

IN-WORK

Needs, resources, obstacles and opportunities for youths with special needs in insertion to work (D.2.1)

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INTRODUCTION

IN-WORK addresses the role of the university within its reference region as a driver for an inclusive culture, by developing and testing a model of intervention focused on relations between inside and outside the university, and engaging people involved. The project adopts the work-integrated learning method, which includes work-based learning (internships and traineeships), to support people with special needs either enrolled or not in the university in undertaking meaningful learning experiences based on relations with the world of work. The project work will be inside the university, to stimulate the use of work-integrated learning pedagogies in an inclusive way by teachers, also by means of online technologies, and outside the university, to promote a culture of inclusion through the involvement of business players in the learning design and development.

Promoting inclusion processes in universities entails supporting enrolled students in achieving their educational and personal goals and fostering a culture of inclusive education. Beyond the confines of academia, universities have the potential to serve as educational institutions and drivers of social inclusion, even for individuals not enrolled in higher education. As such, the social responsibility of universities extends to spreading a culture of inclusion within the broader community and actively contributing to its development.

Universities already contribute to local socio-economic development, but this project proposes redefining and expanding their connections to the community by introducing a model of work-integrated learning. This model specifically targets higher education students and non-student youths with special needs. The consortium members involved in this project specialise in the field of inclusion. Previous experiences have shown that the impact of their efforts is often limited to the individuals directly supported, primarily through the services provided by university support centres and disability officers. While this approach focuses on students' academic achievements and success, it offers less support for their journey towards inclusion in life and society beyond graduation.

Career development studies highlight the importance of initiating and nurturing the process of life design during the years of study. Building upon previous research and practices, it is recognized that support should be integrated into regular activities such as teaching and curriculum design, as well as the promotion and participation in extracurricular activities. Consequently, it is essential for teachers and support staff to design and develop accessible activities as the norm, catering to the needs of individuals with special requirements, rather than treating them as "special cases." This inclusive attitude should extend to interactions outside the university, as institutions engage with their surrounding communities. By integrating inclusion goals, universities can support collaborative efforts between individuals with special needs and the world of work, fostering mutual understanding, professional networks, and community development.

Moreover, universities also serve as employers by providing opportunities for internships and traineeships. By incorporating work-integrated learning activities into both curricular and

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extracurricular pursuits and embracing inclusive approaches throughout the design process, the overarching objective of this project is to foster a sense of commitment and belonging to inclusive communities for all stakeholders involved. This educational objective extends beyond the enrolled students, as the university functions as a learning environment for everyone.

The IN-WORK project aims to explore the university's role in fostering an inclusive culture. This takes place by developing and testing an intervention model that emphasizes the relationships between the university and its external environment while actively engaging relevant stakeholders. This project adopts the work-integrated learning approach, encompassing work-based learning such as internships and traineeships, to facilitate meaningful learning experiences for individuals with special needs within the realm of work. The project's activities take place both within and outside the university setting. Within the university, the goal is to encourage the inclusive use of work-integrated learning pedagogies by educators, utilizing online technologies as well. The project seeks to promote an inclusive culture beyond university, by involving businesses in the design and development of learning experiences. The objectives of the project are the following:

- strengthen community ties by pursuing short-term objectives like co-designing learning experiences and medium-term goals such as promoting an inclusive culture.
- support the idea that the university is an educational institution for everyone, not just students, by collaborating with stakeholders to co-design extracurricular activities. The university also serves as a host institution for traineeships for youths with special needs from the reference communities.
- Provide training for internal staff to design, develop, and implement work-integrated learning activities. This ensures the integration of these methods into the regular university curriculum, ensuring project sustainability.
- Validate the effectiveness of the approach and intervention model through real-world testing during a regular semester of the academic year. This hands-on experience allows for adjustments and refinements as necessary to better cater to the needs of the target group in the future.



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This document shows the results of the research activities carried out in the first part of the project. It is a report on the needs and resources for youths with special needs and aims to compare data, and define the main obstacles and successes to insertion to work of youths with special needs. The document is preparatory for designing a grounded model of intervention for inclusive universities.

The research activities have been carried out in the following steps:

- Desk research to understand which are the main obstacles of work insertion for youths with special needs according to literature;
- Field research, to explore and triangulate different points of observation and identify needs, constraints and opportunities of the involved target groups.

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1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This section describes how the research has been designed.

1.1 Research Aim & Objective

The IN-WORK project aims to support the development of a sense of commitment and belonging to inclusive communities by educational and business players and civil society through work-integrated learning (WIL) activities. More specifically the field research aimed to:

a) Identify obstacles and successes to insertion to work of youths with special needs and contextual factors affecting the process.

The research provides elements to tailor the project action effectively and efficiently in the addressed territories.

1.2 Desk research

The desk research consists of a literature review aimed to collect data to identify

- a) success factors and obstacles in accessing employment of youths with special needs;
- b) legal frameworks related to work insertion/education/special needs;
- c) educational provisions in HE focused on the transition to work for youths with special needs both enrolled in HE or not.

The relevant sources have been drawn from the following sources:

- articles, projects and publications on experiences of youths with special needs in this and other sectors;
- journals on pedagogical approaches and methods for work-integrated learning design and development, transitions from education to work, capacity building at a community level, career development for youths with special needs, etc.;
- Ministries databases particularly (e.g., National Ministries of Education, Ministries of Labour, etc.), other Higher Education registries, European Databases (e.g., DG EAC databases such as EPALE) and portals (e.g., Eurofound), relevant journals;
- blogs, professional network discussions and documents, etc.

1.3 Field research

Field research includes the collection of data from different perspectives and target groups representing the main stakeholders of the project, namely

- Higher education students with special needs
- Youths with special needs not enrolled in higher education

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- Social services (or labour administration, where necessary) involved in the process of employment of youths with special needs
- Public and private organisations (employers)

Field research will also identify obstacles and enabling factors for job insertion of people with special needs, with an overview of contextual issues (if any), such as culture, type of sector, size of company etc., in the regions of the addressed countries.

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2. DESK RESEARCH

Inclusion in university and work settings is an important issue that needs to be constantly renewed to maintain the focus on it and to produce and share new and effective solutions. Fostering inclusion processes for universities means supporting enrolled students to achieve their learning and life objectives and supporting the achievement of widespread inclusive education. On this assumption, the university can be an educational place and driver of social inclusion also for those who are not enrolled in higher education.

The social role of the university requires spreading a culture of inclusion beyond the walls of academia by being an active player on the reference territory and contributing to community development. In this sense, besides being a learning place for all, not only for enrolled students, the university also plays a role as an employer, by hosting internships and traineeships. The scientific literature and the efforts made by organizations responsible for ensuring inclusion for students with disabilities all around Europe are huge and witness the will to create an inclusive society where everyone has his own opportunities for personal fulfilment. Previous studies have shown that there are international models of good practice that can be applied to support young people with sensory disabilities or specific learning disorders.

2.1 Demographic Framework

	European Union	Finland	Italy	Spain
Population on 1 January <i>(absolute number)</i>	446 735 291 (2022)	5 548 241 (2022)	59 030 133 (2022)	47 432 893 (2022)
Youth Population (15-29 years) <i>(as % of the total population)</i>	16,3% (2021)	17,3% (2022)	14,9% (2022)	15,7% (2022)
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion <i>(as % of the population)</i>	21,6% (2022)	16,3% (2022)	24,4% (2022)	26,0% (2022)
Early school leavers <i>(as % of the population aged 18-24)</i>	9,6% (2022)	8,4% (2022)	11,5% (2022)	13,9% (2022)
Rate of inflation <i>(% variation compared to the previous year)</i>	9,2% (2022)	7,2% (2022)	8,7% (2022)	8,3% (2022)
Unemployment rate <i>(as % of the active population aged 15-75)</i>	6,2% (2022)	6,8% (2022)	8,1% (2022)	12,9% (2022)
Youth Unemployment rate <i>(as % of the active population aged less than 25)</i>	14,5% (2022)	14,2% (2022)	23,7% (2022)	29,8% (2022)
GDP per capita <i>(Euro per inhabitant)</i>	28 820€(2022)	37 780€(2022)	27 860€(2022)	24 580€(2022)

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2.2 Legal frameworks

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006, represents an important normative point of reference for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention aims to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the same basic human rights and opportunities to participate in society as persons without disabilities. A significant aspect of the Convention is the recognition that disability is not simply a physical or medical condition but is the result of a complex interaction between persons with disabilities and the behavioural and environmental barriers present in society. The UN Convention recognizes that persons with disabilities have the right to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. It establishes a number of fundamental principles, including respect for human dignity, equality of opportunity, accessibility, inclusion, respect for differences, active participation and non-discrimination. Furthermore, the Convention specifically addresses different areas of daily life, such as care, social protection, education, work, mobility and home life, in order to ensure that persons with disabilities can fully enjoy their rights in all these areas. The Convention underlines the importance of overcoming social and environmental barriers to ensure the full participation and equality of persons with disabilities in society. The change of vision promoted by the UN Convention influenced national policies, leading to interventions that aim to overcome paternalistic forms of protection and adopt an anti-discrimination perspective in all aspects of the life of persons with disabilities. This implies the elimination of socio-economic and environmental barriers that limit or prevent the participation of persons with disabilities in society, including the labour market. Article 3 of the Convention underlines the importance of respect for the dignity, freedom and equal opportunities of all persons, including those with disabilities. The general principles defined in this article guide national policies towards the fight against discrimination and full social inclusion of people with disabilities, including equality of opportunity between men and women. In the context of employment, Article 27 recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work on the basis of equality. This implies that people with disabilities must have the freedom to participate in the labour market in an open and accessible environment. States must ensure that there is no discrimination in relation to all aspects of employment, such as recruitment, hiring, employment, job continuity, career advancement, occupational safety and hygiene conditions and remuneration. Furthermore, States must provide services for guidance, vocational training, rehabilitation and job placement in order to support persons with disabilities in their participation in the labour market. National policies are influenced by the UN Convention to foster the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, including the right to work without discrimination and access to inclusive and continuing education.

In the following tables, we fix specific elements of the three countries that take part in the project.

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FINLAND	
The official definition of 'special need' in education:	<p>“The accessibility plan for higher education and higher education institutions” was adopted in Finland in the year 2021. It focused on social, regional and linguistic equality in higher education and presents objectives and policies for promoting accessibility for everyone, but especially for under-represented population groups and minority groups. The following were highlighted as features of these groups: family background, regional accessibility of higher education, gender segregation, migrant background, functional limitations and disability, belonging to linguistic and cultural minorities, diverse learning, and belonging to sexual and gender minorities.</p> <p>Even Finland has a higher education strategy which focuses on equity, inclusion and accessibility, universities do not have an official or even established definition of special support. The need for special support is most often understood as a specific pedagogical need for support in HE.</p> <p>HE-students` needs for support can be caused by e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disability, illness or disability • social, emotional and mental health difficulties • lack of motivation, stress, coping problems, hopelessness • life situation; difficulty reconciling studies, work, family, hobbies, etc. and financial difficulties.
The official definition of 'special need' in the labour market:	<p>In the labour market, the term “A person with partial work ability” is used instead of “special needs”. This term refers to a person who has at his disposal a part of his working capacity and a desire to use this ability, but not even this term is unambiguous. Workability is affected by the demands of work and the workplace, and workability can be influenced by changing them. Therefore one person can be “a person with partial work ability” in one workplace, but a “person with whole workability” in another. People with partial work ability may include, for example, people with disabilities, people with long-term illnesses, those recovering from a serious illness, and those who have experienced a life crisis. Persons with partial work ability may also include the long-term unemployed, whose work and functional capacity has been reduced due to disability, illness or social reasons. The most common causes of decreased working capacity are depression and musculoskeletal disorders. 1.9 million Finns of working age have some type of disability or chronic disease. A third of them, or about 600,000 persons, find that the disease or disability affects their work or work opportunities. There are approximately 65000 people with partial work ability in Finland.</p> <p>In the Social Welfare Act, " A person in need of special support" refers to a person who has special difficulties in seeking and receiving the social and health services he or she needs. This may be due to</p>

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	<p>his/her cognitive or mental disability or illness, substance abuse, different support needs arising at the same time, or for other similar reasons. The main idea is his/her difficulties to achieve services and it is the authorities' obligation to identify and determine the need for services.</p>
<p>Demographics (percentages, unemployed, employed people with special needs)</p>	<p>The unemployment rate was 7,9 % in April/2023 and the unemployment rate for persons aged 15 to 24 stood at 22.6% (which was 5.7 percentage points higher than one year ago).</p> <p>In Finland, there is no official definition of partial work ability, and no register is kept of persons with partial work ability. 1.9 million Finns have a long-term illness and, according to one study, 600,000 estimated that the illness affects their ability to work. The employment rate of people with partial work ability is up to one-fifth lower than that of other working-age people.</p> <p>The previous Government implemented an extensive work capacity programme (2019-2023) to improve the employment of people with partial work ability, which the new Government is likely to continue. See more: Working capacity programme - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (tem.fi)</p>
<p>Laws and regulations for people with special needs (education)</p>	<p>No exact laws concerning students with SN. Legislation on higher education contains only a provision: "A reason related to the applicant's state of health or functional capacity must not be an obstacle to admission. However, a person who is not in good health or functional capacity for practical tasks or practical training related to studies may not be admitted if the safety requirements related to the studies so require and if the obstacle cannot be removed by reasonable measures.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education and Culture prepared an accessibility plan for higher education in accordance with the Government Programme (2019) for 2020–2021." The accessibility plan for higher education and higher education institutions includes a review of how social, regional and linguistic equality is realised in higher education and presents objectives and policies for promoting accessibility for everyone in higher education and more specifically for under-represented population groups and minority groups.</p>
<p>Organisations in charge (education)</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education and Culture Each higher education institution had to draw up its own accessibility plan by the end of 2022</p>
<p>Laws and regulations for people with special needs (labour/work)</p>	<p>In Finland, there is a lot of detailed legislation on how social, health and labour administration authorities must consider the service needs of those in need of special support. Similarly, there is legislation concerning a person's right to receive e.g., personal aids for coping at work.</p> <p>Each administrative branch has its own legislation, and it has been difficult to coordinate them. In recent years, several reforms have been carried out, in which cooperation between different authorities has been developed and the division of duties between authorities in employing people with partial work ability has been clarified. This work will continue with a new division of responsibilities between the</p>

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	<p>authorities also next year (see the reforms in Finnish Muutoksen tuulet puhaltavat työllisyysenhoidossa Vates)</p> <p>There is no legislation obliging private employers to hire people with partial work ability, but employers can receive financial support for hiring people with partial work ability as well as for changes in the working environment to make work more suitable for the employee.</p>
Organisations in charge (labour/work)	<p>Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and its subordinate local offices</p> <p>Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and its subordinate local offices</p>
Other relevant information	

ITALY	
The official definition of 'special need' in education:	<p>In Italy, the official definition for "Special Needs" in education and work is governed by current legislation.</p> <p>In the Italian legislation on education, the definition of Special Educational Needs can be found in the Ministerial Circular n. 8 of 6 March 2013. The document underlines how children with special educational needs present one of the following conditions: "social and cultural disadvantage, specific learning disabilities and/or specific developmental disorders, difficulties deriving from lack of knowledge of the culture and of the Italian language because they belong to different cultures".</p> <p>In summary, therefore, it can be said that we are faced with a student with SEN whenever the child or young person shows particular learning needs, which can be of a permanent or temporary nature and caused by different factors. These causes may be organic, biological, familial, social, environmental, contextual, or a combination of these. They, therefore, need interventions accurately tailored to their situation of difficulty and the factors that originate and/or maintain it.</p> <p>Actually, Special Educational Needs are divided into three categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability (L.104/1992) - (supports are assigned, such as the support teacher and the assistant for autonomy and communication, the preparation of the Individualized Educational Plan) • Specific developmental disorders (such as DSA, attention deficit and hyperactivity Law 53/2003 and 170/2010) - (drafting of the Personalized Educational Plan and identification of a personalized educational path). • Disorders related to socio-economic, linguistic and cultural factors (BES in the strict sense - Law 53/2003) - (drafting

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	<p>of the Personalized Educational Plan and identification of a personalized educational path).</p> <p>When a student has a disability or a specific learning disorder, the certification and diagnosis is presented to the school. The latter are issued by specialists who operate within the provincial and national health services as required by Law 104/92 and Law 170/10. For students who experience learning difficulties not due to clinical problems but linked to situations of socio-economic and/or environmental difficulty, the Class Council plans personalized interventions for students in difficulty in agreement with the family. The pedagogical-didactic observation takes into account the ICF functioning model (International Classification of Functioning - International Classification of the Functioning of Disability and Health, 2002) of the World Health Organization. However, pupils recognized with disabilities pursuant to law 104 and DSA have different and separate support and accompaniment paths. With the ministerial directive of 27 December 2012 containing "Intervention tools for pupils with special educational needs and territorial organization for school inclusion", the Ministry of Education, University and Research (Miur) introduced the recognition of special educational needs for pupils with learning difficulties due to family, socio-environmental or cultural causes. Consequently, the Ministry also provided organizational criteria to encourage the inclusion of these students in difficulty, indications which it then further explored and clarified with the ministerial circular of 6 March 2013, as well as with the subsequent notes of 27 June 2013 and 22 November 2013. The core and most important novelty of the introduction of Bes in Italian schools is the expansion of the field of application of personalized and inclusive teaching, which was previously only foreseen for pupils with DSA (Specific Disorder of 'Learning). In other words, the right to a Personalized Learning Plan (PDP), i.e. a personalization of the learning process, is also extended to students with Special Educational Needs. The circular of 17 May 2018 regarding "School autonomy as a foundation for educational success for everyone" seemed to have called into question the possibility of PDPs for pupils with SEN. In reality it was later clarified that the circular does not go beyond the previous ministerial directives, despite actually expressing some criticisms on the 2013 notes regarding the topic. On the contrary, it wants to encourage greater autonomy of schools in the personalization of teaching, thus promoting a less bureaucratic and more educational approach compared to the BES.</p>
<p>The official definition of 'special need' in the labour market:</p>	<p>Regarding the workplace, according to Italian law, workers with special needs are generally identified as "people with disabilities".. The Law of 12 March 1999, n. 68 (Framework law for the assistance, social integration and rights of people with disabilities) and the related Decree of the President of the Republic January 9, 1996, n. 39 (Regulation containing provisions for the implementation of article 1 of the law of 5 February 1992, n. 104, concerning assistance, social integration and the rights of handicapped persons) establish the definitions and criteria</p>

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	<p>for identifying persons with disabilities in the working context. According to Italian legislation, a person with a disability is considered as such when he or she has a physical, mental or sensory impairment that lasts over time and significantly limits the ability to participate in work activities adequately. The precise definition may vary according to the requirements specified by the law and the regulatory provisions applicable in different contexts, such as, for example, access to public or private employment, and the benefits and facilities provided for workers with disabilities.</p>
<p>Demographics (percentages, unemployed, employed people with special needs)</p>	<p>In Italy, according to the “Disability in Figures 2021”, people with limitations in their usual activities in Italy were just over 12 million (21.4%) out of a total of about 59 million individuals¹; of these, 5% stated that they had serious limitations and the remaining 16.4% had minor limitations. The data also highlighted how disability, both severe and less severe, tends to strike mostly women. Half of the people with severe limitations in Italy - 1.5 million - are over 75 years old. As for gender, 60% of disabled people in Italy are women; the difference between genders is present in all age groups, however, it explodes from 65 years of age: a fact that derives from the fact that women live longer than men. If we add to this number the people who claim to have minor limitations, the total number of people with disabilities in Italy rises to 12.8 million. We are talking about very different types of disabilities, ranging from the highest degree of difficulty in the essential functions of daily life to much milder limitations, also including chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, chronic bronchitis, cirrhosis of the liver or malignant tumours, senile dementias, behavioural disorders. Among people with disabilities, 17.1% of women are without an educational qualification against 9.8% of men, in the rest of the population the quotas are 2% and 1.2% respectively. Furthermore, the share of people with disabilities who have achieved higher educational qualifications (high school diploma and academic qualifications) is equal to 30.1% among men and 19.3% among women, compared to 55.1% and 56.5% for the rest of the population.</p> <p>The impact of disability also remains strong on participation in the world of work. Despite the legislative efforts made (Law 68 of 1999 on targeted placement, Law 381 of 1991 on the role of type B social cooperatives for the job placement of disabled people), the disadvantage in accessing the labour market remains important. At the workplace level, in 2021, it emerged that only 12 percent of the total of those with a serious limitation are employed, unlike 28.9 percent of the audience of those who reported a non-serious limitation. 48.4% of those with severe limitations said they had retired from work, compared with 38.9% of those with minor limitations, and 14% of those without any limitations; it should be added that 5.7% of those suffering from severe limitations were found to be unable to work (0.9% for minor limitations). The disadvantage was even clearer for female workers since only 9.1% of women with serious disabilities are employed, while for males the percentage increases up to 16.1%; the gap is even more</p>

¹ ISTAT, *Disabilità in cifre, anno 2021*.

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	<p>evident with reference to minor limitations, for which the percentage is respectively 23.3% and 36%.</p> <p>According to the Report of the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) "Knowing the world of Disability (2019)², it emerges that it is the public sector that has welcomed the majority of people with disabilities, with a concentration of 49.7% of the employed with severe limitations, compared to 41.3% of people without limitations. In this regard, it is useful to mention the role played by law no. 68/1999 in providing for a specific reserve of jobs in the area of public tenders. On the other hand, the employment of people with more or less serious limitations in services (27%, against 32.3% of the population without limitations) and in the industry and construction sectors (16.9% against 21.5 %).</p>
<p>Laws and regulations for people with special needs (education)</p>	<p>Law 104/92 - It is the "Framework law for assistance, social integration and rights of handicapped people» and still today represents the culmination of the path to protect the rights of people with disabilities. In the classes where there are pupils diagnosed pursuant to Law 104/92 (or assimilated to it) there is a support teacher and possibly the integration collaborator.</p> <p>Law 170 8 Oct. 2010 - "New rules on specific learning disabilities in schools." , defines the specific learning disabilities and establishes the rights provided for pupils with learning disabilities.</p> <p>DM n. 5669 12 Jul. 2011 – The Decree and the attached guidelines relating to Law 170/2010 represent the "heart" of the law itself, highlighting its characteristics and methods of application. In particular, the ministerial guidelines fix the dispensatory measures as "interventions that allow the student not to carry out some services which, due to the disorder, are particularly difficult and which do not improve learning".</p> <p>The Ministerial Directive of 27 December 2012</p> <p>With the Ministerial Directive of 27 December 2012 containing "Intervention tools for pupils with special educational needs and territorial organization for school inclusion", the Ministry of Education, University and Research (Miur) has in fact introduced the recognition of special educational needs for pupils with learning difficulties due to family, socio-environmental or cultural causes. Consequently, the Ministry also provided organizational criteria to encourage the inclusion of these students in difficulty, indications further explored and clarified with the ministerial circular of 6 March 2013, as well as with the subsequent notes of 27 June 2013 and 22 November 2013. The core and most important novelty of the introduction of Bes in Italian schools is the expansion of the field of application of personalized and inclusive teaching, which was previously only foreseen for pupils with SDL (Specific Disorder of Learning). In other words, the right to a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), i.e. a personalization of the learning process, is also extended to students with Special Educational Needs.</p>

² Istat, *Conoscere il mondo della disabilità: persone, relazioni e istituzioni*, 2019

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	<p>Legislative Decree 66/2017 – “Rules for the promotion of school inclusion of students with disabilities”. It takes into consideration the following elements: the quality indicators of school inclusion, school planning and organization for inclusion, the new certification procedures; documentation, initial training of teachers for teaching support in kindergarten and primary school, mandatory in-service training for school managers, teachers and collaborators and all the services they must guarantee local authorities for certified students.</p> <p>Ministerial Note 1143/2018 - "School autonomy as the foundation for everyone's educational success". The role of school autonomy and the "personalization" of educational interventions are enhanced. Schools have to focus on the educational success of each pupil, whatever his personal situation, regardless of bureaucratic procedures which risk exchanging the means (procedure) with the end (educational success).</p> <p>Legislative Decree 96/2019 - Supplementary and corrective provisions to the legislative decree 13 April 2017, n. 66, containing: «Regulations for the promotion of the scholastic inclusion of students with disabilities, pursuant to article 1, paragraphs 180 and 181, letter c), of the law of 13 July 2015, no. 107". The Functional Diagnosis and the Functional Dynamic Profile are replaced by a new and single document, the Functioning Profile, which will be preparatory and necessary for the preparation of the Individual Project and the PEI</p> <p>Ministerial Decree 182/2020 - the new methods for assigning the support measures, envisaged by Legislative Decree 66/2017, and the individualized educational plan models (PEI), to be adopted by schools, are defined. The adoption of the new tool and the related guidelines implies a return to reflecting on inclusion practices and constitutes a guide for their possible revision and improvement.</p> <p>Decree no. 43/2022 -"Guidelines on the subject of targeted placement of people with disabilities". It is a tool for guidance and coordination at the national level, thus renewing the commitment of the administrations in outlining a path of collaboration and sharing between - institutional functional to a more efficient and organic work inclusion system throughout the country.</p>
<p>Organisations in charge (education)</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education and Merit is a department of the Italian government. It is responsible for the function of education and the education of the country's youth, with special reference to the state school system. The major duties are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational policies: development and implementation for various levels of education, including early childhood, primary and secondary school. This includes defining curricula, developing curricula, approving textbooks, assessing students, and implementing special programs to foster equity and inclusion; - University: regulation and coordination of university activities in Italy. This includes the definition of university access policies, the quality of education and the evaluation of Italian

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	<p>universities. It also works to promote scientific research and innovation in the academic field;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right to study: guarantee of the right to study for all Italian students, through the management of scholarships, the development of policies for the inclusion of students with disabilities or special needs and the promotion of programs for the fight against early school leaving and support for disadvantaged students; - Teacher training and professional development: definition of policies for teacher training, the evaluation of their professionalism and the development of educators' skills; - International relations: international relations in the field of education, participating in meetings and cooperating with international bodies and institutions in the educational sector. <p>The Ministry of University and Research (MUR) is responsible for formulating and implementing policies related to higher education, scientific research and innovation. The main responsibilities and activities of the Ministry include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervision of higher education: supervision of universities and higher education institutions. This includes approving study programs, accrediting institutions, promoting the quality of education, and monitoring academic activities. - Funding and resource allocation: distribution of funding to universities and research institutes to support scientific research, innovation and higher education. It also manages scholarship and financial support programs for students. - Scientific research policies: promotion of scientific research and innovation through the definition of national policies and programmes. It collaborates with research institutes, universities and other organizations to stimulate high-quality research, technological development and the transferability of knowledge to the productive sector. - International cooperation: promotion of international cooperation and participation in higher education and scientific research. It promotes the exchange of students, researchers and knowledge through mobility programmes, bilateral agreements and participation in international networks and projects. - Inclusion and access policies: guarantee access to higher education and scientific research for all individuals, including those with special needs. It promotes inclusion policies and provides guidance and support to institutions to ensure accessibility and equity in education and research. - Development of strategies and plans: development of strategies and plans for the improvement of higher education, scientific research and innovation. These include programs for
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	<p>promoting academic excellence, attracting talent, developing research infrastructure and technological innovation.</p> <p>20 Regional School Offices operate as regional structures of the Ministry of Education and Merit and deal with the implementation of educational policies at the regional level. They are responsible for managing and coordinating school activities in their respective regions, working in synergy with local educational institutions.</p> <p>Educational Institutions: Schools are managed and governed by various educational institutions. Nursery schools, primary schools, lower secondary schools (middle schools) and upper secondary schools (upper schools) are autonomous institutes with their own directors, teachers and administrative staff. Educational institutions are responsible for the day-to-day organization and administration of school activities.</p> <p>School Councils: Every educational institution in Italy has a School Council, which is a consultative and deliberative body made up of representatives of parents, teachers, non-teaching staff and students (in secondary schools). The School Councils participate in the definition of policies and decisions regarding the school institution.</p>
<p>Laws and regulations for people with special needs (labour/work)</p>	<p>In Italy, there are laws and regulations in place to protect the rights of people with special needs in the labour/workforce. These laws aim to ensure equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Here are some key laws and regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Law 381/1970: This law establishes a quota system for the employment of disabled workers in both public and private sectors. It requires companies with a certain number of employees to reserve a percentage of their workforce for individuals with disabilities. - Law 68/1999: This law establishes the rights and protection for people with disabilities in various aspects of life, including employment. It prohibits discrimination based on disability and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to enable equal participation in the workplace. - Legislative Decree 216/2003: This decree implements the European Directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation. It prohibits discrimination in hiring, working conditions, and career development based on disability, among other protected grounds. - Legislative Decree 151/2015: This decree provides guidelines for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. It promotes vocational training, supported employment, and measures to facilitate the integration of disabled workers into the labour market. - Law 227/2021: the Government has been delegated by Parliament to adopt, by 15 March 2024, one or more legislative

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	<p>decrees for the revision and reorganization of the provisions in force on disability in order to guarantee the Person with Disability to obtain recognition of their condition, also through a congruent, transparent and easy assessment of the same that allows full civil and social rights, including the right to independent life and full social and work inclusion, as well as effective and full access to the system of services, benefits, financial transfers envisaged and any other related facilitation, and to promote the autonomy of the person with disability and the living on the basis of equal opportunities with others, in compliance with principles of self-determination and non-discrimination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministerial Decree 43/2022, following the enabling law n. 227/2021 on disability, adopts the Guidelines on the targeted placement of people with disabilities, which represent guidance and coordination tools at the national level and commitment for the administrations in outlining a path of collaboration and international sharing institutional. While not replacing the regional legislations that have articulated the application of targeted placement on the territories, the Guidelines intend to offer an overall reference framework with respect to implementation principles, interventions and methodologies. Their adoption has filled a significant regulatory gap left by Legislative Decree no. 151/2015 (article 1) which had envisaged, while remaining a dead letter, their adoption within one hundred and eighty days of its entry into force. <p>Overall, the laws and regulations related to the employment of people with disabilities aim to ensure equal opportunities and access to employment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. These laws also require employers to provide support and accommodations to ensure the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.</p>
<p>Organisations in charge (labour/work)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Labor and Social Policies: It is responsible for defining and implementing the policies and regulations concerning the employment and occupational inclusion of people with disabilities. - INPS (National Social Security Institute): It plays an important role in supporting people with disabilities in the workplace. It provides information, services and economic benefits, such as the recognition of invalidity pensions, employment benefits and job inclusion, vocational rehabilitation services, and financial incentives for employers who hire disabled individuals. - National Labor Inspectorate: It is a control and supervisory body that monitors the application of labour laws,

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	<p>including aspects relating to the employment of people with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unified Guarantee Committees (CUG): They are bodies set up within public administrations and large private companies. They deal with promoting equal treatment and opportunities in work organisations, including aspects relating to people with disabilities. - National Commission for the Rights and Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities (CNAD): It is an independent body that works to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in various sectors, including employment. It carries out a role of consultancy, monitoring and promotion of policies aimed at the inclusion of people with disabilities. - Local Authorities: Local administrations, such as Regions, Provinces and Municipalities, are responsible for implementing policies and services to support people with disabilities at the local level. These entities can provide social assistance services, sheltered employment opportunities and social inclusion programmes. - Third Sector Organizations: The third-sector organisations, such as associations and foundations, are involved in promoting rights and providing support services to people with disabilities. These organizations play an important role in raising awareness, advising and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.
<p>Other relevant information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher Technical Institutes (ITS): The ITS are institutions that offer vocational and specialized training courses in specific sectors. They may include training and job placement programs for people with disabilities. - Vocational training bodies and employment centres: These are organizations that offer vocational training, orientation and job placement services for people with disabilities

SPAIN	
<p>The official definition of 'special need' in education:</p>	<p>In Spain, the term "special need" or "necesidades especiales" is used in both education and labour/work contexts, and it refers to individuals who require additional support or accommodations due to a physical, mental, or developmental condition. The official definition may vary slightly depending on the specific legislation or regulations in place, but generally, it encompasses a range of conditions such as physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities, and mental health disorders.</p> <p>In terms of education, there is a difference between:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with disabilities. Students with a disability certificate of 33% or higher who require specific support for academic activities with guarantees. • Students with Specific Educational Needs (NESE). Students who, although they do not have a disability certificate, present specific educational needs and can prove it, such as cases of learning disorders like dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental disorders like autism spectrum disorder and Asperger's syndrome, or mental disorders, among others.
<p>The official definition of 'special need' in the labour market:</p>	<p>In terms of work/labour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013, of November 29, defines disability as a situation that arises from the interaction between people with foreseeable permanent impairments and any kind of barriers that limit or prevent their full and effective participation in society, on equal terms with others. <p>The consideration of a person with a disability was definitively established by virtue of the Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013 of November 29, which approves the Consolidated Text of the "General Law on the rights of Persons with disabilities and their social inclusion." According to this Royal Decree, officially recognized persons with disabilities are those who have a degree of disability greater than or equal to 33%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Law 3/2023, of February 28, on Employment, establishes the group of people with disabilities as vulnerable and specifies that, those with the following recognized disability degrees equal to or greater than 33% will be recognized as people with disabilities facing greater difficulties in accessing the job market: cerebral palsy, mental health disorders, intellectual disabilities, or autism spectrum disorders. Additionally, those with recognized physical or sensory disabilities equal to or greater than 65% will also be recognized as people with disabilities facing greater difficulties in accessing the job market.
<p>Demographics (percentages, unemployed, employed people with special needs)</p>	<p>The weight of the population with disabilities on the total population of working age has been increasing, representing 6.3% in 2020 (14% in Catalonia). The number of people classified as inactive is very high (65.66% in 2020). Among people without disabilities, the inactive population represents 23.92%, almost 42 percentage points lower. Out of the 1,933,400 people of working age, only 663,900 are classified as active (including both those who are employed and those who are unemployed), resulting in an activity rate of 34.3%. The activity rate for the entire country at the end of 2020 was 58.19% and the employment rate for the total population was 48.81%.</p> <p>The unemployment rate is particularly severe among young people with disabilities, reaching 63%, so the main cause of</p>

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	<p>unemployment is the difficulty of accessing the labour market. Educational level emerges as a variable clearly linked to work activity, so the higher the level of education, the higher the activity rate. Sensorial disabilities show a higher rate, especially hearing disabilities. Intellectual disabilities are positioned at the other end. The degree of disability also affects the level of activity, but inversely, the higher the degree, the lower the activity rate. Receiving some type of benefit affects work activity. Thus, among those who do not receive any type of pension, the activity rate rises to 63.2%. (ODISMET , 2022).</p> <p>89.62% of people with disabilities work in the private sector. Self-employed individuals represent 10.38%, and most of them have no employees. In terms of distribution by economic sectors is that they are employed in the service sector.</p> <p>The educational level of unemployed people with disabilities is mostly stagnant at the lowest levels, with over 40% of the group having only primary education or no formal education. Those who have completed compulsory secondary education account for over 30%. Nearly three-quarters of unemployed people with disabilities registered as job seekers are concentrated in the two lowest educational levels. The percentage of unemployed people with disabilities holding higher education degrees is significantly lower than that of non-disabled individuals, with a difference of exactly 5.21 percentage points in the percentage of university graduates.</p> <p>(Observatorio de las Ocupaciones(2022). Informe del Mercado de Trabajo de las Personas con Discapacidad Estatal. Datos 2021. Servicio Público de Empleo estatal)</p> <p>ODISMET (2022). Informe numero 8. Principales resultados. ODISMET.</p>
<p>Laws and regulations for people with special needs (education)</p>	<p>Spain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Law 3/2020 of December 29: This law establishes the right to education for all individuals, including those with disabilities or special educational needs. It also outlines the framework for inclusive education in Spain, which aims to provide high-quality education that meets the needs of all learners. -Royal Decree 366/2007, of March 16: This decree sets out the regulations for the education of students with special needs in Spain. It includes guidelines for the identification, assessment, and support of students with special needs, as well as guidelines for the provision of special education services. <p>The 17 autonomous communities in Spain also have their own education laws and regulations, which may provide additional guidance or requirements related to education of students with special needs.)</p> <p>Catalonia:</p> <p>Over the last decades, the educational attention to students with special educational needs has transitioned from a model based on differentiated schooling with specific supports to a model based on the will to build a truly inclusive educational system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, which modifies Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on education.

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	<p>The Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on education, amended by the Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29 (LOMLOE), establishes that the educational system must guarantee the quality of education for all students regardless of their conditions and circumstances, equal opportunities through education and educational inclusion, and the flexibility of the system to adapt educational processes to the diversity of abilities, interests, expectations, and needs of students, among other principles. A clear commitment is made to education without exclusion, in accordance with the principles of quality and equity, which promotes the inclusion of all students.</p> <p>-Decree 150/2017, of 17 October. This law establishes the framework for the Catalan education system and it is based on the principles of quality, equity, and inclusion. The law establishes that students with special needs have the right to receive an education that is adapted to their needs and abilities, with the aim of achieving their full potential.</p> <p>-Law 12/2009, of 10 of July: This law regulates the procedures for identifying, evaluating, and supporting students with special needs in Catalonia. The decree establishes the criteria and procedures for determining the need for support and the type of support that should be provided.</p> <p>The publication in 2017 of Decree 150/2017, of October 17, on educational attention to students within the framework of an inclusive educational system, aimed to give a new impetus to the inclusive school model in Catalonia with the stated objective, based on Law 12/2009, of July 10, on education (LEC), of "ensuring that all educational centres supported with public funds within the scope of non-university education are inclusive". The Decree 150/2017 provides that all students with special education needs (SEN) should be educated in regular schools and that, exceptionally, families may request schooling in a special education centre for students with severe or profound disabilities.</p> <p>The Law 12/2009, of July 10, on education in Catalonia (LEC), from the preamble, states the need to adapt educational activity to meet the diversity of students and the achievement of equality of opportunities and accessibility. In the preliminary title, it includes, as one of the guiding principles of the Catalan educational system, "social cohesion and inclusive education as the basis of a school for everyone".</p> <p>-The Law 14/2010, of May 27, on the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents (LDOIA), in line with the LEC, is based on the principle that education is a responsibility of the entire society and all public powers and regulates the rights and protective measures for children and adolescents, with special attention to the most vulnerable and those who face limitations or barriers to development or participation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Higher education system -Organic Law 2/2023, of 22 March, on higher education system.</p>
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	<p>The preamble sets out a spirit of "greater inclusivity" in the university system by stating, "in terms of accessibility, universities must guarantee universal access to buildings and their physical and virtual environments, as well as to the teaching-learning and evaluation process, for people with disabilities." It also highlights that equality, non-discrimination, and equity are guiding principles underpinning the Organic Law. This is also reflected in the articles, where "conditions of accessibility are established and outlined, as well as measures to be developed with an impact on people with disabilities."</p> <p>The law "foresees the necessary regulatory and rule-making development to ensure compliance and the achievement and guarantee of the rights it establishes," with competencies falling both on universities and the autonomous communities to which they belong. The universities will be required to reserve 5% of the offered spots and degrees for students with a recognized disability of over 33%, as well as for students with permanent special educational needs.</p> <p>This new law also establishes that universities must promote training for people with intellectual disabilities</p>
<p>Organisations in charge (education)</p>	<p>In Spain, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training is responsible for setting education policies at the national level, while each of the 17 autonomous communities has its own Department of Education responsible for education policies and regulations at the regional level. In Catalonia, the Department of Education of the Catalan Government is responsible for setting education policies, regulations, and guidelines at the regional level. The Department of Education is responsible for the administration and management of the education system, including primary and secondary education, vocational training, and adult education.</p> <p>At a higher education level, the Ministry of Universities is the Department of the General State Administration responsible for proposing and implementing the Government's policy on universities and their specific activities, as well as for the other competencies and attributions conferred by the legal system. Its basic organic structure is developed by Royal Decree 431/2020, of March 3, which develops the basic organic structure of the Ministry of Universities. In Catalonia, The Department of Research and Universities of the Government of Catalonia is the public organization in charge of the educational policy in the university and research field. This Department is responsible for the following functions: Universities, quality of the university system, scholarships that are not the responsibility of the Department of Education, promotion of research, and any other functions assigned to it by laws and other provisions.</p> <p>Additionally, there are several private organizations and associations in Spain and Catalonia that work in the field of education, including those that specifically focus on the education of people with special needs and disabilities. These organizations may provide support, resources, and advocacy for individuals, families, and professionals involved in the education of people with special needs and disabilities.</p>

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<p>Laws and regulations for people with special needs (labour/work)</p>	<p>In Spain and Catalonia, there are laws and regulations in place to protect the rights of people with disability in the workplace. These laws and regulations aim to ensure equal opportunities and access to employment, as well as provide support and accommodations for individuals with disabilities or special needs. Here are some key laws and regulations related to employment of people with special needs in Spain and Catalonia:</p> <p>Spain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Royal Legislative Decree 3/2015, of October 23, which approves the consolidated text of the Employment Law, defines the groups with difficulties in integrating into the labour market. It establishes the fundamental right to physical integrity and a proper safety and hygiene policy. On the other hand, article 15.d) of Law 31/1995 on Occupational Risk Prevention stipulates the adaptation of the workplace by the company to the contracted worker. In this sense, the employer must adapt the workplace of the person with disability based on their personal circumstances. -Legislative Royal Decree 1/2013, November 29th, which approves the Consolidated Text of the General Law on the rights of people with disabilities and their social inclusion. It establishes that all Spanish public and private companies with a workforce (total number of employees regardless of type of contract) of 50 or more workers must reserve a quota for people with disabilities equal to or greater than 33%, which corresponds to 2% of the workforce. This law aims, among other objectives, to promote and encourage the labour integration of people with disabilities. -Law 26/2011, of August 1, on regulatory adaptation to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. -Royal Decree 870/2007, of July 2, regulating the employment support program as a measure to promote the employment of people with disabilities in the regular labour market. -Royal Decree 2271/2004, of December 3, regulating access to public employment and the provision of jobs for people with disabilities. -Order PRE/1822/2006, of June 9, establishing general criteria for the adaptation of additional time in selection processes for public employment access for people with disabilities. <p>Catalonia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Law 13/2014, of October 30, on accessibility, to guarantee accessible working spaces, among others. -Decree 66/1999, of March 9, on access to public employment for people with disabilities and the multiprofessional evaluation teams. -Resolution GAP/1644/2007, of May 28, which approves and makes public the general bases that will govern the selection processes for access to bodies and scales of the Administration of the Generalitat de Catalunya under the competence of the General Directorate of Public Function <p>Public sector (Catalonia)</p> <p>Two avenues to being a civil servant:</p>
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	<p>-The so-called reservation route. According to the current regulations on public employment offers, a quota not less than 7% must be reserved for people with disabilities. Of this 7%, 2% of the positions must be reserved for people with intellectual disabilities and the remaining 5% of the positions must be reserved for people who can demonstrate any other type of disability.</p> <p>-The DIL Program promotes the integration of people with intellectual disabilities in the Government of Catalonia through specific calls for competitions based on merit and abilities to access permanent positions.</p> <p>Overall, the laws and regulations related to employment of people with disability in Spain and Catalonia aim to ensure equal opportunities and access to employment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. These laws also require employers to provide support and accommodations to ensure the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.</p>
<p>Organisations in charge (labour/work)</p>	<p>In Spain, the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy is responsible for setting labour policies at the national level. Each of the 17 autonomous communities also has its own Department of Labour, which is responsible for enforcing labour regulations at the regional level.</p> <p>In Catalonia, the Department of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family of the Catalan Government is responsible for setting labour policies, regulations, and guidelines at the regional level. The department oversees the enforcement of labour laws and regulations, as well as provides support and resources to workers and employers.</p> <p>Additionally, there are several organizations and associations in Spain and Catalonia that work in the field of labour and employment, including those that specifically focus on employment of people with disabilities or special needs. These organizations may provide support, resources, and advocacy for individuals, families, and professionals involved in employment and labour-related issues.</p>
<p>Other relevant information</p>	<p>Integration of workers with disabilities in the Protected Work System.</p> <p>1.Special Employment Centres (SECs)</p> <p>Special Employment Centres are those whose main objective is to carry out productive activities of goods and services, regularly participating in market operations, and aim to ensure paid employment for people with disabilities, while also being a means of inclusion for the largest number of these individuals in the ordinary employment regime. The types of employment contracts may be any of those provided for in the Workers' Statute.</p> <p><i>Regulations</i></p> <p>-Order TMS/805/2019, of July 23, which exceptionally increases the subsidies for the maintenance of jobs for people with disabilities in Special Employment Centres, established in the Order of October 16, 1998, which establishes the regulatory bases for the granting of public</p>

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	<p>aids and subsidies aimed at promoting the labour integration of people with disabilities in special employment centres and self-employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013, of November 29, which approves the Consolidated Text of the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion. -Royal Decree 1368/1985, of July 17, which regulates the special employment relationship of disabled people working in Special Employment Centres. -Royal Decree 2273/85, of December 4, which approves the Regulation of the Special Employment Centres defined in article 42 of Law 13/82, of April 7, on the social integration of people with disabilities. -Order of October 16, 1998, which establishes the regulatory bases for the granting of public aids and subsidies aimed at promoting the labour integration of people with disabilities in Special Employment Centres and self-employment. -Royal Decree 469/2006, of April 21, which regulates the support units for professional activity within the framework of personal and social adjustment services in Special Employment Centres. -Royal Decree 28/2020, of September 22, on remote work. <p>2. Transitional measures from protected employment to ordinary labour market</p> <p><i>Labour enclaves.</i></p> <p>Main objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promote access to employment for people with disabilities. -Facilitate the transition from protected employment to mainstream employment. -Comply with the quota system. -Facilitate that companies become more familiar with the abilities and skills of workers with disabilities. <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -All workers must have disabilities. -At least 60% of them must face special difficulties in accessing the job market. -The contract between the mainstream company and the Special Employment Centre (CEE) must have a duration of between three months and three years, with the possibility of extension. <p>Regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Royal Decree 290/2004, of February 20th, regulating labour enclaves as a measure to promote the employment of people with disabilities.
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3. FACILITATING AND HINDERING FACTORS FOR YOUTHS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

European Economic and Social Committee (2022) hearing emphasizes the challenges faced by young people with special needs in accessing employment opportunities despite legal efforts and increasing skill levels. The barriers exist in both the private and public sectors, and while technological progress and improved access to education have been positive developments, there is still a risk of exclusion from the job market. It is crucial to address these obstacles and ensure that the new EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities effectively tackles the concerns related to employment and education for young people with special needs. The strategy should be ambitious and include quantifiable measures to promote inclusivity and overcome stereotypes that portray individuals with disabilities as unproductive. Efforts from social partners, civil society organizations, and policymakers are necessary to create an inclusive and supportive environment that enables young people with disabilities to access and thrive in the labour market. Ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders can help identify and implement effective strategies to increase the employment rate of persons with special needs, particularly young individuals.

The 2021 Eurofound Report on policies to promote the employment of persons with disabilities highlights that 35% of the measures identified in the study specifically target employees and job seekers with disabilities. This indicates that there are efforts being made at the policy level to support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the labour market. The Commission's online disability tool provides information on various measures implemented in 14 different Member States to support individuals with disabilities. These measures encompass a range of support, including individualized assistance, vocational training, vocational rehabilitation, the transition from education to employment, guidance counselling, and skills enhancement. While the mentioned list is not exhaustive, it gives an overview of the types of measures being implemented to facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities. These measures are crucial in addressing the barriers and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing and maintaining employment. By providing tailored support and training, individuals with disabilities can enhance their skills, gain independence, and improve their chances of successful employment.

3.1 Barriers and obstacles

In the following section, we provide a deepening of the situation on barriers and obstacles of the three country partners. In general, literature underlines the fact that young people with disabilities face greater difficulties in finding employment, in particular after the Covid-19

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pandemic. Access to employment for youths with special needs in Europe can be hindered by various obstacles.

Limited Educational Opportunities: Inadequate access to inclusive education and vocational training can limit the skills and qualifications of youths with special needs. According to European Human Rights Report (2021), access to mainstream education remains a significant challenge in many countries, particularly for individuals with high support needs. The dropout rates among learners with disabilities are more than twice as high as those without disabilities. In 2019, 21.8% of learners with disabilities left school early, compared to 9.6% of learners without disabilities (Grammenos, 2022). This premature exit from education limits their future employment prospects and opportunities for personal growth. Furthermore, the completion rates of tertiary education for persons with disabilities are significantly lower than those without disabilities. In 2019, only 32.5% of individuals with disabilities completed tertiary education, compared to 43.6% of individuals without disabilities (Grammenos, 2022). Eurofound (2021) states that the education and vocational training programs offered often fail to meet the specific needs of persons with disabilities. These programs may lack relevance or alignment with the labor market, which further hampers the employment prospects of individuals with disabilities. This highlights the importance of developing inclusive and tailored educational and vocational training initiatives that address the diverse needs and aspirations of individuals with disabilities. This lack of preparation and training may make it more challenging for them to enter the labour market (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2019). In Spain, CERMI (2020) reported barriers to university access for youths with special needs, which can be related to the curricula area, such as the lack of adaptation and personalized plan of the admission process, but also the non-existence of teacher training and motivation and incomplete accessibility. The limited awareness and understanding of disabilities among educators, school staff and the broader community (Unesco, 2017) and the inadequate support systems European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020) have also been reported in Italy and in Finland (Unicef, 2018), leading to insufficient accommodations, inadequate teaching strategies, and limited opportunities for their full participation in educational settings (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2019).

Skills and work experience: it can be a significant barrier for youth with special needs in accessing employment opportunities. Two of the major challenges in Spain are the lack of experience and the undervaluation of their professional skills. The lack of job opportunities is still a major issue, although it is perceived with less intensity by young people, who have a higher level of qualification on average. A weak point in the job search for young people with disabilities is the lack of sufficient experience (18% compared to only 5% for the overall population of workers surveyed) (Fundación Randstad, 2015). In Italy, the lack of work experience is one of the main obstacles in accessing employment for youths in general and youths with special needs in particular, and one of the reasons that the internship experiences of students with disabilities, despite the widespread consensus (Caldin, Scollo 2018; Pace, Pavone, Petrini, 2018) and the regulating legislation (Ministerial Decree 270/2004; CNUDD, 2014), still suffer from internal and external misalignments between theory and practice. This misalignment affects the acquisition of

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professional skills and vocational awareness and maturity, central to entering the labour market after graduation (Paviotti et al., 2021; Del Bianco et al., 2021; Espada-Chavarria et al., 2020). Research in Finland (Saloranta, 2019) highlighted that students with special needs in university of applied science wished that the university would cooperate more with working life and that the studies would really focus on things that are essential with the demands of working life. The respondents hoped also for support in finding an internship and visits by working life representatives during the education.

Support Systems: The lack of appropriate support services, such as vocational guidance, job coaching, and assistive technologies, can impede the employment prospects of youths with special needs. Without these supports, individuals may struggle to navigate the job search process and fulfil job requirements (European Disability Forum, 2019). The study by Bellacicco and others (2020), carried out in Spain from 1 to 5 years after graduation, suggests that contact with employment services plays a significant role in improving employment rates, even if the latter is low, and the gap with peers without disabilities remains. More than 90% of participants request greater sensitivity to improve their access to employment. To this request, they add greater support in guidance and greater accessibility in the work environment. 48.7% don't know where to start looking for work, and among them, 38.8% admit to feeling lost when facing an interview, and 20.1% have doubts when preparing their resume (Fundación ADECCO, 2021). In Italy, insufficient support systems, such as specialized teachers, assistive technologies, and individualized educational plans, can hinder the educational experience for youth with special needs. The lack of necessary resources and personnel can make it challenging to address the unique learning needs of these students. Italian employment centres face challenges in conducting checks due to being understaffed and equipped with outdated IT equipment. Only a small percentage (17%) of individuals with disabilities report finding work through targeted placement services. Additionally, there is a significant disparity between the number of job vacancies for protected categories (145,000) and the high number of individuals enrolled in targeted placement lists (775,000) (Catanzaro, 2019). In Finland, students with autism seem not to ask for support to career services even though they recognize the need for support in searching for a job (Lahdelma, 2021). Three aspects affected students seeking support from career services: 1) the need for support and recognizing it, 2) meeting the need for support and 3) accessibility of support. Many of the support needs expressed by autistic students were met by services offered by universities, but problems with the accessibility of career services created barriers which hindered students from using the services. On the contrary, there were structures in place that guided students into career services but often getting help demanded that students actively seek it. This demand for self-directness may form a barrier for many autistic students. Based on this study universities should create systematic structures that guide students into services as effortlessly as possible. Miettinen & Pöyry (2015) stated that services are mainly seen as good and sufficient. Young people have the best experiences with people-oriented services, while some services have been perceived as bureaucratic and faceless. Participating in services has increased young people's confidence in getting help. Young people have learned new knowledge and skills their self-esteem has strengthened and their social skills have improved.

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Participation has improved their life management and mental health and they have started to take responsibility.

Lack of Employer Awareness and Accommodations: The lack of employer awareness and accommodations is a significant obstacle faced by youths with special needs in accessing employment opportunities. This obstacle stems from employers' limited knowledge and understanding of disabilities, which can lead to misconceptions, biases, and discriminatory attitudes. Below are some key points related to this issue:

- Employer Awareness and Prejudice: Many employers may lack awareness and understanding of the capabilities and potential of individuals with disabilities. This lack of awareness can lead to scepticism about the productivity and suitability of employees with disabilities, resulting in barriers to their recruitment, employment and professional development. For example, in Spain, for young professionals with disabilities, one of the main problems is the lack of professional development opportunities (a difficulty for 25% of them), then the adaptation problems to the work environment (9%), and the job position (7%) (Fundación Randstad, 2015). In Italy, the prejudice that people with special needs are unsuitable for the labour market remains a significant barrier. Companies obligated to hire disabled workers may opt to take the low risk of sanctions rather than hiring individuals who are perceived as less productive than their colleagues. Moreover, companies may be reluctant to invest in making the workplace accessible for disabled employees. This demonstrates that relying solely on legal obligations and financial incentives, such as fines for non-compliance and incentives for hiring, is insufficient (Belotti, 2019). Research in Finland highlighted that students with disabilities considered the most important factors to be the change in the attitude climate, but also forms of support and activity were seen as central (Heini & Klemetti, 2019).
- Information Gap: Employers may struggle to access relevant information and resources on best practices for employing individuals with disabilities. This information gap can prevent employers from understanding the benefits, legal requirements, and practical steps for creating an inclusive work environment.
- Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodations: Employers may not be familiar with the concept of reasonable accommodations, which are adjustments made to the work environment or job tasks to enable individuals with disabilities to perform their work effectively. The lack of knowledge about accommodations can hinder the provision of necessary support to employees with disabilities (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2020).

Moreover, some patterns emerge in the outcome analysis. On the one hand, for example, the diffusion of part-time work and of a mismatch between the qualification and the job position

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achieved, especially for humanities/social science degrees; on the other, getting a job in a relatively short time as well as greater job opportunities for women (Bellacicco & Pavone, 2020).

As regards, the most valued aspects by professionals with disabilities in their respective jobs are those related to social factors: the relationship with colleagues, feeling useful and recognition of work done. 69% of young professionals with disabilities choose one of these alternatives as the most valued element, while for the overall sample, that percentage is not far off at 65% of responses. Remunerative elements are much less valued, identified as the most valued element by only 9% of young professionals (Fundación Randstad, 2015). In some Italian regions, "employee adoptions" are being promoted, which consist of requiring companies with more than 15 employees, who are unable to hire their share of workers with disabilities, to pay 8,000 euros into a regional fund through which undertake a paid traineeship in another company context. According to the National Disability and Employment Agency, around 800 people with disabilities are already carrying out internships in the world of work in this way (ANDEL, 2021).

3.2 Supportive Initiatives

There have been several successful initiatives that have supported the insertion of people with special needs into the workforce. The 2021 Eurofound report on policies to promote the employment of persons with disabilities highlights that 35% of the identified measures target employees and jobseekers with disabilities. The Commission's online disability tool provides information on various measures to support individuals in 14 Member States, although the list is not exhaustive. Some countries, such as Hungary and Finland, offer support for personal assistance to individuals with disabilities. In Ireland, there is a workplace equipment adaptation grant available for persons with disabilities who are offered or already in employment in the private sector. This grant can be used for obtaining equipment, building modifications, and safety adaptations³. In Germany, employees may receive an allowance for assistive devices, workplace adaptations, mobility support, workplace assistance, and training. Additionally, three Member States specifically mention financial assistance for sign language interpreters: Belgium, Cyprus, and the Netherlands. The Netherlands provides funds for up to a maximum of 15% of the employee's work hours to cover the costs of sign language interpreters.

In European Human Rights Report, Issue 7 – 2023 (Buchanan et al, 2023), it is mentioned that all Member States provide some form of support to employers to encourage the hiring and retention of employees with disabilities. This analysis was conducted by national disability experts with the support of the Commission, along with independent research conducted by the European Disability Forum (EDF) and its members. In terms of reasonable accommodation, 25 Member States offer support to employers. This support can take the form of grants, tax subsidies, or direct provision of equipment. This assistance aims to help employers make necessary accommodations for employees with disabilities. Furthermore, 25 Member States provide wage

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or other financial subsidies to employers. These subsidies can include payments for exceeding the quota for hiring persons with disabilities or offsetting the cost of additional vacation days provided to employees with disabilities under the law. At least 16 Member States grant tax benefits to employers to encourage the employment of persons with disabilities. These tax benefits can serve as incentives for employers to hire and retain employees with disabilities. Additionally, some Member States offer support to employers in the form of training, awareness raising, and capacity building. These initiatives aim to enhance employers' understanding of disability-related issues and promote inclusive work environments.

Supported Employment Programs

They provide personalized assistance and support to youths with special needs in finding and maintaining employment. These programs focus on matching the skills and abilities of individuals with suitable job opportunities, providing on-the-job training, and ongoing support.

In Spain, people with autism spectrum disorder without intellectual disability ended up accessing positions with low professional qualifications. To prevent this, a project was born with the premise of trying to fit the vocational profile of people with autism spectrum disorder without intellectual disability to the job profile, and for this, a different route was sought so that they could access the job market (INAP, 2014).

In Catalonia, it is a key strategy for the integration into regular employment of people with disabilities or mental illness who face special difficulties in joining the labour market. The process has 3 phases: 1) preparation: Reception/assessment of suitability for incorporation into supported employment; updating/development of professional profile: support for the definition of a job objective in basic and cross-cutting competencies and training; Revision/update of professional profile (employability analysis); Development of professional profile (employability analysis); Initiation training for work and reinforcement of basic and cross-cutting competencies. 2) labour insertion (contracting) with active and personalized job search; job analysis; adaptation and training in the workplace/assessment in the work environment. 3) Accompaniment/follow-up (Cabrera, 2018).

In Finland, the One-Stop Guidance Centres are easily accessible, multi-sector service points for the under-30s, that fulfil the objectives and activities of the EU Youth Guarantee. Their national goals are to streamline and facilitate young people's transitions into work, education or other activities, to promote youth inclusion, empowerment and life control and to bring service providers together in a multi-disciplinary service package. This study evaluates the impacts of the One-Stop Guidance Centres' operations and practices in relation to the One-Stop Guidance Centres multi-disciplinary model. The results of the study show that, due to the multi-professional collaboration model, the One-Stop Guidance Centres are able to assess the customer's situation more holistically and have the necessary means to promote effective customer processes. The impacts

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of the One-Stop Guidance Centres are primarily due to the steering of customers towards the most appropriate services and the chain services that are followed by One-Stop Guidance Centre 'customership'. Based on the cost-benefit calculations made in the study, the One-Stop Guidance Centres cover their costs while also producing government savings (Valtakari et al., 2020).

In some Italian regions, the figure of job coach has been established. The project foresees that each new person with special needs enrolled in the placement list targeted on the basis of Law 68/99 is assisted by a qualified operator in an initial phase of orientation, to be followed by an internship experience in local companies.

Work enclaves are a lesser-known but similar concept to supported employment schemes. They provide employment opportunities for individuals with special needs by combining a protected environment with the open labor market. These enclaves, also known as "enclaves," involve the integration of specialized support within companies or organizations that adopt this model. The aim is to support individuals with disabilities in carrying out specific tasks, services, or business lines within open labor environments while providing assistance, accommodation, and emphasizing career development. Work enclaves can be seen as a traineeship phase where individuals have full labor rights and receive wages. The support provided to individuals with special needs in these environments should ensure that the time spent is viewed as preparation for their transition to becoming full employees in the open labor market. However, it is important to note that if the transition to full employment in the open labor market is not envisaged, and if the enclave does not involve tasks directly related to the main services or business lines of the company, resulting in limited or no interaction between workers with disabilities and other employees, then the model may be considered a form of segregation (Lee et al., 2017).

Social Enterprises and Disability-Inclusive Businesses

They create employment opportunities specifically for people with special needs. These organizations prioritize inclusivity and often provide specialized training and accommodations to support the success of their employees.

WISEs (Work Integration Social Enterprises) are a specific system in Spain aimed at promoting socioeconomic inclusion, particularly for individuals in disadvantaged situations, many of whom are persons with disabilities. These enterprises and organizations primarily operate within the social economy framework, where their economic activities are considered secondary to their social objectives. In some countries, WISEs can only be established and managed by non-profit organizations (Pizarro & Miranda González, 2022).

WISEs provide employment opportunities along with social support for individuals, enabling them to develop their skills and abilities related to work. These settings also facilitate building relationships with other employers and prepare individuals for future inclusion in the open labour market, which is competitive and productive. WISEs reinvest their profits into sustaining their primary social activities and expanding their social impact. However, they often rely on external support, whether from public or private sources, to maintain their operations.

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In Spain, Insertion companies (Law 44/2007) offer to people at risk of exclusion paid employment, psychosocial development, training, social support, personal growth, and social transformation. These companies aim to improve employability and help individuals enter the regular job market. The training provided includes technical, professional, social, and personal skills, as well as education for citizenship, transformation, and emancipation. In addition to supporting the development of job-related skills, the companies also provide assistance with non-work-related issues, such as health, housing, and rights. Finally, the companies aim to promote personal growth and social transformation by encouraging participation and addressing the underlying causes of exclusion in their own operations and in the labour market (Martínez Rueda et. al., 2018).

Customized employment

Also called job carving or crafting, it involves the creation of new positions within a business. This can occur through either a bottom-up approach, where the employee designs the job (crafting), or a top-down approach, where the employer and experts create the position (carving). Job carving aims to accommodate individuals with disabilities by reorganizing tasks and workplaces to better suit their needs. The process of job carving may involve identifying specific tasks or responsibilities that can be assigned to individuals with disabilities, taking into account their skills and abilities. This may include modifying existing job roles or creating entirely new positions tailored to the individual's capabilities. Additionally, job carving often includes training for both the employee and the employer (ESF Transnational Platform, 2019). It consists of “individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in a way that satisfies the needs of both. It can include employment that arises from the creation of new jobs (shaped employment), self-employment, or other labour development or restructuring strategies that result in individually negotiated job tasks that fit the needs of people with disabilities”. It is a working methodology that focuses on exploring talent (contribution) and the resources of the person and personalized negotiation with the employer. It is directly linked to Social Responsibility. The objective is to create win-win situations by searching for job positions in the community that match the strengths and skills of the job seeker (Cabrera, 2018).

Pre-employment services

They are a service included in the service portfolio of the Department of Social Rights of the Government of Catalonia. Its objective is to train people with special difficulties for job placement. They were established in 2002 as a pilot experience in the field of mental health. In 2021, there were 45 pre-employment service establishments in Catalonia, with 933 places:

- More than half of the users were under 40 years old (62.11%). 34.62% were under 30 years old. 32.34% had secondary education and 28.95% had primary education. Only 7.2% had higher education.
- At the end of the process, 18.53% found work in a special employment centre, 9.59% in a regular company, and 5.95% continued with other training programs (AMMFEINA, 2022).

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In Finland, the Joint Service Point (JSP) has been established. The idea of the joint service point is to provide for people with special needs all services from the same office and to develop cooperation between different authorities. At the JSP, services are provided by the city, employment authorities and educational institutions in the area. It also has very close cooperation relationships with social and health care as well as a rehabilitation centre.

JSP employees have a good relationship with the employers, visit the workplace and work to bring together employers, employees and working conditions. In this way, the services can be tailor-made.

JSP Networks have regular meetings where actors from different authorities present their activities, so information circulates and it is possible to support with the necessary tool or service.

A service map is currently being prepared to support employees and to develop the identification of service needs with the following process:

1. Interviewing the person with special needs
2. Collecting information from other authorities (with person's authorization)
3. Asking about special support needs directly, including school experiences
4. Agreement on possible updating of skills before finding employment (note: checking that a customer has completed comprehensive school)
5. If necessary, involvement of health or social care services
6. Launching the necessary support measures for employment

Support for training and work

In Italy, in order to facilitate the activation in the world of work of people at risk of social and occupational exclusion, the law 85/2023, from 1 September 2023, the Support for training and work has been established, as a measure of activation to work, through the participation in projects of training, professional qualification and retraining, orientation, job support and active employment policies, however denominated. It includes the universal civil service and projects useful to the community in the cultural, social, artistic, environmental, training and protection of common goods fields, to be carried out in the municipality of residence, compatibly with the other activities of the beneficiary. The performance of these activities is free of charge, is not comparable to subordinate or para-subordinate work and does not, in any case, involve the establishment of a public employment relationship with the public administrations. A service agreement is defined with three employment agencies authorized to carry out intermediation activities identified by the beneficiary as part of the digital activation agreement are indicated as work activation measures. Following the stipulation of the service agreement, the interested party, through the platform, can receive job offers and career guidance and accompaniment services, or be included in specific training projects provided by public or private subjects accredited for training by the regional systems, joint inter-professional funds and bilateral bodies. The interested party can autonomously identify training projects, falling within the category of those indicated in the first period, to which to be admitted and, in this case, must immediately notify them via the platform (Pavoncello & Taricone, 2020).

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In Italy, the project “Permanent training courses - Skills for employability and adaptability” offers to job seekers or employed people with special needs widespread training opportunities aimed at supporting people with disabilities in the acquisition of knowledge and skills to increase their employability and adaptability and therefore functional to strengthen targeted policies for job placement and permanence in the job market. It aims to make available an offer of short, even modular, courses that can be used in a personalized and individualized way, capable of responding to the need to acquire basic knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to activate subsequent active job search paths and to stay in contexts and work organizations (Pavoncello & Taricone, 2020).

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4. PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO SUPPORT THE TRANSITION OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Pedagogical approaches play a crucial role in supporting the transition to work of people with special needs, providing them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to navigate the transition from education to adulthood and independence.

4.1 Guidelines for Supportive Pedagogical Approaches

In Italy, the guidelines for the scholastic inclusion of pupils with special needs establish that each school must activate guidance actions to guarantee continuity in the assistance to the pupil by the following school or the chosen post-school path (MIUR, 2019). The need to develop educational plans which envisage the future choices of the pupil at the end of the school training course, also through orientation, is also underlined. The second biennial action program for the promotion of the rights and integration of people with disabilities (2017) underlines the importance of ensuring continuity between guidance, training and transition to work. This program encourages the creation of blended educational paths that combine education, vocational training and work experience, in collaboration between schools, vocational training centres and the world of work. This approach offers opportunities for inclusion and professional development through educational paths that promote the autonomy and socio-occupational inclusion of people with disabilities. The design of adulthood pathways to develop autonomy requires not only support in the construction of autonomous thought inside and outside school, but also the design of operational practices that consider each individual as a thinking being, beyond the limitations caused by from intellectual disabilities. This lays the foundations for the ability to think and reflect on the other, promoting their autonomy in thought and choice (Pavone 2014; Chiappetta Cajola, 2015; Mura et al., 2021). As part of guidance, each student is called to experiment with cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional skills, expressing opinions, preferences and sharing interests, passions and aspirations. These actions are closely linked to the development of metacognitive skills that support the organization, monitoring and control of one's knowledge process, making the student progressively autonomous in the conscious choice of the opportunities that present themselves (Domenici, 2009; Chiappetta Cajola, 2015). Guidance must not be reduced to a simple tool for managing formal transitions between school orders, but must take on a permanent value in the experience of students with special educational needs. It is necessary to adopt a diachronic-training orientation model that values personal planning and accompanies the progressive structuring of a life project throughout the years of training. The school, as a guidance environment, must stimulate learning and highlight the abilities of each individual, allowing functioning in the classroom and in all extra-school situations. The methods of response of the school system to personal orientation trajectories must embrace an accompanying logic that goes beyond the fragmented and sporadic approach, guaranteeing continuity and adopting a planning

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perspective starting from kindergarten. It is important to favor a heuristic dimension that operates on the possible, probable and latent potential of students (Miatto, 2021).

According to Casares (2013) the challenges for a support-based pedagogy are:

- strengthening institutional networks and partnerships among organisations, administrations and companies to offer more possibilities for high-quality integrated training and service experience
- responding to the needs of people and increasing employment opportunities calls for partnerships.

An example in Catalonia is the Reincopora Program (for people who are in prison) and this methodology can be reviewed for people with special needs.

In Italy, the Conference of Italian Rectors (CRUI) has emphasized the importance of addressing the issue of disability in higher education using a complexity paradigm. This approach entails the coordinated use of actions that fall under the concept of "reasonable accommodation" as outlined in the UN Convention. To achieve this, it is crucial to consider the specific contexts and needs of each student, with a focus on personalized support. The Disability Delegates of Italian Universities, who participated in the CRUI conference, recognized the importance of leveraging the capacities of students rather than solely focusing on their limitations. They highlighted four key conditions that should be applied (Paviotti et al., 2021):

- Transparency: It is essential to be transparent with students and their families about potential future challenges they may face during their academic journey and in terms of employability prospects.
- Managing expectations: It is important to manage hopes and expectations to avoid creating illusions that could lead to disappointment and discouragement later on.
- Promoting awareness and self-responsibility: Students and their families should be encouraged to develop a sense of self-responsibility and awareness about their abilities and potential.
- Freedom of choice and academic support: Respecting students' freedom of choice is vital, and appropriate measures should be put in place during their studies to prevent academic failure.
- By adhering to these conditions, universities can create an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers students with disabilities to succeed in their academic pursuits and transition smoothly into the workforce.

Guidelines to establish a protocol for internships of individuals with special needs are defined by an Italian study by Paviotti et al. (2021). They say that several key aspects should be taken into account (CRUI, 2018). First and foremost, transparency and managing expectations are crucial in ensuring that students and their families have a clear understanding of the practical and learning experiences involved in the internship. It is essential to align expectations to construct meaningful life paths that prioritize the individual's quality of life (Giaconi, 2015).

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Secondly, the learning project should be defined in collaboration with the individual with disabilities, and it is important to provide accessible proposals in an easy-to-read format. The role of the specialized tutor is another critical aspect. They should be well-trained experts who consider both the expectations and functioning profile of the student with disabilities, as well as the requirements of the working environment. This includes addressing accessibility, necessary services, and the presence of facilitators (CRUI, 2018).

Moreover, enhancing vocational maturity levels in students with disabilities is essential (Dowrick, Getzel, & Briel, 2004). In-depth studies on the skills required for internships and employment are significant in this regard (Espada-Chavarria et al., 2020). It is vital to provide specific support to empower students, raise their self-awareness, and develop decision-making and problem-solving strategies. These actions contribute to self-determination and the perception of their own capability to shape their professional future (Del Bianco, 2019). Furthermore, the evaluation of competences acquired during internships should be emphasized. The European Higher Education Area highlights the importance of competence-based learning plans that allow students to assess their own competences in real situations and improve their self-learning (Espada-Chavarria, et al., 2020). This self-evaluation capacity is especially crucial in personalized learning programs for students with disabilities, as it promotes self-assessment, self-advocacy, and the understanding of rights and accommodation needs. Lastly, investing in integrated support systems for internships is vital for improved employment outcomes and quality of life for individuals with disabilities (Del Bianco et al., 2020; Zappaterra, 2012). Collaboration and coordination among universities, companies, and support services in the community can foster an inclusive culture and mainstreaming strategies in the labor market (Bocci et al., 2020; Pace et al., 2018; Caldin, 2017).

According to Del Bianco et al. (2021), universities play a crucial role in establishing meaningful connections with their local communities to foster widespread education and promote social democratization (Mura, 2011). Based on this premise, universities can serve as spaces for interaction and social exchange, facilitating inclusive processes. Even for individuals with disabilities who are not enrolled in higher education, universities can still function as educational environments and catalysts for social inclusion. To this end, it is important for universities to extend their network to encompass all the necessary material and personal resources typically found within educational pathways. This expansion aims to provide qualifications and opportunities for individuals with disabilities while also promoting inclusive processes that facilitate cultural interconnections.

Traineeships can be a valuable opportunity to pursue these objectives. In Italy, the most effective instrument for achieving this aim is the Traineeships for Inclusion and Social Integration (TIS). The TIS is regulated by the "Guidelines for orientation, training, and apprenticeships aimed at social inclusion, personal autonomy, and rehabilitation," which were agreed upon by the State-Regions Conference on January 22, 2015. According to these guidelines, the TIS is designed for individuals under the care of professional social services or competent health services who require personalized assessment, counselling, and guidance to facilitate social and occupational

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inclusion and acquire personal autonomy. These traineeships serve as social activation measures explicitly aimed at supporting empowerment and autonomy at personal, family, and social levels. Each region and autonomous province in Italy is responsible for implementing this type of intervention, resulting in specific regulations being established for the purpose.

In the Marche Region, where the University of Macerata is located, the provision came into effect in 2016 and has since been amended and further regulated by Resolution No. 593/2018. Key features of the TIS include:

- The target audience comprises individuals under the care of professional social services or competent health services.
- A personalized training project is developed through collaboration between the responsible person, the promoting subject, the promoter, the host subject, and the trainee. This project defines the objectives to be achieved and the modalities of implementation. It is essential to ensure coherence between the personalized training plan and the Individualized Care Plan (IAP) established during the initial care process.
- The traineeship has a maximum duration of 24 months.
- Trainees are entitled to a compulsory allowance for their participation, and the costs can be covered by the promoting body, host body, the legal entity responsible for the trainee, or another authorized entity.

The promoter of the traineeship can be any organization appointed for active labor policies, including educational and training institutions, labor agencies, employment centers, public bodies and local agencies, health system agencies, accredited labor service agencies, and entities within the Third Sector/social sector that formally cooperate with the health system.

Both public and private organizations have the capacity to host TIS traineeships.

The University of Macerata recognizes the pedagogical significance of supporting students with disabilities or specific learning disabilities (DSA) during their curricular pathway and after graduation. Following the CNUDD guidelines (2014), the university emphasizes the importance of internships and traineeships in facilitating students' career planning, skill acquisition, self-awareness, and self-responsibility in designing their life projects. Work-based learning enables students to establish or enhance their connection with the world of work, aligning their skills with their individual aspirations.

To support this process, the University of Macerata has developed a specialized professional role called the "specialized tutor" within the framework of the Inclusion 3.0 project (Giacconi, Del Bianco, 2018). This tutor acts as a facilitator for the student's integration into the organizational system and works to create an inclusive environment within the organization. Additionally, the tutor supports the intern's development of professional and social skills, providing guidance throughout their learning journey at the workplace. By bridging the expectations of various stakeholders involved, including the company, university, student, and student's family, the

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specialized tutor maximizes the resources available from the university and the social and family network.

Through the efforts of these specialized tutors, the University of Macerata has established a diverse local network of private and public organizations and companies that host interns with disabilities. Initially functioning as a sending organization for interns with disabilities, the university expanded its role to also become a hosting organization. Through the Traineeships for Inclusion and Social Integration (TIS) program, the university provided a traineeship opportunity to a 24-year-old individual with physical disabilities. The trainee received support from the Agenzia Sanitaria Unica Regionale (ASUR) and a local rehabilitation center.

The traineeship project took place at the Department of Education Sciences library, a frequently visited location by university students and lecturers. The project, which was co-designed and planned in collaboration with various local entities such as ASUR, social services, the trainee's family, and a hosting body (typically companies or institutions), aimed to achieve several objectives:

- Acquire skills in library practices with the support of assistive technologies.
- Foster opportunities for interaction with peers and university students.
- Promote pathways to self-determination.
- Facilitate the adoption of a social and professional role within the traineeship environment.

The trainee attended the library every weekday morning, following the university's opening hours. A multidisciplinary team consisting of a tutor as a social mediator and operational model, as well as an educator to foster integration with peers and other university students, provided supervision. These professionals ensured a match between the trainee's functioning profile and the work system, facilitating the trainee's recognition as a genuine intern within the business environment. They supported the trainee's professional and social role internalization.

The tutor and educator also ensured an accessible work environment and provided specific assistive technologies to enable the trainee to perform assigned tasks. The training was provided for the use of assistive technologies and software for independent management of library procedures.

The traineeship lasted for two years, during which several objectives were achieved. Social integration with peers and young university students was considered a top priority, as social isolation is a common risk after leaving school (Gariboldi, Pugnaghi, 2020; Pinnelli, Fiorucci, 2019; Bell, Clegg, 2012; Goussot, 2009). The traineeship also facilitated the development of self-determination within a structured environment, with the support of a tutor, empowering the trainee to make conscious choices and decisions within work contexts. Additionally, the traineeship provided an opportunity to assume both a professional role within the library and a new social role as a trainee.

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4.2 Communities and networking initiative

Inserta Empleo, the Foundation ONCE's entity for training and employment, presented in 2022 the 'Community for Young Talent', the first initiative aimed at the environment of young people with disabilities, as well as families and professionals who support them, with the aim of advising them to promote their inclusion in the labor market and accompany them during the process. The 'Community for Young Talent' aims to become the advisory place for the people closest to young people with disabilities and, to do so, it offers useful resources, content and training courses for both families and professionals, in order to help them break prejudices and barriers and eliminate the overprotection that, on many occasions, they exercise over young people with disabilities. Co-financed by the European Social Fund, the 'Community for Young Talent' materializes in a connection space. The first one offers valuable content, including knowledge, tools, and methodologies, to young people with disabilities, their families, and the professionals who serve them, such as healthcare professionals, teachers, and counselors. Thus, the virtual community has a series of courses focused on providing resources, strategies, initiatives, guidelines, and testimonies that contribute to facilitating the processes of labor inclusion. The website has three sections, depending on the recipients, for young people, families, and the third sector of disability and socio-sanitary professionals, teachers, and counselors, and the training content is adapted to each of the recipients.

L'Associació empresarial d'economia social presented a study (2019) that aims to highlight the reality of social economy entities that work towards the labor and social integration of people with disabilities and special difficulties in Catalonia. The main ideas are:

- Employability must be understood as the degree to which a person's skills and abilities match the specific needs of the job market
- Employability is the result of training, age, place of residence, type of disability and other personal characteristics of people with disabilities that can influence job performance" (p. 76)
- Mixed employment and training formulas - such as the case of adapted dual training - seem to be the most appropriate way for the development of skills and professional competences among the group of people with disabilities and special needs. The model developed and successfully applied by the entity Amadip of the Balearic Islands can be considered a reference to follow.
- Dual training allows to establish a bridge between the educational and work spheres, seeking a greater integration between theory and work practice.
- Dual training allows to obtain a professional certificate CP, official and approved. The certificate accredits the acquisition of a series of technical competences (p. 76-77).

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Following Council of the European Union in June 16, 2022, “Recommendation about the importance of updating competences, skills, and knowledge in a job market” Microcredentials are an opportunity to complement and improve the ecosystems of education, training, lifelong learning, and employability, without altering the systems of initial education, higher education, and vocational education and training. In 2021, there are currently 1,500 Micro-credentials on offer on MOOC platforms including Coursera, EdX, Future Learn, and Udacity. Micro-credentials can also be used as part of targeted measures to support inclusion and facilitate access to education and training and career opportunities for a wider range of learners. This wider range of learners includes disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (such as people with disabilities, the elderly, low-qualified/skilled people, minorities, people with migrant background, refugees and people with fewer opportunities because of their geographical location and/or their socio-economically disadvantaged situation) (Council Recommendation, 2022).

The research by Montserrat et al. (2012) presents various strategies that could be promoted in secondary education from a psycho-educational guidance viewpoint if an inclusive process has to be ensured for students with learning difficulties in their transition to working life. The Person Centered Planning foresees education authority involvement in defining a legal framework that clearly establishes the responsibility of secondary schools in such processes. It is a model for guiding students in the areas of education and social and labour market inclusion that is integrated within the different areas of the secondary curriculum and is taken into account in the guidance given by teachers, balancing academic curricula to include components relating to social and self-determination skills. Moreover, Person Centered Planning (PCP) is presented as an innovative approach that offers new perspectives on supporting socioeducational and occupational pathways of people with intellectual disabilities. It is important to keep in mind that the vulnerability of people with intellectual disabilities in these transition processes requires intentional emphasis on promoting socio-labor inclusion strategies during the secondary stage guidance process. Finally, advancing the implementation of the actions presented in educational practices also means effectively introducing them into the training processes of education professionals.

In Finland, an interesting initiative in terms of transition to worklife is the “Career Club” [Uraverstas] operated once a month that is intended for students in need of special support (Lignell & Pynnönen, 2018). In the practical workshops, no attention was paid to the special support needs of the students, but the starting point was that the student's participation in the workshop was valuable and there was a need for it. The career workshop emphasized supporting the student's own employment skills and information affecting it, and various job search opportunities and job search channels were presented. The day-long workshops included various mapping and analysis tasks, personal guidance, group discussions and feedback. Career club activities were also organized as personal guidance and online meetings for a few students. Application for personal guidance was due to the client's perception that she/he was "difficult to employ". The personal counseling covered how to appear in a job application situation, stress, work career, the preparation of the CV and the CV presenting the student's strengths were described. The personal support and guidance of the career coach was felt to be important for the special needs student's own competence in supporting the presentation and encouraging courage. During the project, the

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guidance material created in the career workshop was utilized and developed to university's public internet pages, the [Työuralle] website is accessible to everyone. The purpose of the site is to help the students to identify their own competence and communicate it to the job application situation. During the project, the supervisors from the university were interviewed, and they brought up the significance of internships and work-related-projects in term of employment. In addition, they were considered important recruitment events at the university, various company visits and working life forums.

Furthermore, the "Rapporteurs' report. Reports and Memorandums of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 43/2018" (Oivo & Kerätär,²⁰¹⁸) is part of the key project Career opportunities for persons with partial work ability and mapped the situation of persons with partial work ability in the labour market and their transfers to using disability benefits, but also the service agencies promoting their employment and the different alternatives for ensuring the subsistence of these persons. While this report was being drawn up, it focused more and more clearly on long-term unemployed persons in the most difficult labour market situation. It simultaneously examined services and the service system, benefits, the labour market, and the various levels of these all, from legislation to implementation. The report describes the features of the group of long-term unemployed persons, their paths in the benefit and service system and their situation in the labour market. The report also presents proposals for improving their situation. Situations of long-term unemployed persons - their need for services, work ability and need for rehabilitation - are not always examined as individually on a multi-sectoral basis as they should be examined. Therefore, unemployed persons are often left without the services and benefits they need. The labour market does not support people with partial work ability well enough to participate in working life. A nationwide work ability programme is proposed to be established in Finland. The comprehensive strategic programme would span beyond government terms. The aim of the work ability programme is to increase working life participation of long-term unemployed persons and persons with disabilities and to ensure them the services and benefits they need.

The Fundacion ADECCO (2021) suggests proposals for companies to promote inclusion in their hiring and assessment processes:

- Flexibilize selection processes to make them more inclusive, valuing soft skills that are in demand such as creativity and motivation, which are frequently present in young people with special needs.
- Promote closer ties with associations, universities, and vocational training centers as sources of recruitment for young people with disabilities.
- Invest in universal accessibility as an instrument of competitiveness, attraction, and retention of young talent with disabilities.
- Take advantage of the sudden digitalization, a consequence of the pandemic, as a motor for hiring young people with disabilities, promoting telecommuting.

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- Implement mentoring programs that act as a link between the young person with a disability and the world of the company.
- Participate in conferences, forums, and activities that bring together professionals from the sector with young people with disabilities in the environment, promoting networking and exchanges of experiences and knowledge that facilitate access to the labour market.
- Some specific proposals to achieve these goals include corporate volunteering, professional volunteering, and speed networking sessions. These activities promote coexistence and interaction between young people with disabilities and workers from companies, generating empathy and professional links that contribute to breaking down barriers and stereotypes while training skills such as teamwork or communication. By implementing these proposals, companies can attract and retain young talent with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive society.

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5. FIELD RESEARCH

The IN-WORK project aims to support the development of a sense of commitment and belonging to inclusive communities by educational and business players and civil society through work-integrated learning (WIL) activities. More specifically the field research aimed to:

- Identify obstacles and successes to insertion to work of youths with special needs and contextual factors affecting the process

The research provides elements to tailor the project action effectively and efficiently in the addressed territories.

5.1 Approach and design

Field research includes the collection of data from different perspectives and target groups representing the main stakeholders of the project, namely:

- Higher education students with special needs
- Youths with special needs not enrolled in higher education
- Social services (or labour administration, where necessary) involved in the process of employment of youths with special needs
- Public and private organisations (employers).

Field research identifies obstacles and enabling factors for job insertion of people with special needs, with an overview of contextual issues, such as culture, type of sector, size of company etc., in the regions of the addressed countries.

The project used interviews and questionnaires to address the research strategies associated with quantitative research and they were addressed to different target groups as follows.

5.1.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire addressed two target groups:

- Students with special needs enrolled in higher education and
- Public and private organizations.

The HE students questionnaire aims to include the perspective of higher education students with special needs in the exploratory research and to collect their perceptions about the transition from education to work and the labour market.

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The organization questionnaire collects the perspective of employers in the market and their experiences and perceptions about the employability of special needs workers and the potential role of the university in facilitating the transition from education to work and the labour market.

The questionnaires have been administered through a Google Form provided in the languages of the consortium and English. To reduce respondent variability and the time and resources taken up by translating responses, the questionnaire included as many questions as possible that are in the form of checklists (tick-boxes) and multiple-choice questions and minimise the use of closed-constructed response items (which require one-word or short phrase answers) and open-constructed response items (which require more extensive writing).

Validation of the instruments in the partners' proper language has been carried out by each partner country. Formal validation of the questionnaires required cognitive interviews with a sample of the target population (about four students) to identify problematic questions that may elicit response errors (Willis 2015): Verbal probing has been used as a technique for this process.

5.1.2 Interview

Interviews address two target groups:

- Youths with special needs and
- Social services.

They were delivered using a semi-structured interview format and administered face-to-face with the interviewees or by telephone/online, if necessary.

They address the following themes:

- Perceived strengths and weaknesses of job insertion for youths with special needs
- Perceived potential of the university's cooperation with the contest for job insertion of people with special needs
- Perceived mismatch between the labour market needs and the available profiles/competencies of youths with special needs.

5.2 The point of view of youths

5.2.1 HE Student Questionnaire Results

The respondents to the questionnaire were 65 HE students of the three universities of the consortium (UNIMC, JAMK and URV), 79% female (Tab. 1)

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	JAMK	UNIMC	URV	TOTAL
TOTAL	39	16	10	65
Female	85%	75%	60%	79%
Male	10%	25%	40%	18%
Other	5%	0%	0%	3%

Tab. 1 – Sample by gender

In terms of age, most of the sample falls into the 21-25 age range (45%) (Tab. 2). In terms of special needs, most of the sample has a Specific Learning Disorder (55%) (Tab 3). 85% of the sample are bachelor students.

	JAMK	UNIMC	URV	TOTAL
TOTAL	39	16	10	65
15-20 years	13%	19%	50%	20%
21-25 years	33%	75%	40%	45%
26-29 years	13%	0%	0%	8%
30-> years	16%	6%	10%	28%

Tab. 2 – Sample by age

	JAMK	UNIMC	URV	TOTAL
TOTAL	51	16	10	77
Physical Impairment	4%	19%	50%	13%
Intellectual Impairment	20%	0%	10%	14%
Specific Learning Disord	51%	75%	40%	55%
Others	25%	6%	0%	18%

Tab. 3 – Sample by Special Need (it was possible to select more than one answer)

With regards to work experience, 74% of participants don't have work experience. 54% of people lack work experience because they haven't tried looking. The other 46% tried but without luck.

With regards to the perceptions about the labour market, 80% of participants have information about job opportunities and they gathered info mainly via web search (46% of replies) (Tab. 4).

74% of respondents believe that there are some chances to work for them, 22% think they don't have enough information and 5% think that there's no possibility to find a job.

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	TOTAL ANSWERS
If yes, how?	96
Web search	47%
University job placement	15%
Notification of relatives/friends	19%
Labour office	15%
Other	5%

Tab. 4 – Info search (it was possible to select more than one answer)

For the 43% of the answers the participants, who haven't tried to search information about job opportunities, declare that the reason was the lack of time and the 36% of them because they don't know where to look.

About the possible obstacles they perceive to job insertion, the most part of the answers (24%) are that there's no obstacle perceived in job insertion followed by the lack of flexibility in working hours (20%) (Tab. 5). It's interesting to underline the fact that the majority of respondents who say "none" are located in Finland.

	JAMK	UNIMC	URV	TOTAL ANSWERS
	62	13	10	85
None	17	3		24%
I don't know who to contact	1		1	2%
I don't know what to search	4			5%
Mistrust/Prejudices of colleagues	3	2		6%
Lack of tools for me	5	1		7%
Lack of flexibility in working hours	11	2	4	20%
Non-continuous work	3	1	3	8%
Unrewarding job for me	10	3	2	18%
Lack of working experience		1		1%
Other, please specify	8			9%

Tab. 5 – Perceived obstacles in job insertion (it was possible to select more than one answer)

A dedicated database is perceived as the major potential enabling factor to job insertion by the 34% of the answers, followed by the competencies in a specific area (Tab. 6)

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	JAMK	UNIMC	URV	TOTAL	TOTAL ANSWERS
	73	19	10	102	102
a dedicated data base	26	3	6	35	34%
a tutor supporting me in searching and applying	17	9	3	29	28%
more competencies in a specific area	23	6	1	30	29%
Other	7	1	0	8	8%

Tab. 6 – Perceived enabling factors in job insertion (it was possible to select more than one answer)

In general, with regards to expectations of future employability, the participants declare they need to improve some skills both in the specific professional field and in the soft skill area. They mention the following competencies:

- Technical skills: ability to interpret a curriculum, mathematical and practical skills (laboratories, etc.), knowledge about job market, job listings, and public service exams, theoretical knowledge of the profession, competencies related to the field of medicine, effective teaching in early childhood education, tools management,
- Soft skills: initiative, teamwork, resourcefulness, empathy, conflict management, critical thinking, effective communication, language skills, digital skills, leadership, proactivity, problem-solving, adaptability, creativity.

Regarding the role of the University in the employment process, 72% of the participants think that the University can be helpful in job insertion. The ways Universities can help have been identified as follows:

- Offering internships in the third or fourth year of the degree and creating connections with organizations that can offer internships.
- Providing students with the helpful tools for job placement with job offers related to the degree
- Guidance counsellor for career plan and job opportunities
- Creating networking opportunities and business collaboration
- Offering training with practical activities.

45% of the respondents state that his/her special needs could make it difficult to find a job.

Participants were asked also to identify the factors that can support a successful transition from education to work. Following the list of success factors identified:

- more accessibility, more specific information for people with disabilities, and greater adaptability when it comes to doing internships.

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- Support in job searching, such as how to write a CV, how to request a job via email, etc.
- Personal creativity, motivation, perseverance, and social skills.
- Internship within the university
- Connection with an organisation available to an internship
- Knowledge of the subject matter.
- A good grade in the degree
- Job opportunity
- Tutoring and counselling
- Accessible environment
- University support in job searching and networking.

Among the critical issue, they highlight:

- lack of inclusion of people with disabilities in companies, possible discrimination in the workplace due to having a disability, etc.
- Finding very temporary jobs. Not maximising the opportunities of the present.
- Lack of contacts and few job offers in the area of residence.
- Not being able to work full-time.
- A bad grade, not passing the MIR (medical intern resident exam).
- Prejudices and mistrust.
- Lack of working experience.
- Ignorance, lack of knowledge and uncertainty about one's own competence
- Geographical distance to companies offering jobs
- Health challenges.

5.2.2 Youths with special needs interviews results

20 interviews have been administered. The participants are 50% male, aged between 17 and 29 (only one person is 43 years old) with the following profile:

Profile	20
Physical impairment	3
Intellectual impairment	8
Intellectual impairment & autistic spectrum disorder	5
Learning disorder	4

Most of them (75%) are unemployed and are looking for a job.

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The results of the interviews have been reported taking into consideration the three main themes that have been investigated.

1) The perceived strengths and weaknesses of job insertion for youths with special needs

Most of the participants believe that finding a job is challenging and difficult for them, primarily due to their special needs. The reasons of their concerns are related to:

- Lacking information about special needs and their impacts on jobs by the employers
- Misconceptions and limited support programs
- The need to acquire support and tools to facilitate the work
- The difficulty of getting to work
- Lack of work experience and training opportunities.

Some of them know their aspirations and do their best to be ready for the “desired job” but they acknowledge that it is difficult to reach it, even if they don’t give up.

Most of the participants have experience in searching for a job and met some difficulties. One participant found the process very difficult (“Surfing the internet is complex”) and some others have been supported by employment services but it was not easier. In some cases, relatives and acquaintances are effective channels to find a job, even if the experience in this area is different. One participant reported that employers only offered her unpaid activities.

In general, they do not have a wide knowledge of the labour market but it is related exclusively to their experience.

2) The perceived potential of the university's cooperation with the contest for job insertion of people with special needs

Overall, the participants have varied opinions on the role of the university in job insertion for people with special needs. Some believe that the university can play an important role, but mostly they are not sure, as they have not had any experience with the university and the role that the university can play in their job insertion. They don’t know if the university has vocational training programs, job placement services or internships. Those who attribute an important role to the university argue that this role is about providing knowledge skills and connections with the world of local entrepreneurs and organising job fairs. They suggest that the university plans activities for on-the-job learning, internships, or short courses to learn specific skills. Furthermore, two participants mention the possibility of defining the role of a tutor/counsellor/special education teacher inside the university that supports youths with special needs to search and find a job (making job applications, preparing for job interviews, connecting with employers to underline the students’ strengths, etc.).

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3) Perceived mismatch between the labour market needs and the available profiles/competencies of youths with special needs.

Overall participants agree that companies look for people with skills when hiring employees. They mention skills such as communication, teamwork, empathy, sociability, punctuality, and initiative but also technical skills related to the specific companies’ business area. Also, IT and language skills are considered important to develop. They feel that they possess certain competencies that could be useful for certain jobs but may need additional training, guidance or accommodation to perform effectively. Some are more confident in their abilities than others, but all express a willingness to learn and develop new skills to meet the demands of different jobs.

These answers were partially influenced by the lack of knowledge of the labour market.

5.3 The point of view of organizations

5.3.1 Organization Questionnaire Results

40 companies have answered the questionnaire, 75% are privately owned. According to Eurostat Classification, the most part of the organizations are in Professional and Scientific service sector (24%) (Tab. 7)

	TOTAL
TOTAL	37
Manufacturing	14%
Transportation and storage	5%
Professional, scientific service	24%
Distributive trades	19%
Accomodation and food	8%
Administrative and support	22%
Construction	3%
Information and communication services	3%
Repair of computers and personal and household goods	3%

Tab. 7 – Economic Sector

With regards to the dimensions of the companies, 30% of the sample have 11-50 employees, followed by 27% that have >250 employees (Tab. 8).

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	TOTAL
TOTAL	40
< 10 employees	18%
11 - 50 employees	28%
51 - 100 employees	15%
101 - 250 employees	15%
> 250 employees	24%

Tab. 8 – Organization dimensions.

62% of the organizations don't have any legal obligation to hire employees with special needs and 33% don't have employees with special needs in their organization (Tab. 9).

EMPLOYEES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS	40
0	33%
1-4	20%
5-10	15%
>10	20%
I have, but I don't know the number	8%
I don't know if I have	4%

Tab. 9 – Employees with special needs.

Concerning the methods used by the organizations to hire and include workers with special needs, as they are strictly related to the national legislation, we report the answers by country in the following Tab. 10.

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JAMK (FINLAND)
Hiring people with partial work ability is part of the company's HR strategy, and they are hired directly
Cooperation with other organisations and actors, e.g. workshops, various associations and social enterprises to employ people with partial work ability, and receiving support for salary costs from another organisation
Internships without pay
ITALY (UNIMC)
Insertion managed directly by the company
Named goodwill with Targeted Placement Service (Law 68/99) (the employer freely chooses the person to be hired from among the unemployed list, according to Law 68/99)
Numerical start (sent directly by the Placement Service) (the employer hires the worker on the basis of a ranking, provided by the Employment Centre, of registered in the targeted placement lists)
Agreements with social services
Internship
SPAIN (URV)
Insertion managed directly by the company
Special employment centre (CET in Catalan)
Enclavament laboral (A job lock is a group of workers from a Special Employment Center who carry out their tasks by temporarily moving to the workplace of the collaborating company (client) for a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 3 years)
Public examination to be a civil worker
Internship

Tab. 10 – Methods to hire and include employees with special needs in the organization

Among the advantages perceived by the organizations about the inclusion of employees with special needs, the most chosen answer is the Social Responsibility performance improvement, followed by the enrichment for the employees (Tab. 11).

Internal and external advantages	100%
Social Responsibility performance improvement	36%
Enrichment for the employees	23%
Enrichment of the skills present in the company	20%
A human resource management strategy	13%
Improvement of the company climate	4%
Productivity improvement	3%

Tab. 11 – Perceived internal and external advantages

Organizations that have employees with special needs prefer to place the worker in a company area suitable to the worker's special needs and give training and tutoring ad hoc, often defining a specific job description that takes into account abilities and limits (Tab. 12).

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Management tools used for the job placement of employees with special needs	TOTAL
	100%
According to the worker's special need, placement in a suitable company area with related training and tutoring	27%
A specific job description that takes into account abilities and limit	22%
Identification of the most suitable tasks among those routinely carried out in part also by the rest of the employees	17%
Promotions for comparative merits under the contract	14%
Restoring awareness that they are part of an active cycle	14%
Training dedicated to employee placement and career development	7%

Tab. 12 – Management tools used for the job placement of employees with special needs

Among the helpful initiatives that could support in terms of hiring of people with special needs, the companies in the sample mention the most a greater knowledge of the types of disability/special needs and specific training for the company's tutors (Tab. 13).

Helpful initiatives for hiring of people with special needs	TOTAL
	100%
Greater knowledge of the types of disability	29%
Specific training for company tutors	17%
Comparison/sharing with other companies	11%
Insights on aids and workplace adaptations	8%
Knowledge of issues had with previous employers (with the permission of employee)	8%
Greater knowledge of work limitations	6%
Specific insights on the Social Responsibility theme applied to placement	6%
More information about aids provided by public administrations and also about the adaptations that a job may require	5%
Everything	3%
Greater knowledge of Disability and health and safety	3%
Training dedicated to employee onboarding and career development	2%
More places and channels to find people with special needs	2%

Tab. 13 - Helpful initiatives for hiring of people with special needs

Companies declare that support from the external environment could be useful in fostering the inclusion of people with special needs in their organizations. They would appreciate primarily a support in the post-insertion phase (24%), in order to help the person in his process of integration and work and, secondly, internship activation with tutoring (Tab. 14).

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Useful actions for the inclusion of people with special needs in your company
A constant support in the post-insertion phase
Activation and tutoring of training internships
Pre-selection service
Environmental analysis (barriers and facilitators)
Specialist consultancy on legal questions
Consultancy and support in the detection of needs
Tutoring and collaboration in specific projects for integration (e.g. psychologists, educators, etc.),
Information related to the provision of incentives
Channel to find people with disabilities and specific workplace requirements

Tab. 14 – Useful actions for the inclusion of people with special needs in companies

89% of the respondents think that Universities can have an important role in promoting the inclusion of people with special needs in the work environment. About the initiatives they expect by the Universities, we can group them in 3 areas:

1) Training

- awareness-raising on inclusion
- for teachers and staff on the General Disability Law
- on the figure of labour inclusion delegates, within the curricula of Social Work, Social Education, Psychology, and Labor Relations
- for companies about disability and special needs, accessibility, inclusion activities, laws and legal requirements in their own region and psychological aspects
- for students with special needs on specific competencies required in their area
- for people with partial work ability

2) Networking

- acting as an intermediary between employers and youths with special needs
- supporting with a database of competencies and working demands and being a trade union between employers and candidates with special needs
- assisting with pre-selection, analyzing obstacles that people with special needs encounter when seeking employment and offering training/information to companies on how to manage it.

3) Internship

- acting as an intermediary between employers and youths with special needs
- activate internships within their own structure, according to the specific disciplines.

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About the perceived mismatch between profiles/competencies and the labour market needs, 87% of the companies believe that youths are prepared to work, and in the case of youths with special needs, 46% see a difference in competencies level. In particular, the differences they mention are linked to:

- a higher level of protection
- the working pace (but it can be seen as an investment)
- lacking of digital skills
- lacking a real vision of the labour market
- poor motivation to enter the labour market
- the additional challenges of their disability.

Some of the respondents state that there are differences among all individuals and everyone has different needs, abilities, and skills. In any case, depending on the person, people with special needs may have more requirements.

With regards to the obstacles perceived by the organizations in hiring people with special needs, 28% of the answers are focused on productivity issues, followed by problems with other employees (21%) and environmental issues (21%).

Obstacles in hiring	100%
Productivity issue	28%
Problems with other employees	21%
Environmental issue	21%
Legal problemes	13%
Organization don't adapt job especification to worker's needs	8%
It's not a matter of problem, but of conscience.	3%
I don't see any problem	3%
Lack of knowledge, lack of supervicion and lack of social conscience	3%
Other	3%

Tab. 15 – Obstacles in hiring perceived by companies

About the training the respondents say is necessary to facilitate the hiring of candidates with special needs, we can divide the answers in two areas: the training for candidates and the training for employees in the company.

With regards to the candidates, 45% of answers focus on training courses prior to insertion into the company, followed by 38% on pre-insertion internship for the target role (Tab. 16).

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Training needs for candidates	100%
Training courses prior to insertion into the company	45%
Specific pre-insertion internships for the target role	38%
Educational/psychological support	14%
Digital skills and driving license	2%

Tab. 16 – Training needs for candidates

With regards to the companies' employees, the most answered training needs is the training about tutoring and mentoring competencies (43%) followed by the inclusion topic (39%) (Tab. 17).

Training needs for companies' employees	100%
Tutoring and mentoring competencies	43%
Inclusion topic	39%
Training for tutors about the different disabilities	16%
Other	2%

Tab. 17 – Training needs for companies' employees

5.3.2 Social Service Organizations interviews results

6 interviews have been administered. Four of them were administered to coordinators or managers of no-profit social service organizations, and the other two to coordinators of municipality social services.

The results of the interviews have been reported taking into consideration the three main themes that have been investigated.

1) The perceived strengths and weaknesses of job insertion for youths with special needs

The respondents say that the difficulties in job insertion for youth with special needs are at two different levels:

Individual level

- ✓ lack of training or education (mostly not having completed compulsory secondary education or basic vocational training)
- ✓ lack of self-awareness about their competencies and inability to put them into words for employers
- ✓ Low awareness about the importance of having work experience in any area

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- ✓ Low perceived self-efficacy to get and manage a job
- ✓ in some cases, the services for youths with special needs are difficult to access for them
- ✓ In rural areas, in particular in Spain, young people face a first deficiency which is the lack of access to formal education, a minimum educational level is not guaranteed, and they cannot access professional degrees.

Company level

- ✓ General resistance to hiring due to a lack of knowledge and experience in people with disabilities, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises
- ✓ Lack of tools to support needs in job tasks (when necessary)
- ✓ an issue of stigmatization and prejudices
- ✓ Lack of awareness about inclusion topics, the need for special support
- ✓ Need for information, support and guidance in employing process in order to meet the “right person” for the job
- ✓ lack of a common system regarding job insertion.

The following facilitating factors have been identified:

- Support provided to youth with special needs to carry out the training and have a follow-up when they arrive at the company for the first time.
- Job counsellors and job trainers who accompany the person in the insertion process, and even within the company with techniques such as supported employment.
- Service centres (in Finland) that provide to people with special needs all services by the same office and develop cooperation between different authorities. They have a good relationship with the employer and visit workplaces to know the employer, employees and working conditions in order to have resources for guidance and tailor-made service. Strong cooperation between authorities in accordance with the youths’ objectives.
- Public funding initiatives (Spain) such as SIOAS, Subsidies for the implementation of comprehensive services of guidance, accompaniment and support for the insertion of people with disabilities or mental health disorders; Acompaña, The objective of this assistance is to facilitate the social and labour adaptation of workers with disabilities and mental health disorders with special difficulties in labour integration, in ordinary job, market companies under conditions similar to those of other workers occupying similar position.

2) The perceived potential of the university's cooperation with the contest for job insertion of people with special needs

The general perception is that educational institutions, including universities, have good cooperation with other authorities.

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The Universities have great visibility and have the possibility to carry out various projects that give visibility to this issue. University should assume a reference role in their context in order to be the connections among institutions, youths and business organizations, in different ways:

- the creation of a reference figure (teacher) who supports the student or young person with special needs in the process of approaching job search and insertion, and in the initial stage of internships and to become the contact person for the employer.
- Systematization of the job placement and insertion process for youths with special needs to provide tools to job trainers to work with users
- Awareness, facilitation, and accreditation of the job search and insertion for companies to get them involved
- Integrations in the educational paths with skills required in working environments, life management skills (that are the most important criterion for employment), employment relationship (benefits and obligations), inclusion topics and special needs
- Cooperation with business organizations to develop specific students' education paths
- Integrations of the undergraduate and master's degrees in the field of human resources with topics linked to work inclusion and projects and activities related to job placement so that future human resources managers are aware of it.

3) Perceived mismatch between the labour market needs and the available profiles/competencies of youths with special needs.

The perceptions of a part of the participants are that a large proportion of young people have poor working life skills (e.g. mobile phone use, working hours, breaks, reporting absences), and a low level of professional skills.

Some participants say that youths with special needs have a low ability to apply for a job and to get an interview, and they are not able to show their competencies to the employer. So, they should be prepared for that by a tutor or coach.

Transversal and digital skills seem to be very important for the actual job market and youths with special needs have to improve them. In some areas, a driving license seems to be important to get a job.

A skills accreditation process could help workers with disabilities to certify their work experience and it would help in the selection processes in ordinary companies.

In general, they declare that it is important to perform a competency analysis of both the person and the job position to see competencies and needs requested and the possibility to match and/or adapt mutually.

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CONCLUSIONS

This work is the result of the combined work of the partner countries and was carried out in two steps:

- a) A literature review to get the background and provide the state of the art of research on the addressed topic, in order to interpret emerging data and information
- b) Field research to collect data from different perspectives and target groups representing the main stakeholders of the project (Higher education students with special needs; Youths with special needs not enrolled in higher education; Social services or labour administration and public and private organisations (employers)).

The transition from school to work for young people with special needs can be challenging, but there have been significant efforts to improve inclusion and access to employment opportunities for these people. There are still obstacles related to the lack of employers' awareness and accommodation but also to the supporting services and infrastructures sometimes not easily accessible or lacking. On the other hand, youths with special needs register a low level of self-efficacy and motivation that negatively influence their approach to search and find a job. In some cases, they have no easy access to education and training or internships which can bring a mismatch in competencies for working.

Progress may vary from country to country depending on laws, policies and available resources. There are some areas of interest that are under focus and where some progress has been made:

- Laws and regulations: Many countries have laws and regulations that promote the employment of people with disabilities, both in the public and private sectors. These laws may include hiring quotas, tax breaks for employers, and other incentives.
- Training and education programmes: Access to good vocational training and education programs are part of the process activated to ensure that young people with special needs can develop the skills and abilities needed for the world of work, but it is still not enough.
- Transition Support and Services: Some areas offer specific support services to ease the transition between school and work for young people with special needs. These services may include career guidance, employment counselling and post-employment support.
- Awareness Raising and Culture Change: Raising awareness of the challenges and skills of people with disabilities is a key strategy adopted by countries to combat prejudice and create an inclusive work environment.
- Inclusion in the labour market: Many organizations and companies have shown greater commitment to recruiting and supporting workers with special needs, recognizing the value of diversity in a work environment.

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Despite various policies aimed at promoting the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the labour market, the available data and results of our field research indicate that there is still a substantial gap in youths with special needs employment.

Our publication has explored how improved quality can be achieved by creating better opportunities in the open labour market, which relies, to a significant extent, on providing reasonable accommodations and flexibility to enable individuals with special needs to work while retaining their disability allowances. Education and training are also crucial in preparing individuals with special needs to meet the demands of the modern labour market.

The role of the Universities is crucial for the success of the process. It is considered an authoritative point of reference from all stakeholders and has all the necessary competencies to be the collector of needs and demands.

The main areas to focus on are:

- Promotion of an inclusive culture and strategies among all stakeholders: people with special needs, educational institutions, public authorities, public and private companies, and social services.
- Training of a specialized tutor, who serves as both an expert and a mediator within the “work system.”. This tutor must consider the expectations and functional profile of the young person with disabilities, as well as the requirements of the work environment (such as location accessibility, necessary services, presence of facilitators, etc.).
- A well-organized and structured approach to internships and traineeships that enables young people with disabilities to receive valuable training that prepares them not only for the professional realm but also equips them for social engagement (Salerni, 2016)
- Enhancement of the vocational maturity levels of students with disabilities, based on in-depth studies regarding the skills necessary for finding and securing internships or jobs (Giaconi and Del Bianco, 2019)
- Empowerment of students, providing specific support to increase their self-awareness of abilities and needs and equipping them with decision-making and problem-solving strategies.
- Network among professionals involved in working environment

In conclusion, the implementation of fair and accessible work environment traineeships also for people with special need requires not only the sharing of a physical place, but inclusive communities able to share clear values, policies, and practices (Cottini, 2021; Giaconi et al., 2020; Caldin, Scollo, 2018; Cologon, 2014). We believe it is important to adopt beneficial and widely applicable approaches that can be adapted in various social, cultural, and institutional settings to foster meaningful networking.

This research, which is part of the In-Work Project, aims to provide the foundation to create methodological guidelines that encourage and get the basis to design, develop and implement work-integrated learning activities to answer the identified needs, and consider the resources of

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the places, and to involve stakeholders all over the process of designing work integrated learning activities, promote joint development, and integration of practices into the involved organisations.

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