

*Building capacity for excellence in service  
provision for people with disabilities*

## Mutual learning event

### Partnerships with companies: taking a strategic approach in supporting employers

Madrid, Spain, 15 – 16 November 2018,

### Summary Report

#### Background

Following the successful meeting organised in Köln last year attended by more than 30 participants from several countries, EPR is co-organising the 2018 edition on partnership with employers events together with Fundación ONCE and Inserta. The local hosts have extensive experience in developing successful collaboration with a variety of national and international companies. Thanks to their strong network with employers, Fundación ONCE and Inserta will invite representatives of different industries and present successful partnerships to ensure jobseekers with disabilities are employed in meaningful jobs.

#### Day I

On the 15-16 November 2018 20 people from across Europe gathered in Madrid at a mutual learning meeting co-organised with ONCE and their employment agency Inserta, with the aim to help organisations improve their services and better support the integration of people with disabilities in the labour market



The meeting started with a study visit to the company Repsol REPSOL at their barrier-free HQ, which helps to attract talent with disabilities. There was a presentation on their good practice in hiring and supporting people with different disabilities was presented and discussed. They have an approach of engaging “diverse talent”, believing that brings advantages. For more information on this approach see [here](#) and for their full policy and actions see their publication *Diverse Talent* [here](#).



They have a structural cooperation with ONCE, enabling them to find qualified candidates and receiving advice on disabilities. They also have an accessible building, and employ different actions for all employees well-being. Participants had the opportunity to speak to employees with disabilities and understand the adaptations made for them.

After the study visit, participants came back to the venue hotel and got to know each other better during a small drinks reception before meeting for dinner later in the evening.

**Institutional Welcome and presentation of ONCE Foundation/Inserta Empleo.** Sabina Lobato and Virginia Carcedo presented themselves and the organisation. ONCE Foundation and INSERTA are part of the ONCE Social Group. **Inserta** is the employment agency, officially recognised by the government, and is actually bigger than the public employment agency. They approach companies from many different angles, trying to meet their needs in the disability field, as a way to open a first communication channel or relationship, and build upon that. For instance, helping them in the firstly with the accessibility of their facilities, with workplace adjustment, with their websites etc., and address employment as the next step. The idea is to build strong and long-lasting relationships with them. **Fora Inserta** is a learning forum for companies employing people with disabilities.

They also co-create solutions with other organisations representing people with a disability. In their experience, companies are not aware of the talent of people with disabilities and the people themselves are not aware of their disabilities. They recently launched a campaign aimed at young people called Don't Give Up and give grants to young people with disabilities to study. They organise training programmes including soft skills, and their partnerships with companies enable them to build training around company needs.

As there were a number of participants new to EPR Laura Jones, EPR Secretary General, presented EPR's activities related to employment. More information can be found [here](#) (policy) and under [events](#).

Two panel discussions were organized on day 2, engaging with employers and with people with different disabilities.

In the employers' panel, Ana Millan from Accenture, Esther Fernandez from KPMG and Ignacio Velo from Ilunion took part. KPMG has the strategic objective to bring the company abilities that helps their business grow – they see a diverse workforce as win-win. Ilunion is a chain of social enterprises which is part of ONCE, employing 40% people with a disability and 53% women. They also promote diversity throughout their value chain of suppliers.

Accenture talked about the changes the digital transformation will bring, even soft skills will be digitalised. They have training modules in 4 languages and promote immersive learning and training people on the job. Ms Millan spoke about the need for organisations to understand the language of business and be flexible in their support and training as needs change, and internal training can be most relevant.

Companies need professionals and productivity. Organisations can challenge the status quo; offer a different view. Participants were told not to get discouraged, show confidence in dealing with companies and build relationships with them. It takes time to find the first entry into a company, often longer for a big company. In big companies they often need to have a strategy in place and have people across the whole company. Checking if a company is a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Global Disability Network would indicate an international policy of promoting employment of people with a disability. Some companies have their own Foundations – it can be a good place to start with them. CSR policies can be a good entry but it is often difficult to find the right person. If a company has won some kind of award in any kind of staffing related issue that shows an interest in development and potentially in disability – organisations can look for a hook. Some companies might offer pro bono services to non-profits – this can be a good way of making first contact with a company. Companies may change priorities which may mean less interest in employment of people with disabilities, so the relationship needs to be strong.



Using the media can be useful, big companies are interested in their public image so offering the opportunity to promote themselves can help. Some recommended first going to the local branch of a company, and when successful employment has been found and implemented, to then approach the central office. Some companies have a local policy though, so it is important to know where the policy is developed.

When meeting a company it is important to be very prepared; understand the challenges a company faces and be able to offer solutions, know the business case for diversity. For first contact, informal gathering can help, as well as “speed dating” with job seekers. It is important to both train and support people with disabilities in work, mentoring can be a good approach and planning the support in advance. Organisations can build a culture supporting disability and diversity. Initiatives to support companies mutual learning on diversity and informing companies about disability and support services must be supported.

In the discussion with participants it was pointed out that in Spain 90% of people with a mental health diagnosis are unemployed, and those with schizophrenia have an unemployment rate of 98%. Challenges are often in the interview. In the panel with people with disabilities the support of Inserta and ONCE was shown to be invaluable. One young person’s university told him about the support offered by them and he managed to get an internship in a publishers. A man who lost his business in the crisis spoke about the fact that Inserta was the only employment support that helped him feel comfortable.

A 29-year old man with traumatic brain injury due to loss of oxygen following a heart attack said that most people saw a disability on paper and didn’t want to hire him. It is important for people to see their strengths, potential and skills, and advice on how to address the challenges. A young woman on the autistic spectrum spoke about the importance of awareness raising, making simple information about a diagnosis available to staff – taking into account the fact that no two people with the same diagnosis are the same, we are all individuals. There was a consensus about the importance of awareness raising and media work, changing societal perceptions filters down into the work place. EPR has started with simple online media campaigns, in 2018 producing infographics on different issues related to disability: <https://www.epr.eu/what-we-do/policy-analysis/employment-and-skills/online-campaign-2018-employment-and-disability/>

The young lady found that even though she is high functioning on the autistic spectrum she was often infantilised. She felt it is important for all managers to be informed about someone with a disability, and given information about that disability. She also said that spending time with people with disabilities helps break down barriers. She noted that there are not many resources for people with multiple disabilities. It was stressed that skills should be more important than qualifications. Both job seekers and companies should be supported in a tailor-made way.

*A group photo:*



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