


ARTICLE

A Scoping Review on the Conceptualisation of Employer Engagement in the Employment of Vulnerable Workers: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Renate Bosman¹ , Hanneke van Heijster¹, Irmgard Borghouts^{1,2} and Charissa Freese^{1,3,4}

¹Department of Human Resource Studies, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands, ²Department of Business Administration, University West Sweden, Trollhättan, Sweden, ³School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South-Africa and ⁴Avans University of Applied Sciences's, Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands

Corresponding author: Renate Bosman; Email: r.t.bosman@tilburguniversity.edu

(Received 3 December 2024; revised 23 June 2025; accepted 10 July 2025)

Workers with a vulnerable position on the labour market face difficulties finding and maintaining decent work. An increasing body of research on the demand-side of the labour market investigates the involvement of employers in active labour market policies, often referred to as employer engagement. However, the concept of employer engagement varies, causing ambiguity in its definition and use in research. This scoping review investigated sixty-three documents (e.g., peer reviewed scientific papers and grey literature) on employer engagement and outlines the current conceptualisations of employer engagement. By combining the conceptualisations taking a stakeholder-oriented approach, a four stakeholder group perspective on employer engagement was developed. With the organisation as an entity, HRM, line managers, and institutional stakeholders. This review deepens the understanding of employer engagement and contributes to the literature by taking an interdisciplinary approach and offers suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Employer engagement; Social policy; Inclusive HRM; Active labour market policies; Allegedly vulnerable people

Introduction

Decent work for everyone is the eighth goal of the sustainable developmental goals (SDG) of the United Nations. Additionally, the tenth goal describes the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable people (United Nations, 2022; SDG Nederland, n.d.). People with a vulnerable¹ position on the labour market are, for instance: persons with disabilities; persons with a migration background; people that are long-term unemployed; and youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (Ingold and Valizade, 2017; Kersten et al., 2023; Alves et al., 2023). Work is important for meeting individuals' psychosocial needs and in forming individual identity (Waddell and Burton, 2006). For individuals with a disability, for example, work helps during recovery, can lead to better health outcomes, and can improve wellbeing (Waddell and Burton, 2006). To increase the chances of people in vulnerable positions to participate in the labour market there are active labour market policies (ALMP) (e.g., wage subsidies), serving as a form of social security (Borghouts and Freese, 2022). Social security has three functions: income protection in the event of a social risk; promotion of labour market participation; and risk prevention (Borghouts and Freese, 2022). Still, vulnerable people face challenges in finding and maintaining work, including increased systemic

discrimination in accessing decent work (Burgess *et al.*, 2013). Researchers start to acknowledge that employers play a significant role in entering the labour market (Orton *et al.*, 2019), and that work is the greatest form of social security (Borghouts and Freese, 2022).

Previously, labour market research was mostly focused on the supply-side of the labour market (i.e., the role of employees). However, recently the demand-side of the labour market (i.e., the role of employers) is receiving increasing attention in studies concerning the employment of vulnerable people (Ingold and Stuart, 2015; Bredgaard, 2018; Van Berkel, 2021). The growing recognition for the role of employers in the employment of vulnerable groups can be supported by *stakeholder theory* (Freeman, 1984), which posits that organisations have responsibilities not only to shareholders, but to all stakeholders that are affected by or can affect the organisation's objectives. From this perspective, employers are not merely private economic actors but also societal stakeholders with a role in addressing social challenges, such as the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labour market. The role of employers in the employment of vulnerable people is commonly being referred to as 'employer engagement'.

One broad definition of employer engagement is provided by Van Berkel *et al.* (2017): 'the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labour market participation of vulnerable groups'. However, divergent conceptualisations of employer engagement are used. In some studies employer engagement refers to the employment of individuals from vulnerable groups (e.g., Hamilton, 2023), while in others it refers to participation in ALMP (e.g., using subsidies) (e.g., Ravn, 2023). Scholars argue that employer engagement extends beyond employing vulnerable people, encompassing behaviours, motives, and attitudes of employers (see: Ingold and Valizade, 2015; Bredgaard, 2018). Although these divergent views might suggest that employer engagement is primarily a behavioural concept, research indicates that employers' behaviours do not always align with their attitudes or intentions (Bredgaard, 2018) (i.e., employers can be highly motivated to be employ allegedly vulnerable people, but not bring this into practice). In this regard, the integrated behavioural model stresses the importance of for example context (Blonk, 2018). This so-called attitude-behaviour gap highlights that 'employer engagement' cannot be reduced to actual hiring practices alone but that it also involves underlying dispositions and decision-making processes. From the perspective of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), this conceptual ambiguity can be explained by the fact that employers operate within a network of multiple internal and external stakeholders – such as shareholders, customers, employees, public institutions, and the broader community – each with their own expectations, interests, and influences (Pedersen, 2006). Different conceptualisations of employer engagement may consider different stakeholder logics: for instance, research focused on participation in ALMP may view employer engagement as a response to institutional or governmental expectations, while other studies may take a different approach emphasising the employer's ethical stance or social responsibility. These varying perspectives can contribute to the fragmentation of the concept in the literature.

Studying employer engagement in different ways, and lack of consensus about what the concept entails is problematic as this makes it difficult to compare results across studies. Because of this ambiguity, researchers express the need for clarity regarding the conceptualisation of employer engagement (Van Berkel *et al.*, 2017; Ingold and McGurk, 2023). In this study, the following research question will be studied: what are the different conceptualisations of employer engagement in the case of employing allegedly vulnerable people?

By conducting a scoping review of the employer engagement literature, we aim to further support (interdisciplinary) research on the employment of vulnerable groups². By analysing the different ways in which employer engagement is used – whether as behaviour (e.g., participation in ALMP), attitude, or motivation – this study provides a clearer and more structured understanding of the term. This conceptual clarity is crucial for enhancing the comparability of empirical findings, supporting interdisciplinary dialogue, and guiding future research.

Additionally, this paper offers important societal value by clarifying what employer engagement entails. A more consistent conceptualisation enables policy makers, labour market

institutions, and employers themselves to better understand the various forms employer engagement can take, and how these relate to broader goals such as inclusive employment and social justice (as formulated in sustainable development goals (SDG) eight and ten). It fosters a shared language and understanding across stakeholder groups, which is essential for effective collaboration in designing and implementing policies (Olejniczak et al., 2020).

Method

A scoping review was conducted to map the conceptualisations of employer engagement. Scoping reviews aim to find all relevant data from the literature to provide a comprehensive overview of research fields (Xiao and Watson, 2019). Unlike a systematic review, a scoping review allows for broad research questions – such as exploring conceptualisations – while enabling a systematic data search to gather all relevant data, enhancing the review’s reliability and reproducibility (Munn et al., 2018). This review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines for reporting literature searches (Tricco et al., 2018).

Scoping the literature and search strategy

To thoroughly understand employer engagement, various research traditions were reviewed, ensuring a comprehensive topic map through diverse documents (Wong et al., 2013). Employer engagement is a complex concept used in different fields including but not limited to social policy, HRM, rehabilitation, and organisational studies. To ensure that the diverse areas of employer engagement were covered in the search strategy below, this article was collaboratively authored by researchers from diverse disciplines associated with employer engagement (e.g., social policy, HRM, organisational psychology, and social sciences). Additionally, the researchers consulted with search specialists of the university library for improving the search strategy as well as for advice on common synonyms and relevant terms from other research fields.

To develop a good search strategy the researchers conducted trail searches in the period between February 2024 until April 2024. The search string was developed and iteratively. First, relevant search terms were sought. Because the understanding of the concept employer engagement is central in this paper, ‘employer engagement’ was considered a conditional term. However, some articles use synonyms in the title, keywords, or abstracts, such as ‘employer involvement’ or ‘employer commitment’. ‘Employer participation’ also emerged as a possible synonym. A test search including this term yielded more articles, of which we screened the first 100. However these were either already identified through other terms, or did not discuss employer engagement in the main text. As such, employer participation was excluded from the final search string, since it did not contribute to additional relevant literature. Employer engagement, employer involvement, and employer commitment were included in the final search string.

Second, as the objective of this paper was to investigate the conceptualisation of employer engagement regarding the employment allegedly vulnerable persons, the search string terms needed to contain a term referring to people in such a position. There were different brainstorm sessions to investigate suitable search terms, the search terms were based on key words and their synonyms of key papers in the field of employer engagement. The second part of the search string contained a term referring to a vulnerable group or other relevant related terms to employer engagement. Terms concerning vulnerable groups were for example ‘disability’ or ‘marginalised groups’. Regarding social policy terms such as ‘ALMP’, ‘social policy’, or ‘labour market integration’ were included, and regarding rehabilitation, human resource management (HRM), and the organisation side terms like ‘human resource strategy’, ‘HR’, or ‘rehabilitation’ were included. This article defines vulnerable workers based on previous research on labour market

inclusion (Ingold and Valizade, 2017; Kersten *et al.*, 2023) as people with a disability, people with a migration background, people that are long-term unemployed, and youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (Alves *et al.*, 2023). Age, gender, and pregnancy were excluded, as these groups are typically not classified as vulnerable for this research domain.

To address the research question a full search string was developed by combining the first (e.g., ‘employer engagement’) and the second part (e.g., ‘vulnerable workers’, ‘ALMP’, or ‘human resource strategy’, etc.) by the Boolean operator AND. The operator OR was used to sum the search terms within the two parts. It was decided to develop a concise version of the search string, prioritising specificity without compromising comprehensiveness. The full search string can be found in the Appendix. Articles from three databases were collected, including Web of Science, Scopus, and PsycINFO. These databases cover business journals and social scientific papers. Scoping other databases (e.g., JSTOR and ProQuest) resulted in either the same documents as in the aforementioned databases or in irrelevant documents.

In the final selection of documents, citation tracking and snowballing were used iteratively to identify additional relevant papers and grey literature (e.g., governmental reports). Additionally, grey literature was found by contacting authors that have published four or more included documents for conference papers or policy briefings. The addition of grey literature in a scoping review creates a more complete and more comprehensive overview of a topic (Xiao and Watson, 2019).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: (1) employer engagement had to be related to the active involvement of employing people with a vulnerable position on the labour market (documents focusing on ALMP were included, as their purpose is to improve labour market access for vulnerable groups (Borghouts and Freese, 2022)); (2) the included paper could not be another (systematic) review; (3) the paper was written in English, for accessibility purposes; (4) the conditional term ‘employer engagement’ was defined, conceptualised, or operationalised in the paper; and (5) the paper was peer-reviewed. The included grey literature consisted of policy reports, conference papers, and scientific books.

Selection of documents

The search string resulted in a database of 327 documents retrieved on April 18, 2024; 140 from Scopus, 76 of PsycINFO, and 111 of Web of Science. The documents were imported in Rayyan (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016). The 128 duplicates found by Rayyan were checked and deleted, after which 199 documents remained that required screening. The first selection of documents was based on title and abstract, and the first three inclusion criteria. Two of the researchers evaluated 199 the abstracts; 117 were excluded based on the first inclusion criterion, 6 were excluded based on the second, and no articles were excluded based on the third criterion. Two researchers fully completed this phase with an alignment of 94 per cent. Any disagreement was handled by discussing the articles; almost all disagreement was resolved because one of the researchers overlooked a part of the abstract (e.g., methodology or background).

Seventy-six documents remained for a full article scan, where all inclusion criteria were assessed. Seven articles were excluded based on first inclusion criterion and forty were excluded based the fourth. This resulted in twenty-nine articles being included. The additional reference and citation check resulted in an additional twelve articles, one conference paper, four policy/research reports, and ten book chapters. Moreover, contacting authors of more than four included documents resulted in two extra policy documents being included. Some papers were initially overlooked because they belong to grey literature, making them absent from the databases used. Other articles were missed as they lacked terms like *employer engagement* in their title, keywords,

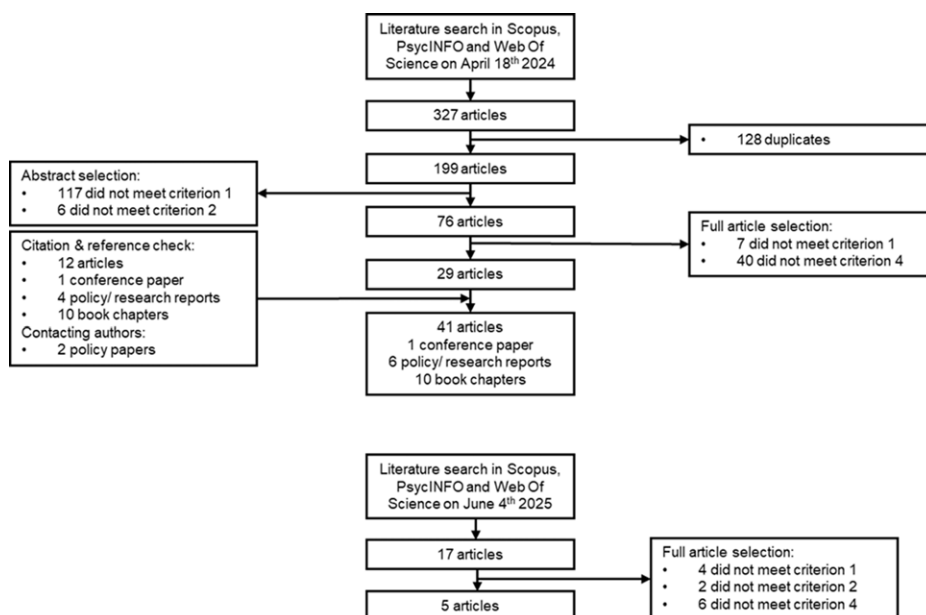


Figure 1. A prisma figure of the search and selection procedure. This PRISMA flow diagram illustrates the systematic process used to identify, screen, and include relevant documents in the scoping review. The flow shows the number of records identified through database searches, the removal of duplicates, and the stepwise exclusions based on title/abstract screening and full-text eligibility assessment, resulting in the final set of sixty-three included documents. Adapted from PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

or abstract, as these topics were not central to their research focus. These articles, however, did include the concept of employer engagement in their work.

On June 4, 2025, an additional search was conducted. The same search string was used to retrieve articles from the same databases between April 18, 2024 until the June 4, 2025. A total of seventeen articles were found of with no duplicates. These articles went through full article scan and four articles were excluded based on exclusion criterion one, two articles were excluded based on exclusion criterion two, and six were excluded based on exclusion criterion four. Resulting in an addition of five articles. For an overview of the article inclusion see Figure 1.

Data extraction

The following data was extracted from the included articles and put in a spreadsheet: (1) author(s); (2) publication date; (3) type of study; (4) qualitative or quantitative analysis; (5) discipline; (6) theories used; (7) conceptualisation of employer engagement; and (8) the coding from the data analysis. For a complete overview of the included documents, see Table 1.

Analysis strategy

In the spreadsheet with the extracted data, a thematic analysis was applied to find overarching themes in the definitions of employer engagement (Clarke and Braun, 2017). Open coding revealed recurring themes regarding employer engagement (e.g., implementing certain policies). The inductive, selective coding resulted in four different forms of employer engagement. We applied stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) as a deductive lens to the data to understand how various stakeholders were reflected in the conceptualisations by identifying different stakeholder groups. The first stakeholder group focused on the engagement of the organisation as an entity.

Table 1. Overview of the included studies on employer engagement

	Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
1.	Aksnes (2019)	Job agents	Twenty-six interviews, and notes from thirteen formal meetings and seminars	People in vocational rehabilitation	Norway	Welfare discourse and market discourse	Ethnographic	Empirical article	Employer engagement has two faces: 1) the actions of employers and 2) the role of job agents in activating employers.	External stakeholders
2.	Aksnes and Breit (2025)	Managers, jobseekers, and other stakeholders from twenty-one organisations	Sixty-nine interviews	People from disadvantaged groups	Norway	Employer engagement and inclusive leadership	Interviews	Empirical article	A micro-perspective of employer engagement with a focus on practices of managers in employing disadvantaged jobseekers.	Line manager stakeholder group of employer engagement
3.	Alves et al. (2023)	Registry data on Norwegian organisations with a minimum of four employees	22.621 companies	Youth with NEET status	Norway	Organisational characteristics	Regressions on registry data.	Empirical article	The active role of organisations in the re-integration of youth with NEET status.	Line manager stakeholder group of employer engagement
4.	Bellis et al. (2011)	Job centres, employers, customers, training providers, and other relevant actors		Disadvantaged groups	England, Wales, Scotland	Employer engagement	Interviews	Research report	The extent to which employers engage with a government policy, programmes, or agency.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
5.	Bezyak et al. (2020)	Employers in hiring or management positions	180	People with a disability	United States of America		Survey	Empirical article	They tested a <i>Disability Inclusion Strategy Scale (DISS)</i> with six questions as employer engagement tool. The DISS exists of items on the role of employers in different activities that foster employment for people with a disability (e.g., collaborate with state vocational rehabilitation agencies for recruitment, and including disability as a part of the diversity and inclusion policies of the company.	HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
6. Boselie et al. (2021)			Vulnerable workers		Perspectives on allegedly vulnerable workers	Literature	Chapter	Employer engagement is defined by the two faces of Ingold and Stuart (2015). It focuses on how employers can contribute to the labour-market participation of vulnerable workers. And on how social policies and social services can help employers.	External stakeholders
7. Bredgaard (2018)	People that make decisions at the workplace level on personnel management	1499	People subjected to ALMP	Denmark	Policy approaches to active labour market policies	Survey	Empirical article	Employer engagement is about the usage of ALMP. Employer usage of ALMP is more complex and varied than often assumed. Attitudes are not a direct predictor of making use of ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
8. Bredgaard et al. (2023)			People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Denmark	Activation policies	Literature	Chapter	The active participation of employers in ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
9. Bredgaard and Halkjær (2016)	Danish companies with more than five employees	1499	People subjected to ALMP	Denmark	Employer engagement in ALMP	Survey	Empirical article	The participation in ALMP and the reasons to participate.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
10. Breit et al. (2025)	Organisational representatives of organisations that have between four and 250 employees	1000	People with a disability	Norway	COM-B model	Survey	Empirical article	The involvement of organisations in the employment of people with a disability. A focus on the micro-level that includes workplace dynamics and organisational practices.	All internal stakeholder groups
11. Butler and Payne (2025)	Project employees, key workers, employers and more actors working at the two researched cased	Twenty-nine interviews	The cases aim to help unemployed people with complex needs	The United Kingdom	Employer engagement literature	Case study	Empirical article	The definition of Van Berkel et al. (2017) is used; however, they have an emphasis on ALMP as they are researching activation programmes.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
12.	Dall et al. (2023)	Employers, municipalities		People subjected to ALMP	Denmark	Employer engagement	Interviews and ethnographic observations	Chapter	Employer engagement not only entails employers being socially responsible on paper; it involves the employing organisations as a whole: managers on all levels, supervisors, HR-staff, union representatives, employees, et cetera.	The active involvement of employers in the employment of vulnerable people
13.	De Dios Pérez et al. (2024-a)	People with multiple sclerosis (MS), employers, and healthcare professionals	Fifteen individuals with MS, three employers, four healthcare professionals	People with MS	The United Kingdom		Mixed-method intervention study	Empirical article	The involvement of employers in the rehabilitation process. This can be on the relationship between employer and employee for education of the employer but also for improvement of the relationship.	Line manager stakeholder group of employer engagement
14.	De Dios Pérez et al. (2024-b)	People with MS, employers, and healthcare professionals	Twenty participants and ten stakeholders	People with MS	The United Kingdom		Intervention study	Empirical article	The involvement of employers in the rehabilitation process. This can be on the relationship between employer and employee for education of the employer but also for improvement of the relationship.	Line manager level of employer engagement
15.	Enehaug et al. (2021)	Managers focusing on workplace level activities part of a Norwegian union	2253	People subjected to ALMP	Norway	Employer engagement, inclusion skills competence, workplace inclusion competence, participation, and control.	Survey	Empirical article	The role of employers in ALMP, but they go beyond Bredgaard (2018) by looking at competence instead of attitude.	HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement
16.	Etherington and Jones (2023)			People subjected to ALMP	Denmark	Job rotation	Literature	Chapter	The active involvement of employers in ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
17.	Fernandez-Urbano and Orton (2021)	Front-line staff and managers that are public officials	Fifteen	People subjected to ALMP	Denmark	Sen's Capability Approach	Mixed- method consisting of interviews and document analysis	Empirical article	The involvement of employers in ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
18.	Frøyland et al. (2019)			People subjected to ALMP		Supply and demand side of the labour market	Literature	Empirical article	Promoting labour market participation of vulnerable groups, with a specific focus on HRM. Based on Van Berkel et al. (2017).	HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement
19.	Frøyland et al. (2025)	Five Norwegian organisations, people with a disability, managers, HR-representatives, union-representatives and co-workers	Twenty-six interviews	People with a disability	Norway	Employer engagement and resistance	Interviews	Empirical article	Active involvement in the employment of people with a disability. This can be done on a macro (policy approaches), meso (programme implementation) and micro level (workplace dynamics).	All internal stakeholder groups
20.	Gjersøe and Strand (2023)	Caseworkers in youth teams	Twenty-two	Vulnerable youth	Norway	Supported-employment literature	Interviews	Empirical article	Active involvement in getting vulnerable people a job. Which in this research is guided by the use of welfare services.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
21.	Green and Sissons (2023)			People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom	Labour market trends and ALMP	Literature	Chapter	The active involvement of employers in ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
22.	Hamilton (2023)	Laundry company		People subjected to ALMP	Australia	Employment policies	Case study	Chapter	The active involvement in hiring vulnerable people. Recruitment and selection should be accessible for all individuals commitment to diversity and inclusion from top down.	The active involvement of employers in the employment of vulnerable people

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
23. Hyggen and Vedeler (2021)	Employers	Eleven interviews, and 1501 surveys	People that use the work training programme	Norway	ALMP and employer engagement	Mixed-method consisting of interviews and surveys.	Empirical article	The usage of ALMP, and the motivation to do so.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
24. Ingold (2018)	Employer engagement staff from street-level organisations	Thirty-four	Clients that are eligible for the Work Programme (e.g., long-term unemployed, and people with a disability)	England, Scotland, and Wales	Employer engagement as inter-organisational relations, and employer engagement staff as ‘boundary spanners’	Interviews	Empirical article	Employer engagement is two-faced as discussed in Ingold and Stuart (2015), this article focused on service providers that try to activate employers to employ people from vulnerable groups.	External stakeholders
25. Ingold (2019)			People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom	Department of work and pensions	Literature	Call for evidence	The definition of the two faces of employer engagement of Ingold and Stuart (2015) is used with an addition on the difference between participation and reasons for participating. Making a distinction between instrumentally and relationally engaged employers.	External stakeholders and the organisational stakeholder group
26. Ingold et al. (2017)	Employers and service providers	103	People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom and Denmark	Employer engagement	Interviews	Policy report	The definition of the two faces of employer engagement of Ingold and Stuart (2015) is used with an addition on the difference between participation and reasons for participating. Making a distinction between instrumentally and relationally engaged employers.	External stakeholders and the organisational stakeholder group
27. Ingold et al. (2023)	Hiring managers	Thirty	Possible welfare recipients	Australia	ALMP and employer engagement	Interviews	Empirical article	The active involvement of employers in the labour market participation of vulnerable groups, by extension how employer services can engage employers, and what drives employers to participate.	External stakeholders

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
28. Ingold and McGurk (2023)			Vulnerable people	Global	Employer engagement	Literature	Chapter	Employer engagement has two faces. It is about the active involvement in the employment of vulnerable groups. Notion of HRM and its importance to study ALMP by looking at the public dimension of HRM (inclusive recruitment for employment and retention).	External stakeholders and the organisational stakeholder group
29. Ingold and Stuart (2014)	Employers for the survey, and employer engagement staff for the interviews	643 for the survey, nine interviews	Possible welfare recipients	The United Kingdom	Employer engagement literature	Mixed-method consisting of interviews and surveys.	Policy report	Employer engagement is two-faced; 1) is the actions of employers in employing vulnerable people on different levels, and 2) are the activities undertaken by service providers to engage employers.	External stakeholders and employer engagement
30. Ingold and Stuart (2015)	Employers for the survey, and employer engagement staff for the interviews	643 for the survey, nine interviews	Possible welfare recipients	The United Kingdom	Employer engagement literature	Mixed-method consisting of interviews and surveys.	Empirical article	Employer engagement is two-faced; 1) is the actions of employers in employing vulnerable people, and 2) are the activities undertaken by service providers to engage employers.	External stakeholders and employer engagement
31. Ingold and Valizade (2015)	Employers	Over 1500	People subjected to ALMPs	The United Kingdom and Denmark	Employer engagement	Survey	Policy report	The definition of the two faces of employer engagement of Ingold and Stuart (2015) is used with an addition on the difference between participation and reasons for participating. Making a distinction between instrumentally and relationally engaged employers.	External stakeholders and employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
32.	Ingold and Valizade (2017)	Nationally representative sample of employers	1003 from the UK and 500 from Denmark	Disadvantaged groups	The United Kingdom and Denmark	ALMP	Survey	Empirical article	Employer engagement is about the participation in ALMP, including public employment services.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
33.	Johnson et al. (2023)	A local job centre pilot		Clients of public employment services	The United Kingdom	ALMP	Case study	Empirical article	Employer engagement is two-faced; 1) is the actions of employers in employing vulnerable people on different levels, and 2) are the activities undertaken by service providers to engage employers. Based on Ingold and Stuart (2015).	External stakeholders
34.	Jones et al., (2025)	Ex-veterans themselves	Sixty-eight	Veterans	The United Kingdom	ALMP and conditionality	Qualitative Longitudinal Research based on interviews	Empirical article	Employer engagement is defined as Van Berkel et al. (2017) states as the involvement of employers (HR) in the labour market participation of vulnerable groups.	The active involvement in the employment of vulnerable people
35.	Jones and Carson (2024)	Employers	Eighty-four	People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom	ALMP	Interviews	Empirical article	The use of public employment services by employers. Conditionality might hinder the chances of employment trough ALMP.	External stakeholders and the organisational stakeholder group
36.	Leahy et al. (2019)	Certified rehabilitation counsellors	317	Individuals needing rehabilitation	United States of America	Job functions and knowledge domains	Survey	Empirical article	Employer engagement is used as the name of a scale which questions the use of HR activities in the employment of people with a disability.	HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement
37.	Levine et al. (2024)	Organisations	349	People with a chronic disease	United States of America	Employer engagement	Intervention study	Empirical article	Employer engagement is defined as the awareness of programme, understanding the business case, and adopting the programmes.	Organisational level of employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
38. Liu (2023)	Public employment service organisations	279	Clients of public employment services	China	ALMP	Survey	Empirical article	Employers' active involvement in job placements.	External stakeholders and the organisational stakeholder group
39. McDonnall et al. (2020)	Vocational rehabilitation personnel	Seventy-one with two to four observations per individual	Individuals who are blind	United States of America	Employer engagement	Quasi-experimental	Empirical article	Employer engagement consist of employers' involvement in the rehabilitation process of blind individuals.	Line manager stakeholder group of employer engagement
40. McGurk (2015)	Store employers that are engaged in the Work Programme		Welfare recipients	The United Kingdom	Employer engagement	Case study	Conference paper	The active participation of employers in welfare to work initiatives for the training and/or recruitment of the long-term unemployed.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
41. McGurk and Ingold (2023)			People subjected to ALMP	Global	Micro, meso, and macro levels of ALMP	Literature	Chapter	The active involvement of employers in ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
42. McGurk and Meredith (2018)	Publicly available data across all LEPs (local enterprise partners)		Unemployed	The United Kingdom	Leadership	Data synthesis	Empirical article	The role of employers in the space that intersects education, training, employment and welfare-to-work.	The role of employers in welfare-to-work
43. McGurk and Meredith (2023)	Recruiting staff via the Work Programme		People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom	Employer engagement	Case study	Chapter	The active involvement for employing vulnerable people. Success is dependent on partnerships with competent, active intermediaries and committed, socially responsible employers sustained engagement requires sustainable jobs.	The active involvement of employers in the employment of vulnerable people

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
44. Murfitt and Gaskin (2022)	Representatives from small to medium enterprises	Thirty-six	People with a disability	Australia	Disability recruitment services	Mixed-method consisting of interviews and surveys.	Empirical article	Employer engagement is about the role of the employer in the employment of people with a disability. Specifically important points are disability awareness, attitude, and confidence, but also workplace culture, policy and procedures, and physical access to support the employment of people with a disability.	The HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement
45. Nicholas et al. (2019)	Employers	First survey is eighty-two. Survey two is twenty-nine. Interviews eleven	Autistic people	Canada	People with autism on the labour market	Mixed-method consisting of interviews and surveys.	Empirical article	Employer engagement is about the employer's role in fostering employment opportunities van autistic people. Including the facilitative and prohibitive practices to inclusive hiring	The HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement
46. Nicholas et al. (2017)	Group consisting of self-advocates, researchers, policy developers, family members, and practitioners	120	Autistic people	Global	People with autism on the labour market.	Focus groups	Empirical article	Employer engagement is about the employers role in fostering employment opportunities of autistic people, while looking at information needs and support needs.	The HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement
47. Ortlieb and Weiss (2020)	Refugees themselves	316	Refugees	Austria	Job quality	Survey	Empirical article	Various ways in which employers can contribute to the labour market integration of refugees. Based on the definition of Van Berkel et al. (2017).	HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
48. Orton et al. (2019)	Different sized partnerships of the Talent Match programme	Four cases with a total of thirty-two interviewees	Possible welfare recipients.	The United Kingdom	ALMP and participation	Case study	Empirical article	Based on the definition of the two faces of Ingold and Stuart (2015), the definition on activities undertaken by programme providers to engage employers is used. While acknowledging that there is also the other face consisting of the activities of employers themselves.	External stakeholders
49. Orton and Green (2019)			Possible welfare recipients	The United Kingdom	ALMP	Literature	Empirical article	Employer engagement is the use of the talent match programme and the involvement in programme delivery, providing work placements, mentoring and focusing on job openings.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
50. Østerud (2020)	Company personal that was recently involved in a hiring process.	Twelve interviews	People with a disability	Norway	Employer engagement literature	Mixed- method consisting of interviews and document analysis	Empirical article	Employer involvement in ALMP with an emphasis on the HRM side with four themes: passive measures; absent job seekers; social responsibility; perception conflicting demands.	Organisational and HRM stakeholder groups of employer engagement
51. Østerud and Vedeler (2024)	HR personnel or management personnel	Twenty-three	People with a disability	Eleven from the United States; twelve from Norway	Regulatory policies	Interviews	Empirical article	Based on Van Berkel (2021) employer engagement is seen as the involvement in ALMP with a focus on recruitment that is subjected to government regulation.	Organisational level of employer engagement
52. Raspanti and Sarius (2022)	Employees of public employment services (PES), and policy workers	Thirty-eight employees of PES five policy workers	Clients of public employment services	Italy	Public employment services and street-level bureaucracy's	Interviews	Empirical article	Employer involvement in ALMP and the service providers that stimulate employers to involve in ALMP.	External stakeholders

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding
53. Ravn (2024)	Nationally representative sample of employers with three employees	1977	Refugees	Denmark	Supply and demand side of the labour market	Survey	Empirical article	The active involvement of employers in ALMP and the role that social responsibility plays in the likelihood to engage.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
54. Ravn (2023)	Nationally representative sample of employers with three employees	1977	Refugees	Denmark	Employer engagement	Survey	Empirical article	Involvement in ALMP and the typology of Bredgaard (2018) as well as Ingold and Valizade (2015) important factors: • Notions of social responsibility, attitudes, and ideology • Self-interest • Wage concerns and incentives	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
55. Sissons and Green (2017)			People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom	Employer engagement	Literature	Empirical article	The active involvement in ALMP with a focus on supporting job entry for vulnerable people.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
56. Spjeltkavik et al. (2023)	People with brain injury and their managers	Sixty-four people with brain injury and forty-five managers total of thirty-eight cases	People with mild traumatic brain injury	Norway	Return to work	Interviews	Empirical article	The active involvement in the vocational rehabilitation process.	Line manager stakeholder group of employer engagement
57. Tamburo et al. (2019)	Organisations in the United States		People with a disability	The United States of America	Knowledge translation	Case study	Empirical article	The role of service providers in engaging employers to hire people with a disability.	External stakeholders
58. Valizade et al. (2023)	Nationally representative sample of employers	1003 from the UK and 500 from Denmark	Disadvantaged groups	The United Kingdom and Denmark	Social networks and collective voice	Survey	Empirical article	The participation of employers in ALMP.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement
59. Van Berkel (2021)	Employers registered in networks that work towards an inclusive labour market	Twenty-one interviews 113 survey	People with a disability	The Netherlands	Employer engagement in activation policies	Mixed- method consisting of interviews and a survey	Empirical article	Based on Van Berkel et al. (2017), including different forms this active involvement can take: 1) demand-led approach addresses employers recruitment needs; 2)	HRM stakeholder group of employer engagement

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Study ID	Sample	N	Vulnerable group	Country	Theoretical framework	Design	Source type	Definition employer engagement	Coding	
								organisations recruitment and selection practices; 3) HRM practices more broadly.		
60.	Van Berkel et al. (2017)		Vulnerable people	Global	HRM and social policy	Literature	Editorial introduction	The active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labour market participation for vulnerable groups.	Employer involvement in the labour market participation of vulnerable groups	
61.	Van Gestel et al. (2019)	For the cases municipalities For the survey employers who were involved in local networks	Five cases 136 survey	Welfare recipients	The Netherlands	Quasi-markets and public-private networks	Mixed- method consisting of a case study and a survey	Empirical article	The definition of the two faces of employer engagement of Ingold and Stuart (2015) is used with an addition on the importance of the second face as this important for a dynamic relationship between service providers and employers.	External stakeholders
62.	Van Kooy et al. (2014)	Employers, labour market intermediary organisations, and business associations	Twenty-six	Disadvantaged jobseekers	Australia	Employer engagement	Interviews	Research report	Employer engagement' is used to describe almost any form of interaction between and labour market intermediaries and an employer (not necessarily for the purposes of assisting excluded workers into jobs).	External stakeholders
63.	Wiggan and Knuth (2023)		People subjected to ALMP	The United Kingdom and Germany	Labour market trends	Literature	Chapter	The active involvement of employers with a national-level active labour market programmes.	Organisational stakeholder group of employer engagement	

Table 2. Coding of the levels and themes of employer engagement

Perspective	Levels	Code
Internal stakeholders	Organisation	Reasons for the employer to engage in ALMP such as social responsibility (e.g., Ravn, 2024), perception of conflicting demands between the organisation and ALMP (e.g., Østerud, 2020), self-interest (e.g., Ravn, 2023), and conditionality (e.g., Jones and Carson, 2024) Attitude towards ALMP (e.g., Bredgaard, 2018) Perceptions of the organisation on vulnerable people (e.g., Ravn, 2023) Relationally engaged employers are structurally engaged (Ingold et al., 2017) Instrumentally engaged employers have ad hoc activities to employ vulnerable persons (Ingold et al., 2017)
	HRM	Inclusive HR policies (e.g., recruitment and education policies) (e.g., McGurk and Meredith, 2018; Van Berkel, 2021) Organisational attitude, confidence and awareness about the employment of vulnerable persons (e.g., Murfitt and Gaskin, 2022)
	Line manager	Providing the right support and accommodations (De Dios Pérez et al., 2024-a) Having a positive attitude and empathy towards employee (e.g., Spjelkavik et al., 2023)
External stakeholders	Institutional	Interactions between labour market intermediaries and employers (e.g., Van Kooy et al., 2014) Service providers filling vacancies (e.g., Ingold and Stuart, 2015)

The second and third group are internal stakeholders of the organisation, namely HRM and line managers. The fourth stakeholder group of employer engagement is focused on external stakeholders. The coding process was done by two of the authors, and finished after inter-coding agreement was achieved. An overview of the perspectives and codes is presented in Table 2.

Results

The analysis of the final literature sample showed that the included documents are relatively recent, with the eldest document dating back to 2011. A substantial portion of the documents – eighteen, representing almost a third of the dataset – were published in the year 2023. While most of the included research is conducted in Norway, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, the sample also includes research from the United States of America, the Netherlands, Australia, China, Canada, Austria, Italy, and Germany. In these studies, various research methods were employed: of the sixty-three found documents, twenty-four are based on qualitative research methods, sixteen are based on quantitative research methods, eleven on mixed-methods, and twelve of the documents are based on literature/conceptual.

Whereas most studies had employers as respondents, a few studies included vulnerable groups themselves, service providers, and policy makers, covering a wide array of stakeholders relevant to employer engagement. Although most research focused on employers hiring people subjected to ALMP, some studies also looked at employers hiring other groups that could be considered vulnerable. Specific subgroups were also analysed in some studies, such as individuals with disabilities (including those with autism, multiple sclerosis, or mild traumatic brain injury), refugees, unemployed individuals with complex needs, clients of service providers, and veterans.

The majority of academic papers are published in journals focusing on social policy, HRM, or organisational behaviour. A smaller body of articles is published in rehabilitation journals. These findings reflect different disciplines that are connected in the concept of employer engagement. A complete overview of the main findings of the general characteristics of the articles can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of the general characteristics of the included documents

	All documents
Total number of documents	63
<i>Year published (%)</i>	
2011–2015	9
2016–2020	35
2021–2025	56
<i>Continent (%)</i>	
Asia	2
Australia/Oceania	6
Europe	73
North America	11
Global	6
<i>Methodology (%)</i>	
Qualitative	38
Quantitative	25
Mix	18
Literature/conceptual	19
<i>Respondents (%)</i>	
Employers/owners/HR staff	57
Persons part of vulnerable groups	9
Service providers and professionals	37
Other	8
<i>Vulnerable group discussed (%)</i>	
People with a disability	25
Welfare recipients/people subjected to ALMP	48
Vulnerable people in general	13
Other (including veterans, refugees, NEET youth)	14

Employer engagement: two perspectives

Based on the included documents, two perspectives on employer engagement could be identified: involvement of the organisation as an entity and their internal stakeholders (e.g., stakeholders within the organisation such as line managers, top management, HR personal, and employees) in employing vulnerable people on the one hand, and on the other hand actions of external stakeholders (e.g., public employment services) that are (in)directly involved in influencing employers to employ vulnerable people (Ingold and Stuart, 2014; Ingold and Stuart, 2015). The largest body of literature (over forty documents) focuses on employer engagement as the involvement of employers and internal stakeholders, the rest of the literature focuses on external stakeholders activating employers (fifteen documents). A visual overview of the different perspectives and stakeholder groups of employer engagement is provided in Figure 2.

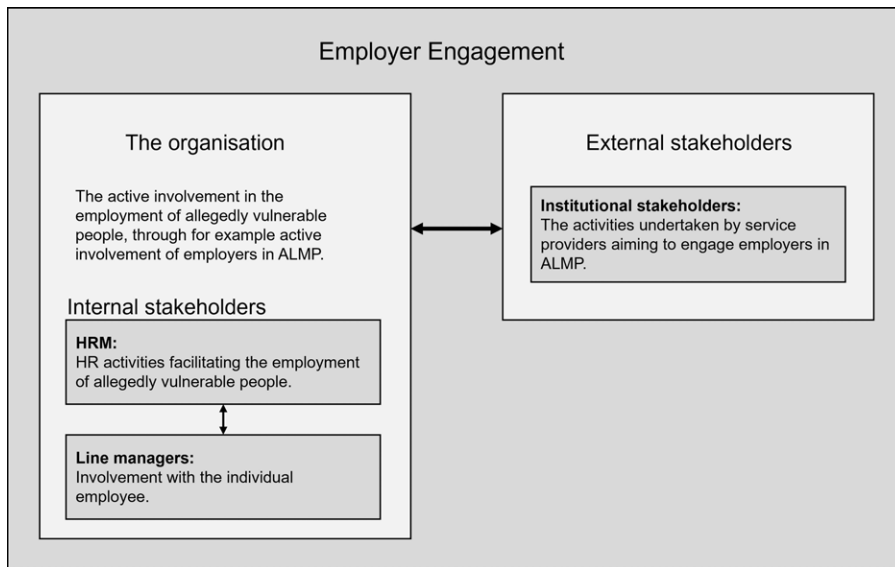


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of employer engagement. This figure presents the four key stakeholder groups involved in employer engagement: the organisation as an entity, HRM, line managers, and institutional stakeholders. The model distinguishes between internal and external actors, highlighting the layered and relational nature of employer involvement in inclusive labour market practices.

The body of literature focusing on employer engagement from the internal stakeholders perspective was categorised into three stakeholder groups: (1) the organisation as an entity, and within the organisation; (2) HRM; and (3) line managers. The literature on the organisation as an entity is more broadly about behaviours, motives, and attitudes concerning the active involvement of the organisation in ALMP. Additionally, within the organisational stakeholder group it was found that employer engagement can be structural or ad-hoc. The HRM stakeholder group is about behaviours, motives, and attitudes in the people management context facilitating the employment of vulnerable people. The line manager stakeholder group includes behaviours, motives, and attitudes showing the stakeholder engagement directly between the line manager and the individual employee.

The body of literature focusing on employer engagement from the perspective of external stakeholders solely focuses as service providers from public policy as external stakeholders, thus no underlying stakeholder groups were found. Therefore, this is referred to as the institutional stakeholder group. Several important behaviours, motives, and attitudes of this perspective were found (e.g., the balancing of labour market actors to meet all stakeholders' needs). In the following sub-sections the four stakeholder groups of employer engagement are discussed further.

Employer engagement; internal stakeholders

In documents focusing on the internal stakeholders of employer engagement, the definition of employer engagement of Van Berkel *et al.* (2017): 'the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labour market participation of vulnerable groups' was often used as an overarching definition of employer engagement. Four of the included articles used solely this general definition of employer engagement other papers added more dimensions for clarity and depth (e.g., engagement with the employee or organisational policy) (Dall *et al.*, 2023; Hamilton, 2023; Ingold and McGurk, 2023; McGurk and Ingold, 2023). In these studies, a distinction was made between studies referring to employer engagement as the hiring of people from vulnerable groups (Hamilton, 2023; Ingold and McGurk, 2023; McGurk and Ingold, 2023)

and studies referring to it as actively addressing the societal challenge of the labour market participation of vulnerable people (Van Berkel et al., 2017; Dall et al., 2023). Most documents however use the definition of Van Berkel et al. (2017) and specify this by taking different stakeholder perspective resulting in the distinct stakeholder groups discussed below.

Stakeholder group 1: the organisation as an entity. About half of the included documents, predominantly from social policy literature. This organisational stakeholder group focuses on the organisation as an entity and its active involvement in ALMP (see: Bellis et al., 2011; Ingold and Valizade, 2015; McGurk, 2015; Ingold and Valizade, 2017; Sissons and Green, 2017; McGurk and Meredith, 2018; Aksnes, 2019; Orton and Green, 2019; Bezyak et al., 2020; Fernandez-Urbano and Orton, 2021; Hyggen and Vedeler, 2021; Raspanti and Saruis, 2022; Bredgaard et al., 2023; Butler and Payne, 2025; Etherington and Jones, 2023; Gjersøe and Strand, 2023; Green and Sissons, 2023; Ingold and McGurk, 2023; McGurk and Ingold, 2023; Valizade et al., 2023; Wiggan and Knuth, 2023; Levine et al., 2024; Østerud and Vedeler, 2024; Breit et al., 2025; Frøyland et al., 2025). The documents provide varied reasons for employers to decide to engage in ALMP. An example is feelings of social responsibility, where employers consider employing vulnerable people as the ‘right thing to do’ (Bredgaard and Halkjær, 2016; Østerud, 2020; Ravn, 2024; Ravn, 2023). Other reasons discussed for (not) participating in ALMP were: conflicting demands where the employer finds parts of ALMP difficult to put into practice (Østerud, 2020); self-interest where employers are mostly looking into benefits for themselves (Ravn, 2023); wage incentives that motivate employers (Ravn, 2023); and welfare conditionality (Jones and Carson, 2024).

Additionally, the role of attitudes towards ALMP in the participation of ALMP was discussed as part of employer engagement by several authors (Bredgaard, 2018; Østerud, 2020; Ravn, 2023). Attitudes towards ALMP was also discussed in the study of Ravn (2023) and Østerud (2020), both derived from the employer engagement typology of Bredgaard (2018). However, Ravn (2023) also discusses the attitude towards the employment of refugees. Yet, merely a positive attitude towards ALMP is not enough to participate in ALMP. Bredgaard (2018) discusses that there is not a direct relationship between attitude and behaviour, which is also reflected in his typology of employers based on attitude towards job centres and participation in ALMP (Bredgaard, 2018). That solely a positive attitude is not enough to enable the employment of vulnerable people was also found by Ravn (2023), who added that preconceptions about the vulnerable group are also important when it comes to attitudes towards ALMP, especially the ones about work motivation and work experience. Ravn (2023) found that a positive attitude does not always result in hiring people in vulnerable positions, because of some of the aforementioned reasons to participate in ALMP, such as feelings of social responsibility, self-interest, or preconceptions of vulnerable people.

The continuity of employer engagement. Within the organisational stakeholder group some documents discussed the idea that employer engagement is not always continuous. When employer engagement is considered the participation in ALMP, a distinction can be made between employers that structurally engage in ALMP to employ vulnerable people, and employers that are more ad-hoc in their activities (Ingold et al., 2017; Bredgaard, 2018; Ingold, 2019; Ravn, 2023). The first group of employers is referred to as ‘relationally engaged employers’ and the second group as ‘instrumentally engaged employers’ (Ingold et al., 2017). The research of Ingold et al. (2017) showed that organisations that are relationally engaged differ from instrumentally engaged organisations in several ways. Relationally engaged employers organise recruitment through ALMP, aim to increase the opportunities for disadvantaged groups, use service providers for matchmaking, and focus on inter-personal relations (Ingold et al., 2017). Contrasting, instrumentally engaged employers use service providers for information and focus more on inter-organisational relations (Ingold et al., 2017).

Stakeholder group 2: HRM. In predominantly HRM and organisational studies related literature and journals, employer engagement was focused on inclusive activities and policies from HRM.

Nineteen of the articles discussed the HR stakeholder group of employer engagement (see for example: Nicholas *et al.*, 2017; Frøyland *et al.*, 2019; Ortlieb and Weiss, 2020; Østerud, 2020; Enehaug *et al.*, 2021; Dall *et al.*, 2023; Hamilton, 2023; Liu, 2023; Breit *et al.*, 2025; Frøyland *et al.*, 2025). These articles focused on HR activities and practices, attitudes, and motives that enable the employment of vulnerable people (Leahy *et al.*, 2019; Bezyak *et al.*, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2025), or inclusive policies within the organisation (Murfitt and Gaskin, 2022). Examples provided in the documents were inclusive recruitment and selection practices (Nicholas *et al.*, 2019; Van Berkel, 2021; Liu, 2023; Hamilton, 2023; Østerud and Vedeler, 2024) and training and education policies (Van Berkel *et al.*, 2017; McGurk and Meredith, 2018).

Various organisational actors were mentioned in the documents as being important for successful employer engagement on a HRM level; HR personnel, top management, line management, supervisors, and other co-workers (Van Berkel, 2021; Dall *et al.*, 2023). The different organisational actors have diverse attitudes, levels of confidence, and awareness about the employment of vulnerable people, which were considered important indicators of employer engagement on the HRM level (Østerud, 2020; Murfitt and Gaskin, 2022). It was stated in the documents that employer engagement is more than stating that you are a socially responsible employer (Van Berkel *et al.*, 2017; Dall *et al.*, 2023) and that it consists of a wide array of HRM practices and policies that can be endorsed on different levels within the organisation.

Stakeholder group 3: the line manager. In seven of the included documents (McDonnall *et al.*, 2020; Spjelkavik *et al.*, 2023; Alves *et al.*, 2023; De Dios Pérez *et al.*, 2024-a; De Dios Pérez *et al.*, 2024-b; Aksnes and Breit, 2025; Breit *et al.*, 2025; Frøyland *et al.*, 2025), employer engagement is conceptualised as (line) managers being closely connected to either the rehabilitation process or the (re-)integration process of vulnerable employees, also sometimes referred to as a micro-perspective on employer engagement (Aksnes and Breit, 2025). These documents originate from rehabilitation literature and predominantly rehabilitation journals. De Dios Pérez *et al.* (2024-a) emphasise the need for engagement of employers to improve vocational rehabilitation, as this can enhance the knowledge of employers on the rehabilitation process and improve workplace relations. This knowledge is beneficial for employees as well, as the employer better understands the needs during the rehabilitation (De Dios Pérez *et al.*, 2024-a) and can provide the right support and accommodations which can positively influence the return to work of employees (Spjelkavik *et al.*, 2023). A high degree of employer engagement from line managers, such as vocational rehabilitation, is often observed in organisations with greater workplace inclusion, where employers typically demonstrate positive attitudes and empathy towards their employees (Spjelkavik *et al.*, 2023).

Employer engagement: external stakeholders

Stakeholder group 4: the institutional stakeholders. Within social policy literature an external stakeholder perspective on employer engagement can be identified. The distinction between these the internal versus external stakeholders was first described as the two faces of employer engagement by Ingold and Stuart (2014). The external stakeholder perspective is labour market actors (in)directly involved in activation of employers to employ vulnerable groups. This includes actions that are part of ALMP (e.g., direct contact between implementing agencies and employers) and interactions with service providers to increase employer involvement in the employment of vulnerable people. Fifteen documents included this external stakeholder perspective on employer engagement (see for example: Ingold and Stuart, 2014; Ingold and Valizade, 2015; Van Berkel *et al.*, 2017; Orton *et al.*, 2019; Tamburo *et al.*, 2019; Aksnes, 2019; Ingold *et al.*, 2023; Ingold and McGurk, 2023). The external stakeholders in the documents were limited to institutional stakeholders. This form of employer engagement focuses for instance on interactions between labour market intermediaries (e.g., public employment services) and employers (Van Kooy *et al.*, 2014). More broadly, it is about the support provided by social policies and social services for

employers in the employment of vulnerable people (Boselie et al., 2021). An example of activities targeting employers described in the documents was service providers and job agents that intervene in the recruitment process by filling vacancies (Ingold and Stuart, 2015). Even though this might seem a simple intervention, these service providers need to balance rights, needs, as well as the interests of the employer and job seeker (Raspanti and Saruis, 2022). For a successful transition towards the labour market a dynamic relationship is needed between the employer and the public employment services (Van Gestel et al., 2019), in which service providers can fulfil a brokerage role (Ingold, 2018; Johnson et al., 2023). Although this dynamic and active role is also needed from employers, they often expect service providers to take more responsibility to avoid (financial) risks for themselves (Van Gestel et al., 2019).

Discussion

This review aimed to address the lack of conceptual clarity of employer engagement, as discussed by Van Berkel et al. (2017) and Ingold and McGurk (2023). This was done by providing an extensive overview of the separate ways in which current research conceptualised employer engagement in the context of employing vulnerable people. In the following sections a consolidated conceptualisation of employer engagement is provided by integrating the findings and relating this to stakeholder theory. After that the implications, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

A consolidated conceptualisation of employer engagement

Two main perspectives on employer engagement could be distinguished based on the findings, as also previously discussed by Ingold and Stuart (2014), an internal and external stakeholder perspective. The definition of Van Berkel et al. (2017): ‘the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labour market participation of vulnerable groups’ reflects the internal stakeholders of employer engagement. However, this review showed that the ‘active involvement’ in this definition is being researched related to three distinct stakeholder groups. The first stakeholder group is the organisation as an entity. This research reflects mostly social policy literature, which includes studies about reasons for participating in ALMP (e.g., welfare conditionality) (e.g., Jones and Carson, 2024). Within the institutional stakeholder group, the findings show that employers can either be relationally (structurally) engaged or instrumentally (ad-hoc) engaged (Ingold et al., 2017). Second, HRM as an internal stakeholder group includes studies focusing on for example inclusive recruitment policies (e.g., Van Berkel, 2021). Third, the line manager as an internal stakeholder group included studies focus on for example employers providing support for rehabilitation and good accommodations for employees (e.g., De Dios Pérez et al., 2024-a). The first perspective and the three stakeholders with their originating disciplines are all covered by the broad definition of Van Berkel et al. (2017).

Van Berkel et al.’s (2017) definition emphasises active involvement, which this review associates with various motives, behaviours, practices, and attitudes. Beyond the analysed literature explicitly addressing employer engagement, several demand-side review studies offer additional insights in what this involvement could be. Scoping reviews on the employer perspective examined successful organisational policies for the inclusion of vulnerable workers (Kersten et al., 2023) and inclusive organisational practices for people with a disability (Van Berkel and Breit, 2024). Another systematic review studied the hindering and facilitating factors for hiring people with a disability (Nagtegaal et al., 2023), which provided an overview of employer practices, and their struggles and successes regarding hiring people with a disability, which provides additional insights in motives, behaviours, and perspectives across the three stakeholder groups.

The second perspective on employer engagement that was identified focuses on external stakeholders trying to engage employers. This makes up the fourth and last stakeholder group of

employer engagement, the institutional stakeholder group. An example of external stakeholders for the employment of vulnerable workers includes service providers supporting employers in recruitment processes (Ingold and Stuart, 2015). It was found that the intermediary professionals in their interactions aim to engage employers have the pressure of balancing rights and needs, as well as the interests of the employer and job seeker (Raspanti and Saruis, 2022). For this perspective, no multidimensionality as in the first perspective on employer engagement was found, since all literature is based on service providers in the discipline of social policy. In the future a distinction can be made in the type of external stakeholders that mobilises employers and their actions. External stakeholders in employer engagement go beyond nationwide ALMP and service providers. An example is the role of trade unions and employers' associations. Also, social partners can address and influence corporate social responsibility and inclusion through collective labour agreements (Biedma-Ferrer *et al.*, 2017), which can thus influence the employment of vulnerable people. Additionally, there are agreements of the United Nations that discuss the rights of having accommodation needs met from for example people with a disability (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2022). So, although no external stakeholder groups besides institutional stakeholders could be distinguished yet, there are likely several distinct stakeholders with differing roles and motives that could further conceptualise the external perspective on employer engagement. Further research on external stakeholders and employer engagement is therefore needed.

Employer engagement and stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory can enhance the understanding of the complexity of the conceptualisation of employer engagement. Organisations operate within a network of internal and external stakeholders, each with their own interests (Freeman, 1984; Pedersen, 2006). This review showed that employer engagement is not just a behaviour, but rather embedded in a broader web of stakeholder interactions. Within the organisation as an entity we found several internal stakeholder groups related to employer engagement. Line managers play a crucial role in supporting the individual needs of (potential) employees. For the HRM stakeholder group the literature shows that employer engagement is shaped through interactions with other internal actors such as top management, supervisors, and co-workers (Van Berkel, 2021; Dall *et al.*, 2023).

Outside the organisation multiple relevant stakeholders were identified. Current employer engagement literature is mainly focused on institutional stakeholders such as municipalities, implementing agencies, and policy makers. They aim to influence employer behaviour through regulation, incentives, and normative expectations related to corporate social responsibility (Østerud, 2020). Intermediary actors like public employment services and job coaches actively seek to mobilise employers by information provision and tailored support (Ingold and Stuart, 2015). These stakeholders often navigate competing expectations, balancing the rights and needs of other relevant stakeholders (e.g., employers and jobseekers) (Raspanti and Saruis, 2022). This role again highlights that employer engagement is a complex phenomenon formed by internal stakeholders but also external influences and relationships. For example, public agencies may influence employer behaviour through formal authority such as quotas or compliance requirements, reflecting coercive stakeholder pressure (Jones and Carson, 2024). In contrast, normative influence from social partners or sectoral bodies operates more subtly, shaping expectations and behaviours through shared norms and values (Biedma-Ferrer *et al.*, 2017). This variation in stakeholder power and legitimacy helps explain the diversity in definitions and practices of employer engagement found in the literature (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

This consolidated conceptualisation highlights that employer engagement is a multi-actor phenomenon, applying stakeholder theory shows that the meanings of employer engagement are co-produced through interactions among stakeholders. Stakeholder theory further explains the conceptual ambiguity in the field, because what counts as employer engagement varies depending on the perspective of the stakeholder and the context within which the engagement occurs.

Limitations

The systematic approach used in a scoping review reduces potential limitations and ensures an unbiased review (e.g., by scoping the literature and databases and including a reference- and citation check). However, this article still has some limitations to consider. The conceptual ambiguity of employer engagement resulted in some documents being unclear about their conceptualisation of employer engagement (e.g., when the general definition of employer engagement is used but no elaboration of what involvement entailed was provided). Therefore, documents where no definition was given were excluded. In documents where the definition was more implicit, narrow interpretations were made based on the context of the documents. An example of a narrow interpretation is that in some studies employer engagement was defined as engagement with ALMP, which was interpreted as participating in ALMP and not for example attitudes towards ALMP. Although there were efforts to mitigate this bias (e.g., unclear conceptualisations were not included in the dataset), the subjective nature of the narrow interpretations remains a limitation to consider.

An additional limitation is the risk of missing potentially relevant studies due to possible missed terms in the search string. As employer engagement is a broad term used to describe a complex phenomenon there is the possibility that relevant search terms were not included in the search string. Developing a good search string was balancing between covering the broadness of the term while not redirecting the search string towards a pre-determined definition of employer engagement. The researchers tried to mitigate this by using reference and citation tracking, additionally the researchers tried to mitigate this by consulting with a search specialist from the university library of the authors their university. However, the possibility remains that relevant articles were missed.

Contributions

This scoping review contributes to the scientific literature in several ways. Firstly, this paper and its results clarify the concept of employer engagement as the research is fragmented across different disciplines. With this article a comprehensive overview was given of not only the concept but also the research areas related to employer engagement. Secondly, by elaborating on the distinct levels of employer engagement applying stakeholder theory, this study opens new pathways for future research. Finally, a key contribution of this research lies in its effort to bridge the definitions used by different disciplines. By synthesising insights from disciplines traditionally treated in isolation (e.g., social policy, work and HRM, and rehabilitation), this paper offers a more holistic perspective on employer engagement. It not only emphasised the multifaceted nature of the concept but also exposes the limitations of relying solely on a single disciplinary framework to grasp its complexity.

On a societal level these findings show that employer engagement is a complex concept differing based on stakeholder perceptions. Based on stakeholder theory these findings indicate that there might also be opportunities to stimulate employers through different external stakeholders since different stakeholders have different power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). Now research has only been done on service providers and public initiatives through ALMP. This opens a wide area of opportunities for organisations to mobilise towards a more inclusive labour market where we also bring the labour market closer to people in more vulnerable positions.

Future research

Based on our findings several future research directions can be suggested. Our study showed that there has been limited research on some of the stakeholder groups of employer engagement, especially the line manager stakeholder group is less frequently taken into account. Yet, studying

all the stakeholders of employer engagement – preferably simultaneously – could provide relevant insights, for instance about how the stakeholders connect to each other and to what extent they are dependent on each other. More specifically, a relevant interdisciplinary research question could focus on the extent to which high employer engagement from different stakeholder groups simultaneously is indeed related to more employment of people with a vulnerable position on the labour market.

Another research direction is to further investigate relational versus instrumental engagement on the for the different stakeholder groups of employer engagement. Our analysis showed that research on continuity of engagement is done on the organisational stakeholder group, yet it would be valuable to investigate what this looks like on distinct stakeholder groups as well, as the continuity of engagement might differ with different stakeholders of the organisation.

Moreover, an interesting direction for research based on this study, is the influence of ALMP and service providers on the different stakeholder groups of employer engagement. The analysis showed that a small proportion of the included studies investigated this role, and if so, only for the organisational stakeholder group. It would be insightful to also study the role of ALMP and service providers on the line manager and HRM as stakeholders of employer engagement. For instance, by looking at how ALMP can increase employer involvement for HRM by stimulating inclusive policies, or even on an line manager level by stimulating line managers in providing good accommodations.

These suggested areas for future research offer opportunities to further deepen our understanding of employer engagement. As the field continues to evolve, further investigation into these directions will not only enhance theoretical frameworks but also offer practical benefits to facilitate the employment of vulnerable people.

Conclusion

In this study a consolidated conceptualisation of employer engagement is developed, providing new insights into how employer engagement can be perceived and conceptualised. The four stakeholder groups found suggest that employer engagement is a multidimensional and relational concept with internal and external stakeholders, which has important implications when trying to study and facilitate the employment of vulnerable people. While our research addressed several key questions, it also highlighted areas where further investigation is needed, particularly when looking at further diving into the interdisciplinarity of employer engagement. Overall, these findings contribute to a growing body of knowledge on employer engagement. As the understanding of employer engagement evolves, continued research will be essential to advance ALMP as well as inclusive HRM for an inclusive labour market.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank the several authors that provided additional grey literature as well as the researchers that provided valuable feedback on a previous version of this paper during the 13th Biennial International Conference of the Dutch HRM Network in Rotterdam.

Author Contributions: CRediT Taxonomy.

Renate Bosman: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Hanneke van Heijster: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing - review & editing.

Irmgard Borghouts: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Writing - review & editing.

Charissa Freese: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Writing - review & editing.

Competing Interests. The author(s) declare none.

Funding statement. This project is funded by institute Gak, project: 2020-166.

Notes

- 1 The term 'vulnerable' appears static but is actually dynamic, shaped by micro, meso, and macro factors (Numans, 2024). This paper refers to 'vulnerable people', acknowledging these dynamics.
- 2 In addition to literature on employer engagement focused on employing individuals in vulnerable labor market positions, there is also research on employer engagement in education, which involves employer involvement in schools and the transition from school to work (e.g., Stanley and Mann, 2014; Bolli et al., 2018). However, this study is limited to employer engagement related to the employment of people in vulnerable labor market positions and thus does not cover engagement in the educational sector.

References

- Aksnes, S. Y. (2019) 'Engaging employers in vocational rehabilitation: Understanding the new significance of knowledge brokers', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, **50**, 1, 73–84.
- Aksnes, S. Y. and Breit, E. (2025) 'Varieties of engagement: Exploring the micro-practices of managers in employing disadvantaged jobseekers', *Journal of Social Policy*, 1–21. DOI: [10.1017/S0047279425000030](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279425000030).
- Alves, D. E., Ballo, J. G., Nilsen, W., Lundberg, C. S., Lillebråten, A. and Bernstrøm, V. H. (2023) 'Which companies hire NEET? Organisational characteristics of hiring NEET in a Norwegian full-population registry study', *Journal of Youth Studies*, **28**, 4, 601–620.
- Bellis, A., Sigala, M. and Dewson, S. (2011) Employer Engagement and Jobcentre Plus. Research Report No. 742, Sheffield: DWP.
- Bezyak, J., Moser, E., Iwanaga, K., Wu, J.-R., Chen, X. and Chan, F. (2020) 'Disability inclusion strategies: An exploratory study', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, **53**, 2, 183–188.
- Biedma-Ferrer, J. M., López-Fernández, M., and Romero-Fernandez, P. M. (2017) 'The collective labour agreement as a key tool for driving corporate social responsibility: Banking sector analysis', *Cuadernos de Gestión*, **17**, 2, 135–156.
- Blonk, R. W. B. (2018) *We zijn nog maar net begonnen*, Tilburg: Tilburg University.
- Bolli, T., Caves, K. M., Renold, U., and Buergi, J. (2018) 'Beyond employer engagement: Measuring education-employment linkage in vocational education and training programmes', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, **70**, 4, 524–563.
- Borghouts, I. and Freese, C. (2022) *Bewegen naar een inclusieve arbeidsmarkt met nieuwe zekerheden: Het samenspel tussen HRM & Sociale Zekerheid*, Tilburg: Tilburg University.
- Boselie, P., van Berkel, R., van Harten, J., van Os, L. and Haenraets, R. (2021) 'Vulnerable workers and the future of work', *New Directions in the Future of Work*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 97–117.
- Bredgaard, T. (2018) 'Employers and active labour market policies: Typologies and evidence', *Social Policy and Society*, **17**, 3, 365–377.
- Bredgaard, T. and Halkjær, J. L. (2016) 'Employers and the implementation of active labor market policies', *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, **6**, 1, 47–59.
- Bredgaard, T., Ingold, J. and van Berkel, R. (2023) '2: Varieties of policy approaches to employer engagement in activation policies' in J. Ingold and P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 15–33.
- Breit, E., Bråthen, M., and Sadeghi, T. (2025) 'Distinctions between inclusive and non-inclusive companies for persons with disability: Exploring the impact of COM-B and HRM practices', *WORK*, **81**, 2, 2651–2661. DOI: [10.1177/10519815251320275](https://doi.org/10.1177/10519815251320275)
- Burgess, J., Connell, J. and Winterton, J. (2013) 'Vulnerable workers, precarious work and the role of trade unions and HRM', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **24**, 22, 4083–4093.
- Butler, P. and Payne, J. (2025) 'Employer engagement with third-sector activation programmes for vulnerable groups: Interrogating logics and roles', *Journal of Social Policy*, **54**, 2, 632–650. DOI: [10.1017/S0047279423000211](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279423000211).
- Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2017) 'Thematic analysis', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, **12**, 3, 297–298.
- Dall, T., Larsen, F. and Bo Madsen, M. (2023) '7: Opening the black box: Promoting employer engagement at the street level of employment services' in J. Ingold and P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 106–125.
- De Dios Pérez, B., das Nair, R., and Radford, K. (2024b) 'Development of a job retention vocational rehabilitation intervention for people with multiple sclerosis following the person-based approach', *Clinical Rehabilitation*, **38**, 7, 965–978.
- De Dios Pérez, B., Das Nair, R. and Radford, K. (2024a) 'A mixed-methods feasibility case series of a job retention vocational rehabilitation intervention for people with multiple sclerosis', *Disability and Rehabilitation*, **46**, 5, 875–886.
- Enehaug, H., Spjelkavik, Ø., Falkum, E. and Frøyland, K. (2021) 'Workplace inclusion competence and employer engagement', *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, **12**, 1, 71–93.
- Etherington, D. and Jones, M. (2023) '3: Political economy of the inclusive labour market revisited: Welfare through work in Denmark' in J. Ingold and P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 34–51.

- Fernandez-Urbano, R. and Orton, M.** (2021) 'No voice, no choice: Assessing Danish active labour market policies using Sen's capability approach', *Work, Employment and Society*, **35**, 1, 178–188.
- Freeman, R. E.** (1984) 'Strategic management: A stakeholder theory', *Journal of Management Studies*, **39**, 1, 1–21.
- Frøyland, K., Andreassen, T. A. and Innvæ, S.** (2019) 'Contrasting supply-side, demand-side and combined approaches to labour market integration', *Journal of Social Policy*, **48**, 2, 311–328.
- Frøyland, K., Breit, E., and Spjelkavik, Ø.** (2025) 'Engaged employers – engaged workplaces? Exploring workplace resistance to work inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwD)', *WORK*, 1–9. DOI: [10.1177/10519815251335786](https://doi.org/10.1177/10519815251335786).
- Gjersoe, H. M. and Strand, A. H.** (2023) 'The street-level organisation in-between employer needs and client needs: Creaming users by motivation in the Norwegian Employment and Welfare Service (NAV)', *Journal of Social Policy*, **52**, 3, 682–699.
- Green, A. and Sissons, P.** (2023) '6: The weakest link? Job quality and active labour market policy in the UK' in J. Ingoldand P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 87–105.
- Hamilton, A.** (2023) '9: Practice case study: Reconnecting employee and employer engagement through continuous improvement of policy' in J. Ingoldand P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 145–156.
- Hyggen, C. and Vedeler, J. S.** (2021) 'Employer engagement and active labour market policies. Evidence from a Norwegian Multi-Method Study', *Social Policy and Society*, **20**, 4, 548–560.
- Ingold, J.** (2018) Employer engagement in active labour market programmes: The role of boundary spanners', *Public Administration*, **96**, 4, 707–720.
- Ingold, J.** (2019) Response to Call for Evidence on DWP's preparations for changes in the world of work. https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/142/employer_engagement_in_active_labour_market_programmes
- Ingold, J., Knox, A., Macaulay, L. and Senewiratne, S.** (2023) 'What about me?': An analysis of employers' engagement with employment service providers in Australia', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, **65**, 3, 251–273.
- Ingold, J. and McGurk, P.** (2023) 'Introduction: Why is employer engagement important?' in J. Ingoldand P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement*, (1st edition), Bristol: Bristol University Press, 1–12.
- Ingold, J., Sarkar, M., Valizade, D., Garcia, R. and Scholz, F.** (2017) Employer Engagement in Active Labour Market Programmes in the UK and Denmark. CERIC Policy Report No. 8: https://business.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/91/ceric_-_employer_engagement_in_active_labour_market_programmes_in_the_uk_and_denmark_final_report
- Ingold, J. and Stuart, M.** (2014) Employer engagement in the Work Programme. CERIC Policy Report No. 5: https://lubswww.leeds.ac.uk/fileadmin/webfiles/ceric/Documents/CERIC_Policy_Report_5.pdf
- Ingold, J. and Stuart, M.** (2015) 'The demand-side of active labour market policies: A regional study of employer engagement in the work programme', *Journal of Social Policy*, **44**, 3, 443–462.
- Ingold, J. and Valizade, D.** (2015) Employer engagement in active labour market policies in the UK and Denmark: a survey of employers. Policy report no. 6, Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and change (CERIC), Leeds University Business School.
- Ingold, J. and Valizade, D.** (2017) 'Employers' recruitment of disadvantaged groups: Exploring the effect of active labour market programme agencies as labour market intermediaries', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **27**, 4, 530–547.
- Johnson, M., Martínez Lucio, M., Grimshaw, D. and Watt, L.** (2023) 'Swimming against the tide? Street-level bureaucrats and the limits to inclusive active labour market programmes in the UK', *Human Relations*, **76**, 5, 689–714.
- Jones, K. and Carson, C.** (2024) 'A step too far: Employer perspectives on in-work conditionality', *Journal of European Social Policy*, **34**, 3, 338–353.
- Jones, K., Scullion, L., Hynes, C. and Martin, P.** (2025) 'Accessing and sustaining work after service: The role of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) and implications for HRM', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **36**, 5, 824–845.
- Kersten, A., Van Woerkom, M., Geuskens, G. A. and Blonk, R. W. B.** (2023) 'Organisational policies and practices for the inclusion of vulnerable workers: A scoping review of the employer's perspective', *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, **33**, 2, 245–266.
- Leahy, M. J., Chan, F., Iwanaga, K., Umucu, E., Sung, C., Bishop, M. and Strauser, D.** (2019) 'Empirically derived test specifications for the certified rehabilitation counselor examination: Revisiting the essential competencies of rehabilitation counselors', *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, **63**, 1, 35–49.
- Levine, S. D., Shapiro, D., Brown, C. E., and Tenney, L.** (2024) 'Employer engagement strategies to promote and add evidence-based chronic disease prevention and management programs as a covered benefit', *Occupational Health Science*, **8**, 2, 365–382.
- Liu, L.** (2023) 'Does the labour service cooperation policy promote re-employment: Evidence from China', *Social Policy and Society*, 1–16. DOI: [10.1017/S1474746423000441](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746423000441).
- McDonnall, M. C., Cmar, J. L. and Tatch, A. J.** (2020) 'Importance of agency context for long-term effectiveness of a business development training for rehabilitation counselors'. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, **53**, 1, 1–16.
- McGurk, P.** (2015) Employer engagement with the Work Programme in the retail sector: a human resource management perspective. ILPC Conference. Athens.

- McGurk, P. and Ingold, J. (2023) '14: Conclusion: Making active labour market policies work' in J. Ingold and P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 231–245.
- McGurk, P. and Meredith, R. (2018) 'Local employer engagement or distant elites? Local enterprise partnerships and employment and skills in England', *Journal of Education and Work*, **31**, 7–8, 692–714.
- McGurk, P., and Meredith, R. (2023) 'Who are the engaged employers? Strategic entry-level resourcing in low-wage sectors' in *Employer Engagement: Making active labour market policies work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 159–181.
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., and Wood, D. J. (1997) 'Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts', *The Academy of Management Review*, **22**, 4, 853–886. DOI: [10.2307/259247](https://doi.org/10.2307/259247)
- Munn, Z., Peters, M. D. J., Stern, C., Tufanaru, C., McArthur, A. and Aromataris, E. (2018) 'Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping review approach', *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, **18**, 1, 1–7.
- Murfitt, K. and Gaskin, C. J. (2022) 'Diversity field officer service: An evaluation of an employer engagement strategy trailed in Geelong, Australia', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, **57**, 3, 215–223.
- Nagtegaal, R., De Boer, N., Van Berkel, R., Derks, B. and Tummers, L. (2023) 'Why do employers (fail to) hire people with disabilities? A systematic review of capabilities, opportunities and motivations', *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, **33**, 2, 329–340.
- Nederland, SDG.. (n.d.) *10 Ongelijkheid verminderen*. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sdgnerland.nl/SDG/10-ongelijkheid-verminderen/> [accessed 17.05.2024]
- Nicholas, D., Mitchell, W., Zulla, R. and Dudley, C. (2019) 'Perspectives of employers about hiring individuals with autism spectrum disorder: Evaluating a cohort of employers engaged in a job-readiness initiative', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, **50**, 3, 353–364.
- Nicholas, D. B., Hodgetts, S., Zwaigenbaum, L., Smith, L. E., Shattuck, P., Parr, J. R., Conlon, O., Germani, T., Mitchell, W., Sacrey, L. and Stothers, M. E. (2017) 'Research needs and priorities for transition and employment in autism: Considerations reflected in a "Special Interest Group" at the International Meeting for Autism Research', *Autism Research*, **10**, 1, 15–24.
- Numans, W. L. (2024) *Doing the right things right: An insider's perspective on vulnerability*, Ridderprint.
- Olejniczak, K., Śliwowski, P., and Leeuw, F. (2020) 'Comparing behavioral assumptions of policy tools: Framework for policy designers', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, **22**, 6, 498–520. DOI: [10.1080/13876988.2020.1808465](https://doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2020.1808465)
- Ortlieb, R. and Weiss, S. (2020) 'Job quality of refugees in Austria: Trade-offs between multiple workplace characteristics', *German Journal of Human Resource Management: Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*, **34**, 4, 418–442.
- Orton, M., Green, A., Atfield, G. and Barnes, S. A. (2019) 'Employer participation in active labour market policy: From reactive gatekeepers to proactive strategic partners', *Journal of Social Policy*, **48**, 3, 511–528.
- Orton, M. and Green, A. E. (2019) 'Active labour market policy in the UK: At a (local) crossroads?', *Local Economy: The Journal of the Local Economy Policy Unit*, **34**, 1, 3–9.
- Østerud, K. L. (2020) 'Leading the way? State employers' engagement with a disability employment policy', *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, **11**, 1, 3–21. DOI: [10.18291/njwls.122196](https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.122196).
- Østerud, K. L. and Vedeler, J. S. (2024) 'Disability and regulatory approaches to employer engagement: Cross-national challenges in bridging the gap between motivation and hiring practice', *Social Policy and Society*, **23**, 1, 124–140.
- Ouzzani, M., Hammady, H., Fedorowicz, Z. and Elmagarmid, A. (2016) 'Rayyan—a web and mobile app for systematic reviews', *Systematic Reviews*, **5**, 1, 1–10.
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., McGuinness, L. A., Stewart, L. A., Thomas, J., Tricco, A. C., Welch, V. A., Whiting, P. and Moher, D. (2021) 'The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews', *British Medical Journal*, **372**, 71.
- Pedersen, E. R. (2006) 'Making Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) operable: How companies translate stakeholder dialogue into practice', *Business and Society Review*, **111**, 2, 137–163. DOI: [10.1111/j.1467-8594.2006.00265.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8594.2006.00265.x)
- Raspanti, D. and Saruis, T. (2022) 'Trapped into reverse asymmetry: Public employment services dealing with employers', *Journal of Social Policy*, **51**, 1, 173–190.
- Ravn, R. L. (2024) 'Workplace factors associated with employment of refugees – evidence from a survey among Danish employers', *Social Policy and Society*, **23**, 3, 703–719.
- Ravn, R. L. (2023) 'Which employers have refugee employees—and which do not? Employer typologies developed through hierarchical cluster analyses' *Social Policy & Administration*, **57**, 1, 67–86.
- Sissons, P. and Green, A. E. (2017) 'More than a match? Assessing the HRM challenge of engaging employers to support retention and progression', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **27**, 4, 565–580.
- Spjelkavik, Ø., Enehaug, H., Klethagen, P., Howe, E. I., Fure, S. C. R., Terjesen, H. C. A., Løvstad, M. and Andelic, N. (2023) 'Workplace accommodation in return to work after mild traumatic brain injury', *Work (Reading, Mass.)*, **74**, 3, 1149–1163.

- Stanley, J., and Mann, A.** (2014) 'A theoretical framework for employer engagement' in L. Archer, A. Mann, and S. Julian (eds), *Understanding Employer Engagement in Education: Theories and Practice*, London: Routledge, 36–52.
- Tamburo, J., Switzer, E. and Gower, W. S.** (2019) 'Lessons from the diversity partners project: Using knowledge translation to strengthen business engagement strategies and improve employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, **50**, 3, 291–299.
- Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O'Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., . . . and Straus, S. E.** (2018) 'PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and explanation', *Annals of internal medicine*, **169**, 7, 467–473.
- UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (2022) *CRPD/C/GC/8: General Comment No. 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crpd-cgc-8-general-comment-no-8-2022-right-persons>
- United Nations** (2022) The Sustainable Development Goals Report.
- Valizade, D., Ingold, J. and Stuart, M.** (2023) 'Employer participation in active labour market policies in the United Kingdom and Denmark: The effect of employer associations as social networks and the mediating role of collective voice', *Work, Employment and Society*, **37**, 4, 991–1012.
- Van Berkel, R.** (2021) 'Employer engagement in promoting the labour-market participation of jobseekers with disabilities. An employer perspective', *Social Policy and Society*, **20**, 4, 533–547.
- Van Berkel, R. and Breit, E.** (2024) 'Organizational practices for the inclusion of people with disabilities. A scoping review', *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 1–10. DOI: [10.1007/s10926-024-10228-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-024-10228-5).
- Van Berkel, R., Ingold, J., McGurk, P., Boselie, P. and Bredgaard, T.** (2017) 'Editorial introduction: An introduction to employer engagement in the field of HRM. Blending social policy and HRM research in promoting vulnerable groups' labour market participation', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **27**, 4, 503–513.
- Van Gestel, N., Oomens, S. and Buwalda, E.** (2019) 'From quasi-markets to public-private networks: Employers' engagement in public employment services', *Social Policy & Administration*, **53**, 3, 434–448.
- Van Kooy, J., Bowman, D. and Bodsworth, E.** (2014) *'Understanding Employer Engagement Programs for Disadvantaged Jobseekers: An Exploratory Study'*, Australia: The Brotherhood of St Laurence.
- Waddell, G. and Burton, A. K.** (2006) *Is Work Good for your Health and Well-Being?*, London: The Stationery Office.
- Wiggin, J. and Knuth, M.** (2023) '8: Active labour market programmes and employer engagement in the UK and Germany' in J. Ingold and P. McGurk (eds.), *Employer Engagement: Making Active Labour Market Policies Work*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 126–144.
- Wong, G., Greenhalgh, T., Westhorp, G., Buckingham, J. and Pawson, R.** (2013) 'RAMESES publication standards: Meta-narrative reviews', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **69**, 5, 987–1004.
- Xiao, Y., and Watson, M.** (2019) 'Guidance on conducting a systematic literature review', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, **39**, 1, 93–112.

Appendix – Search string

("employer* engagement" OR "employer* involvement" OR "employer* commitment") AND ("ALMP" OR "Social security" OR "Social polic*" OR "governmental polic*" OR "active labo*r market polic*" OR "labo*r market integration" OR "labo*r market participation" OR "labo*r market polic*" OR "vulnerable groups" OR "vulnerable populations" OR "vulnerable people" OR "vulnerable workers" OR "vulnerable employees" OR "vulnerable individuals" OR "marginalized groups" OR "marginalized populations" OR "marginalized people" OR "marginalized workers" OR "marginalized employees" OR "marginalized individuals" OR "minorities" OR "disadvantaged groups" OR "disadvantaged populations" OR "disadvantaged people" OR "disadvantaged workers" OR "disadvantaged employees" OR "disadvantaged individuals" OR "disab*" OR "impair*" OR "special needs" OR "support needs" OR "Low*educated" OR "refuge*" OR "ex-convicted workers" OR "ex-convicted employees" OR "Human resource management" OR "human resource strateg*" OR "HRM" OR "HR" OR "organization*" OR "organisation*" OR "rehabilitat*")

Cite this article: Bosman R, van Heijster H, Borghouts I, and Freese C (2025). A Scoping Review on the Conceptualisation of Employer Engagement in the Employment of Vulnerable Workers: An Interdisciplinary Perspective. *Social Policy and Society* 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746425100870>