



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

## **European Blind Union response to the European Commission public consultation on integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market**

**July 2018**

### **Introduction**

In February 2016 the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed in the labour market (LTU Recommendation).

The aim of this consultation is to gather views and opinions on the measures proposed in the Recommendation and their implementation as well as to shed light on future possible action. In the context of this consultation, long-term unemployed are considered as those that have been without a job for more than one year but are looking for a job.

This document contains the European Blind Union full answer to the online survey published by the European Commission.

### **About the European Blind Union**

The European Blind Union (EBU) is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union, and it promotes the interests of blind and partially sighted people in Europe. It currently operates within a network of 44 national members including organisations from 27 European Union member states, candidate countries and other countries in geographical Europe. Our Interest Representative Register ID is 42378755934-87.

## Our replies to the survey

These are from the specific perspective of blind and partially sighted persons.

### Relevance

#### **4.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following measures are still relevant to help long term unemployed find a job?**

- Improving information on the job offers and support available to long-term unemployed persons: Strongly agree
- Encouraging registration of long-term unemployed persons with Employment Services: Strongly agree
- Providing a single point of contact that offers coordinated employment support and social support services to long-term unemployed persons: Strongly agree
- Providing in-depth individual assessments to each long term unemployed person covering employability prospects, barriers to employment and previous job-search efforts: Strongly agree
- Using Job Integration Agreements, detailing explicit goals, timelines and the obligations of both the long term unemployed person and the service provider(s), to facilitate transition into employment: Agree
- Improving services to employers such as placement support, workplace mentoring and training etc. to facilitate professional reintegration of long-term unemployed persons: Strongly agree
- Developing financial incentives for employers to stimulate creation of job opportunities for long-term unemployed persons: Agree

#### **4.2 Is there anything you wish to add regarding the relevance of the measures proposed by the Recommendation?**

Focusing on the needs of blind and partially sighted (BPS) persons, our comments on some of the measures:

- A one-stop-shop is very much needed in the process of exploring what sort of incentives and support disabled workers and potential employers can get.
- Individual assessments should give due consideration to the key factors that determine employability (level of assistive technology and mobility skills, ability to communicate to

- employers the adjustments needed; training needs), which implies special consideration for the specific type of disability.
- Job integration agreements and in-house training allow employers to test the employment of disabled persons and combat perceived difficulties. But there is insufficient availability of ad hoc schemes for disabled persons, whether employed or job-seekers; and a lack of accessible information on truly accessible training available.
  - Better access to information about existing financial incentives is also needed.

#### **4.3 In your view, should the Recommendation pursue other measures to help long-term unemployed find a job?**

Yes.

#### **4.4 If yes, please explain which:**

Bearing in mind that disabled persons and notably blind and partially sighted (BPS) persons are disproportionately victims of unemployment (they are more hardly hit by crises and less beneficiaries of improvement on the employment front) and that measures recommended by the Council have not (yet) delivered significant results, we would like to suggest other best practices for consideration:

- Collect unemployment data per type of disability.
- Ensure enough financial resources for employment services' tailored training and rehabilitation services towards long-term unemployed disabled job-seekers, in particular BPS persons.
- Provide adequate training of personnel to the needs of disabled job-seekers, according to their type of disability, and to the legal framework for assistive devices, rehabilitation, etc.
- Ensure accessibility of the workplace, in particular of the software and hardware used to conducting day-to-day business, and accelerated approval procedures for assistive devices for BPS persons that have re-entered the labour market.
- Encourage a peer-centred approach to mentoring, for exchange of experience within the specific disability community. Not only the mentor is better placed to comprehend the requirements and concerns of the mentee; mentorship skills are also developed as an element of employment of disabled persons.

- Diversify the ways that employers can play their part. For instance, legal quotas of disabled workers within the staff for companies above a certain threshold, or otherwise obligation to contribute to subcontract to assistance and service centres helping disabled persons into work, or to pay a lump sum to a fund for the employment of disabled workers.
- Specialised transport services namely to transport disabled people to and from their place of work.
- Disability allowance disconnected from the income generated by a professional activity, to avoid discouraging disabled persons from entering into the job market.
- A multidisciplinary approach to professional rehabilitation, including psychological help, as well as coaching to disabled job-seekers on how to emphasize their qualifications and skills, communicate their disability, inform potential employers about available subsidies, find assistive tools etc.
- Means of direct communication (e.g. portals, blogs) between would-be employers and disabled job-seekers, to fight prejudices and stereotypes and inform employers about the incentives.

## **Effectiveness**

### **5.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that measures for the following specific groups at risk of long-term unemployment have been strengthened in the last two years?**

- People with physical or sensory disabilities: Neither agree nor disagree

Explanation: we don't really observe public initiatives across the EU that are aimed specifically at persons with disabilities, let alone blind or partially sighted persons. Unfortunately there isn't in general a separate indicator in the statistics on the unemployment of such persons. Besides, the timespan between 2016 and 2018 is too short to comment on the effectiveness of new measures, which may not have had a chance to deliver tangible results.

### **5.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- Efforts to register long-term unemployed persons with employment services have been strengthened in the last two years: Disagree.
- Employment support services offered to long-term unemployed persons have become better tailored to their

- individual needs in the last two years: Neither agree nor disagree.
- Social support services for long-term unemployed persons have been strengthened in the last two years: Disagree.
  - Coordination (or integration) of support (between employment services, social assistance services, health care, training providers etc.) provided to the long-term unemployed has improved in the last two years: Disagree.
  - Cooperation between employment services and employers has improved in the last two years: Strongly disagree.

**5.3 Is there anything you wish to add regarding the coordination, cooperation and partnerships between relevant service providers and organisations in the provision of services to the long-term unemployed?**

There is a lack of cohesion across the range of initiatives and support for blind and partially sighted persons. We see no sign of such coordination on the ground. In particular, the growing requirement of IT skills is not corresponded by adequate digital awareness and skills training.

**EU added value**

**7.3 In your opinion/experience, is it useful to have a targeted EU policy to tackle long-term unemployment?**

Yes.

**7.4 Please, explain why:**

Job creation and employment are one of the main objectives of the European Union to foster economic growth. The EU also has a role to facilitate the implementation of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular with regards to the right to work and employment for people with disabilities. It should support Member States in reaching the common objectives set in Europe 2020 Strategy and the target of increasing the employment rate.

**7.5 If you have anything to add, within the scope of this questionnaire, please feel free to do so here:**

Measures to integrate long term unemployed blind and partially sighted persons should be mainstreamed along two objectives: (a) increase the skills that promote employability and (b) from the

other side, minimise the obstacles and perceived barriers from employers to give these job-seekers a chance.

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