

PERSPECTIVES
FOR
RESEARCH

BACK TO ACTIVITY

A CALL TO ACTION TO SUPPORT
CANCER SURVIVORS IN WORK
AND EMPLOYMENT

A white paper intended for decision-makers in Europe, particularly those in charge of research in social and human sciences and public health

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Over two million working-aged people are diagnosed with cancer each year in Europe. Although better treatments have increased the survival rates tremendously in the past decades, cancer survivors face considerable financial, psychological, and social hardships while support is still lacking at diverse levels. These challenges are “wicked problems” that could be solved with new holistic methodologies, transdisciplinary knowledge and participatory science projects.

Return to work (RTW), which refers to “work retention and return to the former professional situation than before diagnosis, for patients with cancer and for survivors”, seems to be one appropriate answer to these challenges, if it is carried out under appropriate health-promoting work conditions. Under the auspices of the French presidency of the European Union, an international consortium was built in December 2021, which presented insights on Cancer, work and employment during the 2022 European Cancer Meetings in Paris held in February 2022, and organized by the Institut National du Cancer (INCa). This cooperation continued during a dedicated international Scientific Conference on “Cancer, Work & Employment”, organized in November 2022. This conference gathered 110 researchers, from 22 different countries. A consortium of European scientists continued to work together after this conference, forming a scientific committee that supervised the elaboration of a white paper. A subset of this scientific committee formed a working group of seven members, who met regularly to elaborate and edit this document, based on proposals of an operational team formed by INCa, Karolinska Institutet and consultants.

These **perspectives** are the result of an extensive analysis of RTW challenges, structured in **four dimensions**.

The **first dimension** comprises the individual who is suffering from the various professional impacts of cancer and its treatment. Indeed, cancer and its treatments lead to physical, psychological, and social symptoms, with consequences for the individual’s ability to work. There is a great need for interventions that support cancer survivors to return to work and stay at work. Successful and effective interventions are **multidisciplinary interventions which combine psycho-educational, physical activity and vocational elements, and interventions that promote physical activity**. To promote RTW, assessing work ability of patients and survivors in relation to the demands of their work is key, as is evaluating the cognitive impairment of cancer and/or its treatment. There is evidence that activity and work can contribute to rehabilitation and recovery from cancer. A specific focus in further scientific research must be on caregivers of patients with cancer at the long-term.

The **second dimension** comprises the healthcare system, including healthcare professionals. Although they can play a decisive role in patients’ and survivors’ RTW, they seem to be not fully prepared for this role. Ongoing research has demonstrated that integrating health follow-ups within the workplace can be beneficial through occupational health professionals and rehabilitation services. Policymakers develop different avenues for reducing these inequalities in social security support and to stabilize RTW legislation for patients and survivors with cancer.

The **third dimension** comprises the social security system. It considers the wide diversity of legal frameworks, sickness absence regimes, social premiums and taxes, welfare states, and job statuses. Several types of disparities can be observed within the EU, especially regarding RTW legislation (which can vary according to the type of welfare state) and employment statuses (where self-employed, those working for temporary job agencies and platform workers can suffer from a lack of legal protection and financial worries)

The **fourth dimension** comprises the workplace perspective, as cancer has impacts on the labor market, reducing dynamics and employment prospects. Cancer can be a challenge to the workplace, as RTW’s timing vary according to cancer type, treatment, and the company’s size. Furthermore, cancer can influence labor market dynamics through labor supply reductions and early retirements, especially for 50+ aged patients. Various interventions have been developed by researchers to alleviate survivors and patients with cancer burden by giving both employees and employers practical tools and new ways of managing such situations to ease and support RTW.

TO DEVELOP RESEARCH ON RTW, MANY ENABLERS ARE REQUIRED:

First, promote, develop, and support participative and interdisciplinary research on RTW of cancer survivors across the EU:

- build a multidisciplinary European task force, to move forward high-quality research and coordinate a network of researchers on RTW;
- ensure availability of financial resources for research projects and initiatives.

Second, adapt the legal, regulatory, and institutional framework:

- ensure data accessibility, protection, and interoperability;
- adapt the legal framework to facilitate research on RTW;
- build an effective international cooperation research on RTW including companies and businesses.





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