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D 8.3 Policy Recommendations for fostering the employment of people with Chronic Diseases

**WP8 Employment and Chronic Diseases: health in
all sectors**

**Task 8.3 Development of Policy
Recommendations for HPDP in the workplace for
people with CD**

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The Joint Action CHRODIS PLUS

CHRODIS PLUS is a three-year initiative (2017-2020) funded by the European Commission and participating organisations. Altogether, 42 beneficiaries representing 20 European countries collaborate on implementing pilot projects and generating practical lessons in the field of chronic diseases.



The very core of the Action includes 21 pilot implementations and 17 policy dialogues:

- The pilot projects focus on the following areas: health promotion & primary prevention, an Integrated Multimorbidity Care Model, fostering the quality of care for people with chronic diseases, ICT-based patient empowerment and employment & chronic diseases.
- The policy dialogues (15 at the national level, and 2 at the EU level) raise awareness and recognition in decision-makers with respect to improved actions for combatting chronic diseases.

A heavy price for chronic diseases: Estimates are that chronic diseases cost EU economies €115 billion or 0.8% of GDP annually. Approximately 70% to 80% of healthcare budgets across the EU are spent on treating chronic diseases.

The EU and chronic diseases: Reducing the burden of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and mental disorders is a priority for EU Member States and at the EU Policy level, since they affect 8 out of 10 people aged over 65 in Europe.

A wealth of knowledge exists within EU Member States on effective and efficient ways to prevent and manage cardiovascular disease, strokes and type-2 diabetes. There is also great potential for reducing the burden of chronic disease by using this knowledge in a more effective manner.

The role of CHRODIS PLUS: CHRODIS PLUS, during its 36 months of operation, will contribute to the reduction of this burden by promoting the implementation of policies and practices that have been demonstrated to be successful. The development and sharing of these tested policies and projects across EU countries is the core idea driving this action.

The cornerstones of CHRODIS PLUS: This Joint Action raises awareness of the notion that in a health-promoting Europe - free of preventable chronic diseases, premature death and avoidable disability - initiatives on chronic diseases should build on the following four cornerstones:

- health promotion and primary prevention as a way to reduce the burden of chronic diseases
- patient empowerment
- tackling functional decline and a reduction in the quality of life as the main consequences of chronic diseases
- making health systems sustainable and responsive to the ageing of our populations associated with the epidemiological transition

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- CSJA (Consejería de Sanidad de la Junta de Andalucía)
- EPF (Forum Européen des Patients)

The financial support from the European Commission is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated, as well.

Abbreviations

CD	Chronic Disease
CVD	Cardiovascular Diseases
EU	European Union
HPDP	Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
ILO	International Labour Organization
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines chronic diseases (CD) as non-communicable diseases of long duration and generally slow progression. The increasing prevalence of CDs in Europe's working age population underlines the need for a European strategy towards inclusion, integration and reintegration of employees in the workplace as well as towards the development of actions to support workers' health and wellbeing.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) determines that each year in the EU around 550,000 working age people die due to chronic diseases, assuming a health care cost of around 0.8 of Gross Domestic Product/year.

The purpose and objective of this report is to develop and disseminate policy recommendations for health promotion and disease prevention in the workplace for people with chronic diseases. They cover access to reintegration, maintenance and stay at work tackling the employment domain as an area where care of people with CD should be improved. The recommendations are directed to EU Member States stakeholders.

Different stakeholders, such as employers, employment experts, international labour organizations and patient associations, may benefit from promoting employees health and work participation, and preventing the development of diseases.

A literature review shows the many attempts that have been done to develop and apply initiatives concerning return to work for employees with chronic diseases.

Some practical steps for EU policy to support employment for people with or at risk of CD and to address the impact of chronic diseases in the employment domain have been developed in the frame of the JOINT ACTION CHRODIS PLUS. These steps include:

- Create a common European language concerning maintenance of and return to work after CD.
- Foster a culture among employers and workers regarding CD management at work.
- Promote the use of the CHRODIS PLUS WORKBOX on Employment and Chronic Conditions: this instrument is composed by the *CHRODIS PLUS training tool* for managers and the employment domain, and *CHRODIS PLUS Toolkit* for workplaces **in order to promote the** adaptation for allowing access, prevention and maintenance at work of people with CD. The Workbox has been developed by the Joint Action to support European Union members states, employers, supervisors and their stakeholders, and employees in creating working conditions that promote employees' wellbeing and health, prevent the development of chronic diseases and help employees with chronic health problems to continue working.

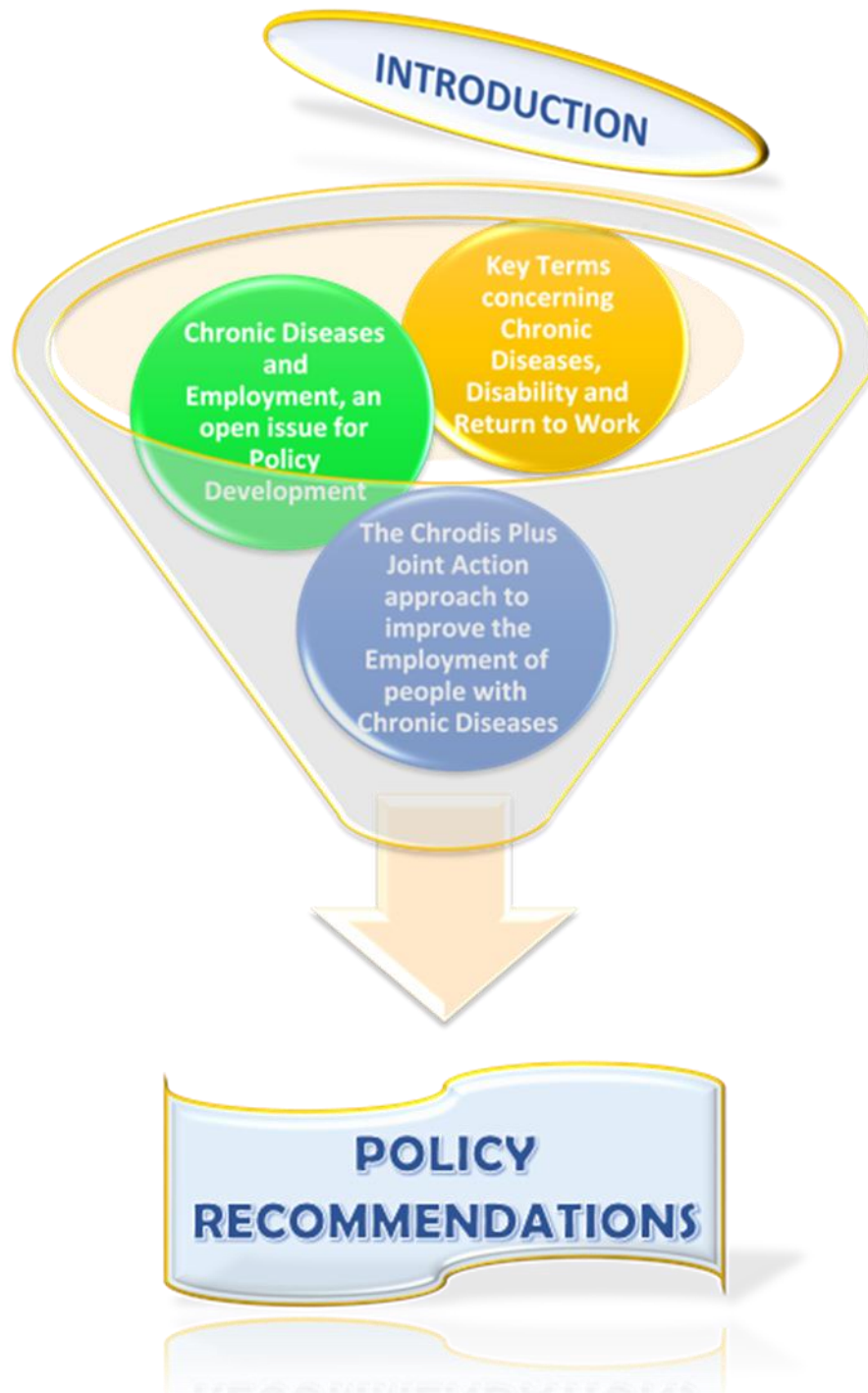
To promote the integration of people with CD into active life in all EU countries, the following groups of recommendations must be considered:

- 1.- Raise awareness of how investing in the wellbeing, health, work ability, and inclusion of all employees benefits not only employees, but also employers and the whole society.
- 2.- Promote inclusion and good management of employees with or at risk of chronic conditions as well as promote workplace inclusiveness for all.

- 3.- Promote the wellbeing, health, and work participation of all employees.
- 4.- Create legislative frameworks to improve the employment of individuals with chronic diseases.

All of them are directed to employees, employers and society, as can be seen in Section 4 of this document

Document orientation visual guide



Introduction

In the European Union (EU) chronic diseases (CD) are the leading causes of disability at work, early retirement due to health problems and premature death. Those diseases that cause premature deaths and loss of healthy life years include endocrine (diabetes) diseases, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, mental disorders and musculoskeletal processes covering 86% of all deaths (1). They incur significant social and economic costs (2). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) determines that each year in the EU around 550,000 working age people die due to chronic diseases, assuming a health care cost of around 0.8 of Gross Domestic Product/year (3).

The number of people with CD in the EU has increased during the last decades due to an improvement in life expectancy facilitated by technological progresses, medical advances, new treatments and improvements in public health. Thus, diseases that years ago had a mortal character are currently chronic diseases. In addition, most of these are found in people of working age and two out of three people at retirement age have at least two chronic conditions (4). The number of cases with CD are expected to increase over the next years (5) (6), therefore increasing the number of disability adjusted life years. Further, the co-occurrence of two or more chronic conditions (multimorbidity) has become increasingly common in Europe. This fact will create difficulties for those working with CDs, placing them in a higher risk on long-term work disability, and frequent sick leave. Other consequences include lower productivity and associated costs. This situation requires changes at different levels, including modifications in policies, legislation, organizations, labour environments, culture and education in the workplaces to improve disease prevention, health promotion and to reach adaptation and reintegration at work of people with CD (7).

Different stakeholders, such as employers, employment experts, international labour organizations and patient associations, may benefit from promoting employees health and work participation, and preventing the development of diseases. Such benefits for employers include reduced absenteeism, staff turnover, and costs, an increased productivity, retaining workers expertise, as well as improvement in the image of the employer (Table 1). For society and employees, the benefits include a reduction in frailty periods, better wellbeing, unemployment reduction, as well as an increase in the employment of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and a delay of the retirement age. Further benefits include avoiding stigma in the workplace and promoting inclusiveness.

The final aim of this document is to disseminate produced policy recommendations for health promotion and disease prevention in the workplace for people with chronic diseases. They cover access to reintegration, maintenance and stay at work tackling the employment domain as an area where care of people with CD should be improved. The recommendations are directed to EU Member States stakeholders.

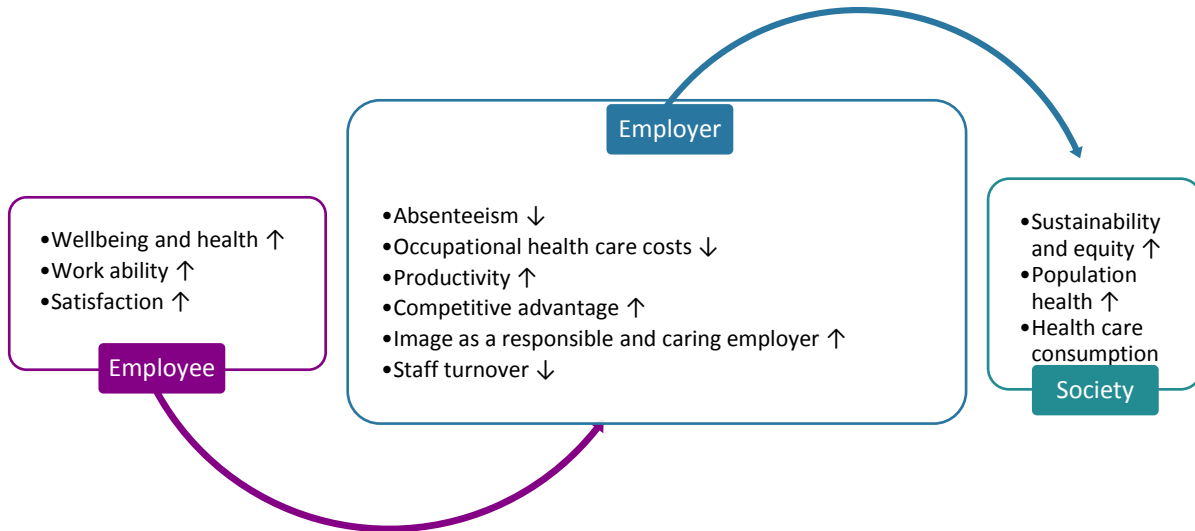


Table 1: Benefits for all sectors of promoting employees health and work participation.

Section 1 - Key Terms concerning Chronic Diseases, Disability and Return to Work

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **disability** is "... a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of the human body and the characteristics of the society in which the person lives" (8). It includes impairments of body structures or body functions, activity limitations and social participation restrictions. Disability is the result of an interaction with a hindering environment, of which different factors can be barriers or facilitators. A disability - caused by an accident or an illness - may make a worker unable to perform the core tasks of work either temporarily or permanently, and limit the possibilities to shift job and build a career in another occupation.

Some useful terms regarding disability at work and Chronic Diseases are shown in table 2.

Term	Definition
Chronic diseases	Non-Communicable diseases of long duration and generally slow progression. The four main types are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructed pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes. ¹
Non-Communicable diseases	Diseases that are not passed from person to person
Reasonable accommodation	It is assistance or changes to a position or workplace that will enable an employee to do the job despite having a disability. It includes any change or adjustment to the job, the work environment or the way work is customarily done which enables an employee with a CD to perform the essential functions of a job.
Re-employment	Return to the workplace after a period of inactivity.
Rehabilitation to work/Return to work	The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines it as the process by which a person manages to compensate with the highest possible degree the disadvantages arising from an impairment or a disability affecting job performance. It restores social integration through achievement, maintenance and promotion of a productive life. A Return to Work program is developed in a collaborative effort to return the worker back to a maximum work capacity. ²

¹ Source: http://www.who.int/topics/noncommunicable_diseases/en/

² Source: Montero Gomez, Catalina. *Estrategias para facilitar la inserción laboral a personas con discapacidad*. San José, Costa Rica : Editorial EUNED. , 2003. ISBN 9968-31-281-9

Work ability	A dimension that evaluates whether an employee is able to perform a job in relation to the demands of the job and to the work environment. Work ability is also determined by professional knowledge and competence, values, attitudes, and motivation.
Work accommodation	A process that involves accommodating the work taking into account the organization, the worker, the task and the work environment. ³
Work relocation	Includes the thoughtful consideration of new placement of a person in an office or a workplace, with a holistic approach taking into account the skills of the worker, the position demands and the psychological, social, and cultural context. It focuses on ascertaining the skills of the worker that returns to work, the demands of the organization, comprising an adequate quality of life for the worker and a productive work for the company
CHRODIS PLUS Workbox	Instrument developed by CHRODIS PLUS that compiles: CHRODIS PLUS training tool for employers and the employment domain and CHRODIS PLUS Toolkit for adaptation of the workplace for access, prevention and maintenance of CD at the workplace

Table 2: Useful terms regarding disability at work and Chronic Diseases.

³ Source: Kristman VL, Shaw WS, Boot CR, Delclos GL, Sullivan MJ, Ehrhart MG. *Researching Complex and Multi-Level Workplace Factors Affecting Disability and Prolonged Sickness Absence*. Hopkinton Conference Working Group on Workplace Disability Prevention. . s.l. : J Occup Rehabil, 2016, Vols. DEc;26(4):399-416

Section 2 - Chronic Diseases and Employment, an open issue for Policy Development

In the EU almost 25% of the population at working age suffers from CDs. These consist in a health, a societal and an economic problem driving to unemployment and inactivity. In the EU, the employment rate of people with health issues is around 30% lower than that of people without CD (9). Nevertheless, suffering from a CD should not necessarily imply the inability to work. Nowadays there is a growing interest in the EU countries for social inclusion, integration of the disabled and paid work for people with chronic diseases, as shown in the EU's document "European Disability Strategy 2010-2020" (10). Therefore, it is important for the Member States to improve the employment of people with chronic diseases and to apply adequate recommendations concerning this issue (11).

It is an open issue as reflected in the literature. There have been many attempts to develop and apply initiatives concerning return to work for workers with chronic diseases, just to cite some: (9) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22) (23) (24) (25) (26) (27) (28) (29) (30) (31) (32).

Relevant features shown in the literature include:

- 1.- It is recommended to explore the needs of people concerning work disability to maintain a job or return to work. They can arise from the start - easier access to the labour market and work search support - to flexible working time and flexible contracts.
- 2.- Fitness to work should consider all kinds of limitations, for example with people coming back from an oncology process: cognitive disabilities physical limitations, and psychosocial difficulties.
- 3.- There are factors that have a negative or positive impact on the working lives of people with chronic diseases including:
 - negative impact: disease, poor working conditions and stigmatization; lack of opportunities, stress, inability to perform as before, job insecurity and stigma.
 - positive impact: social contact, support of others economic independence, work stability.
- 4.- All- parties –employer, employees, employment agencies, professionals – should be an active part of the maintenance or return to work process. A structured dialogue between employee, employer and a health & work professional should be considered.
- 5.- Perceived needs of employers and employees should be considered, including incentives for the employer, benefits for the worker and for the company.
- 6.- At a state level, there should be enough policies to manage the maintenance of work and return to work under CDs conditions and promote employment.
- 7.- There should be a common European framework to prevent unemployment and exclusion from work of people with CDs.

Concerning these conclusions related to inclusion, integration and reintegration of people with chronic conditions in the workplace, and the improvement of workers' health and wellbeing, we direct the reader to a EU Policy dialogue hold in 2019, that is summarized in (Silvaggi et al. 2020) (33)

Section 3 - The Joint Action CHRODIS PLUS approach to improve the employment of people with Chronic Diseases

As previously mentioned, the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases in Europe's working age population underlines the need for a European strategy towards inclusion, integration and reintegration of employees in the workplace as well as towards the development of actions to support workers' health and wellbeing. The goal of the activity is to identify different steps for EU policy to support employment for people with chronic diseases and to give recommendations from policy experts, composing a task force position group.

Objective:

To develop and disseminate policy recommendations for health promotion and disease prevention in the workplace for people with CD including access to, reintegration, maintenance and stay at work tackling the employment domain as an area where care of people with CD should be improved, by policies and implementation of best practices.

Methodology considered:

Choice of methodology. To reach the recommendations included in the document, the methodology has been composed of a consensus from an expert working group. This has been composed of different independent multidisciplinary expert teams (teams list is cited at the start of the document). To reach the final document patients' advice has been also included by participation of the Forum Européen des Patients. It has been a two round consensus including consensus development conferences during a three year period.

Rationale. A consensus is considered adequate in policy documents that belong to social sciences research domains. In this area, evidence based is often limited, and expert consensus guidance is usually considered adequate.

Methodology process. The process of evidence-based expert consensus recommendations report is summarized as such following the topic selection: expert group composition, revision and summarize of review evidences, and final formulation of recommendations. Scientific evidence on the effectiveness of workplace interventions was reviewed, and various stakeholders (e.g., patient associations, employment experts, and international labour organizations) were involved in the development of the CHRODIS PLUS Workbox on Employment and Chronic Conditions. Perspectives of both managers and employees in different EU countries were included to understand the possibilities, facilitators, and barriers of promoting employees' wellbeing and health, preventing the development of chronic diseases, and supporting the inclusion and work participation of employees with chronic health problems.

Data sources. To reach that goal different documents and scientific papers have been considered, that are included at the end of the document.

Benefits and limitations. A consensus from a multidisciplinary group gives robustness to the reached conclusions. It summarizes the conclusions from the expert panel. There are also limitations, being the main one that conclusions may not fit to an individual case. Others include the absence of a systematic review, absent in this social sciences area of research.

Development process. Along the development of the JOINT ACTION CHRODIS PLUS several issues have been kept in mind: on the one hand, previous studies and articles concerning the matter of chronic diseases and workplaces compiled in the literature, as in section 2, which conclude how important the maintenance and return to work are for people with these conditions and also for employers and society. The expert team has performed an extensive review of the scientific literature about the topic as well as the benefits of helping people with chronic conditions to maintain or return to work.

The JOINT ACTION CHRODIS PLUS on implementing good practices for chronic diseases has as overarching goal to support Member States to identify efficient means to reduce the burden of CD, increase the sustainability of health systems and develop human capital. One of its specific objectives is developing tools and policy recommendations for improving the relationships between CD and the employment. With this aim, the Work Package 8, dedicated to practices in the employment domain for people with CD, developed some practical steps for EU policy to support employment for people with or at risk of CD and to address the impact of chronic diseases in the employment domain. These steps include:

- Create a common European language concerning maintenance of work and return to work after CD.
- Foster a culture among employers and workers regarding CD prevention and management at work.
- Promote the use of the CHRODIS PLUS WORKBOX on Employment and Chronic Conditions, a tool developed by the Joint Action to support European Union members states, employers, supervisors and their stakeholders, and employees in creating working conditions that promote employees' wellbeing and health, prevent the development of chronic diseases and help employees with chronic health problems to continue working.

The CHRODIS PLUS WORKBOX on Employment and Chronic Conditions includes two tools:

- 1) **The CHRODIS PLUS Training Tool for managers on inclusiveness and workability for people with chronic conditions.** It is directed to managers of all kinds of workplaces (small, medium and large organizations). It aims to raise managers' awareness on the benefits of inclusion and good management of employees with or at risk of chronic health issues at the workplace. It also provides information and tools for measuring and strengthening the integration and work ability of employees with chronic conditions. The information and tools included in the Training Tool consider human functioning, personal capabilities, and commonalities of chronic diseases, and they help ensuring that the work environment is a facilitator, not a barrier towards a better inclusion and work ability of all employees.
- 2) **The CHRODIS PLUS Toolkit for Workplaces - fostering employees' wellbeing, health, and work participation:** The Toolkit collects concrete means through which workplaces can support the wellbeing and health, and enhance the work participation of all employees, regardless of their current work ability and health status. In addition, the means included in the Toolkit aid to prevent chronic health problems, such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, depression, and lung diseases, in order to promote the development of better wellbeing, and health. The content of the Toolkit arises from scientific evidence, stakeholder interviews, behaviour change models and theories, as well as practical considerations relevant for the workplace setting. The Toolkit is designed for the use of all parties involved in promoting employees' wellbeing, health, and

work participation, for example the management of workplaces, human resources personnel, occupational health care professionals, and catering service providers.

The two components of the CHRODIS PLUS Workbox have been tested for feasibility in altogether 16 workplaces from 8 EU countries, and will be available in several European languages. The pilot workplaces found that both two components were clear and comprehensive, and provide essential tools for whoever manages human resources and issues such as inclusiveness, occupational wellbeing and health, and chronic diseases. The Workbox components cover all aspects of wellbeing, health, work participation, and improving the inclusiveness and working condition of all employees.

It seems clear that patient associations' experience and opinion are central in the application of the CHRODIS PLUS Workbox in the workplace. They also have a main role in understanding the recommendations' application at social and workplace levels.

The JOINT ACTION CHRODIS PLUS on implementing good practices for chronic diseases has a deep understanding of the issues regarding the maintenance of work and return to work of people with CDs. Following the expertise developed and the developments mentioned above, policy recommendations are given as follow in the next chapter.

Section 4 – Policy Recommendations

One of the purposes of the Joint Action CHRODIS PLUS is to promote the integration of people with CD into active life in all EU countries. Countries at the EU have different stakeholders structure, and governments have different ministries with different names and diverse functions. In some, occupational affairs are connected with social security, in others are split in different units. Some have national level rules concerning health, some distributed in regions. Accordingly recommendations are directed to target groups (employees, employers, society) by promoting changes to stakeholders (some with regulatory functions some with advisory actions) that have to be mapped in common terms:

- Improvements (expected) for the employees. Stakeholders include mainly: European Union and governments advisory and regulatory bodies (mainly institutions from Public Health and Employment areas focused on workers' rights and assessment of disability as well as promote proactive outcomes back to work in chronic conditions), occupational medicine units, prevention units and trade unions at companies. Including social and labor benefits to foster sustainability.
- Improvements (expected) for the employers. Stakeholders include mainly: European Union and governments advisory and regulatory bodies (mainly institutions from Public Health and Employment areas focused on workers' rights and assessment of disability, and to promote a legal framework to foster back to work in chronic conditions), companies advisory councils and trade unions, as well as insurance companies and workers medical services when present. Including social and labor benefits to foster sustainability.
- Improvements (expected) for society. Stakeholders include mainly: European Union and governments advisory and regulatory bodies, local administrative councils, scientific societies, third sector associations (patients, disabled, and occupational related groups in general). Regarding specifically the employment domain, the following non-exhaustive list of recommendations must be taken into action to face such challenge:

1.- Raise awareness of how investing in the wellbeing, health, work ability, and inclusion of all employees benefits not only employees, but also employers and the whole society

These investments enhance employees' wellness and job satisfaction. Employers benefit through reduced absenteeism, occupational healthcare costs and staff turnover, and through improved productivity, competitive advantage, as well as an image as a caring employer. For employers, the benefits of hiring and retaining employees with chronic conditions are multiple: it shows the employer values, diversity and inclusion, which are part of a well-functioning company. It ensures that the company retains skilled staff and spares additional costs of recruitment and training. The society, in turn, benefits via increased sustainability and equity, improved population health, and reduced healthcare consumption.

Recommendations with improvements for the employees:

- ✓ Promote psychophysical recovery and welfare of individuals with chronic diseases.
- ✓ Create a specific culture of integration of workers with CD instead of discrimination and stigma.

Recommendations with improvements for the employers:

- ✓ Eliminate uncertainty regarding future work, promote healthy environments to prevent onset of diseases and therefore absence from work.
- ✓ Share maintenance of and return to work initiatives with employees, to improve communication and image.
- ✓ Create company environments that facilitate peer support and integration.

Recommendations with improvements for society:

- ✓ More stable labour market.
- ✓ Gap reduction in the employment sector for people with CDs.
- ✓ Carry out national awareness campaigns and initiatives to help promote health in workplaces and reduce stigma and discrimination

2.- Promote inclusion and good management of employees with or at risk of chronic conditions as well as promote workplace inclusiveness for all

Encourage employers to take up and implement the CHRODIS PLUS Training Tool for Managers, in particular to promote the evaluation of inclusiveness of the enterprises and encourage managers to integrate the tool in the strategies and policies of their organizations. The Training Tool provides information and tools for measuring and strengthening the inclusion and work ability of employees with or at risk of chronic conditions.

Recommendations with improvements for the employees:

- ✓ Promote psychophysical recovery and welfare of individuals with chronic diseases.
- ✓ Have a special focus on employees with cognitive or mental CDs, for them to start or continue working.

Recommendations with improvements for the employers:

- ✓ Increase workers performance, maintains knowledge.
- ✓ Increase concerning productivity and economic growth.

Recommendations with improvements for society:

- ✓ More stable labour market.
- ✓ Reduce labour segments with a high absenteeism rate.
- ✓ Promote the exchange of good practices around the employment and retention at work of people with chronic diseases and of workplace policies that support this.

3.- Promote the wellbeing, health and work participation of all employees

Advance the dissemination, uptake, and implementation of the CHRODIS PLUS Toolkit for Workplaces among all actors involved in the promotion of occupational wellbeing and health. The specific means included in the Toolkit support workplaces to promote the wellbeing and health, prevent the development and progression of chronic health problems, and enhance the continuation of work among all employees, regardless of their work ability and health status.

Recommendations with improvements for the employees:

- ✓ Promote the wellbeing, health, and work participation of all employees, regardless of their ability or health status.
- ✓ Cover levels of support, as well as job security.

Recommendations with improvements for the employers:

- ✓ Share work participation that improves the competitiveness of the company and boosts productivity.
- ✓ Share work participation that reduces costs because absenteeism decreases, less time and money spent on recruiting and hiring.

Recommendations with improvements for society:

- ✓ Stabilize labour market.
- ✓ Create a working culture of inclusion and integration.

4.- Create legislative frameworks to improve the employment of individuals with chronic diseases

Encourage Member States to adopt a holistic inter-sectoral *health in all sectors* -approach to tackle chronic diseases effectively. Targeting policy-makers is important in promoting the development of legislative frameworks that improve the accessibility of existing employment

Recommendations with improvements for the employees:

- ✓ Promote a protective environment and collaboration.
- ✓ Improve the labour market and reduce premature abandonment of the workplace.
- ✓ Reduce the time since the onset of the CD and of unemployment.

Recommendations with improvements for the employers:

- ✓ Eliminate uncertainty regarding future work, prevent relapses and therefore absence from work.
- ✓ Improve communication with employment agencies, and employers.
- ✓ Develop workplace health strategies tailored to company situation.

Recommendations with improvements for society:

- ✓ Foster CD workers employment, to reduce the number of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses and cases of early disability.
- ✓ Foster CD workers integration, to reduce the cost of absenteeism and improve the economy.
- ✓ Enhance the employment rates of all European citizens with CD.

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