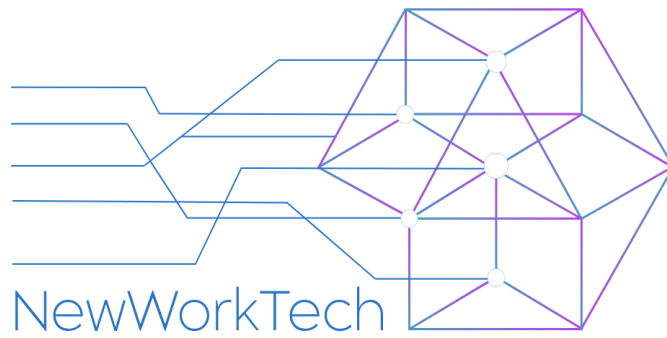




NewWorkTech

From the Margins to the Masses: Standard Practices and Innovative Uses of Technology in Augmenting Different Abilities of People in the World of Work

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Introduction

The NewWorkTech project examines how digital and assistive technologies can improve labour market participation and quality of working life for persons with disabilities across Europe. Despite technological progress, a persistent disability employment gap, [estimated in 2025 at 24 percentage points](#), highlights systemic barriers that continue to limit inclusion in the workplace.

To date, the project has focused on building a strong evidence base on how technology affects workplace accessibility for persons with disabilities. This includes a [co-creation framework](#), a [report on existing research and revision of key concepts](#), and two datasets on [office](#) and [manual](#) work, which, through ethnographic research, interviews and observational fieldwork examine real-world work practices of persons with disabilities. Together, these activities provide a robust evidence base for developing policy recommendations that support more inclusive workplaces.

This NewWorkTech Policy Brief Executive Summary presents in a concise format the key information collected in the full [NewWorkTech Policy Brief](#). NewWorkTech interim findings show that accessibility is not only a technical issue, but a broader challenge shaped by the interaction between technologies, workplace practices, and policies. Addressing these interdependencies is essential to ensure that digital transformation supports inclusion rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.

Key Interim Findings

Opportunities

- **Persons with disabilities are key innovators:** Their lived experience enables them to adapt and combine technologies (ie screen readers, AI tools) to develop practical workplace solutions.
- **Hybrid support systems are essential:** Effective participation relies on combining technology and physical adaptations with human support such as colleagues, supervisors, and job coaches.
- **When worker's access needs, workplace design and task structures are aligned, workers with disabilities are more likely to be successful in the workplace.**
- **Informal accessibility practices are widespread, and lead to tailored person-centred support:** many accessibility solutions arise informally through collaboration among workers and colleagues, reflecting how tailored support can also develop organically and informally. Examples include shared task lists, peer support during training, flexible task allocation and real-time communication with supervisors.
- **Participatory design significantly improves accessibility outcomes:** technologies designed with direct involvement of users with disabilities are more effective and usable than solutions developed without user participation. Participatory approaches also increase awareness among designers and organisations regarding accessibility barriers. **Ethical and accessible participation standards strengthen inclusiveness and alignment with EU fundamental rights.**

Challenges and policy gaps

- **Technology compatibility issues and lack of organisational knowledge on assistive technology in the workplace:** People with disabilities may have the skills and technology to accomplish their tasks, but compatibility issues (e.g. inaccessible legacy workplace software) or a lack of organisational knowledge and investment on assistive technology can derive in a person's inability to work.
- **Employment system organisations lacking knowledge and competence on support for persons with disabilities:** e.g. in the Danish employment system, there are shortcomings in municipal job centre's support to persons with disabilities. They do not

adequately capture relevant needs, have insufficient knowledge about workplace realities, and lack curiosity and ability to assess needs.

- **Under some systems, persons with disabilities are expected to be experts of their own disabilities and the available compensatory schemes:** this is the case for Denmark, and it leads to an important burden on persons with disabilities, who must navigate a complex system to receive the support they need to perform their work.
- **Productivity norms can conflict with inclusion:** workplaces often prioritise speed and efficiency, which can create tension between productivity expectations and accessibility requirements. Workers with disabilities may experience pressure to conform to dominant performance norms even when technologies or workflows are not fully accessible
- **A fear of lack of data privacy and security causes persons with disabilities to refrain from extensively using emerging technologies:** With regards to the use of technologies such as computer vision in Meta AI glasses and other tools based on Language Models, it is crucial that such technologies are evaluated for risks of privacy and data misuse. In many workplaces, data handled by professionals with disabilities is sensitive or confidential, and such technologies do not have the privacy settings to handle such data. This can be a reason for people to refrain from using automated technology. In other cases, people with disabilities trade off privacy for access, making their work practice less private and confidential.
- **Factors external to the workplace, such as commuting can impact the work of persons with disabilities:** The Office Work Dataset reflected how some persons with disabilities experienced commuting as exhausting, time-consuming, and energy-draining. This reinforces the importance of remote work.
- **Co-creation processes face several challenges:** Ensuring balanced participation remains critical, as group dynamics may favour more vocal stakeholders; Methods and materials must be adapted to diverse disability types and cognitive abilities, requiring flexibility and specialised facilitation; Co-creation is also time- and resourceintensive, demanding adequate funding, skills, and organisational capacity.

Policy Relevance

The findings are highly relevant to current EU priorities, as they support the Union's efforts to build a more inclusive, digital, and competitive labour market:

- [European Pillar of Social Rights and Action Plan](#): reinforces equal opportunities and the right of persons with disabilities to fully participate in employment and society.
- [EU Disability Strategy 2021–2030](#): contributes practical evidence to improve employment outcomes and access to assistive technologies.
- [Quality Jobs Roadmap and upcoming Act \(2026\)](#): provides timely input on how workplace digitalisation can support both productivity and inclusion.
- [AI Act](#) and [Digital Decade](#): highlights the need to ensure that digital and AI systems are accessible, inclusive, and beneficial for all workers.
- [European Accessibility Act](#): sets accessibility requirements for products and services (e.g. computers, smartphones, ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines, TV equipment).

Together, these frameworks create a critical opportunity to embed accessibility as a core principle of digital transformation and labour market policy.

Interim Policy Recommendations

For Employers
When possible, offer the option of remote and hybrid work.
Enable flexible working agreements.
Ensure the accessibility of work infrastructures and tools (screen readers, braille displays, speech-to-text, adapted desks, assistive software, physical accessibility).
Provide human support (personal assistants, job coaches, mentors, supportive colleagues).
Raise awareness of disability and accessibility at the organisational level.
Ensure leaders and managers receive specialised training on the use of assistive technology, and how to support employees with disabilities.
Use co-creation methods to develop organisational innovation processes in collaboration with workers with disabilities.

For EU and national policymakers
Ensure the co-creation of policy with persons with disabilities. The project demonstrates that early and continuous involvement of people with disabilities across all stages of the policy is essential to ensure relevance and legitimacy.
Establish EU-level mechanisms to monitor the accessibility of workplace digital systems. Extend such monitoring beyond entities governed by the Web Accessibility Directive, and the European Accessibility Act, including companies, NGOs, public organisations and diverse workplace environments.
Ensure accessibility-first procurement policies for public and private organisations. This includes requiring that newly purchased software and workplace systems meet established accessibility standards and universal design. Such procurement reforms would reduce reliance on inaccessible legacy systems and foster an EU-wide culture of inclusive digital infrastructure.
Invest in education and awareness on accessibility. The EU and its Member States should invest in educational and financial resources on training for employees without disabilities on the importance of accessibility, and awareness programmes that explain why accessibility is a shared responsibility rather than a task left to workers with disabilities.
Integrate accessibility and universal design training in higher education. The EU should promote and fund university-level programmes that embed web accessibility and universal design into curricula across disciplines (e.g. IT, communications, design, social sciences, administration, business).
Reduce the extra workload placed on employees with disabilities. Eliminate reliance on persons with disabilities to fix accessibility issues and navigate complex support systems by simplifying access to accommodations through streamlined EU and national frameworks, and ensuring that accessibility knowledge is distributed across the workforce.

Key Takeaway

Without targeted policy action, digital transformation risks reinforcing existing inequalities. Embedding accessibility as a proactive design principle in EU policy, digital systems, and workplace practices will enable a more inclusive, innovative and resilient European labour market.