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"We have the talent!" - Supported employment in Europe

Impressions from the EUSE conference in June 2024 and information about our European umbrella organization. EUSE is now called ASEE.

First things first: The European umbrella organization for supported employment has changed its name. What was previously known as EUSE is now called ASEE. This stands for "Association for Supported Employment Europe". It is pronounced something like this: eysie.

And there is also a new website where you can continue to find information about the activities and members of ASEE: <https://a4se.eu>.

In 1993, the EUSE (European Union for Supported Employment) was founded by some national umbrella organizations for supported employment. The BAG UB, which was only founded in 1994, was already involved at that time, at least through people from Germany who drove this process forward. The aim was and is to jointly develop the concept of supported employment and to support each other in bringing supported employment more and more into practice throughout Europe. This also means giving more people with disabilities and those in need of support the opportunity to work in the general labor market. This has opened up new opportunities in many European countries. Supported employment, or the English term "supported employment", is now visible both as a term and through practice in society, among service providers and political decision-makers when it comes to the professional participation of people with disabilities. Nevertheless, there are setbacks and barriers that have not yet been identified or overcome - and this in all countries involved. Topics that are currently being discussed and addressed across Europe include:

- the tendering of services and the associated loss of quality - an issue that concerns many countries and often threatens or destroys established structures. Practical solutions to this are also presented and discussed in the European umbrella organization.
- the human resources available for person-centered support. In many countries, there are no adequate staffing ratios for this.
- the further training of qualified specialists
- the certification of providers of supported employment
- the use of new technologies and media, e.g. in job coaching.

The ASEE (formerly EUSE) currently has 17 members and three associated members. Members are the national umbrella organizations for supported employment. Two delegates each represent the members in the ASEE Council. For the BAG UB, these are Andrea Seeger (ACCESS Inclusion in Working Life) and Kirsten Hohn (BAG UB office).

The renaming after 30 years does not change the common struggle for better conditions for supporting people with disabilities in working life. The reason for the renaming is that the old name led some to assume that it was an EU organization. Others assumed that it was a union (union is the English word for union). The new, jointly agreed name has now brought clarity here. The name was publicly announced at the conference in June:

"We have the Talent" was the title of this year's EUSE / ASEE conference, which took place in Tarragona from June 5th to 7th.

Around 600 participants from many European countries and from other continents took part in the conference and presented and discussed their own experiences, concepts and political frameworks from their countries and their respective practices. Around ten people from Germany took part. German participants contributed to the success of the conference with two workshops:

Together with the French umbrella organization for supported employment, the concepts and implementations in the further training of supported employment specialists were presented and discussed. In the subsequent exchange, we learned about other countries in which further training is offered in different formats. And the topic of the use of digital support options (apps, etc.) for professional qualification and job placement was brought into focus by colleagues from the Hamburg employment assistance service in a workshop and through a poster. There was also a fruitful exchange on this.

Some participants from Germany, Austria and Switzerland share their impressions of the conference:

General impressions of the conference:

"What a conference that was! The subject of supported employment was examined from different perspectives in a varied way. Self-advocates with cognitive impairments enriched the event with demands and statements. Employers and providers of services for supported employment gave insights into their commitment and share their success stories. Political representatives and stakeholders from the region, city, Europe and the United Nations gave lectures and committed themselves to the Supported Employment approach. Inclusion is a human right that everyone is working on together. Now and in the future. We still have a lot to do."

"The conference showed how important Supported Employment is not only in individual countries, not even just in Europe, but throughout the world - and how much we can still learn from each other. I was particularly interested in the many scientifically supported projects and studies that were presented (e.g. from the universities in Verona, Copenhagen and Cardiff) - it is always good to have evaluations that show how participants can best be supported."

"Right at the beginning of the conference, one of the main lectures by Luc Hernau emphasized the importance of visions and values as the foundation of Supported Employment and that it is therefore more than just a method. Rather, it is the vision of an inclusive society that we can

approach through participation in working life and taking into account the self-determination of people with disabilities. In another keynote speech by Huw Davies, it was argued that the quality, professionalism and effectiveness of our work are at risk of arbitrariness if visions and values are given priority without quality standards - including methodological ones. However, the conference program was so diverse that both poles of this 'tension' were given sufficient space to be reflected and to create a synthesis with each other." "Supported employment as a global inclusion movement: It was vehemently argued that supported employment should not only be understood as a work integration model, but as a global movement to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities." "The conference was enriched by many contributions from experts on their own behalf, who reflected on their rights, needs and wishes and were thus able to formulate tasks for the organizations and specialists." "The conference was able to underline the importance of European professional exchange for institutional and individual development and was, from our perspective, a great success." "The event made it clear how important international exchange and cooperation are in the field of supported employment. The knowledge and best practices gained will help us to improve our own approaches to further training and promote inclusion in working life."

Learning from international examples and with new contacts:

"The conference offered exciting insights into the different ways in which providers work and the influence of social policy systems in Europe. These differences were expressed, among other things, in cooperation with private companies. The closeness between social organizations and the private sector presented here - which was also reflected in the habitus of the entire conference - was rather unusual from a German perspective. On the one hand, it offered an opportunity for critical reflection, but is also a valuable perspective, as it shows new ways of cooperation and can bring social responsibility into the private sector.

"As always at such events, the breaks were valuable. I made contacts there that will continue beyond the conference."

"In addition to the 'big lines' of a future-oriented development of supported employment and the importance of a human rights-based view of the issue of disability and participation in working life outlined in the main lectures, the accompanying workshops also repeatedly provided inspiration through innovative best practices. One example of this was a workshop on entrepreneurial independence for people with learning difficulties as an option that should always be considered in supported employment. As in many other workshops, the speakers' persuasiveness was based on their authentic experiences that they had gained in their own practice. The courage and openness that they exuded towards the topic was infectious."

Other topics and workshops:

"I was pleased that the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) was covered in both a lecture and a workshop."

“Financing of supported employment: A central topic was the different financing of job coaches in the various countries. It became clear that each country has found its own way to secure funding, which leads to different framework conditions.”

"It also became clear how different the staffing levels are in the different countries and how much or little actual person-centered support and job coaching is possible." "Another focus was digital participation for people with learning difficulties. In addition to many other workshops, the report by the Hamburg employment assistance service on the Erasmus project "BELVEDERE" was able to highlight the importance of digital participation as a human right and point out the gaps that still exist in this regard, but also provide suggestions through best practice examples and information on relevant resources. Throughout the conference, it became clear that digital participation and accessibility must be an integral part of Supported Employment.”

“We learned about the many supportive online tools from Microsoft that can help people with disabilities in their daily work lives.”

“In the workshop ‘Successful Employment Model for People on the Autism Spectrum’, presented by Sean Wiltshire of Avalon Employment Inc., we gained valuable insight into the practices of a highly successful autism employment program in Eastern Canada. The workshop looked at the development and implementation of this program at ten sites in Canada and demonstrated the measurement of effectiveness using a ‘Social Return On Investment Model’ that effectively measured both outputs and outcomes. In addition, the workshop highlighted the importance of understanding the benefits of employment based on social determinants of health and incorporating these into project planning to help the government make funding and program decisions for project approval. The workshop also showed how successful collaboration with people on the autism spectrum and with the local business community can be when the recruitment process is professionally managed from the start. In addition, the workshop discussed the development of policy changes that are needed to integrate these programs into ongoing government services and thus ensure long-term sustainability and support for people on the autism spectrum in the world of work.”

One particularly inspiring aspect was how Spain implements the self-determination of people with disabilities. These people took part in the conference not only as participants, but also as speakers, which underlined their active involvement and importance.

The setting / the organization:

"The event location offered an attractive setting, during the lunch break you could even go for a swim in the pool. The food was sensational. The gala dinner in the open air was unforgettable and the rollercoaster ride was legendary.”

“The conference team put together a conference with 600 delegates from all over the world with a lot of charm, creativity and casualness that will remain unforgettable. The bar is set high for subsequent conferences.”

“The organization of the conference by the Aura Fundacio was outstanding and the hospitality was impressive.

“The presentations were in three languages: English, Spanish and Catalan. Thanks to an impressive translation app that was available to everyone, everything was translated simultaneously by AI (artificial intelligence).”

Many thanks for the impressions from Regula Buzziol (Academia Euregio Bodensee AG, St. Gallen), Alexander Czarnetzki (Hamburger Arbeitsassistenten), Hannah Diry (dabei – Dachverband professionelle Inklusion Austria, Vienna), Andrea Grode (Autismus Rein-Main e.V.) and Andrea Seeger (ACCESS Inklusion im Arbeitsleben, Nuremberg).

The next ASEE meeting will be held in Liverpool in November 2026.