

JOB-U: Job Integration of Young People with Mental Health Issues

# Policy Recommendation

National Report - Cyprus

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## 1. Background and Context

According to the recent *EU Youth Report* and Eurobarometer Survey published by the European Commission, mental health is a growing concern among young people, with 50% of youth in Cyprus experiencing ongoing psychological challenges (European Commission, 2024). This issue is closely connected to unemployment rates, as 10% of young people in Cyprus are currently unemployed (Eurostat, 2025). Mental health problems and unemployment are deeply interrelated, as psychological challenges can have a negative impact on young people's educational attainment, skills development, and readiness to enter the labour market. At the same time, prolonged unemployment can further exacerbate mental health problems by increasing feelings of isolation, stress, low self-esteem, and uncertainty about the future, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

This bidirectional relationship between mental health and unemployment creates multiple barriers for young people, not only impacting their personal wellbeing but also influencing how they are perceived within the labour market. While unemployment can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and social exclusion, mental health challenges can significantly hinder young people's ability to access, enter, and sustain their participation in the labour market. For instance, the OECD reports that individuals experiencing mental health issues are more likely to be unemployed than those without such conditions, highlighting the substantial impact of mental health on employment prospects (OECD, 2023). In addition to personal challenges such as low self-confidence, lack of motivation, and difficulties in coping with stress, young people with mental health problems are often perceived by employers as less productive, less reliable, or high-risk candidates (European Commission, 2022). As a result, many employers are reluctant to hire them, further limiting their employment opportunities and reinforcing the vicious cycle of social exclusion and unemployment.

This situation is particularly evident in the Cypriot context, where, despite the growing awareness of mental health challenges across Europe, significant barriers persist in supporting the labour market integration of young people with psychological difficulties. The national landscape in Cyprus is characterised by high rates of youth unemployment, combined with the absence of targeted policies and support mechanisms specifically addressing the needs of young people with mental health conditions.

This finding is further supported by national data, indicating that Cyprus ranks as the second highest country in Europe where individuals with disabilities, including those facing mental health challenges, experience discrimination in the labour market (Cyprus Mail, 2024). Moreover, this data highlights the lack of comprehensive and structured national policies within the Cypriot workforce to facilitate the integration of young people with mental health challenges into the labour market, further exacerbating their exclusion and vulnerability.

In light of these challenges and the lack of comprehensive policies that address the employability of young people with mental health problems, the Delphi process was conducted as a participatory approach to gather expert knowledge, identify gaps, and develop practical recommendations for future interventions and policy improvements in Cyprus.

In total, two Delphi panels were conducted, each involving the participation of 10 experts. Particular attention was given to ensuring a diverse mix of expertise throughout the selection process of the panel members, in order to capture different perspectives and areas of knowledge related to mental health and youth employability.

The profiles of the experts involved in each panel were as follows:

- *Panel 1:*
  - 3 Mental Health Professionals
  - 4 Employers from various sectors
  - 2 Representatives from Mental Health Support Organisations
  - 1 Representative from a Youth Organisation
- *Panel 2:*
  - 4 Mental Health Professionals
  - 3 Employers from various sectors
  - 2 Human Resources (HR) Managers
  - 1 Policy Maker Representative

This diverse composition ensured that the findings and recommendations emerging from the Delphi process were informed by both practical experience and policy-related insights, addressing the complex and multidimensional challenges young people with mental health problems face in accessing and sustaining employment.

In each Delphi panel, three rounds were conducted, specifically designed to collect both qualitative inputs and ranking, based responses from the above- mentioned experts. The Delphi process mainly aimed to explore and determine the key challenges faced by employers in hiring and managing young people with mental health challenges, assess their significance and impact in the Cypriot labour market, and gather policy recommendations for addressing these challenges.

A blended methodology was applied throughout the process to ensure flexibility and inclusiveness. While the majority of meetings took place in person, an online format was adopted for experts who were unable to attend physically. This hybrid approach allowed for the active participation of all experts, regardless of their location, and ensured a comprehensive exchange of knowledge and perspectives during each round of consultation. The following section presents the key thematic areas and findings that emerged from the Delphi panel process, highlighting the main challenges identified as well as the policy recommendations proposed by the experts.

## *2. Thematic Areas and Key Findings*

The Delphi panel analysis revealed a complex set of challenges and barriers affecting both young people with mental health conditions and employers in Cyprus. These challenges were identified across different stages of the employment journey, from recruitment and hiring to workplace accommodation, retention, and long-term inclusion in the labour market.

Drawing on the contributions of diverse experts (i.e., mental health professionals, employers, HR managers, youth organizations, and policy makers), the findings have been structured into five key thematic areas. This categorization aims to offer a clear and systematic understanding

of the factors that hinder the labour market integration of young people with mental health conditions.

Notably, the challenges identified are not isolated but shaped by wider systemic, cultural, and regulatory conditions, creating additional barriers to both accessing and sustaining employment.

At the same time, the Delphi panels also enabled the identification of enabling factors and existing good practices that can guide future policy interventions. These enablers provide a useful starting point for fostering inclusive workplace cultures and supporting young people with mental health conditions in their professional journeys.

The thematic areas identified in this report serve both as an analytical framework and as a foundation for the development of targeted policy recommendations. They are mainly designed to address the specific obstacles within each area and support inclusive employment practices across Cyprus.

In addition, each thematic area has been further analysed through sub-themes, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of specific challenges and barriers experienced by young people with mental health conditions and employers. These sub-themes reflect distinct dimensions of the challenges identified and serve to guide the development of precise and actionable policy responses.

Key thematic areas identified:

- Thematic Area 1: Recruitment Process
- Thematic Area 2: Workplace Accommodation
- Thematic Area 3: Stigma and Discrimination
- Thematic Area 4: Knowledge and Training
- Thematic Area 5: Legal and Regulatory Barriers

The following sections present a detailed analysis of these thematic areas, together with their corresponding sub-themes-highlighting the main challenges encountered and outlining the policy recommendations proposed by the Delphi panel experts.

## *2.1 Challenges Identified*

### *Theme 1. Recruitment Process*

This thematic area was detected to be one of the most pressing challenges encountered by young people with mental health challenges. Throughout the discussions in the Delphi panels, experts consistently highlighted the fact that barriers at the recruitment stage not only limit access to employment but also contribute to creating a sense of learned helplessness among young people with mental health conditions.

Such a challenge often results in the internalization of their exclusion from the labour market, further discouraging young people with mental health challenges from making additional attempts to seek employment or engage in job-seeking activities.

### *1.1 Insufficient Inclusive Recruitment Practices*

Throughout their recruitment processes, employers often demonstrate a lack of inclusivity, as they do not engage in essential adaptations within their job advertisements, application procedures, or interview phases. These processes are typically designed without consideration of the specific needs or challenges faced by young people with mental health conditions.

The recruitment strategies applied by employers are often rigid and lack the necessary sensitivity and flexibility, creating additional obstacles for young people with mental health conditions and limiting their ability to showcase their skills, competencies, and potential in the selection process.

### *1.2 Lack of Incentives for Employers*

Indeed, the employment of young people with mental health conditions might require specific adjustments or additional resources to support their adaptation and integration into the workplace. Such adjustments may include flexible working arrangements, mentoring, or psychological support services, all of which may require financial investment from employers. However, as highlighted during the Delphi panel discussions, current national policies in Cyprus fail to provide budget-related incentives, tax reliefs, or supportive schemes that would motivate employers to hire young people with mental health challenges.

## **Theme 2. Workplace Accommodation**

While young people with mental health challenges may successfully access employment, they often continue to face significant challenges in the accommodation of their needs within the workplace. The Delphi panel analysis revealed that workplace accommodation represents one of the major barriers experienced by young people with mental health conditions, limiting their ability to fully integrate and perform effectively in professional settings.

The difficulties encountered during the workplace accommodation phase, such as the lack of necessary adjustments, support mechanisms, and flexibility, frequently result in low levels of motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and disengagement among young employees. These challenges not only affect their mental well-being but also hinder their long-term retention in the labour market, contributing to higher rates of absenteeism and early job termination.

### *2.1 Lack of Awareness among Employers*

Young people with mental health conditions might require specific workplace accommodations in order to function effectively and maintain their well-being at work. Such accommodations may include flexible working hours, blended or remote working opportunities, adjustments in workload, and the use of diverse communication methods that are sensitive to their needs.



However, as emphasized by the Delphi panel experts, employers are often unaware of the necessity and importance of these adjustments. In many cases, the accommodation needs of young people with mental health challenges remain unrecognized and unaddressed within the workplace. This lack of awareness and action places additional stress on these employees, negatively affecting their mental health, work performance, and overall ability to sustain employment.

### *2.2 Lack of Psychological Support*

Based on the results of the Delphi panel discussions, it was highlighted that the majority of companies in Cyprus lack essential psychological support mechanisms to safeguard and promote the well-being of their employees. Such support structures are particularly important for young people with mental health challenges, as they can help to minimize stress, anxiety, and other mental health-related difficulties experienced in the workplace. Importantly, the provision of psychological support should not only target young employees with diagnosed mental health conditions but should be available to all employees within the organization. This approach would foster a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

## **Theme 3. Stigma and Discrimination**

In Cyprus, workplace culture often reinforces the stigma surrounding mental health, creating an environment where open communication about mental health-related issues is neither encouraged nor supported. Such a culture prevents meaningful dialogue between employees and employers, limiting opportunities for understanding and appropriate support.

As a result, young people with mental health challenges frequently feel unsafe, unsupported, and excluded within their work environments, both by their colleagues and by managers. This lack of psychological safety further discourages them from disclosing their conditions or seeking help, increasing their vulnerability to stress, isolation, and disengagement from the workplace.

### *3.1 Mental Health Problems as a Taboo*

According to the findings of the Delphi panel, cultural norms regarding mental health conditions continue to persist in Cyprus, with mental health challenges often being perceived as something abnormal or socially unacceptable. This perception creates significant barriers within workplace environments, where mental health is rarely addressed openly or collectively.

Such attitudes prevent organizations from treating mental health as a shared responsibility, limiting efforts to create supportive and inclusive work practices. Consequently, young people with mental health conditions often feel isolated, misunderstood, and excluded from their workplace community.



### *3.2: Insufficient Psychological Safety in the Workplace*

Workplace culture in Cyprus not only reinforces taboos around mental health but also threatens the psychological safety of young people with mental health challenges. The Delphi panel findings indicated that, within many organizations, employees, particularly young people, avoid expressing their needs, concerns, or difficulties due to the fear of being stigmatized or treated unfairly.

This lack of psychological safety prevents open communication, limits access to support, and further contributes to the isolation and exclusion of young people with mental health conditions from the workforce.

## **Theme 4. Knowledge and Training**

According to the Delphi panel results, employers and HR managers in Cyprus often lack essential knowledge, skills, and competences in recognizing, responding to, and supporting the inclusive integration of young people with mental health conditions into the labour market.

This gap in knowledge has been consistently highlighted by the Delphi panel experts as a significant barrier to creating mentally healthy and inclusive workplaces. The absence of mental health training, practical tools, and ongoing educational opportunities prevents employers from adequately addressing the needs of young employees with mental health challenges and limits their capacity to foster supportive work environments.

### *4.1 Lack of Access to Mental Health Training*

During their participation in the Delphi panel, employers highlighted either a lack of access or very limited access to training opportunities with a specific focus on mental health issues in the workplace. The Delphi panel participants emphasized the absence of structured training programmes that aim to equip employers with essential knowledge and skills in recognizing early signs of mental health challenges, responding appropriately, communicating sensitively, and providing adequate support to young people with mental health conditions.

Due to the lack of targeted training, many employers are not equipped to identify the presence of mental health conditions among their employees. This lack of awareness often results in inappropriate responses, a lack of sensitivity in managerial approaches, and an inability to provide the necessary support structures. Consequently, this gap further reinforces the exclusion of young people with mental health challenges from the workforce, not through formal barriers, but through psychological and cultural mechanisms that make them feel unsupported, isolated, and disengaged.

### *4.2 One-off Sessions*

A few employers who participated in the Delphi panel indicated that they had access to mental health training initiatives within their organizations. However, they emphasized that such training opportunities were typically delivered as one-off sessions, lacking any systematic or ongoing learning components necessary for long-term capacity building.

Employers highlighted that while one-time awareness-raising activities can be useful in introducing the topic of mental health, they are insufficient to foster meaningful change in organizational practices or culture. The absence of continuous education prevents employers from developing a deeper understanding of mental health issues, updating their knowledge, or adapting their approaches based on evolving needs and best practices.

In addition to this, the lack of monitoring and follow-up procedures was identified as another challenge. Experts underlined that the effective integration of inclusive and supportive approaches towards young people with mental health challenges requires ongoing, structured, and monitored training processes, embedded within professional development strategies and organizational policies.

#### *4.3 Lack of Practical Tools and Resources*

Delphi panel experts highlighted the urgent need for employers to have access to concrete and operational tools that would support them in effectively managing situations involving young people with mental health conditions in the workplace.

Specifically, the experts stressed the importance of developing response procedures, communication protocols, and practical guidelines that would provide employers with clear steps on how to interact with, support, and accommodate employees experiencing mental health challenges.

In the absence of such resources, employers often approach mental health-related cases with uncertainty, relying on personal judgement or assumptions, rather than evidence-based practices. This uncertainty frequently results in inappropriate responses or missed opportunities for early intervention and support.

### **Theme 5. Legal and Regulatory Barriers**

The absence of an inclusive legal and regulatory framework has been identified as one of the most critical challenges by the Delphi panel experts. Participants emphasized the urgent need for clear national guidelines, legal obligations, and policy directives that would serve as a starting point for promoting workplace mental health inclusion.

Experts underlined that the existence of such frameworks is essential not only for protecting the rights of young people with mental health challenges but also for guiding employers in establishing workplace policies and practices. In the absence of clear legal frameworks, employers often lack direction and certainty, which prevents them from developing structured and inclusive approaches within their organizations.

#### *5.1. Lack of National Level Policies*

According to the responses of the Delphi panel experts, there are currently no available national policies in Cyprus that have the capacity to effectively support the inclusion of young people with mental health conditions into, and within, the workforce.

This absence of a comprehensive policy framework results in a lack of minimum standards and clear directives for employers on how to address mental health in the workplace. Moreover, the absence of legal protection leaves young employees with mental health conditions vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion, and unequal treatment.

### *5.2 Lack of Human Resource (HR) Departments and Human Resource (HR) Procedures*

Besides the absence of national-level policies, the lack of established Human Resources (HR) departments within many organizations in Cyprus was also highlighted as a significant challenge by the Delphi panel experts.

In particular, in smaller organizations and certain sectors, HR structures are either non-existent or not sufficiently developed to address sensitive issues such as mental health. Even in organizations where HR departments are present, the experts emphasized the lack of clear procedures and operational guidelines to effectively manage mental health conditions in the workplace.

Moreover, the Delphi panel experts stressed the importance of equipping HR managers with specialized training provided by work psychologists or mental health professionals. Experts emphasized that managing mental health challenges in the workplace requires a different set of skills and expertise, one that goes beyond traditional HR management practices.

Since mental health is a sensitive issue, HR managers should not be expected to address it without proper education and professional guidance. Specialized training would enable them to approach young people with mental health challenges more effectively, communicate with sensitivity, and promote an inclusive and supportive workplace atmosphere.

### *5.3 Lack of Monitoring Mechanisms*

A few Delphi panel experts mentioned the existence of some informal applications of inclusive practices within certain organizations in Cyprus. However, they also highlighted a critical challenge regarding the absence of monitoring mechanisms to ensure the consistent and correct application of these practices.

Experts emphasized that there are currently no eligible or authorized bodies in Cyprus responsible for regularly inspecting, evaluating, or verifying whether inclusive procedures for employees with mental health conditions are being implemented effectively and appropriately within workplaces.

This lack of monitoring bodies represents a significant gap, as it leaves the application of inclusive practices entirely dependent on individual employer initiative, rather than being guided, supported, and overseen by regulatory monitoring bodies.

## **2.2 Proposed Policies**

Guided by the challenges identified through the Delphi panel analysis (as detailed in Section 2.1), this section outlines a set of policy directions proposed by the experts. These proposed policies were developed with the primary objective of directly responding to the barriers and gaps identified in the recruitment, retention, and workplace integration of young people with mental health conditions in Cyprus.

In this context, the expert-driven policy suggestions aim to break down the structural, cultural, and operational challenges outlined in the previous section, while promoting inclusive employment practices and fostering supportive workplace environments across the Cypriot labour market.

It should be noted that this section serves as an analytical mapping of strategic policy directions intended to guide future practices, reforms, and interventions. The concrete implementation steps, operational actions, and detailed policy recommendations will be further elaborated in Section 3 (Policy Recommendations).

### *Theme 1. Recruitment Process*

#### *Proposed Policy 1: Developing National Level Guidelines on Recruitment Processes Supporting Inclusivity*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 1.1: Insufficient Inclusive Recruitment Practices*.

As mentioned earlier, the recruitment stage represents one of the initial and most critical challenges where young people with mental health conditions face a lack of sensitivity, flexibility, and inclusiveness from employers. Recruitment processes are often designed without taking into consideration the specific barriers experienced by this target group, which leads to their exclusion from the labour market from the very beginning.

To address this challenge, the Delphi panel experts proposed the development of national-level guidelines that would provide a step-by-step framework to guide employers throughout the recruitment phase.

These proposed national guidelines should establish clear standards and recommendations to ensure a bias-free, supportive, and sensitive approach towards young people with mental health conditions. The development and dissemination of such national guidelines would ensure a standardized, fair, and inclusive approach across different sectors in Cyprus, contributing to improving access to employment for young people with mental health conditions.

#### *Proposed Policy 2: Financial Incentives to Promote Inclusive Hiring*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of Incentives for Employers*.

As discussed in the previous section, one of the key challenges encountered by employers in Cyprus relates to their financial capacity to respond to the specific needs or workplace adaptations required when hiring young people with mental health conditions. Indeed, this

financial concern was highlighted as one of the primary reasons preventing employers from initiating inclusive recruitment practices.

Experts emphasized that the lack of budgetary support mechanisms poses a significant barrier for employers who might otherwise be willing to engage in inclusive hiring practices but are limited by financial constraints.

To address this challenge, the Delphi panel experts proposed the establishment of Financial Incentive Schemes designed to support employers in implementing inclusive practices. Such schemes would serve as a crucial enabler, helping employers overcome their budget-related hesitations and encouraging their long-term engagement in inclusive employment practices. Ultimately, this would contribute to the development of more diverse, supportive, and accessible workplaces.

## *Theme 2. Workplace Accommodation*

### *Proposed Policy 3: National Awareness Campaigns*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of Awareness among Employers*.

As highlighted in the Delphi panel discussions, many employers in Cyprus remain unaware that workplace accommodation is not an optional practice but a necessary measure to address the specific needs of young people with mental health conditions. This lack of awareness often leads to the accommodation needs of young employees going unrecognized and unaddressed, a situation that contributes not only to their exclusion from the workforce but also to lower levels of productivity and well-being within organizations.

To respond to this challenge, the Delphi panel experts suggested the implementation of National Awareness Campaigns specifically targeting employers and HR managers. Experts emphasized that awareness-raising is the most effective way to reach a large number of employers and promote behavioural and attitudinal change.

These national awareness campaigns are recommended to be delivered through both in-person events and online platforms to maximize outreach. Additionally, concrete and practical materials should be developed and distributed to employers to serve as lasting resources.

Based on the suggestions of the Delphi panel experts, the content of these awareness campaigns should address the following key topics:

- What is mental health?
- Why does mental health matter in the workplace?
- How can employers support the well-being of young people with mental health conditions?
- What are common workplace accommodations that effectively meet the needs of young employees with mental health challenges?
- Presentation of good practices and success stories from inclusive organizations.
- The advantages and benefits of creating an inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

Engaging in such national awareness campaigns will not only foster a shared understanding among employers regarding the importance of workplace accommodation for young people with mental health conditions. It will also serve the interests of employers themselves, as supportive workplace environments contribute to increased employee well-being, higher retention rates, and improved performance.

#### *Proposed Policy 4: Psychological Support Services*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of Psychological Support*.

As mentioned by the Delphi panel experts, the lack of psychological services integrated within the systematic operations of organizations leads to the needs of young people with mental health conditions going unrecognized. This gap not only limits the provision of timely support but also prevents the development of an inclusive and mentally healthy workplace culture. To address this challenge, experts proposed that each organization should hire a certified work psychologist who will be responsible for:

- Promoting the well-being of all employees.
- Providing access to psychological counselling or mental health guidance.
- Raising awareness on healthy coping strategies and stress management within the workplace.
- Facilitating mental health education activities and well-being workshops.

Experts emphasized that such psychological support services should not be limited solely to employees with diagnosed mental health conditions. Instead, they should be made available to all employees within the organization, fostering a supportive, inclusive, and stigma-free workplace environment.

### Theme 3. Stigma and Discrimination

#### *Proposed Policy 5: National Mental Health Days*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 3.1: Mental Health Problems as a Taboo*.

As highlighted in the Delphi panel analysis, perceiving mental health as a taboo remains deeply rooted in Cypriot culture. This cultural norm is often reflected in workplace environments, resulting in a lack of openness and limited discussion about mental health within organizations.

To address this challenge, the experts suggested the initiation of a National Mental Health Day as a strategic first step towards challenging and changing societal norms. According to the Delphi panel experts, such an initiative is essential in promoting visibility, fostering dialogue, and creating a national-level platform for mental health awareness.

Experts further emphasized that once mental health becomes more visible and normalized at the societal level, it will be easier to promote openness within workplace cultures and to



foster supportive environments where mental health is addressed collectively and without stigma.

Additionally, the experts recommended that the government should actively encourage the participation of organizations in National Mental Health Day activities. Incentives could be provided to organizations that demonstrate engagement, such as recognition awards, certifications, or public visibility, to foster greater participation across diverse sectors.

During National Mental Health Day events, it is suggested that:

- The public should be informed about mental health issues through educational activities.
- Success stories and good practices in inclusive employment should be shared to inspire others.
- Practical tools, guidelines, and resources to enhance understanding of mental health should be distributed freely.
- The critical role of employers in creating inclusive and supportive workplace cultures should be emphasized.

#### *Proposed Policy 6: Establishment of Internal Workplace Policies*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 3.2: Insufficient Psychological Safety in the Workplace*.

As highlighted by Delphi panel experts, workplace culture in Cyprus often results in feelings of unsafety among young people with mental health conditions. Experts observed that these young employees are likely to experience a fear of negative judgment, exclusion, or stigmatization from their colleagues or managers.

As a result, young people with mental health conditions tend to remain silent about their needs and challenges, a behaviour which contributes to their isolation, reduced engagement, and disconnection from the workplace environment.

To address this challenge, experts proposed the development and implementation of clear Internal Workplace Policies aimed at fostering psychological safety and inclusiveness within organizations.

Experts emphasized that these policies should be provided to employees both orally through training and team meetings, and in written form to ensure visibility and accessibility. It was noted that written documents alone may often be overlooked or dismissed, and therefore regular oral communication is essential to reinforce the importance of these policies.

Such a policy will ensure transparency within the organization and promote a culture of psychological safety, helping young people with mental health conditions feel empowered, supported, and respected through official channels.

#### *Theme 4. Knowledge and Training*



*Proposed Policy 7: Establishment of Continuous Mental Health Trainings for Employers/Human Resources (HR)*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenges identified in *Sub-theme 4.1: Lack of Access to Mental Health Training* and *Sub-theme 4.2: One-off Sessions*.

As highlighted by the experts participating in the Delphi panels, the lack of systematic and ongoing mental health training programmes for employers was identified as one of the major challenges preventing the creation of inclusive and supportive workplaces.

While some employers indicated that they had access to mental health-related training, these initiatives were often limited to one-off sessions, without any follow-up mechanisms or long-term learning components. Such training opportunities fail to foster the necessary knowledge, skills, and sensitivity required to support young people with mental health conditions effectively.

To address this challenge, Delphi panel experts proposed the establishment of Continuous Mental Health Training Programmes for employers and HR managers at a national level.

Key recommendations included:

- These training programmes should be free of charge to ensure wide participation from organizations of diverse sectors.
- They should be integrated into the national professional development frameworks, positioning mental health training as a standard part of employer competencies.
- Employers participating in these programmes could be awarded with certifications at each training stage to further encourage engagement and reward commitment to inclusive practices.
- The content of these programmes should be developed in collaboration with mental health professionals and should cover recognizing early signs of mental health challenges, sensitive communication approaches, and workplace accommodation practices.
- In addition, monitoring and evaluation tools should be developed to assess the impact of these training programmes, ensure quality, and detect further training needs within organizations.

Such a policy will ensure that mental health training is not perceived as an optional activity but as a mandatory component of professional operation for employers in Cyprus.

*Proposed Policy 8: Establishment of National Toolkit*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 4.3: Lack of Practical Tools and Resources*.

As mentioned by Delphi panel experts, the lack of access to concrete and practical toolkits prevents employers from responding effectively to mental health situations, even when they are aware of the presence of such conditions among young people in their workforce.

The absence of such operational resources often results in hesitation, uncertainty, and inconsistent approaches, leading to the unintentional exclusion of young people with mental health conditions from meaningful workplace participation and support.

To address this challenge, Delphi panel experts proposed the development of a National Toolkit that would serve as a compact and comprehensive package, equipping employers with all the necessary practical tools and resources to guide their actions.

Experts emphasized that a national policy should be established to support the adoption and use of this toolkit, making it a mandatory component for organizations, particularly at the initiation phase of a company.

This toolkit should include:

- Step-by-step guidance on how to interact sensitively and effectively with young people with mental health conditions.
- Templates for creating and adapting inclusive workplace policies.
- Case studies and examples of good practices from organizations successfully implementing mental health inclusion.
- Practical checklists for managers and HR staff.
- Communication guidelines for handling mental health disclosures.

Experts also highlighted the importance of ensuring the accessibility of this toolkit, recommending that an e-version should be developed and made freely available online to reach employers across different sectors.

Such an initiative would provide employers with a concrete, user-friendly guide to translate the principles of inclusivity into daily operational practices.

## Theme 5. Legal and Regulatory Barriers

### *Proposed Policy 9: Establishment of National Policies*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 5.1: Lack of National-Level Policies*.

As highlighted by the Delphi panel experts, the lack of national-level policies and legal standards was identified as one of the most significant challenges in Cyprus in ensuring the inclusion of young people with mental health conditions within the labour market.

Experts stated that without having clear-cut legal guidelines and minimum standards, employers often fail to adopt inclusive practices and remain uncertain about their obligations when addressing mental health-related situations in the workplace.

To address this challenge, the Delphi panel experts proposed the development of National Policies that would establish clear standards, rights, and obligations for employers regarding the inclusion of young people with mental health conditions. Such a policy direction would foster a common understanding of employers' legal responsibilities and ensure that mental health inclusion is embedded not only in organizational practices but also within the legal

structure of the Cypriot labour market, ultimately promoting fairness, equal treatment, and social justice for young people with mental health conditions.

*Proposed Policy 10: Establishment of Human Resources (HR) departments and Procedures*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 5.2: Lack of HR Departments and HR Procedures*.

During the Delphi panel discussions, experts highlighted the absence of Human Resources (HR) departments in many organizations across Cyprus, particularly within small-sized enterprises. Even in organizations where HR departments do exist, experts observed a lack of clear, standardized procedures and guidelines for managing mental health-related situations effectively.

This creates a critical challenge, as HR structures in Cyprus either do not exist at all or operate without any standardized approach to mental health inclusion, leaving employers unprepared to address the specific needs of young people with mental health conditions.

To address this gap, Delphi panel experts proposed the development of national-level policies that support and encourage the establishment of HR departments within organizations as a prerequisite for professional operation in Cyprus.

Furthermore, Delphi panel experts strongly emphasized the need for specialized training and capacity-building workshops for HR personnel-delivered by mental health professionals who have expertise in workplace mental health inclusion.

Such professional education should be provided through accredited and trusted bodies, ensuring that HR personnel are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to support young people with mental health conditions effectively and foster inclusive workplace environments.

*Proposed Policy 11: Establishment of Government-led Monitoring and Evaluation Bodies*

This policy is proposed by experts to address the challenge identified in *Sub-theme 5.3: Lack of Monitoring Mechanisms*.

Delphi panel experts highlighted the critical challenge of the lack of monitoring bodies in Cyprus that have the capacity and authority to ensure the correct and consistent implementation of inclusive practices within workplaces, particularly concerning young people with mental health conditions.

This absence results in a significant gap in the systematic support provided to organizations, especially for those employers who may already apply inclusive practices informally but lack guidance, verification, or feedback mechanisms.

To address this challenge, experts proposed the establishment of Government-led Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms at the national level. Such mechanisms would be responsible for regularly monitoring, assessing, and supporting the application of mental health inclusion practices within organizations. Such a structure would ensure that mental health inclusion

initiatives within workplaces are not only encouraged but are also systematically supported, guided, and evaluated by competent monitoring and evaluation bodies.

### *3. Policy Recommendations*

In the previous section (Section 2.2), the policy strategies proposed by Delphi panel experts were highlighted and discussed. As noted, the previous section was analytical in its nature, meaning that it provided a strategic mapping of policy directions linked to the challenges identified in the thematic areas. It aimed to present a structured overview of expert-driven proposals that address the complex barriers faced by young people with mental health conditions within the labour market.

Building upon these findings, the current section accumulates the insights discussed previously, summarizes them, and provides a more concrete and actionable set of policy recommendations that are applicable within the Cypriot context at the national level.

In other words, this section illustrates how to move from theory to practice, translating the proposed policy directions identified in Section 2.2 into operational actions that can be implemented by relevant stakeholders, including government bodies, employers, and support organizations.

Furthermore, the policy recommendations presented in this section have been structured in a way that integrates interrelated proposals under a common umbrella, ensuring coherence, feasibility, and alignment with national priorities and existing policy frameworks.

#### **3.1 National Inclusive Recruitment Guidelines and Benefits**

##### **Description:**

This policy recommendation has been established to directly address the challenges identified at the recruitment phase, recognized by Delphi panel experts as one of the most critical barriers encountered by young people with mental health conditions in their transition to the labour market.

As discussed in the previous sections, young people with mental health conditions often experience exclusion and discrimination even before entering employment, starting from the recruitment and selection stages. To minimize these challenges and foster a more inclusive recruitment culture in Cyprus, this policy proposes a combined and integrated approach that responds to both technical and financial barriers faced by employers.

The proposed policy recommendation brings together two interlinked measures within a single, coherent framework, offering a compact and practical package that can be directly applied during the recruitment process:

1. The development of National-Level Guidelines for Inclusive Recruitment Practices to provide technical guidance and standardized procedures for employers.
2. The establishment of Financial Incentives for employers who adopt and implement inclusive recruitment practices in line with the national guidelines.

Guided by the suggestions of Delphi panel experts, this integrated policy aims to provide employers with clear operational guidance on how to conduct inclusive recruitment, while

simultaneously offering financial motivation to facilitate the practical implementation of inclusive recruitment practices.

Specifically, the national guidelines should include detailed and practical instructions on:

- Designing inclusive job advertisements and vacancy announcements.
- Conducting bias-free, supportive, and adaptable interview processes.
- Defining objective evaluation criteria for the fair assessment of candidates.
- Providing examples of reasonable adjustments and accommodations that can be offered during the recruitment phase to support young people with mental health conditions.

These guidelines should be accompanied by the establishment of financial incentive schemes to encourage and reward employers who actively implement inclusive recruitment practices in accordance with the national standards. Based on the insights from Delphi panel experts, the financial incentives schemes can include the following concrete measures:

- **Wage Subsidies:** Employers can be provided with the opportunity to receive partial salary coverage when hiring young people with mental health conditions. This financial support could be granted for a specific period, for example, up to 12 months, in order to provide employers with the necessary financial security and encourage them to initiate recruitment processes with this target group. Such wage subsidies would directly reduce the perceived financial risks and additional costs associated with inclusive recruitment practices, making it more feasible and attractive for employers, particularly small companies, to offer job opportunities to young people with mental health conditions.
- **Tax Relief:** Tax relief schemes can be introduced to further incentivize employers to engage in inclusive recruitment practices. Employers could be offered the opportunity to pay reduced taxes if they demonstrate compliance with the national guidelines on inclusive recruitment during their hiring processes. Such an action can be operationalized via a transparent and structured process led by the relevant national authority (e.g., Ministry of Labour). Specifically, the implementation of the tax relief scheme can follow these steps:
  - Establishment of a Verification Process:** Employers would be required to register on a dedicated online platform. Through this platform, employers would submit the necessary documentation demonstrating their adherence to the national guidelines for inclusive recruitment practices.
  - Documentation Requirements:** This may include examples of adapted job advertisements, records of reasonable adjustments made during interviews, evidence of fair candidate evaluation procedures, or internal policies on non-discrimination.
  - Eligibility for Tax Reduction:** Following successful verification and approval by the relevant authority, employers would become eligible for a tax reduction scheme. The tax relief would be granted for a predetermined period, for instance, during the first year of employment of a young person with mental health conditions.
- **One-time Grants:** Once employers complete the verification process and provide sufficient evidence of applying inclusive recruitment practices in accordance with national guidelines, they can be offered *one-time financial grants* to cover the potential costs associated with hiring young people with mental health conditions.

Presenting this financial incentive as a reward for compliance not only addresses the potential financial hesitation of employers but also acts as a strategic motivator for companies to adopt inclusive approaches more proactively during their recruitment practices.

### Objectives:

The goals of this policy are:

- To ensure that young people with mental health conditions are able to initiate their careers without being subjected to discriminatory practices at the very first stage of their labour market journey.
- To establish inclusive recruitment practices as a standardized and widely adopted approach across Cyprus, ensuring that employers are equipped with both operational guidance and financial support to implement these practices effectively.
- To support the development and implementation of concrete tools, in the form of national-level guidelines accompanied by financial incentives, with the aim of fostering a recruitment culture that is fair, sensitive, and accessible for young people with mental health conditions. Ultimately, this policy seeks to promote equal opportunities and reduce systemic exclusion from the outset of the employment process.

### Implementation Considerations:

During the establishment of national guidelines and financial incentive schemes to support inclusive practices at the recruitment level, several potential challenges might be encountered. Below are the key anticipated challenges and their corresponding solutions proposed to ensure effective implementation:

- **Challenge 1:** Some employers (especially those operating as small or medium-sized enterprises) might perceive the inclusive recruitment guidelines as an additional burden on their operations and may refuse to integrate those into their recruitment practices.  
**Solution:** Ensure that the national guidelines are developed in a simplified, clear, and user-friendly format, avoiding overly technical language or complex procedures. The guidelines should include easy-to-apply steps, practical templates, and visual examples that can be used by organizations of all sizes and sectors. Particular attention should be given to making the guidelines applicable to smaller companies with limited human resources capacity.
- **Challenge 2:** The proposed application and verification processes for accessing financial incentives might create a perception among employers that these procedures are overly complex or bureaucratic. This could discourage participation.  
**Solution:** Ensure the development of a user-friendly online platform dedicated to managing the application and verification processes. This platform should provide step-by-step guidance for each phase of the application, accompanied by clear instructions, templates, and examples. Additionally, the availability of a responsive



helpdesk (via phone, email, or chat) should be guaranteed to support employers throughout the process and diminish concerns associated with administrative complexity.

- **Challenge 3:** It might be possible that employers, particularly smaller businesses, may not be fully aware of the newly developed national guidelines and the available financial incentive schemes. This lack of awareness could prevent them from engaging in inclusive recruitment practices simply due to insufficient information.

**Solution:** Organize a national awareness campaign, led or officially supported by the Ministry of Labour, in order to ensure the formality, credibility, and trustworthiness of the information provided. The campaign should adopt both online and offline formats to maximize its reach and accessibility across different employer profiles. Special attention should be given to effectively reaching small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through local chambers of commerce, employer associations, and business support organizations.

#### Supporting Evidence:

During the Delphi panel discussions, the majority of participating employers openly highlighted that they personally lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence to approach young people with mental health conditions in an inclusive and supportive manner during the recruitment phase.

This knowledge gap has been one of the key reasons why many employers admitted their reluctance to initiate recruitment processes targeting young people with mental health conditions, not because of unwillingness, but due to uncertainty and fear of making mistakes or unintentionally causing harm.

In addition to this, several employers emphasized their need for financial support in overcoming the initial costs that may arise when hiring young people with mental health conditions. Employers underlined the importance of having structured support mechanisms provided by government-led bodies, particularly regarding budgetary resources to cover potential expenses related to workplace adjustments, onboarding processes, or psychological support services.

Based on these insights, we have a valid justification for the need of:

- Developing clear national guidelines that offer standardized, practical, and applicable inclusive recruitment practices, ensuring that employers have a structured reference point to guide their actions.
- Establishing financial incentive schemes, including wage subsidies, tax relief, and one-time grants, to encourage the adoption of inclusive recruitment practices, making the process more manageable, feasible, and attractive for employers across all sectors.

## 3.2 National Workplace Accommodation Policies

#### Description:

This policy recommendation is designed to address the challenges associated with the lack of employer awareness regarding the importance of workplace accommodations and the necessity of offering psychological support to employees, especially to young people with mental health conditions. As discussed extensively during the Delphi panel discussions, the concept of workplace accommodation is often either unknown to employers in Cyprus or misunderstood in its practical application. Many organizations tend to perceive workplace accommodation solely as physical adjustments or minor operational changes, while dismissing the essential role of psychological support in ensuring employee well-being.

Indeed, one of the critical findings emerging from the expert discussions was that psychological support mechanisms should not be considered as an optional or separate service, but rather as an integral component of workplace accommodation strategies. Without addressing the psychological needs of employees, especially young people with mental health conditions, workplace accommodation remains incomplete and ineffective.

Throughout the in-depth discussions with the Delphi panel experts, it was consistently emphasized that these two approaches, raising awareness about workplace accommodation and establishing psychological support mechanisms, are fundamentally interdependent.

Guided by this intersection, national workplace accommodation policies should be established and evolve around the core pillars of:

1. Physical workplace accommodation practices that ensure flexibility, adaptation, and sensitivity in the working environment; and
2. Psychological support structures that safeguard employee well-being and foster inclusive, healthy workplace cultures.

Specifically, physical national workplace accommodation policies should involve the following key operational practices:

- **Flexibility in Working Hours:** Employers should allow flexible working hours for young people with mental health conditions where appropriate, enabling them to adjust their schedules based on their well-being, treatment appointments, or periods of increased stress.
- **Remote and Blended Working Opportunities:** Employers should offer the option for remote working (full-time or partially blended) where job roles allow. Remote working can reduce anxiety related to commuting, social interactions, or stressful work environments, thereby improving retention and productivity.
- **Adjustments Based on Individual Needs:** Employers should be encouraged to assess the specific needs of young people with mental health conditions on a case-by-case basis and engage in necessary adjustments, including:
  - Modifying workload or work intensity.
  - Allocating tasks in a way that minimizes stress triggers.
  - Offering rest breaks when necessary.
  - Providing mentorship or peer-support systems within teams.

- **Use of Diverse Communication Channels:** Employers should provide various communication options to suit the comfort levels and needs of young people with mental health conditions, such as:
  - Allowing written communication (e.g., emails, messaging) over verbal communication if preferred.
  - Facilitating online meetings when face-to-face interaction may cause discomfort.
  - Providing clear and structured feedback to avoid misunderstandings or stress.
  - Ensuring access to private communication with HR or management.

Besides the physical workplace adjustments highlighted above, psychological workplace adjustments should be systematically integrated as a core component of workplace accommodation policies to ensure that the proposed policy framework holistically addresses the diverse needs of young people with mental health conditions.

Psychological support practices should not be limited to reactive interventions that address problems only after they arise. Instead, these practices should be designed to operate proactively, aiming to prevent escalation of mental health challenges, promote well-being from the outset, and create a psychologically safe working environment.

Guided by this approach, the psychological dimension of workplace accommodation should include the following practical measures within organizational operations:

- **Internal & External Psychological Support Mechanisms:** Depending on the size and resources of a given organization, two practical support mechanisms should be applied by employers as a mandatory component of their Workplace Accommodation Policy.
- **Internal Psychological Support Mechanisms:** This mechanism is recommended for larger organizations with sufficient resources and operational capacity to integrate psychological services within their internal structures. In such organizations, it is advised to hire Industrial and Organizational Psychologists (commonly referred to as Work Psychologists) who will play a dual role within the company. Firstly, the internal psychologist should offer regular and confidential consultation sessions for employees at all levels, ensuring that psychological support is accessible, non-stigmatizing, and embedded within daily operations. Secondly, the internal psychologist should take a leading role in the design, implementation, and coordination of internal well-being workshops and programs (detailed in the following point).
- **External Psychological Support Mechanisms:** External psychologist support is particularly suggested for organizations that are smaller in size and operate with limited internal resources, a common case in the Cypriot labour market context, as also highlighted by the Delphi panel experts. For these organizations, partnerships with eligible and certified external mental health service providers should be encouraged and supported at the national policy level. This approach allows smaller organizations to access professional expertise without the financial burden of hiring an in-house psychologist. Through these partnerships, employees, especially young

people with mental health conditions, should have regular and confidential access to professional mental health consultation. In addition to providing direct psychological support to employees, these partnerships can also be utilized for the development and delivery of mental health workshops, awareness, raising activities, and capacity-building sessions within the organization (detailed in the following point).

- **Mental Health Workshops:** Irrespective of their sizes, the organization of regular Mental Health Workshops should become a mandatory component of the Workplace Accommodation Policy. Depending on the size and resources of the organization, these workshops can be facilitated either by internal workplace psychologists or external mental health professionals (for smaller organizations), as outlined in the support mechanisms highlighted above. The content of those workshop can include the following themes:
  - Psycho-educational Workshops on Mental Health:** Raising awareness on what mental health is, common challenges, coping strategies, and the importance of seeking support.
  - Creating a Non-Discriminatory Work Environment:** Providing guidance on how to detect, prevent and respond to cases of stigma and bias.
  - Stress Management and Resilience Building:** Equipping employees with practical tools on how to manage stress and promote well-being.
  - Supportive Communication:** Guiding employees through supportive communication that fosters understanding and empathy.
  - Peer Support Development Workshops:** Encourage and emphasize the importance of establishing peer support teams within organizations, where employees feel empowered, supported, and included in a culture of mutual understanding and respect.

### Objectives:

The goals of this policy are:

- To develop and implement a standardized workplace accommodation policy that encompasses both physical and psychological aspects of employee support, ensuring that accommodations are not limited to operational adjustments but also include mental health and well-being practices.
- To provide clear, actionable, and standardized workplace accommodation practices that can be adapted and applied by all levels of organizations operating in Cyprus, irrespective of their size, sector, or resources.
- To encourage and facilitate the integration of structured psychological support services within organizational operations, through either internal workplace psychologists or external partnerships, making mental health support an essential component of the workplace environment.
- To ensure that mental health awareness becomes an organizational priority by embedding regular mental health workshops, psycho-educational sessions, and awareness-raising activities within workplace culture.

### Implementation Considerations:

It is possible that following the establishment of National Workplace Accommodation Policies, several challenges might be encountered during the implementation and operationalization phases. Below are the key anticipated challenges identified through the Delphi panel insights, alongside the corresponding solutions proposed to ensure effective, inclusive, and sustainable application of the policy:

- **Challenge 1:** Some employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), might perceive workplace accommodation practices, especially psychological support mechanisms, as an additional financial burden on their operations.

**Solution:** While developing the national workplace accommodation policies, it is crucial to ensure that the proposed practices and requirements take into consideration the diversity of organizational sizes and resources operating within Cyprus.

As highlighted in the previous section, the implementation of psychological support mechanisms should be adapted according to the capacity of the organization:

→ Larger organizations can hire internal workplace psychologists

→ Smaller organizations can establish partnerships with external mental health service providers.

In addition to these size sensitive approaches, government-led initiatives (detailed in Policy Recommendation 1) such as financial incentive schemes, wage subsidies, and tax reliefs, should be explicitly integrated into the workplace accommodation policy framework. This will help minimize the perceived financial burden on employers and encourage broader participation in inclusive workplace practices.

- **Challenge 2:** Some employers may have limited understanding or experience with workplace accommodation practices, particularly if they have encountered few or no young people with mental health conditions in their previous recruitment or workforce.

**Solution:** To address the challenge 2, it is essential that the National Workplace Accommodation Policy provides clear definitions, explanations, and practical examples of both physical and psychological accommodation practices, ensuring that employers fully understand the scope and importance of these measures. Additionally, the policy should explicitly link how the adoption of workplace accommodation practices can result in positive organizational outcomes, including; higher employee retention rates, increased productivity, enhanced employee engagement and well-being.

To facilitate employers' understanding and engagement:

→ Visually attractive and easy-to-understand materials should be developed, such as before and, after visual scenarios, explainer videos, infographics, and case study animations, illustrating the impact of workplace accommodation practices on organizational culture and performance.



- **Challenge 3:** Employees, Especially Young People with Mental Health Conditions, Might Hesitate to Access Psychological Support Services. As highlighted in the Delphi panel discussions, even when psychological support services are available within organizations, young people with mental health conditions might hesitate to use them due to the fear of negative judgment, stigma, or concerns about confidentiality.

**Solution:** To address challenge 3, it is essential that National Workplace Accommodation Policies explicitly integrate confidentiality protocols within their framework. Make sure that clear and transparent confidentiality principles are established and communicated to all employees both in written and oral formats. It is important to note that all one-to-one psychological consultation sessions must be provided in a safe and confidential environment.

#### Supporting Evidence:

During the Delphi panel discussions, mental health professionals shared concrete experiences that clearly demonstrate the existing gap in workplace accommodation practices within organizations in Cyprus.

Specifically, one of the mental health professionals provided an example of a young individual with autism who faced significant difficulties in his working environment due to the absence of appropriate workplace accommodations.

In this case, the young person was employed in a company operating within an open-space office layout. However, due to his condition, working in such an environment caused severe discomfort, stress, and reduced productivity, as open spaces are often overwhelming for individuals with autism spectrum conditions.

Despite the young employee's visible struggle, the employer was unaware of the necessity to provide specific accommodations or adjustments based on the individual's mental health condition. During further in-depth discussion with the employer, he explicitly stated that he was not informed or trained about the need to adapt the working environment to the specific needs of employees with autism, highlighting a clear gap in awareness and sensitivity.

Besides this concrete case, several employers who participated in the Delphi panel openly acknowledged their lack of awareness and knowledge regarding essential workplace accommodation practices, particularly in addressing the needs of young people with mental health conditions.

Guided by these expressed needs and the evident gap in knowledge and operational capacity, the development of a clear, standardized, and practical National Workplace Accommodation Policy, that integrates both *physical* and *psychological* adjustments under the same framework, emerges as a crucial and urgent action.

### 3.3 Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct

#### Description:

This policy recommendation has been developed to address the challenges associated with stigma, discrimination, and the lack of psychological safety existing in workplaces, thus



directly responding to the challenges identified in Thematic Area 3 of the Delphi panel analyses.

As discussed during the Delphi panel process, the absence of organizational-level rules, procedures, and ethical standards has been identified as a critical factor contributing to feelings of unsafety, exclusion, and lack of respect among young people with mental health conditions in the workplace.

To address this challenge in a practical and structured manner, it is proposed that all organizations, irrespective of their size or sector, should be required to develop and implement an Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct that explicitly outlines principles related to mental health inclusion, non-discrimination, and respectful workplace behaviour. Such an internal policy will serve to establish clear organizational regulations at the company level, ensuring that employees, including young people with mental health conditions, feel psychologically safe, supported, and protected from stigmatizing or discriminatory practices within their working environment. The key components of ethics code of conduct should involve the following measures:

- Non-discriminatory Principles:** The Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct should include clear and detailed procedures explicitly defining what is recognized as discriminative acts, harassment, unfair treatment. Particular attention should be given to providing concrete examples of behaviours and actions that fall under these categories, ensuring that all employees understand the boundaries of acceptable behaviour within the organization. Moreover, the policy should clearly emphasize that any form of stigma, harassment, or discrimination targeting young people with mental health conditions is strictly prohibited, and such actions will result in disciplinary measures, which may include the termination of employment depending on the severity of the case. This internal regulation should be fully aligned with the existing national anti-discrimination laws and labour legislation in Cyprus, ensuring consistency with legal frameworks and reinforcing the organization's zero-tolerance approach towards exclusionary practices.
- Confidentiality Aspect:** The Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct should include a dedicated section on Confidentiality, outlining clear procedures for managing sensitive information related to employees' mental health conditions. The policy should provide an explicit statement guaranteeing the privacy of any employee who chooses to disclose a mental health condition, ensuring that such information will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Expectations for Inclusive Behaviours:** This section of the Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct should outline clear expectations for respectful, empathetic, and inclusive communication within the organization. It should emphasize that the use of biased, stigmatizing, or discriminatory language and behaviours, whether direct or indirect, are strictly prohibited in all workplace interactions, including verbal, written, and non-verbal communication. To support clarity and prevent misunderstanding, this section should provide concrete examples of expected inclusive behaviours, such as,

active listening without judgement, avoiding assumptions about a person's capabilities based on their mental health condition.

- **Reporting Incidents of Discrimination, Harassment, and Exclusion:** This section of the Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct should provide a clear, step-by-step guide for employees on how to report any acts of discrimination, harassment, stigma, or unfair treatment, particularly in relation to mental health conditions. The reporting procedures should include:
  - A simple and transparent reporting process that outlines what steps employees should follow if they experience or witness any inappropriate behaviour.
  - Identification of the eligible contact person(s) within the organization responsible for receiving and handling reports. This may include HR personnel, an internal or external psychologist, or a trusted manager trained in confidentiality and sensitivity.
  - Availability of confidential reporting mechanisms, including the possibility to report incidents anonymously through online reporting tools.

### Objectives:

The goals of this policy are:

- To ensure that it becomes a mandatory policy requirement for all organizations operating in Cyprus to establish an Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct that explicitly promotes mental health inclusion, non-discrimination, and respectful workplace practices.
- To establish clear internal rules and procedures within organizations that ensure the psychological safety and well-being of young people with mental health conditions.
- To minimize the risks of any potential discrimination, stigma, harassment, or exclusion by setting clear behavioural expectations for all employees, while highlighting the potential consequences of such acts, including disciplinary measures.
- To ensure that privacy and confidentiality of employees, particularly those disclosing mental health conditions, are prioritized and managed in an ethical and legally compliant manner.

### Implementation Considerations:

During the establishment and operationalization of the Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct, several challenges may emerge across different organizational contexts. These challenges are particularly relevant in the Cypriot context, where the concept of mental health inclusion in the workplace is still developing. Below are the key potential challenges identified, along with their corresponding solutions proposed to ensure effective and sustainable implementation of the policy.

- **Challenge 1:** The effectiveness of internal workplace ethics codes highly depends on the existence of clear, well established national-level policies on mental health

inclusion and non-discrimination. Without a national framework, organizations may struggle to develop meaningful and standardized internal rules, leading to fragmentation and inconsistencies across different workplaces.

**Solution:** Make sure that the national-level Mental Health Inclusion Policies (as proposed in Recommendation 5) guide the development and content of the Internal Workplace Ethics Codes of Conduct. National policies should clearly outline the minimum standards, legal obligations, and operational-level guidance for organizations to ensure consistency, clarity, and compliance. This alignment will help organizations to develop their internal codes based on a standardized national framework, while also allowing flexibility for sector-specific adaptations.

- **Challenge 2:** The Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct can be established in theory but may remain invisible to employees in daily practice. In many cases, such internal policies are developed merely to fulfil formal requirements, without being effectively communicated, internalized, or embedded within organizational culture. This can result in a situation where the policy exists only on paper, without real behavioural change or employee engagement.

**Solution:** Instead of sharing the full written document with employees (which might be perceived as too formal), organizations should prepare an engaging presentation summarizing the key principles, behavioural expectations, and reporting mechanisms of the Ethics Code of Conduct.

→ This presentation should be delivered through regular short sessions but also repeated periodically (e.g., once per year) for all staff as a reminder.

→ To enhance learning and internalization, these sessions should adopt an interactive approach, using practical workplace scenarios, role-plays, or case studies that reflect real-life situations employees might encounter.

- **Challenge 3:** Employees, particularly young people with mental health conditions, might avoid reporting incidents of discrimination, harassment, or stigma due to fear of exclusion, negative judgment, or potential retaliation from colleagues or management.

**Solution:** To avoid such situations, the priority of confidentiality should be strongly emphasized within the Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct, not only as a written rule but as a principle that is regularly communicated and reinforced within the organization.

→ Reporting procedures should always provide the option for full anonymity to ensure that employees feel safe when raising sensitive issues.

→ Additionally, the designated contact person responsible for receiving and handling reports should be carefully selected, ideally a trusted and trained individual who is equipped to manage cases with sensitivity, empathy, and professionalism.

### Supporting Evidence:

A real-world example shared during the Delphi panel discussions illustrates the importance of establishing a strong internal ethics framework that guarantees confidentiality and psychological safety.

One employer who participated in the Delphi panel reported that, after initiating the development and internal rollout of an *Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct*, a young employee disclosed that she was experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), linked to a traumatic experience of sexual abuse during her adolescence.

The employee chose to come forward only after the internal policy had been presented to the staff, highlighting that she felt protected and supported through the organization's internal channels. The employer emphasized that the confidentiality principles outlined in the ethics code made both the employee and himself feel secure in addressing the situation appropriately and with care.

Such an example provided valuable insights into the critical importance of having an Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct. The establishment of such policies does not only facilitate the smooth and structured operation of companies but also plays a key role in fostering trust, promoting inclusion, and, most importantly, enabling safe disclosure of sensitive conditions. Moreover, these internal policies act as preventive mechanisms against any form of discriminatory behaviour directed towards all employees, with particular emphasis on safeguarding the rights and well-being of employees with mental health conditions.

### 3.4 National Mental Health Capacity-Building Programme

#### Description:

This policy recommendation directly targets the knowledge, skills, and training gaps identified in Thematic Area 4 of the Delphi panel analysis.

As highlighted through the Delphi panel findings, employers and HR managers operating in Cyprus often lack essential knowledge, competences, and sensitivity required to approach, engage, and support young people with mental health conditions within the workplace. Even in cases where training exists, it is typically limited to one-off sessions, lacking continuity, structured content, and practical application.

To address this challenge, it is proposed to develop a National Mental Health Capacity-Building Programme, a structured, government-led initiative that provides free, standardized, and continuous mental health training for employers and HR personnel, irrespective of their organizational size or sector.

Importantly, this training programme should also become a prerequisite for newly established organizations and start-ups in Cyprus, ensuring that employers and HR managers are equipped with essential knowledge and skills before initiating their operational activities. The policy programme should provide both theoretical and practical content, ensuring that employers and HR managers not only develop awareness but also gain operational skills to effectively support young people with mental health conditions in their organizations.

Guided by the Delphi panel findings, the programme should encompass the following key components:

- Theoretical Component:** This part should aim to equip employers and HR managers with foundational knowledge on mental health and foster a shared understanding of the importance of mental health inclusion within the workplace. The following key content areas should be addressed:
  - Introduction to Mental Health Conditions:** Trainers should provide a basic, clear, and stigma-free overview of mental health and its diversity. This section should cover:
    - What is mental health?
    - Understanding mental health as a spectrum that fluctuates over time.
    - Presentation of the most commonly encountered mental health conditions in workplace (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Anxiety, Depression, and Attention, Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
  - Why Mental Health Matters in the Workplace:** Trainers should pay attention in providing evidence-based information on why mental health matters in the workplace. The link between mental health and organizational outcomes should be highlighted. As an example, how mental health directly impacts performance, job retention, job satisfaction, productivity, etc., all should be presented during the training.
  - Understanding Stigma and Discrimination:** The clear definition of stigma and discrimination, their effects on young people with mental health conditions, and the potential psychological consequences (e.g., isolation, increased anxiety, stress, and non-disclosure) should be explicitly provided within the training content.
  - Benefits of Inclusive Workplaces:** During the training, employers and HR managers should be made aware of the benefits of establishing inclusive workplaces. The organizational advantages of fostering an inclusive work environment should be clearly emphasized to capture their attention, including increased employee performance, improved organizational cooperation, higher levels of employee retention, and enhanced contribution to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), particularly aligning with the Social (S) pillar of ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) standards.
- Practical Components:** This part of the training should aim to equip employers and HR managers with practical tools and actionable strategies to implement inclusive practices within their organizations. It should move beyond theoretical knowledge and guide them on how to translate awareness into practice, ensuring that inclusiveness is not only understood but also applied in daily operations and managerial approaches. The practical component should have the following themes:
  - Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Conditions:** During the training, employers and HR managers should be provided with step-by-step guidance on how to detect early signs of mental health challenges among their employees. This guidance should include observable behavioural, emotional, and performance-related indicators that may signal potential mental health difficulties (e.g., withdrawal from social interaction, sudden decline in work performance, increased absenteeism, visible signs of stress or anxiety). To reinforce this learning, the training should be accompanied by interactive and practical activities, for example, drag-and-drop exercises where employers and



HR managers practice matching early signs of mental health challenges with appropriate supportive actions.

**-Workplace Accommodation Applications:** This part of the training should be guided by the policy recommendations outlined in Section 2, specifically focusing on how employers can effectively implement workplace accommodation practices within their daily operations. The training should provide clear, practical guidance on how to adapt working conditions to meet the diverse needs of young people with mental health conditions. This should include concrete examples of best practices, illustrating how workplace accommodations can be applied in different organizational settings.

**-Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct Development:** This training component should guide employers and HR managers on how to develop and implement an Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct (proposed as Recommendation 3) focused on mental health inclusion, non-discrimination, and confidentiality. Employers should be provided with step-by-step guidance on key content areas (e.g., discrimination definitions, confidentiality rules, reporting procedures), ready-to-use templates and practical examples of existing ethics codes, scenario-based exercises to practice applying the policy in real-life situations.

**-First Aid in Crisis Management:** This part is crucial, as employers and HR managers should be equipped with essential skills to help them handle emergency situations effectively (e.g., panic attacks, suicide attempts). They should also be provided with emergency contact information (e.g., mental health professionals) and crisis support lines to ensure that such situations are managed carefully and appropriately. This component should be practiced through role-playing scenarios to enhance their practical skills and preparedness.

### Objectives:

The goals of this policy are:

- To equip employers and HR managers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and practical tools to enable them to recognize, respond to, and effectively support young people with mental health conditions in the workplace.
- To develop a standardized, government-led, and mandatory Mental Health Capacity-Building Programme that will be delivered in a structured and continuous manner-ensuring accessibility for all sectors and organizations operating in Cyprus.
- To ensure that employers and HR managers are prepared for the real-world application of inclusive workplace policies, and to build their capacity to confidently address questions, challenges, or situations related to mental health inclusion within their organizations.

### Implementation Considerations:

During the development and delivery of the National Mental Health Capacity-Building Programme, several challenges might be encountered by employers and HR managers. The following points explain potential challenges and their corresponding solutions.



- **Challenge 1:** Employers might attend the training sessions merely to fulfill their mandatory obligations without internalizing the importance of the topic or actively engaging with the content. This may significantly limit the effectiveness of the programme and prevent real behavioral change.

**Solution:** Establish a National Certification System for Inclusive Employers. Implement an evaluation mechanism at the end of each training module, including practical assessments, scenario, based exercises, or knowledge checks.

→ Employers who successfully complete the training programme and demonstrate knowledge application can be awarded the title of "Certified Inclusive Employer."

→ This certification can be used on the organization's official website, recruitment campaigns, and corporate materials, enhancing their public recognition and reputation as a socially responsible employer.

- **Challenge 2:** Employers might feel that the training content is general and does not sufficiently reflect the specific dynamics, challenges, and needs of their respective industry sectors.

**Solution:** It is the crucial responsibility of trainers to adapt and customize the practical components of the training (e.g., scenarios, role-playing exercises, and case studies) based on the specific profile and sectoral characteristics of the participating organizations. Tailoring these practical tools will ensure that the training content remains relevant, relatable, and applicable across diverse sectors.

- **Challenge 3:** Employers might express concerns related to time constraints and operational workload, limiting their availability to attend long or rigidly scheduled training sessions.

**Solution:** The National Mental Health Capacity-Building Programme should adopt a flexible and adaptable training structure to accommodate the diverse schedules of employers. The training should be delivered in short and focused modules, with optional time slots offered (e.g., evening or weekend sessions) to accommodate different schedules. Additionally, an e-learning component should always be available to ensure flexible and self-paced learning for all participants.

### Supporting Evidence:

This real-life example shared during the Delphi panel discussions provides a valuable insight into the consequences of lacking mental health training in the workplace. As highlighted by a representative of a youth organization, two young people with mental health conditions, one diagnosed with severe anxiety and the other with panic attacks, experienced significant challenges after disclosing their conditions to their employers.

Due to the employers' limited knowledge and misconceptions, anxiety was confused with fear of working, and panic attacks were misinterpreted as fear of socializing. These misunderstandings not only prevented the employers from providing appropriate support but also created a sense of exclusion and being misunderstood among the young employees. As a result, both individuals chose to resign from their positions.

This clearly demonstrates how the absence of basic mental health training among employers can directly harm talented young people with mental health conditions. It does not only affect their well-being but also result in their exit from the labour market. Such situations reinforce the cycle of exclusion and missed opportunities, both for the individuals and for the organizations that lose valuable human capital.

Indeed, these cases strongly suggest the urgent need for developing a government-led, mandatory National Mental Health Capacity-Building Programme for employers in Cyprus. Such a policy initiative will ensure that every employer is equipped with the essential knowledge and skills to recognize, understand, and support young people with mental health conditions.

### 3.5 National Legal Framework for Mental Health Inclusion in Workplace

#### Description:

This policy recommendation has been proposed to address the existing gaps at the systemic and structural levels identified in Thematic Area 5 of the Delphi panel analyses. In this thematic area, the critical gaps associated with the absence of inclusive legal and regulatory frameworks were extensively discussed.

Currently, Cyprus lacks a structured national policy that provides clear guidance, minimum standards, and legal obligations for employers in the areas of recruitment, retention, and workplace inclusion of young people with mental health conditions. Also, the absence of legal monitoring and evaluation bodies for mental health inclusion is evident in Cyprus. The lack of such a comprehensive framework creates significant uncertainty among employers, particularly in terms of how to operate inclusively and what is expected of them. This gap results in inconsistent practices across sectors and increases the risk of unequal treatment of young people with mental health conditions in the labour market.

To address the systemic-level challenges identified in the Delphi panel analyses, there is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive National Legal Framework for Mental Health Inclusion in the Workplace in Cyprus. This policy framework should be the result of a collaborative process, developed jointly by the Ministry of Labour, national mental health authorities, and representatives from employer associations and civil society organizations working on mental health inclusion.

The National Framework should serve as the central regulatory document that sets out:

- Prerequisites of initiating business start-ups
- Minimum standards for inclusive recruitment, retention, and workplace accommodation practices.
- Legal obligations for employers in supporting young people with mental health conditions.
- Operational guidelines for implementation.
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This part should be given particular priority, as the absence of government-led monitoring and evaluation bodies in the field of mental health inclusion was identified as a serious gap during the Delphi panel

discussions. These monitoring and evaluation procedures should be conducted on a regular basis (e.g., once per month) and should specifically assess the following aspects:

- Whether workplace accommodation practices, both physical and psychological, are being correctly applied in daily organizational operations.
- Whether Internal Workplace Ethics Codes of Conduct are not only developed but also actively implemented and communicated within the organization.
- Whether employers and HR personnel are participating in the continuous capacity-building programme on mental health inclusion as mandated by the national policy framework.

Importantly, the ultimate goal of these monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is not to penalize or punish organizations. Instead, the process should be framed as supportive and developmental. That is, these mechanisms should aim to provide guidance and feedback for organizations to strengthen their inclusive practices and ensure professional growth in their mental health inclusion strategies.

It is important to note that this framework needs to act as an umbrella policy, encompassing and formalizing all the key recommendations proposed in the previous sections (i.e., inclusive recruitment guidelines, financial incentives, workplace accommodation policies, internal ethics code of conduct, and mental health capacity-building programmes). The national legal framework is expected to transform each proposed recommendation from suggested good practices into mandatory legal standards applicable across all sectors in Cyprus.

Additionally, this National Legal Framework should introduce a new structural requirement for all organizations operating in Cyprus, regardless of their size, to have an established Human Resources (HR) department or an officially designated HR officer responsible for managing inclusion and mental health practices within the organization. This requirement aims to ensure that inclusive practices are institutionalized from the beginning of business operations. With regard to the HR requirement, the proposed policy should clearly specify that:

- The presence of an HR department (or an officially designated HR officer) should be a mandatory prerequisite for the registration and opening of new businesses in Cyprus, irrespective of the size or sector of the organization.
- HR personnel should be required to participate in accredited and certified mental health training programmes delivered by certified mental health professionals.
- HR departments should act as the internal focal point within organizations, responsible for implementing, monitoring, and ensuring compliance with the national policies on mental health inclusion in the workplace.

### **Objectives:**

The goals of this policy are:

- To develop a comprehensive Mental Health Inclusion Legal Framework that defines minimum standards and legal obligations to support and promote mental health inclusion across workplaces in Cyprus.

- To support the implementation of all other proposed policy recommendations (Recruitment Guidelines, Workplace Accommodation, Ethics Code of Conduct, Capacity-Building Programmes) through a legally binding national framework, ensuring their application, sustainability, and long-term impact.
- To establish government-led monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that guide organizations through ongoing feedback, ensuring that mental health inclusion becomes an integral part of the workplace culture of organizations in Cyprus.
- To foster the necessity of HR departments in organizations and ensure that HR personnel are adequately trained, equipped, and certified to implement mental health inclusion policies effectively.

### Implementation Considerations:

During the stable development and implementation of the National Legal Framework for Mental Health Inclusion in the Workplace, several challenges might be encountered. The points below highlight the key anticipated challenges along with their corresponding solutions to ensure effective and practical implementation of the policy at a national level.

- **Challenge 1:** Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms might be perceived by employers as overly controlling, punitive, or intrusive inspections, leading them to perceive the process as a threat rather than a supportive tool. This perception may create resistance or reluctance among employers to engage with the monitoring processes.  
**Solution:** It is highly important to emphasize that the primary goal of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is to provide constructive feedback and ongoing support to organizations. Rather than imposing penalties on employers, the focus should be on offering guidance plans and follow-up consultation mechanisms to help track their progress and support continuous improvement in the area of mental health inclusion.
- **Challenge 2:** Some organizations, particularly smaller enterprises, might perceive the establishment of HR departments as an additional financial burden.  
**Solution:** It is important to ensure that flexibility is integrated within the policy framework. For instance, small companies could be allowed to fulfill their HR obligations by hiring part-time HR personnel or by establishing partnerships with external HR consultancy services. This approach would enable smaller organizations to meet the minimum HR requirements while considering their limited resources and operational capacities.
- **Challenge 3:** Employers might hesitate to share their pitfalls, challenges, or mistakes during the monitoring and evaluation activities due to the fear of being publicly exposed or criticized.  
**Solution:** It is crucial to ensure that employers are clearly informed about the confidentiality principles guiding the monitoring and evaluation procedures. Employers should be assured that the monitoring results, especially regarding

challenges and mistakes, will remain confidential between the organization and the monitoring body responsible.

Additionally, it should be emphasized that only best practices and success stories will be publicly shared, with the consent of the organization, to foster a culture of learning and to encourage other employers to adopt inclusive practices.

### **Supporting Evidence:**

During the Delphi panel analysis, mental health representatives shared concrete cases illustrating the existing gaps and challenges faced by young people with mental health conditions in the Cypriot labour market. For instance, they referred to complaints made by young individuals with mental health conditions who reported discriminatory practices by employers during the recruitment phase. Additionally, it was highlighted that certain employers, even when fully aware of the workplace accommodation needs of young people with mental health conditions, intentionally chose not to fulfil these needs, mentioning the absence of any legal obligation or consequence for non-compliance.

Moreover, when the concept of developing an Internal Workplace Ethics Code of Conduct (as proposed in Recommendation 3) was introduced during the discussions, one employer openly stated that since such a policy is not legally mandatory, there is no incentive to invest time and resources in creating it.

These real-life experiences clearly demonstrate the urgent need for establishing a comprehensive and legally binding National Legal Framework for Mental Health Inclusion in the Workplace. Without legal enforcement and clear regulatory standards, the effective integration of mental health inclusion practices in Cypriot workplaces remains highly unlikely. It is therefore essential that all previously proposed recommendations (Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4) are anchored within this legal framework to ensure their systematic application, sustainability, and impact across all sectors.

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