



SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MALTA & GOZO

Towards inclusive employment

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Commissioned by:

**Malta Association of
Supported Employment (MASE)**

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Disclaimers

The responsibility for the opinions and conclusions expressed in this publication rests solely on the author, and the publication does not constitute an endorsement by Jobsplus of the questions, opinions and conclusions expressed in it.

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A special mention goes to the persons with disabilities and their relatives who shared their personal experiences, successes and grief with the researcher, trusting her to bring their voices to the fore through this report.

“The best
research you
can do is talk
to people,”

Terry Pratchett

Foreword:

MARTHESE MUGLIETTE

MASE President

The Malta Association of Supported Employment (MASE)’s research study focuses on Supported Employment for persons with disabilities, including individuals with mental health challenges.

Supported Employment is a framework designed to provide meaningful, sustainable work opportunities tailored to the needs and skills of persons with disabilities, enabling them to achieve economic independence and social integration. MASE’s study aims to assess the current state of Supported Employment services in Malta, identifying existing strengths and areas for improvement. By exploring both the successes and challenges in the system, this research will shed light on how effectively the needs of job seekers with disabilities are being met and the extent to which employers are prepared to support a diverse workforce.

The study also aims to generate recommendations for policymakers, service providers, and employers to create more inclusive and supportive workplaces. This research will serve as a foundation for future improvements, advocating for an environment where all individuals have equal access to fulfilling employment opportunities.

Thank you Dr Lara Bezzina, for your thorough and transparent research.

To us, inclusive employment means having a job you chose yourself, in a place where persons with disabilities and people without disabilities work together and are treated as equals...[and] everyone gets the support they need to do their job.

Inclusion International¹

1 Inclusion International. *Inclusive Employment*. <https://inclusion-international.org/key-issue/employment>

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List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ANED	Academic Network of European Disability Experts
ASEE	Association for Supported Employment Europe (<i>previously EUSE</i>)
BASE	British Association for Supported Employment
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (Malta)
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DDS	Department of Disability Studies
EASPD	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
EDE	European Disability Expertise (<i>previously ANED</i>)
EDF	European Disability Forum
ENIL	European Network on Independent Living
EOA	Equal Opportunities Act (Persons with Disability) Act (Malta)
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EUSE	European Union of Supported Employment
HR	Human Resources
IPS	Individual Placement and Support
KII	Key Informant Interview

LCA	Local Councils' Association (Malta)
LN	Legal Notice
LSF	Lino Spiteri Foundation (Malta)
MASE	Malta Association of Supported Employment
MFOPD	Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability
MIV	Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector (Malta)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIC	National Insurance Contribution (Malta)
NSSS	National School Support Services (Malta)
OLM	Open Labour Market
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
OT	Occupational Therapist
PG	Profiling and Guidance (LSF)
SE	Supported Employment
SET	Sheltered Employment Training (Jobsplus)
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UoM	University of Malta
WEP	Work Experience Placement

Executive Summary

This research explores the current landscape of Supported Employment (SE) services for persons with disabilities in Malta and Gozo, with a focus on inclusivity, effectiveness, and the extent to which these services align with international standards and local needs. Despite positive strides, persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to entering and remaining in the open labour market (OLM), with the rate of employment of persons with disabilities continuing to be lower than the EU average.

Using a mixed methodology that included desk research, 58 in-depth stakeholder interviews, and participatory validation workshops, the study assesses the impact, relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity of SE services in Malta. Core services examined include those provided by the Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF), Jobsplus, Aġenzija Sapport, and various NGOs. While LSF services—such as job coaching and employer engagement—have successfully supported over 1000 individuals since its inception in 2015, many challenges persist. These include inadequate support for persons with complex disabilities and mental health problems, a lack of qualified staff and minimal career progression opportunities.

The study also critiques Malta's continued reliance on sheltered employment and training, which can contradict the principles of inclusive employment promoted by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). Although these services are well-intentioned and sometimes necessary, especially in Gozo, they risk perpetuating segregation and limiting long-term career development.

Findings underscore the need for a more unified and rights-based approach to employment support. Recommendations include enhancing training for job coaches, increasing employer incentives for inclusive practices, integrating services under one umbrella for better coherence, improving monitoring and evaluation systems, and involving persons with disabilities in service design and governance. Legal and infrastructural reforms are also suggested to address external barriers such as education gaps, transportation limitations, and a lack of supportive legislation for social enterprises.

Ultimately, supported employment in Malta must evolve beyond placing individuals in entry-level roles and aim to create meaningful, self-directed career paths that respect and harness the full potential of every individual with a disability.

1. Introduction

Employment is crucial for persons with disabilities to actively participate in the community and lead a dignified life; yet many of them face several challenges in finding and maintaining paid work. Persisting beliefs that persons with disabilities are unable to work in the open labour market² are compounded by the neoliberal ideology in which the current market is embedded, as well as multiple global financial crises in the past couple of decades.

The rate of **employment of persons with disabilities in Malta** and Gozo (hereinafter referred to as “Malta”) continues to be **lower than that of the rest of the population**, and of persons with disabilities across the European Union (EU).³ This is confirmed by multiple studies and reports, indicating that the open labour market (OLM) is still not accessible to many persons with disabilities.⁴

A 2023 report by the *European Disability Forum* (EDF) confirms that less than half (47.1%) of persons with disabilities in Malta are employed; while the full-time employment rate of women with disabilities stood at 16%, making it one of the lowest in the EU.⁵

Seemingly counteracting the advances made in persons with disabilities being included in the OLM, **sheltered workshops (both for training and employment) are still in existence in Malta**, despite Article 27 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) stating that States Parties are obliged to:

*recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.*⁶

Although Article 27 of the UNCRPD does not explicitly prohibit sheltered workshops, General Comment No. 8⁷ from the UN Committee on the Rights of

2 Varkas, M. 2022. ‘Sheltered or Supported Employment Options for Secondary Education Students with Disabilities?’ *IJASOS - International E-journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, vol. 8(23), p. 479-484. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18769/ijasos.1142826>

3 Gauci, V., Callus, A-M. and Camilleri Zahra, A. (EDE). 2021. *European Semester 2020-2021 country fiche on disability equality – Malta*. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23939&langId=en>

4 See, for example: European Commission. 2023. *Commission Staff Working Document. 2023 Country Report – Malta, Accompanying the document: Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2023 National Reform of Malta and delivering a Council opinion on the 2023 Stability Programme of Malta*. https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/MT_SWD_2023_618_en.pdf

5 EDF. 2023. *European Human Rights Report. Issue 7 – The Right to Work: The employment situation of persons with disabilities in Europe*. https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2023/05/hr7_2023_press-accessible.pdf

6 UN. 2006. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

7 UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2022. CRPD/C/GC/8: *General comment No. 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crpdgc8-general-comment-no-8-2022-right-persons>

Persons with Disabilities - along with prior UN recommendations to Member States, has established a more critical perspective on this sector, ultimately suggesting that it gradually be phased out.⁸ More recently, the *European Network on Independent Living* (ENIL) called out state funding, across the EU, being used to maintain, construct or renovate sheltered workshops; and proposed that such funding be redirected to inclusive employment.⁹

Meanwhile, supported employment (SE) has been successfully used for decades as personalised support for people with significant disabilities to obtain and retain employment.¹⁰ The *Association for Supported Employment Europe* (ASEE)¹¹ defines supported employment as “the provision of support to persons with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market.”¹²

Such services are being also provided in Malta. To date, however, very little research has looked specifically at this and at how SE is actually supporting persons with disabilities in seeking, obtaining and retaining employment.

8 Bezzina, L., Zutauteite, J. Belafatti, F. and Paulauskaite, E. (EASPD). 2022. *Fostering Employment through Sheltered Workshops: Reality, Trends and Next Steps*. <https://easpd.eu/resources-detail/fostering-employment-through-sheltered-workshops-reality-trends-and-next-steps>

9 ENIL. 2024. *EU state aid for inclusive employment*. <https://enil.eu/campaigns/eu-state-aid-for-inclusive-employment>

10 BASE. *What is Supported Employment?* <https://www.base-uk.org/what-supported-employment>

11 Prior to March 2024, ASEE was known as the *European Union of Supported Employment* (EUSE).

12 ASEE. 2013. *Defining Supported Employment*. <https://a4se.eu/about-se/defining-supported-employment>

1.1 Aims and Objectives

This research thus aims to delve deeper into the supported employment scenario in Malta, with the aim of gauging:

- the type of supported employment being currently provided, how and to whom;
- whether the current supported employment services are reaching their aim in enabling persons with disabilities in accessing the open labour market; and
- whether the current supported employment services can be improved and in what manner.

1.2 Report Structure

Following this introductory chapter, this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** gives an overview of the meaning and significance of supported employment (SE), delving into salient SE services in Europe, before exploring the same services provided in Malta.
- **Chapter 3** delves into the methodology employed in each stage of the study, including data collection and analysis, validation, dissemination, ethical considerations and limitations.
- **Chapter 4** discusses the findings and evaluates them in terms of the current services' impact, relevance, effectiveness and inclusivity.
- **Chapter 5** brings together the conclusions emerging from the study together with recommendations for the way forward with regard to inclusive employment for persons with disabilities
- **Annex I** and **Annex II** contain the different information sheets, consent forms and questionnaires used in the data collection phase; while **Annex III** contains the validation workshop agenda.

2. The Supported Employment Model

The Supported Employment (SE) model – which is based on the principle that anyone can be employed if they want to work and have enough support - was developed by the ASEE to support people with significant disabilities to access employment in the open labour market.¹³

The ASEE toolkit¹⁴ outlines the **five main stages of the Supported Employment** process:

1. Client Engagement

This stage aims at ensuring that the client makes an informed choice as to whether they would like to use the SE model to find a job, and which SE organisation can assist them to achieve this. The ASEE toolkit highlights the importance of the SE organisation:

- ensuring that the **information provided to the client is clear, accurate, easily understood and available in accessible formats.**
- following up the provision of information with face-to-face meetings and **meetings with other stakeholders suggested by the individual** (e.g. relative, teacher, health professional).

13 ASEE. 2013. *Defining Supported Employment*. <https://a4se.eu/about-se/defining-supported-employment>

14 EUSE. 2010. *European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit*. <https://a4se.eu/about-se/supported-employment-toolkit>

INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT (IPS)

When supported employment is used to support persons with long-term mental health needs, SE is often referred to as Individual Placement and Support (IPS).

In the past three decades, IPS has emerged as an evidence-based approach to supporting people with severe mental health problems – such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression – to find, and succeed in, paid employment.

IPS is made up of 8 main principles:

- 1) Focus on the goal of competitive employment
- 2) Zero exclusion: every client who wants to work is eligible for services
- 3) Attention to client preferences
- 4) Rapid job search: helping clients seek employment shortly after they indicate their interest in working, avoiding lengthy pre-employment assessment and training
- 5) Targeted job development
- 6) Integration of employment services with mental health treatment
- 7) Personalised benefits counselling: helping clients obtain personalised, understandable and accurate information about how working may impact their disability benefits and other government entitlements
- 8) Individualised long-term support for as long as the client wants and needs support to keep a job or to advance in their career.

Drake, R.E. & Bond, G.R. 2023. 'Individual placement and support: History, current status, and future directions.' *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences (PCN) Reports*, 2(3).
DOI: 10.1002/pcn5.122

2. Vocational Profiling

Vocational profiling is one of the most important factors for the success of sustainable integration in the OLM: lack of planning and of engaging fully with the job seeker often leads to unsuccessful job matching. This stage is a **collaborative process between the job seeker and the service provider**, with the former **maintaining ownership of the whole process**.

The objective of this second stage is to achieve the best match possible between the job seeker's skills and support needs, and the requirements of the employer / job. This is done through developing the client's awareness and understanding of:

- the opportunities and obstacles in the open labour market;
- their career opportunities based on their interests and abilities; and
- their individual support needs.

The vocational profiling stage should culminate in a **working action plan identifying the agreed-upon activities, outcomes, aims and objectives, as well as who is responsible** for each.

3. Job Finding

In supported employment, it is **common to use both informal methods (such as word of mouth and using informal contacts) of securing jobs, as well as formal methods**. One job finding method is that of **"job carving" or "job creation"**, where a job is created by identifying parts of a job / tasks that the employer needs done and can be carried out by the job seeker. This method has multiple benefits; however it can also lead to a **lack of progression prospects / career development**, since the jobs created through carving may be short-term. Further,

job carving might be useful for people with intellectual disabilities, but **not for those who have other impairments**.

4. Employer Engagement

Understanding and addressing the needs of the employer is as important as addressing those of the service user.¹⁵ The SE model also emphasises the importance of:

- service providers and job seekers developing their awareness of present and future **labour market needs**.
- service providers demonstrating to employers that employing persons with disabilities is not simply the **appropriate thing to do from a social stance, but also from a business perspective**.
- service providers being aware of the **employer's potential additional needs** (above and beyond the recruitment process ones) such as: disability awareness training; safety and disability employment issues; knowledge of the relevant government support / funding schemes; and support with developing / introducing policies concerning employees and applicants with disabilities.
- **marketing materials, which can play a significant role in promoting SE services with prospective employers, and can make a positive impact.**

15 Throughout the report, 'service user' 'job seeker' and 'client' are used interchangeably.

5. On-and Off-the Job Support

Individualised job support is crucial for many persons with disabilities to secure and maintain employment in the OLM. The ideal SE services offer a range of tailored support both on-and off- the job, catering to the **specific needs of employees with disabilities, their coworkers, and the company as a whole.** This support aims at ensuring that the employee can fully engage in all standard workplace processes, including on-boarding, probation, performance evaluations, and development opportunities. It also helps coworkers train and assist the new employee, ensures that company procedures are accessible to employees with disabilities, and aids the employee in adapting to their new role and reaching their full potential.

5.1 Career Development and Progression

While this is not one of the main stages of the SE model, the ASEE toolkit gives it its due importance in the supported employment process. In today's world, job security is no longer guaranteed, making continuous skill development essential for employees looking to retain or change jobs in response to personal goals or economic shifts. Moreover, individuals with disabilities often have lower skill levels, making them more susceptible to economic fluctuations. They frequently occupy **entry-level positions and face challenges in advancing to more skilled roles within a knowledge-based economy;** consequently, their career paths may involve lateral moves rather than upward advancement. Employees with disabilities thus need guidance in exploring both internal and external career options to make informed decisions about their futures. While service users **might exit employment support programmes once they secure jobs, this raises concerns about the adequacy of ongoing support for career progression.**

Thus, career development is essential both during the process and afterwards; and on-the-job support needs to focus on **identifying opportunities for career advancement and enhancing skills.** Supported employment can facilitate access to these opportunities for workers with disabilities, linking them to **long-term personal planning through individual development plans:** a vital role of SE services is to foster personal motivation and aspirations among employees. However:

- not all employees seek change; many are satisfied with their current roles, especially if a good job match has been found.
- limited resources often lead to a neglect of personal career development, as the priority tends to be on helping job seekers find employment and assisting employees in retaining their jobs. The ASEE emphasises that **ongoing career support must be adequately funded and integrated into the supported employment framework.**
- ultimately, career progression opportunities are influenced by the local job market and the availability of suitable roles aligned with the aspirations of job seekers. Nonetheless, developing soft skills and obtaining vocational qualifications can enhance self-worth, improve job prospects, and help reduce the stigma associated with disabilities. **Support for skill development can come from educational settings, fostering greater independence and empowering individuals.**

2.1 Supported Employment across the EU

Not all EU countries adhere to all of the principles of the SE model described in the previous section. This is due to several factors, among them:

- Differing criteria / **understanding of economic employment** across countries.
- **“Job readiness”** is another contentious issue, whereby some countries oblige persons with disabilities to be “job ready” before seeking employment. This often results in many persons with disabilities participating in employment training for the best part of their lives; and goes against the SE model of training on the job: the **“place-train-maintain”** strategy.
- **Work experience placements (WEPs)** at times are not used as a progression tool / stepping stone to paid employment. When used correctly, however, WEPs can have many benefits – especially for individuals who have never worked / been out of work for a long period - including:
 - helping service users determine their job preferences, strengths and weaknesses;
 - giving the individual something to add to their CV;
 - giving the individual an insight into what real employment is like and helping them assess their own skills and stamina; and
 - helping the service user develop new skills and build on existing ones.
- Disparity in the **levels of training of supported employment services staff**: while some EU countries provide training and diplomas in SE, others do not. This fragmented approach to training and employment engagement skills can have adverse effects on contact with employers; and on the job seekers themselves, since fully including the wishes of the job seeker often depends on the skills of the SE staff.
- **Funding for individualised job support** is often inadequate. In many countries, intensive job support is not available, and the support that is provided is typically time-limited:
 - The need for job support is usually greater at the start of a new role, with the intensity gradually decreasing over time. However, ongoing support should remain available as needed, since it has been shown to be a key factor in long-term success. **Without this continuous support, there is a risk that the employee may lose their job.**
 - It is often challenging to secure funding for long-term job support in the OLM, while **funding for lifelong support in sheltered workshops is generally more accessible**. Furthermore, **job support in open employment is often restricted to crisis management rather than helping employees engage in training or career development opportunities**.¹⁶

16 EUSE. 2010. *European Union of Supported Employment Toolkit*. <https://a4se.eu/about-se/supported-employment-toolkit>

2.2 Supported Employment in Malta ¹⁷

In Malta, the **current supported employment services for persons with disabilities are provided by the Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF)**¹⁸, a social purpose foundation dedicated to supporting sustainable employment of persons with disabilities. The foundation was established in 2015 as a partnership between Jobsplus¹⁹ (the national employment agency) and the cooperative Empower.²⁰

Prior to the setting up of the LSF, supported employment services were provided by various entities, with some services continuing also after LSF was born. These entities include *Aġenzija Support*²¹ (the national disability services agency); Inspire Foundation²² (an NGO providing services for persons with disabilities); Richmond Foundation²³ (an NGO providing services for persons with mental health problems); the Malta Association of Supported Employment (MASE)²⁴; and the Malta Trust Foundation²⁵ (the latter two NGOs providing supported employment services for people in disadvantaged situations, including those with disabilities).

The rest of this section give an overview of the services and other initiatives currently in place to support persons with disabilities in accessing employment. It is to be noted that this section – and the study / report in general – do not cover other areas which are essential in a person with disabili-

ty's life in order for them to work in the OLM, such as education and transport. These issues are mentioned briefly where necessary, but such areas – and others – would need to be looked at in depth through other studies.

2.2.1 The Pathway to Employment

In Malta, persons with disability who are seeking employment – whether they are already in employment or otherwise – can apply to be part of Jobsplus' Register for Persons with Disability.²⁶ Upon application, the client is referred to a Placement Medical Officer, who assesses the employability of the client. An Occupational Therapist (OT) subsequently assesses the abilities of the client and recommends the ideal path towards employment: sheltered employment training, other training programmes, supported employment in OLM or support to search for jobs in the OLM.

This 'pathway to employment' is described below. However, not each 'step', needs to be fulfilled; nor are they necessarily consecutive:

1. Sheltered Employment Training (SET). Managed and offered by Jobsplus²⁷, SET is currently a year-long training taking place in a sheltered setting.²⁸ It aims at preparing those individuals with disabilities who are farther from the OLM, for employment. SET provides this through simulating a work environment where service users receive hands-on training in different tasks, such as: back-office work, product assembly, packaging

17 Unless otherwise stated, all information in this chapter emerged from the KIIs and Validations Workshops conducted for this study.

18 <https://linospiterifoundation.org>

19 <https://jobsplus.gov.mt>

20 Website not working.

21 <https://support.gov.mt>

22 <https://inspire.org.mt>

23 <https://www.richmond.org.mt>

24 <https://www.mfopd.org/malta-association-of-supported-empl>

25 <https://www.maltatrufoundation.org>

26 Servizz.gov. 2024. *Entry of Name in Register for Persons with Disability*. <https://www.servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Work-and-Employment-Services/Employment-Services/Employment-and-Training/WEB2139/default.aspx>

27 The SET was funded by the ESF.02.048 VASTE Programme between 2016 and 2023.

28 Changes to SET and other initiatives are planned to take place through the VASTE II Programme: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/funding/vaste-programme-ii>

material and dismantling of electronic devices.²⁹ The training also includes one “outpost” where service users are given the opportunity to “work” (without pay) at a company in the OLM for six weeks, with the support of a job coach. Participants are not remunerated and are supported by Jobsplus job coaches, each of whom has two / three service users assigned to them. These job coaches are mentored by professionals specialised in the field employed by Inspire and Richmond Foundation.

SET in Numbers

- 6 Sheltered Workshops:
5 in Malta + 1 in Gozo
- 13 Job Coaches
- 244 participants between 2016-2023:
 - 206 participated once
 - 35 participated twice
 - 3 participated thrice

2. Sheltered Employment. The Jobsplus Document Management Sheltered Employment in Gozo employs 66 employees with different disabilities. The employees are supported by LSF job coaches.

3. Headstart Programme.³⁰ Managed and offered by LSF, Headstart is a six-month long programme serving as a launchpad to employment in the OLM. It includes: training in basic English, numeracy and money handling, IT, physical activity, empowerment, cooking, transport training, hands-on assembly and disassembly. Participants receive a stipend and are supported by LSF job coaches.

4. Supported Employment. The LSF’s work is based on three distinct but interlinked pillars:

➤ **Pillar 1 - Profiling & Guidance (PG).** Persons with disability who want to find / change a job are:

- assessed and profiled
- prepared for the market (through in-house training / referral to external training)
- put up for vacancies (carved by LSF or otherwise).

If a service user has mental health problems, they might be referred to Richmond Foundation.

➤ **Pillar 2 - Corporate Relations.** LSF staff:

- reach out to - and support - companies to create jobs or carve existing jobs.
- share the vacancy with the PG Unit to make a match between the service user and the vacancy
- set an interview and support the service user during the interview process.
- support companies with recruitment, fiscal and other incentives, and job retainment.

➤ **Pillar 3 - Job Coaching.** Job coaches support the service user during the recruitment process and during their employment. Support can vary from a few weeks to years, until the client becomes independent.

LSF service users do not necessarily need the services of each of the three Units. For example, if a client is already employed and simply needs job coaching, they would be serviced mainly by the Job Coaching Unit.

29 NSSS. 2020. *Youth Guarantee*. <https://euroguidance.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Job-plus-Youth-Guarantee-infographic-EN.pdf>

30 LSF. 2024. *Programmes*. <https://linospiterifoundation.org/programmes>

LSF in Numbers

Staff & Clients

- Profiling & Guidance Unit :
 - 4 Staff Members (3 in Malta / 1 in Malta & Gozo)
 - 300 service users
- Corporate Relations Unit :
 - 4 Staff Members (3 in Malta / 1 in Gozo)
 - 750 companies
- Job Coaching Unit:
 - 27 Job coaches

Services Provided

2016 – 2023

- 1280 jobs found / created / carved
- > 1180 + individuals job coached
- 86% still actively employed in the OLM

In 2023:

- 306 companies supported
- 250 vacancies created
- 505 individuals coached
- 135 service users employed
- 26 participants in Headstart

2.2.2 Other Schemes and Training Programmes

Persons with disabilities in Malta – as well as employers wishing to employ persons with disabilities – are supported through various other long-standing schemes and initiatives, as well as standalone projects and programmes. The below is a non-exhaustive list of such initiatives, grouped according to the providing organisation:

➤ Jobsplus

- The **Bridging the Gap Scheme** enables registered persons with disabilities to engage in a period of work exposure to enable the employer to evaluate their performance prior to actual paid employment. Employers participating in this scheme are exempted from social security contributions, wages and sick leave benefits.³¹
- The **Access to Employment (A2E) Scheme** provides employment aid to enterprises to promote the recruitment of inactive persons and jobseekers who encounter challenges in finding employment. Employers who benefit from this scheme receive a weekly subsidy (enhanced in the case of employees with disability) for a maximum of 156 weeks for each new registered person with disability engaged. The scheme is co-funded by the ESF+ and the government.³²
- The **Fiscal Incentive Scheme**. Employers – if not already benefiting from the A2E Scheme - are eligible to claim a fiscal incentive equivalent to 25% of the person with disability's basic wage, up to a maximum of €4,500 for each employee with disability.³³
- The **N.I.C. Exemption Scheme**. Employers – if not already benefiting from the A2E Scheme - employing persons with disability are exempt from paying their part of the National Insurance Contribution (N.I.C.).³⁴

31 Jobsplus. 2024. *Bridging the Gap Scheme*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/funding-employer/bridging-the-gap-scheme>

32 Jobsplus. 2024. *Access to Employment (A2E) Scheme 2021-2027*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/funding-employer/access-to-employment-a2e-scheme-2021-2027>

33 Jobsplus. 2024. *Fiscal Incentive Scheme*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/funding-employer/fiscal-incentive-scheme>

34 Jobsplus. 2024. *Employer's N.I. Contribution exemption*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/funding-employer/employer-s-ni-contribution-exemption>

- The **Disability Quota**. Like many other EU Member States – including France, Germany and Italy – Malta has a binding quota system.³⁵ Since 2015, Jobsplus started enforcing the obligation for employers who have more than twenty persons in their employment to have and maintain a minimum of a two percent quota of employees with a disability.³⁶ Employers who fail to adhere to the quota are obliged to make an annual contribution for every person with disability they should be employing. The full yearly contributory amount - €2,400 per person – came into force in 2015, and is capped at €10,000 per employer. These contributions are used to partially finance the LSF and the fiscal incentives for persons with disability, among others.³⁷
- **Pre-employment training** was provided between 2016 and 2022 for persons with disability and mental health problems, among others, through the VASTE I programme co-funded under the ESF 2014-2020.³⁸ The VASTE II programme - potentially co-funded under the ESF 2021-2027 – will continue providing pre-employment training and preparation.³⁹

➤ **Aġenzija Sappport**

- As part of its services, the agency offers the **Way to Work Programme**,⁴⁰ a seven-month work skills training delivered to a small number of participants (up to ten) at a time. The programme also works with parents and guardians in supporting the service users.
- Between 2018 and 2020, *Aġenzija Sappport* implemented the ESF 2014-2020 co-funded project **INK**, which aimed at maximising the abilities of service users through training, support, and secure job placements. The project also supported front-line professionals, parents / guardians and employers.⁴¹

➤ **Aġenzija Żagħżagħ**.⁴² The national youth agency *Aġenzija Żagħżagħ* implements the **Youth.Inc** programme, taking a youth-centred approach to engage young people in living independently and access employment or further study. The programme includes participants with disability.⁴³

➤ **Prisms Malta**.⁴⁴ An NGO of youth workers, Prisms supports persons with disabilities as part of its work. One example is the **Autism Friendly Spaces: The Employability Twist** project - implemented between 2022 and 2024 together with the CRPD Malta⁴⁵ - which included training to youth with autism on employability.⁴⁶

35 EDF. 2023. *European Human Rights Report. Issue 7 – The Right to Work: The employment situation of persons with disabilities in Europe*. https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2023/05/hr7_2023_press-accessible.pdf

36 Jobsplus. 2024. *Empowering Inclusion & Breaking Barriers*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/find-candidates/employing-a-person-with-disability>

37 Jobsplus. 2023. *Annual Report 2022*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publications?year=2022&publicationTypeId=1302>

38 Jobsplus. 2022. *Annual Report 2021*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/media/04ijbsxy/jobsplusannualreportfinalowrescompressed.pdf?fileId=53933>

39 Jobsplus. 2024. *VASTE Programme II*. <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/funding/vaste-programme-ii>

40 *Aġenzija Sappport*. 2024. *Way to Work*. <https://sappport.gov.mt/services/way-to-work>

41 *Aġenzija Sappport*. 2021. *Annual Report 2020*. <https://sappport.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AGENZIIJA-SAPPORT-ANNUAL-REPORT-2020.pdf>

42 <https://youth.gov.mt>

43 *Aġenzija Żagħżagħ*. 2024. *Youth.Inc*. <https://youth.gov.mt/youthinc/>

44 <https://www.prismsmalta.com>

45 <https://www.crpdmalta.org>

46 CRPD Malta. 2024. *Autism Friendly Spaces: The Employability Twist*. <https://www.crpdmalta.org/autism-friendly-spaces-the-employability-twist>

2.2.3 The Legal Framework

There is **no legal framework specifically on supported employment** (or on sheltered training / employment) in Malta. A number of legal acts and subsidiary legislations regulate other aspects of the employment of persons with disability:

- The *Persons with Disability (Employment) Act* of 1969⁴⁷ - (amended multiple times, the most recent being by Act No. XXXIV of 2021⁴⁸), together with *Subsidiary Legislation 210.02*,⁴⁹ establishes the disability quota, which was, however, not enforced until 2015 (see previous sub-section).
- The *Persons with Disability (Employment) Act* also regulates the registration of persons with disability in the Jobsplus Register as per *Legal Notice 156* of 1995.⁵⁰
- The *Employment and Industrial Relations Act* of 2002⁵¹ and the *Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act* (EOA) of 2000,⁵² transpose the EU *Employment Equality Directive* (2000/78/EC)⁵³ into national legislation, and safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities in employment.

- The duty to provide reasonable accommodation for employees is laid down in the *Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act* (EOA) of 2000⁵⁴ and the *Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations* of 2004.⁵⁵ The EOA also establishes that no employer shall discriminate - on the grounds of disability - against a qualified person with a disability in regard to:
 - procedures relative to applications for employment
 - the hiring, promotion or dismissal of employees
 - employee compensation
 - job training; and
 - any other terms, conditions and privileges related to employment.

A revised *Public Service Equality Policy*,⁵⁶ published in 2021, promotes non-discrimination against persons with disability, among other aims, in the public service.

47 Legislation Malta. 1969. *Chapter 210 – Persons with Disability (Employment) Act*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/210/eng/pdf>

48 Legislation Malta. 2021. *An ACT to amend the Persons with Disability (Employment) Act, Cap 210*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/act/2021/34/eng>

49 Legislation Malta. 1995. *Subsidiary Legislation 210.02 – Standard Percentage of Employment of Persons with Disability Order*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/210.2/eng/pdf>

50 Legislation Malta. 1995. *Legal Notice 156 of 1995. Persons with Disability (Registration and Appeal) Regulations*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/1995/156/eng/pdf>

51 Legislation Malta. 2002. *Chapter 452 - Employment and Industrial Relations Act*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/452/eng>

52 Legislation Malta. 2000. *Chapter 413 - Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/413/eng/pdf>

53 EU. 2000. Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/78/oj>

54 Legislation Malta. 2000. *Chapter 413 - Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/413/eng/pdf>

55 Legislation Malta. 2004. *Subsidiary Legislation 452.95 – Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/452.95/eng/pdf>

56 Office of the Prime Minister. 2024. *Equality Policy*. <https://publicservices.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/PeopleRelations/PoliciesAndGuidelines/EqualityPolicy.pdf>



3. Research Methodology

The research study was conducted during 2024. It employed a qualitative approach and consisted mainly of five separate but interlinked phases, as detailed below.

3.1 Desk Research

The first phase consisted of reviewing existing literature from both international, regional (European) and national sources, including, but not limited to:

- UNCRPD recommendations and state and shadow reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD Committee
- EU-level reports, recommendations and directives (including EDE⁵⁷ - previously ANED⁵⁸ - reports)
- Pan-European disability organisations' (including ASEE, ENIL,⁵⁹ EASPD,⁶⁰ EDF⁶¹) reports and recommendations
- National-level disability-related strategies, policies, legislation and government reports
- National-level research and recommendations (including those by the CRPD Malta, the Department of Disability Studies (DDS)⁶² at the UoM, disability and mental health organisations) and news items.

57 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1532&langId=en>

58 <https://www.disability-europe.net>

59 <https://enil.eu>

60 <https://easpd.eu>

61 <https://www.edf-feph.org>

62 <https://www.um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/disabilitystudies>

The desk research helped set the stage for the subsequent phase (see section 3.2) and identified gaps in knowledge to be explored during interviews with various stakeholders. However, the desk research was not confined solely to the first phase of the study, but was carried out throughout the whole of the research process, and incorporated any documents / information identified by interviewed stakeholders.

3.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

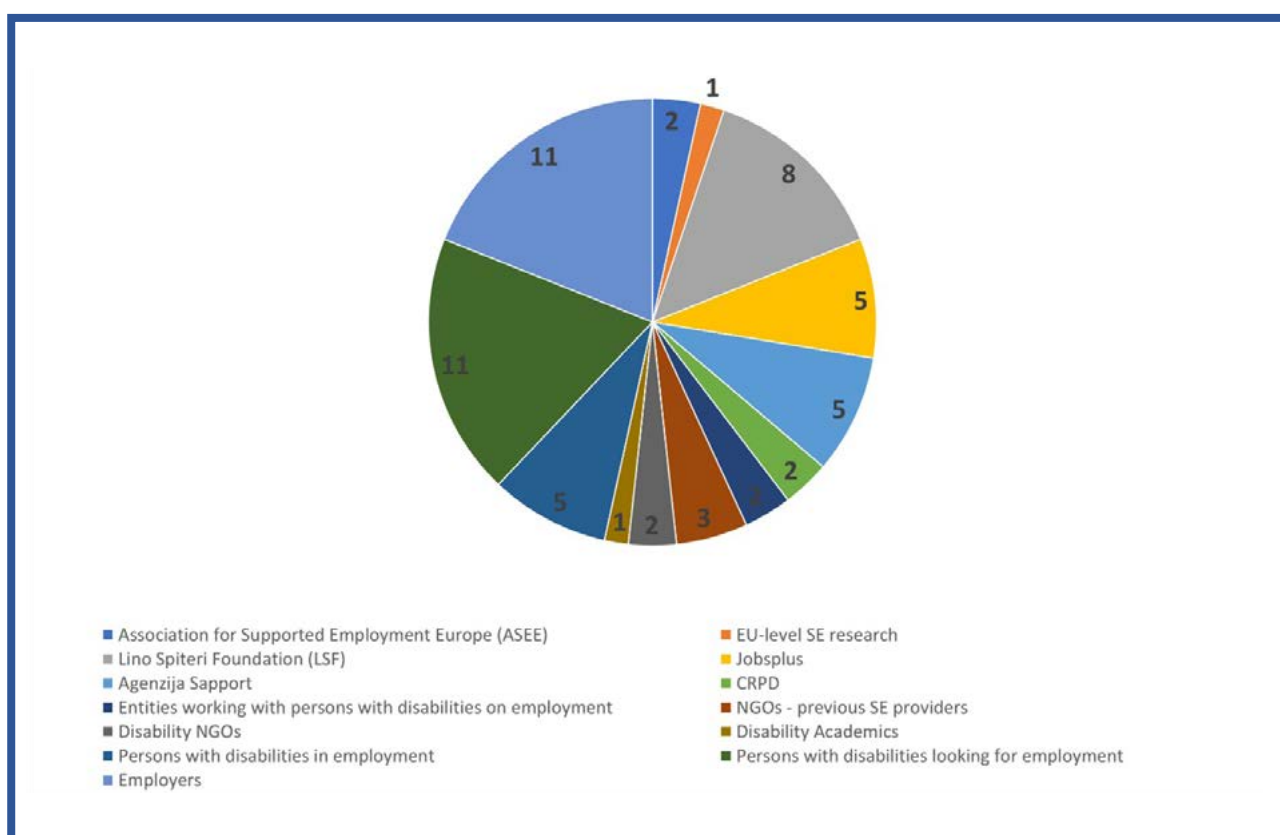
The second phase of the study consisted of fieldwork, or **interviews with a range of stakeholders** as described below. These were carried out **between February and September 2024**. The first part of the fieldwork consisted in conducting exploratory, or scoping, interviews with key stakeholders who could shed an overview of the current services and help the researcher refine the questions for the rest of the stakeholders, which consisted of:

- **Persons with disabilities in Malta and Gozo who are currently receiving support in employment.** This target group consisted of persons with different types of disabilities (physical, intellectual, psychosocial and sensory).
- **Persons with disabilities who are currently looking for employment, whether through official support or otherwise**
- **Employers** who make / made use of supported employment for employees with disabilities
- LSF and Jobsplus representatives
- *Aġenzija Sapport*, CRPD Malta and the Department of Disability Studies representatives
- Representatives of NGOs and other organisations working with persons with disabilities
- ASEE representatives.

Recruitment of participants was carried out with the support of Jobsplus, *Aġenzija Support* and MASE, who sent out a call for participants to their respective networks. Snowballing was also used in order to recruit more persons with disabilities and ensure that the sample consisted of persons of different ages, genders and impairment type.

Participants with disability. The ages of participants with disability range from 18 to 54 years. *Figure 2* zooms in on the service user segment, detailing the type of impairment. The number of persons with disabilities here is different than that of *Figure 1* due to the fact that some interviews were held with a relative of more than one person with

Figure 1 - Type of Stakeholders



As *Figure 1* indicates, a total of **58 interviews** were carried out. In this figure, whether the interview was carried out with the person with disability themselves or with a relative, the interview is labelled as being with a person with disability. It is to be noted that interviews with various organisations include interviews (six in total) with job coaches and ex-job coaches.

disability; and some disability NGO representatives are also parents, and thus included in this figure as well (while in *Figure 1* they are included as disability NGOs / entities previously providing SE services). *Figure 3* then demonstrates the gender of the participants with a disability.

Figure 2 - Service Users: Impairment Type

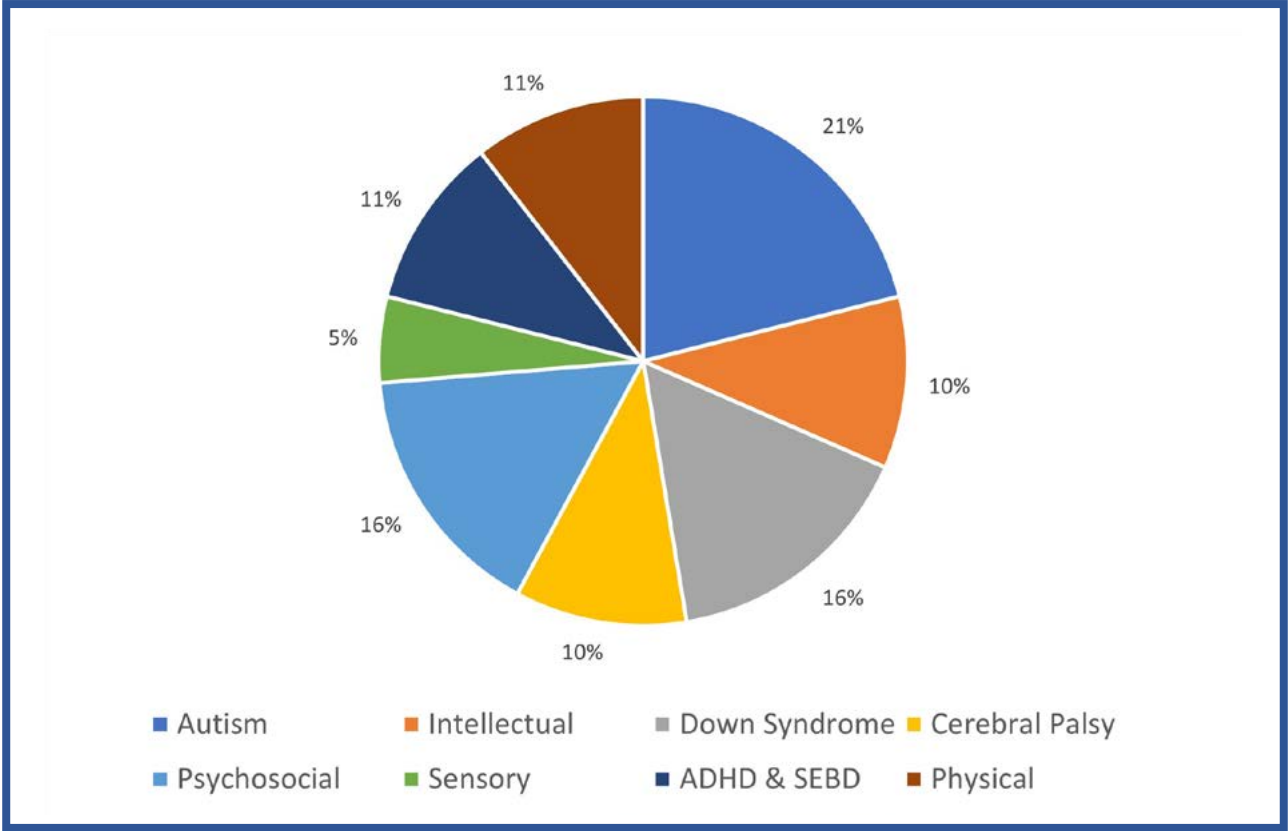
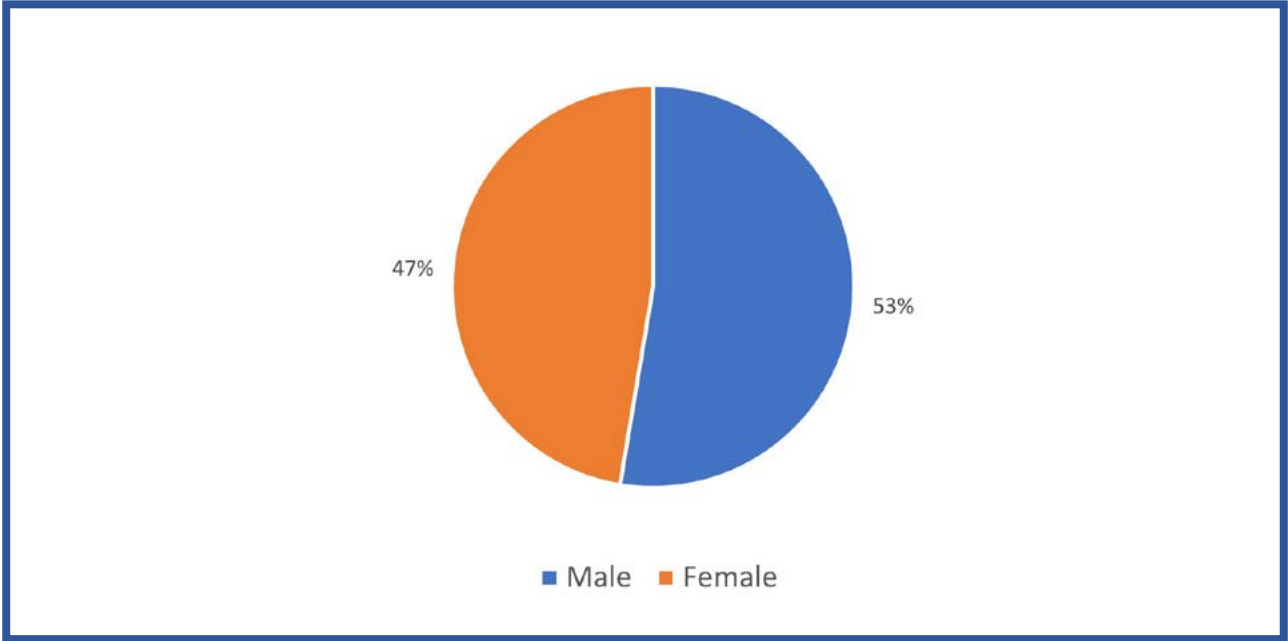


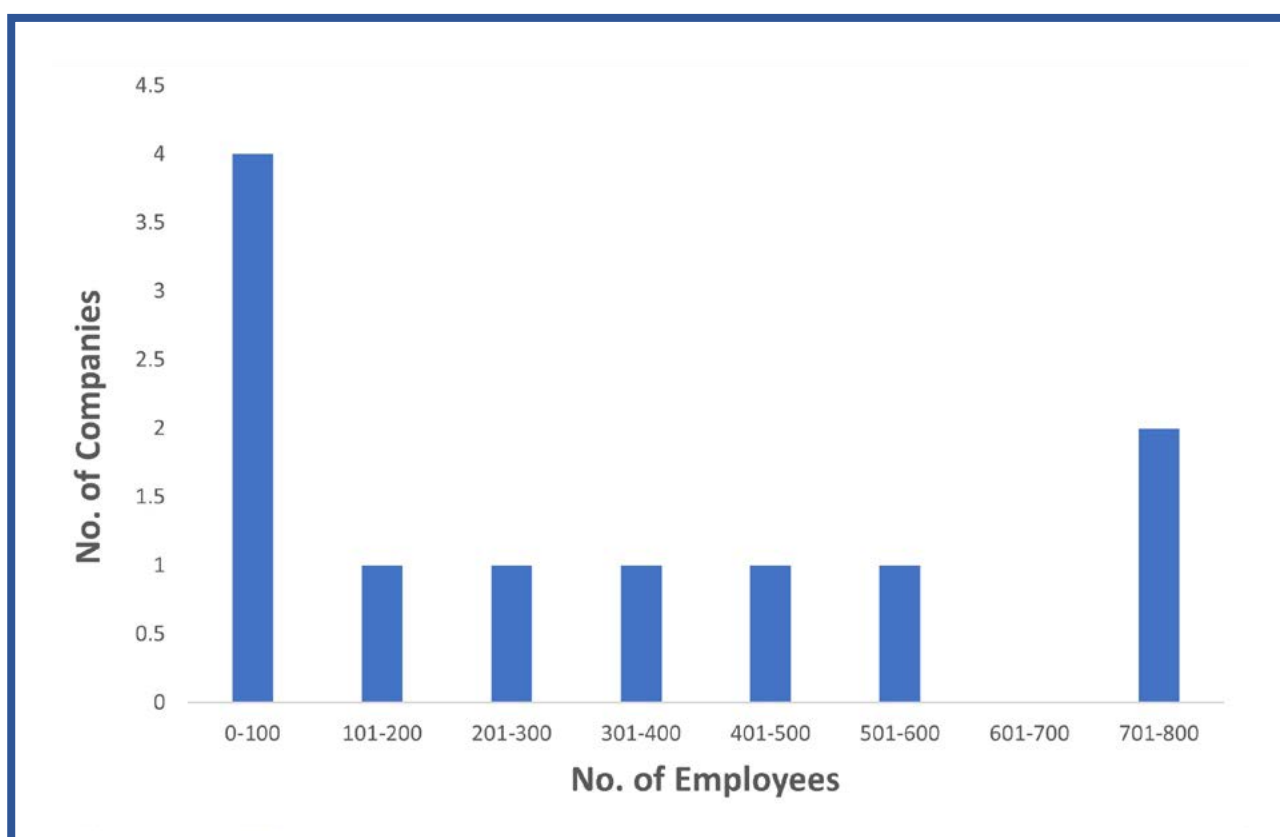
Figure 3 - Service Users: Gender



Both *Figures 2 and 3* show the details, evidently, of the service user, even when the interview was held with a relative. When a service user as well as their relative were interviewed, these were also counted as one interview, even when the researcher spoke to them separately.

The questions that were asked to interviewees were developed following the desk research, in order to identify the most pertinent questions to be asked. The questionnaires (see [Annex II](#)) for the interviews were semi-structured in nature: while a pre-set list of questions was drawn up for each target group, targeting the areas pertinent to the research, it was also imperative to allow the interviewees to have the opportunity to 'bring up their own ideas

Figure 4 - Employers: Company Size



Finally, *Figure 4* aims at highlighting the size of the companies within which employers or Human Resources Managers were interviewed. The companies interviewed operate in diverse economic areas, including: corporate services, temping services, hospitality, aviation services, shipping services, postage services, childcare services and pharmaceuticals.

and thoughts.'⁶³ This ensured that the interviewees could elaborate on aspects which are important to them, which the interview might otherwise not have covered.

63 Willis, K. 2006. 'Interviewing.' In Desai, V. and Potter, R. (eds.) *Doing Development Research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Besides the KIIs, data was also gathered from the validation workshops' (see section 3.4) participants, both during the workshops themselves, as well as from feedback sent by participants to the researcher after the workshops.

3.3 Data Analysis

Following the interviews and their transcription, the data analysis was carried out. The analysis was guided by the principles of triangulation to ensure reliability of the gathered data. The researcher applied triangulation through three steps by:

- identifying potential sources of information for a particular question at hand;
- using each feasible source of information to obtain evidence on the same question; and
- comparing and assessing all data from different sources.

By comparing different sources of information, the researcher avoided subjectivity and partiality in data processing conclusions. As such, the triangulation was helpful not only to cross-validate the findings but also to see different dimensions of the same question. Where triangulation was not feasible – for example, due to limited sources of data available to the researcher on a given question - this was acknowledged accordingly in the limitations.

To be able to coherently process all the data gathered during the data collection phase, the researcher used the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose,⁶⁴ which enabled her to analyse the collected data based on pre-defined codes and drawing on the research questions.

Based on this analysis, the subsequent chapter was then developed.

64 <https://www.dedoose.com>

3.4 Validation of Conclusions and Recommendations

Towards the end of the research study – in the beginning of October 2024 - a participatory workshop (see [Annex III](#)) was facilitated by the researcher. The workshop's aim was to discuss and validate the recommendations emerging from the study and possible solutions. The 36 participants included **persons with disabilities and their parents / guardians**, and representatives of:

- disability and mental health NGOs
- other organisations working with persons with disabilities
- employers
- LSF and Jobsplus
- *Aġenzija Sapport*, CRPD Malta and the Office of the Commissioner for Mental Health⁶⁵
- Directorate for Disability Issues at the MIV⁶⁶ and the Shadow Minister.

Following the workshop, numerous participants asked for a follow-up session in order to continue the discussion, and thus another short workshop was organised at the end of October 2024, attended by 20 stakeholders from the same entities listed above.

3.5 Dissemination

This report is being disseminated by MASE and the researcher to:

- all research participants
- MASE's and MFOPD's⁶⁷ networks at national and EU-level

65 <https://commissionermentalhealth.gov.mt/en>

66 <https://inclusion.gov.mt>

67 <https://www.mfopd.org>

- policy-makers and decision-makers (in hard copy and through targeted in-person meetings)
- the public (through MASE and MFOPD's websites and social media pages)

- **Security of data.** The raw data collected was only available to the researcher. It was kept on a password-encrypted computer and was erased after the end of the research study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that the following ethical principles were in place throughout the course of the study:

- **Accessible information and consent.** Participants and potential ones were provided with an information sheet and consent form (in English or Maltese, as requested) detailing the aims of the research and use / dissemination of results. Easy-Reads format of these documents were also available for those who required them (see [Annex I](#)). The researcher made sure that the participants understood why they are participating, that they can opt out at any time they wish to, and that they can refuse to answer any question posed to them. The participants who requested it were also sent a draft of the report before it was finalised, in order for them to be able to review their contribution.
- Interviews were carried out in the **language of choice (Maltese or English) of the interviewee**. While the majority of the interviews were – with the consent of the interviewees – held online, interviewees were asked if this is convenient for them. When the **interviewee requested a face-to-face interview, their request was granted**.
- **Anonymity.** The researcher made sure to omit the names of the participants (who remained known only to the researcher), and as much as possible, to render them unidentifiable in the report and presentations given as part of the study.

3.7 Limitations

As in any qualitative study, there were limitations and challenges encountered during its implementation. Below is a non-exhaustive list of such issues, as well as the measures taken to mitigate them, where possible:

- Bureaucratic processes in accessing some “groups” of participants rendered it challenging to hold interviews with job coaches and with persons with disabilities participating in sheltered training and employment settings. Furthermore, not all of the potential research participants – that is, of the over 100 individuals and organisations who were contacted - accepted to be interviewed / replied to the researcher's communication.
- The researcher mitigated the limitations posed by this and by non-randomised sampling through: 1) consulting with a range of stakeholders; and 2) during analysis, triangulating the data collected. Nonetheless, this study cannot be considered representative of all persons with all types of disabilities in Malta.
- This research and report cannot be considered as exhaustive. As indicated earlier, supported employment and other related services do not exist in a vacuum and are closely interlinked with – and dependent on – other services, practices and policies which are either covered by other research studies or need to be looked at in depth through further research.

4. Findings: Evaluation of Supported Employment Services

This chapter presents the findings emerging from the desk research and the KIIs detailed in the previous chapter.⁶⁸ The findings were analysed according to the following criteria: impact, relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity.

As indicated earlier in this report, SE services are intertwined with others. And while other vast areas such as education could not be delved into as part of this research, the study took into account closely connected areas to SE such as sheltered training and employment and other schemes and initiatives aimed at facilitating persons with disabilities' inclusion in the OLM.

4.1 Impact

This sub-section looks at the impact – and areas for improvement - that SE and other related services are having on persons with disabilities, their families and employers.

4.1.1 What are the outcomes of the current supported employment services and employer-targeted incentives?

- The **current SE services provided by the LSF are enabling many persons with disabilities to find and to retain employment** - as evidenced both by the findings from the KIIs and the statistics shown in [section 2.2.1](#) - as well as to **thrive in their jobs**.

⁶⁸ Unless otherwise stated, all information in this chapter emerged from the KIIs and Validation Workshops conducted for this study.

I am forever grateful for all the time the staff at LSF have spent to better my son's future.

Mother of person with disability

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to learn more and to help, so I can feel more useful. As, when I was growing up, I always was seen as not capable or clever enough to move forward.

Person with disability to Head of HR

- The LSF's **Headstart programme is also enabling people to become more independent** through learning how to catch the bus, cook, and improving / acquiring other skills.
- The **Disability Quota** enforcement has pushed many employers to reach out to the LSF to adhere to the 2% quota, enabling the LSF to support them in adhering to it. In several cases, this has then led to employers finding that **employing persons with disabilities is rewarding in itself**. These experiences are general voiced, evidently, by those employers and HR managers who are willing to go over and above requirements to really make it work, and thus to learn, make accommodations for employees with disability, and address the needs of the employee. This is sometimes due to their **positive experience in employing person with disabilities**; at other times due to their own sense of social justice and belief in inclusive employment.
- Findings also show that the team of employees working with the employee with disability and who support them, makes a huge difference in the person with disability's employment experience.

The employer asked me a lot of questions on how to accommodate him – about if the noise bothers him, and so on. Now he has been working with them for three weeks and he seems happy.

Mother of person with disability

➤ Nonetheless, the **impact of the quota and other employer-targeted schemes is limited:**

- Adhering to the quota is not necessarily an incentive for employers - particularly large companies - for whom **paying the penalty of €10,000 does not really make a difference.**
- **Many employers still do not employ persons with disabilities**, with some being reluctant to do so due to perceived required changes to the workplace and practice.⁶⁹ At the end of December 2023, while there were 795 companies conforming with the quota, 788 companies / group of companies were not.⁷⁰

Employers need to give persons with disabilities more time to prove themselves at work. Persons with disabilities are not going to give you the 100% as non-disabled persons do. But employers must give them a chance. Without a job, [my son's] self-esteem really went down, and he was crying all the time.

Mother of person with disability

69 Ernst & Young (CRPD Malta). 2020. *Research into the Current Situation of Persons with disabilities and Employment in Malta*. <https://www.crpdmalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CRPD-SYNOPSIS-REPORT-ENG.pdf>

70 Minister for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality. 2024, October 23. *Parliament of Malta - Plenary Session Sitting No. 267: Parliamentary Questions*. https://parliament.mt/media/131024/20241023_267o_par.pdf
https://parliament.mt/media/131024/20241023_267o_par.pdf

- There is **no evidence that either the quota or other available schemes and incentives support job retainment and / or career development** and progression of employees with disabilities.
- There is **still a need to foster an inclusive culture**, rather than obliging employers and making allowances for them to employ person with disabilities.

4.1.2 To what extent are the services reaching persons with disabilities in Malta and Gozo?

- Interviews with persons with disabilities and their parents/guardians indicate that the available SE services are not always reaching them:
- Multiple interviewees are **unsure of what the LSF is and whether they are registered with the Foundation or otherwise**. A recurring issue coming up in the interviews is the conflation between the email vacancy shot sent regularly by Jobsplus (to all those registering with the agency) and the job opportunities communicated to service users by the LSF.
 - As indicated in previous sections, many persons with disabilities remain unemployed. The situation is exacerbated when it comes to **people with mental health problems, who encounter specific challenges in obtaining and retaining employment**. As indicated in [Chapter 2](#), people with mental health problems – particularly those with severe ones – need specific support in the employment process as they do in other areas of life. This aspect is further elaborated on in [section 4.3](#).

➤ The LSF website is inaccessible in many aspects, including:

- language-wise: the website is available only in English, excluding those who do not understand the language.
- accessibility to people with intellectual disabilities: there is no Easy Read version of any information or documents on the website.
- accessibility to people with visual disabilities: there is no option to change the font size, font type or the contrast between foreground and background.
- accessibility people with hearing impairments: none of the videos on the LSF YouTube channel⁷¹ have subtitles / captions or sign language interpretation.

4.2 Relevance

4.2.1 To what extent are the current supported employment consistent with the contextual needs of persons with disabilities?

➤ The LSF services currently being provided are **very relevant not only to persons with disabilities, but also to employers and HR Managers**, as demonstrated by the subsequent quotes.

My experience with the LSF has been very positive. I commend their patience, listening skills, and profile matching skills too.

Head of HR

I always used the LSF's services, and they were very supportive throughout the process. They listened to our needs and recommended candidates that could match the profile. It was important to have a LSF representative during the interview, as this helped the candidates feel more at ease.

Head of HR

➤ There is, however, **room for significant improvement in rendering the LSF more relevant to persons with disabilities**, particularly in the following aspects:

- The majority of persons with disabilities interviewed who no longer make use of LSF services cite the **lack of suitable jobs offered by the Foundation** as one of the reasons, leading to **many persons with disabilities looking for / finding jobs with the help of their parents / guardians**. The main concern is that they are offered jobs (usually in cleaning or production) which they either do not wish to do or are over-qualified for.

'I receive jobs from LSF, but none are adequate for me. They have very limited options for me. I receive monthly the same jobs. I don't meet with them.'

Person with disability

71 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa7S4z_V7mz43UF8MbrWYZQ?view_as=subscriber

- Other interviewees with disability relate that they are at times **recruited for one job (for example, office work) and end up doing another** (for example cleaning or heavy-lifting, which the person may find difficult to do, due to their impairment). This might be due to various factors, including the employer taking advantage of the employee or the **service user not having fully comprehended what the jobs entails**. The latter factor might be linked to the point mentioned in section 4.1.2: together, these points seem to indicate that the **communication between the service provider and the service user is not as effective as it could be**. Effectiveness is further discussed in [section 4.3](#).
- LSF services mainly cater for the private sector**. This means that persons with disabilities wishing to work in the public sector do not receive all the support they might need to find a job, have a job carved for them and be supported in the job within the public service.

4.2.2 To what extent are the current employment preparation services consistent with the contextual needs of persons with disabilities?

➤ **Way to Work (Aġenzija Sapport)**

- The current training given through the **Way to Work** programme (see section 2.2) by *Aġenzija Sapport* is especially relevant due to the **small number of participants in each cohort**, which allows the facilitators to give **individual attention and support** where needed, especially to participants with **more complex disabilities or challenging behaviours**.
- The same programme also **works directly with caregivers** through focus groups and meetings, to support them in helping their children finding employment. The **import-**

tance of working conjunctly with caregivers of persons with disabilities who need support in decision-making is evidenced by findings from this research (see section 4.2.1) as well as other local research.⁷²

The extent to which parents can support their children – who are with them the majority of the time – we cannot do that!

Service Provider

This is also corroborated by Inclusion Europe,⁷³ who - as part of their project on employment for people with intellectual disabilities, *My talents For diversity* - produced a video on the role of the families and their significance in the lives of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.⁷⁴

Families know better the talents of their relative with intellectual disabilities

Mother of a person with disability,
Inclusion Europe⁷⁵

72 Callus, A-M., Borg, S., Grech, C. and Portelli, I. 2024. 'The Story of My Life at Present: Video CVs as a Showcase for Persons with Intellectual Disability.' *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 26(1): 259–271. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.1092>

73 https://parlament.mt/media/131024/20241023_267o_par.pdf

74 Inclusion Europe. 2020. *The role of the families – My talents For diversity*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kd-Jdme1GsP4&t=26s>

75 Inclusion Europe. 2020. *The role of the families – My talents For diversity*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kd-Jdme1GsP4&t=26s>

➤ Sheltered Training and Employment (Jobsplus)

- While the **SET at Jobsplus was originally conceived for persons with complex and multiple disabilities who in all likelihood would be unable to work in the OLM, today it includes also people with less complex intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.** Also in a sheltered setting is the employment offered to persons with disabilities, through a Jobsplus project, at the MaltaPost Document Management Services⁷⁶, where a group of 66 persons with different disabilities are working - and supported by three LSF job coaches - at the facility in Gozo. While the service also employs people without disabilities, the large number of persons with disabilities working in one location inclines towards segregation.
- It is to be noted that both settings – the SET and the Document Management project – are **not without merit**. The **SET aims at preparing persons with disabilities for the next step in the pathway to employment**, whether it is further training or (supported) employment. Indeed, as at July 2024, 32% of the VASTE SET participants were in employment (three of whom were self-employed).⁷⁷ The sheltered employment in Gozo provides **employment opportunities in a context where obtaining employment is more difficult for persons with disabilities than for those residing in Malta, due to the lower amount of job opportunities in Gozo** and the further travelling Gozitans with disabilities need to undertake to work in Malta.
- Nonetheless, these practices tend to diverge from ASEE's assertion that anyone can be employed in the OLM if they so wish and have the right support (see [Chapter 2](#)). **Questions arise as to whether persons with disabilities being trained / working in**

these settings are aware of employment opportunities in the open labour market; and whether they are encouraged and supported, if they so wish, in - transitioning to jobs of their choosing in the OLM. The fact that around 15% of SET participants have repeated the same training indicates that the SET is not fully serving as a launchpad into employment; although this might also be due to other factors causing the “bouncing from one pre-employment training to another” effect (see section 4.3).

- Further, the **training offered by SET is called out by both service users and professionals as being repetitive:** while some people thrive on this kind of work (usually involving assembly line / production work), it is not adequate / useful for others. This, combined with the fact that participants in SET are **not salaried while carrying out work for private companies**, points to the **need for a revision of the current SET**.

4.3 Effectiveness

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE SE SERVICES EFFECTIVE AND THUS ACHIEVING THEIR OBJECTIVES?

Effectiveness - to a certain extent

- **Flexibility with service users and employers.** The LSF's services are flexible enough to accommodate the fluctuating needs of clients. For example, it re-welcomes any service users who would have stopped making use of their services and wish to return. Further, if person with disability is going through a difficult phase in their lives, the job coach can increase their hours of support for that time period. This also helps the employer in supporting and retaining the employee with disability.

⁷⁶ <https://www.maltapost.com/documentmanagement1>

⁷⁷ Jobsplus. 2024, July 16. *Data provided to researcher.*

LSF supports us continually. First, we met them, and we explained the nature of our job. Then they sent me the CVs and I chose one. We did the interviews. Once we chose the person, they gave a lot of support through job coaches. In the beginning they used to come every day but once they saw the person getting used to it, they lessened the support to about once every 3 weeks. However, we are always in touch. When there were periods that the person needed emotional support, LSF did everything they could to give her the emotional support – coming to the workplace until they managed to refer her to therapist services. They were very much involved.

If there is a lacuna in the employee's skills, they help out when I call them to tell them about the problem. For example, when the person has a problem with the routine, LSF did a checklist for the person to follow.

General Manager

Scope for improvement in the effectiveness of LSF services

- **Persisting unemployment of persons with disabilities**
 - Multiple interviewees with disability relate that **they have been registering with the LSF for years** and are still unemployed.

I have been two years without a job. I barely have money to live. I live off the Foodbank,⁷⁸ church donations, and my parents pay my medical bills and food.

Person with disability

I would like to find a job to increase my financial independence and to do something fruitful, as I feel unfulfilled.

Person with disability

Right now, I am living with my parents, but I know I cannot stay with them forever. I don't want to be here in my thirties. I want to move on and be independent. I want my own home.

Person with disability

➤ **The need for more and better communication with all stakeholders**

- Interviews with persons with disabilities and their caregivers bring to light numerous occasions of **persons with disabilities being terminated from employment without them knowing / understanding why**. This has led to **disturbance, heartbreak and trauma** in these people's and their families' lives, and points to the need for **better communication between the employer, the LSF and the employee**. While the LSF needs to keep good relationships with employers, this must not come at the expense of other employees' – and their caregivers' – right to:

78 <https://www.foodbanklifeline.com>

- know and understand the reason for termination
- challenge unjustified terminations
- (if termination is justified) a dignified termination.
- Similarly, **employers need to be obliged to inform the jobseeker of the outcome of their application / job interview** and the reason for which their application / interview was not successful. Futile waiting for application / interview result from a potential employer can not only exacerbate anxiety in persons who are already prone to this, but also discourages the jobseekers from continuing their job search. On the other hand, having feedback on the process enables the jobseeker to learn and improve.
- **Communication channels also appear to be amiss between the LSF and service users and their families, some of whom feel they are being neglected.** Lack of regular interaction and feedback on the employment process leaves service users feeling helpless in the face of the unknown. While the LSF staff *do* keep in touch with a large number of service users, others might need more support, reassurance and regular check-ins and guidance.

The major problem is that I never know what is happening. I am not getting any information.

Mother of person with disability

I would also like to have support – that I can communicate with [LSF]. I am tired of phoning them, sometimes leaving a message. Right now, [the profiler] just phones me, asks me how I feel and tells me there are no jobs. I want more.

Mother of person with disability

- **Parents of persons with disabilities interviewed also express feelings of not feeling welcome when they attempt to be included in the communication between LSF and the service user.** The importance of this communication ties back to the significance of working with caregivers **where necessary and wanted by the service user** (see section 4.2.2): bringing them on board is crucial for the person with disability – especially those with intellectual disabilities - to achieve their employment goals.
- Besides **knowing their child best and being able to support them in ways no one else is able to, communicating regularly with caregivers also helps dispel any fears they might have about “letting their child go”.** Overprotection of people with intellectual disabilities by their parents – which is very present in Malta and can be a disabling barrier for a person with disability to be employed in the OLM⁷⁹ - can also stem from the very present realities of their child being bullied at work and / or of their employment being terminated without apparent cause, as mentioned earlier. This leads to parents preferring their child repeatedly participating in pre-employment training (see section 4.2.2) or attending one of the Day Centres⁸⁰ (managed by *Aġenzija Support*) instead of engaging in paid employment.
- The occurrence of **bullying of employees with disabilities – especially those with intellectual impairments** - is confirmed both through the interviews of this study and as well as through other local studies.⁸¹ This denotes the importance of

79 Callus, A-M., Bonello, I., Mifsud, C. and Fenech, R. 2019. 'Overprotection in the lives of people with intellectual disability in Malta: knowing what is control and what is enabling support.' *Disability & Society* 34(3): 345–367 DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2018.1547186

80 <https://support.gov.mt/services/day-services>

81 Callus, A-M., Bonello, I., Mifsud, C. and Fenech, R. 2019. 'Overprotection in the lives of people with intellectual

training and awareness raising with the other employees, particularly those working closely with the employee with disability. Indeed, when the colleagues are supportive and inclusive, there is a higher chance of job satisfaction and job retention for the employee with disability, as confirmed by the KIIs held for this study.

They [employer and colleagues] showed me clearly that they don't want him [anymore]. I didn't want to leave my son in a [work]place where they don't want him. When you see your son going next to people and no one even considers him, no one even looks at him, it's too much.

Mother of person with disability

- Employers and **job coaches lament the fact that they are not aware of what type of disability the person has**. This limits the job coach's and employer's capacity in understanding the person's needs and challenges, and thus providing adequate support and accommodations. Evidently, it is up to the service user to choose whether they wish to disclose their disability or otherwise.

➤ **The need for adequate supported employment workers**

- Several **persons with disabilities and employers mention the disturbance caused by constantly changing job coaches**. This issue is potentially related to the low supply of job coaches, which might be partly caused by the rather low salary attached to the job post.

disability in Malta: knowing what is control and what is enabling support.' *Disability & Society* 34(3): 345–367 DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2018.1547186

I don't like that they change job coaches all the time. And every time, me and the supervisor have to explain everything from the beginning.

Person with disability

- Other **persons with disabilities as well as professionals within service providing organisations lament the shortcomings of some of the job coaches**, while commending others on their commitment. Some LSF service users voice their frustration at job coaches not giving them adequate support on their job.

These two job coaches would be there [at the place of work] on their mobile ignoring me. Plus, when I make a mistake, they tell my supervisor first, not me - not like the other two job coaches that I like!

Person with disability

- Meanwhile, **professionals and service provider representatives voice their dissatisfaction with the majority of job coaches working at SET within Jobsplus**, who are unqualified and lack the necessary skills – despite regular training and mentoring – to support persons with more complex disabilities.
- The lack of **relevant qualifications and training of job coaches – at both SET and LSF – in supporting persons with certain types of disability** is also emergent from interviews with caregivers and professionals (including job coaches themselves). Parents of **persons who exhibit challenging behaviour, persons on the autism spec-**

trum and persons with complex mental health conditions particularly voice their weariness and aggravation at the lack of knowledge of job coaches in addressing the specific requirements the person with disability would need to help them flourish at work. The quote below is one example of how the needs of persons with mental health problems – which in themselves are hugely diverse – need to be addressed by staff who are qualified in working with people mental health issues.

When my son was feeling depressed and anxious and felt he could not do the job properly, he resigned – out of a sense of responsibility - instead of taking one year leave. The last time he worked, he started having paranoia and imagining that his colleagues were talking about him. In the last four years he has been changing a lot of jobs because of his paranoia; but before he had worked for nine years in another job.

Mother of person with mental health problems

Another example of a person with mental health problems needing specific support and understanding of their condition is when a service user – going through a critical period – asked the LSF to strike him off the register, only to need their support once again at a later stage, when he was ready to work again. However, he then needed to start the process of registration and assessment all over again, which is a stressful and time-consuming situation, particularly for someone who already has anxiety. **What this person needed at the time of the critical period was someone who understands the mental health problem at hand – in this case, schizophrenia – and its fluctua-**

tions, and knows how to guide the person through this period.

Similarly, persons on the autism spectrum might need specific approaches – such as social narratives - in supporting them in their place of work. Due to their difficulties in understanding social cues and norms, individuals with ASD frequently encounter challenges in responding to social behaviours and participating in social interactions.⁸² Such skills denote the need for the staff working with persons with disabilities having the knowledge and understanding of both the disability and the approaches needed in such situations. **Working with the service user through a whole-person approach and discarding diagnoses and labels is useful in certain situations, but certainly not in others which require approaches specifically targeting the challenges faced by persons with particular types of disabilities.** While the LSF provides support which is individualised, it is limited by the lack of in-depth knowledge of such approaches by its staff.

➤ **The need for in-house services and service continuity / coherence**

- The fact that sheltered training and employment are managed by a different entity (Jobsplus) than the supported employment services and the Headstart programme (LSF) leads to a lack of internal coherence and service continuity. This is compounded by the fact that other regular support to both service users and job coaches are being delivered by external entities (Richmond Foundation and Inspire Foundation). Although the entities work in partnership, there are stages in the pathway to employment which could be smoother and more effective. For example, LSF needs its own

82 Brown Lofland, K. (Indiana Resource Centre for Autism) 2015. *Writing and Using Social Narratives in All Environments*. <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/writing-and-using-social-narratives.html>

in-house expertise - such as OTs, a visiting psychiatrist, a psychologist – which are also needed by the SET. Furthermore, SET participants need to be in regular contact with the Profiling & Guidance section at LSF in order for the latter to know what the clients wants to / can do. These aspects point to a potentially more effective service should these services be managed and delivered by the same entity.

➤ **The need for monitoring and evaluation of supported employment services**

- Finally, the effectiveness aspects mentioned in this section denote **the need for regular monitoring and evaluation of supported employment services, including through external evaluations.**

➤ **External Inhibitors to Effectiveness**

- Disability NGOs lament the fact that the **education system in Malta does not prepare persons with disabilities for the world of work**, and the **transition between education and employment is not adequately addressed** by current services.
- **Transport to and from work is a huge issue for many research participants:** this is a double-edged sword in the sense that for those who are capable of catching the bus, they should do so. On the other hand, there are those who cannot use public transport but can do their job perfectly well: if transport is what is holding them back from working, transport should be provided. While there is the Empowerment Scheme managed by *Aġenzija Sapport* – subsidising individualised transport services to persons with disabilities who are not able to make use of public transport and need to go to work⁸³ - caregivers voice their concerns on service users who are unable to use such transport on their own and that they are still unable to

meet the remainder of the transport costs with their often low salary.

- Evidently, the effectiveness of supported employment services - and of a person with disability finding, retaining and progressing in a job in the open labour market – heavily depends on the nature of said market. The neoliberal context we find ourselves in – and its emphasis on ableism – is not conducive to inclusivity, especially of people with intellectual disabilities.

Those who have profound intellectual and multiple disabilities: what use do they have for the market?

Professor Anne-Marie Callus,
Department for Disability Studies (UoM)

4.4 Inclusivity

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES INVOLVED IN THE DECISION-MAKING ON SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES?

A lack of persons with disability, persons with lived experience of supported employment, caregivers and organisations of persons and parents of persons with disability is apparent at decision-making levels – including in the Board of Directors – at the LSF.

This goes against the *Nothing About Us Without Us* motto - adopted by the global disability movement – which relies on the principle of participation and of persons with disabilities taking control over decisions affecting their lives.

83 Aġenzija Sapport. 2024. *Empowerment Scheme*. <https://sapport.gov.mt/schemes/empowerment-scheme>

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research as well as invaluable inputs from interviewees⁸⁴ themselves who contributed to this chapter (whether directly or indirectly), the following recommendations for the improvement of the supported employment and related services and incentives in Malta and Gozo are being presented here.

The recommendations are divided into the following sections for ease of reference: working with employers and staff; increasing inclusivity; moving beyond segregation; improving effectiveness; accountability; and external coherence. However, they are interlinked and depend on the implementation of the other recommendations.

5.1 Working with Employers and Staff

❖ There is scope for more **knowledge-sharing among employers and more awareness of employer success stories** / best practices to enable other employers to believe in inclusive workplaces and realising that the presence of a person with disability in a workplace is not just about including that person, but about making the whole workplace more inclusive. Such show-casing could be done through the Malta Business Disability Forum⁸⁵ and employers' organisations.

- ❖ This could also lead to **fostering more humane ways of working**: enabling employers to find a way to make money while being inclusive. Again, good practices from companies who are already doing this could be beneficial. These stories could also be used by the LSF in their marketing campaigns.
- ❖ **Employers and staff need to be trained** (not in a blanket approach), but **specifically on understanding the challenges the person with disability may encounter and how best to support them**.
- ❖ In supporting jobseekers with disabilities, **employers need to be made aware and supported in providing accommodations in the recruitment process, such as on-the-job interviews** rather than sending a written curriculum vitae and having a verbal interview. This is already being done by some employers, but needs to **become a more common practice**, as evidenced by the quote below. Other accommodations can also be put in place such as ensuring that interview questions are sent to the jobseeker in advance to persons who have anxiety; there is no more than one interviewer interviewing a person with ASD.

I am not given a fair chance at employing my abilities, in the same way as other people. Actions speak louder than words. If they could see me work, then they might say 'eh this person can do this work'. If this is encouraged more, it would be great.

Person with disability

84 The majority of the interviewees could not be cited by name due to anonymity purposes.

85 <https://www.crp.org.mt/about/malta-business-disability-forum>

- ❖ **Fiscal incentives and other schemes aimed at employers should also be targeted at the upward mobility of persons with disabilities**, not simply at employing them. Tax incentives should not be a fixed amount but proportionate to the salary of the employee with disability.
- ❖ Besides fiscal and other financial incentives, **employers can be encouraged through other means such as being given more points upon proving that they are equal opportunities employers and employ persons with disabilities in public procurement.**⁸⁶
- ❖ **Employers need to be made aware of other schemes such as the *Work Accessibility Tax Deduction Scheme*** – managed by the CRPD Malta – enabling employers who employ a person with a disability who is registered with the Commission to make the necessary changes for their employees with disabilities. The costs eligible for tax deduction under the Scheme include those incurred for: installation / modification of physical structures of equipment; removal of architectural and physical barriers; acquisition of devices; and work training of employees with disabilities. The maximum deduction that can be claimed is €20,000.⁸⁷ However, very little use has been made of the scheme, denoting the need for more publicity. A similar initiative is the *Facilitating Work Life for Individuals with Disability Scheme*, managed by the Malta Enterprise,⁸⁸ the economic development agency. Through the scheme, employers and self-employed persons can apply for a grant towards the cost of adapting / making the workplace more accessible for employees with disabilities. The aid under this scheme is awarded in the form of a grant covering 90% of incurred eligible

costs, up to a maximum of €10,000.⁸⁹

- ❖ Global research - carried out with almost 6000 employees with disabilities and over 1700 executives in 28 countries – highlights a perception gap between what leaders think is happening and what employees with disabilities think is the reality. The research uncovered eight factors that strengthen inclusion and that really matter to employees. The factors include: **clear role models; employee resource groups (voluntary, employee-led groups aiming to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace); fair and transparent pay; training; freedom to innovate; and mental wellbeing policies.**⁹⁰

5.2 Increasing Inclusivity

- ❖ There is a marked need to **bring on board and meaningfully include persons with disabilities (and, where necessary - such as when persons have profound disability and cannot clearly articulate their preferences – their legal guardian)** - particularly those with lived experiences of supported employment - **and their organisations in decision-making in supported employment services.** Persons with disabilities can be part of the LSF Board⁹¹ – of which persons with disabilities should make up at least 50% - and/or hold consultancy/ advisory posts, advising the Foundation on various aspects of supported employment, including the challenges / needs of people

86 <https://www.etenders.gov.mt>

87 CRPD Malta. 2021. Work Access Tax Scheme. <https://www.crpdmalta.org/resources/workplace-accessibility-tax-deduction-scheme>

88 <https://maltaenterprise.com>

89 Malta Enterprise. 2021. *Facilitating Work Life for Individuals with Disability*. <https://maltaenterprise.com/node/1785>

90 Accenture. 2020. *Enabling Change. Getting to Equal 2020: Disability Inclusion*. <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/pdf/pdf-142/Accenture-Enabling-Change-Getting-Equal-2020-Disability-Inclusion-Report.pdf>

91 <https://linospiterifoundation.org/our-team>

with particular types of disabilities, the best way to support service users and what accommodations can be made in a workplace, among others.

- ❖ A best practice example in this field is the *Office of Cognitive Accessibility and Easy Reading* in the Extremadura region in Spain, a public office which employs persons with intellectual disabilities, whose work is essential in identifying what cognitive barriers exist in a particular environment, and in proposing solutions to overcome these barriers.⁹²

5.3 Moving beyond Segregation

- ❖ **Training needs to be on the job** rather than in sheltered environments, unless the service users have multiple and complex disabilities which make it extremely difficult for them to work in the OLM.
- ❖ Sheltered employment is still segregated employment. Other options could be **hybrid employment where small groups of persons with disabilities work within a company in the open labour market with the support of a job coach. Within large companies, such job coaches could be provided by the employer themselves. Where needed, employers can be financially supported in this by the funding coming from the disability quota contributions paid by employers who do not reach the quota.** Such an approach could also help mitigate the shortage of job coaches.

92 Inclusion Europe. 2020. *Reasonable accommodation – My talents For diversity*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czpb3iBxWsE>

I believe that if the system was more supportive, more disabled people would work

Service Provider

- ❖ A **cooperative or social enterprise** – where the focus would not be on making profit but on providing an inclusive workplace and creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities could help mitigate some of the challenges mentioned throughout this report. A social cooperative – owning and managing a cafeteria, for example – could **provide both training for those who need it, and paid employment for others.** In this manner, all persons with disabilities, depending on their skillset, needs and preferences, can reach their potential and be productive through work which they enjoy, as the enterprise would be set up by persons with disabilities and their caregivers, with support from NGOs / other organisations working in the field. Setting up such an enterprise, however, is currently hampered by the lack of legislation addressing social enterprises in Malta: the **Social Enterprise Act of 2022**⁹³ has not yet come into force. Meanwhile, cooperatives can make use of existing support to set off, such as TAKE-OFF⁹⁴ at the UoM, the Malta Co-Operative Federation⁹⁵ and *Koperattivi Malta*.⁹⁶

93 Legislation Malta. 2022. *Chapter 630 – Social Enterprise Act*. <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/630/eng>

94 <https://takeoff.org.mt>

95 <https://maltacooperativefederation.coop>

96 <https://cooperatives-malta.coop>

5.4 Improving Effectiveness

- ❖ The LSF needs to **work more closely with caregivers** where the person with disability wants and needs their support, and the caregiver wants to be involved. Caregivers can support their child throughout the SE process in unique ways.
- ❖ **Job coaches working with people with severe mental health difficulties need to have the right background and experience** in working with such jobseekers, in order to give them the support they require. Across the board, **job coaches in both the SET and at the LSF - which should have the same requirements to apply for the post of a job coach, whether it is at SET or at LSF - need to have training on the specific disabilities of the service users they are supporting**, in order to be able to support the service users through **evidence-based approaches and more individualised approaches**.
- ❖ **Sheltered training and employment, and supported employment services should be brought under one roof**, to ensure continuity and efficiency. Furthermore, **in-house human resources at the LSF** such as OTs, social workers, psychologists and a visiting psychiatrist are necessary in order to adequately support service users.
- ❖ In a bid to reach more – and more successfully – persons with disabilities and their caregivers, **the LSF website should be made more accessible** in terms of:
 - Language: website content needs to be provided in Maltese and Easy-Read
 - Accessibility: both website and social media pages and channels need to be accessible for persons with visual and hearing impairments, as well as persons with dyslexia

- Content: the website content could be clearer and more detailed about the type of services the LSF offers, what the job seeker can expect in the SE process, and other aspects.

- ❖ Relatedly, the **transparency and accountability of current SE services needs to be improved**. This can be done through publishing verifiable outcomes:

- who is being supporting (types of disabilities)
- how they are being supported
- the duration of support
- how people on the waiting list are prioritised
- how long people wait to find a job.

Furthermore, there needs to be a budget for **Monitoring & Evaluation** of SE services.

5.5 External Coherence

- ❖ There is a need to **strengthen the collaboration and information sharing between the education and employment** spheres to better prepare persons with disability for work and provide the necessary support and services during the transition from formal education to employment.
- ❖ As mentioned in the beginning of the report, supported employment and employment-related services do not exist in a vacuum. If persons with disability are to be properly supported in job finding and retainment, as well as in career development, they need to be adequately supported in other areas of their lives:

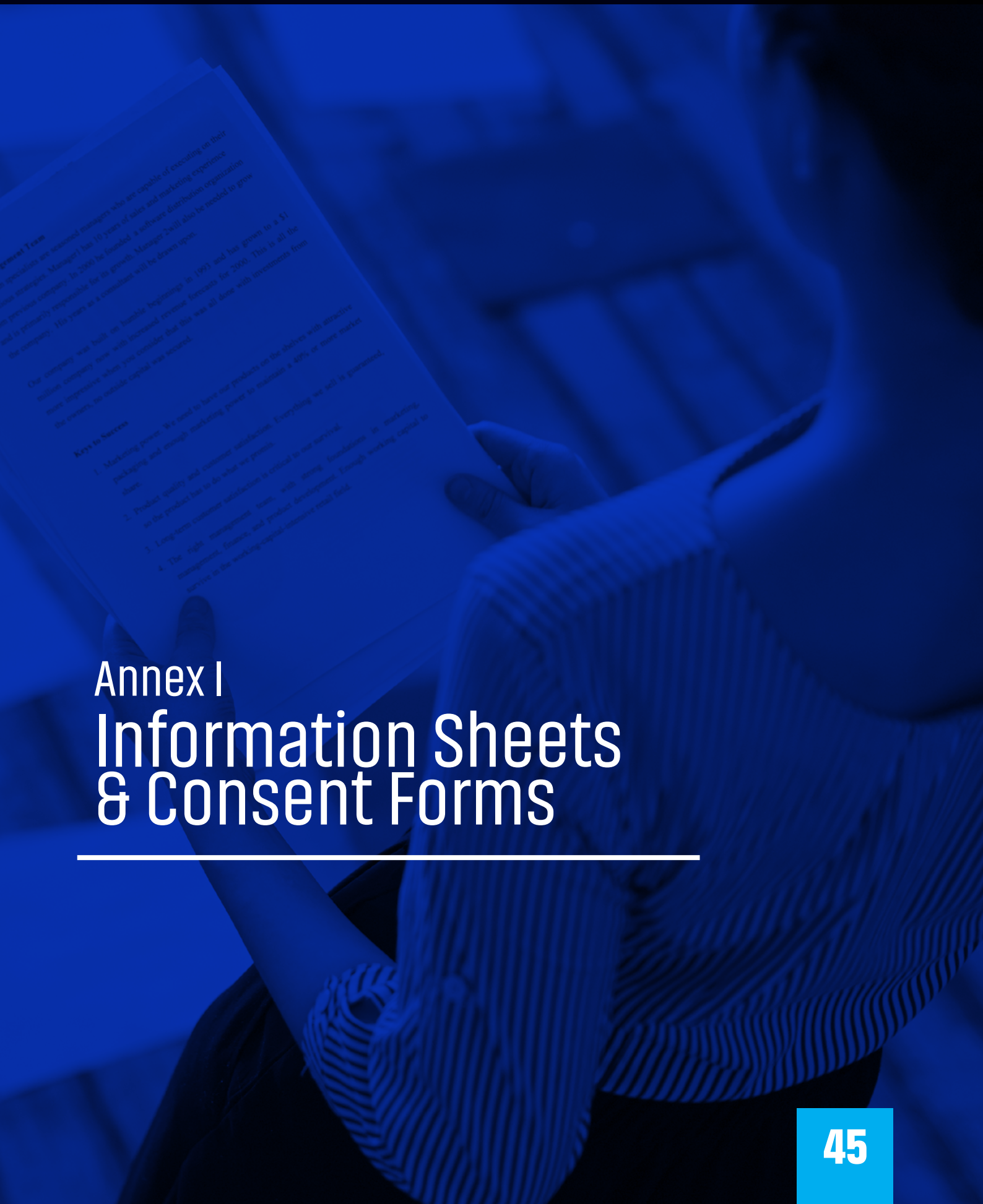
- There is an **urgent need** for the ***Protection of Adults in Situations of Vulnerability Act***⁹⁷ and the ***Personal Autonomy Act***⁹⁸ to come into force.
- **Personal assistance** for persons with disabilities – which is currently under reform⁹⁹ – could mitigate some of the challenges persons with disabilities find in working in the OLM, such as in using transport.
- Taking a lifelong approach in supporting a person with disability through assigning a **“key worker”**, first to the family of the child with disability, then eventually to the person with disability themselves, can help **guide and support the person in accessing the necessary and relevant services at different stages of their lives**.¹⁰⁰

97 The PASVA was re-published for consultation in 2025: <https://www.gov.mt/en/publicconsultation/Pages/2025/L-0017-2025.aspx>

98 The Personal Autonomy Act was published for consultation in 2025: <https://www.gov.mt/en/publicconsultation/Pages/2025/L-0017-2025.aspx>

99 *Aġenzija Sapport*. 2024. *Personal Assistance Reform*. <https://sapport.gov.mt/personal-assistance-reform>

100 Interview with Prof Anne-Marie Callus (Department of Disability Studies, UoM), July 2024.



Annex I

Information Sheets & Consent Forms

INFORMATION SHEET [Date]

The [Malta Association of Supported Employment](#) (MASE) has commissioned [Dr Lara Bezzina](#) to conduct a research study on supported employment for persons with disability in Malta and Gozo. The research is being funded by the [Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector](#) (MCVS) through the [Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme](#) (VOPS) and is being implemented in collaboration with the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector (MIV) throughout 2024.

The aims of this research are to **evaluate the current supported employment services** available in Malta and to **explore the best scenario for inclusive employment**.

To this end, the researcher is conducting interviews with key stakeholders, including: persons with disabilities who are currently in supported employment, or being supported to find/ retain work; providers of supported employment services; professionals and organisations working with persons with disabilities; and European / EU Member States organisations working on supported employment.

The data collected from participants will be transcribed and analysed collectively through a qualitative analysis software. The findings of the research will be presented in a published report and during a validation workshop with key stakeholders towards the end of the implementation period.

Interviewees can choose to remain anonymous: in this case, the names will not appear in the report and all means necessary will be taken to render the interviewees unidentifiable. Interviewees' personal data will not be disclosed to anyone by the researcher, if they so wish. Interviewees also have the right to access, rectify, and, where applicable, erase the data concerning them. Any data collected during the research process will be used exclusively for the purpose of this research. Once the research is complete, all data will be erased.

Interviews will not take longer than one hour. Your contribution to this study would be greatly appreciated and serve to propose recommendations in ameliorating the supported employment scenario in Malta, towards enabling inclusive employment for all persons with disabilities.

Should you require any further information and / or clarifications, do not hesitate to contact Lara Bezzina on bezzinalara@gmail.com or the MASE president, Ms Marthese Mugliette on marthesemugliette@gmail.com.

CONSENT FORM

After having read the Information Sheet, kindly fill in the consent form below and return it to Dr Lara Bezzina on bezzinalara@gmail.com

- I have read the information sheet on the supported employment research study and have understood all the information provided. ☐
- I understand the aims of the research and how the report will be used and disseminated. ☐
- I freely give my consent to be interviewed. ☐
- I understand that even after I give my consent, I can withdraw my participation without giving a reason for my withdrawal. ☐
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any question posed by the researcher, without giving a reason for the refusal. ☐
- I understand that I can stop the interview at any time I wish. ☐
- I understand that I have a right to remain anonymous and that if I request it, the researcher will make sure that I remain unidentifiable in the published research report. ☐
- I understand that the interview may be (audio) recorded if I give consent. ☐
- I understand that all data collected will be stored securely, be only accessible to the researcher, and will be destroyed after the end of the research study implementation. ☐
- I understand that I can access and rectify the data concerning my contribution to the research report. ☐
- I understand that the data collected will be exclusively used for the purpose of this specific study. ☐

Name

Signature

Date

DOKUMENT TA' INFORMAZZJONI [Data]

Il-Malta Association of Supported Employment (MASE) ikkummissjonat lil [Dr Lara Bezzina](#) biex tagħmel riċerka dwar l-impjieg issapportjat għall-persuni b'diżabilità f'Malta u f'Għawdex. Il-fondi għal din ir-riċerka ġew mogħtija mill-[Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector \(MCVS\)](#) - [Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme \(VOPS\)](#) u qed tiġi mplimentata b'kollaborazzjoni mas-Segretarju Permanenti fi ħdan il-Ministeru Għall-Inklużjoni u l-Volontarjat (MIV) matul l-2024.

L-għanijiet ta' din ir-riċerka huma li **tevalwa s-servizzi attwali tal-impjieg issapportjat disponibbli f'Malta** u li **tesplora l-aħjar xenarju ta' mpjieg inkluziv**.

Għal dan il-għan, ir-riċerkatriċi qed tagħmel intervisti ma' persuni b'diżabilità li bħalissa qegħdin jaħdmu u qed jiġu appoġġjati fix-xogħol tagħhom, jew qed ifittxu impjieg u qed jiġu appoġġjati biex ifittxu impjieg; organizzazzjonijiet li jipprovdu s-servizzi tal-impjieg issapportjat; professjonisti u organizzazzjonijiet li jaħdmu ma' persuni b'diżabilità; u organizzazzjonijiet Ewropej/f'pajjiżi Ewropej li jaħdmu fuq l-impjieg issapportjat.

L-informazzjoni miġbura mill-parteciċipanti se tiġi traskritta u analizzata kollettivament permezz ta' softwer ta' analiżi kwalitattiva. Is-sej-

biet tar-riċerka se jiġu pprezentati f'rapport ipubblikat u waqt *workshop* ta' validazzjoni ma' dawk li jaħdmu f'dan il-qasam jew jgħixu dawn l-esperjenzi, lejn tmiem il-perjodu ta' implimentazzjoni tar-riċerka.

Il-persuni intervistati jistgħu jagħzlu li jibqgħu anonimi: f'dan il-każ, l-ismijiet mhux se jidhru fir-rapport u ser jittieħdu l-mezzi kollha meħtieġa biex l-intervistati ma jkunux jistgħu jiġu identifikati. Jekk jixtiequ, l-informazzjoni personali tal-persuni intervistati ma tiġi żvelata lil hadd mir-riċerkatriċi. L-intervistati għandhom ukoll id-dritt li jaċċessaw, jirrettifikaw, u, fejn applikabbli, jhassru l-informazzjoni li tikkonċernahom. Kwalunkwe informazzjoni miġbura matul il-proċess tar-riċerka se tintuża esklussivament għall-iskop ta' din ir-riċerka. Ladarba r-riċerka titlesta, l-informazzjoni kollha ser tiġi mħassra.

L-intervisti mhux se jieħdu aktar minn siegħa. Il-kontribut tiegħek għal dan l-istudju jkun apprezzat ħafna u jservi biex jipproponi rakkomandazzjonijiet għat-titjib tax-xenarju tal-impjieg issapportjat f'Malta, biex ikun possibbli l-impjieg inklussiv għall-persuni kollha b'diżabilità.

Jekk teħtieġ aktar informazzjoni u/jew kjarifiċi, toqgħodx lura milli tikkuntattja lil Lara Bezzina fuq bezzinalara@gmail.com jew lill-president tal-MASE, is-Sinjura Marthese Mugliette, fuq marthesemugliette@gmail.com.

FORMOLA TA' KUNSENS

Wara li tkun qrajt id-dokument ta' informazzjoni, inti ġentilment mitlub/a biex timla l-formola ta' kunsens hawn taht u tirritornaha lil Dr Lara Bezzina fuq bezzinalara@gmail.com.

- Qrajt id-dokument ta' informazzjoni dwar ir-riċerka dwar ☐
l-impjeg issapportjat u fhimt l-informazzjoni kollha pprovduta.
- Nifhem l-għanijiet tar-riċerka u kif ir-rapport se jintuża u jitqassam. ☐
- Jien liberament nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex niġi intervistat/a. ☐
- Nifhem li anke wara li nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi, nista' nirtira ☐
l-partecipazzjoni tiegħi mingħajr ma nagħti raġuni
għall-irtirar tiegħi.
- Nifhem li nista' nirrifjuta li nwieġeb kwalunkwe mistoqsija ☐
magħmula mir-riċerkatriċi, mingħajr ma nagħti raġuni għar-rifjut.
- Nifhem li nista' nwaqqaf l-intervista fi kwalunkwe ħin li nixtieq. ☐
- Nifhem li għandi dritt li nibqa' anonimu/a u li jekk nitlobha, ☐
ir-riċerkatriċi se tiżgura li nibqa' mhux identifikabbli
fir-rapport ta' riċerka ppubblikat.
- Nifhem li l-intervista tista' tiġi rreġistrata (awdjo) ☐
jekk nagħti l-kunsens.
- Nifhem li l-informazzjoni kollha miġbura se tinħażen ☐
b'mod sigur, tkun aċċessibbli biss għar-riċerkatriċi, u se
tingered wara t-tmiem tal-implimentazzjoni tal-istudju tar-riċerka.
- Nifhem li nista' naċċessa u nirrettifika l-informazzjoni ☐
li tikkonċerna l-kontribut tiegħi għar-rapport ta' riċerka.
- Nifhem li l-informazzjoni miġbura se tintuża esklussivament ☐
għall-iskop ta' dan l-istudju speċifiku.

Isem

Firma

Data

Research on Supported Employment in Malta [Date]

Information Sheet



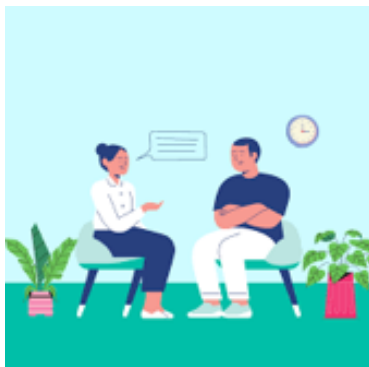
As you know, I am doing research on supported employment in Malta.



I am doing this research for the *Malta Association of Supported Employment*.



This research will help us to know how supported employment services for persons with disability can be improved.



Since you [are being supported at work / in finding work], I would like to talk to you.



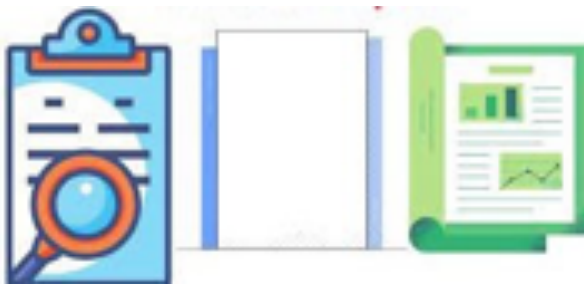
I will ask you some questions about your experience.



During the interview, I will write down what you tell me.



If you give me permission, I may record the interview.



Once I finish all the interviews, I will write the findings in a report, which will be published.



I will use the information that you give me during the interview only for this research.



This interview will take place at a time, day and place of your choosing.



You can refuse to have this interview.



If you would like to ask me anything, you can call me on 79*****.

Thank you.

Lara Bezzina (Researcher)

Consent Form

After reading the information above, please:

- 1) tick the boxes below where you agree with the corresponding statement
- 2) sign at the bottom.

I understand what this research is about and what it will be used for.	
Lara has told me about what she will do with my interview.	
I understand that Lara will use the information that I give her only for this research.	
I understand that I can ask Lara not to use the information that I give her.	
I would like my interview to remain confidential.	
I would not like my interview to remain confidential.	
I understand that if I choose to have my interview remain confidential, Lara will not write down my name in the research report, but some people may identify me when reading the report.	
I give permission to Lara to record my interview.	
I do not give permission to Lara to record my interview.	
I agree to take part in this research.	
I do not agree to take part in this research.	

Name & Surname of research participant

Signature of research participant

Date



Annex II Questionnaires

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS – MANAGEMENT

Interviewee:

Organisation:

Designation:

Date of Interview:

- 1) Kindly tell me about your organisation and what services it provides; and about your role in the organisation.
- 2) Can you tell me more about the system: the organising and financing of the *[supported employment / Sheltered Employment & training services]*; and rules and regulations that the service must adhere to?
- 3) Can you elaborate on the working of the service: referrals, cooperation; and aspects of job coaches / employment specialists' background and workload (including timeline from referral to placement)?
- 4) Which Supported Employment model, if any, does your organisation use in providing these services? (e.g. the EUSE five-stage process)
- 5) The clients/job seekers: who are they (target groups; do they include persons with mental health problems) and what employment options do they have?
- 6) The employers: can you elaborate on your organisation's approaches to and collaborations with employers; job identification, nature of jobs, type and level of job support, and how supporting financial schemes aimed at employers are/can be combined with supported employment?
- 7) Results: how are results / target achievement defined and measured? What kind of monitoring and evaluation of services is implemented?
- 8) Are persons with disabilities / OPDs / NGOs working in the disability field / CRPD consulted in the development of programmes / initiatives / approaches?
 - 7.1 If yes, how?
 - 7.2 If not, why not?
- 9) What are the top successes of such services since you have been working in the field?
- 10) Are there any challenges that are met in these services?
- 11) Is there anything you feel needs to be improved in supported / sheltered employment services in Malta?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR JOB COACHES

Interviewee:

Organisation:

Designation:

Date of Interview:

- 1 Please tell me a bit about your role within the organisation, and your daily work.
 - 1.1 How long have you been working with this organisation?
- 2 What type of service users do you support (e.g. type of disability)?
- 3 How do you support them? Is there a specific supported employment model you use?
 - 1.1 Do you also work with the main caregivers of the service users if necessary?
 - 1.2 Do they have the option of job shadowing or work buddy instead of job coach?
- 3 For how long do you support a particular service user?
 - 3.1 After job coaching, do you keep in touch with the service users?
 - 3.2 If a service user returns for support after having stopped, will they still be eligible for support?
- 4 Do service users who are supported in finding employment find employment? How?
- 5 Do service users who are placed in employment retain their employment? How?
- 6 Which have been the top successes of your work so far?
- 7 Do you encounter any challenges in your work? If yes, how are these mitigated?
- 8 Do you think the current supported employment services reaching their goal, i.e. supporting persons with disabilities in finding, working and retaining a job in the open labour market? Why?
- 9 Is there anything that you think can be improved in the current supported employment services?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Name:

Type of disability:

Age:

Date of Interview:

- 1) What kind of job do you have?
 - 1.1 Part time or full-time?
- 2) How did you find this job?
 - 2.1 How long have you been working in this job and how long would you like to stay in it?
- 3) How did you access support? Can you describe the process, timeline, etc.?
- 4) How are you being supported in your job?
- 5) Is the support you receive satisfactory? Why?
 - 5.1 If not satisfactory, what type of support do you need?
- 6) Are you happy in this job? Why?
 - 6.1 If not happy, what job would you like to do and why?
 - 6.2 How do you plan on finding this job?
- 7) If you are happy in your job, are you being supported in retaining your job? How?
- 8) Is there anything that can be improved in supported employment services?
 - 8.1 If yes, what and how?
 - 8.2 If not, why?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

Name:

Type of disability:

Age:

Date of Interview:

- 1) Have you worked before? What type of job was it and for how long did you work?
Why did you stop working?
- 2) Why are you currently looking for a job?
- 3) What kind of job (type; full-time/part-time, etc.) are you looking for? Why?
- 4) How are you looking for it?
- 5) Is someone supporting you in job seeking?
 - 5.1 If not, why not?
 - 5.2 If yes, who is supporting you and how?
- 6) If you are being supported, how are you finding this support (adequate, not enough, etc.)? Why?
- 7) If you are not finding the right support, what type of support would you need to find a job?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYERS

Interviewee:

Designation:

Company:

Size of company:

Date of Interview:

- 1) Can you please elaborate on the company's work and your role within the company?
- 2) Do you currently employ – or have you previously employed – persons with disabilities?
 - 2.1 If yes, what is / was the reason you employed them?
 - 2.2 If not, what is the reason you do not?
 - 2.3 If not, would you consider employing persons with disabilities in the future? Why?
- 3) If you currently employ / used to employ persons with disabilities, what was the manner in which you recruited them?
 - 3.1 What was your experience with the recruitment process?
- 4) What is your experience with having an employee with disability?
- 5) Do you receive support in employing the person with disability?
 - 5.1 If not, have you asked for support and to whom?
 - 5.2 If yes, who provides the support and how?
- 6) What is your experience with this support?
- 7) What is your view of supported employment services in Malta & Gozo?
- 8) Do you feel there can be any improvement in such services?
 - 8.1 If not, why?
 - 8.2 If yes, why and how?

Annex III Validation Workshop Agenda

Date: Monday October 7, 2024

Time: 9:00 – 12:30

Venue: The Meeting Place, Dom Mintoff Street, Marsa

No.	Item	Duration
9:00		
1	Introduction a. Introduction by MASE President - Ms Marthese Mugliette b. Introduction to the research study by researcher - Dr Lara Bezzina	20 mins
9:20		
2	Presentation of the Research Findings a. Presentation of the findings by Dr Lara Bezzina b. Q&A	40 mins
	Coffee Break @ 10:00	20 mins
10:20		
3	Recommendations: Discussion & Co-Creation a. Presentation of draft recommendations by Dr Lara Bezzina b. Discussion of recommendations: feasibility & sustainability c. Co-creation of further recommendations	90 mins
11:50		
4	Conclusion a. Further comments from participants b. Wrap-up: summary of discussion by Dr Lara Bezzina c. Next steps	30 mins
12:20		
5	a. Closing speech by Minister for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector - the Hon. Julia Farrugia Portelli	10 mins
Total		3.5 hours

Data: It-Tnejn, 7 t'Ottubru, 2024

Ħin: 9:00 – 12:30

Post: The Meeting Place, Triq Dom Mintoff, Marsa

Nru.	Attività	Tul ta' ħin
9:00		
1	Introduzzjoni c. Introduzzjoni mill-President tal-MASE - Ms Marthese Mugliette d. Introduzzjoni għar-riċerka mir-riċerkatriċi - Dr Lara Bezzina	20 min.
9:20		
2	Prezentazzjoni tar-Riżultati tar-Riċerka c. Prezentazzjoni tar-riżultati minn Dr Lara Bezzina d. Mistoqsijiet u tweġġibiet	40 min.
Brejk – Te' u Kafe' @ 10:00		
20 min.		
10:20		
3	Rakkomandazzjonijiet: Diskussjoni u Holqien d. Prezentazzjoni tal-abbozz tar-rakkomandazzjonijiet minn Dr Lara Bezzina e. Diskussjoni tar-rakkomandazzjonijiet: fattibilita' u sostenibbilita' ċ. Holqien flimkien ta' rakkomandazzjonijiet oħrajn	90 min.
11:50		
4	Konkluzjoni d. Aktar kummenti mill-parteċipanti e. Għeluq: sommarju tad-diskussjoni minn Dr Lara Bezzina ċ. Il-passi li jmiss	30 min.
12:20		
5	b. Diskors tal-għeluq mill-Ministru għall-Inklużjoni u l-Volontarjat – l-Onor. Julia Farrugia Portelli	10 min.
Total		3.5 sigħat



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