

## 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)

#### Key Findings

Recent studies dealing with employment and disabled people, include:

- The 2003 NSO study entitled "Persons suffering from a Long-standing Health Problem or Disability: a Perspective".
- A 2004 study carried out by Dr. Gordon Cordina entitled "The Economic Dimensions of Independent Supported Living for People with Disability".
- A 2004 study carried out by KNPD entitled 'Research on the Major Concerns of Persons with Disability and their Families'
- A 2005 ETC Study entitled "Job search and Persons with Disability - Results of a study among persons with disability and employers"

The **2003 NSO Study** was aimed at drawing a picture of the situation of disabled people in Malta. The information was compiled from the June 2002 Labour Force Survey. The survey showed that:

1. A large number of people with long-standing health problem or disability were inactive (63.9% of people with long-standing health problems or disability surveyed in 2002). The number of people with long-standing health problems or disability employed at the time stood at 32.2% whilst the number of unemployed was of 4.0%. In addition, Women were more likely to be fall into the category of inactive than men.

2. Of people with long-standing health problem or disability who were in employment, 20.2% occupied elementary occupations (such as maids, or messengers). This was followed by craft, or related work (including carpenters or electricians). The manufacturing industry was the highest employer of people with long-standing health problems or disability, with 16.3% working in this sector. The second greatest economical activity of people with long-standing health problem or disability was in wholesale or retail, with 15.2% working in such activity.
3. Of (registered?) unemployed people with long-standing health problems or disability, the number of males exceeded that of females with 72.1% of the total unemployed being men.
4. In addition, 28.5% of job seekers with long standing health problems or disability had been unemployed for 6 to 11 months. The unemployment rate of persons with a long-standing health problem or disability stood at 11.0%.
5. 17.1% of persons with a long-standing health problem or disability reported that they were significantly limited in the type or amount of work that they could carry out, or in their mobility to or from the place of work. On the other hand, a large number or 67.1 %, stated that their condition did not pose any limitation.
6. The majority of people with a long-standing health problem or disability reported that they did not need any assistance or special equipment to work. In fact, this was expressed by 76.6% of the respondents. The remaining 23.4% stated that special working arrangements would be welcome. It should be noted that 19.1% of people stating they needed assistance reported having emotional, nervous or mental health problems.

The **2004 Cordina report** followed a project by the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilità (KNPD) (or, the National Commission Persons with a Disability) on independent living. This report aimed to examine the economic impact of the entry of disabled people into employment. The report concluded that if disabled people were provided with financial support to purchase their own transport or personal assistance to enter the world of work, the long-term effect to the economy would be to recoup any expenditure involved in launching such a scheme. In addition, this report suggested that a serious disincentive for disabled people's entry into the labour market was the 'benefits trap'. In other words, disabled people who enter work may lose any state support or benefits whilst gaining little profit in return from their actual employment. The report also concluded that financial support for entry into the labour market would even benefit people with high support needs.

The results of the **2004 Major Concerns** study illustrated a low participation rate among disabled people in the labour market in Malta. The results are based on data gathered through a structured interview with 599 disabled people registered with KNPD. Through comparisons with the results of the NSO's Labour Force Survey of June 2002, the discrepancies between disabled and non-disabled people were also highlighted.



The economic activity of the respondents was as follows:

- 16.4% of respondents were students (compared to 26.1% of the general population);
- 11.5% were employees (compared to 36.5%);
- 17.7% were housewives (compared to 21.9%);
- 7.7% were registering as unemployed (compared to 21.9%);
- 15.4% were inactive (compared to 2.1%);
- 29.4 % were retired (compared to 10.3%);
- 2% did not respond.

The results indicated that, in many areas, disabled women are more disadvantaged than disabled men. This is most noticeable in the fact that:

- 22.6% of disabled women were employed, compared to 50.7% of disabled men;
- 1.8% were registering as unemployed, compared to 4.5% of men

Another main finding was that, of those who work, many are employed in low paying jobs, when compared to the general situation. The following statistics give an indication of this situation:

- 34.3% of disabled people were in elementary occupations, compared to 12.7% of the general population;
- 22.9% were employed as clerks, compared to 11.6%;

Here it is worth noting that

- 17.4% of disabled women were in elementary occupations compared to 42.6%;
- 39.1% were employed as clerks compared to 14.9%.

At the other end of the employment scale

- 7.1% of disabled people were professionals, compared to 10.1% of the general population;
- 2.9% were legislators, high officials or managers, compared to 9.4%.
- In the 'professionals' section, disabled women were outnumbered by disabled men (4.3% compared to 8.5%)
- In the 'legislators, high officials or managers' section, disabled women outnumbered disabled men (4.3% compared to 2.1%).

This research also indicates that

- 80% said that they were happy with their job;
- 47.1% said that they earn a good wage;
- 74.3% said that they would find it difficult to find a new job;
- 22.8% said that they have good prospects for promotion;
- 38.6% said that they have the possibility of on-the-job training.

Unlike the two previous studies, the **2005 Employment and Training Corporation (ETC)**'s study involved a qualitative paradigm. The ETC is the state-run agency tasked with assisting job seekers to enter employment. In this study, the ETC interviewed a sample of disabled

people who were on the ETC's register of disabled job seekers, as well as a select number of employers.

Disabled job seekers and those who had found a job reported:

1. That they perceived attaining gainful employment as an opportunity to be financially independent, as well as a chance to socialise more.
2. Those who were in employment reported that it was a positive experience for them. However, many complained that it was difficult to find a job as employers tended not to answer their requests. In fact, a number of disabled people still on the ETC Disabled Persons' Register had been there for more a year.
3. A number of disabled people also pointed out that conditions in their place of work, such as low levels of access, or little support, made their job experience more difficult.

On the other hand, employers reported that:

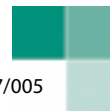
1. They were unaware of what employing a disabled person would entail in real terms.
2. Although many employers expressed openness to employing disabled people, many complained that the majority of disabled applicants were not sufficiently qualified, or did not possess the necessary work experience to fulfil their duties.
3. While employers were open to employing disabled people with mild to moderate impairments, they were less willing to employ disabled people with severe impairments.
4. Employers were also less willing to invest their own profits into making their places more accessible, or to provide disabled employees with reasonable support provisions.
5. Employers who did not employ disabled persons generally held negative ideas about disabled workers, including the fear that disabled people would be less productive, or that the provision of any adaptations would involve them (the employers) in unreasonable costs.

### **Lessons for Good Policy and Practice**

These research studies show the persistent and widespread exclusion of disabled people from the labour market. The Major Concerns study provides useful statistics that indicate that disabled people are at a disadvantage when compared to the non-disabled population. It also shows they tend to have low-paying jobs, little prospects for promotion, for finding a new job, or for receiving on-the-job training. Policy makers therefore need to keep sight of the fact that, for disabled people, it is not just a question that having any job would do, but rather of having a one, which offered reasonable remuneration together with good prospects for promotion and further training.

The ETC study highlighted the need for employers to be better aware of the valid contribution that disabled people can make to their companies or organisations, thus fostering a more positive attitude in employers, thus providing disabled people with better access to meaningful employment. It also clearly highlighted the need for workplaces to be made more accessible.

Cordina's study focused on the 'benefits trap', which remains one of the main obstacles, that disabled people encounter when trying to access the labour market. Therefore, Cordina proposes a benefits system that would raise disabled people out of this trap, that is, the provision of a grant covering impairment-related expenses, for disabled people who begin



working. This proposal has been discussed with the relevant authorities, and while there seems to be some agreement on the level of principles, the recommendations themselves have not yet been put into action.

### **New research**

While the above-mentioned studies provide very useful information, more recent data can give a better picture of the current situation.

KNPD is currently analysing data obtained from the NSO's 2005 Census in order to study the situation of disabled people in Malta. While this data is already 3 years old, it is very useful since it has been compiled from a nationwide census and provides opportunities for comparing disabled with non-disabled people, disabled men and women, those in different age and impairment groups, and those coming from different geographical areas. The findings of this study will be published in 2008.

KNPD is also in the process of reviewing its 1995 National Employment Policy and fresh data are being gathered for this exercise.

Potential areas of research include a factors that impinge on employment but are not directly related to it, such as the provision of accessible and reliable means of transport, and access to further education.

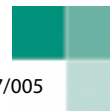
### **1.2 Employment statistics and trends (key points)**

The ETC maintains statistical information on the number of disabled people who are seeking employment. However, given that registration is voluntary, this source of information may not provide a very accurate picture of the issue as a whole.

As indicated above, the NSO 2005 Census gathered information about the status of employment among disabled people. The National Commission Persons with a Disability is currently analysing the existing data and a report should be published later in 2008. The data should reveal differences between disabled and non-disabled employment rates given that data compares the figures in those who stated they had no disability with those who reported they had a disability. The data reveals of that those persons of working age with a long-standing disability, 25.6% were in employment, whilst 66.2% were inactive, 5.0% were seeking work and 3.2% were in some form of training.

The analysis of the NSO Census statistics will include comparisons of the situation of disabled men and women, of young and older people, and of people with different kinds of impairments.

The data does not contain information about when the impairment was acquired or whether it was present since birth. Therefore it will be difficult to draw any conclusions on this matter. The same applies to the study of the situation of disabled people who are migrants, or from ethnic minorities.



### 1.3 Laws and policies (key points)

The present administration's 2008 Budget Speech clearly states that the 'employment of persons with a disability remains one of the areas in which we are experiencing the biggest challenges.' (pp.71-72). It also introduces a new incentive for employers employing registered disabled people as well as consolidating existing employment schemes targeting disabled people.

The 1969 Employment Disabled Persons Act, also known locally as the 'Quota Act' was aimed at increasing the number of disabled people in the workforce by insisting that local companies employing more than 20 people shall ensure that 2% of their workforce are taken from among those disabled people whose name appears on the ETC's register of disabled unemployed persons. However, over the years this law has proved to be unenforceable and in fact it has had little positive effect for disabled people ... at least on a sectorial level --- although a few individuals do owe their jobs (particularly in government departments) to the implementation of this piece of legislation.

On the other hand, the Equal Opportunities Persons with a Disability Act (2000) made it unlawful for employers to discriminate against disabled people on the basis of their impairment. Employment was one of the areas covered by this act, which also obliged employers to make 'reasonable accommodation' when employing disabled people.

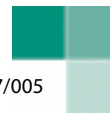
Reforms in the 2007 Invalidation Pensions Act were aimed to discourage those who could still work to apply for benefits through social security. This reform included the setting up of a medical board to vet claims and define eligibility parameters. The reform is already having an effect as the number of claims to an invalidity pension have already dropped or been refused.

The Maltese Government has prioritised the creation of employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, among them disabled persons in all its strategic documents, namely Operational Programmes I and II (in both the Priority Axes and the Horizontal Priorities), the National Reform Programme, the pre-budget document A better quality of life (2006-2010) and the budget speech Families growing stronger (2008), the National Strategic Reference Framework, and the National report on strategies for social protection and inclusion (2006-2008). These documents refer to the need for developing strategies and implementing actions aimed towards promoting the inclusion of disabled people in society in general, and in the world of work in particular.

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

According to data of the NSO 2005 Census, of those disabled people who work, a significant number work in elementary occupations (20.5%), followed by work in craft or trade work (14.7%) those working in service or shop sales work (14.7%) and as clerks (12.6%). However, the census revealed that there are some gender differences when it comes to the main occupation.

In fact, disabled males tend to be employed in elementary occupations (27.7%), in craft and related trades work (19.1%), as service workers and shop or sales workers (12.1%), as clerks (11.5%) and as technicians or as associated professionals (10.2%). On the other hand, disabled women tend to be represented as service workers and shop or sales workers



(27.8%) technicians or associated professionals (19.1%), as clerks (16.4%) in elementary occupations (13.4%) and as professionals (12.1%).

## **PART TWO: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**

### **2.1 Reasonable accommodation in the workplace**

Legally, places of work need to be accessible to all unless making the necessary changes to the work environment are deemed unreasonable because of valid financial or technical reasons. The National Commission Persons with a Disability was appointed by MEPA to act as a consultant on physical access before approving building plans. Even if places of work are not exempt from conforming the access guidelines, employers may appeal to KNPD on the grounds of the reasons outlined above. It is rare for KNPD to exempt workplaces but in cases when the business is cannot afford to make such adjustments (as evidenced by audited accounts of the enterprise) or technically difficult (evidenced by building plans vetted by an architect working for KNPD) the Test of Reasonableness Board – which takes the final decision – may deem such adaptations unreasonable and issue an exemption.

At the same time, employers are protected against discrimination when seeking a job. However, the fact that disabled people still find problems finding a job as evidenced by the ETC 2005 study described earlier demonstrates that legislation alone may not be yielding the desired results.

### **2.2 Other activation policies**

The government agency responsible for employment and training (ETC) also offers support to disabled people seeking employment through such schemes like the Bridging the Gap scheme, which offers disabled people with the opportunity of entering the labour market through supported employment measures.

Through this scheme, disabled people can gain experience on the job, have more employment opportunities, receive a weekly wage (80% of the minimum wage). On the other hand, employers choose and interview the client, can assess the progress of the employee, are not bound to pay national insurance, wages or sick leave benefits for the first 156 weeks of employment. It is a new scheme called Employment Aid Scheme and is being funded by the ESF) whilst employers can benefit from the support of ETC officials during the scheme.

The government has also encouraged employers to recruit disabled people by making changes to the Social Security Act to the effect that employers employing a severely disabled person or a visually impaired person will have their national insurance for the first 156 weeks of employment refunded.

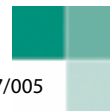
In addition, accessible transport used during working hours is partly subsidised by the government. However, such services are still expensive when compared to regular public transport and there are long waiting lists to use this service.



### **2.3 One example of best practice**

Unfortunately, no documented case of good practice exists at present.





## PART THREE: SUMMARY INFORMATION

### 3.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)

Undoubtedly, the employment opportunities of disabled people have increased over the years. However, disabled people still remain largely under-represented in the labour market, with disabled women being more excluded than disabled men with only 7% employed compared to 22.5% of males (NSO CENSUS 2005). Indeed, both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that disabled people seeking work find problems ranging from lack of access to negative response from employers. In this sense, problems related to accessing the place of work, lack of transport services and negative attitudes prevent disabled people from entering the labour market. Added to that, if the remuneration for working does not justify the time spent working, disabled people may prefer not to work. They may also be afraid to take the plunge into employment, would mean forsaking the relative security of the disability pension, however limited it is.

Disabled people who work may also find that they are never promoted in their career course but would be unwilling to change jobs due to difficulties in finding a new job. Moreover, although personal support is given during the first few months of on the job training, people with severe disabilities may require such support throughout their working life to be fully included at the place of work.

Indeed, there should be better coordination and communication between the ETC, employers and *Agenzija Sapport* on the provision of factual information related to what employing disabled people entails in real terms (such as on assistive technology and other support requirements) and in the use of personal assistance during working hours.

Additionally, Cordina's recommendation of providing financial grants for disabled people to better access the labour market should be seriously considered. Such financial assistance could help disabled people gain a higher degree of independence on their life/work options whilst providing employers with greater incentive when considering the employment of disabled people.

However, whilst removing physical obstacles and addressing disabling attitudes might be a solution for most disabled people, other groups of disabled people need to be considered. In particular people with severe or complex disabilities might experience difficulties in working in the open market since they may require levels of support that may not be accommodated in the open market. This applies to people with mental health issues as well. The following models might be considered:

- Support on the place of work – a severely disabled person is provided with the services of job coach or personal assistance throughout the course of their working career within a mainstream setting.
- Severely disabled people working as Part of an Enclave of no more than 6 disabled people provided with a job coach in a mainstream setting.
- A group of about 6 severely disabled may work as part of a mobile crew travelling around to provide a particular service. A number of job coaches help by driving the crew around where needed and through helping out in the organisation of work or on who does what and when.

- Tasks can be assigned to a number of job coaches.
- Self-employment – severely disabled people may be guided in pursuing a career through the assistance of a support agency which can provide the services of a job coach to aid in transport and personal so that the severely disabled person can perform his or her job.

Even if work in the open market or through supported employment may be solutions that help a larger number of disabled people, there are a small group of people who can be only included in the world of work by operating in sheltered employment settings. In Malta, no such facilities yet exist which means that a few number of disabled people who may contribute in a more secure setting because of their impairments, cannot do so.

Increasing the participation of disabled people within the labour market should involve coordination between ETC, support agencies and employers. Moreover, emphasis on training and increasing educational opportunities for disabled people will invariably increase the employability of disabled people.

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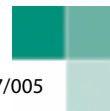
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