

## Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries

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### Background:

The [Academic Network of European Disability experts](#) (ANED) was established by the European Commission in 2008 to provide scientific support and advice for its disability policy Unit. In particular, the activities of the Network will support the future development of the EU Disability Action Plan and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.

This country report has been prepared as input for the *Thematic report on the implementation of EU Employment Strategy in European countries with reference to equality for disabled people*. The purpose of the report ([Terms of Reference](#)) is to review national implementation of the European Employment Strategy from a disability equality perspective, and to provide the Commission with useful evidence in support of disability policy mainstreaming. More specifically, the report will review implementation of EU Employment Strategy and the PROGRESS initiative with reference to policy implementation evidence from European countries, including the strategies addressed in the EU Disability Action Plan (such as flexicurity and supported employment).

### PART ONE: GENERAL EVIDENCE

#### 1.1 Academic publications and research reports (key points)

Only few of people with disabilities are at work in Finland. This blocks them out of working life and out of full citizenship. However every third handicapped person is willing to work. About 40 percent of handicapped persons consider that employment is very important for the human well-being. About 30 percent of disabled persons have an excellent or good working capacity. More than every fifth handicapped persons have a permanent job. If one takes voluntary work into account, half of handicapped persons have worked during the last 24 months. There are a lot of unused employment resources among handicapped persons. (Nummelin 2008; Holm & Hopponen 2007; Linnakangas et al. 2006).

Finnish authorities on disability are interested in supported employment (SE) and supported workers are satisfied with their jobs - in spite of the fact that the development of SE is slow and there are only few workplaces for those who need intensive and on-going support. It is common that a person gets support mainly at the beginning of the employment, not continually. The payments are usually very small in SE. The lowest wages per hour is 0.67 Euros and the mean income per hour is 4.5 Euros in 2001. Usually, persons with diagnosed learning disabilities have the lowest possible wages. The other main group in SE included persons with the diagnoses of mental illnesses. They usually receive minimum wages. The survey of the opinions on the basic values of SE shows that the job coaches regarded inclusion, self-determination and meaningful employment as important values. However, they are doubtful as for accepting the principle of the employment of all willing regardless the degree of disability. (Pirttimaa 2003)

As a development proposal for good policy and practice more tolerant attitudes and updated legislation are needed after good piloting projects of employment of disabled people, e.g. social enterprises. This proposal includes also new research paradigm's like action research among people with disabilities and critical studies of employment structures

## 1.2 Employment statistics and trends (key points)

The employment rates comparison between disabled people and non-disabled people shows that 20 percent of people with disabilities have a paid work and 70 percent of all people have a paid work according to Ministry of Labour and the Statistical yearbook of Finnish Social Insurance Institute. However these percentages are not necessarily as valid as they should be, because the statistical data of employment rates of disabled people has not been gathered systematically. These rates are based on individual studies. (see also Ylipaavalniemi 2005). However the following table 1 shows the increase of disabled people who are at work in age group 25-64 between 2002-2006 (about 221 000 persons). The data has been gathered on several sources, because there is not any longitudinal statistical data focused on disabled people's employment.

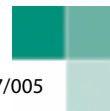
Table 1 Disabled people at work 2002-2006

	2002	2006	Difference
women	16% N=35400 (estimated)	23% N=50800 (estimated)	+7% 15400 (estimated)
men	18% N=39800 (estimated)	24% N=53000 (estimated)	+4% 13200 (estimated)
Total	17% (average) N=75200 (estimated)	24% (average) N=103800 (estimated)	+7% (average) N=28600 (estimated)

sources: Eurostat 2003; Eurostat 2008; Holm & Hopponen 2007; Linnakangas et al 2006.

The comparison between disabled men and women in 2002-2006 shows that 18 percent of disabled men have a permanent job and 16 percent of disabled women have a permanent in 2002. Until 2006 there is a subtle increase on jobs of disabled persons. Third of disabled people who have a work are in the age group 35-44 and usually they have injured in some accidents, not in the birth.

The overview of statistics shows that there is a lack of employment data of disabled persons. There is not a systematic data collection of disabled people's employment in Finland and even the Eurostat is focused on integration to the working life. On the other hand the stigmatisation of disabled people's employment is a partial exclusion. All the labour market policy efforts concern disabled people too, if they are not having disability pensions. Some structural reasons are worth to mention. The Finnish welfare services are not based on the idea that disabled persons would be at work to get their livelihood. Their livelihood is based on disability pensions. If the minimum of the work is paid the pension is abolished. The worst situation is disabled persons as a group of an inexpensive labour.



### 1.3 Laws and policies (key points)

The Finnish labour policy is very traditional in a sense of work search. The eligibility to work search must be argued. In this situation disabled persons have lot of difficulties to convince authorities of their ability to work because of their disability. However the act of vocational rehabilitation (act 189/2001) and the Social Welfare Act (act 710/1982) include supportive elements of disabled persons to get jobs, although the focus is on all unemployed persons. The main idea is to activate unemployed persons at the municipal level. Municipalities can organise it by themselves or they can buy this function from outside. Usually municipalities have established foundations with enterprises and non governmental organisations to actualise this obligation. (see also Vuorela 2008).

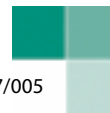
The employment policy of disabled people is focused on so called partly incapacitated persons. According to the latest report (Hytti 2008) the comparison between other Nordic Countries shows that Finland has the narrowest range of partial benefits and targeted measures. A person will receive a full pension if his/her earning capacity has decreased by at least 3/5 and a partial pension of the decrease is at least 2/5 but below 3/5. However it is important the active labour market measures for the partly incapacitated have been managed on the 'mainstream' principle, i.e. the labour administration has not had any special measures for the partly incapacitated at all. However, employment which can be described as supported employment is provided as municipal services under the Social Welfare Act. This means that employment efforts of disabled people are as questions of social and health services and not questions of employment policy such as. In other words the issue of disabled people's employment partially has been medicalised in Finland.

Alongside this activity individual policy programmes have been carried out. The efforts to employ disabled people mainly are focused on people with intellectual disabilities. (Hytti 2008; Hytti & Hartman 2008).

### 1.4 Type and quality of jobs (summary)

It is not very common that disabled people get jobs in the open labour market very easily. Their employment is focused on sheltered employment. The term sheltered employment is quited in Finland and the term supported employment is used. because working places are ordinary ones, but there are developed supportive elements of working conditions. These supportive elements are e.g. more accessible physical environments and people who assistance disabled employee. The employment sectors that mostly are represented among disabled people's working places are at the service sector and NGOs. Many disabled persons are working at stores, fast food places or they are cleaners.

Part time work is the most popular. There are two reasons for that. First disabled people themselves say they do not feel up to work full time. Second disability pension is ceased if full time wages are earned. So the latter reason is a structural one. In fact there is not any encouraging elements to full time work. Training opportunities to real paid work are too little in spite of the legislation (act 189/2001). Also social enterprises have been unsuccessful in Finland, because their legislation is too complicated (see Karjalainen 2008). Disability pensions are the first choice.



## **PART TWO: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**

### **2.1 Reasonable accommodation in the workplace and other activation policies**

Work orientation guidance is the most important support to carry out reasonable work conditions, but it varies a lot in municipalities. Basically the standards of work orientation guidance is knowledged, but there is a lack of money and personell to realise it. One crucial disadvantage of work orientation guidance is too easy training conditions compared with the real working places. This disadvantage is recognised too little. The gap between real works and supported work is real also in employment contracts and social benefits. Then the supported employment has not a real work status in Finnish legislation and governmental practices. (Nummela 2006; Ollikainen 2007).

However the awareness of disabled people as a real workforce has increased and even some private sector service providers have been employed disabled persons. Lately there was a big campaign to get jobs to disabled person i.e. Common Responsibility Campaign of Finnish State Church. The main task of this campaign was to promote and even employ disabled persons to firms. At this moment numbers of new employee are not available yet , but this campaign had a big media visibility. After the campaign one Finnish broadcasting company (SubTv) began the charity campaign to employ persons with intellectual disabilities and challenged other firms to follow their exemplification

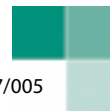
### **2.2 One example of best practice**

Above mentioned Common Responsibility Campaign of Finnish State Church was organised in May 2008. It had two goals. First it spread the knowledge that people with intellectual disabilities are the real workforce in firms. This knowledge included for example work training practices and how to get public support when one is employing disabled person. Besides a guidance to firms and disabled persons and their families was one of the objects. Second it encouraged firms to employ disabled persons. Mostly parishes employed disabled persons, but some firms like SubTv continued this campaign after the end of official time. The real problem of the campaign was its charity basement. The continuity is uncertain. (see [www.yhteisvastuu.fi](http://www.yhteisvastuu.fi)).

## **PART THREE: SUMMARY INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)**

The Finnish labour policy is undeveloped in sense of employing disabled people. The ethos and practice of welfare is based on the idea that disabled people do not have to be at work and the welfare state attempts to compensate this handicap with the disability pension. When the starting point to improve disabled persons' employment situation is this like, it indicates there are many barriers to overmatch. Because of this ideology there is not a real will to employ disabled persons in a governmental administration in spite of individual projects and policy programmes. There are always more important things to administer like consequences of globalisation at the macro level. Many Finnish social scientists have criticised this ethos as a neo-liberalism and New Public Management (e.g. Eräsaari 2006). Then the legislation and statistics of this issue are incomplete.



In the meaning of equality it is not necessary to prioritise different kinds of disability groups in an employment policy. There are however two things that should be considered as changes of disabled persons employment policy. First the consideration of sanctions if enterprises do not employ disabled people and better public supports for employment of disabled people. Second the basic research of disabled people's employment is very minor in Finland. Only some surveys or statistical analysis have been done, but this is not included to the Finnish strong tradition of sociology of work. Critical sociological studies are needed, especially the discrimination perspective. These recommendations should be realised with developments of legislation and statistics.

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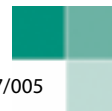
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