

Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries

Country: Slovenia

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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)

The volume of research on disability is relatively small, but the employment of disabled people is the most researched topic in disability studies in Slovenia. A comprehensive research study on employment was published in 2004 (Uršič et al.), coinciding with the change in legislation that introduced major changes in the employment of disabled people (e.g. quota systems, supported employment, etc.). The 2004 study included an assessment of the situation and considered possibilities for introducing new arrangements, such as new assessment procedures, the use of IT technologies by disabled people, quota systems, supported employment and analyses of employers' attitudes to employing disabled persons.

In 2006 a legal study was conducted into the relationship between the social care and security entitlements and the possibilities for employment on the open market (Kresal Šoltes et al. 2007). This study came in response to the new legislation and the main issue was to deal with the loophole left open by the new legislation: the fact that the entitlements (pensions), disability status and institutional care prevent people from entering the market. The study proposes a series of amendments which would not increase the risks in the transition from disability pension to employment, enabling people to retain the entitlements and benefits for care when employed and to receive

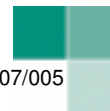
incentives for being employed. It goes on to point out that the new legislation favours sheltered employment over supported employment and that quotas can be filled through contracts to sheltered employment enterprises. It also suggests that a shift to social and individual models of assessment and provision is necessary.

A fairly comprehensive monitoring report was published (OSI-EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme, Kukova, Zavišek and Urh, 2005) on the access to education and employment for people with intellectual disabilities. While concentrating more on integration and inclusion in education, it highlights the problems due to the fact that the majority of people with intellectual disabilities are unemployed; that receipt of various disability benefits and social care prevents people from entering the labour market; and points out the segregating effects of Adult Training Centres (literal translation Care and Work Centres).

In seeking to map the contingencies of the everyday lives of people with long-term distress (Flaker et al. 2007; Čačinovič – Vogrinčič, 2008), the authors include a substantial section on work, employment and income. Their qualitative analysis of various data sets shows that employment is not only a means of acquiring contractual status and income to support life in contemporary society, but is also a way of organising life experiences, constructing a social world and identities and is also an essential constituent of being by being active (e.g. in relation to dementia) and points to everyday tactics and strategies to deal with the intricacies of the workplace (attaining, maintaining and preserving it). It outlines many diverse ways of supporting, helping and enabling people in these situations.

A series of small-scale studies and evaluations were commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs to evaluate both the national programmes (Fatur, Vidmar 2007, Kobal et. al. 2006, 2007, Kobal, Dremelj, Nagode 2007) and various forms of employment (Vidmar et al. 2006, Ministry of Labour 2006a, 2006b, Nagode et al. 2008), including a comprehensive study on human resources in sheltered enterprises (Dolinšek et al. 2005). These are partly designed to set the indicators for policy evaluation and give insights into the functioning of the system, and thus herald a more evidence-based decision-making in the future as well as the development of research and evaluation in the field of disability and employment.

Three publications concerning disability were produced in 2007. One was a legal manual on employment and rehabilitation (Uršič, Destovnik, Kalčič 2007) and the second a general manual for more popular use: *A guide to disability rights* (Kresal et al. 2007). The third publication was produced by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and concerned Disabled People, the Elderly and Other People with Special Needs in Slovenia, presenting data on, among other things, the employment of disabled people (Statistical Office of Slovenia Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, 2007; available at: <http://www.stat.si/doc/pub/invalidi-2007-SLO.pdf>).



1.2 Employment statistics and trends (key points)

Data on employment are generally provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (<http://www.stat.si/>) and by the Employment Service of Slovenia (<http://www.ess.gov.si/>).

The latter provides monthly reports on a number of topics. Firstly, a report is produced on people who are registered unemployed, including the number of disabled people (e.g. in June 2008 there were 10,140 disabled people registered as unemployed, which was 16.7 per cent of the total number). Secondly, data are produced relating to the Occupational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (Zakon o zaposlitveni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov) (e.g. in April 2008 there were 487 people in the rehabilitation process, 103 of whom had started the process during the current month). Thirdly, there is a report on the register of newly employed disabled people (in April 2008 there were 142; during the first four months of 2008 the figure was 608). Finally, a report is published on the number of contracts relating to various measures of the Active Employment Policy (Employment Service of Slovenia).

The Statistical Office does not provide much data on disability and employment apart from what is published in the brochure mentioned above, i.e. the number of disabled people employed (30,739 in 2007); the number of unemployed disabled people (10,415); the percentage of employed and unemployed disabled people according to age and sex; and the number of people employed in disability enterprises. The Statistical Office also provides some data on the Adult Training Centres (Statistical Office, Rapid Reports 77).

There is also data available from the Institute of Pension and Disability Insurance (<http://www.zpiz.si/src/>) which has indirect implications on the employment issue, i.e. the number of people on the disability pension (total 93,558 in May 2008).

The available data are administrative; hence they are reliable in expressing the registered employed or unemployed disabled people, recipients of disability pensions, people included in disability enterprises etc. However, the conclusions drawn from these data may not be valid or even reliable. For instance, figures reported in the 'Compilation' report (Ward, Grammenos, Huber 2007: 54) regarding the proportion of employed people with disabilities are different from those which might be calculated from the figures presented by the same source – the difference being substantial. For example, while the 'Compilation' report states that the proportion of employed disabled people in total employment is less than one per cent, the calculation using the data from the Statistical Office (the same body which provided the information for the 'Compilation' report) gives a result of 3.84 per cent. While unable to track the source of this mistake, we can have more reason to doubt the reliability of the 'Compilation' report than the data closer to the ground.

The proportion of disabled people among the unemployed is much higher at 14.83 per cent, while the unemployment rate of disabled people is 23.4 per cent as compared to the general unemployment rate of 7.3 per cent (calculated on the basis of data from the Statistical Office and the Employment Service:

www.ess.gov.si/slo/Dejavnost/StatisticniPodatki/MesecneInformacije/2007/T01_slo07.pdf). The trends are, however, encouraging. Until 2001, unemployment grew among disabled people (despite the fall in general unemployment since 1998). Since 2001 there has been a decrease in the numbers of unemployed disabled people and, what is even more encouraging, an increase in new employment since 2004. New employment of disabled people doubled from 987 in 2004 to 1,927 in 2007 (Employment Service). It seems that better economic conditions and new regulations (Occupational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act) and policies (Active Employment Policy) have produced positive trends in employment. However, the fall in the numbers of unemployed disabled people might also be the result of stricter regulations in relation to attaining disability status. In addition, there is a large proportion of inactive disabled people (about 70 per cent, Uršič et al. 2004), about half of whom are of working age, many of them prevented from entering the labour market by virtue of their legal status.

1.3 Laws and policies (key points)

Disability is not a major theme in political discussion and there are no significant differences between the political parties regarding the issue. Nevertheless, there have been some actions in the political arena to promote public interest in the issue (e.g. a female wheelchair user running for President, demonstrations and rallies etc.). International treaties and European policies have probably also had a substantial influence on positive changes.

The most important piece of new legislation in recent years was the Occupational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (2004). Alongside it there is in operation the Active Employment Policy 2007-2013 (based on a previous similar policy) and a new Disability Action Plan 2007-2013. The Act has introduced many innovations, among them a quota system, supported employment and more opportunities for sheltered employment, as well as intensive counselling and individual employment planning (rehabilitation plan), including the design of the workplace, adaptation of the workplace and incentives for employers. The Active Employment Policy has special goals and targets regarding disabled people in the Chapters on Social Inclusion and Subsidies for the Hard to Employ. The Disability Action Plan has a major set of goals on employment (22 measures) which aim to improve the legal framework as well as actual practice in employment.

The general impression is that there is a framework and measures on the ground which can improve the opportunities of disabled people and that there are also monitoring tools set up that will enable the stakeholders to amend and improve the strategic as well as operational means of enacting both legislation and policies. On the other hand,

from the user perspective, the system is quite complicated and people need a lot of expertise to exercise their rights. This therefore favours the users who are already included and more socially able and institutes the services as regulators of employment rather than the users themselves.

1.4 Type and quality of jobs (summary)

Most employed disabled people, about three quarters, are employed on the open market. This is probably the result of good protection provided to disabled people to enable them to retain their jobs after the onset of their disability and only recently also the result of the newly introduced quota system and incentives given to employers and disabled people.

The major employers of disabled people are the disability enterprises. In 2006 there were 165 such enterprises, employing 13,685 workers, 6,441 of them disabled (Statistical Office, Rapid Reports 77: 4-5). These are sheltered workplaces with a long history (the first were established in the 1950s). However, they flourished as a transition phenomenon in the 1990s (Ministry of Labour 2006a), being founded by various enterprises in order to increase the productivity of the main enterprises. Hence the majority (78 per cent) of them were founded by state-owned economic entities (as well as some by disability organisations). Most of them are of medium size, although some are quite large. The employed workers in these establishments are on average older and less skilled. This, together with the segregating function of the organisations, produces a demotivated atmosphere and lack of interest.

New forms of sheltered employment introduced by new legislation (2004) are the employment centres for disabled people. In 2007, 15 such centres were established, employing 154 people. The initial findings are positive in terms of social inclusion and support but are somehow undetermined with regard to how productive these could be, both in terms of economic indices as well as in terms of enhancing the careers of the users (Vidmar et al. 2006). Newly introduced are also training workshops and enterprises to provide training in the workplace. In 2006 there were 263 people included in 21 such programmes, half of them disabled (Ministry of Labour 2006b).

There is not much evidence of how successful the introduction of supported employment has been. It has definitely not been developed to its full potential and is not much used by counsellors and rehabilitation workers (Fatur and Vidmar, 2007).

New legislation has also given substantial emphasis to rehabilitation counselling. According to evaluation reports, this has not increased the numbers of people entering the rehabilitation process but is, however, productive in generating a new network of rehabilitation agencies and methods of working, setting professional standards, organising the practitioners and networking with employers.

There are also around 2,700 (Nagode et al. 2008, Rapid Reports, 11) people with intellectual disabilities working in quasi-employment, i.e. the Adult Training Centres (Centres for Care and Work). These establishments offer “guidance, care and employment” (sometimes also accommodation), providing day care for the people with intellectual disabilities who would supposedly otherwise be excluded from the area of work and employment. These have been criticised for their segregating nature and patronising attitudes of staff, which may tend more to exclude people from employment rather than connect them to it.

This is even truer for the occupational therapies offered in psychiatric hospitals and social care homes, which provide occupational activities, but in the name of therapy rather than work, thus devaluing not only the price of work but also the experience. There are, however, some initiatives in social care homes to provide residents with paid work, but they face not only the logistical difficulties of acquiring work other than work within the institution itself, but also legal obstacles due to the illegality of residents earning money from work.

It is obvious that people with intellectual disabilities and long-term mental health problems occupy a more disadvantaged position among disabled people, in terms of lack of programmes, methods of work inclusion and incentives and benefits.

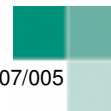
PART TWO: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

2.1 Reasonable accommodation in the workplace

The Occupational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act provides practical assistance for people who are employed, self-employed or about to start a new job. This scheme provides funding towards the additional disability-related costs of special equipment, adaptations of the workplace, personal assistance, travel to work, etc. Eligibility is assessed by the Rehabilitation Commission. The employer normally pays for the additional support required and receives a grant towards these costs. There is no research evidence on how this is put into operation. There is anecdotal evidence of successful implementation of these measures but also the opposite – people being disappointed by the support they have received. The lack of evaluation may indicate that this is an issue which the authorities have not yet tackled systematically.

2.2 Other activation policies

The two main activation policies are the above-mentioned Disability Action Plan and Active Employment Policy. These include measures and programmes such as Disabled to the Disabled, “10,000”, etc. However, a more intensive approach is lacking, especially in the areas of supported employment or job coaching and job retention schemes, where there are pilot experiences but a need for these to be developed into more extensive programmes which are accessible to wider audiences.



2.3 One example of best practice

After 2001 there was a series of projects for employment of disabled people, which were co-financed by the EU. Of 20 selected Equal projects, there were four which focused on the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market and enhancing the possibilities for their vocational development (Vrečer, 2007).

Inclusion of people with hearing disabilities into life and work – a comprehensive model was developed by RACIO – Human Capital Development Company, Ltd. on the initiative of the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia

and Employment Service of Slovenia. The main goals were set as follows: to *identify* unemployed people with hearing disabilities, to *motivate* them to resolve their life and work problems, to *develop* new ways of working with unemployed people with hearing disabilities; and to find and develop additional *opportunities* for work and social inclusion.

The models consist of connecting the existing potential, in terms of expertise, premises and equipment, of the regional associations, professional agencies, disability enterprises, successful entrepreneurs, potential employers and others, in specific environments. The role of the disability associations in the model is of central importance. The social networks that they provide and the knowledge and premises they have at their disposal are invaluable. The use of communication technologies enables people with hearing disabilities to pass information around informal circles and thus create a natural support system in the process of obtaining employment. This is supported by a multi-professional team.

People with hearing disabilities use the occupational rehabilitation services and are included in the programmes of active employment policies, such as public works, workplace training, work assessment etc. The role of the programme itself is to direct people to the most adequate services and to find and encourage training programmes and potential employers to take on new trainees and employees.

The programme is also an example of good practice because it connects the different agencies from all the sectors in a way that creates synergies, viable also on a financial level, and achieves the best results in terms of the inclusion of people with hearing disabilities. This is demonstrated by the data for 2006 and 2007: 49 people with hearing disabilities (around a quarter of all unemployed people with hearing disabilities) used the occupational rehabilitation services and 20 of them (40.8 per cent) were employed; the rest became involved in numerous activities (public works, training and education, addiction treatment etc.) and have therefore been removed from the position of staying passively at home.

The comparative advantage of this model seems to be in being more successful in employing disabled people in ordinary workplaces (Fatur, Vidmar 2007) and in pioneering supported employment. Its virtues are also in combining well the individualisation of assessment and planning with the synergies of the natural support networks, as well as formal networks created by the model. It is a model that could also be used with other disability groups and could be transferred to other countries.

PART THREE: SUMMARY INFORMATION

3.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)

Disabled people are included in employment activation policies and there are also substantial elements of disability policy which are intended to promote employment. There is evidence that these policies and new legislation have had a positive impact on the employment of disabled people. However, there is not much evidence of what has worked and what has not. For example, the figures for new employment show that the introduction of a quota system has had an impact on the increase in new employment, but we do not know how this was achieved and we do not have empirical evidence of what encouraged the employers, disabled people or the brokers.

There is evidence that more emphasis has been placed on sheltered employment and less on supported employment and adaptation of workplaces etc. In future a more systematic approach should be taken to studying and experimenting with these.

An important feature in the new developments is that there is the will to monitor and evaluate both new and old features of the employment schemes, programmes and policies. Regardless of what we think about the quality of these reports, which are of a variable nature, they provide important insights into the working of individual schemes and policies. There is need for improvement in this research and we would suggest that the evaluation and monitoring reports should be subject to independent review. The evaluation being set for the whole-scale monitoring of the Disability Action Plan should be steered by a strategic monitoring group consisting of administrators, academics and disabled people.

Hitherto, research has dealt mostly with legal issues and processing data collected for other purposes. There is a need for basic research into disability and employment, providing survey data on the topic, as well as qualitative data, both on the impact of employment on the lives of disabled people, as well as data that would enable us to understand the procedures, decision-making and other processes. We suggest that this research be conducted in a participatory manner, including disabled people as well as an element of action research. To increase the viability of research in disability and employment, a share of lottery funding could be used for this purpose, together with a more substantial input from the government into research in the disability field.

There is evidence that a large proportion of disabled people are prevented from entering the labour market on legal grounds. We do not know how many disabled people of working age might be able to work and to what extent. Careful consideration is needed to assess both the work potential as well as workable solutions.

People with intellectual disabilities and, even more so, those with mental health problems, are in a different and more disadvantaged position in comparison to people with sensory and physical disabilities. They are more excluded from the work arena, less represented by their associations and advocates, there are fewer incentives available and methods of inclusion are less well developed.

People living long term in institutions are probably the most excluded group from the employment and work arena. Together with the deinstitutionalisation process, there is a need to consider possibilities if not for employment, then for greater activity and useful unemployment.

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