

Toolkit

Partnerships with employers

Creating equal opportunities at the
workplace for people with disabilities

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Easy to Read Summary

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The European Platform for Rehabilitation is a group of organisations that provide services to persons with disabilities and other people. For short we call it EPR.

This document presents ideas and suggestions for organisations that help people with a disability in finding a job. Many of these organisations collaborate with partner companies who give employment to people with disabilities.

In this document, we use the words “user” or “service user”. A service user is someone who uses a service that helps or supports them. In this paper, the service user is the person being supported to get a job.

This toolkit is useful for organisations that offer services to people with disabilities. In the document, there are suggestions on how to start working with a company that offers jobs but has no experience with employing people with disabilities.

WHO WROTE THE DOCUMENT AND WHO HELPED TO WRITE IT?

This study was written by people working for EPR. Descriptions of good practices from EPR member organisations are included in the text. Staff from these organisations approved the descriptions.

WHAT DOES THE STUDY SAY?

Many persons with disabilities in Europe are unemployed, more needs to be done to help them find work in the regular labour market. It is important to create partnerships between organisations offering social services and companies offering jobs.

EPR found four important steps for organisations supporting the employment of persons with disabilities through partnerships with employers. This includes a good strategy when making first contact with employers. It also suggests giving all the information employers need to welcome a person with disabilities to the workplace. The support continues at work and after the employment ends. And when the employment is successful, it is important to share the experience with

other organisations and encourage others to create jobs for other people with disabilities.

Job coaches use a method named Supported Employment which is one method to help persons with disabilities into employment in five stages, starting with making sure the client (person with disability) making their own decision to use Supported Employment, and continues with finding out what are the exact wishes of the client for their work.

The document also gives ideas for convincing employers of the value for them in employing people with disabilities, for example a positive reputation, better understanding of corporate values, or more diversity and inclusion in the company.

The toolkit also gives information on a charter done by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on creating equal opportunities while making business successful. Ten principles are included in the charter.

Another area of concern is reasonable accommodation and workplace adjustments, for which the United Nations and governments in many countries have introduced rules that oblige companies to remove barriers that prevent a person with disability to access their workplace, and to evaluate if the adjustment works for them.

At the end of the document, the study present good practices from member organisations of EPR in different countries how they successfully establish partnerships with employers to create employment for person with disabilities.

Introduction

According to Eurostat, less than 1 out of 2 persons with disabilities are employed¹. This means that there is a waste of individual potential and that persons with disabilities are socially excluded, resulting in social costs. There is a need to work towards a more inclusive society, which also means working towards a more inclusive labour market.

Why this toolkit? In working towards a more inclusive labour market, social service providers building partnerships with employers is essential because it can lead to more in-depth and long-lasting cooperation and therefore greater success in the employment of persons with disabilities in the mainstream labour market. The more employers, with the help of service providers, employ persons with disabilities, the more employers will gain a better understanding of disabilities and change their mindset. This toolkit aims to be useful for organisations that support persons with disabilities in the regular labour market, particularly as regards building partnerships with employers.

This has been a topic of high importance for EPR members for many years, and EPR has facilitated various mutual learning activities and study visits on the topic. The toolkit aims to bring together the information and knowledge gathered over the past years to support further mutual learning and service improvement.

What to expect? This toolkit starts with an overview of success factors in building and maintaining partnerships with employers. The second part deals with arguments and information to help convince employers to hire people with disabilities. Section 3 focuses on how enterprises can achieve business success while simultaneously creating equal opportunities. Section 4 provides information about reasonable accommodation. Section 5 entails examples of EPR members' good practices.

¹ See also Eurostat data on disability statistics: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Disability_statistics_-_labour_market_access

Success factors and tips in partnerships with employers

This first section focuses on success factors in partnership with employers. In order to build a successful partnership, members have found that it is important to take things one step at a time. EPR has identified four important stages with each a number of success factors that are important in partnerships with employers. These lists are non-exhaustive.

Making first contact with employers

Making first contact with employers can be done in different ways. Below you can find a list of possible actions to take in this first stage.

- Identify and involve partners/colleague experts:
 - Before starting a partnership project, it is necessary to check good practices from other organisations
 - Contact colleague experts to ask for feedback on a partnership idea/ ask to collaborate in the partnership
 - Involve relevant partners who can have an added value to the project
- Organize awareness-raising events about the integration of people with special needs into the labour market
 - Awareness raising about misconceptions, advantages/value of hiring people with disabilities,
- Change the mindset of managers: raise awareness about diversity in employment
- Make direct contact with potential employers: set up meetings to explore possibilities/interest
- Provide information about disabilities by using a resource/strength-oriented approach
 - Check employers' knowledge about disabilities, especially invisible disabilities
 - Strength-oriented approach: inform employers about the value of the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in individuals rather than focusing on the disability
 - Resource oriented approach: apply career resource model
 - ✓ Identity resources that include the knowledge of one's own abilities, competencies and goals
 - ✓ Human capital resources describing technical skills, soft skills or knowledge relating to the labour market
 - ✓ Social resources, such as advantageous professional support networks, and
 - ✓ Psychological resources describing the inner attitude²

² For more information on Resource-Activating Mentoring see also <https://www.mentoring.uni-konstanz.de/en/program/a-resource-oriented-approach/#c374602>

- Offer pedagogical support, discuss strengths and potential weaknesses, find suitable organisational solutions. E.g. The time needed to integrate a person with disabilities in teams and to train the new employee: Will there be a special long time of low performance?
- Provide information about possibilities of public funding when hiring people with disabilities
- Research employment needs in order to react to actual employment needs
- Organize (mutual) learning events with employers who already hired people with different labour market needs
 - learning events can be useful to get feedback on lessons learned, positive experiences, feedback on ideas, etc.
- Create understanding and explore the needs and potentials of persons with disabilities
 - Explore the needs and potentials of persons with disabilities that could work in this sector
 - Before starting a partnership, it is important that employers understand what it means to hire persons with disabilities, the value of hiring persons with disabilities in that specific partnership

Providing information before employment

- What do employers need to know about employing persons with disabilities? Providing information before employing persons with disabilities is an indispensable phase in developing partnerships with employers:
- Use an interdisciplinary team approach by defining and addressing the needs of all stakeholders: people with disabilities, employer and social service provider
- Make sure that as a service provider, you have good knowledge of working conditions, corporate culture and companies' needs in order to answer employers' questions.
- Provide the employer with support/case management on different topics such as workplace adjustments or "reasonable" accommodation (and the potential government support for this) – for more information see section 4- social responsibility, etc.
- Provide an individualized and flexible case management approach, addressing all relevant issues of the person with disabilities when they arise
- Attend matching process between possible employee and employers
 - Give feedback on job applications
 - Be present at job interviews
 - Take part in the discussion for selecting the right candidate
- Define training initiatives and special employment programs together with stakeholders/employers
 - Possible stakeholders can be e.g. expert organisations on specific disabilities, peer counsellors, employment organisations, etc.
- Attend practical trainings for employee/employers

- Build trustworthy relationships with employers
 - Make sure employers can rely on you as a social service provider
 - Give correct and honest information and feedback to questions/issues

Providing support during and after employment

Partnerships with employers is not just about matching a person with disabilities with an employer. The next phase is all about providing support not only during, but also after employment of persons with disabilities:

- Provide intensive support for employers during employment
- Propose (optional) follow-up support after employment
- Provide coaching on the floor
 - be present for first week to make sure everything is clear between employer-employee (e.g. practical information, tasks), plan feedback/evaluation sessions with both employer-employee, be available for questions/solve issues, etc.
- Make sure that employers feel and stay involved and are available for both social service provider and PwD when questions/issues arise: organize regular feedback sessions
- Exchange best practices and lessons learned with partner organisations and partnership stakeholders.

In the above three stages it is important as a social service provider to be available to the employer; communicating well and responding quickly and effectively to questions and issues.

Communicating & sharing success

When you have a successful partnership with an employer, it is important to spread the word. In many cases, communicating and sharing success stories is a final phase within partnerships and can help bring in new partnerships. Success stories can be shared in different ways.

- Formal ways of sharing success:
 - Official evaluation reports for subsidizing bodies
 - Official evaluation reports with the employer
 - Internal-external evaluation report and annual report
 - Specific publications focusing on success stories
 - At (mutual) learning events
- Informal ways of sharing success by using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn
- Make success stories more visible by using creative methods in communicating success:
 - Create infographics
 - Make testimonial videos
 - Publish interviews with employers/employer

Supported Employment

Supported employment is a method to implement many of the items mentioned above. Job coaches are usually part of a Supported Employment programmes.

“Supported Employment is a method of working with PwD and other disadvantaged groups to access and maintain paid employment in the open labour market. This method of working is a proactive policy in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.”³

The Supported Employment method can be used for people with significant disabilities: physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory and hidden. The purpose is to provide real employment opportunities of people’s own choice in an integrated setting with appropriate ongoing support to become economically and socially active in their own communities.

The European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) identifies 5 stages in the SE process:

<i>Client engagement</i>	This first stage in the 5-steps process is indispensable to ensure that a PwD makes an informed choice about wishing to use the Supported Employment model to find a job and which Supported Employment organisation can assist them to achieve employment.
<i>Vocational profiling</i>	To help PwD to secure and maintain paid employment, a person-centered approach is used within Supported Employment to collect relevant information about the persons’ wishes, interests and abilities for work.
<i>Job finding</i>	In this third stage, the job seeker is connected with potential employers. The persons’ skills and abilities are viewed in terms of their relevance and requirement in the open labour market. As a result, there is a matching of the job seekers’ needs with those of the employers’ needs.
<i>Employer engagement</i>	When working with the SE-method, it is important that service providers work with both job seekers (clients) and employers. Service providers must focus on identifying the skills and abilities of the job seeker, and matching these with the needs of employers.
<i>Job support</i>	Effective support on and/or off the job is the fundamental element of Supported Employment which makes it different from regular placement services. Job support also entails follow-up after employment

Want to learn more about the Supported Employment method?

Consult the EUSE toolkit online: https://www.base-uk.org/sites/default/files/%5Buser-raw%5D/10-09/european_supported_employment_toolkit.pdf

³ For more information on the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) visit <https://euse.org/>

Ideas to show employers the value of hiring people with disabilities

In this section of the toolkit we present arguments and information that can help employers understand the value of hiring people with disabilities and having inclusive workplaces. These reasons are presented on four different levels when working on disability inclusion: Business, workplace, market place and community.

Business

- All staff need support in different ways. someone with a disability has specific needs. Providing support to all colleagues improves productivity and loyalty; tailor-made, supportive HR practices benefit all employees.
- Gain a positive reputation on the international stage and demonstrate leadership
- Further own corporate values and social priorities
- Key component of diversity: hiring persons with disabilities can make an organization more diverse and inclusive
- Foster an environment that promotes dignity and respect for all persons
- Meet and exceed legal requirements

Workplace

- Gain greater access to talent pool: including persons with disabilities in the pool of possible employees means that as a company/organization, you have more people to choose from.
- Better able to avoid skills shortages or labour supply issues
- Possible decreased labour turnover: If you invest in people and a more inclusive working place, it is likely that employees stay longer.
- Access to untapped resources of different skills, points of view and abilities

Marketplace

- Increased ability to reflect the diverse demands of customers, making the business more receptive and responsive to unique needs, helping it to develop better products and services
- Making businesses better prepared to address people with disabilities and the growing market of older persons
- Foster innovation in products and services
- Enhance supplier diversity by also sourcing from companies that are owned by and employ people with disabilities
- Enhance customer loyalty with inclusive marketing and advertising and avoid the negative repercussions of using stereotypes

Community

- Through increased inclusion and accessibility, contribute to an improved enabling environment for all members of the community, including businesses, to thrive and grow
- Contribute to positive social change through leading by example and positively influencing attitudes

How can enterprises achieve business success while simultaneously creating equal opportunities?

To develop good partnerships with employers it is important that social service providers raise awareness among businesses of what is needed in creating equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The ILO Global Business and Disability Network Charter provides a framework to help enterprises achieve business success while simultaneously creating equal opportunities. Here are the 10 principles provided in the Charter:

- Promote and respect the rights of persons with disabilities by raising awareness and combatting stigma and stereotypes faced by persons with disabilities.
- Develop policies and practices that protect persons with disabilities from all types of discrimination.
- Promote equal treatment and equal opportunities for people with disabilities by providing reasonable accommodation in the recruitment process, on-the-job, apprenticeships, training, job retention, career development and other relevant terms and conditions of employment.
- Progressively make the company premises and communication to staff accessible for all employees with disabilities.
- Undertake appropriate measures to enable current employees who acquire a disability to retain or return to their employment
- Respect confidentiality of personal information regarding disability.
- Consider the needs of those persons with disabilities who face particular challenges accessing the labour market, including persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.
- Promote the employment of people with disabilities among business partners and other companies and collaborate with national employers and businesses networks on disability as well as with organizations working to advance the rights of people with disabilities.
- Review regularly the company disability inclusion policies and practices for their effectiveness.
- Report on company efforts to promote the employment of persons with disabilities to all relevant stakeholders and share information and experiences with the members of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network. The ILO will utilize the company reports and practices in its own communication, wherever relevant.

The ILO Global Business & Disability Network Charter online:
<https://www.businessanddisability.org/charter/>

Reasonable accommodation / workplace adjustments

Understanding reasonable accommodation today

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) defines reasonable accommodation as “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

History

The legal concept of reasonable accommodation is rooted in US law and Canadian law. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 required accommodation for various minorities, including to adapt to religious and cultural practices. Whereas in the US, the 1968 Civil Rights Act⁴ and the 1988 Fair Housing Act⁵ obliged housing providers to arrange for reasonable accommodation where necessary for a tenant with a disability to use their apartment, single family home or other forms of housing. The 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act⁶ introduced legal provision for reasonable accommodation at the workplace. A governmental technical assistance manual at the time specified: “public entities must make reasonable accommodation to the known physical or mental limitations of otherwise qualified applicants or employees with disabilities”⁷

Why thinking about reasonable accommodation is important

- Because of the obligations by national law in an increasing number of countries and to anticipate and comply with existing or future legal obligations
- It is a key measure to promote diversity in the workplace

Important to note is that legislation on reasonable accommodation is different in each country.

Analysing reasonable accommodation

The concept of “reasonable” accommodation can be divided into two main parts:

- identifying effective measures that remove or mitigate barriers encountered by the worker

⁴ See Civil Rights Act of 1968 <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/90/hr2516/text>

⁵ See Fair Housing Act of 1988 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2009-title42/html/USCODE-2009-title42-chap45-subchap1.htm>

⁶ See Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/>

⁷ See Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Technical Assistance Manual <https://archive.ada.gov/taman2.html#II-4.3200>

- assessing the reasonableness of that accommodation

If a person with disabilities wishes to make use of reasonable accommodation, the employer needs to assess the reasonableness of the accommodation requested. Below you can find a list describing the factors that are taken into account in determining whether a requested accommodation would pose a disproportionate burden:

- the cost of the accommodation;
- the size and economic turnover of the enterprise obliged to provide the accommodation. If it is part of a larger company, the size of the entire company should be the reference;
- the functioning and the organization of the company;
- whether the accommodation will benefit more persons than the individual making the request;
- the existence of public (or other) funding, which could cover or reimburse the employer for the partial or total cost of the accommodation;
- occupational safety and health requirements;
- the anticipated duration of the employment relationship. If the worker has been hired on a short, temporary contract, then the employer might not be expected to invest in major changes unless these would be of wider benefit to other workers.

Check the ILO guide online:

Promoting diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments a practical guide

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_536630.pdf

Examples of good practices

Por Talento – Inserta

Inserta Empleo, ONCE Foundation's entity, expert in labour mediation services for people with disabilities, developed Portalento.es, a platform co-financed by the ONCE Foundation and the European Social Fund that coordinates job offers from over 35,000 collaborating companies and assists over 300,000 jobseekers registered in their database.

Equipped with the latest technological innovations, the employment platform is at the forefront of labour mediation and allows their users to directly interact with Inserta's experts in order to get updated on the broad training offer and job opportunities available. The platform also gives the companies the possibility to manage their job offers in real time and access the information of all candidates meeting the requested profiles.

But the distinguishing element of Portalento.es is the fact that it combines the potential of new technologies with human involvement, thus setting a new paradigm in labour inclusion.

Portalento.es is much more than a website, much more than a tool; it is an open fully inclusive meeting place for jobseekers with a disability, companies offering jobs, public administrations or interested persons; open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

"Youth Talent Community". In 2022 Inserta and the ONCE Foundation launched the "Youth Talent Community"⁸, as a meeting point for youth with disabilities, their families, and the professionals in their immediate environment (mainly in the social, health and educational ones). The Community aims at breaking down prejudices, remove barriers, avoid overprotection and promote and facilitate work inclusion for youth with disabilities. The platform includes personalized contents, such as interviews, articles, infographics, freebies, etc. to try to encourage young persons with disabilities to approach the ONCE Foundation and Inserta's training and employment services. It also provides families and professionals with specific training itineraries to help them to become facilitators of employment for youth with disabilities. Since its creation, around 3,500 youngsters, 1,000 families and 600 professionals have been served.

"In your hands". Campaign launched in the framework of the "Women in ON Mode" program launched by the ONCE Foundation and Inserta and co-financed by the ESF, aimed at raising awareness about gender violence against women with disabilities, supporting women with disabilities victims of gender violence in their recovery process and promoting their labour inclusion. The campaign "In your hands" was created to attract employers to the project and to collaborate in the detection of cases, highlighting the importance of social co-responsibility to confront this still hidden reality. Through the website⁹ and a free telephone number, women with disabilities who are victims of gender violence and their close ones can contact Inserta's expert team. Since the project was launched, over 2,000

⁸ See Comunidad Por Talento Joven <http://www.comunidadportalentojuven.es/>

⁹ See Está en tu mano - Mujeres en Modo ON-VG <https://estaentumano.mujeresenmodo.es/>

women with disabilities victims of gender violence have been supported and more than 600 have got a job.

Mediation services for more than 100,000 job offers. Since its creation in 2009, Inserta has processed over 100,000 job offers for persons with disabilities, about 150,000 students with disabilities have been trained, and more than 92,000 persons with disabilities have found a job thanks to Inserta's mediation service. Inserta's services are absolutely free for persons with disabilities thanks to ONCE Foundation's and ESF funding.

Ripples in the Water – Work and Inclusion

Who? Work & Inclusion is an association in the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO), the main business organisation in Norway with 26,000 member companies. W&I have 100 member companies all over the country which base their services on individual coaching towards ordinary employment through providing qualifications, job training, protected work and Supported Employment. They provide services to approximately 35,000 disadvantaged people annually.

What? Ripples in the Water (RIW) is a methodology for cooperation between NHO member companies and W&I service providers. It aims to increase the level of employment for persons with disabilities or disadvantages based on the understanding that the vast majority of people both want and are able to work. With reference to their CSR strategy, NHO companies need manpower and want to be successful in integrating employees with a disability.

Success? An evaluation from December 2017 shows that RIW helps NHO's members recruit the right person for the right job. The NHO company gets in touch with a service provider, who after an assessment of the company's needs, consider whether they have suitable candidates for the position in question. The service provider may also provide training and coaching to prepare the candidate to become employable. In addition, they provide follow-up support in the workplace, including coaching after the candidate has been permanently employed. The evaluation further shows that 57% of the NHO companies would not have recruited without RIW. 84% trust that the service providers propose relevant candidates and 77% agrees that the actual candidate matched the needs of the company. Two out of three find it safe to recruit through RIW.

From 2022 we have further developed RIW by including the method Inclusive Job-design in the job-carving/redesigning new jobs. It seems to be so far a successful intervention.

CDI ISI CURRICULUM - Centre de Réadaptation du Mulhouse

Who? Centre de Réadaptation du Mulhouse (CRM) offers different training programmes adapted to persons with disabilities. A person-centred approach is at the core of their services promoting dignity and citizenship with respect for the choices and needs of each service users. Through its services, CRM promotes the development of people's capabilities, full participation in society and employment inclusion. CRM supports the users' autonomy as well as physical, mental, and moral wellbeing.

What? CDI ISI Curriculum, is a two-year IT development training programme for people with a disability. The aim of the programme is to prepare students for the level required in order to enter the IT engineering training courses provided in most of the big companies in the sector. While companies

have to recruit persons with disabilities to respond to their legal obligations, they often fail to find good profiles matching their demands.

Partnership and success. The problem in the past was that only a small part of CRM's students were able to follow an IT engineer training course without preparation. To increase the number of potential students, it was decided to organize a special curriculum in partnership with companies in the IT sector to enable people to reach the level required to enter into the engineer training program. This resulted in the CDA ISI curriculum program. At the end of the training course provided at the CRM, students obtain an IT engineering diploma (ISI). The majority of students who have followed the curriculum-program in the first year sign a professionalization contract with a company for engineering training afterwards.

Resources

If you want to find out more about partnerships with employers, please consult these useful resources:

ILO: Global Business & Disability Network Charter online:

<https://www.businessanddisability.org/charter/>

ILO: Promoting diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments: a practical guide

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_536630.pdf

UN Global Compact: Guide for Business on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

<https://unglobalcompact.org/library/5381>

European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) Toolkit

https://www.base-uk.org/sites/default/files/%5Buser-raw%5D/10-09/european_supported_employment_toolkit.pdf

Uni Konstanz mentoring program

<https://www.mentoring.uni-konstanz.de/en/program/a-resource-oriented-approach/#c374602>



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