IN KEY – WP3 “Survey for Mapping Inclusive Companies”
Survey Report

IN-KEY – INclusive worK Experiences for Young Professionals
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WORK PACKAGE 3
“Mapping Inclusive Companies”
Assessment of Diversity & Inclusion practices and challenges.
Report of the Survey

LEAD PARTNER: PER FORMARE SRL
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Executive Summary

This report presents the final findings of the INKEY WP3 Company Survey on Inclusive Internship Readiness. The survey was designed to assess how prepared organisations are to host inclusive internships for young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, and to identify the conditions, practices and support measures needed to make internship experiences genuinely accessible, meaningful and sustainable.

The report adopts a triangulated evidence approach. Its quantitative analysis, charts and Inclusive Internship Readiness Score are based exclusively on the valid responses collected through the INKEY questionnaire. These direct findings are complemented by secondary European evidence on Diversity & Inclusion, workplace practices, SME maturity, disability employment and reasonable accommodation. The external sources are not treated as additional INKEY respondents and are not statistically merged with the survey dataset. Instead, they are used to contextualise the results, validate recurring trends and strengthen the recommendations.

This wider evidence base supports the project ambition of analysing employer readiness through more than the direct survey responses alone. In particular, the European Company Survey conducted by Eurofound and Cedefop provides evidence from more than 21,000 establishments, while other European studies contribute employer, organisational, SME and workplace perspectives on D&I implementation, accessibility, reasonable accommodation and inclusion practices. The INKEY survey therefore provides the project-specific diagnostic baseline, while the external evidence provides the broader comparative and policy framework.

After consent validation and data cleaning, organisational responses to the inkey survey were retained for the final analysis. The survey reached organisations from a broad range of country contexts and organisational types. The sample is strongly characterised by micro and small organisations: more than four out of five respondents employ fewer than 50 people. Private companies and NGOs/non-profit organisations represent the largest respondent groups. This profile is particularly relevant for INKEY, as smaller organisations often have a strong potential to offer flexible and personalised internship experiences, while at the same time facing more limited internal resources, fewer formalised procedures and less specialised D&I capacity.

The overall Inclusive Internship Readiness Score is 48.8 out of 100. This places the sample in the Developing Readiness stage. The results show that many organisations are open to inclusion, express positive attitudes towards hosting interns with fewer opportunities and already implement some relevant practices. However, their readiness remains uneven. In many cases, organisational commitment has not yet been translated into structured procedures, clear responsibilities, accessible systems, consistent mentoring arrangements or regular monitoring.

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Leadership support is the strongest dimension emerging from the survey. More than four out of five respondents report strong or full support from top management or the board for D&I initiatives. However, this commitment is not always supported by operational structures. Less than one third of organisations report having a dedicated D&I focal point or a defined metric linked to D&I success. Similarly, while many respondents report having a formal D&I policy or informal guidance, a substantial share either has no policy or is not aware of its existence. **The findings therefore reveal a recurrent gap between positive intentions and formal organisational infrastructure**.

Inclusive recruitment and onboarding practices are developing, **but they are not yet systematic**. Around half of the respondents report adapted recruitment procedures or specific inclusion measures within onboarding processes. Fewer organisations use targeted outreach channels to reach candidates with fewer opportunities, and adjustments to selection procedures are still applied inconsistently. This suggests that organisations may be willing to adapt when a need emerges, but many do not yet have proactive and standardised procedures in place.

Accessibility and reasonable accommodation represent the most critical operational areas. Physical accessibility is more developed than digital and sensory accessibility, but practices remain highly uneven. A significant proportion of respondents are unsure whether their digital tools are accessible to people using assistive technologies. Sensory accommodations, including captioning, amplification tools, screen-reader compatibility and other forms of communication support, are particularly underdeveloped. This confirms that accessibility cannot be considered only as a physical infrastructure issue: it also concerns communication, digital tools, work organisation, task design and the capacity to respond to individual needs.

Mentoring and workplace support are present in many organisations, but they are often informal. Most respondents report providing some kind of support to interns, such as tutors, buddies or regular check-ins. However, structured mentoring programmes and formal mentorship arrangements for people with specific needs remain limited. Mandatory D&I training is also not yet widespread. This indicates a need for practical and light-touch support tools that can help tutors, line managers and colleagues feel more confident in accompanying interns with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities.

Monitoring and continuous improvement are another weak area. Only a minority of respondents regularly use inclusion surveys, climate surveys, D&I indicators or structured reporting mechanisms. In many cases, inclusion is addressed through individual initiatives rather than through a cycle of planning, implementation, feedback and improvement. This is particularly relevant for the future Quality Label, which should recognise not only the existence of positive intentions or isolated actions, but also the ability of organisations to review their practices and improve over time.

The survey also shows encouraging potential for future internship hosting. Around half of respondents already have experience in hosting interns with fewer opportunities. Most organisations are either

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willing to host interns selected through funded projects or would consider doing so depending on the adaptations required. This demonstrates that employer openness is not the main obstacle. Rather, the decisive issue is whether organisations are equipped with the right support, resources and practical guidance.

The main barriers identified by respondents include the time required for supervision and mentoring, difficulties in adapting tasks to individual needs, lack of experience or training in D&I, limited internal procedures, administrative complexity, communication barriers, concerns about productivity and limited access to external support. The most requested forms of support are financial incentives or co-funding, resources for physical or technical adaptations, tutor training and administrative assistance. These findings clearly indicate that companies do not need only awareness-raising activities. They need concrete, easy-to-use tools that help them act.

The findings are consistent with wider European evidence. European Commission research confirms that D&I can strengthen recruitment and retention, organisational culture, innovation, problem-solving, reputation, wellbeing and fairness, but only when inclusion is supported by leadership, resources, practical policies and monitoring. Eurofound and Cedefop show that organisations investing in people, learning opportunities and employee involvement achieve stronger wellbeing and performance outcomes. Research on SMEs highlights that many smaller organisations are interested in D&I but lack dedicated roles, accountability structures, training and monitoring mechanisms. Evidence on disability employment and reasonable accommodation confirms the importance of clear employer guidance, task adaptation, accessible recruitment, practical support, partnerships and financial or logistical assistance.

Based on the INKEY survey results and the wider European evidence, the report identifies six priority recommendations:

- ***Turn commitment into practice***: organizations should develop short and realistic D&I policies, nominate a focal point or responsible person, define minimum responsibilities and identify a limited set of practical inclusion indicators.
- ***Make recruitment and onboarding more inclusive***. This includes accessible vacancy wording, outreach through relevant partners, flexible selection arrangements, clear communication and an inclusive onboarding checklist.
- ***Strengthen accessibility and reasonable accommodation***. Organizations need practical guidance on physical, digital, sensory and organizational adjustments, including task adaptation, flexible work arrangements and communication support.
- ***Introduce structured mentoring***. Inclusive internships should be supported through tutor role descriptions, buddy systems, regular check-ins, escalation procedures and basic training for supervisors and colleagues.
- ***Use simple monitoring tools***. Intern feedback forms, mentor checklists, basic D&I indicators and periodic reviews can help organizations move from isolated actions to continuous improvement.

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- ***Develop a progressive support and recognition pathway***. The INKEY Toolkit should provide practical tools for organisations at different stages of readiness, while the future Quality Label should reward evidence of implementation and improvement rather than declarations alone.

Overall, the report confirms that many organisations are willing to contribute to more inclusive internship opportunities, but require structured guidance, practical resources and external support to do so effectively. WP3 therefore plays a central role in the INKEY project pathway: it translates the systemic barriers identified in WP2 into concrete organisational evidence, which in turn informs the development of the Toolkit and the future Quality Label. Through this connection, INKEY moves from research to practical implementation, helping organisations become more confident, more capable and more inclusive hosts for young people with disabilities and fewer opportunities.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project context and overview of INKEY

The INKEY project aims to strengthen inclusive pathways from education and training to the labour market for young people with disabilities and young people with fewer opportunities. It addresses the need to ensure that internships are not simply short-term work experiences, but accessible, meaningful and supportive opportunities through which young people can develop professional skills, confidence, autonomy and connections with the world of work.

Internships can play a decisive role in supporting the transition from education to employment. However, their impact depends largely on the capacity of host organisations to provide an inclusive environment. A placement cannot be considered inclusive merely because a young person is accepted into an organisation. It must also offer accessible recruitment and onboarding procedures, appropriate communication, reasonable accommodation where needed, trained mentors, supportive colleagues, meaningful tasks and opportunities for feedback and development.

For this reason, INKEY places employers and host organisations at the centre of its approach. Companies, public bodies, non-profit organisations, social enterprises and other potential hosts are key actors in the creation of inclusive internship opportunities. Their level of Diversity & Inclusion maturity, their understanding of barriers, their practical capacity to make adjustments and their willingness to collaborate with training providers and support services all influence the quality of the internship experience.

WP3 focuses on this organisational dimension. It examines how prepared organisations are to host interns with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, what practices they already have in place, which barriers they encounter and what support they need in order to improve their inclusive internship capacity.

1.2 From WP2 to WP3: translating systemic barriers into organisational evidence

WP3 builds directly on the research and evidence gathered through WP2. While WP2 explored the broader conditions influencing the labour market inclusion of disadvantaged people, expecially students, form their point of view, WP3 brings these findings into the concrete reality of organisations and workplaces.

WP2 identified the systemic barriers that can affect access to education, training, internships and employment in students. These barriers may include stereotypes and low expectations, limited employer awareness, inaccessible recruitment processes, insufficient knowledge of reasonable

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accommodation, lack of cooperation between support services and employers, weak mentoring arrangements, administrative complexity and limited monitoring of inclusion practices.

WP3 translates these systemic issues into a company-level perspective. Through the survey, organisations were invited to reflect on their own policies, procedures, experiences and support needs. The purpose was not only to determine whether organisations declare themselves inclusive, but to assess how inclusion is implemented in practice: through recruitment, onboarding, accessibility, mentoring, task adaptation, wellbeing measures, internal accountability and continuous improvement.

The relationship between the two work packages can therefore be understood as an evidence pathway:

- WP2 identifies systemic barriers and enabling factors affecting inclusion in the labour market from the students point of view.
- WP3 investigates how these barriers and enabling factors appear within organisational practice.
- The survey findings identify practical gaps, strengths and support needs.
- The findings inform the development of the INKEY Toolkit.
- The Toolkit supports organisations in improving their capacity to host inclusive internships.
- The Quality Label recognises and encourages progress towards more inclusive and sustainable internship environments.

This process ensures that the project outputs are grounded both in research evidence and in the real needs of potential host organisations. It also creates a direct link between analysis, practical tools and future recognition mechanisms.

1.3 Purpose and objectives of the WP3 company survey

The WP3 company survey was designed as a diagnostic and learning tool. Its purpose is not to rank organisations in a punitive way, but to understand their current level of readiness and to identify realistic pathways for improvement.

The survey explores the organisational conditions that make inclusive internships possible, including leadership commitment, D&I policies, recruitment practices, onboarding, accessibility, reasonable accommodation, mentoring, staff training, wellbeing, monitoring and collaboration with external support services.

The main objectives of the survey are to:

- assess the Diversity & Inclusion maturity of organisations that may host interns;
- analyse organisational readiness to welcome young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities;
- identify existing practices that support inclusive recruitment, onboarding, mentoring and workplace participation;

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- explore the barriers that organisations encounter when hosting, or considering hosting, inclusive internships;
- identify the practical support, tools, guidance and resources that organisations need;
- collect examples of promising practices that may be adapted and transferred to other contexts;
- provide evidence for the development of the INKEY Toolkit;
- contribute to the definition of readiness criteria and progressive levels for the future INKEY Quality Label.

The survey therefore considers inclusion as both a strategic and an operational issue. It examines not only whether organisations express commitment to D&I, but also whether this commitment is translated into concrete structures, procedures and everyday practices.

The findings are interpreted alongside wider European evidence on Diversity & Inclusion, workplace practices, SME readiness, disability employment and reasonable accommodation. This broader perspective helps position the INKEY results within current European research and policy developments, while ensuring that the recommendations developed by the project are evidence-based, practical and adaptable to different organisational contexts.

Overall, WP3 acts as a bridge between research and implementation. It transforms the systemic evidence gathered through WP2 into practical insights from organisations, providing the basis for the Toolkit and the Quality Label. Through this process, INKEY aims to help organisations become more confident, more capable and more inclusive hosts for young people with disabilities and fewer opportunities.

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2. Methodology

2.1 Survey design and structure

The WP3 Company Survey was designed as an online diagnostic instrument to assess the readiness of organisations to host inclusive internships for young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities.

The questionnaire combined different types of questions in order to capture both measurable organisational practices and contextual information. It included closed questions, 1–5 Likert-scale items, yes/no questions, multiple-choice questions, multiple-response questions and optional open-text fields.

The survey was structured around the main dimensions of Inclusive Internship readiness and a collection of information about organization profiles, willingness to host inkey interns and collection of best practices. Following the list of sections:

No. Section	Section Title
1	Organizational Profile
2	D&I Governance and Organisational Commitment
3	Recruitment, Selection and Onboarding
4	Physical and Digital Accessibility
5	Training and Skills Development
6	Organisational Culture, Wellbeing and Retention
7	D&I Data and Monitoring
8	Past Experience with Internships with fewer opportunities
9	Willingness to Host INKEY Interns
10	Final Comments and best practice

Several questions included also optional follow-up fields. These were designed to allow respondents to describe specific practices, explain barriers encountered or provide examples of adaptations and inclusive solutions already implemented within their organisations.

The questionnaire therefore served two purposes. First, it generated descriptive evidence on current organisational practices and perceived needs. Second, it provided the information required to construct the Inclusive Internship Readiness Score and maturity model.

2.2 Target group and respondent profile

The target group included organisations that may potentially host interns or contribute to inclusive work-based learning pathways. These included private companies, public institutions, non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, social enterprises, cooperatives, start-ups, training-related organisations and other actors involved in employability, inclusion or labour-market transition activities.

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The final analytical dataset is strongly characterised by micro and small organisations. Around 55% of respondents represent organisations with fewer than ten employees, while approximately one quarter represent organisations employing between ten and forty-nine people. Overall, more than four out of five respondents represent organisations with fewer than fifty employees.

This profile is particularly relevant for the INKEY project. Smaller organisations can often provide flexible, personalised and close working environments, but they may also have fewer dedicated resources, less formalised procedures and limited specialist capacity in areas such as accessibility, mentoring, D&I management and monitoring.

Private companies represent the largest organisational group in the dataset, followed by NGOs and non-profit organisations. Public institutions are also represented, together with a smaller proportion of start-ups, social enterprises, cooperatives and other organisational forms.

The sample should therefore be understood as an organisational readiness sample rather than as a survey of one single economic sector or employer category.

2.3 Data collection, validation and dissemination process

The survey was disseminated online between April and July 2026 through the INKEY partnership and its professional, educational, business, employability and civil-society networks.

The dissemination strategy followed a network-based approach. The questionnaire was shared with organisations potentially interested in hosting internships, employers already involved in training or work-based learning, organisations active in inclusion and employability, public bodies, NGOs, social-economy actors and stakeholders working with young people.

Participation was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey and were asked to provide GDPR consent before their data could be used for project purposes. Following consent validation and data-cleaning procedures, the final analytical dataset included approximately 92% of the total submissions received. Submissions without valid GDPR consent and one clearly identifiable test or placeholder record were excluded from the analysis.

Data were analysed only in aggregated form. Company names, contact details, email addresses and other identifying information were not used in the analysis or in the presentation of results.

The survey was designed as an exploratory and diagnostic exercise. It does not claim to provide a statistically representative picture of all European employers. Its purpose is to identify recurring trends, gaps, barriers, support needs and promising practices that can inform the practical outputs of the INKEY project.

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2.4 Countries and partner involvement

The survey reached organisations from more than twenty country contexts, including EU Member States, neighbouring countries and a limited number of international contexts.

Italy, Spain, Belgium and Greece are among the most represented country contexts, while the remaining responses reflect a broader range of European organisational environments. This geographical diversity makes it possible to identify common patterns and different organisational experiences related to inclusion, accessibility, mentoring and workplace support.

At the same time, the distribution of responses across countries is uneven. For this reason, the report does not aim to produce statistically robust country-by-country comparisons. Country information is used mainly to describe the diversity of the sample and to support contextual interpretation where appropriate.

Survey dissemination was supported by the INKEY partnership through national, regional and thematic networks. The questionnaire did not systematically record which partner or dissemination channel generated each individual response. Therefore, the report does not attribute responses to specific partners, countries or stakeholder networks.

2.5 Integration of secondary evidence

The INKEY survey findings are complemented by secondary evidence from European reports and studies on Diversity & Inclusion, workplace practices, SME readiness, disability employment, accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

The secondary evidence is used to:

- contextualise the findings emerging from the INKEY survey;
- compare recurring organisational trends with wider European research;
- strengthen the interpretation of barriers and support needs;
- identify transferable good practices;
- support the development of recommendations for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label;
- broaden the evidence base beyond the direct survey responses.

The report follows a triangulated evidence approach. The INKEY survey provides the project-specific primary dataset and is the sole basis for the calculation of percentages, charts and Inclusive Internship Readiness Scores. External reports are not treated as additional INKEY survey responses and are not statistically merged with the primary dataset.

Instead, they provide a wider comparative and policy framework. Together, the direct survey data and the selected external studies allow the report to draw on evidence from more than 500 organisational, employer, establishment and workplace-related perspectives. This broader evidence base supports the

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project objective of developing recommendations that are grounded both in INKEY field evidence and in wider European research.

2.6 Inclusive Internship Readiness Score and maturity model

The Inclusive Internship Readiness Score was developed as a project-specific maturity model. Its purpose is not to rank organisations in a punitive way, nor to provide a legal certification or external audit. Rather, it is intended to identify the current stage of organisational readiness and to support realistic improvement pathways.

The scoring model is based on six equally weighted dimensions:

1. Organisational commitment and D&I governance: including leadership support, written policies, internal responsibility and organisational awareness.

2. Inclusive recruitment and onboarding: including adapted recruitment procedures, outreach channels, flexible selection processes and inclusion measures during onboarding.

3. Accessibility and reasonable accommodation: including physical, digital and sensory accessibility, workplace adjustments, communication support and task adaptation.

4. Mentoring, support and wellbeing: including tutors, buddies, regular check-ins, mentoring arrangements, staff training, wellbeing measures and safe reporting channels.

5. Monitoring and continuous improvement: including climate surveys, D&I indicators, reporting practices, feedback mechanisms and the capacity to review and improve existing practices.

6. Internship implementation readiness: including previous experience with interns with fewer opportunities, willingness to host future interns and capacity to identify the support required.

For Likert-scale items, responses were converted into standardised numerical values. Higher response levels corresponded to higher readiness values, while lower response levels corresponded to lower readiness values. The resulting values were then normalised on a 0–100 scale for the calculation of each readiness dimension.

For yes/no, multiple-choice and categorical questions, structured and clearly evidenced practices received higher values than informal, absent or uncertain practices. For example, formal policies, structured mentoring arrangements, regular monitoring and confirmed accessibility measures received higher values than informal arrangements, lack of procedures or uncertainty about whether a practice existed.

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"Don't know", unclear and missing responses were treated conservatively in the scoring process. This does not imply a negative judgement regarding the organisation's intentions. It means that, for the purpose of a readiness assessment, the existence of a specific inclusive practice could not be confirmed.

Each dimension was calculated on a 0–100 scale. The final Inclusive Internship Readiness Score was obtained by calculating the average of the six dimension scores.

Organisations were grouped into four maturity levels:

- Initial Readiness: below 40 points

Organisations with limited, fragmented or mainly informal inclusive practices.

- Developing Readiness (low): 40–59 points

Organisations showing willingness and some relevant practices, but still requiring more structured tools, procedures and support.

- Advanced Readiness (medium): 60–74 points

Organisations with several established practices, stronger internal structures and a more developed inclusion framework.

- Excellence readiness (high): 75–100 points

Organisations demonstrating high levels of preparedness, structured support, accessibility measures, monitoring and continuous improvement.

The maturity model will inform both the INKEY Toolkit and the future Quality Label. The Toolkit is intended to help organisations move progressively from one stage to the next, while the Quality Label may recognise evidence of implementation, commitment and improvement over time.

2.7 Data analysis approach

The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods.

Closed questions were analysed through descriptive statistics and are presented mainly as percentages. This approach makes the findings easier to interpret and reduces the risk of overemphasising small numerical differences between subgroups.

Likert-scale questions were converted into comparable standardised values for the purpose of scoring, while retaining their original meaning in the descriptive analysis. Multiple-response questions were analysed by identifying the most frequently selected options. For scoring purposes, response options were assigned differentiated point values according to the level of inclusive practice evidenced. Higher

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values were attributed to formalised, implemented and monitored practices, while lower values were attributed to partial implementation, absence of evidence or uncertainty.

Scores were then standardised across questions and dimensions to ensure that no single item or thematic area had a disproportionate influence on the overall Inclusive Internship Readiness Score.

Open-text answers were reviewed through thematic analysis. Recurrent themes were grouped into categories and challenges enhanced in a specific multibox question, such as:

- mentoring and supervision needs;
- accessibility and adaptation needs;
- administrative complexity;
- lack of internal procedures;
- lack of experience or training;
- financial constraints;
- communication barriers;
- examples of inclusive practices and promising approaches.

The combined use of quantitative and qualitative evidence was important because organisational readiness cannot be fully understood through scores alone. Numerical results identify broader patterns, while qualitative answers help explain the reasons behind organisational choices, concerns and support needs.

2.8 Research limitations and critical areas

The survey has some methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the sample is exploratory and not statistically representative of all European organisations. Respondents were reached through project partners and stakeholder networks, which means that organisations already interested in inclusion, training or European cooperation may be more likely to have participated.

Second, the country distribution is uneven. Some countries are more represented than others, while some appear only through a limited number of responses. For this reason, the report avoids strong country-level comparisons and focuses mainly on aggregate trends.

Third, the organisational profile is not balanced. Micro and small organisations are strongly represented, while medium-sized and large organisations are less frequent. This is not necessarily a weakness, as SMEs are a relevant target group for inclusive internship policies, but it means that the findings should be read with this profile in mind.

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Fourth, the survey is based on self-assessment. Respondents reported their own perception of policies, practices and readiness. These answers are valuable, but they may reflect different levels of awareness, knowledge or internal visibility. For example, a "don't know" answer may indicate either a lack of information from the respondent or a lack of clear organisational communication.

Fifth, cross-country interpretation may vary. Concepts such as Diversity & Inclusion, reasonable accommodation, fewer opportunities, inclusive recruitment or accessibility may be understood differently depending on national legislation, organisational culture, sector and previous experience. This is particularly relevant when comparing responses from countries with different policy frameworks and labour market traditions.

Sixth, some answers required conversion or standardisation. Likert-scale responses were converted into numerical values in order to calculate the readiness score. This conversion is useful for creating a maturity model, but it inevitably simplifies complex organisational realities. For this reason, the score should be interpreted together with the qualitative findings, not in isolation.

Seventh, different question types produce different levels of precision. Closed questions provide clear comparable data, while open-ended answers provide richer but less standardised information. Both types of evidence were therefore used in combination.

Eighth, more time would be needed for a more complete and validated analysis. The timing of the survey administration, including the period close to the summer break, may have limited participation and reduced the time available for broader follow-up and validation activities. The final dataset should therefore be interpreted as an exploratory organisational readiness sample rather than as a statistically representative European employer survey.

Finally, the survey findings were strengthened through triangulation with external European reports and studies. This does not remove the limitations of the primary dataset, but it helps to place the results within a broader evidence base and to verify whether the trends observed in the INKEY survey are consistent with wider European research.

Overall, the methodology reflects the practical and exploratory nature of WP3. The aim is not to produce a purely statistical study, but to generate an evidence-based understanding of organisational readiness and to transform this understanding into practical outputs: the INKEY Toolkit and the future Quality Label.

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3. Profile of Responding Organisations

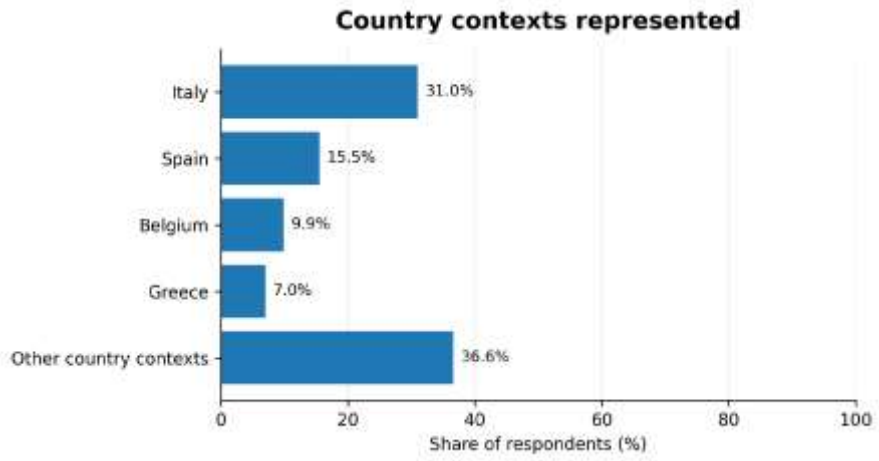
3.1 Overview of the organisational sample

The responding organisations represent a diverse range of employer and hosting contexts. The sample includes private companies, NGOs and non-profit organisations, public institutions, social enterprises, cooperatives, start-ups and other organisations involved in training, employability, inclusion, research, education, services and community-based activities.

This diversity is particularly relevant for the INKEY project. Inclusive internships can take place in very different organisational environments, each with its own opportunities and constraints. A small local NGO, a university, a social enterprise, a public institution and a private company may all host young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, but they may require different forms of support, guidance and practical tools. The profile of responding organisations therefore reflects the broad ecosystem involved in inclusive work-based learning pathways rather than one single employer category or economic sector.

3.2 Geographical coverage

The survey reached organisations based in about 20 country contexts. Most respondents are located in European Union Member States, while a limited number of responses were also received from neighbouring or international contexts. Italy represents the largest share of the sample, followed by Spain, Belgium and Greece. The remaining responses are distributed across a wide range of countries worldwide, including Denmark, Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Austria, Lithuania, Finland, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Hungary, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan and Perù.



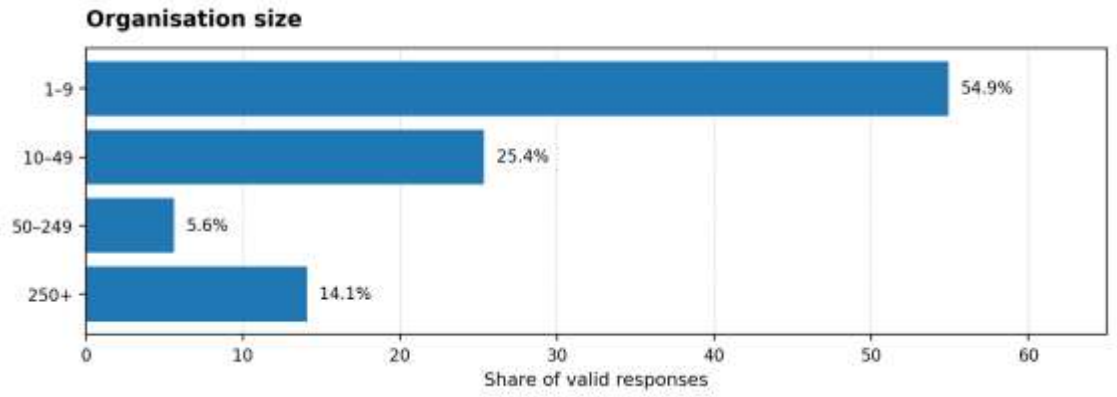
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The geographical profile provides a broad cross-country perspective and allows the report to identify recurring organisational trends in relation to inclusive internships, accessibility, mentoring and D&I practices. However, the distribution across countries is uneven. For this reason, the results are interpreted at aggregate level and are not intended to provide statistically representative comparisons between individual countries.

3.3 Organisation size

The sample is strongly characterised by micro and small organisations.

More than half of the respondents represent organisations with fewer than ten employees, while approximately one quarter employ between ten and forty-nine people. Overall, more than four out of five responding organisations employ fewer than fifty people.



This profile is important for interpreting the results of the survey. Small organisations may often be able to provide more flexible and personalised support to interns, due to closer relationships between managers, staff and trainees. At the same time, they may have fewer dedicated human resources, less formalised D&I procedures, limited specialist knowledge on accessibility and reasonable accommodation, and fewer financial resources for adaptations. This profile should also be interpreted in light of the broader productive structure of the countries most represented in the survey, particularly Italy and Spain, where micro and small enterprises represent the dominant component of the business ecosystem. This reflects a wider European trend: according to Eurostat Structural Business Statistics, micro and small enterprises employing fewer than 50 people accounted for around 99% of all enterprises in the EU business economy in 2022. Therefore, the strong presence of small organisations in the survey is consistent with the broader economic landscape of the countries involved, where smaller organisational structures represent the prevailing business model.

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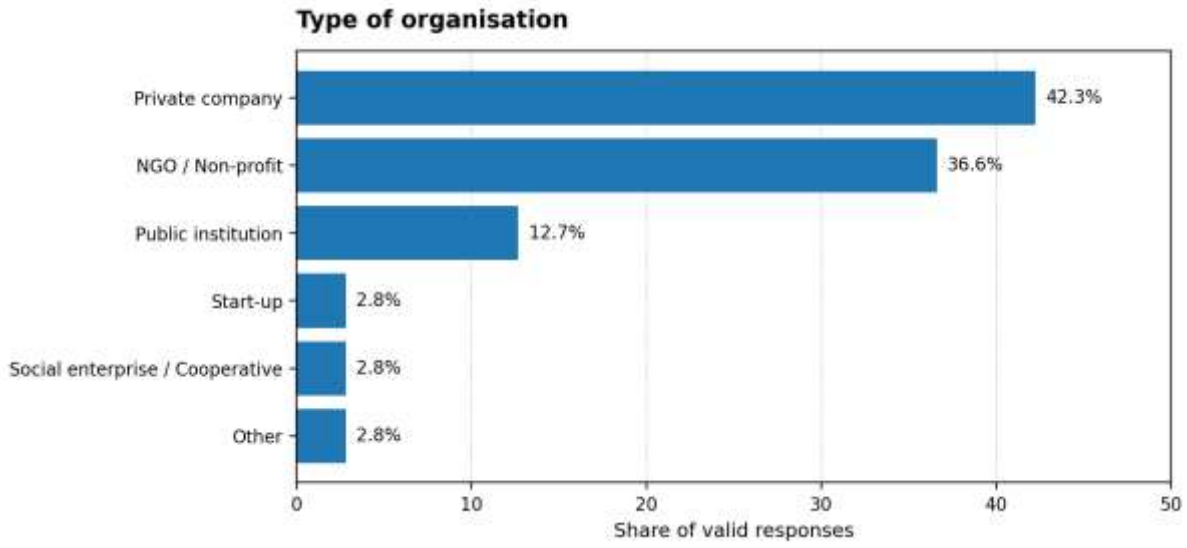
The strong presence of micro and small organisations therefore reinforces the relevance of practical, light-touch and scalable tools within the INKEY Toolkit.

3.4 Type of organisation

Private companies represent the largest organisational group within the sample, followed closely by NGOs and non-profit organisations. Public institutions also account for a relevant share of respondents, while start-ups, social enterprises, cooperatives and other organisational forms are represented to a smaller extent.

This composition highlights that inclusive internship readiness is not only a private-sector issue. Public bodies, NGOs, social enterprises, universities and community-based organisations are also important hosts and intermediaries in the transition from education and training to employment.

The substantial presence of NGOs and non-profit organisations may also indicate a relatively high level of prior awareness of social inclusion issues. At the same time, the survey findings show that awareness does not automatically result in formal policies, structured mentoring arrangements or systematic monitoring practices.



3.5 Sectoral profile

The sectoral distribution of respondents is varied. The largest shares are represented by organisations operating in the non-profit and third sector, education and university contexts, and a broad group of specialised sectors selected under the “Other” category.

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The “Other specialised sectors” category includes organisations active in areas such as training and consultancy, policy research, sustainable agriculture, healthcare, business incubation, banking, tourism and travel, digital marketing, architecture, design, coaching and research.

This broad sectoral profile confirms that inclusive internships cannot be addressed through a single sector-specific model. The INKEY Toolkit should therefore provide adaptable tools that can be used across different organisational environments, while also allowing for sector-specific adjustments where necessary.

Profile element	**Share**
Micro organisation (1–9 employees)	54.9%
Small organisation (10–49 employees)	25.4%
Medium organisation (50–249 employees)	5.6%
Large organisation (250+ employees)	14.1%
Private company	42.3%
NGO / non-profit	36.6%
Public institution	12.7%
Other organisation types	8.5%

3.6 Previous experience with inclusive internships

Around half of the responding organisations reported previous experience in hosting interns with fewer opportunities. A further share had not yet hosted such interns, while some respondents indicated that the question was not applicable to their current organisational context.

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This profile is useful for the interpretation of the survey findings. The sample includes both organisations that have already encountered the practical realities of inclusive internships and organisations that may be interested but have limited direct experience.

The report therefore considers readiness not as a simple distinction between “experienced” and “inexperienced” organisations. Instead, it examines the different conditions that can help organisations move from initial willingness to more structured and sustainable inclusive internship practices.

The intention to host an international internship for people facing fewer opportunities can emerge from different organisational motivations, ranging from ethical considerations and social responsibility objectives to reputational benefits, innovation goals or the expectation of positive effects on team dynamics and organisational performance. These motivations are not equivalent, as they may influence the level of commitment, resources invested and organisational preparedness required to move from intention to implementation.

Research on diversity and inclusion suggests that organisations increasingly recognise the potential value of diversity beyond compliance or moral responsibility. Diversity can contribute to innovation, problem-solving capacity and organisational performance when it is effectively managed and supported by inclusive practices. For example, McKinsey & Company (2023) found that companies with higher levels of gender and ethnic diversity in executive teams were more likely to achieve above-average profitability, with the most diverse companies showing a 39% higher likelihood of outperforming their less diverse counterparts in terms of financial performance. Similarly, Deloitte (2020) highlighted that inclusive cultures are associated with higher levels of employee engagement, innovation and organisational adaptability.

However, the motivation behind diversity initiatives remains a crucial factor in determining their long-term impact. Research on diversity perspectives has shown that organisations may approach diversity either through a “discrimination-and-fairness” perspective, mainly focused on ethical principles and equal opportunities, or through an “integration-and-learning” perspective, where diversity is also understood as a source of organisational learning and value creation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). While ethical motivations are fundamental drivers of inclusion, they may not always be sufficient to generate sustainable practices if they are not accompanied by organisational awareness, dedicated resources and the development of inclusive capabilities.

This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of international internships for people facing fewer opportunities. Organisations may genuinely wish to provide an inclusive opportunity, support social mobility or contribute to equal access to international experiences; however, without a clear understanding of the practical implications of this commitment, they may underestimate the requirements associated with hosting an intern, including mentoring, accessibility measures, preparation of colleagues, adaptation of communication practices and continuous support.

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The gap between “wanting to host” and “being ready to host” may therefore emerge precisely when positive intentions are not matched by adequate organisational structures and competences. Previous research on diversity management has shown that symbolic commitments, without corresponding changes in organisational practices, may lead to limited or unsustainable outcomes (Kulik, 2014).

Further research could explore this dimension more systematically by investigating how different motivations for engaging in diversity and inclusion initiatives influence organisations’ readiness, investment decisions and long-term commitment. Understanding whether inclusion is primarily driven by ethical values, strategic benefits, organisational learning or external expectations could provide valuable insights into how companies can be supported in developing more sustainable and impactful inclusive internship practices.

3.7 Implications for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label

The profile of respondents confirms the need for a flexible and progressive approach.

The high proportion of micro and small organisations means that the INKEY Toolkit should avoid overly complex procedures or resource-intensive requirements. It should instead provide practical instruments that can be easily adapted to smaller organisational settings, such as concise checklists, mentor guides, onboarding templates, accessibility prompts, simple monitoring tools and examples of reasonable accommodation.

At the same time, the presence of larger organisations, public institutions and education-related bodies suggests that the Toolkit and Quality Label should also include more advanced elements for organisations that already have formal D&I policies, internal structures and wider resources.

The Quality Label should therefore recognise different stages of progress rather than applying a single threshold. Organisations should be encouraged to start from their current level of readiness and improve gradually through practical actions, reflection, monitoring and collaboration with external support services.

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4. Diversity & Inclusion Policies and Governance

Diversity & Inclusion governance refers to the way organisations translate their commitment to inclusion into policies, responsibilities, procedures, staff support and monitoring mechanisms.

The survey results show a clear pattern. Many responding organisations report positive management attitudes towards D&I and provide forms of wellbeing or flexibility to employees. However, these positive cultural elements are not always supported by formal policies, designated responsibilities, regular reporting systems or structured monitoring processes.

This suggests that D&I is often recognised as an important value, but is not yet consistently embedded in organisational governance.

4.1 Formal D&I policies and internal guidance

Responding organisations show mixed levels of formalisation in relation to Diversity & Inclusion policies.

D&I policy status	**Share of respondents**
Yes, public and internal D&I policy	29.6%
Yes, informal D&I guidelines	29.6%
No D&I policy or guidelines	33.8%
Don't know	7.0%

Overall, 59.2% of organisations reported having either a formal D&I policy or informal internal guidance. However, 40.8% either reported having no policy or were not aware of whether such a policy existed.

This result highlights an important distinction between formal commitment and informal practice. Some organisations may already promote inclusive values through everyday management, flexible working arrangements or staff support. However, without a shared policy, clear internal guidance or defined responsibilities, inclusion can remain dependent on individual initiative rather than becoming part of the organisation's standard way of working.

This represents a potential vulnerability for the sustainability of inclusion practices. When inclusion relies mainly on the personal commitment, sensitivity or ethical values of individual managers or colleagues, actions may be effective in the short term but remain fragile over time. Changes in staff, competing priorities or the absence of specific knowledge may interrupt or weaken inclusive efforts, causing initiatives to depend on individual goodwill rather than on organisational capacity.

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This aspect is particularly relevant when hosting international interns facing fewer opportunities. Successful inclusion requires more than a positive attitude: it requires shared practices that facilitate interaction, mutual understanding and meaningful participation. Without clear guidance, organisations may unintentionally place the responsibility for inclusion entirely on the individuals directly involved, rather than creating an environment where colleagues are supported in understanding different needs, overcoming barriers and building effective relationships with the intern.

Therefore, the transition from informal commitment to structured inclusion represents a key step in ensuring that inclusive internships are not isolated experiences but become part of a sustainable organisational approach. Developing simple procedures, assigning responsibilities and providing practical guidance can help transform individual willingness into collective organisational practice.

For micro and small organisations, a formal policy does not need to be long or complex. A short D&I commitment statement, a basic non-discrimination principle, a named contact person and a simple procedure for discussing support needs may already provide a useful starting point.

4.2 Management commitment to D&I

Management commitment is one of the strongest findings emerging from the survey.

Level of management or board support	**Share of respondents**
Fully supportive – level 5	53.5%
Strongly supportive – level 4	29.6%
Moderate support – level 3	11.3%
Low support – level 1	5.6%

Overall, 83.1% of respondents reported strong or full support from top management or the board for D&I initiatives. This is a positive foundation for the development of inclusive internships. **Leadership support can make it easier to introduce flexible arrangements, approve adaptations, encourage mentoring and promote a more inclusive workplace culture**.

However, the survey also shows that leadership support does not automatically lead to systematic implementation. **Organisations may express strong commitment to D&I while still lacking a formal policy**, internal responsibility, monitoring process or clear procedure for inclusive internship hosting. The key challenge is therefore to transform leadership support into practical organisational arrangements.

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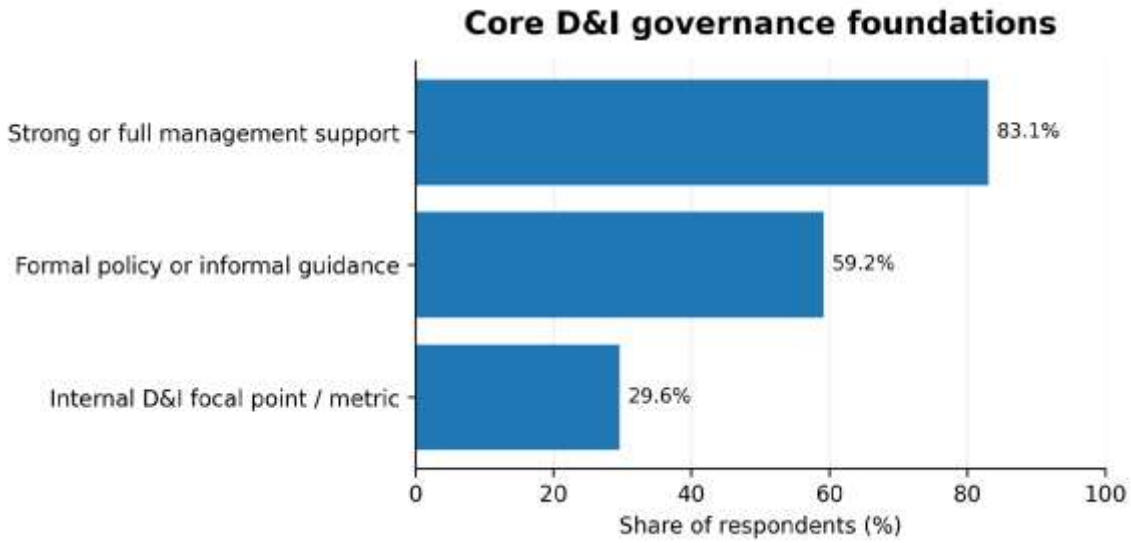
4.3 D&I accountability and internal Responsability

While **management commitment is high, operational accountability is significantly weaker**.

D&I accountability measure	Share of respondents
Yes, there is a person or metric linked to D&I success	29.6%
No designated person, focal point or metric	70.4%

Only 29.6% of responding organisations reported having a person, internal focal point or metric linked to D&I success. In contrast, 70.4% reported no such formal accountability mechanism.

The analysis of organisational culture, wellbeing, safe reporting and D&I data and monitoring is presented in Chapter 6, where these areas are considered together with previous experience and readiness to host inclusive interns.



The pattern observed in the INKEY survey—strong leadership support but limited formal accountability—closely reflects the European Commission's conclusion that **the benefits of D&I depend on implementation systems as well as commitment**. The DEI4SME evidence similarly points to a frequent SME gap between positive intentions and the presence of dedicated roles, formal policies, staff training and monitoring practices (European Commission, 2025; DEI4SME Project, 2025).

4.5 Key implications for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label

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The findings show that many organisations have a positive cultural basis for inclusion, particularly in terms of management commitment, flexible work arrangements and informal staff support.

The main gap is the translation of this positive culture into structured governance and continuous improvement practices.

The INKEY Toolkit should therefore provide:

- a short D&I commitment statement or policy template;
- guidance for appointing an internal inclusion contact person or focal point;
- a simple D&I responsibility map for small organisations;
- a basic annual inclusion review template;
- a small set of practical D&I and internship inclusion indicators;
- an intern feedback form and mentor reflection checklist;
- a feedback from work colleagues in order to have a broader consideration;
- guidance on safe reporting channels and respectful handling of concerns;
- examples of how wellbeing, flexibility and accessibility can be integrated into inclusive internship hosting.

The future Quality Label should recognise both organisational commitment and practical implementation. Leadership support should be considered an important starting point, but higher levels of recognition should require evidence of internal responsibility, accessible procedures, mentoring arrangements, feedback mechanisms and continuous improvement.

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5. Inclusive Recruitment, Accessibility and Skills Development

Inclusive internships begin before the intern enters the workplace. Recruitment channels, selection procedures, onboarding arrangements, accessibility conditions and staff preparedness all influence whether young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities can access, participate in and benefit from an internship experience.

The survey findings show that **many organisations are willing to make adjustments when a specific need arises**. However, proactive and standardised inclusive practices are less common. Recruitment and onboarding are often adapted on a case-by-case basis, while digital accessibility and staff training remain unevenly developed.

This chapter examines the practical conditions that shape access to inclusive internships, from the first communication of an opportunity to the preparation of staff, tutors and supervisors.

5.1 Inclusive Recruitment and Outreach

Inclusive recruitment is an essential first step in ensuring that internship opportunities are accessible to young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities. It requires organisations to consider not only what happens during an interview or selection process, but also whether opportunities are visible, understandable and accessible to a diverse range of potential candidates.

The survey shows that fewer than half of responding organisations have adapted recruitment procedures in place.

Adapted recruitment procedures	**Share of respondents**
Yes	46.5%
No	36.6%
Don’t know	15.5%
Unclear response	1.4%

While 46.5% of organisations confirmed that they use adapted recruitment procedures, more than one third reported having no such procedures. A further 15.5% were unable to confirm whether adapted procedures existed within their organisation.

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This suggests that inclusive recruitment remains underdeveloped in a substantial part of the sample. In some cases, organisations may be willing to make adjustments when a candidate requests them, but have not yet considered whether their standard recruitment process creates barriers for young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities.

Adapted recruitment procedures may include clear and accessible vacancy descriptions, flexible application formats, accessible online forms, reasonable adjustments during interviews, additional response time, simplified language, alternative communication methods and the possibility for candidates to request support without stigma.

The survey also explored whether organisations use specific outreach channels to reach candidates with fewer opportunities.

Specific outreach channels for candidates with fewer opportunities	**Share of respondents**
Yes	38.0%
No	46.5%
Don’t know	15.5%

Only 38.0% of respondents reported using specific channels to reach candidates with fewer opportunities. The open-text responses indicate that some organisations cooperate with universities, employment services, NGOs, disability organisations, traineeship platforms, local networks and other intermediary bodies.

However, almost half of responding organisations do not use targeted outreach channels. This may reduce access to internship opportunities for young people who have fewer professional networks, face social or geographical barriers, need accessible information or are not reached through traditional recruitment channels.

The findings suggest that **inclusive recruitment should not depend only on individual disclosure by candidates. Organisations should proactively consider whether their internship opportunities are communicated through accessible language**, diverse outreach **channels and procedures** that allow candidates to request support safely and confidently.

Implementing inclusive recruitment processes can therefore generate value beyond the specific objective of attracting candidates from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. Practices designed to reduce barriers — such as clearer job descriptions, accessible communication, transparent selection

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criteria and structured procedures — can improve recruitment quality and effectiveness for all candidates.

This reflects the principle of the “curb-cut effect”, whereby solutions initially developed to address the needs of specific groups often create broader benefits for the wider population. In the same way, inclusive recruitment practices can strengthen organisational processes by making them clearer, fairer and more focused on recognising skills and potential, rather than being limited to supporting only candidates with specific needs.

From this perspective, diversity and inclusion should not be considered only as targeted interventions, but also as an opportunity for organisational learning and improvement, generating value across the entire recruitment system.

5.2 Selection Procedures and Inclusive Onboarding

The survey examined whether organisations modify selection procedures when candidates request support or adjustments.

Adjustment of selection procedures on request	**Share of respondents**
Always	19.7%
Often	25.4%
Rarely	23.9%
Never	2.8%
Not applicable	28.2%

Overall**, 45.1% of organisations reported that they always or often adapt selection procedures when requested. This provides a positive basis for inclusive internship hosting, but it also shows that consistent adaptation is not yet common across the full sample**.

Almost one quarter of respondents reported making adjustments only rarely. In addition, 28.2% selected “Not applicable”. This may indicate that **some organisations have not yet received requests for adjustments, do not manage formal selection procedures, or have limited experience in recruiting young people with diverse support needs**.

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Possible adaptations during selection may include accessible interview locations, online or hybrid interview options, additional time, alternative assessment formats, written rather than oral tasks, adapted communication, flexible scheduling and the involvement of an intermediary organisation where appropriate.

Inclusive selection should be understood as a process of removing unnecessary barriers rather than lowering expectations. The objective is to enable candidates to demonstrate their skills, motivation and potential through procedures that are fair, accessible and appropriate to their circumstances.

Inclusive onboarding practices are present in just over half of responding organisations.

Inclusive onboarding measures	**Share of respondents**
Yes	50.7%
No	49.3%

The open-text responses indicate that existing onboarding practices may include assigning a tutor, mentor or buddy; organising regular check-ins; adapting tasks, pace of work or supervision; providing additional orientation and practical support; adjusting working hours or communication methods; and involving specialised internal professionals or external support figures where available.

These examples show that **organisations often understand inclusive onboarding as a personalised process rather than as a standardised procedure**. This can be a strength, particularly in smaller organisations where flexibility and close working relationships may be easier to establish.

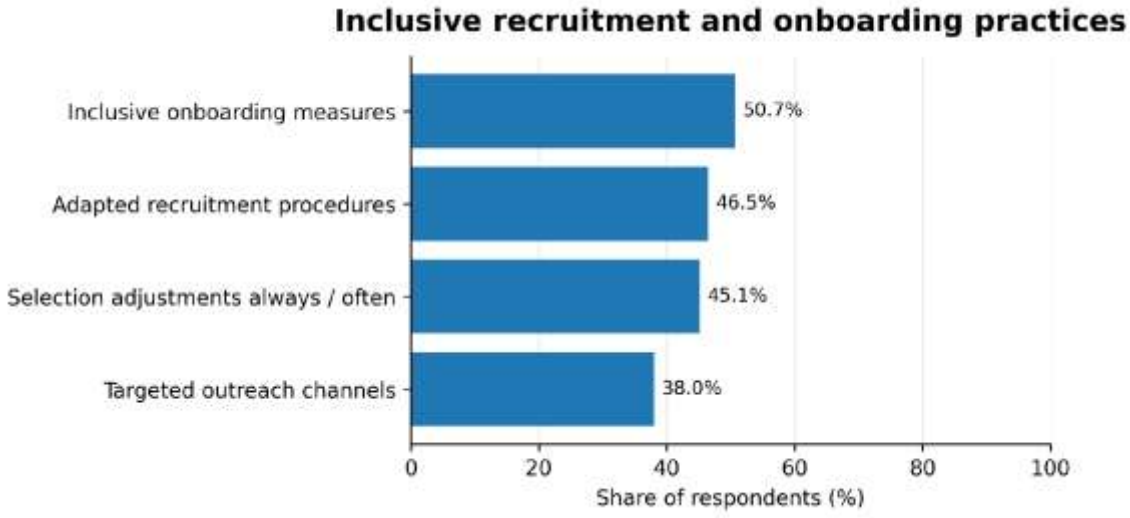
However, the absence of specific inclusion measures in almost half of the sample suggests that support often depends on individual goodwill rather than on a shared organisational approach. **A more structured onboarding process can reduce uncertainty for both interns and supervisors** and help identify potential barriers before they become critical.

A basic inclusive onboarding process should include advance communication on working hours, location, tasks and key contacts; discussion of possible support needs; appointment of a tutor or supervisor; clarification of learning objectives; regular check-ins during the first weeks; and information on available internal and external support services.

These practices, while particularly important for interns facing fewer opportunities, can also improve the onboarding experience more generally by providing clarity, structure and support to all new team members. By reducing uncertainty and facilitating early integration, inclusive onboarding approaches

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can contribute to smoother transitions and stronger engagement, regardless of whether specific support needs are identified.



The INKEY findings reinforce European evidence that inclusion has to be built into access pathways, not only added later. Waddington (2023) identifies employer action on recruitment, positive measures, reasonable accommodation and partnership support as relevant to facilitating employment of persons with disabilities. The high reliance on case-by-case adaptations in the INKEY sample therefore points to a need for clear, proactive procedures.

5.3 Physical Accessibility

Physical accessibility was assessed through a self-evaluation of organisational premises, including elements such as ramps, lifts, accessible toilets and access to workspaces.

Level of physical accessibility	**%**
1 – Not at all accessible	19.7%
2	14.1%
3	19.7%
4	18.3%
5 – Fully accessible	28.2%

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When grouped into broader accessibility levels, 33.8% of organisations rated their physical premises at low levels of accessibility, 19.7% at an intermediate level and 46.5% at high levels.

This indicates that physical accessibility remains uneven across the sample. Some organisations appear to have accessible premises or have already invested in basic infrastructure. Others may still face limitations linked to building design, rented offices, shared workspaces, location constraints or limited financial capacity for adaptations. Physical accessibility should not be treated as a binary condition. Even where premises are generally accessible, organisations may still need to review entrances, meeting rooms, toilets, workstations, signage, common areas and emergency procedures.

For inclusive internship hosting, accessibility should be considered before the placement begins rather than only after a specific need is identified.

5.4 Digital and Sensory Accessibility

Digital accessibility emerged as one of the least clearly developed areas within the survey.

Accessibility of digital tools, websites or portals	**Share of respondents**
Yes	31.0%
Partially	1.4%
No	21.1%
Don't know	46.5%

Only 31.0% of respondents confirmed that their digital tools, websites or portals are accessible to people using assistive technologies. By contrast, 21.1% reported that their digital tools are not accessible, while almost half of respondents were unable to confirm whether accessibility requirements were met.

The high proportion of "Don't know" responses is particularly significant. It suggests that many organisations may not have assessed whether their websites, online application forms, digital platforms, internal portals, shared documents or communication tools are compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers, keyboard navigation, captioning tools or text-to-speech software**. Digital accessibility is increasingly relevant for internships**, especially where recruitment, onboarding, training, task management and internal communication take place partly or fully online. **An accessible physical workplace is not sufficient if an intern cannot independently use the organisation's website,**

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application forms, shared documents, learning materials or communication platforms. The survey also examined the provision of accommodations for sensory disabilities, including screen readers, captions and amplification tools.

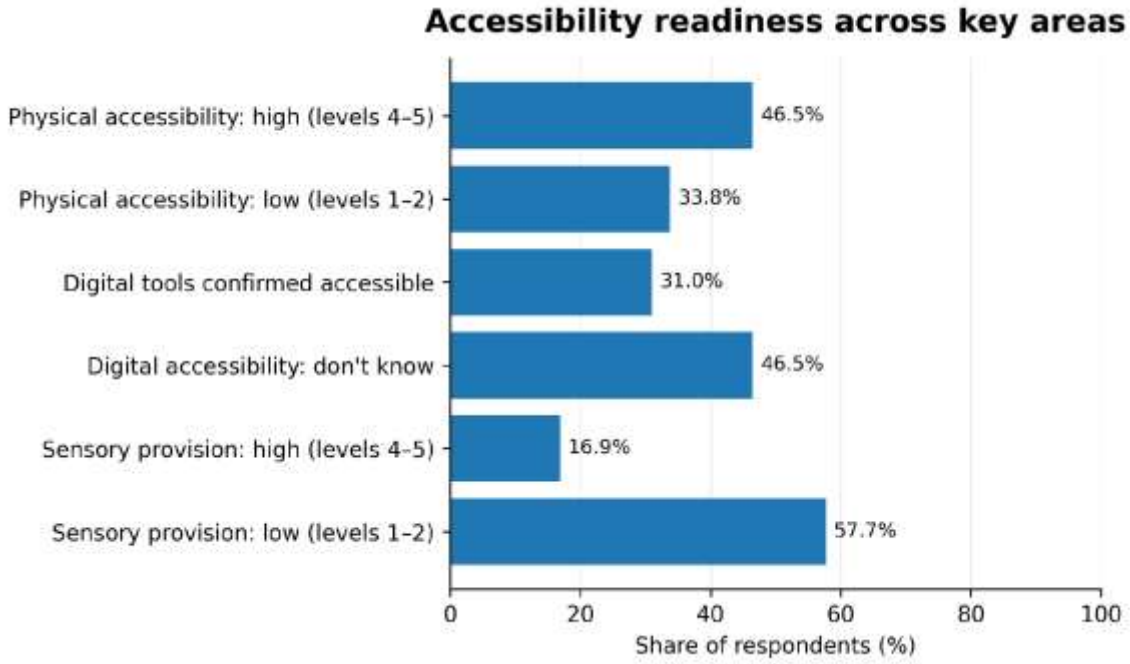
Level of sensory accessibility provision	Share of respondents
1 – Not at all provided	40.8%
2	16.9%
3	25.4%
4	9.9%
5 – Fully provided	7.0%

Overall, 57.7% of organisations rated their provision of sensory accessibility measures at the two lowest levels. Only 16.9% rated their provision at levels 4 or 5.

This suggests that sensory accessibility is one of the least developed areas of inclusive internship readiness. Organisations may be more familiar with physical adaptations than with measures related to communication, audio and visual information, concentration needs, lighting, noise, captions, assistive technologies or accessible digital formats.

The findings highlight the need for practical guidance on digital and sensory accessibility. This should include basic checks for accessible documents, readable formats, captions, alternative text, accessible online forms, inclusive communication and compatibility with assistive technologies.

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INKEY's uncertainty around digital accessibility and its low levels of sensory provision are consistent with wider European guidance on reasonable accommodation, which emphasises an individualised, barrier-removal approach and practical support for employers. **Accessibility planning should include not only premises but also communication, digital systems, task design and work organisation (Waddington, 2023).**

5.5 Training and Skills Development

Staff preparedness is a key condition for inclusive internships. Managers, tutors, supervisors and colleagues may be willing to support young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, but they may not always feel confident in responding to accessibility needs, adapting tasks, communicating inclusively or managing situations that require additional support.

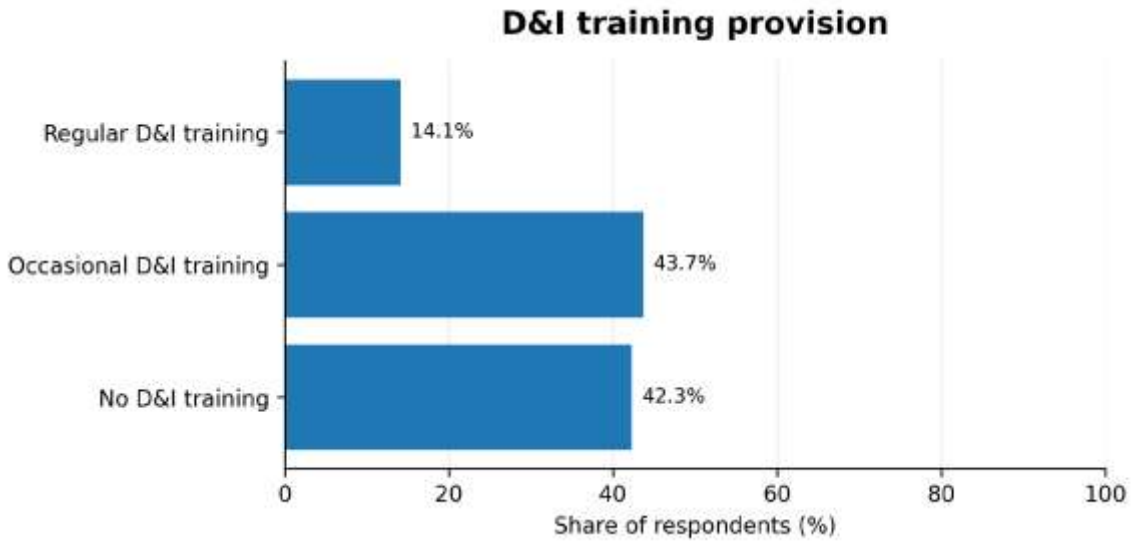
The survey shows that regular D&I training is limited.

D&I training provision	**Share of respondents**
Yes, regularly	14.1%
Occasionally	43.7%

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D&I training provision	Share of respondents
No	42.3%

Only 14.1% of responding organisations reported providing D&I training on a regular basis. A further 43.7% provide training occasionally, for example through workshops, seminars or isolated awareness-raising activities. More than two fifths of organisations do not provide D&I training at all.



This result is particularly relevant when considered alongside the barriers identified elsewhere in the survey. Organisations reported concerns related to supervision time, task adaptation, communication, lack of experience, uncertainty about accessibility and the absence of internal procedures. These are not only organisational issues, they are also competence-related issues.

Training for inclusive internships should therefore move beyond general awareness-raising. It should provide practical, role-specific guidance for people directly involved in hosting and supporting interns.

Priority learning topics include:

- inclusive communication and respectful discussion of support needs;
- disability awareness and the social model of disability;
- reasonable accommodation and task adaptation;
- accessible recruitment, selection and onboarding;

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- digital and sensory accessibility;
- tutor and supervisor responsibilities;
- feedback and regular check-in methods;
- responding to wellbeing concerns, discrimination or team integration difficulties;
- cooperation with universities, training providers and specialised support services.

The demand for practical capacity-building is also confirmed by the high level of interest in a free online seminar on inclusive internships and D&I practices, organized under the InKey Project. Overall, 67.6% of respondents reported that they would be interested in attending such an activity.

Training should therefore be concise, applied and accessible to organisations with limited internal resources. Short online modules, tutor guides, case studies, checklists and peer-learning opportunities may be more useful for many organisations than long and highly theoretical training programmes.

The need for practical staff preparation also echoes the European Company Survey 2019. Eurofound and Cedefop report that workplace practices combining training and learning, employee autonomy and worker voice are associated with outcomes that benefit both employees and employers. For INKEY, this supports concise, role-specific training for tutors, supervisors and colleagues rather than awareness activities alone (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2020).

5.6 Key Implications for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label

The findings show that inclusive recruitment, accessibility and staff preparedness need to be addressed as interconnected elements of inclusive internship readiness.

The INKEY Toolkit should therefore include:

- an inclusive recruitment and outreach checklist;
- accessible internship vacancy templates;
- guidance on reasonable adjustments during selection;
- an inclusive onboarding checklist;
- a pre-placement discussion guide for interns and host organisations;
- a physical, digital and sensory accessibility self-assessment tool;
- practical guidance on accessible documents, online forms and communication;
- a tutor and supervisor preparation pack;
- short training modules on D&I, inclusive communication, task adaptation and reasonable accommodation;
- examples of collaboration with universities, NGOs, employment services and specialised support organisations.

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The future Quality Label should recognise organisations that move from reactive responses to proactive preparation. Higher levels of recognition should require evidence that recruitment, selection, onboarding, accessibility and staff preparation are addressed through clear and repeatable practices.

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6. Organisational Capacity, Experience and Readiness to Host Inclusive Interns

This chapter examines the organisational conditions that influence the capacity of companies and host organisations to offer inclusive internship opportunities. It brings together evidence, also from chapter 4, on organisational culture, wellbeing-related practices, mentoring, D&I data and monitoring, previous experience with interns with fewer opportunities, practical barriers, adjustments, financial support and willingness to host future INKEY interns.

The findings show that many organisations already provide forms of flexibility, support and informal care that can contribute to a positive environment for inclusive internships. However, these practices are often not supported by systematic monitoring, structured mentoring arrangements, clear procedures or regular data collection.

The overall picture is therefore one of significant potential. Organisations are generally open to inclusion and many already provide practical support measures. At the same time, their capacity to host inclusive interns remains dependent on the availability of time, mentoring, accessibility arrangements, financial resources and external support.

6.1 Organisational Culture, Wellbeing and Retention-Related Practices

The survey explored the wellbeing-related practices made available to employees and, potentially, to interns. These practices are relevant because inclusive internships depend not only on formal policies or physical accessibility, but also on whether the workplace provides flexibility, support, trust and opportunities for participation.

The survey did not measure retention rates directly. Instead, it explored retention-related conditions, such as flexible work arrangements, mentoring, work-life balance, wellbeing support and team-based activities.

As respondents could select more than one option, the percentages presented in this section do not add up to 100%.

Wellbeing or organisational support measure	Share of respondents
Flexible working hours	78.9%
Remote or hybrid work options	71.8%
Team-building or social activities	66.2%
Work-life balance initiatives	42.3%

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Wellbeing or organisational support measure	Share of respondents
Language support or training	36.6%
Mentoring or coaching programmes	35.2%
Health insurance or medical support	28.2%
Diversity & Inclusion initiatives or awareness activities	28.2%
Mental health support	23.9%
Financial wellbeing support	21.1%
Accessibility accommodations for employees with disabilities	14.1%
Additional paid leave beyond legal requirements	12.7%
None of the above	5.6%

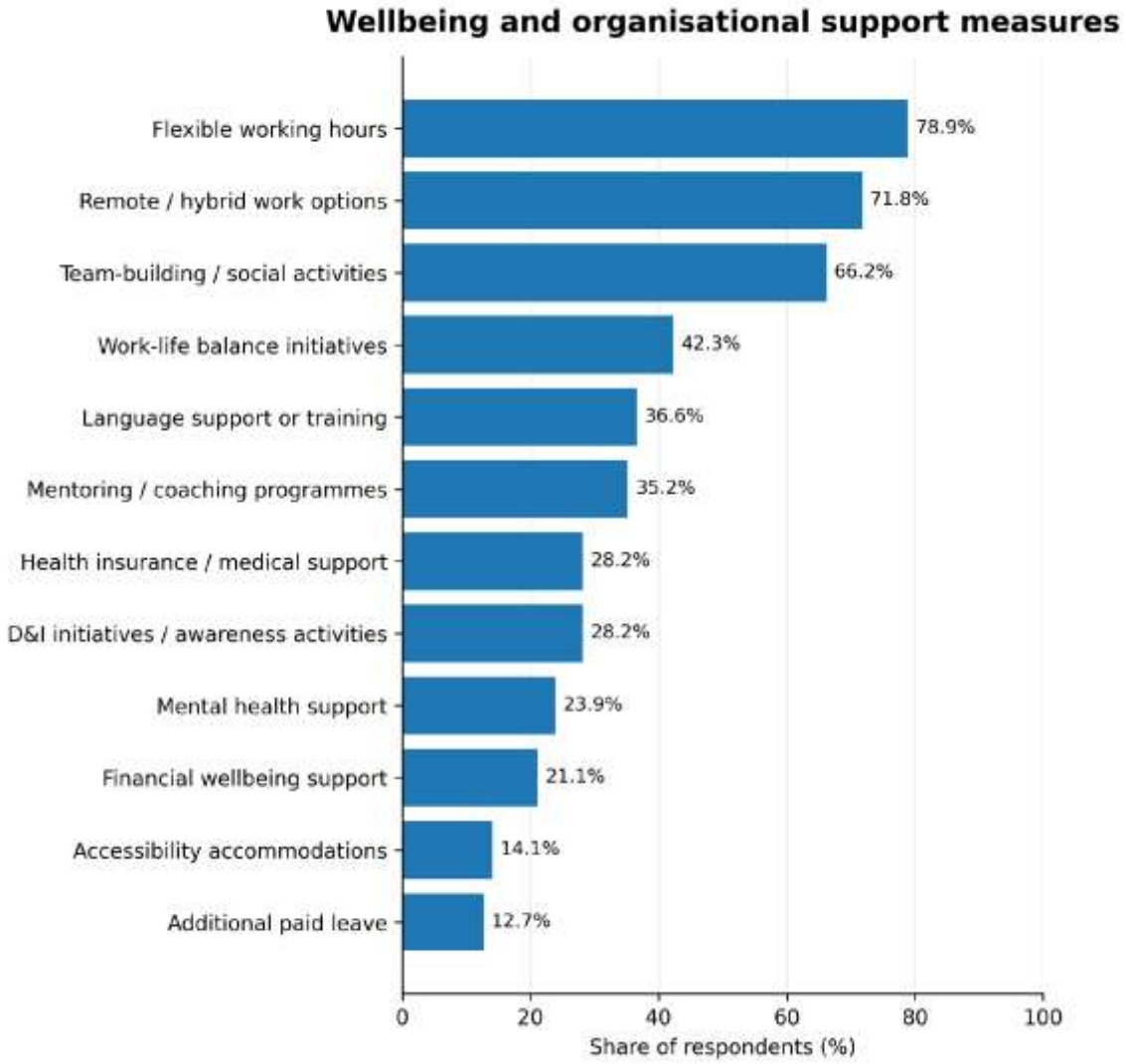
Flexible working hours, remote or hybrid work and team-building activities are the most widespread measures reported by organisations. These practices can be particularly relevant for young people who face health-related needs, mobility barriers, long commuting distances, caring responsibilities, study commitments or other circumstances that require a more flexible approach to work organisation.

The relatively high use of flexible arrangements suggests that many organisations may already have a practical basis for supporting inclusive internships. Flexibility in schedules, attendance and work location can help reduce barriers without necessarily requiring major financial investment.

At the same time, some measures that may be particularly relevant for young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities remain less widespread. These include mental health support, accessibility accommodations for employees with disabilities and financial wellbeing support.

The results show that organisational culture can create favourable conditions for inclusion, but wellbeing measures should not be treated as a substitute for accessibility, reasonable accommodation or structured inclusion procedures. A positive workplace culture is most effective when it is combined with clear responsibilities, practical support and opportunities for interns to raise concerns safely.

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The prevalence of flexible work, remote or hybrid options and team-based activities provides a useful foundation for inclusion. Eurofound and Cedefop (2020) similarly show that workplace practices promoting autonomy, employee involvement and learning can benefit both employee wellbeing and organisational performance. The INKEY evidence suggests that these practices should be linked to clear support arrangements for interns.

6.2 Mentoring, Workplace Support and Safe Reporting Channels

Mentoring and workplace support are among the most important practical conditions for successful inclusive internships. Tutors, buddies, supervisors and colleagues can help interns understand their role,

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adapt to the workplace, receive feedback and address difficulties before they become more serious barriers.

The survey shows that mentoring and support are widely present, but are mainly informal.

Mentoring or support for interns	**Share of respondents**
Yes, informal support	52.1%
Yes, structured programme	29.6%
No	16.9%
Missing response	1.4%

More than half of respondents reported providing informal support to interns, such as tutors, colleagues, buddies or regular check-ins. A further 29.6% reported having a structured mentoring or support programme.

This is a positive result, as it indicates that **most organisations recognise the importance of workplace support.** However, the distinction between informal and structured mentoring is important. Informal support can be highly valuable and flexible, particularly in smaller organisations. At the same time, it may depend strongly on the motivation, availability and experience of individual staff members.

Structured mentoring arrangements provide clearer roles, greater continuity and more reliable support. This is particularly important when an intern has specific communication, accessibility, learning or wellbeing needs.

The survey also explored the existence of mentorship programmes for employees with specific needs.

Mentorship programmes for employees with specific needs	**Share of respondents**
Yes	11.3%
No	88.7%

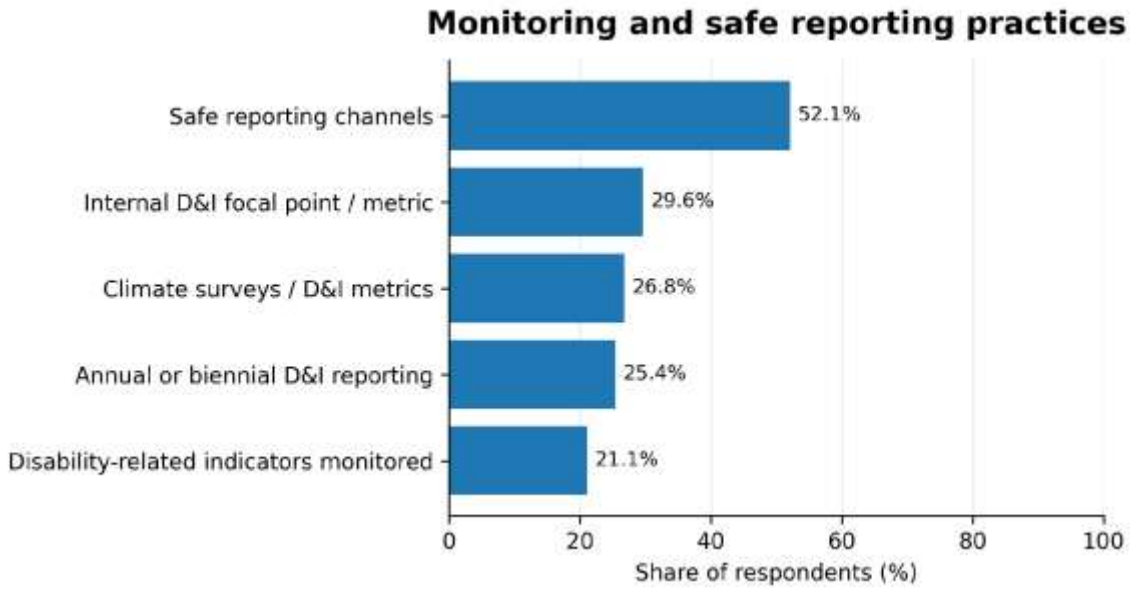
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The low proportion of specific mentorship programmes suggests that most organisations rely on general support arrangements rather than targeted systems designed for people with particular support needs.

Safe reporting channels are another relevant element of organisational culture. They can help interns and employees raise concerns related to discrimination, non-inclusive behaviour, harassment, accessibility barriers or wellbeing issues.

Safe reporting channels	**Share of respondents**
Yes	52.1%
No	46.5%
Other or unclear response	1.4%

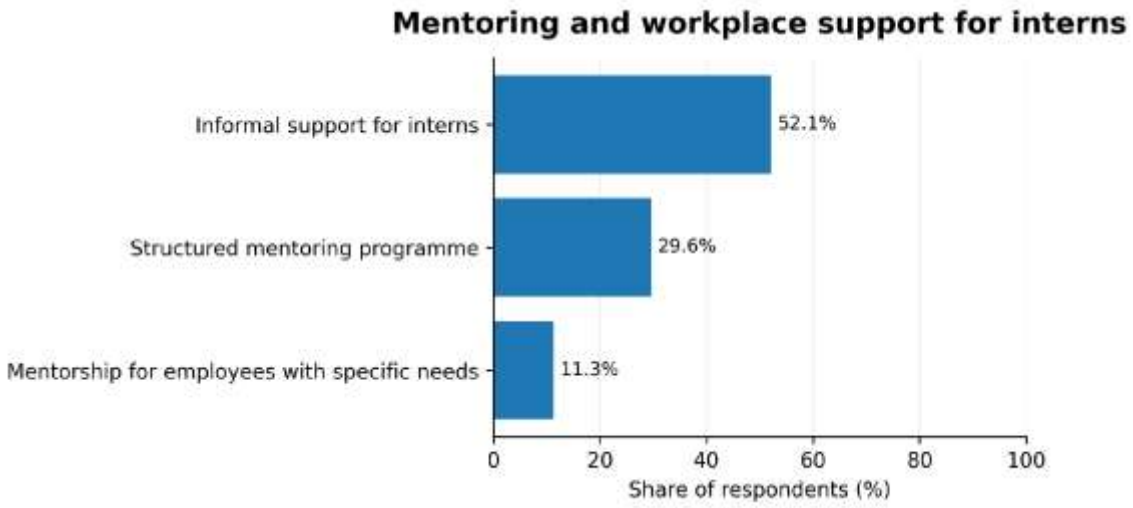
Just over half of respondents confirmed the existence of safe reporting channels. Open-text responses referred to practices such as anonymous reporting forms, whistleblowing procedures, confidential advisors, direct contact with managers, internal wellbeing contacts, anonymous surveys, counselling services and reporting channels linked to national procedures.



However, almost half of the sample reported having no safe reporting channels. This is a relevant gap, particularly for interns who may be new to a workplace, unfamiliar with organisational hierarchies or reluctant to raise concerns.

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For inclusive internships, organisations should ensure that interns know who they can speak to, how concerns can be raised and how confidentiality and non-retaliation will be protected.



6.3 D&I Data, Monitoring and Reporting

The survey explored whether organisations use climate surveys, inclusion perception surveys or D&I metrics, which indicators they monitor and how often they produce D&I-related reports.

The results show that regular monitoring is one of the least developed areas of organisational readiness.

Climate surveys, inclusion surveys or regular D&I metrics	**Share of respondents**
Yes	26.8%
No	56.3%
Don’t know	16.9%

Only 26.8% of responding organisations confirmed that they run climate or inclusion surveys or regularly track D&I metrics. More than half reported that they do not use such tools, while a further 16.9% were unable to confirm whether monitoring practices existed (section 6).

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This does not necessarily mean that organisations do not care about inclusion. Rather, it suggests that many organisations may address D&I issues through informal conversations, individual cases or ad hoc initiatives, without collecting regular evidence that can inform decision-making.

The survey also explored which D&I-related indicators organisations monitor (section 7).

D&I indicator monitored	**Share of respondents**
Gender balance	57.7%
Employees with migrant backgrounds	40.8%
Age diversity	35.2%
Socio-economic background, where available	33.8%
Training participation	32.4%
Staff turnover	23.9%
Employees with disabilities	21.1%
Other	5.6%

Gender balance is the most frequently monitored indicator, followed by migrant background, age diversity and socio-economic background. Disability-related indicators are monitored by only 21.1% of responding organisations.

This result is significant for INKEY. An organisation may have a broad interest in D&I but may not yet collect information that helps it understand whether people with disabilities or fewer opportunities are accessing, completing and benefiting from internships or employment pathways.

The survey also examined the frequency of D&I reporting.

Frequency of D&I reporting	**Share of respondents**
On demand	39.4%
Never	35.2%

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Frequency of D&I reporting	Share of respondents
Annually	23.9%
Biennially	1.5%

Only 25.4% of organisations reported producing D&I-related reports annually or biennially. The majority either report only when required or do not produce D&I reports at all.

The findings suggest that monitoring should be developed in a proportionate and practical way. Small organisations do not need complex reporting systems. However, they do need simple methods for recording adjustments, collecting feedback from interns and mentors, identifying recurring barriers and reviewing whether support measures have been effective.

INKEY's low levels of regular monitoring and reporting are consistent with the DEI4SME findings, which show that smaller organisations may adopt D&I practices without dedicated data, accountability or formal monitoring structures. The European Commission likewise identifies monitoring and implementation structures as essential to making D&I policies effective in practice (DEI4SME Project, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

6.4 Past Experience with Interns with Fewer Opportunities

Previous experience is an important indicator of practical readiness. Organisations that have already hosted interns with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities are more likely to have encountered concrete questions related to accessibility, communication, task adaptation, mentoring, wellbeing and collaboration with external services.

Previous experience hosting interns with fewer opportunities	Share of respondents
Yes	50.7%
No	38.0%
Not applicable	11.3%

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Just over half of responding organisations reported previous experience in hosting interns with fewer opportunities.

The open-text responses indicate that organisations have hosted young people facing a broad range of situations and barriers, including economic disadvantage, migration or refugee background, limited professional networks, geographical distance, mobility limitations, visual disabilities, neurological conditions, psychosocial difficulties, intellectual disabilities, health-related needs, linguistic barriers and limited access to prior work experience.

Several respondents described positive experiences in which interns gradually increased their responsibilities, gained confidence, strengthened their employability or progressed towards more stable employment, volunteering or professional opportunities.

The examples also show that successful experiences often involved regular check-ins, gradual task allocation, flexible working arrangements, close supervision, practical training, mentoring and personalised support.

At the same time, **previous experience does not automatically mean that organisations have fully developed inclusive system**s. Some organisations may have supported interns effectively through individual commitment and informal flexibility, but without formal procedures or structured monitoring.

6.5 Main Challenges Encountered

Respondents were asked to identify the main challenges encountered when hosting interns with fewer opportunities. As multiple answers could be selected, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Main challenge	**Share of respondents**
Need for additional supervision or mentoring time	28.2%
Don’t know	22.5%
No significant challenges experienced	19.7%
Difficulty adapting tasks to individual needs	18.3%
Concerns about productivity or performance	16.9%
Lack of experience or training in D&I	14.1%
Administrative or bureaucratic complexity	11.3%

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Main challenge	Share of respondents
Communication barriers, including language and cultural differences	11.3%
Lack of external support from institutions, universities or services	11.3%
Difficulties in team integration	9.9%
Financial constraints or additional costs	9.9%
Lack of internal guidelines or procedures	8.5%
Accessibility issues, physical or digital	2.8%
Prejudice or negative attitudes from customers	1.4%

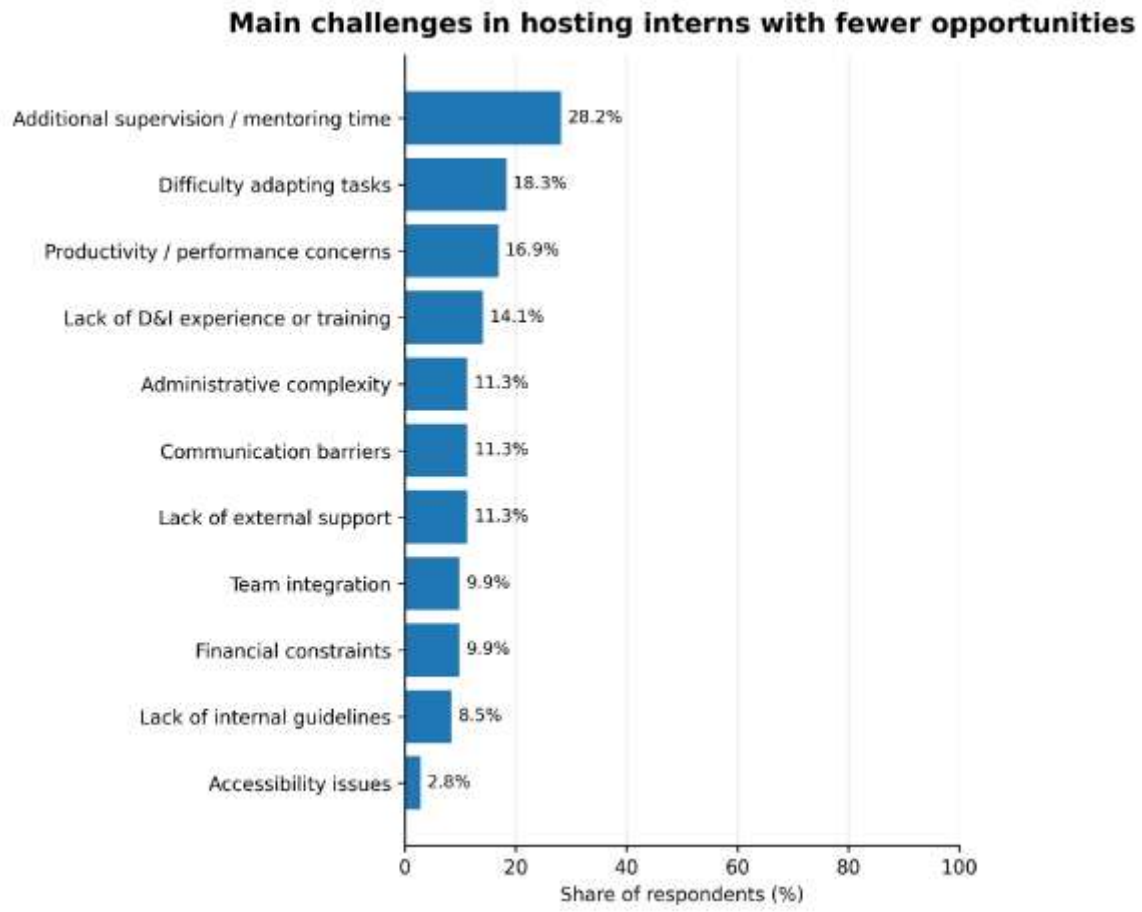
The need for additional supervision or mentoring time is the most frequently identified challenge. This confirms that organisations often perceive inclusive internships as requiring more time from managers, tutors and colleagues, particularly during onboarding and the first stages of the placement.

Difficulty adapting tasks and concerns about productivity are also relevant. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence of resistance to inclusion. Rather, they indicate that organisations may lack practical models for adapting tasks, distributing responsibilities, setting realistic expectations and supporting colleagues involved in supervision.

The results also show **that many barriers are organisational rather than ideological**. Organisations are most concerned about time, task adaptation, uncertainty about how to respond to different needs, administrative complexity and the absence of internal or external support structures.

The relatively low proportion of respondents who selected accessibility as a direct challenge should be interpreted carefully. Other findings in the survey show substantial uncertainty about digital accessibility and limited sensory accessibility measures. This suggests that accessibility barriers may sometimes be under-recognised until a specific need arises.

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6.6 Adjustments Implemented or Considered Feasible

The survey asked organisations which adjustments they had already implemented or would be willing to implement in order to support interns with fewer opportunities.

The results should therefore be interpreted as an indication of both current practice and future willingness to adapt. They do not imply that every selected measure is already fully implemented within each organisation.

Implemented or potentially feasible adjustment	**Share of respondents**
Adaptation of tasks or responsibilities	66.2%
Assignment of a mentor or tutor	49.3%

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Implemented or potentially feasible adjustment	Share of respondents
Flexible working hours or remote working	42.3%
Specific D&I guidelines	31.0%
Digital accessibility improvements	31.0%
Specific training on D&I	29.6%
Collaboration with external support services	29.6%
Simplified or adapted communication methods or language support	25.4%
Emotional or wellbeing support measures	22.5%
Physical workplace adaptations	16.9%
Don't know or not applicable	14.1%

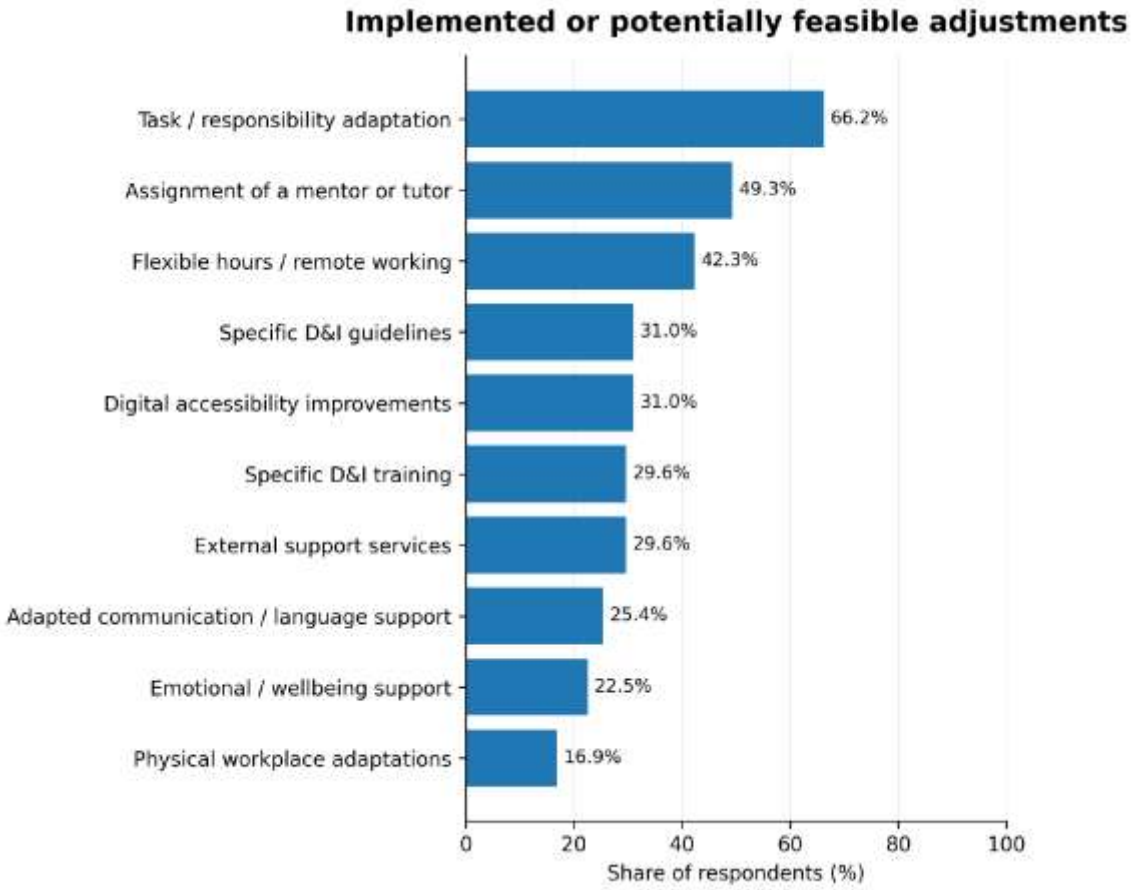
The most frequently selected measure is the adaptation of tasks or responsibilities. This suggests that organisations see task design, workload adjustment and gradual allocation of responsibilities as practical ways to support interns.

The assignment of a mentor or tutor and the use of flexible working arrangements are also widely considered feasible. These measures may be particularly suitable for micro and small organisations, where close contact, flexible schedules and direct communication can often be organised more easily than major infrastructure changes.

By contrast, physical workplace adaptations are selected less frequently. This may reflect financial constraints, technical limitations, shared or rented premises, landlord approval requirements or uncertainty about which adaptations may be needed.

The results confirm that **reasonable accommodation should be understood as a broad and practical concept. It can include task adaptation, communication support, flexible schedules, mentoring, digital accessibility, wellbeing measures, physical changes and cooperation with external support services**.

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The range of adjustments selected by INKEY respondents is consistent with European evidence on reasonable accommodation. Waddington (2023) highlights the importance of practical, individualised measures, employer guidance, partnerships and support mechanisms in enabling the recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities. The INKEY data extend this perspective to internship hosting, where task adaptation and mentoring emerge as the most readily feasible measures.

6.7 Financial Compensation and Practical Support for Interns

The survey explored whether organisations usually provide financial compensation to interns. This question refers to internship compensation in general and is not limited only to interns with fewer opportunities.

Two organisations did not answer this question. The following percentages are therefore calculated on the organisations that provided a valid response.

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Financial compensation provided to interns	Share of valid responses
No	44.9%
Occasionally	26.1%
Yes, in most cases	17.4%
Yes, always	11.6%

Overall, more than seven out of ten responding organisations either do not usually provide financial compensation to interns or do so only occasionally.

This is particularly relevant for inclusive internships. **Young people with fewer opportunities may face additional costs related to transport, accommodation, meals, assistive technologies, healthcare needs, reduced working capacity or limited family financial support**.

The survey also explored the types of financial or in-kind support provided by organisations.

Type of financial or practical support	Share of respondents
Transport support	33.8%
Salary or allowance	31.0%
Accommodation support	23.9%
Other forms of support	16.9%
Meal vouchers or meal support	11.3%

The “other” category included examples such as reimbursement of expenses, language courses, access to training, bicycles for local travel, food support, gratuities and support provided through external employment or internship schemes.

These findings show that practical support is often fragmented and dependent on organisational resources, project funding or external schemes. They reinforce the importance of funded internship

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pathways, co-financing mechanisms and support packages that reduce barriers for both interns and host organisations.

6.8 Willingness to Host INKEY Interns

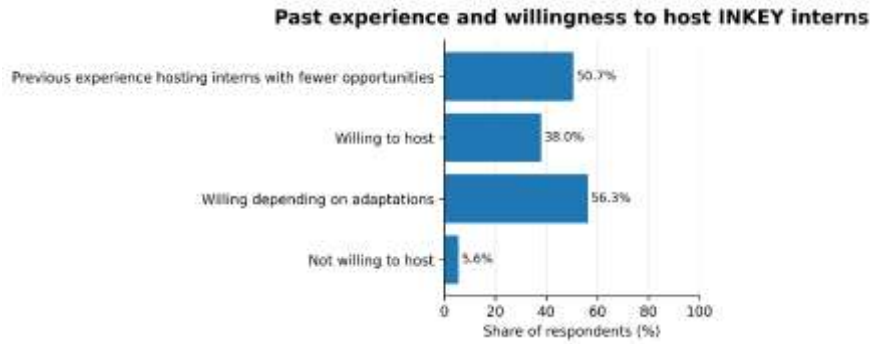
The survey examined whether organisations would be willing to host interns selected through a funded project such as INKEY.

Willingness to host interns under a funded project	**Share of respondents**
Yes	38.0%
Maybe, depending on required adaptations	56.3%
No	5.6%

Overall, 94.4% of responding organisations were either willing to host an intern or would consider doing so depending on the adaptations required.

This is one of the strongest findings of the survey. It shows that employer willingness is generally high. The main issue is not whether organisations are open to hosting young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, but whether they feel equipped to provide appropriate support.

The high proportion of conditional responses is particularly informative. It suggests that organisations require more clarity about the intern's needs, the adjustments that may be required, the availability of mentoring, access to specialist support and the financial implications of inclusive hosting. The survey therefore confirms that willingness alone is not enough. Organisations need practical guidance, realistic planning tools, support for tutors, access to external services and, where necessary, financial assistance.



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6.9 Support Needs and Capacity-Building Demand

When asked what support they would need to host an intern with fewer opportunities, respondents identified financial incentives or co-financing as the most important enabling factor.

Support needed to host an intern with fewer opportunities	**Share of respondents**
Financial incentives or co-funding	71.8%
Resources for physical or technical adaptations	49.3%
Tutor training	42.3%
Administrative support	26.8%
Other forms of support	8.5%

Financial incentives or co-funding are the most requested form of support. This result confirms that organisations may need help not only with physical adaptations, but also with the time and resources required for supervision, mentoring, flexible schedules, communication support, external expertise and administrative arrangements.

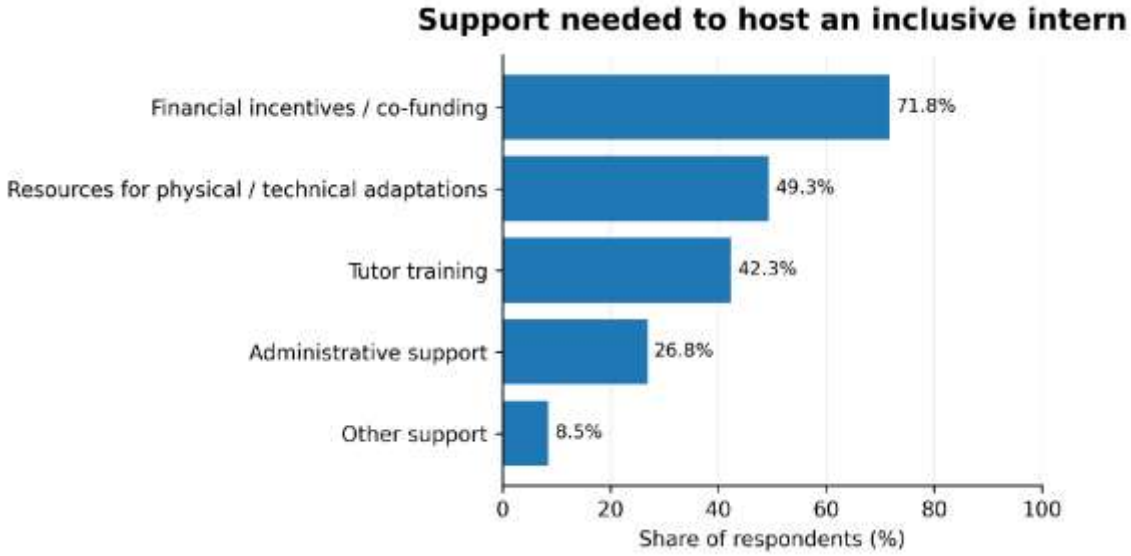
Resources for physical or technical adaptations are the second most requested support measure. This finding is consistent with the uncertainty identified in relation to digital accessibility and the uneven availability of physical and sensory accommodations.

Tutor training is also a major priority. This confirms that organisations recognise the importance of supervisors and mentors, but may not always feel prepared to support interns with diverse needs.

Interest in practical capacity-building is high. Overall, 48 organisations, corresponding to 67.6% of the sample, expressed interest in attending a free online seminar on inclusive internships and D&I practices.

This demand suggests that the INKEY training offer should be concise, practical and directly linked to everyday workplace situations. Priority topics should include mentoring, task adaptation, inclusive communication, accessibility, onboarding, reasonable accommodation, cooperation with support services and practical problem-solving.

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The strong demand for co-financing and adaptation resources reinforces European evidence that employer initiatives work best when they are supported by accessible information, partnerships and financial or logistical assistance. This is particularly relevant for micro and small organisations, which may have willingness and flexibility but limited capacity to absorb additional costs (Waddington, 2023; DEI4SME Project, 2025).

6.10 Key Implications for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label

The findings show that organisations often have a positive basis for inclusive internships, including flexible work arrangements, informal support, willingness to adapt and interest in future participation.

However, organisations need help to turn this potential into structured and sustainable practice.

The INKEY Toolkit should therefore include:

- a pre-placement readiness checklist;
- a mentor and tutor preparation pack;
- a task adaptation template;
- a reasonable accommodation planning tool;
- a guide on inclusive communication and regular check-ins;
- a simple intern feedback form;
- a mentor reflection checklist;
- a practical D&I monitoring template for small organisations;
- guidance on safe reporting channels and respectful handling of concerns;

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- a simple budget-planning tool for internship-related costs;
- information on co-financing, financial support and external services;
- examples of collaboration with universities, NGOs, employment services and disability organisations.

The future Quality Label should recognise not only organisations that already have advanced structures in place, but also those that demonstrate a credible commitment to improvement. Organisations should be encouraged to progress from informal support and case-by-case adaptation towards more structured mentoring, monitoring, accessibility and continuous improvement practices.

Overall, the evidence confirms that organisations are not primarily blocked by a lack of interest in inclusive internships. Their main challenge lies in transforming willingness into practical capacity through time, support, skills, resources and clear organisational procedures.

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7. Good Practices and Case Studies

In addition to structured survey questions, the INKEY WP3 Company Survey invited organisations to describe Diversity & Inclusion practices (in section 10 of the survey) that they considered effective and replicable. The responses provide useful practical insight into how inclusion is implemented in everyday organisational settings. There were more than 20 experiences collected.

The examples collected show that inclusive practices do not always require large budgets, specialised departments or complex procedures. In many cases, the most effective approaches combine clear communication, flexibility, mentoring, gradual task adaptation, accessible information and a workplace culture in which interns feel able to ask for support.

At the same time, the practices described by respondents should be interpreted as self-reported examples rather than independently verified case studies. Their value lies in illustrating practical approaches that can inspire other organisations and inform the development of the INKEY Toolkit.

7.1 Common features of reported good practices

Despite the diversity of sectors, countries and organisational types represented in the survey, the reported practices show several recurring features.

The first is the importance of **clear and inclusive onboarding**. Organisations described practices such as providing accessible information before the start of the placement, defining learning objectives, clarifying tasks and expectations, and scheduling regular check-ins from the first week.

The second recurring feature is the use of **mentoring and peer support**. Many respondents referred to tutors, supervisors, buddies, experienced colleagues or peers as key figures in helping interns feel welcomed, understand their role and address difficulties before they become barriers.

A third element is **flexibility in work organisation**. Several organisations described adapting working hours, attendance requirements, task allocation, learning pace or communication methods according to the individual circumstances of the intern.

A fourth feature concerns **inclusive organisational culture**. Some respondents highlighted informal team rituals, intercultural activities, shared meals, cultural exchange sessions and regular awareness-raising events as practical ways to strengthen belonging, reduce hierarchy and normalise diversity in everyday work.

Finally, some organisations reported more structured approaches, including D&I action plans, regular awareness activities, accessibility reviews, monitoring of equality indicators and periodic revision of internal policies.

7.2 case study 1: structured onboarding and dual mentoring

One non-profit organisation described a structured onboarding and mentorship model for interns from different academic, cultural and social backgrounds.

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Each intern is paired with both a supervisor and a peer mentor. At the beginning of the placement, the organisation provides a clear onboarding plan including learning objectives, key resources and expected milestones. Weekly check-ins are used to review progress, identify challenges early and adapt tasks according to the intern's learning pace and previous experience.

The organisation also encourages interns to take part in team meetings and presentations, helping them develop confidence and feel included in the wider workplace community.

This practice is particularly relevant for interns with limited previous access to professional environments, networks or work-based learning opportunities. It is also highly replicable because it does not require major financial investment. Its core elements are clear expectations, two complementary support figures, regular feedback and gradual adaptation.

Transferable elements:

appointment of both a supervisor and a peer mentor;
clear written onboarding plan;
regular individual check-ins;
progressive adaptation of tasks;
active participation in team meetings and presentations.

7.3 case study 2: flexible internship arrangements for geographical and educational barriers

One small organisation described an internship experience involving a young person who lived far from the workplace and was still completing university studies.

To reduce the impact of commuting and allow the intern to continue her studies, the organisation introduced a hybrid arrangement. The intern was required to attend the office only once a week, while the remaining activities could be completed remotely. Senior team members provided continuous guidance and learning opportunities, helping the intern strengthen her technical and professional skills.

The practice demonstrates that inclusion can be supported through relatively simple organisational adjustments. Flexibility in attendance, working hours and task allocation can reduce barriers linked to geography, economic circumstances, caregiving responsibilities or educational commitments.

Transferable elements:

hybrid or flexible attendance arrangements;
adaptation of working hours;
continuous guidance from senior staff;
gradual skills development;
focus on individual circumstances rather than one standard model for all interns.

7.4 case study 3: accessible outreach, flexibility and structured supervision

One private-sector organisation described a practice aimed at broadening access to internship opportunities through partnerships with universities and traineeship platforms.

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The organisation uses these partnerships to reach students from different academic, social and cultural backgrounds, including young people who may have fewer opportunities to access professional experience. Once selected, interns are supported through flexible working arrangements, including remote work and adaptable schedules. Each intern is assigned a mentor or supervisor who provides guidance throughout the placement and supports integration into the team.

This example is particularly relevant because it combines three different stages of inclusion: inclusive outreach, flexible work organisation and structured support during the internship.

Transferable elements:

cooperation with universities, traineeship platforms and intermediary organisations;
proactive outreach to wider and more diverse candidate groups;
flexible work arrangements;
named mentor or supervisor;
support for integration and professional development.

7.5 case study 4: progressive responsibility and regular support

An organisation working with people with intellectual disabilities described an approach based on regular check-ins and gradual increases in responsibility.

Rather than assigning complex tasks immediately, the organisation starts with manageable activities and expands responsibilities according to the person's pace, confidence and demonstrated skills. Support is maintained throughout the process, allowing the individual to ask questions, receive feedback and build autonomy gradually.

This approach is particularly useful in internship settings because it avoids the assumption that all interns should adapt immediately to the same pace, workload or performance expectations. It also helps supervisors identify strengths and support needs over time.

Transferable elements:

gradual allocation of responsibilities;
regular feedback and check-ins;
realistic expectations;
personalised learning pace;
focus on strengths, confidence and progression.

7.6 case study 5: inclusion through organisational culture and participation

Several organisations described practices aimed at strengthening belonging and intercultural understanding through informal participation.

Examples included shared cooking afternoons, cultural exchange sessions, multilingual "word of the day" activities, team lunches, informal discussion spaces and activities in which interns or new team members could share aspects of their background, culture or experience.

Although these practices are not substitutes for formal accessibility measures, mentoring or anti-discrimination procedures, they can contribute to a more welcoming workplace culture.

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Respondents reported that informal participation helped new interns and volunteers integrate more easily, reduced hierarchy, strengthened trust and encouraged communication across cultural and professional differences.

Transferable elements:

low-cost informal team activities;
intercultural exchange;
voluntary participation;
attention to dietary, cultural and accessibility needs;
opportunities for interns and junior staff to contribute actively to team life.

7.7 Structured practices: governance, accessibility and awareness

Some respondents described more formal D&I approaches. These included:

written equality or diversity plans;
periodic review of D&I policies and indicators;
regular training and awareness activities;
workplace accessibility assessments covering both physical spaces and digital tools;
inclusion of disability, gender equality and LGBTQIA+ perspectives within organisational accessibility reviews;
yearly Diversity Days, awareness campaigns, quizzes, posters and external speakers;
clear procedures for equal access within recruitment processes.

These examples show that inclusive practice can operate at different levels. Some organisations focus on direct support to individual interns, while others work on broader organisational systems, policies and culture. The strongest models combine both levels: they create an inclusive environment while also ensuring that individual support needs can be identified and addressed.

7.8 Replicable approaches for the INKEY Toolkit

The examples collected through the survey suggest a set of practical approaches that can be adapted across different organisational contexts.

Replicable approach	Practical application	Main benefit
Inclusive onboarding plan	Clear information, learning objectives, key contacts, first-week schedule and regular check-ins	Reduces uncertainty and supports early integration

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Dual mentoring model	Supervisor plus peer mentor or buddy	Provides both technical guidance and informal support
Flexible work organisation	Hybrid work, adaptable schedules, task pacing and adjusted attendance requirements	Reduces geographical, economic, health-related or personal barriers
Progressive task allocation	Start with manageable responsibilities and increase complexity over time	Supports confidence, learning and autonomy
Accessible outreach	Partnerships with schools, universities, employment services and traineeship platforms	Broadens access to internship opportunities
Inclusive team culture	Informal participation, intercultural exchange and team-based activities	Strengthens belonging, trust and communication
Accessibility review	Review of spaces, digital tools, communication formats and task design	Identifies barriers before a placement begins
Regular D&I awareness activities	Short training sessions, campaigns, workshops or staff discussions	Builds shared understanding and reduces uncertainty

7.9 Success factors and lessons learned

The self-reported examples suggest that successful inclusive internships are rarely based on a single intervention. They tend to combine several elements:

- management commitment;
- willingness to adapt;
- clear communication;
- accessible onboarding;
- mentoring and peer support;
- flexibility in work organisation;

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- gradual task allocation;
- collaboration with external partners where necessary;
- an organisational culture that values participation and diversity.

The examples also show that inclusion is often more effective when organisations move from reactive adaptations to proactive preparation. Instead of waiting until a difficulty arises, organisations can prepare by identifying a tutor, reviewing accessibility, clarifying communication methods and discussing possible support needs before the internship begins.

These elements are not relevant only in the context of international internships for people facing fewer opportunities. The same principles contribute to employee wellbeing more broadly, as organisations that invest in clear communication, supportive management, flexibility, psychological safety and inclusive working practices tend to create healthier and more sustainable work environments for all staff members. In this sense, inclusive internship practices can also be seen as an opportunity to strengthen organisational approaches to wellbeing, by encouraging practices that benefit the wider workforce beyond the specific context in which they are introduced.

7.10 Implications for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label

The practices described in this chapter provide a practical basis for the INKEY Toolkit. They can be transformed into templates, checklists, examples and guidance materials for organisations at different stages of readiness.

The Toolkit should include:

- an inclusive onboarding plan;
- a supervisor and peer mentor guide;
- a flexible work and task adaptation template;
- examples of accessible outreach channels;
- a workplace accessibility review checklist;
- guidance on building inclusive team culture;
- examples of low-cost reasonable accommodation;
- a D&I awareness activity pack;
- a good-practice repository based on real organisational examples.

The future Quality Label should recognise not only formal policies, but also evidence of practical implementation. Organisations should be able to demonstrate that they provide meaningful support to interns through mentoring, accessible communication, flexible arrangements, task adaptation, monitoring and continuous improvement.

The good practices collected through the survey confirm that inclusive internships are achievable across different types of organisations. Their success depends less on organisational size than on the ability to combine willingness, structure, flexibility and everyday attention to individual needs.

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8. D&I Maturity Analysis

The Inclusive Internship Readiness Score provides an overall indication of how prepared organisations are to host interns with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities. However, the value of the maturity model lies not only in the average score, but in the different profiles that emerge across the sample.

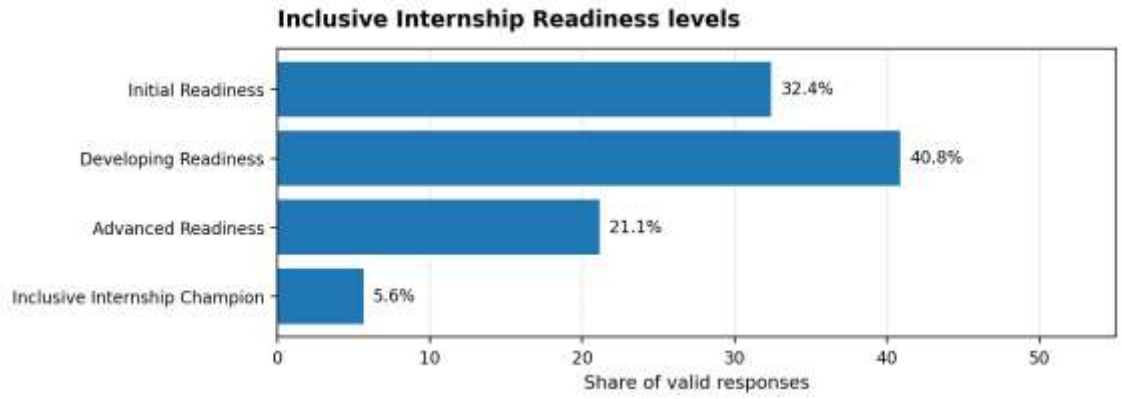
For the purpose of interpretation, the four readiness levels used in the INKEY scoring model are grouped into three broader maturity clusters:

- **Low or no maturity organisations**, corresponding to the Initial Readiness level;
- **Medium maturity organisations**, corresponding to the Developing Readiness level;
- **High maturity organisations**, including both Advanced Readiness and Inclusive Internship Excellence organisations.

This grouping makes it possible to identify the main differences between organisations that are only beginning their inclusion journey, those that have some relevant practices but need more structure, and those that already demonstrate more mature and systematic approaches.

Overall, the findings show that the organisational landscape is receptive but uneven. The largest group of respondents falls within the medium maturity category, confirming that many organisations are willing to host inclusive interns and have already introduced some relevant practices. However, a substantial share remains at an initial stage, while only a smaller group demonstrates a more advanced and structured level of D&I maturity.

Maturity cluster	Readiness level included	Share of organisations
Low or no maturity	Initial Readiness	32.4%
Medium maturity	Developing Readiness	40.8%
High maturity	Advanced Readiness and Excellence Readiness	26.8%



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The average Inclusive Internship Readiness Score of the sample is 48.8 out of 100, placing the overall sample in the Developing Readiness stage.

At a broader level, the concentration of organisations at Developing Readiness is consistent with recent SME evidence: many organisations report openness to diversity and inclusion but have not yet developed the formal responsibilities, monitoring or training needed for systematic implementation. The INKEY maturity model therefore captures an improvement pathway rather than a fixed distinction between inclusive and non-inclusive hosts (DEI4SME Project, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

8.1 Low maturity organisations: Initial Readiness

Around one third of responding organisations fall within the Initial Readiness level. These organisations should not be interpreted as uninterested in inclusion. In many cases, they express positive attitudes towards Diversity & Inclusion and may be willing to host interns with fewer opportunities, particularly when external support or funded project arrangements are available.

However, their practices are often fragmented, informal or dependent on individual initiative. Inclusion may be addressed on a case-by-case basis rather than through shared procedures or organisational planning.

Common characteristics of lower maturity organisations include:

- absence of a written D&I policy or uncertainty about whether such a policy exists;
- lack of a designated D&I focal point, responsible person or internal accountability mechanism;
- limited use of adapted recruitment procedures or targeted outreach channels;
- little awareness of digital accessibility and assistive technology compatibility;
- limited sensory accessibility measures;
- absence of structured mentoring programmes;
- no regular D&I training for managers, tutors or staff;
- limited or absent monitoring of inclusion practices;
- uncertainty about what reasonable accommodation may involve in practice;
- strong dependence on financial support, external guidance or project-based assistance.

For these organisations, the main challenge is not to build a complex D&I system from the beginning. The priority is to introduce a minimum set of accessible and realistic practices that can create a reliable foundation for inclusive internship hosting.

The most relevant support needs for this group include:

- a short and adaptable D&I policy template;
- a basic self-assessment checklist;
- guidance on inclusive recruitment and onboarding;

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- simple examples of reasonable accommodation;
- a tutor or mentor role description;
- information on available external support services;
- practical guidance on funding and co-financing opportunities;
- introductory training on disability inclusion, inclusive communication and task adaptation.

The INKEY Toolkit should be particularly accessible to this group, using short formats, ready-to-use templates, examples and low-cost actions. The aim should be to reduce uncertainty and help organisations move from willingness to basic operational readiness.

8.2 Medium maturity organisations: Developing Readiness

The largest share of responding organisations falls within the Developing Readiness level. These organisations typically show openness to inclusion and have already introduced some practices, but their approach is not yet fully systematic or consistently implemented across all areas.

They may have informal D&I guidelines, some adapted recruitment or onboarding procedures, regular support from tutors or colleagues, flexible working arrangements and experience in hosting interns with fewer opportunities. However, these practices are often not supported by clear internal responsibilities, formal monitoring systems or comprehensive accessibility strategies.

Common characteristics of medium maturity organisations include:

- visible leadership support for D&I, but limited formal accountability;
- some recruitment and onboarding adaptations, often introduced when a need arises;
- informal mentoring or tutoring arrangements;
- willingness to adapt tasks, schedules or communication methods;
- some experience in hosting interns with fewer opportunities;
- flexible work organisation, including hybrid or remote working where possible;
- limited digital accessibility awareness;
- weak sensory accommodation measures;
- occasional rather than regular D&I training;
- monitoring practices that are informal, irregular or limited to selected indicators.

This group represents the main opportunity for the INKEY project. Organisations at this stage do not need to be convinced that inclusion matters. They need help to make their practices more coherent, visible and sustainable.

The main support needs for medium maturity organisations include:

- a structured inclusive onboarding plan;
- mentor and tutor guidance;

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- task adaptation and flexible work templates;
- practical digital accessibility guidance;
- checklists for reasonable accommodation;
- simple monitoring tools, such as intern feedback forms and mentor checklists;
- examples of cooperation with universities, training providers, employment services and specialised support organisations;
- short training modules for managers, tutors and staff;
- guidance on how to turn informal practices into shared organisational procedures.

For this group, the Toolkit should function as an improvement pathway. The objective is to help organisations move from reactive and informal inclusion practices towards more structured, planned and evidence-based approaches.

8.3 High maturity organisations: Advanced Readiness and Excellence Readiness

Around one quarter of the sample falls within the high maturity cluster. This group includes organisations assessed as Advanced Readiness and a smaller group of Exellence.

These organisations are more likely to demonstrate a combination of leadership support, formal or semi-formal D&I structures, inclusive practices, mentoring arrangements, accessibility awareness and some form of monitoring or review.

High maturity organisations are not necessarily perfect or fully accessible in every area. The survey shows that even organisations with strong inclusion practices may still need to improve digital accessibility, sensory accommodations, disability-specific monitoring or structured staff training. Nevertheless, they provide useful examples of how inclusive internship readiness can be embedded within organisational culture and practice.

Common characteristics of higher maturity organisations include:

- clear leadership commitment combined with visible internal responsibility;
- formal D&I policies, action plans or internal guidelines;
- adapted recruitment, selection and onboarding procedures;
- structured mentoring or support arrangements;
- regular use of tutors, buddies, supervisors or peer support;
- willingness and capacity to adapt tasks, schedules and working arrangements;
- stronger awareness of accessibility and reasonable accommodation;
- experience in hosting interns with fewer opportunities;
- some form of feedback, reporting, monitoring or review process;
- active interest in participating in training, peer learning or future project activities.

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This group can play an important role in the next stages of INKEY. Advanced organisations can contribute examples, case studies and peer-learning opportunities for organisations at earlier stages of maturity.

The main needs of high maturity organisations are likely to be more advanced and strategic. These may include:

- benchmarking tools;
- more detailed accessibility standards;
- advanced staff training;
- guidance on inclusive data collection and monitoring;
- structured approaches to disability inclusion and reasonable accommodation;
- support for developing internal D&I action plans;
- opportunities to exchange practices with other organisations;
- recognition through the future INKEY Quality Label.

The Quality Label should therefore not function only as a recognition mechanism. It should also create a community of practice, allowing more advanced organisations to share experience and inspire others.

8.4 Key differences between maturity groups

The analysis highlights several key differences between the three maturity clusters.

Area	**Low maturity organisations**	**Medium maturity organisations**	**High maturity organisations**
D&I commitment	Positive attitudes but limited formalisation	Strong willingness and some informal practices	Commitment supported by policies, roles and procedures
Recruitment and onboarding	Usually reactive or absent	Some adaptations, but not always systematic	More structured and proactive arrangements
Accessibility	Limited awareness; often unassessed	Some practical adaptations, but uneven digital and sensory accessibility	Greater awareness and broader use of accommodation measures
Mentoring	Informal or absent	Informal support common; limited structured mentoring	More consistent tutor, mentor or buddy arrangements
Training	Rare or absent	Occasional workshops or awareness activities	More regular training and internal capacity-building

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Monitoring	Usually absent	Limited or occasional feedback and indicators	More structured review, reporting or monitoring practices
Support needs	Basic tools, funding information and introductory guidance	Structured templates, training and practical improvement tools	Benchmarking, advanced guidance and recognition opportunities

The most important difference is not willingness. Across all maturity groups, many organisations show openness to inclusive internships. The main difference lies in the ability to translate willingness into structured and repeatable practice.

Lower maturity organisations need confidence, practical starting points and access to support. Medium maturity organisations need tools to formalise and strengthen what they already do. Higher maturity organisations need opportunities to deepen their practice, benchmark progress and contribute to a wider community of learning.

8.5 Implications for the INKEY Toolkit and Quality Label

The maturity analysis confirms that a single Toolkit cannot meet the needs of all organisations in the same way. The INKEY Toolkit should therefore be organised as a progressive pathway, offering different levels of tools and support.

For organisations at Initial Readiness, the Toolkit should focus on awareness, basic preparation and minimum inclusion standards.

For organisations at Developing Readiness, the Toolkit should focus on practical implementation, including mentoring, onboarding, accessibility, task adaptation and simple monitoring.

For Advanced Readiness and Inclusive Internship Excellence organisations, the Toolkit should offer more strategic tools related to benchmarking, monitoring, inclusive culture, partnership-building and continuous improvement.

The future Quality Label should reflect the same progressive logic. It should recognise organisations not only for their current level of maturity, but also for evidence of commitment, implementation and improvement over time.

The main value of the INKEY approach is therefore not to divide organisations into “good” and “bad” hosts. Its value is to help each organisation understand its current position, identify realistic next steps and become progressively more capable of offering meaningful and inclusive internship opportunities.

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9. Recommendations

The findings of the INKEY WP3 survey show that organisations are generally open to hosting young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, but they often need practical support to translate willingness into effective and sustainable inclusion practices.

The recommendations presented in this chapter are based on the main barriers, support needs, examples of good practice and maturity profiles emerging from the survey. They are also informed by wider European evidence on Diversity & Inclusion, reasonable accommodation, inclusive workplace practices and employer support.

The recommendations are addressed to four key stakeholder groups:

- companies and host organisations;
- universities, training providers and intermediary organisations;
- policy makers and public authorities;
- the wider Erasmus+ ecosystem.

They provide the basis for the development of the INKEY Toolkit and for the future Quality Label. The proposed approach is progressive: organisations should not be expected to implement advanced practices immediately, but should be supported to move from initial awareness to structured implementation and continuous improvement.

9.1 Recommendations for companies and host organisations

Companies and host organisations should consider inclusive internships as a structured organisational process rather than as an exceptional or informal arrangement. The most important starting point is to move from general willingness to clear and practical preparation.

1. Establish a minimum inclusion framework

Every organisation, including micro and small organisations, should define a minimum internal framework for inclusive internships. This does not necessarily require a complex D&I strategy or a dedicated department.

At minimum, organisations should:

- identify a person responsible for coordinating inclusive internship arrangements;
- define a short internal statement or policy on inclusion and non-discrimination;
- establish basic procedures for discussing support needs with interns;

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- clarify who is responsible for onboarding, mentoring and regular check-ins;
- identify possible internal and external support contacts.

For smaller organisations, this framework may consist of a short one-page commitment document, a named tutor and a simple checklist. The objective is to ensure that inclusion does not depend exclusively on the goodwill or availability of one individual.

2. Make recruitment and selection more inclusive

Organisations should review how they communicate internship opportunities and how candidates are selected.

Key actions include:

- using clear, inclusive and accessible language in internship advertisements;
- avoiding unnecessarily restrictive criteria in vacancy descriptions;
- explicitly encouraging applications from young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities;
- using outreach channels connected to universities, training providers, employment services, NGOs and disability organisations;
- allowing reasonable adjustments during selection and interviews;
- providing accessible online application forms and communication materials;
- informing candidates in advance about the possibility of requesting support or adjustments.

Inclusive recruitment should be proactive rather than reactive. Organisations should not wait until a candidate discloses a need before considering whether their recruitment process is accessible.

3. Introduce inclusive onboarding procedures

Inclusive internships should begin with a planned onboarding process. Organisations should provide interns with clear information before and during the first days of the placement.

A basic inclusive onboarding process should include:

- advance communication on working hours, location, tasks and contacts;
- an orientation meeting before the internship begins;
- a discussion of possible support needs and reasonable accommodation;
- a written overview of tasks, learning objectives and expectations;
- appointment of a tutor, supervisor or buddy;
- planned check-ins during the first weeks;
- information on wellbeing, reporting procedures and available support services.

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A structured onboarding process can reduce anxiety, prevent misunderstandings and help both interns and supervisors identify potential difficulties at an early stage.

4. Strengthen mentoring, supervision and peer support

The survey shows that mentoring is one of the most valued and most frequently used inclusion measures. However, support is often informal and dependent on individual staff members.

Organisations should therefore:

- appoint a tutor or mentor for each intern;
- define the tutor's role and minimum responsibilities;
- provide regular check-ins, especially during the first stage of the internship;
- consider buddy systems or peer mentoring;
- ensure that tutors can seek additional support when needed;
- provide simple guidance on inclusive communication, feedback and task adaptation;
- avoid assigning mentoring responsibilities without allocating sufficient time.

For organisations with more advanced D&I capacity, mentoring systems can also include peer learning, coaching, wellbeing support and structured feedback from interns.

5. Plan reasonable accommodation and workplace adjustments

Reasonable accommodation should be understood as a broad and flexible process. It does not only concern physical accessibility or expensive adaptations.

Possible adjustments may include:

- adapting tasks or responsibilities;
- adjusting work pace, workload or learning objectives;
- offering flexible working hours or hybrid work arrangements;
- adapting communication methods;
- providing accessible documents and digital tools;
- allowing additional breaks or modified schedules;
- improving physical accessibility;
- using assistive technologies;
- providing mentoring, coaching or wellbeing support;
- involving external specialists or support services.

Organisations should adopt a "plan, discuss, adapt and review" approach. Adjustments should be agreed with the intern where possible, reviewed during the placement and adapted if needs change.

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6. Improve digital and sensory accessibility

Digital accessibility should become a standard part of internship preparation. Organisations should ensure that key online materials, application forms, shared documents, learning resources and internal communication tools can be accessed by people using assistive technologies.

Priority actions include:

- using accessible document formats;
- providing captions for video content where possible;
- using readable fonts, sufficient contrast and clear layouts;
- adding alternative text to images;
- checking that online forms can be completed using keyboard navigation;
- avoiding communication that relies only on visual or audio information;
- providing information in plain language where appropriate;
- reviewing whether digital tools are compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies.

Organisations should also consider sensory accessibility, including noise, lighting, concentration needs, communication pace and the availability of quiet spaces.

7. Introduce simple monitoring and continuous improvement practices

Organisations should not treat inclusive internships as one-off experiences. They should collect feedback and use it to improve future placements.

Minimum monitoring actions may include:

- a short feedback form for interns;
- a tutor reflection checklist;
- a final review meeting;
- recording of adjustments made and lessons learned;
- identification of recurring barriers;
- regular review of the organisation's inclusion procedures.

More advanced organisations may also track D&I indicators, review retention and progression outcomes, conduct staff climate surveys and publish periodic updates on inclusion activities.

9.2 Recommendations for universities, training providers and intermediary organisations

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Universities, vocational education and training providers, employment services, NGOs and intermediary organisations play a key role in connecting young people with host organisations. Their role should not end with matching an intern to a placement.

1. Prepare students and interns before placement

Preparation should support young people to understand the internship environment, clarify expectations and identify possible support needs.

Preparation activities may include:

- orientation on workplace culture and communication;
- information on rights, responsibilities and available support;
- guidance on how to discuss accommodation needs;
- support in preparing CVs, applications and interviews;
- workshops on confidence, self-advocacy and professional communication;
- pre-placement meetings involving the intern, the host organisation and the intermediary body.

Preparation should be personalised wherever possible and should not place the full responsibility for inclusion on the young person.

2. Improve matching between interns and host organisations

Matching should consider more than sector or technical skills. It should also take into account accessibility, travel, working hours, communication preferences, support needs, organisational culture and the availability of mentoring.

Intermediary organisations should therefore:

- assess the readiness of host organisations before placement;
- discuss possible adjustments in advance;
- identify whether a tutor or mentor is available;
- consider transport, accommodation and financial barriers;
- avoid placements that are unsuitable because of inaccessible environments or insufficient support;
- use structured matching tools and readiness checklists.

The INKEY Readiness Score and Toolkit can support this process by helping intermediaries identify suitable host organisations and areas requiring additional preparation.

3. Provide support throughout the internship

Support should continue during the entire internship period.

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Universities and training providers should:

- maintain regular contact with both intern and host organisation;
- provide a clear contact person for emerging difficulties;
- facilitate communication if misunderstandings arise;
- support the implementation of reasonable accommodation;
- organise interim reviews and final evaluation meetings;
- help organisations access external expertise when needed.

This ongoing role is particularly important when organisations are hosting inclusive interns for the first time or when the intern faces multiple barriers.

4. Support employer capacity-building

Universities and training providers should not only ask organisations to host interns; they should also support them to do so effectively.

Possible actions include:

- providing short training sessions for tutors and supervisors;
- sharing practical guidance on inclusive recruitment and onboarding;
- offering templates for task adaptation and feedback;
- creating networks of employers willing to exchange practices;
- connecting organisations with disability organisations, employment services and relevant experts;
- recognising organisations that improve their inclusive capacity.

9.3 Recommendations for policy makers and public authorities

Policy makers, public authorities and labour-market institutions have an important role in creating the conditions that make inclusive internships feasible for both young people and organisations.

1. Strengthen financial support and co-financing mechanisms

The findings show that financial support is one of the most important enabling conditions for organisations.

Public support schemes should consider funding for:

- mentoring and supervision time;
- workplace and digital accessibility adaptations;
- assistive technologies;
- communication support;

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- transport and accommodation;
- internship allowances;
- wellbeing or coaching support;
- external expertise and job coaching;
- administrative support for smaller organisations.

Financial support should be easy to understand and access. Complex application procedures can discourage organisations, particularly micro and small employers.

2. Promote accessible and inclusive internship standards

Public authorities should encourage the development of minimum quality standards for inclusive internships.

These standards should cover:

- accessible recruitment;
- fair selection procedures;
- reasonable accommodation;
- mentoring and supervision;
- meaningful learning tasks;
- financial accessibility for interns;
- safe reporting channels;
- feedback and monitoring;
- collaboration between employers, education providers and support services.

Standards should be flexible enough to apply across different sectors and organisational sizes, while still ensuring that inclusive internships are not reduced to symbolic placements.

3. Simplify administrative procedures

Administrative complexity is a recurring concern for organisations. Public institutions should simplify procedures linked to funded internships, workplace adjustments, incentives and reporting.

Priority actions include:

- developing simple application forms;
- creating one-stop information points;
- providing model agreements and templates;
- offering clear guidance on reasonable accommodation;
- reducing duplication of documentation;
- ensuring that information is accessible and available in plain language;

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- providing direct support to smaller organisations.

4. Strengthen employer support networks

Policy makers should support local and national networks that connect employers with training providers, disability organisations, employment services, social enterprises and other support bodies.

These networks can provide:

- technical advice;
- practical guidance;
- access to job coaches or disability experts;
- information on funding;
- peer-learning opportunities;
- referral pathways;
- good-practice exchange.

Inclusive internships are more likely to succeed when employers are not expected to manage every issue alone.

5. Improve monitoring and data collection

Public authorities should encourage organisations and programmes to collect meaningful data on participation, completion, satisfaction, accessibility, support needs and progression outcomes.

Monitoring should be proportionate and respectful of privacy. The objective is not to create unnecessary reporting burdens, but to understand what works, where barriers remain and how resources can be targeted more effectively.

9.4 Recommendations for the Erasmus+ ecosystem

The Erasmus+ ecosystem can play a strategic role in promoting inclusive internships across countries, sectors and educational settings. It can support not only mobility and cooperation, but also the development of shared quality standards, practical tools and learning communities.

1. Promote inclusive internship models within Erasmus+ projects

Erasmus+ projects should increasingly integrate inclusive internship arrangements into work-based learning, mobility and employability activities.

Projects should consider:

- accessible mobility and placement procedures;

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- inclusion support before, during and after the internship;
- financial support for additional costs;
- flexible participation arrangements;
- mentoring and peer support;
- cooperation with host organisations;
- evaluation of inclusion outcomes.

Inclusive internships should be treated as a core quality dimension of mobility and cooperation projects, not as an optional additional activity.

2. Support transnational exchange of tools and good practices

The Erasmus+ ecosystem can facilitate the exchange of practical resources between organisations in different countries.

Useful actions include:

- sharing inclusive onboarding templates;
- collecting examples of reasonable accommodation;
- developing common tutor-training modules;
- creating repositories of accessible communication tools;
- organising peer-learning events for host organisations;
- supporting transnational communities of practice;
- sharing case studies from different sectors and countries.

This exchange is particularly valuable because organisations may face similar barriers but operate under different legal, cultural and institutional conditions.

3. Encourage progressive quality recognition

The future INKEY Quality Label can become a practical model for recognising organisations that demonstrate commitment and improvement in inclusive internship hosting.

The Erasmus+ ecosystem should encourage recognition models that:

- reward practical implementation rather than declarations alone;
- allow organisations to improve progressively;
- recognise different levels of readiness;
- value mentoring, accessibility, participation and feedback;
- promote peer learning rather than competition;
- create visibility for organisations that invest in inclusive opportunities.

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4. Strengthen the link between inclusion, mobility and employability

Erasmus+ initiatives should continue to connect inclusion priorities with employability, vocational education, higher education, youth work and labour-market transition.

This means supporting projects that:

- involve employers from the beginning;
- address both learner and employer needs;
- reduce financial and accessibility barriers;
- create links between schools, universities, NGOs, employers and public services;
- provide continuity after mobility or internship experiences;
- support young people to translate internship experience into future employment opportunities.

9.5 From recommendations to the INKEY Toolkit

The recommendations above provide the direct foundation for the INKEY Toolkit. The Toolkit should be organised as a progressive set of practical resources, supporting organisations at different stages of maturity.

Toolkit level	Main target group	Priority objective	Suggested tools
Level 1 – Getting Started	Organisations at Initial Readiness	Build awareness and establish minimum inclusive conditions	D&I commitment template, readiness checklist, inclusive internship checklist, basic guide to reasonable accommodation, tutor role description
Level 2 – Developing Inclusive Practice	Organisations at Developing Readiness	Turn informal practices into structured procedures	Inclusive onboarding template, mentor guide, task adaptation tool, accessibility self-assessment, communication guide, intern feedback form
Level 3 – Inclusive (advanced and excellence)	Advanced organisations and Excellence	Strengthen monitoring, benchmarking and continuous improvement	D&I action plan template, advanced accessibility review, monitoring dashboard, peer-learning guide, Quality Label self-assessment tool

Organisations were grouped into four maturity levels:

- Initial Readiness: below 40 points

Organisations with limited, fragmented or mainly informal inclusive practices.

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- Developing Readiness: 40–59 points

Organisations showing willingness and some relevant practices, but still requiring more structured tools, procedures and support.

- Advanced Readiness: 60–74 points

Organisations with several established practices, stronger internal structures and a more developed inclusion framework.

- Excellence Readiness: 75–100 points

Organisations demonstrating high levels of preparedness, structured support, accessibility measures, monitoring and continuous improvement.

The Toolkit should remain practical, concise and adaptable. It should not assume that all organisations have the same resources or level of experience. Its purpose is to reduce uncertainty, make inclusion easier to implement and help organisations take realistic next steps.

The future Quality Label should build on the same principle. It should recognise organisations that demonstrate commitment, implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement, while also encouraging organisations at earlier stages to begin their inclusion journey.

Overall, the recommendations confirm that inclusive internships require a shared responsibility. Companies, universities, policy makers and Erasmus+ actors all have a role to play in ensuring that young people with disabilities and fewer opportunities can access internships that are not only available, but genuinely inclusive, supported and capable of opening pathways to future employment.

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10. Conclusions

The INKEY WP3 Company Survey confirms **that inclusive internships are both needed and achievable across a wide range of organisational contexts**. Companies, non-profit organisations, public bodies, social enterprises and education-related organisations show **a generally positive attitude** towards the inclusion of young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities.

The evidence collected through the survey suggests that the main obstacle is not a lack of willingness to host inclusive interns. Rather, **organisations often need clearer procedures**, stronger internal responsibility, practical knowledge, accessible tools and external support in order to translate willingness into sustainable practice.

The survey also confirms that inclusive internship readiness is uneven. Some organisations already demonstrate structured approaches to Diversity & Inclusion, mentoring, accessibility, task adaptation and monitoring. Others are at an earlier stage, relying mainly on informal support, individual goodwill or case-by-case solutions. This does not mean that they are unwilling to become more inclusive. It means that they require a realistic and progressive pathway to develop their capacity.

A central finding of the report is the **gap between commitment and implementation**. **Many organisations express support for Diversity & Inclusion** and are willing to consider inclusive internships. However, **this commitment is not always supported by formal policies**, designated responsibilities, accessible recruitment procedures, regular staff training, structured mentoring systems or monitoring mechanisms.

Accessibility also remains a key challenge. Physical accessibility is often more visible and more widely recognised than digital, sensory and communication accessibility. Yet inclusive internships require a broader understanding of accessibility, including accessible digital tools, adapted communication, flexible work organisation, task design, reasonable accommodation, wellbeing support and the possibility of asking for help without stigma.

The findings further show that **mentoring is one of the most important enabling factors for inclusive internships**. Organisations frequently identify tutors, buddies, supervisors, regular check-ins and personalised support as practical ways to make internships more sustainable. At the same time, mentoring is often informal and dependent on individual staff members. More structured guidance and preparation for mentors are therefore essential.

Financial and organisational support also play a decisive role. Organisations are more likely to host inclusive interns when they can access co-financing, resources for adaptations, tutor training, administrative assistance and external expertise. This is particularly relevant for micro and small organisations, which may have strong motivation and flexibility but fewer internal resources.

Overall, the report confirms that inclusive internships should not be treated as exceptional arrangements. They should become a normal and supported component of education-to-work transition pathways.

10.1 Key takeaways

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The main lessons emerging from the WP3 survey can be summarised as follows:
Organisations are generally open to hosting young people with disabilities and/or fewer opportunities, especially when support and adaptations are available.
Inclusion is more effective when it is planned in advance rather than managed only in response to difficulties.
Leadership commitment is important, but it must be translated into practical procedures, responsibilities and resources.
Small organisations need simple, adaptable and low-cost tools rather than complex compliance systems.
Inclusive recruitment and onboarding are essential. Support should begin before the internship starts, not only after the intern arrives.
Mentoring, tutoring and peer support are among the most practical and transferable inclusion measures.
Reasonable accommodation should be understood broadly, including task adaptation, flexible schedules, communication support, digital accessibility, wellbeing measures and workplace adjustments.
Digital and sensory accessibility require greater attention, as they are often less visible and less systematically addressed than physical accessibility.
Monitoring and feedback are necessary to move from isolated good practices to continuous improvement.
Financial incentives, co-financing and access to external support can significantly increase organisations' capacity and confidence to host inclusive interns.
These findings are consistent with wider European evidence on Diversity & Inclusion, disability employment, reasonable accommodation and employer support. They reinforce the idea that inclusive workplaces are not created through declarations alone, but through sustained action, practical tools, internal learning and collaboration between employers, education providers, public authorities and support organisations.

10.2 Future perspectives for inclusive internships

The future of inclusive internships depends on the ability to build stronger connections between education, training, employment, accessibility and social inclusion.
For young people with disabilities and fewer opportunities, internships can provide more than work experience. They can create opportunities for confidence-building, professional identity, social participation, skills development and access to future employment. However, these outcomes are only possible when internships are designed as learning and inclusion pathways, rather than as short-term placements without adequate support.
For organisations, inclusive internships can become an opportunity to strengthen workplace culture, improve management practices, widen access to talent and develop more flexible and inclusive ways of working. Hosting an intern with fewer opportunities can also encourage organisations to reflect on accessibility, communication, mentoring, wellbeing and the broader needs of their workforce.
The future development of inclusive internships should therefore focus on **four priorities**:

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- **Preparation**
  Organisations should be supported to assess their readiness, identify possible barriers and prepare practical arrangements before the internship begins.
- **Partnership**
  Inclusive internships require cooperation between employers, universities, training providers, employment services, disability organisations, public bodies and young people themselves.
- **Support**
  Organisations and interns should have access to mentoring, reasonable accommodation, financial resources, administrative guidance and specialist expertise where needed.
- **Continuous improvement**
  Internship experiences should be monitored, reviewed and used to improve future practices. Inclusion should be treated as a process of learning and development, not as a one-time achievement.

10.3 From evidence to action: the role of INKEY

The WP3 survey plays a central role in the overall INKEY project pathway.
WP2 identified the systemic barriers and enabling factors affecting the inclusion of disadvantaged young people in education, training and the labour market. WP3 translated this evidence into concrete organisational insights by examining how companies and host organisations understand inclusion, what they already do, where they face difficulties and what support they need.
The findings of this report will now directly inform the next project outputs:

- the **INKEY Toolkit**, which will provide practical and progressive tools for organisations at different stages of readiness;
- the **Inclusive Internship Readiness model**, which will help organisations identify their strengths, gaps and realistic next steps;
- the future **INKEY Quality Label**, which will recognise organisations that demonstrate commitment, implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement in inclusive internship hosting.

The INKEY approach is therefore not based on dividing organisations into “inclusive” and “non-inclusive”. Its purpose is to support a gradual process of change. Organisations may begin with basic steps, such as appointing a tutor, adapting communication, using an onboarding checklist or reviewing accessibility. Over time, they can develop more structured policies, monitoring systems, training activities and partnership arrangements. The central message of this report is clear: inclusive internships become possible when willingness is supported by awareness, structure, flexibility, resources and shared responsibility. Through the combined development of evidence, practical tools and recognition mechanisms, INKEY can help create internship environments in which young people with disabilities and fewer opportunities are not simply present, but are able to participate, learn, contribute and progress.

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Annexes

- Final questionnaire
- Scoring model

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