

Supported Employment in France, a new lever for professional and social inclusion?

Report

15th October 2019

Hôtel de Rennes Métropole, Rennes, France

On October 15th, EPR held a National Awareness Raising Event in Rennes, France. The event was co-organised by EPR French member Fagerh with the collaboration of the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) and Collectif France Emploi Accompagné.

The objective and main focus of this NARE event was to raise awareness on the need to improve access to employment for persons with disabilities and the opportunities drawn from supported employment models in France and in other European countries. To do so, EPR invited professionals from its members Belgium, Norway and Portugal to present their practice and perspective on supported employment in their countries. The event took place timely three years after supported employment was included within French Labour Law.



The aim of the event was to present and place within the European context French practices on supported employment together with looking at inspiring practices coming from various French actors and EPR members. The event was animated by a French journalist, Stéphane de Vendeuve.

The day kicked off with an introductory presentation led by the Director of EPR French member Fagerh, Isabelle Merian, and the Director of Fagerh vocational training department, Frederique Payet. Both welcomed participants and highlighted the importance that focusing the NARE event on supported employment had for being a crucial timely moment to address this topic in France. In addition, they remarked the event will help for the sector to take steps towards advancing on the practice of employment of people with disabilities. With a clear majority of French participants, the day focused in being an informative exchange where participants could also learn from other EPR member's practices and from the examples of the invited enterprises to the day.

European policies on employment of people with disabilities

Laura Jones, EPR Secretary General, presented the network to the audience including its main strategic objectives, members and activities. She highlighted some of the main topics EPR works in together with its members such as mental health, the use of ICF, participation or co-production and the sector activities such as access to employment or social inclusion. During her presentation,

Laura Jones briefed participants on current issues concerning employment of people with disabilities and the trends currently being



considered on the topic at European level: supported employment, partnerships with employers, job carving and job customisation, reasonable accommodation, diversity as an added value.

Laura Jones introduced the audience to key related European policies bringing to light employers often do not know how to engage people with disabilities and are misled by the costs of the action. Diversity of the workforce is one of the added values of hiring people with disabilities. She spoke about the Equality Framework Directive from 2000 proposed including a percentage of people with disabilities to be hired by all EU countries for employing people with disabilities. The European Disability Strategy is currently under evaluation and EPR with partners have called for a bigger focus on employment in any future strategy. The Principles 4 and 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights refer to employment, active inclusion and people with disabilities.

EPR also stated that supported employment gives people with disabilities the possibility to engage in a remunerated activity, develop their professional skills and be part of our society equally to others. In order to achieve this, job coaches play a key role, and EPR is organizing a training workshop for them, open to the public, in October 2019 as well.

New measures put in practice for the employment of people with disabilities in France

During the first panel session of the day, Laure Fourmental (Accessyl, initiative in Essonne), Angéline Visseault and Stéphanie, accompanied person, (GEIST 53, initiative in Mayenne) and Lénaïc Normand (L'Adapt West initiative en Bretagne) shared with the audience their experiences as experts from experience and professionals working with people with disabilities and supported employment. Laura Fourmental explained that at Essonne there are 40 persons with disabilities from which four are accompanied. They work with two job coaches.



In their experience approaching enterprises to propose a collaboration with the people with disabilities they work with is often challenging. She shared the difficulties they experienced when approaching enterprises since there are enterprises they cannot knock at the door of. They are not inclusive and willing to have people with disabilities in their team. Both Angéline Visseault and Stéphanie remarked that people with disabilities often need to work more than others to be employed. Within the GEIST 53, an initiative in Mayenne, there are 31 persons on

supported employment. Within the CRP, professional rehabilitation center, people need more proximity. The expert from experience highlighted her contracts have been mainly short term from three months to three months which makes the experience tiring as she needs to re-start from the beginning each time. It is needed to adapt positions to the needs and the challenges different people have, they highlighted.

One of the key moments of the conference was when the audience heard an emotional testimony from a lady who was supported by a job coach to deal with her severe social anxiety to find and keep a job for the first time.

L'Adapt from Brittany affirmed the need for job coaches specialized in all types of disabilities. Panelists called for moving away of the current concept of supported employment towards clarifying the support needed is medical and social and move towards another type of support today. Because supporting people with disabilities depends on the disability itself.



Round Table: What are the future perspectives in Europe for supported employment?

A key aim of the event was bringing the European perspective to French professionals. To do so, a round table with professionals from the EPR membership and the President of the European Union for Supported Employment (EUSE) took place.



The perspectives from EPR members were brought by The Association of Work & Inclusion, EPR member in Norway and Centro de Reabilitação Profissional de Gaia (CRPG) Gaia, one of the EPR members in Portugal. They presented their examples on supported employment as both Norway and Portugal had measures put in place for supported employment to a diversified public for a longer period than those have been in France.

The President of EUSE stated that in France there is a law on supported employment whereas in other EU countries such as Ireland it does not exist. In Flanders, inclusion is promoted by providing people with disabilities employment support services in the same place that everyone else accesses them, normalizing their services, shared Luc Henau. If you believe in the skills and competences of the service users you work with, he added, it is more important to focus on supporting the employers than the users, to open the companies' doors, to convince them of the user's capacities.

EPR member from Norway, Work and Inclusion, represented by Paal Harvorsen, shared with the audience a successful practice from Norway. They have built up a system of people working in service providers who serve the needs of the companies, and who develop long-term partnerships with them to provide them qualified staff. As Paal told the audience, in 1992 in Norway a national project was launched following a report of the government. In Norway, supported employment has always been a strategy from the government, he added. Supported employment is financed by the labour market authorities but set by the healthy system. This program has today from five to six thousand people involved. It has evolved very positively with regards to the past decades. In the 90s, people with disabilities in Norway did not last long on employment.

In three years more than 2000 recruitment agreements were done. 65 per cent of people with disabilities trained are able to get a job. Good quality education plays a key role in helping setting up people with disabilities into the labour market.

A key message from the contribution of the European panel to the day was that the transitions from education to employment or from job to job are often difficult moments, therefore sufficient care and support is therefore key in these times to ensure they are successful.



The day looked into the needs that exist in Brittany related to the employment of people with disabilities. As such, both audience and experts' panelists called for more attention to be given to people with autism in particular; more support to the person with a disability and also to the job coach. At present 80 persons with a disability are in enterprises with supported employment. There is need for increased financing for organisations running supported employment services, as they are not able to reach their potential in supporting people in work. The resources currently allocated are not sufficient and there is need for more cooperation



between the institutions. Employment is a good indicator of the well-being of a person and helps to reduce medication in many cases.



The day finished with the contribution from representatives of companies such as Levi's & co France. The enterprises shared their practices in supporting hiring people with disabilities to join their employees.

Levi's & co shared their experience hiring people with disabilities for short term contracts. It was a positive experience although short as it was a fixed contract and for personal reasons the person employed did not renew it although possibilities were given.

Overall, they had a good experience and are willing to keep creating opportunities to this end.

Conclusions for policy makers and stakeholders on employment of people with disabilities; identifying challenges and solutions for the French context

- It is a crucial time to develop further existing initiatives on supported employment in France especially with more dedicated measures to promote increasing hiring by employers of people with disabilities.
- There is need for increased financing for organisations running supported employment services to ensure they are able to support everyone that would benefit from them, and that any evaluation of the service is fair; that they are evaluated from a place of receiving the needed resources.
- The European Disability Strategy currently under evaluation and the future one coming in 2021 or the implementation of the CRPD in the EU contemplate the right to equal opportunities and employment of people with disabilities. The principles 4 and 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights refer to employment, active inclusion and people with disabilities. France, as the other EU countries, should take into account these EU and international measures to continue advancing on increasing the number of people with disabilities employed.
- Supported employment gives people with disabilities the possibility to engage in a remunerated activity, develop their professional skills and be part of our society equally to others. In order to achieve this, job coaches play a key role and need to be supported.
- Proposing longer term contracts and taking into account the needs of the person are key to succeed on employing people with disabilities.
- More efforts and willingness need to be present at French employers to move toward more inclusive recruitment.
- Employers need to more support and need to be convinced of the capabilities people with disabilities have and the added value and what they can bring to their team.
- French experts called for more support to be given to people with autism in particular.



NARE Evaluation Report:

The National Awareness Raising Event organised in Rennes, France, had an overall rating of 4.3/5. Participants were greatly content with the content of the conference, the panellists and the opportunity to get to know better and participate in exchanges with EPR members from other countries (Norway, Portugal or Belgium). Overall participants gave high ratings to the quality of structure, the information and the knowledge they gained.

The testimonies of pwd engaged in employment opportunities thanks to supported employment schemes was greatly welcomed. Also, the presentation of the different methods or systems used to support employment in France and elsewhere in Europe. The European perspective of the event was very positively rated.

