

## JOINT D-WISE NETWORK & EPR WEBINAR

### *Report*

22 October 2021

10:00 to 12:00 CET

Online (Zoom)

### **Welcome to the joint webinar & introduction to the D-WISE Network**

Laura Jones, Secretary General at the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), welcomed all the participants and speakers (in total 35 persons, 57% of which female, 43% male). She thanked the D-WISE Network for their interest to organise an event with EPR members and Weber Shandwick for their valuable support in preparing and facilitating the event. She then gave an overview of the objectives of the webinar, the agenda, and the speakers. Finally, Laura introduced Sabina Lobato, D-WISE Network representative & Director of Training, Employment, Operations and Transformation, Fundación ONCE, Spain.

Sabina Lobato presented the D-WISE Network, its national member organisations, European network partners and European/global observers.

- Sabina explained that the vision of the network is to build a European partnership gathering work inclusion social enterprises employing persons with disabilities (D-WISE). One of the main aims is to analyse how D-WISE employ and include workers with disabilities into the European labour market and overall society. Another is to explore partnerships between D-WISE and mainstream companies and to support their transformation towards inclusive enterprises.
- The main objectives of the network are 1) exploring challenges and opportunities faced by D-WISE to ensure that they fulfil their mission; 2) mapping commonalities and differences among European D-WISE; 3) identifying best practices across Europe; and 4) exploring policy needs and provide recommendations.
- Sabina recalled that the D-WISE Network was launched in Brussels in 2018, following a preparatory meeting held in Madrid in 2017. Initially, it was called the European Observatory for Inclusive Employment and the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2019, the members organised site visits at the 6 national members' locations so that they could present their model of WISE and their employment system and services to support the labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwD).
- So far, the D-WISE Network worked on 4 main deliverables: 1) to understand the regulatory context for WISE by conducting an [analysis of the EU regulatory framework](#) and an [overview of the international policy framework](#); 2) to explore the WISE sector thanks to the comparative study [“Towards Inclusive Employment of Persons with Disabilities”](#)

(authored by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research based in Vienna); 3) to exchange and learn about WISE in practice, taking into account [6 case studies](#) – one for each of the national partner organisations – produced for Belgium, France, Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia and Sweden; as well as 4) to shape the future of WISE by putting forward [policy recommendations](#) to national and European decision-makers (explored in greater detail later in the event).

More information and complementary event materials, including the [slide set](#) used, can be found on the [EPR's webpage](#) as well as the [D-WISE Network webpage](#). Should you want to watch the full recording of the webinar you can still do it through [EPR's YouTube page](#).

This report which was elaborated by staff from EPR and reviewed by Weber Shandwick reports on what was said during the event.

### **Report “Towards inclusive employment of persons with disabilities: a comparative study of six social economy organisations and companies in Europe”**

Luis Cervilla, Associate Director for Public Affairs, Weber Shandwick (acting as the secretariat for the D-WISE network), gave an overview of the comparative study [“Towards Inclusive Employment of Persons with Disabilities”](#). The report presents a comparative assessment of policies, approaches and specific measures taken by the 6 D-WISE network members. It provides insights into the different approaches and models of work integration for PwD and highlights the main challenges and opportunities for WISE and other social economy organisations and companies supporting the inclusion of PwD into the labour market. Guided by Weber Shandwick, the study draws on national reports prepared by the D-WISE network members on the basis of a questionnaire and a set of common criteria.

Even if the 6 D-WISE are social economy organisations and companies with different models of operation, they share common features. They have, as main focus, the work integration and social inclusion of PwD. The organisations rely on explicit social missions that have priority over profit-making. They are also characterised by democratic and participatory decision-making processes. Moreover, they provide employment opportunities in the open labour market and offer training to enhance the employability of their workers. They also produce goods and services across a number of economic sectors – from health to tourism, gardening, or cleaning – in order to meet social needs, to the benefit of community-based services and in the interest of the whole society. Finally, even though the members increasingly rely on revenues from their commercial activities, public financing remains an essential income source and is vital to secure their sustainability.

Despite facing barriers specific to their contexts, Luis highlighted that all the members of the D-WISE Network face a number of common legal, financial and operational challenges. Legal obstacles – e.g., unclear legal status for WISE, lack of a clear regulatory framework at EU level and in many countries – can significantly hinder the development of social enterprises, thus increasing their operating costs and reducing their funding capacity to pursue their social

and economic goals. Furthermore, the financial and fiscal ecosystems in place in most EU MS is not geared towards the needs of the social economy and WISE. Social economy actors typically lack access to financial options available for conventional enterprises. Moreover, because of insufficient income from business activities, many social enterprises are not able to simultaneously fulfil their social mission and make sufficient profits, thereby achieving financial sustainability. Due to barriers in the education system, as well as persistent discrimination, PwD often have a low educational profile and/or skill levels. Finally, social enterprises contribute to or serve sectors (e.g., manufacturing, logistics, laundry) that will likely go through significant changes due to digitalisation, resulting in the shrinking need for human workforce and implying the need to train PwD for new skills or to upskill them for future jobs in old and emerging sectors.

Finally, Luis explained how these challenges can be addressed through more supportive regulatory and policy frameworks and more investment and training and up- and re-skilling. According to the research, social enterprises need a wider recognition of their contribution to the creation of economic value, innovation, and social cohesion, policies that help create enabling environments which are adapted to the specific needs of WISE, and continued provision of public support, including state aid. Governments also need to make use of other channels to facilitate access to finance, including through public procurement that uses social clauses in public contracts or reserves them for social economy actors, in particular WISE, which in turn offer services to support the labour market and social inclusion of PwD or direct employment opportunities for them.

### **Case Study 1: Samhall AB (Sweden): Gradually upskilling workers with disabilities to place them on the Swedish labour market: The Samhall Method™**

Albin Falkmer, Director of Communications, Samhall AB, Sweden, presented his organisation. Samhall is a Swedish company with the mission to create meaningful jobs for PwD, including on the open labour market and, therefore, in competition with other companies. They employ 25,000 employees with severe disabilities and have 1 billion euros in turnover. PwD are offered jobs in different sectors, such as H&M, Volvo, IKEA, McDonald's, the Swedish Police, among others. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, in 2020 Samhall facilitated 8,600 new job opportunities for employees with disabilities. Furthermore, the number of employees who leave Samhall for new jobs has been increasing.

In order to achieve these positive results, Samhall uses a methodology called the “The Samhall Method™”. The aim of the method is to develop an employee’s profile. Capacities important for getting or keeping a job are assessed in 16 areas (categorised as “low”, “medium”, or “high”). The employee’s profile is instrumental for the employers to better know the person that they would like to hire, by matching the skills needed with the work capacities of the PwD and for the employees to find a job more easily. Albin identified as key success factors 1) the emphasis on a customer-focused organisation that can well adapt to ongoing market changes; 2) a focus on what the employees can do (rather than on their limitations) as

well as on their upskilling needs; and 3) the use of transition to the mainstream labour market as a key performance indicator.

Reading	Writing	Calculating	Time & punctuality
Hygiene	Fine motor ability	Strength	Mobility
Physical endurance	Concentration & focus	Problem solving	Cooperation & teamwork
Communication	Flexibility	Independent work	Service performance

16 areas capacities assessed in the context of the Samhall Method™

### **Case Study 2: Groep Maatwerk (Belgium): “Work values (*in Dutch: Mijn werkwaarden*) – Bridging severe disabilities at work”**

Stef De Cock, Senior Advisor, Groep Maatwerk, Belgium, presented an innovative scientific tool (and the first scientifically validated) to measure what PwD can do, i.e., which capabilities they have, and want they would like to do in their future careers. The tool, which should help bridge this gap, is called “Work Values” and was developed in the context of a European Social Fund project in collaboration with three universities: the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the University of Ghent and the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. It builds on self-assessments conducted by PwD. The digital tool focuses on the work aspirations of PwD, in particular those with intellectual disabilities. It contains a set of 27 questions to which PwD need to respond to by rating the importance of the presented elements (ranging from “very important” or “fully agree” to “not at all important” or “fully disagree”). Having filled in the questionnaire, the result displayed shows what level the person achieves in view of the 6 work values, namely “autonomy”, “feedback”, “variety”, “comfortability”, “social relations” and “easy work”. The tool generates a report for the PwD and another for the job coach. This also allows to make an assessment beyond the narrow scope of a particular job description. Stef announced that the instrument would be launched in December 2021 in Dutch.

### **D-WISE Network Policy Recommendations**

Álvaro Couceiro, D-WISE Network representative & International Strategic Planning Officer, ONCE General Council, Spain, presented the D-WISE Network Policy Recommendations and elaborated further on most of them.

These recommendations, developed in November 2020, reflect the network's position on the basis of [the EU](#) and the [international policy framework](#), the comparative study "[Towards Inclusive Employment of Persons with Disabilities](#)", and the [the organisational models of the network's members](#).

The set of recommendations is reproduced below.

### **1. Heterogeneity among work inclusion social enterprises employing persons with disabilities and linkages with the social economy sector**

- Recognise D-WISE as valuable social economy actors, in particular for the promotion of the employment of PwD, and actively consult D-WISE on any legal and policy developments that impact social economy legislation.

### **2. Employment forms of men and women with disabilities and transition to the open labour market**

- Labour laws and programmes should allow and prompt the regular labour market to be more open and flexible to the evolving needs and working capacities of PwD. This includes the transition to the open labour market, without losing social rights and decent work conditions.

### **3. Business models of D-WISE**

- Include social provisions in legislation related to climate change and digital transformation to ensure the opening of work opportunities for PwD;
- Promote funding to organisations and companies employing PwD and persons with higher support needs: create employment opportunities linked to the green and digital economy;
- Ensure accessibility of EU-level funds to projects around education, training, lifelong learning, skills development and traineeship-to-employment programmes for PwD.

### **4. State Aid**

- Maintain and reinforce the current exemptions granted for employment of PwD in the EU rules on State aid and GBER, as well as the social preferences allowed by the Public Procurement Directives;
- Promote the access for D-WISE to EU Structural and Investment Funds, particularly the European Social Fund+, and increase EU pre- and co-financing levels for programmes of social inclusion and employment for PwD.

### **5. Data and research relating to all forms and settings of work and employment experiences of men and women with disabilities**

- Fund research aiming to improve the understanding of D-WISE across EU Member States;
- Promote the access for D-WISE to EU Structural and Investment Funds, particularly the European Social Fund+, and increase EU pre- and co-financing.

## 6. The role of legislation in creating a conducive environment for D-WISE to fulfil their mission

- Employment of PwD as a priority within the EU Disability Rights Strategy for 2021-2030;
- Mainstream employment of PwD in other key EU instruments;
- Pro-actively include the considerations of D-WISE and other Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) into the social economy related policy development.

## 7. Impact and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on D-WISE

- Collect and use data on the impact;
- Non-discrimination and mainstreaming on EU-Funding, including investments in D-WISEs;
- Learnings on flexibility of the minimum % of workers with disabilities during crises;
- Funding for training in digitalisation;
- Improve the financial model of social services, to ensure their availability in difficult times.

## Policy debate

Laura Jones introduced the six panellists of the policy debate: (1) Estrella Durá, Member of the European Parliament, S&D Group, Spain; (2) Haydn Hammersley, Social Policy Officer, European Disability Forum (EDF); (3) Margit Perko, Policy Officer, Social Economy Unit, DG EMPL, EC; (4) Susanne Kraatz, Policy Officer, Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, EC; (5) Pablo Sanchez, Board Member, EPR & Deputy Managing Director, Fundación INTRAS, Spain; and (6) Sabina Lobato, D-WISE Network representative & Director of Training, Employment, Operations and Transformation, Fundación ONCE, Spain.



*From left to right and above to below:  
Estrella Durá, Haydn Hammersley, Margit Perko, Sabina Lobato, Pablo Sanchez, Susanne Kraatz*

During the discussion, the six panellists addressed a number of topics related to the different topics outlined below.

A non-exhaustive list is given below, presented under four headings:

### **1. Contribution from D-WISEs in providing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for PwD**

- D-WISE are key steppingstones for social and labour market inclusion of PwD. They represent important entry routes for them to gain work experience and paid employment as well as facilitators of a transition into the open labour market and quality jobs.
- By setting a framework for decent employment opportunities for PwD and by providing tools to increase the employment rate of PwD in supported employment, in sheltered workshops and on the open labour market, D-WISE also are facilitators of social protection and promoters of gender equality for PwD. They thus also contribute to living up to the provisions and aspirations of the UN CPRD.
- D-WISE aim at high quality products and services;
- D-WISE reinvest their profits into social causes, they are not extracting them and sharing them via the stock market;
- D-WISE can also be a tool to realise social entrepreneurship for PwD to forge their own way into the labour market by offering services meeting specific needs of PwD.

### **2. Current policy challenges faced by disability WISEs**

- Recent research shows that there is a risk that a large share of jobs currently offered and/or developed by D-WISE will disappear in the next 10 to 15 years;
- D-WISE already are innovators identifying and realising new jobs, products, services and ways of employment for PwD, but have to become this even more than today.

### **3. Policy actions & instruments that could help build on the successes of D-WISE**

- National, regional and local public authorities as well as EU institutions should promote and use socially responsible public procurement when buying services and products – this is instrumental for D-WISE. Essential tools are social clauses or the stipulation in EU Procurement Law that Member States may reserve the right to participate in public procurement procedures to sheltered workshops and economic operators whose main aim is the social and professional integration of disabled or disadvantaged persons or may provide for such contracts to be performed in the context of sheltered employment programmes, provided that at least 30 % of the employees of those workshops, economic operators or programmes are disabled or disadvantaged workers.
- EU state aid rules which consider specificities of D-WISE are key for their financial situation. Panellists mentioned in this regard that the General Block Exemption Regulation allows state aid for the employment of workers with disabilities in the form of wage subsidies and for additional costs of employing workers with disabilities.
- Need to facilitate the access of WISE to all relevant EU funds, including the European Social Fund (ESF+) 2021-2027, the InvestEU Programme and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) which was launched in 2020 to address the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This also applies for the EU financial tools

to support the green and digital transitions, e.g., by facilitating the investment of D-WISE active in the circular economy.

- Need for active employment policies to improve the labour market inclusion of PwD and accessible, inclusive, non-discriminatory labour markets. These objectives are underpinned by the Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment, with the EP insisting on a full-fledged revision;
- Need to improve measures to address the mental health conditions of PwD and the related support services;
- Need for employers to make provisions on reasonable accommodation and work adaptation a reality and for them to live up to their obligations, to be facilitated by support services to help identifying existing financial instruments for employers to shift towards inclusive workplaces;
- European Semester: For governments and decision makers to give more weight to the EU-level indicator “Employment gap of PwD” (compared to workers/employees without a disability), with the aim to reduce the existing (often still considerable) employment gaps and also to better balance economic and social aspects in the European Semester;

#### **4. How the Social Economy Action Plan and the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 will support the employment of PwD**

- Social Economy Action Plan: D-WISE have high expectations towards the supportive character of the forthcoming Social Economy Action Plan, to be issued in December 2021. It should also help to recognise D-WISE as valuable social economy actors for the promotion of the employment of PwD, and help further develop enabling legislative frameworks within the EU Member States and at EU level. This should also cover the aspect of the obligation to reinvest profits of D-WISE into the expansion and further development of the quality of their services.
- European Disability Strategy 2021-2030 (I): Support of quality employment and support of transitions of PwD to the open labour market;
- European Disability Strategy 2021-2030 (II): Disability Employment Package (to be published in 2022), with tools to develop quality employment and to support the transition to the regular labour market, to be rolled out also by means of mutual learning in the framework of the Disability Platform, involving EU MS and key stakeholders;
- European Disability Strategy 2021-2030 (II): European quality framework for social services of excellence for persons.

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For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>*