

**Beyond
Inclusion**



**Employability for
persons with disabilities**

**K2 – Strategic Partnerships
„Beyond Inclusion: Employability for persons with disabilities”
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**Research study on employability-disability nexus for the
development of learning material for SMEs and
persons with disabilities for social inclusion and benefits for
SMEs**

REPORT FOR GREECE



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1. Methodological approach

The research methodology was already drafted at the proposal stage. Composed on the basis of a mixed-method approach, it included desk research and field research.

1.1. Desk research

Desk research was conducted based on literature review during the months of March and April 2021, for identification of crucial factors, facilitators, scope of the learning intervention to be developed, with respect to status, perceptions, views of SMEs, HR, recruiting actors, persons with disabilities, organizations supporting persons with disabilities at project countries level, regarding the disability-employability nexus.

1.2. Field research: surveys and interviews

Field research has been conducted during the months of April and May 2021 on two categories of stakeholders. Both SMEs' representatives (HR, managerial/executive level staff incl. consultants who are responsible for recruiting, hiring, retaining employees.) and persons with disabilities (hearing impairments, visual impairments, mobility impairments) or their support actors had to respond to a quantitative questionnaire with regards to the employability of persons with disabilities in SMEs. In total 46 questionnaires were collected in Greece, among them 24 from SMEs and 21 from persons with disabilities.

Among the respondents with disabilities, 81% of them are male and 19% of them female and belong to all adult age groups. 62% of them have a physical disability, 19% are deaf or have a hearing impairment, while 14% are blind or visually impaired. 85% of the respondents are currently working and 10% are not working right now yet are in search of a job. With regards to the educational level of the respondents, 16% of them have not acquired a high school degree, while most of the other 84% are currently enrolled or have graduated from their undergraduate studies. 10% of the respondents have a master degree as well.

To elaborate on the aspects addressed in the quantitative surveys in Greece 10 interviews were held among persons with disabilities. Sign interpreters were provided for the persons with hearing impairments.



2. Literature review regarding the disability-employability nexus in Greece.

AIM AND MAIN THEME: Identification of crucial factors, facilitators, scope of the learning intervention to be developed, with respect to status, perceptions, views of SMEs, HR, recruiting actors, persons with disabilities, organizations supporting persons with disabilities at project countries level, regarding the disability-employability nexus.

2.1 Employability of persons with disabilities in Greece

According to the Law 4488/2017, that lays the foundations for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Greece “as persons with disabilities are defined those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, in particular institutional, environmental or attitudinal, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”¹

Although Greek legislations point to a “human rights approach and the social model of disability, there is no universally applied definition on disability, and thus the medical approach to disability prevails in many areas, e.g., disability assessment. The reality is that the Greek legal framework is in a transitional phase. On the one hand, the human rights approach to disability as prescribed by the CRPD gains more and more ground, on the other, one could say that there is still dominance of the medical approach to disability”.²

With regards to employment, inclusion of persons with disabilities in Greek labour market as per the relevant data are rather disappointing, presenting the substantial violation of their rights to work, exercise their freedom and participate in the community.

According to the research conducted by the Hellenic Statistical Authority in cooperation with Eurostat in 2016, as per the GALI (Global Activity Limitation Index), people with serious or moderate impairments are 24,7% of the Greek population.

Among persons with serious impairments that belong to the working age population only 24,2% are employed, compared to the general population that the employment rate reaches

¹ N. 4488/2017 article 60. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ergasia-koinonike-asphalise/nomos-4488-2017-fek-137a-13-9-2017.html>

² National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP). 2019. *Human Rights and Persons with Disabilities, Alternative Report Greece*, Ilioupoli: National Confederation of Disabled People



57,6%. The overall unemployment rate among persons with serious disabilities reaches 39%, while among persons with moderate impairments, it reaches 29,3%.

Apart from the unemployment rates themselves, indicating a significant field that requires intervention, it is important to be noted that 84% of persons with disabilities mention that they do not have proper accommodation at their work environment.³

The data around employability of persons with disabilities in Greece describes a core area of intervention and highlights the need for inclusion of persons with disabilities in SMEs and the labour market in general, indicating at the same time an unexploited potential in this untapped labour force.

The National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Greece announced some interventions about employability of persons with disabilities for the years 2021-23. (Incentives for employers to recruit persons with disabilities, reinforcing supported employment as a means of creativity and independent living, support for artists with disabilities etc.)⁴. However, most of the measures address the public sector or companies with more than 50 employees, not addressing the wide issue of unemployment of persons with disabilities in small and medium-size enterprises.

The National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP) is a significant institution that represents persons with disabilities and promotes their inclusion into the labour market. Raising awareness, informing about all disability issues and all the legislation changes on national, European and international level, evaluating new policies and submitting policy recommendations, the NCDP along with other institutions such as the National Federation for the Blind, the Hellenic Federation of the Deaf, the National Federation of Physically Impaired and the Greek Patients Association, promote inclusion beyond the social responsibility, addressing discrimination against persons with disabilities as a substantial violation of their rights.

³ Ε.Σ.Α.μεΑ Παρατήριο Θεμάτων Αναπηρίας. 2018. *2ο Δελτίο Στατιστικής Πληροφόρησης: "Δείκτες Απασχόλησης και Πληθυσμός με Αναπηρία- Μέρος Α"* Ηλιούπολη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.esamea.gr/publications/others/3732-2o-deltio-paratiritirioy-thematon-anapirias-tis-e-s-a-mea-deiktes-apasxolisis-kai-plithysmos-me-anapiria-meros-aa>

⁴Υπουργός Επικρατείας. 2020. «Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τα Δικαιώματα των Ατόμων με Αναπηρία» Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <http://www.opengov.gr/ypep/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2020/09/%CE%95%CE%B8%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%BF%CC%81-%CE%A3%CF%87%CE%B5%CC%81%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CE%94%CF%81%CE%B1%CC%81%CF%83%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B1-%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%>



2.2 Legislation regarding employment of persons with disabilities in Greece

According to the article 21 par. 6 of the Greek Constitution: “People with disabilities have the right to benefit from measures ensuring their self-sufficiency, professional integration and participation in the social, economic and political life of the Country”.⁵

The Law 4074/12, ratifying the UN’s CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to “live in the community, with choices equal to others”, and the “full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community” on an equal basis.

Therefore, since employability is a key element of inclusion and participation in the community, the aforementioned law sanctions “the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:

- a) Prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions;
- b) Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;
- c) Ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others;
- d) Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- e) Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
- f) Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one’s own business;
- g) Employ persons with disabilities in the public sector;

⁵ Σύνταγμα της Ελλάδος, άρθρο 21 παρ. 6 Retrieved May 10· 2021 from <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Syntagma/article-21/>



- h) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;
- i) Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace;
- j) Promote the acquisition by persons with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market;
- k) Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities”.⁶

The right to equal treatment in the work environment (both for public and private sector) is recognized by the Law N. 4443/2016. Direct or indirect discrimination due to disability or chronic disease is prohibited and accessibility at work, the hiring criteria and requirements about professional development are governed by the provisions of the aforementioned Law. Furthermore, the Law 4443/2016 safeguards work conditions, such as benefits, health and insurance, dismissal rights, inclusion in case of unemployment, as well as access to all levels of education, professional orientation and training or internships on an equal basis. Non-discriminating participation in union movements is also ensured.

Explicitly it is stated that denying “reasonable accommodation” in the work environment that facilitates the employment of persons with disabilities or chronic diseases is prohibited. The employer has to take appropriate measures in order to ensure that persons with disabilities or chronic diseases have access to the work environment and are able to exercise their duties, develop their skills and participate in training sessions, when the cost of the accommodation is not disproportionate based on the organization’s financial ability.

On these grounds, an employment quotas system has been enforced since 1998 (Law 2643/1998) and extra provisions have been introduced in 2016 with the Law 4440/2016. This quotas system in general addresses almost entirely public companies or private organizations with more than 50 employees.⁷ Another quotas system has been instituted with Law 4019/2011 about Social Enterprises that target inclusion, where 40% of its workforce needs to belong to the under inclusion group.⁸

Therefore, the majority of SMEs in Greece is left out of the legal framework.

⁶N. 4074/2012 αρ. 27 Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/diethneis-sunthekes/nomos-4074-2012-fek-88a-11-4-2012.html>

⁷ Ε.Σ.Α.μεΑ Παρατήριο Θεμάτων Αναπηρίας. 2020. «Οδηγός απασχόλησης και επιχειρηματικότητας για άτομα με αναπηρία και χρόνιες παθήσεις» Ηλιούπολη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.esamea.gr/publications/books-studies/5032-odigos-apasxolisis-kai-epixeirimatikotitas-gia-atoma-me-anapiria-kai-xronies-pathiseis>

⁸N. 4019/2011 αρ. 2 Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-epikheireseis/n-4019-2011.html>



2.3 Barriers and enablers to employment in Greece

Employers in Greece hesitate to include persons with disabilities in their workforce. The reason behind this attitude is that most of the employers think that persons with disabilities are less productive because of their disability⁹, that they lack proper education, that the costs for their accommodation at work are going to be really high and the interaction with the rest of the employees problematic.

These misperceptions cease to exist when the employers actually hire a person with disability. Research shows¹⁰ that most of the employers employing persons with disabilities are satisfied with their performance, the rest of their employees are highly motivated and customer loyalty increases towards businesses that include persons with disabilities in their workforce. These facts act as enablers to employment of persons with disabilities, since most of the employers that have actually experienced the benefits from hiring persons with disabilities retain them in their workforce for a long time.

With regards to the costs of the accommodation of persons with disabilities, they are often overrated.¹¹ The majority of persons with disabilities does not actually need “reasonable accommodation” and if they do, this cost is insignificant. Besides, teleworking has been introduced in Greece as a form of employment in 2006 and lately, especially after the restrictions of the pandemic, it is considered an acceptable and popular form of employment.

The barriers for persons with disabilities at the workplace are various, depending on their type of disability. For a person with a mobility impairment, lack of accessibility at the work place (stairs instead of ramps, limited spaces, slippery floor surfaces) and lack of technical equipment (i.e. wheelchair) can hinder their accommodation. For a deaf or heard hearing person, the restrictions relate to lack of Sign Language Translation, lack of replacement of the spoken word by written text, or lack of conversion of the audio signals (i.e. alarms) into visual signals, while blind or visually impaired people might face challenges when there is no tactile paving, colour contrasts on the walls, audio signals, alternative presentations of the written texts (big characters, Braille, digital form), replacement of visual notifications by audio.¹²

⁹ Λογαράς, Δ. 2013. *Συνδικαλιστική Εκπαίδευση Στελεχών Αναπηρικού Κινήματος/ 2: Εργασία – Απασχόληση και Αναπηρία* Ηλιούπολη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία 60

¹⁰ Λογαράς, Δ. 2013. *Συνδικαλιστική Εκπαίδευση Στελεχών Αναπηρικού Κινήματος/ 2: Εργασία – Απασχόληση και Αναπηρία* Ηλιούπολη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία 60-62

¹¹ Λογαράς, Δ. 2013. *Συνδικαλιστική Εκπαίδευση Στελεχών Αναπηρικού Κινήματος/ 2: Εργασία – Απασχόληση και Αναπηρία* Ηλιούπολη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία

¹² Ε.Σ.Α.μεΑ Παραττήριο Θεμάτων Αναπηρίας. 2019. *Οδηγός εργοδοτών για την απασχόληση των ατόμων με αναπηρία*. Ηλιούπολη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.esamea.gr/publications/books-studies/4995-odigos-ergodoton-gia-tin-apasxolisi-ton-atomon-me-anapiria>



Therefore, the architectural, ergonomic or technological barriers for persons with disabilities can easily be removed with “reasonable accommodation”. The substantial barriers that arise from the misconceptions about disability are the ones that need to be eradicated through Informing and awareness raising, and bureaucratic obstacles deriving from policies excluding persons with disabilities from certain forms of education or employment need to be eliminated.¹³

Based on the above, since the barriers to employment of persons with disabilities are formed on a discriminatory mindset identifying disability with inability, when redirected towards an inclusive work environment that benefits the company, where diversity of skills and abilities is an asset, SMEs will practically remove this barriers.

2.4 Good practices for learning materials in Greece

NAME OF THE GOOD PRACTICE 2: ARTimeleia Theatre Group
Inclusive art group
ARTimeleia is a theatre group consisted of actors with and without physical/kinetic disabilities that targets to develop the acting skills of both the actors with and without disabilities.
Its primary aim is to explore the unlimited possibilities that the physical limits offer in an integrated theatrical environment. The continuously developing acting skills of both the disabled and the non-disabled actors are unique based on the method ‘a neurological approach to acting’ developed by their artistic director, Annita Kapousizi.
This inclusive environment creates a high quality artistic result, welcomed by colleagues and art critics.
ARTimeleia includes all levels of artists. Diversity of skills is what leads to the development of the artistic result.
The artistic director of ARTimeleia uses a “neurological approach to acting”, adjusted to the abilities of persons with mobility impairments. Performances are built on each actor’s unique abilities and talents and the group promotes their skills. The interaction of the group motivates the actors without disabilities as well, promoting their talents and creates an absolutely inclusive mindset deriving from the benefits that arise from disability inclusion. Soft skills are enhanced by the interaction of this diverse group for persons both with and without disabilities and their artistic skills are developed by this exchange of ideas and perceptions.

¹³ Ε.Σ.Α.μεΑ Παρατήριο Θεμάτων Αναπηρίας. 2019. *Οδηγός εργοδοτών για την απασχόληση των ατόμων με αναπηρία*. Ηλιοπούλη: Εθνική Συνομοσπονδία Ατόμων με Αναπηρία. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.esamea.gr/publications/books-studies/4995-odigos-ergodoton-gia-tin-apaxholisi-ton-atomon-me-anapiria>



NAME OF THE GOOD PRACTICE 3: ReGeneration
Training Programme
ReGeneration is the largest paid placement, professional, and personal development program challenging brain drain in Greece by fostering youth employability in an all-inclusive way.
<p>Vision: Democratize opportunity for Greek youth by catalysing the up and re-skilling revolution in Greece, empowering the next generation of young professionals to thrive.</p> <p>Professional & Personal Development: Continuous investment in this holistic program that provides, aside from paid employment, targeted training and community service engagement, as part of an integrated experience that prepares participants to advance on both a professional and personal level.</p> <p>Highlighting Talent & Skills: They bridge the gap between talented individuals, and companies. The program offers graduates the opportunity not only to be employed, but also to acquire the skills necessary to stay competitive in the job market, challenging youth unemployment.</p> <p>Method: Mapping the junior talent market based on 4 criteria: up to 29 years old, 0-3 years of professional experience, community involvement through extracurricular activities. 2 stages assessment: evaluation and selection through game-based assessment and gamified psychometric tests. Live Assessment: 30 minutes interview from experienced executives who evaluate potential finalists. Development: 32 hours of soft skills training before placement, 80-250 hours of hard skills training on cutting-edge technology and developing sectors of the Greek economy, before placement, 25 hours of community service, Mentoring by top executives. Placement: Min 750 euros monthly gross salary, Min 6-month contract in multinational, small and medium-sized companies and start-ups, 90% contract extension.</p>
ReGeneration works with an accessibility consultant . The participants, in their application, include any impairment. Each stage is evaluated by a focus group of disabled people and it is being adjusted to the individual needs of every disabled participant. The accessibility consultant keeps an open communication with the participants. The promotion of each cycle is carefully designed to be accessible to everyone.
Every stage of the process is evaluated and adjusted to the personal needs of every disabled participant e.g. Written interview instead of spoken one.
The trainers are pre-trained in matters of diversity and inclusion to better integrate disabled students in their class. The training is carried by disabled people that work on the field. That way they adapt their training materials themselves having as a constant consultant the disabled focus group.



NAME OF THE GOOD PRACTICE 4: Career Fair4All

Training Seminars and Matchmaking of employers and employees

Career Fair.4all tries to bring the Greek labour market close to disabled people through a yearly career fair where disabled people and companies that are hiring get together for live interviews.

The main axis of Career Fair.4all is the personal networking of people with company managers. Via Career Fair4All academy they support disabled people to know their labour rights, to discover the profession that suits them best, to evolve in the social media era, to develop their skills and CV.

At the same time they train the companies involved to better accommodate disabled employees.

The main goal is to evolve the Fair in a general all-inclusive way to involve everyone.

Inclusion and accessibility should be considered in a-for-all design whenever there is a big event regarding employability. Via Career Fair4All companies understand the power of diversity in the workplace and get in touch with the laws they can advantage of.





2.5 Good practices for policy recommendations in Greece

NAME OF THE GOOD PRACTICE 1: Lifelong Training Centers (KeDiVim)
Governmental program
Lifelong Learning Centers are operating since 2010 with the aim of promoting the upgrading of environment, digital, literacy, civic, financial, Personal & Interpersonal capabilities among marginalized groups (people with disabilities, immigrants, religious minorities etc.)
The program aims at promoting a positive attitude to learning, ensure equal access to education, using leisure time in a creative way, enhancing access to the labour market and finally, to integrate or re-integrate into the education process any adult who for any reason has not completed the compulsory education cycle.
A repository of learning material in each of the disciplines that boosts social activation, active involvement, put on practice (project-based learning) and self-learning (via educational material provided with activities, scenarios, etc., available online). Regarding this way of sharing information, a problem-posing approach is being activated. The substantive differentiation of KeDiVIM is that the Municipality has the ability to decide on and organize the educational and training programs that it wishes to implement in its region. This enables the process of selecting educational programs to be reversed, as it is possible to first investigate the educational needs of citizens and then 'translate' the needs into learning programs. This way, persons with disabilities develop and promote their skills and manage to enter the labour market in positions suited to their talents, benefiting the business.

NAME OF THE GOOD PRACTICE 2: Observatory of Disability Affairs of NCPD
Policy & strategy
The Observatory aims to monitor and evaluate disability policies throughout public life in the light of the legal approach to disability and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the NCPD as the core of disability policy production.
The Observatory is a powerful tool of the disability movement, so that the rights of people with disabilities and chronic diseases are not left on paper, but translated into real changes in the life of disabled people and the creation of an inclusive society with equal rights and opportunities for all. It conducts thematic research and each year prepares a report on disability issues in Greece, following the course of social integration of disabled people.
Among other things, they have prepared a report on the employment of the disabled in Greece, the results of which could be studied in the program compared to similar records of other countries of the European Union



3. Quantitative and qualitative study on employability-disability nexus.

3.1 Employability of the persons with disabilities in the SMEs

In Greece, from the analysed sample, 23% of SMEs are currently employing and/or have employed in the past persons with disabilities (hearing impairments, visual impairments, mobility impairments, other types of disabilities).

When hiring persons with disabilities, 60% of these companies have recruited a person with disability through direct recruitment or recommendations, 40% with the help of organizations/bodies that support the rights of people with disabilities and 20% through the Ministry of Labour, while the persons with disabilities prefer to look for a job: through recommendations (with the help of family, friends, acquaintances) (47%), by directly contacting the employer(21%), By applying online for an available position (16%).

77,3 of SMEs are not employing and/or have not employed in the past persons with disabilities, due to reasons such as:

- The nature of the job and inability of persons with disabilities to perform it (29,5%)
- The fact that they have never received an application from a person with disability. (29,5% as well).

When looking for a job, persons with disabilities are motivated by the following reasons: they want to be creative (47%), to be financially independent from the family (42%), to learn new things (31,6%) and refer to their family (32%) or to their friends (21%) for advice or support, while 53% of the respondents have not received any support in looking for a job.

The daily life of persons with disabilities is affected in various ways, depending on the type of disability they have. Most of them face accessibility issues, while some lack independent living and must be supported. Therefore, most of the interviewees highlighted how important it is to have a job, mainly in order to be creative and be an active member of the society but also, in order to be financially independent and support themselves, since life in a non-accessible environment can be rather expensive.

Only 4,5% of SMEs consider the legislation supporting the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market to be effective while 86,3% of SMEs view the legislation in Greece as not effective enough.

The following shortcomings and gaps in the legislation have been identified by the respondents:

- Not enough facilities for employers when hiring persons with disabilities
- Inadequate insurance policies
- Lack of education for both the Community and the persons of disabilities



84% of the questioned persons with disabilities (hearing impairments, visual impairments, mobility impairments) think that finding and sustaining work in Greece is challenging or very challenging.

10 persons with disabilities were interviewed with regards to their employability. According to their opinion, the whole perception of the society points to the wrong direction, questioning the productivity of persons with disabilities, identifying disability with inability. Therefore, when in search for a job, persons with disabilities face serious difficulties and some of them do not hesitate to mention that they have to create their own job opportunities if they want to find a place in the labour market.

More specifically, interviewees mention that when applying for a job they face accessibility issues in the workplace. Apart from the architectural accessibility of the work environment, a deaf interviewee has mentioned that he was called for an interview without the presence of a sign language interpreter! Almost all of them highlighted the bias with regards to the disabled employees' productivity and that they end up being either self-employed, or hired by employers they know personally, or absorbed in the public sector.

The misconception about the work skills of persons with disabilities affects their confidence, as one of the interviewees has mentioned, resulting in a vicious circle, where lack of confidence becomes an additional limitation for persons with disabilities in finding and maintaining a job.

3.2 Levels of awareness regarding the social, cultural, financial value of a diverse, disability-inclusive workforce in the SMEs

Despite the fact that 77,3 of the responding SMEs have never employed a person with disability, all of them (100%) think that the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the labour market as important or very important!

When approaching the employment of the persons with disabilities

- 95% of the responding SMEs recognize that a person with disabilities makes a greater effort to find a job than a person without disabilities. However,
- 86% of them agree that a person with disabilities can integrate very well into the normal work pace and that hiring persons with disabilities has positive effects on the image of the company/organization/institution.
- 82% of the responding SMEs agree that the quality of the work done by a person with disability is the same as that of those without disabilities.
- 82% of the responding SMEs agree that for a person with disabilities finding a job is mainly determined by the skills and knowledge possessed.
- 82% of the responding SMEs agree that there are employers who consider physical disability an impediment to employment.

When asked the same question, the persons with disabilities have similar views as the representatives of the SMEs. From their perspective:



- A person with disabilities makes a greater effort to find a job than a person without disabilities (86%)
- Hiring a person with disabilities brings benefits and advantages to the company (86%)
- There are employers who consider physical disability an impediment to employment (81%)
- A person with disabilities can easily integrate into a team (76%)
- Hiring persons with disabilities has positive effects on the image of the company/organization/institution (71%)

From the 22,7% of SMEs which are currently employing and/or have employed in the past persons with disabilities, all of them are very satisfied with the performance of the persons with disabilities in the workplace.

While applying for a job, 79% of the respondents with disabilities encountered “a positive/encouraging behaviour with regards to the integration of persons with disabilities” while 10,5% have encountered both positive and negative/discriminatory/discouraging behaviour with regards to the integration of persons with disabilities”.

For the 95% of them having a job is important or very important, while 63% believe that their current job is the right one.

While at the workplace, 47% would like to see no change in the attitude of their colleagues/peers, while:

- 32% of them would prefer their colleagues to ask if they need help before actually helping
- and 26% of them would prefer their colleagues to have the courage to ask about their disability rather than to presume knowledge, to be treated as an individual because all people should be treated equally and to avoid focusing on my disability and act as they would normally act.

3.3 Impeding factors in hiring persons with disabilities in the SMEs

Most of the representatives of SMEs note that they have concerns when hiring persons with disabilities, such as:

- Lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities
- Not knowing how much accommodation will cost
- Actual cost of accommodating disability
- Attitudes of co-workers, supervisors and customers

In fact, when accommodating employees with disabilities within the company 41% of the respondents note that the unfavourable attitude of colleagues or customers may hinder the hiring of persons with disabilities, while almost the same percentage of the respondents (36%) believes that the unfavourable attitude of employers may have the same outcome.

From the perspective of the SMEs representatives, the persons with disabilities face the following main challenges when entering the labour market



- Lack of promotion of jobs among persons with various disabilities (68%)
- Employers rarely see people with disabilities applying for jobs (68%)
- Employers' perception of persons with disabilities / don't know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job / concerns about attitudes of co-workers toward the person with a disability (59%)
- Particularities of vacancies (59%)
- Their accommodation costs (45,5%)
- Employers' safety concerns regarding people with disabilities (45,5%)

The persons with disabilities consider that they face the following challenges when entering the labour market:

- Lack of promotion of jobs among persons with various disabilities (68%)
- Employers' perception of persons with disabilities / don't know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job / concerns about attitudes of co-workers toward the person with a disability (38%)
- The cost of providing reasonable accommodations so that workers with disabilities can do their jobs / other costs, such as increased health insurance or worker's compensation premiums (37%)
- Employers are afraid they won't be able to discipline or fire a worker with a disability for poor performance, because of potential lawsuits (32%)
- Other employees' perception of persons with disabilities / concerns about the extra time that supervisors or co-workers will need to spend to assist workers with disabilities (32%)

When analysing the 2 groups we can observe that there are some similarities. Both SMEs and persons with disabilities view the lack of promotion of jobs among persons with disabilities as the main challenge when entering the labour market. Additionally, they both consider that employers' perception for persons with disabilities, the cost of their accommodation and concern about the possible attitude of co-workers may limit the entry of persons with disabilities in the labour market. However, it is interesting to note that SMEs do not receive often applications from persons with disabilities, considering this fact as a major challenge along with the particularities of vacancies, while persons with disabilities add in one extra challenge they face, when entering the labour market, the fear of the employers when firing or enforcing discipline measures to a person with disability.

During the interviews that were held, interviewees with disabilities described their experiences when looking for a job. Supportive behaviour from employers and colleagues was among the positive experiences in their work environment. However, the cases where they had to face discrimination with regards to their disability were numerous. Interviewees with disabilities mention specifically that people assume things for their disability and their personality without actually knowing them, and for this reason, as candidates for a job, they have to show exceptional soft skills and actually prove who they really are and the quality of work they are capable of. Also, employers find excuses not to hire a person with disabilities, according to some of the interviewees' opinion, and are not flexible to different ways of



performing the job. One of the interviewees points out that when teleworking was suggested by a person with disability 2 years ago as a different form of performing the job, the employers turned it down saying that “teleworking is a way for the employee to be lazy and avoid control”.

3.4 Perceived facilitating factors in hiring persons with disabilities in the SMEs

To increase in the number of persons with disabilities in employment, the SMEs indicate the following possible measures:

- More adequate policies and standards to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. clear policy of inclusive education, enforceable access standards in physical environments, and priority accorded to rehabilitation) 73%
- Investments in specific programmes and services for persons with disabilities (68%)
- More financial / economic facilities for employers (e.g. tax reduction in relation to the number of persons with disabilities employed) (63,6%)
- Training programmes for employers to create an inclusive mindset among SME’s (64%)
- Adapting legislation so that it is more inclusive towards persons with disabilities (59%)

Similarly, the persons with disabilities view the following measures as possible to lead to an increase in the number of persons with disabilities in employment:

- More adequate policies and standards to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. clear policy of inclusive education, enforceable access standards in physical environments, and priority accorded to rehabilitation) (57,9%)
- Increasing public awareness and understanding of disability (47%)
- Investments in specific programmes and services for persons with disabilities (42%)
- Training programmes for employers to create an inclusive mindset among SME’s (37%)
- More financial / economic facilities for employers (e.g. tax reduction in relation to the number of persons with disabilities employed), creating special training programmes for persons with disabilities and adapting legislation so that it is more inclusive towards persons with disabilities (32%)

According to the respondents, in order to better integrate in the workplace, the persons with disabilities need/can benefit, from:

- Adaptation of the work environment to provide access to the place of work (e.g. accessible parking, elevators, modified toilets, railings)73%/ Persons with disabilities respectively;
- A clear company strategy on disability management in the workplace (54,5%) % Persons with disabilities respectively;



- Ensuring equal opportunities with other workers at the workplace to acquire the skills and experience necessary to advance in the career (54,5%) Persons with disabilities respectively;
- Enforcing policies prohibiting discrimination in the workplace (50%) Persons with disabilities respectively;
- Better communication and awareness raising within the workplace in regard to potential challenges for workers with disabilities (45,5%) Persons with disabilities respectively.

To get a job, for the persons with disabilities the determining factors are: Skills acquired during studies (63,2%), Experience in the field (47%), Personality traits (42%), Personal relationships (family, friends, acquaintances) (42%), Proper preparation for interviews, competitions (37%).

The knowledge and understanding of the legislation regarding the employment of persons with disabilities would improve the work situation for 95% respondents.

The participation in programmes supporting professional development for inclusion in the labour market (courses, trainings, seminars/workshops, etc.) is useful for 74% of the respondents. 9% of SMEs organize this type of programmes within their company/ institution, for example sheltered workshops for the visually impaired conducted by the Lighthouse for the Blind.

For the respondents, the following skills and abilities are considered to be the most important to be developed in a person with disabilities, for employment:

Agreeability and Cooperation (63%),

Tenacity and Creativity (58%)

Resilience, Sincerity, Flexibility (53%)

Change Management, Problem Solving (42%),

while some interviewees emphasize the acceptance of their disability as a parameter to find and maintain job, as a factor of self-confidence and thus effective self-presentation when applying for a job.

The interviewees were asked whether they considered themselves as “persons with disabilities”. Between their diverse answers, there was a common axe: it’s who they are. They do have impairments, but as one of them said “Some things are just harder, we are not lacking the ability”. Persons with disabilities appreciate the same skills at work as everyone else. Teamwork, flexibility, honesty, taking initiative are some of the skills they believe one needs to have in order to integrate effectively in a work environment. Most of them highlight self-confidence, for some not an easy task due to the discrimination they have faced in the work environment. Others mention that this exact same discrimination helped them develop certain skills such as resilience and adaptiveness. Some are very self-confident as well. One interviewee mentioned: “I have given labour to 2 kids, I run my own business, I have everything, I can do anything.”.

Based on their responses, what they need to know is their strengths, and develop the ability to present them at an interview. Self-confidence and self-presentation, as they said, matters when trying to enter the labour market.



The interviewees admit, also, that the creation of an inclusive environment changes the mindset of their colleagues. Amidst an environment where awareness about inclusion is insufficient, other employees learn more about inclusion and they are taught how to actually include and embrace a person with disability. What some of the interviewees wish is that their colleagues asked more about their disability, instead of assuming, and one of them mentions that persons with disabilities themselves should be open as well, not presuming others are against them. They just don't know, as they say. Not knowing creates a specific mindset about persons with disabilities, and this mindset is the "real disability" as one interviewee has added.

3.5 Perceived benefits of hiring persons with disabilities in the SMEs

When considering the advantages/benefits to hiring individuals with disabilities, the following were identified by the responding SMEs:

- 26% of SMEs believe that employees with disabilities are as capable as anyone else, when in a different question, as mentioned in chapter 3.2., 82% of them have agreed that the quality of the work done by a person with disability is the same as that of those without disabilities.
- 13% of them believe that persons with disabilities bring in better interaction between diverse staff members / a positive workplace culture, while
- 8,7 % of them highlight the tax breaks for the company and the employer financial or economic incentives, a positive effect on the company's workforce, its customer base, and the community by demonstrating commitment to social responsibility, they recognize the added value for job morale, company culture and social mission, and also they believe that employees with disabilities will increase diversity in the workplace and contribute to an inclusive and diverse workplace



3.6 Preferred steps and guiding/training/consulting pedagogy, material, guidelines towards creating a disability-inclusive workforce

58% of the questioned persons with disabilities have been involved in training programmes before, payed on their own (45,5%) or by European Fund projects (45,5%) or organized by the faculty/educational institution they were involved (27%) or by institutions/organizations supporting the rights of persons with disabilities, while none of the respondents was involved in training programmes organized by the employer.

The 42% of the respondents did not previously participate in training programmes either because these programmes did not match their needs (50%) or because they did not have the time to do so (37,5%), or because they didn't know where to turn (25%), but 53% of the respondents would be interested in being involved in a training program with topics such as: showing how to demonstrate, acquire, develop job skills and /or apply transferable soft skills at the workplace, 74% of them in order to help both their professional and their personal growth. Training courses which are interactive/stimulating were preferred by 74% of respondents while classic, theoretical, lecture-based courses by 26%.

The following topics in developing learning tools for persons with disabilities to be better equipped in finding and maintaining a job are viewed as important and very important:

- About myself: Personality traits and inventory 74%, interests 63%, personal values 63%, my life skills – 84%;
- Disability and the job market: Career exploration – 84%, job search methods- 79%, identification of jobs and job matching – 84%;
- Self-presentation and self-marketing: applying for a job - 74%, the resume and the job interview – 74%, dealing with employers and negotiation 63%, self-presentation skills 74%, promoting the value in me (what can I offer) 79%, marketing disability 63%;
- At the workplace: job skills vis-à-vis disability - 74%, focus on soft skills (understanding and readiness for application) 74%, dealing with employee and employer expectations – 42%, professional development - 58%.

In general, the interviewees insisted on self-awareness. Knowing their abilities, the “value in them” and developing the ability to promote it during an interview. Self-presentation was a skill they highlighted many times during the interview, and job-matching was something they would like to feel more comfortable with. Finding the right job for them is really important and knowing how to search for a job and apply, from CVs to interviews, was something they would like to have guidance with. At the same time, some of the interviewees mentioned that learning about laws and their rights when applying for a job is something that matters to them and so does the psychological preparation for failing an interview.

When developing learning tools to create a disability-inclusive work force, the following topics were considered as important and very important by the SMEs:



- Creating the right work environment and providing workplace flexibility (including time, place, task) 91 % of the respondents;
- The added value for job morale, company culture and social mission - 91% of the respondents;
- Persons with disabilities as a source of high work quality, 86% of the respondents;
- Benefits of hiring people by looking at all labour markets – 82% of the respondents
- Personnel strategy (e.g. recruiting, retention, talent identification, professional development strategies and practices etc.) 82% of the respondents
- Workplace mentoring for employees and employers for a disability-inclusive and disability-friendly workplace – 82% of the respondents.

The SMEs also consider that is important and very important to include the following type of information in the learning tools developed

- Information showing how hiring people with disabilities has benefited other companies - 86% of the respondents;
- Information showing how hiring people with disabilities has benefited nationally recognized companies – 86% of the respondents
- Information on satisfactory job performance, attendance, and retention of people with disabilities -86% of the respondents
- Information showing how hiring people with disabilities can benefit company's bottom line – 82% of the respondents
- Information showing how hiring people with disabilities can increase company's productivity - 82% of the respondents;
- Information that is supported by statistics or research – 82% of the respondents;

The respondents prefer to take professional training courses: Blended learning (41% for SMEs while 21% for persons with disabilities), Remote / online training (32% for both), Group work (27% for SMEs while 32% for persons with disabilities) and face-to-face training (32% for persons with disabilities, while only 17% of SMEs prefer face-to-face training)

Persons with disabilities in their interviews expressed their desire for short/intensive training courses and they mentioned that they appreciate flexibility of the training hours for such programs.

As far as the means of presentation are concerned, learning platforms were considered as most relevant/useful for the learning process of SMEs (68% of SMEs while only 21% of the persons with disabilities find it useful) while for persons with disabilities find audio and video files are their preferred means of presentation (39% of persons with disabilities, while 45,5% of SMEs find it useful). With regards to Infographics 32% for SMEs and 26% of persons with disabilities find it useful, while persons with disabilities find printable worksheets useful as well (32% of persons with disabilities, 26% of SMEs). In their interviews persons with disabilities preferred distance/online learning methods because of their accessibility, but they recognize the value of face-to-face training as a more substantial educational method.



4. Conclusions on developing learning materials and tools for SMEs and persons with disabilities

According to the desk and field research conducted, although SMEs representatives are highly aware of the importance of inclusion of persons with disabilities and recognize some of the benefits from their inclusion, they hesitate to include them in their own workforce. Both SMEs and persons with disabilities believe that most of the employers consider disability as an impediment in the work environment.

Questioning the productivity of persons with disabilities, not knowing or overestimating the cost of their accommodation, potential negative behaviour of other employees and safety considerations are only a few of the concerns of SMEs' actors with regards to hiring or recruiting persons with disabilities.

The case is different among employers that already have included employees with disabilities in their workforce. The perceived benefits from their inclusion in this case are accurate and the levels of awareness really high, thus indicating that training SMEs' actors can contribute to substantial inclusion of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

On the other hand, most of SMEs' representatives participating in the research mentioned that they have never recruited a person with disability for they have never had an applicant with disability to consider. Correlated with the fact that, as per the findings mentioned above, the persons with disabilities need guidance on how to give prominence to their strengths and on the application process itself, the lack of job candidates with disabilities points to another direction of necessary intervention as well, the one of training persons with disabilities themselves.

Therefore, the development of learning materials and tools for both SMEs and persons with disabilities seems rather necessary, and the respondents have given valuable input with regards to their content, the topics they need to be addressed and their preferred educational methods.

4.1. SMEs preferred content and methods

- a. SMEs representatives have been precise about the topics to be included in their training materials.

Most of them agree that they need to know how to create the right work environment and how to provide workplace flexibility for employees with disabilities. In other words, what exactly do they have to do in order to employ a person with disability and how demanding that is after all?



Additionally, the learning tools developed should elaborate on the benefits for the company when hiring persons with disabilities (quality of work, productivity, job moral etc.). Information indicating how inclusion has benefited other companies in the past, ideally supported by statistical research, is considered to be really useful by SMEs' representatives, while a personnel strategy on how to recruit and retain employees with disabilities, identify their talents etc., is a useful tool for SMEs on the way to a disability-inclusive workforce.

Good practices where inclusion has benefited the company they were working for, such as the case of Artimeleia, mentioned in chapter 2.4., can provide evidence about the benefits of inclusion.

- b. With regards to the preferred methods, SMEs representatives really appreciate blended or online training via e-learning platforms. They acknowledge how useful video and audio files are, especially compared to printable worksheets, in terms of presentation of the material, and 1 out of 3 find infographics interesting as well.

4.2. Persons with disabilities preferred content and methods

- a. Persons with disabilities that have participated in the quantitative and qualitative research have insisted on specific topics to be included in their learning material.

Awareness about their strengths and their life skills, as well as learning how to deploy them in front of a potential employer are the main skills they need to acquire in order to expand their employability. Most of them agree that career orientation and job matching are really important when in search of a job, and they would like to be informed about how to apply effectively for a job, from creating a CV to participating to an interview, while they acknowledge the importance of soft skills' development as well.

For the participants in the survey, their personal and professional growth are interconnected and should both be targeted by the training course.

- b. As for their preferred training methods, online and face-to-face training are equally popular, yet as stated by the interviewees, distance/online learning responds more effectively to accessibility issues. Most of them prefer short/ intensive training with flexible schedule, while their preferred means of presentation are audio and video files, infographics and printable worksheets.



4.3. General recommendations

According to the above findings, **the content** to be developed should:

- focus on practical approaches and theoretical ones
- directly address the participants
- be:
 - Easy to read
 - Short and modular, highly segmented
 - Interesting and dynamic
 - Qualitative yet simple (which implies a high level of segmentation)
 - Practical & user-friendly
 - Accessible to persons of all types of disabilities (blind/visually impaired, deaf/hard-hearing, physical disabilities)
- promote self-reflection
- attend user-friendliness and respond to the preferred ways of presentation of training topics and material laid down above.
- strike a balance between text and other content formats (e.g. audio files, infographics etc.)
- Take into consideration good training practices:
 - **Life Long Centers** present a training method compatible with the respondents' preferences, providing self-learning (via educational material provided with activities, scenarios, etc.) available online.
 - At the same time, **ReGeneration** offers soft skills and hard skills training on cutting-edge technology and developing sectors of the Greek economy, community service and mentoring by top executives and, on the other hand,
 - **Mellonabilities'** personalized approach uses tools that strengthen each person individually, on the basis of their own professional profile, their own needs and aspirations, serving their own professional choices, transferring directly applicable skills knowledge.
- present good practices and research data indicating the benefits of inclusion of persons with disabilities and challenging misconceptions.

The expected **learning outcomes** per module should be also put forward at the beginning of each module (for example: "After completing this module, you should be able to..."). All learning outcomes should be precise, concise, observable and measurable.

Based on all of the above, once SMEs familiarize with the quality of work of persons with disabilities, challenge the widely spread misconceptions about disability in the workplace and acknowledge the benefits of inclusion, they will be able to actually include persons with disabilities in their workforce.



On a parallel level, an online tool addressing the issues mentioned, taking into consideration particularities of the participants and offering guidance to persons with disabilities when applying for employment shall equip them with the appropriate skills to successfully enter the labour market.

