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# Portugal

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.

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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

According to data from EU-SILC, the employment rate for persons with disabilities in Portugal was 59.8% compared to 79.1% for the general population<sup>1</sup>. This is more than 8% above the EU27 average.

Campos Pinto et al. (2022) note that there was a positive development in the employment rates of persons with disabilities in Portugal up until the COVID-19 crisis, but the loss of employment opportunities during the crisis was not greater than for the general population<sup>2</sup>.

There is a 5% quota for the recruitment of persons with disabilities within the Portuguese public sector. In 2020, the number of employees with disabilities amounted to 2.6%, still well below the quota despite a slight increase between 2019 and 2020<sup>3</sup>.

# Digital Skills

The European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche on disability includes a recommendation to invest in training and education for persons with disabilities in terms of digital skills. According to the report, it is an area where persons with disabilities in Portugal are especially at a disadvantage, and it is not sufficiently covered in current policies since neither the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Portugal nor the National Disability Strategy sets any targets for the participation of adults with disabilities in learning. The Recovery and Resilience Plan does include the topic of digital education but does not mention persons with disabilities in relation to these plans<sup>4</sup>.

The National Strategy for Digital Inclusion and Literacy 2015-2020 (ENILD, Estratégia Nacional para a Inclusão e Literacia Digitais 2015-2020) aimed to develop digital skills in the population that has never used the Internet and people more vulnerable to info-exclusion. Two of its objectives were “to increase the Portuguese population’s digital competences” and “to encourage the improvement of the interface between online services and citizens (accessibility and usability)”<sup>5</sup>. The strategy was not renewed after 2020.

The Portuguese government has rolled out a National Initiative for Digital Competence (INCoDe 2030) to promote digital skills across the population. The initiative includes 5 action lines:

reinforcement of digital skills training in the education system;

professional training of adults regarding digital skills, in view of labour market integration;

training of the general population to be able to access and use digital technologies;

advanced training in technical graduate and postgraduate courses;

research to advance the knowledge base on digital technologies;

The first steps of the initiative included the development of free online courses on digital skills. In 2022 and 2023, a series of events are being held across the country to promote digital training for the general public<sup>6</sup>.

The 2021 State Budget Law (Lei do Orçamento de Estado para 2021, Lei n.º 75-B/2020) included several measures concerning the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, in areas such as physical and digital accessibility,

support for employment and vocational training, the enlargement and requalification of social equipment, and the access of persons with disabilities to public services<sup>7</sup>. The national agenda for employability reinforced support for employment and vocational training, innovating and strengthening active policies for inclusion and for the promotion of employability, through employment and vocational training measures, involving the different social partners and territorial entities<sup>8</sup>.

Within the INCoDe programme, the Polytechnic Institute of Santarém has received an award for providing a course on digital skills for persons with intellectual disabilities. The course is the first higher education training that has been developed for persons with intellectual disabilities. It focuses on providing digital skills needed in the labour market<sup>9</sup>.

Another initiative is the government-sponsored programme "EUSOUDIGITAL" with a mission to teach basic digital skills to persons (especially adults over the age of 45) that are not used to the online environment. The skills can be used both for everyday life and for employment purposes<sup>10</sup>.

According to the EDF employer survey (n=23), specific HR guidelines for hiring persons with disabilities are not widespread: 17% of the companies responded that they have such guidelines. Employers, in general, do not seem to be looking for outside help, as none of the respondents participate in any programme aimed at employing persons with disabilities – although at least 26% of them are aware of the public support systems promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. This is in line with the findings and the opinion of the Organisations of People with Disabilities on the administrative difficulties of hiring somebody that needs reasonable accommodation. (See more under "Assistive Technologies".)

26% of the employers agree that the lack of digital skills is hindering the employment of persons with disabilities. But while at least 22% of the companies offer training programmes for employees to improve their digital skills, no respondent was aware of any training with a specific focus on employees with disabilities.

Organisations of People with Disabilities interviewed are only aware of the public initiatives for training in digital skills, but they did not have any experience with them. For persons with cognitive disabilities, there have been several national and international training courses, with the aim of improving digital skills, including the use of social networks to contact others and to get informed. As a

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more systematic approach, the Inclusion Resource Centres and the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training design individual lifelong learning projects based on skills assessments, however, this does not include specific digital skills training programmes aimed specifically at people with disabilities. OPDs mention a mismatch between the training offers and the specific skills required at work, suggesting that training programmes should be regularly updated based on information from employers so that the skills acquired are directly related to the work they do in the company. If training has no immediate or medium-term practical implementation in the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities, the knowledge acquired can get lost.

## Assistive Technologies

Recent data has been difficult to find. A comparative study by Fiala (2019) shows that there was a downward spiral in the provision of support for assistive technology (AT) for workplace purposes supplied by the national Employment Agency (IEFP, Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional / Institute for Employment and Vocational Training) from when the law on employment support came into force in 2009 until 2015<sup>11</sup>. According to the study, only 83 female and 134 male persons with disabilities benefited from the provision in 2015. A majority of them (54.8%) had a high school or university degree.

The National Institute for Rehabilitation (INR, Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação) and the national Employment Agency (IEFP) are in charge of supporting workplace adaptations and the provision of assistive technologies (based on Law no. 4/2019). See further details under the section Reasonable Accommodation.

INR's System for the Allocation of Support Products (SAPA, Sistema de Atribuição de Produtos de Apoio) is set up to assign and provide assistive technology needed by persons with disabilities or temporary disabilities. SAPA aims to do that by, among other things, simplifying the procedures and the financing, and by implementing a centralised IT system. SAPA includes both the prescribing entities and the funding entities of assistive technology provision<sup>12</sup>.

In the EDF employer survey, 17% of the companies were aware of any employee using assistive technology, listing magnifier software and device, screen reader and input peripherals as examples. Regarding the procedure of acquiring AT, 27% of the employers knew about the existence of a public legal framework or public programme that supports the acquisition of assistive technologies, and 18% claimed that their company has a policy in this regard. One described the process as the company buying the assistive technology and then receiving reimbursement from the public agency.

The Organisations of People with Disabilities interviewed represent persons with hearing impairments, cognitive disabilities, and motor impairments. In their view, the policy on the provision of assistive technology in Portugal does not work as intended. There is a system where the employer is supposed to get financial support from the government, which can be accessed both for

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employment and for attending vocational training. But it is so bureaucratic and slow that very few employers use it. People with disabilities are sometimes not employed because employers either do not know about the support systems or have bad experiences using them, and if the employer should pay for the assistive technology, it would become too expensive.

## Reasonable Accommodation

National research on the covering of reasonable accommodation as an HR procedure has been difficult to find. The researchers from the European Disability Expertise network (EDE) note a lack of recent data related to barriers concerning digital skills and refer to a 2012 report from the Portuguese Association of People with Disabilities. The report notes that persons with disabilities working in the public and private sector have difficulties getting access to assistive technology and that information is not provided in accessible formats. The EDE network concludes that there is a lack of awareness about the needs of persons with disabilities in general, and that companies avoid the perceived burden of adjustments and accessibility, for example by avoiding employing persons with disabilities<sup>13</sup>.

Policies of supported employment (regime de emprego apoiado) are in place, and employers creating new jobs under this regime can receive compensation for parts of the salary. The capacity of the person with a disability needs to be between 30% to 90% of "normal" work capacity. The Employment Agency (IEFP) provides financial support for adaptation of the workplace, provision of assistive technology, and elimination of barriers in the built environment. The support is available for open-ended or fixed-term contracts with a minimum duration of 12 months. There is a fixed limit for work adaptations of up to 16 times the baseline (The baseline was €440 in 2022). Support for the provision of assistive technologies cannot exceed 50% of the total investment<sup>14</sup>.

The provision of assistive technology is funded and managed by IEFP through an application and evaluation process. Assistive technology for work purposes cannot be funded through the general system of assistive technology provision<sup>15</sup>.

According to the EDF employer survey, the situation with reasonable accommodation is very similar to that of providing assistive technology, and the responses show that the two categories are perceived as nearly identical. 14% of the companies claim to have an HR policy about providing reasonable accommodation, and 27% are aware of the supporting public framework. None of the respondents claimed to have or know about company policy on accessible recruitment.

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The problems with reasonable accommodation are the same as with assistive technology, according to the Organisations of People with Disabilities interviewed. There is a public framework, but the rules are either too complex or they do not work in practice. Because of this, employers can use the high cost as an excuse not to hire persons with disabilities.

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