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Document 3: Policy Guidelines for Business Decision-Makers

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Introduction

The aim of **sheltered workshops** is to **prepare and support people with disabilities in transitioning to regular employment**. However, many individuals with disabilities end up staying in sheltered workshops for **extended periods or their entire working lives, particularly those with cognitive disabilities**. This indicates a failure to achieve the inclusion goals outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a recent directive from the European Parliament.

Table: Disability Statistics & Employment Rates in Partner Countries

Country	Population with Disabilities (%)	Employment Rate (%)
Belgium	9%	26%
Cyprus	24%	48.5%
Germany	n/a	53%
Slovenia	1%	n/a

(source: Include3 Transnational Report, find here: https://include3.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Include_3_Transnational_report.pdf)

To facilitate a sustainable transition, it is crucial to **align the needs of individuals with disabilities with the requirements of the labor market**. **Counseling** plays a central role in this process by **identifying strengths, interests, and training needs of individuals seeking advice**. Counselors in sheltered workshops also maintain contact with employers, serving as intermediaries. Proper guidance ensures that vocational training is tailored to individual learning needs, skills, and goals, as well as the demands and support opportunities within the labor market.

The "Include³" project aims to **develop resources and a participatory curriculum** through collaboration between guidance practitioners, individuals with intellectual disabilities, employers, and vocational training professionals. The goal is to **create pathways from targeted training to sustainable and suitable employment in regular work settings**. This process involves reorienting vocational education in an individualized manner to prepare individuals for specific labor market opportunities.

This policy document highlights the main findings from the partner countries Belgium, Cyprus, Germany and Slovenia. The policy document refers to the national report by picking up examples of good practice and summarizing the outcomes from the national report. It also derives practical guidelines for policy makers in Sheltered Workshop VET. Four to five practical guidelines for implementation are given for specific topics, such as collaborative partnerships. The policy document ends with a conclusion.

Policy Document 3: Policy Guidelines for Business Decision-Makers

Introduction

This policy document aims to provide **guidelines for business decision-makers to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workplace**. It highlights the importance of an **inclusive labor market, equal opportunities, and accessibility**. It is widely understood that all other policy aspects cannot come into fruition without the active support and engagement of the labor market stakeholders and primarily the business owners / employers. It is therefore important, to highlight an attitudinal transition from offering employment to people with disabilities as part of isolated practices or good will practices, towards an understanding that people with disabilities have unique contributions to make that can impact positively the efficiency and profitability of companies and organizations. The document draws insights from the Transational report and emphasizes the **role of businesses in creating an inclusive work environment**.

Summary of Partner Countries

Similar to the previous policy documents, this section provides a brief overview of partner countries, including relevant statistics on persons with disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and employment rates. The date of ratification of the CRPD is also mentioned.

Example of Good Practice

Vocational preparation measure in a school, specifically the Special School in Nicosia, in collaboration with the Christos Steliou Ioannou Foundation in Cyprus.

The project **targets young students with intellectual disabilities and aims to provide them with general and social work skills for employment**. The program includes activities **conducted both at the school and in partnership with the foundation** and companies in the open market. The innovative aspect of the project lies in the collaboration with municipalities, which offers office work opportunities for the students.

The project **emphasizes the well-being of the students, promoting their autonomy, independence, and vocational rehabilitation**. It focuses on various developmental areas such as **self-care, socialization, communication, movement, and cognitive skills**.

Additionally, the project addresses waste management, dealing with aggressive behaviors, and provides traffic education.

Excerpt from the Conclusion of the Transnational Report

The National report draws **significant attention to the importance of inclusive practices, the need for training and support, and the value of diverse and inclusive workplaces**. These key findings have direct implications for business decision-makers, highlighting the potential benefits and advantages that can arise from embracing diversity and inclusivity within their organizations. By incorporating these conclusions and claims into their decision-making processes, business leaders can foster an environment that not only promotes social equality but also contributes to enhanced business performance and competitiveness.

Inclusive Practices:

The report emphasizes that implementing inclusive practices is crucial for businesses aiming to thrive in today's diverse and interconnected world. Business decision-makers need to recognize that inclusivity goes beyond token gestures and quotas. It requires a **fundamental shift in organizational culture, policies, and practices to ensure equal opportunities for all employees**. By fostering an inclusive environment,

businesses can tap into the diverse perspectives, experiences, and skills of their workforce, leading to improved creativity, innovation, and problem-solving.

Implication for Business Decision-Makers:

It is imperative for decision-makers to prioritize inclusivity by **developing comprehensive strategies that address biases, promote diversity at all levels**, and create a culture of respect and belonging. This may involve revisiting recruitment and hiring practices, establishing diversity and inclusion committees, and implementing training programs that foster awareness, empathy, and cultural competence.

Need for Training and Support:

The report highlights the necessity of providing training and support to employees to effectively navigate a diverse and inclusive workplace. Business decision-makers must **acknowledge that individuals come from different backgrounds and may require specific support to overcome barriers and fully contribute to the organization**. Providing training and support not only enhances employee engagement and retention but also improves productivity and collaboration.

Implication for Business Decision-Makers:

Decision-makers should invest in ongoing diversity and inclusion training programs that educate employees about unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive communication. Additionally, providing **mentorship programs, affinity groups, and employee resource networks** can offer valuable support systems and facilitate the integration of diverse perspectives within the organization.

Value of Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces:

The report highlights the significant benefits that arise from fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces. It demonstrates that organizations that embrace diversity and inclusivity outperform their competitors in various aspects, such as innovation, customer satisfaction, and financial performance. Moreover, diverse teams are more adaptable to change, as they bring a wider range of perspectives and experiences to problem-solving and decision-making processes.

Implication for Business Decision-Makers:

Decision-makers need to recognize the **value that diversity and inclusion bring to their organizations**. By actively seeking diverse talent, promoting inclusive leadership, and creating opportunities for underrepresented groups, businesses can unlock a multitude of benefits. This may include gaining a competitive edge, attracting top talent, enhancing brand reputation, and expanding market reach.

In conclusion, the National report emphasizes the **significance of inclusive practices, the need for training and support, and the value of diverse and inclusive workplaces**. **Business decision-makers play a pivotal role in driving these changes** within their organizations. By incorporating these key conclusions and claims into their decision-making processes, they can foster an environment that embraces diversity, promotes inclusivity, and reaps the associated benefits.

Guidelines for Business Decision Makers

Policy guidelines for promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities, specifically focusing on transitions from sheltered employment to the general labor market:

Outgroups and External Job Placements:

- Encourage the establishment of "outgroups" where workshop employees can work in companies in the general labor market while retaining their status and pay.
- **Facilitate external job placements for individuals or groups from sheltered workshops**, enabling them to perform tasks directly in the company through contracting.
- Ensure that these jobs are open-ended and provide opportunities for long-term employment in the general labor market.
- **Implement mechanisms to protect the rights of individuals transitioning to external job placements**, including ensuring fair wages and employee benefits.

Pre-vocational Training and Qualification Programs:

- **Develop pre-vocational training programs** that prepare young students with intellectual disabilities for permanent transitions to the general labor market.
- **Offer part-time employment opportunities** in the general labor market for students, with the support of job coaches and specialized organizations.

- **Provide a curriculum that combines traditional classroom learning** with hands-on work experience, focusing on practical skills relevant to the labor market.

Job Coaching and Support:

- Establish **job coaching programs** to accompany individuals with intellectual disabilities during their transition to the general labor market.
- **Deploy job coaches in vocational training areas**, workshop areas, and external workplaces to provide individualized support and guidance.
- **Conduct regular project days or training sessions to facilitate knowledge exchange**, skill development, and learning related to the world of work.

Inclusive Employment Opportunities:

- **Promote the creation of inclusive employment opportunities** in various sectors, such as gastronomy, through collaborations between sheltered workshops and companies.
 - This can be reached through:
 - Creation of job posts with easy to learn activities and less complex tasks
 - Preservation of low-threshold jobs, no outsourcing of activities
 - Expansion of niche jobs
 - Individual workplace design according to the abilities of employees with disabilities
- Advocate for the **payment of a minimum wage to individuals with disabilities** working in inclusive employment settings.
- **Raise awareness** among companies and society about the importance of inclusive employment and their social responsibility to create such opportunities.

Empowerment and Participation:

- Adopt an **empowerment and participation approach** throughout the vocational training, guidance, and transition processes.
- Encourage the development of **teaching and learning materials that promote self-determination, independence**, and active participation of individuals with disabilities.
- Foster an **inclusive culture** that recognizes the value and contributions of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration:

- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices among countries, regions, and stakeholders involved in the inclusion of people with disabilities.
- **Establish platforms, such as websites, podcasts, or online communities**, to share experiences, insights, and resources related to inclusive employment and transitions.
- **Continuously evaluate and improve the policy guidelines** based on research, feedback from stakeholders, and evolving best practices.
- **Create networks** to assist employers with issues related to employment of people with disabilities.
- **Work closely together in networks.**
- **Have contacts available for employers** to contact if they have questions or if they want to create jobs for people with disabilities.

Comprehensive Accessibility Standards:

Establish comprehensive accessibility standards for workplaces, including physical accessibility, communication accessibility, and digital accessibility. Ensure that all facilities, equipment, and communication channels are **accessible to individuals with various types of disabilities**.

Reasonable Accommodations:

Enforce the provision of **reasonable accommodations in the workplace** to ensure equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Employers should make necessary adjustments or modifications to enable employees with disabilities to perform their job duties effectively.

Anti-Discrimination Policies:

Implement and enforce strict anti-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination based on disability. Educate employers and employees about their rights and responsibilities to prevent discriminatory practices and foster an inclusive work environment.

Disability Awareness and Sensitivity Training:

Develop and conduct regular disability awareness and sensitivity training programs for employers, managers, and colleagues to promote understanding, reduce stereotypes, and **encourage inclusive attitudes towards people with disabilities**. Moreover, you can promote within your business network and to the public to provide jobs for people with disabilities.

Supported Employment Programs:

Establish and support comprehensive supported employment programs that provide tailored assistance, job coaching, and ongoing support to individuals with disabilities. These programs should **facilitate the transition from sheltered employment to open employment in the general labor market**.

Collaboration with Vocational Training Organizations:

Foster **collaboration between employers and vocational training organizations to ensure that training programs** are aligned with the skills and competencies needed in the labor market. Provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to gain practical work experience through internships, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training.

Inclusive Recruitment and Hiring Practices:

Encourage employers to **adopt inclusive recruitment and hiring practices that promote equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities**. This includes removing barriers in job advertisements, providing accessible application processes, and actively seeking candidates with disabilities.

Mentorship and Peer Support Programs:

Establish **mentorship and peer support programs** that connect individuals with disabilities to experienced employees who can provide guidance, support, and encouragement throughout their career journey. This can help foster a sense of belonging and increase retention rates.

Disability-Inclusive Policies:

Develop and implement disability-inclusive policies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in the workplace. These policies should cover areas such as flexible work arrangements, career advancement opportunities, and employee benefits.

Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement:

Continuously **evaluate the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion policies and practices for individuals with disabilities**. Collect data, measure outcomes, and seek feedback from employees to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to ensure long-term success.

Policies Evaluation

Policy evaluation is a crucial component of the Inclusive Career Development and Business Empowerment Framework. It serves as a means to assess the effectiveness of the policies implemented for sheltered workshops, career counseling, and business decision-making. By **conducting regular evaluations, decision-makers can gather valuable insights, measure outcomes, and identify areas for improvement**.

Clear Evaluation Objectives:

Establish **clear objectives for policy evaluation, including measuring the impact of the policies on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities** in the labor market, identifying successes and challenges, and informing evidence-based decision-making. Objectives should be **specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART)**.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Evaluate the impact of career counseling policies on the employment rates and job satisfaction of individuals with disabilities within a timeframe of two years.	Conduct annual evaluations over a period of five years to assess the long-term impact of the policies.	Ensuring that the evaluation objectives align with the overall goals of the framework, securing resources for comprehensive evaluations, and managing expectations of stakeholders regarding the timeframe for evaluation.	Prioritize evaluation objectives based on their relevance and feasibility. Conduct phased evaluations, focusing on specific aspects of the policies within shorter timeframes.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Collect relevant data on various aspects of policy implementation, such as employment rates, career advancement opportunities, accessibility measures, and satisfaction levels of individuals with disabilities. Use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both statistical data and individual experiences. Analyze the data to gain insights into the effectiveness of the policies and their impact on the target population.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Collect quantitative data on employment rates, career advancement opportunities, and job retention rates, along with qualitative data through interviews and surveys to capture individual experiences and satisfaction levels	Collect data annually , and conduct comprehensive data analysis every two years to identify trends and patterns	Ensuring data accuracy and reliability, maintaining data privacy and confidentiality, and analyzing qualitative data effectively	Implement data quality assurance measures, such as regular audits and validation processes. Use anonymized data for analysis while ensuring ethical data handling practices. Employ advanced analytical tools and techniques for qualitative data analysis, such as thematic coding and sentiment analysis

Stakeholder Engagement:

Engage key stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, career counselors, employers, vocational training providers, and disability advocacy groups, in the evaluation process. Seek their feedback, experiences, and perspectives through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and consultations. Incorporate their input to ensure a comprehensive evaluation that reflects diverse perspectives.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Engage individuals with disabilities, career counselors, employers, and advocacy groups through focus groups, interviews, and surveys to gather their feedback and perspectives on the policies	Conduct stakeholder engagement activities annually , coinciding with the data collection process	Ensuring diverse representation among stakeholders, managing logistics for stakeholder engagement activities, and addressing potential power imbalances between stakeholders.	Use stratified sampling techniques to ensure diverse representation. Employ a mix of in-person and online engagement methods to accommodate different preferences and accessibility needs. Implement facilitation techniques that promote inclusive and equitable participation.

Comparison with Baseline:

Establish a baseline by collecting data and assessing the situation before implementing the policies. This baseline data serves as a reference point for evaluating the progress and impact of the policies over time. Compare the current outcomes with the baseline to determine the effectiveness of the policies and identify areas of improvement.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Establish a real-time monitoring system to track the implementation of policies, measure key performance indicators,	Monitor key performance indicators on a quarterly basis , with an annual comprehensive review	Developing an efficient and user-friendly monitoring system, securing resources for continuous monitoring,	Utilize digital platforms or tools to automate data collection and monitoring processes. Seek partnerships with technology providers or

and identify emerging challenges		and ensuring data accuracy and timeliness.	organizations specializing in monitoring and evaluation solutions. Implement regular data quality checks and validation processes
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Continuous Monitoring:

Implement a robust monitoring system to track the implementation of policies in real-time. Regularly monitor and collect data on key performance indicators to identify any gaps, bottlenecks, or emerging challenges. This allows decision-makers to address issues promptly and make necessary adjustments to improve the effectiveness of the policies.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Establish a real-time monitoring system to track the implementation of policies, measure key performance indicators, and identify emerging challenges	Monitor key performance indicators on a quarterly basis, with an annual comprehensive review	Developing an efficient and user-friendly monitoring system, securing resources for continuous monitoring, and ensuring data accuracy and timeliness	Utilize digital platforms or tools to automate data collection and monitoring processes. Seek partnerships with technology providers or organizations specializing in monitoring and evaluation solutions. Implement regular data quality checks and validation processes.

Feedback and Reporting:

Share **evaluation findings with relevant stakeholders** to promote transparency and accountability.

Prepare comprehensive reports that highlight the achievements, challenges, and recommendations based on the evaluation results. Share these reports with decision-makers, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the policies.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Prepare comprehensive evaluation reports highlighting the achievements, challenges, and recommendations based on the evaluation results. Share these reports with decision-makers, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in policy implementation	Share evaluation reports annually , within three months of completing the evaluation process	Synthesizing complex evaluation findings into accessible reports, ensuring report relevance and usefulness to stakeholders, and managing information overload	Use data visualization techniques to present key findings in a visually appealing and easily understandable format. Customize report formats to meet the specific needs and preferences of different stakeholder groups. Consider providing executive summaries or shorter briefs alongside detailed reports.

Iterative Improvements:

Use **evaluation findings as a basis for iterative improvements to the policies. Identify areas that require adjustments or enhancements to enhance the effectiveness** and impact of the policies. Continuously learn from the evaluation process and incorporate feedback to refine the policies and ensure they remain responsive to the evolving needs of individuals with disabilities.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Use evaluation findings to identify areas that require adjustments or enhancements in the policies, such as expanding career counseling services or introducing new training programs	Incorporate evaluation findings into policy adjustments annually or as needed based on evaluation outcomes.	Balancing the need for timely improvements with the potential disruption caused by policy changes, addressing resistance to change, and securing resources for policy adjustment	Pilot test potential improvements or adjustments on a smaller scale before full implementation. Develop change management strategies to address resistance and promote stakeholder buy-in. Seek external funding or partnerships to support policy adjustments.

Knowledge Sharing and Dissemination:

Share the findings, best practices, and lessons learned from policy evaluation with other decision-makers, researchers, and practitioners. Establish platforms, such as conferences, workshops, and online communities, to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration. This promotes the adoption of effective strategies and fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Example	Timeframe	Challenges	Alternative Solution
Share evaluation findings, best practices, and lessons learned from policy evaluation through conferences, workshops, publications, and online platforms.	Engage in knowledge sharing activities annually , alongside or following the release of evaluation reports	Identifying suitable platforms for knowledge sharing, addressing language and accessibility barriers, and ensuring the relevance and practicality of shared knowledge	Collaborate with existing networks, organizations, or platforms specializing in knowledge sharing in the disability inclusion field. Translate key knowledge products into multiple languages. Develop practical guides or toolkits

			based on evaluation findings to facilitate the implementation of successful strategie
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Conclusion

In conclusion, **embracing diversity and inclusion for individuals with disabilities** in the workforce is not just the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense. By taking into account the comprehensive guidelines we've discussed throughout this conversation, policy makers have the power to drive positive change and create an environment where everyone can thrive.

Policy guidelines when it comes to the inclusivity of disable people into the workforce, have in mind the overall process, should be draw by having in consideration:

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that workplaces, facilities, and communication channels are accessible to individuals with disabilities through comprehensive accessibility standards.
- **Reasonable Accommodations:** Enforce the provision of reasonable accommodations to enable individuals with disabilities to perform their job duties effectively.
- **Anti-Discrimination Policies:** Implement and enforce strict anti-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination based on disability.
- **Disability Awareness and Sensitivity:** Conduct disability awareness and sensitivity training programs to promote understanding and reduce stereotypes.
- **Supported Employment Programs:** Support comprehensive supported employment programs that provide tailored assistance and ongoing support to individuals with disabilities.
- **Collaboration with Vocational Training Organizations:** Foster collaboration between employers and vocational training organizations to align training programs with labor market needs.
- **Inclusive Recruitment and Hiring:** Adopt inclusive recruitment and hiring practices to provide equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- **Mentorship and Peer Support:** Establish mentorship and peer support programs to facilitate career development and increase retention rates.

- **Disability-Inclusive Policies:** Develop and implement disability-inclusive policies addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.
- **Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement:** Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion policies and make necessary adjustments based on data and feedback.

When the above are taken into consideration, policy makers can **contribute to the creation of an inclusive and equitable labor market where individuals with disabilities have equal access to opportunities, are supported in their career journeys**, and can thrive in their chosen professions. This not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also leads to a more diverse, innovative, and productive workforce for the overall betterment of society.