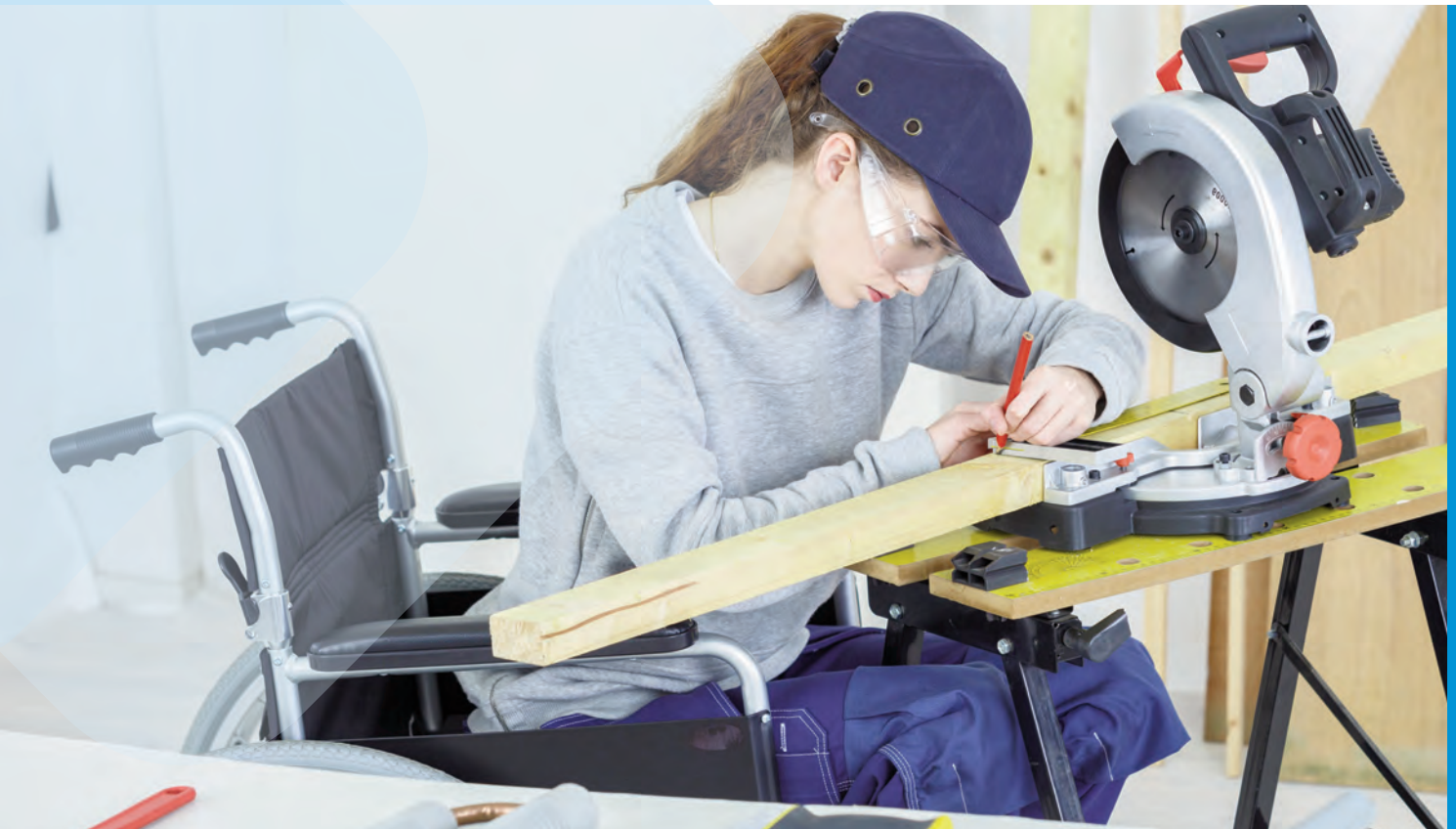


Living conditions and quality of life

Disability and labour market integration: Policy trends and support in EU Member States



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When citing this report, please use the following wording:

Eurofound (2021), *Disability and labour market integration: Policy trends and support in EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Eurofound project: Services for people with disabilities (190806)

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Acknowledgements: Thanks to the Network of Eurofound Correspondents for collecting evidence on policy measures and to Joan O'Donnell (independent researcher) and Barbara Schmidt (Eurofound) for conducting the Irish case study (published as a Eurofound working paper alongside this report at <http://eurofound.link/ef20013>).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

Print: ISBN 978-92-897-2167-7 doi:10.2806/49656 TJ-02-21-332-EN-C

PDF: ISBN 978-92-897-2168-4 doi:10.2806/143896 TJ-02-21-332-EN-N

This report and any associated materials are available online at <http://eurofound.link/ef20013>

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The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

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List of abbreviations

ANED	Academic Network of European Disability Experts
AT	assistive technology
COVID-19	coronavirus
CRII	Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative
CRII+	Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus
EASPD	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
EDF	European Disability Forum
EHSIS	European Health and Social Integration Survey
ESF	European Social Fund
EU-LFS	European Union Labour Force Survey
EU-SILC	European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
GALI	Global Activity Limitation Indicator
IT	information technology
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PES	public employment service(s)
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
SURE	Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VSM	Viable Systems Model

Executive summary

Introduction

This report investigates policy developments in EU Member States supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market. It comes at a time of important change: the end of the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020, the launch of the new strategy and the evolving situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite legislation prohibiting discrimination, people with disabilities participate less often in the open labour market and are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Their integration into the world of work is a dynamic process involving interactions between organisational (demand side), personal (supply side) and contextual (institutional) factors. This research focuses on entry into, retention in and return to the open labour market.

Over 150 policy measures that were in place in the Member States before the onset of COVID-19 were analysed. They belong to four key groups: support for job creation (supply and demand); support for individuals with disabilities (employees, jobseekers) (supply side); support for employing organisations (demand side); and support for the institutional environment (context).

This analysis was complemented with a case study on Ireland and additional examples of policies adopted during the pandemic.

Policy context

The European Commission has put forward a strengthened disability strategy for the period 2021–2030, building on the previous strategy, which succeeded in mainstreaming disability issues in EU legislation and in moving disability up the EU policy agenda.

The European Pillar of Social Rights addresses disability rights (Principles 3 and 17). As part of the European Semester process, the European Commission monitors actions taken by Member States to enhance the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market.

Key findings

- Despite progress at policy level, participation in the labour market remains a major challenge for people with disabilities; this is compounded by the economic and employment uncertainty caused by COVID-19.
- Key obstacles to the employment of people with disabilities include disability-related stereotypes, bureaucratic difficulties in accessing the available services, lack of strategic vision in governance, insufficient monitoring of policy implementation, limited training resources for employers and lack of specialist support.
- EU governments are increasingly focusing on a capacity-based approach that supports the full integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market.
- Although a multi-disciplinary response is needed to improve the labour market situation of people with disabilities, there is room for improvement as regards the involvement of different actors, who often operate in silos.
- Employers play a crucial role in hiring, managing and retaining employees with disabilities. Their attitudes and openness to diversity and flexibility are prerequisites for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities.
- During the pandemic, employment-related responses have played a key role in protecting people with disabilities from becoming unemployed. However, the support provided is often limited and it remains difficult for those who are not working to find a job.

Policy pointers

Policy needs data, information and clear definitions

- Member States should reflect on the legal definition of disability to reach a shared understanding.
- To enable well-informed policy action, Member States should collect comparable, robust and granular data, broken down by disability type.
- Rigorous and systematic evaluation and monitoring of interventions supporting people with disabilities are needed to feed back into policymaking.

People should be at the centre

- Policy support should promote a person-centred approach, focusing on the potential and capacity to work.
- Policies should address the interconnectedness of issues experienced by people with disabilities.
- The type and degree of support should reflect the different labour market situations of people with disabilities.

- All measures providing labour market support should have a disability inclusion perspective. Tailored policy responses should also be available for specific groups.
- Policymakers should ensure the right mix of measures to tackle job creation, labour demand and supply, and contextual factors.

Support is useful when it is visible, inclusive and accessible

- The voices of people with disabilities need to be heard when formulating policies affecting them.
- Awareness of available measures must be raised, ensuring high levels of accessibility and visibility and the targeting of every potential beneficiary.
- Reasonable accommodation should be made available to people with disabilities to enable them to perform their work, in the workplace and at home.

Coordination between policy areas based on a life-cycle approach must be at the core of service design and provision

- Integration between policy areas must be ensured, including between the generosity of disability benefits and incentives for employment.
- While the labour market participation of people with disabilities should be supported and promoted, adequate and inclusive social protection mechanisms must be in place.
- Systems and institutions should have sufficient capacity to provide coordinated, effective and disability-inclusive responses.
- A lifelong, preventive and long-term perspective is needed to ensure support is available throughout all stages of employment.
- Labour market practices must be accessible and inclusive of disability across all stages of the job life cycle.

- Policy actions should not neglect any of the three dimensions of entry into, retention in and return to the labour market.

Results come about through strategic and financial commitments

- Developing a shared purpose requires a strategic commitment at all levels of the employment system and across public services.
- While ensuring their commitment to the full implementation of international and EU disability strategies, Member States should also go beyond these objectives through ambitious policy actions.
- Financial resources should be made available by the EU and within each Member State in line with a disability rights perspective, while fostering coordination between European and national actions, funds and policies.
- Organisations representing people with disabilities and NGOs should be assisted in providing full support for labour market inclusion through adequate training, financing and staffing.
- Pilot projects should be encouraged to test the effectiveness of measures, and funds should be provided to scale them up if successful.

Responses must be relevant to the present but ensure a forward-looking perspective

- As forms of work evolve, attention is needed to ensure that people with disabilities can access them equally, with inclusive technology at the core of policy responses.
- People with disabilities should be supported in the recovery following the COVID-19 crisis, and not left behind due to the lack of accessible solutions, decrease in recruitment and increased competition in the labour market.

Introduction

Background

People with disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the EU when it comes to social inclusion and employment, with lower participation in the labour force, lower work intensity and a higher risk of in-work poverty compared to the population as a whole (Eurofound, 2018).

Focusing specifically on employment, this study examines the policy developments and the characteristics and effectiveness of policies and interventions designed and provided in EU Member States for the better inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market. Member States have transitioned from an ‘incapacity interpretation’ of disability, in which disability is seen as a medical or biological dysfunction, towards a social model of disability, in which it is understood as a concept that is socially created, originating from a lack of fit between a person’s characteristics and the social and physical environment (ESN, 2017).

Better employment inclusion leads to multiple positive outcomes for people with disabilities, such as higher incomes, an improvement in quality of life and an increase in social inclusion. There are also benefits for employers, service providers and the economy, and therefore for society as a whole. A more inclusive labour market enables the more effective and efficient use of (often untapped) talent and skills, while greater economic autonomy of individuals reduces the demand for service provision and welfare. The economy benefits from a more productive and larger workforce and a wider potential tax base. Overall, society benefits from better integration and cohesion (Rohwerder, 2015; ESN, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges that people with disabilities face in different spheres of their lives – their health, their social circumstances and their labour market situation – and the interconnectedness of these issues. As the pandemic began while this study was being developed, additional research was carried out to understand recent developments in the field of employment for people with disabilities and the policy responses adopted at national level to support them in these very challenging times.

Rationale and objectives of the study

This report comes at a period of important change – the introduction of the 2021–2030 European Disability Strategy and the implementation of the policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its health, economic and social consequences. Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, people with disabilities were particularly vulnerable in the labour market, with numbers rising in parallel with the ageing of the population across Europe (Eurofound, 2019). The pandemic has added complexity to this situation and exposed the most vulnerable to additional disadvantages, in the labour market and beyond. This study aims to:

- highlight the key obstacles that people with disabilities face when it comes to participation in the open labour market
- describe what countries have been doing in recent years to enable people with disabilities to enter, remain in and return to employment in the open labour market
- highlight examples of what works and what does not work in measures supporting the labour market inclusion of people with disabilities
- provide an updated analysis of key policy developments and measures adopted in EU Member States to protect the labour market situation of people with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
- provide conclusions and policy pointers on actions and approaches to ensure the better integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market

Although the study takes a systematic approach to research, it also includes a country study using a systems thinking methodology¹ as a way of better understanding the complexity of disability as an issue.

1 See Eurofound (2021) and Chapter 3.

Definitions used in the research

Disability. Disability is defined in different ways, depending on the context and the purpose of research. To ensure broad coverage of a wide spectrum of measures in the context of employment, this report uses the definition of disability in Article 1 of the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD): ‘Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (UN, 2006).

Open labour market and supported employment. This research focuses on the open (meaning competitive) labour market. This includes supported employment, a method of working with groups in disadvantaged situations to enable them to enter and maintain paid employment in the open labour market. Its concept is based on the premise that successful job attainment is achieved when adequate support is given to both the employer and the employee. This does not cover sheltered employment – which typically happens in a protected work environment and caters for people with severe disabilities.

Entry, retention and return. This report analyses policy measures supporting the participation of people with disabilities in the open labour market, with a focus on entry (for instance, transitioning from education, from sheltered employment or from receipt of a disability pension), retention (ensuring that sufficient conditions are in place for people with disabilities to remain in the open labour market and to be able to continue performing their tasks, and to protect them from the risk of dismissal) and return (for instance, after a period of unemployment, after having become inactive or after a period of sick leave).

Disability employment gap. This is the difference between the employment rate of people with disabilities and the employment rate of people without disabilities.

Employment outcomes. The key employment-related outcomes of the measures examined in this study cover not only job creation but also the development of skills and competences and therefore employability, the improvement of workplace practices and of job quality, and sustained employment effects.

Understanding the complex issues involved

A system that supports the participation of people with disabilities in the open labour market is, by its nature, complex (Rohwerder, 2015; Eurofound, 2021). Although this report conventionally refers to people with disabilities as a ‘group’, it is important to acknowledge the diversity and interconnectedness of issues that characterise disability and employment.

- **People with disabilities are a heterogeneous population:** The nature and intensity of different physical and mental disabilities, the evolution of their manifestations and the existence of ‘invisible disabilities’ (physical and psychological conditions that are not immediately apparent or that do not have a clear connection with a disability) define a complex and heterogeneous group. Identifying the number and characteristics of people with disabilities in the open labour market depends on the definitions used and their application to this diverse population.
- **Diverse experiences of disability:** The combination of personal factors and inequalities produces different experiences of disability. People with disabilities are not all equally disadvantaged. Aspects such as age and gender are particularly important, but other factors such as ethnicity and migration status also matter.
- **Different employment outcomes:** Different types of disability tend to be related to different employment outcomes. Among people with disabilities, those with mental health difficulties and those with intellectual impairments tend to experience the lowest employment rates (Bell, 2018).
- **Different world views:** Different stakeholders view the situation differently and orientate their actions according to different goals. For example, a human rights perspective emphasises equality and access to decent work, whereas an economic perspective may aim to supply enough workers for a sustainable economy and a medical-centred perspective focuses on the incapacity to work.
- **Interconnectedness of issues:** Having a disability is synonymous with structural or educational disadvantage and discrimination. For this reason, it can be expected that support measures focusing on aspects other than employment – for instance, poverty reduction, access to housing and childcare, accessible public transport, and personal assistance – also play a key role in providing opportunities for people with disabilities to access and remain in the workforce.

- **Different disabilities are dealt with differently and multiple policy instruments exist:** For each policy area to be effective it must deal with its own metrics and targets. This plurality of goals, instruments and approaches makes it difficult to assess how policies in different areas affect the labour market participation of people with disabilities. At the same time, given the interconnectedness mentioned above, policy action in one field affects action in other fields, without this being fully predictable or controllable in advance.
- **Ever-changing environment of work:** The world of work is constantly evolving. It is being reshaped by structural shifts in health, technology, demographics, globalisation, production patterns, forms of employment and people's professional expectations, and by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Data limitations

The evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 noted that the ad hoc module of the 2011 EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) (Box 1) and the inclusion of a proxy variable on disability every two

years in all population surveys coordinated by Eurostat are important achievements from a policy point of view (European Commission, 2020a). Another important contribution came from ANED (undated), which from 2007 to 2019 collected and analysed data about people with disabilities in Member States. In 2020, a new reporting initiative, European Disability Expertise, was launched. Its purpose is to collect, analyse and provide independent and scientific data and information relating to national disability policies and legislation and their link with EU-level policies and legislation. It also deals with information about the situation of people with disabilities.

Despite this progress, the evaluation pointed to three main challenges: (1) there are no concrete targets for Member States or indicators for measuring their progress when implementing disability-related policies within the European Semester; (2) there is no single uniform approach to measuring access to healthcare across the EU; (3) there are no disaggregated data on disability.

At Member State level, very few countries collect disability-disaggregated data in national surveys.

Box 1: EU data sources ²

The European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), the reference source for statistics on income, poverty and living conditions in the EU, measures the prevalence of disability every year using the Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI). Beginning in 2022, it will collect more detailed information on disability every three years.

From 2021 onwards, the core EU-LFS will also include the GALI variable, which will radically alter the ability to disaggregate labour market data. The EU-LFS also included two ad hoc modules about the employment of people with disabilities in 2002 and 2011. In these ad hoc modules, the EU-LFS defined people with disabilities as those having a basic activity difficulty (such as problems with sight, hearing, walking or communicating) and/or being limited in their ability to work because of a long-standing health problem and/or a basic activity difficulty.

In 2012, Eurostat fielded the European Health and Social Integration Survey (EHSIS). The EHSIS defines people with disabilities as those whose long-standing health condition, illness, disease or long-standing difficulty with basic activities (such as seeing, hearing, concentrating or moving around) prevents them from participating in at least one life domain. It is the only EU-wide survey that has collected comparable disaggregated data by type of disability and by important socioeconomic characteristics such as ethnicity.

² For a clear overview of EU data sources, see Eurostat (2019).

Structure of the report

The findings in this report are mostly based on a review of responses from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, supplemented by a review of recent literature, desk research and expert consultations and a country case study. Chapter 1 sets the context by briefly presenting the latest available statistics, which highlight the disadvantaged position of people with disabilities. It goes on to describe the policy context in the EU and Member States, discussing the role of the different actors. It ends with a description of the barriers faced by people with disabilities with regard to integrating into the open labour market. Chapter 2 provides a detailed analysis of 154 policy measures from across the EU identified by the national correspondents. These measures were collected prior to the onset of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has resulted in drastic changes in the socioeconomic order. Hence, Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the policy responses adopted in the Member States between the start of the pandemic and September 2020 to support the labour market situation of people with disabilities in the context of COVID-19. The report also includes a summary of a case study on Ireland (Chapter 3) that focuses on the complexity of disability and support systems. The full study, which adopts a systems thinking approach, is described in a separate working paper (Eurofound, 2021). The final chapter presents conclusions and lessons learned and ends with policy messages to inform those stakeholders seeking to design and provide support for the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market.

1 Inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market

Introduction

Despite progress at policy level, participation in the labour market remains a major challenge for people with disabilities – a fact compounded by the overall economic and employment uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated long-standing challenges. In its Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy launching the 2021 European Semester cycle, the European Commission (2020b) stresses the issue of the continuing lack of fairness in society and mentions people with disabilities as one of the disadvantaged groups that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis, including in the field of employment.

Eurostat statistics show that the employment rate of people with disabilities remains below that of people without disabilities (50.8% compared with 75%), pointing to the risk of people with disabilities being stuck in long-term unemployment and struggling to access the labour market.³ In the general population, employment levels are higher for men than for women; however, the gap has been closing in recent years as women with disabilities have benefited from the feminisation of the labour market. People with disabilities face a significant risk of poverty or social exclusion (28.4% compared with 18.4% for those without disabilities). Even when in work they are more often at risk of poverty, mainly because of low work intensity and non-favourable working conditions (Eurofound, 2019).⁴ Access to inclusive and quality education remains limited for many people with disabilities. High numbers of young people with disabilities are early leavers from education and training (20.3% compared with 9.8% of pupils without disabilities in 2018; European Commission, 2020b).

EU policy context

Over time, the EU has paid increasingly closer attention to the situation of people with disabilities.⁵ Promoting the active inclusion and rights of people in society has been and continues to be a priority for the EU. The Employment Equality Directive (Council of the European Union, 2000) prohibits discrimination and provides for reasonable accommodation in employment. In 2010,

the Commission presented the European Disability Strategy as the policy framework through which the EU would deliver the commitments made under the 2006 UNCRPD, in line with the respective competences provided for in the treaties and taking into account the experience of the Disability Action Plan (2004–2010).

An evaluation of the 2010–2020 strategy pointed out that 75% of the actions planned in the area of employment had been successfully implemented (European Commission, 2020a). These actions were effective with regard to the use of EU funds; awareness-raising about disability rights in the field of employment and specifically in the private sector; and improving statistical data on the employment situation of people with disabilities. The evaluation noted that ‘overall, the Strategy achieved positive results in mainstreaming disability issues in EU policy and legislation and that one of the main achievements of the Strategy was the placement of the disability agenda higher among the EU policy priorities’ (European Commission, 2020a, p. 37).

The European Parliament (2020b), echoing calls from the United Nations (UN) that the EU should develop a coherent strategy to implement the UNCRPD in 2015, called on the European Commission to ensure an ambitious post-2020 Disability Strategy that reflects the diverse needs and lifestyles of each individual as they look to fully enjoy their human rights. In a September 2020 motion, the Parliament requested further targeted action and mainstreaming of the rights of people with disabilities. Among other things, the motion requires the European Commission to place special emphasis in the post-2020 European Disability Strategy on employment, cover all the provisions of the UNCRPD, set binding targets relating to workplace diversity, address intersectional discrimination and monitor the efficiency of the strategy with the involvement of people with disabilities. It also requires the Commission to propose measures to improve the employment situation of people with disabilities, taking into account COVID-19-related challenges and rights violations (European Parliament, 2020c, 2020d).

In response to these calls by the European Parliament, the new 2021–2030 European Disability Strategy recognises that it is time to scale up European action.

³ Unless otherwise stated, Eurostat data cover the 27 EU Member States and the UK and are taken from EU-SILC 2019.

⁴ For further details on disability statistics, see Eurostat (2019).

⁵ See European Parliament (2020a) for a historical overview of EU policy developments.

With regard to employment, one of the flagship initiatives of the new strategy is the presentation of a package to improve labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in 2022. The new strategy also outlines the development of new disability indicators, providing, among other things, better information about the situation of people with disabilities in employment (European Commission, 2021).

The European Pillar of Social Rights represents another important development for the EU in terms of renewing its focus on new and more effective rights for EU citizens. Principle 3 provides for equal treatment and opportunities in relation to employment, while Principle 17 states that people with disabilities ‘have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity, services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society, and a work environment adapted to their needs’ (European Commission, 2017). The Pillar also aims to make more effective use of European funds, to support the implementation of policies and initiatives targeted at all vulnerable groups across Member States.

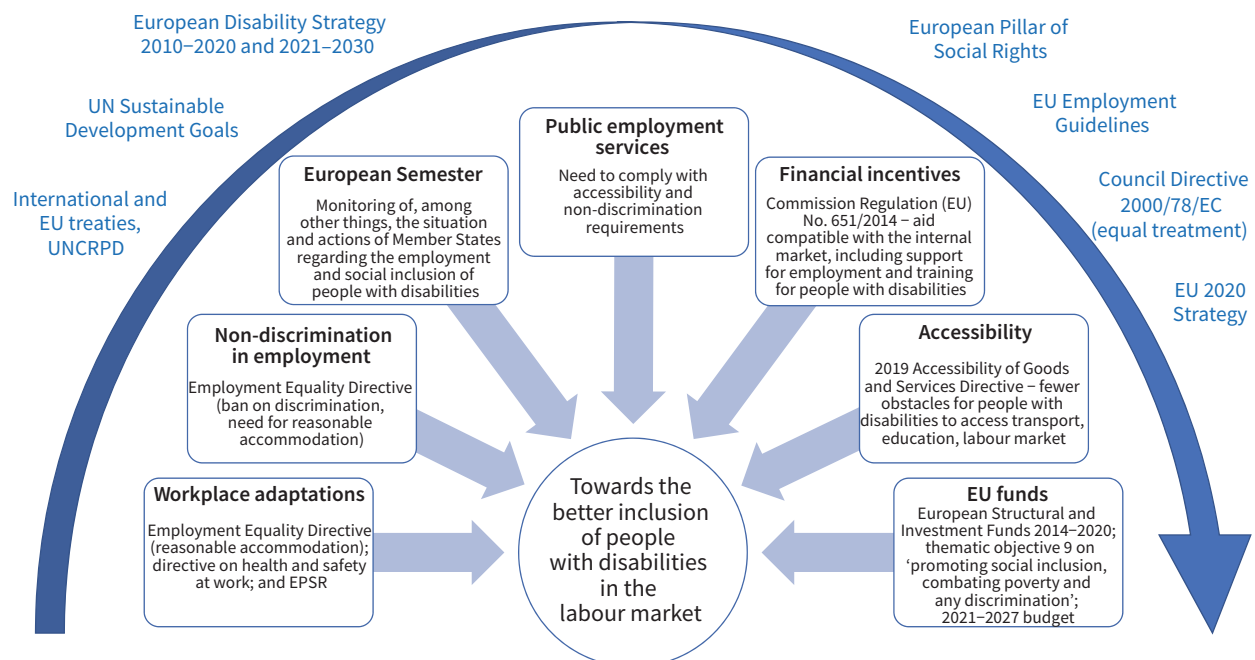
The 2020 EU employment guidelines observe that ‘the potential of people with disabilities to contribute to economic growth and social development should be further realised’. Guideline 6 states that ‘Member States

should support an adapted work environment for people with disabilities, including through targeted financial support and services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society’. Guideline 8 asserts the need for equal treatment and accessibility in labour markets (European Commission, 2020c).

Following the principles enshrined in the Disability Strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Semester, the EU supports different initiatives to assist people with disabilities in the area of employment, including in relation to workplace adaptations, non-discrimination, public employment services (PES),⁶ financial incentives, accessibility and EU funding (European Parliament, 2020a), as displayed in Figure 1.

The European Semester country reports for 2020 reveal prominent disability issues, especially related to high levels of unemployment, risk of poverty, educational attainment and care services. As informed by the European Disability Forum, large variations exist in the amount of information provided on these issues in the country reports (Priestly, 2018; EDF, 2020). Issues related to employment and poverty and social exclusion are summarised in Table 1.

Figure 1: EU policies and initiatives



Note: EPSR = European Pillar of Social Rights.

Source: Authors’ own design, based on European Parliament (2020a)

6 For the sake of clarity, PES is used for both the singular (public employment service) and plural (public employment services).

Table 1: Employment, poverty and social exclusion issues for people with disabilities, as reported in the 2020 European Semester country reports

Country	Employment of PwD and related government actions	Social protection and risk of poverty and social exclusion for PwD
Austria	n/a	The ESF has promoted the social integration of 3,761 people with disabilities.
Belgium	Employment rate for PwD is well below the EU average. Insufficient financial incentives to enter employment.	Higher than for most EU countries.
Bulgaria	Employment rate for PwD is one of the lowest in the EU. Limited progress in improving quality, labour market relevance and inclusiveness of education and training.	Significant problems for PwD relating to poverty and social exclusion.
Croatia	Employment rate for PwD is well below the EU average. Decreasing disability employment gap, but still one of the largest in the EU. Policies adopted to improve the employment prospects of PwD, including a quota system, but many entities opted out.	Many PwD are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and are dependent on social protection. Government spending on disability benefits is higher than in other EU countries.
Cyprus	Employment rate for PwD is below the EU average. Mobility benefits for PwD expanded; various training schemes introduced.	Significantly higher than the EU average.
Czechia	Higher than average disability employment gap. Scope for improving the targeting of active labour market policies.	Higher than the EU average. Strong disparities between people with and without disabilities.
Denmark	A government proposal (2018) aims to increase employment among people with significant disabilities in the open labour market.	Gap between people with and without disabilities is below the EU average.
Estonia	Labour market integration and activity of PwD improved through the work ability reform. Challenges for sustainable employability.	Higher than the EU average.
Finland	n/a	Income inequality among the lowest in the EU.
France	Volume of subsidised jobs is falling. Training and monitoring are being strengthened to improve employability. Tools for labour market integration of the most disadvantaged are being scaled up.	n/a
Germany	Promising policies on skills enhancement.	Risk of poverty or social exclusion slightly declining, but rising income inequality.
Greece	Support provided to improve the labour market and pension, social welfare, health and education systems.	n/a
Hungary	Despite recent improvements, unemployment is higher among PwD. Labour market outcomes for PwD have improved but remain well below average in the Hungarian workforce.	The overall poverty situation has improved, but challenges remain, including rising income inequality.
Ireland	Employment rate for PwD is increasing but is well below the EU average. Disability employment gap is the highest in the EU. New Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities introduced in 2015.	Gap between people with and without disabilities is much higher than the EU average.
Italy	Important role of the ESF in supporting participation of PwD in employment and social inclusion.	n/a
Latvia	n/a	One of the highest in the EU. In addition, one of the biggest gaps between people with and without disabilities. Measures are being taken to improve the weak social protection for PwD.
Lithuania	Significant funding cuts for policies to get people into employment will result in fewer vulnerable people being in work. The ESF played a key role in promoting the employment and inclusion of PwD.	Higher than the EU average.
Luxembourg	Important policy developments to support PwD, including the amendment to the Labour Code (2019) to improve their access to the open labour market.	n/a
Malta	Increasing employment rate for PwD but still one of the lowest in the EU. Weak labour market outcomes for PwD, explained by a low level of qualifications and educational attainment and a lack of accessibility to or reasonable accommodation in the workplace.	PwD are still at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than those without disabilities.

Country	Employment of PwD and related government actions	Social protection and risk of poverty and social exclusion for PwD
Netherlands	Untapped potential in the labour market inclusion of PwD.	The government aims to implement mandatory disability insurance for self-employed people.
Portugal	Employment rate for PwD is lower than that in many EU countries and has barely improved in recent years.	n/a
Poland	n/a	There is an overall decrease in expenditure on social protection benefits for disability.
Romania	Employment rate for PwD is below the EU average. Lack of synergies between education, employment and social services aggravates the situation of PwD.	Among the highest in the EU.
Slovakia	n/a	Low but not decreasing proportion of PwD at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
Slovenia	n/a	Relevant role of disability benefits in alleviating poverty. Expected increase in disability insurance benefits.
Spain	Low employment rate for PwD. Increasing disability employment gap, despite most hiring incentives being targeted at PwD.	n/a
Sweden	Employment rate for PwD is above the EU average.	Wide gap between people with and without disabilities.

Notes: ESF = European Social Fund; PwD = people with disabilities; n/a = not applicable.

Source: Authors' own interpretation, based on EDF (2020)

Involvement of different actors in the integration process

The Network of Eurofound Correspondents provided evidence on the role and level of involvement of different types of actors in actions to integrate people with disabilities into the open labour market.

In most Member States, the PES play a central role in the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market (see Table 2).⁷ According to a peer review conducted by the European Commission (2018), PES

follow two main approaches for people with disabilities: a mainstreaming model (used, for instance, in Ireland and Finland) in which the mainstream PES system also includes services for people with disabilities, and specific PES targeted at people with disabilities, which operate in coordination with the main PES (for instance, in France and Italy). The analysis stresses the need to support a mainstreaming approach while ensuring that the right structures are in place, allowing the higher support needs of jobseekers with disabilities to be considered and ensuring the effective targeting of beneficiaries.

⁷ In Cyprus, a specific department (the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities) oversees the country's disability strategy. The department collaborates with all ministries including the PES.

Table 2: Perceived role of different actors in EU Member States regarding the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market

Country	PES	Other government actors	Trade unions	Employer organisations	NGOs/civil society organisations
Austria	1	1	2	2	1
Belgium	1	1	1	1	2
Bulgaria	1	1	2	2	1
Croatia	1	2	2	2	1
Cyprus	2	1	4	3	1
Czechia	1	1	3	2	2
Denmark	1	1	3	3	2
Estonia	1	1	2	2	1
Finland	1	1	2	2	1
France	1	2	2	2	2
Germany	1	1	1	2	1
Greece	1	1	2	2	1
Hungary	1	2	4	1	1
Ireland	1	1	2	2	1
Italy	1	1	1	1	1
Latvia	1	2	2	2	2
Lithuania	1	3	4	2	2
Luxembourg	1	1	2	2	2
Malta	1	2	2	2	1
Netherlands	1	1	2	2	2
Poland	1	1	3	3	1
Portugal	1	1	3	3	1
Romania	1	1	3	4	1
Slovakia	1	4	4	3	2
Slovenia	1	2	3	3	3
Spain	1	1	3	2	1
Sweden	1	2	3	1	1

Notes: The table shows the responses given to the following question: To what extent are each of the following involved in actions to integrate people with disabilities into the open labour market in your country? 1 = to a great extent; 2 = to some extent; 3 = very little; 4 = not at all. NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Source: Authors' own analyses, based on responses from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Cyprus is the only country where Eurofound's national correspondent indicated that the PES is involved only to some extent in the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market. This might be explained by the fact that the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is responsible for the implementation of the Law on the Recruitment of

Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector (Special Provisions) of 2009 (which is the basis of assessment for fulfilling the quota obligation), while the PES provides advice to those in mainstream employment. Box 2 shows an example of where responsibilities have been reallocated from the national level to a more local level.

Box 2: Changes in the allocation of responsibilities: Example from the Netherlands

In 2015, the Netherlands shifted responsibility from central government to the municipal level for three social domain areas: the Social Support Act, the Youth Act and the Participation Act. All three areas pertain to the integration of people with disabilities in the (open) labour market. An evaluation by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) concluded that the expected increase in labour participation did not materialise (Kromhout et al, 2020). Furthermore, although job opportunities for young people with a disability who can work increased, their income position deteriorated and they were often given only temporary work. Based on this evaluation, the SCP recommends closer cooperation between the central government and the ministries responsible for the three social domains. The authors also noted that the social domain is a complex system for many of the parties involved (see also Chapter 3).

The involvement of civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is key in terms of subcontracting the public provision of disability employment training and support services (as well as running EU-funded projects in this area) and for information provision and advocacy. The national correspondents pointed to the significant participation of NGOs and civil society organisations in almost all Member States. In Ireland, for instance, more than 10 groups representing different types of disabilities are involved in advocacy, raising awareness and enabling people with disabilities to obtain and stay in employment. Slovenia is the only country where the involvement of NGOs and civil society organisations is more limited. More consideration is needed of the strengthened role that these actors could play in service provision and the monitoring of employment policy (European Commission, 2018).

The review by the national correspondents shows that social partners – the trade unions and employer organisations, at both national and workplace levels – also help to foster the employment of people with disabilities, but to a lesser extent than other stakeholders. Their engagement with disability focuses mainly on ensuring better application of existing legislation and labour rights, designing policy and new legislation proposals, ensuring better employment protection through collective bargaining and agreements and negotiations with employers, and supporting good working conditions (European Commission, 2018). The extent to which the social partners are involved at policy level in the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market varies between countries. Their participation in decision-making processes is affected by the industrial relations and policymaking structures that exist in each country. Similarly, their impact can vary, depending on the political agendas in place and the priorities of trade unions and employer organisations (Eurofound, 2020a).

Barriers to the labour market integration of people with disabilities

The integration of people with disabilities into the world of work is a dynamic process that involves interactions between organisational (demand side), personal (supply side) and contextual/institutional factors and characteristics. The manifestations of these factors and characteristics differ significantly, depending on the specific individual, employer/workplace and context of the country under consideration. Moreover, these elements change over time. An example is the composition of the workforce, where typically a small number of young people with disabilities enter the labour market and a large number of workers acquire a disability during their career. These evolutions have inevitable consequences for the interactions between disability and work.

Despite legislation and initiatives promoting diversity in the workplace, and the policy developments described in this chapter, people with disabilities still have fewer opportunities to enter into, remain in or return to employment than other people (Vornholt et al, 2018; Bonaccio et al, 2019). Identifying the institutional, economic and social determinants driving low employment rates and the limited participation of people with disabilities in the labour market is fundamental to support the implementation of well-informed policy responses (ILO and OECD, 2018; Vornholt et al, 2018; Bonaccio et al, 2019; Giermanowska et al, 2020).

An overview of the most common challenges is presented in the following sections.

At the level of the employing organisation

A Special Eurobarometer on discrimination in the EU (European Commission, 2019a) showed that 52% of Europeans with disabilities felt discriminated against in the previous 12 months. The engagement with and openness to diversity of employers and their positive attitudes towards people with disabilities are fundamental for their integration into the workplace (ILO and OECD, 2018). At an organisational level – on the demand side – key barriers relate to several factors, including:

- a lack of awareness of the composition of the workforce, in quantitative and qualitative terms
- the adoption of approaches based on compliance rather than there being a genuinely inclusive organisational culture and work ethic
- unfavourable personnel practices, work schedules, intensity and pressure
- a lack of or a limited health and safety policy
- discrimination from colleagues towards people with disabilities
- ineffective communication between jobseekers and employers
- resource constraints, such as a lack of resources to provide support to people with disabilities in the workplace, which may hinder their ability to remain in an organisation for an extended period
- capacity constraints, such as a lack of relevant training provision to support effective career development interventions for people with disabilities

The drivers of these barriers mainly consist of negative stereotypical beliefs, preconceptions and stigma from both employers and co-workers. These factors can be identified throughout the whole work cycle – from recruitment to performance management (Shaw et al, 2014; Jones, 2016; ILO and OECD, 2018; Vornholt et al, 2018; Bonaccio et al, 2019; Dispenza, 2019; Strindlund et al, 2019):

- Recruitment processes and employee selection: non-encouraging hiring practices and instruments, in terms of both physical accessibility and non-inclusive messages; preconceptions related to the (lack of) competence, work experience and personal characteristics required to perform certain tasks; and employers' perceptions of the difficulties of assessing the abilities and potential of candidates with a disability. Moreover, multiple discrimination exists based on the type of disability and the characteristics of the person with a disability (for instance, mental illness and gender, hearing impairments and age).

- Accommodation: apprehension about the costs of accommodating people with disabilities (including the costs and time required for training) and lack of awareness of the real accommodation costs; denial of the need for accommodation actions deriving from a misunderstanding and distrust of disabilities and lack of awareness of related needs; and lack of information on how to accommodate people with disabilities.
- Social context and integration at work: concerns related to organisational characteristics and interpersonal relationships at work, for instance the possible impact of people with disabilities on their co-workers and supervisors. This may relate to disruption of the functioning of work teams or fear of unfair work redistribution to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, resulting in an increase in job difficulty or higher workload. Another aspect is 'aesthetic anxiety' related to a possible decrease in the attractiveness of a company in the eyes of clients because of the presence of people with disabilities in the workforce.
- Performance management: stereotypes deriving from prejudice or imperfect information relating to the perception that people with disabilities are less productive, slow down work and show higher levels of absenteeism, lateness and dependence and lower levels of motivation than their counterparts without disabilities. Additional concerns are linked to the occupational health and safety behaviour of workers with disabilities, the uncertainty around how to manage discipline and work performance assessments, and the disclosure of health and disability information.

At individual level

On the supply side, the above barriers can discourage people with disabilities from entering or remaining in the labour market or from undertaking vocational or higher education. These obstacles can place an extra burden on them when it comes to proving and demonstrating their skills and performance.

In addition, they can affect people's choices regarding the disclosure of their disability, because of the fear of discrimination or of negative repercussions on their careers. Disability disclosure has mixed consequences for individuals. It can negatively affect the chances of being called for an interview and can be linked to isolation and rejection. Fearing the above, people with disabilities may refrain from requesting accommodation, which may result in absenteeism (frequent absence from work) and presenteeism (working despite being sick).

Moreover, the nature of a disability can be a constraining factor for employment, with particularly negative effects associated with mental disabilities. All of the above can be magnified by the biased perceptions of people with disabilities, for instance, fearing and anticipating a level of stigmatisation that is higher than the level of stigmatisation that they actually suffer (ILO and OECD, 2018; Dispenza, 2019).

Contextual and institutional factors

Contextual factors (social, legal, institutional and economic) also play a role. People with disabilities can be exposed to stigma, discrimination and adverse societal attitudes. These can manifest themselves in their daily lives as ableism – a cultural and systemic preference in society for a set of physical, cognitive and sensory abilities, and the consideration of people with differing abilities as impaired – and disablism – prejudices and negative attitudes that result in social exclusion and the oppression of people with disabilities. A legal setting that does not include ambitious anti-discrimination laws, segregation and labour law regulations and legal mechanisms to implement international regulations at a national level might lack the capacity to counteract stereotypes and discrimination (Giermanowska et al, 2020).

Access to basic services is an additional obstacle. Access to mainstream education is an issue in many countries, and especially for those with severe disabilities acquired in early life. Moreover, the education and vocational training offered often do not meet the needs of people with disabilities, nor are they necessarily relevant or market oriented. Additional barriers are a lack of relevant or flexible provision of social services in the fields of professional and social rehabilitation, healthcare and social assistance and support for independent living. Difficulties related to public transport services for commuting between home and work should also be considered, and they typically affect rural areas more intensively. This is still not being

adequately addressed by the use of alternative and adequate forms of work such as teleworking (ILO and OECD, 2018) – something even more urgent in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Demographic developments and the ageing population put additional pressures on the provision of social support, and different groups may find themselves in competition to access such support. Older people, people with chronic diseases and people with disabilities are examples of potentially overlapping/competing groups, considering that workers over the age of 50 are more than twice as likely to have a chronic illness as those under the age of 35 (Eurofound, 2019).

Overall, the functioning and efficiency of institutional and policy settings are fundamental for the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market. Key obstacles are bureaucratic difficulties, fragmentation and lack of collaborative partnerships with regard to public support, services and funding; limited monitoring of policy implementation; limited accessibility of websites and online tools; limited training resources for employers; and the adoption of pan-disability approaches, preventing specialist support from going to those with acute needs or the inclusion of only some people with disabilities in public support services (Shaw et al, 2014; Vornholt et al, 2018). At a macro level, this is influenced by the economic cycle, the level of economic development of a territory and the availability of resources.

On the other hand, certain policy interventions may discourage the labour market integration of people with disabilities, with an example being generous disability benefits and their potentially negative effects on the labour market attachment of their recipients. This has been observed more closely over the past few years and recent reforms have introduced strategies to encourage reengagement with work, as well as more restrictive eligibility criteria (Jones, 2016).

2 Comparative overview of policy measures in Member States

The shift towards a social model of disability and a human rights approach is reflected in the types of public support provided to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy their rights, on an equal basis with others, to access, remain in and return to the labour market. To shed light on the key approaches adopted in Europe, Eurofound collected evidence on available measures offered to people with disabilities in all Member States to support their right to work and ensure fair labour market outcomes, as a key step to enable them to fully enjoy their right to make a living.

Overview of policy measures

With the support of the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, Eurofound collected 154 examples of policy measures across all EU Member States.⁸ This included actions promoted by governments, public authorities/agencies, the social partners and other business/employer organisations. Measures fully organised and funded by employers or NGOs and civil society organisations were excluded. To select measures, the correspondents used the definition of disability in Article 1 of the UNCRPD. The population covered was people with disabilities aged 15–64 years.

This explorative exercise covered a variety of intervention types – both demand- and supply-side measures alongside integrated and coordinated services. It focused on recent interventions for which some assessments and evaluation evidence are available. The different intervention types covered also included supported employment (assisting people with disabilities to access employment opportunities and achieve economic independence and social inclusivity) and measures supporting transitions from sheltered employment or education to the open labour market, but not sheltered employment (supporting individuals who are viewed as being unable to work in a competitive employment setting) or purely educational measures.

As displayed in Figure 2, the 154 policy measures can be categorised into four key groups:

- support for job creation (labour supply and demand): 44 measures (29%)
- support for individuals with disabilities (employees, jobseekers) (supply side): 54 measures (35%)
- support for employing organisations (demand side): 33 measures (21%)
- support for the institutional environment (context): 23 measures (15%)

There is a high concentration of measures in certain categories, with the most common ones being workplace adaptations and assistance; all-encompassing individual support and bundles of measures; incentives for employers; matching services and placements; and quotas. This analysis inevitably mirrors the availability of information: research and assessments are available for measures that have been established for longer, that are more common or that are required by law at a national level. The identification of other types of measures, although more infrequent, provides a richer overview of existing approaches.

Table 3 (p. 17) displays the distribution of the collected measures by clusters of countries and policies (for a definition of the clusters, see Eurofound, 2015).

The countries are grouped as follows:

- Continental Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands
- Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
- Mediterranean countries: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain
- Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Sweden
- Liberal welfare states: Ireland, UK

⁸ Including five measures from the UK, which are not analysed further in this report.

Figure 2: Policy measures by key type



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Given the search methodology used to identify measures, these characteristics may be specific to this particular sample and caution is required when extrapolating more generally.

While job creation and employee support measures are well distributed throughout all country clusters, a less even distribution is observed for policies at the organisational and institutional levels. Support for employing organisations seems to receive higher policy attention in Nordic countries and liberal welfare states. Policies strengthening the institutional framework are adopted mainly in Mediterranean countries, continental Europe and Nordic countries; such policies are almost entirely absent in eastern Europe and liberal welfare states.

In terms of the distribution within each country cluster, continental Europe displays a rather balanced focus across policy types, with all countries providing support in all dimensions (with the exception of Luxembourg, where interventions focus mainly on support for individuals and employing organisations). This is similar to the situation in Nordic and Mediterranean countries, although the latter seem to have a stronger policy focus at the levels of job creation and support for labour supply. Liberal welfare states seem to provide support mainly at the level of the employing organisation. In eastern Europe, policy efforts are strongly focused around job creation and support for labour supply, while support at the organisational level is limited and support at institutional level is almost entirely absent.

Table 3: Distribution of policies by country and cluster, EU27 and the UK

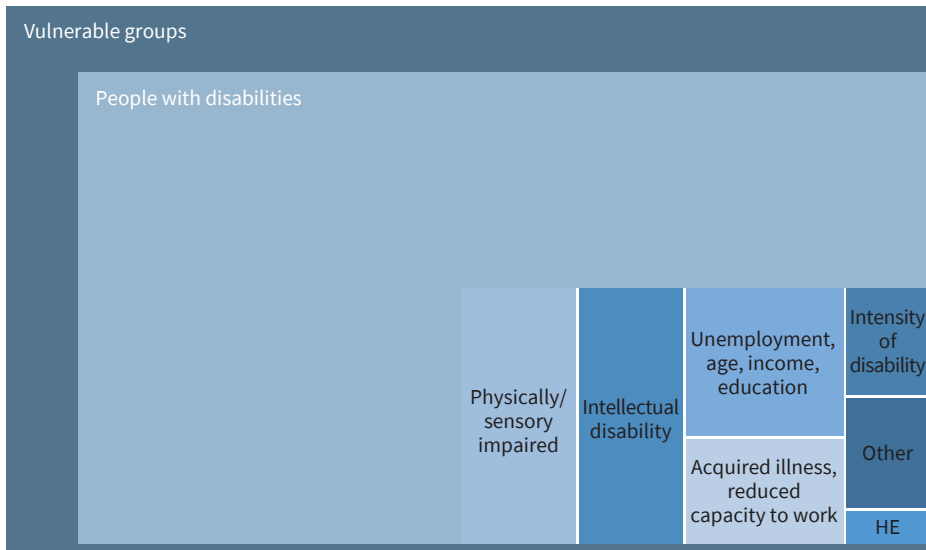
Country clusters	Country	Job creation	Employee/ jobseeker level	Organisational level	Institutional level	Total
Continental Europe	Austria	2	1	1	1	5
	Belgium	1	1	1	3	6
	France	2	1	1	1	5
	Germany	1	2	2	1	6
	Luxembourg	1	4	2		7
	Netherlands	1	2	1	2	6
Eastern Europe	Bulgaria	1	3	1		5
	Croatia	2	3	1		6
	Czechia	1	2		2	5
	Estonia		5			5
	Hungary	1	1	2	1	5
	Latvia	2	3	2		7
	Lithuania	3	2			5
	Poland		4	1		5
	Romania	1		1	1	3
	Slovakia	4	1	1		6
	Slovenia	3	3			6
	Mediterranean countries	Cyprus	2	2		1
Greece		3	1	1	1	6
Italy		3		1	1	5
Malta		3	2		1	6
Portugal			2	2	1	5
Spain		1	2		2	5
Nordic countries	Denmark	1	2		2	5
	Finland	2	1	2		5
	Sweden	1	2	4	1	8
Liberal welfare states	Ireland	1		4	1	6
	United Kingdom	1	2	2		5
	Total	44	54	33	23	154

Source: Authors' own calculations, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Of the 154 policy measures, three-quarters address a combination of work entry, job retention and return to the labour market. Entry to work is the aspect most frequently covered, followed by labour market return. Job retention is covered less often, although early exit from the labour force is frequently identified as a key disability challenge (lack of retention of workers acquiring an impairment during their working lives and the need to focus on the sickness absence phase) (OECD, 2010). Job retention is a particularly complicated goal to achieve, given its sustainability perspective, which relates to people not only entering employment, but also securing their jobs through, for instance, permanent contracts.

In almost half of cases, the measures cover both labour market demand and supply, mainly consisting of workplace adaptations and assistance, matching services and quota systems. Another 35% of the measures specifically target labour supply (employees/jobseekers with disabilities), consisting mainly of all-encompassing interventions, adaptations and assistance; they also support entrepreneurship, self-employment and vocational rehabilitation. A further 17% of the interventions target labour demand (employing organisations) exclusively; these mostly relate to incentives for employers and, to a lesser extent, support for adaptations. A small proportion of the measures target other actors.

Figure 3: Measures by key beneficiaries



Note: HE = higher education.

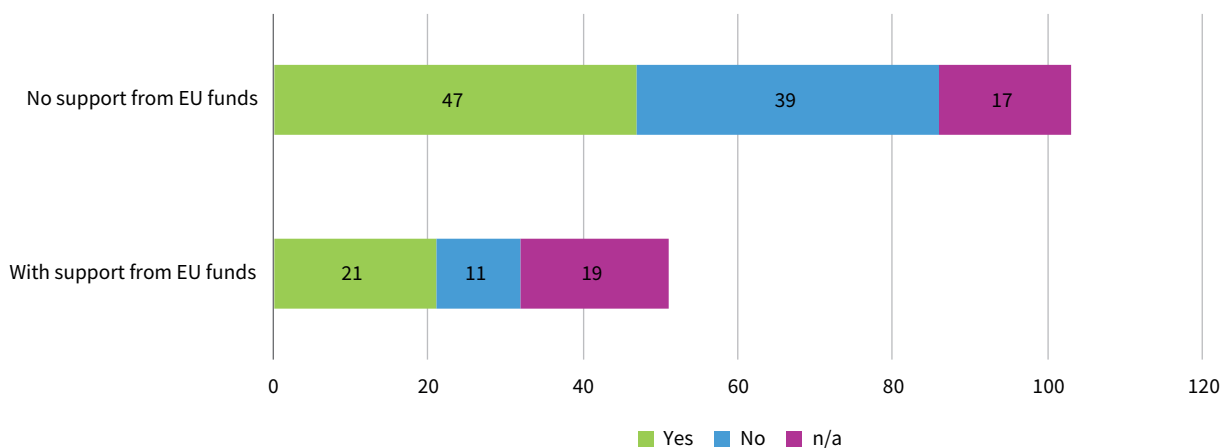
Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Member States have been progressively integrating a disability perspective in their policies, while combining this with additional actions providing solutions for the specific needs of selected subgroups. The measures identified show a good mix of targeting strategies, with more than half focusing specifically on people with disabilities (with no further specifications or criteria). Less than one-quarter target particular subgroups of people with disabilities, mainly defined by disability type and, less frequently, by the intensity of the impairment, age, gender and/or employment status (Figure 3). Only one-fifth of measures address the broad

group of vulnerable people. In this case, the statistics need to be interpreted with caution as they have been influenced by the approach used to identify the measures, with those targeting people with disabilities given priority. The presence of one-fifth of measures targeting a broader population – despite the focused search strategy – may indicate a trend towards more universal responses that mainstream disability.

Around two-thirds of the measures received support from European funds. Overall, some form of evaluation/assessment evidence was available for fewer than half of the measures (Figure 4, Box 3).

Figure 4: Measures assessed/evaluated by presence or absence of support from EU funds



Note: n/a = not available.

Source: Authors' own calculations, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Box 3: Evaluation evidence used for the analysis of the measures

The analysis conducted in this study summarises information obtained from diverse sources and using different methodologies. These range from monitoring documents, project reports and informal assessments to structured evaluations based on qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches. This confirms that a standard evaluation practice in the field of employment support for people with disabilities is not yet broadly established. Even when evaluations are conducted, methodologies are applied that differ greatly when it comes to approaches, robustness and strength of evidence.

The review was intended to provide an as exhaustive as possible understanding of the set of interventions in place and their effectiveness. A framework was used to compare and integrate different types of information within a common logic. It was inspired by realist evaluation techniques, with key areas of focus being the mechanisms, contexts and outcome patterns of the policy measures – to understand what works, for whom and in what circumstances (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, 2004).

- Context refers to external conditions that guide the selection of policy measures, facilitate or hinder their mechanisms of action and influence the scope of their impact.
- Mechanisms are ways in which a measure's components generate change through the reactions of beneficiaries. Disentangling these mechanisms helps to explain how policy actions bring about outcomes within given contexts. Mechanisms are often interrelated and influenced by specific contexts. Some might also be triggered unintentionally and lead to undesired outcomes.
- Outcomes are effects produced by causal mechanisms, triggered by policy measures within given contexts. Key aspects covered for each measure (subject to the availability of information) include comparison between the objectives and the outcomes; analysis of the success of targeting and take-up; the number and characteristics of beneficiaries; strengths and weaknesses of the measure; and preconditions that should be in place to allow for transferability to other countries. Additional aspects of interest relate to the type of employment created (self-employment or employment; permanent or fixed-term; full-time or part-time); duration of employment in the (new) job; match between the beneficiary's profile and the new job (for example, skills, occupation, position, type of contract); quality of the new job compared with the previous job, if any (related to employment and working conditions); wage level of the beneficiary in the new job (compared with that of the previous job); additionality (net effect of the policy measure; difference between actual changes and the counterfactual); unintended outcomes, such as displacement/substitution or deadweight effects; and satisfaction of the beneficiary with the services received. The evidence available on the above points varied greatly across the measures.

In each type of policy intervention, the review of the evaluation evidence according to these dimensions facilitated the identification of the most common mechanisms enacted, the key enabling and hindering factors and the main outcomes typically achieved.

These considerations were then integrated and validated with the findings from expert consultations and existing research on this subject.

A thorough assessment of the strength of the evidence was not carried out in this study. This would be a useful exercise that could provide further evidence to identify recommendations related to the need for a more solid evaluation culture and a more extended evaluation practice for policies related to employment support for people with disabilities.

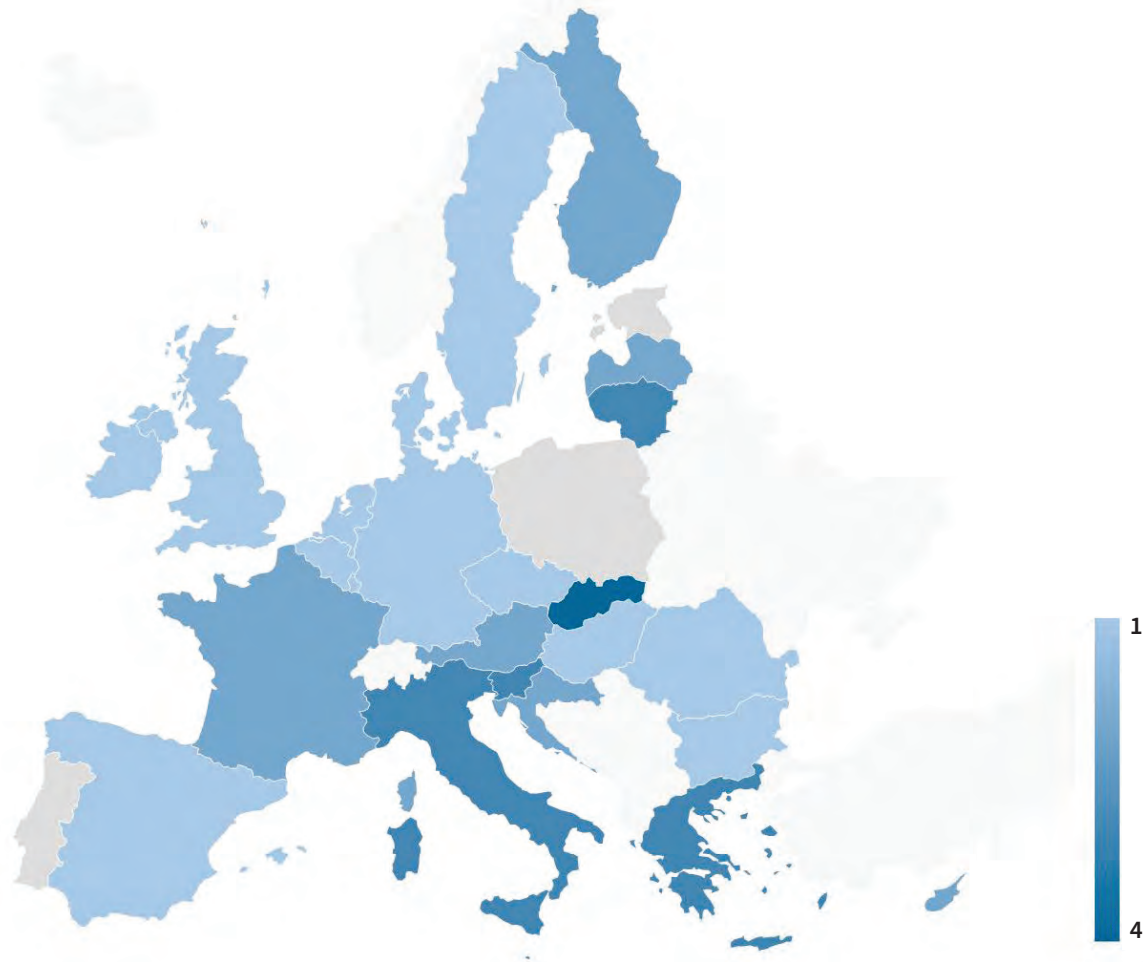
The following sections provide an overview of the four groups of measures, describing each type of measure and focusing on their aims, outcomes, mechanisms enacted and strengths and weaknesses.

Support for job creation

The Network of Eurofound Correspondents identified 44 measures that aim to have a direct impact on job creation for people with disabilities by generating better hiring opportunities or supporting self-employment and

entrepreneurship. These focus mainly on entry to private and public sector employment and, to a more limited extent, retention in such employment. This is stimulated by actions such as providing incentives to employers (15 measures), implementing quota systems (14), providing support for entrepreneurship and self-employment (7), setting up social enterprises (6) and implementing public procurement and public works (2). These measures were observed to be concentrated in countries in the eastern and Mediterranean country clusters (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of policy measures identified supporting job creation by country



Note: Not representative of all of the measures available in the different countries.
Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Incentives for employers

Incentives for employers operating in the private sector aim to enhance the hiring of people with disabilities and to avoid discouraging employers because of stronger job retention obligations. They provide employers with some form of financial gain to compensate for a perceived or actual increase in financial costs that may arise when employing people with disabilities. Working with an employee for a certain period at a lower cost provides the employer with the time and opportunity to assess their suitability. This is intended to eliminate barriers related to stereotypes and uncertainty about workplace abilities (Barr et al, 2019).

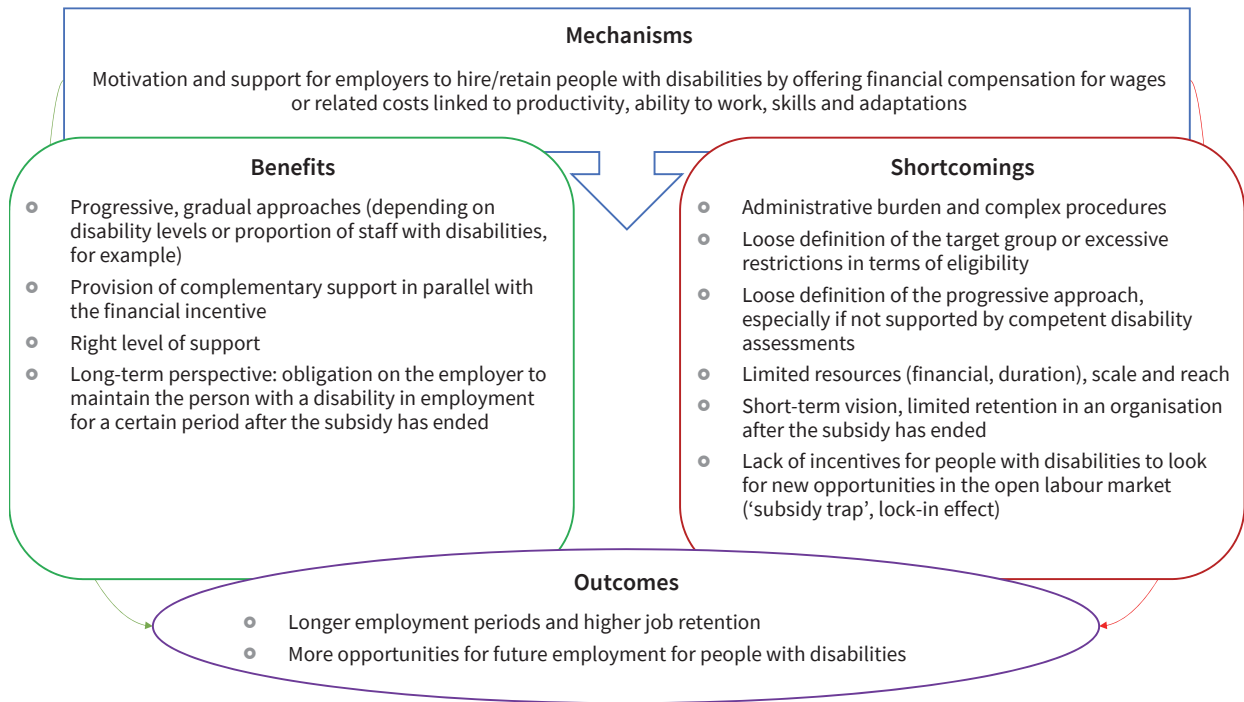
Incentives mainly consist of wage subsidies, cost coverage and rebates for social security contributions. Financial support typically focuses on enabling skills development, compensation for lower productivity, and retention. In more integrated measures, the support tends to be combined with flexible work arrangements and workplace adaptations and assistance.

The examples identified address vulnerable groups and people with disabilities in general. Only occasionally do they target people with a particular type of disability or level of incapacity. Incentives tend to be available for a period that rarely exceeds three years. Their amount and duration can be modulated depending on the proportion of people with disabilities working in a company, the intensity of disability or the type of establishment (in some cases eligibility is limited to companies registered as social enterprises).

The amount of support plays an important role in the effectiveness of incentives: if too low, the incentivising effect is not sufficiently strong for employers to hire people with disabilities, but if too generous it can result in segregation in the labour market, whereby people with disabilities are not working in a competitive employment setting. Even in successful cases, limited evidence is available on the long-term sustainability of employment outcomes (Barr et al, 2019).

Figure 6 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of incentives for employers.

Figure 6: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of incentives for employers



Source: Authors' own calculations, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Several measures implement gradual approaches to the provision of incentives (Box 4). This tends to improve the post-subsidy earnings of those hired through the measures and increase their duration in employment. In some cases, effectiveness is linked to the provision of additional support, such as training.

Difficulties in implementation can hinder effectiveness. In Croatia, these consisted of limited availability of resources (in terms of amount and duration), complex procedures and a loose definition of the target group for which the measure 'subsidies for the employment of people with disabilities' was intended.

Box 4: Progressive approaches to the provision of incentives to employers

Ireland: The 'Wage Subsidy Scheme' for people with disabilities focuses on productivity compensation for new recruits who have a disability and are working full time. Compensation is graded, and more substantial support is provided for organisations employing greater numbers of people with disabilities. An increase in the uptake of this scheme has been seen over the years.

France: The 'Employment assistance for workers with disabilities' initiative provides employers with financial compensation for the potentially lower productivity of people with disabilities. The amount offered is dependent on the severity of a person's disability, but this has been identified as creating an administrative burden.

Box 5: Support based on a long-term vision

Germany: An ‘integration’ subsidy supports the inclusion of people with disabilities through training. Once the support has ended, the employer is obliged to keep the person in employment for at least the same number of months as the subsidy was available.

Sweden: The *lönebidrag* scheme provides a wage subsidy to incentivise employers to adapt jobs and workplaces to the specific needs of employees with disabilities, so that they can remain in employment after the financial support ends. Improved personal, working and social situations for workers with disabilities, especially in the early years; an increase in employment duration; and better future opportunities in the labour market are some of the main effects. Nonetheless, people with disabilities who benefited from the support still face difficulties when they attempt to fully transition into the open labour market, appearing to be locked into a sequence of subsidised jobs.

When it comes to sustainability of outcomes, measures put different levels of responsibility on employers over the longer term (Box 5).

Quota systems

All European countries except Denmark, Finland, Latvia and Sweden have a quota system in place, whereby employers must employ a minimum percentage of people with disabilities, typically between 2% and 7%.

In Estonia, the concept of a ‘quota’ is translated into a policy objective. Quotas generally apply to the public and/or private sector; in Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia and Ireland they apply only to public bodies.

A minimum size (20 employees or more, depending on the country) is often established for private companies to be obliged to meet the quotas (Table 4).

Table 4: Overview of quota systems in EU Member States

Country	Quotas	Additional information
Austria	Yes	Employers with 25 or more employees: one person with disabilities for every 25 employees. Compensatory taxes must be paid if quotas are not reached.
Belgium	Yes	Only for the public sector.
Bulgaria	Yes	Employers with 50–99 employees: one person with permanent disabilities; more than 99 employees: 2% of current headcount.
Croatia	Yes	Employers with 20 or more employees: 3%.
Cyprus	Yes	Only for the public sector: 10% of all new vacancies.
Czechia	Yes	Employers with more than 25 employees: 4%. Employers can fulfil the mandatory quota as follows: direct contractual employment of people with disabilities; purchase of products and/or services from companies with more than 50% of employees with disabilities; or through levies to the state budget.
Denmark	No	–
Estonia	Yes*	Only for the public sector. *The concept of a ‘quota’ is translated into a policy objective to employ 1,000 people with disabilities by 2020.
Finland	No	–
France	Yes	Employers with 20 or more employees: 6%. Compensatory measure: payment of a financial contribution to specific funds.
Germany	Yes	Employers with 20 or more employees: 5% for people with severe disabilities. If a company does not fulfil the quota it must pay a penalty, called the equalisation levy.
Greece	Yes	Private sector: employers with more than 50 employees – 2% for people with disabilities and 1% for their relatives. Public sector: 10% of permanent jobs for people with at least a 50% disability rate. Other conditions apply depending on individual cases.
Hungary	Yes	Employers with more than 25 employees: 5%. If employers do not comply they must make a ‘rehabilitation contribution’.
Ireland	Yes	Only for the public sector.
Italy	Yes	Employers with 15–35 employees: 1 worker; 36–50 employees: 2 workers; more than 50 workers: 7% of the workforce.
Latvia	No	–

Country	Quotas	Additional information
Lithuania	Yes	A 5% quota is recommended for employers with 50 or more employees.
Luxembourg	Yes	Public sector: 5%. Private sector: 25–50 full-time employees: one person with disabilities on a full-time basis; 51–300 full-time employees: 2%; more than 300 full-time employees: 4%.
Malta	Yes	Employers with more than 20 employees: 2%. Employers that do not comply must pay €2,400 for each person with disabilities not employed, capped at €10,000.
Netherlands	Yes	Yes. Public sector: 1.93%.
Poland	Yes	2%.
Portugal	Yes	Employers with 75–249 employees: 1%; 250 employees or more: 2%.
Romania	Yes	Employers with 50 employees or more: 4%. Employers that do not comply must pay a gross minimum wage to the state for each person with disabilities not employed.
Slovakia	Yes	Employers with 20 or more employees: 3.2%. Alternatively, goods or services can be ordered from other companies employing people with disabilities.
Slovenia	Yes	Applies to employers with at least 20 employees.
Spain	Yes	Private sector: yes; compensatory measures also exist. Public sector: 7% of the workforce, with the condition that 2% of positions are for those with intellectual disabilities.
Sweden	No	–

Source: Authors' own interpretation, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents; in the case of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Sweden, information was complemented with statistics from the European Commission (2016a)

Other ways to fulfil the quota obligation beyond direct employment are through the payment of financial contributions, the provision of internship programmes or outsourcing to sheltered employment structures for people with disabilities (European Commission, 2018).

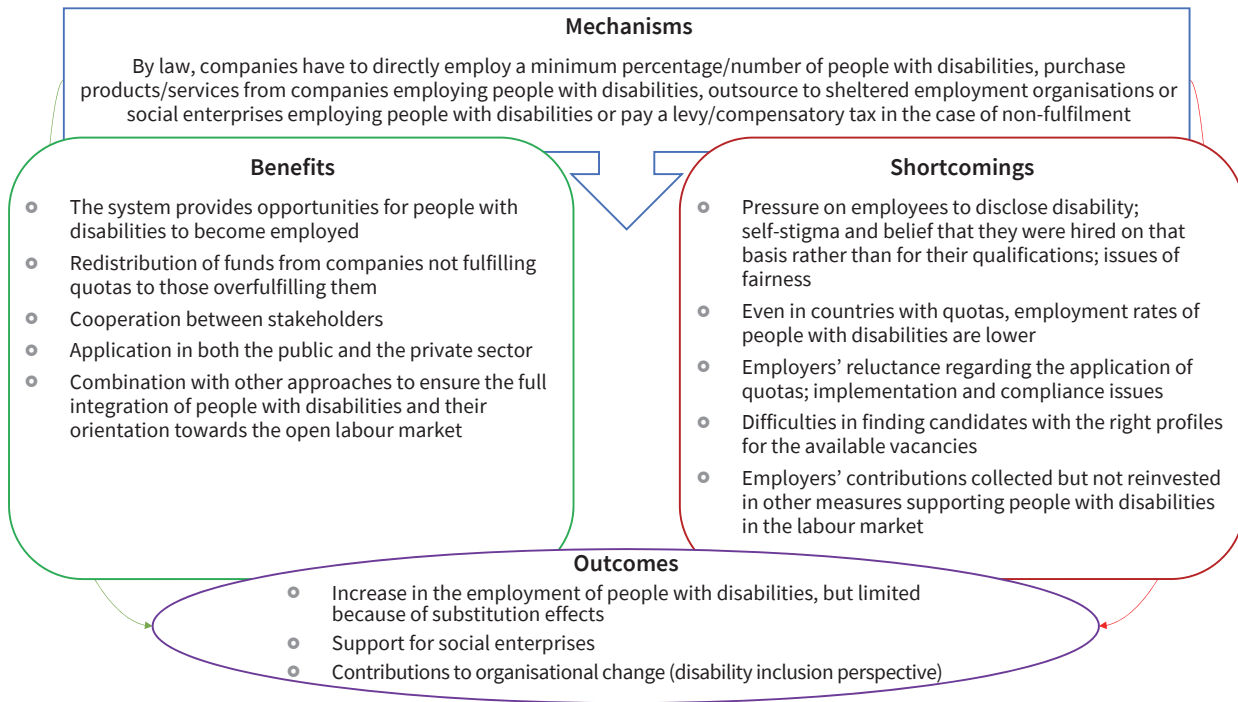
Most countries impose a fine on companies that do not fulfil quotas. Organisations must therefore either follow the rules or pay a penalty. Funds from the payment of these fines can be redistributed to organisations employing more than the minimum number of people with disabilities. Important variations exist across countries when it comes to observing the quotas and the employment effects of compensatory taxes. In Austria, an increase in taxes did not result in changes in the employment of people with disabilities. At the same

time, the flat nature of these taxes generated stronger employment effects in low-wage firms, which underlines the need for these measures to be proportionate to the size of the employing organisations (European Commission, 2016b).

Evaluation evidence suggests that the effectiveness of employment quotas is limited, leading to small employment gains, with one of the reasons for this being substitution effects (Dahl and van der Wel, 2020). Moreover, the use of quotas raises the risk of employers 'cherry picking' jobseekers who can be more easily mobilised towards the labour market, leaving those who are most in need of support behind.

Figure 7 shows both the positive and negative implications of quotas.

Figure 7: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of quota systems



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, the literature review and Vernholt (2018)

Different approaches exist in relation to quotas. For instance, the Slovakian system encourages the direct employment of people with disabilities or the purchasing of goods or services from companies employing people with disabilities. Alternatively, the employer can pay a contribution, which represents 0.9%

of the employee's total labour cost, to the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. This nonetheless is criticised for its limited emphasis on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market. Other measures propose integrated approaches to ensure the successful implementation of quotas (Box 6).

Box 6: Integrated approaches to ensure the effective implementation of quotas

Italy: The 'Social cooperatives' measure enables the implementation of quotas by providing employers with the opportunity to use the services of social cooperatives employing workers with disabilities. Meanwhile, 'Conventions for the labour market integration of people with disabilities' promote agreements between PES and individual employers to support the integration of people with disabilities, with a view to reaching the mandatory target. These agreements define the conditions related to the hiring of workers with disabilities, the tasks to be assigned to them, the specific support to be provided and the monitoring actions needed.

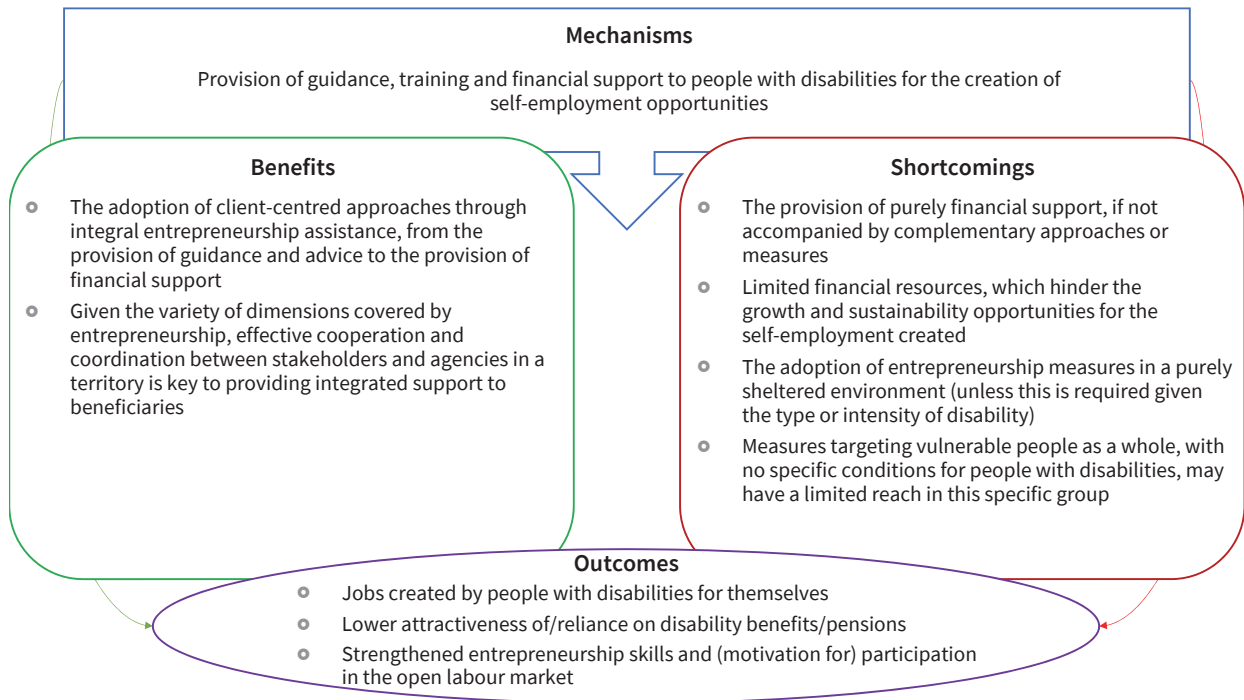
Entrepreneurship and self-employment

The UNCRPD stresses the need to promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship and starting one's own business. EU Member States typically promote these avenues for people with disabilities through financial aids (loans, subsidies, income support and funding for workplace adaptations)

and by providing people with disabilities with guidance, training and support for accessibility. Several measures disincentivise a reliance on disability benefits and pensions by making them less attractive.

Figure 8 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of entrepreneurship support.

Figure 8: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of entrepreneurship support



Source: Authors' own design, based on information provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Some measures, such as the Austrian 'Support towards economic activities' initiative, provide financial assistance only. In these cases, coordination with other services is crucial to ensure that full support is given to

beneficiaries. Most measures provide more comprehensive support for the transition of people with disabilities to the open labour market. Some adopt client-centred approaches (Box 7).

Box 7: Customised approaches to foster self-employment

Latvia: The 'Support for self-employment' initiative helps unemployed people with disabilities under the age of 30 to create their own jobs in microenterprises. It provides guidance on drafting a relevant application and (in the case of an award) a subsidy for the creation of a job or of the conditions to perform direct job functions in the created workspace. Consultations, clarity and transparency of rules for granting aid are fundamental to the effectiveness of such a service, which is client-centred and provides personalised solutions. Limited financial resources are the major shortcoming, with the need for sufficient funds especially important in the start-up phase.

Belgium: The 'Z²O entrepreneurship' programme adopts a similar customised approach. Specialised team mediators provide guidance on the existing framework and available services related to business creation and offer support for drafting a business plan or obtaining a business management certificate. Additional funding is available for people with disabilities who already have their own business and want to improve workplace practices. Good cooperation between the stakeholders has contributed to the measure's effectiveness; nonetheless, its reach has been limited because of its low visibility.

Other measures fostering entrepreneurship are much closer to the model of sheltered employment in specialised centres (such as the 'Self-employment' measure in Slovakia, or the Cypriot 'Scheme for the creation and operation of small units for

self-employment purposes of persons with disabilities'). The approach seems relevant for people with serious levels of disability, but the potential links to the open labour market are more limited.

Social enterprises

The social economy can be a source of valuable labour market support for people in vulnerable situations. It can enhance their employability in mainstream businesses by fostering sustainable job creation, social integration, upskilling and active citizenship.

Social economy organisations cover different legal forms – cooperatives, mutual societies, non-profit associations, foundations and social enterprises. Their activities mainly relate to work integration (training and inclusion of people with disabilities and unemployed people), personal social services (health, professional training and education support for elderly and vulnerable people), local development of disadvantaged areas, and actions in other thematic fields (for example, environment, sports and science).

Social enterprises support various models of work integration. Transitional employment/on-the-job training and the creation of permanent self-financed jobs are of relevance in the field of disability. In these cases, social enterprises follow market-driven models and are run as businesses that can mostly cover their costs. Employment outcomes depend on the viability of the business models. By achieving financial sustainability and scaling up, social enterprises can promote transitions to the open labour market for people with disabilities (Policy Impact Lab, 2018).

Other models of work integration address highly disadvantaged people and are closer to a sheltered employment model. They provide services of inclusion as an extension of the welfare system and create

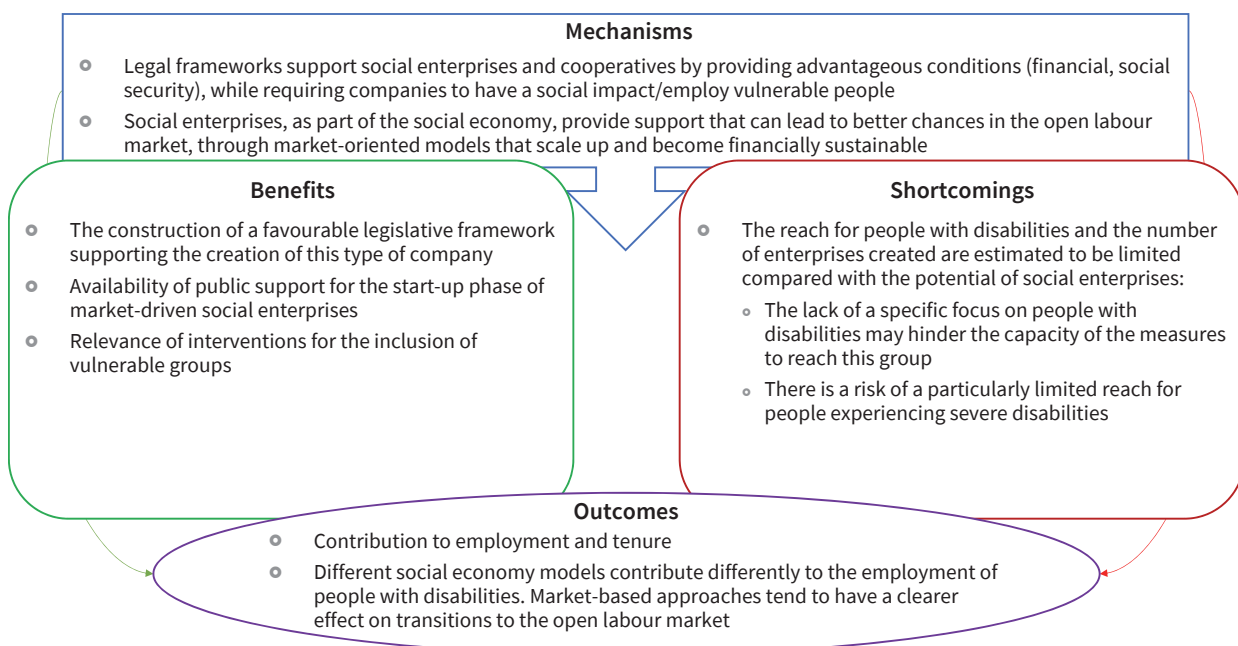
sustainable employment for people with disabilities who would otherwise be excluded from the labour market. However, they rarely contribute to promoting transitions to the open labour market. Public funds are key for sustaining work integration services (Policy Impact Lab, 2018).

Overall, evidence on the effectiveness of these measures is scarce and no universal methodology exists to estimate the cost-benefit ratio or the social return on investment of social enterprises. Assessments stress their relevance and their contribution to the labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups, but also their limited uptake and reach – more so in the case of people with severe disabilities.

Figure 9 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of social enterprises.

In Lithuania, social enterprises provide subsidies to companies that employ people with disabilities (at least 50% of employees with disabilities, working at least 80 hours per month), covering costs related to wages, adaptations, assistance and training. This has contributed to the increased employment and prolonged job tenure of people with disabilities. Similarly, in Greece, social and solidarity economy enterprises integrate people with disabilities from protected employment into the country’s wider social and economic life by supporting them in setting up social enterprises. Other countries have legal frameworks in place to support the creation and operation of social enterprises and cooperatives (Box 8).

Figure 9: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of social enterprises



Source: Authors’ own design, based on information provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Box 8: Legal frameworks supporting the social economy

Romania and Italy: The Romanian Law 219/2005 on the Social Economy and the Italian ‘Social cooperatives for the labour market participation of disadvantaged persons’ envisage support and financial and social security contributions for social enterprises, which must ensure employment opportunities for people in vulnerable situations, while conducting activities that have a social purpose.

Public procurement and public works

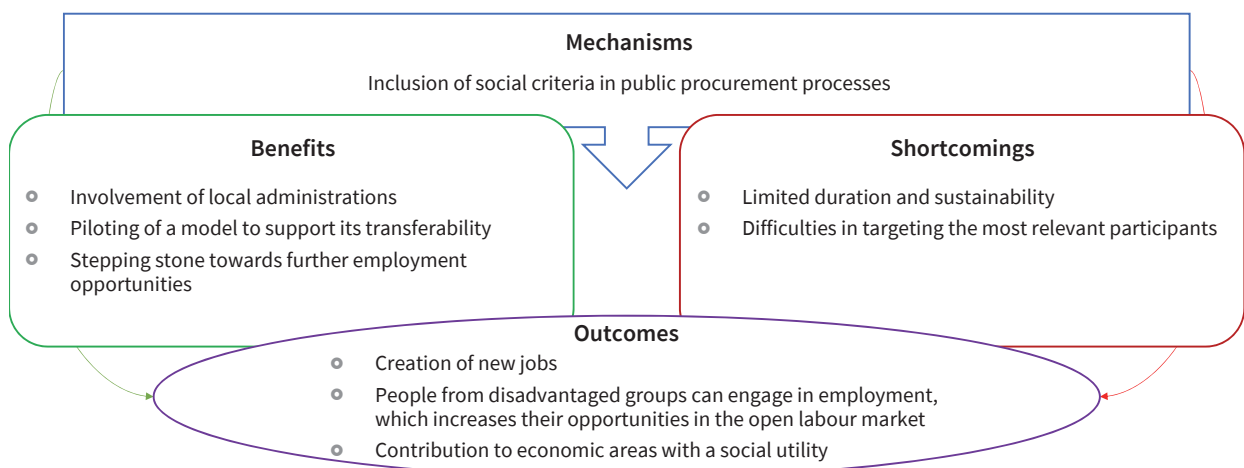
Public authorities can support the employment of people in a vulnerable position by incorporating social and employment criteria in public procurement processes, while respecting the rules relating to state aid. Key mechanisms involve partnerships with suppliers such as social enterprises, which deliver goods and services and create social benefits; clauses in contracts that oblige commercial suppliers to achieve social goals; requirements for suppliers to employ local jobseekers who are in disadvantaged situations; and

requirements for large suppliers to subcontract part of their work to social benefit providers (Dean, 2013).

Figure 10 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of public procurement and public works.

This model can work at different administrative levels. Examples are found, especially in regional and local administrations, where the socioeconomic characteristics of the territory are taken into account (Box 9).

Figure 10: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of public procurement and public works



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Box 9: Social criteria in public procurement at different administrative levels

Slovenia: The ‘Public works’ measure has a regional approach and offers training support and subsidies for employers hiring people from disadvantaged groups. The PES co-funds the wages of participants in the programme. The wages are in line with rates that are based on the regional unemployment structure and are higher for people with disabilities. The ultimate aim is to make people more active, prepared and motivated to search out permanent employment while enjoying the necessary level of social protection. Although participation in the programme is limited to a maximum of two years, it increases the probability of further employment afterwards.

Finland: Four municipalities piloted the use of social criteria in public procurement procedures through the ‘Jobs through public procurement’ scheme. The measure used employment criteria that required suppliers to employ a certain number of disadvantaged people if municipalities were buying goods or services from them. The initiative created new jobs, especially in social and healthcare services, without leading to higher prices for purchases. The main shortcomings consisted of the long, slow processes involved; the requirement for a ‘facilitator’ to negotiate between the government organisations, PES officials and competing companies involved in the procurement; challenges to find suitable candidates; and a lack of follow-up of the employment effects. Despite these reservations, the project generated positive outcomes and created a model that could be replicated in other municipalities.

Summary: Key characteristics of measures supporting job creation

Types of measures and mechanisms

- Incentives provide motivation and support for employers to hire/retain people with disabilities by offering financial compensation for wages or related costs. They are particularly effective when combined with other support, namely skills enhancement. The level of generosity needs to be well calibrated and efforts are required to ensure positive long-term employment outcomes.
- Diversity quotas that legally oblige companies to employ a minimum percentage/number of people with disabilities can ensure their employment. However, they can also pose questions regarding the selection of people to be employed, substitution effects and non-compliance.
- Entrepreneurship and self-employment support in the form of guidance, training and financial aid can provide opportunities for people with disabilities to be active in the open labour market, disincentivising their reliance on disability benefits and pensions, but such support needs to be well targeted and adequately resourced.
- Social enterprises can promote a market-oriented model for activities that, if successfully managed, can be scaled up and be financially sustainable in the open labour market. Specific targeting is required to reach people with disabilities and they need to be adequately supported by the institutional and legal framework.
- By including social criteria, public procurement and public works provide opportunities for (local) administrations to involve people with disabilities in the delivery of services, which can be a stepping stone towards further development and labour market opportunities.

Factors for success

- Provision of complementary support in parallel with the financial incentives, especially in the form of skills support and training
- Adoption of client-centred approaches
- Effective coordination between stakeholders and services
- Adoption of a sustainability perspective

Challenges

- Limited resource availability
- Administrative burden
- Ineffective targeting
- Difficulties in ensuring the sustainability of the employment outcomes

Positive outcomes

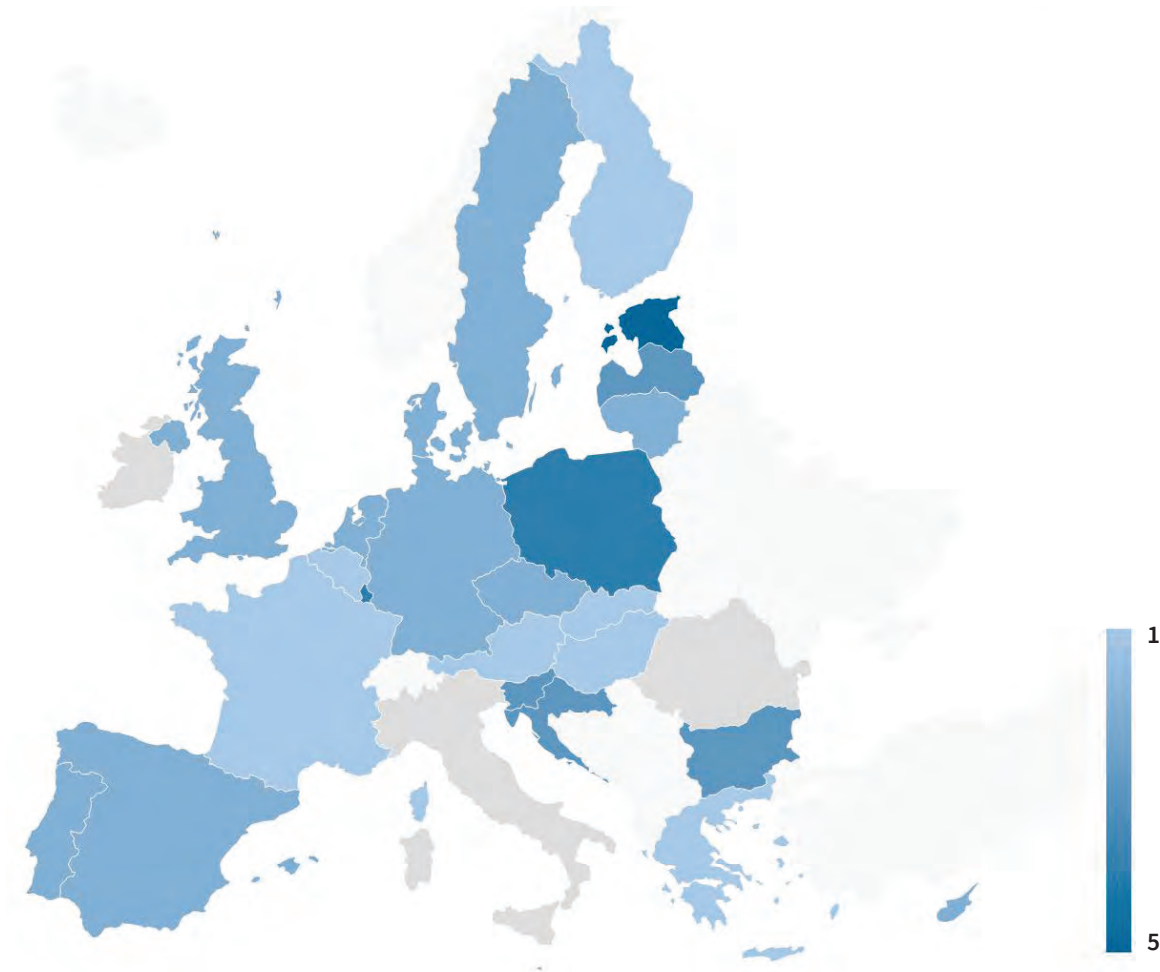
- Contribution to organisational changes through a disability inclusion perspective
- Creation of new jobs and increase in employment (rate and duration) for people with disabilities
- Better chances of future employment, strengthened entrepreneurship skills and more opportunities for self-employment
- Lower attractiveness of disability benefits and pensions
- Support for the social economy and broader social impact

Support for individuals with disabilities (employees, jobseekers)

Several measures provide support for individuals (jobseekers or employees) with disabilities to get ready for work and achieve better employability and employment outcomes, bridging the gap to the labour market.

The Network of Eurofound Correspondents identified 54 measures that aim to impact labour supply. They consist mainly of measures providing all-encompassing, individual support (17 measures), measures focused on skills (19 measures: vocational training, transition from education and skills enhancement/assessment), vocational rehabilitation (12), guidance and counselling (5) and extra benefits to people with disabilities who are in employment (1). Examples were identified in all countries except Ireland, Italy and Romania (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Number of policy measures identified supporting employees and jobseekers by country



Note: Not representative of all of the measures available in the countries.

Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Overall, these measures have a more integrated nature than those focused solely on job creation. Personalised services tend to be more effective than large, uniform interventions in supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market (European Commission, 2016b).

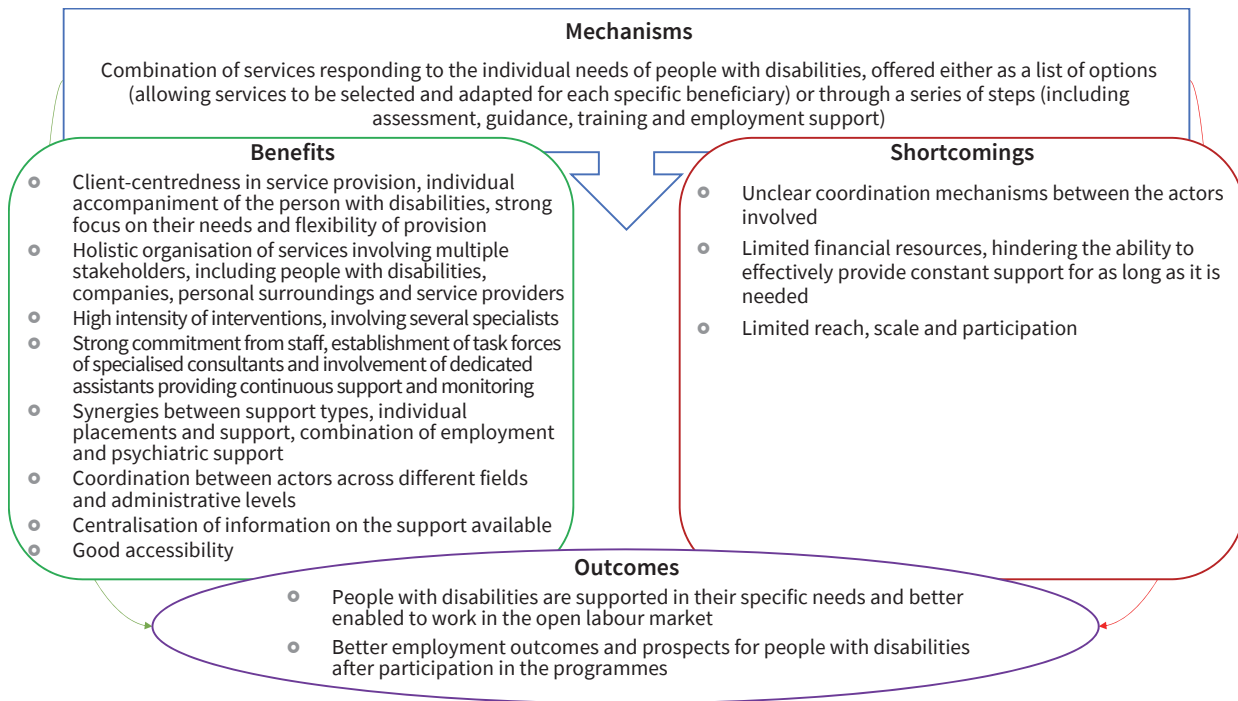
All-encompassing and individual support

Personalised and integrated support is a way to provide tailored responses to the diversity of people with disabilities and the complexity of their needs. Holistic approaches are increasingly being used. All-encompassing and individual support combines various activities – job coaching, skills enhancement, awareness-raising, matching services, workplace adaptations and assistance, and support for the transition from sheltered employment and education to the open labour market.

The individualised treatment, accompanied by a client-centred approach, allows for the needs of beneficiaries to be better met. An individual case management approach can support beneficiaries in finding their way through multiple and complex support systems (European Commission, 2018; ILO and OECD, 2018). The flexible adjustment of services, their integrated delivery through collaboration across fields, a multistakeholder approach involving different administrative levels and the availability of specially trained staff are considered necessary for the effective provision of such support. Weaknesses mainly relate to difficulties in the delivery of complex measures and inefficiencies in stakeholder cooperation.

Figure 12 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of all-encompassing and individual support.

Figure 12: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of all-encompassing and individual support



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Several measures offer job coaching, mentoring and personal support, with the coach or mentor playing a crucial role in supporting the beneficiaries (Box 10). This can involve the establishment of specialised task forces

at local level – in the Danish ‘Special measures for people with disabilities’, for instance, they consist of specialised social workers and job consultants who provide intensive support to jobseekers.

Box 10: Job coaching, mentoring and personal support

Austria: The ‘Work assistance’ measure provides a variety of consultations, information and counselling: support during job/apprenticeship searches and during the induction and training phases for new employees; clarification of occupational perspectives and alternatives; development of constructive solutions and crisis management; and clarification of perspectives on safeguarding jobs and long-term (re)integration into the labour market. Service provision involves not only beneficiaries (where consideration is given to their personal situation) and companies, but also public administrations and funding authorities. The client-centred scope and involvement of a variety of stakeholders contribute to improved outcomes for both people with disabilities and companies. Difficulties in cooperation are a key hindering factor for the effectiveness of these interventions.

The Netherlands: With its sustainability angle, the ‘Jobcoach’ measure aims to enable people with disabilities to work independently, without personal guidance. A job coach accompanies an employee with a long-term illness or disability to, or in, a job. The employee receives personalised training or an induction programme and guidance in the workplace. At the end of this journey, the employee should be able to carry out their work independently. The job coach remains available to provide support when difficulties arise. Such measures have been widely used in the (re)integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market, with satisfactory participation rates. Key shortcomings mainly consist of a lack of harmonisation in service provision, depending on the municipality, and a limited number of hours available for job coaching.

Other services consist of individual placement and support, which provide personalised interventions for people with mental disabilities through a logic of ‘job first, then support’ (Box 11). They are typically focused on eight principles: competitive employment, zero exclusion/eligibility based on client choice, attention to

client preferences, rapid job search, integration of employment services with mental health treatment, personalised benefit counselling, targeted job development and individualised long-term support (Bond et al, 2020).

Box 11: Individual placement and support

Denmark: The ‘Project inclusion’ initiative supports people with mental disabilities by providing orientation towards the open labour market, rapid placements with minimum assessment and on-the-job training, combined with psychiatric support, support for job retention and business-oriented initiatives. Job searches are led by the participant’s preferences and support is provided for as long as it is needed, including the coordination of the participant’s case across systems. The focus on the individual’s needs, the ‘job first’ approach and the provision of social and cognitive assistance contribute to the measure’s effectiveness.

Mostly pioneered in the mental health field, these approaches have expanded in scope more recently. The types of initiatives adopted in Europe for people with mental disabilities are observed to be more effective than standard vocational services (European Commission, 2016b, 2018) and particularly successful in terms of employment outcomes in the competitive labour market (Bond et al, 2020).

All-encompassing interventions and services are characterised by a high intensity of support, involving specialists from different sectors. A way of managing this complexity is through the delivery of services along pre-established steps (Box 12).

Box 12: Intense service provision through pre-established steps

Estonia: The ‘Rehabilitation programme for people with partial work ability’, which supports people with a reduced work ability and who are registered as unemployed to enter the open labour market, is divided into three main phases: preparation for working life in a rehabilitation centre; apprenticeships, skills acquisition and workplace accommodation with the support of a rehabilitation specialist; and an employment contract.

Poland: The ‘Made-to-measure skills’ scheme aims to improve the professional qualifications, employability and labour market inclusion of people with disabilities through sociopsychological support, career advice, social and professional skills and the offer of a three-month paid internship.

Another common approach is the establishment of one-stop shops that provide information on relevant services, subsidies and benefits for people with a reduced work ability (Box 13). Such initiatives often ensure satisfactory participation of various stakeholders, but concerns exist about their sustainability.

Guidance and counselling

Guidance and counselling feature in many measures and are prominent dimensions of integrated services, but some interventions provide this type of assistance exclusively in an individualised manner, for instance, on a case management basis. The support is sometimes

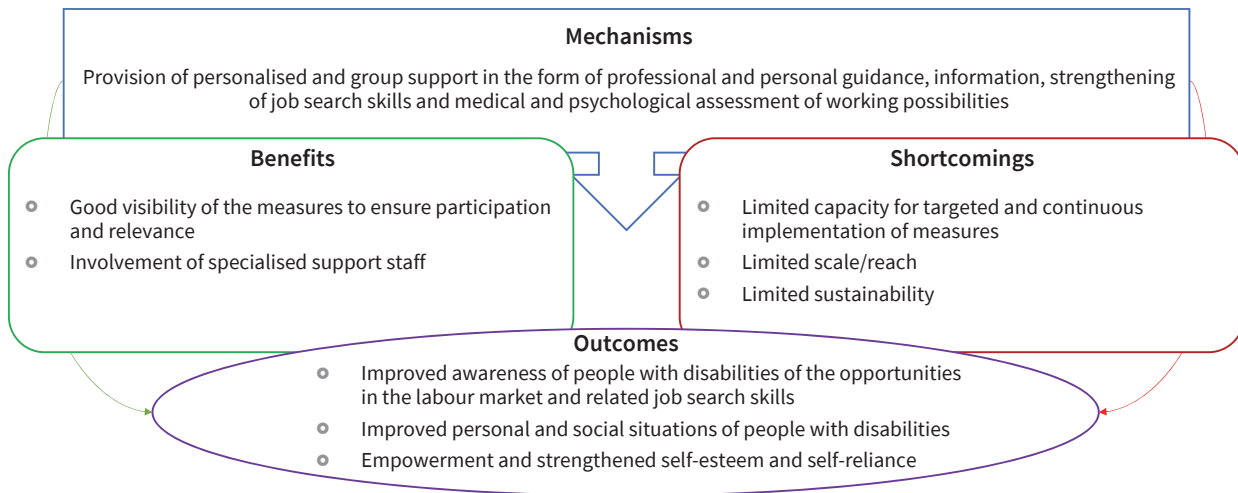
universal, targeting the general population, and sometimes specific to people with disabilities.

Positive results have been seen in terms of the job search capacity and self-esteem of people with disabilities and connections to the labour market. Limitations relate to the scale, sustainability and reach of such measures, which require the continuous, tailored follow-up of beneficiaries. Moreover, when personalised intervention is linked to specific job targets, this may induce a potential bias in the selection of participants in favour of those who are ‘easier to place’ (Barr et al, 2019).

Box 13: One-stop shop providing a range of information

Finland: The ‘Career opportunities for people with partial work ability’ initiative is an online one-stop shop. It addresses the fragmentation of available services, and targets professionals working with disadvantaged groups, people with a reduced work ability and employers. It makes the information on each service accessible, contributing to the effectiveness of the overall support system.

Figure 13: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of guidance and counselling



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Figure 13 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of guidance and counselling.

The Croatian ‘Professional counselling of unemployed people with disabilities’ and the Portuguese ‘Information, assessment and guidance to qualification and employment’ initiatives use similar approaches. They provide tailor-made, work-related information to people with disabilities to improve their knowledge, competencies and career management skills. Professional counselling is offered at individual and group levels by counsellors specialised in vocational rehabilitation and career development. In addition, the measures focus on the assessment of work ability, the improvement of job-seeking competencies adapted to different types of disabilities and the identification of the essential means and support needed for employability.

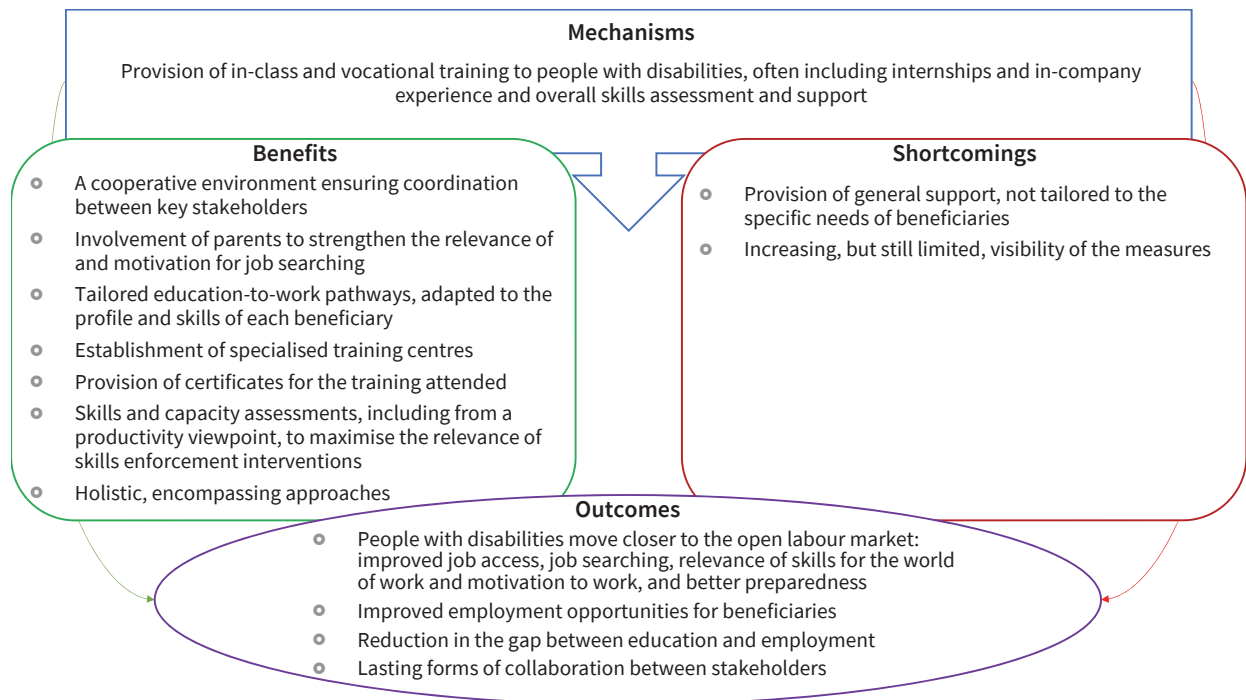
Skills enhancement, vocational training and transition from education

Vocational support and skills enhancement with a work orientation (both for searching and performing a job) are central to the labour market integration of people with disabilities. They typically consist of internships and vocational programmes, the establishment of specialised training centres and personalised training pathways. Assessing the skills of jobseekers with disabilities is also used to facilitate their professional reintegration, for instance, in combination with internship opportunities. Employers are typically interested in conducting the capacity assessment from a productivity point of view (European Commission, 2018).

Other interventions support the transition from education into employment, with highly tailored services. Overall, these measures tend to enhance the employment outcomes of participants, but in this case too, selection effects can occur (measures addressing those who are more work-ready may appear to be more effective) (Barr et al, 2019).

Figure 14 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of skills enhancement and assessment and transition from education.

Figure 14: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of skills enhancement and assessment and transition from education



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Measures addressing the development of internships and vocational programmes and pathways for people with disabilities are used to ensure opportunities for vocational practice and to strengthen the skills of participants (Box 14). They often provide certificates and diplomas on completion of the training. These

opportunities for job specialisation and better preparedness increase participants' employability, but limited visibility and insufficient opportunities for longer-term employment in the workplace where the vocational training is provided are risk factors for their effectiveness.

Box 14: Internships and vocational programmes and pathways

Croatia: The 'Experience is the best teacher' measure supports cooperation with companies to provide a first working experience for young people with disabilities. Participants acquire knowledge and practical skills, which strengthens their employability. At the same time, this programme increases general awareness of the problems facing people with disabilities in the labour market and broadens possibilities for their social integration. Sustainability has been identified as its key shortcoming.

Cyprus: The 'Scheme for the subsidisation of organisations for vocational training programmes for people with disabilities' financially supports organisations representing different groups of people with disabilities for tailored vocational education and training. This covers the remuneration of trainers, rental of training equipment and spaces, and reproduction of training material. Despite its small scale, allowing only limited effectiveness and reach, the programme has a strong focus on the relevance of the training provided.

Another approach is the establishment of specialised training centres. The Dutch 'Subsidy scheme for the training and reintegration of persons with occupational disabilities and severe educational barriers' involves specialised training institutions. They offer customised solutions based on participants' capabilities and needs, profession-oriented education

(providing diplomas and certificates) and opportunities to gain practical experience within companies. Those who complete the programme increase their chances of finding work. The Athens Vocational Training School in Greece provides theoretical and practical training for unemployed people with disabilities, alongside psychosocial and social support.

However, these types of support are sometimes criticised, as in some countries ‘training centres’ are analogous to sheltered workshops; when this is the case, there is a risk that users become stuck in such places semi-permanently or are recycled through different ‘courses’ without positive labour market outcomes.

Other interventions support the transition from education into employment, with highly tailored services. They typically target specific groups of people with disabilities – such as young people with mental and psychiatric disabilities. The effectiveness of such specialised but holistic approaches depends on good cooperation between stakeholders, the provision of constant support to all parties involved, and the adoption of individualised solutions (Box 15).

Box 15: Transition from education to work

Slovenia: The ‘Transition of young people’ measure was used to promote systematic activities to ensure the greater social inclusion of young people with special needs. This contributed to a unified supporting environment as an interface between school and the labour market. The involvement of different stakeholders and educational institutions – as well as the beneficiaries’ parents – allowed the creation of specialised teams and strengthened their capacity to support the transition of students with disabilities from education to the labour market. The project led to an increase in the motivation of people with disabilities and brought them closer to the world of work (as jobseekers, trainees or employees).

The Netherlands: Addressing a fragmented regulatory framework and involving parents were key features of an intervention called ‘De Class’, which supported young people with an acquired brain injury to move closer to the world of work through an approach covering employment, sports, lifestyle, parental involvement, training and tailor-made counselling.

Poland: The ‘Graduate’ pilot project addresses people with disabilities who are finalising their studies and about to enter the labour market, through actions that include cooperation with and financial support for key stakeholders – focusing on career paths, professional qualifications and enhancing opportunities for employment or self-employment through activation internships.

Vocational rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation is a multidisciplinary, evidence-based approach that is provided in different settings and services for working age individuals with health-related restrictions that affect their ability to work. It focuses on retention and return for those who have acquired an impairment. Its objective is to optimise work participation. Strongly integrated in nature, it can cover guidance, accommodation, support from specialised staff and the provision of certificates, and is often combined with elements from subsidised and supported employment (European Commission, 2018).

These interventions allow for a thorough follow-up of the beneficiaries and yield positive returns on investments and results, especially when activated at an early stage: better employability, decision-making and emotional well-being and a reduction in the number of employees unable to work because of health impairments. They are acquiring increasing relevance in national policies (ILO and OECD, 2018) and are becoming more integrated in service provision. In Czechia, for instance, positions for professional rehabilitation coordinators were opened at regional PES offices.

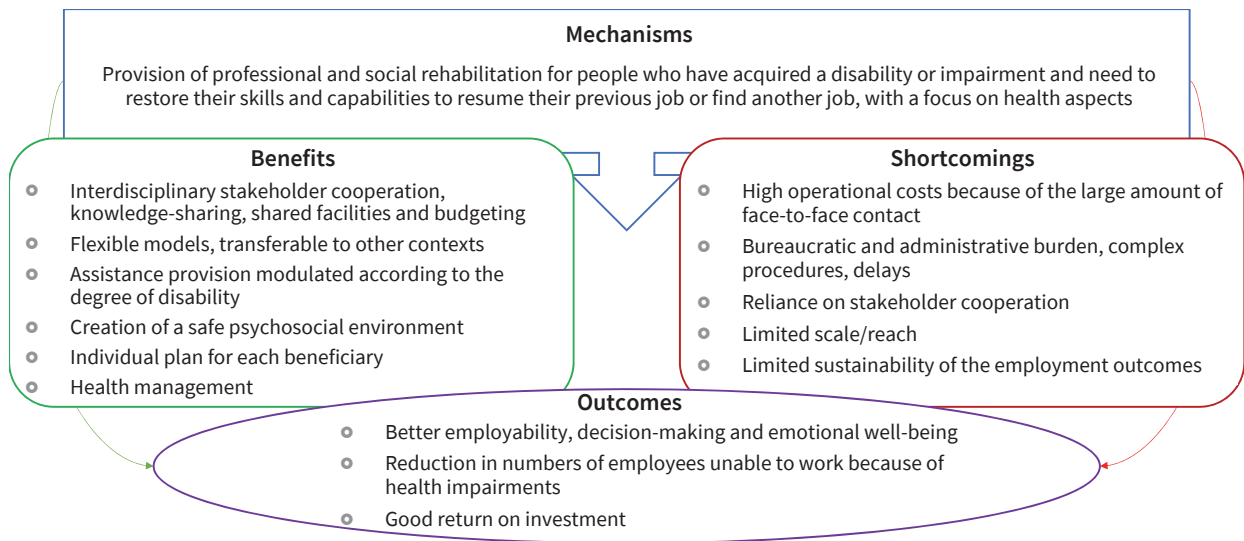
Key strengths of this type of measure relate to interdisciplinarity, cooperation and coordination (exchange of information; collaboration through a service coordinator; meetings between organisation representatives; multiprofessional working groups; partnership agreements between organisations; use of shared facilities for the common provision of services; and shared budgeting of projects), flexibility and personalisation of the service (Martimo and Takala, 2020).

Rehabilitation strategies focused on health management and medical rehabilitation, through either a preventive or a management approach, have also shown positive employment effects. By assisting participants to better manage their health condition, they reduce work-limiting effects and improve fitness to work (Barr et al, 2019).

Figure 15 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation.

Key approaches include vocational and social rehabilitation measures (Box 16), involving multidisciplinary teams to provide tailored assistance adapted to specific groups and degrees of disabilities. They combine psychological and career counselling services with functional capacity evaluation and health and physical assistance.

Figure 15: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Box 16: Vocational and social rehabilitation

Belgium: The 'Care Path Work' measure aims to increase sustainable workability by providing therapeutic treatments with work (resumption) in mind. It encompasses screening, project management, diagnostics, development, implementation, evaluation and continuous follow-up. A 'care path' is established and implemented through collaborations (between care providers, labour counsellors and awareness campaigns) and complementarity with other existing measures. The programme was designed to be transferrable to similar organisations with minor adjustments.

Slovenia: The 'Vocational rehabilitation' scheme establishes specific rehabilitation plans, including a whole set of actions: counselling and motivation, assessment of work capacity, information provision on training and employment opportunities, support to social and job-search skills, identification of the means of work necessary for employment of the person with a disability, professional assistance, continuous evaluation of the rehabilitation process, assessment of work performance, and financial support for accommodation.

Companies can also have important contributions in rehabilitation. In the German 'Company integration management' scheme, for instance, businesses are encouraged to define an individual reintegration plan for each employee who has acquired an impairment, in cooperation with the employee and the works council.

This includes an analysis of the situation of the employee and results in a package of measures to be applied.

Summary: Key characteristics of measures providing support for individuals with disabilities (employees, jobseekers)

Types of measures and mechanisms

- All-encompassing and individual support allows tailored responses to be provided to different situations experienced by people with disabilities. Services can be combined as a set of options (allowing the support to be adapted to each specific beneficiary) or as a series of steps (including assessment, guidance, training and employment support) and require sufficient human and budgetary resources.
- Guidance and counselling involve the provision of professional and personal guidance, information, strengthening of job-search skills and medical and psychological assessment of work ability, often on an individual case management basis.
- Vocational rehabilitation provides professional and social support for people who acquire a disability or impairment and need to restore their skills and capabilities to return to work. The rehabilitation strategies focus on health with a view to reducing the work-limiting effects of the disability or impairment and improving fitness to work.
- Skills enhancement and assessment and transition from education mainly consist of in-class and vocational training for people with disabilities, often including internships and in-company experience and overall skills assessment. Skills support is a fundamental aid, either used alone or embedded in other types of measures.

Factors for success

- Creation of a safe psychosocial environment
- Client-centredness in the service provision, individual support for the person with disabilities, with a strong focus on their needs, and flexibility in the provision
- Holistic organisation of highly intensive services involving multiple stakeholders and interdisciplinary cooperation across different administrative levels
- Strong commitment and specialisation of staff
- Synergies between support types: knowledge-sharing, shared facilities and budgeting
- Centralisation of the information, and visibility of and good accessibility to the support
- Focus on skills and capacity, including from a productivity viewpoint

Challenges

- Unclear coordination mechanisms between the actors involved
- Provision of general support not tailored to the specific needs of beneficiaries
- High operational costs and limited financial resources and capacity for targeted and continuous interventions
- Limited reach, scale and participation
- Bureaucratic and administrative burden, complex procedures and delays
- Limited sustainability of the employment outcomes

Positive outcomes

- Improved awareness of people with disabilities about opportunities in the labour market
- Improved personal and social situations of people with disabilities: empowerment, strengthened self-esteem and self-reliance, and improved emotional well-being
- Shorter distance to the open labour market: improved entry to employment, job-search skills, employability and preparedness, motivation to work and decision-making, and reduced work-limiting effects of health conditions
- Narrower gap between education and employment
- Lasting forms of collaboration between stakeholders

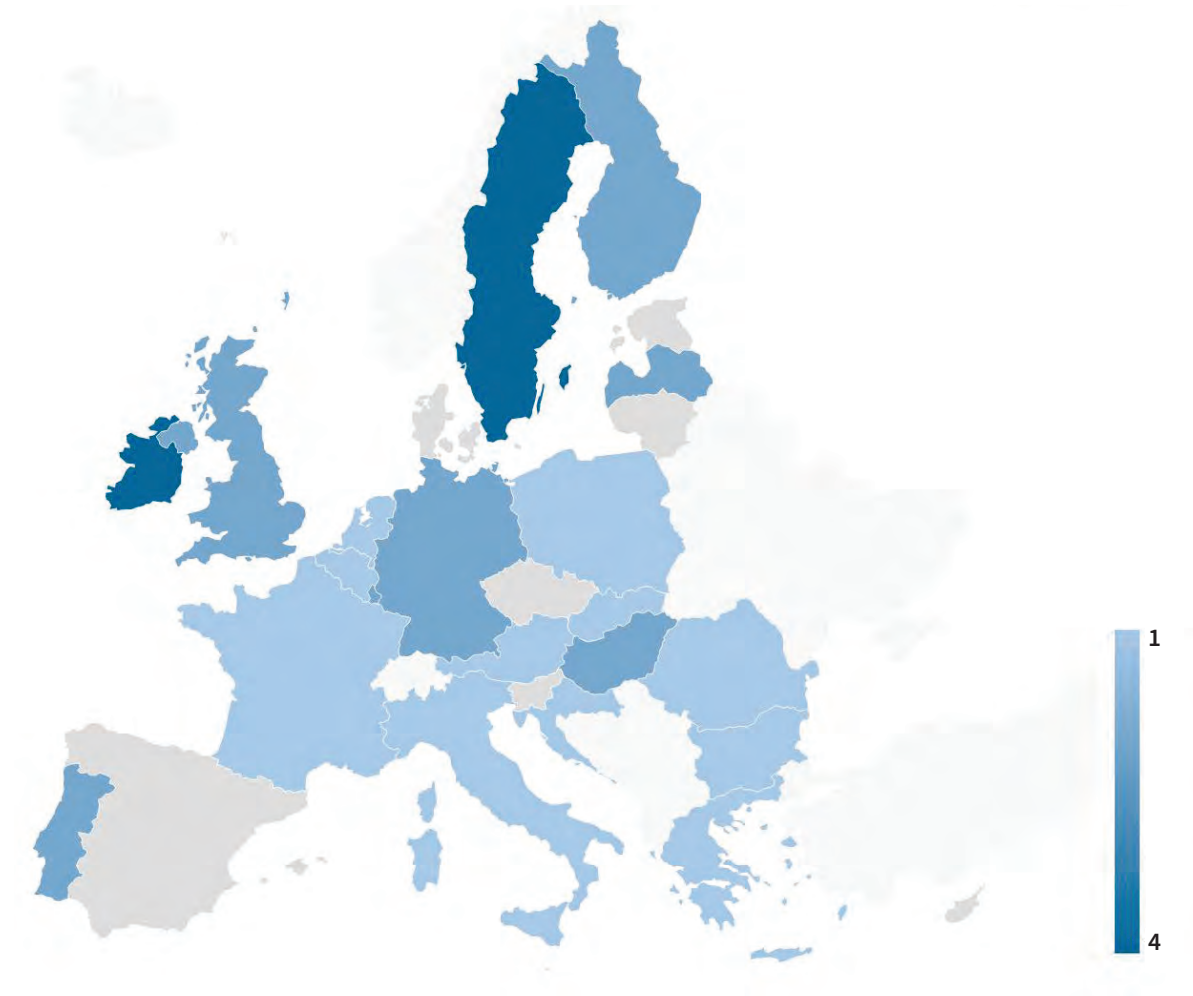
Support for employing organisations

The Network of Eurofound Correspondents identified 33 measures that aim to ensure the right conditions from a labour demand perspective, providing support to employing organisations: support for employers to ensure that assistance and workplace adaptations focused on the needs of individual workers are in place (24 measures), guidance and support for retention (5) and awareness-raising and capacity-building actions (4). Examples were identified in 20 countries (Figure 16).

Workplace adaptations and assistance

The Equality Framework Directive (Council Directive 2000/78/EC), which is also echoed in the European Pillar of Social Rights, provides for ‘reasonable accommodation’ in employment for people with disabilities. Article 5 states that employers should take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability to enter, participate and advance in employment, unless such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. This requirement is not based on health status but rather depends on the national definition of disability, the national context and legislative provisions, and the support measures available.

Figure 16: Number of policy measures identified supporting employing organisations by country



Note: Not representative of all of the measures available in the countries.

Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Workplace adaptations can be material (provision of work aids, assistants and workplace adjustments) or immaterial (working time adjustment and remote working) and range from one-off support to integrated approaches. Evidence shows that a one-off adaptation may be insufficient, with monitoring of workers' requirements resulting in the need for further accommodation in the future (Eurofound, 2019).

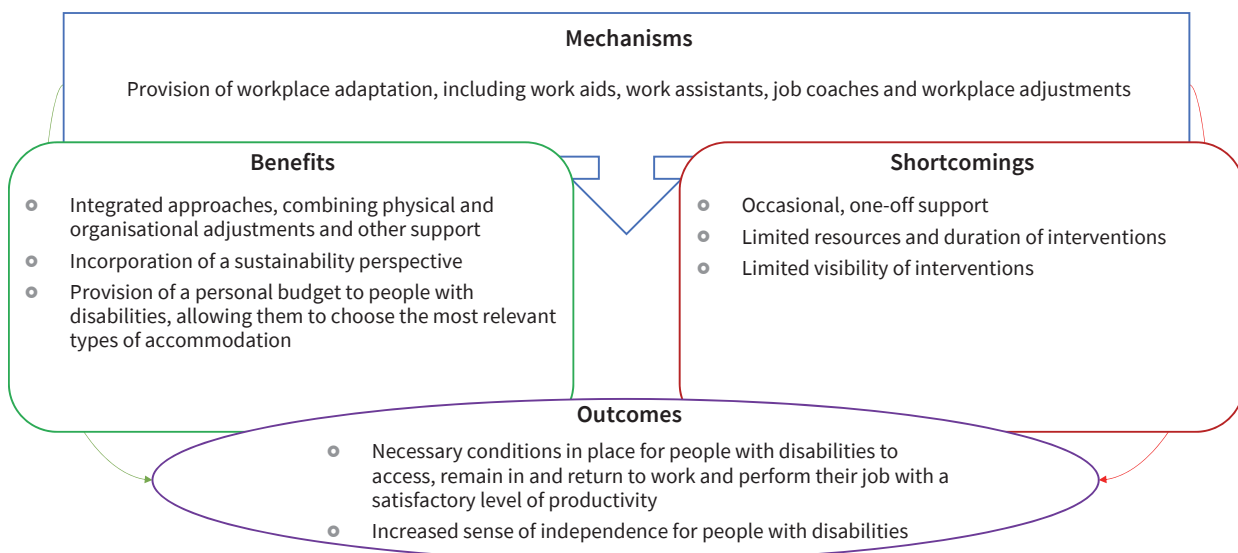
Workplace adaptations have positive impacts on job quality, work sustainability, career prospects and performance – especially when employees have flexibility in work schedules and stronger control over work demands (Barr et al, 2019). Overall, they help to ensure that the necessary conditions are in place to allow people with disabilities to work and to improve employees' performance and independence, which ultimately support career prospects and sustained

employment. The uptake of such measures is nonetheless still limited among workers with limiting health conditions.

Figure 17 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of workplace adaptations and assistance.

Adaptations commonly involve work assistance, which enables people with disabilities to access or perform their job (Box 17). Some provide limited specific support, for instance, for job interviews or in the form of interpretation services. The Irish 'Job Interview Interpreter Grant' scheme assists jobseekers who have a speech or hearing impairment in carrying out job interviews or who need support during an induction period. As a one-off intervention, its effectiveness is limited. A broader scope is likely to be more effective.

Figure 17: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of workplace adaptations and assistance



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Box 17: Work assistance and personal budget initiative

Germany: In the 'Work assistance' scheme, staff provided systematic support to employees to compensate for any disability-related functional limitations. Strict eligibility criteria ensure the relevance of the measure: employees must have a severe disability and be able to adequately perform work only with substantial support, which needs to be regular and permanent. The person with disabilities receives a personal budget to hire a work assistant, a strategy that supports employees' performance and increases their chances of securing employment. The main shortcomings relate to the restricted budget and duration of the support alongside the complex procedures, low visibility and limited sustainability of the results without continued assistance.

The 'personal budget' measure creates autonomy for people, who can organise their own benefits and services. This freedom of choice increases beneficiaries' independence and solves a bureaucratic triangle between funding agencies, beneficiaries and service providers.

Box 18: Removing physical barriers

Portugal: The ‘Workplace adjustments and removal of architectural barriers’ measure ensures workplace adaptation are made, by partially covering their costs.

Bulgaria: The ‘Accessible environment and reasonable accommodation’ contributes to the right of equal access for people with disabilities to the physical environment for living, working and relaxing. It aims to identify and remove physical obstacles to accessibility in urban areas, buildings, public service facilities and transportation, alongside the provision of information in accessible formats.

Adaptation of workplaces also consists of the removal of physical obstacles (Box 18). Other measures have a more integrated nature, involving aid that is fully

tailored and based on an assessment of each situation. This aims to completely compensate for any disability (Box 19).

Box 19: Integrated approaches to workplace adaptation

Italy: The National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL) sponsors a fund to help workers return to work after suffering an industrial accident. The support consists of workplace adaptations and retraining, such as how to use a newly adapted workstation or acquire new skills to carry out different job tasks.

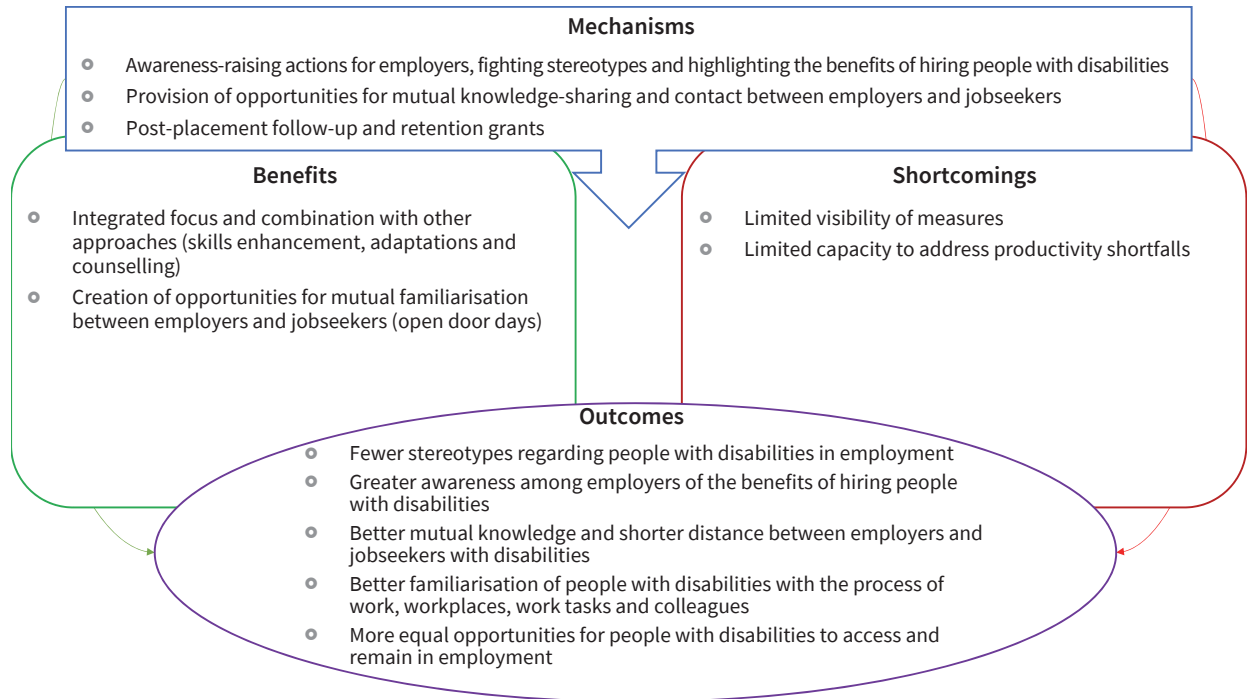
Support for retention and awareness-raising

Awareness-raising actions and measures strengthening retention respectively aim to address key barriers to employment: stereotypes and preconceptions, and the limited sustainability of the employment outcomes.

They tend to appear as part of bundles of measures, being typically combined with skills enhancement, adaptations and counselling.

Figure 18 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of retention support and awareness-raising.

Figure 18: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of retention support and awareness-raising



Source: Authors’ own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Actions raising awareness of the importance of integration into the world of work typically provide employers with information on positive practices and experiences of hiring people with disabilities, reducing discrimination, encouraging their employment and ensuring equal participation in the labour market. One example is the Croatian annual prize for the best employer of people with disabilities; with its high visibility in the mass media, it contributed to improved knowledge among the public and employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Another common approach at company level consists of increasing the proximity of employers to people with disabilities, for instance, through open days.

Raising employers' awareness is a way not only to ensure stronger engagement with regard to hiring people with disabilities, but also to help sick-listed people back into work (Box 20). It can support the quick reintegration of those who have been out of work because of an impairment, reducing the numbers of people who move from short-term into long-term sickness and preventing their disengagement and detachment from the labour market. In some countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, recent reforms have strengthened requirements for employers to engage in return to work planning. Despite their positive employment effects, the take-up of this type of measure has been limited to date (Barr et al, 2019).

Box 20: Bringing employers and jobseekers together

Latvia: The 'Open doors for persons with disability in enterprises' measure aims to integrate people with disabilities into society and employment and to counteract existing stereotypes by organising open days. Enterprises and institutions that are planning to hire people invite jobseekers with disabilities to visit. Open door days provide a space for direct meetings between employers and potential employees before establishing an official employment relationship. It also allows potential candidates to familiarise themselves with the process of work, workplaces, work tasks and colleagues.

Luxembourg: Similarly to the above, the 'Duoday' initiative aims to raise companies' awareness by welcoming a person with disabilities for one day. Volunteer employees guide the person with disabilities through the professional tasks expected. The '(Handi)Cap' Emploi' initiative organises a series of 'employment cafés' to support encounters between employers and jobseekers, creating meetings that generate real job opportunities.

Other measures specifically focus on providing support for employment retention, for instance,

through follow-up actions after a placement experience or through tailored skills support (Box 21).

Box 21: Facilitating employment retention

Portugal: The 'Post-placement follow-up' measure provides professional specialised rehabilitation for workers with disabilities and their employers, in order to retain jobs and promote career progression. The assistance ranges from technical support, including adaptation or reorganisation of job tasks, to social integration into the work environment, the development of social and personal skills and support for accessibility.

Ireland: The 'Employee Retention Grant' assists employers to retain employees who acquire a condition that impacts on their ability to carry out their job by exploring their continuing capacity to operate as a productive member of the workforce. Employers are enabled to buy in the external specialist skills and knowledge needed to develop an individualised 'written retention strategy' for an employee who acquires a disability. Funding is then provided to implement the strategy, including for retraining, job coaching or hiring an external coordinator. Although it can assist employers to enable employees with a newly acquired disability to get back to work, the measure has been criticised for not supporting productivity shortfalls and for being rarely used.

Summary: Key characteristics of measures providing support for employing organisations

Types of measures and mechanisms

- Workplace adaptations and assistance provide reasonable accommodation in the form of physical and organisational adjustments in the workplace and work assistance. They often represent a fundamental tool to ensure that adequate conditions are in place for people with disabilities to be able to perform their tasks.
- Support for retention and awareness-raising aims to highlight the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, eliminating the barriers that prevent them from entering and staying in employment.

Factors for success

- Creation of opportunities for mutual adjustment between employers and jobseekers
- Provision of a personal budget to people with disabilities, allowing them to choose the most relevant types of accommodation
- Integrated approaches, combining physical and organisational adjustments and other support
- Incorporation of a sustainability perspective

Challenges

- Limited resources and duration of the interventions
- Limited visibility of the measures
- Limited capacity to address productivity shortfalls

Positive outcomes

- Fewer stereotypes and greater awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities
- Better mutual knowledge and shorter distance between employers and jobseekers with disabilities
- Better familiarisation of people with disabilities with the process of work, workplaces, work tasks and colleagues, and their increased independence
- Necessary conditions and more equal opportunities in place for people with disabilities to enter, remain in and return to work and perform their job with a satisfactory level of productivity

Support for the institutional environment

The UNCRPD, the International Labour Organization's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention of 1958 (ILO, 1958) and policy approaches promoted at European level are reflected in national policies. Both national and supranational legal frameworks have been crucial in the recognition of the need to ensure participation, economic well-being and labour market opportunities for people with disabilities (Dahl and van der Wel, 2020).

The shape of these legal frameworks cannot be disentangled from the welfare systems available in the Member States. When defining national labour market and social protection policies, policymakers face multiple challenges: to support as many people with disabilities as possible to enter into suitable and sustainable employment; to ensure that the social protection system protects the incomes of people with disabilities; to avoid a lack of employment leading to poverty; and to protect and improve the living conditions and opportunities for the most disadvantaged in society (Barr et al, 2019; Dahl and van der Wel, 2020). This involves a difficult balance between providing adequate social protection and avoiding welfare dependency (Box 22).

Box 22: Ensuring adequate social protection to reduce welfare dependency

The combination of an ageing population and shrinking national budgets has resulted in disability benefits being subject to stricter controls, given that they can act as a potential disincentive to people with regard to getting back into work. In recent years, some countries have introduced policies that have made access to benefits more restrictive, in order to disincentivise welfare dependency. However, the literature shows that the association between benefit receipt rates and employment rates among people with disabilities is far from clear. Moreover, reducing benefits may have undesired consequences, such as higher sickness absence rates in the longer term,

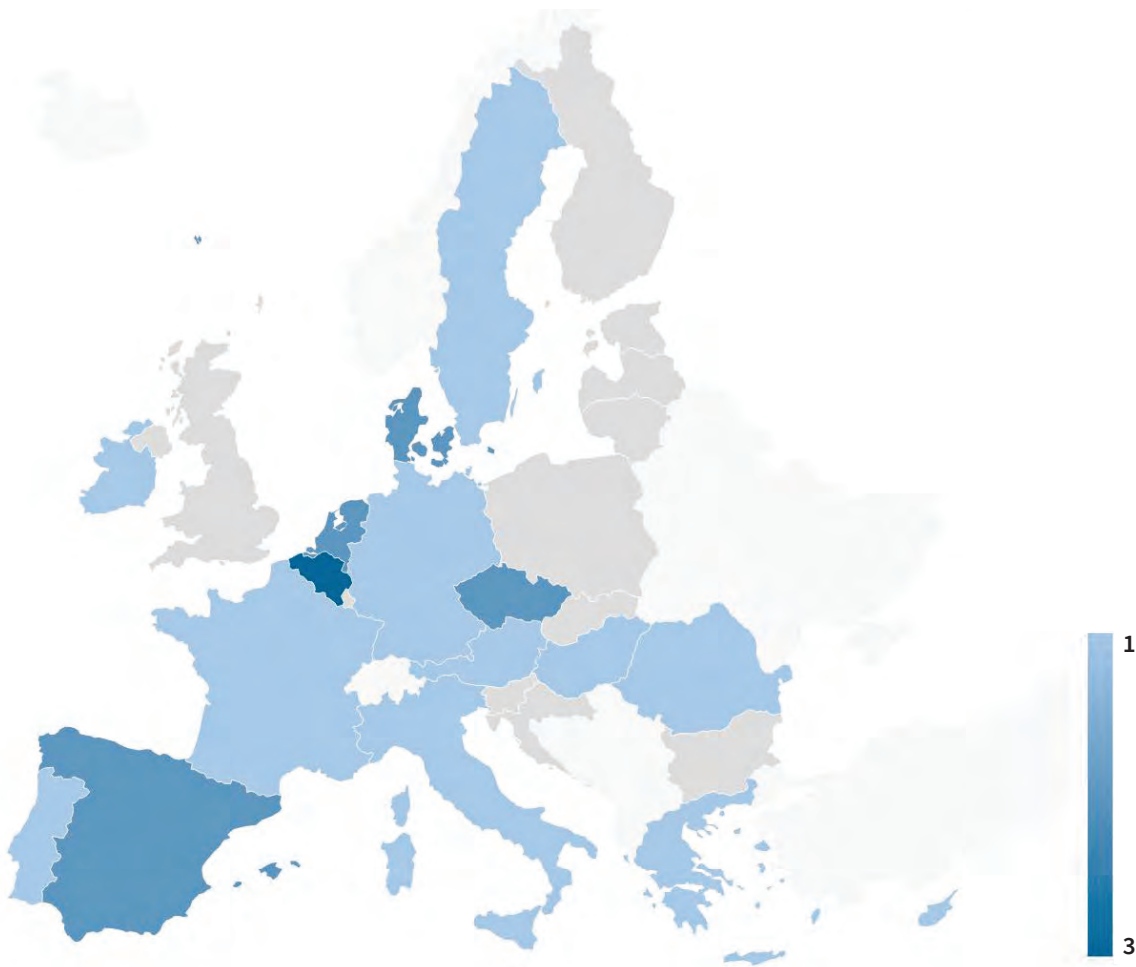
and a risk of poverty and social exclusion for recipients of benefits that are inadequately low, especially for families with other dependents (OECD, 2018). It is therefore important to make sure that balanced interventions are in place – disability benefits that ensure a sufficient livelihood and adequate living standards even without earnings from paid work, in parallel with actions to ensure that the economy benefits from the full potential of the workforce.

In this context, several countries have designed policies to incentivise the transition from benefits to work, for instance, by avoiding an immediate, drastic benefit withdrawal as soon as someone is in employment or increases their working hours; providing in-work benefits such as tax credits; or making sure that the procedures for the assessment of work ability are more accurate (OECD, 2018; Dahl and van der Wel, 2020).

In parallel with social protection systems, supportive institutional conditions need to be in place for employment interventions to be effective. The Network of Eurofound Correspondents identified 23 measures that aim to have a direct impact on the institutional environment. These encompass existing legal and policy frameworks (7 measures identified), the provision

of matching services through well-functioning PES and labour market institutions (14) and capacity-building actions to guarantee the provision of high-quality support (2). Examples were identified in 17 countries, most of which belong to the Mediterranean and continental Europe clusters (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Number of policy measures supporting the institutional environment by country



Note: Not representative of all of the measures available in the countries.

Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Legal instruments, collective agreements and protection against dismissal

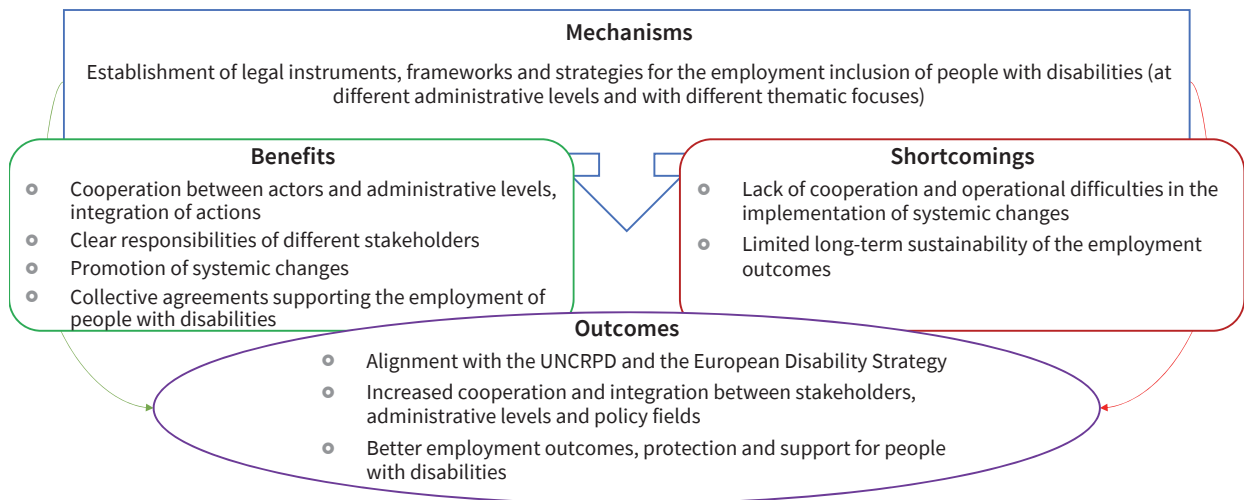
Different types of legal instruments are available in EU Member States to protect the rights of people with disabilities, including employment. Some measures consist of national and regional legal instruments (such as anti-discrimination legislation), plans and frameworks. More specific interventions of a legal nature correspond to collective agreements and measures to protect people with disabilities against the risk of dismissal.

While these instruments are crucial in creating a context that is inclusive, evidence shows that this is not sufficient per se to guarantee effectiveness.

Complementary strategies and actions are important to ensure compliance, awareness among employers and employees, and the coverage of the whole population (Barr et al, 2019).

Figure 20 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of legal instruments.

Figure 20: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of legal instruments



Source: Authors' own design, based on Eurofound's collection of measures

One example of a national law is the Spanish General Law on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion, which is strongly oriented towards the entry of people with disabilities into the open labour market. This law stresses the need to adopt measures to prevent or compensate for the disadvantages caused by disability in order to guarantee full equality at work, encourage employment services to provide support,

establish quotas in public and private organisations and guarantee basic conditions of accessibility in the workplace. It also calls on public authorities to promote autonomous work initiatives for people with disabilities through social economy organisations.

National strategies and plans have also been designed in Member States to ensure the application of the UNCRPD and/or the European Disability Strategy (Box 23).

Box 23: National strategies and plans

Romania: The national strategy 'A society without barriers for persons with disabilities, 2016–2020' aimed to ensure that people with disabilities have access to an open working environment adapted to their needs; vocational programmes; training in preparation for work; entrepreneurship skills; and independent living.

Spain: Likewise, the Spanish Disability Strategy 2012–2020 included a series of strategic measures, such as the development of the employability of people with disabilities, and also encouraged actions to develop a 'new economy of disability' and support the better inclusion of women with disabilities in the labour market.

Czechia: The National Plan for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2015–2020 proposed systemic changes in the area of employment support, through all-encompassing bundles of measures and better integration and coordination in the system. For instance, it supported interlinkages between health, social and occupational rehabilitation. However, assessments stress the difficulties involved in making systemic change happen, as issues can arise at an implementation level.

Box 24: Regional frameworks supporting the employment of people with disabilities

Italy: The Lombardy region has a framework promoting local policies for the social and employment inclusion of people with disabilities. The specific projects are developed at province level, whereas the region provides the funding, devises the instruments and coordinates the local measures. Having a general system of financial support for both workers and employers and the ability to develop and activate networks between the various stakeholders are crucial for the effective operation of the measures. However, this is highly dependent on the commitment of the different provincial administrations, and would benefit from more involvement by NGOs and better dissemination of the available instruments.

Other interventions have been promoted more locally, for instance, through regional frameworks (Box 24).

Other legal measures focus specifically on protecting people with disabilities against the risk of dismissal (Box 25).

Box 25: Protection against dismissal

Germany: The ‘Special protection against dismissal’ measure protects people with complex disabilities such that an employer can dismiss such an employee only when there is prior consent from a specialised office. Evidence stresses the relevance and effectiveness of the measure in counteracting barriers related to discrimination and stereotypes. However, it highlights that employers may consider the measure as an employment obstacle. Moreover, given that approval by the office in charge takes a long time, this may be used as a delaying tactic when negotiating a settlement.

Commitments to support the employment of people with disabilities can be formalised at a

sectoral/company level through collective agreements (Box 26).

Box 26: Collective agreements encouraging the employment of people with disabilities

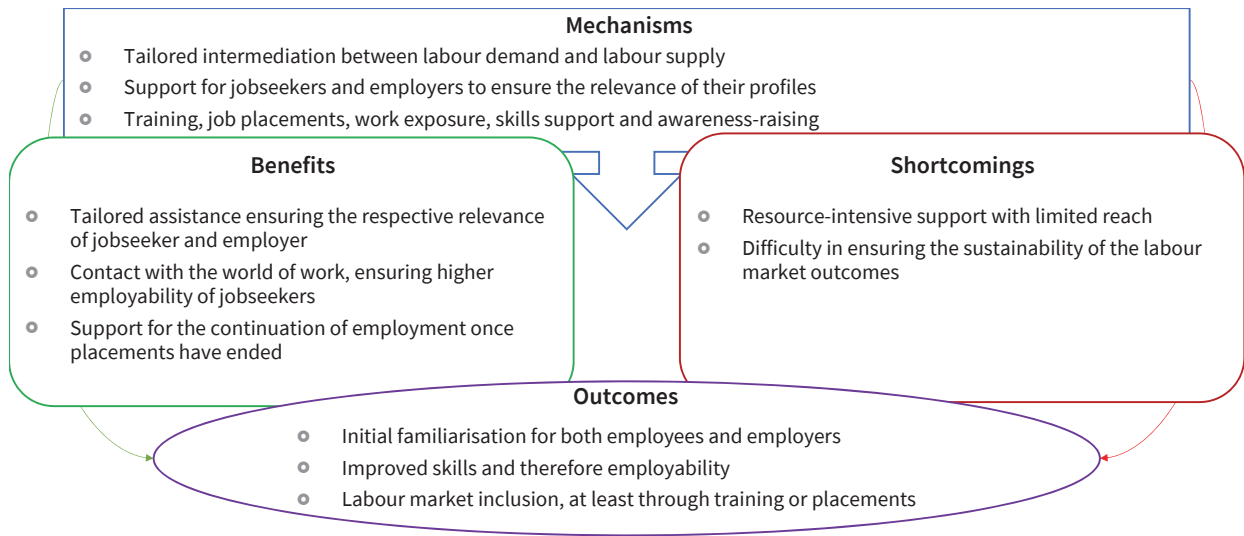
France: A company-level agreement on retention in employment and in favour of the employment of workers with disabilities has been signed between Carrefour and its representative trade unions. The 2017 agreement provides support for the retention of employees with disabilities. This means acting with all entities in the group in order to adapt workplaces through ergonomic interventions; to finance skills and professional assessments; to finance specific equipment in addition to common law aid; and to allow access to training regardless of the disability situation. The second objective is to integrate workers with disabilities on a long-term basis. An assessment of the measure stressed the ambition of the group to exceed legal quotas and the contribution of the measure to positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Shortcomings are linked mainly to employment retention.

Intermediation between demand and supply: Matching services and placements

A positive institutional environment also supports the intermediation between labour supply and labour demand – namely through matching services and offers of placements. Effective matching provides opportunities for initial contact between employers and jobseekers, increased awareness in the workplace and

ongoing assistance for jobseekers’ long-term labour market inclusion once placements have ended. Cooperation is key to enable these mechanisms to function. Aspects that hinder effectiveness mainly relate to the limited reach of these measures, which are resource intensive; limited awareness of their availability; and difficulties in ensuring sustained employment effects.

Figure 21: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of intermediation between demand and supply: matching services and placements



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Figure 21 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of intermediation between demand and supply.

A key approach consists of traditional matching services, which are at the disposal of jobseekers and employers but target people with disabilities. Ctalents, a social enterprise in the Netherlands, is an example of a recruitment/matching agency that seeks to connect people who have a sensory impairment with employers, providing placement and after-placement support.

Some measures involve work trials and opportunities for work exposure (Box 27). When combined with awareness-raising and incentives for employers, they allow for the provision of individualised training to people with disabilities while raising employers' awareness of their employment needs. Key outcomes include increased autonomy at work, enhanced skills and a better employment situation, alongside increased awareness of companies of the priorities of all members of staff.

Box 27: Skills enhancement, work trials and traineeships

Malta: The 'Bridging the Gap' scheme supports people with disabilities to transition to employment through a work exposure period, with the possibility of employment at the end of the placement. While individuals can access workplaces and build skills, employers can evaluate how they would fit within their workplace, prior to employment. Employers benefit from specialised guidance, receive financial incentives and face no additional costs for this period. The exposure to the labour market enhances participants' skills and employment opportunities. Even if they are not retained, their employment prospects are improved. Both employers and workers with disabilities are supported throughout the whole intervention.

The Netherlands: The 'Trial placement' initiative provides employers with wage subsidies for a two-month period to enable them to employ a person with a disability on a trial basis. To prevent abuse, the measure requires a real job opportunity to exist in the company. Employers must declare in advance that they intend to hire a candidate after the trial placement for at least six months. Stressing the sustainability of the approach, the results show that in half of the cases examined the candidate was retained.

Belgium: The 'Duoday' initiative provides opportunities for people with disabilities to undertake short internships. Through an event organised with companies, it supports the creation of 'duos' consisting of a trainee with a disability and a company employee. This collaboration makes it possible to highlight and enhance the skills of trainees and allows employers to gain concrete experience of the employment of people with disabilities.

Other services have a wider approach, accompanying the whole matching process with full assistance and a partnership focus (Box 28).

Another group of measures in this category relates to sheltered employment centres, with a focus on transition towards the open labour market (Box 29).

Box 28: Creating alliances and partnerships

Ireland: The ‘EmployAbility Service’ facilitates integration into mainstream employment by forming alliances and working partnerships. Employers are informed about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, and high standards are promoted in employment and placement services within an equality framework. Intensive, ongoing support by local offices ensures satisfactory participation and uptake. The need for services such as these is very high and they struggle to meet the demand.

Denmark: The ‘KLAPjob’ initiative creates jobs for a large number of people with disabilities through nationwide agreements with companies, connecting municipalities, employers and jobseekers. Cooperation with local actors for the provision of matching services and outreach work are central elements in its effectiveness.

Box 29: Opportunities through sheltered employment centres

Sweden: Samhall is a state-owned company that aims to provide work to further the development of people with impairments that reduce working capacity. It offers education and training to individuals with disabilities and offers employment through a network of employers under market conditions. Samhall primarily provides sheltered employment, but the training it offers also creates opportunities for people to move into the open labour market. Approximately 1,500 employees leave each year for a position with another employer, most often the employer for which they already work through Samhall. However, challenges related to the sustainability of such outcomes exist, with a high probability of workers returning to sheltered employment.

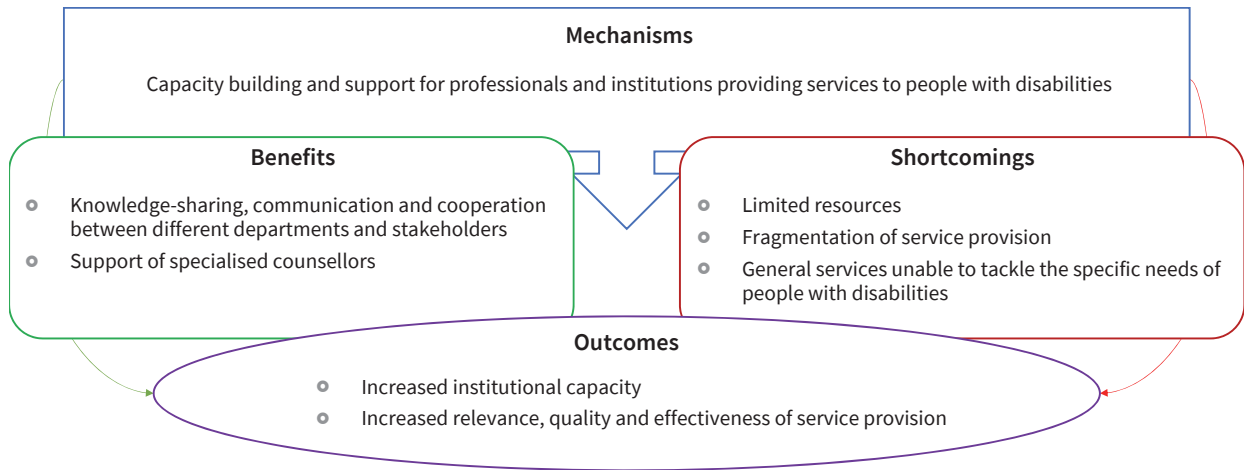
Institutional capacity building

Improving the capacities of institutions, services and staff who work with people with disabilities can strengthen the quality of support provision. Existing analyses highlight the fact that PES staff often lack experience or training on specific issues related to the requirements of people with disabilities. They frequently need additional training or expert support when it comes to service provision for people with disabilities.

Learning and cooperation between institutions and providers (knowledge-sharing between departments and actors, or coordination between national, regional and local levels) are fundamental to ensure that services are familiar with contextual developments, for example the shift to online modes and the availability of modern information technology (IT) infrastructure support.

Figure 22 provides a summary of the mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of capacity building.

Figure 22: Mechanisms, outcomes and effectiveness of capacity building



Source: Authors' own design, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

In Cyprus, vocational training programmes for disability professionals aim to increase their knowledge about disabilities, therefore impacting the quality, relevance, accessibility and effectiveness of the services offered. Moreover, all PES offices work with employment counsellors specialised in psychology and sociology, who can provide specific support for people with disabilities to develop their profiling and individual

action plans (European Commission, 2018). Acting at a more systemic level, the Czech 'System of support for the employment of people with disabilities in the open labour market' aims to increase the capacity and quality of services provided by PES in the field. This measure capitalises on previous projects and involves different stakeholders; its key strengths are regular cooperation and knowledge-sharing.

Summary: Key characteristics of measures providing support for the institutional environment

Types of measures and mechanisms

- Legal instruments, collective agreements and protection against dismissal can provide the basis for systemic change and the establishment of supportive institutional environments and national and regional frameworks that are aligned with the UNCRPD and the European Disability Strategy.
- Services providing support at the intersection between labour supply and labour demand, such as matching services and placement offers, provide the opportunity for an initial contact between employers and jobseekers with disabilities through tailored intermediation; the provision of training, job placements and work exposure; and awareness-raising.
- Capacity building can improve the capacities of those who work with and in services for people with disabilities, which can strengthen the learning and cooperation aspects of institutions and providers and ultimately improve the quality of support provision.

Factors for success

- Promotion of systemic changes (from national frameworks to collective agreements supporting the employment of people with disabilities)
- Cooperation between actors and administrative levels and integration of actions, with clear responsibilities for different stakeholders
- Help with institutional and staff capacity building for the support of people with disabilities
- Tailored assistance that is relevant to both jobseekers and employers
- Contact with the world of work, ensuring higher employability rates for jobseekers
- Support for the continuation of employment once placements have ended

Challenges

- Lack of cooperation and operational difficulties in the implementation of systemic changes; fragmentation of service provision
- General services unable to tackle the specific needs of people with disabilities; limited reach
- Resource-intensive support and therefore limited reach
- Limited long-term sustainability of the employment outcomes

Positive outcomes

- Better alignment with the UNCRPD and the European Disability Strategy
- Increased institutional capacity
- Increased cooperation and integration between stakeholders, administrative levels and policy fields
- Increased relevance, quality and effectiveness of service provision
- Better protection and support for people with disabilities
- Improved skills and therefore employability of people with disabilities
- Labour market inclusion, at least through placements

3 Systems thinking approach to employment and disability: Case study on Ireland

Basis for systems thinking approach

Chapter 2 showed that a great variety of policy approaches exist in EU Member States to support the employment of people with disabilities. Institutional and contextual settings play a key role with regard to the effectiveness of policy actions; analysing measures in isolation provides only a partial picture of how they work.

This chapter presents a case study in which a whole system of support measures in an EU country and their interactions are analysed, adopting a systems thinking methodology to explore the complexity associated with disability (Box 30). It focuses primarily on services providing direct support to jobseekers/workers with disabilities and employers in the employment area, while acknowledging the importance of education, housing, accessible transport and accessible childcare for the socioeconomic integration of people with disabilities. It aims to identify opportunities for learning and improving, which are inevitably temporary given that the environment and people are in a constant state of flux (Ison, 2017). It also analyses policy and implementation gaps and presents reflections on actions needed.

Rationale for a case study of Ireland

Of all the EU Member States, Ireland has one of the lowest rates for participation in the open labour market by people with disabilities (European Commission, 2019b). In 2018, although the country experienced almost full employment, the average employment rate for people with disabilities was just over 37%; the rates for those with moderate limitations and severe limitations were 40.5% and 29.4%, respectively. The disability employment gap in Ireland was 40 percentage points in 2018, compared with 24 percentage points for Member States and the UK as a whole (EU-SILC 2018 data). Data from 2017 show that 24% of people who were unable to work because of illness or disability were living in poverty compared with 6.7% of the overall population. In-work poverty was also a risk for those who were working (Hammersley, 2020). This situation is a long-standing one that policy measures have had little success in tackling, and has become more pronounced since the Great Recession started in 2007. This crisis hit disadvantaged groups particularly hard, and when the economy recovered the benefits were felt unequally, with the situation of people with disabilities still needing to be improved significantly.

The above data and the exceptional extent to which non-governmental actors are involved in the delivery of statutory services in Ireland are behind the choice of this country for a case study.

Box 30: Systems thinking methodology

Systems thinking focuses on understanding how a system functions in its entirety. A boundary is drawn around a 'situation of interest', rather than viewing a system as a fixed entity. In this case study, this was applied using two main tools.

- Viable Systems Model (VSM), to understand the functions and interactions of the support measures and processes available and how they interact to create a viable system – balanced in its internal and external functions, and with sufficient mechanisms and opportunities to grow, learn and evolve in its environment (Beer, 1972). The VSM can be applied to understand a system across different levels of functioning and subsystems, focusing on functional areas: the provision of support services; their coordination; their management and monitoring; interactions within the system and with the wider environment; and overall governance. Analysing each area contributes to an assessment of the viability of the system.
- Critical Systems Heuristics, to analyse power and boundary issues, looking at where power resides and where it should be situated (Ulrich and Reynolds, 2010). This reflective tool allows tensions arising from different perspectives and stakeholder interests to be understood.

Irish policy context

Disability policy

Irish disability policy is grounded in the principle of mainstreaming, which is enshrined in the Disability Act 2005 – mainstream services across government departments and public services should involve people with disabilities in their design and delivery. Other primary legislation promoting inclusion includes Article 40(1) of the Irish Constitution, the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 and the Equal Status Acts 2000–2015.

Irish government policy on disability is driven by the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS), a cross-departmental approach to improving the lives of people with disabilities, including in the sphere of work. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is charged with ensuring that all Irish public bodies take measures to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and anyone else affected by their policies. This is known as the public sector duty. The IHREC also deals with complaints from individuals. The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent statutory body that provides information and advice to the government.

Overall employment strategy

Ireland's mainstream employment policy is driven by Future Jobs Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2019a), a multiannual framework to ensure that Irish enterprises and workers are resilient and prepared for future challenges and opportunities. Among its objectives are embracing innovation and technological change, enhancing skills and increasing participation in the labour force. It aims to increase labour market participation for people aged 25 to 69 years to 78% between 2019 and 2025 and to support lifelong learning, skills enhancement and matching. It also includes specific actions around disability to improve incentives to participate in the labour force, mainly focusing on the entry and return to work of people with disabilities. The Pathways to Work 2016–2020 strategy is driven by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and aims to enhance employment, education and training services for jobseekers, continue with reforms to make work pay and increase engagement with employers to provide greater opportunities for jobseekers.

Disability and employment

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015–2024 (CES) is a cross-departmental approach to support people with disabilities to gain employment; it forms part of the NDIS. Responsibility was originally held within the

Department of Justice and Equality (now the Department of Justice) and moved to the newly created Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in 2020. The strategy is chaired independently and aims to address the participation of people with disabilities in education, training and employment across six strategic pillars: building skills, capacity and independence among jobseekers; providing bridges and support into work for workers and jobseekers with disabilities; addressing the costs of going out to work; promoting job retention and re-entry to work; providing coordinated and seamless support; and promoting employers' awareness and engagement. The CES also aims to increase the statutory target for the percentage of employees with disabilities in the public sector from 3% to 6% by 2024. No quotas are imposed on the private sector.

In its second phase (2019–2021), the CES focuses mainly on the UNCRPD. It includes some encouraging initiatives, such as the pre-apprenticeship programmes supporting people to obtain mainstream apprenticeships, plans to establish employment support measures for mental health service users, and the development of an early engagement plan for young people to support participation in education, training and employment. The Individual Placement and Support service, a pilot service that facilitates people with mental health difficulties to move into mainstream competitive employment (see Chapter 2 for further examples), has been regarded as effective (NDA, 2019) and is due to be embedded into health services under the CES action plan for 2019–2021.

Support services

Intreo, the Irish PES, provides activation support and services to a range of social welfare payment recipients. It also offers matchmaking support. Key services for people with disabilities include:

- employability programmes: employment and recruitment services to assist people with disabilities to secure and retain employment in the open labour market
- European Social Fund (ESF)-supported initiatives under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014–2020, including:
 - the Ability Programme, which brings young people with disabilities who are not job ready closer to the labour market using person-centred support
 - the Youth Employment Support Scheme, which offers work placements for young jobseekers aged 18 to 24 years, with jobseekers with disabilities eligible to apply

There are also broader schemes that are open to people with disabilities, including:

- the Community Employment scheme for long-term unemployed people and people with disabilities
- the Community Services Programme, which provides local employment opportunities for certain groups of people, including people with disabilities
- the Rural Social Scheme, which provides income support for farmers and fishermen on long-term social welfare payments such as disability payments
- the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, which encourages people in receipt of Disability Allowance or a Blind Pension (among other allowances) to take up self-employment

In addition, most adults of working age with disabilities are in receipt of Disability Allowance, a means-tested payment that also offers an income disregard (which will increase from €120 to €140 per week from June 2021) if people choose to work. The Partial Capacity Benefit is the primary social welfare payment, which allows a person to return to work or self-employment (if they have a reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a benefit payment, based on the level of disability. This is the main in-work income support payment available and is based on the social insurance contributions made previously by the person with disabilities. Both payments are medically assessed. Grants are also available to support jobseekers, workers and employers under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund (RAF):

- the Employee Retention Grant, which assists employers to retain staff with acquired disabilities by identifying accommodation and retraining needs
- the Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant, which provides grants to employers for the adaptation of premises and equipment on a refund basis
- the Personal Reader Grant, which provides personal readers for visually impaired staff
- the Job Interview Interpreter Grant, which provides sign language interpreters for job interviews and job induction training
- the Wage Subsidy Scheme, which provides financial incentives to employers to employ people with disabilities for between 21 and 39 hours a week

From service provision to governance: Critical assessment

Provision of services

There are significant issues related to access to support for jobseekers and workers with disabilities, which confirm some of the challenges identified in Chapter 2.

Access to quality support services

At the beginning of the 2010s, disability support measures were distinct from mainstream support measures, leading to the ‘othering’ of jobseekers with disabilities as a separate category of jobseekers or employees. More recently, people with disabilities have been increasingly directed to access services through a new case management system provided by Intreo (rather than to specialist services), which is generally regarded as being supportive of those accessing its services (NESC, 2018).

However, this shift in services has not been sufficiently backed up by capacity building for Intreo staff, who traditionally have not been trained to serve jobseekers with disabilities, nor with additional human or financial resources. While meetings between jobseekers and Intreo case managers can be pivotal for progression, jobseekers may lack trust in staff who do not have specific disability management knowledge or who are overloaded in terms of workload. Case managers in Intreo services need to (be able to) provide adequate time to listen to jobseekers, demonstrate empathy and build trusting relationships, in order to understand their interests, skills, circumstances, motivations and the barriers to employment that they face (NESC, 2018). Training is being addressed in the second phase of the CES; however, focusing on aspects such as culture and protocols (for example, the amount of time spent with individual clients) is also a precondition for success.

Equality of access to services

The services provided to enhance the skills, capacity and independence of jobseekers with disabilities are perceived not to be equally available, depending on the specific group. The CES places the emphasis on young jobseekers and those with intellectual disabilities and focuses less on those who acquire disabilities in their working life, despite an identified need in this area, stressing the difficulties related to job retention and return. Moreover, jobseekers with invisible disabilities or mental health problems do not feel understood or well supported when they approach services for assistance (NDA, 2019). Those with high levels of support needs are also excluded from accessing the workforce, highlighting the difficulty of including those who are furthest from the labour market, as no provision is made for a personal assistant service within the CES.

In addition, inconsistencies can be observed between geographical locations in the degree to which jobseekers with disabilities report positive experiences of accessing some support schemes, such as the EmployAbility Service (Indecon, 2016).

Access to information

Both jobseekers and employers report difficulties in accessing information on available services. For employers, this includes awareness of their obligations to make reasonable accommodation and provide information on grant schemes (NESC, 2018; NDA, 2019). In some instances, employers have required advocacy from external agencies to access grants. There was consensus among those consulted for this research that jobseekers ‘who shout loud enough’ are more likely to get assistance, while services are leaving behind those who have less confidence in their approach.

Access to grants

Grants falling under the RAF for the support of both jobseekers and employers are considered to be outmoded and their applicability patchy (low expenditure levels, failure to address shortfalls in productivity, limited uptake). The CES action plan for 2019–2021 includes an evaluation of the RAF, but this is an operational review rather than a commitment to a more strategic update of reasonable accommodation.

Coordination of support services

For each support service to contribute to the overall goal of the system, it must be given enough autonomy to function. This must be balanced with horizontal coordination mechanisms in order to avoid conflicts, duplication and gaps across support services. The evidence from this case study suggests a lack of coordinating mechanisms between services, which poses a particular challenge in Ireland with its liberalised economy and historical reliance on religious and charitable institutions for service delivery.

Information deficits between service providers

Despite having a PES that is described as a one-stop shop, jobseekers with disabilities report being sent to different places for different services, with inefficiencies stemming from the long process required to identify who they need to speak to; they are often asked to provide the same personal information multiple times (NESC, 2018). Jobseekers also stress the inaccuracies in the information received about entitlements once they return to work.

Competition between services for the same clients

A lack of local coordination in leadership and the tendency of organisations to work in silos have led to the duplication of services in some areas (for instance, support for the transition of young people from education to work), resulting in different organisations approaching the same potential users. Promising

developments are emerging to strengthen coordination, an example being the inclusion of an early intervention scheme for young people under the CES.

Lack of access to peer support for employers

Lack of coordination also means that employers have little access to peer support in order to gain positive experiences of employing workers with disabilities. The Employer Disability Information service supported employers with the recruitment, management and retention of employees with disabilities, strengthening coordination between employers, employees and state services, but this service was not renewed after its pilot phase. Intreo is now the single point of contact for employers, offering employer support throughout the recruitment process, but the coordinated peer support available to employers is considered to be insufficient (NDA, 2019).

Management and monitoring of the system of support

Overall management responsibility for the full suite of services sits within the Department of Justice and operational responsibilities are devolved to various departments. Many support services aimed at increasing employment in the open labour market are managed operationally or outsourced by the Department of Social Protection. Other departments are also involved in supporting different parts of the system. For example, the Health Service Executive and Department of Education also manage early intervention initiatives. In its review of the CES strategy, the NDA (2019) stressed the need for greater collaboration in service management and called for stronger links between inter- and intradepartmental mechanisms and operational responsibilities devolved to various departments.

The IHREC is in charge of monitoring implementation of the UNCRPD, including its employment provisions. It actively monitors discrimination in the workplace and the extent to which government departments discharge their public sector duty to ensure that services are accessible to people with disabilities. Covering all aspects of the system, including what is happening on the ground, this monitoring function can be expected to positively influence performance within the system over time.

Interaction with the environment

This research found little critical discourse around balancing tensions between the rights-based approach of the UNCRPD and the economic imperative for growth and access to a skilled workforce. There is limited interplay with other instruments such as the Sustainable Development Goals. One workshop participant pointed out that the CES works in a ‘ghettoised way, in parallel with other instruments such as economic, cultural and social rights’. Little attention

is given to ensuring that people with disabilities have access to decent work that adequately addresses in-work poverty, even though this is a recognised issue for the general workforce (Eurofound, 2017). How people with disabilities would be protected and supported in the event of an economic downturn was a concern even before the COVID-19 crisis, in light of how they were excluded from accessing activation programmes during the Irish recession, which started in 2007.

The extent to which the CES, a 10-year strategy, has the agility to keep pace with advances and benefit from opportunities in the wider and emerging landscape of work is also unclear. The plan for the next cycle of the strategy is to begin to address some long-standing dichotomies between mainstream and specialist policies, as well as the time lags in responding to emerging trends related to work. The degree to which it encourages innovation in the system is less evident.

Future Jobs Ireland 2019 lays out the challenges facing the workforce of tomorrow, including the accelerating pace of technological change. It sets out a deliberate policy shift to increase the quality of jobs and their sustainability. Jobseekers and workers with disabilities can gain from the changing nature of work as the availability of accessible and assistive technology grows and options for remote working arise, as long as support for appropriate accommodation is ensured. However, workers with disabilities are not explicitly included in the conversation about remote working (Government of Ireland, 2019b). Similarly, the ongoing discourse on the need for assistive technology (AT), including recommendations to introduce an AT Passport for work, has gained little traction (O'Donnell et al, 2016). State commitments to address access to and the affordability of AT are running behind schedule.

The success of the system in preparing the world of work to embrace people with disabilities is also questionable. The level of discrimination experienced by people with disabilities in the workforce testifies to a poor relationship between how the employment system engages employers and how it sets out clear obligations around reasonable accommodation in the workplace (IHREC, 2019).

Promising developments in service provision

Despite the concerns discussed above, some developments in the support offered to employees and jobseekers and the provision of a supportive workplace environment have the potential to improve the labour market participation of people with disabilities.

In the field of **workplace accommodation and assistance**, a high-profile case in the Supreme Court in 2019 (Daly v Nano Nagle School) led to clarification of an employer's responsibilities, placing emphasis on the human rights and dignity of the employee. However, reluctance is observed among some employers in relation to reasonable accommodation, also due to a lack of adequate policies and procedures for its timely provision (NDA, 2019). In response, the new action plan for the CES has emphasised actions to promote awareness among employers, alongside a review of reasonable accommodation. This is expected to ensure clarity around employers' responsibilities in this field.

Regarding **entrepreneurship and self-employment** for people with disabilities, a dedicated strategy is planned to ensure that such experiences can be capitalised on more effectively and address challenges such as: ensuring equal social protection rights for self-employed people to avoid the risk of a double penalty for those who have a disability; ensuring access to all kinds of entrepreneurship for people with disabilities; and strengthening the capacity of supporting staff. Boosting rates of self-employment also requires caution as self-employed people are more at risk of in-work poverty than employed people (Eurofound, 2017).

The overall system demonstrates an increasing capacity to scan the environment to ensure long-term viability in distinct areas. There is room for more strategic consideration of how the changing nature of the workplace impacts on the well-being of workers, including in relation to in-work poverty and access to decent work, and how this system interacts with instruments in the wider policy environment.

Governance

Governance is the function responsible for developing a vision and strategy for the system, ensuring that arrangements are in place for different levels of the system to work well and that reforms are made where necessary.

Vision and strategy

It has been argued that the CES is unambitious in its vision. While the number of people with disabilities employed in the public sector has increased, this may reflect the ageing of the workforce rather than being the result of inclusive recruitment, and may require further research.

The independent chair of the CES shared the concern that 'if people with disabilities continue to fail to benefit from a recovering and growing economy, and from a demand among employers for loyal, committed and productive workers, it will be our failure, not theirs' (Eurofound, 2021). The next phase of the strategy focuses on many worthy actions, but attention to governance issues will also be key in facing the existing challenges.

Governance arrangements

Limited success to date can be attributed to two overarching issues: the governance arrangements keep it on the sidelines of mainstream policy and the focus is largely on changing parts of the system in a piecemeal way rather than driving mainstream inclusion in all employment measures across government. The Department of Justice manages the governance and monitoring arrangements for the CES, with support from the NDA, but it has no other role in employment despite the overarching philosophical framework of the NDIS being one of mainstreaming. In addition, the Department of Social Protection has responsibility for preparing the workforce for work and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has responsibility for job supply. The provision of support to potential employees to enable them to be work ready and to employers to diversify their workforce happens in parallel, and neither of the departments in charge of these functions is ultimately responsible for the strategy. This mismatch between supply and demand hinders the effectiveness of the CES.

Moreover, the CES sits to the side of competing agendas both within and across departments. Employment measures have been criticised for locating people with disabilities in a vacuum, where ‘disability is considered in isolation of all other identities we as humans have’ (DFI, 2018). Different parts of the employment landscape work to different purposes, with competing priorities between short-term political actions, the drive for economic growth and the human rights agenda. There is an absence of a shared agenda in the development of policies that centre on equipping people for the future of work, and specialist support services that prepare people with disabilities for work.

System reform agenda

Public sector duty is the primary driver of reform within government departments to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of employees, customers, service users and anyone else affected by their policies and plans. Concerns were raised about the extent to which public procurement rules take this responsibility into account to avoid structural discrimination in the design of services, including questions about the accessibility of public sector IT systems for employees with visual impairments. There was a strong call for universal design principles to be adopted in all publicly funded services.

Reforms within support services for jobseekers and employers have largely focused on operational reviews and changing how services are delivered to jobseekers. No substantial changes have been made to the types of employment services that are delivered.

The framing of the strategy as a list of individual actions does not demonstrate an understanding of the complexity of disability in an ever-changing environment. Instead, it grapples with policy legacy issues, such as the RAF, in a traditional management way (OECD, 2017). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) lists conditions in the wider environment that suggest that a system may be ripe for a systems thinking approach. Applied to the Irish case, only some conditions can be found: an innovation agenda has taken hold (Future Jobs Ireland); inclusion of citizens has become a priority (UNCRPD, public sector duty); citizen orientation is overtaking institutional organisation; demand from government for experimentation exists (public sector innovation); and problems are no longer solved by traditional means (public sector innovation). Consideration of the arrangements in place suggests that the governance frame for supporting people with disabilities into work is out of step with the wider policy agenda and is unlikely to produce the level of transformation required to ensure greater participation of people with disabilities in the open labour market, beyond individual pockets of action.

Challenges inherent in the system

Significant issues contribute to the difficulties that the system has in balancing its functions, growing and learning: a lack of strategic leadership and vision at a governance level, difficulties around framing of the issue, and a limited capacity to balance tensions between different parts of the system to achieve its purpose.

Limited strategic leadership and governance

The system does not have a coherent vision and identity across its functions; one of the reasons for this is a lack of high-level strategic leadership and ownership. This hinders its capacity to create the level of transformation required to ensure that policies and practices embrace people with disabilities in the open labour market. It is also difficult for individual parts of the system to move away from siloed responsibilities towards a shared purpose. This affects the effectiveness of services on the ground; the coordination capacity, to avoid gaps; engagement with the wider environment; and the capacity to effectively manage resources and assess performance. These factors lead to limited learning or meaningful growth within the overall system.

Conservative approach in framing the issue

The organisation of the CES indicates a lack of understanding of the complexity of disability in a fast-changing world. The strategy is under-ambitious in driving systemic change across the open labour market in the context of the UNCRPD and the public sector duty. The system's behaviour could be described as 'dynamically conservative' (Schön, 1973) by virtue of its resistance to engaging in the transformation of institutions and its focus on piecemeal changes to programmes and policies, and in the interpretation of the future as a continuation of the present rather than a new emerging landscape characterised by uncertainty and volatility (OECD, 2017). This leads to the strategy being at risk of doing 'the wrong thing righter' (Ackoff, 2001) rather than addressing the systemic causes of discrimination.

Tensions between different parts of the system

The capacity of the current system to grow and learn is limited. Labour market support for people with disabilities sit in a silo apart from other social inclusion measures and from bigger debates on issues such as the future of work, decent work and a fast-changing environment. The system also creates silos internally within its constituent parts and inequities in services. It lacks enough variety to balance the complexity it is confronted with in the broad employment landscape. It needs to diversify its response and embrace the innovation agenda in order to grow and respond to the inevitable challenges that lie ahead.

The current system encompasses diverse groups of stakeholders with different responsibilities. While most are highly committed to their endeavours, they are not united by a shared sense of purpose or strategic understanding of the different roles within the system and how they should act together to achieve that ambition. The voices of jobseekers and workers with disabilities are not sufficiently supported, and power imbalances, a lack of trust and unequal capacity among staff contribute to a self-defeating culture within the services designed to empower an already disadvantaged group.

New challenges ahead in light of COVID-19

Since this case study was conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the employment landscape in Ireland across all sectors of society.

Although this disruptive event has impacted mostly on young people in unskilled jobs, it has also had an impact on policy development and implementation. This is in a context where Ireland has been a late adopter of the UNCRPD and where there had already been a shift in the quality of jobs that favoured employers over the health and security of employees, to the detriment of employee mental health and well-being (EDF, 2020).

It also, however, offers an opportunity to disrupt business as usual. The review of the 2019 CES points to the need for greater collaboration and greater coordination, but it pitches these recommendations at an implementation and information-sharing level only (NDA, 2020). While some actions within the strategy have stalled, there are some green shoots emerging. These include the development of a programme within Enterprise Ireland for entrepreneurs with disabilities, and the revitalisation of a lapsed pilot information service for employers called 'Employers for Change', to be launched in the first quarter of 2021.

The pandemic offers an opportunity to fast-track the promotion of remote working to ameliorate difficulties related to reasonable accommodation and accessible transport. However, progress on reviewing a scheme to provide assistive and accessible technologies to workers has been further delayed. This is a critical development during a period when other parts of the employment landscape are adapting to external conditions. Examples include the publication of the National Remote Work Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2021), a recommendation by Ireland's Labour Market Advisory Council to digitalise the PES run by Intreo and the development of a digital literacy strategy.

These anomalies lend further weight to the conclusion of this case study that the CES does not have the level of flexibility and 'requisite variety' within its structures at a strategic enough level to impact significantly on the numbers of people with disabilities in employment. This is of great concern considering the expected further shock that Brexit poses for the Irish labour market.

4 Supporting employment for people with disabilities in the context of COVID-19

Situation of people with disabilities during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on all of society, from health, social, economic and employment perspectives. It is exacerbating inequalities and imposing challenges that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups (UN, 2020a). People with disabilities are overly exposed not only to health risks but also to social and economic consequences because of disruptions to the general and personalised support services they rely on, which is why representative organisations have been advocating for policymakers to ‘shield’ disability services from the COVID-19 crisis (EASPD, 2020; European Parliament, 2020c; WHO, 2020).

Data on the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis for the employment situation of people with disabilities are scarce and do not allow a complete picture to be obtained, particularly because the suppression of activity in the general population tends to mask the relative marginalisation of minority groups in aggregate terms. The barriers that these groups typically face with regard to employment (see Chapter 1) are exacerbated in this context. Being more exposed to less stable forms of employment, they have lower levels of access to related social insurance support. Moreover, they may face important limitations because of a lack of reasonable accommodation to enable them to work under the restrictions resulting from the pandemic. A sudden cut in income represents a considerable threat and may result in a higher risk of poverty for people with disabilities, especially as they often have additional costs related to the management of their condition.

Box 31: EU funding for people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic

At EU level, a package of measures has been adopted with the aim of supporting jobs and businesses. This includes the relaxation of EU state aid rules and application of the full flexibility of EU fiscal rules to allow governments to provide liquidity to the economy to support businesses and jobs. Flexibility in the use of structural funds has also been increased to allow Member States to transfer money between different funds and regions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility was adopted on 12 February 2021 (Regulation (EU) 2021/241). This facility, which is the basis of the NextGenerationEU temporary recovery instrument, provides for the creation of high-quality and stable jobs and the inclusion and integration of disadvantaged groups. It also supports the strengthening of social dialogue, infrastructure and services, as well as social protection and welfare systems. A total of €100 billion of financial aid has been made available under the temporary initiative Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) to support short-term work schemes and similar measures to help Member States protect jobs and thus employees and the self-employed against the risks of unemployment and loss of income (European Commission, 2020d). There is no specific reference to people with disabilities under the SURE initiative.

The European Commission also launched the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+) to mobilise EU cohesion policy to address the crisis (European Commission, 2020e, 2020f). One of the aims of these two packages is to support vulnerable groups, although people with disabilities are not specifically mentioned.

The CRII/CRII+ initiatives will be supplemented by the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) package, which is currently under negotiation with the Council and European Parliament institutions (European Commission, 2020g). REACT-EU will deliver €55 billion of additional funds, which will be made available to the European Regional Development Fund and the ESF, as well as to the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived. The ESF can be used to fund measures specifically for people with disabilities.

Scattered evidence provided by some country researchers based on surveys and studies (Croatia, Estonia) stresses that the labour market situation of people with disabilities does not seem to have been more severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis than the situation of people without disabilities. Lessons learned from the 2007–2008 financial crisis showed that people with disabilities were not always ‘the first to be fired and the last to be hired’. They seemed to retain, on aggregate, some modest level of protection with regard to employment, which might be the result of protected/segmented job positions, financial incentives for employers, laws providing special protection to workers with disabilities, concern over anti-discrimination legislation or the more advanced age profile of people with impairments (with older people perhaps being in more secure employment than younger people).

However, the data do not provide information on how the working conditions and working time of people with disabilities have been affected by the pandemic, nor a granular picture according to the types and intensity of disability. Being a very heterogeneous group, people with disabilities have not all been equally affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The European Parliament (2020c) stressed the particularly vulnerable situation of people with intellectual disabilities because of their dependence on support, the high toll of the confinement measures, and their exposure to the risks of social segregation and discrimination. Data from Eurofound’s ‘Living, working and COVID-19’ e-survey (Box 32) also show a worrying situation for people with disabilities who are unable to work. This calls for effective support for employment and income protection, including social protection (UN, 2020b), to be provided to all people with disabilities so that no one is left behind.

Box 32: Findings from Eurofound’s ‘Living, working and COVID-19’ e-survey

The ‘Living, working and COVID-19’ e-survey (carried out in April and July 2020 in all Member States of the EU) gathered responses from just over 2,500 respondents who classified themselves as unable to work because of a long-term illness or disability.

Compared with other respondents, this group lives in a more precarious financial situation. Around three-quarters reported being part of a household that has difficulties making ends meet (76% in April and 73% in July). In July, 23% said that they were in arrears with their payments for healthcare or health insurance. While, overall, optimism about the future financial situation improved between April and July, the outlook remains bleak for this group of respondents. In July, 35% were of the view that their financial situation would get worse, compared with an average of 25% for all e-survey respondents.

Experiences of loneliness were also more common among this group: three-quarters reported feeling lonely (76% in April and 74% in July), compared with around two-thirds of all respondents (65% in April and 63% in July). They were also less likely to feel happy and reported lower life satisfaction levels than the average e-survey respondent: they rated their life satisfaction score at 5.5 and 5.3 (on a scale of 1 to 10) in April and July, respectively, compared with 6.6 and 6.5, respectively, for all e-survey respondents.

Not surprisingly, respondents unable to work because of a long-standing illness or disability were less optimistic about their future: in July, 31% of this group felt optimistic, compared with 49% of all e-survey respondents.

Sociodemographics

In comparison to the total e-survey sample, respondents with a long-term illness or disability were more likely to be female (57% compared with 52%) and their educational attainment level was lower (only 13% had completed tertiary education, compared with 29% for the sample as a whole). Finally, the average size of the household in which they live was 2.3, compared with 2.6 for the whole sample.

Source: Authors’ own analyses, based on Eurofound’s ‘Living, working and COVID-19’ e-survey data

Member States' responses in the area of disability and employment

Towards disability mainstreaming approaches

The policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic has focused on cushioning social and economic consequences, mainly by helping businesses to stay afloat to prevent bankruptcies and lay-offs and by providing financial support to workers who saw their working hours reduced or their contracts suspended. The needs of people with disabilities have not necessarily gained visibility in this wider debate. An optimistic interpretation of this would be to assume that mainstreaming of disability has already been accomplished.⁹ At the same time, the evidence collected suggests that, in the overall governmental discourses on reactions to the crisis, the focus is seldom on people with disabilities.

The policies that have targeted people with disabilities have focused mainly on protecting their health, which in practice has resulted in their labour market participation being temporarily constrained. Several interventions were adopted in the field of disability beyond employment support (and therefore are not covered in this study), including health support, and care and assistance for carers. Belgium, for example, aimed to reduce social hardship for people with disabilities by temporarily increasing their personal budget or personal assistance budget.

The labour market measures have targeted a more general population (for instance, people in a precarious financial situation or in a situation of vulnerability); gainfully employed people with disabilities can profit from these measures just like any other employee. Only a few specific provisions have been aimed directly (and exclusively) at people with disabilities. These are either interventions launched for all employees in the face of the crisis, or modifications to already existing disability-targeted measures. These adaptations are often made by relaxing existing eligibility criteria and by broadening the coverage of the target groups, for instance, to include additional grades or types of disabilities. Moreover, while pre-pandemic policy responses had a long-term perspective, COVID-19 measures typically are of a temporary nature in the context of an emergency – raising issues of sustainability.

Some national evidence indicates that these measures have had a key role in protecting workers with disabilities from the risk of becoming unemployed.

Beyond that, however, the support they have received has often been limited, for instance, for those workers with disabilities who are working part time. Moreover, it has remained very difficult for jobseekers with disabilities to find employment during the pandemic.

An important aspect has been an increase in public awareness of the need for accessible information. In several countries, information about the pandemic and measures taken is increasingly provided in different formats to accommodate all types of disabilities. However, these developments have not yet been implemented across the whole of the EU.

Some countries have also responded to the needs of people with disabilities working in social institutions (such as sheltered workshops) and of social care providers. For instance, in Germany, during the pandemic, the policy response has shifted to greater protection and (financial) support for social care providers. In Czechia, on the other hand, most of the interventions have focused on sheltered employment rather than on the open labour market.

Targeting of disability types

In their health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States have adopted tailored approaches according to health profiles and types of vulnerabilities; however, only on rare occasions has this been observed in employment-related policy responses. Before the pandemic, Member State policies already targeted people with disabilities as a whole group (or as part of an even broader population), with more scattered examples of interventions focused on specific types of disability or intensity of impairments.

Slight reorientations towards more targeted solutions have been observed in some countries in the context of the pandemic, but they seem to be specific to the emergency rather than an indication of structural changes towards more tailored solutions. The following cases are worth noting. In Croatia, increased attention has been paid to making information on COVID-19 more accessible; Denmark has ensured that more consideration is given to groups with an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (including people with chronic diseases and those with a weakened immune system); in Portugal, the level of support provided varies depending on the type or intensity of impairment or level of work capacity; in Greece, some policy responses take into account the level of risk related to exposure to the virus in different groups of vulnerable workers as a function of their health conditions; and in Slovakia, among people with disabilities, more

⁹ According to information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents in 21 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden), disability was already mainstreamed or in the process of being mainstreamed in policy before the COVID-19 crisis.

advantageous conditions are guaranteed to the most vulnerable, including those with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments and autism.

Key stakeholders involved

Central governments

The nature and urgency of the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has required new, fast solutions or adaptations of existing interventions, mainly implemented by central governments and with limited formal involvement of other stakeholders. According to evidence collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, the degree of participation in and

advocacy for the employment protection and labour market support of people with disabilities during the pandemic varies depending on the types of actors and country considered.

Regional and local governments

Regional and local administrations, as key providers of (employment) services for people with disabilities, have also played a fundamental role in the context of the crisis in some countries (Denmark, Finland and Spain) (Box 33). Moreover, in Finland and Slovakia, municipalities have had an advocacy role in the provision of disability-inclusive responses to the pandemic.

Box 33: Municipalities as key providers of services to people with disabilities: The case of Finland

Finnish municipalities provide services for people with disabilities, including those related to employment. During the pandemic, many of these services were closed. Furthermore, the exchange of information between the PES, social insurance institutions and municipalities was often suspended as organisations had to focus on urgent COVID-19-related changes.

Municipalities developed alternative ways to tackle service disruptions, for instance, shifting to the digital provision of rehabilitative work activities (enhancing the life management skills of people who, because of limitations in their work ability, cannot participate in services provided by the PES).

More people were reached, and even former clients used these services more intensively.

Source: Authors, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Ombudspersons, specialised commissions and task forces

Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia and Greece stressed the advocacy role played by the ombudsperson regarding the disability dimension of policy responses. The Estonian Chancellor of Justice expressed the need for better targeting of people with disabilities in the COVID-19 context. In Greece, after adoption of the early measures, the ombudsperson addressed the relevant ministers, critically assessing the actions taken and proposing additional measures for specific categories of the population, including people with disabilities.

National human rights institutions and specialised task forces played a similar role. For instance, in Ireland, the IHREC expressed concerns about a potential increase in discrimination, poverty and social exclusion experienced by people with disabilities and advocated for the integration of reasonable accommodation into routine recruitment, selection and employment processes to address the disability employment gap. In Malta, a COVID-19 Disability Task Force was established (Box 34). In Spain, the State Observatory on Disability, part of the Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda, raised awareness about the vulnerable situation of

Box 34: COVID-19 Disability Task Force in Malta

The Maltese Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, in agreement with the government, officially set up a COVID-19 Disability Task Force in April 2020. It consists of 25 stakeholders, including NGOs and organisations representing people with disabilities, advocating for the rights of people with disabilities during this period. Consolidated feedback is sent to different ministries and entities. By the end of August, the task force had met 10 times. Its focus is to ensure that people with disabilities are included in each policy and measure developed by the government, including those related to employment. Tangible results include the introduction of a financial supplement for people with disabilities working in the private sector for whom it is risky to go to work because of their disability; the introduction of sign language interpreting in press briefings related to COVID-19; exemption from mask wearing for those with specific impairments; and the resumption of physical therapies.

Source: Authors, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

people with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis, especially with regard to employment.

Social partners

With the exceptions of France and Malta, the social partners have had limited involvement in defining COVID-19 employment responses for people with disabilities in Member States. Instead, they have focused more generally on the protection of (vulnerable) employees. In a few countries, they had an advocacy role also in relation to disability. Examples include Ireland and the Netherlands (focusing on telework and flexible working solutions) and Poland (where they criticised the limited social dialogue during COVID-19).

Organisations representing people with disabilities, NGOs, confederations and umbrella organisations

Organisations representing people with disabilities, NGOs, confederations and umbrella organisations have played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in the labour market and beyond. The work performed by organisations at EU level, such as the European Disability Forum and the European Network on Independent Living, and their constituent organisations in the Member States has been central in raising awareness and ensuring the better inclusion of disability in policy responses adopted in the context of COVID-19.

In accordance with Article 4(3) of the UNCRPD, these organisations should be consulted and involved in all decision-making processes affecting people with disabilities. However, their involvement in decision-making and the formulation of policy responses in the context of the pandemic has varied across European countries, often pointing to insufficient consultation and implications for the policymaking process. The participation of NGOs has mainly been the result of their proactiveness rather than a structured process of inclusion on the part of governments.

In some countries these organisations have a particularly strong advocacy and awareness-raising role and have presented initiatives, interventions, requests and recommendations to government. For instance, the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities in Greece supported the adoption of specific measures to protect workers with disabilities or chronic diseases and their families during the pandemic. In Denmark, France, Latvia and Slovenia, NGOs have advocated for the inclusion of people with disabilities as beneficiaries of COVID-19 measures, for instance, in relation to income protection and remote work (Latvia) and access to solidarity allowances (Slovenia). In Lithuania, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour consulted NGOs about amendments to the Law on Employment. Box 35 outlines how inclusiveness in the employment ecosystem was supported in the Netherlands.

In most countries, the role of NGOs has mainly consisted of expressing positions on and raising awareness of the employment situation of people with disabilities during the pandemic. For instance, the President of the Cyprus Confederation of Organisations of Disabled People, in an open letter to the President of the Republic, complained about the lack of government action to protect people with disabilities in the workplace and about their exclusion from the list of groups defined as vulnerable. The message also stressed the importance of the participation of organisations representing people with disabilities in the consultation processes for policies designed for them. In Italy, the initial responses to the pandemic did not specifically take into consideration the needs of people with disabilities, but this situation improved after the main federations encompassing associations for people with disabilities and their families were galvanised.

In other countries, NGOs have gathered and disseminated information on the labour market situation of people with disabilities during the pandemic. In Estonia, this consisted of analysing the struggles and everyday coping of people with

Box 35: Building an inclusive employment market during COVID-19: An example from the Netherlands

The Dutch De Normaalste Zaak, a network of more than 600 enterprises and organisations with the aim of building an inclusive employment market that involves people with disabilities, played a remarkable role in advocating for and supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The network has a section on its web page that provides specific information for the 'inclusive employer' with regard to policy responses to the pandemic adopted in the Netherlands: existing arrangements and emergency measures, with a special focus on employees with a psychological vulnerability; guidance and supporting tools for employers; and support for employees with disabilities.

Source: Authors, based on the information provided on the network's web page (De Normaalste Zaak, 2020)

Box 36: Independent reports on the employment situation of people with disabilities during COVID-19

Belgium: Unia, a national independent organisation that aims to combat discrimination of all types, has studied the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people with disabilities in the country, providing information on the difficulties that they have encountered in their working life. Concrete examples include problems with telework for people with a visual or auditory impairment and problems that parents of children with disabilities face when combining work with care at home.

Ireland: The Centre for Disability Law and Policy at the National University of Ireland Galway released a statement on the rights of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis, stressing the need to provide social welfare support to reduce the loss of income of people with disabilities; recognise any increased costs related to disability during the pandemic; and utilise remote working technologies to ensure continued employment where possible (NUI Galway, 2020).

Source: Authors, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

disabilities in that context. In Ireland, the Disability Federation called for clear guidelines for high-risk people returning to work and advocated for a campaign aimed at employers to ensure reasonable accommodation. In Slovakia and Spain, NGOs and other entities analysed and warned about the labour market vulnerability of people with disabilities, disseminating periodic information but also supporting them regarding the use of ATs.

Other stakeholders

Other stakeholders that have advocated for the rights of people with disabilities in responses to the pandemic include social enterprises (in Slovenia, some social enterprises submitted written initiatives relating to legislation concerning people with disabilities, but were also involved in the preparation of measures at sectoral level), sheltered employment organisations (Germany) and academic and independent organisations (Belgium and Ireland) (Box 36).

Public support measures introduced in response to COVID-19

The measures identified tended to be of a temporary nature, with most being completely new instruments or adaptations of existing instruments (Box 37). Examples were found in all EU Member States except for Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia and Sweden. With the exception of Hungary and Latvia, in the countries where no measures were identified, the lack of specific policy responses was because of the existence of comprehensive COVID-19 measures targeting a broader population, or the existence of disability-specific measures that had not been adapted to the COVID-19 situation. The lack of public measures targeting the three dimensions of disability, the open labour market and the pandemic leads to difficulties given the severe consequences of COVID-19 for people with a reduced working capacity and who are further from the labour market.

Box 37: Workplace practices to support the employment of people with disabilities during COVID-19

To understand what actions had been implemented beyond those supported by governments, the Network of Eurofound Correspondents collected examples of practices promoted autonomously by companies and organisations to retain and support their employees with disabilities during the pandemic. Only a few examples were identified. This could be because companies adopted more general policies for the overall workforce rather than special measures for people with disabilities in this context.

Examples of actions of relevance for people with disabilities mainly consist of the implementation of telework, workplace adjustments (physical adaptations and flexible working arrangements), the conversion of business activities and the provision of training and guidance.

Telework and workplace adaptations: At Klésia (Paris, France), there was a shift to telework in response to the pandemic. Based on the lessons learned from this initial adaptation, the management and trade unions supported access to telework in a broader and more sustainable way through a collective agreement. This included a specific measure for workers with disabilities concerning the adaptation of their workspace at home.

The Maltese Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability initially shifted to telework, providing staff with the necessary equipment to work from home. Workers with disabilities who could not work from home continued to be paid as normal. Gradually, a roster system was set up for all staff and the workplace was adapted to ensure that the necessary hygiene measures were in place to protect workers. Similarly, Bodočnost (Maribor, Slovenia), a social enterprise for the rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities, adapted protective equipment in the workplace and installed video screens providing instructions on health measures.

Conversion of business activities: Some companies adapted their business activity during the pandemic to avoid temporary or permanent lay-offs. Väylä Ry (Espoo, Finland), a company whose core business consisted of the provision of cleaning services to private customers, had to temporarily lay off all staff at the start of the pandemic. In an effort to adapt its business activity and continue to employ people with disabilities during the pandemic, it began producing face masks and opened a web shop to sell them. Bivio, the Slovakian Association for People with Developmental Disabilities, also converted its activities, mainly redeploying people with disabilities from laundry, hotel and restaurant services – all of which were suspended because of the pandemic – to gardening activities.

Training and guidance: URIHO (Zagreb, Croatia), an institution involved in vocational rehabilitation and the employment of people with disabilities, provided work instructors who are in direct contact with people with disabilities with specific training and all necessary employment-related information. Training focused on prevention measures in relation to COVID-19.

Additional measures consisted of the supply of protective equipment; monitoring of companies' medical services; the provision of specialised transport services; implementation of safe rules of conduct at work; implementation of hygiene and safety measures; ensuring periodic contact with employees; and the provision of accessible material on COVID-19 through online training (ILO, 2020).

Source: Authors, based on information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Support for job creation and retention

One of the main approaches to support the entry into and retention in employment of people with disabilities during the pandemic has been the provision of support and incentives to employers.

Hiring and entry into employment

A key area of focus has been job creation and entry into employment. France introduced a measure to provide financial support to employers when hiring workers with disabilities. This exceptional aid of up to €4,000 for recruitment covers employment contracts concluded within six months of 1 September 2020. The employee must be hired under an open-ended contract or a fixed-term contract of at least three months.

In Portugal, the 'ATIVAR.PT' programme enhanced incentives for the hiring of unemployed people with low employability during the pandemic, while providing vocational training and transitional mechanisms to support their inclusion and adaptation to the exceptional context. Less burdensome requirements were enforced for hiring unemployed people with a disability or an impairment. This measure also has a sustainability perspective and provides an additional financial incentive if the employer converts a fixed-term contract into an open-ended one. The financial support provided to the employer (a maximum of 12 times the value of the Social Support Index of €438.81) is increased by 10% when hiring an unemployed person with a disability or an impairment.

Increases to wage subsidies were also implemented in Poland, where the government proposed an 'anti-crisis shield', a legislative package of measures to counteract the economic effects of the crisis. It included 'Wage subsidies for employees with disabilities' which, with a budget of €31.6 million, increased the value of wage subsidies by approximately 10% (new values range between €101 and €456 depending on the degree of disability); in the case of people with mental disabilities, epilepsy and blindness, the values of wage subsidies were almost doubled for severe and moderate degrees of disability (to between €124 and €268). In parallel, the 'Temporary solutions regarding payments to the State Fund for rehabilitation of people with disabilities' action allowed a temporary relaxation of some payment obligations to the fund for companies hiring people with disabilities during the pandemic.

In Malta, the 'Access to Employment' scheme fosters the recruitment of people who experience challenges with regard to employment, including those registered as having a disability under national law and who are not in full-time employment. In the case of people with disabilities, up until December 2019 a subsidy of €125 per week for a maximum of 156 weeks was provided to employers. In 2020, this amount was increased to €155 per week.

The Lithuanian ‘Subsidies for job creation/adaptation’, encouraging the creation of new jobs and the necessary employment conditions for people with disabilities, were updated for jobs created (adapted) during the pandemic. A subsidy may be granted for the acquisition, installation or adaptation of the means of work or technical aids to establish a workplace for people with disabilities; or for the repair or adaptation of owned premises to create a workplace. The amount of subsidy per job should not exceed €18,800. The employer commits to pay 35% of the total costs of establishing a job for an employee with a disability. The created or adapted job should be retained for at least 36 months.

Job retention

An increase in job subsidies was also used to support the sustainability of businesses employing people with disabilities, assuming that they may face the risk of a greater absence of employees and other uncertainties as a result of the employment of vulnerable workers. In Slovenia, the ‘Increase in the wage subsidy for workers with disabilities’ measure provides a 10% increase, with the total amount of the subsidy not exceeding 75% of the wage of the worker with a disability. Similarly, in Austria, existing job security allowances and wage subsidies have been extended by 50% for three months for people with disabilities as part of the ‘Expansion and increase of the job security allowance and wage allowance’ measure.

According to available data (from the database of the Institute for Expertise, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities) in Croatia, the number of people with a disability employed in the open labour market has not decreased since the start of pandemic, thanks in part to the ‘Support for the preservation of jobs affected by COVID-19’ measure implemented by the Croatian Employment Service to co-finance wage costs. This has benefited many companies employing people with disabilities. An additional measure was also launched – ‘Support for the preservation of jobs in protected workshops, integrative workshops and working units’ – for people with disabilities whose employment was endangered as a result of the pandemic. The monthly grant, amounting to €534 for a full-time job, was available from July to December 2020. The state also paid contributions for pension insurance.

Another example of a job retention measure is the ‘Reimbursement of the monthly crisis allowance for people with disabilities’ in Slovenia. Employers had to pay a monthly crisis allowance of €200 to low-wage employees working during the pandemic. As social enterprises and employment centres struggled in terms of liquidity, the state ensured the reimbursement of these payments for workers with disabilities. Reimbursements were claimed for more than 13,000 workers with disabilities.

Apprenticeships, traineeships and internships

Support has also been provided for apprenticeships, traineeships and internships for people with disabilities and their retention during the pandemic. In France, the ‘Exceptional aid to support the employment of a person with disabilities on an apprenticeship contract or a professionalisation contract’ measure supports companies wishing to continue ongoing apprenticeships or work–study contracts for people with disabilities during the pandemic through the provision of flat-rate financial assistance (of between €1,500 and €2,500).

In Portugal, ‘ATIVAR.PT internships’, which support employers who integrate trainees with disabilities or impairments, extended the duration of the internships from 9 to 12 months. The value of the ‘job creation award’, provided when an intern is offered an open-ended employment contract, was also temporarily increased.

Support for workers with disabilities

Employee support

Other measures provide direct support to employees to help them remain in the labour market during the pandemic or to return after a work suspension as a result of the pandemic.

Support for employee retention has taken different forms, such as guidance, paid absence from work and better protection. In the German region of North Rhine-Westphalia, guidelines were developed on retaining people with high levels of support needs in sheltered workshops or providing alternative working opportunities. The guidelines include an individual needs assessment, a qualification process to improve participants’ performance in the context of the pandemic, and the provision of training.

In Denmark and Greece, measures were launched to allow vulnerable workers whose health status may be at risk from COVID-19 to abstain from work. In Greece, during this period, private employers are obliged to pay employees their full salaries, unless a company has been severely affected by COVID-19 restrictions; in the public sector, employees belonging to vulnerable groups may be justifiably absent on special leave. In Denmark, private and public employers who pay salaries to employees at risk while at home are entitled to sickness benefit reimbursements from the first day of absence.

In Lithuania, amendments were introduced to legislation to better protect people with serious health problems. These included the prohibition of discrimination against employees on the basis of a medical condition; the creation of telework opportunities; higher severance pay when employees are dismissed because they are no longer able to perform their duties because of a medical condition; and the right to take leave as a matter of priority.

Regarding support for the return to work, the Italian region of Lombardy launched a 'Work support endowment' intervention that supports the job reintegration of people with disabilities after carrying out COVID-19-related short-term work. It provides training initiatives to help workers with disabilities requalify in the event of changes to/reconversion of production at a company level, tutoring to help workers if changes in their tasks are envisaged, and psychological support to help address the impact of the pandemic.

Support for the self-employed

In Austria, an existing 'Bridging subsidy' provides self-employed people with disabilities with additional income to cover a demonstrated disability-related additional expense that represents a significant burden for entrepreneurial activity. During the COVID-19 crisis, access to the subsidy (monthly support of €267, available for three months) has been eased and requirements for proof of disability removed.

Access was also broadened to the Lithuanian measure 'Support for self-employment of people with disabilities'; this is usually available for people with a working capacity rated at 40% or lower, but was extended to those with a working capacity of 45–55%. The subsidy is granted for the acquisition, installation and adaptation of means of work or technical aids.

Support for the work environment: Workplace adaptations

The COVID-19 pandemic has required extra accommodation in order to enable the overall workforce, and especially people with disabilities, to be protected and supported in the workplace – whether this is the office or the home – and to organise their work and working time. Occupational health and safety

measures and flexible working arrangements and conditions have been reshaped so that they are accessible and inclusive in the context of the pandemic.

Equipment

Most companies have adapted their premises to make them COVID-19-proof and to ensure the necessary protection and security of their employees. The French 'Exceptional aid to cover the extra cost of specific prevention equipment' measure was launched to cover the additional costs of specific COVID-19 risk prevention equipment, made available for the benefit of people with hearing or cognitive problems. This was supplemented with a payment to cover the additional cost of 'inclusive' (transparent) masks to facilitate communication between the person with a disability and their team. The Italian region of Emilia-Romagna issued a call for applications covering workplace adaptation interventions aimed at preserving the employment of people with disabilities with a working capacity below 50%.

Telework and distance training

The pandemic has shown that telework is a viable alternative mode of working (Box 38). However, its use has not increased equally: since the COVID-19 outbreak, telework has mainly been used in high-paid, white-collar employment (Sostero et al, 2020). In many sectors and occupations it is not viable or requires planning to be a real option that can benefit everyone equally. However, the pandemic has allowed for reflection on long-term changes needed for people with disabilities in relation to the reshaping of work. The World Health Organization (WHO) has published recommendations in favour of flexible work arrangements allowing people with disabilities to telework, by providing them with the necessary technology, and allowing those at high risk to take leave until the risk of infection decreases (WHO, 2020).

Box 38: Telework as a route to better inclusion

When remote working became a realistic option in the 1990s, it was advocated as a key accommodation for people with disabilities, removing significant obstacles to work such as commuting and unsuitable workspaces. Although statistics on telework practices vary depending on sector and occupation, the increase in telework observed overall has not been mirrored among people with disabilities (Moon et al, 2014) and telework has not led to a substantial increase in employment for people with disabilities (Linden, 2014). Employers have not always been motivated to use telework to enable them to hire more people with disabilities. That aside, telework has not been widely taken up by companies because it is not possible in all jobs. Employment is 'teleworkable' only in part, with significant differences in the use of telework observed between high- and low-paid workers, white- and blue-collar jobs, and women and men.

When it has been implemented in the past, telework has often stimulated more general workplace innovation in the form of organisational changes, flexibility, online learning and new forms of cooperation. As companies revisit their work practices and embrace telework, the potential it offers for change could be a useful approach to facilitating disability inclusion in society and the workplace.

To be inclusive, mainstream telework policies need to be developed from a disability rights perspective and involve people with disabilities in their design. When new collective labour agreements are negotiated on telework, or when companies revise their telework policies, they should be disability friendly. Telework, as an accommodation, should allow workers to use their vocational skills and talents to their full capacity, regardless of whether or not they have a disability.

Adopting telework practices requires active engagement to foster the benefits and reduce the risks involved to ensure the best possible working conditions for each individual. It can be a tool for customising work, allowing employers to better focus on the strengths and abilities of people with disabilities rather than on their support needs. For telework to be inclusive and non-discriminatory, the default position should be for it to be available and voluntary to the greatest extent possible. When job tasks allow, people should be free to decide whether or not, and how often, they want to telework, as some may want to telework less rather than more. Employees should have the option to work remotely or in the workplace, and this choice should be a facilitator and not a condition for work entry or retention.

Considering the overall risks associated with the pandemic, good teleworking policies alone will not suffice for the labour market to be fair and inclusive of people with disabilities. Retention practices must be equitable, and equality has to be at the forefront of decisions about redundancies. Social protection and quality public services must be available when those with disabilities lose their jobs.

Source: Authors, based on an expert workshop with key stakeholders and Eurofound (2020b)

Several measures have been launched by governments to support the shift to and the viability of telework for workers with disabilities.

One example is the provision of support to carry out the necessary adjustments to make telework viable. In France, the 'Exceptional support for the implementation of telework' measure provides support for teleworking arrangements. This aid is intended for any employer of employees with disabilities for whom teleworking is newly set up in the context of the pandemic and the resumption of activity; it may be used to cover the costs of computer equipment, office furniture, transport and an internet connection for employees. France has also promoted similar measures to ensure the continuity and feasibility of training programmes in their shift to distance learning during the pandemic. The 'Exceptional support for training courses to support people with disabilities' measure provides financial support to cover the costs of continuing training cycles, namely in terms of equipment costs incurred as part of the move to distance learning.

In some cases, telework is offered as one form of working arrangement support, and discretion over its use is left to employees. In Portugal, the 'Telework and workers with disability or impairment' measure, which was launched in response to the lockdown, protects workers who have specific health conditions, disabilities or impairments. When workplaces or work organisation do not ensure safety, telework cannot be made mandatory by employers for such workers; however, telework is mandatory when requested by these workers. In Austria, the 'Special protection for COVID-19 risk groups at work' measure allows workers with a very

high risk of developing a serious illness if they become infected with the virus to work from home or entitles them to adapt their working conditions. If this is not possible, a paid temporary leave of absence can be taken, with full payment of wages by the employer, which is reimbursed by the social security system. In Greece, a legislative act, 'Distance working or work suspension for vulnerable workers', allows employers and workers belonging to vulnerable groups to protect themselves against the pandemic by working remotely, by working in posts that do not involve contact with the public or, if either of these is not possible, through the temporary suspension of their employment contract.

Travel and transport

When telework is not viable and employees need to work from office premises, the security and accommodation of transport systems is key to ensure workplace accessibility and protect health.

In France, the 'Exceptional travel support for workers with disabilities' measure provides aid to particularly vulnerable people with disabilities for whom the use of public transport is strongly discouraged to avoid exposure to COVID-19. It offers a maximum of €100 in travel expenses per day worked during the period of lockdown or resumption of activity.

In the Netherlands, a 'COVID-19 protocol to ensure the safety of care transport' was introduced. It provides guidance to ensure that services offered can continue and that individuals who cannot use normal public transport can remain mobile. For people with disabilities this plays a role in workplace access and, more broadly, social inclusion.

Supportive framework: Income support

Other measures target people with disabilities who have suffered a temporary lay-off, who work part time, who receive a disability pension or who are on a particularly low income. Social protection can provide relief to those who have been economically affected by the COVID-19 crisis and has gained relevance for people with disabilities who have lost their job or income because of the pandemic.

One-off financial support

In some countries one-off solidarity/financial support payments have been provided for people with disabilities on a low income. Slovenia extended the circle of recipients of solidarity allowances to include beneficiaries of disability insurance compensation who are working part time, temporarily laid off or absent from work because of force majeure. This one-off allowance, combined with other disability compensations, should not exceed €700. Similarly, Lithuania provides a lump sum payment of €200 for people receiving a disability pension. In Belgium, an additional monthly premium of €50 was offered to those receiving social assistance benefits – including disability allowances – from July to December 2020.

In Malta, a benefit was created for those working in the private sector who were medically advised to remain at home but who were unable to work from home. Recipients obtain a weekly direct payment (€166.15 if working full time and €103.85 if working part time) on top of disability assistance and their social security contribution is paid.

Projects promoting independent living

In Italy, the resources assigned to the ‘Fund supporting non-self-sufficient people’ were increased. A total of €20 million is reserved for initiatives implementing projects promoting an independent life, including participation in the labour market. These financial resources are distributed to regional administrations, which in turn distribute them at the territorial level to support specific projects.

Extension of benefits

Other measures relate to the renewal of disability benefits, an increase in benefits or extensions to their duration and coverage. In Greece, throughout the lockdown period, the government extended the validity of disability certificates and the payment of benefits by three months for people with disabilities and chronic diseases. Similarly, France introduced a six-month ‘Extension of period for recipients of social rights allowances’ measure for recipients whose rights would have expired during the lockdown period.

5 Lessons learned and policy pointers

Despite policy efforts, people with disabilities remain one of the most disadvantaged groups in the EU. The labour market participation of people with disabilities continues to lag behind that of people without disabilities, and this increases their risk of living in poverty or social exclusion. Participation in the open labour market is fundamental to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy their right to independent living, and vice versa. It also enhances their professional and personal development and self-esteem.

People with disabilities are a heterogeneous population in terms of type and degree of disability, age, education level and skills, socioeconomic background and work experience. Moreover, they often suffer cumulative disadvantages. Factors other than disability can also contribute to the disability employment gap, but little is known about the specific contribution of each factor given the lack of systematic data. Furthermore, difficulties integrating people with disabilities into the open labour market also relate to stereotypes and misconceptions regarding their productivity and the still insufficient adjustment process between employers and jobseekers. A whole range of types of support is therefore needed to effectively enhance their labour market inclusion.

Employment was identified as one of the five top policy priorities for future action in the evaluation of the 2010–2020 European Disability Strategy. The new 2021–2030 strategy, which considers participation in employment as the best way to ensure economic autonomy and social inclusion, aims to foster access to quality and sustainable jobs. Together with the UNCRPD and the European Pillar of Social Rights, the strategy is the key instrument that will guide Member States in their actions to support people with disabilities.

Overall, EU countries have undergone a positive policy shift from a medical to a capacity concept of disability, and from an individual to a social concept of disability. Increasing emphasis on access to supported employment shows a clear orientation towards employment in the open labour market, even in those countries where forms of sheltered employment used to be relatively widespread. However, important differences exist between countries in terms of institutional and policy systems.

This study has examined the diversity of policy approaches and measures in use in EU countries to improve the labour market integration of people with

disabilities, and their key mechanisms, strengths, weaknesses and main outcomes. The 154 policy measures presented in this report were classified into four categories:

- support for job creation (labour supply and demand)
- support for individuals with disabilities (employees, jobseekers) (supply side)
- support for employing organisations (demand side)
- support for the institutional environment (context)

Most of the 154 policy measures address a combination of entry to, retention in and return to the labour market. Entry to work is the aspect covered most often, followed by labour market return. Job retention is a less frequent objective, probably because of the difficulty of ensuring sustainable labour market outcomes, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups. Even when contributing effectively to the employment outcomes of people with disabilities, most interventions struggle to incorporate a sustainability perspective to ensure the longer-term duration of these outcomes. The sustainability, continuation and preservation of service provision are equally fundamental.

Understanding the mechanisms and effectiveness of policy actions requires good-quality and disaggregated employment data, but a major shortcoming in EU Member States is the lack of granular statistics allowing the employment situation of people with disabilities (and a breakdown of key disability types) to be identified. This is exacerbated by the absence of a common official definition of disability, with terms varying across countries.

This report includes an abridged version of a case study of Ireland that uses a systems thinking approach, complementing the comparative research results in the other chapters. Ireland was chosen for the case study because participation in the labour market of people with disabilities is particularly low. This provides a good setting to study how a system functions in its entirety. The study shows that, by developing a better understanding of the fact that participation in the labour force is a complex issue occurring in an uncertain and changing environment, the development of more systemically viable responses becomes possible. This is based on continuous and shared learning by all parts of the system, rather than on fragmented attempts to solve the issue.

Although the study was planned and developed before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also attempted to consider the impact of the pandemic on the employment situation of people with disabilities. Data are still limited, but the crisis generated by the pandemic has confirmed and exacerbated the vulnerability of people with disabilities with regard to three main aspects – the health, social and economic/employment dimensions. Their vulnerability has also increased as a result of disruptions in access to and the provision of services (transport, access to the workplace and personal assistance, to mention a few that have a direct impact on employment). In this context, the study also looked at specific responses adopted in EU Member States to support the participation of people with disabilities in the open labour market in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, considering the extra risks they face.

Lessons learned

This study has highlighted the complexity associated with disability and offers an opportunity for learning and identifying areas for improvement.

In all Member States, disability support in the area of employment requires the intervention of different actors.

- National governments establish the legislative framework and strategic direction for disability policy, the broad mix of measures available and the balance of expectations between incentives and conditionality, employment support and welfare schemes.
 - Regional and local authorities play a key role in the definition and provision of services, and in the related public procurement. Different public and private services (healthcare, education, employment support) contribute to creating a system of support. Their coordination and the specialisation and skillset of their staff are key with regard to quality and effectiveness.
 - Employers play a crucial role in hiring, managing and retaining employees with disabilities. Their attitudes and openness to diversity and flexibility are prerequisites for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities. Different types of enterprises can contribute to the employment of people with disabilities. Among them, social enterprises are a specific example of entities that put this dimension at the centre of their work.
 - Social partners promote employment quality and protection, for instance, through collective agreements and initiatives to protect against dismissal.
- NGOs and civil society organisations – especially organisations representing people with disabilities – play a fundamental role in terms of service provision, advocacy and awareness-raising, and the collection and dissemination of information on the situation of different groups of people with disabilities.

Given the interconnectedness and complexity of needs of individuals with disabilities, responses must be multidisciplinary. The different actors have to operate in a coordinated and integrated way, rather than in silos. Within the ecosystem, the lead responsibility may be taken by one actor, such as one ministry within central (or regional) government that ensures that disability policy is mainstreamed and inclusive across the board.

Although disability has been increasingly integrated in policy responses introduced in EU Member States, this process seems far from being complete. The COVID-19 crisis has provided a new opportunity to observe how and whether this disability mainstreaming works in practice. In their rapid formulation of emergency responses to the pandemic, only rarely have Member States explicitly taken disability into account. One example is telework – a reasonable accommodation for workers, but which can have both negative and positive consequences for people with disabilities if not supported by complementary interventions such as psychosocial support to avoid further isolation and segregation.

Mainstreaming disability and ensuring the relevance of the support systems also require the consultation of people with disabilities through their representative organisations, but this has rarely happened when formulating policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The set of measures identified highlights that a variety of approaches has been adopted in EU Member States to support the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market. The analysis of the key types of measures identified, in place before the pandemic, allows different lessons to be derived.

Support for job creation

- Well-designed financial incentives for employees and employers can be effective in supporting work entry, especially if combined with high-quality complementary services with a longer-term perspective.
- Quota systems are a common approach that help to ensure diversity in the workplace. However, criticisms of these systems point to their mandatory nature, which is not necessarily combined with an awareness-raising function; non-compliance; and the risk that employers will select profiles of people with disabilities who can be more easily mobilised towards the labour market, therefore leaving behind those who are most in need of support.

- Social enterprises have an important role as creators of job opportunities for people with disabilities, but limited evidence is available on their effectiveness and social return on investment. For this model to be sustainable, both their social role and their economic role need to be supported, for instance, through favourable legal and institutional frameworks, and attention needs to be given to avoid new forms of segregation preventing a full transition to the open labour market.
- Opportunities related to entrepreneurship and self-employment can create new jobs and reduce dependence on disability benefits.
- Public administrations, especially at regional and local levels, can support social and employment development in their territories through public procurement and public works, which can act as a facilitator for people with disabilities to get closer to the open labour market.

Support for individuals with disabilities (employees, jobseekers)

- Employment-related interventions are more effective if they focus on both skills (upskilling, reskilling) and work tasks/job requirements. Supporting the skills of people with disabilities (through formal education, vocational training and work placements) is instrumental to labour market inclusion, especially when provided as part of integrated interventions.
- On-the-job training and work exposure opportunities, mentoring, job coaching and personal assistance providing support to both employees with disabilities and employers can raise awareness, increase familiarisation, reduce stereotypes and better prepare both employees and employers.
- Career counselling and guidance is important to make people with disabilities more aware of their own abilities; it can help them to realise how they could be exploited in the labour market and inform them about the availability of support.
- Vocational rehabilitation that includes health management and employment orientation can prevent workers with disabilities, or those who develop a disability while at work, from losing their job.
- Integrated and individualised interventions can be resource intensive. To be sustainable, they require efficient delivery and coordination mechanisms to be in place. If not, they may be at risk of being discontinued in times of budget cuts.
- The autonomy given to people with disabilities to select the most suitable types of support and accommodation (for instance, by providing them with a personal budget) can support the efficiency of resource allocation and the effectiveness of service provision.

Support for employing organisations

- Employers play a central role in the labour market inclusion of people with disabilities. Raising their awareness can ensure that opportunities are provided to integrate new employees and reintegrate people who have been out of work due to illness or because of an impairment back into employment. Extra attention should be given to smaller organisations, which may struggle more from a resource perspective.
- Adjustments and assistance help to ensure that the right conditions are established for people with disabilities to work. This means having inclusive physical and organisational adjustments in place, supported by accessible information and communications technology.
- Information and awareness-raising measures help to reduce information- and discrimination-related barriers to the employment of people with disabilities and support a more inclusive organisational culture.

Support for the institutional environment

- Framework conditions are conducive to getting jobseekers with disabilities into the open labour market. These refer to legislative policies concerning the employment of people with disabilities, the organisational and administrative aspects of the provision of employment services, and the coordination and balance between benefit generosity and the labour market services in place.
- Coordination of services is key. As jobseekers with disabilities often have complex needs, they require personalised measures and a wide range of services that are provided through a well-organised delivery process that harmonises the contributions of PES, external providers and employers, for instance, thorough well-functioning matching services.
- The organisational and administrative aspects of service provision are vital for efficient delivery. They can be strengthened through capacity-building actions that will improve the preparedness of service providers and the quality of service provision and processes.
- The implementation of pilot projects – which can be converted into more permanent interventions if effective – has proved useful to test the effectiveness of new ideas and approaches while minimising the risks of loss in the event of ineffectiveness.

The above points highlight that no one-size-fits-all solution exists. Support measures have progressively evolved towards client-centred, holistic and integrated solutions, especially when accompanied by a shift in the social awareness of the value and integration of people with disabilities. In contrast, dispersed, one-off, non-targeted interventions are unlikely to work.

The effectiveness of the support provided can be strengthened through a combination of responses, from different dimensions:

- disability mainstreaming in general labour market measures and tailored policy responses for specific situations and individuals, ensuring a good balance between personalised support and integrated support to meet general and particular needs
- responses tackling the different dimensions of the labour market (labour supply, labour demand and the whole ecosystem)
- coverage of the three dimensions of entry, retention and return through preventive and timely interventions
- incorporation of the sustainability of employment outcomes as a key perspective in any type of support provision

Obtaining a thorough understanding of the mechanisms and effectiveness of different measures has proved a complicated exercise as the types of evidence range from monitoring documents to quantitative evaluations, and therefore do not provide the same type and quality of information. The evaluation culture and practice in the field of employment support for people with disabilities is not yet broadly established across EU Member States. Moreover, research and assessments tend to be available mainly for measures that have been in place for longer, that are more common or that are required by law at national level. There is still a lack of widespread, robust evidence on the effectiveness of all the interventions.

It is too early to see evidence about the effectiveness of policy measures adopted to protect the employment situation of people with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As per information collected by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, the policy response has focused on cushioning social and economic consequences, and the needs of people with disabilities have not necessarily gained visibility in the wider debate. The nature and urgency of this crisis have required quick solutions, in which organisations representing people with disabilities have scarcely been formally involved. Some national evidence indicates that these measures have played a key role in protecting workers with disabilities from the risk of becoming unemployed. A supportive institutional environment has been fundamental during the pandemic, whereby assistance in the form of social security and income support with fewer conditionalities have been instrumental in providing immediate assistance to people with disabilities. Notwithstanding the above, the support has often been limited, mainly consisting of incentives for employers, employee

support, workplace adjustments, and income and social support for the most vulnerable. The COVID-19 context has demonstrated further the requirement for reasonable accommodation (from physical adjustments to adequate and accessible information and communications technology) to help people with disabilities to work flexibly and with full inclusion.

Despite the positive results identified, there is still room for improvement with regard to the actions taken, both before and during the pandemic, to contribute more actively to the achievement and fulfilment of the rights and principles stated in overarching policy objectives established in the UNCRPD, the European Disability Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Policy pointers

Several principles and policy pointers have been identified for policymakers to consider when designing interventions supporting the integration of people with disabilities in the open labour market.

Policy needs data, information and clear definitions

- For well-informed policy actions, consideration should be given to the available evidence on the situation and the needs of people with disabilities in the labour market based on disaggregated statistics; the representative organisations should also be consulted.
- For the above to be possible, more efforts on the collection of robust and granular data – disaggregated by disability type – are needed in every EU Member State and with a sufficient level of coordination and guidance at EU level to ensure their comparability.
- Member States should reflect on the legal definition of disability to achieve a shared basis and understanding.
- The above efforts must support and accompany the enhancement of an evaluation culture. There is a need for rigorous and systematic evaluation and monitoring of interventions supporting people with disabilities, focusing on aspects related to their effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability of the employment outcomes and transferability. Interventions should be monitored throughout the policy cycle to allow for learning and improvement and to feed back into the policymaking process.

People should be at the centre

- Policy support should move towards a person-centred approach, focusing on the potential and capacity to work rather than on a medical disability perspective.

- It is important to consider the interconnectedness of issues experienced by people with disabilities, responding in parallel with different dimensions/disadvantages (such as ensuring a gender perspective in disability support, or considering other dimensions such as age, ethnicity and homelessness) to combat social exclusion and eradicate (in-work) poverty.
- It is recommended that the type and degree of support required also reflects the different labour market situations of people with disabilities (for example, those outside the labour market, those close to (re)entry, those already in employment).
- It is important to ensure that every person with a disability can be reached and receives real opportunities to access the available measures, so that even those who are furthest from the labour market can be supported and this distance can be shortened.
- Any measure providing labour market support should have a disability-inclusion perspective, even when it targets the general population. In parallel with disability mainstreaming in general labour market measures, it is important that policy responses that are tailored to people's specific situations are made available. This also applies to the processes introduced in response to the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences.
- The measures tackling the four dimensions of job creation, support for individuals with disabilities (supply side), support for employing organisations (demand side) and support for the institutional environment (context) should represent a 'menu of options' for policymakers to consider when designing interventions adapted to the specificities of the target groups, the institutional and economic settings, and environmental and societal factors. Measures must be conceived, formulated and adapted while taking into account the whole ecosystem in which they are implemented.
- Consideration could be given to improving access to workplaces by removing barriers to mobility and providing financial incentives and support services for employers to adapt workplaces to the needs of employees with disabilities.
- Reasonable accommodation should be afforded to people with disabilities to enable them to perform their work, both in the workplace and – if telework is adopted – at home.

Policy coordination and balance based on a life-cycle approach must be at the core of service design and provision

- Integration and balance between policy areas must be ensured, including between the generosity of disability benefits and incentives for employment for people with disabilities. This should be conducive to a more proactively inclusive world of work, therefore reducing the need to rely on compulsory schemes such as diversity quotas.
- The complexity and diversity of the situations of people with disabilities in the labour market require specialised and high-quality support. Systems and institutions need to have sufficient capacity to provide effective and disability-inclusive responses. Member States need to empower and strengthen the skills and capabilities of staff and organisations working in the disability field that have a labour market orientation.
- Policy coordination also requires a lifelong, preventive and long-term perspective to be adopted.
 - Support measures such as guidance and mentoring should be available throughout all stages of employment.
 - Since the inclusion of people with disabilities does not begin when they start working, but rather when they are in education, adequate financial and human resources are required to provide inclusive education and effective lifelong learning with a focus on upskilling and reskilling.
 - Moreover, as disadvantages accumulate over time and most people acquire a disability during their working life, more attention needs to be given to enabling people to continue working when they acquire a disability. It is important that rehabilitation services are not left underdeveloped, underfunded or underused.
- In order for a system to be fair, labour market practices must be accessible and disability inclusive across all stages, from the definition of job posts and opportunities to recruitment and retention.
- Moreover, policy actions should not disregard any of the three dimensions of entry into, retention in and return to the labour market.

Support is most useful when it is visible, inclusive and accessible

- The voices of people with disabilities need to be heard in the formulation of policies affecting them and should not be ignored under any circumstances, even in the case of emergency responses such as those introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In order to ensure the reach and coverage of the measures, awareness must be raised of their availability, ensuring their high visibility and the targeting of every potential beneficiary. Increasing the accessibility of information by providing it in different formats has been fundamental during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Coordination between services and stakeholders, including PES, health services and education and training providers, is key and needs to be ensured in the context of a scarcity of resources.
- While the ultimate objective of the labour market participation of people with disabilities is full inclusion, independence and participation in society, adequate and inclusive social protection mechanisms need to accompany this process.

Strategic and financial commitments need to go hand in hand

- Despite progress, efforts are still needed to ensure that stereotypes, discrimination and segregation of people with disabilities are completely eradicated. More investment is needed to build inclusive societies and workplaces.
- The EU and its Member States need to commit to the full alignment and implementation of the UNCRPD, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the new Disability Strategy and to ensure that more actions are taken to fully exploit the potential of all people with disabilities who can be active in the open labour market.
- While ensuring the enforcement of the measures already in place, it is important to go beyond legal obligations (such as the fulfilment of quotas) and provide ambitious policy actions. This is key from both a societal and an economic perspective and can contribute to the independent living of people with disabilities, their social and labour market participation and, overall, more sustainable labour markets and social welfare systems.
- For all of the above to be fulfilled, financial resources need to be invested in employment interventions for people with disabilities. Financial support should be made available by the EU and within each Member State, following a disability rights perspective and by fostering coordination between European and national actions, funds and policies.

- When setting up funds for labour market-related interventions, it is recommended that disability inclusion is considered as a criterion for the selection of beneficiaries or the allocation of budgets to different organisations. Specific budgets and prioritised access to resources are needed to address the needs of people with disabilities, especially in times of crisis such as that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, even when disability is fully mainstreamed in policy responses.
- Key actors must be supported with training and financial and human resources. Special attention should be devoted to supporting organisations representing people with disabilities and NGOs, so that they can provide full support for labour market inclusion, not only through direct assistance, but also by collecting and disseminating information on the labour market situation and on the needs of different groups of people with disabilities.
- Funds should be made available to scale up and implement successful approaches in the longer term, in larger territories or to target larger populations.

Responses need to be relevant to the present but ensure a forward-looking perspective

- As the world and forms of work evolve – as demonstrated by the surge in telework during the pandemic, which will also be required in the just transition towards environmental sustainability and digitalisation – particular attention is needed to ensure that different types of work are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. Inclusive technology needs to be at the core of policy responses.
- It is fundamental that people with disabilities are supported in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring that they are not left behind because of a lack of accessible solutions, a decrease in recruitment and increased competition in the labour market (because of the existence of a larger pool of jobseekers who were dismissed during the crisis).

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This report examines policy developments in EU Member States aimed at supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market, with a particular focus on the three stages of entering into employment, staying in the job and returning to work after an absence. It explores the mechanisms and effectiveness of more than 150 different policy measures designed to address the dimensions in place in the EU before the COVID-19 pandemic: job creation, labour supply, labour demand and contextual factors. In addition, it provides an updated analysis of early policy measures created in the wake of the pandemic that aimed to support the labour market situation of people with disabilities. A country case study on Ireland complements the study by outlining the complexity of disability and support systems from a broader perspective. The report builds on the lessons learned and provides policy pointers to improve the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market.

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