

**Preliminary Title**

*Workplace accessibility and accommodation for young people with intellectual and learning disabilities.*

**Context of the thesis**

This thesis is embedded within the SNSF research project “Pathways into the labour market of young people with disabilities in Switzerland and in Luxembourg” (PATH\_CH-Lux), a binational project exploring the situation of young people with disabilities during their school to work transition both in Switzerland and in Luxembourg. Insights will be gathered from different perspectives including that of the young people themselves, potential employers and psycho-social service providers.

**Introduction*****School-to work transitions***

Entering the labour market is one of the key events in a young person's life, significantly determining their future path throughout adulthood and contributing to social and economic independence. In postmodern societies the transition from full-time education to work has become a complex, non-uniform phase with many possible trajectories and outcomes (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010). When it comes to school to work transition young people with disabilities are especially vulnerable. Employment rates of people with disabilities are persistently lower than those of people without disabilities (OECD, 2022). They are more likely to remain unemployed or be confined to sheltered employment. As participation in work is linked to health outcomes and participation in other areas in life the low employment rate of people with disabilities is concerning.

***Educational Attainment and Disability***

The proportion of people with higher education degrees is increasing, it increasingly becomes a necessity and low educational attainment has been shown to be linked to unemployment and work disability (Schoon & Bynner, 2019). Childhood disability is associated with poor educational outcomes. This is especially true for young people with neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions that might affect academic learning (Brekke et al., 2023). As a result, they are likely to encounter difficulties when entering the labour market, since educational diplomas and degrees serve as a source of information to infer on a person's competence and productivity. However, research also shows that despite equal educational attainment, people with disabilities are still less likely to be considered for jobs (Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021). This indicates that the disadvantage of people with disabilities in the hiring process cannot be attributed to education alone and beliefs that people with disabilities are less competent and productive and add extra burdens and costs to the workplace persist (Nagtegaal et al., 2023; Østerud, 2023).

***Reasonable accommodation***

In the transition from school to work, young people are expected to evolve from being full-time students to being economically independent and productive workers. For many young people with disabilities, this means leaving the school context, where their access and accommodation is ensured by compulsory education and investment in their learning potential, to enter a demand-driven labour market context. (Tschanz & Powell, 2020). While societies are committed to providing access to education for all, access to the labour market is not guaranteed, but requires a young person to prove their competence and productivity to perform in the specific job (Pérez, 2018). According to the concept of the “ideal worker”, jobs are abstract categories to be filled by a 'disembodied worker', an abstract idea of a worker with a specific way of doing a job (Acker, 1990; Foster & Wass, 2013). Thus, an employee who might need adjustments to perform well in a job would inevitably contradict the ideal (Foster & Wass, 2013). Based on this concept, young people with disabilities who are expected to require adjustments from the outset when they enter working life are dependent on an employer being prepared to hire them despite expected deviations from the abstract ideal.

### **Research question**

The briefly outlined theoretical and empirical considerations lead to the following research questions: What role does accommodation play in understanding the accessibility of the labour market for young people with intellectual and learning disabilities?

### **Methodological approach**

As a starting point this thesis takes a broad perspective investigating institutional factors that contribute to or impede the entry into competitive employment of young people with disabilities in a systematic literature review. This will be followed by a focus on the demand side of the labour market, specifically examining the employers' perspective and the impact of disability on their considerations of young people entering the labour market using a factorial survey experiment. Factorial survey experiments are considered a suitable approach to gain a better understanding of employer's hiring intentions and have been used as such (McDonald, 2019).

In this study the methodological approach allows to identify the isolated impact of a disability signal from other characteristics that would commonly co-occur in the real world (such as education or migration), as well as its interplay with other characteristics (Martínez-Pastor & Fernández-Lozano, 2022). This will allow to disentangle educational attainment from disability and examine how a disability signal and the educational type and level of a person impacts the hiring intentions of recruiters separately as well in interaction.

A survey part following the factorial survey experiment is used to gather information on recruiter and organisational characteristics, job demands and recruiter's experience in and attitudes towards workplace accommodation for people with disabilities. Hereby, we can examine the role of experience

in providing workplace adjustments and accommodations for people with disabilities and how attitudes towards different types of accommodations might be related to recruiter's hiring intentions towards young people with different types of disabilities and backgrounds.

The consideration of five different occupational sectors offers the opportunity to investigate whether the employment opportunities of people with disabilities differ depending on the occupational sector and other organisational characteristics. With the concept of the ideal worker in mind, this study could additionally provide insight into the mental representation of competence that recruiters have in relation to different disability signals by investigating the relationship between job requirements and hiring intentions.

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