**In the upper left part of the image is the project logo, and other images of graphs, statistics and a woman typing on a computer.
In the centre is the title: REPORT, to establish a European Quality Framework for sheltered employment.
New paradigm of sheltered employment from the social economy. 
Below are the logos of the three organisations involved in the project, the logo of the EU co-financing and the EU disclaimer on the production of this material. **

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7. **INTRODUCTION:**

The Erasmus+ KA210-ADU project, called DISJOB, aims to address and improve the situation of sheltered employment in Europe. With Spain as the coordinating country and Romania and Croatia as partners, this project seeks to analyse and propose a unified model that can be applicable in all European countries. Sheltered employment, which focuses on providing paid work and support to people with disabilities and in vulnerable situations, is a key element for social and labour inclusion in our societies.

The initial aim of the DISJOB project was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current situation of sheltered employment in Europe. However, during the research, we encountered several challenges, such as the lack of consistent and up-to-date data and significant differences in the employment policies of each participating country. These difficulties have underlined the complexity of creating a uniform model for sheltered employment that is effective and applicable in all national contexts.

Faced with these challenges, and after deep reflection, we have identified that social economy and social inclusion enterprises could offer a viable and sustainable solution to the current needs of sheltered employment. Social economy enterprises, which include cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations, operate with the main objective of generating a positive social impact and fostering the labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations. Similarly, social inclusion enterprises, which are specifically designed to integrate people with integration difficulties into the labour market, play a crucial role in promoting an inclusive and equitable labour market.

Through the DISJOB project, we seek not only to better understand the realities and challenges of sheltered employment in Europe, but also to propose an intervention model based on social economy and social inclusion enterprises. We strongly believe that this approach has the potential to offer an effective and tailored response to the specific needs of each country, thus promoting greater social cohesion and fairer and more equitable economic development across Europe.

Now that we have introduced the project to you, we consider it appropriate to provide some important facts to contextualise the content of this report. Firstly, in all EU countries there is a significant employment gap for people with disabilities (hereafter PWD). The probability of having a job decreases dramatically for a PWD compared to non-disabled people. Across countries, the disability employment gap varies between 10 and 42 percentage points. In the EU as a whole, 50.6% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 74.8% of people without disabilities. For individual disabilities the situation may be worse. Of the 30 million blind and visually impaired, the unemployment rate is 75%. Among the autistic, only 10% are employed.

Secondly, even if a PWD has a job, working conditions are worse than those of people without disabilities. Eleven per cent of employed PWD face in-work poverty, compared to 9.1 per cent of non-disabled people. PWD are more likely to receive temporary contracts and lower wages and to lose their jobs in economic downturns.

Thirdly, the risk of poverty and material deprivation is higher for PWD. 29.5% of women and 27.5% of men with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, compared to 22.4% of the population as a whole. A disproportionate number of people with disabilities are homeless and the risk of homelessness is higher.

To increase the employment participation of people with disabilities, European governments traditionally implement active labour market policies (ALMPs). A key component of these policies is the creation and maintenance of sheltered workshops, also known as supported employment.

It is currently unknown exactly how many people with disabilities across Europe work in sheltered employment. However, the European Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021-2030 admits that "a large number of people with severe disabilities do not work in the open labour market, but in facilities offering so-called sheltered employment".

**2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Sheltered employment is spreading in many countries, with various types of institutions offering an increasing number of jobs to people with disabilities who wish to work. The structures involved also show a growing desire to be recognised as full participants in the economy and as employers of a higher professional standard. Indeed, many sheltered employment providers now use management methods taken directly from the commercial world.

However, these institutional structures have evolved in very diverse legal contexts, ranging from general commercial law to special provisions governing establishments with a therapeutic function. Given this contextual diversity, issues related to the employment status and fundamental rights of the workers involved may be overlooked, sometimes crudely. This study attempts to provide an overview of this particular aspect of sheltered employment.

Two issues are particularly important in this sector. The first arises from the different concepts of sheltered employment: does it provide workers with a long-term occupation or can it be a transitional job on the way to entry or re-entry into non-sheltered employment? The second question is an extension of the first in terms of the objectives of sheltered employment: should the production of goods and services take precedence over therapeutic, medical and social concerns?

Sheltered employment in Europe refers to policies and measures designed to ensure the inclusion in employment of vulnerable groups or groups with special needs, such as people with disabilities, young people, older people or the long-term unemployed. This concept is based on a number of principles and theoretical frameworks that advocate equal opportunities and social justice in the field of employment. Here is an outline of the theoretical framework of sheltered employment in Europe:

1. **Human Rights and Labour Rights**: Sheltered employment is based on internationally recognised human rights and labour rights principles. This includes the right to work (Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and equal employment opportunities (ILO Convention 111).
2. **Social Inclusion**: Sheltered employment is part of social inclusion policies, which seek to guarantee full and effective participation in society for all citizens, regardless of their personal circumstances.
3. **Principle of non-discrimination**: Sheltered employment is based on the principle of non-discrimination, promoting equal treatment and opportunities in access to employment and professional development.
4. **Social and Solidarity Economy**: In Europe, sheltered employment is linked to the development of the social and solidarity economy, which includes social enterprises, cooperatives, foundations and other forms of organisations that prioritise social welfare over economic profit.
5. **Employment policies**: Sheltered employment systems are supported by active employment policies, which include measures such as incentives for hiring vulnerable groups, targeted training and skills programmes, and support for inclusive job creation.
6. **Access to Education and Training**: The importance of ensuring access to quality education and vocational training programmes to improve employment opportunities for vulnerable groups is recognised.
7. **Rights and Capabilities Approach**: Sheltered employment adopts an approach centred on the rights and capabilities of individuals, recognising and strengthening their skills and potentials to contribute meaningfully to the labour market and society as a whole.
8. **Stakeholder Collaboration**: Effective implementation of sheltered employment requires collaboration between governments, employers, trade unions, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders to develop comprehensive and sustainable policies.
   1. ***EUROPEAN STRATEGY ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2021-2030***

In March 2021, the European Commission adopted the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. With this ten-year strategy, the European Commission aims to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Europe and around the world.

The Strategy builds on the results of the previous European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which paved the way for a barrier-free Europe where people with disabilities can exercise all their rights and participate fully in society and the economy. Despite the progress made in the last decade, people with disabilities still face considerable barriers and are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The aim of this Strategy is to move towards a situation where, irrespective of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation, all people with disabilities in Europe

* can asserttheir human rights
* enjoy equal opportunities and participation in society and the economy
* can decide where, how and with whom they live
* can move freely within the Union, irrespective of their aid needs
* and do notsufferdiscrimination

This new reinforced Strategy takes into account the diversity of disabilities, including long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments (in line with Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), which are often invisible.

Given the risks of multiple disadvantages faced by women, children, older persons, refugees with disabilities and persons with socio-economic difficulties, this Strategy promotes an intersectional perspective in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To this end, the new Strategy sets out an ambitious set of actions and flagship initiatives in a number of areas and establishes numerous priorities, such as:

* Accessibility: to move and reside freely, but also to participate in the democratic process.
* The possibility to have a decent quality of life and to live independently, as the Strategy focuses especially on the process of deinstitutionalisation, social protection and non-discrimination at work.
* Equal participation, given that the aim of the Strategy is to effectively protect persons with disabilities against all forms of discrimination and violence and to ensure equal opportunities in and access to justice, education, culture, sport and tourism, as well as equal access to all health services.
* The EU's role in leading by example
* The EU's aim to achieve the objectives of this Strategy is to
* Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities at the global level

**Flagshipinitiatives**

1. **EU Accessibility:** a knowledge base providing information and good practice on accessibility in all sectors (by the end of 2022)
2. **European Disability Card:** The European Commission will propose a European Disability Card that will apply to all EU countries. The card will make it easier for people with disabilities to receive appropriate support when travelling or moving to another EU country (by the end of 2023).
3. **Guidelines recommending improvements for independent living and inclusion in the community**. This will contribute to people with disabilities being able to live in accessible and supported housing in the community or remain living at home (2023).
4. **A framework of excellent social services** for people with disabilities (2024)
5. **A package to improve labour market outcomes for people with disabilities** (to be launched in the second half of 2022)
6. **Disability Platform**: The Disability Platform brings together national authorities responsible for the implementation of the Convention, organisations of persons with disabilities and the Commission. It supports the implementation of the strategy and strengthens cooperation and exchange in the implementation of the Convention.
7. **Renewed human resources strategy** of the European Commission, including actions to promote diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.

**Implementing the Strategy: working closely with EU countries**

The Commission will support Member States in developing their national strategies and action plans to advance the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Union legislation in this field.

The European Commission calls on Member States to contribute to this new reinforced Strategy as a framework for the Union's actions and for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

* 1. ***THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES***

In its **article 27,** the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right to work of persons with disabilities and establishes the legal framework for the obligations of States Parties in relation to the work and employment of persons with disabilities*.*

***Article 27***

*Labour and employment*

*1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.*

*States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for persons who acquire a disability in the course of employment, by taking appropriate measures, including the enactment of legislation, inter alia:*

*(a) Prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions;*

*(b) Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunity and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and redress for grievances;*

*c) Ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others;*

*(d) Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to comprehensive technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;*

*e) Encourage employment opportunities and career advancement of people with disabilities in the labour market, and support them in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;*

The right to work and employment

*f) Promote opportunities for entrepreneurship, self-employment, setting up cooperatives and starting one's own business;*

*(g) Employing persons with disabilities in the public sector;*

*(h) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through relevant policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;*

*(i) Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided for persons with disabilities in the workplace;*

*j) Promote the acquisition by people with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market;*

*(k) Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and re-employment programmes for persons with disabilities.*

1. *States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not held in slavery or servitude and that they are protected, on an equal basis with others, from forced or compulsory labour.*
   1. ***EMPLOYMENT PACKAGE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES***

On 21 September 2022, under the mandate of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Employment Package for People with Disabilities was launched.

The Employment package, which is part of the Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030, will help develop national policies that engage people with disabilities in the green and digital just transition.

The measures integrated in the package are divided into six main areas of action in the form of guidance, guidelines, manuals and good practice presentations:

* Strengthen the capacities of employment and integration services.
* Promote recruitment prospects through positive discrimination and anti-stereotyping measures.
* Ensure the adequacy of workplaces.
* To encourage people with disabilities to remain in employment and to prevent disabilities associated with chronic diseases.
* Ensure vocational rehabilitation plans in case of illness or accident.
* Study of quality jobs in sheltered employment and pathways to the open labour market.

This initiative aims to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy social inclusion and economic autonomy through employment. The package is expected to be adopted through the conclusions of the Council of the European Union.

It proposes a series of actions for the period 2021-2030. It builds on the Social Entrepreneurship Initiative and the Start-up and Growing Business Initiative. It has been developed through an open and inclusive process over a two-year period.

Work integration social enterprises are a common type of social enterprise throughout Europe. They specialise in providing work opportunities for disadvantaged people.

The package - one of the seven flagship initiatives of the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 - is in line with the UN CPRD and supports the realisation of the principles of the EU social rights pillar. It aims to improve the situation of people with disabilities in the labour market and to reduce the employment gap between people with and without disabilities. As we have seen above, according to Article 27 of the CRPD, people with disabilities have the right to enjoy social inclusion and economic autonomy through employment on an equal basis with others. However, the latest data available at EU level, from 2019, show that only 50.8% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 75% of non-disabled people. The situation is even worse for women with disabilities: on average, only 48.3% of women with disabilities are employed.

As we saw at the beginning of this section, the package focuses on six areas of action, the results of which will serve as practical tools and guidelines for implementing pre-existing employment legislation and will be published over the next two years. Theseinclude:

1. **Strengthening the capacities of employment and integration services - through** the publication of a guide for Member States to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of employment services, which was published on 25 September 2022.
2. **Promoting recruitment prospects through positive discrimination and combating stereotypes** - through a catalogue of positive actions to facilitate the recruitment of people with disabilities involving employers (planned for the first quarter of 2023).
3. **Ensuring reasonable accommodation at work** - through the development of guidelines for employers, one of which is the development of guidelines on reasonable accommodation at work for employers (expected in the third quarter of 2023).
4. **Prevention of disabilities associated with chronic diseases -** through the publication of a manual for the management of chronic diseases and the prevention of the risk of acquiring disabilities through the publication of a manual published by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (planned for Q4 2023).
5. **Ensure occupational rehabilitation schemes in the event of illness or accident.** by issuing guidelines for effective occupational rehabilitation schemes covering common illnesses and types of accidents (planned for the first quarter of 2024).
6. **Exploring quality jobs in sheltered employment and pathways to the open labour market -** by launching a study on improving the employment of people with disabilities through alternative employment models, including recommendations for fair working conditions and career development in alternative forms of employment and pathways to the open labour market that comply with the UN CRPD (planned for the first quarter of 2024).

While the EUD welcomes this initiative of the EU Commission, there is still work to be done to ensure that appropriate measures are not only identified, adapted to different types of accessibility requirements, but also *implemented* at national level, as well as to influence all future actions to ensure that the deaf perspective is reflected. For example, measures on reasonable accommodation for deaf people in employment. Indeed, the joint paper on the employment package for persons with disabilities mentions that the package will take disability diversity into account, in line with the UNCRPD.

To meet the objectives of this Package, a major effort will be required from civil society. Accordingly, the EUD will work with the EU institutions and support EUD national member associations to advocate for the inclusion of the deaf perspective in the development of the deliverables. The EUD will also support its national member associations in the implementation of these outputs at Member State level. For example, through the dissemination of toolkits; in fact, by the end of 2022, the EUD will publish a toolkit on the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030, covering all relevant flagship and other actions, including on employment.

**3. SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT IN EUROPE. DATA OBTAINED FROM THE RESEARCH CARRIED OUT AS PART OF THIS PROJECT**

1. ***OVERVIEW OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT***

**1.1 Type and legal status of sheltered employment structures**

* **Spain**
* Public/private establishments
* Commercial (public and private limited companies)
* Worker-ownedcompanies and cooperatives
* Associations and foundations
* **Croatia**
* Others:

Employment of persons with disabilities in Croatia can be found in various sectors, including private establishments, public establishments, voluntary associations and commercial enterprises. Unfortunately, many organisations, whether public or private, do not have defined policies for including people with disabilities in their workforce. Currently, in Croatia, there is no legally recognised and specially regulated model of supported employment, in the sense that companies are established mainly focusing on this type of employment model. Existing organisations set up associations or social enterprises in which people with disabilities are employed in accordance with the existing legal regulations, which also apply to non-disabled employees. With the help of public institutions, employers have access to certain incentives to co-finance the salaries of people with disabilities, workplace adaptations, rehabilitation and, under special conditions, can apply for supported employment projects for people with disabilities within inclusive and sheltered workshops.

# Romania

* Private establishments
* **European Union**

The legal framework of sheltered employment provision varies. In most cases they are private establishments, generally run by voluntary associations or as cooperatives or, more rarely, as genuine commercial enterprises. (In Ireland and Portugal all structures are private).

The composition of the sector as a whole varies from situations where sheltered workshops are run by many small, voluntary associations, some of which run only one establishment, to a situation where a single entity predominates (as in the case of Remploy in the UK) or even constitutes the whole sector (such as Samhall, a foundation that became a limited company in 1992 in Sweden). Individual sheltered workshops employ on average between 30 and 90 DCWs.

Overall, the sheltered employment sector has grown significantly, although the pace of growth obviously varies from country to country.

1.2 Objectives and activities of sheltered workplaces The main objectives of sheltered employment are to

**are:**

* **Spain**
* Social integration
* Professional integration
* Job vacancies
* others:

# Compliance with employment quotas:

Compliance with employment quotas for people with disabilities in Spain is regulated by the General Law on the Rights of People with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion, as well as by Royal Decree 364/2005. These regulations establish that companies with more than 50 employees are obliged to reserve a percentage of their jobs for people with disabilities.

Specifically, the employment quota for people with disabilities in Spain is 2% of the company's total workforce.

Companies that do not comply with this quota may face financial penalties proportional to the number of employees they should have hired according to the established quota.

Compliance with these quotas has been a debated issue in Spain, as some companies do not comply with these obligations and the effectiveness of the control measures and sanctions imposed has been questioned. In addition, there has been debate on the need to promote policies that do not only focus on the compliance with the

quota, but also promote real inclusion and equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market.

# Croatia

* Social integration
* Professional integration
* Rehabilitation
* Provision of posts
* Others:

# Compliance with labour contributions:

In Croatia, the legal framework concerning the employment of persons with disabilities is mainly governed by the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities. The aim of the legislation is to promote equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in the labour market.

Employers are encouraged to provide equal opportunities for the employment of people with disabilities and to create an enabling work environment.

Croatian law obliges certain companies, especially those with 20 or more employees, to allocate a certain percentage of their workforce to people with disabilities. Non-compliance results in fines, and these fines contribute to a government fund to support the employment of people with disabilities.

* **Romania**
* Social integration
* Professional integration
* Job vacancies
* others:

# Compliance with employment quotas:

Romania has the lowest employment rate compared to other EU countries for people with severe limitations (with a more than threefold difference between Romania and the best performing countries).

The determining causes may be: the restrictions on the exercise of the right to work in the amended and supplemented Law no. 53/2003 (e.g. prohibiting the employment of persons under guardianship), the instrument to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities through the quota system does not work effectively, the budget collected from the payment of the non-labour tax is not adequately used to increase the employment of people with disabilities and the subsidy system for employers is not sufficiently attractive.

According to Law No. 448/2006 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as reissued, amended and supplemented, any public or private employer with at least 50 employees is obliged to employ persons with disabilities, at a percentage of at least 4.

In terms of active measurement, the quota system has not led to an increase in the employment rate, which means that one of the future challenges is related to the increase and diversification of employment-related services by actively using the quota system.

The provision of employment support services tailored to the needs of people with disabilities is one of the most effective means for employment. As regards supported employment, although there are positive experiences of some social welfare and child protection directorates general and non-governmental organisations in the provision of such services, there is no programme at national level.

# EuropeanUnion

The main objectives of sheltered employment were most frequently cited as social and vocational integration and rehabilitation. In many countries (Denmark, Sweden), job creation of one structure or another was seen as the main objective (Belgium even referred to "job creation"). Others cited the production of goods and services (Norway, Portugal), while the Swedish company Samhall also mentioned financial performance, albeit only fourth on the list of priorities. In Luxembourg, however, "Production is not seen in terms of performance. It is the consequence of a disabled worker's self-fulfilment rather than an immediate goal.

At the opposite end of the scale of objectives formulated

clearly in terms of production, or even productivity, are those related to improving the well-being of disabled workers, e.g. restoring their dignity. Therapeutic treatment as such was only mentioned by Greece, and a purely occupational function only in relation to the Spanish work assistance centres.

Some intermediate objectives were also often mentioned, e.g. supplementing the income of disabled workers (Spain); vocational training (Norway, Scotland); and transition to "mainstream" employment (Belgium, Sweden).

# 1.3 What are the types of activities carried out in sheltered employment structures?

# Spain

* Subcontracting of a service of an industrial nature (packaging, assembly, manufacturing)
* Manufacturing
* Service sector
* Agriculture
* Commercial activities
* Others:
  + Graphic arts and bookbinding Logistics services
  + Textile and clothing
  + Call Centre
  + Customer service
  + Administrative Services
  + Hotel and Catering
  + Recycling and Waste Management
* **Croatia**
* Subcontracting of a service of an industrial nature (packaging, assembly, manufacturing)
* Manufacturing
* Service sector
* Agriculture
* Commercial activities
* Others:
* Graphic arts and bookbinding
* Textile and clothing
* Accommodation and catering
* Recycling and waste management
* Physical care
* Garden maintenance
* Cleaning services
* Public administration

# Romania

* Subcontracting of a service of an industrial nature (packaging, assembly, manufacturing)
* Manufacturing
* Service sector
* Agriculture
* Commercial activities
* Others:
* Call centre and customer service
* Administrative services

# European Union

Although there are no precise data on the types of activity carried out in sheltered employment structures, the most frequently mentioned by EU countries, in decreasing order, are: industrial subcontracting (packaging, assembly or manufacturing), manufacturing proper, services, agriculture and commercial activities.

1. ***LEGISLATION AND SUPERVISION***

**2.1 Does your country have specific legislation on the organisation or operation of sheltered workplaces?**

* **Spain**
* Yes

# Croatia

* No

# Romania

* No

# European Union

The sheltered sector is governed by different types of legislation. While some countries (e.g. Greece, Ireland, Croatia, Romania, Sweden) do not have specific legislation on the organisation or operation of sheltered workplaces, most other countries have specific legislation or regulations governing aspects of sheltered employment, both to protect employees and to specify exceptions to the application of labour law (notably regarding a fixed minimum wage).

However, in some countries sheltered employment is explicitly excluded from standard labour legislation (e.g. in Austria, unless there is a company agreement or an "award" in the branch of activity concerned);

in other countries, existing labour legislation applies in the absence of any specific reference to sheltered employment in the legislation.

These workshops can be supervised directly by the Ministry of Labour at central level (e.g. Norway, for "labour market enterprises" (AMB), and Portugal) or at regional or local level (Spain), or by the Ministry of Social Affairs, or even jointly.

Where there are two or more types of workshops, a distinction is usually made between those that are primarily production-based and those that focus on processing. They are supervised by the competent ministry (labour or health, respectively) and are subject to different regulations, especially with regard to labour law. Workers with less severe disabilities are mostly found in workshops with an emphasis on production, while treatment-oriented workshops employ a large proportion of people with a mental impairment.

# *FUNDING AND SUBSIDIES*

* 1. **Protected workplaces in:**
* **Spain**
* They combine multi-tiered funding

# Croatia

* Combining multi-tiered funding

# Romania

* They combine multi-tiered funding

# European Union

Countries fall into two broad categories: those where these centres receive funding from central government, either through a ministerial department or a national agency (e.g. France, Ireland or Sweden); and those where funding is provided by national governments. at regional or local level (e.g. Belgium, Portugal and Spain), although a few countries combine funding from several levels (e.g. Denmark and Scotland (UK).

# 3.2 Is public funding linked to a certain level of income?

# Spain

* **No. It** is not directly related to the level of income, but to other aspects such as:
* Number of workers with disabilities hired.
* Disabilitylevelofemployees
* Compliance with established quotas
* Development of training and education programmes
* Results and achievementofobjectives
* Participation in specific programmes

# Croatia

* **No. It** is not directly related to the level of income, but to other aspects such as:
* Number of workers with disabilities hired
* Compliancewithestablishedquotas
* Development of training and education programmes
* Participation in specific programmes (EU or nationally funded)
* Donationsfromcitizens and companies

# Romania

* **No.** There is a quota system to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities by offering them subsidies, but it is not sufficiently attractive.

Although, according to legislation, there is an obligation in the public sector to hire people with disabilities, including the organisation of employment competitions dedicated to hiring them, the level of employment is low.

The most important benefit for employers with more than 50 employees who hire people with disabilities is that they no longer pay the disability fund to the state, and with the respective money they can pay the salary of a disabled person who also performs some activity.

Employers who hire disabled graduates for an indefinite period of time will receive a monthly amount of the gross minimum wage per economy in force for the following 18 months.

Some of the most effective measures to increase the employment of people with disabilities are supported employment services tailored to their needs.

However, the number of unemployed people with a disability certificate registered with local public employment agencies is very low.

The number of people with disabilities benefiting from labour market activation measures for the general population is very low, and the employment target for people with disabilities is also low and decreasing.

County employment agencies do not ensure adequate physical accessibility and accessibility of information and communications.

There is a need to improve the quality of public employment services and to increase and diversify private providers of employment services.

The employment services provided are deficient in terms of content, and their integration with other public social services is limited.

# *PEOPLE IN SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS*

# Spain

In 2022, there were 1,941,900 people with disabilities of working age (16-64 years), which was 6.3% of the total working age population, and an increase of 0.6% (12,500 people) compared to 2021. Of this population, 685,300 were active, 2.6 per cent more than in 2021. The non-disabled active population increased by 0.7%. Within the active population with disabilities, there was a higher percentage of men, more weight in the 45-64 age group and less representation of people with higher education than in the active population without disabilities.

The protected employment rates in Spain are 60.7% for men and 39.3% for women.

By age, the majority of people with disabilities working in a special employment centre are over 45 years old (56.8%).

* **Croatia**

According to the Register of Employed Persons with Disabilities (4 September 2023, Croatian Institute of Public Health), 21,616 persons are registered in the Republic of Croatia. Among them, 16,944 persons with disabilities (52.5% men and 47.5% women) meet the criteria set out in the Regulation on the content and method of keeping the Register of Employed Persons with Disabilities (4 September 2023, Croatian Institute of Public Health, Croatian Institute of Public Health).

Employed Persons with Disabilities (NN 75/18). Employers

can count these persons towards their employment quota or use the benefits for employing people with disabilities.

The percentage of employed persons with disabilities is calculated annually, but does not represent complete statistical information. For example, in 2022, a total of 131,938 persons were employed according to the records of the Croatian Employment Service, including 3,065 persons with disabilities. Compared to the previous year, when 2,740 persons with disabilities were employed, this represents an increase of 11.9 per cent. Of the total number of employed persons with disabilities, 1,587 are men (51.8%) and 1,478 are women with disabilities. In terms of industry of employment, the highest number of persons with disabilities in 2022 were employed in the manufacturing industry (15.2%), followed by Hospitality (12.4%) and Public Administration (12%).

Unfortunately, we lack specific information on Croatian legal persons employing persons with disabilities.

# Romania

As of 31 December 2022,4 the total number of persons with disabilities reported by the General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection of the Counties (GDSACP), and respectively the local ones of the Bucharest districts, was 857,638 persons. Of these, 98.03% (840,727 persons) are in the care of families and/or live in the care of a family.

1.97% (16,911 persons) are in public residential social care institutions for adults with disabilities coordinated by the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions.

As of 31 December 2022, the rate of persons with disabilities in the Romanian population was 3.87%, differentiated by region, with the regions of South-West Oltenia, South Muntenia and North-West Muntenia having the highest rates.

In counties/municipalities, the highest number of persons with disabilities is registered in Bucharest municipality (73,313 persons), followed by Prahova county (37,732 persons), and the lowest number is registered in Covasna county (6,363 persons).

Women represent 53.25 per cent of the total number of persons with disabilities. The number of people over 50 years of age represents 72.72 percent of the total number of adults with disabilities. From the centralisation of the data by age groups, it results that 53.04 per cent are persons aged 18 to 64 (415,995 persons) and 46.96 per cent are over 65 (368,369 persons), in the total number of adults with disabilities.

For the 18-64 age group, the proportion of people with disabilities is as follows:5 18-19 years, 0.98%; 20-24 years, 2.11%; 25-29 years, 2.11%; 25-29 years, 0.98%; 20-24 years, 2.11%; 25-64 years, 2.11%; 25-64 years, 2.11%; and 25-29 years, 2.11%.

2.44%; 30-34 years 4.24%; 35-39 years 4.14%; 40-44 years

5.35 per cent; 45-49 years 5.80 per cent; 50-54 years 7.25 per cent; 55-59 years 6.29 per cent; 60-64 years 10.01 per cent.

The number of people with severe disabilities represents 40.09% of the total, people with severe disabilities 48.21% and people with medium and mild disabilities 11.70%.

As of 31 December 2022, the number of public social care institutions for adults with disabilities was 508, of which 453 were residential and 55 non-residential. Of the 453 public residential social care institutions for adults with disabilities, 85 are centres with more than 50 beneficiaries.

* **EuropeanUnion**

The biggest difference between EU countries was in the actual number of people with disabilities employed in the sheltered sector and their relative size (27,000 in Sweden out of an economically active population of about 4 million).

The majority of workers in the sheltered sector are people with disabilities; the percentage of non-disabled workers (mostly employed in some supervisory role) is usually between 5% and 25%. However, in Poland the situation is unusual, with only 122,000 workers with disabilities in a total protected workforce of about 200,000; this anomalous situation is due to the fact that any company with a workforce of at least 40% PWD (or even 30% if they are visually PWD) is eligible for the

sheltered employment status.

The proportion of men in sheltered employment is systematically higher than that of women, constituting on average 60% to 70% of the total (even 80% in Switzerland). There are few statistics on the age distribution of workers with disabilities.

The population of sheltered workshops tends to be larger in countries with more experience and in greater numbers.

# *NATURE OF DISABILITIES*

The nature of disability among workers in sheltered employment is rarely studied. The few figures available reveal marked differences. In Sweden, for example, only 33% are mentally or mentally disabled, and 26% in Norway; only 16% are mentally disabled in the UK. The percentage of people with a physical impairment is around 50% in Sweden, but only 7% in centres in France.

* **Spain**
* Physical and organic, sensorial and psychic (intellectual and mental)
* 50% of the workers in the special employment centres are people with intellectual and/or mental disabilities due to their difficulties in accessing the ordinary labour market.
* **Croatia**
* long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory disabilities
* **Romania**
* Physical, visual, auditory, deafblind, somatic, mental, mental, psychic
* Severe disabilities 40.09%, severe disabilities 48.21% medium and mild disabilities 11.7%.

1. ***TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES IN A SHELTERED ENVIRONMENT***

* **Spain**

Special Employment Centres CEE and Enclaves Laborales are two different models of labour integration for people with disabilities in Spain. Both concepts are briefly described below:

# Special employment centres:

Definition: EWCs are companies whose main purpose is the labour integration of people with disabilities. They are regulated by the General Law on Disability and the specific regulations of each autonomous community in Spain.

Proportion of workers with disabilities: According to Spanish legislation, at least 70% of the workforce of an EWC must be made up of people with disabilities.

Activities and sectors: EWCs can operate in various sectors, such as services, industry and agriculture, among others. They offer employment adapted to the abilities of people with disabilities.

Job adaptation: EWC jobs are adapted according to the individual abilities of disabled workers.

# Work enclaves:

Definition: Work Enclaves are a modality of labour integration that consists of collaboration between a Special Employment Centre and an ordinary company. In this model, workers with disabilities hired by the EWC carry out their work in the facilities of the collaborating company.

Participation of Ordinary Companies: In the Labour Enclaves, the ordinary company participates in the labour integration by facilitating an inclusive work environment for the disabled workers in the EWC.

Adaptation of the work place: As in the EWCs, in the Enclaves Laborales the work places are adapted according to the individual needs and abilities of the workers with disabilities.

Both models aim to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market by providing them with a job adapted to their characteristics. The choice between a CEE and a Enclave Laboral may depend on several factors, such as the specific needs of the disabled person, the characteristics of the job and the collaboration with ordinary companies. These models are part of the labour integration policies in Spain and seek to promote equal opportunities in the workplace.

# Croatia

In Croatia, the employment situation of persons with disabilities in a sheltered environment can be of various categories. National opportunities for employment of persons with disabilities include provisions for sheltered employment. However, we would like to point out that in Croatia there is no specific legal framework for sheltered employment. The mentioned opportunities can be characterised as sheltered employment, financed by public institutions.

These are the types of employment status of workers with disabilities in Croatia:

1. **Sheltered and inclusive workshops** (*Zaštitneiintegrativneradionice*): these are designated workplaces offering employment to people with disabilities. The working environment is adapted to the needs and abilities of the employees, providing a supportive environment. There is also a form of work unit for employing people with disabilities that the employer establishes by a special act as a separate accounting unit. The work unit will become a sheltered and inclusive workshop if it fulfils the conditions for it. A sheltered workshop is an institution or an enterprise that offers sheltered jobs to persons with disabilities for whom the vocational rehabilitation centre has determined, by means of an assessment and opinion (hereinafter referred to as the centre's assessment and opinion), that they are employable only in jobs.

protected workplaces. Due to their disability, they can achieve between 30% and 70% of the expected work performance. A sheltered workshop must have at least 5 employees, and of the total number of employees, at least 51% must be persons with disabilities employed in sheltered workplaces.

On the basis of a referral from the vocational rehabilitation centre, a sheltered workshop may accept rehabilitated persons for practical training. The number of employees of the sheltered workshop who are not persons with disabilities employed in sheltered workplaces, together with the number of rehabilitated persons employed in sheltered workplaces, shall not exceed the number of persons with disabilities employed in sheltered workplaces.

1. **Supported employment** (*Mjereaktivnepolitikezapošljavanja*): this model consists of providing assistance and support to people with disabilities to find and maintain employment in the mainstream labour market. The support is tailored to the needs of the individual and may include job counselling, adaptations in the workplace and other assistance.
2. **Employment in social enterprises** (*Zapošljavanje u socijalnimpoduzećima*): Some social enterprises in Croatia focus on the employment of people with disabilities. These enterprises may operate in various sectors and their main objective is to provide employment opportunities and promote social inclusion.
3. **Open labour market** (*Otvorenotržišterada*): some people with disabilities can be employed in the regular labour market with adaptations and support, with the aim of achieving full inclusion. Public sector employers are obliged to give preference during employment if a person performs as well as the candidate with the highest score.

The specific type of work situation will depend on the person's abilities, preferences and available opportunities. The Croatian legal framework, including the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, provides guidelines and regulations to ensure equal opportunities and fair treatment of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

# Romania

Since 2010, Romania has been developing policies to increase accessibility, equal participation, education and vocational training, social protection, health and the employment rate of persons with disabilities, in order to build a "barrier-free Europe for all". According to the Romanian Constitution, the right to work cannot be restricted, and "persons with disabilities enjoy special protection".

The state authority responsible for vocational counselling, guidance, integration and employment is represented by the National Employment Agency and the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities (NAPD).

Until 2002, the employment rate of PWDs was never analysed. Moreover, employment was never, in the past, the target of an active and coherent policy aimed at addressing the special social needs of PWD.

The Romanian electronic register on disability, founded in 2011 and managed by MLFSPEP, aims at an accurate estimation of the degree of professional integration in this field. Data on inclusive education are more easily collected, mainly from inclusive schools. Some elements are missing which prevent a precise estimation of the degree of vocational integration of people with disabilities in Romania. Employment follow-up does not last long enough to eliminate all risks of drop-out by PWDs.

The employment rate of disabled people with disabilities in Romania is still relatively low: 12.26% (in 2019) to 14% (in 2020), compared to the labour market inclusion in developed European countries Norway 61.7%; Switzerland 62.0%; Austria 41.9%; Germany 46.1%; UK 38.9%), or North

(Canada 56.3%; USA 38.1%).

Legal regulations and administrative policies have a huge impact on the lives of people with disabilities. According to existing policies on the employment of PWDs, anyone wishing to integrate or reintegrate into the labour market has access to free vocational assessment and counselling, regardless of their age and the type or degree of their disability.

In addition, they can receive vocational counselling if they are trained and of the appropriate age, if they are unemployed and have no professional experience, or even if they are employed but wish to retrain.

Vocational training for PWDs is organised through initiation, qualification, requalification, further training and specialisation programmes.

Employment of PWDs takes place in the open labour market, at home, or in authorised sheltered units (sheltered employment), which employ people with (more severe) disabilities, or as an intermediate stage in the open labour market.

These are entities organised as/represented by natural or legal persons, public or private; they can also be sections, workshops or other structures within economic operators or public institutions, non-governmental organisations, or they can be organised by an authorised individual disabled person, who can run an independent enterprise, as stipulated by law. The rate of disabled personnel must be at least 30% of the staff. The number of authorised protected units in Romania increased from 400 (in 2010) to 722 units registered in 2019. According to the data of the National Institute of Statistics and European reports, more than 3,000 non-governmental organisations carry out constant economic activities, under various forms (sheltered workshops, licensed sheltered units, social enterprises, etc.).

# EuropeanUnion

At European level there are three main types of employment status for workers with disabilities in a sheltered environment.

* The first is the type where all workers in the sector are considered to be clients or trainees, i.e. they have no real employment relationship with their employer. Germany, Greece and Ireland are examples of this category. In this case, workers with disabilities are never considered employees, even if they receive financial remuneration for the work they do.
* The second category, which applies in most European countries, contains several types of employment status. They vary according to the nature of the sheltered employment structure, the degree of disability and whether the employer is party to a collective agreement.

The result is that some workers are considered students, trainees or clients, while others enjoy the status of employees and all the associated rights.

* Finally, in the third category, workers in the sheltered employment sector are basically considered to be employees. Countries in this category include Belgium, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In these cases, employees sign a contract identical to those used outside the sheltered employment environment.

# *ON FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION, CAN WORKERS IN SHELTERED WORKSHOPS JOIN TRADE UNIONS?*

* **Spain**

Yes, workers in Special Employment Centres in Spain have the right to join trade unions. Trade union membership is a fundamental right recognised by Spanish labour law, which applies to all workers, including those employed in EWCs.

Trade unions play an important role in representing workers, collective bargaining and defending their labour rights and interests. EWC workers have the right to participate in trade union activities, such as membership, participation in trade union meetings and election of trade union representatives.

It is important to note that union membership is voluntary and that workers are free to choose whether or not to join a union. Trade unions can offer support and advice to workers on a range of labour issues, such as working conditions, wages and collective bargaining.

In summary, workers in Special Employment Centres in Spain have the right to join trade unions and to participate in trade union activities to protect and promote their labour rights.

# Croatia

No, in Croatia there are no trade unions for people with disabilities or employees of sheltered workshops.

# Romania

Yes, workers have the right to join trade unions and to participate in trade union activities to protect and promote their labour rights.

# EuropeanUnion

As far as freedom of association is concerned, in some countries - especially those where workers with disabilities do not have the status of employees - unionisation in the sheltered workplace is ruled out. Where two types of sheltered employment coexist, as in France, workers in sheltered workshops can join trade unions, but they are not granted this right in sheltered workplaces. In the vast majority of countries, freedom of association in these establishments exists in principle, but does not take any tangible form. There is thus a gap between the theoretical right to organise and an (often very) low rate of membership, which can be explained by a certain lack of interest shown by the large trade union federations towards protected staff in general, on the one hand, and the difficulties of operating alongside voluntary associations, on the other. Finally, in the few cases where employee status is widely recognised for workers with disabilities in a sheltered environment, it can be observed that trade unions play a central role: this can be seen in Wallonia (French-speaking Belgium) with membership rates of 30-40% and where 62% of sheltered production workshops (entreprises de travail adapté) have a trade union representative; and in Sweden, where almost 100% are affiliated to trade unions.

In almost half of the countries no collective agreement applies to employment. However, in the UK, by contrast, Remploy has its own national collective agreement, and in Belgium almost all collective agreements recognised by the National Labour Council now apply to sheltered workshops.

Similarly, with regard to elective representation and participation of disabled workers in decision-making within sheltered employment structures, situations vary widely, ranging from the "ordinary" case close to unsheltered employment (e.g. Belgium, Norway, Sweden and the UK, where there are elections of shop stewards), to a total absence of representation or participation in decision-making (e.g. Luxembourg and Switzerland).

# *LEVEL OF INCOME OF WORKERS IN SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT CENTRES*

* **Spain**

It will depend on the professional category for which the worker is recruited.

# Basic salary:

**Group II**. Qualified staff between 1,800 and 1,400 euros**Group III**. Technical staff between 1,270 and 964 euros **Group IV**. Operators 830 euros

# Croatia

We do not have specific information on the exact income of workers with disabilities in Croatia. The income of workers with disabilities in sheltered workshops or in any other type of employment may vary depending on several factors, such as the type of work, the employer and the applicable regulations.

In Croatia, the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities addresses issues related to the employment of persons with disabilities, including wage regulations. In addition, Croatia is one of the countries with a mandatory minimum wage to which companies must adhere. Minimum wages are adjusted once a year by government regulations, and these adjustments are usually announced before they come into force.

The minimum wage for the year 2023 amounted to EUR 700.00 gross, while in 2024, by decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, the minimum wage will be increased to EUR 840.00 gross. The average gross wage in November 2023 at national level in Croatia was EUR 1,680.00 gross.

# Romania

Disability allowance (indemnizațiepentrupersoanele cu handicap)

Irrespective of their income, people with disabilities receive a monthly allowance and a monthly supplementary personal budget.

The monthly allowance is:

RON 419 for an adult with a severe disability;

RON 317 for a profoundly disabled adult.

The monthly supplementary personal budget is

179 RON for an adult with a severe disability;

132 RON for an adult with a profound disability;

72 RON for an adult with an average disability.

The family or legal representative of a child with a severe, profound or medium disability also receives a supplementary personal budget for as long as they care for, look after and maintain the child, equal to:

359 RON for a severely disabled child; 210 RON for a profoundly disabled child;

72 RON for a child with an average disability.

# EuropeanUnion

In more than two-thirds of the countries surveyed, there was a minimum wage or income for workers with disabilities in sheltered employment; the exceptions were Greece, India and Ireland.

However, the existence of a minimum income does not influence either the average level or the composition of the minimum wage of these workers. In some cases, the pay is the only source of income, in others it complements a

disability. The different forms of income of people in sheltered employment need to be examined more closely.

In a number of countries, earned income is considered separately from other forms of income and is set broadly according to standard criteria: experience, qualifications, productivity, collective agreements or awards. In some cases, these payments constitute the disabled worker's only income.

Countries in this category include Belgium, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, because of structures that offer a transition to open employment; and Spain, despite marked disparities in wage levels.

In France, the basic wage in a sheltered workshop is at least 35% of the minimum interprofessional wage (SMIC), and a supplement paid by the government brings the total to at least 90% of the SMIC. Whatever the wage paid by the company, a worker's total remuneration cannot exceed 130% of the SMIC, which limits the possibilities for promotion, at least in terms of income. The income of a person working in a workplace assistance centre is composed of a part linked to productivity (at least 15% of the SMIC) and an income supplement paid by the government (at least 55% of the SMIC). Adults with disabilities can receive a supplementary benefit not linked to their employment; the resulting total income is then between 70% and 110% of the SMIC.

Similarly, in Germany, the basic wage set by the labour office is supplemented by a component assessed on the basis of the volume and quality of the individual's work. In the Czech Republic, workers whose work does not justify payment of the minimum wage receive a supplement calculated according to the level of pension entitlement (which can amount to 75% of the minimum wage when the pension is paid in full, or 50% when it is paid in part). In Denmark, the wage is fixed on the basis of the disability pension received by each worker.

In Ireland, workers in sheltered workshops receive a pension and a supplement paid by the employer which cannot exceed 50% of the pension.

In Switzerland, the wage (usually supplemented by a disability pension) is expected to reflect the "residual" capabilities that the disabled person may have (i.e. the greater the disability, the lower the wage). Similarly, in Greece, although productivity may be taken into account, income is largely assessed according to the degree of disability.

Luxembourg is an exception in this respect, as income is granted irrespective of work performed; persons officially registered as PWD receive a guaranteed minimum income regardless of whether they work or not. In all cases considered, wages are paid in cash or into workers' bank accounts.

Workers often benefit from a range of subsidies in addition to their salary. These include subsidised transport in almost 75% of cases, albeit in various forms: partial or full reimbursement, free transport for PWD, collection services. Similarly, almost half receive a meal allowance. In some cases, work clothes are provided (e.g. in France and Ireland), although this rule often applies to all workers (e.g. in Belgium and the UK). In some cases, workers are accommodated on the premises (in France, this is rarely the case in sheltered workshops, but is more frequent in work assistance centres, although accommodation is always funded from a separate source; in Belgium, accommodation is sometimes provided alongside sheltered employment establishments. In some cases, leisure activities are organised, as in Greece or in French work assistance centres.

# *WORKING CONDITIONS OF WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES IN SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT (HOURS OF WORK/WEEK, PAID HOLIDAYS, PAID HOLIDAYS GRANTED).*

* **Spain**

With regard to working hours, rest periods, holidays, leave and leave of absence, the **Workers' Statute** is applicable (section five of chapter two of Title I), with the following peculiarities

1. Overtime is prohibited, except for those necessary to prevent or repair accidents and other extraordinary damage.
2. A disabled worker may be absent from work, provided that he/she gives prior notice and justifies it, to attend medical-functional medical-functional rehabilitation treatment and to participate in vocational guidance, training and retraining activities, with the right to remuneration, provided that such absences do not exceed ten days in any six-month period. remuneration, provided that such absences do not exceed ten days in any six-month period.

# Croatia

The working conditions of workers with disabilities in Croatia may vary depending on the specific employer, the type of sheltered workshop and the applicable regulations. Employers are encouraged to provide equal opportunities for the employment of people with disabilities and to create a work environment that is conducive to the employment of people with disabilities.

conducive. The following is an overview of typical employment conditions for workers with disabilities, bearing in mind that these details may be subject to change and may differ from one organisation to another:

Working hours/week: The standard weekly working hours for employees in Croatia are usually 40 hours, spread over five working days. However, specific working hours for workers with disabilities can be adjusted depending on the nature of the work and the needs of the workers. Some employers may offer part-time opportunities or flexible working hours.

Paid leave: Croatian national legislation provides for sick leave and annual leave for all employees, including workers with disabilities. Specific paid leave policies may depend on the company and relevant employment contracts or collective agreements. By law, the minimum number of leave days is 20 working days. However, workers with disabilities are entitled to a minimum of 25 working days if they work 5 days a week or 30 days if they work 6 days a week as part of their annual leave.

Paid holidays granted: all employees are entitled to paid holidays and weekends in Croatia each year.

# Romania

Depending on qualification and degree of disability, any person has the right to work. To increase the number of employed persons with disabilities, their rights are regulated by Law 448 of 2006.

* 1. Employment conditions of people with disabilities

If they suffer from a disability, the employer must provide them with all the necessary conditions to be able to perform their work. Moreover, like any other co-worker, they have the right to be promoted.

In order to be placed in a job in accordance with their vocational training and working capacity, they must present the certificate of placement in the degree of disability. This act is issued by the evaluation commissions at county level or at the level of the municipality of Bucharest.

According to Emergency Ordinance 60/2017, any employer with more than 50 employees must hire persons with disabilities at a percentage of 4% of the total number of employees.

In addition, if you are a disabled person, you benefit from a paid probationary period of at least 45 days. The employer must provide training during this probationary period and offer the same benefits as in the individual employment contract.

* 1. Righttovocationaltraining

Before looking for a job, they should know that they have access to free career counselling and guidance. This will make it easier for them to find a new job or even to retrain if they wish to change their field of activity.

They can benefit from vocational training programmes if they are old enough to enter the labour market (over 16 years old). Even if they have a job but want to retrain, they can benefit from free vocational training.

* 1. Salary, benefits and holidayperiod

If you have a disability, you will benefit from at least 3 days of paid leave provided by your employer. So, in addition to the minimum 21 days of paid leave that you must receive by law, you will receive at least 3 extra days. Young people and people working in harsh or harmful conditions will also benefit from these additional days.

As far as salary is concerned, the employer is obliged to offer the same salary as he would give to any other employee in a similar position. In addition, you will continue to receive the monthly disability allowance after signing the employment contract. The attendance allowance is also not revoked when you take up employment.

If you have a severe disability, you can benefit from reduced working hours of 8 hours. In order to have such working hours, you must present a document certifying that an assessment committee has recommended shorter working hours.

# EuropeanUnion

The smallest difference between countries concerns working time. In general, working hours are between 35 and 40 hours per week, except in Greece (30 hours).

The vast majority of countries reported that there are no specific measures for female workers. There appear to be no cases of child labour (under 15 years of age) in sheltered employment structures in the countries examined.

Some disparities emerge with regard to night work. It is illegal in almost half of the countries in the sample. In Belgium it is considered exceptional or very rare, while in France it is marginal and requires special permission from the labour inspection authorities and the safety, health and working conditions committees. In Spain it is prohibited, unless special dispensation is granted, due to insufficient public transport. It is permitted in the Czech Republic and Poland, subject to medical permission, as in India, where a premium is also paid.

The system of paid leave for persons in sheltered employment does not differ from the usual system in most of the countries studied.

In Luxembourg, Poland and in some Belgian establishments additional sick days are granted to workers with disabilities. In the Czech Republic, Sweden and the United Kingdom, the number of sick leave days granted is higher than in "ordinary" employment.

# *ARE THE SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS APPLICABLE IN SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN OTHER SECTORS?*

* **Spain**

In the case of Special Employment Centres in Spain, Social Security contributions may have some specific characteristics compared to other sectors. However, it is important to bear in mind that the regulations may change and that the particularities may depend on various factors, such as regional regulations and the specific circumstances of each case.

Some aspects that could be relevant in relation to social security contributions in EWCs are:

**Allowances and reductions**: In some cases, EWCs can benefit from bonuses and reductions in social security contributions. These tax incentives are intended to encourage the hiring of people with disabilities and collaboration between EWCs and ordinary companies.

**Flexibility in contributions**: There may be certain flexibilities or adaptations in Social Security contributions to reflect the special employment conditions in EWCs.

**Collaboration with ordinary companies**: If an EWC establishes a labour enclave in collaboration with an ordinary company, social security contributions can be managed jointly or adapted to the needs of this specific collaboration.

**Autonomous Community regulation**: Some issues related to Social Security contributions may be regulated at Autonomous Community level, as in Spain there are decentralised competences in labour matters. Therefore, it is important to take into account the specific regulations of the autonomous community in which the EWC operates.

# Croatia

Social security benefits for workers with disabilities are generally subject to the same rules and principles as for other sectors.

# Romania

Unlike an employee who is not disabled, he/she is exempt from payroll tax. The conditions for retirement are different from those for non-disabled persons. Thus, if they are severely disabled and have completed one third of their contribution period before being hired, they benefit from the reduction of the retirement age by 15 years.

# EuropeanUnion

In almost half of the European countries surveyed, the social security benefits applicable in sheltered employment are identical to those in the rest of the world (Czech Republic, France (for sheltered workshops), Germany, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain (for sheltered workshops), Sweden and the United Kingdom).

In Greece, although the same social security benefits apply in sheltered employment as in other forms of employment, workers with disabilities are entitled to a pension earlier.

In several countries, benefits paid in sheltered employment are comparable to those paid in "ordinary" employment, with the exception of unemployment benefits. In the case of disabled workers, it is calculated according to specific rules in Belgium; it is not granted in Denmark, in work assistance centres in France and Spain, or in Switzerland.

In Ireland and Luxembourg, employees in sheltered employment receive an invalidity pension which entitles them to other social security benefits, thus linked to their disability and not to their occupational activity.

1. ***SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT MODEL***

* **Spain**

In Spain, the model that has been developed in most of the special employment centres is a salaried model, very similar to the one developed in the ordinary company, but with specific working conditions established in the agreement. On the employers' side, their vision is much more focused on performance and profit than on the needs of the collective.

It is likely that the special employment centres aimed at hiring people with mental disabilities do present a more therapeutic model adapted to the characteristics of people with disabilities.

# Croatia

Croatia employs a mixed (dual) model for the employment of workers with disabilities, which combines elements of both protection and paid employment. In this model, people with disabilities benefit from a supportive environment designed to suit their specific needs, while at the same time receiving a wage for their work. This dual approach aims to strike a balance between protection and social inclusion for workers with disabilities.

The mixed model allows for tailor-made adjustments in the workplace, ensuring that working conditions and tasks are adapted to the abilities of people with disabilities. Although the emphasis is on providing a protective environment

and support workers, workers with disabilities are considered employees and receive wages in accordance with labour legislation.

This approach is in line with broader initiatives promoting the social and professional inclusion of people with disabilities. It recognises the value of work as a means of empowerment and social integration, acknowledging the rights of workers with disabilities to fair compensation for their contributions. The blended model reflects Croatia's commitment to foster inclusive workplaces that enable people with disabilities to participate meaningfully in the labour market, while enjoying the necessary protection and support for their specific needs.

# Romania

In Romania, the model that has been developed in most of the special employment centres is a salaried model, very similar to the one developed in the ordinary company, but with specific working conditions established in the agreement. On the employers' side, their vision is much more focused on the needs of the group.

The following activities are carried out:

* Recruitment and selection processes according to a set of qualification criteria.
* Support to employees provided by a multidisciplinary team of specialists (social workers, trainers/instructors, career guidance counsellors, human resources, etc.) with expertise in resources and job security) to facilitate the integration into the labour market and to facilitate the integration into the labour market.

social inclusion of people with disabilities.

* Socio-professional assessment process for young people with disabilities (integrated individualised plan).
* They participate in a vocational counselling and guidance programme to identify their needs and provide them with effective employment in a sheltered unit.

Employment is based on a legal employment contract under Romanian law.

* Individual or group counselling and career guidance is carried out on the basis of people's skills, employability and available options.
* Vocational training courses and regular support are offered to participants in the form of workshops, e.g. in tailoring, hand bookbinding, computers or handicrafts,

painting, production of decorative candles and archiving of documents.

* Provision of professional, social and psychological support according to needs.
* Free labour market counselling is available on request.

# EuropeanUnion

It has seemed useful to group the "types of sheltered employment status" together, in order to better understand both the different models involved and the differences between them in terms of employment relations and working conditions.

The therapeutic model (protection from employee status)

The therapeutic model is generally the one applied in institutions employing people with a mental impairment. Except in Ireland, where the centres are run by charities.

Associations of people with mental disabilities or their parents are often very active in these institutions.

In Luxembourg, parents' associations are represented on the boards of most private institutions in the sector.

In Ireland and Greece, no public authority has a particular responsibility for sheltered employment and no specific legislation applies to the sector.

The situation in Luxembourg differs somewhat, as the Ministries of Labour and Education are jointly responsible for the sector.

In this therapeutic model, workers are usually considered as beneficiaries, trainees or clients, and not employees (except in a minority of cases in Luxembourg). Therefore, they do not have a contract with their employers and are not covered by most of the provisions of the relevant labour codes (with the notable exception of all those relating to health and safety which apply equally to sheltered employment. Similarly, the workers' social security rights are not modelled on those of employees, but are linked to their disability status rather than to the work they do in a sheltered environment.

Except in Luxembourg, social security in sheltered employment bears little resemblance to that offered to workers in "ordinary" employment.

Thus, in this model, workers with disabilities do not sign employment contracts or join trade unions. Most respondents stated that trade union membership is possible, although not widespread, largely due to the lack of trade union interest in this sector. Greece mentioned the election of representatives to discuss social policy issues with management; reference was also made to elections in a number of such institutions in Ireland, but only in relation to safety issues. Collective bargaining is therefore very limited and collective agreements non-existent in the sheltered employment environment of the therapeutic model.

Thus, disabled workers' income is largely derived from benefits, allowances or pensions rather than from wages and is therefore not linked to the minimum wage. In Luxembourg they receive the guaranteed minimum wage, while in Ireland their income is made up of a fixed pension plus a supplement.

In this model, working hours are shorter than those prevailing in other situations: with the exception of Luxembourg, where they can amount to 40 hours, they are 35 hours in Ireland and 30 hours in Greece.

The intermediate model (the disabled worker as a quasi-employee)

In this model, although working conditions cannot be considered as solely relative to the relative to employment wage employment, neither does reflect a function

purely therapeutic.

Although generally considered employees, workers may not be covered by all provisions governing regular salaried employment. An employment contract is considered advisable, but does not always exist in practice (especially in Denmark and Germany). In this model, union membership is always considered permissible, but in practice membership levels are extremely low or even non-existent. Similarly, collective bargaining is very rare (indeed, in Germany its legal status has not yet been determined), and only rarely do disabled workers participate in decision-making processes and elect their representatives. In all cases there are no collective agreements that can cover the sector.

However, wages must be higher than a stipulated minimum. They may vary according to the existing disability pension and its amount (in Denmark, the amount to be paid must be at least 5% of the minimum wage), or they may be composed of a basic salary payable to all plus an individualised supplement (Germany).

However, these payments do not constitute wages in the normal sense of the term. In Portugal, they are equivalent to the minimum wage.

Unlike the previous model, social security in this intermediate model is based on that applicable to workers in general, but with certain restrictions: in Switzerland and Denmark, unemployment benefit is not paid and, in the latter case, old-age pensions are only paid when the beneficiary reaches the age of 67.

Working hours - between 35 and 42 hours, with some exceptions - do not differ much from those observed in "ordinary" employment.

The intermediate model tends more towards the salaried employment model than the therapeutic model. However, trade unions are virtually or totally absent, as are collective bargaining agreements and participation or representation of workers with disabilities.

Working conditions in this sector in Portugal, where sheltered employment has been established much more recently than in other countries in this group (the first legal provisions date back to 1983 and the first establishment was opened in 1988), tend to reflect the wage employment model.

The mixed (dual) model

In this model, two, and sometimes more, types of sheltered employment structures often coexist. However, this does not mean that the situations in countries with dual systems are all the same. The distinction between the different types of structures is practically identical in Spain and in France (work assistance centres and sheltered workshops), with the first type of structure corresponding to the therapeutic category and the second following the salaried employment approach. In Norway, the principle is practically identical, but the practice is fundamentally different in the sense that the market enterprises

The employment cooperatives (ASB and ASVO for the public sector) and production workshops (PV) offer more extensive protection and represent the other facet of the Norwegian sheltered employment policy.

In Norway, the fixed-term nature of contracts in labour market enterprises is cited as one of the reasons for the low level of union membership. In lower-tier structures, which generally employ a higher proportion of workers with a mental impairment (26% in co-operatives, 57% in the AMB in Norway and with a comparable distribution in France and Spain), workers with disabilities are not considered employees (although in Norway they do sign a real contract) and trade unions are virtually absent. As far as legislation is concerned, in higher level structures the degree of participation of disabled workers in their own representation and decision-making within the establishments in which they work is broadly the same as for "ordinary" employment. In practice, however, the situation is not always so straightforward. Although the relevant collective agreements are usually those applicable to the sector of s t r u c t u r e a c t i v i t y , difficulties arise in their implementation, especially due to the absence of effective trade union representation and information on rights.

In Norwegian labour market enterprises (which allow transition to "ordinary" employment), and in Spain in sheltered workshops, the wages paid are calculated on the same basis as in "ordinary" employment, whereas in France they consist of a part paid by the employer (at least 35% of the SMIC) and a supplement paid by the State. In all cases, the minimum wage serves as a reference.

In contrast, in the Spanish welfare-to-work centres and in the Norwegian cooperatives, the income consists of a basic pension plus an individual premium which can vary.

In France, the income of persons working in a job centre consists of the partial benefit payable to a disabled adult plus a salary paid directly by the centres themselves (at least 5% of the SMIC) and an income supplement (50% of the SMIC) paid by the labour office of the provincial authority (département) concerned. The level of social protection is also determined by the nature of the structure (except in Norway, where it is equivalent to that applicable to employment in general), as it is linked to employee status in higher level structures and depends on the pension in other structures (the question of social protection for people with disabilities working in Spanish work centres seems problematic in this respect).

The advantage of this dual system is that it allows for a transition between the different types of structures; however, it can also "tie" individuals to the type of establishment furthest away from "ordinary" employment (in France, for example, less

15 per cent of workers are in sheltered workshops, compared to more than 85 per cent in workfare centres).

The salaried employment model (protection and labour law)

This model covers a wide variety of situations depending, firstly, on the composition of the sector (in Sweden, a single group; in the UK, a dominant company employing more than half of the workers in the sector, together with more limited structures, private or public, at local level; in Belgium, a large number of establishments of limited size, most of them run by non-profit associations; in Poland, an equally wide range of structures, with large variations in size, from 20 to 3 000 people); and in the ratio of disabled to non-disabled employees (in Sweden, 90% of the workers employed by Samhall are PWD; in Poland, companies with a workforce of 40% disabled employees - and even 30% if they are visually impaired - qualify as protected enterprises and benefit from corresponding tax advantages; in Belgium, the workshops also cater for "workers gradually returning to employment after illness" and "hard-to-place unemployed"). Although this model includes systems that have evolved very differently over time (in Poland, in particular, where growth was very marked and the number of sheltered employment structures more than tripled between 1991 and 1996), their unity and strength derive from their full integration into the world of work.

However, there are no significant differences between this model of paid employment and previous models in terms of the type of work performed by people with disabilities and the sector of activity. But it differs in that the disabled person is considered to have the right to work and also (as far as possible) to enjoy the same rights and fulfil the same obligations as any non-disabled worker. The responsibility for the workshops under this model of wage employment is generally vested in the Ministry of Labour, and the persons with disabilities working in them have the status of employees. Thus, for most of the issues considered here, these workshops operate in much the same way as "ordinary" employment structures: employees sign a contract identical to that of any other employee; levels of union membership, while not high, are still significant; employees elect their representatives; and there is some collective bargaining. The sector is covered by collective agreements and deviates very little from the provisions of the labour codes.

The main reservations about this model concern the persons employed (in particular, a lower percentage of persons with a mental impairment than in other situations; and, more specifically, whether it can remain dynamic over time. In this respect, there is a substantial difference between the Belgian and Swedish cases. Belgium seems to reflect a tendency (mentioned by several respondents) to retain workers with higher production capacity, while workers with more severe disabilities are less frequently accepted, with an estimated re-employment rate of less than 1%. By contrast, with an integration rate of between 3 and 6 per cent per year and a determined policy to ensure a wide range of prospects for its employees, the Swedish company Samhall exemplifies a different facet of this approach to wage employment. Its approach demonstrates that considering disabled workers in the sheltered environment as full employees does not necessarily lead to a rigid system with few promotion prospects for the people concerned.

India could be included in this model, as its form of sheltered employment differs little from normal employment, although there are large differences between small unregistered enterprises and large establishments in its sheltered employment sector.

Finally, a "lower wage employment model" may be considered to apply here, given that, despite the virtual absence of employment protection, people with disabilities employed in this sector seem to enjoy working conditions very similar to those in "regular" employment. Moreover, it seems likely that the same link between unspecified working conditions for disabled workers and a low level of social protection may be found in other countries.

# *CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING THE* MAINSTREAM *MARKET*

* **Spain**

Recruiting people with disabilities in mainstream companies can pose specific challenges. The following highlights some of the main difficulties faced by companies in this context:

# Lack of knowledge and awareness:

Companies are often faced with a lack of awareness of the abilities of people with disabilities and the reasonable accommodation that may be required in the work environment. Awareness raising and education are essential to overcome this obstacle.

# Prejudice and stigmatisation:

There are stereotypes and prejudices that can affect the perception of people with disabilities in the workplace. Companies may encounter resistance due to the stigma associated with disability.

# Lack of physical and technological accessibility:

The physical and technological infrastructure of some companies may not be accessible to persons with disabilities. Lack of accessibility can be a major obstacle to full participation in the work environment.

# Ignorance of the economic benefits:

Some companies may not be aware of the economic and fiscal benefits associated with hiring people with disabilities, such as social security rebates and tax deductions.

# Lack of knowledge of possible adaptations:

Lack of awareness of the work and technological adaptations available to support employees with disabilities can be a barrier. Companies may be unaware of simple and effective solutions that can be implemented.

# Perceived costs:

Some companies may fear that adapting the workplace for people with disabilities will involve significant costs. However, in many cases, accommodations can be affordable and have long-term benefits.

# Non-inclusive selection processes:

Recruitment processes may not be inclusive, making it difficult for persons with disabilities to access employment opportunities. Recruitment processes may need to be reviewed and adjusted.

# Lack of awareness of support programmes:

Companies may not be aware of support programmes and services offered by governmental agencies or non-governmental organisations that facilitate the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market.

Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes awareness programmes, diversity and inclusion policies, reasonable accommodation in the workplace and collaboration with specialised agencies. Inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace not only benefits individuals, but also contributes to the creation of more diverse and productive teams.

# Croatia

The recruitment of people with disabilities in mainstream companies poses difficulties arising from a lack of knowledge and awareness of their abilities and the necessary adaptations. Prejudice and stigmatisation, together with problems of physical and technological accessibility, make inclusion even more difficult. Some companies are unaware of the economic benefits, tax advantages and simple adaptations available. Concerns about perceived costs, non-inclusive selection processes and lack of awareness of support programmes are additional barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including awareness programmes, diversity policies, reasonable accommodation in the workplace and collaboration with specialised institutions. Inclusion of people with disabilities not only benefits individuals, but also contributes to the creation of more diverse and productive teams.

# Romania

Recruiting people with disabilities in mainstream companies can pose specific challenges. Some of the main difficulties faced by companies in this context are highlighted below:

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There are stereotypes and prejudices that can affect the perception of people with disabilities in the workplace. Companies may encounter resistance due to the stigma associated with disability.

# 12.1 Obstacle that may prevent persons or companies from participating in sheltered employment initiatives?

* **Spain**

There are a number of barriers that can make it difficult for individuals and companies to participate in sheltered employment initiatives, such as Special Employment Centres (CentrosEspeciales de Empleo):

# Lack of awareness and sensitisation:

Lack of knowledge of sheltered employment initiatives and low awareness of the benefits they bring to both people with disabilities and companies can be an impediment.

# Stigmatisation and prejudice:

Persistent stigma and prejudice towards people with disabilities can be a barrier to participation in sheltered employment programmes.

# Ignorance of the economic benefits:

Individuals and companies may not be aware of the economic and fiscal advantages associated with participation in sheltered employment initiatives, such as social security rebates.

# Lack of accessibility:

Lack of physical and technological accessibility in the work environment can hinder the participation of people with disabilities.

# Perceived costs:

Businesses may perceive that making reasonable accommodations and participating in sheltered employment programmes entails high costs, which can be a barrier.

# Uncertainty about necessary adaptations:

Uncertainty about the adaptations needed to support employees with disabilities can lead to reluctance on the part of companies.

# Lack of training and psychological support:

The lack of training programmes and advice for companies on how to integrate people with disabilities can be an obstacle.

# Non-inclusive recruitment processes:

Recruitment processes that are not inclusive and do not take into account the needs of persons with disabilities can limit participation.

# Lack of knowledge of existing resources:

Lack of awareness of available resources, such as employment agencies, support programmes and training services, can make participation difficult.

# Resistance to organisational change:

Resistance to change within companies and unwillingness to change working practices can be major obstacles.

Overcoming these barriers requires a holistic approach that includes awareness raising, training, promotion of inclusion and access to resources and support services. Collaboration between businesses, public agencies and civil society organisations can play a key role in removing these barriers.

# Croatia

As with the challenges mentioned above, participation in sheltered employment models faces a number of barriers. These include a lack of awareness and awareness of these programmes, persistent stigmatisation and prejudice towards people with disabilities. In addition, lack of knowledge about economic benefits, accessibility issues, perceived costs, uncertainty about necessary adaptations and non-inclusive recruitment processes act as barriers. Lack of training and advice for companies, lack of awareness of existing resources and resistance to organisational change also contribute to the challenges.

According to a survey conducted in December 2023 by Croatia's largest job portal, *Mojposao*, the majority of companies surveyed (69%) do not employ persons with disabilities. Among the companies that do employ persons with disabilities, 46% state that the disability is visible, 23% have employees with both visible and invisible disabilities, while 31% of the companies surveyed employ persons with disabilities that are not visible.

It is worrying that companies do not have processes in place for the recruitment of people with disabilities. Almost half of the companies (42%) have no measures related to the implementation of diversity policies in the workplace.

Only 16% of companies have developed a system in which people with disabilities are included as employees, consumers of the company's goods and services and business partners.

This study reveals an important discrepancy between legislative frameworks and implementation practices in Croatia. On the one hand, there is a certain regulatory framework that ensures the inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in the labour market. However, on the other hand, there is still considerable resistance and disinterest among employers in addressing this issue.

Therefore, to overcome these barriers, a comprehensive approach involving awareness-raising, training, promotion of inclusion and collaboration between businesses, government agencies and civil society organisations is essential.

# Romania

There are a number of barriers that can make it difficult for individuals and companies to participate in sheltered employment initiatives, such as Special Employment Centres:

# Stigmatisation and prejudice:

Persistent stigma and prejudice towards people with disabilities can be a barrier to participation in sheltered employment programmes.

# Ignorance of the economic benefits:

Individuals and companies may not be aware of the economic and fiscal advantages associated with participation in sheltered employment initiatives, such as social security rebates.

# Lack of accessibility:

Lack of physical and technological accessibility in the work environment can hinder the participation of people with disabilities.

* **EuropeanUnion**

It is clear that there is a difference in the outcomes that can be expected for people with disabilities from different employment models. On a broad scale, there has been a shift in investment towards the inclusive labour market and away from more sheltered options. However, the transition remains modest and, in many countries, sheltered workshops are still the predominant route for people with disabilities to gain access to paid employment. For some people with disabilities, particularly those with an ASD, intellectual disability or mental illness, the shift towards individually selected jobs, with the support of qualified job coaches, has increased their options for paid employment and their employment outcomes.

Inclusive enterprises have generally created jobs that offer market-valued products and services, with longer-term contracts and salaries within the usual legal limits, with training and development. However, many people continue to receive services in sheltered accommodation, occupational centres and other group employment models with low or no pay and little prospect of transition to other forms of employment. There is also little transition between group and individual models of employment placement. People with less severe disabilities are cared for within the generalised model of rehabilitation and vocational training, where outcomes remain relatively poor.

Vocational rehabilitation must be part of the response to people who have a long-term illness or disability and need help to return to work or change careers. However, effective transition to open employment for the full range of people with a disability will require investment in employment methods supported by job coaches and IPS. Appropriate support from open labour market employers will also benefit from direct employment services such as Supported Employment and IPS. This transition will also require changes in legislation, definitions of disability and capability, and benefit rules in some States to accommodate a shift towards open market jobs. Protected work outcomes focused on existing employment may need to be improved while establishing pathways to open employment, when the prospects for immediate transition to open employment are slim. Rights-based frameworks are already well advanced across the EU, providing an opportunity to adopt policies that encourage employers to adapt to the needs of people with disabilities, with financial support from the state, rather than providing wage subsidies that reinforce the perception that people with disabilities have low labour productivity. Any use of additional employer-based subsidies will need to be creative and may be better targeted at hiring people with very significant disabilities who wish to access employment and include allowances for additional mentoring, supervision and partial participation.

# *THE BENEFITS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORTING THE SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT MODEL, BOTH SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY*

* **Spain**

Sheltered employment support, such as that provided by Special Employment Centres, can generate a range of social and economic benefits in local communities. Some of the most salient of these are detailed below:

**Social benefits:**

# Social inclusion:

The creation of sheltered employment promotes social inclusion by providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities, integrating them into working and community life.

# Reducing stigmatisation:

By encouraging the active participation of people with disabilities in the labour market, it contributes to reducing stigmatisation and changing negative perceptions towards this population group.

# Strengthening social cohesion:

Diversity in the workplace, including people with disabilities, contributes to strengthening social cohesion and the development of more inclusive communities.

# Development of social skills:

Employees of Special Employment Centres have the opportunity to develop social skills, strengthening their interpersonal relationships and their participation in the community.

**Economic benefits**:

# Local job creation:

Sheltered employment generates jobs locally, contributing to the economic development of the community by providing sources of income for local residents.

# Local economic stimulus:

The additional income generated by sheltered employment translates into increased purchasing power for workers, which stimulates the local economy through the consumption of goods and services.

# Reducing welfare dependency:

By providing sheltered employment, the dependency of people with disabilities on social benefits is reduced, which can result in a reduction of the financial burden on the social security system.

# Contribution to productivity:

Workers in Special Employment Centres contribute to economic productivity by performing functions in various sectors and branches of industry.

# Incentives and tax benefits for companies:

Companies participating in sheltered employment programmes can benefit from tax incentives and subsidies, which can encourage their participation and collaboration with EWCs.

# Development of labour competences:

Participation in sheltered employment gives workers the opportunity to develop and improve their labour skills, which can lead to a more skilled workforce in the labour market.

In short, supporting sheltered employment not only benefits people with disabilities and businesses, but also has a positive impact on the social and economic fabric of local communities, helping to build more inclusive and sustainable societies.

# Croatia

Supporting the sheltered employment of workers with disabilities brings important social and economic benefits to local communities. Socially, it promotes inclusion by providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities, reducing stigmatisation, improving social cohesion and fostering the development of social skills. Economically, it creates local jobs, stimulates the economy by increasing purchasing power, reduces welfare dependency, contributes to productivity and offers tax incentives to participating companies. In addition, participation in sheltered employment programmes facilitates the development of labour skills, resulting in a more skilled local workforce. In essence, supporting sheltered employment not only has a positive impact on people with disabilities and businesses, but also improves the overall social and economic fabric of communities, fostering inclusion and sustainability.

# Romania

Sheltered employment centres do create and enhance social and economic sustainability because they contribute more financially to the government than they receive. They are not very profitable, but they survive in the market, employing workers with diversity and giving them an economic and social role. In answer to the second research question, we can state that sheltered employment centres do create social value through their operation and activity.

By creating work for disadvantaged people, instead of being at home and having no role in society, workers with a disability can be in the workplace, feeling valuable. Moreover, the fact that these people are active may in turn reduce the cost of the health service, as they are more emotionally engaged and may even be an example of effort and courage to all workers. Their families may also feel that they are less dependent.

# *HOW ARE SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT MODELS INTEGRATED WITH MAINSTREAM EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES?*

* **Spain**

Integrating sheltered employment models with mainstream employment opportunities is key to moving towards a more inclusive labour market and providing people with disabilities with a variety of employment options. Here are some strategies and approaches to facilitate this integration:

# Work enclaves:

Work enclaves are a form of integration that involves collaboration between Special Employment Centres and ordinary companies. The disabled workers of the CEE carry out their tasks in the facilities of the collaborating company, working side by side with the ordinary employees.

# Transition programmes:

Transition programmes can be implemented to prepare disabled workers who have been employed in an EWC for integration into mainstream employment. This may include specific training and support to adapt to the requirements of mainstream employment.

# Collaboration with employment agencies:

Collaboration with employment agencies specialised in the inclusion of people with disabilities can facilitate the transition to mainstream employment. These agencies can help identify employment opportunities and provide ongoing support.

# Training and development programmes:

It can be crucial to provide training and development programmes that equip workers with disabilities with the skills needed for regular jobs. This may include technical training, interpersonal skills and job-specific skills.

# Work adaptation:

It is essential to encourage the adaptation of workplaces in regular enterprises to accommodate workers with disabilities. This may include adjustments to the work environment, work tools and operating procedures.

# Incentives for companies:

Offering tax incentives and subsidies to companies that hire people with disabilities, either directly or through sheltered employment programmes, can stimulate the participation of regular companies.

# Promoting diversity and inclusion:

Fostering an organisational culture that values and promotes diversity and inclusion can facilitate the integration of workers with disabilities in mainstream companies. This requires awareness-raising and appropriate training of employees.

# Corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies:

Companies can incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility policies that consider the inclusion of people with disabilities in their work practices.

# Development of support networks:

Facilitating the development of support networks, both within the company and through associations and organisations, can be valuable for the successful transition to mainstream employment.

The effective integration of sheltered employment models with mainstream employment opportunities requires a collaborative approach and the active participation of companies, workers, Special Employment Centres, employment agencies and other relevant labour market actors. Promoting inclusive work environments benefits both companies and society at large.

# Croatia

Integrating sheltered employment models with mainstream employment opportunities is crucial to creating an inclusive labour market for people with disabilities. Strategies for integration include: transition programmes that prepare workers for mainstream employment, collaboration with disability-focused non-profit organisations, training programmes, adaptation of the workplace in the mainstream company, incentives for hiring people with disabilities, promoting diversity and inclusion in the organisational culture, implementation of the Disability Act and the Disability Act, and the implementation of the disability-friendly labour market policies.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities, and development of support networks. Successful integration requires collaboration between companies, workers, the Croatian Employment Service and other entities.

Stakeholders contribute to inclusive work environments that benefit business and society at large.

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# *HOW CAN EU EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT IN COUNTRIES WITH NO LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THAT PARTICULAR MODEL?*

* **Spain**

Examples of good practice from the European Union (EU) can play an important role in encouraging the development of sheltered employment in countries without a legislative history of this model. Here are some ways in which EU good practices can have a positive influence:

# Exchange of knowledge and experience:

Facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience between EU countries and those without a legislative history on sheltered employment can be valuable. Countries can learn from successful practices and avoid known obstacles.

# Networks and partnerships:

Encouraging networking and partnerships between organisations, governments and companies can facilitate the dissemination of good practices and collaboration in the implementation of sheltered employment models.

# Technical assistance and training:

Providing technical assistance and training to policy makers, business people and other stakeholders in countries without

legislative background can help develop a solid understanding of the benefits and application of sheltered employment.

# Adaptation to local contexts:

EU good practices can serve as an inspirational model, but it is essential to adapt them to local contexts and country-specific realities. This implies taking into account cultural, economic and legislative factors.

# Financial incentives and grants:

Examples of good practice may include strategies to implement financial incentives and subsidies to encourage companies to participate in sheltered employment models.

# Public policy development:

Successful experiences in the EU can serve as an example for the development of public policies that support sheltered employment. This includes the development of laws and regulations that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

# Awareness-raising campaigns:

Good practice can include effective awareness-raising campaign strategies that help change public perceptions of disability and encourage acceptance of sheltered employment models.

# Evaluation of results and continuous improvement:

Share examples of outcome evaluation and evaluation processes

continuous improvement in sheltered employment models can provide guidance on how to measure impact and adapt practices for better results.

# Active participation of civil society:

The active involvement of civil society, including disabled people's organisations, can strengthen the implementation of sheltered employment and ensure that the needs and aspirations of disabled people are adequately addressed.

# Diplomacy and international cooperation:

International agencies, governments and non-governmental organisations can foster diplomacy and international cooperation to share good practices in the field of sheltered employment.

By sharing lessons learned and successful strategies, the EU and other countries can work together to advance the development of sheltered employment and promote labour inclusion worldwide. Cooperation and mutual learning are essential to overcome challenges and move towards more inclusive societies.

# Croatia

EU good practice examples play a vital role in promoting the development of sheltered employment in countries such as Croatia, with no legislative history of this model. The main ways in which EU practices have a positive influence are: facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience, encouraging networking and partnerships, providing technical assistance and training, adapting practices to local contexts, demonstrating financial incentives and subsidies, providing examples for public policy development, launching effective awareness-raising campaigns, sharing processes for evaluating results, actively involving civil society and fostering international cooperation. Collaborative efforts aim to advance sheltered employment, promote work inclusion globally and contribute to more inclusive societies through shared experiences and mutual learning.

# Romania

European Union (EU) examples of good practice can play an important role in encouraging the development of sheltered employment in countries without a legislative history of this model.

E.g. sheltered employment in the approved "Util Deco" sheltered units

The rationale behind this practice is that sheltered employment in a licensed unit can serve as a transition period to the free labour market for young people with disabilities. The participants work in the sheltered units "Util Deco" of the Alaturi de Voi Foundation in Iasi, a social enterprise for labour integration. They receive regular training and support to improve their skills and keep their jobs, as well as to produce competitive and quality products and services that are sold on the free market.

The aim of the internship is to offer sheltered employment to young people with disabilities.

Util Deco" earmarks the income from the provision of services and the sale of the goods produced for social purposes and the development of workshops. The Foundation provides free counselling, vocational guidance, qualification and mediation services to PWDs.

Util Deco has developed a number of manuals. These set out the rules of operation, including the rights and obligations of employees in accordance with current legislation and regulations.

There is also a specific manual on the provision of psychological support and another on social assistance.

Several web pages contain information related to the consultation and have been updated within the consultation:

The website [www.utildeco.ro](http://www.utildeco.ro/) describes the services and goods produced by PCD (in Romanian).

▶ www.job[direct.eu](http://www.jobdirect.eu/) was established in May 2016 as a Placement and Workplace Assistance Agency, offering assessment, testing, counselling, professional skills development, mediation and job placement services, as well as job coaching for people with disabilities or for groups at risk.

▶ The website [www.wise.travel.](http://www.wise.travel/) Wise.travel was created in August

2016, initially under the name UtilDeco Travel. In June 2018, the agency was reauthorised as a tour operator under the WISE. travel brand, offering travel and event organisation services, while 50% of its profits are donated to NGOs and social enterprises.

▶ A video on the consultation can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsLQC55V\_JE.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsLQC55V_JE)

# *HOW CAN SOCIAL AWARENESS OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT BE RAISED?*

* **Spain**

Raising social awareness about sheltered employment involves educating and sensitising society about the importance of providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Here are some strategies that can help to achieve this goal:

# Awareness-raising campaigns:

Organise awareness-raising campaigns at local, regional and national level to highlight the benefits of sheltered employment. These campaigns can include media advertisements, community events and social media presence.

# Success stories:

Sharing success stories of people with disabilities who have thrived in sheltered employment settings can have a positive impact. These stories can humanise the experience and showcase the potential and capabilities of workers with disabilities.

# Inclusive events and job fairs:

Organise inclusive events and job fairs where companies practising sheltered employment can present their initiatives and employment opportunities. These events can attract employers, employees and the general public.

# Collaboration with the media:

Work with the media to obtain media coverage highlighting sheltered employment and its benefits. This may include interviews, features and special programmes.

# Training and workshops:

Providing training and workshops to employers, workers and the general public on the importance of labour inclusion and the characteristics of sheltered employment.

# Participation of people with disabilities:

Actively involve persons with disabilities in awareness-raising initiatives. Their experiences and authentic voices can be powerful drivers of change.

# Partnerships with organisations and activists:

Collaborate with disability rights organisations and activists to strengthen awareness-raising initiatives and reach out to a wider audience.

# Educational programmes in schools:

Introduce educational programmes in schools that teach pupils about inclusion and sheltered employment. Fostering understanding from an early age can help change attitudes over time.

# Presence in social networks:

Use social media to share information, stories and resources related to sheltered employment. Digital platforms are powerful tools to reach diverse audiences.

# Incentives and recognition:

Establish incentive and recognition programmes for companies that actively adopt and promote sheltered employment. This may motivate more companies to participate and be recognised for their efforts.

# Attracting opinion leaders:

Engage opinion leaders, celebrities and public figures who can amplify the message and help raise social awareness.

# Open days:

Organise open days at the Special Employment Centres so that the community can learn first-hand about the work and contributions of employees with disabilities.

By applying these strategies in a comprehensive manner, a significant increase in social awareness of sheltered employment can be achieved, thus encouraging greater acceptance and participation in the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

# Croatia

Raising awareness about sheltered employment involves implementing various strategies to educate and sensitise society on the importance of providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Key strategies include: organising awareness campaigns, sharing success stories, organising inclusive events and job fairs, collaborating with the media, providing training and workshops, actively involving people with disabilities, partnering with organisations and activists, introducing educational programmes in schools, using social media platforms, establishing incentives and recognition programmes for companies and involving opinion leaders. The comprehensive implementation of these strategies aims to significantly increase awareness, fostering greater acceptance and participation in the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

# Romania

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Util Deco has developed a number of manuals. These set out the rules of operation, including the rights and obligations of workers in accordance with legislation and organisational policy. There is also a specific manual on the provision of psychological support and another on social assistance.

# *CONCLUSION*

This survey repeatedly revealed a surprising diversity of situations. Depending on the approach taken, there was every conceivable variation between two extremes: on the one hand, the conception of the disabled worker as a mainly "sick" person who needs support and who, in the context of this support, participates in some occupational activity, and on the other hand, the definition of the protected environment as an environment that does not differ from the "ordinary" work environment in terms of workers' rights and obligations.

A country's level of development has little influence on how working conditions in the sheltered environment are determined. Although more prosperous countries can be expected to subsidise sheltered employment to a greater extent, the mode of funding is by no means the only criterion for judging the prospects and possibilities offered to workers with disabilities in the sheltered environment.

Ultimately, the question is whether and how "protection and support", which are such important features of this sector, affect employment relations and working conditions. Thus, as far as working conditions are concerned, it could be said that the support required by the particular situation in which a person finds himself, whatever his disability, should not limit the possibilities for him to participate fully in professional life.

Admittedly, in many countries, finding employment in a sheltered structure is not easy and can involve lengthy procedures. In times of employment crisis, with high unemployment, some people with disabilities who might otherwise have obtained employment in the open market turn to sheltered employment. The degree to which "ordinary" employment relations and working conditions are applied seems even more important in these cases, and is particularly relevant in enabling the transition from "ordinary" employment to the sheltered sector or vice versa.

It is also clear that the nature and quality of employment relations and working conditions in sheltered employment structures are not directly related to the activities carried out in these establishments. Indeed, in countries where the types of activity are identical or very similar, the situation of workers' rights is very divergent. Even within the same country, very similar types of manufacturing activity may be carried out in both "therapeutic" structures and in the salaried employment model, with the consequence that employment relations and working conditions are very different.

Moreover, while a distinction is often made by the nature of the disability in countries where several different types of sheltered employment structure coexist, it is also possible that people with comparable disabilities are channelled into structures that operate very different systems, each with its own style of employment relations and working conditions (even if they are only a few kilometres apart geographically). While it is unrealistic to consider that all people with disabilities should be able to take advantage of all the possibilities offered by an advanced system of labour law and labour relations, this is true for the population as a whole and therefore cannot be used to justify any restrictions in this respect.

The restrictions on the full application of labour law in sheltered employment are rooted in the two basic definitions of the sector. On the one hand, from a strictly economic point of view, the sheltered employment sector, which has often emerged as a result of initiatives taken by voluntary associations, gives the impression in some countries of not being able to meet the requirements of labour law, thus endangering the very survival of such establishments.

On the other hand, the therapeutic objective of sheltered employment conflicts with the fulfilment of legal and social requirements in terms of work organisation.

Although the absence or low level of public funding in some countries means that sheltered employment is in a very precarious position, the support function tends to predominate in these establishments, which often means therapeutic care and assistance.

There is a clear correlation between the definition of sheltered employment structures as places of treatment and less respect for labour law, particularly with regard to participation issues. To some extent, disability in these cases is seen as a form of incapacity which, far from being remedied by an environment supposedly intended for it, actually fosters the structure itself.

Consequently, it can be said that, even today, the therapeutic function is still widely perceived as an obstacle to the development of working relationships based on rights and obligations.

Although this is only feasible for a minority of those employed in the sheltered environment, it seems that more progress is being made towards achieving this mobility through a more open (less discriminatory) approach to the jobs themselves (at a technical level) than to employment rights. Thus, the sheltered environment seems to be better able to assume its integration role in the "ordinary working environment" when the working conditions it offers (in terms of status, contract, collective bargaining, worker representation, etc.), are close to or identical to those prevailing in the "ordinary" working environment. The result is that, as more cases of successful transition to employment occur, employment relations and working conditions in sheltered employment are also normalised.

While it is clear that some disabled workers will never be able to work in a "mainstream" environment, the very fact that sheltered employment is seen as open to the outside world (and therefore as a temporary place of employment for some) creates more favourable conditions for the community of disabled workers as a whole.

Today, although encouraging results seem to confirm that, in most cases, a disability is not an insurmountable obstacle to integration into regular employment (both in terms of job performance and personal and collective fulfilment), it remains essential to protect workers and their rights in order to achieve autonomy. Although PWDs, and in particular those in sheltered employment, have certain inherent characteristics, their situation must be seen as part of a broader issue, namely whether work is experienced as an imposition and a source of alienation, or whether it can be a means of liberation and self-fulfilment.

**4. RESULTS OF THE SATISFACTION SURVEY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CURRENTLY WORKING IN SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT.**

In this section, we present the testimonies of people with disabilities currently working in sheltered employment in the three countries participating in our project: Spain, Romania and Croatia. Through these stories, we seek to provide an authentic and human insight into the experiences, challenges and achievements that these people face in their work environments.

For this purpose, we conducted a satisfaction survey using Google Forms addressed to employees of sheltered employment agencies in the three partner countries. The results of this survey provide valuable data on employees' perception and satisfaction with their employment, working conditions, the support received and their integration into the work environment.

It is important to note that surveys may be biased due to the difficulty of obtaining a representative number of responses and the specific nature of the target group with which each partner works. Differences in the types of disability and the characteristics of sheltered employment institutions in each country may also influence the results. However, the graphs and data obtained will be annexed at the end of this report to give a more complete and detailed picture of the current situation of sheltered employment in Europe.

Through a combination of personal testimonies and survey data, this section seeks to highlight both the positive aspects and challenges faced by people with disabilities in sheltered employment, providing a solid basis for analysis and proposals for improvements in this key sector for social and labour market inclusion.

Some examples of these testimonies are:

* Among the positive aspects of working in a special employment centre, the most common responses include:

All of them, but mainly the treatment received and the involvement with the workers".

Integration of people with disabilities in the world of work".

Man, they give you a job... which, for example, I had a hard time finding in another normal company and you feel fulfilled and inserted".

✓"Qualification/training courses to facilitate integration into the labour market".

Among the aspects that should change in relation to working in a special employment centre, the most common points include:

Greater investment in staff training and development".

To really adapt the workplace according to the illness in order to be able to do the job".

✓"Access to more skilled jobs".

Less temporariness in the adaptation of these people to the job so that they can perform it efficiently and at the same time taking into account the well-being of the worker".

* The most common answers to the question "If you were in charge of a special employment centre, what would you take into account when hiring and working with people with disabilities?

Your training, your experience and your disability, to know whether you can do the job in a way that does not harm you".

That the person to be recruited fits in well with the rest of the team and does not create conflicts between workers".

That the post should be adapted to the needs of each person".

I would look at their willingness to work and determination to learn, whether they have experience or not, I wouldn't care, because if we don't give them a chance, they will never get the experience that is required in many places.

* Finally, some of the issues highlighted by respondents that were not addressed in the survey are as follows:

There are workers who take advantage of their disability to work less than their colleagues. It therefore harms the company and the workers themselves".

✓"I would highlight the help when going to medical check-ups, adapting to our needs, thank you very much".

I am grateful to the special employment centre to which I belong for the trust placed in me, because they believed in my abilities when even I was not capable of doing so. Today, after more than three years, they continue to do so and I have regained my self-confidence. THANK YOU".

My experience has been very positive. The work I have done thanks to this special centre has been very motivating for me".

- ***CONCLUSION***

Taking into account the main objective of the project, i.e. "to produce a report highlighting the needs and proposals for the creation of a European quality framework for sheltered employment in Europe". This activity provided us with direct feedback from the main protagonists of this project, which are people with disabilities of working age, employed in different forms of sheltered employment facilities. By conducting these surveys and obtaining results, we have learned how people with disabilities in sheltered employment feel in the countries forming the consortium of this project, revealing that the majority of respondents with disabilities have positive attitudes towards the special employment centres, feel gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to be included in the labour market and in society, and are fulfilled as workers. Negative aspects of the social employment centres identified by the majority include lower incomes, lack of necessary adaptations, poor access to more skilled jobs, as well as poor balance between the needs of a disabled worker and fulfilled work arrangements and reasonable accommodation.

Positive attitudes towards sheltered employment models are reflected in the majority of responses in three countries on the usefulness of a work experience from a special employment centre and the possibility of changing or upgrading jobs. Furthermore, it is worth noting the majority of responses confirming the implementation of support, equal treatment and reasonable accommodation in special employment centres.

Exchange of experiences and best practices between partner countries

It will help the partner consortium to develop tools to measure the effectiveness of different sheltered employment models, while raising awareness and promoting the improvement of employment conditions for people with disabilities.

The partner consortium hopes to establish a European-wide reference framework on the current situation of people with disabilities working within the sheltered employment model and these satisfaction survey results represent a concrete step in this process.

**5. PROPOSAL OF THE NEW MODEL OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT.**

**NEW PARADIGM OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT FROM THE SOCIAL ECONOMY**

The promotion of sheltered employment models through the social economy in Europe is a growing trend that seeks to address the challenges of unemployment and job insecurity. The social economy encompasses a variety of enterprises and organisations, such as cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations, which operate on principles of solidarity, democratic participation and reinvestment of profits in the community.

This approach seeks to create quality employment, promote social inclusion and contribute to sustainable economic development. Key initiatives include support programmes for worker cooperatives, tax incentives for social enterprises and public procurement policies that prioritise social economy organisations.

The European Union has been actively supporting this approach through structural funds and specific programmes, such as the European Social Fund and the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation. In addition, strategies are being developed at national and regional level to promote the social economy and create an enabling environment for its growth.

These efforts are aimed at generating stable employment, promoting the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labour market and strengthening the economic resilience of local communities. Ultimately, the aim is to build a fairer and more equitable Europe, where everyone has access to decent and sustainable employment opportunities.

In addition to improving gender equality, the social economy contributes to building bridges for the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market and provides essential services that help them to lead an independent life. Social entrepreneurship and the social economy can be particularly appealing to people with disabilities. Raising awareness of these alternative business models could increase the attractiveness of entrepreneurship in general and contribute to labour market integration. In recent years, entrepreneurship education has become more prevalent in education systems, but social economy business models, including cooperatives, are still far from being a standard component of all entrepreneurship curricula and business management courses. ...

Social economy and inclusive enterprises are emerging as key actors in economic and social development in Europe. These entities play a vital role in promoting social cohesion, employment inclusion and economic sustainability. This report examines the concept of the social economy, the role of inclusive enterprises and their impact as a new paradigm of sheltered employment on the European continent.

***5.1 SOCIAL ECONOMY IN EUROPE***

**5.1.1 Definition and Concept**

The social economy refers to a set of private organisations, such as cooperatives, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which are characterised by their commitment to social, economic and environmental objectives. These principles include the primacy of people over capital, democratic and participatory management, and reinvestment of most of their profits in improving the services offered to their members or in the collective interest.

**5.1.2 Types of Organisations in the Social Economy**

Social economy organisations are divided into several categories, each with its own characteristics and objectives:

* **Cooperatives:** Member-owned enterprises that seek to meet their common needs and aspirations.
* **Associations:** Non-profit organisations operating in various fields, from culture to social welfare.
* **Foundations:** Organisations that manage funds dedicated to supporting causes of general interest.
* **Social Enterprises:** Businesses that combine commercial activity with an explicit social purpose, such as the integration of people in vulnerable situations into the labour market.

**5.1.3 Economic and Social Impact**

The social economy accounts for a significant share of employment and GDP in Europe. In the European Union, more than 13.6 million people work in social economy organisations, equivalent to 6.3% of the European workforce. Moreover, these organisations contribute to social innovation and to solving social and economic problems that traditional models fail to address effectively.

***5.2. INCLUSIVE ENTERPRISES AND SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT***

**5.2.1 Definition and Objectives of Inclusive Enterprises**

Inclusion enterprises are social economy entities whose main objective is the integration of people at risk of social exclusion into the labour market. These companies offer employment, training and support to individuals with difficulties in accessing the conventional labour market, such as people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, young people in vulnerable situations, and migrants.

**5.2.2 Characteristics of Sheltered Employment**

Sheltered employment in inclusive enterprises is distinguished by:

* Workplace Adaptation: Creating work environments that match the capabilities of employees.
* Personalised Support: Provision of ongoing support and training to develop work and social skills.
* Transition to mainstream employment: In some cases, these enterprises act as a bridge to employment in the mainstream labour market.

**5.2.3 Inclusive Business Models in Europe**

* Spain: Insertion Companies and Special Employment Centres

The objective of the Insertion Companies (EI) is the social and labour integration of people in a situation of social exclusion through the development of an economic activity. They hire people in vulnerable situations and provide them with training and work experience for a limited period of time in order to facilitate their transition to regular employment.

And Special Employment Centres (CEE) are companies where at least 70% of the workforce is made up of people with disabilities.

They offer paid employment, along with personal and social adjustment services and training for workers with disabilities.

* Romania: Social enterprises and social cooperatives

The former are companies that operate with the primary objective of generating a social impact, rather than distributing profits to shareholders. They reinvest most of their profits in the company's social mission, which may include the integration of people at risk of exclusion into the labour market.

And Social Cooperatives that integrate disadvantaged people as members and employees, promoting democratic participation and the improvement of their living conditions.

They operate under cooperative principles, focusing on labour inclusion and training of their members.

* Croatia: social enterprises and cooperatives

In Croatia, the inclusive business model is based on social enterprises and social cooperatives similar to Romania, with an additional focus on sustainability projects.

These are companies whose main objective is to address social and environmental problems, reinvesting their profits to achieve this purpose.

They offer employment opportunities to vulnerable groups and work on projects that promote environmental sustainability.

And social cooperatives that seek the social and labour inclusion of their members, combining economic and social objectives. They promote the active participation of their members in decision-making and in the management of the cooperative, with a focus on improving the living conditions of disadvantaged people.

* France: IntegrationCompanies (EI)

In France, the mission of the Insertion Companies is to integrate socially excluded people through employment and training. These companies focus on creating job opportunities for individuals who face significant barriers to employment.

* Italy: Social Cooperatives

In Italy, social cooperatives play a crucial role in labour inclusion. There are two main types: type A, which provide social services, and type B, which create jobs for disadvantaged people. Type B cooperatives employ at least 30% of disadvantaged people in their workforce.

***5.3 BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES***

**5.3.1 Benefits**

* Social and Labour Integration: They facilitate the inclusion of people with barriers in the labour market.
* Economic Stability: They provide stable income to individuals who might otherwise be dependent on social assistance.
* Skills Development: They offer training and work experiences that enhance future employability.

**5.3.2 Challenges**

* Financial Sustainability: Need to balance social objectives with economic viability.
* Regulation and Public Support: Dependence on favourable public policies and adequate funding.
* Stigma and Public Perception: Addressing the perception that sheltered employment is less valuable or productive.

***5.4 EUROPEAN POLICIES AND SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE ENTERPRISES***

**5.4.1 Legal and Policy Framework**

The European Union supports inclusive enterprises and the social economy through various policies and programmes, such as the Social Economy Action Plan and the European Social Fund (ESF). These instruments provide funding, guidance and a regulatory framework to encourage the creation and development of these entities.

***5.5 GOOD PRACTICES AND SUCCESS STORIES***

**5.5.1 Local and Regional Initiatives**

Several European countries have implemented successful initiatives that serve as role models. For example:

UK Social Enterprise Initiative: A programme that facilitates access to finance and supports the growth of social enterprises that seek to solve social problems.

Network of Social Cooperatives in Italy: Project that promotes the creation of networks of cooperatives to share resources and improve their impact.

**5.5.2 International Collaboration**

Collaboration between countries and international organisations has enabled the dissemination of good practices and the strengthening of the social economy at European level. Initiatives such as "Interreg Europe" and transnational learning networks facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience between regions.

***5.6 CONCLUSION***

Inclusive enterprises and the social economy represent an emerging paradigm that combines economic sustainability with social justice. These entities not only offer effective solutions for the labour market integration of people at risk of exclusion, but also contribute to a more inclusive and resilient economy. The expansion and continued support of these initiatives is crucial to address contemporary social and economic challenges in Europe.

***5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS***

* Strengthening the Legal and Policy Framework: Governments must continue to develop policies and regulations that support the growth of the social economy and inclusive enterprises.
* Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships: Public-private partnerships can provide additional resources and expand the impact of these organisations.
* Promoting Social Awareness: Increasing the visibility and understanding of the social economy is essential to combat stigma and encourage greater public and private support.

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On this back cover we find the project logo in the middle, just below it New paradigm of sheltered employment from the social economy. 
The logo of the three organisations, the logo of the European co-financing and the EU disclaimer on this material. 