

Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries

Country: Latvia
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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)

In recent years a number of institutions (University of Latvia, private companies and research institutes) have undertaken research about people with disabilities and their employment options. This research has mostly been financed from European Structural Funds programmes

(http://sf.lm.gov.lv/esf/index.php?main_page_id=5&page_type=d_cat&second_page_id=31).

The clients commissioning this research are state institutions, such as the Ministry of Welfare, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and business associations. The main target groups of the projects are people with disabilities in relation to their disability (people with mental disabilities, wheelchair users and people with long-term illnesses) or people with disabilities as potential employees in some branch of industry (mechanical engineering, electronics).

Although the projects involved different clients and different research organisations and there were some difference in the main targets of the projects, there is a great deal of similarity in the research conclusions, although some of them are contradictory.

A common objective for all projects is to evaluate the options for people with disabilities in the labour market and the possibilities of integration into society and the labour market, as well as to state the main problems and provide recommendations.

The main conclusions of the research are:

1. People with disabilities have problems with integration into the labour market. The main reasons are lack of necessary infrastructure, societal attitudes and lack of motivation both on the part of employers and of people with disabilities (*Reasons for low employment levels among people with disabilities and solutions to the problems, Riga, 2007*).
2. Employment levels differ depending on the type of disability and other social and demographic factors. Only 20% of all wheelchair users are employed (*Integration of people with disabilities – wheelchair users into the labour market, Riga, 2006*).
3. Women with disabilities are more subject to financial risks and have fewer resources (mobile telephones, cars, internet) necessary for integration into the labour market (*Reasons for low employment levels among people with disabilities and solutions to the problems, Riga, 2007; Integration of people with disabilities – wheelchair users into the labour market, Riga, 2006*).
4. Like people without disabilities, young people with disabilities have fewer problems with integration into the labour market. Greater problems are faced by people with disabilities who are of pre-pension age. It is also impossible for people with mental disabilities to find work in cases where their disability is evident or the cause of their disability is mentioned in documents necessary for work.
5. Disabled people with a higher level of education have more possibilities for finding work. At the same time not all universities are interested in providing higher education for people with disabilities because of lack of adequate infrastructure and educational methods.
6. The best possibilities for integration into society are offered where disabled persons receive education in ordinary schools, but at the same time there is shortage of a common attitude about the necessity of integrated education. The main reasons given are lack of financial resources and concern that the overall level of education will be lower if children with disabilities attend the same class.

There are cases where children with disabilities are rejected from ordinary schools because of the lack of accessible environment.

7. There is a shortage of information in society about people with disabilities, their problems and possibilities, and a lack of success stories in the mass media.
8. Society is sceptical about the integration of people with disabilities into society because of their difference.
9. Latvia has the necessary legislation, political and planning documents, but has practical problems in the implementation of them (*Reasons for low employment levels among people with disabilities and solutions to the problems, Riga, 2007*). At the same time, legislation, policy and practice are not directed towards the education and employment of people with mental disabilities. All people with disabilities are classified as a single group and the specific needs they have depending on their type of disability are not taken into account (*Possibilities for people with mental problems in the labour market, Riga, 2006*).
10. NGOs play an important role in the field of employment, but at the same time the cooperation between different NGOs is weak.
11. There is a lack of flexible working time.
12. Technical equipment for adapted work places is not of high quality and does not support integration into society.
13. There is a lack of educated staff such as social workers and therapists (for the adaptation of workplaces).
14. Cases of discrimination in the workplace – refusal to employ, lower salaries and dismissal from work because of disability.
15. Conflicting suggestions about the need for a quota system (*Reasons for low employment levels among people with disabilities and solutions to the problems, Riga, 2007*,).
16. Lack of a 'one-stop-shop agency' for employers and people with disabilities for obtaining information about vacancies and options for people with disabilities.
17. Despite the fact that the state employment agency provides state support programmes for employers, such as subsidised jobs for people with disabilities, only 46% of them had heard about it. In future approximately 4% of employers would like to use subsidised work programmes (*Possibilities for people with mental problems in the labour market, Riga, 2006*).

18. With financial support from EU Structural Funds, possibilities for education and practical placements have grown.
19. Support from state programmes does not cover real expenses, which lowers the motivation of employers.
20. Lack of common database or statistics about people with disabilities.

1.2 Employment statistics and trends (key points)

As stated by several research projects, there are no common statistical data on the employment of people with disabilities in Latvia.

A number of state institutions have their own databases about people with disabilities or other matters in connection with disability. The Ministry of Welfare produced the Statistical Bulletin of People with Disabilities 2002-2006 (www.lm.gov.lv/text/151).

The State Medical Expertise Commission on Health and Working Capacities maintains a database on disability matters, including data about the status of a person at the time of assessment (employed person, unemployed person), age, gender, kind of disability, severity of disability and other categories) (<http://www.vdeavk.gov.lv>).

The State Social Insurance Agency performing the public administration functions in the area of social insurance and social services maintains a database on pension and social benefit receivers, amount of pensions, etc. (<http://www.vsaa.gov.lv>)

The State Employment Agency registers and records unemployed persons and persons seeking employment and helps unemployed persons and job seekers to become involved in the labour market. The agency's database contains general data about people with disabilities who are registered as employed or as job seekers.

As stated in the 'Report on progress in implementation of the national Lisbon Programme of Latvia for 2005-2008', the rapid economic development in Latvia in recent years has had a positive influence on the situation in the labour market.

During the last three years (2004–2006), the employment rate has increased by 4.5 percentage points. The employment rate in Latvia was 0.7 points below the EU average in 2003, but in 2006 it was already two percentage points higher. The employment rate in 2006 was three percentage points higher than in the previous year. Female employment is growing faster, increasing by 3.1 percentage points in 2006. The male employment rate in Latvia (70.4 per cent in 2006) exceeds the target set for 2010.

Unemployment indicators have improved accordingly. The unemployment rate decreased especially fast in 2006 and was 6.8 per cent (it was 8.9 per cent in 2005). The share of long-term unemployed people has decreased. The long-term unemployment rate was 2.5 per cent in 2006, down from 4.1 per cent in 2005.

Unemployment among young people (aged 15-24) has substantially decreased in 2006 – from 13.6 per cent in 2005 to 12.2 per cent in 2006. The employment rate among older people (aged 55-64) has increased in 2006. In 2006 it was 53.3 per cent, which is 3.8 percentage points higher than in the preceding year. The employment level for older people has substantially increased for both women (from 45.3 per cent in 2005 to 48.7 per cent in 2006) and men (from 55.2 per cent to 59.5 per cent).

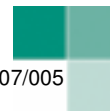
According to the data from State Employment Agency, in recent years the number of people with disabilities registered as unemployed has fluctuated between 3,000 and 3,500. The number of unemployed people with disabilities in 2003 was 3,165, in 2004 it was 3,292, in 2007 it was 3,367 (of whom 1,810 were women and 1,557 were men) (<http://www.nva.lv>).

The unemployment rate in Latvia in December 2006 was 6.2 per cent and in December 2007 it was 5.4 per cent, compared with the EU27 rates of 7.6 per cent in December 2006 and 6.8 per cent in December 2007 (www.nva.lv/index.php?cid=6#bezdarbs).

The overall number of people with disabilities in 2006 was 112,600 or 4.9 per cent of the population (2,281,300). Of these, 48.6 per cent were woman and 51.4 per cent men (www.lm.gov.lv/text/151). Over recent years the number of people with disabilities has remained in the region of five per cent of the population.

As stated in the research project, 'Study of employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the mechanical engineering and metal working industry', in 2006 there were 55,573 people with disabilities aged between 16 and 57 in Latvia, and according to data from the State Medical Expertise Commission on Health and Working Capacities only 13-14 per cent of them were employed. Grouping them by type of disability, 3,000-3,300 people had a visual disability, 1,400-1,600 had a hearing disability, 6,900-7,200 people had a physical disability, 15,800 -16,100 had a mental disability and 28,300-28,600 had a disability caused by ordinary illnesses (http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/petijumsletera_invaliduiesp.pdf).

Although several state institutions have databases, the availability and quality of statistical data is weak and remains unreliable. There are problems in finding correct data on the employment rate of people with disabilities and data which could be used as evidence of changes or improvements. There is a lack of comparative statistical data on the employment of disabled women and men, young people and older people, people with different kinds of disabilities or impairments, people who were disabled from birth or later in life and disabled people who are migrants or from ethnic minorities.



1.3 Laws and policies (key points)

Latvia is a country where the predominant approach is the 'mainstreaming model'. This approach involves not only the provision of special employment services for people with disabilities but also employment-enhancing measures in all policy areas. At the same time, some targeted active labour market policies have been implemented through financial incentives for employers hiring people with disabilities (e.g. subsidised jobs) and through vocational rehabilitation programmes.

There are few major political documents and legislative acts regulating employment for people with disabilities.

In 1998 the Cabinet of Ministers accepted the policy 'Equal Opportunities for All'. The goal was to create equal opportunities for people with disabilities, promoting social rehabilitation and the restoration of working capacities and involvement in the labour market. The main problems in the employment field were stated as being:

- Lack of stimulating mechanism for people with disabilities and a low level of education;
- Lack of a system for attracting the interest of employers in employing people with disabilities;
- Lack of finances for adaptation of workplaces for people with disabilities;
- Lack of vocational diagnostics and vocational guidance;
- Approximation of minimum salary and disability pension.

The main task in the employment field was to ensure equal rights for people with disabilities to be productive and to obtain well paid work in the labour market (<http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/61>).

Following the 'Equal Opportunities for All' policy, which includes an action plan that runs until 2010, the Cabinet of Ministers accepted a new policy planning document, 'Policy guidelines for reducing disability and its consequences', prepared by the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with NGO and Action plan.

On 19 October 2005, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the national Lisbon Programme of Latvia for 2005–2008, the aim of which is to facilitate growth and employment in Latvia. The Programme is a policy planning document, which shows how, in 2005–2008, Latvia will achieve the Lisbon Strategy goals on the basis of the 'Integrated guidelines for growth and jobs' approved by the European Council in July 2005. The progress towards the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals is evaluated in the 'Report on progress in implementation of the national Lisbon Programme of Latvia for 2005–2008'.

The programme for 2005–2008 defines the following main tasks for fostering employment: promotion of an inclusive labour market; encouraging economic activities

in the least developed regions; and reduction of undeclared employment. However, people with disabilities are not included as a specific group (www.em.gov.lv/em/images/modules/items/item_file_18074_2.pdf).

The main legislative acts are the Labour Code and the Law on Support for Unemployed Persons and Job Seekers.

1.4 Type and quality of jobs (summary)

Since the predominant approach in Latvia is the ‘mainstreaming model’, according to the Law on Support for Unemployed Persons and Job Seekers, the State Employment Agency ensures the organisation and implementation of the following active labour market policy measures which promote competitiveness among unemployed people and job seekers in the labour market, thus facilitating professional mobility as well:

- professional training, improvement of professional skills and retraining;
- measures for raising competitiveness;
- paid temporary employment

These measures also apply to people with disabilities and there are some specific measures for people with disabilities.

According to the State Employment Agency data, the number of workers with disabilities in subsidised employment in 2003 was 619, in 2004 it was 415, but in the first nine months of 2005 it was 296. At the same time, temporary employment of people with disabilities in 2003 was 322, in 2004 it was 410 and in the first nine months of 2005 it was 349. Professional training services were received by 415 people with disabilities in 2003, 146 in 2004 and 431 in the first nine months of 2005.

In relation to other forms of employment, it must be mentioned that Latvia has not implemented a quota system. Policy planning documents foresee the introduction of other forms of employment for people with disabilities (social enterprises, supported employment and sheltered employment).

At the same time, in recent years some NGOs have implemented sheltered work by organising sheltered workshops for people with mental disabilities who are clients of day care centres. Earlier, in 2001 the Latvian association, ‘Rupju berns’, within a project financed by the PHARE programme, initiated supported employment in Latvia for people with intellectual disabilities.

PART TWO: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

2.1 Reasonable accommodation in the workplace

The Labour Code defines it as a duty of the employer to ensure reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Within the state programme for subsidised employment employers receive financial support. But as was stated in research studies, the financial support is insufficient and does not cover the real costs. The other conclusion was that the technical equipment and technical aids available for people with disabilities are of poor quality.

It was stated by many employers that people with disabilities need individual assistance at work. Such assistance was available within the programme for subsidised employment – co-worker (programme offered by the State Employment Agency) or supported employment – job coach (provided by the Supported Employment Agency). Personal assistance in subsidised employment was financed from state programmes or from EU Structural Funds, but in supported employment financing resources were different – from project funding to state or municipality or even NGO funding.

The beneficiaries of subsidised employment programmes were people with all types of disabilities. The beneficiaries in supported employment were mainly people with intellectual disabilities, young people from day care centres.

2.2 Other activation policies

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2.3 One example of best practice

An example of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in Latvia is supported employment for people with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment was introduced by the Latvian association, 'Rupju berns', in 2001 within a project financed by the PHARE programme. Over the years the Supported Employment Agency was established, this agency provided the services of job coaches for people with intellectual disabilities. Approximately 50 people found a job in the open labour market on the same work contracts as other people.

The other example is the website www.varcentrs.lv, which is maintained by the NGO, APEIRONS, and is used both by people with disabilities and by employers as a place to exchange information about vacancies and job searches. People with disabilities may submit their CV and receive practical suggestions on how to complete a CV, as well as basic information about rights and other information.

PART THREE: SUMMARY INFORMATION

3.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)

People with disabilities remain significantly disadvantaged in the quantity and quality of their participation in the labour force. The employment rates of people with disabilities are unsatisfactory.

There is some evidence of improvement in the employment of disabled people through the introduction of subsidised employment or supported employment. However, the demands and expectations of people with disabilities arising from the 'rights and responsibilities' policy agenda (including the UN Convention) are increasing.

Recommendations:

1. Inform society about people with disabilities, their needs, problems and their possibilities.
2. Draft legislative acts, policy planning documents and action plans, taking into account the needs and problems of people with different kinds of disabilities.
3. Establish a common database and statistics about people with disabilities.
4. Develop financial support programmes for employers to cover the costs of reasonable accommodation in workplaces for people with disabilities.
5. Extend use of technical aids and technical equipment for people with disabilities, including IT technologies in workplaces and ordinary life.

3.2 References

'Effective involvement of people with disabilities as unused labour force potential in electronic and electrotechnical production companies in Latvia', Riga, 2005.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/petijumsletera_invaliduiesp.pdf

'Study of employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the mechanical engineering and metal working industry', Riga, 2005.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/petijumsletera_invaliduiesp.pdf

'Possibilities for people with mental problems in the labour market', Riga, 2006.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/detalizetie_rezultati_gar_marketlab.pdf

'Integration of people with disabilities – wheelchair users into the labour market', Riga, 2006.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/BISS/biss_ritekrslu_lietotju_integracija.pdf

'People with threatened disability in the labour market', Riga, 2006.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/sustento_petijums.pdf

'Risk Possibilities and reasons for unemployment and social exclusion of people with disabilities', Riga, 2006.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/invalidu_nodarbinatiba.pdf

'Reasons for low employment levels among people with disabilities and solutions to the problems', Riga, 2007.

Available in Latvian:

http://sf.lm.gov.lv/CMS/modules/EReditor/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/esf/Petijumi/lu_invalidu_nodarbinatibas_problemas.pdf

Conception "Equal opportunities for all", Riga, 1998.

Available in Latvian <http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/61>

'National Lisbon Programme of Latvia for 2005-2008', Riga, 2005 http://www.em.gov.lv/em/images/modules/items/item_file_18074_2.pdf

'Report on progress in implementation of the national Lisbon Programme of Latvia for 2005-2008', Riga, October, 2007

http://www.em.gov.lv/em/images/modules/items/item_file_18296_en.pdf

<http://sf.lm.gov.lv/>

<http://www.nva.lv>

<http://www.vdeavk.gov.lv>

<http://www.vsaa.gov.lv>

<http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/151>

<http://www.lm.gov.lv/news/id/371>