



## **UEmploy: Consultancy for Employment Inclusion**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

The focus of UEmploy is to develop a European level standardized scheme for the integration of disabled people in the labour market. The project focuses on developing an inclusion framework within five countries (BG, HU, FI, IE, RO). It addresses a number of different beneficiaries: SMEs, NGOs and individual professionals active in the field of social and vocational integration.

The project addresses both individual professionals (who prepare, train and support disabled people towards labour market integration) and agencies (who receive inputs, supports and best practice methodologies on how to select and integrate disabled employees in their work environments). Modern quality-driven rehabilitation, services and processes designed to enable disabled people to maximize their life experience are all on the agenda of the project.

There are several developmental and implementation stages within UEmploy project:

1. **Research and contextualization** – in this stage the project partnership has researched the national contexts of their respective countries to determine the conditions and status employment for disabled people. Using specially designed tools, the project team has collected and analysed information that was then compiled into national reports. The five national reports have been further developed through comparative analysis by the representatives of the international project team and compiled in one European Report. This report reflects European policy, practice and existing realities for disabled citizens in accessing employment
2. **Materials development** – using the research findings and report materials, the project team has then developed training materials for consultancy in the field of disability-specific employment. Materials developed in the project, and which form the core of the training, include: competency checklist, competency toolkit, the training kit and other complementary materials developed later on within this present report. These materials reflect best practice in disability pro-active adaptation.
3. **Training organisation and implementation** – using the materials developed earlier in the project, national training programs have been organized in each project country, with the help and support of an international expert present at all training sessions. This resulted in the completed training of a team of EU consultants in employment inclusion. Additionally, representatives from each country were trained as scheme managers at international level to support the employment consultants.
4. **Fieldwork** – all professionals trained in the project will deliver audits at national level for volunteer companies. Scheme managers will directly coordinate this process. Results will be centralised at the level of the partnership. Final training materials will be made available online, in all project languages. This will build into project sustainability and transferability.

UEmploy supports employment of disabled people, development of a general implementation strategy and provision of the tools and means to implement it. It addresses the needs of disabled employment seekers by facilitating their

employability and improving their independence and self-confidence. It supports SMEs by providing necessary supports, expertise, inputs and information on how to achieve quality outcomes through improved access and employability for disabled jobseekers.

# Table of Contents

- 1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES..... 7
- 2. PROJECT APPROACH ..... 8
- 3. PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS..... 9
- 4. PARTNERSHIPS ..... 12
- 5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE ..... 13
- 6. CONTRIBUTION TO EU POLICIES ..... 14
- 7. EXTRA HEADING/SECTION..... 16

# 1. Project Objectives

The aim of UEmploy project is to support and facilitate the employment of disabled people at various entry levels within the European labour market. There are two main approaches the project adopts to implement and develop this key objective: training individual professionals as specialist consultants in the field and providing professional consultancy services to SMEs based on identified needs and quality placement supports and services. The project also aims to establish a vocational rehabilitation consultant network in each project country.

Project activities are planned and implemented so as to support consultants' training in the acquisition and use of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Training beneficiaries will then provide dedicated and resourced employment consultancy services to both companies and disabled potential employees.

The project aims to facilitate and support cooperation between companies, agencies and organisations providing consultancy on advanced employment inclusion throughout Europe. This is done by raising employers' awareness on the needs and capacity of people with disabilities. It is also achieved by providing policy updates and organizational adaptations to employ disabled people and ensure a suitable and inclusive work context that supports personal and professional development.

The overall objective of the project is to develop and improve support system quality so as to ensure equal employment opportunities for disabled workers and to promote this as an integral element in both employment policy and community development strategies.

UEmploy wants to encourage companies to employ disabled people by informing decision makers at higher organizational and decision-making levels about the modernizations necessary to provide disabled employees with adaptable and inclusive work environments. For disabled workers, this develops higher levels of motivation and self-confidence and also a more active social and professional life. For employers it enhances innovation, develops universal design methods and addresses issues such as work absence and improved productivity.

By making UEmploy project deliverables available online in all project languages, the project ensures sustainability and transferability of training materials. It provides future potential beneficiaries with training opportunities and, therefore, other SMEs and institutions with inputs and supports from the consultancy network.

Structuring a standardized frame for all these objectives, UEmploy is increasingly facilitating appropriate and tailored employment inclusion mechanisms for disabled employees. It is also equipping employers with the professional skills, latest research based methodologies, best practice tools and relevant information background to meet the needs of new and existing disabled employees – and create opportunities for hiring and retaining disabled workers.

## 2. Project Approach

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UEmploy aims to implement a holistic approach to professional vocational and social inclusion of disabled employees. Activities set out within the project implementation plan have all been ordered in a logical sequence. They present a complex yet coherent set of processes accompanied by dedicated implementation tools. The major aim of the project is to support the inclusion of disabled people through their social and professional integration in the workplace. In order to achieve this objective, the project approaches tasks from different angles corresponding to the different actors, needs and dimensions of effective workplace inclusion for those with disabilities.

The general direction of the project development and implementation strategy follows the following pattern: baseline research; generalized findings on comparative best practice; identification of major areas of focus; materials development and internal validation; professional development via both national and international training programs; cascading project results and materials through building on national and international networks of consultants (initially trained within the funded life of the project).

First of all, the project team investigated issues around work inclusion for those with disabilities to identify patterns, issues and conditions in the project countries. This allowed the project team to implement activities from a verifiable, researched and realistic starting point. Through questionnaires and comparative research, national project teams were able to construct an accurate image of the current labour market situation of disabled employees. They also isolated opportunities and blockages in employment opportunities for disabled citizens. They compiled this information in national and international reports, designed to guide development of subsequent project activities. These reports underlined those aspects essential for partner focus in building positively in to the main project objectives. At this stage the principle collaborators were agencies and employer representatives who answered questionnaires on their receptiveness to employment of disabled workers or their interest in future interest in engagement with disability in the workforce.

The research stage was followed by development of support materials for the training programs and preparatory sessions. This included contributions of training experts and inputs from the entire project team. Materials developed for consultants' training were piloted and improved according to feedback received.

All project activities, simultaneously implemented within all project countries, have been developed on the basis of a common implementation framework that ensures a standardized process. It also contributes to coherence and cohesion of the overall project impact.

The project explored online dissemination and use of the online environment as a key tool for promoting values and principles which support workplace inclusion for disabled employees, accompanied by the materials and training opportunities developed and created by the project team.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

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In order to support and facilitate more effective employment outcomes for disabled people, the UEmploy project developed a complex set of instruments and materials starting with comprehensive research studies, gradually building towards professional training materials, training provision and field applications of project deliverables. This has been done both at national levels and through international best practice transfer.

Project outcomes and results are presented below. They are categorised by their nature as well as area of development and utility within the project. More details on the deliverables presented here are provided in the confidential part of the Interim Report.

**Management and administrative tools:** the project partnership has employed a number of management and administrative tools necessary for the smooth implementation of the project. Contracts and collaboration agreements have been signed within the partnership at national and international levels. These structured collaboration and shared work within the project team.

Project management also involved provision of team meeting minutes, an archive of all support and organisational materials from the internal meetings and support for other public project events. Project coordinators undertook these administrative tasks but the entire project team participated in materials development, feedback sessions, learning reviews and evaluative report development. This ensured that the final product and materials would achieve the highest quality standards.

**Research tools and mechanisms:** one of the first steps in project implementation was national research, developed by each national partner. Research outcomes were the basis for training and training materials development. In order to implement relevant and accurate research processes, the international project team developed research techniques and tools (surveys, questionnaires and research plan). National research was therefore standardized and facilitated development of the international research report - the final stage of the project research process. Outcomes were benchmarked against international best practice to produce cutting-edge analysis.

**Training materials:** these were developed based on the international report findings (which also summarised national research findings in each project country). Training materials included tools for beneficiaries' selection, input contents, comparative study resources materials as well as evaluation materials and tools. These materials have been piloted in national training sessions. They are to be improved on the basis of the feedback received from the selected training beneficiaries. The final interactive form of these materials will be available online in all the project languages by the end of the project.

**Training implementation:** training deliveries within the UEmploy project have been planned and implemented at both national and international levels. Beneficiaries have been carefully selected for the first stage of training (national training). Then a representative from each national team was selected to participate in the international scheme managers' training. Scheme managers will coordinate auditing

work of the national beneficiaries' team. They will therefore facilitate and support development of the national networking system. Scheme managers collaborate online with the project team.

**Audits and applicability:** within the second part of the national training programs, each beneficiary will develop an audit based on the input they received within the first part of the training. Trainees will monitor and analyse the organizational context and background of participating organizations. They will assess the orientation these institutions have towards employing disabled people. They will also make suggestions for cost-effective and pro-active employment strategies for disabled workers. Participants will thus have the opportunity to put into practice the competences developed in the first part of the training. Each national partner will develop 5 such audits, which will be supervised by the national scheme manager and wider project team. The final form of the audit will be sent to the participating agencies and employers. Feedback from these will be provided to the project team and the trainees.

Final results of the national audits will be compiled with the help and support of Enable Ireland who will develop a common report on this stage of project development.

**Network development and online presence:** the online presence of the project is related both to project visibility as well as the functionality of the communication system among scheme managers and all other parties involved in project. The project website can be accessed at [www.uemploy.eu](http://www.uemploy.eu)

The project team is presently working on developing the networking system for scheme managers and all the other consultants trained in the project. This will act as a communication and support channel for sharing and evaluating best practice.

The project intranet is also available for the project team. It is used as a communication and archive system for project work and development.

Other media and visual materials developed within the project are represented by short films, which will be developed by the partnership with support from Finnish partner Context Learning. These will be video presentations of the project and the consultancy process it promotes. It includes interactive e-learning modules which will be made available online after the end of the piloting and improvement stages. The project explicitly includes advanced ICT tools, reflecting their key role in inclusion of disabled workers.

**Dissemination:** dissemination is based on project activities and deliverables and is aimed at increasing project visibility – and awareness of the values it promotes. The international partnership has identified and participated in national and international dissemination events. This participation has been accompanied by parallel dissemination of promotional materials (e.g. articles (published or to be published), brochures, posters and newsletters). The project newsletter is published twice a year in all project languages and emailed to an extensive international contact list. Project newsletters are also available on the project website. Dissemination reports have been compiled by each member of the international project team and are included in the Interim Report. Dissemination actions reached disability specific professional organizations in Europe, Canada and the United States

**Evaluation and quality assurance:** throughout entire project implementation phases, several quality assurance tools and mechanisms were used. These ensured relevant project deliverables with high levels of applicability. The project team includes an internal evaluator to monitor and develop evaluation tools for constant and on-going measurement of achievement levels, set against initial project planning objectives. Feedback is incorporated in the development process, to constantly update project actions and include opinions of those who piloted or evaluated deliverables. Quality Assurance has focused on the standards and validity of the research findings, setting them against anticipated outcomes from training interventions. A framework of formative evaluation is employed to enhance project outcomes and processes. Internal performance and external interaction are referenced in developing best practice paradigms for sustainability and mainstreaming outcomes.

## 4. Partnerships

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The UEmploy project involves a complex developmental structure. The international partnership and collaborative framework were carefully selected to support implementation and development of all project activities. This ensures relevance and a high degree of applicability of deliverables for end users and intended beneficiaries.

The partnership involves 7 institutions from 5 different countries (Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Ireland and Romania). The complementarity of the partner institutions' profiles is based not only on their fields of activity and expertise but also on their different backgrounds in terms of engagement with European Union disability policies and vocational integration and employment access programs for disabled citizens.

As a partnership, the 7 institutions also present a complex range of skills, competences and expertise. The participation of the associated partners (SMEs, disabled people's associations, employment agencies) also provides significant added value and heightened relevance to the partnership.

The main sectors addressed by the project are represented in the partnership: businesses (HU, lead partner for content development), inclusive education (RO, BG, IE), SN policies (IE, FI Vates), ICT & Distance Education for the world of work (FI Context Learning).

Fundația EuroEd (P1, RO) is the coordinator of the project, active in the field of education, with an extensive experience in European project implementation. Context Learning (P2, FI) is specialised in ICT supported innovative learning and supports the online presence and networking. VATES (P7, FI) and EI (P3, IR) are institutions with extensive experience in specialized disability supports and they provide key expertise on approaches to vocational inclusion. Euroinform (P4, BG) is in charge of the dissemination activities and has wide experience with European project implementation. Universal Learning Systems (P6, IR) is internal evaluator: monitoring project implementation, advising on smooth and successful implementation of project outcomes within its expertise framework of rehabilitation research and developing activity reports. Tudásklaszter Társad (P5, HU) is the expert in materials development and also provides support for training sessions at national and international levels. Although there are clear and specific tasks for each of the members of the partnership, project activities have been appropriately distributed among all partners so that they can contribute to each and every developmental stage in collaborative and mutually reinforcing ways.

Communication within the partnership has been done online (synchronous and asynchronous communication) and face-to-face. Communication channels have been selected so that partners, beneficiaries and collaborators maximize collaboration and ensure high quality levels for project deliverables.

Official documents, contracts and collaboration agreements have implemented a collaborative framework and provide the partnership with logistics for project implementation.

## 5. Plans for the Future

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Up to the present phase of the Interim Report, all activities of the UEmploy project have been implemented as initially planned in the original project proposal. This indicates that the project team has been efficient and effective and that project activities occurred within the allocated timeframe.

Within the next stages of the implementation period, the project team plans to implement the project activities which lead to the complete achievement of the project goals, as follows:

1. Administrative activities: project meetings and reports to ensure a smooth project implementation and registration of all project data.
2. Training implementation: the second training module (company auditing) will be implemented with the participating agencies. This will provide UEmploy consultants with the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills developed during the first part of the training in concrete field situations. This will benefit the consultants, the institutions being audited and also future employees of the participating employers being audited. At the same time, the project team will analyse feedback from these agencies which will be built into the project materials. This will therefore act as an extra validation for the training interventions and training materials.
3. Project dissemination: based on the project products, video and media promotion materials will be developed and thus increase the visibility of the project results so as to make outputs available on a larger scale. Publications, conference presentations, academic articles and disability-specific news items will be developed at an increased level.
4. Project exploitation – the project partnership has started to work on the exploitation of the project deliverables and products starting with the funded life of the project. To increase the degree of exploitation and valorisation after the funded life the project partnership has taken into consideration a variety of exploitation points and has built on them while developing on project deliverables.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

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UEmploy project builds on and supports EU policies in several main directions:

### 1. Support and inclusion of disabled citizens

The UEmploy project contributes to social cohesion, building on increased participation in social and professional activities of people with special needs. Activities in the project have been planned to enhance employment of the disadvantaged category and thus support both their professional and social inclusion. This results in a higher level of self-esteem leading to higher quality of life and greater developmental chances for the targeted category.

Through the activities it plans and implements, UEmploy supports professional inclusion of disabled people by working to develop the necessary work environment and institutional policies that would facilitate inclusion and would build on the higher professional developmental opportunities for disabled employees.

### 2. Provision of training opportunities and professional development for all social categories

Although UEmploy envisages disabled people as primary beneficiaries, the project also addresses and develops the learning and training outcomes of other categories of beneficiaries. Training sessions have been carefully planned and prepared to cater for the professional development of representatives of all social groups interested in participating in professional development. All national partners have organized selection processes based on standardized selection criteria and process frameworks. This presents equal opportunities for all those who applied for the training inputs. The existence of a set of selection criteria made it possible for the entire partnership to implement a finely tuned selection process without any flaws in objectivity.

Through the national and international training sessions, UEmploy has provided support to trainees for acquisition and use of knowledge, skills and qualifications so as to facilitate personal and professional development, employability and participation in the European labour market.

### 3. Increase the volume and quality of cooperation between institutions

Activities in the project are also related to and work on increasing cooperation between institutions and between institutions and individual beneficiaries. UEmploy trainees are initiated and trained in ways that enhance cooperation between SMEs and their future potential employees. After the theoretical and practical modules of UEmploy training, UEmploy consultants are ready to provide support, input and suggestions to SME representatives on how to better adapt and equip their environments to suit the needs of disabled employees. This not only adds and builds

a wider range of accommodations for disabled people who might become employees, but it also raises awareness on the needs of disabled people who may become clients of the SMEs.

## 7. Extra Heading/Section

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UEmploy can be accessed online at [www.uemploy.eu](http://www.uemploy.eu) .

All those interested to be part of the project and use project deliverables can contact the project team using the contact data on the project website.

