



UEmploy: Consultancy for Employment Inclusion

Final Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The goal of UEmploy project was to address a number of common European issues in the employment of people with disabilities and to promote effective solutions and inclusive approaches. Based on the expertise of the 7 partners (Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland and Ireland) the project developed a specialised consultancy model to support and enable employers to recruit and hire people with disabilities in an efficient and equitable manner. The project developed a range of services and solutions to support both people with disabilities and their employers. The UEmploy consultancy model is a mechanism implemented to guarantee an effective selection processes in order to match the employer's needs with the skills or qualifications of a potential employee with disabilities.

The path toward achieving this goal included the following activities:

- Research and contextualization – in this stage the project partnership researched the national contexts of their respective countries to determine the conditions and status of employment for disabled people. Each partner country identified advantages, legal provisions, services offered, experiences and best inclusive practices with regard to employment of people with disabilities. Using specially designed tools, the project team collected and analysed information which was then compiled into national reports. The five national reports were further developed through comparative analysis by the representatives of the international project team and compiled in one European Report. This report embeds the results on national survey and it reflects European policy, practice and existing realities for disabled citizens in accessing employment.
- Development of consultancy tools– using the research findings and report materials, the project team then developed consultancy instruments for the field of disability-specific employment. Materials developed in the project, which represent the core of the training, include: competency checklist, competency toolkit, matrixes, tools to describe job-specific competencies, support for job-matching processes, potential problem identification, analysis of environmental barriers and the training kit.
- Training of consultants in five partners countries - using the materials developed in the previous stage of the project, national training programs were organized in each project country, with the help and support of an international expert present in all training sessions. This resulted in the completed training of a team of 45 EU consultants and 5 national Scheme Managers in employment inclusion. Additionally, representatives from each country were trained as scheme managers at international level to support their national team of employment consultants.
- Piloting the designed schemes of consultancy process – all the consultants trained in the project delivered audits at national level for volunteer companies. Scheme managers directly coordinated this process. The field work experiences, lessons learnt and results were centralised at the level of the partnership. Final training materials were made available online, in all project languages. This builds onto project sustainability and transferability.
- Awareness campaign to promote the importance of inclusive employment and project consultancy model – throughout the project implementation period the partnership aimed to spread the project information and outcomes at local, national

and international level. Guided by a dissemination strategy, partners carried out constant dissemination activities targeting relevant groups for the project goal: people with disabilities, employers, policy and decision makers.

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 input and support from the consultancy network.

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1. Project Objectives

The objective of UEmploy project was to support and facilitate the efficient employment of disabled people at various entry levels within the European labour market. There were two main approaches the project adopted to implement and develop its 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 aimed to establish a vocational rehabilitation consultant network in each project country.

Project activities were planned and implemented so as to support consultants' training in the acquisition and use of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Training beneficiaries provided dedicated and resourced employment consultancy services to both companies and disabled potential employees. By piloting the consultancy tools and instruments, the project partnership made continuous improvements in quality and innovation in consultancy processes and practices related to employment inclusion so as to meet the disabled people's and employer's needs.

The project aimed to facilitate and support cooperation between employers, agencies and organisations providing consultancy on advanced employment inclusion throughout Europe. This was done by raising employers' awareness on the needs and capacity of people with disabilities. It was 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 was 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 encouraged companies to employ disabled people by informing decision makers at higher organizational and decision-making levels about the modernization processes necessary to provide disabled employees with adaptable and inclusive work environments. For disabled workers, this developed higher levels of motivation and self-confidence and also, a more active social and professional life. For employers it enhanced innovation, it developed a universal design method and it addressed issues such as work absence and improved productivity.

Structuring a standardized frame for all these objectives, UEmploy increasingly facilitated appropriate and tailored employment inclusion mechanisms for disabled employees. It is also equipped 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.

The project aimed at filling the gap which is due to: lack of standardisation in rehabilitation support/lack of qualified staff: scheme managers to manage the consultancy process and consultants to meet the disabled people's needs/lack of proper materials to train the staff/lack of methodology and evaluation tools. Project partners supported employers and provided practical demonstrations of the tools and techniques that illustrated how people with disabilities can become a valuable part of their personnel.

2. Project Approach

The overall approach of the UEmploy project was to consolidate the equal opportunity on the labour market and to showcase innovative models on inclusive employment of European citizens. The project approached actions from different angles corresponding to the different actors, needs and dimensions of effective inclusion for people with disabilities. Activities set out within the project implementation plan were ordered in a logical sequence: 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); creation of dedicated e-learning resources and advanced ICT supports tools. They presented a complex yet coherent set of processes accompanied by specialized implementation tools to create pathway to scenarios of sustainable economic development.

The following components were part of project implementation approach:

- Analysis and research of current knowledge, experiences and practices across five European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Ireland, Finland, Hungary). This allowed the project team to implement activities from 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.
- Development of concepts, ideas and models for innovative consultancy services for employment of people with disabilities. To address the identified gaps the project partnership proposed and developed practical instruments to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities
- Testing and piloting the consultancy model by organizing national training sessions. The selection processes were based on standardized selection criteria and process framework. 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.
- Clearly identified target groups and stakeholders and tailored dissemination strategy. All key messages and dissemination activities were equally relevant to all target audiences of the project, therefore they were tailored to the needs of each target group, namely they showed what gaps the project addressed and what solutions it offered to the particular group of users.
- Common implementation framework that ensured a standardized process and also contributed to coherence and cohesion of the overall project impact
- Clearly defined coordination, management and financing arrangements
- 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
- A quality management and evaluation system to support performance and quality in achieving and delivering project outcomes.

UEmploy partnership sought to ensure that all project activities meet identified target groups needs, with consistent management supports, and to a standard that was consistent with referenced best practice. The key outcomes and achievements of the

project have been finalised by close observation, discussions, project meetings, surveys and questionnaires developed.

The added value of the project, beyond its practical and effective model of consultancy for employment inclusion is connected to UEmploy inclusive approach: breaking modes of dependency and social assistance and indicating to employers that hiring disabled workers can be a positive and win-win outcome. At a time when severe restriction in public funding and the dismantling of the welfare state seems to be an emerging policy direction in many countries, the impact on and consequences for disabled Europeans developed a renewed importance. The need for alternatives has never been greater: one vast and largely untapped resource is citizens with disabilities, who can become active actors in economic development.

In addition to these aspects, the creation of e-learning resources and was a distinguishing achievement of the UEmploy project. In a rapidly changing and globalized employment environment, it is critical that specialized employment consultants be equipped with modern, flexible and up to date models and methods based on real employment conditions.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The focus of the UEmploy project was modern rehabilitation, a range of services and processes designed to enable all disabled people to live their lives as fully as possible. In order to support and facilitate more effective employment outcomes for disabled people, the UEmploy project developed a wide range of instruments and materials starting with comprehensive research studies, gradually building towards professional training materials, training provision and field applications of project deliverables. This was 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

Management and administrative tools

The project partnership employed a number of management and administrative tools necessary for the smooth implementation of the project. Contracts and collaboration agreements were 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 organizational 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 studies

The project partnership developed, published and disseminated key national and European reports on the status of people with disabilities in relation to labour market access, employment standards, vocational integration and strategic occupational insertion in a rapidly changing employment environment. Through these reports the project team addressed issues and gaps with regard to professional development, comparative research and evidence-based best practice and the way they relate to achieving sustainable employment outcomes for disabled citizens in Europe. The project produced original and evidence based materials and it reached a wide and significant professional and end-user audience in Europe and further afield internationally.

The focus of the survey centred on organisations' willingness to employ people with disabilities, their attitudes towards legislation and their successful or unsuccessful experiences with hiring people with disabilities. Each partner developed and compiled a National Report on the general situation regarding disability and employment. These reports included information about policies, laws and regulations regarding employment of people with disabilities in Romania, Finland, Ireland, Bulgaria and Hungary. As part of the report process each partner consulted with local employers examining their willingness to hire people with disabilities. Research outcomes were the basis for training and training materials development.

These research activities supported improvements in quality and innovation in consultancy processes and practices related to employment inclusion and the outcomes were benchmarked against international best practice to produce cutting-edge analysis. The European Report is available on the project website (www.uemploy.eu), under Resources area.

Consultancy tools and instruments to support inclusive employment

These were developed based on the international report findings (which also summarised national research findings in each project country). The focus of consultancy materials was to enable the consultants to choose the best type of disabled category to be employed in that certain job position. These materials were piloted during the national training sessions and also during the auditing process run in each partner country. The development of these practical instruments are the key resource of the project, as they enabled consultants to examine workplaces and identify areas to improve the physical conditions in order to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities and minimize risk. Moreover, the consultants were able to identify potential hazards and problems for people with disabilities, to collect examples for safe and unsafe conditions for people with disability and to identify recommendations for the employers. Using these professional and specialized tools, the consultants had the concrete instruments to make the employers aware of the fact that an appropriate recruiting process of people with disabilities could provide a valuable human resource who have the ability to display higher levels of productivity, commitment and adaptability. Thus employers were encouraged to employ people with disabilities without any taking any risk. All the tools are available on the project website (www.uemploy.eu), under Consultant's area.

Training sessions

Following the research and development stage, the project partnership selected and trained consultants and scheme managers.

Training delivery within the UEmploy project was planned and implemented at both national and international levels. Beneficiaries were 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 were equipped to coordinate the work of the national beneficiaries' team. They facilitated and supported development of the national networking system and collaborated with the project team. During the training sessions, 45 consultants from 5 countries participated in a two-day training course to enable them to carry out an audit review of local employers. 5 Scheme Managers were trained and appointed to oversee the consultancy process. They supported and managed the consultants' progress. For the delivery of the trainings specific training kits were developed and made available in all partners languages. These materials are available on the project website (www.uemploy.eu), under Consultant's area.

Fieldwork – auditing companies: following the national training programs, each beneficiary developed an audit at a real employer. The aim of this auditing stage was to check whether consultants fully understood the consultancy process, to check whether they could use the audit tools perfectly, to evaluate consultant's activities by external evaluation of the audit reports written by each consultant. Within this activity the trainees monitored and analysed the organizational context and background of participating organizations. They assessed the orientation these institutions had towards employing disabled people. They also made suggestions for cost-effective and pro-active employment strategies for disabled workers. Participants had the opportunity to practice the competences developed in the training.

The final form of the audit was sent to the participating agencies and employers. Feedback from these was provided to the project team and the trainees.

Final results of the national audits were compiled into a common report on this stage of project development. These final results enabled the project team to improve the

quality of the consultancy process and the electronic learning modules. By delivering products of a high quality level, UEmploy will continue to play a permanent role in addressing the needs of European citizens with disabilities in labor market entry.

Electronic tools and web resources :

The development of specialised e-learning resources and advanced ICT support was a distinguishing outcome of the UEmploy project. In a dynamic and continuous changing environment, the project partnership aimed at the development of specialized employment consultancy model equipped with modern, flexible and sustainable methods.

The online presence of the project is related both to project visibility as well as to 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

The project web site was built according to “Design for all” guidelines including general information (project introduction, aims, partners info), news (announcements, e-newsletters, press releases, downloadable leaflets in PDF-format), event information, training modules, Contacts and support.

The development of online modules for consultants and employers aimed at the promotion of inclusive employment, by creating a set of online tools adapted to the needs of specific target groups: consultants and employers. The project website also includes audio visual materials meant to introduce the Employ model of consultancy service, to encourage employers to recruit the disabled who have the required skills and can be a valuable part of their personnel and training tools and materials to further support this consultancy model. These training tools were improved on the basis of the feedback received from the fieldwork piloting. The final interactive form of these materials is available online in all the project languages and can be accessed on the project website.

Dissemination:

The dissemination activities undertaken by the UEmploy consortium within the project period included three consecutive phases:

- awareness raising and orientation: setting up of main dissemination tools and materials (project logo, common graphic design, website, newsletter, project leaflet, introductory presentation outlining the project objectives and foreseen activities, lists of target institutions)
- promoting the results: updating the website, posting and spreading news in order to encourage active communication and keep people interested and informed; presentation of research and practice oriented results; participation in conferences and other public events to make all target audiences aware of the project progress
- exploitation and mainstreaming: communication of final outputs to the target audiences; proactive involvement of decision makers, demonstration of specific results (such as video of consultancy process, etc), publishing articles in appropriate online and paper journals; presentation of the project experiences and final products, convincing users to apply the developed by the project tools and approaches.

Evaluation and quality assurance:

Throughout entire project implementation phases quality assurance tools and mechanisms were used. These ensured relevant project deliverables with high levels of applicability. The project team included 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 was incorporated in the development process, to constantly update project actions and include opinions of those who piloted or evaluated deliverables. Quality Assurance focused on the standards and validity of the research findings, setting them against anticipated outcomes from training interventions. Internal performance and external interaction are referenced in developing best practice paradigms for sustainability and mainstreaming outcomes.

4. Partnerships

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

The partnership involved 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. Each partner was encouraged to think beyond national boundaries, to operate as a European team and to ensure that the learning from shared interventions around labour market access for citizens with disabilities became a key part of transformative policy and practice. Each of the partners contributed their knowledge and experiences but by bringing all this together we were able to create a European approach which addresses the needs and concerns regarding inclusive employment. Transnational collaboration within the project created among partners a shared understanding about the common work of the consortium which directly relates the project developments to wider strategic directions and European priorities.

The fact that all partners were at the same time willing to share their knowledge and competence, as well as eager to learn from others and from the joint efforts, brought about a very fruitful cooperation. Also, the differences in the five participating nationalities and their respective social structures and histories contributed to a more comprehensive understanding on how the audit tool and processes could be beneficial to potential employers and job-seeking people with disabilities at the same time and in different situations.

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, decision-making and strategy planning organisations) 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) was 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 supported the online presence and networking. VATES (P7, FI) and EI (P3, IR) are institutions with extensive experience in specialized disability supports and they provided key expertise on approaches to vocational inclusion. Euroinform (P4, BG) was in charge with the dissemination coordination 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. ULS ensured that a dynamic international perspective enhanced a European focus on inclusion, value for money and shared mutual benefit in UEmploy products and processes. From advanced Nordic models, Irish independent living

frameworks and Balkan community needs, the partnership encapsulated a diverse and mutually enriching focus. Since HR systems for helping people with disability is highly developed in Ireland and Finland, it was extremely useful to transfer this knowledge to other countries, where inclusion is not so developed and services to help people with disability are missing. The direct involvement of citizens with disabilities was a noted feature in the design of training and audits – reinforced by shared learning with academics, professionals and disability rights activists in Europe, Canada and the United States.

Tudásklaszter Társad (P5, HU) is the expert in materials development and also provided support for training sessions at national and international levels. Their experience in providing business consultancy to employers and HR departments of companies for an inclusive employment policy proved to be very empowering to the whole partnership.

Although there were clear and specific tasks for each of the members of the partnership, project activities were appropriately distributed among all partners so that they could contribute to each and every developmental stage in collaborative and mutually reinforcing ways.

5. Plans for the Future

The UEmploy partnership considers they have overachieved the objectives of the project and all members of the partnership are interested in further developing/valorising the project outcomes.

The first step was to discuss the IPR agreement so as to set the main lines for future exploitation activities. The project outputs and the exploitation and IPR agreements were signed by the partners by the end of the project. They open new prospects for the activities of the partner institutions

Added to this, each partner has its own plans to valorise UEmploy at national level. Below we present these national perspectives and plans for UEmploy project.

The lead partner, Fundatia EuroEd intends to continue to promote UEmploy service and encourage its exploitation. Moreover, the intention is to build on associated partnerships and networks developed through this project and further valorise tools and products for wider use both nationally and internationally. The fact that at the international valorisation event organised in Romania, in Iasi, representatives from national strategy-elaboration guests participated (the Ministry of Work, the regional agency of employment, the regional labour inspectorate), were actively present and showed a real interest in the tools and processes of the project opens new doors in connection to the future usability and development of the current tools.

Another goal in Romania is to gain national accreditation for the training on employment inclusion.

The plan of Context Learning(P2, FI) is to utilize the knowledge gained in this project as the basis when developing a more focused approach for the national needs. Context Learning are currently building new national networks and finding out possibilities to start new projects in this area. They are also open for international cooperation and look for opportunities to take things further with their role as the ICT learning expert organization.

From an Irish (P3, IR) perspective it would be the intention to continue with the partnership to further develop and refine the tools with a view to a pan-European Transfer of Innovation application. Enable Ireland are currently engaged in discussion about such possibilities with University College Cork.

Euroinform (P4, BG) intends to develop localized continuous training of consultants in Bulgarian language. Also Euroinform will continue promoting the UEmploy service and encourage its use exploiting the links forged over the project (e.g. with national employer's associations; national federation of employers of people with disability, etc.)

Tudasklaszer (P5, HU) together with a major Associated Partner, the Progress Foundation, decided to develop a special training room where managers from interested companies can be trained to become more sensitive towards people with disability. This new training room will serve as a meeting place for foundations and organisations representing people with disabilities. ICT and other vocational training programmes are planned for SN people in this new location. The organisation plants to sustain relationship with other Associated Partners, such as (Napos Oldal) in the long run. This foundation is willing to offer UEmploy services to companies and is ready to use the location build for this purpose by Tudasklaszter.

From the outset of the project, Universal Learning Systems (P6, IR) emphasized sustainability and added value. The scale of needs in Europe is vast and

increasing due to the current economic crisis. The development of effective tools (auditing and employment-analytic), the provision of trained auditors and advisers and the provision of direct training are powerful and linked elements of the UEmploy final product. The usefulness to disability-specific agencies, employment and training agencies, advocacy groups and associations of citizens with disabilities represents a significant achievement. Universal Learning Systems will continue to publicize these tools and outputs through its own publications (academic and applied), professional contacts, networks, social media sites (including the Facebook UEmploy page) and disability specific associations where ULS operates. In its capacity as a leading e-learning designer and provider, ULS will actively promote UEmploy and its training packages through bodies in which it plays a prominent role such as EDEN (European Distance and E-learning Network), IARP (International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals), NCRE (National Council on Rehabilitation Education), GAJE (Global Alliance on Justice Education), the European Disability Forum and the Universal Design Network.

VATES (P7, FI) considers the future development of the tools and methods development during the project can be divided into three topics. With the completion of these, the tools developed in the project could be in widespread use by dozens or even hundreds of job coaches and benefit thousands of job-seeking persons with disabilities and their potential employers. Firstly, a concept and partnership for organising further training for UEmploy consultants will have to be planned and agreed. Secondly, a local project to complete the localisation of the tool (taking into consideration locally developed mechanisms) needs to be arranged. Thirdly, a national project to evaluate, to validate and standardise the tool needs to be arranged. All of the above, but especially the second and the third, require rather immediate activity in finding the suitable partners and financing. This work has already been started.

At the end of the project the partnership already have identified a lot of possibilities ahead and they decided to continue to build on this basis for national needs and localised perspectives.

6. Contribution to EU policies

At the level of the European Union, issues around the employment of people with disabilities have been regarded as a fundamental aspect of the process of social inclusion. Participation in employment has been seen as both an important duty of citizenship as well as a means of personal development. As far back as 1996 a major report from the Helios II initiative described the focus:

The problems of unemployment or unsatisfactory employment, and the accompanying financial difficulties, are compounded by the problems of social exclusion faced by disabled people. So the exclusion from appropriate and rewarding employment experienced by many disabled people is just one aspect of their wider exclusion from many of the everyday social activities of modern life. To counteract the problems discussed above, it is often necessary to provide additional assistance and appropriate training and employment provisions for disabled people seeking work. (HELIOS 1996, p. 77)

The European Union's involvement in disability issues originally was contained within European Social Fund activities in relation to vocational training. Today it is part of policy to promote a wider consideration of social measures and instruments to secure the rights, responsibilities and inclusion of disabled citizens. While recognizing the widely different approaches, understandings, mechanisms and policies of Member States in relation to disability the EU has promoted some common initiatives. The Helios Programme influenced the European Union's Council of Ministers to adopt a report, *A New European Community Disability Strategy*, which endorsed and expanded the United Nations' Standard Rules. Specifically, this report re-asserted the principles of employment and non-discrimination as the key elements in developing social inclusion for people with disabilities.

Nonetheless it was clear that most workers with disabilities were underemployed, in part-time work, lacking required supports and in low status jobs. At European level, these concerns have been acknowledged in various studies and reports. Agencies such as CEDEFOP, OECD, EASE, Workability International and the European Disability Forum have examined the needs and requirements of those with disabilities to access and sustain employment. While reviewing training and support mechanisms, they also focused on the varying needs of different disability categories and the crucial issue of appropriate and meaningful assessment and workplace auditing.

At European Union level the changing labour market has been highlighted as an area where job opportunities and conditions for those with disabilities have deteriorated and where the gap between unemployment rates for disabled and non-disabled workers has actually increased in recent years. To the low participation rates of those with disabilities in Europe must be added the increased number of people in receipt of disability benefits, thus suggesting a growing exclusion of those with disabilities from the labour market. The European Commission suggests two factors contributing to this growth:

- Economic downturn and growing redundancies - where disabled workers who become unemployed have little opportunity to find new work or to develop new careers (particularly older workers)

- The increased emphasis in labour market requirements where emphasis is placed on intellectual ability, advanced educational levels and adaptability - which may not be easy for those emerging from segregated educational structures or having poor skills levels.

In its Resolution on the *Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities* (1997), the European Commission, while recognizing that the primary responsibility for action lay with individual Member States, laid out a set of key guiding principles. It further recognized that European societies are largely structured around the needs of “average” citizens without any disability and, therefore, those with disabilities were excluded from the rights and opportunities of the vast majority.

The Commission identified the main areas of exclusion for those with disabilities:

- Education – segregated systems with restricted access to mainstream resources, including good quality training
- Work – high rates of unemployment and discriminatory employment practices
- Mobility and access – inaccessibility of public transport and public buildings
- Housing – scarcity or prohibitive expense of adapted or adaptable housing
- Welfare systems – minimum support, bureaucratic complexity and restriction.

The Commission considered it could best play a role by using its own resources and in encouraging Member States to stress common standards and targets for inclusion.

The Commission considered that strategy could best be advanced by:

- Mainstreaming
- Co-operation
- Encouragement of the work of NGOs
- Employment
- Information and communications technologies
- EU Structural Funds.

The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is a ten-year strategy for people with disabilities so they can take part in all aspects of daily life across the EU. About 80 million people living in the EU have a mild to severe disability. The physical obstacles they face, like gaining access to a school or work place, leave them vulnerable to social exclusion. Lower employment and education levels mean the poverty rate for those with disabilities is 70% higher than the average.

This addresses the EU commitment to the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which it signed in 2007. The strategy's targets for the first five years include:

- Devising policies for inclusive, high-quality education
- Ensuring the European Platform Against Poverty includes a special focus on people with disabilities
- Working towards the recognition of disability cards throughout the EU to ensure equal treatment when working, living or travelling
- Developing accessibility standards for voting premises and campaign material
- Taking rights of people with disabilities into account in external development programs and for EU candidate countries.

The commission will consider a "European Accessibility Act", to set EU standards for products, services, and public buildings. Promoting accessibility is an important part of creating a culture of equal opportunities for all in the EU. But it also stands to benefit the economy as a whole. Boosting the industries that invest in accessible products and services will foster innovation and create jobs.

UEmploy addressed these strategic objectives and policies by promoting awareness, employment access and best practice to ensure that both employers and citizens with disabilities can derive shared benefit from labour market integration. UEmploy and its outputs demonstrate that disability and inclusion is not a one way street. Mutual learning and advantage are created by designing for difference. The provision of high-quality, ICT enhanced training materials means that UEmploy contributes towards a culture of employment best practice and European innovation in the domain of disability, rights and inclusion. The products and research findings further demonstrate significant potential for future roll-out and adaptation. Already a significant team exists to capitalize on this and it is gratifying that partners have unanimously agreed to sustain the processes and products developed in UEmploy over the longer term.

