



with support from
Google.org

The Netherlands

Funka Foundation



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](https://www.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.

4 The European Disability Forum

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

The European Semester report of 2022 shows that the employment gap between persons with disabilities and other persons is at 25.4%, within the EU average¹. However, the European Semester country fiche on disability of 2018/2019 states that national data from the Statistics Bureau CBS indicate a wider gap in employment rates, with only 35.6% of persons with disabilities participating in the labour market compared to 75.9% of other persons².

A reform of the labour market and benefit system was implemented in 2014 with the objective of increasing the number of persons with disabilities in the workplace and reducing the number of persons applying for disability benefits and the number of people in sheltered workshops. Public sector employers with more than 25 employees must meet a quota of 1.93% of employees with disabilities³.

Organisations of Persons with Disabilities interviewed highlighted that employment is not only hindered by employers' prejudice or the lack of accessibility, but the social benefit system does not incentivise it either: if somebody works part-time, they might end up receiving less money than by receiving disability benefit.

Digital Skills

According to Statistics Netherlands, in 2022 around 11% of Dutch people between 26 and 65 have little or no experience with computers. The figure rises to 20% for people aged 55 and older, and 30% for people with low literacy⁴. We have not been able to find data that are specific for persons with disabilities.

A 2021 report of the European Disability Expert network notes that the increased digitalisation of public services is a barrier for persons with disabilities, both with regards to digital skills and in terms of the accessibility of the services⁵.

ECP – Platform for the Information Society is an independent organisation connecting public, private, and non-profit actors with the objective of promoting a digital society where everyone can participate. The platform initiates and disseminates a large variety of programmes and initiatives on digitalisation and digital skills.

One of their themes is digital skills for everyone ('Digivaardig')⁶. Under this theme, several projects have been initiated. One of the projects displayed on the platform is the project "Tel mee met taal", run by The Dutch Media Institute, together with the Alliance for Digital Cohabitation. The project was a study to see how innovative technology could help people with fewer digital skills. For example, the study set up a helpline for people needing support to log into digital services⁷.

Many libraries also provide an information service from the national Digital Authority that can help people become more independent in their use of digital services from municipalities and authorities⁸.

Persons with disabilities can access courses on digital skills through the Foundation for Reading and Writing. Some care providers also offer courses on digital skills⁹.

On the higher end of the digital skills scale, there are different programmes to re-skill workers to work in the ICT sector.

Project 'Digitaler naar werk', initiated by the Foundation for Reading and Writing, teaches people with low digital skills some basic skills needed for work (internet use, email, video conferencing, etc.). 130 people were trained in 2022, and a new round started in 2023. The training is offered to persons working in sheltered employment¹⁰.

The Employees Insurance Administration Office provides the possibility for jobseekers to ask for a personal budget to use for courses to enhance their employability, for example by improving their digital skills¹¹.

According to the OPDs interviewed, training is available – although mostly for people with a physical disability, and there are few or no vocational training courses for people with intellectual disabilities. Also, training generally focuses on traditional ICT areas and on how to use assistive technology: with the new AT, users can get a half-day course, and some organisations (like the tax authority or banks) have their own training programmes for their staff with disabilities. At the same time, training on how to use new, mainstream technology like Zoom and Teams, including their built-in accessibility features and how they work with client-based AT, is generally scarce.

The EDF employer survey (n=24) shows that 33% of the employers have specific, set guidelines for hiring persons with disabilities. Such guidelines have varied focus or tools: e.g. aiming to select at least one candidate with a disability among the interviewed candidates, or a specific programme on hiring persons with disabilities with a goal of 2% employees with disabilities. 43% are aware of the public support systems for the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities, but there are complaints about its complexity and inconsistency.

When it comes to digital skills, 39% of the respondents think that the lack of digital skills is hindering the employment of persons with disabilities, mentioning that using assistive technology is just one facilitator, but the lack of knowledge of the surrounding technical environment is a disadvantage, and that continuous skill development could help. Nevertheless, among the 21% that develop training programmes for employees related to digital skills, less than half of them offer training focusing on the digital skills of employees with disabilities.

Assistive Technologies

There is a national coalition for technology and inclusion (De Coalitie voor Technologie en Inclusie, CTI) that supports technological developments for a more inclusive employment market. It is facilitated by the UWV – Employees Insurance Administration Office/National Employment Agency, with representatives from research institutions, industry, and public authorities.

The coalition has launched tech challenges in 2019¹², and 2021¹³ for inclusive technologies in the workplace.

Some of the winners include AI for people with speech impairments, cobots (collaborative robots) for persons with loss of strength in their arms, language recognition technology for people with hearing disabilities, and text-to-voice scanning machines.

These are all new technologies, but the information about the challenge does not say anything about the actual use of these technologies in workplaces. However, there are other articles that showcase some of the technologies funded in 2019. These articles stress that simply making the technology available is not enough to promote inclusion. There is a lot of training and support needed, both for the employee and for the employer, to make it work¹⁴.

According to Panteli et al., the regulatory framework for AT in the Netherlands consists of several insurance schemes and programmes that sometimes overlap¹⁵. The main legislation for individuals is the Social Support Act (WMO), covering AT for home/independent living. This scheme is organised by the municipalities. For work purposes, there is also the Act for Employment and Income According to Employment Capacity (WIA). Under this Act, the provision of AT is handled by the Employees Insurance Administration Office (UWV). In the procedure for obtaining assistive technology for work purposes, it is the UWV that, together with the suppliers, assesses the needs of the individual and makes a decision on what assistance will be appropriate in each instance.

The OPDs interviewed recognised the availability of assistive technology and that it is paid for by the government, but they also emphasised that the process is complex and very bureaucratic. It is difficult to know which organisation to turn to. For example, screen readers are provided to the employer and Braille displays to the individual. It could be simplified by creating one contact point for all.

The EDF employer survey shows that 35% of the employers are aware of the public framework supporting the acquisition of assistive technologies. Although 38% are aware of their employees with disabilities using assistive technology (and in at least one case there are more than 25 employees using them), only 9% have company policies implementing support for the acquisition and use of assistive devices and technologies – e.g. by supporting the implementation and installation of the technologies, or training on how to use them.

Employers mention both hardware (switches, keyboards, pointing devices) and software (voice recognition, screen readers, time management software) as assistive technology used. As for the limitations of using assistive technology, respondents mention compatibility issues, the difficulties in implementing and installing them, or the need for training for employees to be able to use them properly.

Reasonable Accommodation

According to Knapen et al. (2020), 60% of people with physical disabilities do not receive any adaptations at work, with 81.7% of this group saying that they do not need any adaptations. Of the people who do get adaptations, the most common type are adaptations of tasks or working time (19.7%), while 14.7% receive some type of adapted tools, furniture, or equipment. The people who do receive adaptations are satisfied with the arrangements or neutral (48.7% and 47.8%)¹⁶. The study cites earlier research showing that a high workload is the norm in the Netherlands, and that there is little room for flexibility, such as the ability to work from home or other types of adjustments. This has earlier been shown to be a significant bottleneck in terms of finding employment.

According to the European Commission and Smits, most employers are unaware of what kind of support or incentives are available for employing persons with disabilities. This lack of awareness and consideration for employing persons with disabilities hampers national efforts to increase employment rates through quotas, tax relief, and wage subsidies¹⁷.

Reasonable accommodation ('doeltreffende aanpassing') is covered in the Dutch Act on Equal Treatment on the Grounds of Disability or Chronic Illness of 2003. Furthermore, obligations of employers with regards to assistive technology and reasonable accommodation are defined in the Act on Reintegration of Labour-disabled 2005.

The Employees Insurance Administration Office (UWV) provides support to both employers and employees. Work accommodations covered include adapted workstations as well as assistive devices and adaptations to equipment such as computers. Different types of adaptations to working hours are also considered within the framework of reasonable accommodation¹⁸.

The OPDs interviewed focus on persons with visual impairments, cognitive disabilities, and motor impairments. They agree that digital technology used for reasonable accommodation is available, and people who need them get them, along with additional support. Associations (mainly those working with persons with visual impairments) guide people into the job market and on how to keep a job.

In the OPDs' view, the biggest obstacle is that many people do not know what AT solutions and support are available; there is no general overview. Besides

that, prejudice can still be found on the employers' side, and the administrative processes and legislation on reasonable accommodation are complicated. The EDF employer survey shows that only 19% have standardised HR policies on reasonable accommodation. Slightly fewer, 14%, have a specific policy regarding the accessibility of recruitment processes – like publishing job vacancies in an accessible form, adapting the procedure if a candidate indicates their needs, or offering part-time positions (dividing full-time tasks among more employees with disabilities).

Among the reasonable accommodations provided, employers mention wheelchair accessible offices, offering adapted training (including on leadership), providing assistive technology, adjusting tasks and work time, or in one case, creating a café where staff use sign language. As the main limitations for providing reasonable accommodation, employers listed the lack of physical accessibility, the missing know-how, or the complicated and bureaucratic processes.

12 The European Disability Forum

References

1. European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion & Smits, J. (2023). Striving for an inclusive labour market in Netherlands – Positive actions and reasonable accommodation to facilitate hiring and employment of persons with disabilities involving employers and employer initiatives. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/doi/10.2767/949265>
2. European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion & Smits, J. (2019). The European Semester 2018/2019 country fiche on disability – The Netherlands. Publications Office of the EU. https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/empl_portal/ede/NL%20%20-%20ANED%202018%20-%20Task%20-%20EU2020%20report%20-%20final%20for%20web.docx
3. Ibid.
4. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2022). ICT-gebruik bij personen – ICT, kennis en economie 2022. <https://longreads.cbs.nl/ict-kennis-en-economie-2022/ict-gebruik-bij-personen/>
5. European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion & Smits, J. (2021). Digitalisation and digital transformation in the Netherlands: Implications for persons with disabilities. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://books.google.be/books?id=taGvzwEACAAJ>
6. <https://ecp.nl/thema/digivaardig/>
7. ECP – Platform voor de InformatieSamenleving (2022). Tel mee met taal experiment. <https://ecp.nl/tel-mee-met-taal-experiment/>
8. Digitale Overheid (2023). Informatiepunt. <https://www.informatiepuntdigitaleoverheid.nl/?lang=en>
9. European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion & Smits (2021), op. cit., endnote 5.
10. Lezen en schrijven (2022). "Digitaler naar werk" verbetert positie laaggeletterden op arbeidsmarkt | Stichting Lezen en Schrijven. <https://www.lezenenschrijven.nl/over-stichting-lezen-en-schrijven/actueel/digitaal-naar-werk-verbetert-positie-laaggeletterden-op>

- 11.** UWV (2023). Welkom bij STAP-budget. <https://www.stapuwv.nl/p/voorportaal>
- 12.** Coalitie voor Technologie en Inclusie (2019). Pilots Technologie voor Inclusie 2019. <https://www.technologievoorinclusie.nl/challenge.html>
- 13.** Coalitie voor Technologie en Inclusie (2021). Pilots 2021. <https://www.technologievoorinclusie.nl/pilots-2021.html>
- 14.** Sociaal Bestek (2020). Professionals kunnen de kansen van inclusieve technologie verzilveren. <https://www.technologievoorinclusie.nl/content/uploads/2021/01/Professionals-kunnen-de-kansen-van-inclusieve-technologie-verzilveren-ZorgWelzijn.pdf>
- 15.** Panteli, D., Henschke, C., Kroneman, M., Fuchs, S., Hjortland, M., Oliva, G. & Van Ginneken, E. (2018). Regulation and Coverage in five European Countries A Rapid Review Prepared for Converge3. Rapid Review 8. https://naohealthobservatory.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NAO-Rapid-Review-8_EN.pdf
- 16.** Knapen, J., Grosscurt, R. & Boeije, H. (2020). Werken met een beperking Arbeidsomstandigheden van mensen met een lichamelijke beperking. Het Nivel. <https://www.nivel.nl/sites/default/files/bestanden/1003802.pdf>
- 17.** European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion & Smits (2023), op. cit., [endnote 1](#).
- 18.** Ibid.