



Best practice for inclusive Employment

(VIEWS International)

Title of the best practice

The right person in the right place, regardless of their difference or disability

Country of the case study

In 2024, people with disabilities represented 25.5% of the Belgian population, of which 27.6% were women and 23.3% were men¹. Regional distribution shows that most persons with disabilities live in Flanders and Wallonia, while the Brussels-Capital Region has slightly lower percentages. The most common disabilities include mobility, sensory, cognitive, and mental health limitations, with many individuals experiencing multiple limitations simultaneously. In Belgium, an estimated 385,000 people are blind or visually impaired, and approximately 75% of those of working age are not in employment². Despite the existence of laws and policies promoting inclusion, systematic data collection on the situation of persons with disabilities remains insufficient, as highlighted by UN³ reviews and Unia⁴. This introductory overview provides the context for the subsequent analysis of policies, employment, and socio-economic conditions of persons with disabilities in Belgium.

In Belgium, inclusive employment for persons with disabilities is supported by a legal and policy framework that mandates “*reasonable accommodations*” in the workplace⁵. According to UNIA – the Belgian inter-federal equality body which monitors anti-discrimination laws, promotes equal opportunities, and provides research and guidance on inclusive employment, acting as a key policy-level stakeholder – these adjustments whether physical, organizational, or structural are intended to compensate for barriers created by the work environment. Refusal to provide them without legitimate justification constitutes discrimination, unless it imposes a “disproportionate burden” on the

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/disability-eu-facts-figures/#0>

² <https://www.euroblind.org/>

³ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014).
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/791467?v=pdf>

⁴ <https://www.unia.be/en/knowledge-recommendations/equality-data-collection-belgium>

⁵ [Belgian Disability Forum](#)



employer⁶. The federal Anti-Discrimination Law of 10 May 2007 includes disability among protected characteristics and obliges employers to provide necessary accommodations to ensure employees with disabilities can access, perform, and progress in their jobs, unless doing so entails excessive costs or hardship⁷. Not providing reasonable accommodation is explicitly considered a form of discrimination. A key development occurred in 2021, when Article 22 was added to the Belgian Constitution, guaranteeing the right to “*full inclusion in society, including the right to reasonable accommodation*”⁸. This provides a strong legal foundation for the rights of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Workplace regulations also require that offices, equipment, and common areas consider the specific needs of employees with disabilities.

Understanding the implementation of these rights requires considering Belgium’s complex governance structure. Belgium is a federal state composed of three language-based communities (Dutch, French, and German) and three territorial regions (Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels-Capital). Responsibilities are shared between the federal state, regions, and communities, so employment policies for persons with disabilities come from multiple sources: the federal level provides anti-discrimination laws, quotas for federal civil servants, and disability benefits; the regions oversee special placement agencies and wage subsidies; and the communities manage vocational training and sheltered work programs⁹.

In addition to these mechanisms, Belgium’s employment framework for persons with disabilities continues to be shaped by the *Social Rehabilitation Act* of 1963, which remains the central federal legislation governing the employment of persons with disabilities in both the public and private sectors¹⁰. The Social Rehabilitation Act provides the federal legal basis for sheltered work, while all communities and all regions have adopted decrees regulating Adapted Work Companies. These companies, which are private non-profit organisations, receive substantial funding from the Disability Community Agencies. Belgium has four such Agencies—VAPH, PHARE, AVIQ, and DPB—each responsible for a linguistic community. These agencies also implement active policies that include not only financial incentives to support the employment of persons with disabilities, but they provide wage subsidies, integration bonuses, and assistance with workplace adaptations¹¹.

⁶ https://www.unia.be/en/what-are-reasonable-accommodations?utm_

⁷ socialsecurity.belgium.be

⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/reasonable-accommodation-at-work/en/>

⁹ Samoy, E. (2013a). Employment policies for people with disabilities in Flanders (Belgium). A short overview. In Departement Werk en Sociale Economie. <https://disabilityin.org/global-directory/belgium>

¹⁰ European Blind Union. (n.d.). *Belgium – Article 27: Work and employment*. (November 28, 2025) <https://www.euroblind.org/convention/article-27/belgium>

¹¹ European Blind Union. (n.d.). *Belgium – Article 27: Work and employment*. (November 28, 2025) <https://www.euroblind.org/convention/article-27/belgium>



When a disabled employee is hired, an “adaptation period”—ranging from one to three years depending on the region—may be supported by public funding covering the worker’s health-insurance costs. During this period, part of the employee’s wage may also be subsidised. Employers can additionally receive an “integration bonus”, which may amount to up to 25% of the total wage cost, for recruiting a disabled worker. Practical expenses linked to workplace adaptation—such as specialised equipment, assistive technologies, or infrastructural changes—can also be financed through public schemes administered by the Agency.

Despite the existence of these supportive legal measures, significant gaps in employment outcomes persist. National data make this discrepancy particularly clear. According to the data published by Statbel in 2018, 9% of Belgium’s population aged 15–64 reported being *severely limited* in daily activities due to a disability or long-standing health problem. Among this group, only 23% have a job, and half of these jobs (51 %) are adapted to their specific needs¹². The demographic profile of this population also highlights structural vulnerabilities: 56% are aged 50–64, only half have attained more than lower secondary education, and just 13 % hold a higher-education diploma, compared to one-third of the general population¹³. Their labour-market outcomes mirror these disadvantages: their unemployment rate is three percentage points higher than that of the total population, and 74% are inactive, meaning they are not employed and not actively seeking work. The at-risk-of-poverty rate among people aged 16 and over with a disability (activity limitation), in Belgium was 13.8%¹⁴. Among people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Belgium, 17.6% report having difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses or contact lenses, compared with 9.2% among those not at risk¹⁵.

Moreover, regional data from Wallonia provide additional nuance: in 2018 the number of people with a recognised disability in Wallonia was around 21,405 under age 21, some 107,587 aged 21-64, and 117,161 aged 65 or older¹⁶. This age distribution underlines how disability prevalence rises with age and highlights that the core working-age group (21–64) still comprises a size-able portion of persons with disabilities in the region.

According to a European report, quota systems for inclusion in public administrations are often inefficient and circumvented through cooperatives or agreements with sheltered enterprises. For instance, in the Walloon Region the legislation foresees that the public institution must ensure that at

¹² [Statbel](#)

¹³ [Ibidem](#)

¹⁴ [eurostat/statistics-Disability statistics - poverty and income inequalities](#)

¹⁵ [Statbel risk poverty or social exclusion](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1063171/disability-in-wallonia-per-age/>



least 2.5% of its employees are persons with disabilities. In Flanders, the public administration is subject to a 3% employment target for persons with disabilities, while in the Brussels-Capital Region the quota varies by institution: the regional public service (SPRB) applies a minimum of 2%, local administrations and CPAS are required to reach 2.5%, and the French Community Commission (COCOF) sets a higher target of 5%¹⁷. These targets apply only to the public sector, as no binding quota exists for private-sector employers in Belgium. More recent data and analyses add further depth to the challenge:

- According to Statbel's 2024 report, 72.3% of people aged 20–64 are employed, whereas among those with severe long-term disabilities affecting daily activities, only about 25% participate in the workforce¹⁸.
- A 2024 study by King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) found that the employment rate of persons with disabilities in Belgium is around 41.1%. It also noted that 75% of people with disabilities believe more employer awareness is imperative, and 65% believe selection processes favour non-disabled candidates¹⁹.
- At the EU level, the OECD's Economic Survey of Belgium (September 2024) notes that among individuals aged 15–69 with activity limitations, the employment gap in Belgium remains substantial and has improved far less over time compared with other population groups²⁰.
- A 2025 report by HR services firm Acerta Consult found that only 0.23% of private-sector employees had a recognised disability in 2024—a drop from 0.25% in 2023. Regionally, Brussels recorded 0.36%, Wallonia 0.31% (down from 0.38% the prior year) and Flanders 0.19%²¹.

These figures illustrate a persistent gap between Belgium's legal commitments and practical outcomes, a situation further complicated by the federal structure, which makes harmonisation difficult.

Recent assessments reinforce concerns about limited progress. In 2024, the Belga News Agency reported that persons with disabilities “*still have too little access to regular education and the regular*

¹⁷ Van Basselaere, Carole. 2025. *Employment of Persons with Disabilities: An Assessment of the Effectiveness of National Policies Belgium*. European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. ISBN 978-92-68-28471-1 & doi:10.2767/0629879.

¹⁸ <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/news/723-people-aged-20-64-were-employed-2024?utm>

¹⁹ [Fondation Roi Baudouin Emploi & Handicap](#)

²⁰ [OECD Economic Survey: Belgium September 2024](#)

²¹ [belganewsagency.eu/proportion-of-private-sector-employees-with-disabilities](#)



labour market”²², despite Belgium’s obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). GRIP’s shadow report to the UN similarly highlights systemic shortcomings — including insufficient investment in inclusive education, long support waitlists, and persistently low labour-market participation — suggesting that gaps in implementation remain substantial²³.

An important recent evolution in Belgium concerns accessibility legislation. Digital and physical accessibility requirements — previously applicable mainly to the public sector — will, starting in June 2025, also apply to private companies²⁴. This means that all businesses will be required to ensure that their websites, applications, buildings, and services meet accessibility standards. The aim is to improve equal access to employment and remove structural barriers that prevent disabled persons from participating fully in the labour market. However, media reports throughout 2024 suggest that Belgium is lagging behind in meeting these accessibility obligations, which could delay the expected benefits²⁵. Focusing on workers who are blind or partially sighted, the European Blind Union (EBU) emphasises the necessity of providing adapted equipment, accessible digital tools, and personal assistance in order to ensure effective participation in a wide range of professional, managerial, commercial, and industrial occupations. Flexible working arrangements — such as telework, adapted schedules, or modifications to job tasks — are also identified as essential forms of *reasonable accommodation* for persons with visual impairments or other disabilities²⁶. Further good practices are given at the federal level by the Federal Administration’s selection office, illustrating how inclusion can be implemented effectively. The Administration promotes inclusion by providing a range of reasonable accommodations during recruitment procedures, including screen readers, screen magnification, Braille displays, adapted time for tests, personal assistance inside the building and guided support. Moreover, candidates with disabilities who succeed in competitive exams are placed on a dedicated waiting list, from which all federal institutions can recruit directly. This mechanism increases visibility and hiring opportunities for candidates with disabilities²⁷. These approaches and examples demonstrate how systemic adjustments—from recruitment to placement—can foster accessibility and meaningful inclusion in the workplace.

The EBU also notes that blind and partially sighted jobseekers face persistent barriers linked to inaccessible recruitment procedures, insufficient availability of assistive technologies, and a general

²² belganewsagency.eu/disability-advocacy-groups-criticise-belgian-inclusion-policy

²³ gripvzw.be

²⁴ [European Accessibility Act](#)

²⁵ [Website accessibility](#)

²⁶ European Blind Union. *Belgium – Article 27: Work and employment*.

²⁷ <https://travaillerpour.be/fr/travailler-pour-ladministration-federale/egalite-des-chances>



lack of employer awareness. In addition, workplace adaptations funded by regional agencies are often slow to approve and implement, sometimes discouraging employers from hiring visually impaired workers.

On a more positive note, technological developments of recent years have also significantly improved employment opportunities for disabled people. For persons with visual impairments in particular, modern screen readers, Braille displays, screen magnifiers, OCR tools, and increasingly accessible digital interfaces make it easier to perform computer-based work. These technologies broaden the range of jobs that visually impaired persons can access and support smoother integration into mainstream workplaces. Despite these advances, however, the European Blind Union (EBU) highlights that sheltered workshops (also called “adapted work companies”) remain the main employment option for many persons with visual impairments in Belgium, reflecting the limited accessibility of mainstream employment pathways. According to EBU, a 2022 survey conducted by Brailleliga²⁸ revealed that visually impaired people continue to face multiple obstacles in accessing and maintaining employment. As reported:

- 42.75% of respondents reported challenges in getting to work.
- 10.76% find that the difference between offered wages and their current benefits is too small to make taking a job worthwhile.
- 19.67% feel they lack the necessary education or qualifications for the labor market, which also demands high performance and flexibility.
- 26.82% highlighted that misconceptions and insufficient understanding among employers and colleagues create barriers. Workplaces are often inadequately adapted despite available support resources.
- 40.23% of jobseekers received assistance during their job search, yet 34.08% still seek specialized guidance²⁹.

Thus, despite the legal framework, effective participation in the regular labour market remains constrained. Organisations such as UNIA, the Belgian Disability Forum (BDF) and Brailleliga report that much public funding continues to support sheltered workshops rather than promoting inclusion in mainstream employment, and that specialised counselling services are crucial for enabling visually impaired individuals to participate fully in the labour market³⁰.

²⁸ <https://www.braille.be/fr/representation-et-interpellation>

²⁹ [EBU-Belgium obstacles for visually impaired people](#)

³⁰ [European Blind Union \(EBU\)](#); [EBU-Belgium obstacles for visually impaired people](#); [Brussels Times](#)



In response to these persistent gaps, several organisations in Belgium have developed practical initiatives to promote inclusive employment. For example, EQLA supports visually impaired learners through adapted training, assistive technology, and guidance to enhance participation in vocational education and training programs, while DiversiCom works directly with jobseekers with disabilities and employers, providing coaching, recruitment support, and workplace adaptation strategies to facilitate successful transitions into the labour market. Diversicom does not work in isolation; they lead the professional search while relying on a specialized network. This network-based strategy ensures the best-suited service is activated at each stage; for instance, a candidate may use Diversicom for employer relations while simultaneously delegating specialized tasks like mobility training (commute autonomy) to the Ligue Braille, or collaborating with technical partners like Optelec or SensorTech to identify the best assistive software. Diversicom's current pool of beneficiaries (47% motor/invalidating, 35% mental/cognitive/autism, and 18% sensory) demonstrates that while diversity is high, the need for "bespoke" accompaniment remains the key to success.

These examples illustrate how targeted interventions can complement legal frameworks by addressing practical barriers and enabling meaningful participation. Analysing the experiences of organisations like EQLA and DiversiCom helps identify scalable and evidence-based practices that improve access to training, enhance workplace inclusion, and support sustained employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Belgium.

The additional insights from the European Blind Union further highlight that inclusion must not only be guaranteed in law but also materially supported through sustained public investment in accommodations, accessible technologies, specialised support services, and flexible working conditions—without which genuine labour-market participation remains elusive for many persons with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments³¹.

Taken together, these observations underline the urgent need for research into which models of inclusion are effective in practice in the Belgian context. By documenting success-stories (for example, supported employment, inclusive digital training initiatives) and analysing policy, organisational, and employer-level strategies, this study aims to address a critical knowledge gap and provide evidence-based guidance for stakeholders committed to achieving meaningful inclusion in the Belgian labour market³².

³¹ European Blind Union. *Belgium – Article 27: Work and employment*.

³² De Rouck, E., & Antoine, M. *Access to the labour market and social protection for people with disabilities*. SOCIEUX+ EU Expertise on Social Protection, Labour and Employment. <https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/publications/socieux/paper-disability-en.pdf>



Company context

This contribution was submitted by AVIQ and presented by Nicolas Stalmans, Director of Human Resources.

AVIQ is a public organization operating at the level of the Walloon Region, employing approximately 900 staff members. Its core activities relate to social action and public policy in the fields of health, disability, and family affairs. The inclusive practice is implemented across the organization, including regional branch offices as well as telework and home-office arrangements.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are fully embedded in AVIQ's human resources policy. Inclusion is considered part of the organization's DNA, with all HR staff members and executive management sensitized to these issues. The Internal Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (SIPP) plays a central role in the implementation of workplace adaptations. The practice relies primarily on internal expertise and resources rather than an external partner network.

Problem and motivation

The initiative originated from AVIQ's desire to ensure consistency between its internal human resources practices and the inclusive standards it promotes externally when working with employers to support professional adaptation contracts. While inclusion was already present in daily practice, the organization identified the need for a more structured, formalized, and professional methodology.

A key signal for change was an internal awareness that inclusion needed to be addressed at all levels of the employment lifecycle, from recruitment and onboarding to daily work and career development. As the authority responsible for disability policy in the Walloon Region, AVIQ also felt a strong responsibility to act as an exemplary employer and demonstrate that inclusive employment is both achievable and sustainable.

Governance & ownership

The practice is owned and coordinated by the Human Resources department. It has been formally approved by the Director of Human Resources, the Inspector General, and the Deputy Administrator General, ensuring strong executive sponsorship.

All HR professionals are involved in the implementation, while managers play a key role in identifying needs and supporting employees in their teams. The SIPP acts as a technical and advisory body for workplace accommodations, ensuring that health, safety, and accessibility considerations are properly addressed.



Compliance & policy

The practice is grounded in AVIQ's anti-discrimination, health and safety, and accessibility policies. These policies are applied through concrete operational processes rather than stand-alone declarations. When a need is identified, it is handled confidentially and in compliance with data protection rules. Disability-related information is not disclosed during recruitment, as written applications are anonymized and any mention of disability is removed before being shared with hiring managers. Workplace accommodations are implemented based on individual needs, following consultation and consensus among relevant stakeholders.

Practical approach

Two main changes underpin the practice: the anonymization of job applications and the adoption of a formal procedure for reasonable accommodations. Anonymized recruitment has been in place for many years, while the structured accommodation procedure was formally introduced in 2023.

The approach impacts the entire organization and currently supports around 30 employees with a wide range of physical and sensory disabilities. Managers select candidates based solely on skills and experience, without prior knowledge of disability status, and adaptations are implemented once employment begins.

Reasonable accommodations process

Accommodation requests can be submitted through an HR ticketing system, a dedicated email address, or directly via the employee's manager. Once a request is received, the SIPP coordinates consultations with HR, the employee, and management to identify appropriate solutions.

The average timeframe between request and implementation is approximately one month. Final approval is granted by the Director of Human Resources and the Prevention Advisor (SIPP). Budgets are managed centrally, with costs varying depending on individual needs.

Accessibility

- **Physical:** AVIQ ensures physical accessibility through step-free routes, accessible toilets, inclusive evacuation plans, and adjustable workstations.



- **Digital:** Digital accessibility is supported through an accessible intranet and learning management system, accessibility testing of internal tools, the use of alternative text for images, and subtitled videos. Internally developed software can be adapted to better interact with assistive technologies.
- **Organizational/process:** Flexible working hours and hybrid or remote working arrangements are widely used to support individual needs. Organizational rules are applied with flexibility to accommodate different situations.
- **Learning & Development:** Training opportunities are offered in accessible formats, with alternative evaluation methods and practical guidance provided to trainers.
- **Assistive tech:** Employees may use assistive technologies such as voice recognition software and screen magnification tools. These tools are maintained and adapted as needed to ensure long-term usability.

Recruitment, onboarding & career progression

Inclusive recruitment practices include explicit references to possible accommodations in job advertisements, accessible assessments, structured interviews, and opportunities through internships or apprenticeships.

Onboarding is supported through mentoring or buddy systems, progressive workload integration, accessible onboarding modules, and training for managers. Career progression is fostered through accessible learning and development opportunities, transparent promotion criteria, and mentoring schemes.

Results

The practice has enabled AVIQ to recruit employees who are blind or who use wheelchairs, with managers selecting candidates without knowing their disability status. Once hired, all necessary adaptations are made to ensure full integration.

In one concrete example, a visually impaired employee's workstation was adapted through the purchase of specialized software and the modification of an internally developed application to improve compatibility with screen magnification, significantly improving efficiency and user experience.



Outcome indicators (0, 6, 12, 24 months)

AVIQ monitors several indicators over time, including hiring rates, time-to-hire, offer acceptance rates, accommodation turnaround time, retention, promotions, employee engagement, and absenteeism. All data is collected, stored, and monitored through the organization's HR management system, *Arno*, ensuring traceability and continuity.

Cost efficiency

The cost of accommodations varies by situation. For employees who are blind, costs typically range between €3,000 and €4,000 due to specialized software. Most other accommodations involve minor adjustments or transportation reimbursements, such as taxi fares. These investments have contributed to reduced staff turnover, fewer sick leave absences, faster integration of new employees, and fewer workplace incidents, generating clear long-term value for the organization.

Success factors

Key success factors include strong leadership commitment, continuous staff training, the availability of appropriate tools and clear service-level agreements, and the allocation of sufficient budgetary resources.

Challenges & solutions

The main challenges encountered relate to attitudes and stigmatization, as well as logistical constraints. These were addressed primarily through awareness-raising and sensitization of employees, managers, and HR staff. Logistical challenges were overcome through pragmatism, common sense, and goodwill, which proved highly effective in finding workable solutions.

Sustainability

The practice is sustained through regular updates of internal policies, ongoing staff training, and continuous monitoring via HR systems. It has been formally in place since 2023 and is fully embedded in AVIQ's long-term HR strategy.



Transferability

To replicate this practice, the minimum requirements include an open-minded employer willing to implement reasonable accommodations, invest in staff sensitization across all organizational levels, and allocate a modest budget for software, equipment, or minor infrastructure works.

Key steps include conducting an audit of potential barriers, identifying existing solutions, assessing their costs, and evaluating the feasibility of implementation.

A key risk to monitor is the perception among non-disabled staff that accommodations may be overly burdensome; proactive communication and awareness-raising are therefore essential.

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