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University Lifelong Learning to Live a Better Life – Continuing Education for Sustainable Quality of Life in Europe

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Strand: Wellbeing in a Digital Age

HiLives: a digital tool to connect and network opportunities for independent lives in Higher Education

Despite the progress of the last years, young people with disabilities, namely with intellectual and developmental disorder (IDD), still have the greatest difficulties in accessing higher education (HE) and employment. HiLives aims to create opportunities towards the (i) inclusion of students with IDD in HE Institutions, and (ii) the transition to an active and independent life, exploring the role that digital media can play in this process.

Besides other two outputs, HiLives aims at developing a prototype of a digital tool to connect and network opportunities, tackling gaps and mismatches between the expectations, skills and needs of young adults with IDD, and both the HE offer and the employment opportunities. This digital tool will allow young adults interested in a HE Institution (HEI) to introduce their profiles and find a match with the opportunities to study at a certain university. It will also allow universities to register and present inclusion/curricular opportunities, and students to find employment opportunities.

By assessing which career options result in higher productivity and job satisfaction, HEI can propose more assertive qualification paths for these students, in order to make them fit for the job market opportunities. HEI will also be able to promote a more focused learning path and a truly inclusive qualification. People with IDD will register in the tool, entering a profile; the tool will then map their technical knowledge, skills, desires, dreams of future work, as well as types of behaviours and motivators to analyse dimensions like dominance, influence, stability, and compliance, and help understand how people deal with challenges, rules, procedures, changes, pressure, and interpersonal relationships. An inclusive HEI curricular path will then be dynamically proposed. Companies can also register and define available positions, inserting information such as position, description of the vacancy, salary, schedules, benefits, requirements, skills, knowledge and the profile based on behavioural characteristics that best suit the vacancy. A dashboard will be set up, composed of the behavioural characteristics and desires of the candidate, along with the characteristics of the available positions, so that a match of this information is made.

This digital tool is, therefore, being conceived as an inclusion instrument, fostering the transition of young people with IDD to HE and to employment, guaranteeing their active participation in the community, and the development of their socio-professional skills together with their peers. It is known that digital media may have a fundamental role in promoting more inclusive social and learning experiences, particularly when considering the challenge of widening participation that HEI are currently facing. Digital resources have been widely highlighted by the key role they can have in promoting inclusion, for its flexible and ubiquitous nature and for the potential they present in overcoming physical, social and attitudinal barriers. HiLives can play a very important role in this path. It aims to bring young people with IDD closer to academic life and the labour market, contributing to change the current reality in which these groups are disproportionately reunited in semi-skilled and unqualified occupations.