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Learning & Innovating Together

# Ensuring rights-based services for people with a disability

## EPR members' challenges and success stories

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# Acknowledgements

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# Table of contents


European Platform for Rehabilitation ..... 4
About the study ..... 5
Understanding rights- based services ..... 7
European Pillar of Social Rights ..... 7
European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan ..... 8
The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 ..... 8
The European Social Charter ..... 9
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ..... 9
The human rights-based approach ..... 10
PANEL principles ..... 10
The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) ..... 11
Summaries of the practices ..... 12
Espacio Visiones, an empowerment project through art ..... 13
I-SME (Inclusive small and medium enterprises) ..... 14
Ayho! Web platform and app for pre-employment training and on-the-job support ..... 15
Making Safeguarding Personal ..... 16
Initiative of human sexuality normalization in Lithuania ..... 17
Competence development program for informal caregivers ..... 18
Recommendations ..... 20
Recommendations to EU institutions ..... 20
Recommendations to national governments ..... 20
Recommendations to service providers ..... 22
Conclusions ..... 23

# European Platform for Rehabilitation

European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) is a network of service providers to people with disabilities committed to high quality service delivery. EPR's mission is to build the capacity of its members to provide sustainable, high-quality services through mutual learning and training. Its vision is a society where every person can co-create quality services that bring about equal opportunities for all, social inclusion and quality of life.

EPR activities go beyond traditional mutual learning exchanges. EPR's members co-create and pilot innovative products, tools and methods to better meet the needs of clients, employers and funders. Professionals from EPR members gather to benchmark and analyse effectiveness in service provision over time; improving quality of services and quality of life for clients, as well as positively impacting their daily work experience. Through membership of the European Platform for Rehabilitation, organisations are better equipped to be competitive in a changing market environment.

EPR offers numerous opportunities to network with leading 30 service providers from 18 different European countries. EPR members are committed to high quality service delivery in the fields of vocational education and training, employment reintegration, medical rehabilitation and social care. In addition to the experienced secretariat, EPR initiatives are supported and facilitated by renowned experts in these fields.

Through its public affairs activities, EPR enables service providers to contribute to the social and disability debate and to the strengthening of the social service sector. In addition, EPR facilitates access to EU funding through project development support, partner matching and training sessions.

# About the study

Through the collection of good practices from EPR's members and their analysis, the study aims to provide EPR members and other stakeholders with interesting and inspiring projects, methodologies, and services from which to learn from. This year, 2023, the study is focusing on ensuring rights-based services for people with a disability, challenges and success stories of the organisations working on the matter.

EPR members were asked to share information about any practices covering services, programmes or projects that fitted the subject of the study. The current study aims to showcase members' success stories, good practices or challenges to implementing rights-based service creation and delivery.

Terminology that is used to express rights of people or rights-based approach is somewhat diverse. It all bases on the concept of human rights-based approach. Most European and international bodies use "human rights-based" and some use a more simplified version of it as "rights-based". There are some bodies, e.g., European Union Agency on Fundamental Human Rights[1], uses a term fundamental human rights instead of human rights or rights. In the context of this study, despite of the different terms used the meaning is the same in terms of talking about the rights of people with a disability.

7 examples of challenges and success stories or good practices were collected and analysed in this study. Analyses were based on a set of criteria to assess their conceptual approach, quality, participatory and innovative nature.

The study title refers to "Rights-based approach in services". Rights-based approach refers to a framework that recognises and upholds the fundamental rights and dignity of individuals with disabilities. It places the person with disabilities at the centre of decision-making processes, emphasising their autonomy, independence, and equal participation in all aspects of life. This framework is characterised by some more concrete key features[2]:

A. **Accessibility** which includes removing physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers to enable full participation in society.
B. **Reasonable accommodation** meaning providing necessary support and accommodations to ensure individuals with disabilities can enjoy their rights.
C. **Non-discrimination** meaning ensuring equal treatment and opportunities for individuals with disabilities, eliminating all forms of discrimination.
D. **Participation and inclusion**, in the way of involving people with disabilities in decision-making processes, actively including them in all aspects of society and recognising that people who use services are experts in their own right, rather than passive recipients of care (e.g., co-production approach in policies and services).
E. **Accountability and monitoring tools** to oversee the respect of human rights.

[1] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. See more on their webpage.
[2] Munger, Kelly M., Donna M. Mertens. 2011. "Conducting research with the disability community: a rights-based approach." New directions for adult and continuing education 2011, no. 132 (23-33).

F. **The ending of special, institutionalised and segregated structures** in favour of community-based ones: Recognising the right of individuals with disabilities to make decisions about their own lives and respecting their autonomy[3].

This study is also aiming at finding examples which illustrate how the approach is ensured in practice. The analysis of good practices in the study aimed to identify the success factors, to compare different approaches and to understand their impact, but also to support the development, dissemination, and implementation of innovative and successful approaches. The analysis of challenges aimed at understanding the obstacles or barriers that came on the way of EPR members to successfully implementing a rights-based service.

The call for practices looked for initiatives – i.e., services, programmes, projects, but also broader organisational reorganisation approaches – that demonstrated the application of a rights-based approach in the creation, production and delivery of services for people with disabilities. Those could have been related to distant or hybrid service provision in any field. Examples of this include training on disability inclusion for employers and colleagues, adapting procedures to accommodate different disabilities, independent living support, collaborating with disability rights organisations and providing assistive technologies that enhance mobility, communication, and daily living activities.

In this way, the experience gained in one country can be shared at European level, encouraging mutual exchange and learning, the identification of features which are (relatively easily) transferrable to other national or local contexts, with the aim to support the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the services. This could benefit the users, the professionals involved, the organisations delivering them and the public authorities providing financial or other support.

Based on the feedback from the contributing organisations, policy recommendations on how to better recognise and remove societal barriers, create an inclusive environment that enable full and equal participation and how to effectively monitor and be accountable for the services' outcomes will be produced. These recommendations, addressed to European institutions and governments, could also pave the way for addressing future similar situations.

This study also aimed to find examples which illustrate how the approach is ensured in practice. Seven organisations submitted practices: **LADAPT** (France), **Rey Ardid Foundation** (Spain), **GTB vzw** (Belgium), **Fundación ONCE** (Spain), **Rehab Group: National Learning Network** (Ireland), **Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre** (Lithuania), and **The Social Integration State Agency SIVA** (Latvia). These practices are presented and analysed in this study based on a set of criteria to emphasise focus of rights- based nature:

- **Needs driven** (Does the practice address a clearly identified unmet need?)
- **Systematic approach** (Are the problem, the milestones and outcomes well specified?)
- **Stakeholders' involvement** (Is the practice centred on the client, taking a co-production approach? Do other stakeholders have a role in the initiative?)
- **Direct impact** (Is the impact on beneficiaries obvious and clearly demonstrated?)
- **Strategic/wider impact** (Has the initiative derived important lessons learned? Can it be transferred to other centres/target groups or generalised to the sector?)
- **Practicality** (Is the initiative easy to implement and cost-effective?)
- **Inventiveness/Creativity** (Does the initiative include new ways of thinking or working?)

[3] Lawson, Anna. 2005. "The EU Rights Based Approach to Disability: Strategies for Shaping an Inclusive Society." International Journal of Discrimination and the Law no. 269–87.

# Understanding rights- based services

Human rights reflect the minimum standards necessary for people to live with dignity. All humans share the same rights, regardless of their nationality, place of residence, sex, national/ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or other status. The basic objective of human rights is to empower individuals to fulfil their potential by giving them the autonomy to change their own lives, improve their own communities and influence their own futures. At its heart, human rights legislation focuses on ensuring that all individuals have the right to choose and participate in all decisions affecting their lives. Human rights are wide and varied, including (for example) the right to life, the right to liberty, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of thought and expression, the right to education and to an adequate standard of living.

The human rights of individuals living in Europe are protected through a number of international and regional binding human rights treaties and other instruments adopted globally since 1945, as well as through domestic human rights legislation. Regional or international mechanisms come into play mainly where the state is deliberately or consistently violating rights.

In order to put human rights laws and principles at the heart of policy making and service delivery, policy-makers, staff and individuals as service users must all be empowered with knowledge on human rights and leadership in order to be able to understand how best to implement all human rights, paying particular attention to vulnerable individuals and groups[4].

There are several guiding policies and frameworks on European level that are relevant in the context of ensuring rights of people with a disability. They give context to the services that are directly provided to the service users, specifically people with a disability.

## European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)[5] is an initiative launched by the European Commission with very ambitious aims; to bring back the social dimension of the EU, rebalance economic policies with social considerations, reconnect with European citizens, while at the same time addressing key issues related to changes in the world of work and society more generally, promoting higher social standards. The Pillar does not give the European Union more power or competences, but aims to be a tool to promote social rights with joint collaboration and responsibility of the European institutions together with Member States, civil society, social actors and social partners. All EU countries agreed to implement the 20 principles in November 2017.

At least four principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights are relevant for this year's topic of the Study: 3: Equal opportunities, 4: Active support to employment, 5: Secure and adaptable employment, 12: Social protection and 17: Inclusion of people with disabilities.

[4] European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. Respect My Rights. An ENNHRI Toolkit on Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Long-term Care for Older Persons Oct 2017.

[5] European Commission. See more on their webpage. EPR webpage dedicated to the EPSR. See more on the webpage.

## European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan[6] was launched on 4 March 2021 by the European Commission. Action Plan is the Commission's contribution to the implementation of the Social Pillar principles, in line with the calls from European Leaders and the European Parliament. The Action Plan sets out a number of EU actions that the Commission is committed to take during the current mandate, building on the many actions taken since the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It also puts forward three EU-level targets to be achieved by 2030 and that will help to steer national policies and reforms:

1. At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030;
2. At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year;
3. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030.

Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights is a shared political commitment and responsibility of the EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society, all of which have a role to play in line with their competences.

By analysing and presenting good practices in a specific social policy field – here of disability and rehabilitation services – which are beneficial to their users, families, employers, public authorities and public employment services, the EPR Study 2023 endeavours to help improve the evidence base for policy developments and reforms.

Review of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan is planned to take place in 2025.

## The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030

The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030[7] was launched by the European Commission in 2021 with the aim to improve the condition of persons with disabilities in the EU over the next ten years, making sure that they can fully enjoy their rights, have equal opportunities and access to society and economy, can decide where, how and with whom they live and can move freely in the EU regardless of their support needs.

The Strategy belongs to a series of initiatives aiming at achieving a Union of Equality where everyone is included regardless of gender, race, ethnic minorities or disability, as well as at mainstreaming equality in all EU policies. The Disability Strategy is also part of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the key current policy framework for employment and social policies in Europe. Moreover, it takes into account the consequences that the pandemic has had on persons with disabilities and it supports the achievement of fair and inclusive green and digital transitions, which are set to make the Union more sustainable, resilient, prosperous and fair for all. At the international level, the Strategy is a key instrument to promote the implementation at both EU and national level of and compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which the European Union together with all Member States is a party. The Strategy has 7 priorities, which cover all aspects of life of people with disabilities.

[6] The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. See more on their webpage.
[7] European Commission. See more on their webpage.

## The European Social Charter

The European Social Charter[8] that was initially adopted in 1961 & revised in 1996 is a Council of Europe treaty that guarantees fundamental social and economic rights as a counterpart to the European Convention on Human Rights, which refers to civil and political rights. It guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare.

The Charter lays specific emphasis on the protection of vulnerable persons such as elderly people, children, people with disabilities and migrants. It requires that enjoyment of the abovementioned rights be guaranteed without discrimination.

The Charter system is amongst other goals, aimed at applying the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 within Europe; for this reason, it is linked to the United Nations' Human Rights Treaty System and the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights[9].

No other legal instrument at pan-European level can provide such an extensive and complete protection of social rights as that provided by the Charter, which also serves as a point of reference in European Union law; most of the social rights in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are based on the relevant articles of the Charter.

The Charter is therefore seen as the Social Constitution of Europe and represents an essential component of the continent's human rights architecture.

## The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)[10] is one of the main international human rights treaties. Its purpose is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

The UNCRPD covers all the aspects of the life of persons with disabilities for their full inclusion in society. Separate articles define the fundamental rights such as the right to live independently and be included in the community (Art.19), the right to education (Art.24), the right to health (Art.25), the right to work and employment (Art. 27) and the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection (Art.28).

The Convention has its own reporting and monitoring mechanism guided by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

As of 2022, the UNCRPD has 185 parties. The EU ratified it in 2006, setting minimum standards for rights of persons with disabilities. Since it is a legally binding treaty, both the EU and its Member States are obliged to implement it according to their respective competences. At EU level, it also means that all existing and future legislation must be in line with the UNCRPD.

[8] Council of Europe. See more on their webpage.
[9] Council of Europe. See more on their webpage.
[10] United Nations. See more on their webpage.

## The human rights-based approach

The human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights[11]. Taking a human rights-based approach is about making sure that people's rights are put at the very centre of policies and practices.

Under the HRBA, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law, including all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and the right to development. HRBA requires human rights principles (universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability) to guide United Nations development cooperation, and focus on developing the capacities of both 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations, and 'rights-holders' to claim their rights.

The European Commission's updated Human Rights Based Approach Toolbox[12] was published in the summer 2021. The Toolbox helps to make EU "external actions even more inclusive and sustainable, ensuring participation and non-discrimination on the ground." The Toolbox makes the case for the human rights- based approach, and unpacks the concept and the five working principles of the HRBA. It also looks at how to translate the HRBA approach into practice, linking it to programming, and the design and implementation of all sectors of EU external action, as also called for the by Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI[13])-Global Europe, the recently adopted financing instrument for 2021-2027[14]. HRBA is underpinned by the "PANEL" principles.

## PANEL principles

Taking a human rights approach is about using international human rights standards to ensure that people's human rights are put at the very centre of policies and practice. A human rights-based approach empowers people to know and claim their rights. It increases the ability of organisations, public bodies and businesses to fulfil their human rights obligations. It also creates solid accountability so people can seek remedies when their rights are violated.

The PANEL principles are one way of breaking down what a human rights-based approach means in practice. PANEL stands for[15]:

- **Participation:** People should be involved in decisions that affect their rights.
- **Accountability:** There should be monitoring of how people's rights are being affected, as well as remedies when things go wrong.
- **Non-discrimination and equality:** All forms of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. People who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights should be prioritised.
- **Empowerment:** Everyone should understand their rights, and be fully supported to take part in developing policy and practices which affect their lives.

[11] United Nations Sustainable Development Group. See more on their webpage.
[12] European Commission. See more on their webpage.
[13] EU Neighbours. See more on their webpage.
[14] European Disability Forum. See more on their webpage.
[15] Scottish Human Rights Commission. See more on their webpage.

- **Legality:** Approaches should be grounded in the legal rights that are set out in domestic and international laws.

A HRBA essentially involves all five values being brought to bear on a particular issue. These principles are used to inform decisions, not to determine them[16]. Specifics of any human rights approach will depend upon the issues in hand. Rights-based approach to services to people with disabilities is key in order to realize their users' rights.

## The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS)

EQUASS[17] is an initiative of the European Platform for Rehabilitation. EQUASS provides comprehensive services in the areas of development, promotion, recognition and certification of quality, all of which comply with the European requirements[18] for quality in the provision of Social Services.

EQUASS enhances the social sector by engaging social service providers in continuous improvement, learning and development, in order to guarantee service users quality of services throughout Europe.

The EQUASS System comprises 10 Principles and 50 Criteria for Quality that are derived from Stakeholder consultation in the Social Sector and based on the European Quality Framework for Social Services[19]. The principles are addressing a balance of fundamentals of quality management, as well as aspects specific to service delivery to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Amongst all the other important principles in assuring rights of people with a disability (Good governance and leadership, Competent staff, Ethics, Participation, Person centred approach, etc) one of the 10 principles is Rights that sets a standard for assuring and promoting rights of all the people:

"Social Service Providers are committed to protect, promote and respect the rights of the Person Served in terms of equal opportunities, equal treatment and freedom of choice, self-determination and equal participation This commitment is visible in the organisational values and in all elements of service development, service delivery of the social service provider Social Service Providers ensure that Person Served understand and approve all their proposed individual interventions."

[16] European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. Respect My Rights. An ENNHRI Toolkit on Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Long-term Care for Older Persons Oct 2017.
[17] European Quality in Social Services. See more on their webpage.
[18] Position Paper on Quality (High Level Group on Disability, September 2007) and the Voluntary Quality Framework for Social Services (SPC, October 2010)
[19] European Commission. See more on their webpage.

# Summaries of the practices

## Pedagogy of Independent Living PéVA (Pédagogie de la Vie Autonome)

Organisation
LADAPT, France

Target group
The target group is broadly adults with disabilities that impede independent living in ordinary settings. The majority of clients of Péva are those with motor impairments. This often includes wheelchair users or those with accompanying cognitive impairments.

Summary of description
PéVA is a three-step pedagogical program with the aim of independent living at home for persons with severe motor disabilities. PéVA puts forth a rights-based approach to independent living rather than an aid-based approach. It operates with a posture of empowerment, with the aim of training those with severe disabilities to live an autonomous and independent life and, to that end, ultimately granting participants the ability to move into a residence of their own. The three stages of PéVA are carried out in an average of 4 years and 21 training modules.

Demonstration of rights-based approach
Rights-based approach is present throughout the Péva stages as the initiative of the individual to take up and carry out the Péva method is at the heart of the program. Nothing can be done in the Péva method without the full participation of the client. During each module, assessment of skills is collaborative, meaning the clients assess themselves and decide along with their support team when they feel ready to progress or what additional aid they may require. Péva is not only rights-based in the accomplishment of these goals, but also the goal of Péva itself is inherently rights-based: independent living. The program can, in fact, be seen as a direct application of article 19 of the UNCRPD, the right to independent living.

Success factors
The approach to independent living in stages has been major success factor in the development of confidence among clients. The product of PéVA emerges as not only the ability to live alone but also the belief in oneself that they can live alone and face the obstacles that come with that independence. These results have been closely tied to the emphasis on self-determination and empowerment throughout the process as demonstrated by the great deal of independence granted to clients from the beginning and the emphasis on self-evaluation. Another major success factor is the restructuring of vocabulary around PéVA as a training, something clients participate in, rather than something done to them or for them. This philosophy flows throughout the PéVA program.

Challenges
A recurring barrier to the participation, empowerment, and accountability of clients has been the reticence of their parents to relinquish control over their family members and accept that the results of Péva are possible. These well-meaning parents have to accept a transferring of control from themselves to their child which can require a major reimagining of the status quo for both the family and the client. This can impede both the entry of the individual into the Péva program, as well as the

client's progress as they come to realize their own power and accountability for success. It is a fundamental and, at-times, difficult change for the clients and their families alike.

Takeaway: Investing into supporting independence of people, saves money on care services



## Espacio Visiones, an empowerment project through art

### Organisation
Rey Ardid Foundation (Fundación Rey Ardid), Spain

### Target group
People/ adults with a disability associated to a problem of severe mental suffering

### Summary of description
Espacio Visiones is a place for artistic expression within Fundación Rey Ardid that promotes the creativity and empowerment of people with disabilities associated with a problem of severe mental suffering through citizen participation, collaboration with cultural spaces and regional artists and accompaniment in alternative itineraries of socio-labour insertion through art and culture. A space for meeting and participation in the community with a different role in which to discover, accompany and support the person, providing them with the tools and disciplines that art offers and to develop and give oneself value and social validation through one's own creations. Visiones Emergentes provides, among others, a virtual site in which to exhibit the works of the different artists and to bring them out of anonymity as creators and citizens who contribute to add social value to our societies.

### Demonstration of rights-based approach
The project starts from the premise of mental health as a fundamental element of general health and well-being that underpins individual and collective capacities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world in which we live. Not only that, but it is a fundamental human right and essential for personal, community and socio-economic development, as established by the World Health Organisation. Within this framework, Espacio Visiones was born in 2009 as a centre oriented to artistic creation in the line of Art Brut /Outsider and free creation in mental health, following the guideline set by Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts [...]".

### Success factors
Focus on the community rather than the individual, working with the person but in relation to his or her context, favours a more effective and lasting intervention in the long term. The conception of the user as an artist and not as a patient breaks the moulds from which it is customary to work with these people. The model of intervention replaces the traditional hierarchical models of care. Empowerment of people with mental suffering through the transfer of knowledge, with the participation of the beneficiaries in all phases of the projects and the generation of spaces for the exchange of ideas between all the actors involved to promote the reconstruction of a new life project through art other than that of a person with a mental illness. Art allows for the generation of a climate of non-judgement and freedom that boosts self-esteem, initiative, autonomy, decision-making and, in short, empowerment. Work with a gender perspective, through actions such as giving priority when it comes to exhibiting women, trying to break the existing gender gap in art, or the creation of the Women's Group.

Challenges
The stigma associated with this group continues to cause rejection and generates few possibilities for socialisation in normalised environments. These are people who have insufficient specialised social resources available to attend to their needs once they have completed their rehabilitation process. Progress in terms of rights is also hindered by the very terminology with which we refer to people: "handicap", "disability"... which speak of a person's inferiority, of deficiencies, instead of focusing on abilities and hindering the processes of validation, normalisation and inclusion of people. In addition, when carrying out certain activities' barriers have been encountered in the accessibility of the public spaces, many of which are not adapted to the different needs of people.

Takeaway: art as a way of inclusion does not have boundaries nor prejudice.





## I-SME
## (Inclusive small and medium enterprises)

Organisation
GTB vzw, Belgium

Target group
Experts from Public Employment Services, VET, job coaches who are responsible to set up awareness activities to engage employers to become more open for employees with disabilities or health problems. Employers of SME. Policy makers of all levels.

Summary of description
In this I-SME project the focus is not on the persons with disabilities but on the employers and how to convince them in realising more inclusive workplaces. The special focus is on the employers of small or medium business because most of the employment in the EU is generated by this type of compagnies. On the other hand, these employers argue that they need flexibility of their staff and therefore they lack the focus on employees with disabilities or health problems.

Demonstration of rights-based approach
The starting point for the project was the right to paid work in a normal working environment for people with disabilities. GTB team looked for 30 success stories in which the person with a disability and the SME employer indicate that the employment is a positive story for both parties. Each story has been written out and the team has systematically looked for these elements that indicate that it worked. It has been ensured that different types of disabilities - personas - were listened to. The working environments also had a diversity, ranging from IT companies to green maintenance and bakeries. This source material has been the basis for drawing up and testing the working documents. The videos and published testimonials always allow people with disabilities and their employers to have their say. The project required a lot of translation work, which was carried out by Autimatic, a regular company that employs people with autism.

Success factors
In Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, there is a very low unemployment rate (<3%) and high demand for employees. This is to the advantage of the target group - people with disabilities. Employers are prepared to abandon the unsuccessful search for white ravens as employees. They want to invest in reasonable adjustments and job design, but they must be able to count on expert support from labour market actors. There are valuable job seekers who can work if given the opportunity. GTB services can strengthen the competencies of this group by focusing on

strengthening self-confidence and making their competencies more visible. EPR has already developed knowledge in this regard in the past, see: Jump to Job – Transit Action – Quolivet. Offering this to coaches in training can be an important success factor.
The I-SME products have been developed and tested in 7 countries. Various employers' federations have been involved in the testing.

Challenges
The Flemish policy on VET, job mediation and coaching are increasingly guided by tendering. This policy trend is creating many service providers that are in competition with each other. On the one hand, there is currently little transparency for employers as to who the providers are and what their quality is. On the other hand, there is little willingness among these actors to share good practices as they are competitors of each other. Particularly in complex change processes such as realizing a more inclusive labour market, we advocate sustainable alliances between government, social partners, universities and service providers;

Takeaway: systematic work needs to be done with employers in creating opportunities for people with a disability to be included in the labour market.



## Ayho! Web platform and app for pre-employment training and on-the-job support

Organisation
Fundación ONCE, Spain

Target group
It is addressed to all disability groups eligible for supported employment under the Spanish Supported Employment regulation (Royal Decree 870/2007), which includes:

- People with cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, psychosocial disability or hearing impairment with an officially recognized degree of disability greater than 33%
- People with physical or sensory disabilities with an officially recognized degree of disability greater than 65%

Summary of description
Ayho! is a project developed by Fundación ONCE in collaboration with Samsung and the Spanish Association of Supported Employment. The name Ayho stands for "assisting and guiding tool" (by its initials in Spanish). It is a technological tool that aims to facilitate the labour inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market under the supported employment formula. It is an accessible multi-platform tool, with access from any web or mobile phone browser, and with native applications for Android and iOS phones and tablets. Ayho! offers transversal pre-employment training content that can be useful in many sectors. It also facilitates workers' task performance, with step-by-step directions on how to perform the tasks assigned to them, which increases their motivation and autonomy. And for trainers, job coaches and natural supports, it facilitates management and communication.

Demonstration of rights-based approach
Reasonable adjustments are key to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, and even more so for those with higher support needs. The personalized support Ayho! offers will foster the autonomy and self-confidence of workers with disabilities in the workplace, thus improving both employability and job retention.

Success factors
Involving disability organizations and their service users with disabilities, and working under a user-centred approach, are two major success factors, since they ensure the output meets the real needs of the end users. Providing support through a digital tool will make the work of job coaches much more efficient, which will in turn allow them to support a higher number of workers with high support needs without reducing the quality of their service.

Challenges
Some companies are reluctant to allow their workers to use mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets in the workplace. This decision is sometimes attributed to the specificities of the job or the workplace, to safety reasons, but in many cases the rationale is weak, based on HR policies, and could allow for more flexibility in the case of workers with high support needs. This has forced us to limit the types of jobs and companies where the tool could be piloted. The major challenge will be to keep the Ayho! community alive, organising activities that engage and motivate its members, and to attract new users.

Takeaway: integrating technology into services offers an alternative to traditional service provision.

RehabGroup
Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

## Making Safeguarding Personal

Organisation
Rehab Group: National Learning Network, Ireland

Target group
Students over 18 years of age with an intellectual disability

Summary of description
As an organisation, while implementing the national policy “Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse” it was felt that the process of safeguarding was happening “to people” rather than “with people”. With this problem in mind, Rehab set about creating a rights-based, collaborative and empowering approach to safeguarding. They set out to work with students to make safeguarding personal to them and build their capacity to safeguard themselves. The initiative wanted to help people to build their intrinsic safeguarding capacity which is a preventative strategy. As part of the endeavour to make safeguarding personal, a new framework was developed, called “Making Safeguarding Personal”. This framework led to the design and delivery of a series of workshops. These workshops empower and enable participants to keep themselves safe from abuse. These workshops are based on the premise that we all have a right to feel safe everywhere.

Demonstration of rights-based approach
Making sure that our vulnerable adults understand their right to feel safe at all times was a key message of this initiative. All related topics were included: participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, legality. The participants were treated with dignity and respect throughout this whole process. Providing them with space, information, support and time to learn about their rights was core and central to this project. The idea is simple, the methodology is simple. Despite its simplicity the message is powerful, the impact is empowering.

## Success factors

Agreeing that these workshops were a priority helped us to schedule them easily with full support of managers and staff. Prioritisation and scheduling of workshops allowed for inclusion and participation. Meeting with participants who are in need of a safeguarding plan is much easier now that they know what to expect. The process does not seem as daunting to them, they feel empowered and included. Information and knowledge have made the process so much more accessible to them.

## Challenges

The project/initiative is simple in its design but entirely effective! Staff, management and participants were very supportive of enthusiastic about the initiative. The only hurdle we have is finding time to reach as many service users as possible! Prioritising this initiative as a worthwhile endeavour will be key to making this as accessible as possible for all service users.

Takeaway: sometimes the simplest solutions are the most powerful.



Valakupių reabilitacijos centras

# Initiative of human sexuality normalization in Lithuania

## Organisation

Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre (VRC), Lithuania

## Target group

The initiative has focus of these groups:

1. Social workers and other support specialists, working with people with intellectual disability,
2. Family members of people with intellectual disability,
3. People with intellectual disability,
4. General society.

## Summary of description

In the end of 2022 and 2023 our team VRC's has implemented national initiative on sexual education for people with intellectual disabilities. In Lithuania, as one of the post-Soviet countries, sexuality and sexual health are an uncomfortable topic for many people, including professionals in education, social or health care sectors. The initiative aimed at giving knowledge, skills and confidence for adults with intellectual disabilities and professionals in the field about science-based sexuality education including the equality of partners, human autonomy in making healthier and safer decisions. The initiative was implemented in cooperation with the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and experts.

## Demonstration of rights-based approach

The initiative addresses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states the importance of access to education, information and communication in enabling people with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms by:

- educating the support specialists and family members of people with disabilities on the importance of sexual education for people with disabilities to enable support net to help those of need,
- publishing an online version of the easy-to-read publication: "What we should know about sexuality".

Success factors
One of the main success factors of the initiative to start speaking more about sexual education for people with disabilities was Valakupiai rehabilitation centre's collaboration with the main state institution, responsible for rights-based living of disabled people in Lithuania - the Affairs of the Disabled of Social Security and Labour. Mainly their dissemination of information on sexual education in their web page. There is a video, with people with intellectual disabilities, who have tested the publication "What we should know about sexuality" in easy-to-read language, showing the inclusion and participation and active involvement in using the end product from the people with disabilities perspective.

Challenges
Some of the important parties (psychiatrists and psychologists specialising in working people with disabilities) of supporting the spread of sexual education in Lithuania are not yet ready to discuss the topic publicly and openly due to its sensitive combination - disability and sexuality. Not so much specialized information is yet available in local language. Translating and competence building requires funds. The main challenge is that the process of ensuring sexual education for people with disabilities in Lithuania could be very slow. It takes time to gain the approach and knowledge for staff, to find the best practical solutions for ensuring the sexual rights within the organisations or families.

Takeaway: in making big changes start with little ones- involve those who are ready and willing. Later others will follow.



SIVA

## Competence development program for informal caregivers

Organisation
The Social Integration State Agency (Sociālās integrācijas valsts aģentūra, SIVA), Latvia

Target group
Informal caregivers - relatives, friends, and other close ones of persons with a disability

Summary of description
Within the European Union Recovery Fund investment project, the competence development training program was developed to ensure that both persons whose functional impairments prevent or could prevent them from entering the labour market and social life, as well as their informal caregivers, as well as social and education sector parties and other specialists who take care of or educate persons with disabilities. The contents of the competence development training program are designed in such a way that informal caregivers can provide appropriate support and care to persons with disabilities, as well as be able to take care of their own needs and psycho-emotional well-being.

Demonstration of rights-based approach
Rights-based approach is the basis of the methodology and is seen in both for persons with disabilities to receive quality support and care, further economic and social planning such as possible employment and participation in social activities, and for the informal caregivers to have enough and fulfilled knowledge on their rights, self-care to not burn out, and educating them about the specifics of different limitations of their close ones to provide a quality care.

Success factors

SIVA has more than 30 years of experience in providing services for persons with disabilities. The staff members are professionals in their occupation, such as health care specialists (physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, caregivers), psychologists, social workers, career counsellors, educators, etc. It was possible to combine their experience, gather feedback from relatives and close ones to persons with disabilities, and in cooperation with NGOs define the focus of the competence development training program. SIVA's strategic approach and experience allow considering that the developing competence centre and developed training program will have the foreseen success.

Challenges

On the training program modules' development stage, more and more topics turned out to be relevant (additionally to the stated ones within the research). As a result, the provided materials, resources, and scope of methodology are deeper and wider than expected. Nevertheless, this implementation obstacle has turned out to be an additional option for lecturers to diversify and combine modules and materials more effectively. However, it is impossible for SIVA to provide all informal carers with the specific information they need. Each informal caregiver has its own needs and a developed methodology isn't the comprehensive tool to replace support from other institutions and fill all the gaps in the system.

Keeping in mind the rapid development of assistive technologies and tools, it will be necessary to regularly renew the material-technical base of the competence centre, which will require an additional budget. In planning and organising the training to be available in regions closer to the informal caregivers and the persons being cared for place of residence.

Takeaway: when working with people with a disability one also needs to pay attention to their close network who might need support as well.

# Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the service providers as contributing organisations, policy recommendations on how to better recognise and remove societal barriers, create an inclusive environment that enables full and equal participation and how to effectively monitor and be accountable for the services' outcomes is presented. These recommendations, addressed to European institutions, governments and service providers will pave the way for addressing future similar situations.

## Recommendations to EU institutions

- ✓ People with a disability are still experiencing exclusion and they are not considered as full participants in the society. **Ensure integration of strong principles, goals and activities of tackling stigmatization of people with a disability into all European level policies**, frameworks, programs, project calls that are related to the protection and/ or promotion of human rights.
- ✓ **Accessibility to understandable information and physical accessibility are part of human rights that everybody should be able to practice**. Nevertheless, physical accessibility to public buildings is not yet assured to all the people in many European countries. Ensure that accessibility for all is part of every European policy, framework, program, project call that is related to promoting and assuring rights of all the people.
- ✓ Make sure that **legal provisions provide a solid framework for supported employment and the working conditions of persons with disabilities**, including reasonable accommodations and other measures required by a worker to perform well in her or his job, even with high support needs.
- ✓ **Enhance political support for the right to independent living**. Increase financial resources to reach out to more people benefitting, and expand competence development for informal caregivers.
- ✓ **Create opportunities for funding promotion of exchange of good practices at local, national and international level** to enable transfer of knowledge, expertise and good practice.
- ✓ **Reinforce EU level efforts to support Member States in protecting the rights of people with disabilities** incl. legislation, strategies and programming as well as awareness raising. Awareness raising work needs to be done in wider scope than only disability sector to create awareness about the source in people with a disability specifically in the current situation of lack of employees in many sectors.
- ✓ **Include rights-based approaches in the objectives of EU funds and programmes** that promote investing in people. Prioritise the further development and scaling up of good practices where there is evidence, they improve the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

## Recommendations to national governments

- ✓ People with a disability are still experiencing exclusion and they are not considered as full participants in the society**. Ensure integration of strong principles, goals and activities of tackling stigmatization of people with a disability** into all national level policies, frameworks, programs, project calls that are related to the human rights.

- ✓ Accessibility to understandable information and physical accessibility are part of human rights that everybody should be able to practice. Nevertheless, physical accessibility to public buildings is not yet assured to all the people. **Ensure accessibility for all in every national policy, framework, program, project call** that is related to promoting and assuring rights of all the people.
- ✓ **Include quality criteria in tendering for service provision in the social service and disability sector**. Instead of promoting competition, encourage transparency and sharing of good practices among service providers to improve the sector in its entirety.
- ✓ **Reinforce support to disability services in rural and remote regions** where participation and inclusion is particularly challenging and support systems often underdeveloped.
- ✓ **Invest in community-based services** as most suitable and cost-effective way of providing care in support of independent living, equality, and inclusion into community life.
- ✓ **Encourage collaboration and alliances** between regulators, funders, industry, employers, training providers, trade unions, service providers, researchers and innovators to jointly facilitate complex change processes like making the labour market more inclusive.
- ✓ **Ensure continued national and local funding** for innovations, methods and tools developed for rights-based approaches in EU funded programs and projects. Put emphasis on sustaining assistance and care for people in vulnerable situations which depend on continuous support.
- ✓ **Stress-test the social transfer, welfare and pension systems** to what extent they truly support vulnerable people in their transition to paid employment. The job should always be worth taking up. Equally, employers need to be well informed and assured that they receive support for hiring a person with disabilities.
- ✓ **Highlight the importance and urgency of integrating mental health as major issue in employment, social and inclusion policies**, moreover in action plans and programming to enable communities to deal with the existing and emerging problems that mental health issues cause at work, in the family and society as a whole.
- ✓ **Ensure equal treatment of people with mental disorders and disabilities in terms of support services and care**. Focus of support and care for people with mental disorders and disabilities should not only be about improving the symptoms of their illness without taking into account the need to specifically address the social and labour inclusion needs of these people, favouring their empowerment and participation in public life.
- ✓ **Promote using service design methodology** in developing services and products to people with a disability. Following a user-cantered design methodology, putting the end user at the centre of the process, from the start and throughout all its phases, to ensure that the product/ service responds to the specific needs of every target user profile.
- ✓ **Uphold the right to work** as fundamental component of the rights of people with disabilities and rights- based approaches in support services. Increase awareness and funding for supported employment and accompanying services that enable people with disabilities to take up and keep a decent job.
- ✓ **Invest in care, assistance and support systems** that at least partly relieve informal carers i.e., family members from shouldering the full weight of assistance for a person with a disability. Carers require protection from stress, overload and burning out; the person they assist relies on the good care to be able to fully participate in social life and take up employment.
- ✓ **Ensure that social and educational interventions are made available in working with challenges of mental health** for successful integration and social participation of this target group.
- ✓ **Provide financial support** not only to R&D for assistive technologies, also to education and training for frontline workers in the sector, for building technical infrastructure, and maintenance of new technology in service provision. Promote the involvement of service practitioners in getting new equipment and tools ready for market.

## Recommendations to service providers

- ✓ Seek for opportunities to share and introduce good practices that have proven impact on supporting independence of people with a disability to expand the number of beneficiaries. Be aware of the importance of the competence building in supporting others in using the same approaches.
- ✓ Explore and embrace technology where it promises a true improvement for the access to your services e.g., tech and app solutions that blind people use on a daily basis.
- ✓ Join alliances for multistakeholder approaches as they tend to achieve better and sustainable results in service development. Include other service providers, advocacy organisations, trade unions, workers associations, private sector/industry, disability representing organisations, and state authorities.
- ✓ Seek out the talents in your staff and in your network with exceptional learner, starter, leader and changemaker skills, who can also encourage others to join their initiatives in the making.
- ✓ Initiate debates and attract attention to the topics related to the protection of the rights of people with a disability even if they are considered as a taboo in your culture (e.g., sex and disability).
- ✓ Be active in seeking for local or European good practices and ways of working that have proved impact to the service users and/ or their close networks to help create services and interventions that support access to practising rights and living life to the fullest.

# Conclusions

Current study and members' success stories, good practices and challenges in implementing rights-based services has proven that there are various ways of tackling the topic of rights on service provider level. There is always more that we can do to support the development, dissemination, and implementation of innovative and successful approaches. Each step towards supporting attempts to creating a better world for people with or without a disability is everyone's responsibility.

We hope that the study has been inspiring, encouraging mutual exchange and learning, that the practices and approaches presented are transferrable to other national or local contexts, with the aim to support the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the services. This will benefit the users, the professionals involved, the organisations delivering them and the public authorities providing financial or other support.

EPR is grateful for all the people and organisations that have contributed in the making of this study.