IN-WORK

Research protocol

2022-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000087184

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the procedures and provides tools for carrying out research activities within Work Package 2 (WP2) in the frame of the IN-WORK project, leading to the provision of the Deliverable D2.1 Report on the needs and resources for youths with special needs. The overall objective of WP2 is to set up the ground for designing a grounded model of intervention for inclusive universities. In this frame, the introductory research phase aims to compare data, define the main obstacles and successes to insertion to work of youths with special needs, and identify, if any, contextual factors affecting the process in relation to literature and the project countries.

To reach the aim of introductory research, the following activities will be needed:

- Desk research to understand which are the main obstacles of work insertion for youths with special needs according to literature;
- Field research, to explore and triangulate different points of observation and identify needs, constraints and opportunities of the involved target groups;
- Draft conclusions and provide suggestions for the project implementation.

The first set of activities within WP2 has a descriptive purpose – mapping practices, trends, needs and legal frameworks, and a learning purpose – providing inputs for developing the IN-WORK project.

Following this Introduction, the document is composed of four main sections:

Section 2 defines the research questions and the adopted research approach;

Section 3 describes tools and methods for desk research;

Section 4 describes tools and methods for field research;

Section 5 explains how the research will be implemented.

2. Research Design

This section describes how the research has been designed.

Research Aim

The IN-WORK project aims to support the development of a sense of commitment and belonging to inclusive communities by educational and business players and civil society through work-integrated learning (WIL) activities.

Exploratory research will be carried out to:

Identify obstacles and successes to insertion to work of youths with special needs

Compare data and define main obstacles and successes to insertion to work and identify, if any, contextual factors affecting the process.

The research will provide elements to effectively and efficiently tailor the project action in the addressed territories.

Research approach and design

In designing the research approach, we have focused on the work by Creswell (2013), who suggests three main questions that must be addressed by researchers: which knowledge claims are made by the researcher? What strategy of inquiry will inform the procedures? What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?

Knowledge claims in this project mix social constructivism with pragmatic knowledge; this would allow the combination of an active role of researchers with their pragmatic approach to research inquiries. Constructivism highlights the social implications of knowledge creation (Perkins, 1999).

Pragmatism is characterised by high flexibility: researchers are not forced to choose between qualitative or quantitative methodologies, and they choose according to the emerging needs and project's aims (Creswell, 2013); scholars (Patton, 1990) highlight that pluralistic approaches are valid in pragmatism.

For what concerns the research approach, this project will employ primarily qualitative methods according to the purposes of the project. The project will use interviews and surveys to address the research strategies associated with quantitative research.

The methods of data collection will be defined in detail for every single task of WP2. In the following paragraphs, we will briefly discuss some general aspects of desk and field research.

2.1   Desk research

The desk research consists of a literature review aimed to collect data to identify

a) success factors and obstacles in accessing employment of youths with special needs;
b) legal frameworks related to work insertion/education/special needs;
c) educational provisions in HE focused on the transition to work for youths with special needs both enrolled in HE or not;
d) statistical trends related to work insertion/special needs;

2.2   Field research

Field research includes the collection of data from different perspectives and target groups representing the main stakeholders of the project, namely

- Higher education students with special needs
- Youths with special needs not enrolled in higher education
- Social services (or labor administration, where necessary) involved in the process of employment of youths with special needs
- Public and private organisations (employers)

Field research will also identify obstacles and enabling factors for job insertion of people with special needs, with an overview on contextual issues (if any), such as culture, type of sector, size of company etc., in the regions of the addressed countries.

3. Research implementation

This section explains how data will be collected and shared and how the study will be delivered.

3.1   Context

Provision and support for special needs vary across countries. As an introductory activity, the context description will set the project's background.

IN-WORK operates in three countries, namely Finland, Italy, and Spain, which have different legal frameworks and provisions for job insertion and to support people with special needs in education and transition to the labour market.

A descriptive matrix (Table 1) will provide key elements to consider in the following comparison across countries.

Topic	Country
Country name	
Country profile (size, geographical location, demographics, GDP)	
Official definition of 'special need' in education and in work/labour, if different	
Demographics (percentages, unemployed, employed people with special needs)	
Laws and regulations for people with special needs (education)	
Organisations in charge (education)	
Laws and regulations for people with special needs (labour/work)	
Organisations in charge (labour/work)	
Other relevant information	

Table 1. Country overview

3.2 Desk research

- Understanding theoretical background which forms the basis of the proposed model of intervention
- Understanding needs and opportunities of young people with special needs with regards to their inclusion to the labour market
- Knowledge of methods, tools and resources to design a WIL activity in their university and promote the inclusion of youth with special needs into the workplace
- Understanding how to involve stakeholders and promote joint development and integration of WIL practices into universities
- Understanding some of the best practices from the three partner countries

3.2.1 Data search and collection

This task refers to all activities of searching and collating relevant sources and their entering into a spreadsheet (or way used for notes). The items should be drawn from sources such as:

1. Existing and already known source material;
2. Searches from databases;
3. Suggestions and advice from partners, colleagues, and experts;
4. The internet (as free search).

a. Existing material

Previous articles, projects and experiences of youths with special needs in this and other sectors might provide helpful insights from their websites and publications. Also, journals on pedagogical approaches and methods for work-integrated learning design and development, transitions from education to work, capacity building at a community level, career development for youths with special needs, etc., could be good sources of information.

b. Searches from databases

Search procedures, in this case, should address Ministries databases particularly (e.g., National Ministries of Education, Ministries of Labour, etc.), other Higher Education registries, European Databases (e.g., DG EAC databases such as EPALE) and portals (e.g., Eurofound), relevant journals.

c. Suggestions and advice from partners, colleagues, experts

Questions to key respondents from professional networks would help identify relevant cases and related materials as well as other events in which you will participate.

d. Free search

Free search on the internet can help identify "grey literature", such as blogs, professional networks discussions and documents, etc.

As search terms, it is suggested to use basic research questions, e.g.

1. Students + higher education + job
2. Higher education + work-integrated learning
3. Learning + work + special needs Etc.

3.2.2 Quality and relevance appraisal

This activity will reduce the list of materials collected to a shortlist by selecting relevant materials useful to identify and develop cases worth of study. This involves checking material for relevance and quality, according to Table 2 items.

Criteria	Question	✔
Domain relevance	Does the item cover job insertion for youths with special needs and/or relevant techniques and methods for work-integrated learning?	
Research relevance	Does the item address the research questions?	
Timeliness	Is the item relatively recent (i.e., produced after January 2012)?	
Quality	Is the item sufficiently understandable (well written if text, accessible if multimedia, etc.) to summarise?	
Comprehensiveness	Is the material extensive enough in breadth and depth to allow meaningful conclusions to be drawn?	
SCORE		**…/5**

Table 2. Quality and relevance appraisal

As suggested in the previous chapter, each of the three countries (from Finland, Italy, and Spain) should carry out this task. Italy will harmonise the final document of desk research.

The selection of cases should naturally follow the quality and relevance appraisal: the higher the checklist score, the stronger the possibility of providing a relevant subject for IN-WORK purposes.

The final stage of this task is to compile a spreadsheet or take notes of the selected sources, by summarising

1. Short description of the addressed topic, with references
2. A short summary of the key findings
3. References.

Additional desk or field research could follow only the cases under investigation.

3.2.3   Reporting data

Selected resources should be summarised as described in Table 3.

ADDRESSED TOPIC	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	REFERENCES
Job insertion of graduates with special needs	*Brief description of findings*	--
Job insertion of youths with special needs not included in higher education		--
Previous experiences in supporting the insertion of people with special needs		
Pedagogical approaches and methods to support the transition of people with special needs		
Additional information	*Any additional information that might be useful*	

Table 3. Literature review template

Templates will be collected and stored in a single database for analysis.

3.2.4 Synthesis

The synthesis will be aimed at identifying similar theories, approaches and techniques used in comparative settings to identify if the project is taking into account

a) most suitable methods to successfully act in context;

b) all variables that should be considered during the process to anticipate/manage potential risks and pitfalls.

3.3 Survey

The surveys will address two target groups, students with special needs enrolled in higher education and public and private organization. The student survey aims to include the perspective of higher education students with special needs in the exploratory research and to collect their perceptions about the transition from education to work and the labour market. The organization survey aims to include the perspective of employers in the market and to collect their experiences and perceptions about the employability of special need workers and the potential role of university in facilitate the transition from education to work and labour market.

3.3.1 Sample: higher education students with special needs & employers

The sample is composed of students with special needs enrolled in higher education. They should study in the regions in which the universities of the consortium are located.

Since the survey contributes to exploratory research and is not meant to verify a hypothesis or provide statistically valid findings, the confidence level applied to the addressed population has been 90%, and the confidence interval >10%: the target set for the survey is, therefore, min 40 respondents consulted within the consortium by all three countries.

The Sample composition for employers:

- Companies and other organisations (employers), regardless of the sector and dimensions, located in the regions of the universities of the consortium
- Public and private organisations

Size: the target is set as 40 concerned organisations consulted within the consortium by all three countries.

3.3.2 Survey Instrument

The survey will be implemented through a self-administered questionnaire that will be provided in the languages of the consortium and English and will be online-based.

To reduce respondent variability and the time and resources taken up by translating responses, the questionnaire will include as many questions as possible that are in the form of checklists (tick-boxes) and multiple-choice questions; Likert scales; and will minimise the use of closed-constructed response items (which require one word or short phrase answers) and open-constructed response items (which require more extensive writing).

The scope of the questionnaire for higher education students is to cover the following areas/contents:

Area	Content
Respondent Profile	Country Age group Gender Student status (undergrad; masters; post-grad) Current course subject
Special need *(to set according to the country definitions)*	Physical impairment Intellectual impairment Specific learning disorder Other
Work experience (if any)	Paid/unpaid work (seasonal work, volunteering, etc.) Sector of work
Perceptions about the labour market	Perceived employment potential in the actual labour market Perceived potential obstacles to job insertion Perceived potential enabling factors to job insertion Perceived equity and equality at work
Expectations of future employability	Perceived competences needed by the candidate Perceived relevance of relations between the university and the local labour market Perceived relevance of difficulty due to special need
Success factors and critical issues related to the transition from education to work	Perceived success factors Perceived critical issues

Table 4. Student survey content

The scope of the questionnaire for employers is to cover the following areas/contents:

Area	Content
Respondent Profile	Country Organisation Type Sector Dimensions

Job	Legal Obligation
insertion for youths with special needs	No. of employees with special needs Special Needs Methods used for inclusion Perceived advantages and disadvantages of inclusion Management Tools for inclusion Expectations
Perceived potential of the university role	Support actions needed University potential aid and role
Perceived mismatch between profiles/competences and the labour market needs	Perceived level competences of the candidates Perceived differences with special need candidates Perceived obstacles in hiring candidates with special needs Training needs of employees and employess with special needs

Table 5. Organisation survey content

The above baseline needs to be developed by taking into account also first findings from the desk research review. The design and the development of the instrument will therefore take an iterative approach.

3.3.3 Validation of the instrument

A validation of the instruments in the partners' proper language will be carried out by each partner country. Formal validation of the questionnaires will require cognitive interviews with a sample of the target population (about four students) to identify problematic questions that may elicit response errors (Willis 2015): verbal probing is suggested as a technique for this process.

Verbal probing is a basic technique in which the interviewer "probes" further into the basis for the response (Willis 1999) by using questions following in different categories as follows:

Category	Question (examples)
Comprehension/Interpretation probe	What does the term "labour market" means to you?
Paraphrasing	Can you repeat the question I just asked in your own words?
Confidence judgement	How sure are you that those competences are the most important for job insertion?
Recall probe	How do you know that networking is the most important tool for job insertion?
Specific probe	Why do you think that the labour market is critical in this respect?
General probes	How did you arrive at that answer?

	Was that easy or hard to answer? I noticed that you hesitated; tell me what you were thinking

Table 6. Categories of verbal probing, adapted from Willis (1999)

The interviews should be ideally carried out face-to-face. Reporting should point out unclear/ambiguous questions and suggest modifications. Each of the three countries will carry out the validation process in order

3.3.4 Disseminating the survey

The survey dissemination will primarily address the communities directly involved in the project activities and the countries of the consortium (that will be listed on the Respondent Profile). However, it will be open to all European students to collect additional inputs for other countries (that will be all included in an additional choice "Other country" on the Respondent Profile).

3.4 Interviews

Interviews will address two target groups, youths with special needs and social services and will be delivered using a semi-structured interview format. Interviews should be administered face-to-face with the interviewee, if possible, but can be done by telephone or online if this is the only option.

The suggested format for interviews includes:

1. Preparation: the interviewer fills in the report form, which contains general details about the interviewee;
2. The interview should begin with an explanation of the project objectives and a description of how the interview will be carried out;
3. The interviewer and the interviewee fill in and sign the certificate of informed consent or any other document needed according to national laws;
4. The interviewer follows the questions shown in the Guidelines (see following paragraphs) sequentially. The responses can either be recorded – having obtained the interviewee's permission – or the responses can be taken down in written (note) form. Please note: there is no need to transcribe the interviews fully;
5. On completion of the interview, the interviewer should summarise the key results of the interview using the proper template.

3.4.1 Interviews Guidelines

Interviews will address the following themes:

(a) Perceived strengths and weaknesses of job insertion for youths with special needs

(b) Perceived potential of the university's cooperation with the place for job insertion of people with special needs

(c) Perceived mismatch between the labour market needs and the available profiles/competences of youths with special needs

Each theme has three kinds of questions:

1. Main questions – these address the IN-WORK issues from a general perspective by setting the scene for the discussion
2. Supplementary questions – these drills down more deeply into the general questions.
3. Clarifying questions, such as "are you saying that…; do you mean that…" to clarify the interviewee's position about issues, are also used during the interview (not included in the guidelines below).

3.4.2 Sample and instruments: youths with special needs

Sample composition:

- Youths[1] with special needs not enrolled in higher education, living in regions where the universities of the consortium are located

Size: the target is set as 20 youths with special needs consulted within the consortium.

Instrument: guidelines are provided in Table 6.

1. Job insertion for youths with special needs	
Main Questions	**Supplementary questions**
Which work would you like to do? Do you think that il will be easy to find a work in your area? Why do you think that it will/it will not be easy to find a job?	Do you think that it is difficult to find a job today? Why?

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[1] As defined by Eurostat, people aged 15-29.

Do you have any experience on job search or job insertion? Which was your experience? Do you think that special needs influence the job insertion? In which way?	
2. Perceived potential of the university role	
Main Questions	**Supplementary questions**
Do you believe that the role of the university for job insertion is important in your area? Do you believe that the university can do anything else to support job insertion for people with special needs? If yes, why; if no, why.	What do you think the university can do for youths not enrolled in the university?
3. Perceived mismatch between profiles/competences and the labour market needs	
Main Questions	**Supplementary questions**
Do you believe that the companies of your area look at specific competences to recruit staff? If yes, which are those competences in your opinion? Do you think that the competences that you possess are adequate to perform required jobs in your area?	

Table 7. Semi-structured interview guidelines/youths with special needs

3.4.3   Sample and instruments: social services

Sample composition:

- Social services appointed to support youths with special needs in job insertion in the regions where the universities of the consortium are located

Size: the target is set as 4 social services consulted within the consortium.

Instrument: guidelines are provided in Table 7.

1. Job insertion for youths with special needs	
Main Questions	**Supplementary questions**
Can you describe your role in the process of job insertion of people with special needs?	Are difficulties related to what? To lack of infrastructure? General lack of jobs? Other?

Which are the main difficulties in the process, and which are the enabling factors? How is the insertion to work of youths with special needs in your area?	Which could be an investment (resource can also be time, not only financial) that could help overcome difficulties?

2. Perceived potential of the university role	
Main Questions	**Supplementary questions**
Which are your relations with the university, if any? Do you believe that there is anything the university can do to support people with special needs in job insertion?	How can the present situation be improved? Is any form of cooperation between HEIs and the community that you believe could work and has not yet been exploited?

3. Perceived mismatch between profiles/competences and the labour market needs	
Main Questions	**Supplementary questions**
To which extent do you deem important the possessed competences of the candidates? Is there anything that can be done, in your opinion, to improve employability of youths with special needs? Is there anything that can be done, in your opinion, to support companies in hiring youths with special needs?	How can the present situation be improved?

Table 8. Semi-structured interview guidelines/social services

3.5   Focus Group

Focus groups will be organized, if necessary, and address two target groups, higher education students with special needs and employers in order to go deepen in topics faced during questionnaires and will be delivered using a semi-structured approach, with a list of open questions. Focus group will be organized independently by each country, when data collected by surveys show ambiguity or discord.

Focus groups should be administered face-to-face with the interviewee.

The suggested format for focus group includes:

1.   Preparation: the interviewer fills in the report form, which contains general details about the focus group;

2. The focus group should begin with an explanation of the project objectives and a description of how the meeting will be carried out;
3. The interviewer and the participants in the focus group fill in and sign the certificate of informed consent or any other document needed according to national laws;
4. The interviewer follows the open questions shown in the Guidelines (see following paragraphs) sequentially. The responses can either be recorded – having obtained the interviewee's permission – or the responses can be taken down in written (note) form. Please note: there is no need to transcribe the focus group fully;
5. On completion of the focus grouè, the interviewer should summarise the key results of the interview using the proper template.

3.6   Study Report

The Study Report will summarise and analyse data collected from the described sources, triangulate data and discuss findings, and provide recommendations for elements that should be taken into account in implementing the project.

It is envisaged that the structure of the report will therefore be the following:

- Introduction
- Methodological note
- Literature review
- Context
- Findings
    - Higher education students with special needs
    - Youths with special needs
    - Social services
    - Public and private organisations
- Discussion: understanding and assessing the needs of diverse stakeholders
- Conclusions and recommendations
- References

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