

RESEARCH REPORT

Employment of young people with disabilities in the EU



NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities

September 2026

Funded by:



Co-funded by
the European Union



Project Partners:



FINANCED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FREEDOM -
CENTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS DEVELOPMENT FOR 2018-2030 CSODev

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NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

The disability employment gap has not been bridged, even though the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021– 2030 establishes a framework that promotes labour market inclusion for persons with disabilities across Member States, and the Reinforced Youth Guarantee explicitly recognises young persons with disabilities as a priority target group as well. In this report, we aim to identify actions that would help us bridge this gap, especially for young people with disabilities.

First, we present an overview of the difficult situation of young persons with disabilities on the labour market. They are significantly less attached to the labour market and face more precarious working conditions. These problems relate to lower participation in education, higher drop-out rates and lower educational attainment of young persons with disabilities. Better alignment between qualifications and labour market needs can improve employment prospects, particularly for those who feel under-qualified. The NEET rates for young persons with disabilities in the EU are also high, which necessitates expanding access and completion rates in higher education and STEM fields among these populations.

In the second chapter, we describe results from a survey of organizations supporting young persons with disabilities in seeking employment. We aimed to identify the main challenges and barriers to finding jobs for the organization's clients, possible innovations, and ways to improve interinstitutional collaboration. The findings show that accessibility remains a major concern, even among organizations meant to support persons with disabilities. Moreover, innovative technologies are underused. Social innovations that brought different social services together in widely accessible locations were highly successful but unfortunately rare. Collaboration between institutions is considered important, particularly in employer engagement strategies, staff training and capacity building, and supported employment models.

The third chapter discusses issues related to disability inclusion in the Reinforced Youth Guarantee in several European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland). National implementation remains uneven, and access to tailored, continuous school-to-work support is still rare. The insufficient personalized support and fragmented coordination between employment, education and social services are especially problematic. Limited data and monitoring systems are a contributing factor. Stronger mainstreaming of disability is needed to ensure effective implementation. Key priorities include improving cross-sector coordination, developing personalised support pathways, and strengthening disability-sensitive monitoring and accessibility measures.

1. YOUNG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON THE EU LABOUR MARKET

Executive Summary

Young persons with disabilities face many difficulties on the labour market. They are significantly less attached to the labour market, despite expressing a stronger willingness to work than their counterparts without disabilities.

Moreover, persons with disabilities face more precarious working conditions. While they enjoy slightly more flexible arrangements, they also work under fixed-term contracts more often and report greater dissatisfaction with their hours. Efforts to reduce precarious employment and support flexible working arrangements can improve retention and satisfaction among employed persons with disabilities.

These problems relate to lower participation in education, higher drop-out rates and lower educational attainment of young persons with disabilities. This education gap is estimated to explain 27% of the disability employment gap for that age group (Albinowski, Magda & Rozszczypała, 2025). Reducing early school leaving among young people with disabilities is critical.

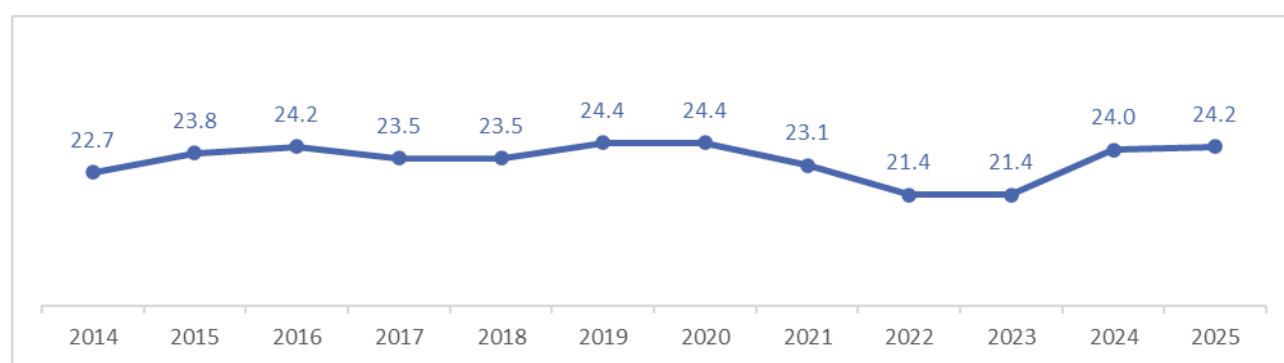
The skills and education of young persons with disabilities are also more often mismatched with actual job requirements. Better alignment between qualifications and labour market needs can improve employment prospects, particularly for those who feel under-qualified.

The NEET rate for young persons with disabilities in the EU is also high, with a large variation among countries. The highest risk factors for being NEET are being male, having less than a tertiary education, leaving education early, and not having studied in STEM fields. Expanding access and completion rates in higher education and STEM fields would significantly reduce both employment and NEET gaps.

1.1. Introduction

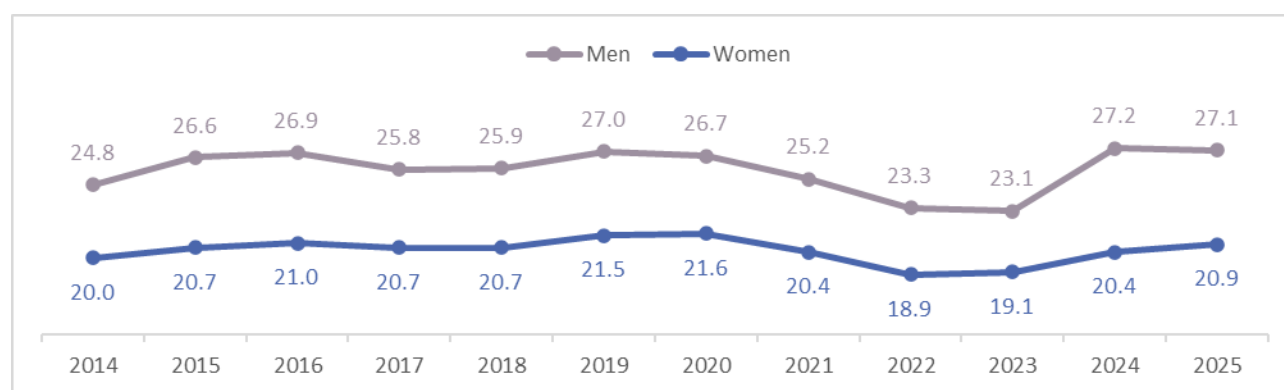
The disability employment gap remained stable between 2014 and 2024 in the EU-27. It was the highest in 2019-2020 at 24 p.p., and the lowest in 2022-2023 at 21 p.p. (Figure 1-1). The gap was lower for women, at about 19-20 p.p., and for men, it reached 23-27 p.p. (Figure 1-2).

Figure 1-1. Total disability employment gap (p.p.) for persons with some or severe activity limitation in the EU-27 (2014-2024)



Source: Own elaboration based on [Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex \(source EU-SILC\) \[hlth_dlm200_custom_19522677\]](#).

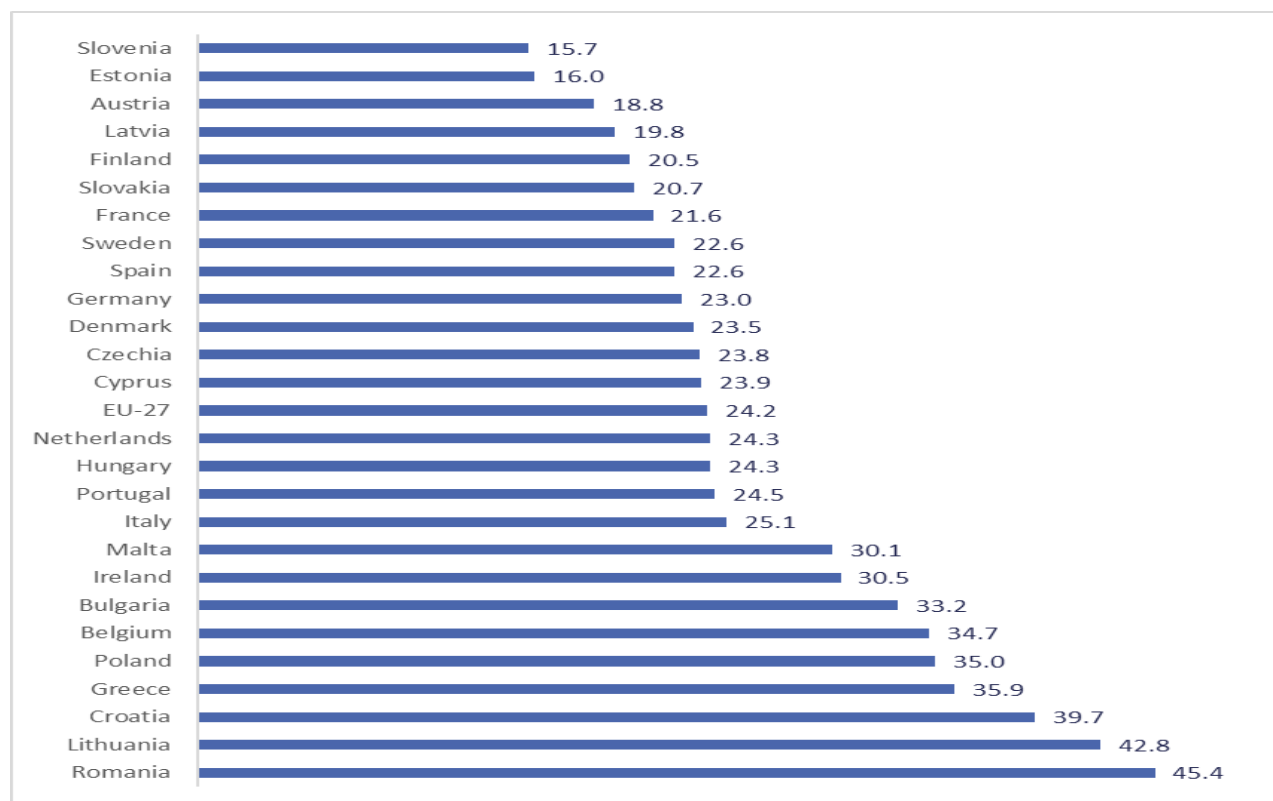
Figure 1-2. Total disability employment gap (p.p.) for persons with some or severe activity limitation in the EU-27 (2014-2024), by gender



Source: Own elaboration based on [Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex \(source EU-SILC\) \[hlth_dlm200_custom_19522677\]](#).

There is considerable variation in the disability employment gap across the EU Member States, ranging from 16% to 45%, with 24% in the EU-27. While in 2025 the disability employment gap exceeded 40 p.p. in Lithuania and Romania, it was below 20 p.p. in Slovenia, Estonia, Austria and Latvia (Figure 1-3).

Figure 1-3. Total disability employment gap for persons with some or severe activity limitation in the EU Member States (2025)



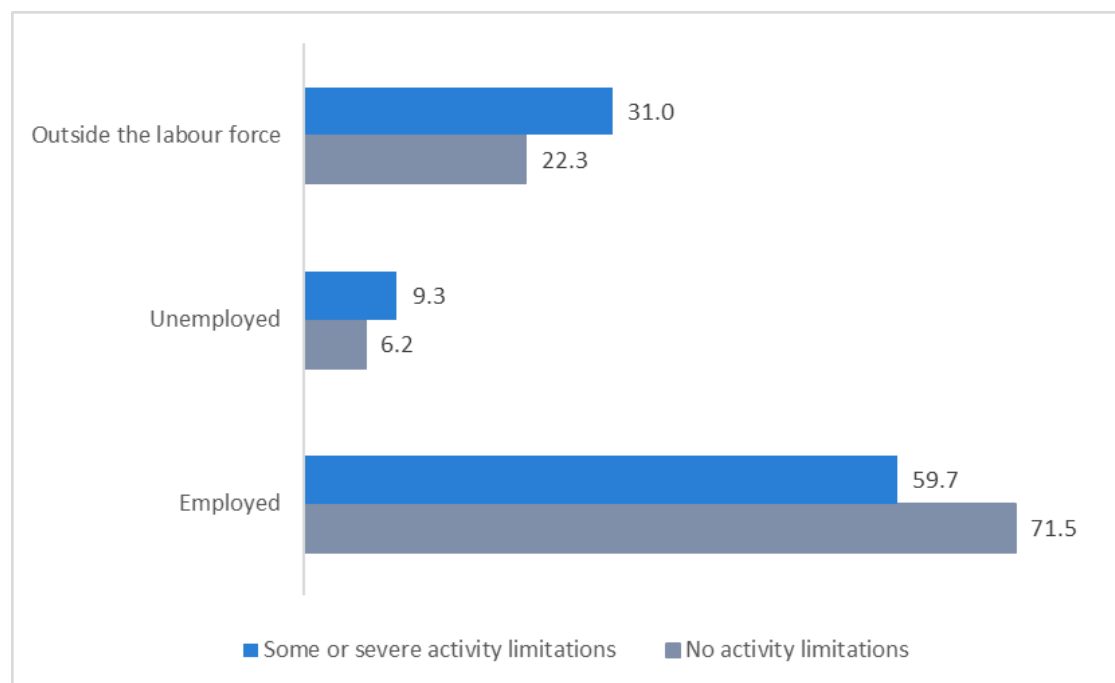
Source: Own elaboration based on [Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex \(source EU-SILC\) \[hlth_dlm200_custom_21640687\]](#).

1.2. Labour force participation

For the following analyses, we use data from the EU-LFS 2024. Only data from direct interviews with persons aged 145-34 living in private households are included. We drop observations with missing data regarding activity limitations, as this variable acts as our measure of disability. We also exclude countries with fewer than 100 observations of persons with activity limitations from the sample. We use weights provided by Eurostat for the ad hoc module.

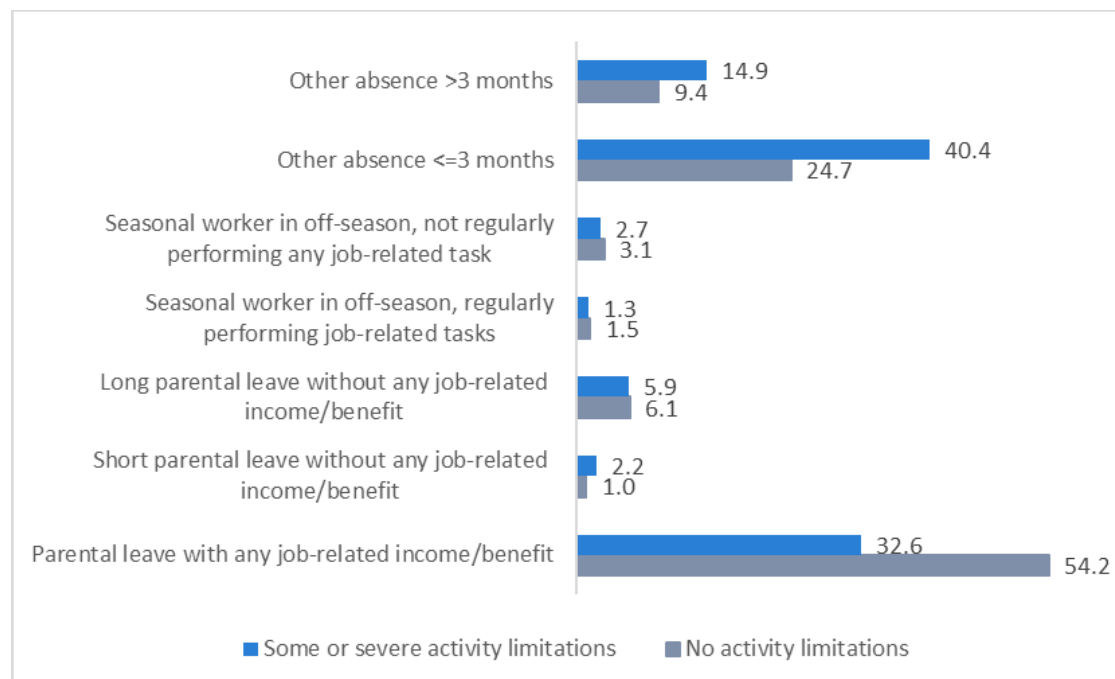
Young persons with disabilities are less attached to the labour market, despite their willingness to work. Compared to persons without disabilities, they are 12 p.p. less likely to be employed, 3 p.p. more likely to be unemployed, and 9 p.p. more likely to remain outside the labour force (Figure 1-4). Unsurprisingly, persons with disabilities are more often absent from work for other reasons than parental leave (55% vs. 34%, Figure 1- 5). They also look for jobs or remain unemployed for longer periods than persons without disabilities (Figures 1-6 and 1-7). Nonetheless, persons with disabilities are 16 p.p. more likely to want to work, even if they are not searching for employment (Figure 1- 8).

Figure 1-4. ILO employment status of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



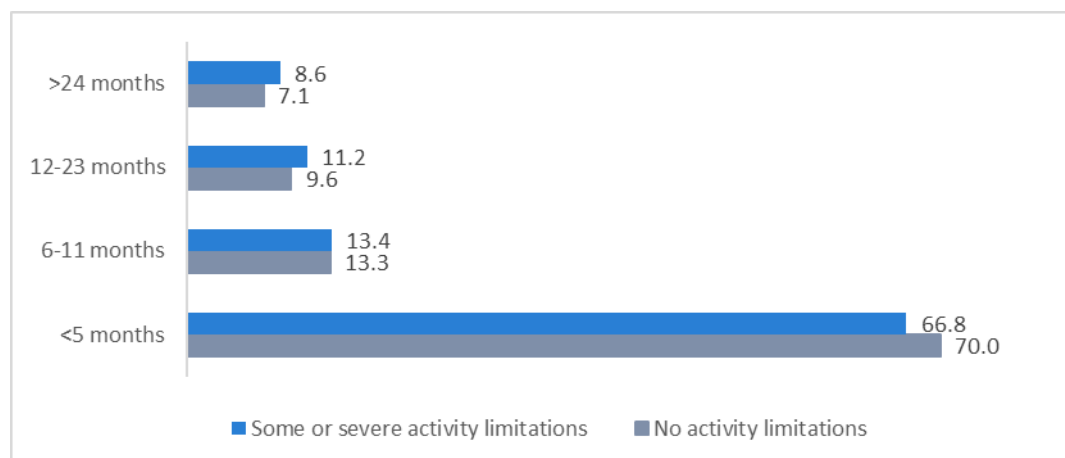
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-5. Job attachment of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



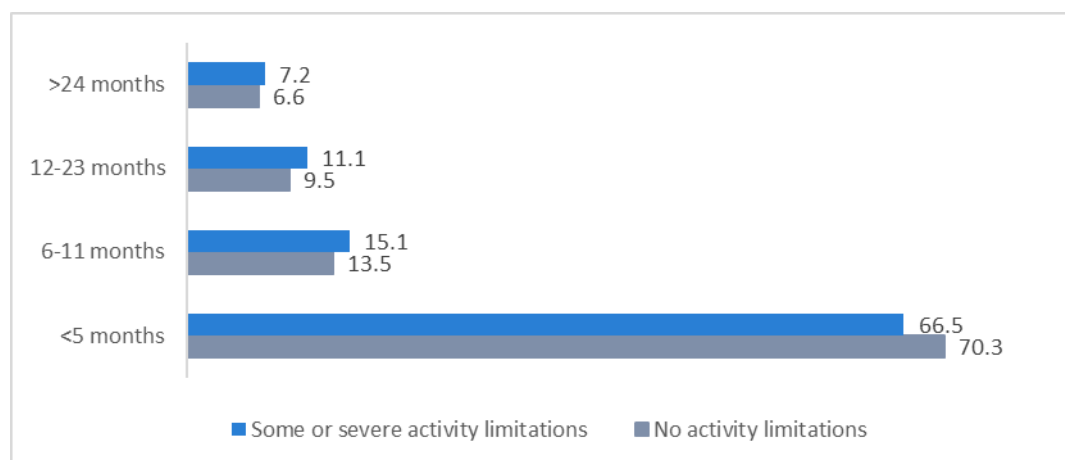
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-6. Duration of search for employment of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



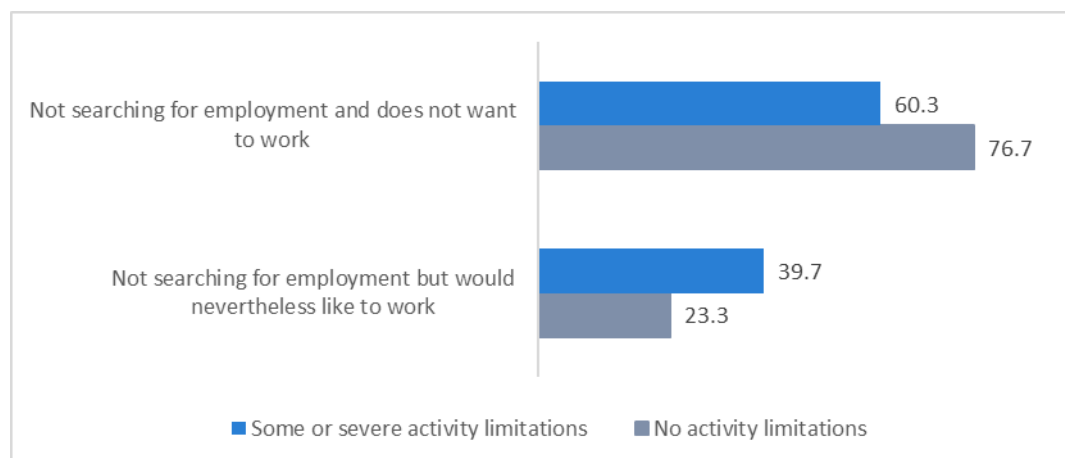
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-7. Duration of unemployment of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-8. Willingness to work even if not searching for employment of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



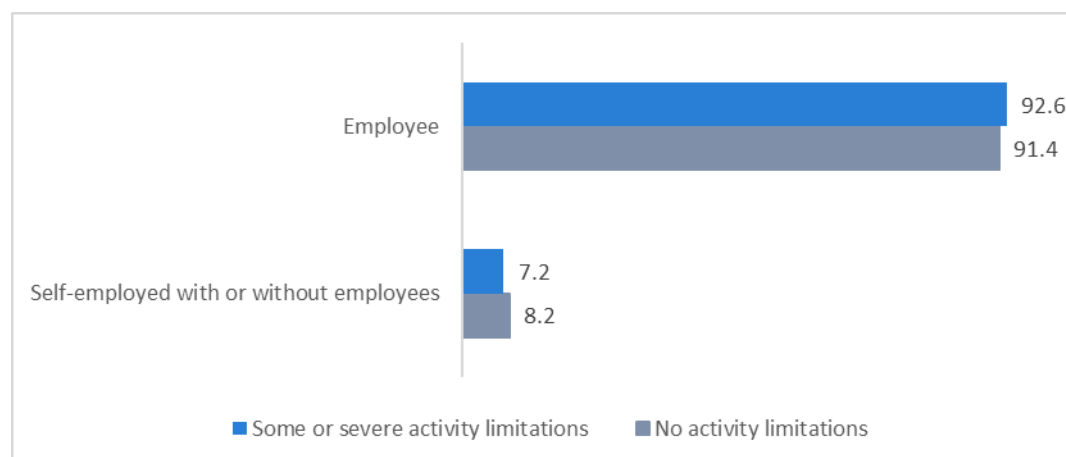
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

The subgroups most vulnerable to economic inactivity in connection with disability are men, city-dwellers, persons with lower than tertiary education, who have left education early, not participated in education in the past year, and those who consider their skills lower than required by their last job. Based on a logistic regression model (see Annex for details), we find the risk of inactivity is higher by 3 p.p. for men with disabilities than for women with disabilities. Persons with disabilities living in cities are 3-4 p.p. more likely to be inactive than their peers living in towns or rural areas. The effect of disabilities is 8 p.p. larger among persons without a tertiary education than among those with one, 4 p.p. larger among those who have dropped out of education, and 5 p.p. lower among participants in education or training. Finally, among persons who consider their skills lower than required at a (last) job, the effect of disabilities is 6 p.p. larger than among those who find their skills adequate (see Table A1 in the Annex for details).

1.3. Working conditions

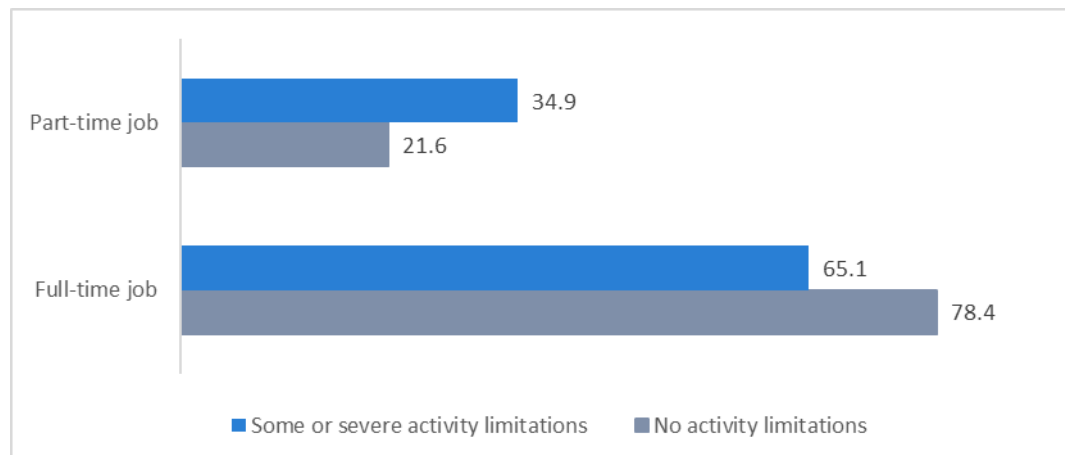
Working conditions of persons with disabilities are more transient. Although having a disability does not affect employment status (being an employee or self-employed, Figure 1-9), persons with disabilities are more often on fixed-term contracts by 4 p.p. and work part-time by 13 p.p. (Figures 1-10 and 1-11). In a similar vein, about half of persons with disabilities would rather work fewer hours, while most persons without disabilities find their working hours satisfactory (Figure 1-12). More persons with disabilities look for another job compared to persons without disabilities (18% vs. 8%, Figure 1-13).

Figure 1-9. Status in employment at the main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



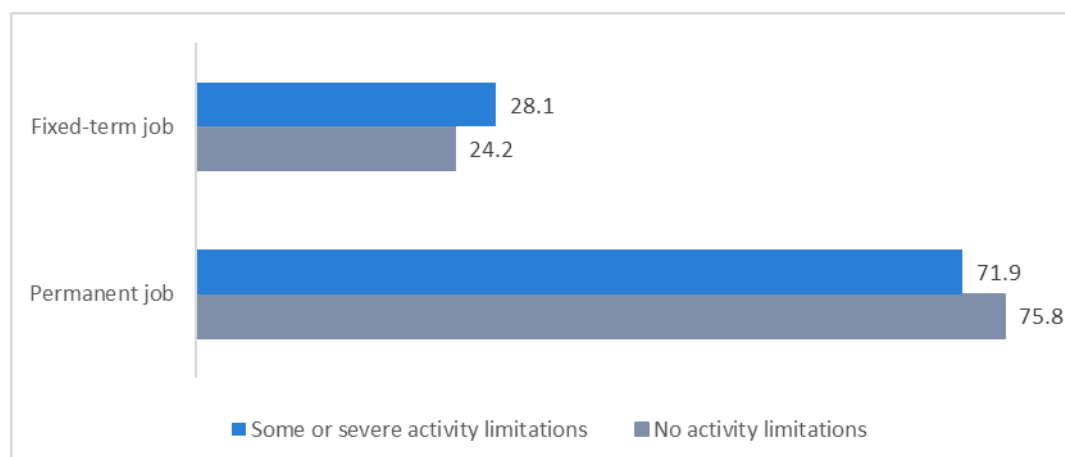
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-10. Full- or part-time at the main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



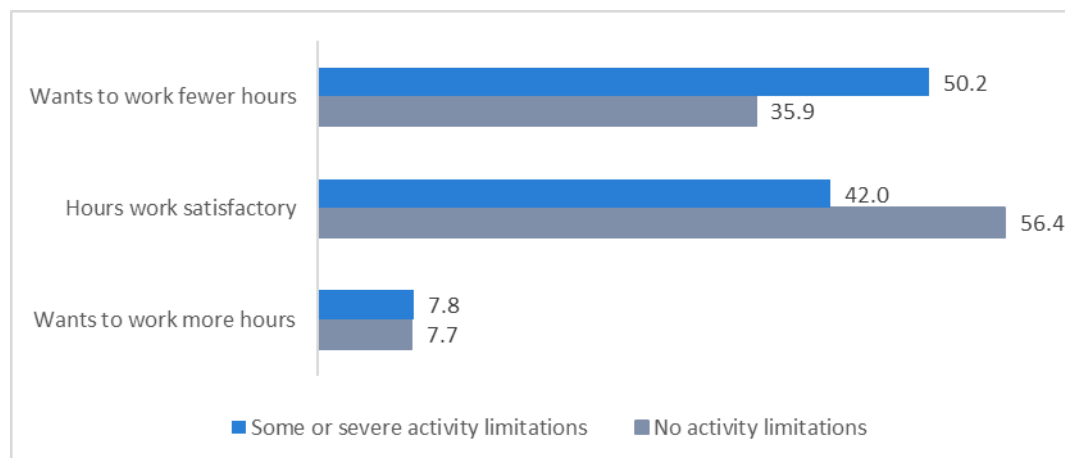
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-11. Permanency of the main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



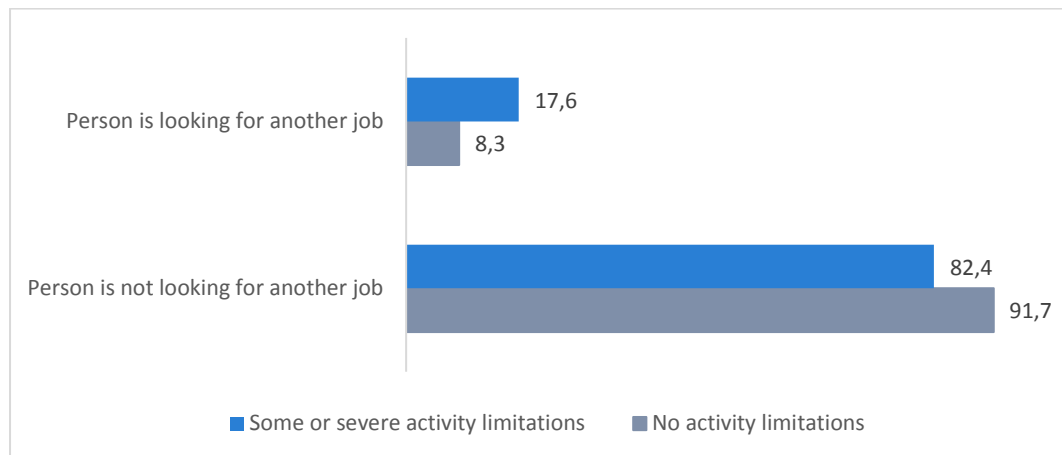
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-12. Satisfaction with hours worked of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

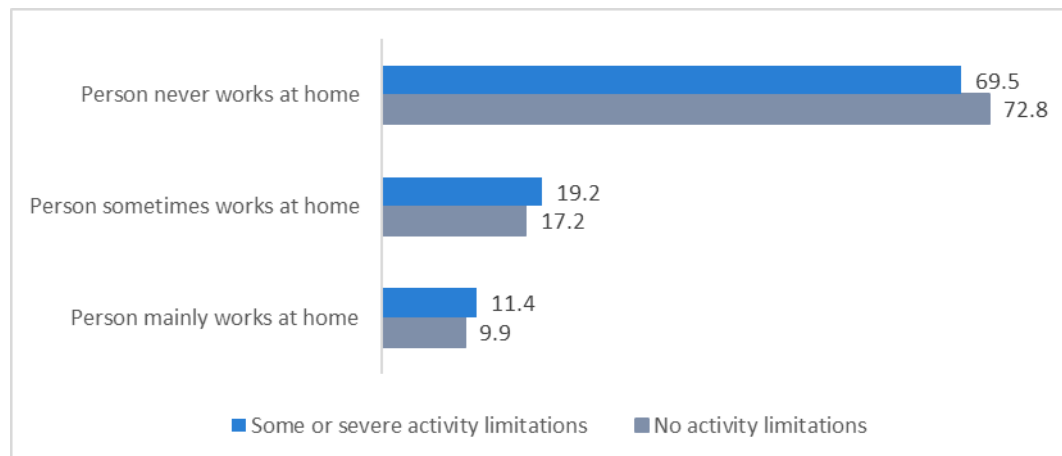
Figure 1-13. Looking for another job - persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

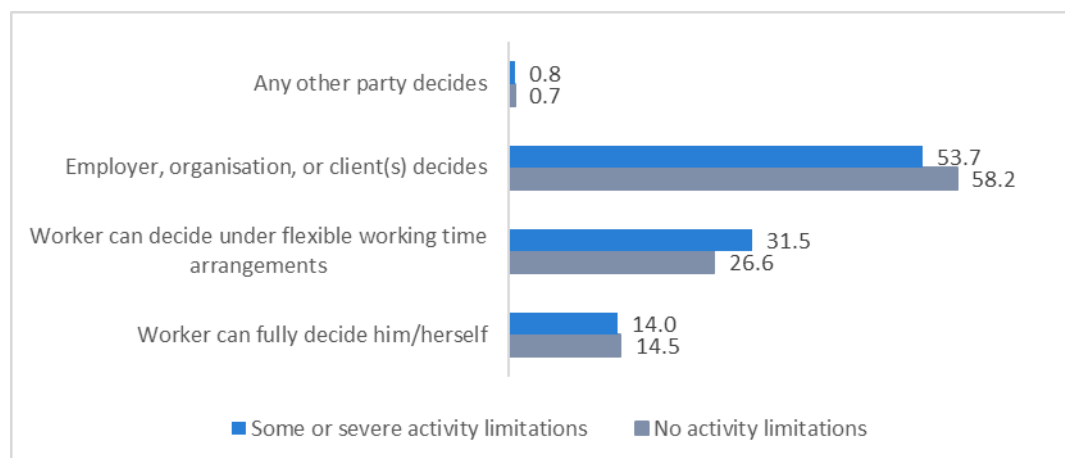
Persons with disabilities have slightly more flexible working arrangements. They are 3 p.p. more likely to work from home (Figure 1-14), and a higher share of persons with disabilities have some control over their working hours (32% vs. 27% of persons without disabilities, Figure 1-15).

Figure 1-14. Working at home at the main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-15. Decision on start and end of working time of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

1.4. Education

Young adults with disabilities participate in education less often and are more likely to drop out early. Their participation rate is 14 p.p. lower than that of persons without disabilities. Persons with and without disabilities who are aged 25-54 participate in education and training similarly often, while for older persons with disabilities the participation rate is lower by 3 p.p. (Table 1-1). Drop-out rates of persons with disabilities reach 25%, exceeding the 8% rate of persons without disabilities. The difference is especially high for men, by 20 p.p., while for women it reaches 13 p.p. (Table 1-2). This contributes to lower tertiary education attainment of persons with disabilities (Table 1-3).

Table 1-1. Participation rate in education and training by level of activity limitation in the EU-27 (2024)

	Some or severe activity limitation	No activity limitation
18-24 years	50.6	64.5
25-34 years	22.4	22.6
35-44 years	15.5	15.4
45-54 years	12.1	13.6
55-64 years	7.0	10.2

Source: Own elaboration based on [Participation rate in education and training \(last 4 weeks\) by level of disability \(activity limitation\) \[trng lfs 16 custom 19267714\]](#).

Table 1-2. Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) by gender and level of activity limitation in the EU-27 (2024)

	Some or severe activity limitation	No activity limitation
Men	30.3	9.2
Women	19.5	6.7
Total	24.6	8.0

Source: Own elaboration based on [Early leavers from education and training by level of disability \(activity limitation\)](#) [edat lfse 40 custom 19539061].

Table 1-3. Educational attainment by level of disability (activity limitation) in the EU-27 (2024)

	At most lower secondary (ISCED levels 0-2)	General upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED levels 34 and 44)	Vocational upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED levels 35 and 45)	Tertiary (ISCED levels 5-8)
25-34 years				
Some or severe activity limitation	26.9	11.0	32.1	30.0
No activity limitation	12.6	11.3	30.2	45.9
35-44 years				
Some or severe activity limitation	28.0	8.8	34.6	28.7
No activity limitation	15.4	9.5	31.3	43.8
45-54 years				
Some or severe activity limitation	30.9	7.8	37.8	23.4
No activity limitation	18.9	10.4	34.8	36.0
55-64 years				
Some or severe activity limitation	34.1	7.5	41.1	17.3
No activity limitation	23.9	10.5	37.1	28.4

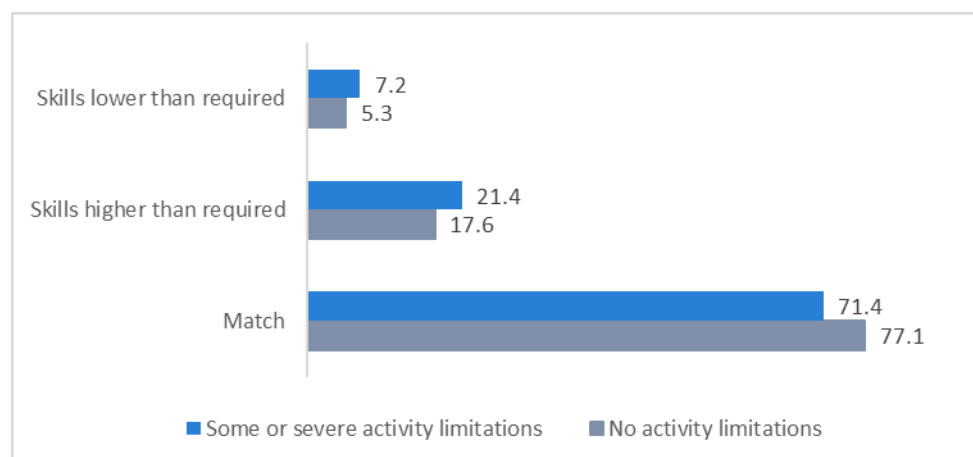
Source: Own elaboration based on [Population in private households by educational attainment level and level of disability \(activity limitation\)](#) [edat lfs 9920 custom 21512302].

Educational attainment of persons with disabilities is lower, but some progress has been made regarding general upper secondary education. The share of persons with general upper secondary education is about 11% both for persons with and without disabilities in the 25-34 age

group. For older age groups attaining this level, there is a disability education gap of 1-3 p.p. This gap is the largest for persons aged 55-64. Older persons with disabilities have vocational upper secondary education more often than persons without disabilities by about 10 p.p. This difference is reduced to 2 p.p. in case of younger persons with disabilities. The educational attainment gap in tertiary education reaches 11-16 p.p. It is the highest for the youngest age group (Table 1-3). According to Albinowski, Magda & Rozszczypała (2025), the disability education gap accounts for 27% of the disability employment gap among individuals aged 25-34 and 11% among individuals aged 25-64. Thus, insufficient educational attainment prevents persons with disabilities from taking up employment.

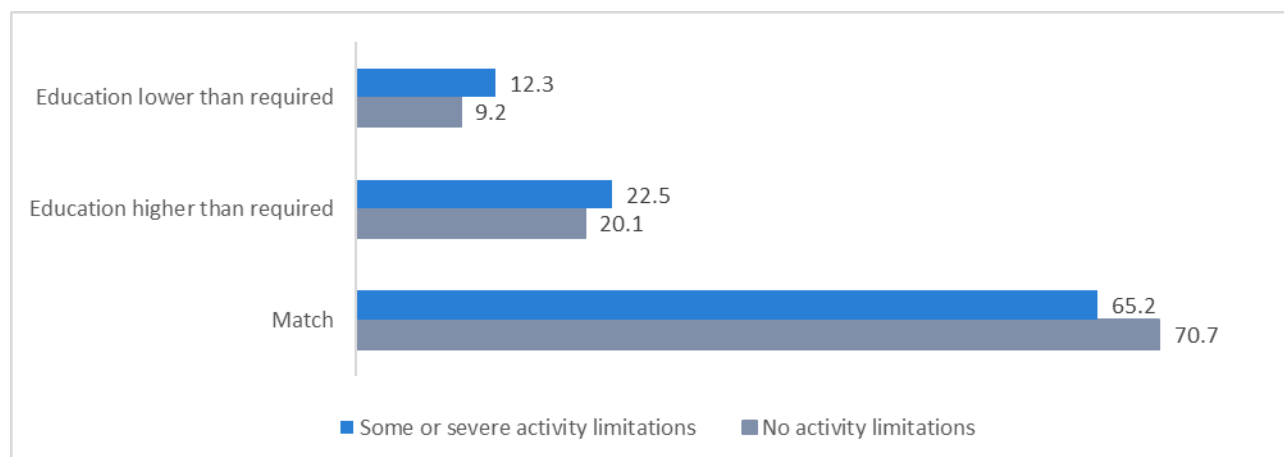
Persons with disabilities see their skills, level and field of education as less well matched to their job place than persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities report more often that their skills are lower (by 2 p.p.) and higher than required by their jobs (by 4 p.p.; Figure 1-16). Their answers follow a similar pattern regarding their level of education, indicating that it is lower than expected 3 p.p. more often, and higher than expected 2 p.p. more often (Figure 1-17). Finally, persons with disabilities are more likely to do jobs not requiring specific education (by 2 p.p.) or jobs that have no overlap with their field of education at all (by 3 p.p., Figure 1-18).

Figure 1-16. Match between skills and current/last main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



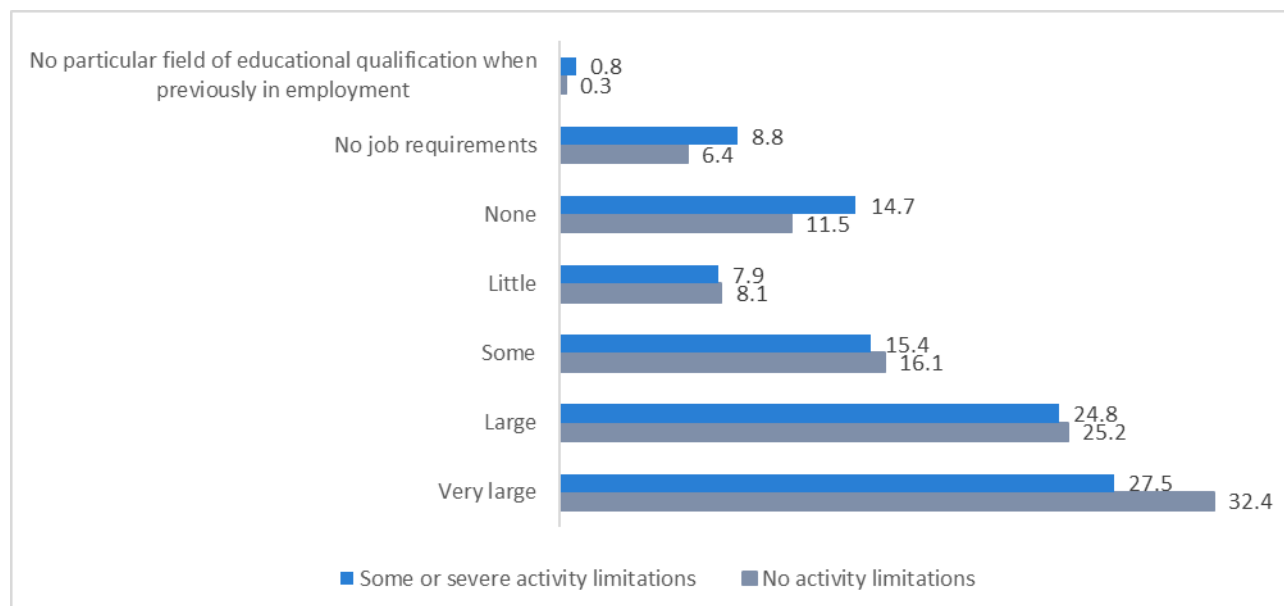
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-17. Match between educational attainment level and current/last main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Figure 1-18. Match between field of highest level of education successfully completed and current/last main job of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27 (2024), by activity limitation



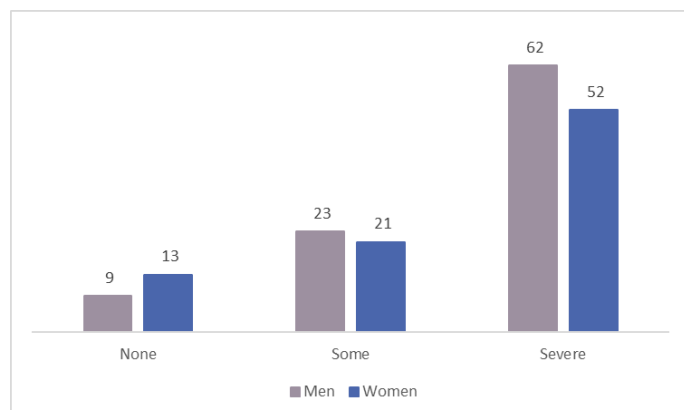
Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

1.5. Persons neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET)

While women without disabilities are more likely to be NEET, NEET rates are higher for men than women with disabilities. Among persons without disabilities, the NEET rate for women is 4 p.p. higher than for men. However, among persons with disabilities, it is men who are neither in employment nor in education and training more often. The difference between NEET rates of men

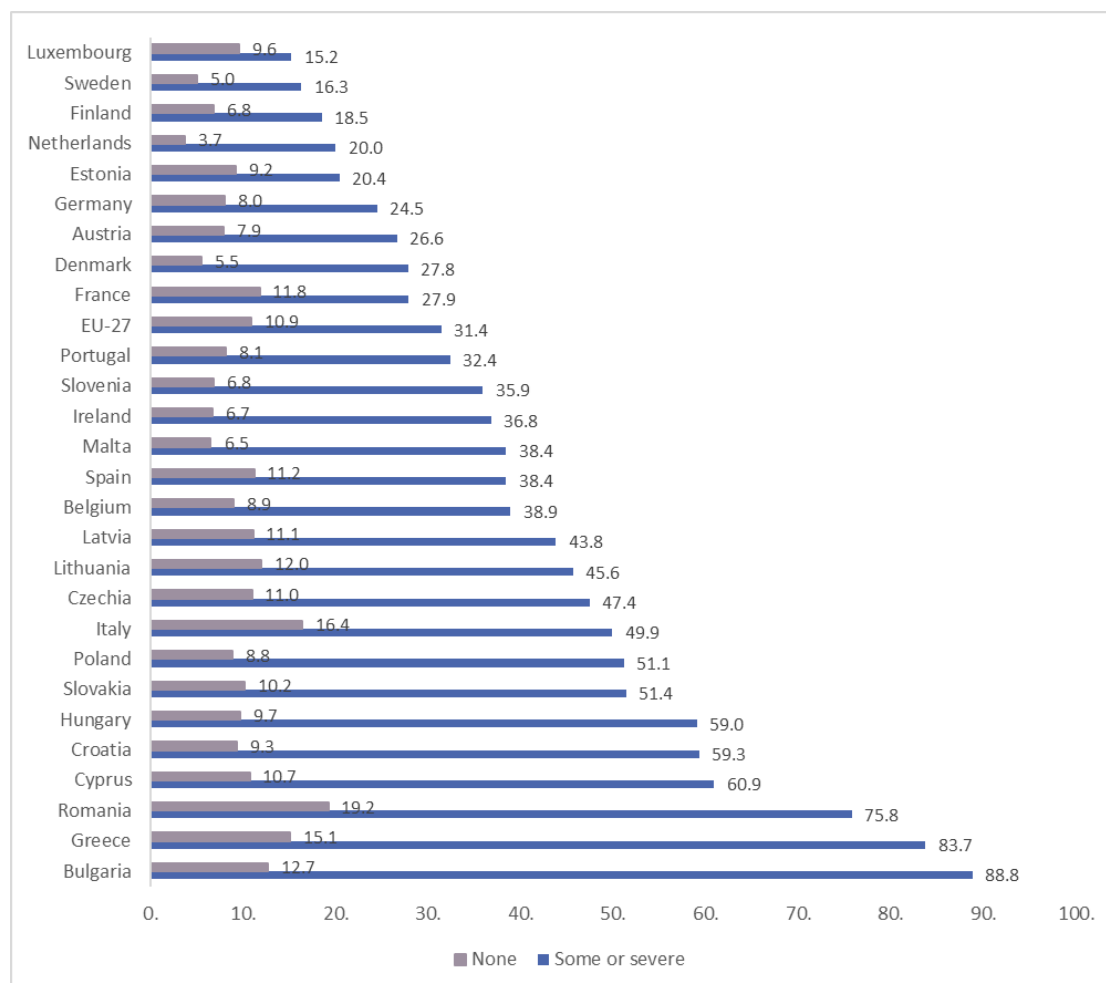
and women reaches 2 p.p. in case of some activity limitations, and 10 p.p. for severe activity limitations.

Figure 1-19. NEET rates of men and women aged 15-34, by activity limitation in the EU-27 (2024)



Source: Own elaboration based on [Young persons neither in employment nor in education and training by level of disability \(activity limitation\) \(NEET rates\) \[edat lfse 39 custom 19523177\]](#)

Figure 1-20. NEET rates of persons aged 15-34, by activity limitation in the EU-27 (2024)



Source: Own elaboration based on [Young persons neither in employment nor in education and training by level of disability \(activity limitation\) \(NEET rates\) \[edat lfse 39 custom 21561142\]](#)

The NEET rates for persons with disabilities across EU Member States range from 15% to 89%, with the EU-27 rate at 31%. In Luxembourg, Sweden, and Finland, NEET rates for persons with disabilities are below 20%, while in Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria they exceed 75%.

The subgroups most vulnerable to being NEET in connection with disability are men, persons with lower than tertiary education, who have not graduated in STEM fields, who have left education early, and who have dropped out of lower than tertiary education. Based on a logistic regression model, we find the risk of inactivity is higher by 5 p.p. for men with disabilities than for women with disabilities. The effect of disabilities is 11 p.p. larger among persons without a tertiary education than among those with one, 3 p.p. lower among graduates of STEM fields, and 4 p.p. larger among those who have dropped out of education (see Table A2 in the Annex for details).

1.6. Conclusions

Young persons with disabilities face compounding disadvantages across education and the labour market, with education gaps being a major driver of employment gaps. Targeted policy interventions, especially around education retention and skill matching, are needed to close these divides.

The disability employment gap in the EU-27 has remained broadly stable at around 21–24 percentage points between 2014 and 2024, with large variation between Member States (ranging from 16% to 45%). Lithuania and Romania have the highest gaps; Slovenia, Estonia, Austria, and Latvia have the lowest.

Young persons with disabilities are significantly less attached to the labour market. They are 12 p.p. less likely to be employed, 3 p.p. more likely to be unemployed, and 9 p.p. more likely to stay out of the workforce altogether. Notably, however, they express a stronger willingness to work (by 16 p.p.) even when not actively searching. The most vulnerable subgroups are men, city-dwellers, those with lower education, early school leavers, and those who feel their skills fall below job requirements.

When employed, persons with disabilities face more precarious conditions: more fixed-term contracts by 4 p.p., more part-time work by 13 p.p., and greater dissatisfaction with their hours. On the other hand, they enjoy slightly more flexible arrangements, with more remote work and greater control over working hours.

Young adults with disabilities participate in education at significantly lower rates (14 p.p. less) and drop out far more often (25% vs. 8%). The tertiary education attainment gap reaches 11–16 p.p. and is widest for the youngest cohort (25–34). This education gap is estimated to explain 27% of the disability employment gap for that age group. Skills and education are also more often mismatched with actual job requirements.

The NEET rate for young persons with disabilities in the EU-27 stands at 31%, with enormous cross-country variation (15% to 89%). Unusually, men with disabilities are more likely to be NEET than women — the reverse of the pattern seen among those without disabilities. The highest risk factors for being NEET are being male, having lower than tertiary education, having left education early, and not having studied in STEM fields.

These findings point to several priority areas for policy action:

- **Education retention and support:** reducing early school leaving among young people with disabilities is critical, with particular attention needed for boys and young men.
- **Pathways to tertiary and STEM education:** expanding access and completion rates in higher education and STEM fields would significantly reduce both employment and NEET gaps.
- **Skill matching and vocational guidance:** better alignment between qualifications and labour market needs can improve employment prospects, particularly for those who feel under-qualified.
- **Targeted outreach to vulnerable sub-groups:** policy interventions should specifically address men with disabilities, those living in cities, and those without recent participation in education or training.
- **Job quality:** efforts to reduce precarious employment (fixed-term, part-time) and support flexible working arrangements can improve retention and satisfaction among employed persons with disabilities.

Annex

We model the probability of 1) labour-market inactivity (Table A1), and 2) being NEET (Table A2) using a logistic regression model with robust standard errors. Dependent variables include demography (gender, 5-year age group, migrant status, degree of urbanisation), education (tertiary education, education in a STEM field, having dropped out of education before), and country controls. For the labour market inactivity models, the dependent variables also include participation in formal and non-formal education or training in the past 12 months, as well as an assessment of the match between one's skills, education field, and level and one's (last) job.

Table A1. Marginal effects of disability across subpopulations on labour-market inactivity of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27

SUBPOPULATION		
Gender		
Men	0.114	**
	(0.011)	
Women	0.087	**
	(0.011)	
Degree of urbanisation		
City	0.120	**
	(0.012)	
Town	0.085	**

Rural area	(0.012) 0.081 ** (0.015)
Tertiary education	
No	0.135 ** (0.012)
Yes	0.049 ** (0.011)
STEM education	
No	0.102 ** (0.010)
Yes	0.094 ** (0.016)
Dropping out of education	
No	0.092 ** (0.010)
Yes	0.132 ** (0.016)
Formal education participation in the last year	
Yes	0.059 ** (0.017)
No	0.114 ** (0.010)
Non-formal education or training activity participation in the last year	
At least one job-related	0.055 ** (0.011)
Only non-job-related/personal	0.102 ** (0.022)
No	0.118 ** (0.011)
Skills lower than job requirements	
No	0.096 ** (0.009)
Yes	0.160 ** (0.026)
Education level lower than job requirements	
No	0.100 ** (0.010)
Yes	0.099 ** (0.016)
Education field matches job requirements	
No	0.100 ** (0.011)
Yes	0.102 ** (0.012)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Total $N = 77,915$.

Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

Table A2. Marginal effects of disability across subpopulations on NEET status of persons aged 15-34 in the EU-27

SUBPOPULATION	
Gender	
Men	0.145 ** (0.007)
Women	0.100 ** (0.006)
Degree of urbanisation	
City	0.124 ** (0.007)
Town	0.119 ** (0.007)

Rural area	0.121 ** (0.009)
Tertiary education	
No	0.163 ** (0.007)
Yes	0.053 ** (0.006)
STEM education	
No	0.129 ** (0.006)
Yes	0.093 ** (0.010)
Dropping out of education	
No	0.112 ** (0.006)
Yes	0.153 ** (0.010)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Total $N=100,760$.

Source: Own elaboration based on EU-LFS 2024 data

References

Albinowski, M., Magda, I. and Rozszczypała, A. (2025). 'The employment effects of the disability education gap in Europe', *Education Economics*, 33(5), pp. 686–699. doi: [10.1080/09645292.2024.2395564](https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2024.2395564)

2. ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ON THE LABOUR MARKET

Executive summary

In May-June 2026 we ran a survey with organizations supporting young people with disabilities on the labour market. We aimed to identify the main challenges and barriers to finding jobs for the organization's clients, best outreach methods, possible innovations, and ways to improve interinstitutional collaboration.

An invitation to participate in the CAWI survey was sent out to Public Employment Services, vocational rehabilitation centres, disability-specific providers, and other organizations working on issues related to employment of persons with disabilities (NGOs, research institutes). English, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish language versions were distributed. Most participants represented Public Employment Services.

Accessibility is a major concern. Inaccessible workplaces, transport difficulties and low awareness of available services remain among the main obstacles to the employment of persons with disabilities. While physical accommodations (ramps, elevators) are fairly common, provisions such as flexible scheduling, home visits, multilingual support, and transport assistance are fairly rare even in organizations meant to support persons with disabilities.

Intersectional, proactive outreach is lacking. Referral networks are used most often, and direct engagement is not widespread. Ethnic minorities, LGBTQ persons, and recent migrants/refugees with disabilities are reached markedly less often.

Social innovations are limited, and the use of innovative technology is underused. Only a small subsample of respondents indicated that their organizations used innovative approaches. When they did, they usually meant introducing digital technologies and service integration. Social innovations involved bringing different social services together in widely accessible locations.

Priority themes for collaboration include employer engagement strategies, staff training and capacity building, and supported employment models. These are seen as the most relevant areas for future EU-level action. Difficulties in cooperation tend to stem from the comparative rigidity of public employment services.

2.1. Organizational characteristics

The majority of organizations that responded to the survey were Polish PES, acting at a local level. As such, the number of clients with disabilities they worked with usually did not exceed a hundred within last year. Young people make up a minority of clients. Most organizations have been working on issues related to employment of persons with disabilities for over 20 years (Table 2-1).

Table 2-1. Characteristics of organizations in the survey sample, by countries of operation

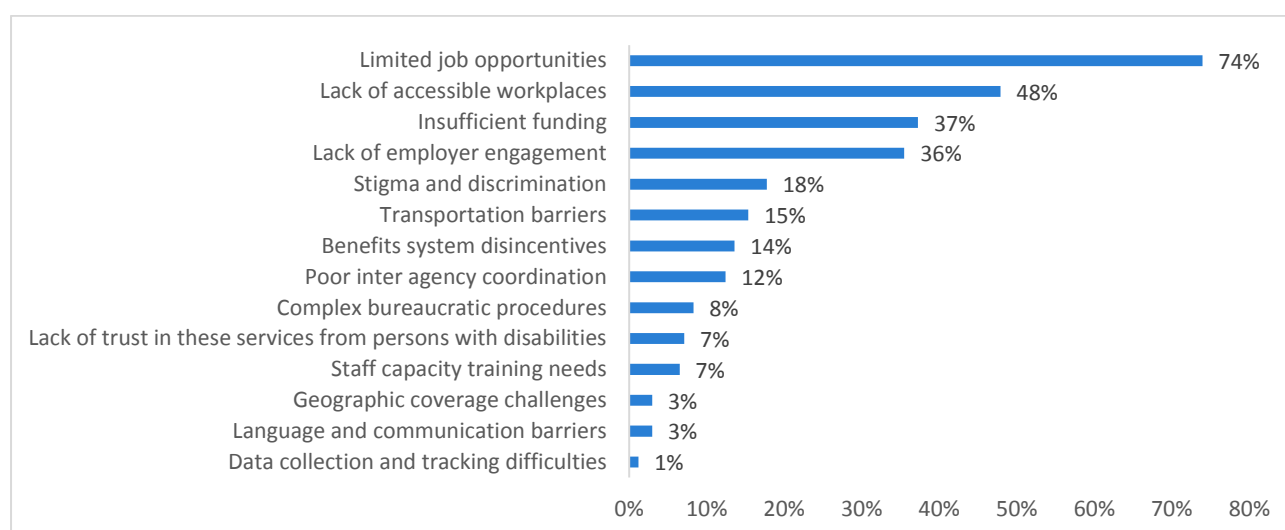
	Italy	Poland	Portugal	Slovenia	Spain	Total
Type of organization						
Disability-specific service provider	-	-	2	-	-	2
NGO	-	2	2	-	-	4
PES	-	155	-	-	-	155
Research institution	-	1	-	-	-	1
Vocational rehabilitation centre	-	-	-	1	-	1
Other	1	1	3	-	1	6
Level of operation						
Local	-	131	2	-	-	133
Regional	-	15	2	1	1	19
National	1	13	3	-	-	17
Organization has worked on disability employment for:						
2-5 years	-	1	0	-	-	1
6-10 years	-	2	1	-	-	3
11-20 years	-	6	1	-	1	8
>20 years	1	150	5	1	-	157
Number of clients with disabilities in the last 12 months						
Fewer than 50	-	87	2	-	1	90
50-100	1	30	-	-	-	31
101-500	-	30	2	1	-	33
501-1,000	-	7	2	-	-	9
1,001-5,000	-	3	1	-	-	4
More than 5,000	-	2	-	-	-	2
Percentage of clients with disabilities younger than 25						
0-10%	1	128	2	-	1	132
11-24%	-	18	1	1	-	20
25-49%	-	1	2	-	-	3
50-74%	-	1	-	-	-	1
75-89%	-	1	-	-	-	1
Don't know/Not tracked	-	10	2	-	-	12
Total	1	159	7	1	1	169

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

2.2. Challenges & barriers

Limited job opportunities, lack of accessible workplaces, insufficient funding, and lack of employer engagement were most often indicated as challenges that the organization faces in the context of finding employment for persons with disabilities (Figure 2-1). Organizations find that employers' prejudices and stereotypes, as well as productivity concerns, and workplace accessibility issues contribute to difficulties in promoting employment of persons with disabilities (Figure 2-2). Furthermore, organizations point to fear of losing benefits, lack of awareness about services, and transportation difficulties as the greatest barriers to accessing services by persons with disabilities (Figure 2-3).

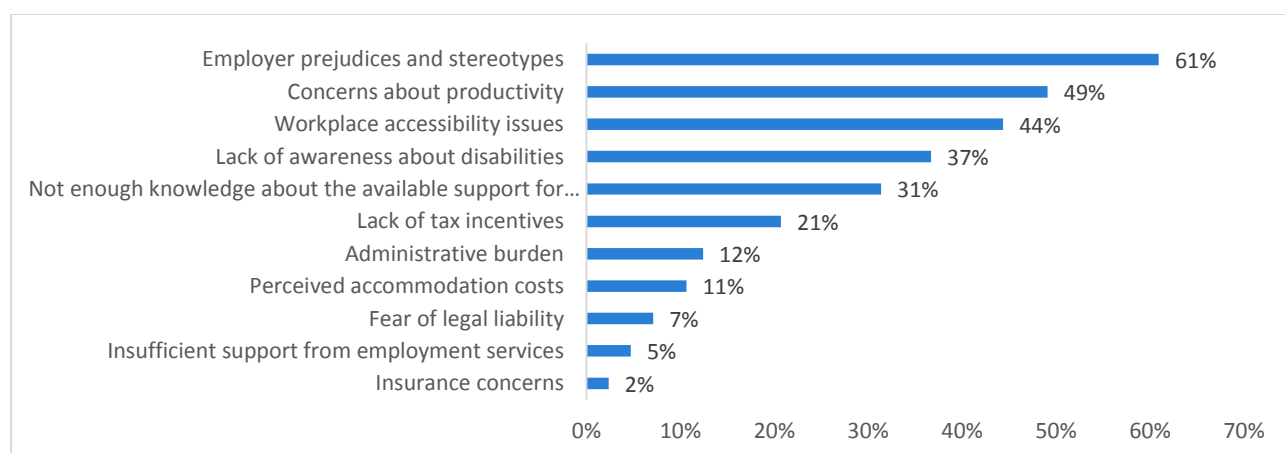
Figure 2-1. Challenges in helping persons with disabilities find employment, as seen by the organizations participating in the survey



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

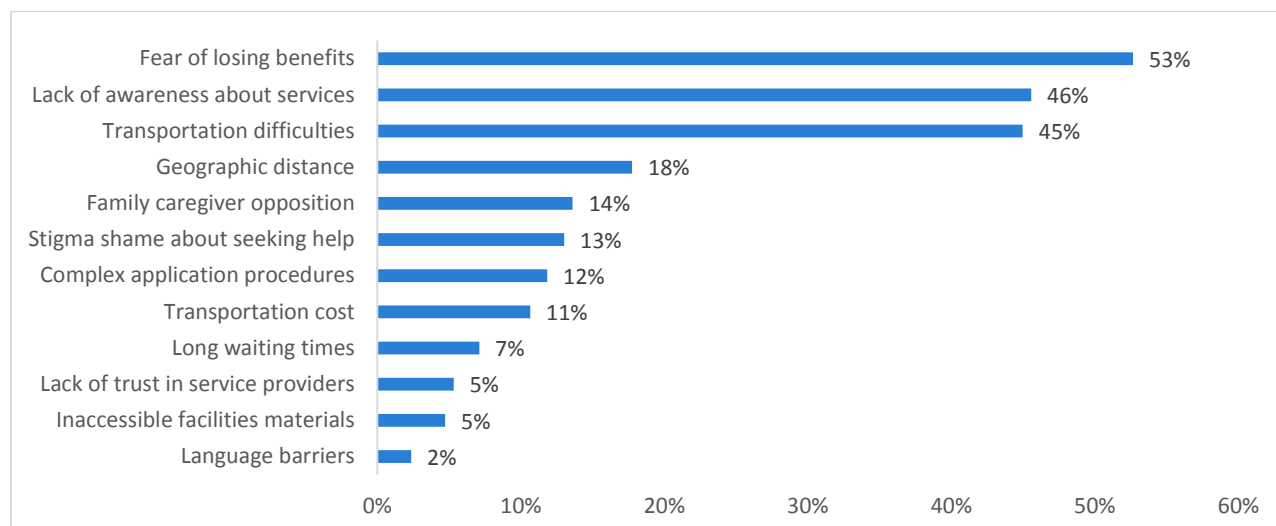
Figure 2-2. Barriers to employment of persons with disabilities on the side of employers, as seen by the organizations participating in the survey



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

Figure 2-3. Possible difficulties that persons with disabilities face in accessing services of the organization, as seen by the organizations participating in the survey

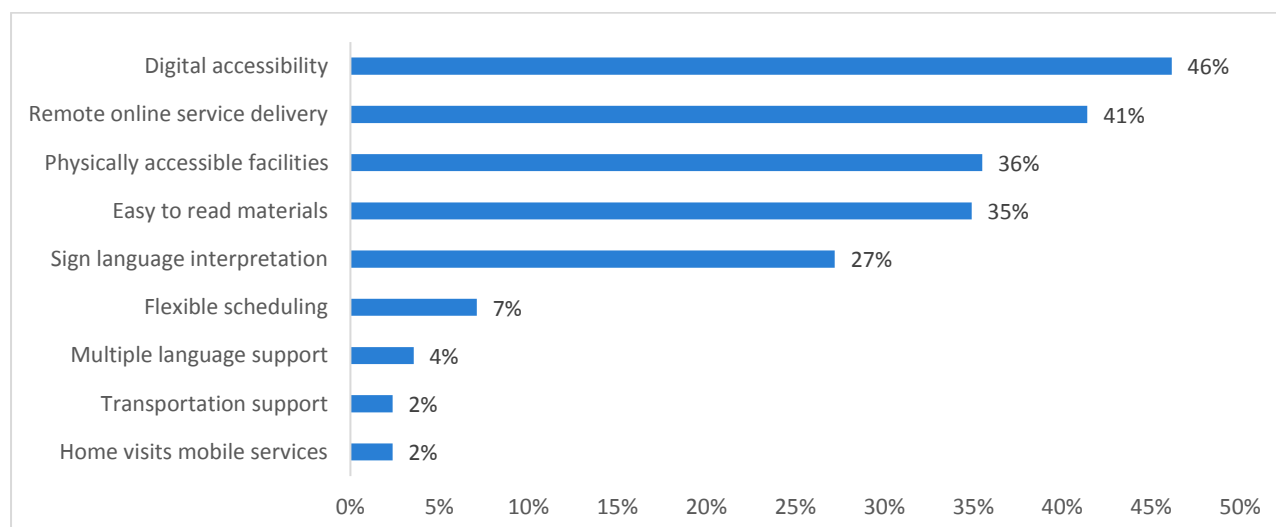


Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

As regards accessibility measures provided by the organizations themselves, the majority of organizations (64%) provide at least some measures. Digital accessibility, remote online service delivery, and physically accessible facilities are among the most widespread. Flexible scheduling, home visits, multiple language support, and transport support remain the rarest (Figure 2-4).

Figure 2-4. Accessibility measures provided by organizations in the survey



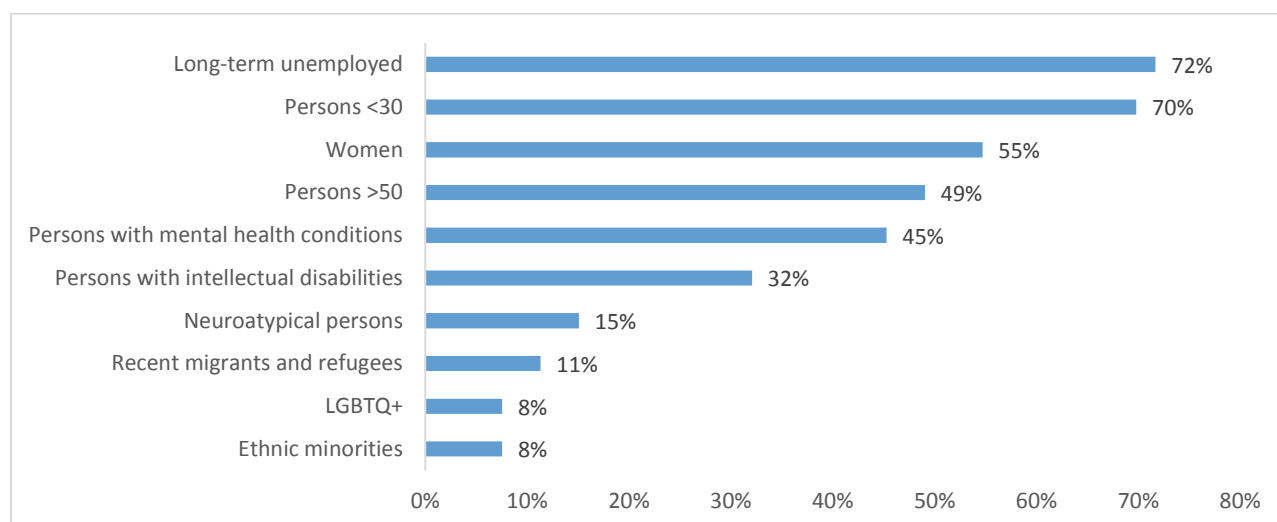
Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

2.3. Outreach

Less than half of the responding organizations identify and reach out to persons with disabilities (44%). For those, the most popular outreach methods were referrals from social services (45%), employer referrals (39%), and partnerships with educational institutions (37%). Online presence, employer referrals, and referrals from social services and/or disability organizations were indicated as best outreach methods. Many organizations reached out to underrepresented persons with disabilities as well, especially long-term unemployed persons with disabilities, young people with disabilities, and women with disabilities. Ethnic minorities with disabilities, LGBTQ populations with disabilities, and recent migrants refugees with disabilities were contacted least often (Figure 2-5).

Figure 2-5. Outreach to underprivileged groups



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

2.4. Innovations

Innovative practices in the last three years were relatively rare in the sample, as they were mentioned in only 15% cases. Respondents who described innovations highlighted the role of modern technologies and the integration of various services in one place.

Innovations

Respondents highlight two directions: bringing employers and people with disabilities (PwDs) together, and co-locating support services in one place. Digital tools add a further layer of reach.



Employer collaboration

Job fairs designed specifically for PwDs help connect employers directly with candidates.

Integrated service points



Job Express

Małopolska bus stations

- Job placement services
- Career counselling
- Legal and psychological advisory
- Activation, motivational and makeover vouchers
- Adaptation scholarships



w Punkt (Bullseye)

Pułtusk County, 2023–2024, ages 18–29

- Career counselling and job placement
- Social welfare support
- Psychological support

Digital and mobile tools



AI tools

Applied across a variety of situations



Mobile devices

Text messages on new job offers



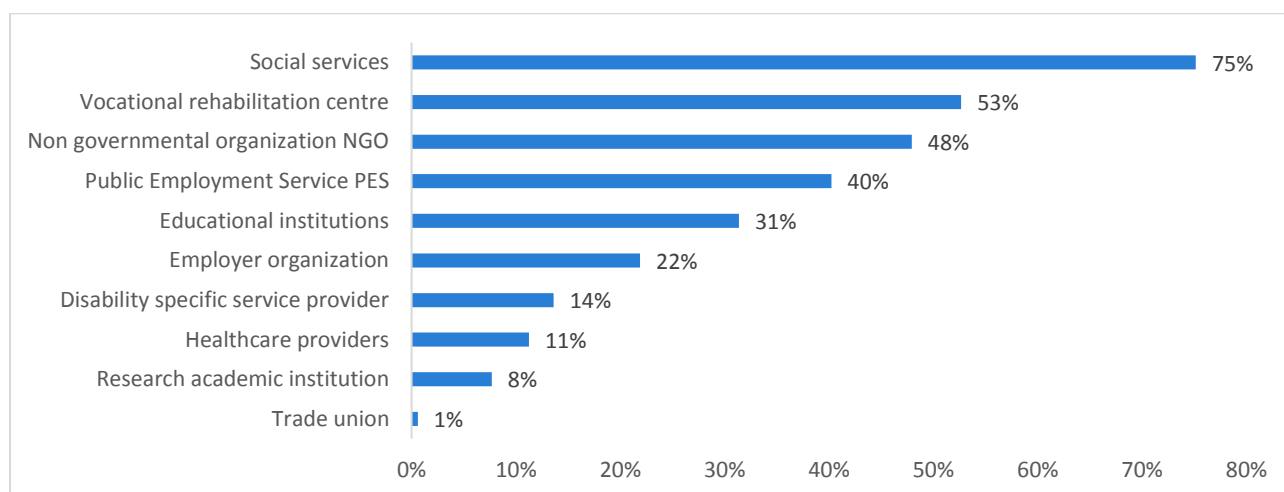
Online conferencing

Remote meetings and counselling

2.5. Collaboration

Most surveyed organizations declared collaborating with other agents (92%), such as social services, vocational rehabilitations centres, and NGOs. Cooperation with healthcare providers, research institutions, or trade unions was mentioned least often (Figure 2-6). Lack of standardized procedures, insufficient funding, and differing organizational priorities were most often indicated as cooperation barriers (Figure 2-7).

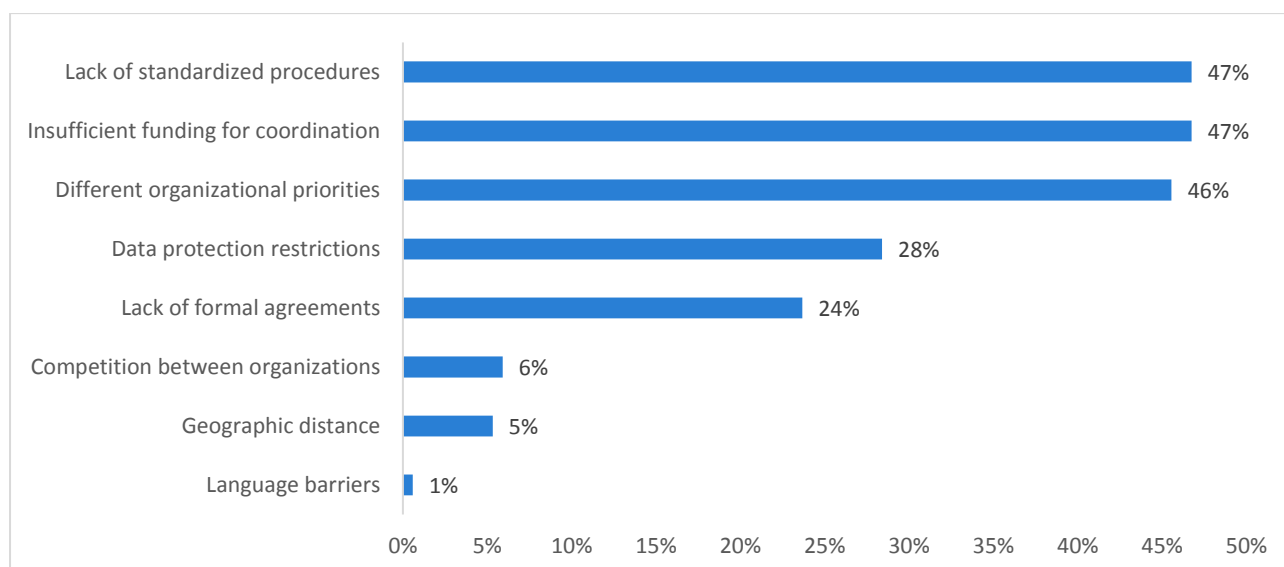
Figure 2-6. Collaboration partners of surveyed organizations



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

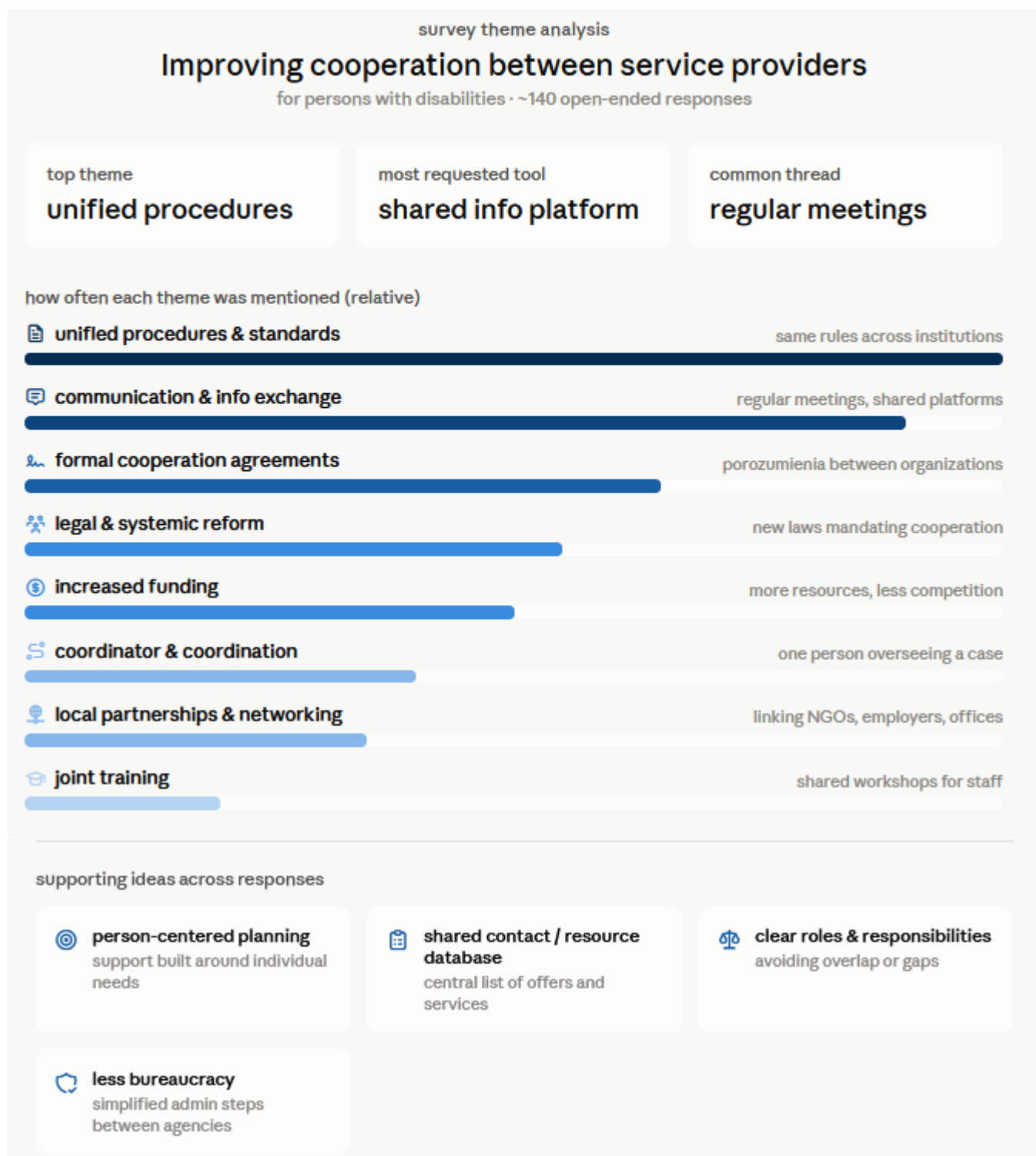
Figure 2-7. Cooperation barriers, according to surveyed organizations



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

Respondents offered some suggestions on how to improve cooperation between institutions. Clear communication, a platform for sharing information, and unified procedures were most often mentioned.

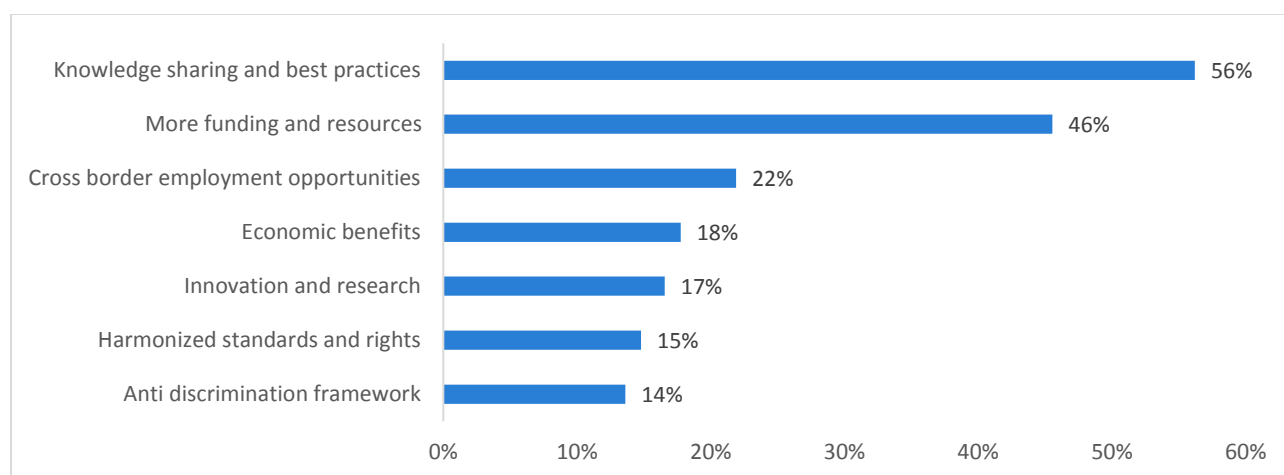


We also asked whether difficulties in cooperation differ depending on the type of organization. While most respondents denied this (70%), the remaining responses highlighted the rigidity of PES partners, which contrasts with NGOs' flexibility. Legal/regulatory rigidity and data-protection formalities came up most often as sources of friction, and respondents noted cooperation is easiest between similar types of organizations (NGO-to-NGO or agency-to-agency) that already share working methods and goals.

2.6. Role of the EU

Most respondent (74%) see benefits to EU-level collaboration on issues related to employment of persons with disabilities. Sharing of knowledge and best practices, increased funding and resources, as well as cross-border employment opportunities motivate these beliefs (Figure 2-8). About half of the respondents (53%) agree that some themes are important for EU-level collaboration. In particular, these include employer engagement strategies, staff training and capacity building, and supported employment models (Figure 2-9).

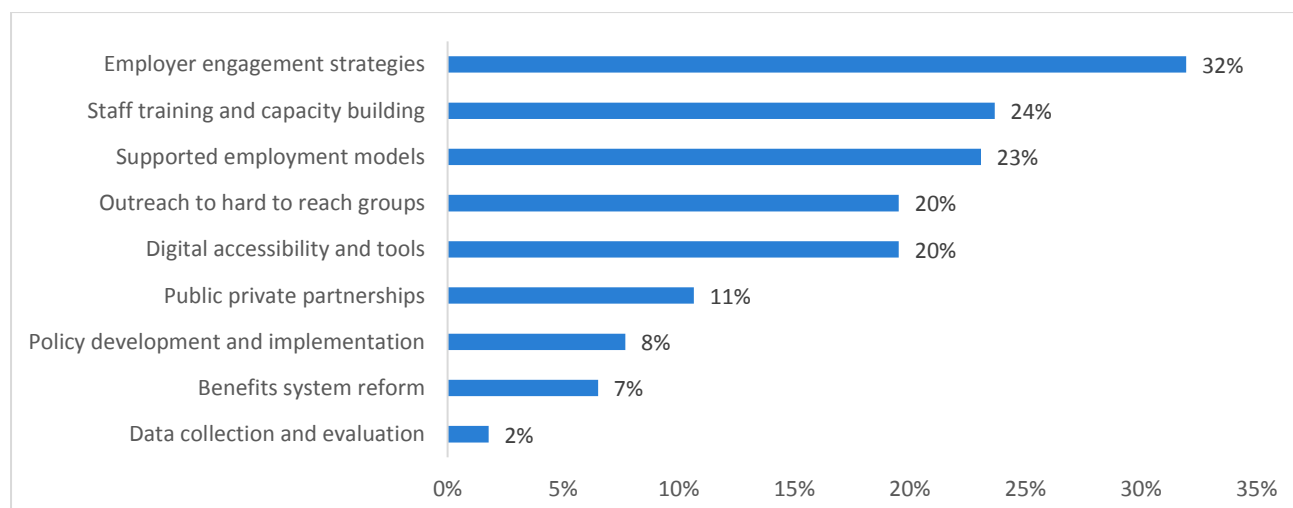
Figure 2-8. Benefits from EU-level collaboration, as seen by the surveyed organizations



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

Figure 2-9. Possible subjects of EU-level collaboration



Note. Respondents could choose up to three options, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

2.7. Conclusions

Although the majority of respondents represented Polish PES, some insights gained from this survey may be valuable in other contexts.

On the demand side, organizations continue to face a narrow labour market for persons with disabilities, compounded by inaccessible workplaces, limited funding, and weak employer engagement. They see further barriers in employers' own prejudices, productivity concerns, and unaddressed accessibility needs. On the client side, fear of losing benefits, low awareness of available services, and transport difficulties remain the principal obstacles to accessing support. While most organizations offer some form of accessibility accommodation, provisions such as flexible scheduling, home visits, multilingual support, and transport assistance are still uncommon.

Proactive outreach is not yet the norm: fewer than half of responding organizations actively identify and approach persons with disabilities, and where outreach does happen, it relies heavily on referral networks - social services, employers, and educational institutions - rather than direct engagement. Certain groups, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ persons, and recent migrants and refugees with disabilities, are reached markedly less often, suggesting that intersectional needs are not yet well addressed by current outreach strategies. Similarly, innovation appears limited, with only a small share of organizations reporting new practices in the past three years, mainly centred on digital technologies and service integration.

Collaboration between organizations is widespread. Difficulties tend to stem from the comparative rigidity of public employment services, and are most easily overcome between organizations of similar type. EU-level collaboration on disability employment is appreciated, especially for the sharing of knowledge and best practices, additional funding, and cross-border opportunities. Around half of respondents identify specific priority themes for such cooperation, with employer engagement strategies, staff training and capacity building, and supported employment models standing out as the most relevant areas for future EU-level action.

These findings point to several priority areas:

- Increased informational outreach, also to underrepresented groups: as some employment barriers relate to the lack of knowledge/awareness of existing services, or stereotypes;
- Improved accessibility of services: not only digital, but also including flexible scheduling and home visits;
- Promoting innovation, especially in strengthening employer engagement.

3. DISABILITY INCLUSION IN EU YOUTH POLICIES: ASSESSING THE REINFORCED YOUTH GUARANTEE IN PORTUGAL, SPAIN, ITALY, AND POLAND

Executive Summary

This policy brief assesses how disability inclusion is addressed within the Reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG) and the broader legislative framework in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland. The analysis shows that EU-level commitments have strengthened the visibility of young persons with disabilities within youth employment policies, but national implementation remains uneven. Across the four countries, disability is formally recognised as a vulnerability factor; however, access to tailored, accessible and continuous school-to-work support is still limited.

A recurrent implementation gap emerges between policy recognition and effective inclusion. Young persons with disabilities continue to face barriers or uneven opportunities linked to inaccessible education and training pathways, weak personalised support, fragmented coordination between employment, education and social services, and persistent labour market discrimination. These barriers are reinforced by territorial inequalities and by limited data and monitoring systems capable of tracking disability-disaggregated outcomes within Youth Guarantee (YG) schemes.

Key Messages

- All four countries formally recognise disability within Youth Guarantee-related frameworks, supported by EU funding instruments such as ESF+ and Recovery funds.
- Despite policy recognition, tailored pathways and personalised support for young persons with disabilities remain limited.
- Structural barriers persist, particularly regarding accessibility, education-toemployment transitions and labour market discrimination.
- Fragmented coordination between employment, education, and social services weakens the effectiveness of support measures.
- Monitoring systems continue to lack robust disability-disaggregated indicators and comparable evidence.

The analysis shows that the RYG remains an important policy lever for promoting youth inclusion, but stronger disability mainstreaming is needed to ensure effective implementation. Key priorities include improving cross-sector coordination, developing personalised support pathways, and strengthening disability-sensitive monitoring and accessibility measures.

3.1. Policy Context and Rationale

3.1.1. EU framework on disability

Disability inclusion has become an increasingly central dimension of European social and employment policy. The EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021– 2030 establishes a comprehensive framework aimed at promoting equal participation, accessibility, independent living and labour market inclusion for persons with disabilities across Member States. The Strategy aligns closely with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), to which both the European Union and all Member States are signatories. Its objectives emphasise the removal of physical, digital, institutional and social barriers that continue to restrict participation in education, employment and community life.

The relevance of disability inclusion is particularly significant given demographic trends within Europe. Approximately one quarter of the EU population reports some level of disability, making disability rights and accessibility a major cross-cutting policy concern affecting employment, education, social inclusion, and territorial cohesion (European Commission, 2021).

3.1.2. Reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG)

The RYG, introduced in 2020 as an update of the original 2013 YG initiative, represents one of the European Union's key policy instruments for combating youth unemployment and social exclusion. The initiative aims to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The RYG places stronger emphasis on vulnerable youth groups than the original framework, explicitly recognising young persons with disabilities as a priority target group. Its implementation occurs through national action plans supported by European funding instruments, particularly the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and national implementation plans that adapt the framework to different labour market contexts (Council of the European Union, 2020).

3.1.3. Why disability matters in youth policies

Young persons with disabilities remain disproportionately exposed to risks of unemployment, inactivity and social exclusion across Europe. Compared to their peers, they face more difficult transitions from education to employment due to structural barriers such as limited accessibility, unequal access to education and training opportunities, lower participation in higher education, and persistent labour market discrimination.

These disadvantages contribute to significantly higher risks of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), often resulting in long-term exclusion trajectories beginning early in

adulthood (Eurostat, 2025). Although the RYG formally recognises disability as a vulnerability factor requiring targeted support, important implementation gaps remain across Member States regarding accessibility, tailored activation pathways, personalised support, and cross-sector coordination. Consequently, analysing how disability inclusion is operationalised within national YG frameworks provides important insights into the broader effectiveness and equity of EU youth employment policies.

3.2. Comparative country analysis

3.2.1. Employment gap

Young people with disabilities face significant barriers in entering the labour market, including more difficult school-to-work transitions, limited workplace accessibility, weaker tailored support services, and persistent employer discrimination and stigma. As a result, disability remains a major source of early labour market disadvantage, increasing the risk of long-term inactivity and social exclusion.

The most recent data, referred to 2024, show a clear gap between young people aged 20–29 overall and those reporting difficulties in basic activities. At the EU level, the labour force participation rate is 74.0% for young people overall, compared with 73.5% for those with disabilities, a gap of 0.5 percentage points. The gap is much wider in several countries, including Poland (1.9 points), Spain (1.3), Portugal (1.1), and Italy (0.6). Italy stands out for its particularly low participation rate among young people with disabilities (57.0%), pointing to a double disadvantage: weak youth participation overall and an additional penalty associated with disability. These figures highlight the need for stronger inclusive labour market policies, with greater attention to accessibility, targeted activation measures, and anti-discrimination interventions.

Table 3-1. Labour force participation in 2024 for young people with and without disability

	Employment rate for people aged 20-29		Youth disability employment gap
	With disabilities	Without disabilities	
EU	73.5	74.0	1.0
Portugal	74.3	75.4	1.1
Italy	57.0	57.6	0.6
Spain	70.8	72.1	1.3
Poland	74.0	75.9	1.9

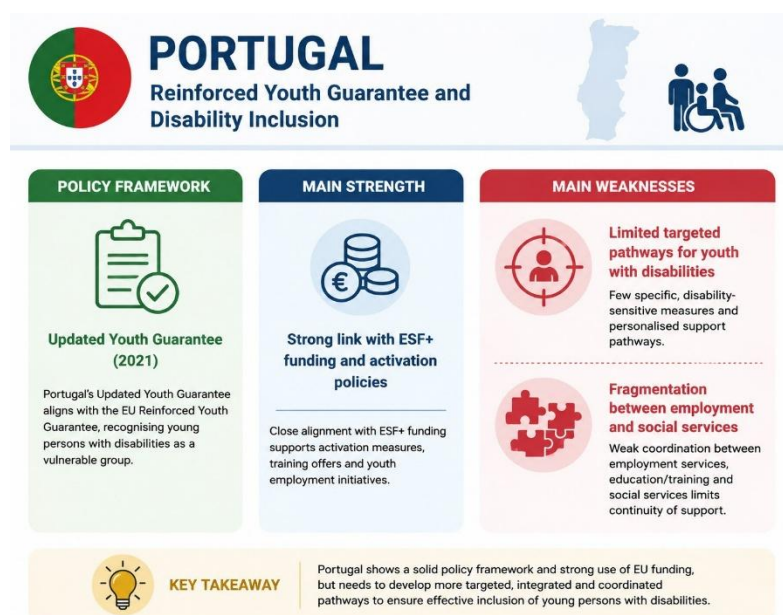
Source: Eurostat data *lfsa_argaedd1*

3.2.2. Country snapshots

Portugal

Portugal's Updated Youth Guarantee (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2021; Council of the European Union, 2020) aligns closely with the objectives of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee,

combining activation measures with the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding to support young people transition into employment. While the overall framework is well established, with the proportion of young people aged 15-29 who are NEET estimated at around 8.7%, below the EU average, evidence suggests that disability-specific pathways remain comparatively underdeveloped, limiting the programmes capacity to address the complex barriers faced by young persons with disabilities.



Recent data from the Disability and Humans Rights Observatory in Portugal shows that people with disabilities remain considerably more exposed to educational and labour market exclusion. According to Eurostat (2025), 32.4% of young persons with disabilities in Portugal were NEET in 2024, compared with 8.1% of young people without disabilities, representing a gap of more than 24 percentage points. Quantitative evidence suggests

cumulative disadvantage trajectories in which educational inequalities are reproduced through labour market exclusion. Despite gradual improvements in employment outcomes, persons with disabilities continue to experience lower employment rates and higher unemployment than the general population. According to the latest Disability and Humans Rights Observatory report (2025), in 2023 persons with disabilities represented only 0.81% of employees in private-sector companies with more than ten workers and 3.4% of public-sector employees (data from 2024). Furthermore, employees with disabilities in the private sector were predominantly women and older workers: 68% were aged 45 years or over, whereas only 11.8% were aged 34 years or younger, highlighting the persistent underrepresentation of younger persons with disabilities in paid employment. These findings raise important concerns regarding the effectiveness of quota systems, supported employment schemes and workplace accommodation measures in facilitating labour market entry for young people with disabilities (Observatório da Deficiência e Direitos Humanos, 2025).

A further structural limitation concerns the fragmentation between employment, education, health, and social support services. Although the Youth Guarantee formally promotes integrated pathways, coordination mechanisms between institutions remain weak and often dependent on local implementation capacity. This institutional fragmentation reduces the effectiveness of personalised

interventions and creates discontinuities in support trajectories, particularly for young people with disabilities, whose transitions often require simultaneous assistance in skills development, vocational guidance, accessibility, health support, and social inclusion. As highlighted by the OECD (2022), the absence of coordinated and person-centred approaches undermines the capacity of activation policies to address complex and multidimensional forms of exclusion. Consequently, although Portugal performs well on aggregate youth employment indicators, the significant challenges remain in ensuring that the Youth Guarantee effectively reaches those facing the greatest structural disadvantages.

Spain

Spain's YG Plus 2021–2027 represents a significant evolution of the previous YG framework, placing stronger emphasis on the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including young people with disabilities, migrants, low-qualified youth, and those at risk of social exclusion. The programme adopts a more comprehensive and person-centred approach, combining employment activation with training, guidance, and social inclusion measures. Its implementation is strongly supported through ESF+ funding and coordinated with broader active labour market policies.



One of the main strengths of the Spanish model lies in its decentralised structure, which allows Autonomous Communities to develop regional-level interventions adapted to local labour market realities. This has enabled the emergence of innovative practices and targeted support measures in several regions, particularly regarding vocational training, supported employment, and youth transition programmes. Spain has

also reinforced partnerships between public employment services, social entities, and third-sector organisations working with vulnerable youth populations.

However, significant territorial disparities continue to affect the consistency and accessibility of support services across the country. Differences in institutional capacity, funding allocation, and regional policy priorities result in uneven implementation of YG measures, particularly in rural and

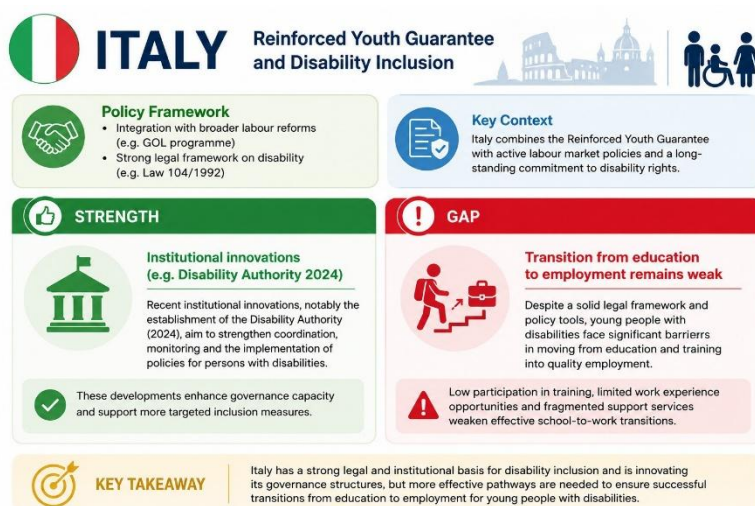
peripheral areas. Consequently, access to specialised services for young people with disabilities varies substantially between regions, creating inequalities in support quality and labour market opportunities (OECD, 2023).

Structural challenges also persist regarding the transition from education to employment for young persons with disabilities. Although Spain has expanded inclusive vocational education and supported employment initiatives, employment rates among persons with disabilities remain considerably below those of the general population, while inactivity and temporary employment remain disproportionately high. These patterns suggest that activation measures alone are insufficient without stronger coordination between education systems, employment services, social protection mechanisms, and accessibility policies.

Furthermore, fragmentation between regional administrations and national coordination frameworks can reduce policy coherence and limit the scalability of successful practices. While the YG Plus framework formally recognises the multidimensional barriers faced by vulnerable youth, implementation gaps continue to constrain the effectiveness of integrated and long-term inclusion pathways (OECD, 2022).

Italy

Italy's approach to supporting young people with disabilities in accessing employment reflects a relatively developed but only partially targeted policy design. While the country has aligned with the RYG through programmes such as the Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori (GOL) and the National Programme Giovani, donne e lavoro (2021–2027), these initiatives primarily address broad vulnerable groups rather than explicitly focusing on youth with disabilities (Council of the European Union, 2020).



Disability-specific employment support continues to rely mainly on Law No. 68/1999 on targeted placement (collocamento mirato), complemented by more recent reforms, including the 2022 national guidelines and the 2024 disability reform introducing a personalised “life project” approach.

Indeed, the Legislative Decree No. 20/2024 introduced the National

Guarantee Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is responsible for monitoring compliance with rights, combating discrimination, and promoting inclusion, in line with the UN

Convention. However, the absence of a clearly defined youth-disability nexus within activation policies limits the system's capacity to address transition-specific barriers.

Implementation mechanisms are formally comprehensive but operationally fragmented. The system combines quota obligations for employers, financial incentives, targeted placement services, and increasingly structured profiling and personalised pathways under GOL.

Nonetheless, coordination across employment services, education systems, health services and social assistance remains weak, with strong regional disparities in delivery capacity (OECD, 2022). Multiple assessment procedures and administrative complexity further hinder access, particularly for young people requiring integrated and continuous support. As a result, pathways into employment often lack continuity, and personalised interventions remain unevenly implemented.

Outcomes point to persistent structural gaps. Italy's NEET rate among 15–29 year-olds declined to around 15% in recent years yet remains above the EU average and conceals wider inequalities affecting persons with disabilities (Eurostat, 2025). Their employment rate remains substantially lower while inactivity is significantly higher (OECD, 2022).

Evidence on targeted placement highlights limited effectiveness: only a small share of eligible individuals is registered with employment services, hiring rates remain low, and a large proportion of contracts are temporary (INAPP, 2023). In addition, incomplete compliance with quota obligations and the limited scale of supported employment measures suggest that existing instruments are not fully translating into stable labour market integration. Overall, the Italian case illustrates a gap between a relatively advanced legislative framework and its effective implementation, particularly in supporting young people with disabilities in their transition from education to employment.

Poland

Poland's approach to supporting young people with disabilities in accessing employment reflects an early adoption of EU activation frameworks combined with a comparatively limited disability-specific targeting. The country implemented the YG in 2013 and subsequently aligned with its reinforced version, with a strong emphasis on labour market activation delivered through public employment services and ESF-funded programmes (Council of the European Union, 2020). At the strategic level, the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 provides a comprehensive and cross-sectoral framework aimed at social and labour market inclusion, promoting a transition towards a rights-based approach. However, similarly to other policy areas, youth-disability linkages remain only weakly specified, and key planned instruments—such as a national employment programme for persons with disabilities—have not been fully implemented (Government of Poland, 2021).

Implementation mechanisms are extensive but fragmented. The system combines employer quotas

(6% threshold), wage subsidies, vocational rehabilitation and activation measures coordinated through the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON). However, administrative complexity remains high due to parallel certification systems (disability status vs incapacity for work), fragmented benefit schemes and reliance on programme-based service



provision. Coordination across policy domains, particularly between labour market, education and social services, is limited, and services are unevenly distributed territorially. While activation is a central policy objective, the system does not consistently provide integrated and personalised pathways, especially for young people transitioning from education to employment.

Outcomes highlight persistent structural gaps despite strong activation efforts. Poland exhibits a large disability employment gap, which increased from around 31 percentage points in 2020 to 36 percentage points in 2024, widening the distance from the EU average. Educational inequalities play a key role: the gap in tertiary attainment between persons with and without disabilities reaches approximately 28 percentage points, significantly above the EU average, and contributes substantially to labour market disparities. At the same time, barriers related to accessibility, transport and workplace conditions continue to limit effective inclusion. Overall, the Polish case illustrates a strong activation-oriented policy model with early YG adoption, but also a significant gap in the systemic integration of disability-specific measures, particularly in supporting young people with disabilities in their school-to-work transition.

3.2.3. Key cross-country findings

The comparative analysis of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland reveals a common pattern across national implementations of the RYG: while disability is increasingly recognised within policy frameworks, the operationalisation of inclusive support mechanisms remains uneven and fragmented. Across countries, there is a visible gap between EU-level commitments regarding disability inclusion and the practical capacity of national systems to ensure accessible, coordinated and personalised transitions into employment for young persons with disabilities.

One important common strength concerns the formal integration of disability within broader youth

employment and social inclusion strategies. All four countries explicitly recognise persons with disabilities as a vulnerable target group within Youth Guarantee-related frameworks or associated labour market policies. In Portugal and Spain, YG reforms are strongly connected to European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding and activation-oriented approaches.

Italy combines YG implementation with broader labour market reforms such as the GOL programme and maintains a comparatively advanced legislative framework on disability rights. Poland, despite a more activation-centred model, has also developed a comprehensive strategic framework through the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. In all cases, EU funding instruments, particularly ESF+ and Recovery and Resilience Facility resources, have played an important role in supporting reforms and activation measures.

However, the analysis also identifies several common gaps. First, tailored pathways specifically adapted to the needs of young persons with disabilities remain limited across all countries. Activation measures often prioritise general employability objectives without sufficiently addressing accessibility, supported employment, personalised counselling or long-term transition support. As a result, many young people with disabilities continue to experience unstable school-to-work transitions, higher inactivity rates and weaker labour market integration.

A second cross-country challenge concerns insufficient coordination between education systems, employment services and social protection structures. In Portugal and Poland, fragmentation between institutional actors weakens continuity of support and reduces the effectiveness of integrated interventions. In Spain and Italy, decentralised or regionally differentiated governance structures create additional territorial disparities in implementation capacity and service provision. Across all countries, governance fragmentation limits the development of multidimensional support models capable of addressing the complex barriers faced by young persons with disabilities.

Finally, all four countries face significant limitations regarding monitoring and evidence systems. Disability-disaggregated indicators within YG monitoring frameworks remain limited, inconsistent or insufficiently comparable. Existing Eurostat disability-disaggregated indicators illustrate important inequalities but remain limited in scope and are not systematically integrated into Youth Guarantee monitoring systems (Eurostat, 2025). Consequently, policymakers often lack robust evidence regarding participation rates, quality of offers, employment outcomes and long-term trajectories of young persons with disabilities. This weakens evidence-based policymaking and limits the capacity to evaluate the real effectiveness of disability inclusion measures within YG implementation.

COMPARATIVE COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Reinforced Youth Guarantee and Disability Inclusion



PORTUGAL



POLICY FRAMEWORK

- Updated Youth Guarantee (2021)
- Strong alignment with EU priorities
- Strong ESF+ linkage
- Disability formally recognised as a vulnerable group



IMPLEMENTATION

- IEFP activation measures
- Vocational education and training
- Employment incentives
- ESF+-funded youth transition programmes



MAIN GAPS

- Limited disability-specific pathways
- Weak personalisation
- Fragmented coordination between employment, education and social services



SPAIN



POLICY FRAMEWORK

- Youth Guarantee Plus 2021–2027
- Stronger focus on vulnerable youth
- Disability integrated within broader social inclusion policies



IMPLEMENTATION

- Regional implementation
- Autonomous Communities adapt services
- Partnerships with third-sector organisations
- Supported employment initiatives



MAIN GAPS

- Territorial disparities
- Uneven implementation capacity
- Limited policy coherence across regions



ITALY



POLICY FRAMEWORK

- Labour market reforms (GOL Programme)
- Strong disability legislation (Law 68/1999; 2024 reforms)
- Rights-based approach



IMPLEMENTATION

- Quota system
- Targeted placement services
- Financial incentives
- Personalised pathways under GOL



MAIN GAPS

- Weak education-to-employment transitions
- Regional disparities
- Administrative complexity
- Fragmented coordination



POLAND



POLICY FRAMEWORK

- Early Youth Guarantee adoption
- Labour activation approach
- Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030



IMPLEMENTATION

- Employer quotas
- Wage subsidies
- Vocational rehabilitation
- PFRON activation programmes



MAIN GAPS

- Limited integration of disability-specific measures
- Fragmented certification and support systems
- Persistent disability employment gap

3.3. Key challenges

Across Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Poland, the implementation of the RYG continues to face significant challenges in ensuring the effective inclusion of young persons with disabilities. Although disability is increasingly recognised within national YG frameworks, this recognition is not consistently translated into accessible, coordinated and tailored support pathways. Evidence from all four countries points to persistent structural, governance and monitoring limitations affecting school-to-work transitions and longterm labour market inclusion. Across Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Poland, the implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee (RYG) continues to face significant challenges in ensuring the effective inclusion of young persons with disabilities. Although disability is increasingly recognised within national Youth Guarantee frameworks, this recognition is not consistently translated into accessible, coordinated and tailored support pathways. Evidence from all four countries points to persistent structural, governance and monitoring limitations affecting school-to-work transitions and long-term labour market inclusion.

1		Structural and Accessibility Barriers	• Limited access to education, training and employment. • Accessibility gaps in transport, digital services and workplaces. • Territorial inequalities reduce access to inclusive services.
2		Weak School-to-Work Transitions and Limited Personalisation	• Fragmented transition pathways across education and employment. • Limited personalised support and mentoring. • Disability-specific measures remain weakly integrated.
3		Governance and Coordination Challenges	• Fragmented responsibilities across institutions. • Administrative complexity limits continuity of support. • Weak cross-sector coordination reduces effectiveness.
4		Labour Market Inclusion Challenges	• Employment outcomes remain below expectations. • Inclusive recruitment and workplace adaptations are insufficient. • Temporary and unstable employment remains common.
5		Data and Evidence Gaps	• Limited disability-disaggregated data. • Inconsistent monitoring and evaluation systems. • Weak evidence for assessing long-term policy impact.

3.4. Policy recommendations

The cross-country comparison shows that disability inclusion within the RYG should move from formal recognition to operational mainstreaming. The following recommendations are intended to strengthen the capacity of youth employment systems to provide accessible, coordinated and effective support for young persons with disabilities.

3.4.1. Strengthen Disability Mainstreaming in RYG

- Mandatory disability inclusion benchmarks in national plans
- Integrate disability indicators in monitoring systems making greater use of disability disaggregated indicators already available through Eurostat (Eurostat, 2025).

3.4.2. Develop Tailored and continuous transition Pathways

- Personalised employment support models
- Supported employment & transition programmes
- Include explicit disability inclusion benchmarks in national YG and youth employment plans, covering outreach, registration, offer quality, accessibility and employment outcomes.
- Require disability-sensitive indicators within monitoring frameworks, including participation rates, type and quality of offers, completion of training, transitions to employment and sustainability of employment outcomes.
- Ensure that disability mainstreaming is embedded in all stages of implementation rather than treated as a separate or residual measure for vulnerable groups.

3.4.3. Improve cross-sector and territorial Coordination Mechanisms

- Cross-sector governance (education–employment–social services)
- Local-level integrated service delivery
- Establish integrated governance mechanisms linking public employment services, schools, VET providers, higher education institutions, social services, disability agencies and employers.
- Develop local one-stop or case-management models to reduce fragmentation and administrative burden for young persons with disabilities and their families.
- Address regional disparities by supporting weaker local delivery systems, especially in rural, peripheral and economically disadvantaged areas.

3.4.4. Invest in Skills and Accessibility, and employers' engagement

- Inclusive VET and digital skills programmes
- Accessibility as labour market infrastructure
- Increase access to inclusive VET, digital skills and green skills programmes, ensuring that training environments, curricula and digital platforms are accessible.
- Treat accessibility as labour market infrastructure, covering transport, digital services, training facilities, public employment services and workplaces.
- Strengthen employer engagement through incentives, technical assistance, workplace adaptation support and anti-discrimination measures, while improving enforcement of quota or targeted placement obligations where they exist.

3.4.5. Enhance Data and Evidence Systems

- Develop and improve the release of disaggregated data by disability type
- Link administrative and survey data on disability and build ad hoc information on education and labour market outcome for sound comparisons between people with and without disabilities.

Across the countries considered, the evidence shows that the RYG still falls short in addressing the specific barriers faced by young people with disabilities. Although some progress has been made in recognising vulnerability within broader activation frameworks, disability is rarely mainstreamed in a systematic way, and targeted support remains limited, fragmented, and unevenly implemented. Weak school-to-work transitions, insufficient coordination across services, persistent accessibility barriers, and the lack of robust disability-sensitive monitoring continue to undermine effective inclusion. Strengthening disability mainstreaming, developing tailored pathways, improving cross-sector coordination, investing in inclusive skills and accessibility, and enhancing data systems should therefore be seen as key priorities for making youth employment policies more equitable and effective.

3.5. Conclusions

The EU provides a strong normative framework, but

- Implementation remains uneven and insufficiently targeted
- The RYG represents a key policy lever, but requires systematic integration of disability inclusion to be effective

The EU provides a strong normative and financial framework for disability inclusion in youth

employment policy. The RYG explicitly recognises young persons with disabilities as a priority group and offers an important platform for reducing exclusion during the transition from education to work. However, the comparison of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Poland shows that implementation remains uneven and often insufficiently tailored to disability-specific barriers.

Across the four countries, the main challenge is not the absence of policy recognition, but the limited translation of this recognition into accessible, personalised and coordinated pathways. Fragmented governance, weak links between education and employment services, territorial disparities, administrative complexity and insufficient employer engagement continue to limit effective labour market inclusion. Data gaps further constrain the capacity to monitor whether YG measures are reaching young persons with disabilities and improving their longterm outcomes.

To reach a more inclusive RYG, there is a need for systematic disability mainstreaming, stronger cross-sector coordination, investment in accessibility and skills, and robust disability-disaggregated monitoring. Without these elements, youth employment policies risk reproducing existing inequalities rather than reducing them. Strengthening disability inclusion is essential not only for the credibility of the RYG, but also for the broader EU commitment to equal participation, social rights and inclusive labour markets.

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CLOSING REMARKS

The barriers facing young persons with disabilities in the EU are structural, interconnected, and persistent, beginning in the classroom and extending through the labour market. At the policy level, a consistent translation of normative commitment into personalised, accessible, and monitored pathways is missing. On the service delivery side, good intentions are constrained by limited capacity. Proactive outreach remains the exception rather than the rule, innovation is modest, and groups at the intersection of disability with other marginalised identities, e.g. migrants, refugees, LGBTQ persons, or ethnic minorities, are consistently underserved. Collaboration with public institutions is hampered by rigid systems.

All in all, these findings do not call for new principles, but for better execution. This includes stronger retention efforts in education, sharper focus on intersectional vulnerabilities, and closer alignment between skills and job requirements. Last but not least, monitoring systems and disaggregated data are needed to evaluate interventions. The task ahead is therefore less about recognising the problem, which the EU has already done, and more about building the coordination, accountability, and outreach infrastructure needed to close the gap in practice.



NEETcraft Initiative: Innovations for Empowering Youth with Disabilities

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Social Fund Agency. Neither the European Union nor the Granting Authority can be held responsible for them.



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CENTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS DEVELOPMENT FOR 2018-2030 CSODev

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