

Service Provision to Tackle Long-term Unemployment

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EASPD is the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation and represent over 11,000 social service provider organisations across Europe and disability. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

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A third of EASPD's membership provide employment and work services to Persons with Disabilities. It is our understanding that the huge experience developed by our sector in terms of supporting persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups –often long-term unemployed (LTU) - back into employment would be of particular interest to the European Commission and their work on the role of service provision in tackling LTU.

Key points

- Long-term unemployment is a long-term problem and has only been aggravated by the crisis; in particular for disadvantaged groups.
- STAR recommendations show the way for a holistic approach to the role of service provision in tackling long-term unemployment.
- It is equally important to provide and finance adequate support for both the unemployed and the employer, but also in-work support.
- Decent jobs, with decent pay, working conditions and career paths should be the objective in order to avoid the benefit trap.
- Life-long career support (when unemployed and in employment) should be promoted, not a prioritised category-based approach.
- Individualised approaches through the integration of services must be supported, but implemented as close as possible to the users.
- Structural Cooperation must be developed at all levels between all relevant stakeholders.
- Government organisations should take the lead by employing disadvantaged groups.
- Research into measures aiming at long-term unemployed people, in particular of disadvantaged groups, should be adequately financed and supported.

I. Context: Service provision and Unemployed with Disabilities.

In Europe there are around 80 million people with disabilities. It is clear that their labour force participation rate is significantly lower than when compared to the population as a whole. **Persons with disabilities are not fully integrated into the labour market and almost 50% of the working age population are either unemployed or considered as not able to work (Eurostat, 2014).** For a variety of reasons (societal, political, legal), a significant proportion of unemployed persons with disabilities are long-term unemployed. Generally speaking, this can be explained by the **lack of support given to persons with disabilities and employers**, among others, in order to bridge the gap and create inclusive labour markets.

The current state of play is not positive and has been aggravated by the economic crisis which has often reduced the financing of social support services for persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups, including the employment services. Over the last decade a strong movement fighting for mainstreaming set the basis for a change of mind-set in work and employment schemes for persons with disabilities, recognising their right and their ability to work in the open labour market, if being given adequate support. **Today, however, the number of jobs available in the open labour market for persons with disabilities is not higher compared to 15 years ago.** The situation of persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups is further worsened in times of crisis due to the “last in, first out” trend meaning that disadvantaged groups are often the last to gain employment in times of economic prosperity and often the first to lose employment in times of crisis. This means that public authorities have not given the right political, financial and legislative support to allow the business world and service providers to align themselves to the change in paradigm allowing for the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

The possibilities for work and employment for persons with disabilities, especially persons with severe disabilities, often depend on the amount of (specialised) support available to them (i.e. human support, vocational education and training and technical adaptations, such as reasonable accommodation) and on the existence of support available for employers too (i.e. compensation measures against the potential loss in productivity and/or guidance on how to deal with technical and human support issues linked to persons with disabilities).

People with disabilities, similarly to other disadvantaged groups such as migrants, single parents, homeless, people with mental health problems, are structurally disadvantaged in the labour market because of the barriers posed by society. This also often leads to a vicious cycle of precarious employment, repetitive job loss and finally long-term unemployment. Nonetheless, **support measures, when provided, may help overcome structural and functional hindrances, provided that they are accompanied by a sustainable legislative and financial framework fitting long-term support needs.** Similarly, services must continue to be provided following employment to avoid potential relapses into unemployment and therefore, if not tackled at an early stage, long-term unemployment.

Accessible, inclusive labour markets, providing good quality jobs, must be the objective of any measures the European Commission (EC) promotes. All active citizens (employed, unemployed, long-term unemployed) must receive adequate support in order to have equal opportunities in the labour market, to avoid situations of unemployment; in particular long-term, which often leads to living in poverty and social exclusion. However, any employment policy must also reach out to employers, understand their needs, provide adequate support measures and communicate how a diverse workforce often lead companies to being more innovative, more successful and better at the retention of workforce; as several studies have shown: [a cost benefit analysis of disability in the workforce](#); [Re-examining the business case for diversity](#).

II. Analysis of the European Commission’s perspective.

The European Commission's intention to launch a series of measures to tackle long-term unemployment and in particular the role of service provision in supporting this process must be welcomed. The [background document](#) of its [Public Consultation regarding the provision of services to long-term unemployed](#) recognises high long-term unemployment as one of the main employment legacy of the crisis. Although this might be true for some groups, long-term unemployment has been a significant trend for persons with disabilities for decades. The recent crisis, in terms of its impact on the financing of (specialised) employment services - has only aggravated the situation for persons with disabilities and halted the progress towards employment for persons with disabilities in the open labour market that had been made since the turn of the century. **The European Commission must recognise long-term unemployment as a long-term pattern, which has simply been made more apparent to the public eye since the crisis in 2008.** Long-term unemployment for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups has always been an important matter.

Regarding the background document, EASPD fully agrees with the Commission's initial evaluation that long-term unemployment can lead to an increase in social stigma, to skills depreciation, to increased prejudice and reluctance from potential employers to hire and permanently lower wages and reduced career advancement prospects. It is also the experience of EASPD's members that the connection to the labour market for persons with disabilities deteriorates as unemployment duration increases, which often requires the involvement of more support services. **It is therefore essential to ensure that support services are available not only in the early stages of unemployment but also throughout an individual's employment to pre-empt unemployment from even happening;** in particular in times of crisis. Indeed, EASPD suggests that the European Commission also includes preventive measures in its proposal aiming to support initiatives which contribute towards avoiding that persons at risk of long-term unemployment lose their jobs and thus increase the overall unemployment rate. Employment and social services should also be supported not only in job-seeking services but also in intervening and cooperating with employers to increase job retention; in particular for those at risk of long-term unemployment, including, amongst others, older people, single parents, ethnic minorities and people with recognised or unrecognised mental health problems or disabilities.

EASPD regrets that failure to gain access to the labour market is often viewed as primarily on the fault of the unemployed individual, rather than on a labour market that is not inclusive. The emphasis should not only be on the employability of the individual but also, and one could argue in particular, on the inclusiveness of the labour market and support to employers. EASPD particularly regrets the use of terms such as "those most employable" which intrinsically discriminates against certain groups based on their suitability to the labour market in its current form. It is a universally recognised human right for all individuals, of a certain age, to gain access to work and employment (Universal Declaration of Human Rights); therefore affirming the necessity for inclusive labour markets to fully achieve this right.

However, it is not only an issue of human rights, it is also an issue of effectiveness. EASPD's experience in supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market is that a holistic approach is necessary, implementing **support measures which provide a win-win situation both for the individual and for the employer.** We believe that the design and extent of support to employers who hire disadvantaged persons as well as the long-term unemployed is just as important – if not more - as the design and extent of support to the individuals looking for employment. Similarly, in terms of cooperation between the different stakeholders, EASPD fully agrees that **mutual partnerships between all stakeholders (individuals, employers, municipalities, social services, trade unions and public employment services) are key** to the process of tackling long-term unemployment for all Europeans.

The Public Consultation proposed by the EC brings up several, if not all, of the most important questions; despite perhaps its general focus on the unemployed rather than on the employer. However, the European Commission's willingness to question which groups are more worthy of intensive support (based on age or level of education) is in complete contrast to the attitude needed to effectively tackle long-term unemployment through service provision. **Trying to identify the group which should be prioritised is ill-suited due to the often complex and multi-layered nature of persons effected by long term unemployment, age being just one factor.** Most long term unemployed are affected by more than one form of "disadvantage". Instead, the European Commission should first view tackling long-term unemployment by making the right support available to all individuals at all stages of their life, whatever their age, whatever the categories one puts them in. For instance, providing in-job support should be considered as an important factor in creating quality jobs, allowing people to stay in work in the first place. Secondly, it is essential that individualised support – on the basis of the STAR recommendations presented

in the following part - is provided to an individual as soon as he/she becomes unemployed as the longer one waits, the harder it becomes. The same logic applies for long-term unemployed, although more support may be required, both for the employee and for the employer; here it is important to also offer support to persons at risk of long-term unemployment and their employers whilst they are still in work

As a whole, EASPD fully welcomes the EC objective to reduce long-term unemployment by providing a much-needed consistent framework for Member States to strengthen support given to the long-term unemployed, in particular by cooperating between organisations who provide this support. However, EASPD would also argue that it is just as important to strengthen support and assistance to employers in this area as it is to the long-term unemployed, and that **only through a holistic integrated approach can long-term unemployment be successfully tackled**. Another important aspect the European Commission must consider is to ensure that these measures do not result in the same rather disappointing returns that the Youth Guarantee has led to, as well as to understand what additional financial support would be dedicated to the measures in addition to those already included in the cohesion funds.

III. A Holistic Approach? Follow the STAR recommendations

It is clear that a holistic approach is necessary to successfully tackle long-term unemployment. EASPD encourages the European Commission to promote the STAR recommendations which if implemented together have proven to be successful in reducing unemployment – and often long-term unemployment – for persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups. The recommendations are based on success factors found in 25 projects focusing on employment of persons with disabilities. They include recommendations on:

- Stakeholder cooperation
- Targeted actions
- Availability of support
- Research

The integration and implementation of all these actions – **jointly** - is essential if the EU is to successfully tackle long-term unemployment strategy.

1. Stakeholder cooperation

Any approach aiming at tackling long-term unemployment must promote cooperation between a variety of stakeholders (individuals, employment support services, employers, social services, VET providers, trade unions, public employment agencies, public authorities) as creating inclusive labour markets is about shared responsibilities between all stakeholders. It is key that all stakeholders be continuously involved in the different stages in order to ensure that the different perspectives and roles are taken into account, understood and valued. Only via a structured and ongoing partnership approach is it possible to create quality jobs for long-term unemployed and disadvantaged groups on a sustainable basis.

It is important that this partnership process is not only organised at local level but that it should be developed at all levels of governance (local, regional, national and European) and that each level should support and inform the others regarding good practices and experiences.

Furthermore, integration of service provision – through for instance a one-stop-shop delivery system for activation support, benefits and social services - is essential to provide the type of individualised services which would bring the job-seeker and the labour market closer together. **Nonetheless, this integration must also take place at local level for it to be effective and not centralised to a few contact points per region.** This process must be undertaken as close to the individuals (and employers) as possible for it to be fully effective and reach those most excluded from the labour market. Another important factor would be to successfully involve public employment agencies as part of the cooperation process.

Last but not least, the mutual responsibilities approach should be fully supported at all times by the measures proposed by the European Commission. However, mutually binding commitments from both the individual and the service providers are very much strengthened if other stakeholders are also mutually responsible for the interventions, including public authorities, employers, trade unions and even, in certain cases, the education systems. Other aspects of this approach which ensure its success are the importance of having responsive and committed partners on all sides, as well as **the necessity to have a “spider-in-the-web” – often played by the service provider - able to bring all partners together and demonstrate the win-win situation for all involved.**

The European Commission and policy-makers at all levels should:

- **Set-up structural stakeholder cooperation at all levels between all relevant stakeholders;**
- **Make sure that integrated social service provision remains as localised as possible;**
- **Support the mutual responsibilities approach, including commitments from all stakeholders.**

2. Targeted actions

There are three “generations” of employment policies around. The first “generation” developed an approach based on specialised and specific legislation. A second “generation” of policies then followed by mainstreaming a disability perspective in all policies. A third generation of employment policies soon developed, which are most suitable to successfully respond to the complexity of the labour market and the multi-layered nature of the needs of many disadvantaged individuals today. The third generation of policies incorporates both focused and mainstream approaches, in other words taking an individualised approach to employment policies. **The European Commission must acknowledge the fact that to successfully tackle long-term unemployment this individualised approach is required. The European Commission should also make the case for accessibility in a broader context:** accessibility of public employment services and of vocational training (training of staff on how to communicate and advise persons with intellectual disabilities or disadvantaged groups; creation of easy-to-read information and communication, accessible contact points, reaching our efforts, etc); whilst also taking into account essential factors such as reasonable accommodation, amongst others.

One particularly useful example of the individualised approach is the supported employment methodology. A description of this methodology can be found in Annex 1.

The European Commission and policy-makers at all levels should:

- **Develop and promote an individualised approach to support services in all employment policies;**
- **Ensure that employment leads to decent pay and working conditions, and career paths;**
- **Ensure that welfare benefits (e.g. medical coverage, travel, child care) are not immediately withdrawn when gaining employment in order to avoid the benefit trap;**
- **Take the lead by employing disadvantaged groups in government organisations; Review and withdraw legislation and regulations which (vastly) exclude certain disadvantaged groups from the labour market and/or unemployment statistics.**

3. Availability of support

In order to create inclusive labour markets and reduce long-term unemployment, both employers and employees should receive the relevant support.

On the side of employers, subsidies covering additional costs such as a potential loss in production (**although research shows that productivity more often than not increases with a more diverse workforce**), adaptation of the work environment, training and retraining of staff and employees are essential. Equally essential is to ensure that employers are aware of these subsidies and to help show employers that recruiting long-term unemployed is not just about corporate social responsibility, but that it can create a **win-win situation for both the employer and the employee**. As previously mentioned, several studies have demonstrated that productivity actually increases and the overall work environment more

positive. There are also methodologies such as **job carving** where job coaches go to employers and carve out suitable jobs allowing employers to maximise staff productivity.

On the side of employees, there is an obvious need for adaptation and provision of transportation; training, accessible labour rights related documents, job coaching, and paperwork support, amongst others. It is also essential to further the awareness of long-term unemployed about jobs available to them; in particular for groups such as persons with disabilities.

It is essential that any measures aiming to tackle long-term unemployment provide the support services with sufficient funding and backing to enable them to successfully work with both long-term unemployed, employees (at risk) and employers in an integrated approach.

Based on EASPD's experience in providing employment services for persons with disabilities, perhaps one of the most important factors in introducing long-term unemployed people into the labour market is to pursue a change in paradigm from the traditional "train, place, maintain" methodology to, for instance, **the much more successful supported employment methods: "place, train, career path"** (See Annex 1). Although basic training – often in the form of vocational education – is important, it is the on-the-job trainings as well as training the employer and staff which really make the difference in terms of effective employment measures for persons with disabilities in the open labour market. A similar approach has also proved to be successful with other disadvantaged groups.

One of the most obvious gaps in terms of availability of support is the lack of communication about inclusive job ads for excluded groups; in particular in a format which is accessible for them, for instance in easy-to-read format. Structures should be developed at all levels (local, regional, national and European) to better advertise and communicate inclusive job opportunities throughout Europe.

The European Commission and policy-makers at all levels should:

- **Develop coherent and holistic legislation and funding systems covering the action costs of hiring people, and also in-work support (adequate and sustainable financing for the support to unemployed, employers, staff, etc.);**
- **Implement campaigns to articulate and promote the positive outcomes for employers when diversifying their workforce.**
- **Develop a multi-level platform (regional, national, European), enabling the exchange of best practices regarding employment measures targeting disadvantaged groups, as well as better advertising and communicating inclusive job opportunities throughout Europe.**
- **Promote and support the development of supported employment agencies throughout Europe (either within public employment agencies or through private non-profit organisations)**

4. Research – aiming at evidence based improvement

As both the needs of individuals and of the labour market are always in constant development, **it is necessary to continuously collect new data** in order to constantly improve and assess the success rate of initiatives and approaches of employment policies. Benchmarking between different approaches, methods, sectors and countries is only feasible when comparable data is available.

The European Commission and policy-makers at all levels should:

- **Support (financially and politically) research on measures aiming at unemployed people as well as people at risk of unemployment (success rate, barriers, other impacts, failures, etc);**
- **Develop more detailed unemployment statistics and analysis for disadvantaged groups;**
- **Include researchers in the stakeholder cooperation platform;**
- **Analyse the impact of the EU Anti-discrimination directive 2000/78/EC on employment of disadvantaged groups.**

III. Annexed documents

Annex 1. Briefing on Supported Employment Methodology

- 3-page description of the Supported Employment methodology and its transferability, by renowned expert Christy Lynch, CEO, KARE Ireland.

Annex 2. EASPD Employment-related projects for Persons with Disabilities

- Brief description of 5 successful EC-funded employment-related projects for persons with disabilities, with links to websites, and guidelines regarding success factors.

Annex 3. EASPD Booklet on 10 Best Practices in Employment support for People with Disabilities (2013)

- Booklet presenting the 10 best practices in employment support for People with Disabilities for the 2013 EASPD Employment for All award (financed by the European Commission).

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