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Denmark

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Introduction

This collection of country reports is part of the research on Digital Skills, Accommodation and Technological Assistance for Employment, conducted by the European Disability Forum (EDF) with the support of Google.org.

The aim of the study is to explore the situation of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, focusing in particular on the potential of digital skills training and the use of accessible and assistive technologies to foster inclusion in the workplace.

National experts from each EU Member State (with the exception of Luxembourg) and the UK analysed their respective national contexts. They outline policies and programmes to support reasonable accommodation as a Human Resources (HR) procedure, map trends in the use of accessible and assistive technologies in the workplace, and explain the main limitations experienced by employees with disabilities in acquiring accessible or assistive technology that meets their needs. They also analysed the barriers faced by persons with disabilities related to digital skills and highlight some good practices at national level.

The national reports cover the following countries: the UK, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Luxembourg is the only EU Member State that is not part of the study due to not finding a suitable national expert on the topic.

Glossary

Assistive devices: external devices that are designed, made, or adapted to assist a person to perform a particular task. Many people with disabilities depend on assistive devices to enable them to carry out daily activities and participate actively and productively in community or professional life.

Assistive technology: any item, piece of equipment, service or product system including software that is used to increase, maintain, substitute or improve functional capabilities of persons with disabilities or for, alleviation and compensation of impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions.

Disability allowance: payments that persons with disabilities can receive from the State to cover basic living costs and services.

Discrimination: any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of one or several grounds (sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.) that damages or nullifies the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field, on an equal basis with others.

European Union (EU): a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries, as it stands at the time of publication of this report.

EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC): a regular cross-sectional and longitudinal sample survey by Eurostat that provides data on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions in the European Union.

General Comment: a General Comment is a treaty body's interpretation of human rights treaty provisions, thematic issues or its methods of work. General Comments often seek to clarify the reporting duties of State Parties with respect to certain treaty provisions and suggest approaches to implementing those provisions.

Member State(s) (of the EU): the EU currently consists of 27 countries, also called "Member States". Each Member State is party to the founding treaties of the European Union and is therefore subject to the privileges and obligations of membership. Unlike members of most international organisations, the Member States of the EU are subject to binding laws in exchange for their representation within the common legislative and judicial institutions.

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Number of observations (n): indicates the number of employers each national expert managed to interview.

Open labour market: this refers to work in a mainstream or “regular” employment setting, as opposed to a setting that has been created specifically to employ a specific group of employees, such as persons with disabilities.

Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD): represent the interests of their members with disabilities and have the mandate to advocate for the realisation of their human rights and lobby for the consideration of their interests.

Percentage points: this term expresses the arithmetic difference of two percentages, whereas percent (%) refers to the rate of change. For example, if Country A has an employment rate of 30% and Country B has an employment rate of 60%, Country B’s employment rate is 30 percentage points higher than Country A’s but is also higher by 100%.

Persons with disabilities: individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Reasonable accommodation: the necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. To be “reasonable”, the accommodation cannot impose a disproportionate or undue burden. Denial of reasonable accommodation is a form of discrimination.

The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI): an index that the European Commission reports between 2014-2022, monitoring Europe’s overall digital performance and tracks the progress of EU countries in their digital competitiveness.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): an international human rights treaty that reaffirms that all persons with disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The CRPD clarifies that all persons with disabilities have the right to participate in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural life of the community in the same way as anyone else.

National Overview

In Denmark, people with disabilities who are in work or trying to enter the workforce face significant challenges regarding digital skills. The reason is Denmark's early and extensive adoption of digitalisation. The first digitalisation plan emerged in the 1990s, and since then one plan has replaced the other. Today, there are almost no bank branches left, e-mails have replaced letters, and most interactions with authorities occur via self-service on their websites.

Digitalisation also offers opportunities for people with disabilities. But even if there are possibilities, we have to develop individual solutions before we can use them, which does not happen by itself. To ensure that digitalisation benefits people with disabilities and provides them with more opportunities for employment, substantial efforts in research and development of new software and solutions are necessary.

The Danish form of government, with its tradition of partnerships, offers a way of solving these problems. The Agency for Digital Government collaborates with disability organisations, among others, and several disability organisations make an active effort to enhance employment opportunities. Notably, the Danish Association of the Physically Disabled (DHF) collaborates with a number of municipalities, and the organisation of parents of people with intellectual disabilities, LEV, supports employment through their so-called KLAP jobs.

Digital Skills

In our survey, some companies identified a lack of digital skills as a challenge when hiring applicants, regardless of disability status.

In interviews, organisations highlighted the insufficient integration of digital opportunities in the education and training of individuals with disabilities. They believe that businesses and employment agencies need to be more aware of how digital skills can benefit and include individuals with disabilities.

The 2021 report of the Danish Agency for Digitalisation, 'Digital Inclusion in the Digitalised Society', estimates that 17-22% of the adult population are digitally exposed, including elderly citizens and citizens with disabilities¹.

Statistics Denmark's 2017 report on the population's use of IT and the internet² indicates that 97% of families have internet access at home. Amongst the elderly aged 65-89, 84% are online every day, and 99% of young people aged 15-20 are daily internet users, primarily via mobile phone. 86% use online banking and 76% buy online.

While several surveys address Danes' IT use and skills, none of them look specifically at people with disabilities. However, the journal 'Social Kritik' addressed this issue in a 2021 edition on digital welfare³, presenting experiences from digitally exposed people who feel that society is moving away, but also pointing to new opportunities for participation provided by digitalisation.

The association LEV conducted a survey of 300 of their members about the consequences of digitalisation, revealing that digitalisation increases dependence on help for many people with developmental disabilities⁴.

Most of the companies that answered our survey did not have specific training programmes targeting employees with disabilities, they assessed training arrangements on a case-by-case basis. Some companies mentioned general education and training programmes that increased digital skills but were not specifically designed for employees with disabilities.

The interviews emphasized that key gaps and investment requirements include allocating resources for digital inclusion in the labour market, developing

specialised solutions for people with disabilities, investing in caseworker training, establishing networks for knowledge exchange, ensuring the portability of digital solutions during transitions, and making technology accessible. The technological advancements should be recognised as tools for inclusion and retention.

The Ministry of Digitalisation has produced a platform called 'Digital Start' to help 15-18-year-olds get started with their digital citizenship⁵. The Erasmus project 'Digital Accessibility for You' aims to provide young people with digital skills⁶. The project ran between 2019-2021, but there is still a website with a lot of information and an active Facebook group.

Digitalisation affects production, and therefore workers must acquire the necessary digital skills. They can do so through AMU courses⁷ AMU stands for labour market education, and they are now also available in digitalisation.

A few companies from our survey mentioned ongoing courses and training programmes to improve digital skills, without differentiation for employees with disabilities. Some companies relied on digital solutions from specialised centres or government platforms to support employees with disabilities. One company ensured that employees with disabilities had the necessary aids for equal participation in digital skills training.

The interviews with organisations noted that Denmark has a range of companies developing technological solutions for the labour market, but accessibility remains a challenge. Notably, Danish speech recognition technology tailored for individuals with impaired arm and hand functions could benefit other Nordic countries if supported financially.

Denmark's digitalisation is rooted in growth strategies dating back to the 1990s⁸. A partnership of representatives from academia, the education sector, industry, the public sector, and the non-profit sector has been formed to implement the strategy regarding employment⁹.

There are a number of projects, such as a 2019-2022 project supported with 5 million EUR by the European Social Fund (ESF), aimed particularly at small and medium-sized enterprises¹⁰.

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The 2021 report of the Ministry of Business and Industry on Denmark's digital growth shows that the country's digitalisation rate is the second highest in the EU, after Finland¹¹. Danish companies lead in the use of e-commerce, websites and social media, but lag slightly behind some comparable countries in the use of artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things. There is a need to get the small businesses more involved in the digital transition.

Assistive Technologies

The survey showed that the companies' awareness of the use of assistive technologies by employees with disabilities varied. Some companies did not have specific figures or were unsure, while others acknowledged the need for workplace adaptation and had global guidelines in place. The main categories of assistive technologies and devices mentioned included physical aids, pain relief aids, sign language interpreters, visual aids, IT programs for dyslexia, and computer hardware and software. However, there were also companies that reported not using any assistive technologies or were uncertain about their usage. Regarding technological limitations, responses were mixed, with some companies mentioning IT security as a concern.

In the interviews it was underlined that the general situation for employees with disabilities requiring assistive technologies depends on the timely provision of appropriate aids. Employees who receive the necessary assistive technologies can perform their work on par with others. However, limited knowledge about available assistive devices can impact employees' work capabilities.

In Denmark, it is forbidden to discriminate against people with disabilities¹², and there is legislation on compensation¹³ which aims to give people with disabilities equal opportunities for employment. According to the Compensation Act, the costs of a personal assistant and aids in the form of work tools and workplace equipment for persons with disabilities can be covered if this can ensure inclusion in the labour market. In addition, companies can hire newly qualified people with disabilities with a wage subsidy according to the so-called ice-breaker scheme.

The COVID-19 pandemic gave a boost to the use of home working and meetings over the internet, and there are several systems in use. From the point of view of people with disabilities, accessibility is essential. The Danish Disability Organisations (DH) has carried out an analysis of the accessibility of the digital meeting tools Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet¹⁴.

DH has put forward a proposal to get more people with disabilities into jobs¹⁵. Disabled People's Organisations Denmark (DPOD) proposes, among other things, (1) a trial scheme with subsidies for employers who take students with disabilities on internships, (2) that new graduates can keep their aids until they get a job, and (3) more use of the ice-breaker scheme.

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In the survey, several companies reported policies or guidelines in place to support the acquisition and use of assistive devices and technologies by employees with disabilities. These policies varied in their specifics, but common themes included investigating options, providing necessary work tools and aids, and supporting workplace adaptations. Companies were generally aware of the public legal framework and programmes supporting the acquisition of assistive technologies, with examples such as collaboration with municipal job centres, dialogues with municipalities for workplace adaptations, financial support from municipalities, and reimbursement of expenses. However, there were also instances where companies had not explored these supports or were unsure about them.

The respondents in the interviews indicated awareness of the legal framework supporting the acquisition of assistive technologies, either directly by employees or indirectly through employers. However, no specific details were provided.

Since the 1960s, Danish social legislation has covered necessary aids in work for the citizen, and Danish labour market legislation has covered these expenses for the employer. The requirement for reasonable adaptation does not appear in the law itself but in the EU directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000, which is attached as an annex to the law.

The guidance states that the employer must make reasonable adjustments to the workplace if the employer knew or should have known that an employee has a disability. Reasonable means that it is not unreasonably expensive and does not take too long to establish. The adaptation may, for example, include access conditions or reduced working hours. This also applies if it is a disability that the employee acquires after starting employment.

The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR) provides thorough information about the legislation on its website¹⁶. The STAR website also talks about the possibilities to cover costs for the reasonable adaptations of the workplace¹⁷. The grant covers the entire additional cost of accessible and assistive technological aids. Formally, it is the citizen that applies for the subsidy, but in reality, it is usually the employer who takes the necessary steps.

Reasonable Accommodation

The companies' responses in our survey indicate varying approaches to reasonable accommodation. Some companies do not have a specific written policy but express a willingness to make adjustments on a case-by-case basis. Others have incorporated reasonable accommodation into their personnel policies, emphasizing diversity, inclusivity, and creating an accepting work environment. They mention adapting the workplace, providing special equipment, and offering management training to support diversity and inclusion.

According to our interview of the disability organisations, swift and sufficient compensation and adjustments should be available to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. Currently, there are diverse local practices, and limitations include the absence of a unified employment strategy, accessible specialised knowledge for all parties, addressing transitional challenges between education, work, leisure, and life stages, revising counterproductive offsetting arrangements, and implementing effective methods supported by success stories.

There is not much Danish research on trends in the use of accessibility and assistive technologies in the workplace. But there is a starting point in The Danish National Database on Assistive Technology¹⁸ (Hjælpemiddelbasen¹⁹). It includes 20,000 product lines and 900 suppliers and has 50,000 visits per month.

The Ministry of Research has prepared a report on research and development in relation to welfare technology. It provides an overview of the quality and scope of Danish research and suggestions on how the public sector can support research and innovation²⁰, focusing on technical and digital aids that are used in the field by older people and persons with disabilities. This report shows that welfare technology is a high priority area for the Ministry of Research, so we can expect new technical and digital aids to be developed for people with disabilities.

In our survey, some companies highlight that adapting the workplace for employees with disabilities is a legal requirement. Others collaborate with organisations, job centres, and public authorities to promote accessibility and inclusivity in recruitment processes. They mention providing equal opportunities for applicants with disabilities and participating in initiatives that support diversity.

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There is a lot to criticise. Digital technologies available for reasonable accommodation encompass solutions like screen readers, devices compatible with hearing aids, speech recognition and electronic magnifiers. However, limited awareness and financial prioritisation hinder access to these solutions, despite their potential preventive and investment value. Municipalities lack knowledge and financial resources to meet applications for technological aids, although regional communication centres offer support in this regard. Overall, future improvements include developing websites and digital programmes that are easily operable by individuals with physical disabilities, prioritising Danish speech recognition as a tool for integrating people with limited arm and hand function into society and the workforce. Adequate support, resources, and frameworks from political entities are crucial to implementing and utilising emerging technological advancements effectively.

There is no Danish research on the use of reasonable adaptation, but there is some research on what can be done, how it can be done, and what can be gained from it.

The Danish Social Welfare Agency's knowledge platform²¹ on disability and employment for use in practice has gathered interdisciplinary knowledge on disability and employment, and STAR's Disability and Job Unit provides a number of references to the same material on their website²².

Væksthuset's study 'From deferred to employed'²³ has interviewed representatives from 66 companies that have employed unemployed people with disabilities in permanent jobs and asked their views on what it takes for them to enter the labour market. The most important prerequisite is a long-term testing and development process with public support, which they call the 'look-at phase', where they can clarify whether the person can handle a job and also fits into the company's social life.

In 2015, DHF carried out a survey on barriers to the inclusion of people with mobility impairments in the labour market. They then carried out the 'Remove the barriers' study²⁴, where they identified a negative and a positive inclusion chain. Based on these studies, they have carried out a number of projects in collaboration with municipal job centres.

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