

INCREASING LABOUR MARKET INCLUSION – REFORMING EU STATE AID LEGISLATION



Good practices in employment support
for disabled people and a reform proposal
for the General Block Exemption Regulation

POLICY REPORT



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Key facts

Access of disabled people to employment and income

Disabled people are very much excluded from employment and income, which is against human rights and also causes damage to the economy.

- ➡ Being barred from access to employment violates article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- ➡ In 2010 the disability employment gap stood at 18,8%, in 2024 it stood at 24%.
- ➡ The EU loses EUR 0,84-1,42 billion of GDP per year

The (in)effectiveness of segregated employment

- ➡ General Comment No 8 of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD-Committee) has established a definition of sheltered employment.
- ➡ Studies show that more spending on segregated employment can result in a higher disability employment gap.
- ➡ Many studies show that when it comes to producing transitions to the open labour market, the top absolute value for segregated employment is 6,25%. The overwhelming majority of studies find substantially lower values.

Employment support

- ➡ General Comment No 8 lists a variety of instruments that can facilitate the labour market inclusion of disabled people.
- ➡ To make sense of the large variety of concepts, ENIL defines the entirety of all measures as employment support and approaches that focus on competence profiles as supported employment
- ➡ Wage subsidies and job coaching are examples of commonly applied instruments

Examples of promising practices

To highlight two impressive examples:

- ➔ The Emergo Plan of the City of Milan is a comprehensive plan involving a variety of skills trainings, job orientation and employer engagement measures. The Emergo Plan achieves transition rates into the open labour market of 29,8%.
- ➔ Diversicom providers supported employment services in Belgium. In 2025 62% of all participants were working in the open labour market.

Strengthening supported employment by reforming EU state aid legislation

- ➔ Despite their strong empiric track record, employment support instruments receive far less funding than segregated employment. Sweden is subsidizing the provider Samhall with EUR 500 Mio. per year. In many countries 96%-98% of the budgets earmarked for labour market inclusion of disabled people go into segregated employment.
- ➔ To ensure a fairer distribution we recommend amending the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER):
 - Article 48, 3 (a) and (c) to ensure accommodations can be supported in their entirety, not just the legal minimum. It's an investment
 - Article 48, 3 (b) to introduce the concept of personal assistance at work fully to the GBER
 - Article 48, 3 (f), remove the term “sheltered employment” and replace by “employs persons with disabilities in the open labour market” to ensure only real work will benefit from support to conduct construction or renovation works
 - Article 48 3 (g) new to allow awareness raising and training activities to receive financial support too provided those lead to the employment of disabled people
 - Article 48 3 (h) new to permit authorities to fund providers of employment support services
- ➔ The United Nations have formally requested the EU to reform the GBER
- ➔ EU state aid legislation is routinely being used to further other means than regulating competition
- ➔ There is good evidence that those reforms will not lead to a collapse of the system

Plain language Summary

More disabled people should work in regular jobs

This text is about work.

It is about disabled people.

It explains why disabled people need better support to work.

It also explains what ENIL wants the European Union to change.

ENIL means European Network on Independent Living.

ENIL is an organisation led by disabled people.

ENIL works for the rights of disabled people.

Key facts

Disabled people have the right to work

Disabled people have the right to work.

This right is a human right.

Human rights are rights that every person has.

Disabled people have the right to work in the open labour market.

The open labour market means regular jobs.

For example, jobs in companies.

Or jobs in public services.

Or jobs where disabled and non-disabled people work together.

Disabled people also have the right to support at work.

Support can help disabled people get a job.

Support can also help disabled people keep a job.

Many disabled people are still excluded from work

Many disabled people want to work.

But many disabled people do not get the same chances as other people.

Fewer disabled people have jobs than non-disabled people.

This difference is called the disability employment gap.

A gap means a difference between 2 situations.

The disability employment gap has become bigger.

This means the situation has become worse.

This is unfair.

It is also against the rights of disabled people.

Exclusion from work causes serious problems

When disabled people cannot work, they often have less money.

When people have less money, they may become poor.

They may need more support from the State.

They may have fewer choices in their lives.

Work is important because it gives people income.

Income means money that people receive.

For example, money from a salary.

Income helps people make choices.

Income helps people live more independently.

Excluding disabled people also harms society

Disabled people have skills.

Disabled people have knowledge.

Disabled people have talents.

When disabled people are excluded from work, society loses these skills.

Companies may also lose good workers.

The economy also loses money.

The economy means the way money, jobs and services work in a country or in Europe.

So inclusion at work is good for disabled people.

It is also good for society.

Segregated work does not work well

Some disabled people work in segregated work.

Segregated work means work separated from other workers.

This often happens in sheltered workshops.

A sheltered workshop is a workplace mostly for disabled people.

Sheltered workshops are often presented as a step towards regular jobs.

But the report says this usually does not happen.

Very few people move from sheltered workshops to regular jobs.

This means segregated work does not work well.

It does not give many disabled people real access to the open labour market.

Support to work can help

Disabled people need better support to work.

Support to work means help for the disabled person.

It can also mean help for the employer.

An employer is a person or organisation that gives someone a job.

Support to work can include many things.

For example:

- help to find a job
- help to prepare a curriculum vitae
- help to prepare a job interview
- training at work
- a job coach
- personal assistance at work
- changes to the workplace
- accessible equipment
- money to support the employer

A job coach is a person who supports someone at work.

Personal assistance at work means support with practical tasks linked to disability.

For example, support to travel to work.

Or support during a work meeting.

A personal assistant does not do the job instead of the disabled worker.

The disabled worker does their own job.

Some good examples exist in Europe

The report gives good examples from Europe.

One example is the Emergo Plan in Milan.

Milan is a city in Italy.

The Emergo Plan gives different kinds of support.

For example, training.

Job orientation.

Support for employers.

This plan helped many disabled people get regular jobs.

Another example is DiversiCom in Belgium.

DiversiCom supports disabled people to find jobs.

DiversiCom also supports employers.

More than half of the people supported by DiversiCom were working in the open labour market in 2025.

These examples show something important.

Good support can help disabled people work in regular jobs.

Public money should support inclusion

Public authorities spend money to support employment for disabled people.

But too much public money still goes to segregated work.

This is a problem.

ENIL thinks public money should support inclusion.

Inclusion means disabled people can take part on an equal basis with others.

Public money should help disabled people work in the open labour market.

ENIL wants the European Union to change the rules

The European Union has rules about State aid.

State aid means public money given to organisations or companies.

There is a European rule about State aid.

The full name of this rule is the General Block Exemption Regulation.

This name is difficult.

In this text, we call it the European rule on State aid.

ENIL wants the European Union to change this rule.

The rule should make it easier to fund good support.

For example:

- reasonable accommodation
- personal assistance at work
- training for employers
- job coaching
- support services to help disabled people find work

Reasonable accommodation means changes that a disabled person needs.

For example, changing working hours.

Or making the workplace accessible.

Or giving information in an accessible format.

Main message

Disabled people have the right to work in regular jobs.

Segregated work does not help enough.

Good support can help disabled people get regular jobs.

The European Union should change its rules.

Public money should support inclusion.

Public money should help disabled people work in the open labour market.

What is this report about?

This report is about disabled people and work.

It explains that disabled people have the right to work.

It explains that many disabled people are still excluded from work.

It also explains what should change.

The report says that disabled people need better support to work in regular jobs.

Why work is important

Work is important for many reasons.

Work gives people money.

Money helps people make choices.

Money can help people decide where to live.

Money can help people decide what support they need.

Money can help people take part in society.

When disabled people cannot work, they may have fewer choices.

They may become poor.

They may depend more on other people.

They may depend more on public services.

This can make independent living harder.

Independent living means having choice and control over your own life.

Disabled people have the right to work

The right to work is written in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This Convention is an important agreement about the rights of disabled people.

In this text, we call it the Disability Rights Convention.

The Disability Rights Convention says disabled people have the right to work.

This means work that people choose freely.

It also means work in an open, inclusive and accessible workplace.

Accessible means that disabled people can use it.

Inclusive means disabled people can take part with other people.

Work is also part of Independent Living

ENIL has 18 Pillars of Independent Living.

The 18 Pillars are important ideas about how disabled people can live independently.

Access to employment and income is part of independent living.

Employment means work.

Income means money that people receive.

For example, money from work.

Work and income help disabled people make their own decisions.

The problem is getting worse

The report says there is a big problem in Europe.

More non-disabled people are working.

But disabled people are not getting the same chances.

This means the disability employment gap has become bigger.

The disability employment gap means the difference between disabled people and non-disabled people in employment.

This is a serious problem.

It shows that Europe is not doing enough to respect the right to work.

Sheltered workshops are not the answer

Many public authorities still use sheltered workshops.

Sheltered workshops are workplaces mostly for disabled people.

They are separate from the open labour market.

The report says sheltered workshops do not help many people move into regular jobs.

This means they are not a good solution.

Disabled people need real chances to work in the open labour market.

What can help?

The report says that support to work can help.

Support to work can include different things.

For example:

- support to find a job
- support to learn job skills
- support at the workplace
- support for employers
- personal assistance at work
- changes to make the workplace accessible

Some support is called supported employment.

Supported employment means support to get and keep a paid job in the open labour market.

Supported employment starts from the person.

It looks at the person's skills.

It looks at the person's wishes.

It looks at what support the person needs.

Then it helps the person find a suitable job.

What ENIL recommends

ENIL recommends changing European rules.

These rules are about State aid.

State aid means public money given to organisations or companies.

ENIL wants public money to support inclusion.

This means public money should help disabled people work in regular jobs.

Public money should not make segregated work stronger.

What this report does

This report explains 5 main things.

First, it explains that disabled people are excluded from work and income.

Second, it explains why this exclusion is harmful.

Third, it explains why segregated work does not work well.

Fourth, it gives examples of better support.

Fifth, it explains how European rules should change.

Conclusion

Disabled people have the right to work.

This right must become real.

To make this right real, disabled people need support.

Employers also need support.

The European Union should make sure public money helps inclusion.

Public money should help disabled people work in the open labour market.

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1. Introduction

There can be no doubt that disabled people have the right to work in the open labour market and that the exercise of this right is essential. The right to employment in the open labour market is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Access to employment and income are part of the 18 Pillars on Independent Living. Income from work provides autonomy as it enables us to make decisions and to make choices about our life. Rather than depending on the state and the community to inconvenience themselves to provide support, income from work makes it possible to pay for certain services ourselves. Lack of sufficient income can lead to poverty, homelessness and institutionalisation.

Between 2010 and 2023 the disability employment gap, the difference between the access of disabled and non-disabled people to employment in the regular labour market, has increased.¹ These deepening inequalities are causing higher poverty rates, homelessness and dependencies on social benefits. There is insufficient awareness of the fact that discrimination and exclusion also cause damages to our economy and to public finances.

In the EU, segregated employment is a frequently used instrument to improve the labour market inclusion of disabled people. Authorities are investing enormous financial resources in the sector.² However, sheltered employment has a poor track record. Transitions into the regular labour market barely occur.

How can the labour market inclusion of disabled people be improved?

There is evidence that many employment support and particularly supported employment measures hold great potential as a labour market inclusion instrument.

ENL is recommending to policy makers:

To improve funding to employment support by adjusting state aid legislation, in particular the General Block Exemption Regulation.

This report is intended to provide evidence to substantiate the claim that employment support is an effective instrument. The report will do so by:

- 1. Providing evidence for the claim that disabled people are discriminated against when it comes to accessing employment and income and that this exclusion has consequences for all of us**
- 2. Provide evidence for the ineffectiveness of segregated employment**
- 3. Outline measures that can legitimately be used to promote the labour market inclusion of disabled people by:**
 - a. Drawing on the UN CRPD, General Comment no 8 and recent studies**
 - b. Establishing a distinction between employment support and supported employment**
- 4. Presenting examples of good practice and success rates**
- 5. Presenting policy proposals for reform**

¹ ENIL 2025. Advocacy campaign for inclusive employment takes shape. <https://enil.eu/advocacy-campaign-for-inclusive-employment-takes-shape/>

² ENIL 2024. Stop subsidising sheltered employment: Implementing the UN CRPD into EU State Aid legislation <https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/ENIL-Briefing-Stop-subsidising-sheltered-employment.pdf>

2. Access of disabled people to employment and income

When it comes to access to employment and income, disabled people in the EU are at a fundamental disadvantage, leading to grave societal, budgetary and economic consequences.

2.1. The Evolution of the disability employment gap

Between 2010 and 2024 the access of non-disabled people to employment has grown substantially while the access of disabled people has stagnated. In 2010, the employment rate of disabled people stood at 50%, while the employment rate of non-disabled people was at 68%.³ The Disability Employment Gap stood at 18,8%. In 2024, the employment rate of disabled people was at 51,8%, while the employment rate of non-disabled people stood at 75,8%.⁴ The Disability Employment Gap stands at 24%. Inequalities in access to employment in the regular labour market have increased.

2.2. The Consequences

Fundamental Rights

UN CRPD article 27 enshrines the right of every disabled person to employment in the open labour market and to accommodations and support services to exercise this right.

According to article 26 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the EU respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their occupational integration.

The disability employment gap is caused by a variety of factors, for example discrimination or exclusion from education. However, we know that insufficient access to support and accommodations is a major factor, creating a state of non-compliance with the UN CRPD and the Charter on Fundamental Rights.

We are in a constant state of fundamental rights violation, which is in contradiction to Europe's identity as the birthplace of civilisational values.

Poverty

Partly because of the limited access to income from employment, disabled people are on average poorer than non-disabled people. In 2024 28,8% were at risk of poverty, compared to 17.9% of non-disabled people.⁵

3 Comp. European Commission 2010. European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF>; European Commission 2011. Labour Force Survey. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/stat_11_96

4 Comp. European Union 2026. Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:C_202600034; Eurostat 2026. Employment and activity by sex and age. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsi_emp_a/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=909a1cb6-b563-43eb-8f42-b9aac6f459dd&c=1779115181000

5 Eurostat 2025. Disability statistics - poverty and income inequalities. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics_-_poverty_and_income_inequalities

Homelessness

Disabled people are significantly more likely to be homeless. In some EU member states a quarter of the homeless population report to have physical impairments and up to 60% to have a psychosocial impairment.⁶

Dependency

Being prevented from earning an income and trapped in poverty leads to a high dependency on the welfare state: In 2024, 68,2% of disabled people were at risk of poverty before social transfers and 20,7% after.⁷

Costs to the economy

Exclusion of disabled people from the labour market has a harmful effect on our economies. The non-use of talent leads to productivity losses. Being barred from income from work leads to reduced consumption.

A study conducted by the International Labour Organisation on Asian and African countries, found serious GDP losses, ranging between 3%-7%.⁸

Newer studies have corroborated these findings for the EU. Research from Spain has revealed a cost of excluding disabled people from work in the open labour market of 0,9%-2,4% of GDP. Once the effects on consumption are included, the costs rise to 1,5%-4% of GDP.⁹ For the entire EU, the OECD calculated the loss of GDP to stand at EUR 0,84-1,42 billion per year, causing losses in tax revenue of EUR 302-493 million.¹⁰

In 2023, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared a labour and skills shortage crisis in the EU.¹¹ Labour and skill shortages occur, when there are not sufficient qualified workers to fill all open positions. Skills shortages hamper the economy because businesses are no longer able to process all orders. It is said that job vacancy rates¹² above 4% are critical.

In the EU, ten occupations report vacancy rates between 5%-8,4%. The engineering sector reports a vacancy rate of 5%. Among sales, marketing and development managers 8,4% of jobs are vacant.¹³

At the moment, only 51,8% of disabled people are in employment. By increasing the employment rate of disabled people to that of non-disabled people, it would be possible to drastically reduce our skills shortages. In addition, we would see GDP increases and higher tax revenues.

In times of economic stagnation and public deficits, which lead to painful cuts to public services, we can not afford to exclude disabled people from employment any longer.

6 OECD 2021. A crisis on the horizon: Ensuring affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/09/a-crisis-on-the-horizon_f5739419/306e6993-en.pdf

7 Eurostat 2025. Disability statistics - poverty and income inequalities. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics_-_poverty_and_income_inequalities

8 Backup 2009. The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people

9 Cámara et al 2020. Macroeconomic cost of excluding persons with disabilities from the workforce in Spain. <https://reference-global.com/download/article/10.2478/izajolp-2020-0015.pdf>

10 OECD 2025. Combatting Discrimination in the European Union. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/combating-discrimination-in-the-european-union_29c2c36a-en.html

11 European Commission 2023. State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Job_vacancy_statistics#Job_vacancies:_a_breakdown_by_economic_activity

12 Eurostat. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Job_vacancy_rate_\(JVR\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Job_vacancy_rate_(JVR))

13 Eurostat 2026. Job vacancy statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Job_vacancy_statistics.

3. The (in)effectiveness of segregated employment

3.1. What is segregated employment?

General Comment no 8 on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment, issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2022, established criteria for the identification of segregated employment:¹⁴

- a. Segregation of persons with disabilities away from open, inclusive and accessible employment
- b. Employment organised around specific activities deemed to match the skills set of disabled people
- c. A focus on medical and rehabilitation approaches
- d. No effective promotion of transitions to the open labour market
- e. No equal remuneration for work of equal value
- f. No remuneration on an equal basis with others
- g. No regular employment contracts and no coverage by social security schemes

A variety of settings fall under those criteria. The 2025 European Commission study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities describes three types of settings that specialise in providing employment for disabled people: sheltered workshops, sheltered employment and work integration enterprises. The study itself admits that work integration enterprises would count as segregated employment under General Comment no 8.¹⁵ There is no doubt that sheltered workshops and sheltered employment fall under the definition.

3.2. The performance of segregated employment

The main purpose of segregated work settings, such as sheltered workshops, sheltered employment and work integration enterprises is to support disabled people's transition to the open labour market. However, there is growing empirical evidence showing the ineffectiveness of segregated employment in producing these transitions.

In a broader sense, a study by Roos van der Zwan and Paul de Beer found that investing in facilities such as sheltered workshops or in programs such as vocational rehabilitation and training did not lead to a reduction in the disability employment gap. Investing in these services did not seem to have a consequence on disabled men's employment rate. However, it had significant negative consequences for disabled women. This study showed that, in EU countries where there is a higher investment in these services, the disability employment gap is larger. Put simply, in countries where there is a higher investment in segregated employment, fewer disabled women are employed in comparison to non-disabled women. Considering these findings, the authors recommend that

¹⁴ General Comment no 8 on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crpdgc8-general-comment-no-8-2022-right-persons>

¹⁵ European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

governments should attempt to invest in other policies, more aligned with the CRPD, which may generate a higher employment rate for disabled people.¹⁶

Examining the academic literature on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities provides more evidence as to why investing in segregated settings is an ineffective way to reduce the disability employment gap. A study published in 2001 points out that, across Europe, only a very small percentage of disabled people working in segregated settings was able to transition to the open labour market. More specifically, the transition rates of disabled employees working in sheltered workshops were below 3% and most of its data found a transition rate of less than 2% during this period.¹⁷

Another study published in 2020 shows that this tendency has not decreased. This study examined the transition rates of 6 social economy organizations from across Europe that provide work for disabled people. Once again, the transition rates for all these companies proved to be very low. Only one company from this sample had a transition rate above 5%, the Swedish enterprise Samhall. Its high transition rate of approximately 6.25% is due to the legal obligation of this company to ensure that every year at least 1500 of its current disabled employees transition successfully to the open labour market.¹⁸

Finally, a study published by the European Commission in 2023 showed that, in recent years, the transition rates for disabled people working in sheltered workshops remains significantly low across Europe¹⁹.

More specifically, the transition rate remains very low across western, southern and eastern Europe. Western European countries, such as Austria and Germany have a transition rate below 1%. This trend seems to be present in southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain and in eastern European countries such as Lithuania. Northern European countries seem to have a slightly better transition rate. The transition rates across European countries will be examined in more detail below.

In Austria, the current transition rate is estimated at 0.7%. For example, in 2022, only 5 disabled residents of Upper Austria move from sheltered employment to the regular labour market, out of a total of 5,580 people employed in sheltered workshops in the region. Comparably low transition rates are found across the country, with only 8 out of 1 250 disabled workers transitioning to the open labour market in Vorarlberg and only 12 out of 1 380 doing so in Carinthia.

In Germany, sheltered workshops were reported to have a transition rate below 1%. More specifically, a 2023 study commissioned by the ministry of labour and social affairs, comparing the transition rates of 300 workshops between 2015 and 2019 found that in 4 years, there was only a slight increase in the percentage of people moving from sheltered workshops to the open labour market, from 0.26% in 2015 to 0.35% in 2019. This rate did not increase in 2020. According to Germany's integration office only 235 disabled people working in sheltered workshops transitioned to the open labour market during this period.

16 Van der Zwan, Roos, De beer, Paul, 2021. The disability employment gap in European countries: What is the role of labour market policy? [The disability employment gap in European countries: What is the role of labour market policy?](#) - Roos van der Zwan, Paul de Beer, 2021

17 Delsen, L. (2001) Economic study of special employment of disabled people in the European Union. Paper EG0123, University of Nijmegen. [Economic study of special employment of disabled people in the European Union](#)

18 Zolyomi, E., and Birta, M. (2020) Towards inclusive employment of persons with disabilities. A comparative study of six social economy organisations and companies in Europe. European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research. [Towards inclusive employment of persons with disabilities - Publications - European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research](#)

19 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

The transition rates for southern European countries are harder to determine, as no data at the national level is available. However, there is evidence that in Italy sheltered workshops are not effective in promoting the transition of disabled workers to the open labour market. Similarly, in Spain, data shows that ILUNION, one of its largest sheltered workshops has a transition rate of 0.55%.

The situation in Lithuania is similar. While there is no clear data on the transition rate of disabled people from sheltered workshops to the open labour market, an audit reported that social enterprises have put little effort in facilitating disabled people's transition into the open labour market.

Finally, in northern Europe, the transition rate is less homogenous. Sweden has maintained the highest transition rate of all the countries in this sample, with a stable 6-7% rate. A similar pattern has not been verified in other northern countries, such as the Netherlands which has a stable transition rating below 1%.

The data presented in this section shows that, across Europe, sheltered workshops have failed to fulfil their central goal: preparing disabled workers to transition to the open labour market.

The following section will present an alternative policy for increasing the labour market integration of disabled people: supported employment.

4. Employment support

The UN CRPD enshrines the right to employment in the open labour market and calls for support to achieve that objective:

According to UN CRPD article 27, persons with disabilities have “the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible.” “State parties shall safeguard and promote the realisation of the right to work by taking appropriate steps”.

- **If sheltered employment is not effective in providing access to employment, which measures are?**

There are a large variety of measures in circulation that can aid us in bringing disabled people into regular employment and also support the retention of regular work.

A first important distinction we must make is between mainstream services that are relevant for labour market outcomes and services specifically provided to disabled people. Relevant mainstream services are for example school and university education or vocational training. Access to such services is very important. However, services or support measures applied specifically to disabled people have a high relevance. The present report focuses on those services.

- **Which disability specific services or support options provide aid to the individual or the employer?**

The following section will provide an overview over the most important measures.

4.1. What is employment support?

General Comment no 8 on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment lists a variety of support measures and services that support employment:

- To promote self-employment: “Accessible information on entrepreneurship, micro- and small and medium-sized enterprises and other forms of business models and economic units, such as cooperatives”
- Awareness raising among public and private sector employees
- Allocation of targeted funding
- Specifically designed vocational programmes
- Employment quotas, although the General Comment recognises that quotas alone are not sufficient
- Targeted funding: For modifications to the working environment, apprentice wage support, payroll tax deductions and wage subsidies
- Reasonable accommodations in the form of for example individualised modifications, adjustments and support”
- Provide technical and financial assistance to public and private employers
- Workplace-based learning schemes: Internships, scholarships, bursaries, apprenticeships
- Job retention and return-to-work programmes

- Access to rehabilitation services

Under “core obligations” the General Comment calls on state parties to:

“promote the right to supported employment, including to work assistance, job coaching and vocational qualification programmes”

What is supported employment and how does it differ from employment support?

4.2. What is supported employment?

What is supported employment and how does it differ from other support measures?

The concept of supported employment is being shaped by the Association for Supported Employment Europe (ASEE),²⁰ an organisation of providers of supported employment. ASEE is using the following definition:

“Providing support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market”

Supported employment completely rejects the sheltered employment approach of “first train, then place”. Job seekers are placed in a job in the open labour market as quickly as possible. Training and support are provided on the job.

On the first glance the concept of supported employment looks identical to employment support. The difference becomes clear when looking at the 5-stage process methodology developed by ASEE:

Client Engagement

The client engagement stage is all about ensuring the service user has all the information needed to make an informed choice as to whether to use supported employment.²¹

Vocational Profiling

At this stage information is gathered about the disabled person`s interests, aspirations and skills to produce a vocational profile. Vocational profiling is a tool to allow the job seeker to make informed choices about employment preferences and to produce a training strategy. The objective is to achieve the ideal job match, to provide the job seeker with employment that is ideally suited for the skills-set, the interests and aspirations. Work placements like internships are permitted to aid the process, to allow the person and the supported employment worker to get a better understanding of their vocational profile. The outcome of the profiling process is a plan with detailed information about the job seeker and the support measures that are required.²²

This information can be used to customise employment: “Support that is tailored and specific to the job role”. Job carving is an important part of customised employment. It involves creating customised job roles or specific positions that match the skills, interests and abilities of the disabled person.²³

²⁰ <https://a4se.eu/>

²¹ Association for Supported Employment Europe 2014. European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit for Diversity. <https://a4se.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUSE-SE-Toolkit-2014-english.pdf>

²² Association for Supported Employment Europe 2014. European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit for Diversity. <https://a4se.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUSE-SE-Toolkit-2014-english.pdf>

²³ European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Job Finding

Once the vocational profile is completed, job seekers are linked up with employers. The supported employment worker will seek to identify an employer whose needs match the needs of the job seeker. A pre-condition for success is the compilation of detailed information about the needs of the job seeker and the needs of the local labour market.²⁴

A technique used at this stage is called Individual Placement and Supports (IPS). It “involves intensive, individual supported, and rapid job search followed by placement in paid employment, and time-unlimited support in and out of the workplace for both the employee and the employer”. In IPS an employment specialist works closely with each client. This work includes support in disclosing the impairment, resume assistance, interview preparation and benefits counselling.²⁵

Employer Engagement

The employer engagement stage is the counterpart to the vocational profiling stage. Supported employment workers are tasked to do detailed research of the local labour market and to understand the business models of employers. Job seekers should be matched according to their needs but also the requirements of employers to maintain their business. In addition, disability awareness raising activities, trainings, advice on accommodation needs and on health and safety for disabled workers should be provided.²⁶

On/Off Job Support

Supported employment providers work with employees and employers to identify training and support needs, requirements for adaptations and support strategies.²⁷

At this stage job coaches play a crucial role. “A job coach provides structured assistance to users of supported employment in regular employment settings”. The assistance can include “job-specific training, enhancing social skills, helping with commuting”.²⁸

The European Commission study on alternative employment models list a range of measures that fit with the definition of supported employment.²⁹

In summary

In summary, supported employment can be referred to as a sub-category of the employment support measures listed in General Comment No 8. Supported employment is not about providing material support, like wage subsidies or in-work benefits, personal assistants that perform services for the disabled person, accommodations or assistive equipment. Instead, it focuses on qualifications, job profiles and labour market requirements.

24 Association for Supported Employment Europe 2014. European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit for Diversity. <https://a4se.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUSE-SE-Toolkit-2014-english.pdf>

25 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

26 Association for Supported Employment Europe 2014. European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit for Diversity. <https://a4se.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUSE-SE-Toolkit-2014-english.pdf>

27 Association for Supported Employment Europe 2014. European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit for Diversity. <https://a4se.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUSE-SE-Toolkit-2014-english.pdf>

28 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

29 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

5. Examples of promising practices

Given its importance, the inclusion of disabled people in the open labour market has a high priority. In this section we are presenting promising practices that can potentially support this objective. We are adopting an outcome-oriented approach. Our goal is not to achieve conceptual purity but to identify measures that work. We are presenting examples of all types, not limiting us either to General Comment No 8 or the supported employment concept. We will present data on the impact whenever it is available.

5.1. Comprehensive Plans

The Emergo Plan

Emergo - Esperienza Metodologia e Risorse Generano Opportunità – is the inclusive employment plan of the Metropolitan City of Milan.³⁰ This program is funded by the Fondo Regionale Disabili, Italy's regional disability fund.

Emergo promotes the employment inclusion of people with disabilities through personalized services, financial instruments, support for companies, schools, families, and local social and health services. It supports the integration and maintenance of work; it supports companies that hire workers with disabilities and seeks to coordinate social and social-health services to achieve a better integration.

Emergo consists of various activities and programmes:

- **Dote Unica Lavoro:** A set of personalised services for the benefit of the person with disability and the family. It is both used for job placement and labour market retention. Personalised case management is a key method. Unemployed persons with disabilities receive a personalised offer of guidance, training and support services. Job retention support is reserved for persons at risk of losing their job due to a worsening of the impairment, if indicated in a request submitted by the employer, due to company reorganisation, modification of tasks or a company crisis.
- **Dote Impresa:** Resources and services allocated to companies to support the integration and retention of persons with disabilities in employment. Employers receive contributions to expenses connected to recruitment and employing.
- **Skills and Potential Assessment:** a tool used to build personalised career pathways for disabled job seekers. It accesses:
 - the job-seekers' existing competences
 - Their developmental capabilities (the areas where they can improve their knowledge)
 - The current life circumstances of the job seeker
- **Network actions:** Projects aimed at disabled people with intense support needs
- **System actions:** Experimental interventions in the field of training, awareness raising and services. In the years 2024-2025, the system actions consisted of:
 - Support for the employment of persons with autism spectrum disabilities
 - Digital Citizenship for the dissemination of digital competences among persons with disabilities seeking employment
 - Italian Sign Language interpreting

³⁰ <https://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/lavoro/piano-metropolitano-per-loccupazione-dei-disabili/index.html>

- **Provincial system actions:** Experimental interventions carried out in the metropolitan city of Milan in the field of support, improvement, and system qualification. In the years 2024-2025, the provincial system actions consisted of:
 - Support for inclusion in Employment Centres for sensory disability.
 - Support for the labour-market integration of persons with disabilities through support for companies.

Impact of the practice

In 2023, 15.237 persons with disabilities were enrolled in the Emergo Plan and in 2024, 15.850, representing a 4% increase. In 2023, 4.272 programme participants were successfully placed in the open labour market, which is a 29,8% success rate. In 2024, this number increased to 4.542, representing a 6% increase.

In the first half of 2025, the Dote Lavoro program, and network initiatives engaged 1,603 people, achieving a 15% success rate in new job placements, and supported 436 job retention cases. The Dote Impresa program involved 162 companies and 715 targets, while system-level actions engaged 289 people with disabilities and employees from 126 companies in inclusion training and stereotype reduction.³¹

Yearly funding

The funding for the EMERGO project has increased by about 7% between 2023 and 2025, from 16.471.704,33 € in 2023 to 17,627,942.93 € in 2025. More specifically, the funding for the Dote Unica Lavoro program increased significantly. Its funding for the placement of unemployed disabled workers increased by 12%, from 4,749,238 € in 2023 to 5.350,000 € in 2025 while its fund for the retention of disabled workers increased by 74.14%, from 1,033,715.50 € in 2023 to 1,800,000.00 € in 2025. The funding for all the other instruments decreased from 2023 to 2025. Regarding Dote Impresa, the funding decreased by 8.15%, from 4,856,000.00 € in 2023 to 4,460,000.00 € in 2025. This decrease in funding was also verified in the program's system actions. More concretely, the funding for system actions supporting the employment of persons with autism spectrum disabilities decreased by 6.67%, from 375,000.00 € in 2023 to 350,000.00 € in 2025. Similarly, the funding for system actions concerning Digital Citizenship for the dissemination of digital competences among persons with disabilities seeking employment decreased by 40%, from 500,000.00 € in 2023 to 300,000.00 € in 2025. The difference in funding allocation from 2023 to 2025 may indicate a change of priorities of the EMERGO program, with labour market integration and retention of disabled people as a whole being prioritized over other initiatives targeting specific disabilities^{32,33}.

Services provided:

Dote Lavoro provides supported employment for disabled people in a broad range of situations. One of the areas in which Dote lavoro provides support is in the creation of self-employment opportunities. The types of support that are provided by Dote Lavoro regarding self-employment for disabled people include:

31 Città metropolitana di Milano, Piano EMERGO – Fondo regionale disabilità 2025. Masterplan 2025, Allegato A <https://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/export/sites/default/lavoro/pdf/emergo/Programmazione-emergo/Masterplan-EMERGO-2025.pdf>

32 Città metropolitana di Milano, Piano EMERGO – Fondo regionale disabili 2023. Masterplan 2023, annualità di realizzazione 2024–2025, pp. 6–7 (also p.9) . [Microsoft Word - rev.06_Relazione Masterplan_14_12_23.docx](#)

33 Città metropolitana di Milano, Piano EMERGO – Fondo regionale disabilità 2025. Masterplan 2025, Allegato A, p.7 (also pp.9-10) . [Masterplan-EMERGO-2025.pdf](#)

- presenting financial and non-financial tools and benefits that support an entrepreneurial idea or self-employment initiative.
- explaining procedures for starting autonomous work, possible business changes, and access to public contracts.
- informing the person about local specialist bodies such as Invitalia or chambers of commerce.
- informing the person about specialist pathways that help build a realistic, financeable business plan.
- collecting offers and requests for self-employed work.
- monitoring results after the person starts the business, through periodic contact with both the person and the specialists they consulted.
- tutoring the person during self-employment or business start-up.

Besides providing knowledge relevant to disabled people wishing to become self-employed, Dote Lavoro also provides support for disabled entrepreneurs wishing to start their own business. This includes:

- specialist pathways and consultancy, including coaching, counselling, and assistance to develop a business idea.
- training for the business plan.
- building knowledge and skills through feasibility studies, market research, local marketing actions, and communication plans.
- personalized help in writing the business plan.
- support in accessing credit and financing.
- support for setting up the business, including bureaucratic and administrative steps, social-security issues, and help finding technological or production partners.

5.2. Wage subsidies and job coaching

The VDAB, Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Service)

The VDAB is the employment and vocational training service of the Dutch speaking region in northern Belgium. VDABs' primary mission is to support job seekers in finding employment and employers to find workers.³⁴

It offers a variety of support options, including wage subsidies and job coaching. These services are available for disabled workers whether they are working for an employer or are self-employed. Both of these services are available for disabled people and people with chronic health conditions who live in Vlaanderen, in cases where their health condition reduces their functionality at work. This subsidy helps cover any costs related to loss of productivity and can also cover the costs of a job coach, to provide workplace guidance for the disabled or chronically ill employee, as well as their colleagues and employer.

³⁴ <https://www.vdab.be/vdab>

The wage subsidy can be requested in a variety of different situations. Some of the situations where employers hiring disabled employees may benefit from financial compensation include: a lower work pace; a need to work for less hours per day; an adjustment of their tasks, to account for their disability or more frequent absences. This subsidy is also available for self-employed disabled workers, in particular those who may have a lower work pace due to their disability. When a worker benefits from wage subsidy support from VDAB, a percentage of their salary is paid by the VDAB. The percentage covered may vary between 20% and 75%, depending on the support needs of the disabled employee. If the support needs of the disabled employers are judged to be high, a wage support of 55% of the salary is granted. Employees with a short-term impairment may receive a wage subsidy for a period of up to 2 years. Employees with a permanent impairment may receive a wage subsidy for a period of up to 5 years. The objective of the wage support is to compensate the employer for providing accommodations or reduced productivity of the employee³⁵.

Joeri's experience illustrates how the wage subsidy works:

"Joeri is a production worker and suffers from epilepsy. To keep his condition under control, he takes medication that causes concentration problems and fatigue. As a result, Joeri Makes more mistakes during assembly, which leads to a loss of raw materials for his employer. The wage subsidy that his employer receives can compensate for this loss."³⁶

Beyond providing financial compensation for loss of productivity for disabled workers, this subsidy can also cover the costs of hiring a qualified support worker. This professional is often deployed to assist people with psychosocial disabilities. The role of a support worker may include: helping disabled workers to understand clearly the tasks that they must perform at work; informing their colleagues about the disabled worker's condition and mediating potential conflicts between disabled workers and their colleagues to avoid further escalation.

Finally, the VDAB also makes available job coaching services. Job coaching services target a diverse group of disadvantaged jobseekers, including disabled people. A job coach provides individualized support to help disabled jobseekers find and keep a job in the open labour market. This entails assisting job seekers in the job search process, as well as providing support in the workplace once a job is secured. This process begins by gaining an initial understanding of each jobseekers' education, experience, interests and potential obstacles that may make it harder for the individual to get a job. This initial assessment is followed by the drafting of an action plan, determining the actions the jobseeker will take to look for a job as well as the specific areas where they need support. Once this is established, the job seekers are assisted in all phases of the job search process. This may entail receiving support in drafting or improving their CV and cover letter; assistance in optimizing their LinkedIn profile; support in searching for jobs; assistance with practice for job interviews and support with networking and spontaneous applications. Once a position is secured job coaches continue to provide support to the newly hired disabled employee by providing assistance in the first days or weeks of work; helping the new employee to discuss workplace adjustments; mediate conflicts between the new employee and their co-workers.

The VDAB in practice

From practical experiences, we know that the application procedure is reasonable. The disabled person has to fill out a short questionnaire about the support measures she or he wishes to apply for and needs to submit a short document, written by a medical specialist, certifying and describing the impairments together with the disability certificate awarded by Belgian social security. The application is processed quickly. Belgian social security awards the national disability certificate after an intrusive interview, so it is well that for VDAB support, no further interview is required.

35 <https://www.vdab.be/orienteren/werken-beperking-gezondheidsprobleem/tegemoetkomingen/individueel-maatwerk>

36 https://assets.vlaanderen.be/image/upload/v1687784526/IMW_FLYER_CASES_DEF_jr3ovq.pdf

5.3. Job immersion programmes

Phare

Phare is a directorate of the public administration service of the French-speaking community of Brussels.

It offers multiple forms of support for disabled workers including a form of supported employment known as *contrat d'adaptation professionnelle (CAP)* translated as Professional adaptation contract. This contract is available for disabled workers that have a recognized disability status in Belgium. The Professional adaptation contract allows disabled workers to get a first experience on the labour market at reduced costs for the employer. Phare covers the costs of salary for the disabled worker for the duration of the contract. These contracts can last for up to 2 years in the open labour market. The idea of Phare behind these contracts is to serve as both an opportunity for the disabled workers to gain relevant professional experience in the field they choose and to prove their ability to work in a professional environment. These contracts are seen as a gateway for disabled workers to eventually be offered a regular working contract at the end of their Professional adaptation contract although this is not guaranteed. The disabled job seeker must introduce a request for this contract themselves and then the phare must approve this request and formulate an agreement with the three parties involved: the worker, the employer and the phare.

Phare in practice

From practical experiences we know that the application procedure is reasonable. Phare professional adaptations contracts are available for all sectors, giving its beneficiaries the possibility of using it to gain experience in any sector of their choice. Before the start of the program, the disabled person, together with their prospective employer, has to fill in a short form detailing the functions they will execute during the duration of the program, any difficulties they might experience during work and any reasonable accommodations they require to be able to perform their work. This form is then read by a team at Phare, who evaluates the demand. This evaluation is usually completed within a fairly short period, and, if approved, the program starts, after the contract has been signed by the employer, Phare and the new employee. This contract can be renovated for a period of up to 2 years, giving the disabled person time to acquire valuable professional experience.

5.4. Support for finding employment

Diversicom

DiversiCom is a non-profit organization committed to increase the employment rate of disabled people in Belgium. To do so, they focus on four main activities: assisting disabled jobseekers in the job-searching process; advising companies on best-practices for recruiting and integrating disabled employees in the workforce; job-matching and awareness raising about the benefits of increasing diversity in the workforce.

DiversiCom's first line of activity, assisting disabled jobseekers in the job-searching process, is very similar to those proposed by other supported employment programs. The starting point of this activity is an assessment of each jobseeker's competences, with an emphasis on each jobseeker's desired career path. This is followed by an analysis of the specific reasonable accommodations that the jobseeker may need in the workplace as well as any training that they might need to gain the skills necessary to perform their desired job. This is followed by assistance in creating a CV, finding suitable positions, writing cover letters, and preparing for job interviews. Once a position in the job market is secured, DiversiCom assures the new employee's safety by helping the hiring

company to foresee and prevent any safety hazards that may happen considering the employee's disability³⁷.

While activities like these are common across supported employment models, DiversiCom adds a new dimension in their approach: beyond helping jobseekers find a job, it also helps them enhance their self-esteem and confidence in their skills³⁸. This aspect is important when developing a supported work model, as literature on supported employment suggests that lower self-esteem hinders disabled jobseekers' chances of finding and keeping a job³⁹.

Beyond supporting disabled jobseekers in finding a job, DiversiCom also assists companies with the process of hiring disabled employees. It provides trainings for employers wanting to hire disabled job seekers; it helps them design a job contract, where legal provisions for reasonable accommodations are included; it supports them in acquiring the materials necessary for the disabled jobseeker to perform their tasks and it provides expertise on how employers can benefit from financial benefits from hiring disabled employees.

The activities of DiversiCom go a step further from other supported employment programs offering individual support to disabled job seekers and consultancy services for employers. DiversiCom offers a job matching service, serving as the first contact point between companies seeking to diversify their workforce and disabled employees. The mediation of DiversiCom between employers and jobseekers creates a smoother recruitment process. DiversiCom does this by presenting disabled jobseekers to prospective employers, ensuring that the needs of the company match the skills of the jobseeker, which will, more likely, lead to a successful employment experience.

Finally, one of the most innovative aspects of DiversiCom is its advocacy work. This work is carried out on several fronts, including direct engagement with politicians, training for public administrations, and media publications highlighting success stories.

The bulk of DiversiCom's advocacy work with politicians happened in 2023, as decision making actors sought DiversiCom's expertise to better understand the challenges that disabled people faced within the open labour market. In this capacity, DiversiCom received visits from several decision-making actors, such as the Federal Minister for Disability, Ms Karine Lalieux and the open VLD parliamentary group. Moreover, its founder, Marie-Laure Jonet participated in a hearing in the francophone parliament on the inclusion of disabled people in the public and private sectors.

DiversiCom's advocacy efforts go well beyond providing supported employment for workers and attempt to actively influence decisions concerning the employment legislation in Belgium, so that disabled workers' needs are better reflected in labour policy. Alongside regular contact with politicians, in 2023 DiversiCom also provided training to public administrators working in the employment sector. Actiris and CoCOOF were several of the partners benefiting from these training sessions.

Moreover, DiversiCom uses several different communication channels, including both traditional and social media, to share success stories of the jobseekers it supports. These publications aim to raise awareness about what supported employment is and of the benefits it can bring for both dis-

37 DiversiCom ASBL. (2025). Handicap et emploi. Accompagnement et conseil pour faciliter l'emploi de la personne en situation de handicap. Rapport d'activité 2025 [Présentation PowerPoint](#)

37 DiversiCom ASBL. (2025). Handicap et emploi. Accompagnement et conseil pour faciliter l'emploi de la personne en situation de handicap. Rapport d'activité 2025 [Présentation PowerPoint](#)

37 De Winter, L., Michon, H., Couwenbergh, C., and van Weeghel, J. (2022) Eerder aan het Werk: Onderzoek naar de toepasbaarheid en uitkomsten van Individuele Plaatsing en Steun (IPS) voor mensen met Common Mental Disorders. Utrecht: Kenniscentrum Phrenos. [Eerder aan het Werk: Onderzoek naar de toepasbaarheid en uitkomsten van Individuele Plaatsing en Steun \(IPS\) voor mensen met Common Mental Disorders - Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

abled workers and employers. They consist of articles, interviews and news features where disabled workers and employers share the positive impacts supported employment has brought them. This activity can have a positive impact in two fronts: first, it can encourage disabled people looking for jobs that it will be possible for them to work while receiving the necessary support and secondly, it can contribute to changing the way society sees disabled people, by breaking negative stereotypes regarding the capability of disabled people to work and creating a more inclusive and respectful work environment⁴⁰.

Data on the success of DiversiCom

The success of DiversiCom's activities has increased between the period of 2023 and 2025. More concretely, there has been a significant increase in the global employment rate of DiversiCom beneficiaries, from 53% in 2023 to 62% in 2025. This figure combines the percentage of people who signed a working contract in 2025 with the percentage of people who completed a work-related placement or training lasting more than 3 months. In more concrete terms, in 2025, DiversiCom had 138 beneficiaries completing work-related placements. This means that, in comparison to 2023, DiversiCom managed to facilitate 29 more work placements in 2025. More importantly, 54% of DiversiCom's beneficiaries were in a working contract at the end of 2025. These figures show the effectiveness of DiversiCom in increasing employment for disabled people in Belgium. In a broader sense, these figures show that supported employment measures can significantly increase disabled people's employment rate^{41,42}.

DiversiCom in practice

From practical experience we know that the application procedure was reasonable. However, over two years ago, starting in June 2024, this service has attained its maximal capacity and is unable to provide services to new beneficiaries. Before this time period, the application procedure was reasonable. Moreover, we know that the disabled people who registered before this period continue to receive support in recent years. Besides helping disabled jobseekers to enter the job market, DiversiCom puts a lot of effort into ensuring that they are placed in positions that correspond to their career aspirations. However, despite these efforts, some positions may not entirely align with the participants' ideal career aspirations.

Job assistance for people with disabilities in Austria

Job assistance for disabled people is one of the most important assistive employment services in Austria. It targets a wide range of disabled citizens. This includes people of working age with a degree of disability of at least 30% who are unable to find a job or remain employed in the open labour market without this type of assistance as well as young people with social or emotional issues or with additional educational support needs⁴³.

Austria's job assistance program provides support in several different situations. One of its roles, known as its inductive function, is to help disabled people find a job in the open labour market.

40 DiversiCom ASBL. (2023). Handicap et emploi. Accompagnement et conseil pour faciliter l'emploi de la personne en situation de handicap. Rapport d'activité 2023 [Présentation PowerPoint](#)

41 DiversiCom ASBL. (2023). Handicap et emploi. Accompagnement et conseil pour faciliter l'emploi de la personne en situation de handicap. Rapport d'activité 2023 [Présentation PowerPoint](#)

42 DiversiCom ASBL. (2023). Handicap et emploi. Accompagnement et conseil pour faciliter l'emploi de la personne en situation de handicap. Rapport d'activité 2023 [Présentation PowerPoint](#)

43 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – Overview Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)[https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

To do this, the providers of this service first get to know each disabled jobseeker to pinpoint their strengths and interests. This information is used to help disabled jobseekers to identify possible career paths that would be suitable for them and, subsequently, to write job applications for suitable positions⁴⁴.

Another essential role of this service is its preventive function. This function is targeted at disabled people who are currently employed but are at risk of losing their job. In such cases, the Austrian job assistance program can intervene in several ways. For example, it can support employers with implementing the necessary workplace adaptations so that the workspace remains accessible for the disabled employee. In other cases, this service provides support for disabled employees to return to work after having to take a prolonged sick leave. Additionally, it can play a crucial role in the mediation of conflicts between disabled employees and their colleagues or superiors. This is done by helping the actors involved to reflect on potential changes that could be implemented or compromises that could be found to solve the conflict. Finally, this program has an important communication function, acting as a point of contact between employers and employees⁴⁵.

The wide range of areas in which this program supports disabled jobseekers and employees shows its crucial importance to increase the presence of disabled people in the Austrian open labour market.

Outcomes of job assistance for people with disabilities in Austria

Data from a report on labour market policy in Austria shows that the access to job assistance for people with disabilities has increased in Austria. Between 2017 and 2023, the total number of users of this service increased by 23%, from 14869 in 2017 to 18302 in 2023. This increase was slightly higher for disabled men compared to disabled women, with the uptake of these services increasing by 24% for disabled men and only by 21% for disabled women, showing that a gender gap in the access to these services persists in Austria⁴⁶.

Ireland's` Supported employment model

Supported employment in Ireland is provided by EmployAbility. This is the Irish supported employment service, a component of the social protection department of the Irish government⁴⁷.

EmployAbility provides supported employment services for people with a debilitating injury, chronic health condition or recognized disability who are deemed capable of working by the Irish Public Employment Services. EmployAbility's activities are done in collaboration with local community-based organisations, non-profits, disability service providers, and charities⁴⁸.

44 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismushttps://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

45 Sozialministeriumservice. (2025). Arbeitsassistentz inklusive NEBA Betriebskontakter:innen: Umsetzungsregelungen <https://www.sozialministeriumservice.gv.at/suchergebnis/Suchergebnis.de.html?query=Umsetzungsregelungen&context=&p=1>

46 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismushttps://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

47 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

48 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

The services provided by EmployAbility are similar to those provided by DiversiCom and by the work assistance model of supported employment in Austria, as they also offer individualized support in all the stages of the process of finding a job. Like DiversiCom and the work assistance program in Austria, this program includes a personalized evaluation of competences and career aspirations. After this initial assessment, jobseekers benefiting from this program are connected to a company looking for an employee that matches the jobseeker's profile. If, after an initial contact between both parties, if the company perceives the jobseeker to have the desired profile, EmployAbility assists the employer to draft a contract for the future employee. Besides helping to draft the working contract, EmployAbility is also consulted to ensure the workplace is accessible for the future employee. Once the job position has started, EmployAbility remains in regular contact with the new employee, to provide on-going career guidance to them.

According to 2023 data, 3,000 people benefit from EmployAbility's services annually.⁴⁹

5.5. Vocational training support

Vocational training assistance in Austria

Vocational training assistance is another of Austria's supported employment programs. Like the work assistance program previously discussed, it is managed by the Network for Work Assistance (NEBA) in collaboration with the Social Ministry Service⁵⁰.

This program targets young disabled people who cannot complete a regular apprenticeship because they require additional support in their education. The profiles of the people targeted in this program vary from people who have a recognized disability, those who have a school leaving certificate with negative grades, people who have no secondary school qualifications or people who, despite having completed secondary schooling, still require additional support to complete a vocational training program⁵¹.

The apprenticeships offered under this program may differ from regular traineeships in several ways. First, people participating in apprenticeships under this program receive personalized guidance to ensure that they can successfully complete it. This service is provided by trained support workers who support the apprentices in all phases of their training. This support may involve facilitating the first contact between the disabled person enrolled in vocational training school and the company where they will conduct the apprenticeship; providing a liaison between the place where training is occurring and the vocational school providing the training; providing learning support materials; ensuring that a job coach is involved in the apprenticeship and, finally, helping the apprentices to prepare for their final examination. Having access to tailored support, such as tailored learning materials while completing an apprenticeship may significantly increase the chances of the disabled apprentices to successfully complete the training⁵².

Another aspect that differentiates apprenticeships under the training assistance program is the possibility that the duration of the apprenticeship can be extended for a period of up to two years compared to the standard duration of similar apprenticeships. This possibility is crucial for dis-

49 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

50 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

51 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismushttps://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market%20Policy%20Austria%20-%20Overview%20-%20reporting%20year%202023.pdf)

52 Netzwerk Berufliche Assistenz (NEBA). (2024). Vocational Training Assistance [Brochure]. https://www.neba.at/downloads/public/03-berufsausbildungsassistenz/BA0208o_neba_bas_falzflyer_eng_v14_20240229.pdf

abled participants who may need additional time to learn new skills. In this scenario, apprentices will learn all the skills that non-disabled apprentices are taught in similar apprenticeships, but the extended duration of the program will allow them to fully comprehend and practice what they are learning. In this way, the extended duration of the apprenticeship contributes to levelling the playing field for disabled apprentices when entering the labour market, as they will have the opportunity to develop their skills to a level similar to that of their non-disabled counterparts⁵³.

Beyond offering the possibility of a prolonged apprenticeship, this program also makes it possible to design the training in a way that matches the skills and interests of each participant. This is relevant in situations where the participant's disability prevents them from being able to execute all the tasks of a particular profession but still allows them to acquire some of the skills required to perform this profession. In this case the program is structured around the particular skills that the disabled apprentice will be able to acquire or enhance and, once it is complete, it will provide the disabled jobseeker with a partial qualification. This option can significantly improve the chances of disabled people to enter the open labour market and gain valuable professional experience⁵⁴.

Outcomes of vocational training assistance in Austria

Data on the use of vocational assistance in Austria shows that access to this type of support has grown throughout the years. More specifically, the percentage of disabled people who had access to vocational assistance increased by 37% between the years of 2017 and 2023, from 8102 in 2017 to 11061 in 2023. While this trend has been positive, it is important to note that there is still a small difference between the percentage of disabled men and women accessing vocational training assistance in Austria. Between 2017 and 2023 the use of this service increased by 40% for men but only by 29% for women, leaving a 10% gap between the offers of these services for men compared to women in Austria⁵⁵.

5.6. Targeted placements of persons with disabilities

Targeted placements in Italy

Targeted placements of persons with disabilities are one of Italy's supported employment initiatives. These placements are funded by Italy's public employment service but are run by Italy's type A or type B social cooperatives. The goal of this program is to help disadvantaged groups, including disabled people, to find work that matches their specific skills, capabilities and needs⁵⁶.

The starting point of this program is an individualized assessment of the beneficiary's skills, capabilities and needs. After the profile of each candidate is defined, they receive training and education to ensure they develop or improve the skills necessary to perform the work they wish. This training is arranged together with potential employees who are willing to employ the disabled job seeker after the training is completed. When the training is done and the disabled jobseeker has effectively

53 ENagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...) [https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

54 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...) [https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

55 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...) [https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

56 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

been hired by the training company, the cooperatives organizing targeted placements provide the newly employed disabled person with on-the-job training and assign them a job coach to provide continuous support. In addition to these support measures, the cooperatives can also facilitate job carving, so that the tasks of the disabled worker can specifically be defined to match their skills and abilities⁵⁷.

Targeted placements in Ireland

Individual Placement and support (IPS) is one of Ireland's supported employment programs. It is organized by Rehab Group, a non-profit organization, together with providers of mental health services. The goal of this program is to help people who have a disability or suffer from a prolonged illness, including mental illness, to find a job in the open labour market. Due to the nature of the programme, the age of its beneficiaries ranges between 18 to 66 years old, Ireland's working age range⁵⁸.

This supported employment program provides services for both disabled job seekers and companies looking to increase the diversity in their workforce.

Each disabled job seeker benefits from individualized guidance from an Employment Specialist. This person is responsible for supporting the jobseeker in every phase of the process of securing a job. This starts with an assessment of each jobseekers' skills, strengths and needs. Based on this assessment, a career plan is developed. Once this is established, the Employment Specialist assists the disabled jobseeker in the creation of a CV and in the search for suitable positions. Throughout this process, the Employment specialist reviews the jobseeker's motivation letters and assists them in preparing a high-quality job application. When applicable, the Employment Specialist assists the jobseeker in the preparation of job interviews, by organizing mock interviews. Finally, when a position is secured, the Employment Specialist provides specific job training to the new employee, to facilitate their transition to employment in the open labour market⁵⁹.

Besides supporting disabled jobseekers finding a job, Ireland's IPS program also provides support for companies looking to hire disabled employees. One of the ways they do this is by providing information about financial incentives and grants available to companies hiring disabled employees. Another is their job-matching service. Ireland's IPS program functions as a bridge between disabled employees and companies looking to hire more diversely. When a company reaches out to them indicating interest in hiring more diversely, they use the career plans developed with each jobseeker to find the pairing that would be more suitable for both⁶⁰.

Outcomes of IPS in Ireland

While specific data about the global success rate of IPS in Ireland seems hard to find, data from specific places where IPS was implemented seem to indicate that it is a successful approach.

One example of this is Shannon Day Hospital, an Irish hospital whose patients benefited from supported employment services. According to data collected in 2022, this IPS program supported 130 jobseekers. Of these, 114 secured job offers. This is one example of the effectiveness of IPS programs in Ireland⁶¹.

57 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

58 EmployAbility Service Louth. (n.d.). Jobseekers. Retrieved June 5, 2026, from <https://www.employabilitylouth.ie/job-seekers/>

59 Employability Clare. Individual Placement Support. Retrieved June 5, 2026, from <https://employabilityclare.ie/individual-placement-support/>

60 Employability Clare. Individual Placement Support. Retrieved June 5, 2026, from <https://employabilityclare.ie/individual-placement-support/>

61 Employability Clare. Individual Placement Support. Retrieved June 5, 2026, from <https://employabilityclare.ie/individual-placement-support/>

5.7. Personal assistance at the workplace

Personal assistance, as defined in General Comment No 5 and the ENIL fact sheet, serves an important auxiliary function in enabling access to employment. Personal assistants aid in the transport to and from work. Having a personal assistant to accompany the person, can be a pre-condition for attending business trips.

Personal assistance at the workplace in Austria

Personal assistance in the workplace is one of Austria's supported employment initiatives and it is managed by the Austrian Network for Work Assistance (NEBA) in collaboration with the Social Ministry Service⁶².

This program is available for people of working age who have a recognized disability status in Austria and whose degree of disability is estimated to be 50% or higher or to receive a care subsidy of at least level 3 of Austrian care allowance⁶³.

This program offers support to people in a wide variety of situations, with a common goal of ensuring that the recipients increase their chances of securing or maintaining employment in the open labour market. The most common recipients of personal assistance in Austria are disabled people who are already in a full-time employment relationship covered by social security. These are people who; despite having the necessary qualifications to execute their chosen professional activity or the necessary competences have significant functional impairments. In these situations, providing technical aids to these workers is not enough to ensure their autonomy and self-determination in the workplace, hence, personal assistance services are required. Beyond this common target group, personal assistance can also be attributed to disabled self-employed people; disabled job seekers; disabled people in low-pay marginal employment and people who are enrolled in academic education. The provision of personal assistance in the workplace in such a variety of situations ensures that disabled people not only receive support when they start full time employment but that they also receive support while pursuing education and training opportunities that will help them gain the necessary qualifications to obtain meaningful employment in the open labour market. The extensive support provided by this program ensures the long-lasting participation of disabled people in employment⁶⁴.

Personal assistants in the workplace perform a wide variety of tasks to provide functional support to the disabled worker receiving personal assistance. One core part of this service is assistance with the worker's mobility. This entails accompanying the disabled worker during their commute to and from work as well in any necessary work-related outings, for example, attending a meeting outside the workplace or taking part in a business trip. Beyond accompanying disabled workers in their work-related outings, personal assistants also may support disabled workers with executing manual tasks that are necessary for their job but not linked to their core responsibilities. This involves, for example, carrying relevant documents for workers or supporting them in filling these documents. Additionally, personal assistants may support disabled workers with other disability related tasks, such as entering and exiting a car during their commute, putting on and taking off their jacket upon entering or exiting a building, or supporting them during lunch. Despite being able to perform all these tasks, personal assistants are strictly forbidden from completing any work-related tasks that

62 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

63 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – OverviewBundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...) [https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

64 Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz. (2021). Richtlinie Persönliche Assistenz am Arbeitsplatz (Geschäftszahl: BMSGPK-44.101/0027-IV/A/6/2019, aktualisiert am 1. April 2021).

are assigned to the disabled worker being assisted, such as preparing reports or answering emails on the worker's behalf⁶⁵.

The examples of tasks performed by personal assistants indicated above illustrate the crucial importance of personal assistance, as a service that ensures the professional aptitudes of disabled workers will not be undermined by their support needs.

Outcomes of personal assistance in the workplace in Austria:

Data on the number of users of personal assistance at the workplace in Austria shows that access to this type of support has grown throughout the years. According to a report on labour market policy in Austria, the number of disabled people who had access to personal assistance at the workplace increased by 28% between the years of 2017 and 2023, from 510 in 2017 to 652 in 2023. The increase in the uptake of personal assistance at the workplace was slightly lower for disabled women than for disabled men. From 2017 to 2023 the use of this service by disabled men increased by 32%, whereas in the same period the use of this service for disabled women increased by only 23%. This data shows that, while there has been an increase in the overall provision of personal assistance services across Austria, a slight difference in the availability of personal assistance in the workplace for men and women remains in this country.

5.8. Subsidised work assistants

Subsidised work assistants in Lithuania

Subsidized work assistants is one of Lithuania's supported employment programs. This program targets disabled people working within the open labour market. The goal of this program is to ensure they receive adequate support while working and that the accommodations they need at the workplace are provided to them. This is done by tasking able-bodied employees working in the same company with the provision of assistance to disabled co-workers. The workers providing assistance are appropriately compensated by receiving a subsidy for this work⁶⁷.

According to data from 2023, 260 people benefit from this service every year and it has proven to have a positive impact, contributing for the creation of a more inclusive workplace⁶⁸.

65 Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz. (2021). Richtlinie Persönliche Assistenz am Arbeitsplatz (Geschäftszahl: BMSGPK-44.101/0027-IV/A/6/2019, aktualisiert am 1. April 2021).

66 Nagl, I., & Moshhammer, B. (2024). Labour market policy Austria: Overview, reporting year 2023. Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. [Labour Market Policy Austria – Overview](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)[Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)[https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour Market...](https://www.bmwet.gv.at/dam/Labour%20Market...)

67 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

68 European Commission 2025. Study on alternative employment models for persons with disabilities. <https://op.europa.eu/cs/publication-detail/-/publication/1cc9efd9-1b5d-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

6. Strengthening supported employment by reforming EU State Aid legislation

The General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) is one of the cornerstones of the EU legislative acquis on state aid. To promote public policy objectives, the General Block Exemption Regulation defines and lists specific sectors and activities for which state aid is permitted and which are exempt from notification requirements.

The GBER lists measures to support the employment of disabled people which are in line with General Comment No 8 and the definition provided by Eurofound:

- Wage subsidies
- Personal assistance at work
- The Purchase of assistive equipment
- Modifications of the built environment
- Transport
- Rehabilitation

It also lists a measure which, according to General Comment No 8 has to be regarded as segregated employment and not in line with the UN CRPD:

“Where the beneficiary provides sheltered employment, the costs of constructing, in-stalling or modernising the production units of the undertaking concerned, and any costs of administration and transport, provided that such costs result directly from the employment of workers with disabilities.”

6.1. The distribution of public funding

According to our research, enormous financial resources are being channelled into segregated employment. The government of the Belgium region Vlaanderen has announced to spend EUR 30 million on sheltered employment to create 1000 additional places. Sweden is subsidizing the provider Samhall with EUR 500 Mio. per year. Germany will invest at least EUR 33,34 million to build new facilities or renovate existing ones over the next years.⁶⁹

According to the study “Fostering employment through sheltered workshops: reality, trends and next steps” published by EASPD, in many countries almost the entire public budgets earmarked for labour market inclusion is being spent on segregated employment. In the Czech Republic, 96% of the money dedicated to the system of support for the employment of persons with disabilities went to employers in the sheltered labour market between 2010 and 2015. In Spain, out of almost EUR 461.2 Mio of public funds dedicated to labour market integration of persons with disabilities in 2021, 98% were allocated to protected employment.⁷⁰

69 BENIL 2025. New Pathways for inclusive employment. <https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/New-policy-pathways-for-the-labour-market-inclusion-of-disabled-people.pdf>

70 EASPD 2022. Fostering employment through sheltered workshops: reality, trends and next steps. https://easpd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Fostering_Employment_through_Sheltered_Workshops_Reality__Trends_and_Next_Steps_2.pdf

Due to these investments, the number of disabled people using such services is increasing: In Finland the number of users increased from 15.805 in 2011 to 17.871 in 2021, in Spain from 56.332 in 2009 to 98.551 in 2021. In the Czech Republic the number increased by 14.500 in 2016 to 63.000 in 2021. In Germany the number of sheltered workshops increased from 688 to 734 in 2019. Approximately 320 000 disabled people work in the country's sheltered workshops.⁷¹

According to the EASPD study, policy makers see sheltered employment as the default option, the only realistic option for disabled people to find work. Also, ENIL has gathered evidence which shows that when confronted with the choice between various options, authorities choose sheltered employment.

6.2. Boosting supported employment by reforming the GBER

The European Commission is in the process of reforming the GBER. The Commission has published a draft regulation for consultation purposes.⁷² We believe that simple changes to the GBER could provide a much-needed boost to supported employment. In 2024 and 2025, ENIL published policy reports on how changes to the GBER to incentivise greater investments in supported employment could be implemented.

A step in the right direction

Compared to the 2014 GBER, the draft regulation foresees a slight increase of the maximal aid intensity for wage subsidies and other costs such as accommodations from EUR 10 million to EUR 11 million.^[4]

ENIL believes that this is for the most part a step in the right direction, since it could encourage national authorities to increase financial support the measures listed in the GBER that are in line with the UN CRPD.

The drawback is, that it could lead to funding increases for sheltered employment as well.

6.3. Recommendations for change

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) has the objective “to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities”.

In March 2007, the UN CRPD was signed by the European Union. The Decision of the EU Council of 26 November 2009 “concerning the conclusion, by the European Community, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010/48/EC)” approved the UN CRPD on behalf of the EU. Being a state party to the UN CRPD entails the obligation “to adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention”.

Article 216 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that “the Union may conclude an agreement with one or more third countries or international organisations”. “2. Agreements by the Union are binding upon the institutions of the Union and its Member States”. The UN CRPD is thus part of the legal order of the EU.

71 EASPD 2022. Fostering employment through sheltered workshops: reality, trends and next steps. https://easpd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Fostering_Employment_through_Sheltered_Workshops_Reality__Trends_and_Next_Steps_2.pdf

72 European Commission 2026. DRAFT COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) .../... of XXX declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market https://competition-policy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/13d86416-7f23-466e-83aa-0af8105b72d2_en?filename=empty_file_en.pdf

According to Article 34 of the UN CRPD, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD-Committee) may adopt recommendations on how to interpret and implement the Convention. The recommendations of the CRPD-Committee are to be regarded as authoritative.

In the concluding observations to its second and third combined periodic reports of the European Union, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD-Committee) remarked on the General Block Exemption Regulation:⁷³

64. The Committee is concerned that:

- (a) Practices of segregated employment (see this Committee’s General Comment No. 8 [2022] para. 14) exist across Member States, and that Member States use State aid to support segregated employment.

The CRPD-Committee recommended clear changes:

“65. The Committee recommends that the European Union:

- (a) Repeal legislation that allows public financing of segregated forms of employment for persons with disabilities, such as institutions and other segregated facilities, amend Directives 2014/23/EU and 2014/24/EU to remove the possibility of awarding public procurement to such facilities, repeal article 34(2)(f) of the General Block Exemption Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 651/2014), and prohibit State aid of segregated employment;”

In our policy reports published in 2024 and 2025, we recommended completely removing article 34(f) of the regulation currently in force.⁷⁴

Our proposal for an amendment reads as follows:

Article 2 – Definitions	
European Commission 'sheltered employment' means employment in an undertaking where at least 30 % of workers are workers with disabilities;	Amendment 'sheltered employment' means employment in an undertaking where at least 30 % of workers are workers with disabilities;
Article 34 – (f)	
European Commission (f) where the beneficiary provides sheltered employment, the costs of constructing, installing or modernising the production units of the undertaking concerned, and any costs of administration and transport, provided that such costs result directly from the employment of workers with disabilities.	Amendment (j) where the beneficiary provides sheltered employment, the costs of constructing, installing or modernising the production units of the undertaking concerned, and any costs of administration and transport, provided that such costs result directly from the employment of workers with disabilities.

73 CRPD-Committee 2025. Concluding Observations to the combined second and third period reports of the European Union. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4080772?v=pdf>

74 Comp. ENIL 2024. State aid for inclusive employment. <https://enil.eu/campaigns/eu-state-aid-for-inclusive-employment/>; ENIL 2025. New Pathways for inclusive employment. <https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/New-policy-pathways-for-the-labour-market-inclusion-of-disabled-people.pdf>

In reaction to the draft regulation published for consultation, we are modifying our recommendations:

Article 2 – 108

Text proposed by the European Commission

(108) ‘sheltered employment’ means employment in an undertaking where the work arrangements are designed specifically for workers with disabilities, in an environment that engages predominantly with workers with disabilities and that has as its primary objective to offer employment, protection and support to such workers, which are typically not available to them in the open labour market;

Amendment

(108) ~~sheltered employment support~~ refers to measures designed to assist persons with disabilities in accessing and retaining employment or training in the open labour market on a basis equal to others or to assist the employer in employing persons with disabilities. Measures are predominantly provided while the person with disability is working in a position, for example personal assistance at work, job coaching or wage subsidies. Measures provided before a person is working in a position, for example resume or job search assistance or customising employment must be directly linked to the uptake of work or training. Preparatory jobs in segregated settings are not employment support.

Article 48 – **Aid for compensating the additional costs of employing workers with disabilities – 3(a)(b)(c)(f)(e) new**

3. The eligible costs shall be limited to the costs arising in relation to the worker with disabilities and shall be the following:

- (a) costs of adapting the premises if in compliance with reasonable accommodation obligations
- (b) costs of employing staff solely for time spent on the assistance of the workers with disabilities and of training such staff to assist workers with disabilities

3. The eligible costs shall be limited to the costs arising in relation to the worker with disabilities and shall be the following:

- (a) costs of adapting the premises if ~~in compliance with reasonable~~ to meet the accommodation **needs of the person with disabilities** obligations
- (b) costs of ~~employing staff solely for the time spent on the~~ **personal assistance at work** of to the workers with disabilities and of training such staff to assist workers with disabilities, **including the costs of purchasing assistance services. Providing financial support to the workers with disabilities to purchase personal assistance at work is also permitted.**

(c) costs of adapting or acquiring equipment, or acquiring and validating software for use by workers with disabilities, if in compliance with reasonable accommodation obligations; including adapted or assistive technology facilities, which are additional to those which the beneficiary would have incurred had it employed workers who are not workers with disabilities;

(f) where the beneficiary provides sheltered employment, the costs of constructing, installing or modernising the production units of the undertaking concerned, and any costs of administration and transport, provided that such costs result directly from the employment of workers with disabilities.

Aid shall not be granted for costs that are covered by the social security system of the Member State

(c) costs of adapting or acquiring equipment, or acquiring and validating software for use by workers with disabilities, ~~if in compliance with reasonable~~ **to meet the accommodation obligations needs of the worker with disabilities**; including adapted or assistive technology facilities, which are additional to those which the beneficiary would have incurred had it employed workers who are not workers with disabilities;

(f) where the beneficiary ~~provides sheltered employment~~ **employs persons with disabilities in the open labour market**, the costs of constructing, installing or modernising the production units of the undertaking concerned, and any costs of administration and transport, provided that such costs result directly from the employment of workers with disabilities.

Aid shall not be granted for costs that are covered by the social security system of the Member State

(g) new

where the beneficiary conducts activities to raise awareness or to train non-disabled staff or management in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and in employment, provided such activities result in the hiring and long-term employment of persons with disabilities or the provision of short-term placements for persons entering or re-entering the labour market

(h) new

costs arising from the provision of employment support services, providing this work is undertaken by an organisation of persons with disabilities according to the peer support principle

6.4. The use of state aid for public policy objectives

It is often argued that EU state aid rules can not be changed to support the employment of disabled people because its sole purpose is to regulate competition in the internal market.

The 2012 Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) Package, defined under which conditions services in service of social- or healthcare objectives are exempt from EU state aid rules.

In the EU housing prices and rents are growing faster than incomes. To improve housing supply and reduce prices an Affordable Housing Plan was adopted. As part of this effort, the decision was taken to reform an important component of that package, the SGEI-decision.

The plan announced:

“To facilitate support for affordable housing for low- and middle-income households, including essential workers, households with specific family circumstances, persons with disabilities and students, the Commission has decided to revise the SGEI Decision. While this decision leaves the rules for social housing support fundamentally unchanged, it expressly includes a new category of affordable housing among the categories exempted from notification for which there is no maximum compensation cap. In this way, Member States can maintain their existing social housing schemes and create additional affordable housing schemes for other target groups.”[7]

Already in December 2025, the reform of the SGEI-decision was adopted.[8] The Directorate-General for Competition gave the following justification for the decision:

“Moreover, the SGEI Decision has been modified on 16 December 2025, with the primary aim of clarifying the concept of social housing and to offer Member States an option to support affordable housing in a faster and simpler way. This initiative contributes to the Commission’s efforts to address European citizens’ housing needs and constitutes one component of the European Affordable Housing Plan. The revision of the SGEI rules aims to address challenges related to housing affordability that go beyond social housing. To that end, the updated State aid rules facilitate investments in affordable housing at national, regional and local level.”

These quotes show clearly that state aid is used to support other objectives than regulating competition in general and to support social objectives in particular.

6.5. The system will not collapse

There is no reason to believe that sheltered employment would collapse from one day to the next. Following European Commission authorisation, public authorities will still be permitted to subsidise construction and renovation costs. There is the hope that by making the use of this instrument less convenient, an incentive for a greater use of supported employment instruments would be generated.

It is important to keep in mind the enormous benefits a shift in financial support to employment support could bring, bearing in mind the difficult situation when it comes to skills shortages and public finances.

With its reform for the promotion of an inclusive labour market, Germany has already restricted funding for the construction and renovation of buildings for sheltered workshops (Germany 2024). Despite this legal change, the sheltered workshop system in Germany still exists.

Thus, similar legal change at EU level is advisable. It would not produce a revolution, but the urgently needed evolution in the right direction. Instead of not implementing the large change needed because it feels too massive, we should take a smaller but more realistic step.

7. Conclusion

The present policy report represents a comprehensive collection of all arguments in favour of a reform of the General Block Exemption we have to date. We urge the European Commission and all stakeholders to support an expansion of employment support services in Europe, so we can improve our compliance with human rights, solve critical societal challenges and improve economic growth and public finances.

About the European Network on Independent Living

The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is a disabled-led, cross-disability network of disabled people and their representative organisations. ENIL promotes the right to independent living, as set out in Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), its General Comments and the *Guidelines on deinstitutionalisation, including in emergencies*. ENIL's work is guided by the CRPD and the Independent Living principles, enshrined in the Independent Living Pillars. ENIL is active at the European level, and internationally, through cooperation with Centres for Independent Living from around the globe. ENIL's actions and activities are based on the social and the human rights models of disability, and on the principles of inclusive equality, self-determination, solidarity and intersectionality.

ENIL has participatory status with the Council of Europe (i.e. is a member of the Conference of INGOs) and consultative status with ECOSOC.

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