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# Spain

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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](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 the Labour Market and Disability Observatory, the activity rate of people with disabilities in 2021 was 34.6%, far below that of the population without disabilities, which stands at 77.7%, establishing a difference of 43.1 percentage points<sup>1</sup>. In short, just over a third of people with disabilities are active in labour terms. Regarding gender, without significant differences, it seems that women show a slightly higher activity rate. The age range between 25 and 44 years registers the highest activity rate (48.4%). The educational level emerges as a variable clearly linked to work activity; thus, the higher the level of studies, the higher the activity rate. Sensory-type disabilities, especially hearing, show a higher rate of activity. At the other extreme are intellectual disabilities. The higher the degree of disability, the lower the activity rate.

Regarding the employment rate, data for people with disabilities (26.9%) are significantly different from those found for the general population, which stands at 66.3%, a difference of more than 39.4 percentage points. In other words, only one in four people with disabilities have a job.

On the other hand, the unemployment rate among people with disabilities amounts to 22.5%, while in the general population, in 2021, it was 14.7%. That is, a difference between both groups of 7.8 percentage points. There are differences between regions.

Among the main obstacles to employment for people with disabilities, it is worth noting, above all:

- the still low levels of training among some people with disabilities,
- the lack of knowledge and the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes in companies,
- the accessibility aspects, both in ordinary companies and in public employment.

# Digital Skills

There are no specific data available on the educational and training levels of persons with disabilities in digital skills in Spain. However, the available data on education indicate the persistence of a gap between the educational levels of people with disabilities and those without disabilities. The percentage of people aged 16 to 64 with primary education or less was 20.3% among people with disabilities in 2021, while it was reduced to 6.1% among people without disabilities. Conversely, the percentage of people with disabilities with higher education is 18.7%, while it rises to 36.9% among people without disabilities<sup>2</sup>.

Different studies point to the existence of a digital divide for people with disabilities in terms of access to technology, according to different factors:

- the persistence of training gaps among people with disabilities;
- participation in the labour market much lower than the average for the general population, higher levels of unemployment and, in relation to this, higher rates of risk of poverty and exclusion;
- accessibility barriers presented by new technologies pose a difficulty in their use<sup>3</sup>;
- barriers in the ongoing training of Spanish teachers in relation to ICTs applied to people with disabilities<sup>4</sup>;
- different situations even within disability: it affects some profiles to a greater extent than others – the gap increases among older people, presenting a significant challenge.

According to the EDF employer survey, 50% of companies (n=22) believe that the lack of digital skills is a burden when planning to hire people with disabilities. These companies point out the difficulty of covering current job demands by hiring people with disabilities, which include basic, intermediate, and advanced digital skills requirements. It is essential, they state, to have a minimum of digital knowledge and skills. Intermediate and advanced competence in digital skills (e.g., Power BI, medium/advanced Excel) and cutting-edge technologies (data analysis skills, Artificial Intelligence) would open up many possibilities for people with disabilities.

In the EDF survey, 86% of the companies (n=22) stated that they develop employee training programmes on digital skills. Usually, these programmes are addressed to the entire staff, specifically considering the needs of those people

who request it through their managers/according to the needs of the position. In some cases, accessibility problems are pointed out in platforms such as the Cloud and other tools, which are a trend in the workplace.

Interviewed OPD representatives highlight training as a determining factor for access to employment. Today, digital skills are required for different jobs, from the least qualified to the most complex. In this regard, there is a starting deficit in digital skills among part of the general population, and among people with disabilities. On the other hand, in recent years there has been a significant boost to training in digital skills, with support from European funding (Next Generation), both for the employed and unemployed population, including people with disabilities. It is necessary to strengthen continuous and updated training in digital skills, which must be inclusive of people with disabilities. Training in digital skills is key not only in access to employment but also in maintaining it.

In this context, there are different programmes and initiatives for learning digital skills, promoted by different OPDs. Outstanding among them is the programme "Portamento Digital" ("ForDigital Talent"). "Portamento Digital" is a permanent training programme aimed at improving the digital and technological knowledge and skills of people with disabilities, and consequently their employability. This programme is launched under the coordination and financing of the ONCE Foundation and its associations Inserta Empleo and Inserta Innovación, with the support of the European Social Fund.

As data highlighting this experience as a good practice, it is worth noting: In 2022, 5,558 people were trained through the Portamento Digital programme, and 20,964 students have been trained since its launch<sup>5</sup>. The subjects taught range from basic digital skills to more specific areas such as web programming (Java, JavaScript, Full Stack, object-oriented and databases), digital marketing, e-commerce, mobile application development, big data, QA and video game testing, user support and installation of client applications, installation and configuration of computer applications, and assembly of microcomputer components or peripherals. 'Por Talento Digital' has a scholarship and financial support programme to facilitate the completion of the courses offered.

There are also advanced training programmes from universities – such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, or Internet of Things (IoT) – through agreements with companies and OPDs. In this sense, it is worth mentioning the initiative of the University of Malaga, Samsung, and the ONCE Foundation as an example<sup>6</sup>.

# Assistive Technologies

According to the research results collected in Pérez (2022), the increase in the provision of public and private services through ICT and the growing number of conventional and daily digital tools that can be used as accessible devices is changing the paradigm of technology-based development for people with disabilities<sup>7</sup>. Technological transformation can, if done inclusively, offer people with disabilities better access to the labour market.

However, people with disabilities experience greater difficulties in accessing education, higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity, and the risk of insufficient social protection. In the future, automation and new technologies should provide new opportunities to favour the socio-labour inclusion of people with disabilities, which must be accompanied by the promotion of active training, employment, and diversity management policies specifically oriented towards the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The regulation of measures aimed at promoting the labour integration of people with disabilities falls within the competence of the state in matters of labour legislation (Art. 37 and 40 of the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion – LGDPD)<sup>8</sup>. Article 40 of the LGDPD establishes that “existing the contract, employers are obliged to adopt the appropriate measures for the adaptation of the workplace and accessibility in the company, depending on the needs of each specific situation, in order to enable people with disabilities not only to access employment, but also to carry out their work, to progress professionally and to access training, unless such measures place an excessive burden on the employer.”

Secondly, article 4.2.d of the Workers’ Statute establishes that a worker has the right to their “physical integrity and to an adequate occupational risk prevention policy.” And, in parallel, article 25 of the Occupational Risk Prevention Law states that the employer is obliged to adopt the necessary measures for the adaptation of the workplace and the accessibility of the company.

Legislation at the state level establishes the measure “adaptation of jobs, including measures of universal physical, sensory, cognitive, and communication accessibility and the appropriate measures based on the needs of each specific situation.” This subsidy, addressed to the company, amounts to €1,800 per hired worker, without in any case exceeding the real cost that is justified by the aforementioned adaptation, endowment, or elimination. This includes reimbursement for specific technologies required for employment. The

autonomous communities apply this budget and can also adapt complementary measures<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the use of accessible and assistive technologies in employment, according to the study by Keysight Technologies and the Adecco Foundation, 48% of people with disabilities use different technological adaptations to overcome physical and/or audiovisual barriers (virtual mice, keyboards with covers, braille printers, magnifying zooms, etc.)<sup>10</sup>. These resources have allowed them to reach important milestones such as completing their studies under equal conditions and/or later accessing the labour market.

According to the EDF survey, 45% (n=22) of companies/organisations claim to have policies for the acquisition and use of assistive devices and technologies. Open responses indicate that this support consists of the delivery or implementation of the necessary resources, according to the needs indicated by the professional with a disability, together with the assessment of the areas of Occupational Risk Prevention / D&I. Only 12% were aware of the public legal framework and/or public programmes supporting the acquisition of assistive technologies for people with disabilities.

Regarding the acquisition of assistive technologies, some people with disabilities need them. Part of these assistive technologies, such as hearing aids or wheelchairs, are financed, at least in part, by the Public Health System. Regarding more specific technologies for the workplace, there are subsidies for the adaptation of jobs and the acquisition of support technologies, whose legislation is state-owned and the call, by the autonomous regions, is annual. These aids are focused on the employer. However, OPDs warn they are little known—as the EDF employers survey confirms—and are hardly requested. This could be because companies cover this cost directly, are not aware of the aid, or hire people with disabilities who do not need it.

Among the digital technologies and support technologies that improve the employability of people with disabilities, the following stand out:

- technologies for teleworking, which have benefited part of the group;
- inclusion of accessibility and personalisation tools, which include assistive technologies, in the operating systems themselves, in the software for computer equipment and smartphones;
- accessibility of web portals, which has advanced in recent years and is essential – further advancement in this area is necessary, including cognitive accessibility.

# Reasonable Accommodation

Only some workers with disabilities require reasonable accommodation on the job. However, regarding the necessary adaptations of jobs, available knowledge suggests that the main problems derive from the lack of specificity and fuzzy outlines of the key concepts in this area: 'reasonable accommodation' and 'disproportionate burden'. Both concepts are marked by high degrees of ambiguity, with a lack of sufficiently clarifying and precise legislation<sup>11</sup>.

As mentioned above, legislation at the state level establishes the measure "adaptation of jobs, including measures of universal physical, sensory, cognitive, and communication accessibility and the appropriate measures based on the needs of each specific situation." This subsidy, addressed to the company, amounts to €1,800 per hired worker, and the autonomous communities apply this budget and can also adapt complementary measures.

Beyond public policies, different entities, among which ONCE and the ONCE Foundation stand out, offer visual aids for accessibility in employment, including the acquisition of assistive technologies.

In the EDF employer survey, 55% of respondents (n=22) stated that their company's Human Resources policy included reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities as a standardised procedure. Among other measures, assessments are carried out to adapt the working position to the employee's needs and to match position requirements with a person's skills.

The role of Support Units (in Special Employment Centres) is also mentioned. More specifically, "WhatsApp communication with employees with deafness, job adaptation for people in wheelchairs," screens and ergonomic chairs provided by the company for home use, and adjustments in schedules based on the difficulties they may have (time to start work, breaks, etc).

32% of respondents have a company policy regarding the accessibility of recruitment processes. In these cases, actions include specific training on disability for the people involved in the selection to minimise possible biases and make the pertinent adaptations; website accessibility; accessibility in environments, services, and processes for people with disabilities who join the company; encouraging the participation of people with disabilities for all vacancies; and proactive searches for people with disabilities through foundations or specialised companies.

For the few companies that responded regarding the main costs of providing reasonable accommodation, the answers are diverse, within a shared sense: it depends on each case, they do not incur extra costs, or they do not have this data. Sometimes it is mentioned that the main costs lie in the adaptation of physical spaces and in the accessibility of technological tools. Regarding the main limits in the provision of reasonable accommodation, the few answers provided are related to not having knowledge about the needs of potential candidates; in the case of intellectual disabilities, “the time and emotional burden invested by the person tutoring”; or “the reforms that the adaptation to the position for people in wheelchairs may require.”

Only 9% (n=22) of surveyed employers were aware of the legal framework and public programmes supporting its provision.

So, the law establishes the obligation to adopt “reasonable accommodation.” However, as available knowledge and OPDs point out, the main problem is that there is hardly any legislative development in this regard. Therefore, there is a lack of definition and regulatory precision about what reasonable adjustments consist of and their application and scope. The development of regulations on reasonable adjustments is pointed out as a main challenge.

On the other hand, no special difficulties are indicated for the acquisition of digital technologies in the work environment: there is a willingness among companies to carry out this kind of specific adaptation in the field of technological tools. Some OPDs (ONCE and Fundación ONCE) also provide financing to acquire technologies for training and employment.

Among the technologies with the greatest potential for the employability of people with disabilities, the following are indicated:

- Progress in the development of assistive technologies and customisation options in standard operating system software, as well as in different technological tools. It is necessary to ensure that technological innovation is accessible and inclusive.
- Advances in web accessibility. It is necessary to push this, including improvements in job portals and applications such as LinkedIn, etc.
- The necessary advancement of cognitive accessibility, both on the web and in other digital technologies.
- Virtual and augmented reality, given its value in labour learning and in carrying out work practices.

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- One specific and promising tool is Ayho!<sup>12</sup>, an application for iOS and Android mobile phones and tablets, and from the web, which facilitates pre-employment training and the incorporation of people with disabilities into employment under the supported employment methodology<sup>13</sup>.

In this context, interviewed OPDs point out that, regarding assistive technologies, since technological change is so rapid, aid for its acquisition would also need to be dynamic and continuous over time.

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**10.** Fundación Adecco (2022), op. cit., [endnote 3](#).

**11.** Real Patronato sobre discapacidad (2023). Libro Blanco sobre Empleo y Discapacidad. Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030. p. 484.

**12.** <https://ayho.fundaciononce.es/>

**13.** Ayho! is developed by the ONCE Foundation with the support of Samsung and the Spanish Association of Supported Employment.