



WORK ACCOMMODATION AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS – THE WAY FORWARD

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Employment rate gap of people with and without disability and of people 50-64 and 25-49 years old is around 20 percentage point in EU. Population ageing and labour force shortage together with the increasingly prevalent mindset of equal opportunities for all groups has raised the issue of how to promote labour market inclusion of disabled and older people

into spotlight. Increasing social partners' expertise on how through industrial relations enhance work accommodation is crucial for achieving this aim. Action research in three European countries (Estonia, Hungary and Poland) imply that this demands significant efforts from both – policy makers and social partners themselves.

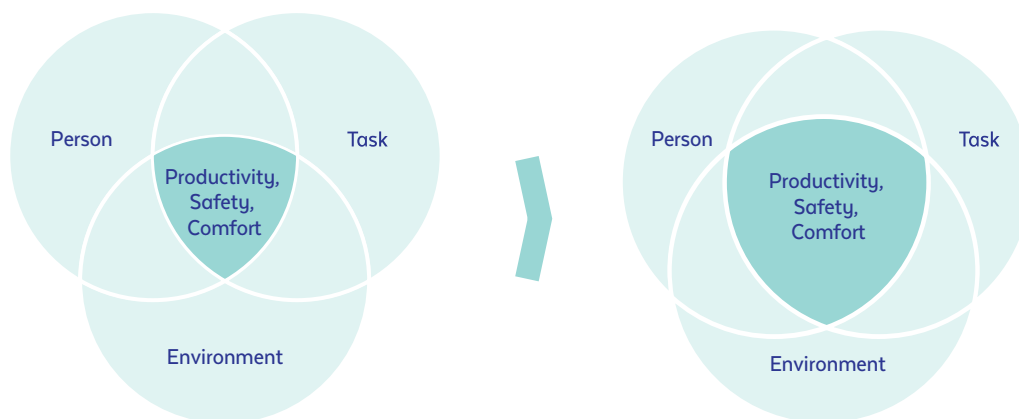
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Stronger labour market integration of disabled and older people could be achieved by supporting social partners to negotiate reasonable work accommodations.
- Counterfactual impact assessment of different types of interventions are necessary to support social partners and governments in designing and implementing effective support measures.
- Employment policy and industrial relations responses should be designed in the way that motivate and support work accommodation for both disabled and ageing workers. Mutual learning and peer reviews are required to collect and design support measures.
- EU social partners should be the key parties raising awareness and spreading the knowledge and good practices of work accommodation between different member states. The support should take into consideration the differences in industrial relations systems in EU.

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FIGURE 1. WORK ACCOMMODATION - FITTING THE WORK TO THE WORKER



SOURCE: PAQUETTE, SONIA. 2016. "ERGONOMIC ACCOMMODATION IN RETURN TO WORK." IN HANDBOOK OF RETURN TO WORK, EDITED BY IZABELA Z. SCHULTZ AND ROBERT J. GATCHEL, 307-26. HANDBOOKS IN HEALTH, WORK, AND DISABILITY 1. SPRINGER US.

POLICY CONTEXT

To respond to the changing national demographic and labour market realities and achieve EU growth targets, stronger labour market inclusion of disabled and older people has been emphasised in different relevant EU strategic documents. European Disability Strategy 2010-2020¹ brings out the need for further integration of disabled people to the labour market by also adjusting working conditions. In March 2017, European level social partners signed a framework agreement on active ageing and an inter-generational approach² that emphasises the need to adjust working conditions to allow older people to work longer. In the European Pillar of social rights³, one of the key principles brought out as workers right is a working environment adapted to their professional needs that enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market. Thus, work accommodation is seen as a measure that helps to improve the labour market participation of disabled and older people and thereby relieve the challenges related to demographic ageing and labour shortages that many EU countries face. Social partners relevant role in promoting labour market inclusion has been noted already in 2010, when the EU-level cross-industry social partners adopted a joint autonomous framework agreement⁴ outlining what can be done to improve labour market inclusion. In 2017, a new start for social dialogue⁵ was launched

Although work accommodation presumes individualised solutions, collective employment relations in its different forms could encourage actions at workplace level and empower workplace level actors in co-determining and negotiating reasonable accommodations.

emphasising the role of social partners and social dialogue in promoting both competitiveness and fairness in Europe.

POLICY RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

EU level disability regulation is built on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Thus, the coverage and eligibility of intervention, both central government policy and collective employment relations instruments currently differ for disabled and old people. Rights and obligations and incentives to make work accommodations are manifested more likely in disability than age related legislation. However, the policy and industrial relations responses should be designed in the way to motivate and support work accommodation for both disabled and ageing workers. Even more, life-course perspective is required that would prevent work related reduction in work capacity. Evidence suggest however, that to do so, it might not need more extensive regulation and economic incentives, but rather, making the current policy interventions available and effective. Making the employment law effective and improving the take up of economic incentives requires both making the administrative process more transparent and

1 EUROPEAN DISABILITY STRATEGY 2010-2020

2 FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON ACTIVE AGEING AND AN INTER-GENERATIONAL APPROACH (2017). [HTTPS://WWW.ETUC.ORG/ SITES/WWW.ETUC.ORG/FILES/PRESS-RELEASE/FILES/Framework_Agreement_on_Active_Ageing_003.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/press-release/files/framework_agreement_on_active_ageing_003.pdf)

3 THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS. [HTTPS://EC.EUROPA.EU/COMMISSION/PRIORITIES/DEEPER-AND- FAIRER-ECONOMIC-AND-MONETARY-UNION/EUROPEAN- PILLAR-SOCIAL-RIGHTS_EN](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

4 FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKETS (2010). [HTTPS://WWW.ETUC.ORG/Framework-Agreement-Inclusive-Labour-Markets](https://www.etuc.org/framework-agreement-inclusive-labour-markets)

5 NEW START FOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE. [HTTP://EC.EUROPA.EU/SOCIAL/MAIN.JSP?CATID=88&LANGID=EN&EVENTSID=1028](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catid=88&langid=en&eventsid=1028)

matching the rules to organisations and employment relations practices.

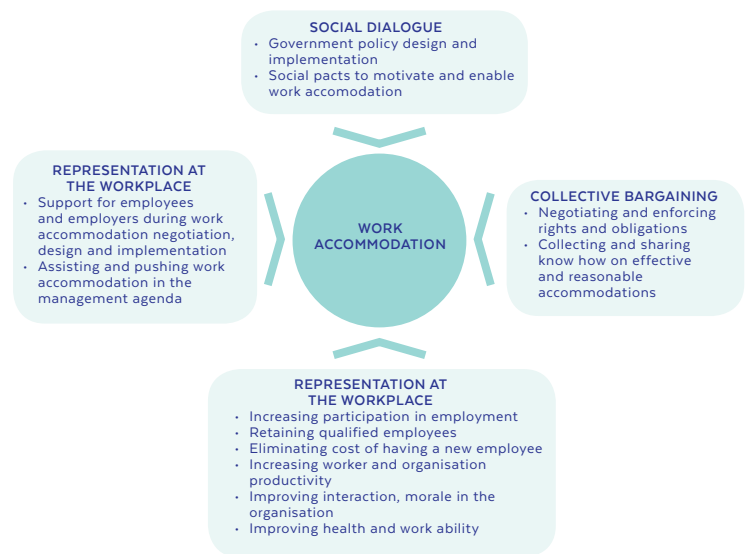
Currently, counterfactual impact assessment of the different types of interventions aimed at motivating the employment of disabled and older populations in general, or work accommodation, is lacking. However, to design evidence and knowledge based practical measures that would improve their inclusion in the labour market impact assessments are needed. Thus, EU level policy makers could push and support policy research institutes and national governments to evaluate different interventions and this way also support social partners and national governments in designing and implementing effective support measures.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Social partner measures to support work accommodations are first and foremost limited by their capacity and available resources. Different economic and employment related issues are competing for the social partners' attention, especially in small countries and in countries where the role of collective employment relations is relatively modest. Nevertheless, work accommodation has the potential to be more extensively addressed in collective employment relations in these countries as well due to the need to manage the challenges stemming from population ageing and labour shortage. As mentioned above, there have been several initiatives the social partners have started to promote inclusive labour markets. However, as with similar actions, the success and impact of the agreement depends on its implementation.

As the member states are different, the support from European level social partners should take more into consideration the different realities in EU member states. The key to successful representation and bargaining is an improved understanding of work accommodation. The motivation and readiness to put work accommodation on social partners agendas could be improved by sharing

FIGURE 2. WORK ACCOMMODATION - FITTING THE WORK TO THE WORKER



knowledge on work accommodation. Thus, it is vital to collect and share knowledge on work accommodation from bottom up and from top- to-down thereby considering country differences in industrial relations systems, including differences in representation and co-determination. EU social partners should be the parties raising awareness and spreading the knowledge and good practices of work accommodation between different member states ensuring mutual learning and dissemination of best practice at national, sectoral and workplace level. Also, EU social partners could take a stronger position in supporting national social partners in developing strategies on how to put work accommodation into collective bargaining agendas as currently it is not common even in countries with extensive collective employment relations.

European Union and Member States Government's, in close cooperation with social partners should pay more attention on employment policy measures that enable and motivate work accommodation. Mutual learning practices are required to develop effective policy instruments

METHODOLOGY

This policy brief is compiled based on a study conducted in three Central-Eastern European countries Estonia, Poland and Hungary. The aim of the study was to improve social partners' expertise on how industrial relations could enhance work accommodation, and as a result promote labour market inclusion of disabled and older workers. The study design is based on participatory action research methodology combining a retrospective desk study and discussions from seminars with social partners.

Masso, M. Osila, L., Foster, D. (2017) Industrial relations and work adaptation in Estonia, Hungary, Poland. Supporting industrial relations in the field of work adaptation to enable the employment of older or disabled populations. Synthesis report. Praxis Centre for Policy Studies. Tallinn. Estonia.

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