerable groups without targeted and differentiated support (Sokira & Myshbayeva, 2021). As shown by Vale and Hanisch (2025), even in welfare-oriented policy systems, the discourse of inclusive employment may remain normatively ambitious while being operationally narrowed to workforce management concerns, thereby reinforcing the discrepancy between formal commitments to inclusion and the actual conditions of labour market access for persons with disabilities.

These barriers should also be considered in relation to the wider institutional and regulatory environment that shapes access to formal employment. Ben-Salha et al. (2025) demonstrate that the employment exclusion of persons with disabilities is also shaped by regulatory conditions, as barriers in credit markets, business environments, and the broader formal economy may push them into informal and insecure forms of work. Complementing this macro-level perspective, Ozel et al. (2026) demonstrate that growth in the number of employed persons with disabilities does not automatically reflect genuine inclusion, as employment may remain concentrated in low-paid, physically demanding, and low-status jobs created primarily to satisfy formal legal obligations.

The role of employers and organisational practices is particularly salient in the literature. Case-study evidence from Norway shows that employers are more willing to provide workplace adaptations for existing employees who acquire disabilities than for new job applicants, indicating that perceived risks, organisational routines, and managerial attitudes outweigh formal policy obligations or adaptation costs (Kuznetsova & Bento, 2018). Complementary research confirms that workplace adaptations aimed at removing architectural and environmental barriers not only facilitate access to employment but also enhance long-term participation by improving overall organisational accessibility and safety (Tylutki et al., 2024). At the same time, psychometric studies demonstrate that negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities remain a measurable and multidimensional factor in work contexts, underscoring the persistent influence of implicit biases and organisational culture on employment-related interactions (Chávez-Castillo et al., 2024). Francis and Glasgow (2026) further show that barriers to inclusive employment arise through the combined effect of employer bias, limited accommodations, weak legal enforcement, unequal educational access, and the cumulative discouragement experienced by persons with disabilities after repeated exclusion from the labour market.

Research on recruitment practices suggests that barriers to inclusive employment are reproduced not only through formal exclusion, but also through the communicative dynamics of hiring itself. Vedeler (2024)

shows that even within diversity-oriented organisations, disability may still be addressed in job interviews through a person-deficit perspective, which shifts attention from competence to impairment and reinforces barriers to inclusive hiring at the interactional level. Moreover, recent research suggests that even where inclusion-oriented initiatives are introduced, their effectiveness may be limited if they are not embedded across organizational culture and institutional processes, thereby sustaining a gap between formal commitments to inclusion and participants' actual experiences (de Lima et al., 2026).

Recent qualitative evidence further demonstrates that barriers to inclusive employment persist not only at the stage of labour market entry but also throughout workplace participation itself. Nguyen, Alexander, and Bellon (2025) show that inclusive employment barriers continue beyond hiring and are reproduced within everyday workplace participation through inaccessible environments, weak accommodations, discriminatory attitudes, and the exclusion of employees with disabilities from communication, development, and support structures. In this context, sustainable inclusion cannot be reduced to mere access to employment; it also depends on the quality of participation, the availability of support, and the degree to which workplace structures respond to actual employee needs.

At the same time, the literature increasingly shows that inclusive employment must be analysed as a continuous transition process rather than as a single hiring event. Lopez-Gavira, Orozco, and Perez-Lopez (2025) show that the successful employment inclusion of graduates with disabilities depends on a combination of personal capabilities and external supports, including disability services, workplace accommodations, prior work experience, and employer awareness across the transition from higher education to work. These challenges become especially visible when employment inclusion is examined not only as access to work, but also as a process of transition between support environments. Research on the transition from supported to open employment further shows that labour market inclusion cannot be ensured without coordinated organisational and policy support. Joyce et al. (2025), based on interviews with employees with intellectual disabilities, supported employment staff, and open employers in Australia, found that transition to open employment is constrained by inflexible funding arrangements, insufficient employer knowledge and confidence, weak career preparation, and the lack of sustained workplace support. Their findings suggest that even when persons with disabilities express a clear preference for more community-based and inclusive employment options, these aspirations may remain unrealised in the absence of structured pathways, gradual job adaptation, and institutional mechanisms capable of supporting movement between protected and open labour market settings. This highlights that barriers to inclusive employment are reproduced not only through exclusion from hiring, but also through the failure to organise transition processes in ways that align support systems, employer practices, and individual employment trajectories.

Recent policy-oriented research further confirms that disability employment barriers persist across recruitment, accommodation, retention, and career development because policy efforts remain overly focused on individual capacity-building while insufficiently addressing deficit-based attitudes, fragmented systems, and structural discrimination (Lawrence, Mellifont & Bulkeley, 2026). Taken together, these findings suggest that sustainable inclusion cannot be achieved through fragmented policy instruments alone and instead requires coordinated, person-centred, and workplace-responsive support mechanisms.

In this context, social entrepreneurship and the non-profit sector are increasingly discussed as intermediate spaces for inclusive employment. Studies focusing on Kazakhstan show that inclusive business models integrating social and economic value creation can generate employment opportunities for socially vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities; however, their sustainability depends on strategic clarity, managerial capacity, and institutional support. Process-oriented management of business activities has been identified as a key condition for balancing social objectives with economic efficiency and ensuring long-term organisational viability (Tuyakova, 2021).

Finally, a number of studies highlight the relevance of conceptual and methodological frameworks that shift the focus from medical diagnosis to functional capacities and environmental factors. Applying the ICF-based biopsychosocial model in employment support facilitates the identification of contextual barriers and enablers, thereby reducing the gap between individual abilities and actual work performance (Caruso & Messina, 2025).

Cross-cultural validation of standardised instruments, such as the Work Rehabilitation Questionnaire, further supports the use of structured assessments to enhance vocational rehabilitation and promote sustainable employment outcomes for persons with disabilities (Fernandes et al., 2023). Complementary qualitative research on assistive technologies illustrates how socio-technical arrangements can reframe disability, reduce experienced ableism, and expand participation by enhancing agency and redefining norms of bodily performance (Cherrington & Brighton, 2024). Recent cross-country evidence also suggests that the future of inclusive employment is increasingly shaped by technological transformation: Omri and Afi (2025) demonstrate that the effect of artificial intelligence on the employment of persons with disabilities is conditional and nonlinear, as AI may initially intensify exclusion, but under stronger economic and institutional governance its longer-term impact may become more inclusive. At the same time, qualitative studies demonstrate that strengths-based employment services can foster inclusive workplaces by cultivating shared hope, aligning individual and collective goals, and challenging deficit-oriented assumptions through everyday organisational practices (Carr-Kirby et al., 2025). As such, strengths-based and context-sensitive support models provide an important conceptual basis for supported employment approaches that seek to align individual capacities, workplace demands, and adaptive support mechanisms in a more personalised and sustainable way.

3. Research objective and methodology

A qualitative research design was employed to achieve the objectives of the study, focusing on the analysis of subjective perceptions and practical experiences of key actors involved in inclusive employment. The choice of a qualitative methodology was conditioned by the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon under study, which encompasses institutional, organisational and individual components that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods alone.

The empirical basis of the study was formed through semi-structured in-depth interviews with two groups of respondents. The first group comprised employers with practical experience in hiring and supporting employees with disabilities. In total, nine interviews were conducted with representatives of organisations operating in different sectors of the economy. Experts were selected based on their demonstrated experience in implementing inclusive practices and their direct involvement in workplace adaptation processes for employees with disabilities. Interview questions addressed perceptions of key barriers to inclusive hiring, available support measures, assessments of existing state employment policies, and prospects for expanding inclusive practices. The second group of respondents included 53 persons with disabilities representing different types of impairments, including physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities. Interviews with this group focused on individual experiences of job search, recruitment and interview processes, interactions with employers and human resource services, as well as working conditions and workplace adaptation. Interview formats were adapted to respondents' needs: written questionnaires were used for participants with hearing impairments, while oral interviews were conducted with respondents with visual impairments and cognitive disabilities.

Data collection was carried out both in person (Astana) and remotely using the Zoom platform for participants from other regions. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from different respondent groups and multiple sources, including oral interviews, written questionnaires and expert assessments.

All participants were informed about the aims and objectives of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Interviews were audio-recorded only with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed in Russian or Kazakh, depending on respondents' language preferences.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring themes, key categories and stable patterns in perceptions of inclusive employment. Particular attention was paid to comparing the perspectives of employers and persons with disabilities, which allowed for the identification of

both areas of convergence and divergence in the interpretation of barriers and conditions of inclusive employment.

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the geographic scope of the fieldwork predominantly covered urban centres, which limits the representation of rural contexts. Second, the sample size does not allow for statistical generalisation; however, it enables the identification of robust trends and typical situations. Third, the voluntary nature of participation may have resulted in selection bias towards employers already interested in inclusive practices. Despite these limitations, the findings demonstrate high analytical and practical relevance and provide a solid foundation for further research and the development of supported employment models.

4. Results and discussion

Sample Structure and Research Context

The empirical basis of the study comprises data obtained from in-depth interviews with persons with disabilities and employers implementing inclusive hiring practices. The characteristics of the employers who participated in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of employers participating in the study

Participant group	N	Gender	Age (range)	Mean age	Location	Type of enterprise	Status
Employers / business owners	48	Male, female	32–47	43	Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, other cities of Kazakhstan	Catering (social cafés), sewing and carpentry workshops, car washes, furniture production, educational and rehabilitation centres	59% registered social entrepreneurs; 41% non-registered

Source: created by the authors

The sample covers representatives from various sectors of economic activity and reflects the diversity of organisational contexts in which inclusive employment is implemented.

Sectoral Structure of Employment of Persons with Disabilities

The analysis of the distribution of persons with disabilities across employment sectors reveals pronounced heterogeneity in access to different segments of the labour market. As shown in **Figure 1**, respondents' employment is predominantly concentrated in social enterprises and selected segments of the open labour market, while participation in the public sector remains limited.

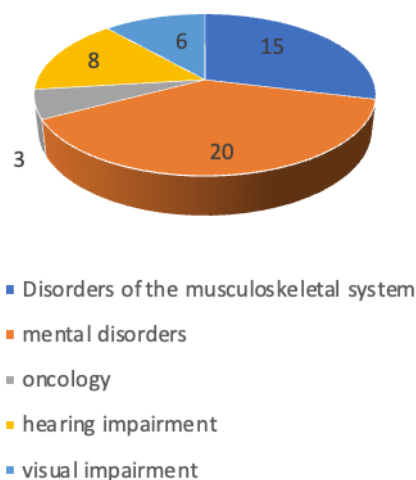


Figure 1. Distribution of Persons with Disabilities by Type of Disability and Employment Sector

Source: created by the authors

This distribution indicates the presence of institutional and organisational factors shaping employment opportunities beyond the individual characteristics of job seekers. In this context, social enterprises function as a key channel for labour market inclusion, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

Sectoral Segmentation of Employment by Type of Impairment

A more detailed analysis presented in Figure 2 reveals a stable association between the type of functional impairment and the sector of employment.

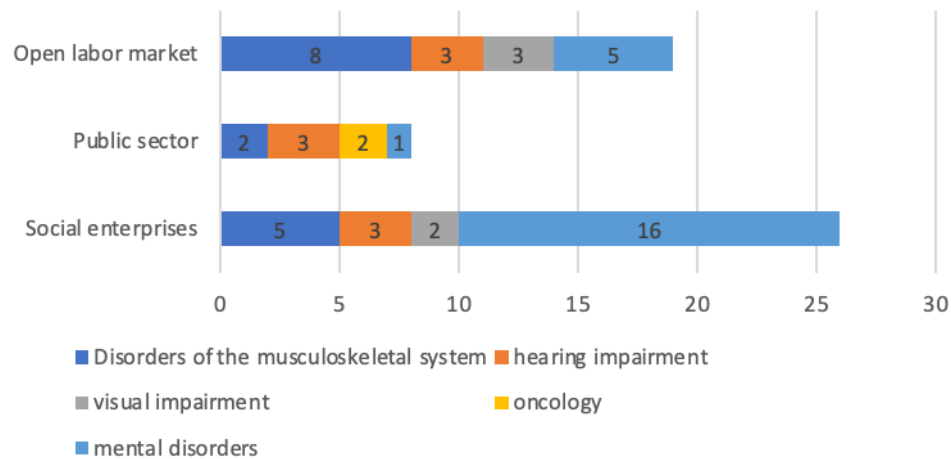


Figure 2. Distribution of Employment Sectors by Type of Disability

Source: created by the authors

Respondents with mental and intellectual disabilities are predominantly employed in social enterprises, whereas persons with physical and sensory impairments are more frequently represented in the open labour market. Across all groups, participation in the public sector remains minimal.

The findings indicate the existence of a segmented labour market in which access to specific sectors is determined not only by professional skills, but also by the type of impairment and the willingness of organisations to adapt workplaces and work processes. Such segmentation constrains labour mobility and limits transitions between sectors.

Interpretation of Barriers from the Perspective of Persons with Disabilities

Interviews with persons with disabilities indicate that employment barriers are predominantly perceived through experiences of stigmatisation, distrust and unequal treatment. Respondents report difficulties at the stages of job search, recruitment and workplace adaptation, largely associated with opaque requirements and lowered expectations on the part of employers. An additional constraint is the limited flexibility of working conditions and the lack of individualised solutions, which complicates both entry into employment and job retention. At the same time, high motivation for work and the presence of individual adaptation strategies suggest that the identified barriers are systemic in nature and primarily rooted in the organisational environment.

Employers' Perspective: Risks and Conditions of Feasibility of Inclusive Hiring

From the employers' perspective, key barriers to inclusive hiring are articulated in terms of managerial risks and organisational costs. Respondents highlight productivity uncertainty, the need to adapt work processes, additional burdens on management teams, and the absence of standardised support tools. Particular importance is attributed to sensitivity to the type of functional impairment: while adaptation is perceived as relatively feasible for certain impairments, it is viewed as requiring specialised resources and infrastructure for others. According to employers, employment sustainability largely depends on the availability of mentors, a supportive organisational culture, and clearly regulated stages of workplace adaptation.

The Expectation Gap as an Integrative Analytical Outcome

The comparison of data obtained from persons with disabilities and employers allows the expectation gap to be identified as a key integrative outcome of the study. While job seekers predominantly interpret barriers as a deficit of trust and equal treatment, employers frame the same situations through the lens of manageability and risk. The main differences in interpretations and expectations between the two groups are systematised in Table 2.

Table 2. Expectation gap in inclusive employment: perspectives of persons with disabilities and employers

Analytical dimension	Persons with disabilities	Employers
Interpretation of employment barriers	Stigmatization, distrust, unequal treatment, lack of recognition of capabilities	Organisational risks, uncertainty of productivity, additional managerial and financial costs
Key concerns at the hiring stage	Fair access to employment, transparency of requirements, stability of employment	Predictability of performance, manageability of work processes, legal and operational responsibility
Perception of adaptation needs	Individualised accommodations and flexible work arrangements as a prerequisite for inclusion	Adaptation as a source of additional workload and resource allocation
Understanding of support mechanisms	Expectation of continuous support and mediation during adaptation	Need for clear procedures, guidelines, and external expertise
Factors of sustainable employment	Trust-based relationships, inclusive organisational culture, long-term security	Standardised processes, mentoring systems, and reduction of uncertainty
Dominant risk perception	Risk of discrimination and job loss	Risk of inefficiency and operational disruption

Source: created by the authors

The identified expectation gap constrains the effectiveness of employment support measures and reduces employment sustainability, as it impedes the alignment of requirements and forms of support at the stages of recruitment and workplace adaptation.

The findings of this study provide a renewed understanding of the nature of barriers to inclusive employment by shifting the analytical focus from isolated constraints to the mechanisms through which such barriers are reproduced in interactions between key labour market actors. Unlike approaches that examine barriers primarily from the perspective of persons with disabilities or employers in isolation, this study demonstrates that persistent constraints emerge within the zone of misaligned expectations, interpretations and managerial logics.

The Expectation Gap as a Mechanism of Barrier Reproduction

One of the key contributions of the study is the conceptualisation of the expectation gap between persons with disabilities and employers as an independent mechanism reproducing barriers to inclusive employment. Empirical evidence indicates that identical challenges—such as workplace adaptation, task performance pace and the need for additional support—are interpreted by the two sides through fundamentally different frames of reference. For job seekers, these challenges are associated with experiences of stigmatisation, distrust and unequal treatment, whereas employers tend to interpret them in terms of risk, productivity uncertainty and additional organisational costs. This divergence in interpretations reduces the effectiveness of even formally well-designed employment support measures, as it prevents the alignment of expectations during recruitment and adaptation processes. As a result, inclusive employment remains unstable: positive attitudes towards inclusion do not translate into sustainable employment practices, while emerging difficulties reinforce mutual doubts between the parties involved.

Sectoral Segmentation and the Limited Scope of Employment Channels

The results further confirm the presence of pronounced sectoral segmentation in the labour market for persons with disabilities. Social enterprises function as the primary employment channel for persons with mental and intellectual disabilities, while access to the open labour market and the public sector remains limited and selective. This segmentation reflects not only differences in individual capacities, but also structural features of the organisational environment, including employers' readiness to adapt workplaces and the availability of structured support mechanisms. In this context, social enterprises perform a compensatory function by

lowering entry barriers to employment for the most vulnerable groups. However, the concentration of persons with disabilities within this sector simultaneously points to the limitations of existing inclusion models, which fail to facilitate meaningful transitions to the open labour market. This underscores the need to develop intermediary and bridging mechanisms capable of linking social enterprises, the open labour market and public institutions.

Limitations of Individual-Centred Support Models

The empirical findings allow for a critical reassessment of individual-centred supported employment models that focus primarily on preparing and supporting the job seeker. While such approaches remain important, they prove insufficient in contexts where key barriers are located at the level of organisational processes and managerial decision-making. The absence of standardised adaptation procedures, uncertainty in the distribution of responsibilities, and a lack of tools to support employers intensify perceived risks and reduce organisational readiness for inclusive hiring. In this sense, the findings support the need to move from a one-sided logic of support towards dual-sided models that take into account the interests and constraints of both parties. Supported employment should therefore encompass not only assistance to the job seeker, but also the reduction of managerial uncertainty for employers through the regulation of recruitment, adaptation and performance evaluation stages.

Implications for the Development of a Supported Employment Methodology

The identified empirical patterns define key requirements for a supported employment methodology aimed at enhancing employment sustainability. Such a methodology should simultaneously address socio-psychological and organisational-institutional barriers by facilitating the alignment of expectations among participants in the employment process. Core elements include profiling tools and task-ability matching instruments, regulated adaptation pathways, mentoring systems and structured feedback points, as well as standardised formats of interaction between employers, job seekers and support professionals. Within this framework, the methodology proposed in the article is conceptualised not as an alternative to state employment policies, but as an applied mechanism that complements existing measures and enhances their implementability at the organisational level.

Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the analytical and practical relevance of the findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the empirical base predominantly reflects urban contexts, which limits consideration of rural-specific conditions. Second, the voluntary participation of employers may have introduced selection bias towards organisations already inclined towards inclusive practices. Third, while the qualitative research design does not allow for statistical generalisation, it enables the identification of stable mechanisms and typical situations. Future research may focus on quantitative validation of the identified patterns, expanding the geographic scope of analysis, and assessing the effectiveness of the proposed methodology across different institutional settings and economic sectors.

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to analyse barriers to inclusive employment and to develop a supported employment methodology for persons with disabilities oriented towards enhancing employment sustainability. Based on a qualitative analysis of the perspectives of persons with disabilities and employers, the study demonstrates that key constraints to inclusive hiring are formed not only at the level of individual characteristics or institutional conditions, but also within the zone of misaligned expectations and interpretations among actors involved in the employment process.

The central conclusion of the study is the substantiation of the expectation gap between persons with disabilities and employers as an independent mechanism reproducing barriers to inclusive employment. While job seekers tend to interpret employment-related difficulties primarily through experiences of stigmatisation, distrust and unequal treatment, employers are more likely to frame the same situations in terms of managerial risks, productivity uncertainty and additional organisational costs. As shown by the empirical findings, this

divergence reduces the effectiveness of formal employment support measures and constrains employment sustainability even in contexts characterised by positive attitudes towards inclusion.

The empirical evidence also indicates pronounced sectoral segmentation in the employment of persons with disabilities. Social enterprises function as the primary channel of labour market inclusion for the most vulnerable groups, particularly persons with mental and intellectual disabilities, while access to the open labour market and the public sector remains limited. This structure reflects a lack of reproducible adaptation and support mechanisms and underscores the need to develop intermediary and bridging employment models.

The practical significance of the study lies in the development and piloting of a supported employment methodology grounded in a dual logic of support. Unlike individual-centred approaches, the proposed methodology addresses not only the needs of job seekers, but also employers' managerial constraints by reducing uncertainty and perceived risks through process standardisation, regulated adaptation stages and a set of applied tools. This allows the proposed approach to be considered a reproducible and scalable mechanism that complements existing employment policy measures.

From the perspective of future research and practice, the findings point to the need to shift the analytical and policy focus from isolated support for specific groups towards the development of support systems that facilitate the alignment of expectations and the distribution of responsibility among actors involved in the employment process. Expanding the empirical base through quantitative studies, assessing the effectiveness of the proposed methodology across different institutional contexts, and examining pathways from social entrepreneurship to the open labour market represent promising directions for further research.

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