

# EU project wins major grant to improve accessibility in workplaces

**TAMPERE, FINLAND - 6 December, 2024** - A significant number of people experience functional restrictions at some point in their lives. Additionally, an estimated one-fifth of the global population lives with a long-term impairment or disability, and as a result, can face barriers at the workplace. A new EU-project called NewWorkTech has received €3 million in funding to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities and critically examine related access technologies.

Coordinated by Tampere University, the NewWorkTech project aims to improve accessibility and inclusion in the world of work and promote the human rights of people with disabilities.

*“By removing barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the world of work, we can expand our working-age population, grow the economy and increase well-being,”* says **Maija Hirvonen**, a Professor at Tampere University who leads the NewWorkTech project.

The project, launched in December 2024, will focus on empirical research to support the enhancement of employment of this population. It will generate new insights into the world of work, such as workplace practices and interactions, identify how technologies can improve the working life and job opportunities for people with disabilities, and discover new competences to the working life in general. In addition, the project seeks to define innovative practices of technology use for all.

## **Technology as human, human as technology: Critical research on access technologies**

People representing different disabilities and functional restrictions will participate in the project throughout the research and development phases. Based on the findings, the project will develop the use of access technologies, such as the automatic description of the surrounding environment or the haptic augmentation systems. This will be done in collaboration with the project partners and their tech/business networks.

The project partners also aim to shift the perception of technology from being seen as a replacement for people and a threat to jobs to a tool that supports and opens up new possibilities.

*“Technologies can improve and expand human capabilities. One aspect of our project is looking at innovative practices that we could bring from the margins to the masses – for instance, the practices employed by sign language users in visual and video communication could be introduced more broadly into workplaces to support video conferencing,”* says Hirvonen.

## **From restriction to resource: Policy recommendations and ethical guidelines for policy makers, education, rehabilitation, and workplaces**

By producing new knowledge based on empirical data and developing new theoretical insights, the researchers will formulate several recommendations for workplace improvements and access to work, tapping into new technologies and improving accessibility.

These recommendations will be made widely available and will feed into an open-access knowledge platform that includes ethical guidelines for all relevant stakeholders, including employers, decision-makers and the scientific community.

## Kick-off seminar for NewWorkTech on Friday 24 January

The kick-off seminar for the NewWorkTech project will take place at Tampere University on Friday, 24 January 2024 from 10:00 to 14:00. This seminar is open to everyone and can also be attended remotely. The programme will feature presentations on the timeliness and importance of this research theme for society and introduce participants to the research and development activities planned for the project. Find out more about the event [here](#).

### Media Contact

Raia Mihaylova

Communications and Events Officer at the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)

[rmihaylova@epr.eu](mailto:rmihaylova@epr.eu)

+32 486 73 47 86

<https://www.newworktech.eu/>

### Project partners



**Autismisäätiö**



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