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Dyslexia@work.EU

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1. WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

Dyslexia is classified as a specific learning difficulty/difference, which is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder, in the DSM 5 (American Psychological Association, 2013). This category of specific learning difficulties groups together all reading, writing, or calculation difficulties, under common diagnostic criteria. Thus, they involve difficulties— with skills significantly below those expected and which significantly impact on academic performance—in learning and using academic skills, with at least one of the following features: inaccurate, slow, or laboured word reading; difficulty with understanding the meaning of what is read; difficulty with spelling; difficulty with written expression; difficulty with mastering number sense, number facts, or computation; and difficulty with mathematical reasoning. Specific learning difficulties involve skills that are significantly below those expected, negatively and significantly interfering with academic performance at school or university. These developmental difficulties which generally appear during the school years may manifest themselves only when demands exceed the individual's abilities, and cannot be explained by other impairments (intellectual, hearing, visual, psychological etc.). The most common manifestation of specific learning difficulties is dyslexia, which refers to a learning profile, characterized by difficulties in recognizing common words accurately or fluently and poor decoding and spelling skills. It is estimated at a worldwide prevalence of 10% (Dyslexia International Report, 2014) (and in France between 6 and 8%. In Italy more conservative estimates are about 3,5 %, but according to the Italian Ministry of Education the prevalence in the schools is about 5%.

These difficulties can then lead to a reduced experience in reading which could impede the growth of the individual's vocabulary and general knowledge.

This normative definition of dyslexia can be complemented by specific criteria: a deficit in phonological processing is noted; dyslexia is lifelong; there are exclusionary factors to differentiate a person with dyslexia from a person with a learning disability (absence of visual, attentional, mental, emotional disorders, etc.); there is adequate access and exposure



to learning. Furthermore, dyslexia cannot be attributed to a lack of motivation to learning to read. In conclusion, dyslexia are a complex and multifactorial difficulty (Pennington, 2006).

Faced with this normative positioning of dyslexia within a nosographic classification of specific learning difficulties, a transdisciplinary vision drives us to rethink the defining perimeter of dyslexia. It is currently essential to take into consideration the “evolutionary trajectory” of each individual. Indeed, an SLD undergoes changes throughout a person’s life and, taking into account individual trajectories, allows for the redefinition of the contours of the difficulty, and its impact in different areas of life. Speech therapy practice testifies that dyslexia is a difficulty that can evolve favorably due to interventions or compensations implemented by a person with dyslexia, with spelling difficulties being the issue that adults with dyslexia most complain about¹. Indeed, literature considers dysorthographia as a disorder consubstantial with dyslexia². Nor is dyslexia limited to a reading and spelling problem³. It involves difficulties related to textual production, impacting syntax, lexicon, high-level processes, etc⁴.

2. DYSLEXIA IN THE WORKPLACE

European citizens with learning difficulties such as dyslexia represent between 3% and 12% of the population with, sometimes significant differences between countries (European Dyslexia Association - EDA - <https://eda-info.eu/what-is-dyslexia/>). Dyslexia, which is the most frequent profile, is included among specific learning difficulties (SpLD), and co-occurring difficulties such as dyscalculia, dyspraxia/DCD and ADHD. These profiles have long been considered primarily educational challenges. However, the reality is that these SpLD’s persist throughout a person’s life and can lead to obstacles and difficulties in adulthood and one's professional life. Nevertheless, dyslexia in adults, and even more so in the workforce, remains poorly recognized or supported. On a European and international level, there is a lack of shared procedures, where workers with SLDs do not benefit from any specific

¹ (Launay, 2018; Leloup, Anders, Charlet et al., 2021)

² (Lyon et al., 2003; Snowlong, 2000)

³ (Carter & Sellman, 2013; Morken & Helland, 2013)

⁴ (Carter & Sellman, 2013; Farmer, Riddick & Sterling, 2002)



protection. Those working in the job placement sector often demonstrate lack of familiarity and understanding of the profiles of people with SLDs.

Furthermore, few scientific studies have investigated this phenomenon within the workforce. Studies have focused particularly on exploring the reasons behind professional failure and as a result, the negative impacts of being dyslexic in the workforce (De Beer et al., 2014). Few studies have delved into the factors and good practices that would favour professional success for those with SLDs. In general, we can easily identify individual challenges directly linked to dyslexia, as well as environmental obstacles and barriers.

In terms of individual difficulties, there are numerous studies which confirm the impact dyslexia has in the various stages of one's professional life (from the transitional period of school to work and job choice, to one's professional development and growth), precisely with regard to specific work activities and work sectors (McLoughlin, 2018; Taylor, 2017; Amanda Kirby, 2014; de Beer et al., 2014; McLoughlin & Leather, 2013; Hyland & Rutigliano, 2013; Macdonald, 2009; Sylvia Moody, 2009; Bartlett, Moody & Kindersley, 2010; Ghidoni, 2011; Alexander-Passe, 2006; Morris & Turnbull, 2006; Reid, 2001; Kortering & Braziel, 2000; Hitchings & Retish 2000; Michaels, 1997; Ohler, Levinson & Barker 1996; Rojewski, 1996).

In fact, a recent English study highlighted the lack of knowledge and awareness on the subject in the workplace. It revealed the use of discriminatory and disabling selection procedures and methodologies as they are based on a neurotypical model (Hewlett, Cooper & Jameson, 2018). From a legal standpoint, a common frame of reference is lacking, and even the definition of the profile itself is not clear-cut or consistent from country to country.

The European Erasmus+ project Dyslexia@work.EU (an ERASMUS Project) brings together associations and researchers from five countries (France, Italy, Malta, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the European Dyslexia Association) and its main objective is to address these gaps, and lack of knowledge and awareness about dyslexia in the workplace and the legal context.



3. DYSLEXIA@WORK.EU PROJECT

The main goal of the dyslexia@work.eu project is to facilitate access to work for people with dyslexia. In particular, the aim is to implement a series of actions to improve the skills and professional development of the professionalism charge (guidance consultants/career advisors, specialists in the management and training of human resources in companies, staff of public employment services and other individuals) on the subject of dyslexia and inclusion in the workplace. In this context, the project aims to achieve a dual objective:

- on the one hand to identify a set of good practices, methodologies and tools that allow companies, recruiters, public and private employment services to be able to appropriately assess the abilities and talent of a dyslexic candidate;
- and on the other hand, provide opportunities for dyslexic adults to better manage the job search and recruitment/selection process, job placement and professional development.

Thus, several associations and researchers from five countries (Italy, Ireland, France, Malta, UK) have joined together to meet the objectives of the project:

- AID Associazione Italiana Dislessia (lead partner);
- European Dyslexia Association;
- Malta Dyslexia Association;
- Fédération Française des Dys-;
- British Dyslexia Association
- Dyslexia Association of Ireland
- Università Degli Studi Dell'Insubria.

The reference target of the project is made up of professional operators working in the field of recruitment, training and job placement (from counsellors to trainers, from service workers to human resource managers in the company). Also, this project is divided in three main phases:



- 1) *Comparative analysis.* In this phase, each partner undertook to identify in its own country a series of specific elements, in particular on the legislation relevant to the subject of dyslexia and work, on the organization of public and private employment services, on the processes of recruitment and selection of personnel, and finally on the analysis of some specific situations (such as the process of the examination of the driving licence, the process of the examinations for access to the Professional Associations, the selection procedures for public recruitment competitions).
- 2) *Research action.* In this phase, a team of researchers concentrated on preparing a semi-structured interview to be carried out with employers and professionals in order to identify knowledge and specific skills and good practice in relation to dyslexia in the workplace. To this end, over 100 structured interviews were conducted with sector operators in the various countries involved in the project.
- 3) *Creation of Guidelines and Project Manual.* The central phase of the project, the result of which is the production of Guidelines and contextual Project Manual aimed to provide operators (guidance counsellors/career advisors, recruiters, public institutions, etc.) with the appropriate tools to identify and enhance the full potential of dyslexic workers (while supporting any areas of difficulty) in their recruitment, induction and development within the workplace. Central to this will be guidance on making selection and induction phases more dyslexia friendly.

This project therefore has a win-win basis, where all parties benefit:

- dyslexic workers (or those seeking employments) who will be selected and evaluated in a more equitable and respectful manner;
- job placement operators (from counsellors and career advisors to recruiters, from human resources departments of companies to public service employers) who will have greater skills to be able to carry out their work in the best possible way;
- companies that will have workers better integrated into the workforce and therefore more productive;



- society in general is advantaged by the increased possibility that more people can be suitably employed in the workplace.

In this document, the project manual, we present the main results of phases 1 and 2. In the fourth section, we report the results of the comparative study concerning the legislative aspects related to dyslexia and the workplace (phase 1); whilst in the fifth section, the results of the research action. Finally, we propose to resume the different key sequences for successful employment of people with dyslexia in the workplace.

4. PHASE 1- COMPARATIVE STUDY: DYSLEXIA AND LAW

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this first phase was to assess the legislation or policies that are in place with regard to dyslexia and employment across all participating countries, namely France, Ireland, Italy, Malta and the United Kingdom (UK). After the January 2020 conference that was held in Malta, all participating entities were asked to answer a series of questions relating to this subject. Among other topics, these questions covered how the legislations in question are set up and what the national definitions of dyslexia are according to each country. They also opened a discussion on any access arrangements that are available for people with dyslexia when it comes to employment, education and getting a driver's license.

A first report was written about this phase (Dyslexia@work, 2020). The main goal was to compile of all the information supplied by each country for each question. It is important to note that some questions were merged under one topic due to shared similarities.

This section presents the main results, namely the differences: in the definition of dyslexia in different countries from a legislative point of view; in the legislation on dyslexia and work/employment; in the legislation process; in the separation of legislations for employment and dyslexia; in the statements on dyslexia by public and private sectors; in the numerical statistics of dyslexia in the Workforce; in the accommodation for dyslexia at



retention and recruitment level; in the legal access arrangements required from public and private employers; in the formal assessment by employers or organisations to provide necessary access Arrangements; in the legal arrangements to facilitate access to national qualifications assessment/ testing/ licensing; in the law and policy for Life-long learning; in the dyslexia and driving license laws; in the legal cases or complaints in relation to dyslexia and employment and in the national commissions and boards to voice dyslexia concerns. For more information, you can read the complete report (Dyslexia@work, 2020).

4.2. Main Results of Phase 1

Definition of dyslexia. The report shows that the five countries participating in this European project do not have exactly the same definition and that this impacts on the legislative perspective. Whilst Malta and Italy adopt a national definition of dyslexia, Ireland stated that although the country does not have a national definition, the definition of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland is generally referred to. The UK generally uses the Rose Report (2009) definition, and France refers to the definition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11, 2019) rather than a national definition wherein dyslexia is listed under the sub-heading 'specific reading disorder'.

Legislation on dyslexia and work/employment. Just as the five countries differ on the national definition of dyslexia, they also differ on the legislation of work and employment of people with dyslexia. Whilst Italy presents no legislation on dyslexia, Malta, Ireland and France legislations about disability includes dyslexia, without a specific reference to dyslexia. Moreover, in France there exists a law about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which includes references to disability and non-discrimination, requiring companies to employ at least 6% of persons with disability; in Malta a similar law requires to employ at least 2%. The UK is the only country of this project to recognized dyslexia as a disability through the Equality Act (2010). In Ireland, legislation does not note reference to any specific disabilities.



Legislation process. Again, the difference between the five European countries is important about legislation process. In Ireland and the UK, laws are drafted and proposed by the Oireachtas and the government respectively. In Ireland, Legislation begins as a Bill. The bill must be passed by the Dáil and the Seanad (these are the two Houses of the Oireachtas – our parliament) before the President can sign the bill into law. However, they often consult with associations or others relevant stakeholders. In France, the general national legal framework is under state responsibility, although the individuals' decisions are taken under regional responsibilities. In both Italy and Malta, dyslexia can be considered a disability by the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) but this rarely happens.

Separation of legislations for employment and dyslexia. Ireland, Italy and Malta have separate laws for employment and education, whereas in the UK, employment and education are both covered by the Equality Act (2010). The impact is, for example, that for Malta that education laws speak of the accommodations available to get a person through school but they do not include anything with regard to transitions from school into the working world as this is found in the employment laws. In England, for instance, the Children and Families Act (2014) includes further legal rights for dyslexia and education. Similar laws exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In France, laws concerning disability have an impact on different fields. Nonetheless, education and employment laws are both based on two principals – non-discrimination and reasonable accommodations. The application of these principals is different in the two fields; in the field of labour, the accommodations are possible only if a person is recognised as disabled (RQTH).

Statements on dyslexia by public and private sectors. Ireland and the UK make reasonable accommodations for people with dyslexia or with disability. In Ireland, reasonable accommodations in the workplace is a legal requirement.⁵ Likewise, the public sector in Malta states that there should be equality for opportunity. No information about the private

⁵ "The Employment Equality Acts oblige employers to make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. An employer must take 'appropriate measures' to meet the needs of disabled people in the workforce. This means they must make arrangements that will enable a person who has a disability..."



sector was found but private sector is bound by the Maltese Disability act which covers equality of opportunity. France also has no specific information about the private sector, but, like Malta, the public sector makes it easier for disabled individuals to find work, so much so that it puts candidates with disability at an advantage by having more opportunities to access public jobs. In Italy, both public and private sectors do not state anything about dyslexia and disability. There is a specific law for disability (Law 68/1999) which protects job placements of disabled people.

Numerical statistics of dyslexia in the Workforce. Italy and France do not have any statistics in this regard. In Italy, only rough estimates based on prevalence in the school age, that is, between 3% and 5% are available. In France, a national statistic about disabilities in the workplace and about illiteracy is reported, including employment issues. These statistics explain that “7% of the adult population aged 18 to 65 who have attended school in France is illiterate” and “more than half exercise a professional activity [showing how] the fight against illiteracy therefore affects very closely the world of work, of business.” On the other hand, Ireland and the UK has some statistics. Ireland has statistics for the overall category of disability in the workforce but it does not individualise categories. The Irish 2016 Census reported that a total of 643,131 people had a disability in Ireland; equivalent to 13.5% of the population. The UK is the only participant country that has recent statistics and, according to the Report developed by the Made by Dyslexia association in collaboration with Ernst and Young⁶, the latest statistics indicate that there is one neurodiverse profile per seven people. Malta also has some, but rather patchy, statistics. The most recent National Statistics’ Office Labour Force Survey in this regard dates back to 2003 and concludes that the employment rate of persons who have long standing health problems or disability (aged 15 years and over) stood at a low 32.2%. These scarce, heterogeneous and non-specific data do not allow comparisons to be made between the various countries.

⁶ https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_uk/topics/diversity/ey-the-value-of-dyslexia-dyslexic-capability-and-organisations-of-the-future.pdf



Accommodation for dyslexia at retention and recruitment level. Almost all countries reported that there are no public or private employment agencies that accommodate for dyslexia per se at retention and recruitment level. The only indication for accommodation at this level in the UK is that employment agencies have a tick box on application forms specifically for dyslexic individuals to tick as well as a disability box, as not all people are aware that dyslexia is a disability. This measure can be found under the Equality Act (2010), which agencies have to abide by.

Legal access arrangements required from public and private employers. Ireland, Italy, and Malta have no access arrangements pertaining to dyslexia specifically but there are laws that concerns arrangements for disabled individuals (Italy), that ensure there is no discrimination from the employer's side at the work place (Malta) or that that list access arrangements under reasonable accommodations, but the term is used loosely (Ireland). Ireland works similarly to Malta and Italy but it has a number of legislations that list access arrangements under reasonable accommodations, but the term is used loosely. This includes the Disability Act (2005)²⁵ that requires public bodies to take positive actions to employ people with disabilities – 3%. Ireland's Employment Equality Acts (1998-2001)²⁶ also call for positive action in ensuring everyone gets full equality and in attracting people with disabilities into their workforce. In Italy, however a very recent law (law n. 113/2021) provides the use of compensatory or dispensatory measures during competitions for public administration workplaces. Likewise, in the UK, an employer has to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that a disabled person is not disadvantaged; for example, providing assistive technology. In France, being recognised as a disabled worker allows one to benefit from an orientation with regard to a work assistance establishment/service, the job market or a vocational rehabilitation centre. Additionally, since 2018, the regulations allow the funding of "specific support services" for Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) to support job seekers. Recognition of the Quality of Disabled Worker (RQTH) also gives priority access to various measures to aid employment and training.



Legal arrangements to facilitate access to national qualifications assessment/ testing/ licensing. Both Ireland and Malta report that there are specific access arrangements for persons with disability or learning difficulties when it comes to national qualifications. The UK provides support through the government scheme Access to Work. France provides accommodations for exams according to the procedure reserved for students with disabilities. However, the possible accommodations remain very general. In Italy there is no mention about dyslexia or other specific disorders at either regional or national level. However, Law 170/2010 must also be taken into account, even in exams for obtaining the Vocational Education and Training (IEFP) professional qualification from a training institution.

Law and policy for Life-long learning. There is no separate law on this in both Ireland and the UK as life-long learning is covered by the Equality Act (2010). However, the Irish state organisation SOLAS⁷ funds and coordinates further education and training, produces a regular Further Education and Training Strategy. Malta has a National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2020) which “meets Malta’s obligations within the EU Lisbon process; addresses the challenges faced in embedding Lifelong Learning within our society and identifies the areas of national priority in the years to come” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014. para. 1). France adopts a different approach as there are two options to getting a diploma: initial education and vocational training. Initial education is managed by the law of education while the vocational training system is regulated by the law concerning employment. Moreover, with regard to employment, France has laws concerning internships, apprenticeships, merit assessment/recognition of prior learning, vocation training and life-long learning; each having accommodations that are always subjected to disability recognition. When it comes to the resumption of schooling in adulthood in order to obtain a diploma, in Italy the same didactic supporting measures of Law 170/2010 are applied.

⁷ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Literacy and Numeracy Learning for Life (www.gov.ie)



Dyslexia and driving license laws. All countries in question seem to have the option for dyslexic individuals to apply for access arrangements during the theory test. In Malta there is no mention of dyslexia in the driving license legislation but dyslexic individuals can apply for reading assistance when it comes to the theory examination which is free of charge. In Ireland, if people with dyslexia have a letter of evidence from a professional who can verify literacy difficulties and need for assistance during the theory test, they have access to arrangements. The law in the UK does not discriminate either. Persons with dyslexia are allowed access arrangements in the theory test of driving licences. No specification was outlined by France. France only states that there is an agreement that allows interested parties to benefit from specific arrangements during the theory test. In Italy dyslexic people can use audio tracks and extra time during exams.

Legal cases or complaints in relation to dyslexia and employment. There are no legal courts cases reported in France and Malta regarding dyslexia and employment. However, there has been a court decision concerning accommodation at school and/or exams in France. Contrastingly, in Italy, there have been many cases in schools and only a single case in employment which involved comorbidity and severity. In Ireland and the UK particular cases are recorded. The Irish Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) ruled that a company discriminated against an actor on the grounds of disability under the Employment Equality Act when dismissing her from a production six days after rehearsals commenced in September 2018.⁸ In the UK, a female dyslexic employee took her employer to court because they had discriminated against her after she made some mistakes due to her difficulties with reading, writing and telling the time.⁹

National commissions and boards to voice dyslexia concerns. All the countries of this project have some entities that can represent dyslexic people. Whilst Italy has no commissions or

⁸ <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/actress-fired-from-musical-over-dyslexia-gets-20000-compensation-38726983.html>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-35521061>



boards that focus solely on dyslexia within the Ministry of Labour, dyslexia is represented by the Italian Dyslexia Association (Associazione Italiana Dislessia [AID]). The British Equality and Human Rights Commission is the entity through which persons with disability, including persons with dyslexia, can voice their concerns. This can also be carried out by the British Dyslexia Association. In Malta, the Malta Dyslexia Association (MDA) as well as the Parliamentary Secretariat for Active Aging and Persons with Disability under the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity are national organization which voice dyslexia concern. Ireland has the Dyslexia Association of Ireland, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD), the Disability Federation of Ireland, National Disability Authority, the National Council for Special Education and there was a Task Force on Dyslexia (which ended in 2001) made up of different agencies and voices. At a national level, France has the Conseil National Consultatif des Personnes Handicapées (National Advisory Council of Persons with Disabilities) which is the body where organisations with disabilities can voice the concerns of the dyslexic individuals. Additionally, persons with dyslexia, their families, and associations can refer to the ombudsman in case of discrimination and/or non-compliance to the law. At local level, the commission of the MDPH include a representative of person with disability.

4.3. Conclusion

This comparative analysis reveals that in these five countries there exist some good ideas, laws and entities that can help and protect people with dyslexia. Overall, there seems to be a lack of legislations that hone solely on dyslexia in relation to employment across all the participating countries. However, legislations that apply for persons with disability generally include persons with dyslexia as it is recognised as such on a national level. Malta and Italy have their own national definitions of dyslexia while in Ireland, the majority follows either the Dyslexia Association of Ireland definition and/or the definition from the Irish Task Force on Dyslexia, and the UK mainly uses that from the Rose Report (2009). Only France uses an international definition. One could also consider the fact that Ireland, Malta and the UK have different laws for education and employment, while Italy only has separate laws with regard



to training and instruction laws and in France both legislations are based on the same principles.

Additionally, there is no direct indication of the number of dyslexic people within the work force of each respective country, only some statistics on persons with disability at the workplace. Only, the UK seems to have a reliable statistic.

In Ireland, Italy, Malta, and the UK the law does not specify any access arrangements that employers should implement for people with dyslexia, only ones concerning persons with disability which are based on reducing discrimination at the workplace. On the other hand, French legislations make reference to access arrangements for persons with learning disorders with the aim of providing equal opportunities.

When it comes to legal arrangements to facilitate access to national qualifications assessment, testing or licensing, Ireland, Malta and the UK have specified measures for persons with learning difficulties like dyslexia. France and Italy do not have such specifications but there are arrangements for persons with disability. However, all countries seem to have some form of arrangements which persons with reading difficulties can apply for when it comes to the driving license theory test.

5. PHASE 2- RESEARCH ACTION: DYSLEXIA IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD

The aim of Phase 2 was to present knowledge, skills and good practices in terms of dyslexia and SLDs by workers and professionals who work in various capacities within companies and employment agencies in the participating countries. For this purpose, a structured interview was developed (Dyslexia@work, 2021) where 106 participating companies and employment agencies in the various participating countries participated. This survey allowed us to identify:

- the level of knowledge and skills on dyslexia and SLDs,
- any practices and methodologies adopted in the orientation process, selection, management and development of personnel.



The results of this research, together with what emerged in the first phase of the project, represent the starting point in defining guidelines to support recruitment selection, induction management and development of personnel that are dyslexia friendly.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Study Design

This was a mixed method, quantitative and qualitative (QN + QL) study design conducted to identify a set of good practices, methodologies and tools used among companies, recruiters, public and private employment services, in the phases of job search and selection of persons with dyslexia and the awareness of Specific Learning Disorder in the workplace.

5.1.2. Setting and Sample

The research involved 106 institutions of which 75 (70,8%) were companies and 31 (29,2%) recruitment agencies. The participants were from five countries: France (22,6%), Italy (25,5%), Ireland (21,7%), Malta (7,5%) and United Kingdom (22,6%). Medium and large companies and agencies were involved in the survey. This study used convenience sampling. All respondents gave their consent to participate and be included in the survey.

5.1.3. Measurements

Quantitative questions (QN)

There were two versions of the questionnaire (Dyslexia@work, 2021) used, one for companies and the other for recruitment agencies. Both questionnaires included nine general questions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Nine General questions for Companies and Recruitment Agencies

1. Do you know of anyone in your immediate circle with dyslexia?
2. Do you have an estimate of how many employees in your organization have formally disclosed they have dyslexia?

Questions addressing good practice:



3. Are applicants asked to declare if they have any neuro-diverse profiles or disability or a condition that requires additional supports?
4. What types of supports / accommodations do you put in place for recruitment and selection processes?
5. What types of supports do you put in place for the job?

Questions exploring awareness of dyslexia in the organization

6. Do you provide information on support available for dyslexia in any of the following places?
7. What kind of training or awareness raising do you provide around dyslexia?

Questions addressing views on the legislative environment

8. Is there in your country a law related to dyslexia?
9. Has your organization had legal or HR issues related to an employee with dyslexia?)

Qualitative open questions (QL)

To complete the survey, all participants had to respond to three open questions:

- 1) If the government could change one thing to make it easier to employ someone with dyslexia what would it be?
- 2) What is the one piece of advice you would give to an organization looking to improve the way it supports employees with dyslexia?
- 3) Do you have any final thoughts you feel we should reflect in the findings of this research project?

5.1.4. Data collection

Data were collected between September and December 2020. The MSH Lyon St-Etienne, the University of Lyon¹⁰ and the French Federation of Dyslexia (FFDys-)¹¹ handled the data collection phase for this project. The researchers in each of the participating countries

¹⁰ Audrey Mazur set up and managed the data collection process.

¹¹ Régine Tchakgarian and Vincent Lochmann.



carried out the telephone and online interviews by entering the answers directly into a platform (Lime survey)¹² created specifically for this survey.

Respondents received a copy of the questionnaire by e-mail a few days before the telephone/online appointment. In the introduction to the questionnaire, the purpose of the study was explained. Before answering the questionnaire, everyone was informed about the purpose and confidentiality obligations as per the General Data Protection Regulation for EU Member States ('GDPR' Regulation (EU) 2016/679). All participants declared informed consent. The whole process of the survey was conducted pseudonymously and all socio-demographic information were kept confidential.

5.1.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using both a quantitative and a qualitative approach by a researcher identified by the Italian Dyslexia Association¹³.

5.2. Results

The presentation of the results below has been organised, first and foremost, according to the institution to which the respondents belong, i.e. companies and recruitment agencies, then according to the specific section of the questionnaire, specifically: General Questions, Good Practices, Awareness of Specific Learning Difficulties in the Company/Agency, Considerations on a Legislative Scope, Final Considerations.

This document only present salient results. For more information you can consult the full report of Stage 2 of the project Dyslexia@work.eu (Dyslexia@work, 2021).

5.2.1. Companies

Distribution of contributions. The total number of companies involved in the study was 75: 22 English companies (29.3% of the sample), 20 French (26.7% of the sample), 17 Irish

¹² We thank the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (Lyon, France) and more precisely Céline Faure for their support.

¹³ Krzysztof Szadejko, Fondazione CEIS Onlus, Modena (Italy)



(22.7% of the sample), 11 Italian (14.7% of the sample) and 5 Maltese (6.7% of the sample). When viewing the spread across countries of the number of participants, one also needs to take into consideration the population size of each country and that this distribution reflects this reality.

General questions. Data indicate that most respondents (72%) know someone, such as a relative or acquaintance, who has a specific learning difficulty (SLD), for instance dyslexia. Among the companies interviewed, few had an estimate of dyslexic workers who have formally declared their dyslexia in the workplace (24%); 48% stated that they do not have this data, while the remaining 28% asserted that no employee has formally declared to have dyslexia. Moreover, it appears that companies from Britain (8 of 22), France (6 of 20) and Ireland (4 of 17) are aware of employees with dyslexia in their organisation.

Good Practices. Results regarding the candidate's opportunity to declare the presence of a disability, neurodiversity or a condition that requires additional support show that, unlike France, Italy, and Malta, Britain, and Ireland have implemented this practice in more than half of the companies surveyed. Most companies (80%) do not provide for personnel recruitment or selection procedures that take into account the possible presence of candidates with SLDs.

With regard to recruitment and selection processes, 65.3% include reading and writing tasks, or timed tests. However, upon closer inspection of the situation in individual countries, only Italy opposes this trend, since most Italian participants reported that they do not include reading, writing, or timed tests as part of the recruitment and selection process.

With regard to the possibility of declaring the difficulty during selection interviews, the situation appears varied. In general, companies are willing to offer this opportunity during selection interviews. In France, for instance, employers are not allowed to ask any question about neurodiversity but employers must ask candidates if they need any particular accommodation in the context of accessibility.



Different type of support and adjustments in the selection phase are reported, indicating differences between countries. The question, *“What types of support/adjustments are made available to the candidate in the selection process?”* provided for different answer options as well as an item entitled 'other', in which respondents could write in their own answer, like, for instance, possible additional time for written tests, use of a computer, flexibility in spelling errors in written work or use of assistive technologies. The report of the phase 2 details additional information for each country (Dyslexia@work, 2021).

Awareness of Specific Learning Difficulties in the Company. The report of phase 2 (Dyslexia@work, 2021) focuses on the answers provided for three questions concerning: 1) the availability of information on the support provided for workers with SLDs; 2) training or awareness-raising activities on the topic carried out within the company and finally 3) the perception of SLDs as an obstacle in the workplace.

The question, *“Is information provided on the types of support available to workers with specific learning difficulties at the following levels?”* allowed for several response options: as part of the application process, before selection interviews, as part of the information contained in the onboarding plan or on the corporate intranet or equivalent, upon request to a line manager, upon request to the Human Resources Department; we do not provide any information or support, I don't know. According to the country, information on the type of support available are provided in different ways. For instance, English or Irish companies provide information more often upon request to a line manager or human resources department. Such information is also available, for some companies, in the onboarding plan or on the corporate intranet. More rarely, it is part of the application process and before selection interviews. French companies go through the human resources department, and sometime, upon request, through a line manager. Information can also be on the corporate intranet or in the onboarding process. Like Britain and UK or Ireland, more rarely information is part of the application process and before selection interviews. Results reveal that it remains marginal, in these three countries that this information is not available (1 for Britain and Ireland; 5 for France). Italy and Malta are somewhat different: some companies



only declared that they provide information upon request to the human resources department.

The question, *“What type of training or awareness-raising activities are provided on the subject of dyslexia and specific learning disorders?”* had several response options: an awareness-raising session is held at least once a year, which is open to all staff; training courses, open to all staff, are held at least once a year; all line managers receive training on dyslexia and specific learning difficulties; all human resources staff receive training on dyslexia and specific learning difficulties.

Taking into consideration only the “none” answer option, it can be seen that, unlike Italy and Malta, more than half of the French, English and Irish companies carry out training or awareness-raising activities on the issue.

The question, *“Do you think that dyslexia can be an obstacle in the workplace?”* shows that most French companies do not consider dyslexia as an obstacle in the workplace, while the trend is reversed in other countries. Qualitative analysis reveals how many times a certain reason was given and the level of saturation. For instance, those who consider SLDs an obstacle in the workplace (28 of 75 respondents) declared that, in most cases, this depends on a lack of awareness and understanding of the topic.

Considerations on a Legislative Scope. The analysis of the answers to *“Is there a law on dyslexia and specific learning difficulties in your country?”*, ascertained that 53.3% were familiar with the existence of a law related to SLDs. However, it is important to consider that this question did not specify whether there was a law specifically for workplace protection. Therefore, the answers collected are not particularly useful to the objectives of this discussion.

Final Considerations. For this part, a qualitative analysis of the answers was carried out, since the questions allowed exclusively for open answers. The question, *“If the government could change one thing in order to facilitate hiring people with specific learning disorders, such as dyslexia, what would it be?”* evidences that, among the five countries, the most frequent



response is the need for greater awareness on the issue and then, the need for specific training on specific learning difficulties within companies. Countries presented different suggestions. For instance, Irish and Italian companies advocate the benefits of hiring incentives to encourage and embed inclusive workplace practices.

5.2.2. Agencies

Distribution of contributions. The total number of companies involved in the study was 31: 13 Italian (41.9%), 7 French (22.6%), 6 Irish (19.4%), 3 Maltese (9.7%) and 2 English (6.5%). Considering the limited sample and differences, in terms of the source of the contributions, which imply a poor representation of the sample, this report focuses on the analysis of the aspects considered most relevant for the purposes of this discussion.

As a reminder, in this present document, the results are synthesized, for more information you can consult the report of phase2 of the project Dyslexia@work.eu (Dyslexia@work, 2021).

General questions. This section presents results about the type of service offered and the distribution of the answers regarding the number of people who use job placement services offered in one year. We can see that only one UK agency declares that there are employers who specifically request candidates with a specific learning difficulty (SLD), such as dyslexia.

Good practices. The question “Are users asked to declare whether they have a neurodiverse profile, disability or a condition that requires additional support?” yielded the following responses: 18 agencies answered affirmatively, 12 answered “no” and 1 did not answer. In terms of the possible application of specific procedures for those with SLDs, as emerged in the company interviews, most recruitment agencies surveyed also stated that they do not have such procedures in place. The English agencies proved to be the one exception. Although the sample is by no means representative, both English agencies interviewed stated that they do put into practice specific procedures for those with SLDs.



Awareness of Specific Learning Difficulties in the Agency. Respondents were asked if they had received training on SLDs. The distribution of responses for each country is presented in the report (Dyslexia@work, 2021). In general, an almost total absence of training is identified. Responses to the question “*Do you think that specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia can be an obstacle in searching for a job?*”, the majority of agencies considered dyslexia to be an obstacle in finding a job.

Final considerations. Qualitative analysis of data reveals three main responses to the question “*If the government could change one thing to facilitate the hiring of people with a specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, what would it be?*”: 1) the need for specific training on dyslexia that could raise awareness; 2) improving legislation by possibly including dyslexia as part of a protected category, yet as a distinct category from disability; 3) solutions could be summarized with more information on dyslexia in order to implement a standardised process and approach in the company's recruitment phase by proposing customised processes and procedures for dyslexic workers.

5.3. Conclusion

The results present a picture of the current knowledge and management situation of workers with SLDs in the workplace in the various participating countries: Britain, France, Ireland, Italy and Malta. Although differences between the countries have emerged amongst some of the aspects analysed, the results nevertheless show a rather homogenous trend. Considering the sample of companies, the first common aspect to all these countries concerns the fact that the companies interviewed do not have an accurate estimate of employees with SLDs, nor do they provide specific actions or opportunities for disclosing such during the recruitment and selection phases. In general, it is up to the candidate/worker to decide if and when to disclose their profile. Respondents identified the interview phase as the most appropriate time for such a declaration. Another common aspect is the absence of recruitment and selection procedures specifically aimed at



candidates with SLDs, despite the fact that in more than half of the cases selection involves written and timed tests.

Some substantial differences concern providing support and adjustments in the recruitment and selection phases. In particular, Britain and Ireland demonstrate greater willingness and flexibility to identify this need and provide different types of support and adjustments. Similarly, both the countries mentioned, provide information-based actions. By contacting the line manager or the human resources department, the employee can obtain information on the support and adjustments granted to workers with SLDs. These aspects can partly be explained by the regulations in these countries, which require employers to provide reasonable adjustments in order to ensure disabled people are not disadvantaged. Another difference concerns the use of internal training courses on learning disabilities. In this case, only France, Britain and Ireland provide training aimed at increasing awareness on dyslexia and SLDs in the interviewed companies.

As for the interviewees' considerations in terms of legislation, it is difficult to generalize the results as the starting situation of the individual countries is varied. Furthermore, the wording of the question did not specify "legislation in the workplace". From the total answers given from the companies interviewed, more than half of the sample affirmed that they are aware of a law protecting people with SLDs.

More than half of the sample perceive dyslexia as a potential barrier in the workplace. However, it is interesting to note that despite the answer, the reason for perceiving it as an obstacle or not, is attributed to a lack of awareness and understanding. These data are in line with the final considerations provided by the interviewees regarding the need to: increase awareness and knowledge on the subject; receive specific training; find solutions; improve legislation; provide for hiring incentives or tax relief; define practical guidelines. The limited number of participating agencies in the sample does not permit one to consider a broad representation of the participating countries. The data that were obtained, however, highlight a lack of procedures specifically for those with SLDs as well as a lack of training courses on the subject.



An opposing trend emerges in terms of opportunities dedicated to disclosure. More than half of the agencies interviewed affirmed asking people to present any disabilities/additional needs they may have. Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration that the question did not exclusively specify SLDs, but also other conditions that may be considered disabilities. Therefore, it is not possible to distinguish which condition interviewees were specifically referring to, to then be able to extrapolate only the data relative to neurodiverse conditions, such as dyslexia.

In terms of perception of dyslexia, just as was the case with companies, most agencies interviewed also felt that dyslexia was a potential obstacle in finding employment. Reasons for this once again include the need for specific training, raising awareness, and the need to improve laws, find solutions so any gaps in information may be filled, and to put appropriate processes and methodologies into place for those with SpLDs. In accordance with this data, agencies indicated that in order to facilitate hiring those with SpLDs there was a need to raise awareness on the subject through specific training, improve laws, and find solutions to optimally support these candidates/workers.

6. PHASE 3 – GOOD PRACTICES

6.1. Good Practices which emerged from the interviews (Phase 2)

The interview data reveal a general lack of knowledge and awareness of SpLD issues for those involved in job placement, both within companies and employment agencies. Nevertheless, most companies in the five countries are trying to put in place good practices for recruiting and working with people with dyslexia. With the limited representation of companies and agencies in each of the countries, the situation appeared to be more structured and overall more inclusive in the English-speaking countries of the study. Most companies and agencies interviewed, except for some English and Irish ones, do not provide internal training courses on this topic nor do they apply methodologies or procedures specifically for dyslexia. Although in most cases, general inclusion policies are declared, it is however up to the dyslexic worker to disclose whether they have dyslexia and then to



explicitly request reasonable adjustments. The fact that Britain and Ireland both exhibit a greater willingness in terms of providing support and training courses on the subject, confirms the lack of shared and systematically applied practices. The absence of legislation specifically in relation to dyslexia in the workplace, together with a lack of guidelines and operational indications, is probably the main cause for these gaps and irregularities between and within these countries. Some companies have an inclusion policy, either through a disability department or a disability advisor and by implementing training and inclusion actions or by investing in technological solutions. While some companies do not have a clear inclusion policy in place and deployed, many do offer assistance where significant reading and writing difficulties are evident.

In this section, we propose to identify the good practices mentioned by the companies that participated in the project, with regard to recruitment, daily adjustments to the workstation or the organization of work tasks.

Recommendations

- *Recruitment.* In the questionnaires, several companies indicated that they made adaptations during recruitment, for example by providing additional time during written tests, by making a computer available, by having a certain flexibility towards spelling errors, or by offering technological assistance. In addition, although this is less common among the sample, some companies report that they carry out special interviews for people with dyslexia, for example by contacting them before the interview.
- *Daily adjustments.* Several of the companies interviewed propose adaptations to the workstation, including the provision of quiet areas, the fitting out of the workstation (larger screen, for example), with the deployment of the adjustments recommended by the occupational health. In addition, almost all companies put in place support systems to help employees carry out their professional duties. The most frequent are the provision of a computer, technological assistance, proofreading assistance with the provision of correction software and proofreading assistance procedures. Less



frequently, companies may also provide an ergonomic assessment, give instructions orally and demonstrate them manually, provide extra time for tasks or provide coaching.

- *Organization of work tasks.* All companies that participated in the project report providing support and flexibility in the organization of tasks. Types of support included encouraging cognitive breaks during the workday, flexibility in work schedules, and remote working. Some companies may offer assistive technology or applications to help with task planning and work organization. Some companies mention involving the occupational health department to find out what kind of support they should put in place, and others make team members aware of these task organization issues.

This study shows that the companies interviewed are concerned about the wellbeing of people with dyslexia and they even make proposals when asked what the government could do to change the situation. The following solutions were proposed: reforming spelling, having part of the salary paid by the state, improving digital accessibility and democratizing audio supports, raising awareness on a large scale, screening and providing more support for people, simplifying procedures and extending disabled worker provision to people with dyslexia. Finally, the companies that have already employed people with dyslexia recognize these workers as having many talents and strengths, despite persistent difficulties. In particular, they speak of their work strength and their ability to adapt, linked to their good knowledge of their own profile, which they are also very good at describing. These employees are described as bright, invested, caring and possessing highly developed social skills.

A specific brochure has been produced about the good practices: “Good practices and Guidelines for Dyslexia at work”.



6.2. Further examples of good practice

The 'DSA Progress For Work' project, conceived and implemented by the Italian Dyslexia Association, can be an example of structured intervention aimed at satisfying the growing need for job placement and professional development of people with dyslexia and other Specific Learning Disorders.

The project is aimed to achieve a twofold positive situation (win-win): on the one hand the project wants to establish a path that will identify a set of practice, methodologies and tools that will allow Companies to assess the skills and talents of a dyslexic candidate properly; at the same time the project wants to provide SLD candidates and SLD workers with the tools and strategies necessary to bring out the real talent and to minimize fatigue and discomfort that arises from Learning Disorders. The project envisages a step-by-step process aimed at revising the internal processes of selection, training, communication, management and development of personnel from a "Dyslexia Friendly" point of view. At the end of the project, the companies receive the official recognition of "Dyslexia Friendly Company". This Intervention has been set up as an action-research, and was carried out in about 10 companies of various sizes (from over 50,000 to less than 100 employees).

The project was divided into 5 closely related phases, carried out in a predefined order. The project activities are carried out by a researcher (psychologist), and the staff of the Italian Dyslexia Association. The First contact with a Company consists of a preliminary meeting with Management aimed to present the project in its operational steps and identify a person in the Human Resource Managers staff who will cover the role of Corporate Tutor and will interface with Association staff during all project phases.

Below a detailed description of steps taken by each Company:

1. Environmental analysis: knowledge and data collection about recruitment and selection processes, corporate training and professional growth already in use in a Company, through a semi-structured interview built ad hoc.
2. Training: one training session about Specific Learning Disorders and their impact in the workplace, addressed to corporate resources responsible for the various



processes of recruitment, selection and training (in particular Human Resource Managers).

3. Design and testing of a dyslexia friendly workplace: development of specific best practices for each company (delivered to company resources through a “pocket guide”) about methodologies of recruitment, selection and career development support.
4. Audit and review: evaluation testing carried out 3 months after provision of a pocket guide verifying effective implementation of practices proposed. At this point a review of practices and methodologies is foreseen.
5. Company Recognition: Upon completion of the verification phase the Company will be officially recognized as "Dyslexia friendly company" through the consignment of a logo certifying its authenticity.

Good practices and guidelines are implemented in a consolidated manner in some realities as emerges from the documents produced by other associations, in particular the British Dyslexia Association, which has published detailed guides for employers and for years has been collaborating directly with companies for training and consultancy activities for the creation of working conditions that allow dyslexic workers to achieve their potential.

Another example is the documents and brochures made by the Fédération Française des dys- (the French Dyslexia Association) such as “Histoire 2 comprendre les Dys en entreprise “ (To understand people with dys- in the work place) ou encore “ tout savoir sur les dys- » (To know everything about Dys people)¹⁴.

¹⁴ <https://www.ffdys.com/documentation>

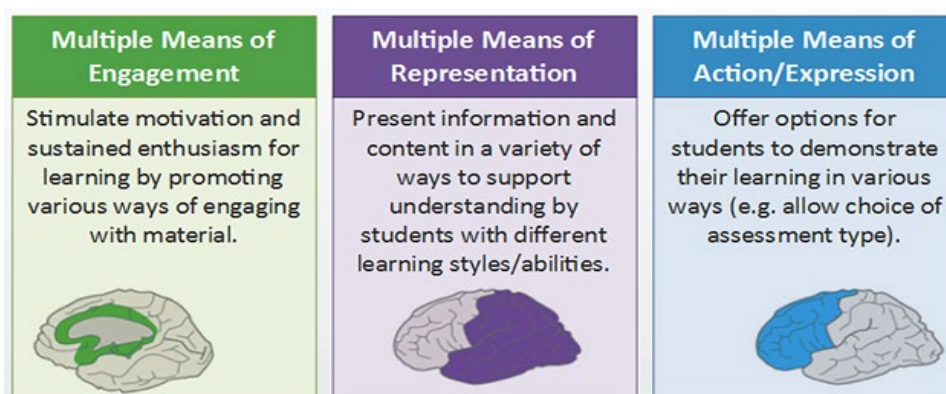


6.3. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the world of work

The Universal Design for Learning guidelines provided by the Centre for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2017 are based on the idea that there is no such thing as a 'typical' or 'average' student, that all students learn differently and that to successfully teach all students, we have to introduce greater flexibility into teaching and learning practice (<https://www.cast.org/>).

The principles of Universal Design offer a framework to employers and managers who are tasked with providing for the needs of dyslexic employees to create an inclusive workplace environment. The UDL framework advocates supporting recognition learning through multiple types of representation, support for strategic learning through multiple types of action and expression, and support for affective learning through multiple means of motivation and engagement and highlights the use of technology in the role of teaching and learning (García-Campos et al., 2020).

The image below illustrates the key principles of UDL – multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of expression.



Digital technology becomes a tool that can help configure different learning opportunities that promote autonomy. In the context of SpLDs, UDL focuses on different ways of learning,



inviting the activation of environments in which it is possible to perceive, understand and use content and tools through a plurality of different channels.

The valuable contribution of universal design in work environments becomes immediately clear when we consider the great heterogeneity of individuals with SpLD, the existence of many dyslexic people who are unaware that they have SpLD and the tendency not to disclose their condition in the world of work.

Applying the principles of Universal Design in the professional sphere can provide a valuable opportunity to address the needs of everyone. In fact, applying the principles of UDL can provide accommodations in an accessible and inclusive environment to truly enhance everyone's preferred style of work.

Therefore, there is a need for further discussion and research among practitioners and researchers in the field of SpLD to collaborate with experts in work organisations and workplace design, drawing on the principles of UDL in order to provide a more inclusive dyslexia friendly working environment for all.



7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that although there is still progress to be made in companies in different countries, this study shows that developing an inclusive policy involving consideration of the difficulties, specificities and talents of people with dyslexia is possible and beneficial. When an inclusive policy is supported by the company, we can see the development of arrangements in everyday working life which facilitate the employability of people with dyslexia. There is no single model of reference to implement inclusive management of people with SpLD, as situations are very variable depending on the type of job, the tasks required, and the individual features of people with SpLD. A possible choice is that of a flexible approach that creates a work environment in which each worker has the tools that are useful for them and can use working methods and strategies appropriate to their characteristics, an approach similar to what was proposed in educational contexts with the Universal Design for Learning methodology.¹⁵ Having an inclusive work environment right from the start, which accommodates and supports all forms of diversity may not even require the person to disclose their dyslexia. It should be noted that awareness, training and support were regularly mentioned by companies, whether during recruitment or the adaptation of the workstation or the organisation of tasks. To build on the good will of employers and recruitment agencies in the study it is recommended that dyslexia awareness and training be implemented or improved to better support dyslexic people in the world of work. This is an essential aspect of their success and fulfilment in the workplace.

¹⁵ <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>



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