

Beyond Inclusion



EMPLOYABILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Policy Recommendations Report



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Beyond Inclusion



EMPLOYABILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

BEYOND INCLUSION project

Employability for persons with disabilities

2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215

IO4 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY:

THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
РЕЗЮМЕ НА РЪКОВОДСТВОТО	7
ΣΥΝΟΠΤΙΚΗ ΕΚΘΕΣΗ	10
REZUMAT EXECUTIV	13
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO	16
I. INTRODUCTION	19
II. ACTUAL CONTEXT AT COUNTRY LEVEL (BG, ES, GR, RO)	22
III. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	24
IV. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND THE DEVELOPED GUIDELINES AND LEARNING MATERIAL FOR SMES - THE BASIS FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL	28
4.1 About the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs	28
4.2 Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration	30
4.3 SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats	32
4.4 Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention	34
4.5 Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology	36
V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS - POSSIBLE AVAILABLE OR UPCOMING INTERVENTIONS AT NATIONAL AND EU LEVEL THAT COULD BE COMPLEMENTED BY THE BEYOND INCLUSION OUTPUTS	38
5.1 Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion	38
5.2 Policy recommendations identified at the country level	42
Working Documents	
ANNEX 1: T2 - COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	53
ANNEX 2: T3 - AGENDA - draft	54
ANNEX 3: T3 - DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP	55
ANNEX 4: T4 - STRUCTURE OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS COUNTRY RESULTS – draft proposal	58
ANNEX 5: T4 - STRUCTURE OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT – draft proposal	58
Country Reports	
ANNEX 6.1 COUNTRY REPORT BULGARIA	60
ANNEX 6.2 COUNTRY REPORT GREECE	72
ANNEX 6.3 COUNTRY REPORT ROMANIA	80
ANNEX 6.4 COUNTRY REPORT SPAIN	94

„Beyond Inclusion: Employability for persons with disabilities” is an Erasmus + Strategic Partnerships project, with project number: 2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215. A brief description of the project, objectives, stages and results are presented in the **Introduction** section of this Report, within the intellectual output IO4 - Policy recommendations for social inclusion of persons with disabilities through employability: the role of SMEs and good practices of the beyond inclusion intervention.

This project focuses on the important role of the labour-market in terms of its employment providers in promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. It looks into equipping SMEs, including Human Resources departments and recruiters as well as business consultants responsible for human resources processes with a set of tools and practices that will help them acknowledge and reap the benefits of including disabled persons into their workforce, beyond the ‘philanthropy – social responsibility – law abiding’ nexus.

Moreover, provides the persons with disabilities with a structured approach, tools, practices and methodologies to demonstrate, acquire and further develop their job skills, as well as transferable soft skills for professional development at the workplace.

It is being implemented in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, and Cyprus by a mix consisting of 8 organizations and companies from both sides of the employability-disability area.

The project’s results are structured in **4 Intellectual Outputs**, namely:

- **IO1** – A methodological framework for the development of learning material for SMEs and persons with disabilities for social inclusion and benefits for SMEs;
- **IO2** – Beyond inclusion: Digital training modules for SMEs and persons with disabilities for a disability-inclusive workforce;
- **IO3** – Beyond Inclusion testing courses and Handbook for SMEs actors;
- **IO4** – Policy recommendations for social inclusion of persons with disabilities through employability: the role of SMEs and good practices of the beyond inclusion intervention.

The Policy recommendations report was a common endeavour on behalf of all partners. It draws conclusions from across all Intellectual Outputs, the primary and secondary data acquired during the project activities from both SMEs and persons with disabilities, formal and informal feedback received, new knowledge developed among the project partnership.

A **summary of the findings of the IO1 desk research** is presented in **Chapter 2** to provide a national overview on the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market in the following countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Spain.

In accordance with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, ‘disability’ is a concept that includes deficiencies/impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. This concept does not overlap with the concept of illness or disease, but represents its functional consequence. Deficiencies/Impairments may be temporary or permanent, evolving, regressive or stationary, intermittent or continuous.



In 2020, more than 20% of the EU population was officially declared with some form of disability. Current statistics show that the employment rate of the persons with disabilities is at a low level - 30.7% in Bulgaria (2019), 24.7% in Greece (2016), 43.7% in Romania (2020) and 35% in Spain (2018) - but the legal framework does not effectively encourage their employability, while also public employment support services are limited.

The persons with disabilities have limited access to support services. The lack of synergies and complementarity between educational, employment and social services further aggravates this situation.

Following the development phase of the Beyond Inclusion project, the present report on policy recommendations has been prepared to address some indicative issues, which we present below.

Chapter 3 presents the key findings for each country within the project on the recommendations concerning policies, practices and effective approaches for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities.

Chapter 4 will show how the methodological framework and learning material created within the project can form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional, national or EU level when addressing a disability inclusive labour market.

In **Section 4.1** of the chapter a brief description of the methodological framework, guidelines and learning materials created in IO1 and IO2 is presented.

The proposed **methodological framework** is a synthesis of exploring the factors that determine the link between employability and disability on the part of SMEs and persons with disabilities. Following the creation of the framework, a **set of digital modules** have been developed both in terms of content and technically to be made available in an online environment. The set includes **materials for SMEs** to create a workforce that includes persons with disabilities, as well as **materials for persons with disabilities** to support them in pursuing their employment and professional development as employees.

Section 4.2 sets out country-specific issues that would facilitate and condition such an institutional integrated approach with regard to the instruments and methodologies created for SMEs within the project.

Section 4.3 of the chapter shows how the SMEs and persons with disabilities have responded to the proposed tools, learning materials and formats. In order to assess the usability, suitability and level of achievement of the desired learning outcomes and also the impact of the learning delivery via a free-to-use eLearning platform, as developed in IO2, a small-scale PILOTING PROGRAM was carried out in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Spain. After piloting, the participants provided feedback on the proposed tools, learning materials and formats (75 SME representatives and 45 persons with disabilities). The average ratings given by respondents from all countries on the overall rating of training are good, indicating a positive appreciation of the learning platform and materials.

Section 4.4 presents the expected outcomes of the intervention proposed within the Beyond Inclusion project and how they could be extended, based on country-specific recommendations. These issues are presented separately for SMEs and persons with disabilities. This chapter also presents some topics and ideas that can be further improved and/or expanded, ideas about additional content that can be integrated building on the Beyond Inclusion learning offer.

The strengths, opportunities and challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the training provision and its methodology are presented in **Section 4.5** of the chapter. Beyond Inclusion is one of the few existing platforms (if not the only one) that explores the challenges and misconceptions around inclusion from both perspectives - that of an employer (i.e. SME) and that of a person with a disability, providing guidance to SMEs on how to pursue disability diversity as a valuable resource that benefits the enterprise, rather than as a moral/legal obligation. The Beyond Inclusion platform consists of content to help equip persons with disabilities with

appropriate cross-cutting skills tools, practices and guidance, as well as a methodology on how to best demonstrate their unique skills in a professional context or when looking for a job. The online availability of the Beyond Inclusion training course, available free of charge to all, allows further exploitation of the training offer.

In **Chapter 5, Section 5.1** illustrates some of the possible available or future interventions at national and European level that could be complemented by the results of the Beyond Inclusion initiative.

Also in this chapter, in Section 5.2, detailed policy recommendations are developed for each country participating in the project and also at EU level, drawing on the findings of the research studies prepared in the project, the guidelines, the learning material and piloting sessions and, most importantly, the feedback collected through focus groups and in-depth interviews with SMEs and persons with disabilities.

In order to increase the number of persons with disabilities employed in SMEs, the following measures have been indicated:

- More appropriate policies and standards to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. a clear inclusive education policy, applicable access standards in physical environments and priority given to rehabilitation);
- Investments in specific programmes and services for persons with disabilities;
- More financial/economic incentives for employers (e.g. tax reduction according to the number of persons with disabilities employed);
- Training programmes for employers to create an inclusive mindset among SMEs;
- Adapting legislation to make it more disability-friendly;
- Increasing public awareness and understanding of disability.

In order to better integrate into the workforce, persons with disabilities need/can benefit from:

- Adapting the work environment to provide access to the workplace (e.g. accessible parking, lifts, modified toilets, handrails);
- A clear company strategy on disability management in the workplace;
- Ensuring equal opportunities with other workers in the workplace to gain the skills and experience needed to advance in their careers;
- Implementing policies that prohibit discrimination in the workplace;
- Better communication and awareness in the workplace about potential challenges for workers with disabilities.

The Policy recommendation report **proposes to transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations.** By fertilising primary data through the direct application of a methodology and the tools and materials created, it serves as a forward-looking reference document for a particular approach to a general problem that should be addressed more effectively.



Проект Beyond Inclusion: Заетост за хора с увреждания (реф. №2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215) е инициатива финансирана от Програма „Еразъм +“ на Европейската комисия.

Настоящия доклад е част от Интелектуален продукт 4 (ИП) „Препоръки за политики и добри практики за социално включване на хора с увреждания чрез повишаване на тяхната пригодност и перспективи за заетост“.

Допълнителна и по-подробна информация за проекта е представена в следващата глава на този документ.

Проект Beyond Inclusion се фокусира върху важната роля на пазара на труда и участващите в него организации и заинтересовани страни върху дейностите и инициативите за насърчаване възможностите за заетост на хора с увреждания. Проекта има за цел да „оборудва“ служители отговарящи за човешки ресурси и наемане на персонал в малките и средни предприятия (МСП), специалисти и експерти, работещи в сферата на човешките ресурси, с разнообразни инструменти и практики, които ще им помогнат да оценят ползите от наемането на хора с увреждания, като ценен човешки ресурс, а не просто необходимост, заради „морално“ или „законово“ задължение.

В допълнение на това, проекта има за цел да разработи и предложи на хората с увреждания цялостен и интегриран подход и набор от инструменти, с които да демонстрират, придобиват и развиват своите професионални умения, а също и специфични меки умения, за да се възползват максимално от възможностите си за професионална реализация.

Пилотните дейности по проекта се реализират в Румъния, България, Гърция, Испания и Кипър от проектен консорциум, състоящ се от 8 организации, които работят както с МСП, така и в подкрепа на хората с увреждания.

Основните резултати от проекта са структурирани в **четири основни интелектуални** продукта:

- **ИП1** – Методология и насоки за разработване на образователни материали и съдържание за МСП и хора с увреждания, която има за цел да популяризира ползите от наемането и социалното включване на лица с увреждания в пазара на труда;
- **ИП2** – Платформа за онлайн обучение „Beyond Inclusion“;
- **ИП3** – Онлайн наръчник за консултанти на МСП (вътрешни или външни), работещи в сферата на човешките ресурси, който ще служи като за това как да се подобрят модулите за електронно обучение.
- **ИП4** – Доклад на тема „Препоръки за политики и добри практики за социално включване на хора с увреждания чрез повишаване на тяхната пригодност и перспективи за заетост“.

Настоящия доклад е разработен съвместно от организациите – партньори в реализацията на проекта, като в него са поместени, **в резюме, основните резултати и препоръки от всички резултати**, включително проучвания, статистически данни, доклади и друга важна информация, получена от двете основни целеви групи на проекта - представители на МСП и хора с увреждания.

В глава 2 от този документ е представено **кратко резюме на резултатите от проучването** **проведено като част от дейностите по ИП1**, което имаше за цел да покаже текущото състояние и политиките във всяка от държавите – участници в проекта, по отношение на интеграцията на хората с увреждания на пазара на труда.

В съответствие с Международната класификация на функционирането, уврежданията и здравето, „уврежданията“ е обобщаващ термин за нарушени функции, ограничена дейност и ограничено участие. Той обозначава отрицателните аспекти на взаимодействието между индивида (който има болестно състояние) и контекстуалните фактори на същия индивид

(факторите на околната среда и личностните фактори). Уврежданията могат да бъдат временни или постоянни; прогресиращи, регресиращи или статични; периодични или постоянни.

Според Евростат, през 2020 г. повече от 20% от населението на ЕС се класифицира с някаква степен на увреждане. Текущата статистика показва, че нивото на заетост на хората с увреждания остава много ниско - 30,7% в България (2019 г.), 24,7% в Гърция (2016 г.), 43,7% в Румъния (2020 г.) и 35% в Испания (2018 г.). Въпреки това, все още правната среда не предлага ефективни инструменти за насърчаване на пригодността за заетост на хората с увреждания, като същевременно социалните услуги за подпомагане на заетостта са сравнително ограничени.

Ограничен е и достъпа на хората с увреждания до услуги за подкрепа. А липсата на взаимодействие и взаимно допълване между образование, заетост и социални услуги, допълнително влошава тази ситуация.

В резултат от изпълнението на проект Beyond Inclusion, настоящия доклад предлага редица предложения за политики, които имат за цел да отговорят и да предложат решения за идентифицираните проблеми и предизвикателства.

В Глава 3 са представени основните констатации за всяка държава относно препоръките за политики, въвеждането на добри практики и ефективни подходи за повишаване пригодността и перспективите за заетост на хора с увреждания.

В Глава 4 са показани различни примери, за това, как създадените в рамките на проекта, методическа рамка и образователни материали, могат да послужат като основа за създаването на интегриран подход на институционално, национално и Европейско ниво по отношение на интеграцията на хората с увреждания на трудовия пазар.

Раздел 4.1 е направен кратък очерк на методическата рамка, насоките и образователните материали, които бяха разработени в рамките на ИП1 и ИП2 от проекта.

Предложената **методологична рамка** е базирана на резултатите от изследване на факторите, които определят връзката между пригодността за заетост и уврежданията, на база на нуждите и разбиранията на МСП и хората с увреждания. След създаването на рамката беше **разработен набор от дигитални модули** – достъпни в онлайн среда. Образователното съдържание **включва материали за МСП**, както и **материали за хора с увреждания**, които да ги подкрепят в процеса на търсене на заетост и професионалното им развитие.

Раздел 4.2 описва различни казуси за всяка държава – участник в проекта, които биха улеснили планирането и изпълнението на интегриран подход по отношение на инструментите и методологиите, създадени за МСП в рамките на проекта.

Раздел 4.3 представя резултатите от проучване на удовлетвореността на представители на МСП и хората с увреждания относно предложените инструменти, учебни материали и формат. За да оценим доколко са полезни и ефективни за постигане на желаните резултати за всяка от целевите групи, както и доколко създадената платформа за онлайн обучение е полезна и лесна за работа, в рамките на проекта бе проведена и кратка пилотна програма за тестване на основните резултати от проект **Beyond Inclusion** в държавите – участници в инициативата - България, Гърция, Румъния и Испания. На база на обратната връзка, която получихме от 75 представители на МСП и 45 лица с увреждания, създадените материали и онлайн платформата бяха оценени като ефективни и полезни, както за участващите представители на МСП, така и за хората с увреждания.

Раздел 4.4 представя в резюме очакваните резултати от интервенциите предложени от проекта, както и идеи за това, как те могат да бъдат надградени и разпространени в други държави. Резултатите са представени по отделно за двете основни целеви групи – МСП и хора с увреждания. В тази част от Доклада са представени и допълнителни идеи и насоки за създаването на допълнително съдържание, което може да бъде интегрирано към съществуващия пакет от учебителни материали и съдържание, което е разработено в рамките на проект Beyond Inclusion.

В раздел 4.5 е направен анализ на силните страни, възможностите и предизвикателствата за по-нататъшно използване или адаптиране на учебителното съдържание и методология.



Beyond Inclusion е една от малкото съществуващи платформи (ако не и единствената), която изследва предизвикателствата и погрешните схващания относно включването и интеграцията на хора с увреждания на пазара на труда от двете основни гледни точки – тази на работодател (т.е. МСП) и тази на лице с увреждане. Как? Като предлага на представителите на бизнеса (МСП) необходимите инструменти, познания и добри практики, които ще им помогнат да оценят ползите от наемането на хора с увреждания, като ценен човешки ресурс, а не просто необходимост, заради „морално“ или „законово“ задължение. От друга страна, хора с увреждания, които искат активно да се включат в пазара на труда могат да открият и използват различни начини и инструменти, с които да демонстрират, придобиват и развиват своите професионални умения, а също и специфични меки умения, за да се възползват максимално от възможностите си за професионална реализация.

Глава 5, раздел 5.1 описва някои от възможните налични или бъдещи интервенции на национално и европейско ниво, които могат да бъдат допълнени от резултатите от проект Beyond Inclusion.

В раздел 5.2, са разработени подробни препоръки за разработването и прилагането на политики за всяка страна, участваща в проекта, а също и на ниво ЕС, като се основават на резултатите от проучванията, направени в рамките на проекта, създаденото образователно съдържание, пилотните сесии, и не на последно място, обратната връзка, която получихме от представителите на бизнеса и хората с увреждания, които се включиха в различните събития и дейности по проекта.

В резултат на проекта идентифицирахме следните препоръки и индикативни дейности, които имат за цел да увеличат броя на хората с увреждания на пазара на труда:

- По-подходящи политики и стандарти за отчитане на нуждите на хората с увреждания (напр. ясна приобщаваща образователна политика, приложими стандарти за достъп във физическата среда и приоритет на рехабилитацията);
- Инвестиции в специфични програми и услуги за хора с увреждания;
- Повече финансови/икономически стимули за работодателите (напр. Данъчни облекчения според броя на наетите хора с увреждания);
- Програми за обучение на работодатели за създаване на приобщаващо мислене и среда в МСП;
- Адаптиране на законодателството, за да го направи по-щадящо за хората с увреждания;
- Повишаване на обществената осведоменост и разбиране на уврежданията.

За да се интегрират по-ефективно на пазара на труда, хората с увреждания имат нужда от:

- Адаптиране на работната среда, за да се осигури достъп до работното място (напр. достъпен паркинг, асансьори, модифицирани тоалетни, парапети);
- Ясна фирмена стратегия за управление и работа с хора с увреждания на работното място;
- Осигуряване на равни възможности с другите работници на работното място за придобиване на умения и опит, необходими за напредък в кариерата;
- Прилагане на политики, които забраняват дискриминацията на работното място;
- По-добра комуникация и осведоменост на работното място относно потенциалните предизвикателства пред работниците с увреждания.

Тези насоки, които ще намерите в настоящия доклад имат за **цел да насърчат допълнително предприемането на интегриран подход за социалното включване на хора с увреждания на пазара на труда посредством активната роля на МСП в процеса.**



Το „Beyond Inclusion – Πέρα από την Ένταξη: Απασχολησιμότητα Ατόμων με Αναπηρία” είναι ένα έργο Στρατηγικής Συνεργασίας του προγράμματος Erasmus+, με αριθμό: 2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215. Στην εισαγωγή της έκθεσης Προτάσεων Πολιτικής παρουσιάζεται μία σύντομη περιγραφή του έργου, των στόχων που αυτό έχει θέσει, τα στάδια υλοποίησής του και τα αποτελέσματά του, στο πλαίσιο υλοποίησης του Πνευματικού Προϊόντος (IO) 4 – Προτάσεις Πολιτικής για την κοινωνική ένταξη των ατόμων με αναπηρία μέσω της απασχολησιμότητας: ο ρόλος των ΜμΕ και καλές πρακτικές της παρέμβασης του Beyond Inclusion.

Το έργο επικεντρώνεται στο σημαντικό ρόλο που παίζει η αγορά εργασίας και ιδίως η εργοδοσία στην παροχή ευκαιριών απασχόλησης για άτομα με αναπηρία. Προσβλέπει στο να εφοδιάσει τις ΜμΕ, συμπεριλαμβανομένων των τμημάτων Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού και των υπεύθυνων πρόσληψης, όπως επίσης και των συμβούλων επιχειρήσεων που ασχολούνται με διαδικασίες πρόσληψης, με μία σειρά από εργαλεία και πρακτικές, που τις βοηθούν να αναγνωρίζουν και να αδράττουν τα οφέλη από τη συμπερίληψη των ατόμων με αναπηρία στην επιχείρησή τους, πηγαίνοντας ένα βήμα πιο πέρα από την απλή ένταξή τους λόγω κοινωνικής υποχρέωσης, φιλανθρωπίας ή συμμόρφωσης με το νόμο.

Επιπλέον, επιχειρεί να εξοπλίσει τα άτομα με αναπηρία με τα απαραίτητα εργαλεία, πρακτικές και κοινωνικές δεξιότητες, όπως επίσης και με τη μεθοδολογία σχετικά με το πώς να παρουσιάζουν τις μοναδικές τους δεξιότητες επαγγελματικά ή κατά την αναζήτηση εργασίας.

Το έργο υλοποιείται στη Ρουμανία, τη Βουλγαρία, την Ελλάδα, την Ισπανία και την Κύπρο, από μια διεθνή κοινοπραξία 8 οργανισμών με αλληλοσυμπληρούμενη εξειδίκευση τόσο από τον κλάδο της απασχόλησης όσο και από τον κλάδο υποστήριξης ατόμων με αναπηρία.

Τα αποτελέσματα του έργου κατηγοριοποιούνται σε **4 Πνευματικά Προϊόντα (IOs)**, συγκεκριμένα:

- **IO1** – Μεθοδολογικό πλαίσιο για την ανάπτυξη εκπαιδευτικού υλικού για ΜμΕ και για άτομα με αναπηρία, σχετικά με την κοινωνική τους ένταξη και τα πλεονεκτήματα για τις επιχειρήσεις
- **IO2** – Beyond Inclusion – Πέρα από την ένταξη: Ψηφιακές διδακτικές ενότητες για ΜμΕ και άτομα με αναπηρία για ένα συμπεριληπτικό εργασιακό δυναμικό.
- **IO3** – Πιλοτικές εφαρμογές και Εγχειρίδιο για στελέχη ΜμΕ
- **IO4** – Προτάσεις Πολιτικής για κοινωνική ένταξη ατόμων με αναπηρία μέσω της απασχολησιμότητας: ο ρόλος των ΜμΕ και καλές πρακτικές της παρέμβασης του Beyond Inclusion.

Η έκθεση Προτάσεων Πολιτικής έγινε από κοινού από το σύνολο των εταίρων. Εξάγει συμπεράσματα από όλα τα Πνευματικά Προϊόντα (IOs) του έργου, με τα πρωτογενή και δευτερογενή στοιχεία να προκύπτουν από τις δραστηριότητες του έργου, στις οποίες συμμετείχαν τόσο ΜμΕ, όσο και άτομα με αναπηρία, από την επίσημη και ανεπίσημη ανατροφοδότηση από τους συμμετέχοντες και από τα νέα γνωστικά πεδία με τα οποία ήρθαν σε επαφή οι εταίροι.

Το **Κεφάλαιο 2** παρουσιάζει περιληπτικά τα ευρήματα της **έρευνας** τεκμηρίωσης του IO1, η οποία αφορούσε στα εθνικά χαρακτηριστικά της συμπερίληψης των ατόμων με αναπηρία στην αγορά εργασίας των χωρών που συμμετέχουν στο έργο: Βουλγαρία, Ελλάδα, Ρουμανία και Ισπανία.

Σύμφωνα με τη Διεθνή Ταξινόμηση της Λειτουργικότητας, της Αναπηρίας και της Υγείας, ο όρος “αναπηρία” περιλαμβάνει ένα σύνολο βλαβών, περιορισμών δραστηριότητας και συμμετοχής. Ο όρος δεν ταυτίζεται με τον όρο “ασθένεια”, αλλά αντιπροσωπεύει τη λειτουργική συνέπεια

της ασθένειας. Οι βλάβες μπορεί να είναι προσωρινές ή μόνιμες, εξελικτικές, φθίνουσες ή σταθερές, στιγμιαίες ή διαρκείς.

Το 2020, δηλώθηκε επίσημα ότι περισσότερο από το 20% των ατόμων της ΕΕ έχουν κάποια μορφή αναπηρίας. Τα τρέχοντα δεδομένα δείχνουν ότι το ποσοστό απασχόλησης των ατόμων με αναπηρία είναι ιδιαίτερα χαμηλό – 30,7% στη Βουλγαρία (2019), 24,7% στην Ελλάδα (2016), 43,7% στη Ρουμανία (2020) και 35% στην Ισπανία (2018) – αλλά το νομοθετικό πλαίσιο δε βελτιώνει σημαντικά στην απασχολησιμότητά τους, ενώ, ταυτόχρονα και οι δημόσιες υπηρεσίες απασχόλησης είναι περιορισμένες.

Τα άτομα με αναπηρία έχουν περιορισμένη πρόσβαση στις υπηρεσίες υποστήριξης. Η έλλειψη συνεργειών και συμπληρωματικότητας των κοινωνικών υπηρεσιών και των υπηρεσιών εκπαίδευσης και απασχόλησης επιδεινώνει την κατάσταση.

Κατά το στάδιο ανάπτυξης του έργου Beyond Inclusion, η παρούσα έκθεση προτάσεων πολιτικής δημιουργήθηκε με γνώμονα μια ενδεικτική θεματολογία, την οποία παρουσιάζουμε κατωτέρω.

Το **Κεφάλαιο 3** παρουσιάζει τα βασικά ευρήματα κάθε χώρας στο πλαίσιο του έργου σχετικά με τις προτάσεις πολιτικής, πρακτικών και αποτελεσματικών προσεγγίσεων για την ενίσχυση της απασχολησιμότητας των ατόμων με αναπηρία.

Το **Κεφάλαιο 4** δείχνει το πώς η μεθοδολογία και το εκπαιδευτικό υλικό που δημιουργήθηκαν στο πλαίσιο του έργου μπορούν να δομήσουν τα θεμέλια για μία ολοκληρωμένη προσέγγιση σε θεσμικό, εθνικό και ευρωπαϊκό επίπεδο, σχετικά με μία συμπεριληπτική αγορά εργασίας.

Στην **Ενότητα 4.1** του κεφαλαίου περιλαμβάνεται μία σύντομη περιγραφή του μεθοδολογικού πλαισίου, των οδηγιών και του εκπαιδευτικού υλικού που δημιουργήθηκαν κατά την υλοποίηση των IO1 και IO2 αντίστοιχα.

Το προτεινόμενο **μεθοδολογικό πλαίσιο** είναι μία εξερεύνηση των παραγόντων που καθορίζουν τη σύνδεση μεταξύ απασχόλησης και αναπηρίας, τόσο εκ μέρους των ΜμΕ όσο και των ατόμων με αναπηρία. Σε συνέχεια της ανάπτυξης του πλαισίου, μία σειρά από **ψηφιακές διδακτικές ενότητες** αναπτύχθηκαν τόσο από πλευράς περιεχομένου, όσο και τεχνικά, ώστε να είναι διαθέσιμες στο διαδικτυακό περιβάλλον. Οι ενότητες αυτές περιλαμβάνουν **υλικό για ΜμΕ**, με στόχο τη δημιουργία ενός συμπεριληπτικού ανθρώπινου δυναμικού, όπως επίσης και **υλικό για άτομα με αναπηρία**, με στόχο την υποστήριξή τους στην αναζήτηση εργασίας και την επαγγελματική τους εξέλιξη.

Η **ενότητα 4.2** προσδιορίζει εκείνα τα εθνικά χαρακτηριστικά τα οποία μπορούν να διευκολύνουν μία τέτοια θεσμική προσέγγιση σχετικά με τη μεθοδολογία που δημιουργήθηκε για τις ΜμΕ στο πλαίσιο του έργου.

Η **ενότητα 4.3** του κεφαλαίου παρουσιάζει πώς οι ΜμΕ και τα άτομα με αναπηρία ανταποκρίθηκαν στα προτεινόμενα εργαλεία, στο υλικό και τη συγκεκριμένη μορφή εκπαίδευσης. Με στόχο να εξακριβωθεί η χρησιμότητα, η καταλληλότητα και η αποτελεσματικότητα της εκπαίδευσης, όπως επίσης και ο αντίκτυπος της δωρεάν ψηφιακής πλατφόρμας ως μέσο εκπαίδευσης, όπως αναπτύχθηκε στο πλαίσιο του IO2, διεξήχθη ένα ΠΙΛΟΤΙΚΟ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ μικρής κλίμακας στη Βουλγαρία, την Ελλάδα, τη Ρουμανία και την Ισπανία. Κατόπιν της πιλοτικής εφαρμογής, οι συμμετέχοντες αξιολόγησαν τα προτεινόμενα εργαλεία, το υλικό και τη μορφή της εκπαίδευσης (75 εκπρόσωποι μικρομεσαίων επιχειρήσεων και 45 άτομα με αναπηρία). Συνολικά, υπήρξε θετική ανταπόκριση από τους ερωτηθέντες σχετικά με την αξιολόγηση της εκπαίδευσης, όσον αφορά τόσο την εκπαιδευτική πλατφόρμα, όσο και το περιεχόμενο.

Η **ενότητα 4.4** παρουσιάζει τα προσδοκώμενα αποτελέσματα της παρέμβασης που προτείνει το έργο Beyond Inclusion και πώς μπορούν αυτά να επεκταθούν, σύμφωνα με τα επιμέρους χαρακτηριστικά κάθε χώρας. Αυτά τα θέματα παρουσιάζονται χωριστά για τις ΜμΕ και τα άτομα με αναπηρία. Αυτό το κεφάλαιο επίσης παρουσιάζει θέματα που μπορούν να βελτιωθούν περαιτέρω ή να διευρύνουν την επιρροή τους, ιδέες για πρόσθετο περιεχόμενο το οποίο μπορεί να πάει ένα βήμα παραπέρα την εκπαιδευτική παρέμβαση του Beyond Inclusion.

Οι ευκαιρίες, τα δυνατά και αδύνατα σημεία για περαιτέρω αξιοποίηση των εκπαιδευτικών

ενοτήτων και της μεθοδολογίας, παρουσιάζονται στην Ενότητα 4.5 του κεφαλαίου. Το Beyond Inclusion είναι μία από τις πολύ λίγες πλατφόρμες (αν όχι η μοναδική) η οποία εξερευνά από δύο πλευρές τις προκλήσεις και τα στερεότυπα που παρεμποδίζουν τη συμπερίληψη – από την πλευρά της εργοδοσίας (λ.χ. ΜμΕ) και από την πλευρά των ατόμων με αναπηρία, καθοδηγώντας τις ΜμΕ σχετικά με το πώς να εναγκαλιστούν τη διαφορετικότητα που προκύπτει από την αναπηρία, ως όφελος για την επιχείρηση και όχι ως ηθική/νομική υποχρέωση. Το περιεχόμενο της πλατφόρμας του Beyond Inclusion έχει ως στόχο να εφοδιάσει τα άτομα με αναπηρία με τις κατάλληλες οριζόντιες δεξιότητες, πρακτικές και καθοδήγηση, όπως επίσης και με τη μεθοδολογία σχετικά με το πώς να προβάλλουν τις μοναδικές δεξιότητές τους σε επαγγελματικό επίπεδο ή κατά την αναζήτηση εργασίας. Η δωρεάν διαθεσιμότητα του υλικού σε διαδικτυακό περιβάλλον, επιτρέπει περαιτέρω αξιοποίηση του εκπαιδευτικού υλικού.

Στο **Κεφάλαιο 5**, η **Ενότητα 5.1** παρουσιάζει κάποιες από τις πιθανές παρεμβάσεις σε εθνικό και Ευρωπαϊκό επίπεδο που μπορούν να εφαρμοστούν στο μέλλον και να συμπληρώσουν τα αποτελέσματα της πρωτοβουλίας του Beyond Inclusion.

Επίσης, στο ίδιο κεφάλαιο, στην **Ενότητα 5.2**, αναπτύσσονται αναλυτικά προτάσεις πολιτικής για κάθε χώρα που συμμετέχει στο έργο, οι οδηγίες, το εκπαιδευτικό υλικό και οι πιλοτικές εφαρμογές και, κυρίως, η ανατροφοδότηση που παρείχαν ΜμΕ και άτομα με αναπηρία στο πλαίσιο focus group και συνεντεύξεων.

Με στόχο την αύξηση του αριθμού των ατόμων με αναπηρία που απασχολούνται στις ΜμΕ, προτάθηκε η εξής λήψη μέτρων:

- Πιο κατάλληλες πολιτικές και προδιαγραφές που λαμβάνουν υπόψη τις ανάγκες των ατόμων με αναπηρία (λ.χ. ξεκάθαρη εκπαιδευτική πολιτική, προδιαγραφές προσβασιμότητας που δύνανται να εφαρμοστούν σε φυσικά περιβάλλοντα, προτεραιότητα στην αποκατάσταση),
- Επενδύσεις σε συγκεκριμένα προγράμματα και υπηρεσίες για άτομα με αναπηρία,
- Περισσότερα οικονομικά/φορολογικά κίνητρα για εργοδότες (λ.χ. μείωση φορολογίας σύμφωνα με τον αριθμό των ατόμων με αναπηρία που απασχολείται),
- Εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα για εργοδότες με στόχο τη δημιουργία μίας συμπεριληπτικής αντίληψης μεταξύ των ΜμΕ,
- Προσαρμογή της σχετικής νομοθεσίας, ώστε να είναι πιο φιλική απέναντι στην αναπηρία,
- Ευαισθητοποίηση του κοινού και κατανόηση της αναπηρίας.

Για να αφομοιωθούν καλύτερα στο περιβάλλον εργασίας, τα άτομα με αναπηρία πρέπει/μπορούν να ωφεληθούν από:

- Την προσαρμογή του περιβάλλοντος εργασίας, ώστε να παρέχεται πρόσβαση στο χώρο εργασίας (προσβάσιμο πάρκινγκ, ασανσέρ, τουαλέτα για άτομα με αναπηρία κ.ο.κ.),
- Μία ξεκάθαρη εταιρική στρατηγική σχετικά με τη διαχείριση της αναπηρίας στο χώρο εργασίας,
- Τη διασφάλιση ίσων ευκαιριών με τους υπόλοιπους εργαζόμενους στο χώρο εργασίας, σχετικά με την ανάπτυξη δεξιοτήτων και την απόκτηση εμπειρίας, που προάγει την επαγγελματική εξέλιξη,
- Την εφαρμογή πολιτικών που απαγορεύουν τις διακρίσεις στο χώρο εργασίας,
- Την καλύτερη επικοινωνία και ευαισθητοποίηση στο χώρο εργασίας σχετικά με τις πιθανές προκλήσεις που μπορεί να αντιμετωπίσουν εργαζόμενοι με αναπηρία.

Η έκθεση Προτάσεων Πολιτικής **προτείνει τη μετατόπιση της παρέμβασης από το επίπεδο της απλής δραστηριότητας στο επίπεδο της κοινωνικής συμπερίληψης των ατόμων με αναπηρία, μέσω της απασχόλησης και του ρόλου των ΜμΕ, μέσω τεκμηριωμένων προτάσεων πολιτικής.** Μέσω της αξιοποίησης πρωτογενών δεδομένων, με την άμεση εφαρμογή της μεθοδολογίας, των εργαλείων και του υλικού που δημιουργήθηκε, η έκθεση Προτάσεων Πολιτικής αποτελεί ένα διορατικό έγγραφο που προτείνει μία συγκεκριμένη προσέγγιση σε ένα γενικό πρόβλημα το οποίο χρήζει πιο αποτελεσματικής αντιμετώπισης.



“Dincolo de incluziune: Angajabilitate pentru persoanele cu dizabilități” este un proiect Erasmus + Parteneriate strategice, cu numărul de proiect: 2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215. O scurtă descriere a proiectului, a obiectivelor, etapelor și a rezultatelor sunt prezentate în secțiunea **Introducere** a prezentului Raport, elaborat în cadrul rezultatului intelectual IO4 - Recomandări de politici pentru incluziunea socială a persoanelor cu dizabilități prin angajabilitate: rolul IMM-urilor și bunele practici ale intervenției `Beyond Inclusion`.

Acest proiect se concentrează pe rolul important al pieței muncii în ceea ce privește angajatorii în promovarea oportunităților de angajare pentru persoanele cu dizabilități. Acesta urmărește să echipeze IMM-urile, inclusiv departamentele de resurse umane precum și consultanții de afaceri, cu un set de instrumente și practici care le vor ajuta să recunoască și să profite de avantajele includerii persoanelor cu dizabilități în forța lor de muncă, dincolo de legătura “filantropie - responsabilitate socială - respectarea legii”.

În plus, oferă persoanelor cu dizabilități o abordare structurată, instrumente, practici și metodologii pentru a-și demonstra, dobândi și dezvolta în continuare competențele profesionale, precum și abilitățile transversale transferabile pentru dezvoltarea profesională la locul de muncă.

Proiectul este implementat în România, Bulgaria, Grecia, Spania și Cipru de către un mix format din 8 organizații și companii care abordează atât aspectele ocupării forței de muncă cât și ale dizabilității.

Rezultatele proiectului sunt structurate în **4 Rezultate Intelectuale**, și anume:

- **Rezultat intelectual 1:** „Un cadru metodologic pentru dezvoltarea de materiale de învățare pentru IMM-uri și persoane cu dizabilități pentru incluziune socială și beneficii pentru IMM-uri”
- **Rezultat intelectual 2:** „Dincolo de incluziune: Module digitale de formare pentru IMM-uri și persoane cu dizabilități pentru o forță de muncă incluzivă dizabilității”
- **Rezultat intelectual 3:** „Pilotare și manual platformă de formare pentru IMM-uri”
- **Rezultat intelectual 4:** „Recomandări de politici pentru incluziunea socială a persoanelor cu dizabilități prin creșterea angajabilității”

Raportul privind recomandările de politică este un demers comun din partea tuturor partenerilor. Acesta **extrage concluzii din toate rezultatele intelectuale**, din informațiile primare și secundare obținute în timpul activităților proiectului, atât de la IMM-uri, cât și de la persoane cu dizabilități, din feedback-ul formal și informal primit, din noile cunoștințe dezvoltate în cadrul parteneriatului proiectului..

În **Capitolul 2** este prezentat un **rezumat al concluziilor cercetării documentare din cadrul Rezultatului Intelectual 1** pentru a oferi o imagine de ansamblu la nivel național privind integrarea persoanelor cu dizabilități pe piața muncii în următoarele țări: Bulgaria, Grecia, România și Spania..

În conformitate cu Clasificarea internațională a funcționării, dizabilității și sănătății, “dizabilitatea” este un concept care include deficiențe/afectări ale funcțiilor și/sau structurilor organismului, în corelare cu limitări ale activității și restricții în participare. Acest concept nu se suprapune cu conceptul de boală sau afecțiune, ci reprezintă consecința funcțională a acesteia. Deficiențele/afectările pot fi temporare sau permanente, evolutive, regresive sau staționare, intermitente sau continue.

În 2020, peste 20 % din populația UE a fost declarată oficial cu o anumită formă de dizabilitate. Statisticile actuale arată că rata de ocupare a persoanelor cu dizabilități se situează la un nivel scăzut - 30,7 % în Bulgaria (2019), 24,7 % în Grecia (2016), 43,7 % în România (2020) și 35 % în Spania (2018) -, însă cadrul juridic nu încurajează în mod eficient șansele de angajare ale acestora, în timp ce, de asemenea, serviciile publice de sprijin pentru ocupare sunt limitate.

Persoanele cu dizabilități au un acces limitat la serviciile de sprijin. Lipsa sinergiilor și a complementarității între serviciile educaționale, de ocupare a forței de muncă și cele sociale accentuează și mai mult această situație..

Urmare a etapei de dezvoltare a proiectului "Dincolo de incluziune", prezentul raport privind recomandările de politici a fost elaborat pentru a aborda câteva aspecte orientative, pe care le prezentăm în cele ce urmează.

Capitolul 3 prezintă principalele concluzii pentru fiecare țară participantă în cadrul proiectului cu privire la recomandările privind politicile, practicile și metodele eficiente de facilitare a angajării persoanelor cu dizabilități.

Capitolul 4 va ilustra modul în care cadrul metodologic și materialele de învățare create în cadrul proiectului pot sta la baza unei abordări integrate la nivel instituțional, național sau european, atunci când se urmărește o piață a muncii favorabilă incluziunii persoanelor cu dizabilități.

În **Secțiunea 4.1** a capitolului este prezentată o scurtă descriere a cadrului metodologic, a liniilor directoare și a materialelor de învățare create în cadrul Rezultatelor Intelectuale 1 și 2.

Cadrul metodologic propus reprezintă o sinteză a explorării factorilor care determină legătura dintre angajabilitate și dizabilitate în raport cu IMM-urile și persoanele cu dizabilități. În urma creării cadrului, a fost dezvoltat un **set de module digitale** atât din punct de vedere al conținutului, cât și din punct de vedere tehnic pentru a fi pus la dispoziție în mediul online. Setul include atât **materiale pentru IMM-uri** în vederea creării unei forțe de muncă care să includă persoane cu dizabilități, cât și **materiale pentru persoanele cu dizabilități**, pentru a le sprijini în urmărirea încadrării în muncă și a dezvoltării lor profesionale ca angajați..

Secțiunea 4.2 expune aspectele specifice fiecărei țări, care ar facilita și condiționa o astfel de abordare instituțională integrată în ceea ce privește instrumentele și metodologiile create pentru IMM-uri în cadrul proiectului.

Secțiunea 4.3 a capitolului arată modul în care IMM-urile și persoanele cu dizabilități au reacționat la instrumentele, materialele de învățare și formatele propuse. Pentru a evalua utilizabilitatea, adecvarea și nivelul de realizare a rezultatelor dorite ale învățării, precum și impactul furnizării învățării prin intermediul unei platforme de eLearning cu utilizare gratuită, așa cum a fost dezvoltată în cadrul Rezultatului Intelectual 2, s-a desfășurat un PROGRAM DE PILOTARE la scară redusă în Bulgaria, Grecia, România și Spania. După pilotare, participanții au oferit feedback cu privire la instrumentele, materialele de învățare și formatele propuse (75 de reprezentanți ai IMM-urilor și 45 de persoane cu dizabilități). Aprecierile medii acordate de respondenții din toate țările cu privire la evaluarea generală a formării sunt bune, ceea ce indică o apreciere pozitivă a platformei și a materialelor de învățare.

Secțiunea 4.4 prezintă rezultatele așteptate ale intervenției propuse în cadrul proiectului Beyond Inclusion și modul în care acestea ar putea fi extinse, pe baza recomandărilor specifice pentru fiecare țară în parte. Aceste aspecte sunt prezentate separat pentru IMM-uri și pentru persoanele cu dizabilități. Acest capitol prezintă, de asemenea, câteva tematici și idei care pot fi îmbunătățite și/sau extinse în continuare, idei privind conținutul suplimentar care poate fi integrat pe baza ofertei de învățare Beyond Inclusion.

Punctele forte, oportunitățile și provocările legate de exploatarea sau adaptarea ulterioară a ofertei de formare și a metodologiei utilizate sunt prezentate în Secțiunea 4.5 a acestui capitol. Beyond Inclusion este una dintre puținele platforme existente (dacă nu chiar singura) care explorează provocările și concepțiile greșite din jurul incluziunii din ambele perspective - cea a unui angajator (adică a IMM-urilor) și cea a unei persoane cu dizabilități, oferind îndrumări IMM-



urilor cu privire la modul în care să abordeze problematica diversității în materie de dizabilitate ca pe o resursă valoroasă care aduce beneficii întreprinderii, mai degrabă decât ca pe o obligație morală/juridică. Platforma “Beyond Inclusion” constă în conținuturi menite să ajute la dotarea persoanelor cu dizabilități cu instrumente, practici și recomandări adecvate privind competențele transversale, precum și o metodologie privind modul în care să își demonstreze cel mai bine competențele unice într-un context profesional sau atunci când își caută un loc de muncă. Disponibilitatea online a cursului de formare Beyond Inclusion, accesibil gratuit pentru toată lumea, permite exploatarea în continuare a ofertei de formare.

În **Capitolul 5, Secțiunea 5.1** ilustrează o parte din posibilele intervenții disponibile sau viitoare la nivel național și european care ar putea fi completate de rezultatele inițiativei “Beyond Inclusion”.

Tot în acest capitol, în **Secțiunea 5.2**, sunt elaborate recomandări detaliate de politici pentru fiecare țară participantă la proiect și, de asemenea, la nivelul UE, pe baza rezultatelor studiilor de cercetare elaborate în cadrul proiectului, a orientărilor, a materialelor de învățare și a sesiunilor de pilotare și, cel mai important, a feedback-ului colectat prin intermediul grupurilor de discuție și a interviurilor aprofundate cu IMM-uri și persoane cu dizabilități.

Pentru a crește numărul de persoane cu dizabilități angajate în IMM-uri, au fost indicate următoarele măsuri:

- Politici și standarde mai adecvate pentru a lua în considerare nevoile persoanelor cu dizabilități (de exemplu, o politică clară de educație incluzivă, standarde de acces aplicabile în mediile fizice și prioritate acordată reabilitării);
- Investiții în programe și servicii specifice pentru persoanele cu dizabilități;
- Mai multe stimulente financiare/economice pentru angajatori (de exemplu, reducerea impozitelor în funcție de numărul de persoane cu dizabilități angajate);
- Programe de formare pentru angajatori pentru a crea o mentalitate incluzivă în rândul IMM-urilor;
- Adaptarea legislației pentru a o face mai favorabilă persoanelor cu dizabilități;
- Creșterea gradului de conștientizare și de înțelegere a publicului cu privire la dizabilitate.

Pentru a se putea integra mai bine în câmpul muncii, persoanele cu dizabilități au nevoie/pot beneficia de:

- Adaptarea mediului de lucru pentru a asigura accesul la locul de muncă (de exemplu, parcări accesibile, lifturi, toalete modificate, balustrade);
- O strategie clară a companiei privind gestionarea dizabilității la locul de muncă;
- Asigurarea de șanse egale cu ceilalți lucrători de la locul de muncă pentru a dobândi competențele și experiența necesare pentru a avansa în carieră;
- Punerea în aplicare a unor politici care interzic discriminarea la locul de muncă;
- O mai bună comunicare și o mai bună conștientizare la locul de muncă cu privire la potențialele provocări pentru lucrătorii cu dizabilități.

Prezentul raport **își propune să transpună fluxul de intervenție axat pe activități în vederea incluziunii sociale a persoanelor cu dizabilități prin ocuparea forței de muncă și rolul IMM-urilor în propuneri și recomandări de politici bine documentate.** Prin propagarea datelor primare grație aplicării directe a metodologiei și a instrumentelor și materialelor create, acesta servește drept document de referință orientat spre viitor pentru o abordare specifică a unei probleme generale care ar trebui adresată într-un mod mai eficient.

“Más allá de la inclusión: empleabilidad para personas con discapacidad” es un proyecto Erasmus + de Asociaciones Estratégicas, con número de proyecto: 2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215. Una breve descripción del proyecto, objetivos, etapas y resultados se presentan en la sección Introducción de este Informe, dentro de la producción intelectual IO4 - Recomendaciones de políticas para la inclusión social de las personas con discapacidad a través de la empleabilidad: el papel de las PYME y las buenas prácticas de la intervención más allá de la inclusión.

Este proyecto se centra en el importante papel del mercado laboral en términos de sus proveedores de empleo en la promoción de oportunidades de empleo para las personas con discapacidad. Busca equipar a las PYME, incluidos los departamentos de Recursos Humanos y los reclutadores, así como a los consultores de negocios responsables de los procesos de recursos humanos, con un conjunto de herramientas y prácticas que les ayudarán a reconocer y cosechar los beneficios de incluir a las personas con discapacidad en su fuerza laboral, más allá del nexo “filantropía - responsabilidad social - respetuoso de la ley”.

Además, proporciona a las personas con discapacidad un enfoque estructurado, herramientas, prácticas y metodologías para demostrar, adquirir y desarrollar aún más sus habilidades laborales, así como habilidades blandas transferibles para el desarrollo profesional en el lugar de trabajo.

Se está implementando en Rumania, Bulgaria, Grecia, España y Chipre por una mezcla compuesta por 8 organizaciones y empresas de ambos lados del área de empleabilidad-discapacidad.

Los resultados del proyecto se estructuran en **4 resultados intelectuales**, a saber:

- **IO1** – Un marco metodológico para el desarrollo de material de aprendizaje para PYMES y personas con discapacidad para la inclusión social y los beneficios para las PYME;
- **IO2** – Más allá de la inclusión: módulos de formación digital para pymes y personas con discapacidad para una fuerza laboral inclusiva de la discapacidad;
- **IO3** – Más allá de la inclusión cursos de prueba y Manual para actores de las PYME;
- **IO4** – Recomendaciones políticas para la inclusión social de las personas con discapacidad a través de la empleabilidad: el papel de las pymes y las buenas prácticas de la intervención más allá de la inclusión.

El informe sobre recomendaciones de política es un esfuerzo común en nombre de todos los asociados. **Extrae conclusiones de todos los productos intelectuales**, los datos primarios y secundarios adquiridos durante las actividades del proyecto tanto de las PYME como de las personas con discapacidad, los comentarios formales e informales recibidos, los nuevos conocimientos desarrollados entre la asociación del proyecto.

En el capítulo 2 se presenta un resumen de los resultados de la **investigación documental** para proporcionar una visión general nacional sobre la integración de las personas con discapacidad en el mercado del laboratorio en los siguientes países: Bulgaria, Grecia, Rumania y España.

De acuerdo con la Clasificación Internacional del Funcionamiento, la Discapacidad y la Salud, “discapacidad” es un concepto que incluye deficiencias/deficiencias, limitaciones de actividad y restricciones de participación. Este concepto no se superpone con el concepto de enfermedad o enfermedad, sino que representa su consecuencia funcional. Las deficiencias pueden ser temporales o permanentes, evolutivas, regresivas o estacionarias, intermitentes o continuas.



En 2020, más del 20 % de la población de la UE fue declarada oficialmente con algún tipo de discapacidad. Las estadísticas actuales muestran que la tasa de empleo de las personas con discapacidad se encuentra en un nivel bajo: 30,7% en Bulgaria (2019), 24,7% en Grecia (2016), 43,7% en Rumanía (2020) y 35% en España (2018), pero el marco jurídico no fomenta eficazmente su empleabilidad, mientras que los servicios públicos de apoyo al empleo son limitados.

Las personas con discapacidad tienen un acceso limitado a los servicios de apoyo. La falta de sinergias y complementariedad entre los servicios educativos, de empleo y sociales agrava aún más su situación.

Tras la fase de desarrollo del proyecto, se ha preparado el presente informe sobre recomendaciones de política para abordar algunas cuestiones indicativas, que presentamos a continuación.

En el capítulo 3 se presentan las principales conclusiones de cada país dentro del proyecto sobre las recomendaciones relativas a políticas, prácticas y enfoques eficaces para facilitar el empleo de las personas con discapacidad.

El capítulo 4 mostrará cómo el marco metodológico y el material de aprendizaje creado en el marco del proyecto pueden constituir la base para un enfoque integrado a nivel institucional, nacional o de la UE al abordar un mercado laboral inclusivo para la discapacidad.

En la **sección 4.1** del capítulo se presenta una breve descripción del marco metodológico, las directrices y los materiales didácticos creados en IO1 e IO2.

El **marco metodológico** propuesto es una síntesis de la exploración de los factores que determinan el vínculo entre empleabilidad y discapacidad por parte de las PYME y las personas con discapacidad. Tras la creación del marco, se ha desarrollado un **conjunto de módulos digitales** tanto en términos de contenido como técnicos para estar disponibles en un entorno en línea. El conjunto incluye materiales para que **las PYME** creen una fuerza de trabajo que incluya a personas con discapacidad, así como **materiales** para personas **con discapacidades** para apoyarlas en la búsqueda de su empleo y desarrollo profesional como empleados.

En la sección 4.2 se exponen cuestiones específicas por país que facilitarían y condicionarían dicho enfoque institucional integrado con respecto a los instrumentos y metodologías creados para las PYME en el marco del proyecto.

La sección 4.3 del capítulo muestra cómo las PYME y las personas con discapacidad han respondido a las herramientas, materiales de aprendizaje y formatos propuestos. Con el fin de evaluar la usabilidad, idoneidad y nivel de logro de los resultados de aprendizaje deseados y también el impacto de la entrega de aprendizaje a través de una plataforma de aprendizaje electrónico de uso gratuito, como se desarrolló en IO2, se llevó a cabo un PROGRAMA PILOTO en Bulgaria, Grecia, Rumanía y España. Después de la prueba piloto, los participantes proporcionaron comentarios sobre las herramientas, materiales de aprendizaje y formatos propuestos (75 representantes de PYME y 45 personas con discapacidad). Las calificaciones promedio dadas por los encuestados de todos los países sobre la calificación general de capacitación son buenas, lo que indica una apreciación positiva de la plataforma y los materiales de aprendizaje.

Sección 4.4 presenta los resultados de la intervención propuesta y cómo podrían ampliarse, sobre la base de recomendaciones específicas por país. Estas cuestiones se presentan por separado para las PYME y las personas con discapacidad. Este capítulo también presenta algunos temas e ideas que pueden mejorarse aún más y ampliarse, ideas sobre contenido adicional que se puede en la oferta de aprendizaje.

Los puntos fuertes, oportunidades y desafíos para una mayor explotación o adaptación de la oferta de formación y su metodología se presentan en la **sección 4.5** del capítulo. Beyond Inclusion es una de las pocas plataformas existentes (si no la única) que explora los desafíos y conceptos erróneos en torno a la inclusión desde ambas perspectivas: la de un empleador (es decir, una PYME) y la de una persona con discapacidad, proporcionando orientación a las PYME



sobre cómo perseguir la diversidad de la discapacidad como un recurso valioso que beneficia a la empresa, más que como una obligación moral o legal. La plataforma Beyond Inclusion consiste en contenido para ayudar a equipar a las personas con discapacidad con herramientas, prácticas y orientación transversales adecuadas, así como una metodología sobre cómo demostrar mejor sus habilidades únicas en un contexto profesional o cuando buscan trabajo. La disponibilidad en línea del curso de formación Beyond Inclusion, disponible gratuitamente para todos, permite una mayor explotación de la oferta formativa.

En el capítulo 5, la **sección 5.1** ilustra algunas de las posibles intervenciones disponibles o futuras a nivel nacional y europeo que podrían complementarse con los resultados de la iniciativa «Más allá de la inclusión».

También en este capítulo, en la **sección 5.2**, se elaboran recomendaciones políticas detalladas para cada país participante en el proyecto y también a nivel de la UE, basándose en los resultados de los estudios de investigación preparados en el proyecto, las directrices, el material de aprendizaje y las sesiones piloto y, lo que es más importante, los comentarios recopilados a través de grupos de discusión y entrevistas en profundidad con PYME y personas con discapacidad.

A fin de aumentar el número de personas con discapacidad empleadas en las PYME, se han indicado las siguientes medidas:

- Promover políticas y normas más apropiadas para tener en cuenta las necesidades de las personas con discapacidad (por ejemplo, una política clara de educación inclusiva, normas de acceso aplicables en entornos físicos y prioridad dada a la rehabilitación);
- Invertir en programas y servicios específicos para personas con discapacidad;
- Aumentar los incentivos financieros y económicos para los empleadores (por ejemplo, reducción de impuestos según el número de personas con discapacidad empleadas);
- Elaborar programas de capacitación para empleadores para crear una mentalidad inclusiva entre las PYME;
- Adaptar la legislación para hacerla más favorable a las personas con discapacidad;
- Aumentar la conciencia pública y la comprensión de la discapacidad.

Para integrarse mejor en la fuerza de trabajo, las personas con discapacidad pueden beneficiarse de:

- Medidas para adaptarse mejor al entorno de trabajo (por ejemplo, estacionamiento accesible, ascensores, baños modificados, pasamanos);
- Estrategias empresariales claras sobre la gestión de la discapacidad en el lugar de trabajo;
- Medidas para garantizar la igualdad de oportunidades con otros trabajadores en el lugar de trabajo para adquirir las habilidades y la experiencia necesarias para avanzar en sus carreras;
- La implementación de políticas que prohíban la discriminación en el lugar de trabajo;
- Una mejor comunicación y conciencia en el lugar de trabajo sobre los posibles desafíos para los trabajadores con discapacidades.

El informe de recomendaciones **políticas propone transponer el flujo impulsado por las actividades implementadas en el proyecto y promover el papel de las PYME hacia nuestro objetivo inclusivo en forma de propuestas y recomendaciones de políticas claras y bien documentadas**. Este informe sirve como un documento de referencia prospectivo y propone un enfoque particular de un problema general que debe abordarse de manera más efectiva.





„Beyond Inclusion: Employability for persons with disabilities“ is an Erasmus + Strategic Partnerships project, with project number: 2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215.

This project focuses on the important role of the labour-market in terms of its employment providers in promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. It looks into equipping SMEs, including Human Resources departments and recruiters as well as business consultants responsible for human resources processes with a set of tools and practices that will help them acknowledge and reap the benefits of including disabled persons into their workforce, beyond the ‘philanthropy – social responsibility – law abiding’ nexus.

Moreover, provides the persons with disabilities with a structured approach, tools, practices and methodologies to demonstrate, acquire and further develop their job skills, as well as transferable soft skills for professional development at the workplace.

It is being implemented in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, and Cyprus by a mix consisting of 8 organizations and companies from both sides of the employability-disability area.

The project is structured in 4 Intellectual Outcomes, namely:

IO1 - A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING MATERIAL FOR SMES AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND BENEFITS FOR SMES;

In this IO a methodological framework was developed to support the creation of:

- a) Learning material and tools for SMEs (i.e. HR, managerial/executive level staff incl. consultants who are responsible for recruiting, hiring, retaining employees), that will help to acknowledge and reap the benefits of a disability-inclusive workforce.
- b) Learning material for persons with disabilities to get the best out of their professional development opportunities by showing how to demonstrate, acquire, develop job skills, as well as apply transferable soft skills at the workplace.

To achieve this the following tasks were undertaken:

- TASK 1: Methodology and tools for carrying out targeted research and analysis to develop the methodological framework

- TASK 2: 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, organisations supporting persons with disabilities at project countries level, regarding the disability-employability nexus.
- TASK 3: Quantitative and qualitative primary research accounting for targeted primary data by involving research target groups as demonstrated in the Output description section and the relevant indicative issues.
- TASK 4: Development of methodological framework.

IO2 – BEYOND INCLUSION: DIGITAL TRAINING MODULES FOR SMES AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FOR A DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE;

According to the methodological framework created, following IO1, a set of digital modules was developed both content-wise, as well as technically to be made available in an online environment. The set includes material for SMEs to create a disability-inclusive workforce, as well as material for persons with disabilities, supporting them in pursuing employment and professional development as employees.

Furthermore an eLearning platform, training.beyond-inclusion.eu was made available free-to-use for all, containing the digital training modules created inside this IO.

To achieve this, the following tasks were undertaken:

- TASK 1: Development of material for the digital training modules.
- TASK 2: Technical deployment of digital modules.

IO3 – BEYOND INCLUSION TESTING COURSES AND HANDBOOK FOR SMES ACTORS;

To evaluate the usability, appropriateness and level of achievement of the desired learning outcomes and the impact of the learning provision as developed in IO2 for both SMEs and persons with disabilities, a small-scale PILOTING SCHEME was carried out in Romania, Greece, Spain and Bulgaria, and an ONLINE AVAILABLE HANDBOOK FOR CONSULTING ACTORS FOR SMEs (internal or external) in the context of human resources was developed within this Intellectual Output.

To achieve this, the following tasks were undertaken:

- TASK 1: Development of Beyond Inclusion online Handbook for SMEs.
- TASK 2: Pilot-testing methodology and pilot testing sessions.
- TASK 3: Pilot-testing report.

IO4 – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY: THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION;

The four tasks of this intellectual output were:

- TASK 1: Development of common guidelines and structure of Policy recommendations report.
- TASK 2: Drafting Recommendation policy content at country level.
- TASK 3: Online focus group with stakeholders.
- TASK 4: Development of final Policy recommendations report.



About the Policy Recommendation Report

In the preparatory stage of the proposal, EU and national policies relevant to social inclusion of persons with disabilities have been explored. In particular, the call of the European Disability Forum EDF for the adoption of a European Disability Rights Agenda 2020-2030. With respect to employment and training, EDF stresses the need to focus on the use of EU funds for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, in part through investing in training. At a further point, employment for persons with disabilities should also facilitate the transition from full dependency on benefits to employment. SMEs and especially small and micro enterprises should be part of any relevant intervention, since as it stands they are below the radar of non-discrimination policies and miss valuable and well-documented information on how a disabled-inclusive workforce yields important benefits for them at various levels.

Following the development phase of the proposed project, the **present Policy Recommendations report was developed** to respond to the following indicative issues:

- How can the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level? (national or EU level)
- Which are the country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration?
- How did SMEs as well as persons with disabilities respond to the proposed tools, learning material and formats?
- Which would be the envisaged, scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention?
- How could they be scaled up?
- Which are the strengths (incl. good practices), opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology?
- Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

The Policy recommendations report was a common endeavour on behalf of all partners. **It draws conclusions from across all Intellectual Outputs**, the primary and secondary data acquired during the project activities from both SMEs and persons with disabilities, formal and informal feedback received, new knowledge developed among the project partnership.

Moreover, **a half day online focus group with stakeholder was organized** in each country from the project and held to discuss key topics of interest and explore feasible recommendations that align with EU and national policies.

Elements of innovation/impact/transferability

The Policy recommendation report **proposed to transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations**. Fertilising primary data through direct application of a methodology and the created tools, materials, it serves as a prospect reference document for a given approach for an umbrella issue that should be tackled more efficiently.



II. ACTUAL CONTEXT AT COUNTRY LEVEL (BG, ES, GR, RO)



In accordance with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, disability is a concept that includes deficiencies/impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. This concept does not overlap with the concept of illness or disease, but represents its functional consequence. Deficiencies/Impairments may be temporary or permanent, evolving, regressive or stationary, intermittent or continuous.

In 2020, more than 20% of the EU population had been officially declared with some form of disability. In addition, according to data of Eurostat for 2019, 28.4% of people with a disability (aged 16 or over) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 18.4% of those with no activity limitation. Thus, in 2019, 68.0 % of the EU population with an activity limitation would have been at risk of poverty without social benefits, allowances or pensions. In 2019, the Member States that recorded the highest proportion of people with a disability who were at risk of poverty or social exclusion were: Bulgaria (50.7%), Latvia (42.1%), Estonia (40.0%), Lithuania (39.9%) and Ireland (37.8%). The percent for Romania is 37.0%, for Greece is 33.2% and for Spain is 32.5%.

Current statistical information shows that the employment rate of people with disabilities it is at a low level, respectively: 30.7% in Bulgaria (2019), 24.7% in Greece (2016), 43.7% in Romania (2020) and 35% in Spain (2018), but the legal framework does not effectively stimulate their employability, and public employment support services are limited. The necessary reforms in the approach to case management and relations with employers continue to stagnate, despite the fact that the European Social Fund (ESF) provides funding.

People with disabilities have limited access to support services. The lack of synergies and complementarity between educational, employment and social services further aggravates the situation of this group.

In all these four countries, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Spain, there normative acts regarding people with disabilities are adopted.

An approach that has been implemented in these four countries is a disability quota system which forces companies to employ a minimum percentage of people with disabilities, but the quota systems allow for a fine that organizations can pay and that releases them from fulfilling the quota. Thus, organizations either obey the inflicted rules or, in the event of non-compliance, pay a penalty usually in the form of a tax per month for each place not filled. This quotas system in general addresses almost entirely public companies or private organizations with more than 50 employees. Therefore, the majority of SMEs is left out of the legal framework.



Regarding the barriers to employment of the persons with disabilities there are many stereotypes among society which lead to rejection and isolation. When the persons with disabilities are invisible to society, the proper identification of their problems and rights become very difficult. It also signals that much effort is needed to overcome these negative trends and attitudes, resulting from a multitude of cultural factors, issues and stereotypes. This negative attitude is obvious in the employers' attitude to persons with disabilities. Most employers, especially in smaller communities, prefer not to employ people with disabilities. These further increases social isolation and lack of motivation for employment. Many small employers, SME's, fail to recognise that people with disabilities have the necessary potential and skills to "fit in" their team and company policies.

Despite these stereotypes, the research conducted in IO1 of this project shows 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.

Specific employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities, even if exists, they do not seem to be effective and popular both among persons with disabilities and employers.

The limited access to employment for people with disabilities is also influenced to a larger extent by the lack of equal access to education.

Unfortunately, there are not many enablers that could enhance and facilitate the access of the persons with disabilities to the labour market and thus improve their overall professional and personal realisation prospects and quality of life.

Strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations in order to improve legislation and support the interests of people with disabilities is an essential condition for social integration. Independence can change the quality of life of disadvantaged people.

Moreover, setting up special employment centres to support and guide people with disabilities in their job search process, given the probability that only a few uses public employment services, could help their entry into the labour market much more.

The lack of a job can be seen as being deprived of skills and can be understood as a failure to begin the process of capitalizing on their rights, a process that must be encouraged and initiated together with people with disabilities.



III. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the partners of Beyond Inclusion project suggest a number of key recommendations concerning policies, practices and effective approaches for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market. These key recommendations are summarised below and are explained in more detail in this report. The recommendations for each country and EU are as follows:

Bulgaria

1. People with disabilities lack a platform or a single place where they can advertise their potential and increase their opportunities of being spotted by a company or entrepreneur for either full-time or part-time employment/service.
2. It is important to increase the motivation, self-awareness, and presentation skills of people with disabilities to better “sell” themselves in the labour market.
3. To facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities, SME managers would need more specific programmes and services, and financial/economic incentives to promote the employment/inclusion of disabled people in employment.
4. From the perspective of people with disabilities, it is important to have more adequate and efficient policies and standards to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities.
5. Tailored support and promoting an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity can help create a positive environment for people with disabilities.
6. The relevant policy and administrative effort should be directed towards improving access, its promotion and availability for a wider population of people with disabilities.
7. It is necessary to further promote and develop inclusive education as a means to support the integration of students with disabilities in regular schools.
8. The following training subjects/topics could be further developed and promoted, i.e.: Accessibility training, Awareness training on technologies, Communication and interaction knowledge and skills, Entrepreneurship and self-employment, as well as financial literacy.
9. Further capacity building, networking and exchange of experience and good practices among employers.
10. People with disabilities could benefit from improved apprenticeships and workplace learning.
11. Persons with disabilities could also benefit from improving their self-employment and entrepreneurship capabilities.
12. Further promotion and increasing of awareness regarding the existing government-supported schemes and resources.

Greece

1. The Ministry of Labour could create **a platform where good practices are posted**.
2. **The Ministry could also subsidize** permanently small and medium-sized enterprises with insurance contributions and the salary of workers with disabilities for permanent employment.
3. **Reasonable adjustments** should be made in the workplaces to accommodate persons with disabilities – the Beyond Inclusion describes the “How”.



4. **More flexible working hours** should be legislated for PWDs depending on the health problems they face. **Alternative forms of work**, such as teleworking, should be established as a clear option for persons that find it difficult to move around non-accessible workplaces.
5. **The disability allowance should be disconnected from the salary**, giving motives to persons with disabilities to apply for a position in the labour market, assisted by the Beyond Inclusion training course.
6. SMEs could also further deploy **digital tools and new technologies**. This is how they will be modernized and provide more jobs for PWDs, for example, by utilizing the institution of teleworking.

Romania

A. Occupation

1. Rethinking the employment system for people with disabilities.
2. Supporting the establishment of labour mediation services.
3. Support for families of disabled people in finding a job.
4. Ensuring reasonable accommodation in the workplace and providing measures to support companies to ensure workplace adaptability.
5. Building step-by-step procedures for hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace that will support employers as well as people with disabilities.
6. Rethinking the system of granting rest and medical leave for people with disabilities.
7. Training of staff from state institutions on the subject of inclusion with an emphasis on disabilities.
8. Taking measures from competent institutions to aid support organizations for persons with disabilities.
9. Clearly define the occupational standard by defining the level at which the employee is intended to perform in that position.
10. Introduction of a progress mentor occupation to carry out activities to monitor the evolution over time of an employee in the category of persons with mental disabilities.

B. Education

1. Digitalization at the educational level.
2. A better prepared educational system for people with disabilities.
3. Identifying the elements needed to transform the existing education system into an inclusive education system, both for children and adults in the situation of disabled people who want to continue their education.
4. The provision of elements, within the regular training courses for teachers, to help them to work with pupils/adults with disabilities could be achieved by preparing teachers, in collaboration with the Teaching-Staff Resources Centre, by conducting training programs to develop compassion and raise awareness to work better with this type of people.
5. The training of a larger number of support teachers, assistants, psychologists or psycho-pedagogues and their introduction into the system to support the training needs of people with special needs.

6. Adapting the school curriculum to special educational requirements for the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.
7. Educate people with disabilities so that they know what opportunities to report abuse they have and take steps to ensure that the organizations handling their complaints handle them properly.
8. Building, using and promoting in the work of integrating people with disabilities into the labour market a tool for assessing social and communicational skills, intellectual work skills, which together with the skills profile create a profile faithful to what such a person can execute, and to be included in a group that has the same characteristics as his.

C. Accessibility

1. Consider the concept of “accessibility” (both physical and digital) in its broad sense.
2. Implementing measures to provide greater physical accessibility to persons with disabilities.
3. Digitalisation of information to support information accessibility and, together with this, support those for whom physical accessibility is lower.
4. Gathering information on structures, processes and policy outcomes affecting persons with disabilities.

D. General aspects

1. To carry out campaigns to raise public awareness of the problems and needs of persons with disabilities in order to bring about changes in mentality related to the working capacity of these persons.
2. Conducting campaign to raise awareness, understanding and recognition of disability as a human rights issue, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities with the aim of informing, empowering and activating persons with disabilities who may or may not work.
3. Conducting campaigns to ensure awareness raising among employers from all categories, managers and HR representatives regarding rights, The problems and needs of persons with disabilities, to consider and the employment and inclusion in the labour market of these persons and the use of examples of employers who manage to hire persons with disabilities and keep them as employees for long periods of time.
4. Facilitate and align the political dialog on the rights of persons with disabilities between intergovernmental bodies and between humanitarian and development agencies, with a view to providing a broader set of resources useful to the work of organizations involved in this work.
5. Rebuild the legislative system on the establishment of social enterprises, because at this time the legislation is quite cumbersome on the development of social enterprises and the steps it must take to carry out the activities of a social enterprise are difficult.
6. Launching within the POCU of calls for projects dedicated to disabled persons, including training services.
7. Involvement of persons with disabilities in all levels of decision-making.
8. Involvement of all ministries in the implementation of the UN Convention.



Spain

1. Promote the role of job coach or diversity manager as figures in Spanish companies that could be key to welcome people with disabilities and promote Influence their full inclusion and not only their labour integration.
2. Promotion of the SME workforce in soft skills in general and regarding resilience, flexibility, adaptability and reformulation of values and key to inclusion.
3. Promote a legislative review in Spain so that the law adapts better to reality.
4. Put the emphasis on awareness promotion of SMEs: eliminating all stereotypes and prejudices: these ideas and concepts are mistakenly adopted as universal truths.
5. Promote a selection of workers under objective criteria: skills and competencies must be the fundamental factors in the selection process.
6. Make emphasis on hiring employees who fight for equality.
7. Involve SME workers in decision-making: fostering teamwork favours mutual commitment and shared responsibility.
8. Promote socially responsible management and middle management: disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company.

EU level

The European Commission has adopted for the period 2021-2030 an ambitious strategy for persons with disabilities, following the recommendations of the European Parliament that wants an inclusive society, where the rights of the persons with disabilities are protected and where there is no discrimination.

This strategy takes over Parliament's main recommendations ¹:

- The mainstreaming of the rights of all people living with disabilities into all policies and areas
- Recovery and mitigation measures to avoid people with disabilities getting disproportionately affected by health crises such as Covid-19
- Equal access for people with disabilities to health care, employment, public transport, housing
- The implementation and further development of the EU disability card pilot project, which allows for the mutual recognition of disabilities in some EU countries
- People with disabilities, their families and organisations were part of the dialogue and will be part of the process of implementation.

The **following policy recommendations** were identified at **EU level**:

1. SMEs could claim **funding through the trade associations** and the chambers to which they belong so that programs to familiarize employers with disability can be implemented. **Research projects** should be funded and implemented on European level, presenting data, not only with regards to the current disadvantage's persons with disabilities face in the labour market, but with regards to the advantages they offer to the business when employed.
1. **European Mobility - European Disability Card** – A single Disability Certification Card should be established so that person with disability moving within the EU loses their work rights and work opportunities offered.

1 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200604STO80506/a-new-ambitious-eu-disability-strategy-for-2021-2030>

IV. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND THE DEVELOPED GUIDELINES AND LEARNING MATERIAL FOR SMES - THE BASIS FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL



4.1 About the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs

The methodological framework developed in IO1 of this project is a synthesis of the exploration of the factors determining the employability-disability nexus on the side of the SMEs and that of persons of disabilities.

Integrating data to orient the development of a “learning” path for SMEs for the creation of disability-inclusive workforce, as well for supporting persons with disabilities at the soft skills level, does not only guide the development of the intervention at hand, but furthermore it expands knowledge in terms of the inner workings, the attitudes, the stereotypes, the missing knowledge that condition the views and perceptions of SMEs and persons with disabilities regarding the nature of the relationship between disability-work ability-employability.

The methodological framework was based on a comparative analysis of documentation, elaborating into methodological elements and tools facilitating the production of IO2 which is a core output of the project. Substantial input was provided by all partners regarding country-specific aspects.



The **main goal** of the framework consists in distinguishing what is to be considered as more essential and what not, and to provide a methodological matrix around which educational content will be organized such as (indicatively):

- I. Which are the subjects participants are more likely to engage with?
- II. What is the appropriate time-length in order for participants to reach a significant level of comprehension of the learning material?
- III. Which are the most appropriate pedagogical methods to be used during the learning process?
- IV. How does the learning content need to be structured for the online-based material?

The methodological framework was developed to support the creation of:

- a) Learning material and tools for SMEs (i.e. HR, managerial/executive level staff incl. consultants who are responsible for recruiting, hiring, retaining employees), that will help to acknowledge and reap the benefits of a disability-inclusive workforce.
- b) Learning material for persons with disabilities to get the best out of their professional development opportunities by showing how to demonstrate, acquire, develop job skills, as well as apply transferable soft skills at the workplace.

The framework as a piece of evidence and tool at the same time allows for customisation in different contexts, by leaving enough room for adaptations by referring to national/local context and further categories of persons with disabilities.

According to the methodological framework, **a set of digital modules have been developed** both content-wise, as well as technically to be made available in an online environment. The set includes **material for SMEs** to create a disability-inclusive workforce, as well as **material for persons with disabilities**, supporting them pursuing employability and professional development as employees. The integrated provision covers the needs, the perceived notions of the employability-disability nexus as reflected in both the benefits for SMES, as well as a crucial factor for social inclusion and personal/professional fulfilment for persons with disabilities.

The learning platform can be accessed via the Beyond Inclusion project website: <https://beyond-inclusion.eu/> or directly via the following link training.beyond-inclusion.eu and is divided onto two sections:

I. For SMEs - 2 modules:

- Module 1: Benefits for SMEs
- Module 2: Into action: Steps towards the creation of a disability inclusive workforce

II. For persons with disabilities - 4 modules:

- Module 1: About myself
- Module 2: Disability and the job market
- Module 3: Self-presentation and self-marketing
- Module 4: At the workplace

4.2 Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration

In this section **country-specific aspects** that would facilitate and condition such an integration approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs are presented.

■ In **Bulgaria**, based on the results of both the desktop research and the qualitative feedback received in the frame of IO3 and IO4, there are not many enablers that could enhance and facilitate the access of people with disabilities to the labour market and thus improve their overall professional and personal realisation prospects and quality of life.

In Bulgaria, there are specific employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities are provided in the Employment Promotion Act and in the People with Disabilities Act (PDA). **There are two types of incentives - financial and quota-based.** These were also acknowledged by the participants in the focus groups. According to PDA, Bulgarian companies with staff exceeding 50 employees must hire people with disabilities, according to the new Disability Act. In order to ensure the employment of people with permanent disabilities in the normal working environment, the legislator has foreseen that employers with personnel headcount ranging from 50 to 99 employees must provide work for at least one person with permanent disabilities. Employers with 100 or more employees and workers must provide work to people with permanent disabilities in a number equal to 2 per cent of their current headcount (e.g., a company employing 100 employees must provide work to at least 2 employees with permanent disabilities). It is worth noting that the General Labour Inspectorate may decide to exempt employers from this obligation provided there are specific factors in the working environment that prevent the recruitment of people with permanent disabilities or in case of an absence of persons with permanent disabilities. Therefore, the more inclusive the working environment, the fewer employers will “feel” obliged to employ persons with disabilities to comply with the quota principles. In this aspect, awareness and accessibility training initiatives should be increased and further promoted with the aim of helping SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities, as well as to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and how to create an inclusive environment.

From a person with a disability perspective, the existing financial support and incentives for people with disabilities are provided in the framework of the National Strategy for People with Disabilities (2012 – 2020) and its successor, the National Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021 – 2030, which has been adopted at the end of 2021.

The existing incentives are based on financial support, tax amendments and direct subsidies for people with disabilities who are seeking to enhance their entrepreneurship and self-employment prospects. The relevant labour market legislation also provides numerous incentives for people with disabilities, including promotion and retention of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance for people with disabilities. However, the availability and access to this support is questionable and rather limited (unpopular) according to the experts working in the field. Therefore, the relevant policy and administrative effort should be directed towards improving access, its promotion and availability for a wider population of people with disabilities. **Also, according to the participants in the focus group, it is necessary for Bulgaria to further promote and develop inclusive education as means to support the integration of students with disabilities in regular schools. Thus their subsequent “integration” into society and the labour market (i.e. their employability prospects) will be greatly improved.**

■ In **Greece**, there are many parameters hindering or promoting the scaling-up of Beyond Inclusion at institutional level.

Favourable circumstances are:



- **Lifelong Learning Centres (KeDiViM)** have been operating since 2010 with the aim to promote the upgrading of environment, digital, literacy, civic, financial, Personal & Interpersonal capabilities among marginalized groups (persons with disabilities, immigrants, religious minorities etc.), ensuring equal access to education and enhancing access to the labour market. KeDiViMs can integrate and promote further the Beyond Inclusion practice, fully aligning with their mission.
- Furthermore, in Greece, the **Greek Manpower Employment Organization** offers incentives for SMEs for hiring persons with disabilities, funding SMEs and covering either partially or completely the salaries of the employees with disabilities. Therefore, the Beyond Inclusion training material, addressing the subject matter from a different perspective, can COMPLEMENT this practice and be integrated within the Public Employment Services practice, as well as in the policies of SME's, enhancing their human resource strategy.

Changing unfavourable circumstances are:

- **The disability allowance in Greece is connected to the salary.** Today, when a person with disabilities is hired (with the exception of persons with mental impairments), they lose 50% of the disability allowance; this works as a disincentive to be employed, concerning the low basic salary offered in Greece. If the disability allowance is disconnected from the salary, more persons with disabilities would seek for employment, adopting the Beyond Inclusion tools.
- Currently, the subsidy (coverage of insurance contributions and salary) of **a personal assistant (PA)** for every person with disabilities who wishes so, is legislated as a pilot program only for 1,000 people and only for the Attica Region, yet it is unknown whether it will be implemented and when. PAs are considered necessary for the autonomy of each person with disabilities and this their employability, and it is a good practice applied in many countries in and out of Europe, that would facilitate the integration of the methodology created by the Beyond Inclusion project.

■ In **Romania**, according to the participants in the online discussions, The Beyond Inclusion Platform is a remarkable first step because it includes information that could bring together employers and people with disabilities; at the same time, the platform provides the main directions and steps to be followed, including in this direction. Taking as a reference the existing platform, training programs can be organized, with direct interaction (face to face) to modify some perceptions regarding people with disabilities.

The recommendations in this regard are:

- Organization at the institutional level of training programs dedicated to people with disabilities based on the Beyond Inclusion Platform as a training tool;
- Organization at institutional level of training programs dedicated to SME representatives that focus on the inclusion of people with disabilities, programs that use the Beyond Inclusion Platform as learning material;
- Nomination at the level of institutions and organizations of a dedicated and informed person to be responsible for the employability and integration of people with disabilities among the staff.

■ In **Spain**, maybe it would be advisable to:

- Promote the implementation of the 4 modules of persons with disabilities with "assistants" to widen participation as data shows they are not fully familiar with the use of ICT.
- For SMEs, maybe it would have been a good idea to include examples of "success cases" of inclusion of persons with disabilities in Spain (or at local level) or just promote the role of "diversity manager" for raising the awareness of SMES.



4.3 SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

To evaluate the usability, appropriateness, and level of achievement of the desired learning outcomes and the impact of the learning provision as developed in IO2 for both SMEs and persons with disabilities, a small-scale PILOTING SCHEME were carried out in Romania, Greece, Spain and Bulgaria. After piloting, the participants (SMEs and persons with disabilities) they provided feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats.

The pilot testing was implemented in Spain, Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria engaging 75 SME representatives using online devices and telephone.

In the table below we have included the average ratings provided by the respondents form all countries to the main statements regarding Overall rating of the training, module 1 and module 2. The collated rating corresponding to 4.3:

SUMMARY OF RATINGS	AVERAGE ES	AVERAGE RO	AVERAGE BU	AVERAGE GR	TOTAL AVERAGE
Overall rating of the training for SMEs	4.6	4.3	3.9	4.0	4.2
Overall rating Module 1 Benefits for SMEs	4.5	4.4	4.0	4.1	4.3
Overall rating Module 2 Into Action	4.6	4.4	4.0	4.1	4.3
Total Average	4.6	4.4	4.0	4.1	

Table 1: Summary evaluation– averages ALL COUNTRIES. Own elaboration

To illustrate the results, we have included figure 1 to show the collated rating from all countries involved. We can state that the piloting with SMEs has surpassed the imaginary evaluation line of 4 out of 5, corresponding to a good qualifying.

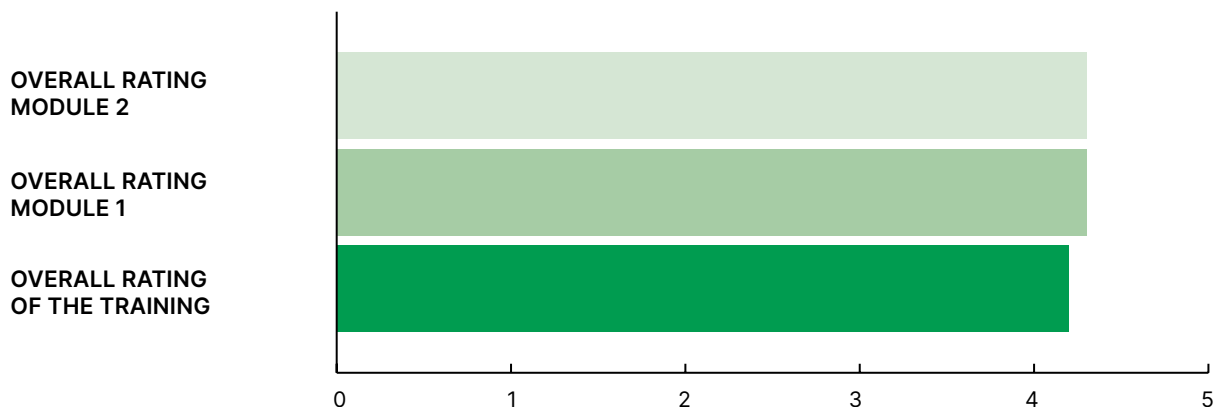


Figure 1: Summary Evaluation of the Beyond Inclusion training – averages. Own elaboration

The pilot testing was implemented in Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria engaging 45 PwD using online devices and telephone.



In the table below we have included the average ratings provided by the respondents from all countries to the main statements regarding the overall rating of the training, module 1, 2, 3 and 4. The collated rating corresponding to 4.2:

SUMMARY OF RATINGS	AVERAGE RO	AVERAGE BU	AVERAGE GR	TOTAL AVERAGE
Overall rating of the training for PwD	4.3	3.7	4.2	4.1
Overall rating Module 1 About myself	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.2
Overall rating Module 2 Disability and the job market	4.3	3.9	4.3	4.2
Overall rating Module 3 self-presentation and self-marketing	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.2
Overall rating Module 4 At the workplace	4.3	4.0	4.2	4.2
Total Average	4.3	3.9	4.3	

Table 2: Summary evaluation– averages ALL COUNTRIES. Own elaboration

To illustrate the results, we have included figure 2 to show the collated rating from all countries involved. We can state that the piloting with PwD has surpassed the imaginary evaluation line of 4 out of 5, corresponding to a good qualifying.

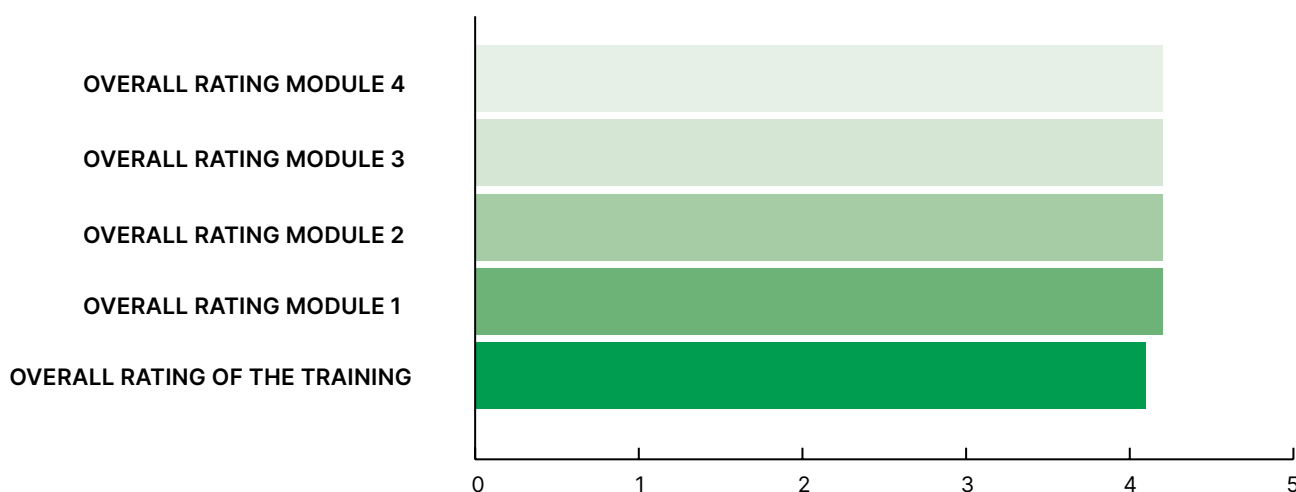


Figure 2: Summary Evaluation of the Beyond Inclusion training – averages. Own elaboration

Among the suggestions for improvement are:

- simplifying the registration process;
- simplifying the access to the training by translating some sentences and words that remained in English;
- more visual digital elements (charts, tables, graphical representations, infographics) to be easier to go through the modules.;
- for the deaf and hard of hearing, special video materials in mime-gestural language;
- providing the content (also) in an audio format would be a great advantage.



4.4 Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention

Starting from the recommendations made above, in section 4.2 (Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs) we envisage the following results regarding the SMEs:

- **Increasing the level of information among SME representatives** regarding the **needs of people with disabilities**, the **legislative aspects** that support the rights of these people, the **benefits of including a diverse workforce** and their **awareness of the condition and needs of these people**;
- Eliminate all stereotypes and prejudices. These ideas and concepts are mistakenly adopted as universal truths. For this reason, candidates should not be judged by their physical abilities and should analyze deeply what they can contribute to the companies.
- This material gives from the beginning a positive direction in the familiarization of small and medium enterprises with disability. With practical examples documented and based on common habits and images of everyday life, it breaks the stereotypes around diversity while promoting disability as an aspect of the daily life of our fellow humans, as a phenomenon next door.
- Beyond Inclusion intervention becomes a SMEs' ally in the attempt to the social integration of persons with disabilities. Prejudices about the alleged non-productivity of workers with disabilities are broken down in simple language but with scientific documentation and simple everyday examples. This material gives evidence to even the most sceptical to reap the benefits of an inclusive workplace.
- Promote the so called "natural supports" (especially intellectual and mental disabilities): colleague workers who understand, help and support people with disabilities in companies.
- Promote specific awareness actions should be addressed to middle managers and SME owners towards diversity in general and towards persons with disabilities. Promoting socially responsible management: disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company are key to promote diversity in SMEs.
- It enables SME to adopt a clearly structured strategy on how to integrate persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention for people with disabilities are:

- **Providing online, free and unlimited access to the training and personal development programs developed** within the project to ensure these people have appropriate skill sets and attitudes for inclusion on the labour market and career development.
- **Enhance the employability of persons with disabilities**, particularly:
 - Helping them better understand themselves (Personality Traits and Values) as well as understand what interests them.
 - Providing them with the necessary knowledge on how to apply for a job and better attend an interview
 - Helping them develop further their soft skills, and present themselves more efficiently
 - Helping them face discriminatory behaviours at the workplace.
 - Helping them to find a job and facilitate further the elimination of stereotypes around disability at the workplace.



Also, among envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention are:

- Increasing the level of information at the institutional level of the staff involved in supporting the entry into the labour market of people with disabilities.
- Increasing the quality of employment support services adapted to the needs of people with disabilities offered by institutions/organizations.

The following topics and ideas could be further enhanced and/or scaled up. These are ideas about additional content that can be integrated on the Beyond Inclusion learning provision:

- **Accessibility training can help SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities.** This training could cover topics such as website accessibility, accessible design, and the use of assistive technology.
- **Awareness training on technologies** that can facilitate access to workplaces based on the individual needs of people with disabilities and utilising the immense possibilities of universal design.
- **Communication and interaction knowledge and skills.** SMEs need to improve their skills in how communicating better with people with disabilities, especially when evaluating the perspectives of hiring a person who has a specific disability that hinders his/her ability to communicate efficiently.
- **Further enrichment of resources and instruments in the field of employability, including tools to assess the working abilities of people with disabilities with a view to enabling their active participation in the labour market.** These can include specialised training and learning content for experts working with people with disabilities to improve their services related to career counselling, active mediation, mentoring, vocational education, workplace support, etc.
- **Further capacity building, networking and exchange of experience and good practices** among employers (i.e. companies and organisations) for the purposes of reasonable accommodation and building an accessibility inclusive environment. This could be integrated into the platform as an additional matchmaking/networking tool.
- **People with disabilities could benefit from improved apprenticeships and workplace learning** which should be made inclusive for persons with disabilities. This is needed in terms of improving the accommodation and vocational skills of employers with disabilities.
- **Persons with disabilities could also benefit from improving their self-employment and entrepreneurship capabilities.** Business and entrepreneurship training can help individuals with disabilities to start their own businesses or manage their finances effectively, as many of them face various barriers to traditional employment. Therefore, self-employment and entrepreneurship could offer much-needed flexibility regarding the work environment and social stigma, paving the way to financial independence and sustainability.



4.5 Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

Overall, the **strengths** identified by the partners within the project regarding further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology are:

1. Beyond Inclusion is one of the few existing platforms (if not the only one) that explores the challenges and misconceptions related to inclusion from both perspectives – of an employer (i.e. and SME) and a person with a disability. This e-learning platform was created specifically to support the development needs of people with disabilities, by equipping them with appropriate skill sets and attitudes for inclusion in the labour market and career development. The platform also includes useful information for SME representatives (managers, business consultants, human resource managers, responsible for recruiting new talent) to recognize and benefit from the inclusion of people with disabilities in their workforce.
2. On the one hand, it gives guidance to SMEs on how to pursue disability diversity as a valuable resource that benefits the business rather than a moral/law obligation. On the other, the Beyond Inclusion platform consists of content to help equip persons with disabilities with the appropriate tools, practices and soft skills orientation, as well as with a methodology on how to best demonstrate their unique skills in a professional context or when seeking a job.
3. The online availability of the Beyond Inclusion training course, freely available to all enables the further exploitation of the provision by direct target groups (SME's and persons with disabilities). The promotion of the proposed intervention by the thorough dissemination strategy and through the 8 partners' wide networks in 5 EU countries and beyond, involves directly relevant stakeholders who integrate the proposed practice in their organization's/ individual activities; The easy-to-understand content of the training material and its eligibility for immediate application on the field establishes a practice ready to be implemented across the SMEs' world.

The **opportunities** of further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology identified for each country from the project are:

1. Current data of the Agency for People with Disabilities in Bulgaria (APD) indicates that in 2019, there are over 460,000 people with permanent disabilities of working age in Bulgaria. However, only 30,7% of them are employed, and 5-6% are registered as unemployed, i.e. 64,7% of these non-disabled people are not employed. This data shows that more than 120 000 people with disabilities are inactive and should be integrated into the labour market. One of the key priorities of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030 is to ensure equal and inclusive employment opportunities and conditions for people with disabilities. According to the strategy, all tools and instruments that are aimed at the provision of adequate support for inclusion in employment and training of persons with disabilities will be promoted extensively as a proven measure that will contribute to their integration into social enterprises, their inclusion in the conventional sector, thus increasing their standard of living.
2. The pilot program for Personal Assistants for persons with disabilities, about to be implemented in Greece, is a great opportunity for this target group to improve their employability, enabling their autonomy and helping them enter the labour market, assisted also by the Beyond Inclusion methodology. The funding program provided by the Manpower Employment Service in Greece facilitating the recruitment of 3.000 persons from disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities, can be also complemented by the Beyond Inclusion intervention, enabling their integration into the workplace.



3. Persons with disabilities represent² a significant group in Romania, with a diverse profile. According to Eurostat data, Romania has about a quarter of the population aged 16 and over with disabilities, of which people with severe activity limitations represent 6% of the population (1.2 million people). Among disabled people, most have great difficulty or total inability to walk or climb stairs (38%), followed by difficulty seeing even with glasses, memorizing and concentrating (13%) and self-care such as to wash or dress themselves (13%). Officially, in 2020 in Romania there were 853,465 people registered as having disability classification certificates and 457,730 receiving disability pension - but there is no estimate regarding the overlap between these two groups. And as the right to work is an inherent part of the set of rights of people with disabilities and its achievement must be universal, people with disabilities should have the opportunity to work in occupations (salaried or entrepreneurial) that reflect professional training, their skills and aspirations regarding professional achievement and occupational gains. At the same time, disabled people should be adequately trained to increase their qualification level and develop their skills, creative and productive potential.
4. The European Disability Card as an opportunity to homogenise the status of persons with disabilities across Spain. Moreover, in Spain the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the equality plan is also considered as an opportunity even though the data of plans registered is still low, it is an opportunity to disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company are key to promote diversity in Spanish SMEs.

The following **challenges** were identified regards to the overall situation of people with disabilities:

- The biggest challenge, as identified in the NSPD in Bulgaria, is related to the need to **guarantee access to employment of people with disabilities** and provide adequate support for workers and employers in this process, in line with the specific requirements and needs of persons with disabilities. The existing employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities do not seem effective and popular among persons with disabilities and employers. The support for people with disabilities who are motivated to work and engage in employment is still insufficient.
- **Social exclusion** - Unfortunately, there are still many stereotypes in Bulgarian society, which lead to rejection and isolation of people with disabilities. When people with disabilities are invisible to society, properly identifying their problems and rights becomes very difficult. It also signals that much effort is needed to overcome these negative trends and attitudes, resulting from a multitude of cultural factors, issues and stereotypes originating from the socialist era. Eliminating all stereotypes and prejudices, so that non-discrimination laws are adequately applied, and disabled people and organizations that represent their interests can easily access mechanisms that allow them to appeal
- **Challenges in education and setbacks related to inclusive education** – still, there are challenges related to the provision of accessible educational facilities for students with disabilities, especially in smaller and more isolated communities. Inclusive education is impossible without accessible infrastructure. In addition, there is a lack of qualified pedagogical personnel to work with students with special educational needs. The lack of access to lifelong learning for people with disabilities is also an issue, as accessibility is just one of the main hindrances in this aspect. But there are also attitudinal barriers, such as negative attitudes and stereotypes about people with disabilities. Financial barriers, such as the cost of assistive technology or specialised training, can also be a significant challenge for people with disabilities.
- **All recent black swan events**, the post-COVID challenges, the war in Ukraine, the current inflation levels, the energy crises in Europe in general: all these create unfavourable circumstances for the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

² Strategic Note with detailed recommendations on the foundation of the new National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, 2021-2027, November 2020, The World Bank, IBRD-IDA, World Bank Group

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS - POSSIBLE AVAILABLE OR UPCOMING INTERVENTIONS AT NATIONAL AND EU LEVEL THAT COULD BE COMPLEMENTED BY THE BEYOND INCLUSION OUTPUTS

5.1 Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion

Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs were identified by the partners in this project.

■ In **Bulgaria**, the following initiatives and support measures were identified in the process of preparing the country report (IO1) and the focus group/interviews that were held in the frame of IO4:

- **Various measures under the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030** are aimed at physical environmental accessibility (buildings, roads, infrastructure, etc.), transportation and communications (information) accessibility, individual mobility (equipment, aids), technologies to facilitate access to workplaces based on individual needs, and universal design. Measures in terms of integrative education include capacity building to secure resources and support for students with special needs, including professional training and continuing education recipients, equal access, etc. Measures in the field of employment include developing an integrated tool to assess the working abilities of people with disabilities to enable their active participation, career counselling, active mediation and mentoring services, effective vocational education, workplace support, as well as employment promotion via stimuli for employers, and capacity building for companies for the purposes of reasonable accommodation, among other activities³.
- **The Regulations for Implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act and the Guidelines for individual needs assessment of persons with disabilities were implemented on April 2 2019 are the two main documents supporting the PDA's implementation.** The Guidelines for individual needs assessment regulate the manner in the evaluation of the need to provide social services, personal assistance, or other types of support under conditions and according to the procedure established by law.
- **The Employment Promotion Act (EPA) of Bulgaria provides for the unemployed and the promotion and maintenance of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance, including people with disabilities.** Under the Employment Promotion Act, an “unemployed person” is a person who has registered at the Local Employment Department, does not work, searches for a job and is ready to start working in a 14-day period after notification of the Local Employment Department. “Long-term unemployed” is a person who has registration at the Local Employment Department that has not been interrupted for at least 12 months. In addition, the law recognises unemployed young people and adults with permanent disabilities as part of the group of persons in the disadvantaged (unequal) situation on the labour market. As such, EPA provides various incentives and opportunities for labour inclusion.
- **National Program for Affordable Housing and Personal Mobility** – The campaign of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) provides funding for the construction of an accessible living environment for people with disabilities has begun. Under the program, electric stair platforms, vertical stairlifts, elevators and wheelchair ramps for disabled people will be built free of charge.

³ <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5342-bulgaria-new-national-strategy-for-people-with-disabilities-2021-2030-71-kb>



- **National Programme for modern, safe and accessible education** – it is managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and it is opened annually. The initiative is aimed at improving educational conditions by providing an accessible architectural environment to improve activities in the school education system and ensure accessibility for students and teachers moving around with wheelchairs.
- **The Social Protection Fund (FSZ)** of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy has an ongoing campaign for financing projects to modernise social services of municipalities, day care centers, homes for the elderly, family-type accommodation centers and other facilities providing social services for people with disabilities.

■ In **Greece**, the following initiatives and support measures were identified:

- **Lifelong Learning Centres (KeDiViM)** promote the upgrading of environment, digital, literacy, civic, financial, Personal & Interpersonal capabilities among marginalized groups (persons with disabilities, immigrants, religious minorities etc.), and can be perfectly complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outcomes, building further the soft skills necessary to improve their employability (a tool ideal to be integrated within the KeDiViM courses).
- **Personal Assistants**, enabling PWDs autonomy, will be the key, maximizing their productivity and making them active members of the labour market.

■ In **Romania**, the following initiatives and support measures were identified:

National Strategy on preventing the institutionalization of adults with disabilities and accelerating the deinstitutionalization process, 2022-2030, approved by the Government.⁴

The strategy of deinstitutionalization brings major changes through 6 directions of action with impact on the system of protection of persons with disabilities, considering that the provision of social services will be oriented toward the community and not toward residential institutions:

1. coordinating the process of deinstitutionalization at national, county and local level and integration into the community of adults with disabilities;
2. ensuring the person-centered approach to transition to independent life and community integration;
3. developing community services for the independent life of adults with disabilities, including for the prevention of institutionalization;
4. training and motivation of staff working with and for these persons;
5. providing support for the family in order to support independent life in the community;
6. raising awareness of society in order to support the independent life of people with disabilities in the community.

⁴ <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/6807-cp-aprobare-strategie-proces-dezinstitutionalizare-pers-adulte-dizab-2023-2030-19122022>

National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2027

The overall goal of the 2021-2027 Strategy is to ensure the full and effective participation of people with disabilities, based on freedom of decision, in all areas of life and in an accessible and resilient environment.

The beneficiaries of the 2021-2027 Strategy are persons with disabilities, children and adults, as the group is defined by Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and society in general: family members caring for people with disabilities, legal representatives, staff involved in direct activities, teachers, professionals, representatives of academia, human rights institutions, authorities and other entities.

The 2021-2027 strategy has eight priority areas:

- 1. Accessibility and mobility;**
- 2. Actual protection of the rights of persons with disabilities;**
- 3. Employment;**
- 4. Social protection, including empowerment/ rehabilitation;**
- 5. An independent and community-integrated life, including access to public services;**
- 6. Education;**
- 7. Health;**
- 8. Political and public participation.**

Education and Employment Programme 2021 – 2027⁵

2.1.1. PRIORITY: 1. MODERNIZATION OF LABOUR MARKET INSTITUTIONS

1.b.1. Creating a modern, flexible SPO, adapted to the socio-economic context, accessible and visible for the future – strategic investment, for example:

- New mechanisms to increase the relevance/quality of the services offered to customers. Updating and developing tools and methodologies to enable the de-bureaucratization and digitalization of the SPO activity, in order to provide integrated services dedicated to SPO clients, as well as to make necessary adaptations for persons with disabilities
- Adapting and improving customer service
- Increasing the capacity of civil society organizations to engage in dialog, to contribute to inclusion through employment and training of disadvantaged groups and to participate, where appropriate, in the provision of active employment measures.

5 <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ca9e947d8072599b96c9b38f2384242c.pdf>



2.1.1.1. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE: ESO4.7.

Promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible opportunities for upgrading skills and retraining for all, taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, through better anticipation of change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, As well as by facilitating occupational transitions and promoting occupational mobility (ESF+), for example:

- Encouraging participation in the PV by expanding/diversifying training opportunities
- Implementation of the “keep up” program aimed at updating the specific skills of employees as a result of rapid technological developments and the emergence of new skills, accompanied by professional counselling services
- Provision by employers, including clusters of employers, training programs for the career progression of disadvantaged employees including collaborative training.

Inclusion and Social dignity Program 2021 – 2027⁶

PRIORITY: P07. SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

2.1.1.1. Specific objective: ESO4.8. Promoting active inclusion in order to promote equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation, as well as to improve employability, in particular among disadvantaged groups (ESF+) Action 7.1 – Employment and retention of persons with disabilities in the labour market.

At EU level, the following initiatives and support measures were identified in **Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (2021-2030)**:

- **Accessibility** as an enabler of rights, autonomy and equality (reinforced by the EU digital Government Strategy, the Web Accessibility Directive, the passenger rights regulatory framework, the trans-European transport network to strengthen the provision on accessibility and the Sustainable Mobility Planning)
- **The enjoying of European rights**: moving and residing freely, participation in the democratic process
- **Decent quality of life and living independently** – reinforcing Community based services, developing new skills for new jobs, fostering access to quality and sustainable jobs, consolidating social protection systems
- **Equal Access and non-discrimination** (Access to justice, legal protection, freedom and security, Equal access to social protection, healthcare, education and goods and services including housing, inclusive and accessible education, access to culture)

Beyond Inclusion is building on one of the main goals of the Strategy, suggesting an innovative framework for the employability of persons with disabilities, taking the “Equal Access” and their “right to participate in social life” one step ahead, offering to SMEs an additional motive to do so.

6

<https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/8917b14349af013a8555f58aeda30f07.pdf>

5.2 Policy recommendations identified at the country level

Bulgaria

The **following policy recommendations** on a national level were discussed with the participants in the focus group in which we discussed how to **ensure and improve the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Bulgaria** – a task which has proven to be very difficult and challenging:

- 1. For people with disabilities, the lack of promotion of jobs among persons with various disabilities and the lack of training of persons with disabilities for job vacancies are some of the main challenges to entering the labour market.** People with disabilities lack a platform or a single place where they can advertise their potential and increase their opportunities of being spotted by a company or entrepreneur for either full-time or part-time employment/service.
- 2. Despite the fact that people with disabilities are fully committed to learning new things and adapting to a particular work environment,** many of them lack the confidence to “go out there” and present their potential. It is important to increase the motivation, self-awareness, and presentation skills of people with disabilities to better “sell” themselves in the labour market. There is a problem with the self-esteem of people with disabilities for enhancing their employability potential.
- 3. To facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities,** SME managers would need more specific programmes and services, and financial/economic incentives to promote the employment/inclusion of disabled people in employment.
- 4. From the perspective of people with disabilities, it is important to have more adequate and efficient 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).**
- 5. Tailored support (i.e. training) and promoting an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity** can help create a positive environment for people with disabilities. In this aspect, the Beyond Inclusion training provision for SMEs (both employees and managerial staff) on how to work with individuals with disabilities and creating flexible working arrangements can help them feel more included. Moreover, such instruments do not exist in most enterprises, especially those located in rural and more isolated communities.

The **“more inclusive the working environment, the fewer employers will “feel” obliged to employ persons with disabilities to comply with the quota principles”**. In this aspect, awareness and accessibility training initiatives should be increased and further promoted to help SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities, as well as to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and how to create an inclusive environment.

- 6. The availability and access to support for people with disabilities** (i.e. promotion and retention of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance, including people with disabilities) are questionable and rather limited (unpopular) according to the experts working in the field. Therefore, the relevant policy and administrative effort should be directed towards improving access, its promotion and availability for a wider population of people with disabilities.
- 7. It is necessary to further promote and develop inclusive education** as a means to support the integration of students with disabilities in regular schools. Thus their subsequent “integration” into society and the labour market (i.e. their employability prospects) will be greatly improved.



8. The following training subjects/topics could be further developed and promoted, i.e.
 - **Accessibility training** can help SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities.
 - **Awareness training on technologies that can facilitate access to workplaces based on the individual needs of people with disabilities** and utilising the immense possibilities of universal design.
 - **Communication and interaction knowledge and skills.**
 - **Entrepreneurship and self-employment, as well as financial literacy.**
9. **Further capacity building, networking and exchange of experience and good practices** among employers (i.e. companies and organisations) for the purposes of reasonable accommodation and building an accessibility inclusive environment.
10. **People with disabilities could benefit from improved apprenticeships and workplace learning**, which should be made inclusive for persons with disabilities. This is needed in terms of improving the accommodation and vocational skills of employers with disabilities.
11. **Persons with disabilities could also benefit from improving their self-employment and entrepreneurship capabilities.** Business and entrepreneurship training can help individuals with disabilities start their own businesses or manage their finances effectively as many face various barriers to traditional employment.
12. **Further promotion and increasing of awareness regarding** the existing government-supported schemes and resources aimed at improving the employability and equal access to labour for people with disabilities under the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030.

In Bulgaria, the participants of the focus group also highlighted the following recommendations as set out in the NSPW 2021 – 2030 as relevant to the objectives of the research:

- Ensuring equal access and opportunities for lifelong learning through the development of a system for research and forecasting of the demand for labour force with a certain qualification, incl. in the context of disabilities.
- Determining the types of activities that people with disabilities can perform, depending on their disability, and in this regard, supporting the lifelong learning process, given the specific needs.
- Providing conditions for the introduction of functional assessment through ICF-CY (International Classification of Human Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth).
- Providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities to overcome their social isolation and inclusion in the labour market, including by carrying out active mediation to arrange jobs suitable for them.
- Promotion of social entrepreneurship to support the employment of people with disabilities.
- Providing opportunities to provide specialised training for people with disabilities, aimed at acquiring key competencies, incl. of digital skills needed in the labour market, as well as opportunities to increase the labour productivity of working people with disabilities and their suitability for employment.
- Improving the opportunities for professional guidance and career counselling for people with disabilities.



Greece

The **following policy recommendations** were identified for **Greece**:

1. The Ministry of Labour could create **a platform where good practices are posted**. In particular, it will publish free of charge any private sector business that employs persons with disabilities. This will act as free advertising for the company and an incentive for other competing businesses, implementing on the field one of the benefits presented by the Beyond Inclusion project, with regards to company reputation.
2. **The Ministry could also subsidize** permanently small and medium-sized enterprises with insurance contributions and the salary of workers with disabilities for permanent employment.
3. **Reasonable adjustments** should be made in the workplaces to accommodate persons with disabilities – the Beyond Inclusion describes the “How”.
4. **More flexible working hours** should be legislated for PWDs depending on the health problems they face. **Alternative forms of work**, such as teleworking, should be established as a clear option for persons that find it difficult to move around non-accessible workplaces.
5. The **disability allowance should be disconnected from the salary**, giving motives to persons with disabilities to apply for a position in the labour market, assisted by the Beyond Inclusion training course.
6. SMEs could also further deploy **digital tools and new technologies**. This is how they will be modernized and provide more jobs for PWDs, for example, by utilizing the institution of teleworking.

Romania

In the case of Romania, various published reports and analyses carried out by institutions and organizations of interest have been accessed and studied in order to develop recommendations for measures and policies appropriate to support the inclusion in the labour market of persons with disabilities. Thus, in order to remove barriers to inclusion in the labour market and to ensure autonomy in the field of accessibility, education and employment, we present the following recommendations, measures to be adopted in support of persons with disabilities, measures that have been analysed in the IO4 online meetings with representatives of SMEs and support organizations for people with disabilities:

A. Occupation

1. **Rethinking the employment system for people with disabilities.** The quota system stipulated by Romanian legislation has proven ineffective for many years. Even though a certain category of employers are obliged to hire people with disabilities, statistics have shown that few people are employed through this system. Moreover, there is no exact and official data on the number of disabled people who should have been employed through this system because the number of employing companies who should apply the quota system is not known.

Considering that there is no control of the way the quota system is used and no control of the estimated penalties collected at the state budget, we propose as an improvement of the social policy the establishment and support of labour mediation services that address exactly the obliged employers to apply the quota system.

Also, the money collected from penalties for not hiring people with disabilities should be redirected to the benefit of people with disabilities, and not spent in the state budget. The money collected could be used for professional reinsertion, for offering a package of services to support



the disabled person in finding a job: vocational counselling, personal development, professional rehabilitation for those who have acquired the disability, so that they keep their work.

It is also indicated to take measures to help employers and motivate them to employ disabled people sustainably, for longer periods of time and with appropriate means.

- 2. Supporting the establishment of labour mediation services.** The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity should establish and promote labour mediation services to employers and support non-governmental organizations that have beneficiaries with disabilities through non-reimbursable funds. Non-governmental organizations can support the disabled person looking for a job by offering supported or assisted employment services. Assisted employment means providing support at the workplace (job-coach), transportation, assistive technology, vocational counselling, personalized supervision. Job search by a job seeker, preliminary job analysis, advocacy for the employment of people with disabilities, matching between the job and the person with the disability, as well as re-analysis of the job to assess the need for support are just a few of services that could be supported more by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. The development of these jobs that could be called mediators for professional integration can lead to the creation of vocational programs for young people with disabilities adapted to the labour market and the skills of these young people. In addition, the experience of governmental or non-governmental organizations can be developed through promotion, information and support campaigns to maximize the chances of success of young people with disabilities.
- 3. Support for families of disabled people in finding a job.** For many people with disabilities, it is the family that gets involved in finding jobs. For this reason, we believe that parents' associations can be more involved in the development of awareness and advocacy campaigns to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It is also necessary to provide support regarding the awareness of the values of children with disabilities among parents, as well as psychoeducational support for parents to understand the situation and support family members with disabilities to achieve their personal goals.
- 4. Ensuring reasonable accommodation in the workplace and providing measures to support companies to ensure workplace adaptability.** According to what was mentioned by the participants in the online discussions, one of the major obstacles for which companies do not hire people with disabilities is this aspect of ensuring adaptability at work. One measure that is required to support them, based on the example given by the participants in the online meetings, is for the organization to prepare and guide the team they will be part of in terms of the approach they will have with colleagues with disabilities for them to feel accepted as they are, especially for those with mental disabilities, because they have not developed the social skills part and fail to discern the nuance of truth, irony or jokes.
- 5. Building step-by-step procedures for hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace that will support employers as well as people with disabilities.** The participants in the online discussions concluded that there should be procedures regarding accommodation and that would support both targeted categories (employers and people with disabilities) both during the period in which they are active within the company, and for the period in which the people with disabilities they are forced to undergo drug treatment or even hospitalization in order to improve their physical or mental conditions. It was found that in Romania there is no good collaboration between specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers. For example, for those with mental problems, for those with depression, schizophrenia, who go through more difficult periods when they have to take treatment in the hospital for a month, two or more, it is difficult to maintain the treatment and at the same time to keep their jobs, thus companies fail to keep them, being forced to suspend the employment contract. For this type of situations, it is necessary to build solutions that will help both the person concerned and the employer. A solution mentioned by the people participating in the online meetings would be to carry out prevention activities through which people with mental disabilities go through a procedure that involves counselling activity through which they become aware of their mental health condition and intuit the periods



in which their condition of health deteriorates in order to call on specialists in time and reduce the time required for treatment for recovery. Also, it is necessary to take support measures for employers so that the positions occupied by the people in this situation can be maintained, and the company's activity does not suffer.

Carrying out a set of interviews with potential employers could reveal the main obstacles and places where it is necessary to contribute with procedures or stages.

6. **Rethinking the system of granting rest and medical leave for people with disabilities**, so that they can receive the necessary medical treatment to improve their health when the situation demands it and not be exposed to the situation of losing their workplace when the recovery period is longer.
7. **Training of staff from state institutions on the subject of inclusion with an emphasis on disabilities** and the inclusion of compassion development programs among training programs, compassion being a basic feature without which nothing else can be effectively built in helping people with disabilities. Building a department dedicated to the integration of these people into the labour market, training the institutional staff regarding the understanding of each type of disability and the level of professional development that can be achieved by these people depending on the type of disability they have, regarding the approach at the level communication is of major importance in supporting them in both professional and social integration.
8. **Taking measures from competent institutions to aid support organizations for persons with disabilities.** According to the respondents to the online discussions organized within IO4, for organizations that aim to facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities, provide training programs, monitor the situation of employees in this category and provide support both during the period of employment, As well as beyond this, in order to include them in social life and to live a normal life among society, it is necessary to build actions and take measures to support them, measures to consider granting subsidies, tax exemptions, grant of non-reimbursable funds, and so on.
9. **Clearly define the occupational standard by defining the level at which the employee is intended to perform in that position.** Many adults with disabilities (for example, those with developmental delays) are the product of an interventional therapy process they have been subjected to since childhood, and their thinking process is focused on precisely targeted behaviours. therefore, it is necessary to define in terms of tasks what a person can perform (to understand a person with disabilities according to the type of disability he has), that is, how much of the skills that define a job must be able to perform or as a number of processes, operations that are included in the job description in order to be able to occupy that position. The skills of people with disabilities are limited, but they must be valued exactly as they are in order for people themselves to feel that they can be useful to society.
10. **Introduction of a progress mentor occupation to carry out activities to monitor the evolution over time of an employee in the category of persons with mental disabilities.** These people need support, counselling, and mentoring is a basic activity for them. Over time they work with personal assistant, therapist or even several therapists, shadow people at school, who are reference persons in their lives, thus, in professional life it is necessary to have a mentor who will guide them and know what the next step is to take for him.

B. Education

1. **Digitalization at the educational level.** In the opinion of participants in organized online discussions, digitalization is an essential condition for a person with disabilities to have access to both public services and education. Developing, building and delivering education designed for the online/offline environment, i.e. hybrid and facilitating learning and having formal recognition of learning following tests, exams would help quite a lot of people with



disabilities stop dealing with the physical and psychological obstacles they face in trying to access this type of services.

2. A better prepared educational system for people with disabilities. Even though special vocational schools and arts and crafts have information about the absorption of graduates into the labour market, there is no specific information about how they have engaged: Whether they have integrated into the profession for which they have trained, whether they have changed their occupation in the meantime. And because **there is no national strategy to look at fluctuations in the labour market**, there is a high probability that jobs for which they are currently employed will not be required in the future. In this regard, we propose the creation of an interinstitutional and intersectoral partnership system between all the factors that can contribute to the vocational orientation of young people with disabilities according to labour market requirements. There is no system of collaboration for the professional orientation of students with disabilities between the Ministry of Education, the National Agency for Employment (A.N.O.F.M.), the social services of the city halls and the National Authority for persons with Disabilities (A.N.P.D.). Day centres developed by local authorities in some areas could be used as resources for young people with disabilities from the perspective of vocational workshops or occupational therapy.

3. Identifying the elements needed to transform the existing education system into an inclusive education system, both for children and adults in the situation of disabled people who want to continue their education. Creating a simpler, lighter educational system based on structure, learning methods, emotional and school performance experiences to introduce children with mental disabilities who demonstrate skills, understand certain concepts, are functional, a system adapted to their cognitive development will facilitate the social integration of these people, avoid school dropout and later facilitate their integration into the labour market, as they will be prepared early for social and professional interaction. Not every child can learn anywhere, especially the disabled child who has special needs, just as no employee can work anywhere. When there is too much difference in abilities, things do not move in the right direction.

At the education level, special schools are overcrowded and with varying degrees of affection for children, and there is no talk of their progress. The greatest progress can be made for those with mental disability through the intervention of ABA, integrative, sensory, occupational therapy, swimming, (complementary therapies). Access to these therapies is discriminatory because the state does not offer or facilitate them. Thus, access for this type of treatment is for parents who can, afford and want to have access to these types of interventions. Public services provide access to centres and develop activities for these children, but it is insufficient and requires improvements in interventional therapy.

4. The provision of elements, within the regular training courses for teachers, to help them to work with pupils/adults with disabilities could be achieved by preparing teachers, in collaboration with the Teaching-Staff Resources Centre, by conducting training programs to develop compassion and raise awareness to work better with this type of people; subsequently, the frameworks formed to be factors of diffusion of the attitude we want within the educational system, respectively of understanding and compassion with fellow disabled people.

5. The training of a larger number of support teachers, assistants, psychologists or psycho-pedagogues and their introduction into the system to support the training needs of people with special needs.

6. Adapting the school curriculum to special educational requirements for the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. Example: Developing an adopted curriculum for children with autism syndrome for whom, although the legislation says they have the right to education, the teacher fails to provide quality education services and adapted to their needs equally as other children.



7. **Educate people with disabilities so that they know what opportunities to report abuse they have and take steps to ensure that the organizations handling their complaints handle them properly.** For the education of people with disabilities, it is necessary to find solutions to teach them all the possibilities they have and that some of them may not be aware of to grow, develop professionally and humanly integrating disability. Because there are disabilities that can become a professional advantage, not an obstacle (e.g. attention to detail, concentration, tenacity).
8. **Building, using and promoting in the work of integrating people with disabilities into the labour market a tool for assessing social and communicational skills,** intellectual work skills, which together with the skills profile create a profile faithful to what such a person can execute, and to be included in a group that has the same characteristics as his. In order to support them in their position in the labour market, the skills, the value qualities of these individuals must be identified and exploited at the appropriate level.

C. Accessibility

1. **Consider the concept of “accessibility” (both physical and digital) in its broad sense.** It is not only about motor disabilities, but also about visual, auditory, intellectual and psychological disabilities.
2. **Implementing measures to provide greater physical accessibility to persons with disabilities,** that is, the equipment of all buildings with wide access, institutions, hypermarkets, etc. with access ramps extremely necessary for persons with disabilities.
3. **Digitalisation of information to support information accessibility** and, together with this, support those for whom physical accessibility is lower. Use on the web pages of software solutions institutions that convert images into text or text into sound or summarize, to facilitate the transmission of information in a format easily achievable for a person with disabilities, especially for those with visual disabilities.
4. **Gathering information on structures, processes and policy outcomes affecting persons with disabilities.** Redirecting resources of any kind to those who should benefit from them is extremely useful for these people to feel informed and integrated in the society in which they coexist.

D. General aspects

1. **To carry out campaigns to raise public awareness of the problems and needs of persons with disabilities in order to bring about changes in mentality related to the working capacity of these persons.** This could be done, according to the participants in the online discussions for IO4, by building a national public education program in which to engage one-to-one communication through social media, by communicating through the media and communicating one to all from all state institutions that issue the same type of common messages and that, by repeating them, the information remains imprinted in the memory of ordinary citizens.
2. **Conducting campaign to raise awareness, understanding and recognition of disability as a human rights issue,** as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities with the aim of informing, empowering and activating persons with disabilities who may or may not work. A method mentioned by the participants in the online discussions for the implementation of these campaigns is the organization of conferences on international days for health education (World Mental Health Day, World Health Day, etc.), on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, World Human Rights Day, and so on, to invite specialists, psychologists, psychotherapists to present the problems faced by people with disabilities and motivate them to overcome their condition.



- 3. Conducting campaigns to ensure awareness raising among employers from all categories, managers and HR representatives regarding rights, The problems and needs of persons with disabilities**, to consider and the employment and inclusion in the labour market of these persons and the use of examples of employers who manage to hire persons with disabilities and keep them as employees for long periods of time. In Romania at the moment, the basic mentality regarding the employability of persons with disabilities is that these persons are not able to carry out activities on the labour market. The implementation of cultural correction programs for persons with disabilities to promote the benefits of diversity would remove the main reason for obstacles to employment. Economic agents should receive information simultaneously from state institutions (ANOFM and others) And from non-state NGOs or organizations that specialize in the field so that the two sources can complement each other both in terms of information and attitude.

The methods indicated in the online discussions that support these campaigns mentioned above are the Living Book model and the World Cafe concept through which discussions between companies are initiated, both among those who have employees with disabilities, as well as among those who do not have such employees and to make them directly acquainted with these persons with disabilities, to interact with them and to realize that they are people with values, with clear and fundamental positive contributions to the development of the company.

- 4. Facilitate and align the political dialog on the rights of persons with disabilities between intergovernmental bodies and between humanitarian and development agencies**, with a view to providing a broader set of resources useful to the work of organizations involved in this work.
- 5. Rebuild the legislative system on the establishment of social enterprises**, because at this time the legislation is quite cumbersome on the development of social enterprises and the steps it must take to carry out the activities of a social enterprise are difficult. At this time, besides social enterprises, there have emerged other types of organizations that are not covered by the law and that cannot function as they need to function, For example, the equivalent of the Halfway House in the western Anglo-Saxon area that helps people who have been in prison to integrate gradually, or concepts of production cooperatives in which people with disabilities could also work and obtain diplomas, dividends, etc. and those who need to retire for a month or two in the hospital can do it without jeopardizing their membership in this community.
- 6. Launching within the POCU of calls for projects dedicated to disabled persons**, including training services.
- 7. Involvement of persons with disabilities in all levels of decision-making**. Close and direct contact with people with disabilities, that is, using teams of specialized people to include people with disabilities in the results analysis and resource redirection teams for these people is extremely useful because they know best what helps them and what does not, based on their specific disability needs.
- 8. Involvement of all ministries in the implementation of the UN Convention.**





Spain

The participants have introduced some ideas to bring forward in the frame of innovative actions:

1. Promote the role of job coach or diversity manager (this is also a need also in the field of migration and diversity in the workplace) as figures in Spanish companies that could be key to welcome people with disabilities and promote Influence their full inclusion and not only their labour integration.
2. We are living a post pandemic War in Ukraine complicated situation: in the storm there are many sudden changes and many blind spots, but spaces that were previously hidden are also glimpsed. In this frame the promotion of the SME workforce in soft skills in general and regarding resilience, flexibility, adaptability and reformulation of values and key to inclusion.
3. Promote a legislative review in Spain so that the law adapts better to reality.

Regarding Spanish SMEs:

4. Put the emphasis on awareness promotion of SMEs (for example in equality plans): eliminating all stereotypes and prejudices: these ideas and concepts are mistakenly adopted as universal truths. For this reason, candidates should not be judged by their physical abilities and should analyse deeply what they can contribute to your company. In this frame in Spain: promoting the awareness of middle managers and businessmen towards diversity in general and towards diversity in particular
5. Promote a selection of workers under objective criteria: skills and competencies must be the fundamental factors in the selection process. Focus on observing the candidate's human potential and analysing his skills and experience to make the best decision
6. Make emphasis on hiring employees who fight for equality: if you want your company to be an example of integration, you must bet on offering the same opportunities and recruit employees who feel committed to equality. Promotion of natural supports (especially intellectual and mental disabilities): colleagues who understand, help and support people with disabilities in companies
7. Involve SME workers in decision-making: fostering teamwork favours mutual commitment and shared responsibility. In this way, people with different abilities will show their creativity and feel motivated for their daily performance in the company.
8. Promote socially responsible management and middle management: disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company. Creating action strategies (in Spain via equality plans) that allow the concerns that concern the community to be shared, so that they are positively reflected in the corporate image.



EU level

The European Commission has adopted for the period 2021-2030 an ambitious strategy for persons with disabilities, following the recommendations of the European Parliament that wants an inclusive society, where the rights of the persons with disabilities are protected and where there is no discrimination.

Building on the 2010-2020 European Disability Strategy, Members of the European Parliament set out in June 2020 the priorities for a new EU Disability Strategy. In March 2021, the European Commission adopted the Disability Rights Strategy (2021-2030), which takes over Parliament's main recommendations⁷:

- The mainstreaming of the rights of all people living with disabilities into all policies and areas
- Recovery and mitigation measures to avoid people with disabilities getting disproportionately affected by health crises such as Covid-19
- Equal access for people with disabilities to health care, employment, public transport, housing
- The implementation and further development of the EU disability card pilot project, which allows for the mutual recognition of disabilities in some EU countries
- People with disabilities, their families and organisations were part of the dialogue and will be part of the process of implementation.

The European Disability Strategy was adopted to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities.

Concrete initiatives launched under the European Disability Strategy include the European Accessibility Act, which ensures that more products and services such as smartphones, tablets, ATMs or e-books are accessible to people with disabilities.

The website accessibility directive provides that people with disabilities need to have easier access to online data and services because websites and applications managed by public sector institutions such as hospitals, courts or universities need to be accessible.

The Erasmus+ student exchange program promotes the mobility of participants with disabilities.

Easier access to means of transport and improved passenger rights for persons with disabilities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a legally binding international human rights treaty that sets minimum standards to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, has been ratified by the EU and all its Member States in accordance with their respective competences. The EU and its Member States are obliged to implement their obligations.

⁷ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200604STO80506/a-new-ambitious-eu-disability-strategy-for-2021-2030>

The **following policy recommendations** were identified at **EU level**:

1. SMEs could claim **funding through the trade associations** and the chambers to which they belong so that programs to familiarize employers with disability can be implemented. This could lead to the removal of stereotypes and greater confidence of employers in the abilities of disabled workers.

European-funded programs should give more **funding to beneficiaries when they employ PWDs** in any way in the execution of the program.

Research projects should be funded and implemented on European level, presenting data, not only with regards to the current disadvantage's persons with disabilities face in the labour market, but with regards to the advantages they offer to the business when employed. Businesses talk numbers, so it would scale-up the Beyond Inclusion Intervention, supported by clear European data.

2. **European Mobility - European Disability Card** – A single Disability Certification Card should be established so that person with disability moving within the EU loses their work rights and work opportunities offered. Today the suffering of PWDs is significant since, if they go to another European country, they have to start the procedures for certifying their disability from the beginning. Often a certified translation of the disability certificate they have in their country is not enough for them to continue enjoying the social benefits to which they are entitled.

There is currently no mutual recognition of disability status between EU Member States. It can cause difficulties for people with disabilities traveling in the EU.

Eight countries already use the European Disability Card, a voluntary system of mutual recognition of disability status and some associated benefits. The card guarantees equal access to benefits across borders for people with disabilities, mainly in culture, leisure, sports and transport.

Building on this good experience, by the end of 2023, the European Commission will propose a European Disability Card that would apply to all EU countries.

European Disability Card, recommendations from Spain:

- Promote a specific Regulation of the European Union, the highest normative rank of the provisions of the territory, in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- To facilitate its administrative development: in Spain disability cards are difficult to obtain, very bureaucratic
- Assure the mutual recognition of the European Disability Card between Member States (and in Spain, across autonomous communities-regions)
- Make sure the holders have access to the same benefits for reasons of disability in the different member countries of the European Union where they are residents
- Promote the setting up of an authority aimed at guaranteeing compliance with the regulations related to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the European Disability Card.





NOTE: The Policy recommendation report will transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations.

Methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs - the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level (2 – 3 pages)

Indicative issues (as per Application):

1. How can the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level? (national or EU level)
2. Which are the country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration?
3. How did SMEs as well as persons with disabilities respond to the proposed tools, learning material and formats?
4. Which would be the envisaged, scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention?
5. How could they be scaled up?
6. Which are the strengths (incl. good practices), opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology?
7. Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

1. About the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs & persons with disabilities

A short description of applicability of the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs at country level (for e.g. existing policies and recommendations, existing projects with similar objectives, potential to answer to certain needs/lack of instruments at institutional level etc.)

2. Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs

Input for country-specific aspects, including information resulting from the focus group

3. SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

List of conclusions of the IO3 report

4. Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention; how could they be scaled up

Input for country-specific aspects, including information resulting from the focus group (for e.g. in respect to existing policies or in response to existing needs)

5. Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

Input for country-specific aspects, including information resulting from the focus group

6. Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way

Input for country-specific aspects, including information resulting from the focus group (for e.g. new programmes and strategies)

ANNEX 2: T3 - AGENDA - draft

- a. Welcome and overview
 - Moderator introduction
 - Purpose and process of the focus group
- b. Introductions by all participants
- c. Topics discussions
- d. Summary of the main themes & feedback of the participants
- e. Closing



I. INTRODUCTION (15')

(Brief description of the project, objectives, stages, result; the purpose of the discussion)

- Self-introduction of the moderator and presentation of the participants;
- Brief description to the BEYOND INCLUSION project, purpose of the focus group and how the results will be analysed and reported (the inclusion of information in the Policy recommendations report);
- Explanation of how issues of confidentiality will be dealt with (e.g. Privacy); request permission to record the discussion;
- Setting of the ground rules (e.g. duration; there are no right or wrong answers; respect towards the views of other participants etc.)

II. ABOUT THE BEYOND INCLUSION TRAINING PLATFORM – UNPROMPTED (15')

Brief description to the BEYOND INCLUSION training platform. Initiate the discussion around the questions provided below:

- From your point of view, how relevant to you think is the availability of such training materials to improve the employability of persons with disabilities?
- In your opinion, skills development training using such materials as provided by the platform could increase the employability prospects for persons with disabilities on the long term? What could be done to facilitate further use in organisations already employing persons with disabilities (public or private sector)?
- On the long term, access to training as provided by the Beyond Inclusion platform, could help minimise the unemployment rates of persons with disabilities at the local level?

III. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – UNPROMPTED (30')

(A list of policy recommendations - unprompted)

Initiate the discussion around the questions provided below. Present each of the questions one by one and by the order given in the guide. Ask the participants if they have any questions regarding to the project and/or the focus group.

Guidelines:

- Make sure you start and finish on time. Timely completion of the focus group shows to the participants that we respect the time they have allocated to take part in our research.
- Keep eye contact and maintain neutrality by neither verbally nor non-verbally approving nor disapproving of opinions.
- If you are not satisfied with the completeness of the information provided in a question, use probe questions to elicit more information from the participant when necessary. For example: "Could you tell me a bit more about that?"; "How does that work in practice?" "Can you give us an example? Etc.

Questions:

What do you think should be done/changed/improved to facilitate the integration of people with disabilities in SMEs in terms of:

- accessibility and mobility,
- effective protection of the rights of persons with disabilities,
- employment and social protection, including empowerment/rehabilitation,
- independent living and Community integration, including access to public services, education, health, political and public participation,
- implementation of the Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities and monitoring of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities.

Personal notes:

.....
.....
.....

This set of questions is repeated for each recommendation mentioned spontaneously by the participants.

You mentioned {recommendation mentioned in the previous question} as policy recommendation.

- What would be the purpose of this recommendation?
- Who is it for/who should do this?
- How should it be done?
- Is this being implemented in other countries?
- How important is this action to facilitate the integration of people with disabilities into SMEs?
- (if applicable) Could make an impact on improving the employability of persons with disabilities and untapping unexploited labour potential (on the on the medium/long term for e.g.)?
- (if applicable; policy regarding SMEs) Could encourage SMEs to become facilitators to promote the dialogue and collaboration to support social inclusion of persons with disabilities through employability?

Personal notes:

.....
.....
.....



IV. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – PROMPTED (45’)

(Prompting policy recommendations from IO4, Task 2)

Suggestion: The policy recommendations created in Task 2 of IO4 will be mentioned and discussed one by one.

Following the research carried out within this project we have created some proposals for policy recommendations that I will mention now and would like your opinion on.

How important do you think this recommendation is to facilitate the employability and/or the integration of people with disabilities into SMEs?

- Recommendation in T2O4
- Recommendation in T2O4
-

Personal notes:

.....

.....

.....

V. ENDING THE DISCUSSION (20’)

(Conclusions, other aspects that the participants can mention and are important for IO4)

In your opinion, the policy recommendations discussed today could be used and/or have a relevant impact (in the medium/long term for e.g.) in regard to:

- planning and implementing social inclusion models and strategies by national and regional authorities supporting employment?
- tackle unemployment of persons with disabilities beyond legislation and non-discrimination laws through active involvement of SMEs?
- become good practices to tackle unemployment levels of persons with disabilities on the long term at local/regional/national or even EU level?

Something else?



ANNEX 4: T4 - STRUCTURE OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS COUNTRY RESULTS – draft proposal

I. Country level policy recommendations based on Beyond Inclusion results

A list of proposed policy recommendations in regard to the indicative issues on the integration of Beyond Inclusion results at policy level as identified in T2.

II. Country level policy recommendations resulted in the focus group

A list of proposed policy recommendations in regard to the indicative issues addressed in the focus group in T3.

To write a policy recommendation the following will be taken into account:

- Define the objective
- Decide on a target audience
- Set out the issue clearly
- Give options where possible
- Recognise the current economic climate
- Fit in with existing strategies or legislation
- Use international examples
- Remember the audience
- Show an impact in the real world
- Emphasise the importance of action

ANNEX 5: T4 - STRUCTURE OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT – draft proposal

I. Introduction

Brief description of the project, objectives, stages, result (max 2 pages)

II. Actual context at country level (BG, ES, GR, RO)

Summary desk research results from IO1 - the conclusions of the desk research (max. 1 page, source: IO1 report)



III. Key Recommendations

A list of proposed policy recommendations (1-2 pages; their details will be found in the chapter VI of this report - V. Policy recommendations - Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs; input by all partners)

IV. Methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs - the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level

i. About methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs

A short description of methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs from IO1 and IO2 (max. 1 page)

ii. Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration

Input for each country, including information resulting from the focus group (max. 1 page per country)

iii. SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

Conclusions of the IO3 report & T2 (2 pages, source: IO3 report)

iv. Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention

Input for each country, including information resulting from the focus group (max. 1/2 page per country)

v. Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

Input for each country, including information resulting from the focus group (max. 1/2 page per country)

V. Policy recommendations - Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs

Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

Input for each country, including information resulting from the focus group (max. ½ page per one policy recommendation)

NOTE: Policy recommendations can be created starting from:

- The recommendations from the IO1 report
- The developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs and persons with disabilities
- SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats



BEYOND INCLUSION project

Employability for persons with disabilities

2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215

**IO4 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY:**

**THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES
OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION**

COUNTRY REPORT: BULGARIA

Document Title: BEYOND INCLUSION project | POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT THE PROPOSAL SAYS

In the preparatory stage of the proposal, EU and national policies relevant to social inclusion of persons with disabilities have been explored. In particular, the call of the European Disability Forum EDF for the adoption of a European Disability Rights Agenda 2020-2030. With respect to employment and training, EDF stresses the need to focus on the use of EU funds for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, in part through investing in training. At a further point, employment for persons with disabilities should also facilitate the transition from full dependency on benefits to employment. SMEs and especially small and micro enterprises should be part of any relevant intervention, since as it stands, they are below the radar of non-discrimination policies and miss valuable and well-documented information on how a disabled-inclusive workforce yields important benefits for them at various levels.

Following the development phase of the proposed project, **a Policy Recommendations report will be developed** to respond to the following indicative issues:

- How can the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level? (National or EU level)
- Which are the country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration?
- How did SMEs as well as persons with disabilities respond to the proposed tools, learning material and formats?
- Which would be the envisaged, scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention?
- How could they be scaled up?
- Which are the strengths (incl. good practices), opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology?
- Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

The Policy recommendations report will be a common endeavour on behalf of all partners. **It will draw conclusions from across all Intellectual Outputs**, the primary and secondary data acquired during the project activities from both SMEs and persons with disabilities, formal and informal feedback received, new knowledge developed among the project partnership.

Moreover, **a half day online focus group with stakeholder will be organised** and held to discuss key topics of interest and explore feasible recommendations that align with EU and national policies. The Report will be fully illustrated and graphically enhanced in English, with Executive summaries in Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Spanish. It will be disseminated mainly to the following actors/target groups:

- SME representative bodies and organisations
- Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- Business associations
- Disabled persons' representative bodies/actors/networks
- Business consulting and training organisations
- Labour and social inclusion governmental institutions

Elements of innovation/impact/transferability

The Policy recommendation report **will transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations.**

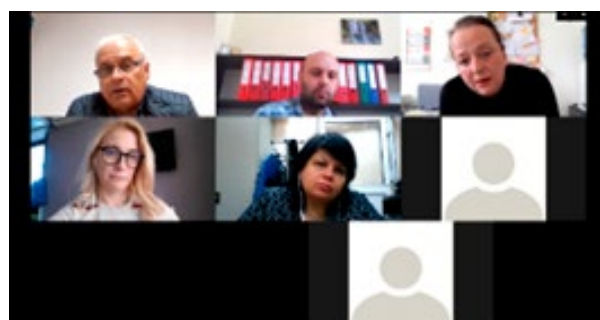
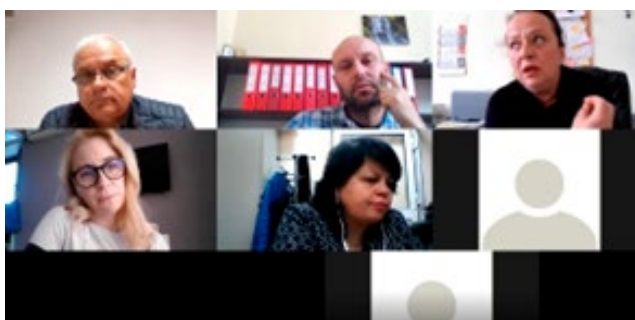
Fertilising primary data through direct application of a methodology and the created tools, materials, it will serve as a prospect reference document for a given approach for an umbrella issue that should be tackled more efficiently.

Bringing the report to the attention of institutional actors, secures considerable impact at decision-making level. Furthermore, similar or complementary actions (existing or scheduled) would benefit at methodological and implementation level.

2. RESULTS FOR POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

In Bulgaria, an online Focus group and two qualitative interviews were organised with the pre-planned participants, i.e. 2 representatives of local SMEs and 1 representative from an NGO (For Change) that works with persons with disabilities. Below is a screenshot of the Focus group.

Photos from the online session are provided below:



The subsequent sections were developed on the basis of the results of the focus group, the results of the IO1 report and the comparative results of the IO3 piloting phase of the Beyond inclusion training provision, as follows:

1. Country level policy recommendations based on Beyond Inclusion results: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues on the integration of Beyond Inclusion results at policy level as identified in T2
2. Country level policy recommendations resulted in the focus group: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues addressed in the focus group in T3.





I. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON BEYOND INCLUSION RESULTS

The proposals and recommendations provided below are aimed towards enhancing the social inclusion of persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs in the process.

1. Methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs & persons with disabilities

In Bulgaria, the definition of a person with a disability is stipulated in the relevant legislation and regulatory documents in the field, i.e. the Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA) (further described below). According to the PDA, “persons with disabilities are considered people with a loss of physical, psychological, intellectual or a sensory impairment, which can prevent their efficient use of the surrounding environment and active participation in the society”.

In addition, a “person with a permanent disability” is a “person who, as a result of anatomical, physiological or mental impairment, has permanently reduced capacities to perform activities in the way and at the level of a healthy person and for whom the medical assessment authorities have estimated a level of the reduced working capacity of 50 and more per cent”.

Based on these conclusions of the research process which has been carried out in the frame of IO1, employability of young people through the relevant labour market legislation which provides numerous incentives for people with disabilities, including promotion and retention of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance, including people with disabilities.

In this aspect, the developed methodological framework and learning materials for SMEs and persons with disabilities will add to the existing resources in the field of informal, adult education, VET and employment guidance.

On a country level, the existence of protected (sheltered) employment has been considered rather effective and successful, however, the existence of specialised enterprises for persons with disabilities (sheltered employment) (SEPD) is not enough for improving the long-term employability of people with disabilities. Tailored support (i.e. training) and promoting inclusive workplace culture that values diversity can help create a positive environment for people with disabilities. In this aspect, the Beyond Inclusion training provision for SMEs (both employees and managerial staff) on how to work with individuals with disabilities and creating flexible working arrangements can help them feel more included. Moreover, such instruments are not existing in the majority of enterprises, especially the ones located in rural and more isolated communities.

2. Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs

The input for this section came from the Country report (IO1)) and the focus group that was held with representatives of SMEs in Bulgaria (as part of IO4).

Based on the results of both the desktop research and the qualitative feedback received in the frame of IO3 and IO4, in Bulgaria, there are not many enablers that could enhance and facilitate the access of people with disabilities to the labour market and thus improve their overall professional and personal realisation prospects and quality of life.

In Bulgaria, there are specific employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities are provided in the Employment Promotion Act and in the People with Disabilities Act (PDA). **There are two types of incentives - financial and quota-based.** These were also acknowledged by the participants in the focus groups. According to PDA, Bulgarian companies with staff exceeding 50 employees must hire people with disabilities, according to the new Disability Act. In order to ensure the employment of people with permanent disabilities in the normal working environment, the legislator has foreseen that employers with personnel headcount ranging from 50 to 99 employees must provide work for at least one person with permanent disabilities. Employers with 100 or more employees and workers must provide work to people with permanent disabilities in a number equal to 2 per cent of their current headcount (e.g., a company employing 100 employees must provide work to at least 2 employees with permanent disabilities). It is worth noting that the General Labor Inspectorate may decide to exempt employers from this obligation provided there are specific factors in the working environment that prevent the recruitment of people with permanent disabilities or in case of an absence of persons with permanent disabilities. Therefore, the more inclusive the working environment, the fewer employers will “feel” obliged to employ persons with disabilities to comply with the quota principles. In this aspect, awareness and accessibility training initiatives should be increased and further promoted with the aim of helping SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities, as well as to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and how to create an inclusive environment.

From a person with a disability perspective, the existing financial support and incentives for people with disabilities are provided in the framework of the National Strategy for People with Disabilities (2012 – 2020) and its successor, the National Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021 – 2030, which has been adopted at the end of 2021.

The existing incentives are based on financial support, tax amendments and direct subsidies for people with disabilities who are seeking to enhance their entrepreneurship and self-employment prospects. The relevant labour market legislation also provides numerous incentives for people with disabilities, including promotion and retention of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance for people with disabilities. However, the availability and access to this support is questionable and rather limited (unpopular) according to the experts working in the field. Therefore, the relevant policy and administrative effort should be directed towards improving access, its promotion and availability for a wider population of people with disabilities. Also, according to the participants in the focus group, it is necessary for Bulgaria to further promote and develop inclusive education as means to support the integration of students with disabilities in regular schools. Thus their subsequent “integration” into society and the labour market (i.e. their employability prospects) will be greatly improved.



3. SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

The following recommendations by both SMEs and persons with disabilities came from the pilot testing of the Beyond Inclusion training provision which was carried out in Bulgaria as part of the Beyond Inclusion project. The evaluation of the training was carried out on training provision as a whole, individual aspects of each module, as well as with the purpose of receiving qualitative suggestions and feedback, as provided below:

■ SMEs:

- The training was considered as very beneficial for SMEs as it gave them appropriate and useful knowledge and tools to promote a disability-inclusive workforce in SMEs, gaining a better understanding of the steps towards the creation of such an environment.
- It provided them with ideas, tools, examples and, most importantly the needed basic knowledge to start considering and promoting the creation of a disability-inclusive environment.
- From another perspective, it improved their awareness to understand the needs of persons with disabilities so as to create an environment that matches these needs.
- Overall, the training material helped SMEs staff (i.e. managerial and HR) to understand the key directions needed to better pursue disability diversity as a valuable resource that benefits the business rather than a moral/law obligation.

■ People with disabilities:

- The Beyond Inclusion training material helped people with disabilities better understand their personal skills and potential, as well as their presentation skills in the current job market requirements and increasing my employability potential.
- They needed to learn more about their life skills, personality traits, values and interests and how these could improve their self-confidence and employability.
- People with disabilities were able to learn more how the identification of jobs and job matching, job search methods and career exploration, as well as providing the appropriate and useful knowledge and tools can help them to understand better the situation of disability and the job market in the EU.
- Increasing their self-presentation and self-marketing skills is important for improving the employability of people with disabilities, enabling them to better demonstrate their unique skills in a professional context or when seeking a job.

4. Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention; how could they be scaled up

The following topics and ideas were shared and discussed with participants in the focus group in regard to how the Beyond Inclusion training provision could be further enhanced and/or scaled up. These are ideas about additional content that can be integrated on the Beyond Inclusion learning provision



- **Accessibility training can help SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities.** This training could cover topics such as website accessibility, accessible design, and the use of assistive technology.
- **Awareness training on technologies** that can facilitate access to workplaces based on the individual needs of people with disabilities and utilising the immense possibilities of universal design.
- **Communication and interaction knowledge and skills.** SMEs need to improve their skills in how communicating better with people with disabilities, especially when evaluating the perspectives of hiring a person who has a specific disability that hinders his/her ability to communicate efficiently.
- **Further enrichment of resources and instruments in the field of employability, including tools to assess the working abilities of people with disabilities with a view to enabling their active participation in the labor market.** These can include specialised training and learning content for experts working with people with disabilities to improve their services related to career counselling, active mediation, mentoring, vocational education, workplace support, etc.
- **Further capacity building, networking and exchange of experience and good practices** among employers (i.e. companies and organisations) for the purposes of reasonable accommodation and building an accessibility inclusive environment. This could be integrated into the platform as an additional matchmaking/networking tool.
- **People with disabilities could benefit from improved apprenticeships and workplace learning** which should be made inclusive for persons with disabilities. This is needed in terms of improving the accommodation and vocational skills of employers with disabilities.
- **Persons with disabilities could also benefit from improving their self-employment and entrepreneurship capabilities.** Business and entrepreneurship training can help individuals with disabilities to start their own businesses or manage their finances effectively, as many of them face various barriers to traditional employment. Therefore, self-employment and entrepreneurship could offer much-needed flexibility regarding the work environment and social stigma, paving the way to financial independence and sustainability.
- **Soft skills for people with disabilities –**
- **Awareness training** on the existing government-supported schemes and resources aimed at improving employability and equal access to labour for people with disabilities under the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030.

5. Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

● **1. Strengths:** As in the rest of the countries that participated in the research, Beyond Inclusion is one of the few existing platforms (if not the only one) that explores the challenges and misconceptions related to inclusion from both perspectives – of an employer (i.e. and SME) and a person with a disability. On the one hand, it gives guidance to SMEs on how to pursue disability diversity as a valuable resource that benefits the business rather than a moral/law obligation. On the other, the Beyond Inclusion platform consists of content to help equip persons with disabilities with the appropriate tools, practices and soft skills orientation, as well as with a methodology on how to best demonstrate their unique skills in a professional context or when seeking a job.



● **2. Opportunities:** Current data of the Agency for People with Disabilities in Bulgaria (APD) indicates that in 2019, there are over 460,000 people with permanent disabilities of working age in Bulgaria. However, only 30,7% of them are employed, and 5-6% are registered as unemployed, i.e. 64,7% of these non-disabled people are not employed. This data shows that more than 120 000 people with disabilities are inactive and should be integrated into the labour market. One of the key priorities of the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030 is to ensure equal and inclusive employment opportunities and conditions for people with disabilities. According to the strategy, all tools and instruments that are aimed at the provision of adequate support for inclusion in employment and training of persons with disabilities will be promoted extensively as a proven measure that will contribute to their integration into social enterprises, their inclusion in the conventional sector, thus increasing their standard of living.

● **3. Challenges:** The following were identified by participants in the focus groups as regards to the overall situation of people with disabilities:

- The biggest challenge, as identified in the NSPD, is related to the need to **guarantee access to employment of people with disabilities** and provide adequate support for workers and employers in this process, in line with the specific requirements and needs of persons with disabilities. The existing employment promotion measures for persons with disabilities do not seem effective and popular among persons with disabilities and employers. The support for people with disabilities who are motivated to work and engage in employment is still insufficient.
- **Social exclusion** - Unfortunately, there are still many stereotypes in Bulgarian society, which lead to rejection and isolation of people with disabilities. When people with disabilities are invisible to society, properly identifying their problems and rights becomes very difficult. It also signals that much effort is needed to overcome these negative trends and attitudes, resulting from a multitude of cultural factors, issues and stereotypes originating from the socialist era.
- **Challenges in education and setbacks related to inclusive education** – still, there are challenges related to the provision of accessible educational facilities for students with disabilities, especially in smaller and more isolated communities. Inclusive education is impossible without accessible infrastructure. In addition, there is a lack of qualified pedagogical personnel to work with students with special educational needs. The lack of access to lifelong learning for people with disabilities is also an issue, as accessibility is just one of the main hindrances in this aspect. But there are also attitudinal barriers, such as negative attitudes and stereotypes about people with disabilities. Financial barriers, such as the cost of assistive technology or specialised training, can also be a significant challenge for people with disabilities.
- **All recent black swan events**, i.e. Covid-19, the War in Ukraine and the unprecedented inflation all hinder the overall employability and integration perspectives of people with disabilities.



6. Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way

The following initiatives and support measures were identified in the process of preparing the country report (IO1) and the focus group/interviews that were held in the frame of IO4.

IN BULGARIA

- **Various measures under the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030** are aimed at physical environmental accessibility (buildings, roads, infrastructure, etc.), transportation and communications (information) accessibility, individual mobility (equipment, aids), technologies to facilitate access to workplaces based on individual needs, and universal design. Measures in terms of integrative education include capacity building to secure resources and support for students with special needs, including professional training and continuing education recipients, equal access, etc. Measures in the field of employment include developing an integrated tool to assess the working abilities of people with disabilities to enable their active participation, career counselling, active mediation and mentoring services, effective vocational education, workplace support, as well as employment promotion via stimuli for employers, and capacity building for companies for the purposes of reasonable accommodation, among other activities⁸.
- **The Regulations for Implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act and the Guidelines for individual needs assessment of persons with disabilities were implemented on April 2 2019 are the two main documents supporting the PDA's implementation.** The Guidelines for individual needs assessment regulate the manner in the evaluation of the need to provide social services, personal assistance, or other types of support under conditions and according to the procedure established by law.
- **The Employment Promotion Act (EPA) of Bulgaria provides for the unemployed and the promotion and maintenance of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance, including people with disabilities.** Under the Employment Promotion Act, an “unemployed person” is a person who has registered at the Local Employment Department, does not work, searches for a job and is ready to start working in a 14-day period after notification of the Local Employment Department. “Long-term unemployed” is a person who has registration at the Local Employment Department that has not been interrupted for at least 12 months. In addition, the law recognises unemployed young people and adults with permanent disabilities as part of the group of persons in the disadvantaged (unequal) situation on the labour market. As such, EPA provides various incentives and opportunities for labour inclusion.
- **National Program for Affordable Housing and Personal Mobility** – The campaign of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) provides funding for the construction of an accessible living environment for people with disabilities has begun. Under the program, electric stair platforms, vertical stairlifts, elevators and wheelchair ramps for disabled people will be built free of charge.
- **National Programme for modern, safe and accessible education** – it is managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and it is opened annually. The initiative is aimed at improving educational conditions by providing an accessible architectural environment to improve activities in the school education system and ensure accessibility for students and teachers moving around with wheelchairs.

⁸ <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5342-bulgaria-new-national-strategy-for-people-with-disabilities-2021-2030-71-kb>



- **The Social Protection Fund (FSZ)** of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has an ongoing campaign for financing projects to modernise social services of municipalities, day care centers, homes for the elderly, family-type accommodation centers and other facilities providing social services for people with disabilities.

AT EU LEVEL⁹

- European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE)
- European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)
- European Accessibility Act Directive (EU) 2019/882 on the accessibility requirements for some products and services
- European Disability Card pilot project.
- The European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference
- The Access City Award, which rewards European cities which have made outstanding efforts to become more accessible.
- The European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides the European Commission with an analysis of data and policies from the EU Member States.
- European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)
- European Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Social economy and inclusive entrepreneurship initiative of the EC in partnership with the OECD



⁹ As mentioned by the participants in the focus group

II. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS RESULTED IN THE FOCUS GROUP

The **following policy recommendations** on a national level were discussed with the participants in the focus group in which we discussed how **to ensure and improve the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Bulgaria** – a task which has proven to be very difficult and challenging:

1. **For people with disabilities, the lack of promotion of jobs among persons with various disabilities and the lack of training of persons with disabilities for job vacancies are some of the main challenges to entering the labour market.** People with disabilities lack a platform or a single place where they can advertise their potential and increase their opportunities of being spotted by a company or entrepreneur for either full-time or part-time employment/ service.
2. **Despite the fact that people with disabilities are fully committed to learning new things and adapting to a particular work environment,** many of them lack the confidence to “go out there” and present their potential. It is important to increase the motivation, self-awareness, and presentation skills of people with disabilities to better “sell” themselves in the labour market. There is a problem with the self-esteem of people with disabilities for enhancing their employability potential.
3. **To facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities,** SME managers would need more specific programmes and services, and financial/economic incentives to promote the employment/inclusion of disabled people in employment.
4. **From the perspective of people with disabilities, it is important to have more adequate and efficient 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).**
5. **Tailored support (i.e. training) and promoting an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity** can help create a positive environment for people with disabilities. In this aspect, the Beyond Inclusion training provision for SMEs (both employees and managerial staff) on how to work with individuals with disabilities and creating flexible working arrangements can help them feel more included. Moreover, such instruments do not exist in most enterprises, especially those located in rural and more isolated communities.

The **“more inclusive the working environment, the fewer employers will “feel” obliged to employ persons with disabilities to comply with the quota principles”**. In this aspect, awareness and accessibility training initiatives should be increased and further promoted to help SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities, as well as to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and how to create an inclusive environment.

6. The **availability and access to support for people with disabilities** (i.e. promotion and retention of employment, providing services for mediation in finding employment, vocational training, and guidance, including people with disabilities) are questionable and rather limited (unpopular) according to the experts working in the field. Therefore, the relevant policy and administrative effort should be directed towards improving access, its promotion and availability for a wider population of people with disabilities.
7. It is necessary to **further promote and develop inclusive education** as a means to support the integration of students with disabilities in regular schools. Thus their subsequent “integration” into society and the labour market (i.e. their employability prospects) will be greatly improved.



8. The following training subjects/topics could be further developed and promoted, i.e.
 - a. **Accessibility training** can help SMEs make their physical spaces and digital content accessible to people with disabilities.
 - b. **Awareness training on technologies that can facilitate access to workplaces based on the individual needs of people with disabilities** and utilising the immense possibilities of universal design.
 - c. **Communication and interaction knowledge and skills.**
 - d. **Entrepreneurship and self-employment, as well as financial literacy.**
9. **Further capacity building, networking and exchange of experience and good practices** among employers (i.e. companies and organisations) for the purposes of reasonable accommodation and building an accessibility inclusive environment.
10. **People with disabilities could benefit from improved apprenticeships and workplace learning**, which should be made inclusive for persons with disabilities. This is needed in terms of improving the accommodation and vocational skills of employers with disabilities.
11. **Persons with disabilities could also benefit from improving their self-employment and entrepreneurship capabilities.** Business and entrepreneurship training can help individuals with disabilities start their own businesses or manage their finances effectively as many face various barriers to traditional employment.
12. **Further promotion and increasing of awareness regarding** the existing government-supported schemes and resources aimed at improving the employability and equal access to labour for people with disabilities under the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in Bulgaria 2021 – 2030.

The participants of the focus group also highlighted the following recommendations as set out in the NSPW 2021 – 2030 as relevant to the objectives of the research:

- Ensuring equal access and opportunities for lifelong learning through the development of a system for research and forecasting of the demand for labour force with a certain qualification, incl. in the context of disabilities.
- Determining the types of activities that people with disabilities can perform, depending on their disability, and in this regard, supporting the lifelong learning process, given the specific needs.
- Providing conditions for the introduction of functional assessment through ICF-CY (International Classification of Human Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth).
- Providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities to overcome their social isolation and inclusion in the labour market, including by carrying out active mediation to arrange jobs suitable for them.
- Promotion of social entrepreneurship to support the employment of people with disabilities.
- Providing opportunities to provide specialised training for people with disabilities, aimed at acquiring key competencies, incl. of digital skills needed in the labour market, as well as opportunities to increase the labour productivity of working people with disabilities and their suitability for employment.
- Improving the opportunities for professional guidance and career counselling for people with disabilities.





BEYOND INCLUSION project

Employability for persons with disabilities

2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215

IO4 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY:

THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION

COUNTRY REPORT: GREECE

Document Title: BEYOND INCLUSION project

**COUNTRY RERPORT GREECE IO4 "POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY: THE ROLE OF SMES AND
GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION"**

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT THE PROPOSAL SAYS

In the preparatory stage of the proposal, EU and national policies relevant to social inclusion of persons with disabilities have been explored. In particular, the call of the European Disability Forum EDF for the adoption of a European Disability Rights Agenda 2020-2030. With respect to employment and training, EDF stresses the need to focus on the use of EU funds for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, in part through investing in training. At a further point, employment for persons with disabilities should also facilitate the transition from full dependency on benefits to employment. SMEs and especially small and micro enterprises should be part of any relevant intervention, since as it stands, they are below the radar of non-discrimination policies and miss valuable and well-documented information on how a disabled-inclusive workforce yields important benefits for them at various levels.

Following the development phase of the proposed project, **a Policy Recommendations report will be developed** to respond to the following indicative issues:

- How can the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level? (National or EU level)
- Which are the country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration?
- How did SMEs as well as persons with disabilities respond to the proposed tools, learning material and formats?
- Which would be the envisaged, scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention?
- How could they be scaled up?
- Which are the strengths (incl. good practices), opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology?
- Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

The Policy recommendations report will be a common endeavour on behalf of all partners. **It will draw conclusions from across all Intellectual Outputs**, the primary and secondary data acquired during the project activities from both SMEs and persons with disabilities, formal and informal feedback received, new knowledge developed among the project partnership.

Moreover, **a half day online focus group with stakeholder will be organized** and held to discuss key topics of interest and explore feasible recommendations that align with EU and national policies. The Report will be fully illustrated and graphically enhanced in English, with Executive summaries in Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Spanish. It will be disseminated mainly to the following actors/target groups:

- SME representative bodies and organisations
- Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- Business associations
- Disabled persons' representative bodies/actors/networks
- Business consulting and training organisations
- Labour and social inclusion governmental institutions

Elements of innovation/impact/transferability

The Policy recommendation report **will transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations.** Fertilising primary data through direct application of a methodology and the created tools, materials, it will serve as a prospect reference document for a given approach for an umbrella issue that should be tackled more efficiently.

Bringing the report to the attention of institutional actors, secures considerable impact at decision-making level. Furthermore, similar or complementary actions (existing or scheduled) would benefit at methodological and implementation level.

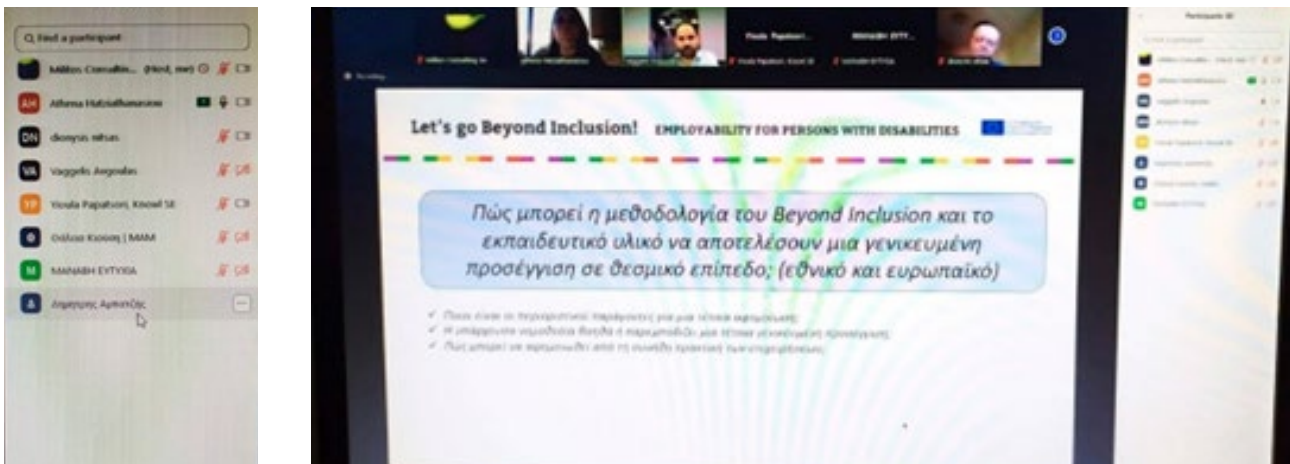
2. GREEK RESULTS FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In Greece, a specific Focus group was implemented on 27/01/2023 online using ZOOM. The participants were

-4 from partner organizations, presenting project results to the participants and guiding the conversation: Georgia Micheli from Militos, Athina Chatziathanasiou from RNDO, Thaleia Kiousi and Vaggelis Avgoulas from Me Alla Matia.

-4 participants from organizations representing SMEs and employment services or persons with disabilities: Dimitris Abatzis, representative from the Ilion Trade Association, Dionisis Nitsas, member of the board of the Ilion association of persons with disabilities, Eftihia Manavi from the Greek Public Employment Service and Yioula Papatsori from Knowl Social Enterprise for life long learning

Photos about the session below:



Following the “IO4_Policy Recommendations_Planning_V4” document, we will include in the following sections:

3. Country level policy recommendations based on Beyond Inclusion results: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues on the integration of Beyond Inclusion results at policy level as identified in T2
4. Country level policy recommendations resulted in the focus group: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues addressed in the focus group in T3.



I. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON BEYOND INCLUSION RESULTS

1. About the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs & persons with disabilities

In Greece, the methodological framework and the training material for SME's and persons with disabilities can be implemented as it is:

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".

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, confirming the suitability of the Beyond Inclusion Methodological Framework as an integrated tool in employment practices.

2. Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs

In Greece, there are many parameters hindering or promoting the scaling-up of Beyond Inclusion at institutional level.

Favourable circumstances

- **Lifelong Learning Centres (KeDiViM)** have been operating since 2010 with the aim to promote the upgrading of environment, digital, literacy, civic, financial, Personal & Interpersonal capabilities among marginalized groups (persons with disabilities, immigrants, religious minorities etc.), ensuring equal access to education and enhancing access to the labour market. KeDiViMs can integrate and promote further the Beyond Inclusion practice, fully aligning with their mission.
- Furthermore, in Greece, the **Greek Manpower Employment Organization** offers incentives for SMEs for hiring persons with disabilities, funding SMEs and covering either partially or completely the salaries of the employees with disabilities. Therefore, the Beyond Inclusion training material, addressing the subject matter from a different perspective, can COMPLEMENT this practice and be integrated within the Public Employment Services practice, as well as in the policies of SME's, enhancing their human resource strategy.

Changing unfavourable circumstances

- The disability allowance in Greece is connected to the salary. Today, when a person with disabilities is hired (with the exception of persons with mental impairments), they lose 50% of the **disability allowance; this works as a disincentive to be employed, concerning the low basic salary** offered in Greece. If the disability allowance is disconnected from the salary, more persons with disabilities would seek for employment, adopting the Beyond Inclusion tools.

- Currently, the subsidy (coverage of insurance contributions and salary) of a **personal assistant** (PA) for every person with disabilities who wishes so, is legislated as a pilot program only for 1,000 people and only for the Attica Region, yet it is unknown whether it will be implemented and when. PAs are considered necessary for the autonomy of each person with disabilities and this their employability, and it is a good practice applied in many countries in and out of Europe, that would facilitate the integration of the methodology created by the Beyond Inclusion project.

3. SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

The pilot testing in Greece was implemented in the period from 27/07/2022 until 27/10/2022 engaging 15 SME representatives and 15 persons with disabilities (mainly visual and mobile impairments).

In the table below we have included the average ratings provided by the respondents (SMEs and persons with disabilities respectively) to the main statements regarding Overall rating of the training material. The collated rating from SMEs corresponding to 4,0 and from persons with disabilities to 4.2:

STATEMENTS	AVERAGE
The training content in all the 2 Modules is relevant for my work, helping me to better understand the benefits for my company and the steps towards the creation of a disability inclusive workforce	4.1
The flow and sequence of the 2 Modules and their content is presented in a clear and logical manner	4.3
The online training environment was user-friendly and easy to understand (e.g., navigation, menus etc.)	4.1
The digital and graphical elements used (images, tables, pictures etc.) are supporting the learning experience.	3.4
The overall time needed to go through the training material is appropriate.	4.3
Collated, all statements	4.0

Table 1: Evaluation of the training material- SMEs. Own elaboration

STATEMENTS	AVERAGE
The training content in all the 4 Modules is relevant for my personal life and work, helping me to better understand myself, my potential, improving my presentation skills in the frame of the current job market requirements and increasing my employability potential	4.3
The flow and sequence of the 4 Modules and their content is presented in a clear and logical manner	4.4
The online training environment was user-friendly and easy to understand (e.g., navigation, menus etc.)	4.3
The digital and graphical elements used (images, tables, pictures etc.) are supporting the learning experience.	3.5
The overall time needed to go through the training material is appropriate.	4.6
Collated, all statements	4.2

Table 2: Evaluation of the training material - persons with disabilities. Own elaboration



SMEs suggestions, remarks and recommendations

1 respondent thinks that some technical aspects need to be changed, 6 of the respondents think that some technical aspects should be optimized (login process), 3 of them made suggestions about the content (added material for country-specific legal framework and incentives for employers) and 4 of the respondents suggested that there should be things added in the way the material is presented (graphical and visual elements). All comments have been notified to the IT partner RNDO and have been optimized.

Persons with disabilities' suggestions, remarks and recommendations

A few of the participants indicated the need for more infographics and visual content, simplifying the perception of the training course, some others highlighted minor accessibility issues with some of the existing infographics and the webpages some hyperlinks were leading to, and trouble with the registration process. All comments have been notified to the IT partner RNDO and have been optimized.

4. Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention; how could they be scaled up

TRAINING TO GREEK SMES AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Increase the emphasis on the promotion of awareness in SMEs, particularly:

- This material gives from the beginning a positive direction in the familiarization of small and medium enterprises with disability. With practical examples documented and based on common habits and images of everyday life, it breaks the stereotypes around diversity while promoting disability as an aspect of the daily life of our fellow humans, as a phenomenon next door.
- Beyond Inclusion intervention becomes a SMEs' ally in the attempt to the social integration of persons with disabilities. Prejudices about the alleged non-productivity of workers with disabilities are broken down in simple language but with scientific documentation and simple everyday examples. This material gives evidence to even the most skeptical to reap the benefits of an inclusive workplace.
- It enables SME to adopt a clearly structured strategy on how to integrate persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Enhance the employability of persons with disabilities, particularly:

- Helping them better understand themselves (Personality Traits and Values) as well as understand what interests them.
- Providing them with the necessary knowledge on how to apply for a job and better attend an interview.
- Helping them develop further their soft skills, and present themselves more efficiently
- Helping them face discriminatory behaviours at the workplace.
- Helping them to find a job and facilitate further the elimination of stereotypes around disability at the workplace.



5. Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

- **Strengths:** The online availability of the Beyond Inclusion training course, freely available to all enables the further exploitation of the provision by direct target groups (SME's and persons with disabilities). The promotion of the proposed intervention by the thorough dissemination strategy and through the 8 partners' wide networks in 5 EU countries and beyond, involves directly relevant stakeholders who integrate the proposed practice in their organization's/ individual activities; The easy-to-understand content of the training material and its eligibility for immediate application on the field establishes a practice ready to be implemented across the SMEs' world.
- **Opportunities:** The pilot program for Personal Assistants for persons with disabilities, about to be implemented in Greece, is a great opportunity for this target group to improve their employability, enabling their autonomy and helping them enter the labour market, assisted also by the Beyond Inclusion methodology. The funding program provided by the Manpower Employment Service in Greece facilitating the recruitment of 3.000 persons from disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities, can be also complemented by the Beyond Inclusion intervention, enabling their integration into the workplace.
- **Challenges:** the post-COVID challenges, the war in Ukraine, the current inflation levels, the energy crises in Europe in general: all these create unfavorable circumstances for the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

6. Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way

■ Greek context

- **Lifelong Learning Centres (KeDiViM)** promote the upgrading of environment, digital, literacy, civic, financial, Personal & Interpersonal capabilities among marginalized groups (persons with disabilities, immigrants, religious minorities etc.), and can be perfectly complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outcomes, building further the soft skills necessary to improve their employability (a tool ideal to be integrated within the KeDiVim courses).
- **Personal Assistants**, enabling PWDs autonomy, will be the key, maximizing their productivity and making them active members of the labor market.

■ EU level

2. **Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (2021-2030)** fostering:

- **Accessibility** as an enabler of rights, autonomy and equality (reinforced by the EU digital Government Strategy, the Web Accessibility Directive, the passenger rights regulatory framework, the trans-European transport network to strengthen the provision on accessibility and the Sustainable Mobility Planning)
- **The enjoying of European rights:** moving and residing freely, participation in the democratic process
- **Decent quality of life and living independently** – reinforcing Community based services, developing new skills for new jobs, fostering access to quality and sustainable jobs, consolidating social protection systems
- **Equal Access and non-discrimination** (Access to justice, legal protection, freedom and security, Equal access to social protection, healthcare, education and goods and services including housing, inclusive and accessible education, access to culture)

Beyond Inclusion is building on one of the main goals of the Strategy, suggesting an innovative framework for the employability of persons with disabilities, taking the "Equal Access" and their "right to participate in social life" one step ahead, offering to SMEs an additional motive to do so.



II. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS RESULTED IN THE FOCUS GROUP

The discussion in the focus group among the participants was oriented around policy recommendations on national and EU level.

■ Greek Context

- The Ministry of Labor could create **a platform where good practices are posted**. In particular, it will publish free of charge any private sector business that employs persons with disabilities. This will act as free advertising for the company and an incentive for other competing businesses, implementing on the field one of the benefits presented by the Beyond Inclusion project, with regards to company reputation.
- **The Ministry could also subsidize** permanently small and medium-sized enterprises with insurance contributions and the salary of workers with disabilities for permanent employment.
- **Reasonable adjustments** should be made in the workplaces to accommodate persons with disabilities – the Beyond Inclusion describes the “How”.
- **More flexible working hours** should be legislated for PWDs depending on the health problems they face. **Alternative forms of work**, such as teleworking, should be established as a clear option for persons that find it difficult to move around non-accessible workplaces.
- The **disability allowance should be disconnected from the salary**, giving motives to persons with disabilities to apply for a position in the labor market, assisted by the Beyond Inclusion training course.
- SMEs could also further deploy **digital tools and new technologies**. This is how they will be modernized and provide more jobs for PWDs, for example, by utilizing the institution of teleworking.

■ EU LEVEL

1. SMEs could claim **funding through the trade associations** and the chambers to which they belong so that programs to familiarize employers with disability can be implemented. This could lead to the removal of stereotypes and greater confidence of employers in the abilities of disabled workers.
2. European-funded programs should give more **funding to beneficiaries when they employ PWDs** in any way in the execution of the program.
3. **Research projects** should be funded and implemented on European level, presenting data, not only with regards to the current disadvantages persons with disabilities face in the labor market, but with regards to the advantages they offer to the business when employed. Businesses talk numbers, so it would scale-up the Beyond Inclusion Intervention, supported by clear European data.
4. **European Mobility - European Disability Card** – recommendations from Greece

A single Disability Certification Card should be established so that person with disability moving within the EU loses their work rights and work opportunities offered. Today the suffering of PWDs is significant since, if they go to another European country, they have to start the procedures for certifying their disability from the beginning. Often a certified translation of the disability certificate they have in their country is not enough for them to continue enjoying the social benefits to which they are entitled.



BEYOND INCLUSION project

Employability for persons with disabilities

2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215

IO4 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY:

THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION

COUNTRY REPORT: ROMANIA

Document Title: BEYOND INCLUSION project

COUNTRY RERPORT ROMANIA IO4 "POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY: THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION"

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT THE PROPOSAL SAYS

In the preparatory stage of the proposal, EU and national policies relevant to social inclusion of persons with disabilities have been explored. In particular, the call of the European Disability Forum EDF for the adoption of a European Disability Rights Agenda 2020-2030. With respect to employment and training, EDF stresses the need to focus on the use of EU funds for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, in part through investing in training. At a further point, employment for persons with disabilities should also facilitate the transition from full dependency on benefits to employment. SMEs and especially small and micro enterprises should be part of any relevant intervention, since as it stand they are below the radar of non-discrimination policies and miss valuable and well-documented information on how a disabled-inclusive workforce yields important benefits for them at various levels.

Following the development phase of the proposed project, the present Policy Recommendations report was developed to respond to the following indicative issues:

- How can the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level? (National or EU level)
- Which are the country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration?
- How did SMEs as well as persons with disabilities respond to the proposed tools, learning material and formats?
- Which would be the envisaged, scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention?
- How could they be scaled up?
- Which are the strengths (incl. good practices), opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology?
- Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

The Policy recommendations report was a common endeavour on behalf of all partners. It draws conclusions from across all Intellectual Outputs, the primary and secondary data acquired during the project activities from both SMEs and persons with disabilities, formal and informal feedback received, new knowledge developed among the project partnership.

Moreover, a half day online focus group with stakeholder was organized in each country from the project and held to discuss key topics of interest and explore feasible recommendations that align with EU and national policies.

Elements of innovation/impact/transferability

The Policy recommendation report **proposed to transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations.** Fertilising primary data through direct application of a methodology and the created tools, materials, it serves as a prospect reference document for a given approach for an umbrella issue that should be tackled more efficiently.

Bringing the report to the attention of institutional actors, secures considerable impact at decision-making level. Furthermore, similar or complementary actions (existing or scheduled) would benefit at methodological and implementation level.



2. ROMANIAN RESULTS FOR POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

In Romania, because the persons recruited to participate in Focus Group could not be present at the scheduled meeting, a focus group was organized with an SME representative and a representative of the support organizations for people with disabilities on the set date, using the Teams platform and subsequently, two in-depth interviews were conducted with an SME representative and a representative of the support organizations for people with disabilities, also using the Teams platform. The participants in this activity were 4, (1 from Diakonian Foundation Sfântu Gheorghe, 1 from My Way Association and 2 from Romanian SME) and the moderator was Irina Ceortan from GPI.

Screenshots about the sessions are shown below:



Following the "IO4_Policy Recommendations_Planning_V4" document, we will include in the following sections:

5. Country level policy recommendations based on Beyond Inclusion results: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues on the integration of Beyond Inclusion results at policy level as identified in T2
6. Country level policy recommendations resulted in the focus group: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues addressed in the focus group in T3.

I. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON BEYOND INCLUSION RESULTS

1. About the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs & persons with disabilities

The guidelines and learning material for SMEs & persons with disabilities are applicable in Romania in the format in which it exists.

Romania ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2011, without reservations. Law no. 448/2006 Of December 06, 2006 regarding the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Disabled Persons, as subsequently amended and supplemented, has been adopted to ensure the right of people with disabilities to work in a non-discriminatory environment and regulates the rights and obligations of disabled persons granted for the purpose of their social integration and inclusion.

In Romania, the legislation has been adopted to ensure the right of people with disabilities to work in a non-discriminatory environment, citing that all institutions, private or public, with a minimum of 50 employees, must respect and fill a quota of 4% in terms of employing individuals with a disability. If this percentage is not met, employers are mandated to pay the government a sum equal to 50% of the minimum wage for each of these assigned positions that are considered vacant. From this tax could be deducted expenses caused by buying goods or services produced by enterprises or organizations of people with disabilities.

According to the law, any disabled person wanting to integrate or reintegrate in labour shall have a free access to professional evaluation and orientation, irrespective of his/her age, handicap type and degree.

2. Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs

According to the participants in the online discussions, The Beyond Inclusion Platform is a remarkable first step because it includes information that could bring together employers and people with disabilities; at the same time, the platform provides the main directions and steps to be followed, including in this direction. Taking as a reference the existing platform, training programs can be organized, with direct interaction (face to face) to modify some perceptions regarding people with disabilities.

The recommendations in this regard are:

- Organization at the institutional level of training programs dedicated to people with disabilities based on the Beyond Inclusion Platform as a training tool;
- Organization at institutional level of training programs dedicated to SME representatives that focus on the inclusion of people with disabilities, programs that use the Beyond Inclusion Platform as learning material;
- Nomination at the level of institutions and organizations of a dedicated and informed person to be responsible for the employability and integration of people with disabilities among the staff.

3. SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

The pilot testing in Romania was implemented in the period 7/10/2022 until 09/01/2023 engaging 30 stakeholders (30 representatives of SMEs) and 15 representatives of the target group with persons with disabilities. The piloting in Romania focused on SMEs that were contacted by the GPI using the network of contacts, and persons with disabilities that were contacted by the RO partner, ARPA using their network of contacts, too.

In the table below we have included the average ratings provided by the respondents to the main statements regarding Overall rating of the training, module 1 and module 2. The collated rating corresponding to 4.4 (on scale to 1 – 5: 1 – Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree):

SUMMARY OF RATINGS	AVERAGE
Overall rating of the training	4.3
Overall rating Module 1	4.4
Overall rating Module 2	4.4

Table 4: Summary evaluation – averages. Own elaboration

In order to illustrate the result we have included figure 4, below.

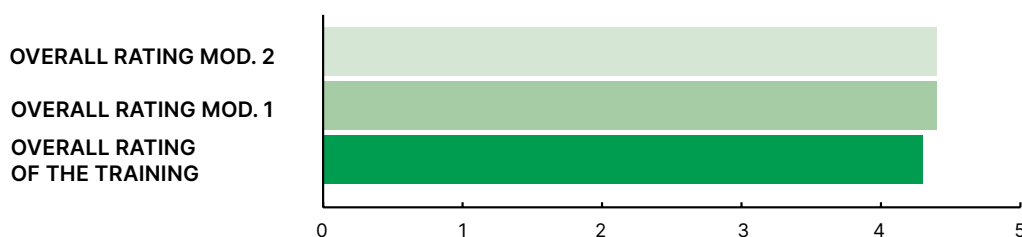


Figure 4: Summary Evaluation of the Beyond Inclusion training – averages. Own elaboration

9 of the respondents replied that there were technical aspects that should be optimized. 14 out of the Romanian respondents filled in the Open question field about further suggestions that were mainly addressed to **simplifying the registration process/ access to Romanian platform and better structuring of information with graphs or other elements**. All identified technical errors were analysed by the project team at Great People Inside and forwarded to the technical partner (RNDO).

In the table below we have included the average ratings provided by the respondents to the main statements regarding Overall rating of the training for persons with disabilities, and for each individual model.

SUMMARY OF RATINGS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES SECTION	AVERAGE
Overall rating of the training	4.3
Overall rating Module 1	4.3
Overall rating Module 2	4.3
Overall rating Module 3	4.3
Overall rating Module 4	4.3

Table 5: Summary evaluation for Pwd's section – averages. Own elaboration

In order to illustrate the result we have included figure 5, below.

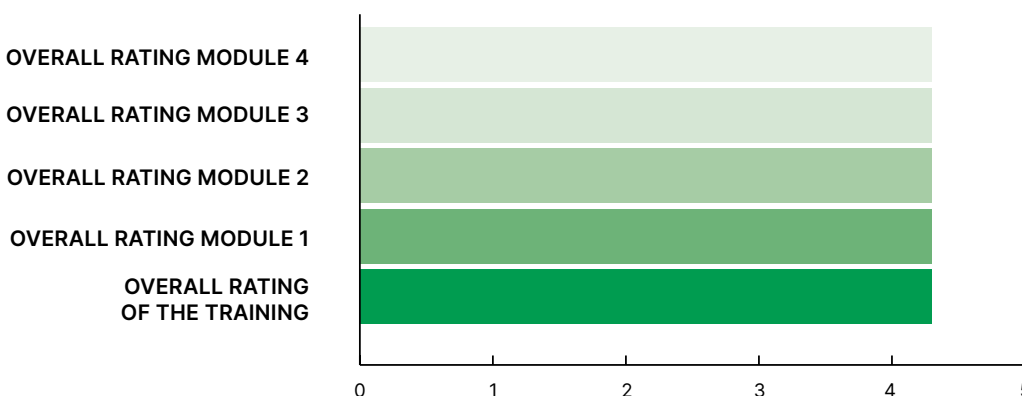


Figure 5: Summary Evaluation of the Beyond Inclusion training for Pwd's – averages. Own elaboration



4 of the respondent persons with disabilities replied that there were technical aspects that should be optimized. 5 out of the Romanian respondents filled in the Open question field about further suggestions that were mainly addressed **to making the learning platform easier to navigate by including materials that include sign language for the hearing impaired and adding a chromatic design.**

4. Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention; how could they be scaled up

Starting from the recommendations made above, in point 2 (Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs) we predict the following results:

- Increasing the level of information among SME representatives regarding the needs of people with disabilities, the legislative aspects that support the rights of these people, the benefits of including a diverse workforce and their awareness of the condition and needs of these people
- Increasing the level of information at the institutional level of the staff involved in supporting the entry into the labour market of people with disabilities
- Increasing the quality of employment support services adapted to the needs of people with disabilities offered by institutions/organizations
- Providing online, free and unlimited access to the training and personal development programs developed within the project to ensure these people have appropriate skill sets and attitudes for inclusion on the labour market and career development.

5. Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

● **Strengths:** It is the only e-learning platform in Romania created specifically to support the development needs of people with disabilities, by equipping them with appropriate skill sets and attitudes for inclusion in the labour market and career development. The platform also includes useful information for SME representatives (managers, business consultants, human resource managers, responsible for recruiting new talent) to recognize and benefit from the inclusion of people with disabilities in their workforce.

● **Opportunities:** People with disabilities¹⁰ represent a significant group in Romania, with a diverse profile. According to Eurostat data, Romania has about a quarter of the population aged 16 and over with disabilities, of which people with severe activity limitations represent 6% of the population (1.2 million people). Among disabled people, most have great difficulty or total inability to walk or climb stairs (38%), followed by difficulty seeing even with glasses, memorizing and concentrating (13%) and self-care such as to wash or dress themselves (13%). Officially, in 2020 in Romania there were 853,465 people registered as having disability classification certificates and 457,730 receiving disability pension - but there is no estimate regarding the overlap between these two groups. And as the right to work is an inherent part of the set of rights of people with disabilities and its achievement must be universal, people with disabilities should have the opportunity to work in occupations (salaried or entrepreneurial) that reflect professional training, their skills and aspirations regarding professional achievement and occupational gains. At the same time, disabled people should be adequately trained to increase their qualification level and develop their skills, creative and productive potential.

¹⁰ Strategic Note with detailed recommendations on the foundation of the new National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, 2021-2027, November 2020, The World Bank, IBRD-IDA, World Bank Group

● **Challenges:** Although there is legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities, there is no support for supporting these rights, i.e. there are no systematic procedures or practices to implement the legislation in force.

Eliminating all stereotypes and prejudices, so that non-discrimination laws are adequately applied, and disabled people and organizations that represent their interests can easily access mechanisms that allow them to appeal.

The need to promote and raise awareness of the inclusion of disability-based diversity as a valuable resource in the work environment rather than a “moral/legal obligation”.

6. Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way

1) NATIONAL STRATEGY ON PREVENTING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ACCELERATING THE DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS, 2022-2030, APPROVED BY THE GOVERNMENT¹¹

The strategy of deinstitutionalization brings major changes through 6 directions of action with impact on the system of protection of persons with disabilities, considering that the provision of social services will be oriented toward the community and not toward residential institutions:

1. coordinating the process of deinstitutionalization at national, county and local level and integration into the community of adults with disabilities;
2. ensuring the person-centered approach to transition to independent life and community integration;
3. developing community services for the independent life of adults with disabilities, including for the prevention of institutionalization;
4. training and motivation of staff working with and for these persons;
5. providing support for the family in order to support independent life in the community;
6. raising awareness of society in order to support the independent life of people with disabilities in the community.

2) NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2021-2027

The overall goal of the 2021-2027 Strategy is to ensure the full and effective participation of people with disabilities, based on freedom of decision, in all areas of life and in an accessible and resilient environment.

The beneficiaries of the 2021-2027 Strategy are persons with disabilities, children and adults, as the group is defined by Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and society in general: family members caring for people with disabilities, legal representatives, staff involved in direct activities, teachers, professionals, representatives of academia, human rights institutions, authorities and other entities.

11 <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/6807-cp-aprobare-strategie-proces-dezinstitutionalizare-pers-adulte-dizab-2023-2030-19122022>



The 2021-2027 strategy has eight priority areas:

1. Accessibility and mobility;
2. Actual protection of the rights of persons with disabilities;
3. Employment;
4. Social protection, including empowerment/ rehabilitation;
5. An independent and community-integrated life, including access to public services;
6. Education;
7. Health;
8. Political and public participation.

3) EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME 2021 – 2027¹²

2.1.1. Priority: 1. Modernization of labor market institutions 1.b.1. Creating a modern, flexible SPO, adapted to the socio-economic context, accessible and visible for the future – strategic investment, for example:

- New mechanisms to increase the relevance/quality of the services offered to customers. Updating and developing tools and methodologies to enable the de-bureaucratization and digitalization of the SPO activity, in order to provide integrated services dedicated to SPO clients, as well as to make necessary adaptations for persons with disabilities
- Adapting and improving customer service
- Increasing the capacity of civil society organizations to engage in dialog, to contribute to inclusion through employment and training of disadvantaged groups and to participate, where appropriate, in the provision of active employment measures.

2.1.1.1. Specific objective: ESO4.7. Promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible opportunities for upgrading skills and retraining for all, taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, through better anticipation of change and new skills requirements based on labor market needs, As well as by facilitating occupational transitions and promoting occupational mobility (ESF+), for example:

- Encouraging participation in the PV by expanding/diversifying training opportunities
- Implementation of the “keep up” program aimed at updating the specific skills of employees as a result of rapid technological developments and the emergence of new skills, accompanied by professional counseling services
- Provision by employers, including clusters of employers, training programs for the career progression of disadvantaged employees including collaborative training.

4) INCLUSION AND SOCIAL DIGNITY PROGRAM 2021 – 2027¹³

Priority: P07. Support for people with disabilities

2.1.1.1. Specific objective: ESO4.8. Promoting active inclusion in order to promote equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation, as well as to improve employability, in particular among disadvantaged groups (ESF+) Action 7.1 – Employment and retention of persons with disabilities in the labor market.

12 <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ca9e947d8072599b96c9b38f2384242c.pdf>

13 <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/8917b14349af013a8555f58aeda30f07.pdf>

II. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS RESULTED IN THE FOCUS GROUP

Romanian Context

The number of people with disabilities employed on the labour market in Romania is still below the average in many European countries (an employment rate of 12% compared to the 50% European average). This low percentage is a consequence of the lack of social policies to encourage employment. The only policy regarding the employment of people with disabilities is the mandatory employment quota imposed on certain employers. The law stipulates that companies that have more than 50 employees are obliged to have a percentage of 4% of their human resources disabled people. The non-application of the mandatory quota by the employers concerned results in a financial penalty of 50% of the gross minimum wage per economy for each vacant position. The law also provides that companies can purchase goods/services from authorized protected units, of the same value as the penalty they have to pay to the state.

Currently, within the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021 – 2027, proposals for specific measures necessary to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) have been submitted in eight main areas: accessibility and mobility, the effective protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, employment, social protection, social services and independent living, education, health, social participation and implementation of the CRPD. Some of these measures that support inclusion on the labour market are listed below:

1. The assumption, through the Employment Program, of more ambitious targets regarding the inclusion of persons classified as disabled in active employment measures.
2. Granting a subsidy for employers to compensate for the productivity deficit of the disabled employee, corresponding as a percentage of the salary to the proportion of responsibilities in the Job Description that the employee cannot perform. The estimation of this deficit should be carried out by DGASPC together with ANOFM, as a public service with attributions in the field of employment of people with disabilities.
3. The decrease from 18 months to 12 months during which there is an obligation to maintain employment or service relations with employees with disabilities, when granting subsidies for employers according to Law no. 76/2002.
4. Eliminating the obligation of employers who receive subsidies for hiring people with severe and severe disabilities to maintain employment relationships for a minimum duration (currently 12 months); in other words, no matter how short the employment lasts, the employer should receive the subsidy.¹⁴

In the case of Romania, various published reports and analyses carried out by institutions and organizations of interest have been accessed and studied in order to develop recommendations for measures and policies appropriate to support the inclusion in the labour market of persons with disabilities. Thus, in order to remove barriers to inclusion in the labour market and to ensure autonomy in the field of accessibility, education and employment, we present the following recommendations, measures to be adopted in support of persons with disabilities, measures that have been analysed in the IO4 online meetings with representatives of SMEs and support organizations for people with disabilities:

¹⁴ Strategic Note with detailed recommendations on the foundation of the new National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, 2021-2027, November 2020, The World Bank, IBRD-IDA, World Bank Group



E. Occupation

1. **Rethinking the employment system for people with disabilities.** The quota system stipulated by Romanian legislation has proven ineffective for many years. Even though a certain category of employers are obliged to hire people with disabilities, statistics have shown that few people are employed through this system. Moreover, there is no exact and official data on the number of disabled people who should have been employed through this system because the number of employing companies who should apply the quota system is not known.

Considering that there is no control of the way the quota system is used and no control of the estimated penalties collected at the state budget, we propose as an improvement of the social policy the establishment and support of labour mediation services that address exactly the obliged employers to apply the quota system.

Also, the money collected from penalties for not hiring people with disabilities should be redirected to the benefit of people with disabilities, and not spent in the state budget. The money collected could be used for professional reinsertion, for offering a package of services to support the disabled person in finding a job: vocational counselling, personal development, professional rehabilitation for those who have acquired the disability, so that they keep their work.

It is also indicated to take measures to help employers and motivate them to employ disabled people sustainably, for longer periods of time and with appropriate means.

2. **Supporting the establishment of labour mediation services.** The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity should establish and promote labour mediation services to employers and support non-governmental organizations that have beneficiaries with disabilities through non-reimbursable funds. Non-governmental organizations can support the disabled person looking for a job by offering supported or assisted employment services. Assisted employment means providing support at the workplace (job-coach), transportation, assistive technology, vocational counselling, personalized supervision. Job search by a job seeker, preliminary job analysis, advocacy for the employment of people with disabilities, matching between the job and the person with the disability, as well as re-analysis of the job to assess the need for support are just a few of services that could be supported more by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. The development of these jobs that could be called mediators for professional integration can lead to the creation of vocational programs for young people with disabilities adapted to the labour market and the skills of these young people.

In addition, the experience of governmental or non-governmental organizations can be developed through promotion, information and support campaigns to maximize the chances of success of young people with disabilities.

3. **Support for families of disabled people in finding a job.** For many people with disabilities, it is the family that gets involved in finding jobs. For this reason, we believe that parents' associations can be more involved in the development of awareness and advocacy campaigns to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It is also necessary to provide support regarding the awareness of the values of children with disabilities among parents, as well as psychoeducational support for parents to understand the situation and support family members with disabilities to achieve their personal goals.
4. **Ensuring reasonable accommodation in the workplace and providing measures to support companies to ensure workplace adaptability.** According to what was mentioned by the participants in the online discussions, one of the major obstacles for which companies do not hire people with disabilities is this aspect of ensuring adaptability at work. One measure that is required to support them, based on the example given by the participants in the online meetings, is for the organization to prepare and guide the team they will be part of in terms of the approach they will have with colleagues with disabilities for them to feel accepted as they are, especially for those with mental disabilities, because they have not developed the social skills part and fail to discern the nuance of truth, irony or jokes.



5. **Building step-by-step procedures for hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace that will support employers as well as people with disabilities.** The participants in the online discussions concluded that there should be procedures regarding accommodation and that would support both targeted categories (employers and people with disabilities) both during the period in which they are active within the company, and for the period in which the people with disabilities they are forced to undergo drug treatment or even hospitalization in order to improve their physical or mental conditions. It was found that in Romania there is no good collaboration between specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers. For example, for those with mental problems, for those with depression, schizophrenia, who go through more difficult periods when they have to take treatment in the hospital for a month, two or more, it is difficult to maintain the treatment and at the same time to keep their jobs, thus companies fail to keep them, being forced to suspend the employment contract. For this type of situations, it is necessary to build solutions that will help both the person concerned and the employer. A solution mentioned by the people participating in the online meetings would be to carry out prevention activities through which people with mental disabilities go through a procedure that involves counselling activity through which they become aware of their mental health condition and intuit the periods in which their condition of health deteriorates in order to call on specialists in time and reduce the time required for treatment for recovery. Also, it is necessary to take support measures for employers so that the positions occupied by the people in this situation can be maintained, and the company's activity does not suffer.

Carrying out a set of interviews with potential employers could reveal the main obstacles and places where it is necessary to contribute with procedures or stages.

6. **Rethinking the system of granting rest and medical leave for people with disabilities**, so that they can receive the necessary medical treatment to improve their health when the situation demands it and not be exposed to the situation of losing their workplace when the recovery period is longer.
7. **Training of staff from state institutions on the subject of inclusion with an emphasis on disabilities** and the inclusion of compassion development programs among training programs, compassion being a basic feature without which nothing else can be effectively built in helping people with disabilities. Building a department dedicated to the integration of these people into the labour market, training the institutional staff regarding the understanding of each type of disability and the level of professional development that can be achieved by these people depending on the type of disability they have, regarding the approach at the level communication is of major importance in supporting them in both professional and social integration.
8. **Taking measures from competent institutions to aid support organizations for persons with disabilities.** According to the respondents to the online discussions organized within IO4, for organizations that aim to facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities, provide training programs, monitor the situation of employees in this category and provide support both during the period of employment, As well as beyond this, in order to include them in social life and to live a normal life among society, it is necessary to build actions and take measures to support them, measures to consider granting subsidies, tax exemptions, grant of non-reimbursable funds, and so on.
9. **Clearly define the occupational standard by defining the level at which the employee is intended to perform in that position.** Many adults with disabilities (for example, those with developmental delays) are the product of an interventional therapy process they have been subjected to since childhood, and their thinking process is focused on precisely targeted behaviours. therefore, it is necessary to define in terms of tasks what a person can perform (to understand a person with disabilities according to the type of disability he has), that is, how much of the skills that define a job must be able to perform or as a number of processes, operations that are included in the job description in order to be able to occupy that position. The skills of people with disabilities are limited, but they must be valued exactly as they are in order for people themselves to feel that they can be useful to society.



10. **Introduction of a progress mentor occupation to carry out activities to monitor the evolution over time of an employee in the category of persons with mental disabilities.**

These people need support, counselling, and mentoring is a basic activity for them. Over time they work with personal assistant, therapist or even several therapists, shadow people at school, who are reference persons in their lives, thus, in professional life it is necessary to have a mentor who will guide them and know what the next step is to take for him.

F. Education

1. **Digitalization at the educational level.** In the opinion of participants in organized online discussions, digitalization is an essential condition for a person with disabilities to have access to both public services and education. Developing, building and delivering education designed for the online/offline environment, i.e. hybrid and facilitating learning and having formal recognition of learning following tests, exams would help quite a lot of people with disabilities stop dealing with the physical and psychological obstacles they face in trying to access this type of services.

2. **A better prepared educational system for people with disabilities.** Even though special vocational schools and arts and crafts have information about the absorption of graduates into the labour market, there is no specific information about how they have engaged: Whether they have integrated into the profession for which they have trained, whether they have changed their occupation in the meantime. And because **there is no national strategy to look at fluctuations in the labour market**, there is a high probability that jobs for which they are currently employed will not be required in the future. In this regard, we propose the creation of an interinstitutional and intersectoral partnership system between all the factors that can contribute to the vocational orientation of young people with disabilities according to labor market requirements. There is no system of collaboration for the professional orientation of students with disabilities between the Ministry of Education, the National Agency for Employment (A.N.O.F.M.), the social services of the city halls and the National Authority for persons with Disabilities (A.N.P.D.).

Day centres developed by local authorities in some areas could be used as resources for young people with disabilities from the perspective of vocational workshops or occupational therapy.

3. **Identifying the elements needed to transform the existing education system into an inclusive education system, both for children and adults in the situation of disabled people who want to continue their education.** Creating a simpler, lighter educational system based on structure, learning methods, emotional and school performance experiences to introduce children with mental disabilities who demonstrate skills, understand certain concepts, are functional, a system adapted to their cognitive development will facilitate the social integration of these people, avoid school dropout and later facilitate their integration into the labour market, as they will be prepared early for social and professional interaction. Not every child can learn anywhere, especially the disabled child who has special needs, just as no employee can work anywhere. When there is too much difference in abilities, things do not move in the right direction.

At the education level, special schools are overcrowded and with varying degrees of affection for children, and there is no talk of their progress. The greatest progress can be made for those with mental disability through the intervention of ABA, integrative, sensory, kinetotherapy, swimming, (complementary therapies). Access to these therapies is discriminatory because the state does not offer or facilitate them. Thus, access for this type of treatment is for parents who can, afford and want to have access to these types of interventions. Public services provide access to centres and develop activities for these children, but it is insufficient and requires improvements in interventional therapy.

4. **The provision of elements, within the regular training courses for teachers, to help them to work with pupils/adults with disabilities** could be achieved by preparing teachers, in



collaboration with the Teaching-Staff Resources Centre, by conducting training programs to develop compassion and raise awareness to work better with this type of people; subsequently, the frameworks formed to be factors of diffusion of the attitude we want within the educational system, respectively of understanding and compassion with fellow disabled people.

5. **The training of a larger number of support teachers, assistants, psychologists or psycho-pedagogues and their introduction into the system** to support the training needs of people with special needs.
6. **Adapting the school curriculum to special educational requirements for the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.** Example: Developing an adopted curriculum for children with autism syndrome for whom, although the legislation says they have the right to education, the teacher fails to provide quality education services and adapted to their needs equally as other children.
7. **Educate people with disabilities so that they know what opportunities to report abuse they have and take steps to ensure that the organizations handling their complaints handle them properly.** For the education of people with disabilities, it is necessary to find solutions to teach them all the possibilities they have and that some of them may not be aware of to grow, develop professionally and humanly integrating disability. Because there are disabilities that can become a professional advantage, not an obstacle (e.g. attention to detail, concentration, tenacity).
8. **Building, using and promoting in the work of integrating people with disabilities into the labour market a tool for assessing social and communicational skills,** intellectual work skills, which together with the skills profile create a profile faithful to what such a person can execute, and to be included in a group that has the same characteristics as his. In order to support them in their position in the labour market, the skills, the value qualities of these individuals must be identified and exploited at the appropriate level.

G. Accessibility

1. **Consider the concept of “accessibility” (both physical and digital) in its broad sense.** It is not only about motor disabilities, but also about visual, auditory, intellectual and psychological disabilities.
2. **Implementing measures to provide greater physical accessibility to persons with disabilities,** that is, the equipment of all buildings with wide access, institutions, supermarkets, etc. with access ramps extremely necessary for persons with disabilities.
3. **Digitalisation of information to support information accessibility** and, together with this, support those for whom physical accessibility is lower. Use on the web pages of software solutions institutions that convert images into text or text into sound or summarize, to facilitate the transmission of information in a format easily achievable for a person with disabilities, especially for those with visual disabilities.
4. **Gathering information on structures, processes and policy outcomes affecting persons with disabilities.** Redirecting resources of any kind to those who should benefit from them is extremely useful for these people to feel informed and integrated in the society in which they coexist.

H. General aspects

1. **To carry out campaigns to raise public awareness of the problems and needs of persons with disabilities in order to bring about changes in mentality related to the working capacity of these persons.** This could be done, according to the participants in the online discussions for IO4, by building a national public education program in which to engage



one-to-one communication through social media, by communicating through the media and communicating one to all from all state institutions that issue the same type of common messages and that, by repeating them, the information remains imprinted in the memory of ordinary citizens.

2. **Conducting campaign to raise awareness, understanding and recognition of disability as a human rights issue**, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities with the aim of informing, empowering and activating persons with disabilities who may or may not work. A method mentioned by the participants in the online discussions for the implementation of these campaigns is the organization of conferences on international days for health education (World Mental Health Day, World Health Day, etc.), on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, World Human Rights Day, and so on, to invite specialists, psychologists, psychotherapists to present the problems faced by people with disabilities and motivate them to overcome their condition.
3. **Conducting campaigns to ensure awareness raising among employers from all categories, managers and HR representatives regarding rights, The problems and needs of persons with disabilities**, to consider and the employment and inclusion in the labour market of these persons and the use of examples of employers who manage to hire persons with disabilities and keep them as employees for long periods of time. In Romania at the moment, the basic mentality regarding the employability of persons with disabilities is that these persons are not able to carry out activities on the labour market. The implementation of cultural correction programs for persons with disabilities to promote the benefits of diversity would remove the main reason for obstacles to employment. Economic agents should receive information simultaneously from state institutions (ANOFM and others) And from non-state NGOs or organizations that specialize in the field so that the two sources can complement each other both in terms of information and attitude. The methods indicated in the online discussions that support these campaigns mentioned above are the Living Book model and the World Cafe concept through which discussions between companies are initiated, both among those who have employees with disabilities, as well as among those who do not have such employees and to make them directly acquainted with these persons with disabilities, to interact with them and to realize that they are people with values, with clear and fundamental positive contributions to the development of the company.
4. **Facilitate and align the political dialog on the rights of persons with disabilities between intergovernmental bodies and between humanitarian and development agencies**, with a view to providing a broader set of resources useful to the work of organizations involved in this work.
5. **Rebuild the legislative system on the establishment of social enterprises**, because at this time the legislation is quite cumbersome on the development of social enterprises and the steps it must take to carry out the activities of a social enterprise are difficult. At this time, besides social enterprises, there have emerged other types of organizations that are not covered by the law and that cannot function as they need to function, For example, the equivalent of the Halfway House in the western Anglo-Saxon area that helps people who have been in prison to integrate gradually, or concepts of production cooperatives in which people with disabilities could also work and obtain diplomas, dividends, etc. and those who need to retire for a month or two in the hospital can do it without jeopardizing their membership in this community.
6. **Launching within the POCU of calls for projects dedicated to disabled persons**, including training services.
7. **Involvement of persons with disabilities in all levels of decision-making**. Close and direct contact with people with disabilities, that is, using teams of specialized people to include people with disabilities in the results analysis and resource redirection teams for these people is extremely useful because they know best what helps them and what does not, based on their specific disability needs.
8. **Involvement of all ministries in the implementation of the UN Convention**.





BEYOND INCLUSION project

Employability for persons with disabilities

2020-1-RO01-KA204-080215

IO4 - POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY:

THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION

COUNTRY REPORT: SPAIN

Document Title: BEYOND INCLUSION project

COUNTRY RERPORT SPAIN IO4 "POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY: THE ROLE OF SMES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE BEYOND INCLUSION INTERVENTION"

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT THE PROPOSAL SAYS

In the preparatory stage of the proposal, EU and national policies relevant to social inclusion of persons with disabilities have been explored. In particular, the call of the European Disability Forum EDF for the adoption of a European Disability Rights Agenda 2020-2030. With respect to employment and training, EDF stresses the need to focus on the use of EU funds for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, in part through investing in training. At a further point, employment for persons with disabilities should also facilitate the transition from full dependency on benefits to employment. SMEs and especially small and micro enterprises should be part of any relevant intervention, since as it stands, they are below the radar of non-discrimination policies and miss valuable and well-documented information on how a disabled-inclusive workforce yields important benefits for them at various levels.

Following the development phase of the proposed project, a **Policy Recommendations report will be developed** to respond to the following indicative issues:

- How can the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs form the basis for an integrated approach at institutional level? (National or EU level)
- Which are the country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition such an integration?
- How did SMEs as well as persons with disabilities respond to the proposed tools, learning material and formats?
- Which would be the envisaged, scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention?
- How could they be scaled up?
- Which are the strengths (incl. good practices), opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology?
- Which are the possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way?

The Policy recommendations report will be a common endeavour on behalf of all partners. **It will draw conclusions from across all Intellectual Outputs**, the primary and secondary data acquired during the project activities from both SMEs and persons with disabilities, formal and informal feedback received, new knowledge developed among the project partnership.

Moreover, **a half day online focus group with stakeholder will be organized** and held to discuss key topics of interest and explore feasible recommendations that align with EU and national policies. The Report will be fully illustrated and graphically enhanced in English, with Executive summaries in Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Spanish. It will be disseminated mainly to the following actors/target groups:

- SME representative bodies and organisations
- Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- Business associations
- Disabled persons representative bodies/actors/networks
- Business consulting and training organisations
- Labour and social inclusion governmental institutions



Elements of innovation/impact/transferability

The Policy recommendation report **will transpose the activity-driven flow of the intervention towards social inclusion for persons with disabilities through employment and the role of SMEs towards that goal into well-documented policy proposals and recommendations.**

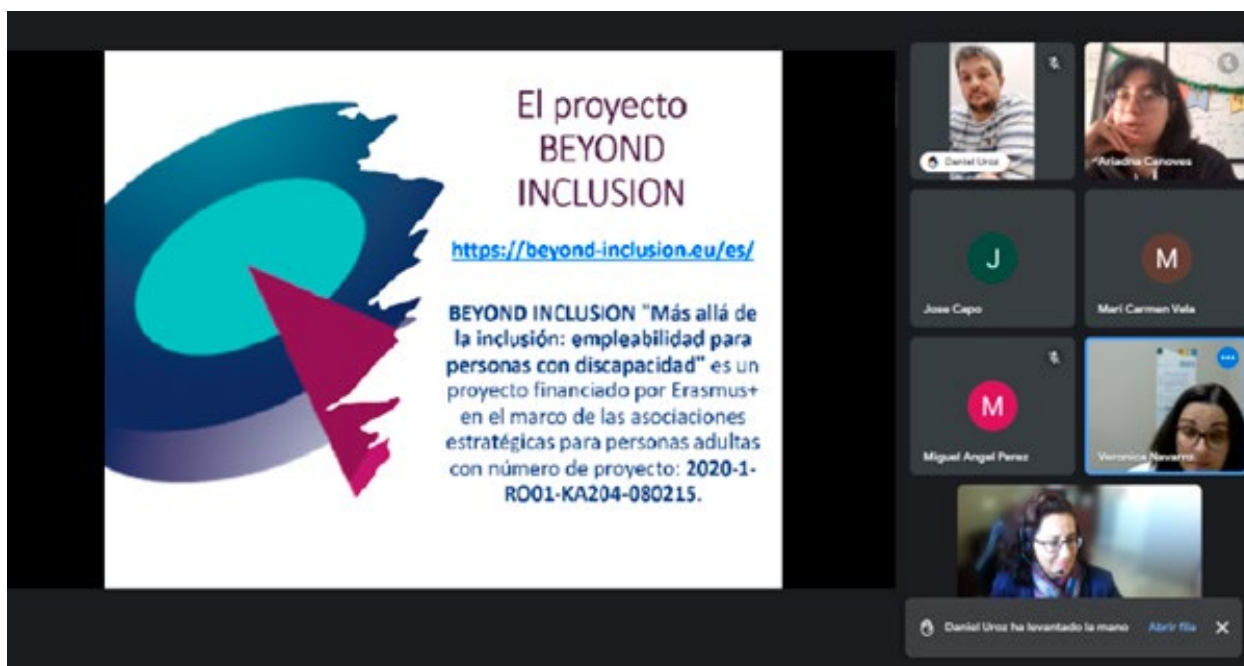
Fertilising primary data through direct application of a methodology and the created tools, materials, it will serve as a prospect reference document for a given approach for an umbrella issue that should be tackled more efficiently.

Bringing the report to the attention of institutional actors, secures considerable impact at decision-making level. Furthermore, similar or complementary actions (existing or scheduled) would benefit at methodological and implementation level.

2. SPANISH RESULTS FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In Spain, a specific Focus group was implemented 11/01/2023 online using MEET. The participants were 6 (3 from **Fundacion Verdiblanca**, the Andalusian foundation for the promotion of inclusion of handicapped persons and 3 from **Rambla Asesores and Innopear**, Spanish SMES) and the moderator was M. Begoña Arenas from ITC.

Screenshot about the session below:



Following the "IO4_Policy Recommendations_Planning_V4" document, we will include in the following sections:

1. Country level policy recommendations based on Beyond Inclusion results: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues on the integration of Beyond Inclusion results at policy level as identified in T2
2. Country level policy recommendations resulted in the focus group: A list of proposed policy recommendations regarding the indicative issues addressed in the focus group in T3.

I. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON BEYOND INCLUSION RESULTS

1. About the methodological framework and the developed guidelines and learning material for SMEs & persons with disabilities

The guidelines and training material are applicable in Spain as they are. However, Spain has specific legislation that makes the context different to other EU member countries. The percentages for employability and quotas in Spain and in the rest of Europe are different. Currently in Spain, companies, whether public or private and with more than 50 workers, are legally required to have a reserve quota for persons with disabilities: of 2% of the total number of their workers.

However, as there are not enough labour inspections in Spain to monitor compliance with the quotas in companies with more than 50 workers, the legislation is not being adequately followed with and, furthermore, it is not sanctioned. Moreover, there are disparities in the promotion of employability between different Autonomous communities (Regions) in Spain, as example, in Andalusia, the FAISEM foundation (to promote the inclusion of persons with mental disabilities) is fighting and advocating for the employability and integration of the mentally disabled.

2. Country-specific aspects that would facilitate and condition an integrated approach at institutional level in respect to the tools and methodologies created for the SMEs

Maybe it would be advisable to:

- Promote the implementation of the 4 modules of persons with disabilities with “assistants” to widen participation as data shows they are not fully familiar with the use of ICT.
- For SMEs, maybe it would have been a good idea to include examples of “success cases” of inclusion of persons with disabilities in Spain (or at local level) or just promote the role of “diversity manager” for raising the awareness of SMES.

3. SMEs and persons with disabilities feedback to the proposed tools, learning material and formats

The pilot testing in Spain was implemented in the period 27/07/2022 until 13/10/2022 engaging 15 stakeholders using online devices and telephone. The piloting in Span focused on SMEs that were contacted by the ES partner, ITC using their network of contacts.

In the table below we have included the average ratings provided by the respondents to the main statements regarding Overall rating of the training, module 1 and module 2. The collated rating corresponding to 4.6:

SUMMARY OF RATINGS	AVERAGE
Overall rating of the training	4.6
Overall rating Module 1	4.5
Overall rating Module 2	4.6

Table 4: Summary evaluation– averages. Own elaboration

In order to illustrate the results we have included figure 4, below.

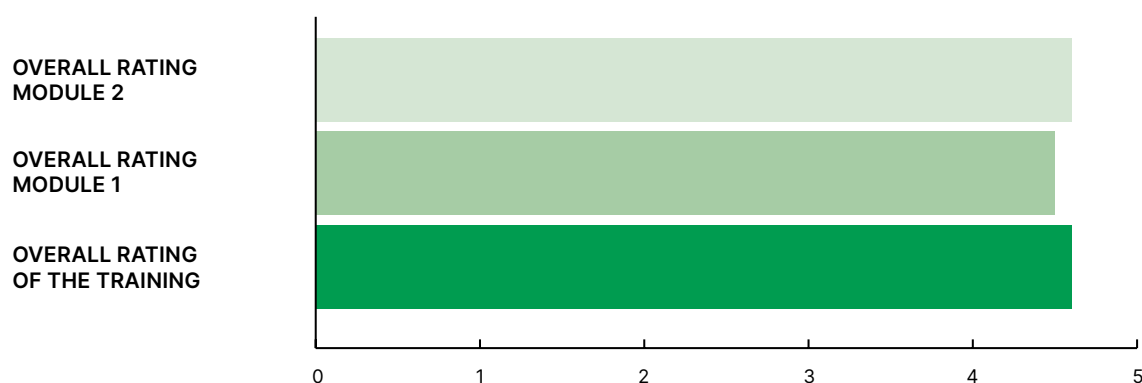


Figure 4: Summary Evaluation of the Beyond Inclusion training – averages. Own elaboration

4 of the respondents replied that there were technical aspects that should be optimized. However, as we have reported in section 1.4, all the Spanish respondents filled in the Open question field about further suggestions that were mainly addressed to **simplifying the registration process and access to the training by translating some sentences and words that remained in English**. All these aspects have been notified to the IT partner, RnDO, and have been optimised when registering in Spanish.

4. Envisaged and scaled-up outcomes of the proposed intervention; how could they be scaled up

■ Training to Spanish SMEs

Increase the emphasis on the promotion of awareness (for example in equality plans: in Spain nowadays 1 out of 5 companies have registered equality plans) in SMEs: the idea would be to:

- Eliminate all stereotypes and prejudices. These ideas and concepts are mistakenly adopted as universal truths. For this reason, candidates should not be judged by their physical abilities and should analyze deeply what they can contribute to the companies.
- Promote specific awareness actions should be addressed to middle managers and SME owners towards diversity in general and towards persons with disabilities. Promoting socially responsible management: disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company are key to promote diversity in SMEs.
- Promote the so called “natural supports” (especially intellectual and mental disabilities): colleague workers who understand, help and support people with disabilities in companies.

■ EU level

Make sure the EU level is visible across the whole training. There is currently no mutual recognition of disability status between EU Member States. It can cause difficulties for people with disabilities traveling in the EU.

Eight (8) EU member countries already use the European Disability Card, a voluntary system of mutual recognition of disability status and some associated benefits. The card guarantees equal access to benefits across borders for people with disabilities, mainly in culture, leisure, sports and transport.

Building on this good experience, by the end of 2023, the European Commission will propose a European Disability Card that would apply to all EU countries.



European Disability Card, in Spain, it is advised to:

- Promote a specific Regulation of the European Union, the highest normative rank of the provisions of the territory, in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- To facilitate its administrative development: in Spain disability cards are difficult to obtain, very bureaucratic
- Assure the mutual recognition of the European Disability Card between Member States 8and in Spain, across autonomous communities-regions)
- Make sure the holders have access to the same benefits for reasons of disability in the different member countries of the European Union where they are residents
- Promote the setting up of an authority aimed at guaranteeing compliance with the regulations related to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the European Disability Card.

■ Spanish Context

Article 49 of the Spanish constitution, refers. to people with disabilities. It is necessary to change in the Constitution to remove from the constitutional text the hurtful expression 'diminished' and replace it with that of "persons with disabilities", as well as to reformulate the article "in the frame of the new paradigm of human rights to understand this reality required by the Convention International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".

A new text, which consists of four points, was agreed upon in the Spanish Congress in 2018 but could not be approved due to the dissolution of the courts that occurred after the calling of elections for 2019. A year later, the Government promoted this same text, already as a bill, which is now being processed again in Congress.

Moreover, it is to note that the ES context is also different: The activity rate of people with disabilities in Spain as of December 14, 2022, is only 26.9%; In other words, 73.1% of people with disabilities are inactive, according to the results of the INE report Employment of People with Disabilities corresponding to the year 2021. In this frame, most of the new contracts for the disabled occur in **special employment centres**: in 2018, 71% of the contracts signed were in these centres (with 70% of people with disabilities hired). Other "hot" issues to promote the employability of persons with disabilities in Spain would be:

- Promote the set of mote occupational centres (that is VET training centres where persons with disabilities are hired and trained at the same time): broaden the spectrum to people with mental disabilities
- Raising awareness to the population towards who should occupy the parking spaces (system that clarifies the system for allocating parking spaces) and control and monitoring of parking cards.

5. Strengths, opportunities, challenges for further exploitation or adaptation of the provision and its methodology

● **Strengths:** data in Spain: The activity rate of people with disabilities in Spain as of December 14, 2022, is only 26.9%. That is, 73.1% of people with disabilities are inactive (INE report Employment of People with Disabilities, 2021). In this frame, most of the new contracts for the disabled occur in special employment centres. It is clear the need to promote and raise awareness between SES in Spain about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities.

● **Opportunities:** The European Disability Card as an opportunity to homogenise the status of persons with disabilities across Spain. Moreover, in Spain the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the equality plan is also considered as a opportunity even though the data of plans registered is still low, it is an opportunity to disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company are key to promote diversity in Spanish SMEs.

● **Challenges:** in the current situation of post pandemic and war, resilience, flexibility, and reformulation of values are challenging key words for Spanish SMES.

6. Possible available or upcoming interventions at national and EU level that could be complemented by the Beyond Inclusion outputs and in what way

The participants have introduced some ideas to bring forward in the frame of innovative actions:

- Promote the role of job coach or diversity manager (this is also a need also in the field of migration and diversity in the workplace) as figures in Spanish companies that could be key to welcome people with disabilities and promote Influence their full inclusion and not only their labour integration.
- We are living a post pandemic War in Ukraine complicated situation: in the storm there are many sudden changes and many blind spots, but spaces that were previously hidden are also glimpsed. In this frame the promotion of the SME workforce in soft skills in general and regarding resilience, flexibility, adaptability and reformulation of values and key to inclusion.
- Promote a legislative review in Spain so that the law adapts better to reality.

II. COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS RESULTED IN THE FOCUS GROUP

We have divided the recommendations in 3 parts: Spanish SMEs, EU level and Spain.

■ Spanish SMEs

1. Put the emphasis on awareness promotion of SMEs (for example in equality plans): eliminating all stereotypes and prejudices: these ideas and concepts are mistakenly adopted as universal truths. For this reason, candidates should not be judged by their physical abilities and should analyse deeply what they can contribute to your company. In this frame in Spain: promoting the awareness of middle managers and businessmen towards diversity in general and towards diversity in particular
2. Promote a selection of workers under objective criteria: skills and competencies must be the fundamental factors in the selection process. Focus on observing the candidate's human potential and analysing his skills and experience to make the best decision
3. Make emphasis on hiring employees who fight for equality: if you want your company to be an example of integration, you must bet on offering the same opportunities and recruit employees who feel committed to equality. Promotion of natural supports (especially intellectual and mental disabilities): colleagues who understand, help and support people with disabilities in companies
4. Involve SME workers in decision-making: fostering teamwork favours mutual commitment and shared responsibility. In this way, people with different abilities will show their creativity and feel motivated for their daily performance in the company.
5. Promote socially responsible management and middle management: disseminating and projecting the values that differentiate each company. Creating action strategies (in Spain via equality plans) that allow the concerns that concern the community to be shared, so that they are positively reflected in the corporate image.



■ EU level

1. There is currently no mutual recognition of disability status between EU Member States. It can cause difficulties for people with disabilities traveling in the EU.
2. Eight countries already use the European Disability Card, a voluntary system of mutual recognition of disability status and some associated benefits. The card guarantees equal access to benefits across borders for people with disabilities, mainly in culture, leisure, sports and transport.
3. Building on this good experience, by the end of 2023, the European Commission will propose a European Disability Card that would apply to all EU countries.

European Disability Card, recommendations from Spain:

- Promote a specific Regulation of the European Union, the highest normative rank of the provisions of the territory, in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- To facilitate its administrative development: in Spain disability cards are difficult to obtain, very bureaucratic
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Beyond Inclusion



Employability for persons with disabilities



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