

Short Briefing on the EU Disability Employment Package

2023

The Disability Employment Package¹ is one of the 7 flagship initiatives of the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. It was presented by the European Commission in 2022 to improve the conditions of people with disabilities in the EU labour market, given that currently only 50.8% of persons with disabilities of working age in the European Union (EU) are employed. The underlying principle is that being active in employment is the best way to promote and guarantee social inclusion and financial autonomy of persons with disabilities. All its actions aim to increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities and make sure that everyone has equal opportunities. The package does not only cover employment but also access to long-term quality health and social care.

The initiative supports the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by the European institutions in 2017, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), especially art. 27 that recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to employment, and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals for sustainable and inclusive economic growth (specifically, goals 8 and 10). The European Pillar of Social Rights creates a framework for the development of

employment and social policies at European and Member States levels. In 2021, the framework was accompanied by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan presenting concrete steps to achieve a more equal, fair, and inclusive society by 2030. As cited above, the promotion of health and (long-term) care is taken into consideration in the third and last chapter which concerns social protection and inclusion. However, the chapters are not mutually exclusive but they build upon each other. The last chapter of the initiative builds upon the European Care Strategy, issued in 2022, which seeks also to enhance work-life balance, childcare, and gender equality together with long-term care. Ultimately, the European Commission supports Member States in setting targets to improve social protection and inclusion, developing national policies for the green and digital transition, and monitoring their progress through the European Semester and statistical common indicators, such as the Disability Employment Gap.

Following, this briefing outlines the singular initiatives composing the Package and their relevance for organisations, associations, and social enterprises working with people with a disability. EPR will continue to monitor the progress and implementation of the measures and keep members updated and engaged.

¹ More information can be found on the official website of the European Commission at this [link](#).



EPR online campaign on Pathways to Employment of persons with disabilities, graphic, 2022²

The Disability Employment Package

Compared to the initiatives on employment of the previous EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020, the Disability Employment Package of the EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 contains practical and detailed actions, to concretely and efficiently achieve the goal: increase the presence of people with disabilities in the labour market. It is composed of 6 areas of action, each with specific deliverables to be achieved by 2024:

1. Strengthening capacities of employment services through guidance to improve accessibility and inclusiveness

This deliverable was developed in collaboration with the Public Employment Services (PES) a European collaborative network with the primary objective of optimizing the effectiveness of the public services. The toolkit³ presents several practices that can enhance the integration of people with disabilities and mental health problems in the labour market. The paper details steps for employers to create a fairer and more diverse labor market for people with disabilities.

² EPR Online Campaign 2022 is available at this [link](#).

³ The toolkit can be found at this [link](#).

- The first step is to **reduce attitudinal barriers** in management and the staff members to eliminate biases and prejudices concerning disability. This should be done through ad-hoc training initially performed by specialists in the sector.
- Secondly, **job adverts should be accessible to everyone**. This means that both digital and paper-based applications should be available, together with a clear statement from the employer that applications from people with disabilities are welcome and that the organisation has an equal opportunities policy.
- Moreover, the **job description should only include those skills that are strictly required** for the task, leaving aside those that are optional.
- **Job interviews must be accessible physically or digitally**, through the delivery of appropriate tools.
- **The employer**, with the assistance of specialists, **should develop performance targets**, with a defined timeframe and dedicated resources, to keep track of what has been achieved and what has not. It could be helpful for the employer to adopt a mission approach with identifiable key employment areas (recruitment, promotion, and training) adding concrete steps needed to include people with disabilities within all these steps.
- Ultimately, organisations could **promote role modelling** which could be helpful to motivate staff with disabilities.

There are also some components under the responsibility of PES such as:

- **Online job portals, counselling, employment support, alternative employment models**, and information campaigns can be developed with information, guidance, and placement services.
- **Career guidance should be inclusive and tailored to individuals' challenges, interests, and capabilities**. Specialist Disability Employment Counsellors can assist with employment and disability assessments to find more suitable jobs.
- Active labour market measures, like **workplace adaptations, incentives for employers, training, job creation, and vocational rehabilitation**, can help neurodivergent individuals and people with physical disabilities gain employment. **PES should provide disability-friendly accommodation, flexible schedules, mentoring schemes, and accessible equipment and materials**.
- Also, **quotas** can be a useful tool to achieve those targets posed by the EU and national governmental bodies.
- **Supported employment**, should include general assistance before, during, and after employment was contracted, and could be intensive personalized⁴, or customised⁵. Another possibility is self-employment, start-up, and entrepreneurship support for those jobseekers who would prefer to be freelancers.
- Besides this, **outreach programs** organised and led by specialists in disability can encourage individuals with a disability to join the labour market and, hopefully, increase their presence.
- **Partnerships between employers, governmental bodies, service providers, and NGOs in the sector are more effective** than a top-down approach. A stakeholder partnership system should use a **holistic approach** that considers the strengths and abilities of people with disabilities.

⁴ Intensive personalized support is aimed at those facing high impediments in entering the job market who would benefit from a tailored support program.

⁵ Customised support gives the possibility to job seekers with a disability to create their profile describing their strengths and interests, and afterwards, collaborate with employers to create an employment opportunity

In conclusion, the European Commission believes that achieving all the necessary elements is crucial. To do so, it recommends following these five steps:

- a) Map the existing situation
- b) Review and update an inclusive PES strategy
- c) Prepare an implementation plan
- d) Develop "distance travelled towards employment" measures by collecting and reporting data on the progress made by the individual once employed
- e) Increase commitment and monitoring towards achieving these goals by involving internal and external partners and stakeholders.

2. Promoting hiring perspectives through affirmative action and combating stereotypes with a catalogue of good practices

The inclusion in the labour market of people caring disabilities can only be possible if biases and prejudices are substituted with positive actions - like, counselling and support to adapt recruitment procedures and the workplace. To this end, the Commission published the "*Catalogue of Positive Actions to Encourage the Hiring of Persons with Disabilities and Combating Stereotypes*"⁶ about the strengths and value that people carrying disabilities can bring to the labour market. The Commission also projects financial support for employers, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These measures should make it preferable for employers to achieve the stipulated quotas of employees with disabilities, instead of paying penalties for not fulfilling the requirements. EPR asked members for good practices in programmes and projects supporting employers and submitted the examples received to the Commission to be considered for inclusion in the final document.

3. Ensuring reasonable accommodation at work

Even though assuring reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities is mandatory for employers, following the EU legislation (Directive 2000/78)⁷, and the spread of COVID-19 advanced the use of teleworking, there are still many challenges in this field to overcome. Reasonable accommodation does not refer only to the physical working space, but also to the recruitment and hiring processes, and the way the job is supposed to be carried out by the employer and the employees. The International Labor Organisation (ILO) also took a standpoint on this topic and produced a publication⁸ describing what is meant by "reasonable accommodation" and offers a practical, step-by-step guide on how to do it effectively.

The EU is dedicated to reducing workplace discrimination and raising awareness through campaigns. A webpage and videos have been created to explain discrimination and the rights of people with disabilities. The Commission is planning events to target employers and enhance reasonable accommodation. Guidelines and success stories will be published for employers by 2023. An event on October 4th will focus on adapting workplaces and highlight good practices and Commission guidelines.

4. Retaining persons with disabilities in employment and preventing risks of acquiring chronic diseases

To maintain those employees with impairments such as chronic diseases – e.g. due to mental health problems, musculoskeletal diseases, or cancer – it is crucial to eliminate barriers through early

⁶ The full publication can be found at this [link](#).

⁷ The full text of the directive can be found [here](#).

⁸ ILO's full publication on reasonable accommodation can be found at this [link](#).

intervention at work. Secondary prevention is becoming increasingly important given the ageing workforce, and the challenges brought by it, like finding and retaining employment. Concerning this, the Commission, in consultation with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) plans to publish a Manual for managing chronic illness, such as diseases, and preventing the risk of acquiring disabilities and occupational diseases. EPR will engage in providing programs and practices for this Manual.

5. Securing vocational rehabilitation schemes in case of accidents or frequent disease.

Vocational rehabilitation services are not always guaranteed by employers, and going back to work can be challenging, especially when multiple coordinated supports are needed. At the same time, sickness benefit costs, social exclusion, and psychological issues increase when these services are not present or mediocre. For this reason, the Commission, in consultation with EU-OSHA, will issue guidelines for effective vocational rehabilitation schemes covering frequent diseases and types of accidents. The guidelines should be available in the first quarter of 2024, with the main goal of helping employers in enhancing early interventions, vocational education, and training to facilitate the return to work of people caring disabilities in suitable positions.

EPR's Return to Work/Partnerships with Employers Working Group will be consulted to give input into these initiatives.

6. Exploring quality jobs in sheltered employment and pathways to the open labour market through a study that looks into alternative employment models

As it is known, a great number of people having disabilities, in particular those with severe ones, prefer alternative type employment (examples are free-lancing or remote working). Since, working conditions and career development paths, as well as policy concepts and labour rights in the Member States, differ greatly, it is hard to create coherent databases of the rates of people moving from alternative forms of employment to the open labour market. Furthermore, common agreement on the difference between rehabilitation schemes and occupational therapy is still to be found. To this end, the Commission has commissioned a study to improve alternative employment options for people with disabilities, with some recommendations for fair working conditions and career development in alternative forms of employment and pathways to the open labour market that comply with the UNCRPD. Through the Inclusive Labour Market Alliance, EPR aims to feed into the study. It is expected to be published in early 2024.

Monitoring & Funding

The European Institutions, and more specifically the Commission together with the Employment Committee (EMCO), and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) are engaged with keeping on monitoring employment, education and training, social inclusion, and all the other principles contained in the Disability Employment Package and the Action Plan for the Social Economy. Through the European Semester, the Social Scoreboard (a new [indicator](#) included in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan) will be used to keep track of the developments concerning the reduction of the disability employment gap.

To forward the inclusion of people with disability in the open labour market, European Institutions encourage service providers, organisations, governments, and employers to make use of the funding at their disposal. Some of them are the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), and the Technical Support Instrument.

For more information

Consult the official document of the EU Disability Strategy on the European Commission's website [here](#). Consult the official document of the UNCRPD [here](#).



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