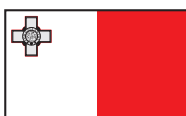


PART OF THE ESF PROJECT (NUMBER 4.255) EQUIP

EQUIPPING EMPLOYERS FOR A MORE EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKET

Service related ESF/MEA/2015/01 Research Study

Presented by:



Operational Programme II - Cohesion Policy 2007-2013
Empowering People for More Jobs and a Better Quality of Life
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Executive Summary

The Research carried out by Business Leaders was divided into two main stages. The first part included carrying out an in depth analysis of previous literature related to factors relating to disability and employment followed by a research exercise amongst employers relating to this topic. The questionnaire was based on insights gained from the literature review.

The survey conducted amongst 100 employers shows that 55% of participating organisations employ persons with a physical or mental disability most of who are registered with the Employment and Training Corporation.

Employers feel they need more information when it comes to recruiting people with disabilities. This is especially the case when gauging elements relating to satisfactory job performance, attendance and retention of people with disabilities (76%) as well as information about how companies can increase their productivity by employing people with disabilities (62%). More than half of the respondents (55%) claimed they require further information about the benefits of employing people with disabilities in their industry. Similarly, employers require further information about the costs relating to the needs of people with disabilities.

More than 3 out of every 4 employers do not have a specific policy relating to the recruitment of people with disabilities. The table below indicates that employers find it particularly difficult to recruit people with disabilities who have the right skills/qualifications for the job (64%) followed by issues relating to effective execution of work (41%).

59% of respondents agree or strongly agree that it is society which disables people by creating barriers. Less than half of the respondents (45%) believe that people with disabilities are treated fairly in Maltese society. A staggering 72% of employers think that people with disabilities do not receive equal opportunities in terms of employment.

People with physical disabilities are generally perceived to be in a better position to fully participate in the workforce whilst it is perceived to be a greater challenge to fully integrate people with intellectual disabilities/autism and mental health disabilities.

Finally respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a number of measures announced in the National Budget of 2015 that were aimed to increase the rate of employment amongst people with disabilities. The introduction of quotas and the corresponding penalties in case of default were the least well received measures.

Literature Review

The research undertaken reviewed the literature, issues and policies in relation to disability and employment. Throughout the modern experience of disability and associated rehabilitation interventions, an orientation to vocational training and employment has been central. At the core of efforts, in all countries, to secure equal rights and social inclusion of people with disabilities has been some form of concentration on work as both a means and an end. This literature review is a first step to identify factors that lead to successful careers for people with disabilities.

Work is central to the dignity, self-confidence and social meaning of individuals. Work gives people a valued identity and a sense of sociological belonging. Work validates the activities and standing of individuals with relation to their lived experiences and in their relationships with others in the community. Making the transition from dependence and institutionalization to independence and contributory citizenship has almost universally been viewed as centring on a vocational approach. In this, skills acquisition and securing employment are effective paths to a valued existence. In addition to the assumed individual benefits of participation in the labour market, significant social benefits and public service impact issues have been identified. These include:

- Reduced social welfare expenditure
- More effective return on public investment
- Increased productivity in an expanded workforce
- Reduced burden on health services
- Improved participation rates for individuals.

The primary research focus has shifted to investigation of the effect of public attitudes on the design of the environment and on the assumed physical, emotional and intellectual characteristics necessary for full participation in community life and work. Hahn (1987) suggests that attitudinal obstacles produce even greater restrictions on people with disabilities than do physical barriers. He commented that

Any research evidence that reveals a deep-seated and pervasive antipathy or aversion toward people with disabilities suggests the restrictions imposed by the built environment and social institutions are not simply accidental or coincidental (Hahn 1987, pp 187-88).

This reordering of the research focus regarding disability has a particular importance with regard to barriers to employment. This relates especially to the appropriateness of functional requirements and physical examinations established as preconditions for many types of jobs. Locating the focus of change in the environment rather than in the individual has produced a far more positive orientation of vocational end employment perspectives for those with disabilities. In addressing employment needs different kinds of both skills and supports must be linked to labour market requirements and address employer concerns. In looking at the transition to employment, the specialized literature on disability identifies five main factors. These are:

- Job seeking skills training
- Direct placement interventions
- Supported employment
- Job development
- Employer concerns.

Job-seeking skills training addresses the needs of individuals to present themselves, their skills, their personal history and their experiences appropriately and effectively to employers in securing entry to the labour market. Completing application forms, personal presentation, interview performance, dealing with negative stereotypes or stigma and approaches to disclosure of personal disability history are key concerns for those with disabilities in seeking work. In addition individuals with disabilities approaching job readiness need to assess availability and accessibility of transport and existence of other potential environmental barriers. Additional familiarity is required with the implications on existing allowances or entitlements if open employment is obtained. Significant examples of such skills training include ESPA – Employment Seeking Preparation and Activity and job clubs.

Research looked at employment trends overall, variations in employment statistics depending on how disability was determined, and differences in employment statistics based on characteristics. This review outlines findings in several general overviews of employment statistics (Houtenville et al 2009, Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003, Boutin 2010, Hall and Parker 2010), reviews focused on people with spinal cord injuries or wheel chair users (Lidal, Huyn and Biering-Sorenson 2007, Ville and Winance 2006), people with developmental disabilities (Gardner and Carran 2005, Migliore and Butterworth 2008) or autism and asperger syndrome (Barnhill 2007, Lawer, Brusilovskiy, Salzer and Mandell 2008), and hearing impairments (Boutin 2010b).

This section also includes results from a longitudinal study of the vocational rehabilitation program that focuses on employment outcomes (Hayward 1998, Hayward and Schmidt-Davis 2003a, 2003b, 2005). Job development actions centre on ongoing contacts with employers and emphasis on employment relevant legislation, best practice and demonstrable economic benefits of recruitment of those with disabilities. Employer-led initiatives, job fairs, public-private partnerships or employment subsidies are all examples of this approach and, while generally effective, are deemed in the research to be capable of wider use in developing job opportunities for those with disabilities (Roessler 1993).

Employer concerns relate to the pre-existing prejudices, assumptions, attitudes and concerns regarding disability and the employment of those with disabilities. These often focus on medical aspects, safety risks, insurance regulations, absenteeism and job performance or output. While research shows that employer attitudes to employing people with disabilities are moderated by a variety of factors (Levy 1993), many of the expressed concerns are groundless or based on significant misunderstandings (DuPont 1990). One major source for research on disabilities is the Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTC) funded by National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). Two recent edited volumes (Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003, Houtenville et al 2009) summarize their work on employment and related issues. The *Decline in Employment of People with Disabilities* explores the drop in employment from 44 percent for men and 37.5 percent for women in 1989 to roughly 33 percent for both genders in 2000 (Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003: 4).

At European Union level the changing labour market has been highlighted as an area where job opportunities and conditions for those with disabilities have deteriorated and where the gap between unemployment rates for disabled and non-disabled workers has actually increased in recent years (EU Commission 1998, p. 6). To the low participation rates of those with disabilities in Europe must be added the increased number of people in receipt of disability benefits, thus suggesting a growing exclusion of those with disabilities from the labour market.

The European Commission suggests two factors contributing to this growth:

- Economic downturn and growing redundancies - where disabled workers who become unemployed have little opportunity to find new work or to develop new careers (particularly older workers)
- The increased emphasis in labour market requirements where emphasis is placed on intellectual ability, advanced educational levels and adaptability - which may not be easy for those emerging from segregated educational structures or having poor skills levels.

Employment rates also vary depending on disability type, education and age. For the working age population (25-61) in 2005, employment rates for any annual work ranged from 57 percent for sensory impairments, 41 percent for physical impairments, 37 percent for mental impairments, 27 percent for work limitations and 24 percent for people that had difficulty with activities of daily living. For those working full time, those with sensory impairments had the highest employment rates (34 percent), compared to physical impairments (20 percent), mental impairments (15 percent), Activities of Daily Living (ADL) (9 percent), Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) (8 percent) and work limitations (8 percent) (Weathers and Wittenberg 2009, 120). Employment rates steadily increased with more education, ranging from 33 percent for people with disabilities without a high school diploma to 57 percent for those with more than high school. Education mattered even more for those working full time, with only 13 percent of those with less than high school working full time compared to 30 percent of those with more than high school education (Weathers and Wittenberg 2009, 121-122). Generally, younger people with disabilities were more likely to be employed and most disabled people dropped out of the labor force by 54. The same impact of education and age on employment was reported in all other studies reviewing these factors in this literature review.

Chan et al (2005) performed a statistical analysis designed to determine factors that improved employment outcomes on the national vocational rehabilitation database for 2001 for people with orthopedic disabilities. The authors used a sophisticated statistical procedure called CHAID that clusters participants with similar characteristics and analyzes factors that led to different outcomes among groups. Issue 34 of the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation published findings from the federal Demonstration to Maintain Independence and Employment (DMIE), designed to prevent unemployment and discourage use of SSDI by people with disabilities. In an overview of the papers in this issue, Ireys and Wehman (2011) report that bridging the two sectors of health and employment supports was critical to successful outcomes. Both medical supports and employment assistance proved equally important services.

In the US, the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, public accommodations, public services and telecommunications. In relation to employment, the Act prohibits employers from discriminating against qualified individuals because of disability in respect of such aspects of employment as hiring, job training, promotion or the discharge process (Adams 1991). This Act applies to companies with 15 or more employees. The impact since its enactment in 1990 has been dramatic. It is estimated that since 1990 some 500,000 jobs for people with disabilities in the United States have been provided as a direct result of this legislation (Berkowitz 2000). The ADA is significant in placing a clear focus on employers and employment practice. Employers must meet statutory requirements by a process of organizational change to protect themselves from the liability of employment discrimination. The Act indicates that it is the responsibility of senior management to create the atmosphere and philosophy that will allow the organization to comply with the intent of the legislation. It is then the responsibility of supervisors and managers to implement the changes.

Concerns around the financial aspects of disincentives to work and the complexities of the Social Security system led to an investigation of possible initiatives throughout the 1990s. In 1999 the US Senate passed the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act. This significantly extended the time during which people with disabilities could work without losing State medical benefits. The combination of potential for new job creation, reduced public support costs and enhancement of the economic condition and quality of life for people with disabilities was seen as a compelling way to reduce the unacceptably high levels of unemployment found among those with disabilities in the population. The Act is designed as a law which has the potential to increase the employability of people with disabilities in the US in the same way that the ADA has increased their participation in and access to public activities. The Act provides beneficiaries with the opportunity to return to paid employment without losing benefits entirely.

In addition to outlining results from current research, the articles in this literature review uniformly called for additional research. A number called for more qualitative studies looking closely at career development, employment experience and the employer role in employment. For example, Kruse and Schur (2003, 296)

advocate that “an ideal research project would follow individuals over time, independently recording medical conditions and impairments, as well as ability to work, as people gain and lose jobs and labor markets become tighter or looser.” While a retrospective study like the one proposed here does not provide the objective observations of a long-term longitudinal study, it can go a long way toward reaching this goal. Likewise, studies of employers advocate gathering different types of qualitative data and developing uniform case studies (Interagency Committee on Disability Research 2007, 43). A life history study can contribute toward gathering employer data as well.

Employer centred and employer led initiatives can play a significant role in demonstrating best practice, fostering social responsibility, extending practical social partnership and addressing innovatively labour market shortages by recruitment, training and promotion of employees with disabilities. Matching job aspirants’ skills and aptitudes to existing vacancies makes for better practice and the mutual satisfaction of all stakeholders in the placement process. Innovative approaches and flexible arrangements could enhance greatly participation rates. Concerns around perceived additional costs of hiring those with disabilities, raised insurance premiums, health and safety issues and expensive modifications to plant and equipment need to be addressed in a proactive and realistic way. Mechanisms to promote the positive advantages of recruiting those with disabilities need to be built upon. For job seekers with disabilities, and those professionals who work with them, there is now an urgent need to re-conceptualize the environments in which individuals work. This means not only a profound re-examination of the nature and scale of employment and work in the globalized 21st century, but also an ability to understand the dynamics of globalization - and the competence to advise, assess and undertake placements in a deeply transformed environment. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) “recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities”. Furthermore, the CRPD prohibits all forms of employment discrimination, promotes access to vocational training, promotes opportunities for self-employment, and calls for reasonable accommodation in the workplace, among other provisions. People with disabilities are usually and internationally disadvantaged in the labor market. For example, lack of access to education and training or to financial resources may be responsible for their exclusion from employment – but it could also be the nature of the workplace or employers’ perceptions of disability and disabled people. Social protection systems may create incentives for people with disabilities to exit employment on to disability benefits.

As work environments change and the recognition grows that the transition to global existence started long ago, we face exciting challenges to expand our understanding of the world, of the closeness of people and places we have hitherto regarded as totally disconnected from our realities. As the world becomes flatter both opportunities and risks emerge. On the one hand the scale of economic disruption is reflected in wars, genocide, ethnic cleansing, health issues and above all the extraordinary movements of people either as economic migrants or refugees – now a permanent and accelerating dimension of globalized life.

Data Analysis

Research Methodology

Business Leaders Malta carried out research amongst employers by means of a quantitative study by means of a self-completed online questionnaire, followed by some further qualitative probing amongst 10 other employers.

In order to reach out to employers, Business Leaders Malta, sent out an invitation to various businesses on a database of companies from various sectors and of different company sizes. The minimum number of responses that were required to be reached were that of 60 responses, the total number of responses received were 100. The sample included a mix of companies in terms of their size, business activity and years of operation. Moreover, the final sample included companies that already currently employ persons with a disability.

The survey was completed by key decision makers within the organisation in the fields of HR (including Directors/Owners, General Managers, Senior and Middle Management). Only 5 of the 100 participating respondents were employed at an executive level.

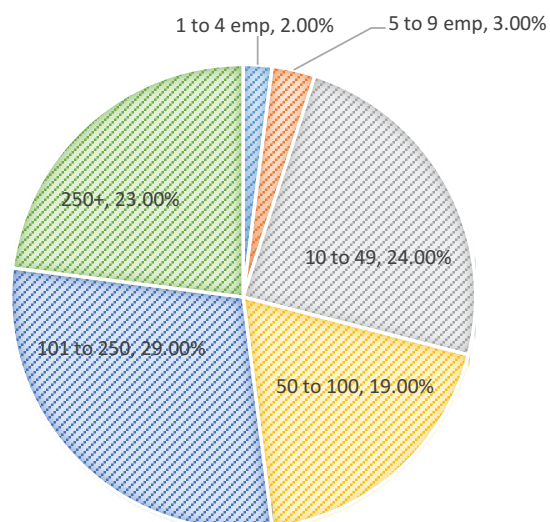
The questionnaire utilised for the purpose of this exercise was designed by Business Leaders Malta and was passed on to the MEA. The final version of the questionnaire is found in Annex I of this report.

Fieldwork was carried out between the 6th to the 11th November 2015. One-to-one interventions were carried until the 26th November 2015.

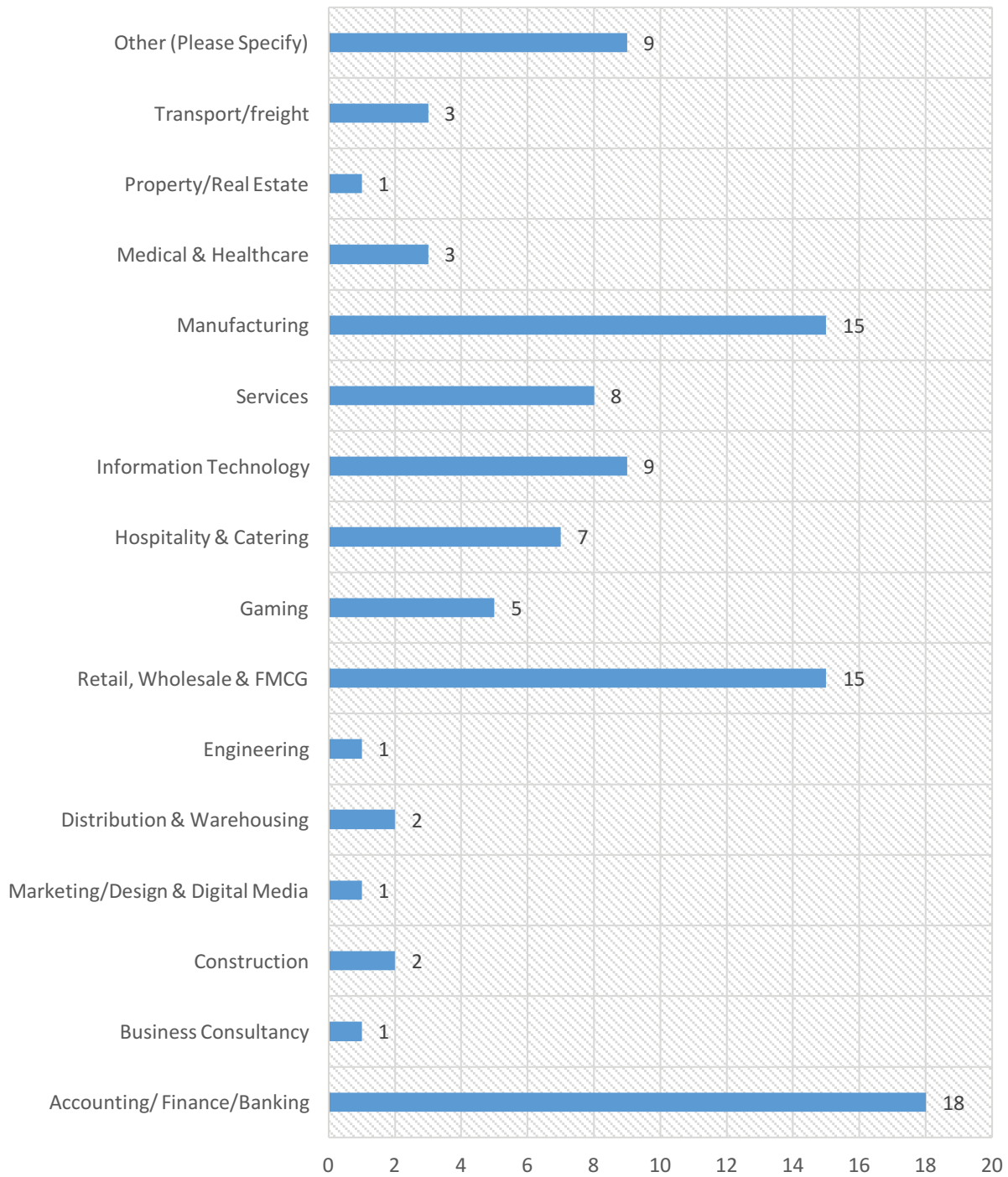
A total of 100 valid interviews were completed with Maltese and Gozitan businesses and an additional 10 one-to-one interventions were made for a more qualitative approach.

Sample Structure

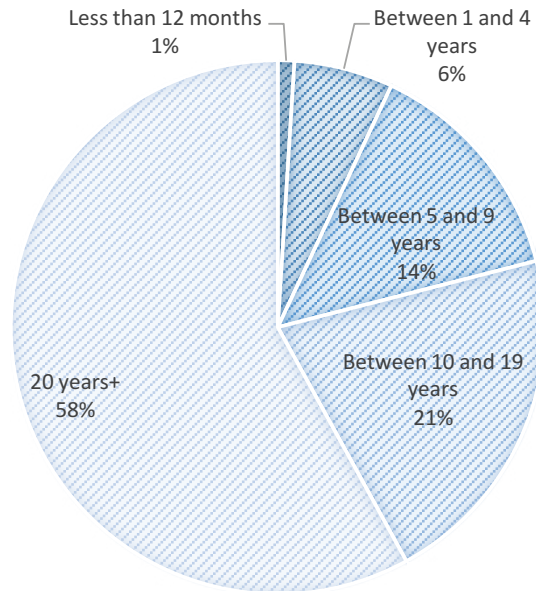
Company Sample distribution by number of Employees



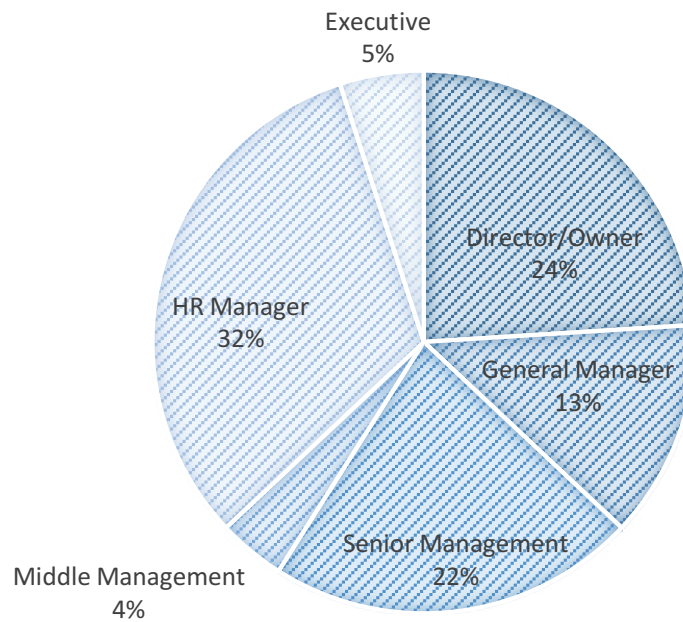
Sample Structure by Economic Activity



Sample structure by Age of company



Sample structure by Respondent Profile

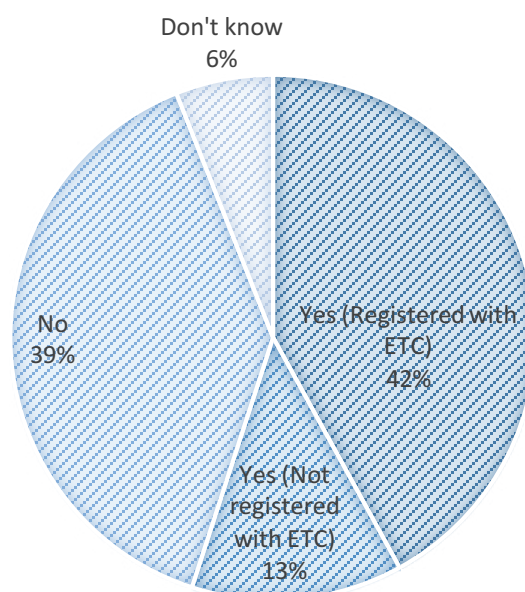


Analyses of the Data

Research with Employers

The survey started off by asking a question on whether the organisation currently employs any registered or unregistered employees with physical or mental disabilities. 40% of employers claimed that they did not employ any people with a disability, 13% claimed to employ persons who are not currently registered as disabled with the ETC and 42% claimed to employ persons with a disability who are registered with the ETC.

Chart 1 – Companies Employing Persons with a Disability

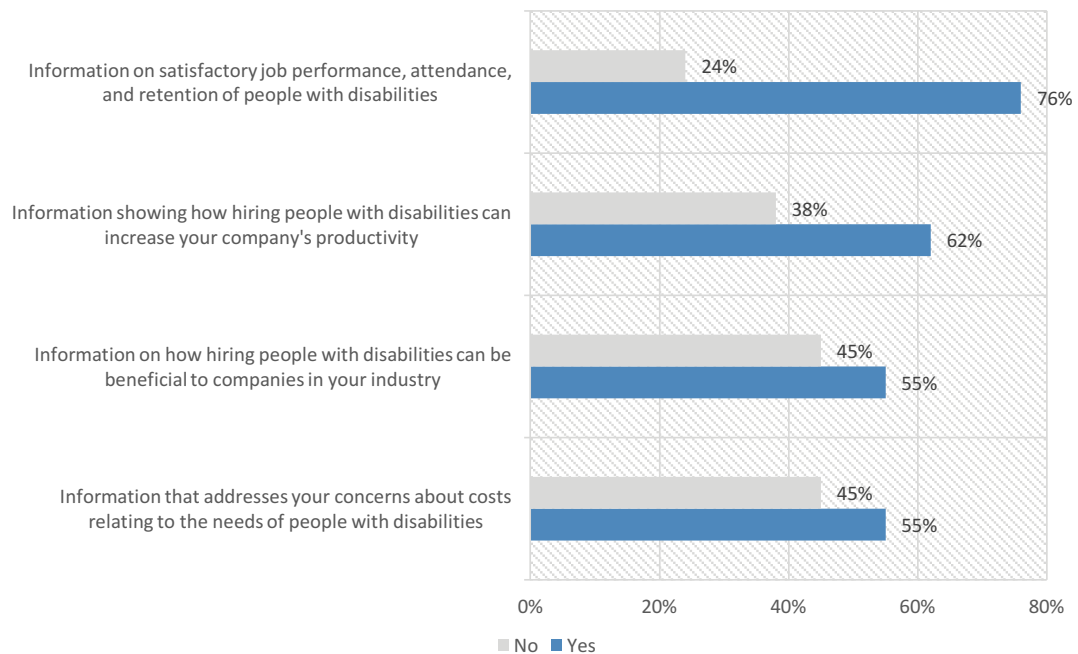


From the 54 respondents who claimed that they employ persons with a disability, 29 (53.7%) indicated that they employed less than 2%, whilst the remaining 46.3% claimed that they 2-9% of their workforce would be persons with a disability.

More than 3 out of every 4 respondents interviewed claimed that they do not have any company policy in place vis-à-vis the recruitment of persons with a disability.

Respondents generally expressed a great interest in receiving further information pertaining to specific aspects pertaining to the employment of persons with disabilities. As is illustrated in Chart 2 below the key topics of interest for employers relate to information about job performance, attendance and retention of persons with disabilities. It is worth noting in this regard, in the workshop that was held with key stakeholders, there was a great interest from the entities present to be directly in touch with employers to provide the information and support needed by employers.

Chart 2 – Additional Information Needed for Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities



The respondents were presented with a number of issues that are sometimes mentioned by employers with regard to employing people with disabilities. As can be seen in the table below, the major concerns of respondents were less about attitudes and more about the ability to find people with the right skills and qualifications and effective execution of the tasks assigned. There was also an element of concern that was tied to a general lack of knowledge relating to certain disabilities.

The darker blue indicates the response where there are the highest proportion of responses registered, followed by the responses in the lighter shade of blue.

Table 1 – Level of Concern about Recruiting Persons with Disabilities

	<i>A significant challenge</i>	<i>Somewhat of a challenge</i>	<i>Not a challenge at all</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities	27.0%	44.0%	26.0%	3.0%
Attitudes of co-workers	5.0%	47.0%	46.0%	2.0%
Attitudes of customers	14.0%	38.0%	40.0%	8.0%
Attitudes of managers/supervisors	2.0%	37.0%	59.0%	2.0%
Costs associated to accommodate disability	19.0%	40.0%	37.0%	4.0%
Finding people with disabilities who have the right skills/qualifications	64.0%	29.0%	5.0%	2.0%
The work required by the organisation cannot be carried out effectively by people with disabilities	41.0%	32.0%	24.0%	3.0%

Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of concern about a number of issues that are sometimes associated with employing persons with disabilities.

Table 2 – Level of Concern about Issues Associated with Recruiting Persons with Disabilities

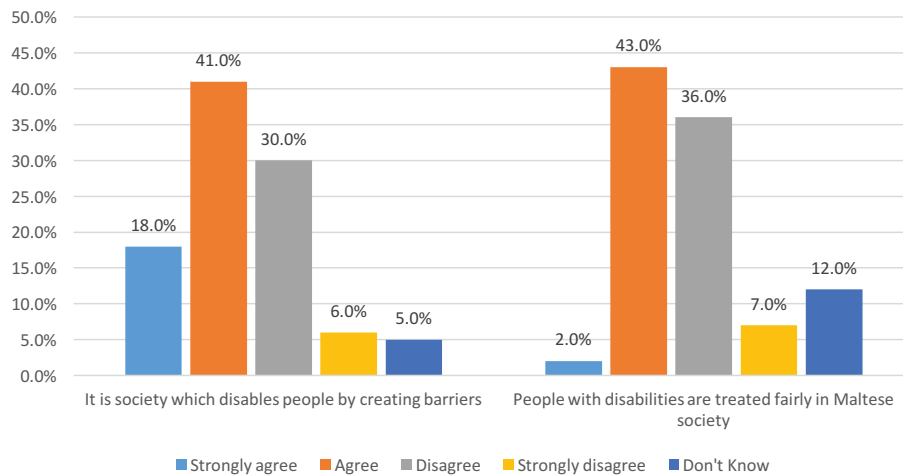
	<i>A significant challenge</i>	<i>Somewhat of a challenge</i>	<i>Not a challenge at all</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Personal discomfort, e.g. not knowing how to relate having to assist them physically not knowing what or what not to say	12.0%	33.0%	35.0%	19.0%
Safety concerns for people with disability, e.g. higher risk of having an accident	25.0%	48.0%	18.0%	9.0%
Behavioural concerns, e.g. worries about aggressive behaviour problems with interpersonal communication, teamwork	15.0%	38.0%	33.0%	13.0%
Suitability of work or work environment, e.g. not capable of the work they would be better off in sheltered employment, with dedicated support	24.0%	35.0%	23.0%	14.0%
More work for self or other work colleagues, e.g. more frequent absences less reliable extra and/or physical assistance required	12.0%	35.0%	32.0%	19.0%
Having to make accommodations around the workplace, e.g. alterations to the building causing disruption incorporating specialised equipment or extra support staff, such as sign language, interpreters or work coaches	18.0%	33.0%	28.0%	20.0%

In the qualitative interviews, one of the respondents explained that in terms of environment there were cases where changes to the infrastructure for wheelchair access are very difficult to take on which is sometimes not understood by government officials:

“My office is rented and I do not think that the landlord and owner would appreciate any physical changes to the structure of his premises, not even at my expense. So wheelchair cases are not an option... Also, it is known that inspectors who insist on changes to (new) premises to accommodate persons with disabilities can be aggressive and even threaten the withholding of licenses if changes are not made”

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with two statements about people with a disability. One statement relates to the extent to which people are debilitated by society rather than disabilities and the other asked to what extent respondents agree about being treated fairly in the Maltese Society. Chart 3 below indicates that respondents believe that people with disabilities are debilitated by society and also that there is generally quite a high proportion of respondents who believe that persons with disabilities are not fairly treated in Malta

Chart 3 – Extent of Agreement to Statements about Persons with a Disability

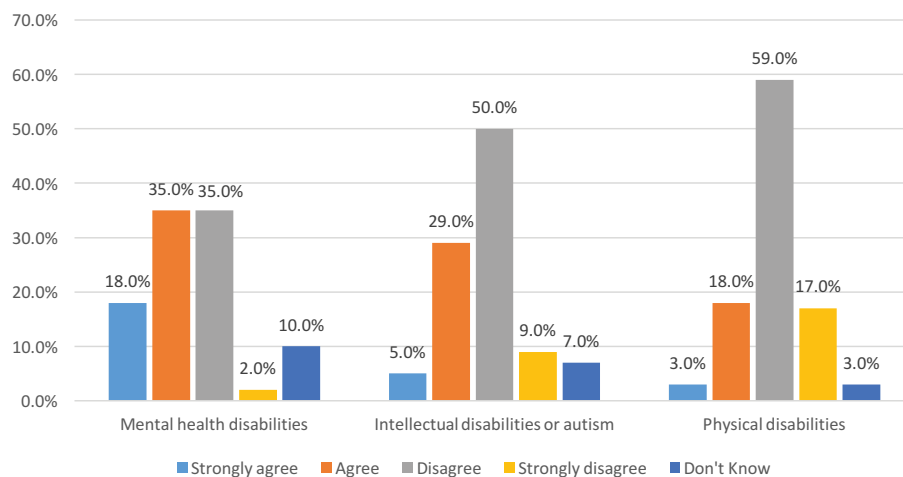


Whilst 45% of respondents believe that people with disabilities are being treated fairly in society the balance tips to 72% who expressed that persons with disabilities are not receiving equal opportunities in terms of employment.

It is also worth noting that 62% of the respondents interviewed believe that it is justified to treat people with disabilities more favourably than others.

Another set of statements were presented to respondents which indicate the belief that persons with mental health issues are far more difficult to integrate in the workplace. Such beliefs, were also attributed by stakeholders to be a result of limited knowledge about mental health issues during the workshop.

Chart 4 – Extent of Agreement to Statements about the Limitations of Integration of Persons with Certain Disabilities



The final section of the questionnaire focussed on the measures that were announced in the 2015 National Budget. As can be seen in Table 3 below, the highest levels of disagreement were with setting the quota for persons with a disability to be employed and the corresponding penalties should companies fail to comply with such quotas.

Table 3 – Level of Agreement with Measures Announced in the 2015 National Budget

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Exemption from national insurance for employed disabled persons	34.0%	56.0%	9.0%	0.0%	1.0%
A tax credit of a maximum of €4,500 for each disabled person in employment	32.0%	61.0%	6.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Enforcing the legislation which stipulates that companies with more than 20 employees must have 2% of the labour force who are disabled	7.0%	29.0%	28.0%	30.0%	6.0%
Companies who fail to abide by the 2% provision and who employ more than 20 persons will pay a 'contribution' of €2,400 for every person they should be employing up to a maximum penalty of €10,000 per annum	8.0%	26.0%	24.0%	39.0%	3.0%
The 'contribution' being introduced over a period of 3 years, with 33% in 2015, 66% in 2016 and 100% in 2017	8.0%	39.0%	21.0%	24.0%	8.0%
The funds collected are administered by the Employment and Training Corporation, and used to setup and administer the Lino Spiteri Foundation. This foundation will use the funds to train and assist disabled persons to find employment.	24.0%	41.0%	15.0%	9.0%	11.0%

Additional Comments from Qualitative Interviews

In the qualitative interviews, the respondents confirmed that their major concern for employing persons with disabilities relate to them having the skills and abilities to perform in their role as was indicated in the quantitative part of the research:

“One must match the role requirements with the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the person concerned”

In some cases the respondents mentioned that they felt there were limited opportunities available within their

business which can be offered to persons with disabilities. The businesses concerned operate in the industry of childcare, pharmaceuticals and setting up of audio-visual equipment during events.

“Due to the nature of our business, a person with a disability would not be a good fit to work as a Carer or Administration since both roles involve carrying kids, communication with parents etc... Probably the role which would fit most would be in housekeeping”

It is worth mentioning that in 3 out of 10 organisations where persons with a disability are employed only one was employed at middle management level.

Two other respondents commented that there aren't enough people on the lists to be able to choose the right candidate, one of the two respondents claimed that this was mostly a problem for higher level vacancies:

“We find that this is an issue more at higher levels– we employ persons with disabilities in the restaurants quite easily”

Respondents claimed that if they wanted to employ people with disabilities they would be in touch with government entities and NGOs. The most commonly mentioned entity was the ETC. However respondents also mentioned other personal contacts they have or entities such as the KNPD and Empower.

As was indicated in the quantitative study, respondents affirmed the belief that persons with mental disabilities are higher risk and are considered to require specialised care and therefore harder to employ:

“If one is in a service industry one has to be careful where clients/ staff are concerned. It is not fair to put a mentally sensitive person in any position of potential stress, especially with clients. It can be a problem enough for the person to merge with the established personnel let alone with a potentially aggressive client.”

Two respondents made a distinction between the different types of disabilities but still considered these issues to be rather challenging:

“It depends on condition and/ or role requirements. For example persons with schizophrenia or autism bring about different skillsets and challenges for integration”

“I think that would depend on the severity of the mental disability. We have yet to experience having a mentally disabled colleague amongst us so it's difficult to say how well they will integrate with the rest of the workforce however I'm sure it will not be easy.”

Employers generally agree that the measures announced during the 2015 National Budget are positive because of the integration of positive effects brought about by integrating persons with disabilities and to a lesser extent because there are advantageous incentives for companies that comply to the set quotas. One of the respondents also mentioned that such initiatives would bring about positive results such as impact on others and improves self-esteem of the persons with disability:

“These initiatives help other employees understand and appreciate the abilities of disabled employees and it also helps disabled people focus on their abilities rather than their disability.”

From the negative side, such a legislation is believed to create additional challenges for companies who do not have the proper infrastructure in place to cater for disabled people. Quite a few respondents mentioned that forcing companies to employ persons with disabilities might not have people facing the issue with the right attitude:

“I would rather employ disabled people because I would like to employ them rather than being obliged to I have no issue in employing disabled people, as long as they are productive”

Two respondents also mentioned the difficulty associated with employees not registering with the ETC as disabled persons with the possibility of being fined anyway:

“There may be various cases where employers have persons with real disability, sometimes severe, on their books, and who for whatever reason have not registered their disability with ETC. I for one am not comfortable in raising the issue with any member of staff in this situation. Requesting the person to register would pass on the message that the person is in some way a burden or being tolerated, or being seen as a means to avoid a fine and comply with the law. This is far from the case. Many of us have worked very hard to ensure that disabled persons are not made to feel different, or be treated differently from their colleagues. While a disabled person should never be obliged in any way to register a disability, nor should a company which is effectively compliant be fined for non-compliance on the technical ground of non-registration outside the company’s control”

The respondents mentioned the following organisations as entities they would expect to provide support to organisations:

- **Malta Association of Supported Employment** – for selection of potential candidates
- **Inspire** – for on the job support and consultation on behaviour
- **ETC** – for skills training, awareness for employers and recruitment
- **OHSA** – for guidance on the risks of certain employees
- **Department of Education** – to include subjects relating to disabilities embedded in the schools’ curriculum so as to create a new generation of a more open minded work force
- **KNPD** - information sessions on employing people with a disability, raising more awareness

Observations and Information (Conference and Workshop)

Conference

During the seminar organised by the MEA various topics relating to employment were addressed.

The conference hosted several expert speakers to present various aspects of the labour market as well as moderated a panel discussion amongst key people involved in industry.

The topics covered during the seminar were as follows:

- 50 years of History: MEA's contribution to Labour Market issues
- The changing Composition of the Maltese Labour Market
- The State of Social Dialogue & Industrial Relations in Malta: Future Challenges
- Education & Employment - The two sides of the HR Coin
- Maximising the Potential of the Maltese Labour Force in a Socially Inclusive Environment (Panel)
- The changing EU Labour Market

The event closed off with an address from The Hon. Dr Simon Busuttil and The Hon. Prime Minister Dr Joseph Muscat.

The key points emerging from the Seminar were as follows:

A research study, commissioned by the Malta Employers Association, found that disabled people encounter significant disadvantages with reference to employment. In this regard it was highlighted that as a result of the research it has been identified that 72% of employers feel that persons with a disability do not have equal opportunities in terms of employment.

Three out of every five employers expressed they do not agree with the measures of enforcing the legislation which stipulates that companies with more than 20 employees must have 2% of the labour force who are disabled and the 'contribution' of €2,400 for every person they should be employing up to a maximum penalty of €10,000 per annum.

It was also divulged that by the KNPD that only five per cent of disabled persons are currently in employment which is a far cry from the 40% EU average. The MEA president Arthur Muscat emphasised that employers were not against employing disabled workers but were facing genuine barriers in doing so and in view of this he said that the association was involved in discussions with government and stakeholders to find ways to overcome these obstacles.

On the other hand, General Workers Union chief Josef Bugeja stated that employers still perceive disabled workers to be a burden on organisations which is a flawed mentality altogether which should not be an issue for Malta at this point in time.

Workshop

An invitation was sent out by the Malta Employers Association to key stakeholders in the field of disability.

A total of 12 respondents attended the discussion group which was held at The Radisson Blu in St Julians on the 23rd November 2015 at 14:00.

The entities that were represented during this discussion were the following:

- MEA (x2)
- ETC
- Lino Spiteri Foundation (x2)
- KNPD (x2)
- Malta Association of Supported Employment
- Malta Federation of Organisation Persons with Disability
- Dar tal-Providenza
- Inspire
- Richmond Foundation
- Commissioner of Mental Health

The discussion guide was prepared by Business Leaders Malta, with the aim to gain some feedback from stakeholders in the field of disability on the key findings of the research conducted amongst employers.

The upcoming section includes specific elements that were discussed during the workshop.

Outcomes of the Workshop

When respondents were presented with a statistic indicating that 76% of businesses interviewed do not have any specific policies tied to the recruitment of persons with a disability, none of the respondents present claimed to be surprised:

“It is not surprising. I don’t think that there is a huge amount of awareness about the potential of employing people with disabilities. It would be very interesting to see how it looks this time next year, when a quota system has been in place for over a year” (KNPD representative)

One of the respondents also mentioned that whilst companies might not have any policies in place on the matter (particularly in the case of the smaller organisations), they might still already have such persons who are already employed in their organisation.

It is expected that policies will be start to be implemented in organisations because of the legislation that is now in place in order to avoid the possibility of taking €10,000 out of the company’s bottom line. One of the respondents mentioned, and many others agreed, that businesses will need support to put policies together because of the unfamiliarity for businesses on this aspect:

“It’s one thing to enforce a legislation and it’s another thing to ensure that people have the support they need to be able to enforce it effectively; so that once people are being recruited there is a system in place that ensures that people are being recruited fairly and with the right support” (Inspire representative)

It is believed that companies need continuous guidance and support to not only recruit people with disabilities but also to help them to fully integrate with their work colleagues.

Two respondents claimed that policies could in reality hinder people with disabilities from becoming truly and fully integrated in the workforce in the same way that other employees are. These respondents explained that inclusion can be enhanced if a company can do without policies whilst empowering disabled persons and other vulnerable groups to reach their full potential with the support of other employees.

Respondents agreed that various stakeholders who are working with persons who have any form of disability are responsible to be able to provide the support that this needed by industry to create truly inclusive workplaces:

“There has to be a voice for disability which does not discriminate in terms of physical to mental to what used to be called learning disabilities...These are issues because if we continue to label things like that we are not going to get anywhere...So from a resource point of view, join forces to talk about disability in all its aspects...and rather than talking about disability let us talk about ability” (Commissioner of Mental Health)

The respondents also agreed that it is important to train people who are in the frontline of the recruitment process, particularly in companies where there is little to no experience with recruiting persons with a disability. The training would instil a sense of understanding of how to recruit persons with a disability, the understanding of how to evaluate the different skills and abilities of different individuals and possible means of communicating with persons with a disability. There was a suggestion whereby funding needs to be allocated to such initiatives in order to ensure that these training sessions take place.

In view of the results from the quantitative research indicating there are several lacunas in the knowledge pertaining to the employment of persons with a disability, the respondents reiterated that the involvement of the different stakeholders is crucial in order to provide employers with the necessary information. These alliances would ensure that information and support is easily available to companies in order to have employment of persons with a disability become a success story of long term employment of people who are reaching their full potential rather than recruiting people with disabilities only to tick a box. It was also noted that the different entities and organisations that are working with persons with a disability need to be working in synch to be able to provide the best service possible to employers and employees:

“There’s probably four entities around this table that are providing job coaching services, and if we are not working hand-in-hand and using similar approaches to address different needs then that in itself will cause confusion because then an employer would not know who to go to” (Inspire representative)

One of the respondents mentioned that support needs to be provided to employers on two very different levels. On one hand, the employment aspect which should be tackled by the ETC which provide their support through schemes and EU Funding possibilities. However, this respondent continues to explain that support should also be provided to employers from the social aspect whereby certain groundwork is done on the background of each of the potential employees as it is impossible for employers to be aware of all the specific details and needs pertaining to specific disabilities. It was therefore highlighted that employers should therefore have the possibility and the ease to get in touch with entities that are experts in the area of disability and provide them with immediate and effective support.

Another point that was raised during the discussion was the fact that an issue relating to the difficulties that are faced by persons with disabilities is multifaceted and could not be treated on one level in isolation. For this reason, when a legislation such as the one requiring an enforcement of a quota, there needs to be inter-ministry collaboration within government as otherwise one ministry could focus on one aspect within their remit without understanding the impact that it has on other areas that are in the remit of other ministries this can cause a problem. This was particularly mentioned in the context of difficulties that may emerge if employment issues are tackled in isolation without considering the changes that need to be implemented in the education system. The respondents provided several suggestions (listed later on in this report) on how improvements in the education system are expected to bring about positive changes in the recruitment of persons with disabilities.

During the discussion, respondents were presented with a statistic indicating that 93% of employers who participated in the quantitative research study indicated that they were concerned with finding persons with a disability who have the right qualifications and skills.

A representative from the MEA explained that this aspect was a matter of concern for employers not because they are opposed to employing persons with a disability in any way, but because if a vacancy arose and the people with disabilities who apply for the job or who register with the ETC do not have the specific skills and competencies required for the job they are unsure about what would happen in such circumstances.

A representative of the KNPD explained that although one can note that there are changes in statistics which indicate that the number of disabled persons who are continuing their education at a tertiary level are increasing, the employer cannot be blamed if there are no persons with a disability who have the required qualifications or if there are none of such persons who are registered with the ETC as interested candidates. It is expected that in the coming years the number of professionals with tertiary level education will become more common thus being able to bridge the gap of supply and demand. In this regard, a representative of the ETC claimed that at this point in time there are very few people with disabilities who are registered with the ETC and have a Diploma Level of Education or higher. In fact, this respondent explained that historically having some formal qualification such as 2 or more O levels would typically have that person almost immediately employed. The respondent claimed that this needs to change in order to be able to service the needs of the industry in a better way.

Respondents highlighted that due to their difficulties, certain people with disabilities may not be in a position to present formal qualifications, which in reality does not mean that they do not have the necessary skills in order to do certain jobs. In order to address this issue, once again it was emphasised that people who are involved in recruitment within organisations need to be supported by specialised entities to assess a persons' ability to carry out certain tasks.

Respondents fervently believed that the issue on qualifications and skills may need to be tackled at a much earlier stage of a person's life rather than when the person is of working age. Therefore, in this regard, respondents agreed that it is not enough to implement processes and legislations but it is also necessary to create an educational system which enables persons with disability to reach their full potential:

"Persons with disabilities of a school age especially in secondary years, already need to start being prompted and encouraged to think about their employability and their ability to go into employment" (Inspire representative)

The respondents mentioned the following initiatives that ought to be considered for implementation in the educational system:

- Schools must consider employability skills training for children with disabilities in secondary school years
- Gearing career guidance professionals to be more in tune with the needs of the industry in order to be able to guide persons with disabilities in the best paths based on their competencies and skills. Such professionals would be aware of the difficulties that such students are likely to face in employment because of their disability and see how such aspects can be addressed. However, one must keep in mind that although guidance is necessary, one needs to take into consideration the wishes of the person with a disability and not to push them into 'stereotypical' jobs which may not necessarily be in line with the wishes of the person. One respondent mentioned that this tended to happen particularly amongst people with mental health issues and intellectual disabilities.
- Having systems that balance out what can be delivered in a mainstream approach within the curriculum and what needs to be provided in an individualised approach (in order to continue to enhance the strengths and skills of the individual concerned to reach their full potential)
- The restructuring of the current Individual Education Plan to include a dimension of employment into this plan turning it into the Individual Education and Employment Plan. One respondent even suggested that certain targeted training can be provided at secondary education level in order to prepare the student for a specific type of job that s/he can pursue after finishing secondary school education
- Restructuring the role of the LSA to become a job coach in the later years of secondary schools in order to empower the student to do things themselves and avoiding as much as possible a sense of dependency on the LSA to make the transition to mainstream employment easier for the individual
- Creating a body within the education division that provides guidance and support to parents of children with a disability to be in a better position to guide their children and to have information at hand on employability and to reassure them if they have any concerns about the working environment their child would be in. Various respondents agreed that some of the greatest challenges in placing people

with disabilities come from the family of such persons because the family members are not making a connection of the notion that the ultimate goal of mainstream education is to be able to join mainstream employment. In view of this family members need to be trained and supported on planning the future of their children

In the quantitative research employers indicated that they are mostly concerned about the extent to which the work environment is adequate to address the needs of persons with disability this was mostly a matter of concern in terms of safety. During the discussion, the respondents mentioned that there are a lot of persons with disabilities who do not require major changes to the infrastructure and therefore employers need to understand that having a person with a disability in their premises does not necessarily imply that a major overhaul is required. Moreover, it is believed that employers need to be made aware of the different financial support schemes that are available for companies that do take on a restructuring project for the sake of inclusion of members of staff with disabilities.

A representative of the KNPDP mentioned that she believes that people who are suitable and who have the necessary qualifications for the job are likely to have no significant difficulty to find a job as long as that person is not considered to be high risk or high cost and such people are not likely to be registered with ETC:

“It’s when they [the employers] perceive that there are high additional costs without realising that they can claim it back through their taxes that there is a problem.” (KNPDP representative)

The lack of awareness about financial support available for companies who wish to take on a person with a disability continues to hinder the employment of people with disabilities and therefore once again the key aspect to address this concern is increased awareness. SMEs that don’t have HR departments are considered to be even less likely to know about such initiatives. A representative of the MEA mentioned that although they regularly reach out to such companies by means of informational seminars, attendance from SME companies tended to be on the low side and therefore one had to consider other more effective ways of reaching out to such companies. In view of such a phenomenon the MEA claimed that initiatives such as The Outreach Programme (an ESF Project) and the setting up of an SME helpdesk were considered to be a successful way to reach out to a larger number of SMEs and Micro enterprises.

On the widespread belief among employers that mental disabilities are far more debilitating in the world of employment, one respondent emphasised that the fear of the unknown is considered to be the main barrier to employment for people with mental health issues. This emerges from the lack of knowledge that mental disorders can be controlled given proper treatment and that very few people can be considered to be disabled by their mental illness.

One of the respondents representing Richmond Foundation confirmed that in practice one can notice that employers are sceptical about taking on board employees with mental health issues and tend to offer the lower level jobs to such individuals because they are considered to be high risk regardless of the qualifications or skills that these persons might have. Whilst if such individuals apply for jobs on their own rather than seeking supported employment services they are likely to be employed without difficulty and retain their jobs over time performing extremely well.

It was noted that in many situations persons with mental health issues are likely to need very minor adjustments to the working conditions, such as allowing employees to start work later. If that flexibility is provided, employees will be able to perform at their optimum level without much support.

In view of these widespread concerns relating to mental issues the respondents agreed that information about mental health is key not only amongst the business community but also amongst the general public at large in order to create a change in mentality within the wider picture. In this regard, entities such as health promotion unit and disease prevention, schools, youth organisations were mentioned as entities that should be involved in the education of the public on such matters.

One of the respondents claimed that in the last 2-3 years there has been a significant interest from employers about mental health, with very good attendance to courses and programmes that cover this topic of interest, including first aid. However, the interest is driven by the wish to tackle employees who are already with the organisation rather than to be better equipped for any future employees and this respondent feels that there should be a change in mentality on this aspect by means of education.

The respondents were asked to provide their feedback on the legislation tied to the quota of persons with disability in employment. In general, the implementation of this legislation is believed to be very much a quick fix, which is a necessary evil due to the dire situation in Malta vis-à-vis the employment of persons with disabilities:

“If you have a quota system in place for 4, 5 or 6, 10 years, however long...At the end of that period my hope would be that so many employers would have experience in employing people with different disabilities...they actually won't have the fear level that they have currently, and that the quota system will eventually be an irrelevance” (KNPD Representative)

It is believed that in order for a solution to this issue to become permanent, a long-term holistic strategy needs to be considered. This is the only way that is believed to bring about the much needed change in culture which in the long-term would mean that no specific quotas or policies would need to be implemented because it would be embedded in the mentality of society at large.

A problem that was highlighted with the quota system was that there may be limitations linked to specific industries that might not allow for a fixed number of people with disabilities to be employed because of the nature of the work within that industry (an example of such an industry is considered to be the construction industry). Such organisations may be put in a position whereby they are penalised by the system whilst the nature of the work does not allow for the employment of disabled persons. In view of such situations it is believed that a case-by-case evaluation approach needs to be in place.

Another problem that may be tied to the quota system is the aspect that certain people with disabilities do not register as so with the ETC because they don't feel that their problems are disabling in any way. This implies that companies are likely to already be employing persons with a disability in practice but since such persons are not registered at the ETC as so, they would not be contributing to the quota and companies may get fined anyway. In this regard, it is worth making reference to the results from the quantitative survey, where 13% of 100 organisations interviewed, claimed that they employ persons with a disability who are not registered with the ETC.

In view of this possibility, an MEA representative claimed that if a company can prove that they do already employ persons with disability who are not necessarily registered as so, many companies would not have significant issues about not being eligible to tax credits as long as it is acknowledged that efforts are being done in this regard even if some of their employees do not appear officially in the ETC books:

“This is where the ETC would have to enforce regulations on a case by case basis...because they would have to give the opportunity to the company to prove or otherwise whether they really have persons with a disability employed with them” (MEA Representative)

One respondent counter argued that such an approach would still have its limitations because certain disabilities are hidden and nobody will ever know that a person with a disability is actually employed. One of the respondents mentioned that since the legislation has come into place, guidance and induction to the employer on a specific employee is considered to bring about very positive results:

“If the employers are specifically taught and inducted on the specific employee they have in front of them our experience is, in these last 6 months, that there is reciprocal cooperation and they are not thrown out and there is the will to employ them” (Malta Association of Supported Employment representative)

A representative from the ETC mentioned that since the implementation of the legislation they have felt an increase in requests from employers, providing vacancies for persons with a disability. This respondent commented that the challenge was now to find people within their databases that have the necessary skills for the job, and this is a matter that needs to be addressed with great urgency.

An aspect that is considered to be an ideal way to transition into a more inclusive workforce is to have systems of supported employment in place.

One of the MEA representatives claimed that whilst it is not likely that the fine given to companies acts as a motivator in itself to employ persons with disabilities, it has generated discussion which in turn has sensitised companies even from a CSR perspective. MEA has also created an employer’s information handbook which has the main purpose of informing organisations about various issues pertaining to employing people. This handbook is especially targeted to those companies that do not have an HR department. Such initiatives and any other initiatives that are tackled from other angles are believed to make the implementation of the legislation a success story.

Finally, the respondents agreed that the take-away though is that employing people with disabilities should not be done simply to tick boxes, but to create long-term, viable and dignified employment for these people. It has been emphasised that having the state employ a lot of these people in positions that are not contributing to their well-being should not be the solution and that industry needs to be in a position to contribute to this serious issue and that industry needs all the support it can get in order to have a seamless transition into a new mentality.

Recommendations for Policy Development and Action

The following are a few points that may be taken into consideration for development of Policies and Future Actions:

- One of the issues arising relates to the mind-set of companies. Adequate information sessions and campaigns need to be carried out to educate companies about the benefits that are linked to employing persons with disabilities. But also generating awareness on disability at a wider national level to contribute to a wider change in perception on disability.
- Creating a network of experts that can easily provide the knowledge and support required by employers in the recruitment process and also have a good and clear reference point during the employee's employment at the organisation
- Considering the individual evaluation of companies who at face-value do not seem as if they are in line with the required quotas, examining possible reasons on why quotas have not or cannot be reached
- Making significant amendments to the education as suggested by the stakeholders to plan for the future in terms of employment starting from secondary school years including support systems for the family members of persons with disabilities

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Annex I - Questionnaire

MEA - Research on Inclusion, Equality &

Diversity at the Place of Work

1) Including yourself, how many employees does this organisation have in Malta?*

- 1-4
- 5-9
- 10-49
- 50-100
- 101-250
- 250+

2) How long has your organisation been in operation?*

- Less than 12 months
- Between 1 and 4 years
- Between 5 and 9 years
- Between 10 and 19 years
- 20 years+

3) What is the main industry of your company?*

Should you operate in more than one industry please mark the area of your CORE business

- Accounting/ Finance/Banking
- Agriculture/Fishing
- Business Consultancy
- Construction
- Marketing/Design & Digital Media
- Distribution & Warehousing
- Energy
- Engineering
- Retail, Wholesale & FMCG
- Gaming
- Hospitality & Catering
- Information Technology
- Services
- Manufacturing
- Medical & Healthcare
- Property/Real Estate
- Sales & Business Development
- Transport/freight
- Other (Please Specify): _____*
- Refuse to reply

4) Which of the following best describes your designation?*

- Director/Owner
- General Manager
- Senior Management

- Middle Management
- HR Manager
- Executive
- Refused

5) Does your company employ any registered/unregistered employees with physical or mental disabilities?*

- Yes (Registered with ETC)
- Yes (Not registered with ETC)
- No
- Don't know
- Refused

If the company has employees with physical or mental disabilities?" ASK Q6

6) What percentage of your employees would you say have some form of disability?*

- Less than 2%
- 2% - 9%
- 10%-19%
- 20%-49%
- 50%+
- Don't Know
- Refused

7) Does your company have a specific policy relating to the recruitment of people with disabilities?*

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Refused

8) For each of the following aspects please indicate in which aspects you feel you need more information, in terms of recruiting people with disabilities?*

	Yes	No
Information that addresses your concerns about costs relating to the needs of people with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on how hiring people with disabilities can be beneficial to companies in your industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information showing how hiring people with disabilities can increase your company's productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on satisfactory job performance, attendance, and retention of people with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9) The following are areas of concern that are sometimes mentioned by employers vis-a-vis employing people with disabilities. How much of a challenge do you think the following factors are when recruiting people with disabilities?*

	A significant challenge	Somewhat of a challenge	Not a challenge at all	Don't Know
Lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities	()	()	()	()
Attitudes of co-workers	()	()	()	()
Attitudes of customers	()	()	()	()
Attitudes of managers/supervisors	()	()	()	()
Costs associated to accommodate disability	()	()	()	()
Finding people with disabilities who have the right skills/qualifications	()	()	()	()
The work required by the organisation cannot be carried out effectively by people with disabilities	()	()	()	()

10) How concerned would you say you are/would be about the following issues that are sometimes associated with having people with a disability at the workplace?*

	Very concerned	Rather concerned	Rather not concerned	Not concerned at all	Don't Know
Personal discomfort, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not knowing how to relate • having to assist them physically • not knowing what or what not to say 	()	()	()	()	()

	Very concerned	Rather concerned	Rather not concerned	Not concerned at all	Don't Know
Behavioural concerns, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> worries about aggressive behaviour problems with interpersonal communication, teamwork 	()	()	()	()	()
Suitability of work or work environment, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not capable of the work they would be better off in sheltered employment, with dedicated support 	()	()	()	()	()
More work for self or other work colleagues, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> more frequent absences less reliable extra and/or physical assistance required 	()	()	()	()	()
Having to make accommodations around the workplace, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> alterations to the building causing disruption incorporating specialised equipment or extra support staff, such as sign language, interpreters or work coaches 	()	()	()	()	()

11) The following are some statements about people with disabilities. For each one, please rate your level of agreement or disagreement.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
It is society which disables people by creating barriers	()	()	()	()	()
People with disabilities are treated fairly in Maltese society	()	()	()	()	()

12) To what extent do you agree or disagree that people with the following disabilities are not able to participate fully in employment?*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Mental health disabilities	()	()	()	()	()
Intellectual disabilities or autism	()	()	()	()	()
Physical disabilities	()	()	()	()	()

13) Do you think that there are occasions or circumstances when it is justified to treat people with disabilities more favourably than others?*

- Yes
 No
 Don't Know
 Refused

14) In general, do you think that people with disabilities receive equal opportunities in terms of employment?*

- Yes
 No
 Don't Know
 Refused

15) The following measures were announced in the National Budget 2015, as a series of measures aimed at increasing the employment of disabled persons. Do you agree or disagree with such measures?*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Exemption from national insurance for employed disabled persons	()	()	()	()	()
A tax credit of a maximum of €4,500 for each disabled person in employment	()	()	()	()	()
Enforcing the legislation which stipulates that companies with more than 20 employees must have 2% of the labour force who are disabled	()	()	()	()	()

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
Companies who fail to abide by the 2% provision and who employ more than 20 persons will pay a 'contribution' of €2,400 for every person they should be employing up to a maximum penalty of €10,000 per annum	()	()	()	()	()
The 'contribution' being introduced over a period of 3 years, with 33% in 2015, 66% in 2016 and 100% in 2017	()	()	()	()	()
The funds collected are administered by the Employment and Training Corporation, and used to setup and administer the Lino Spiteri Foundation. This foundation will use the funds to train and assist disabled persons to find employment.	()	()	()	()	()

THANK AND CLOSE