

# The social economy from the perspective of active inclusion: Employment opportunities for people far from the labour market

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## I. Introduction

Integration of people at a disadvantage on the labour market also in Austria is regarded as a **public task** and makes part of the labour market policy. The Federal Ministry for Economic and Labour, the Austrian Labour Market Service as executing partner as well as the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs and Consumer Protection and its subordinate agency, the Federal Social Office are **strategic actors**.

As a civil servant of the **Federal Ministry for Social Affairs** and Consumer Protection and with regard to the targeted groups listed on page 13 of the discussion paper, the Austrian paper is going to **concentrate** in the following remarks **on the situation of persons with disabilities (PWD)**.

## II. Comments to EU Discussion Paper

With regard to **existing trends** in the employment policy for PWD, there is to state, that also Austria has invested more in active labour market policies for PWD, also due to the existing European support, mainly in terms of the European Social Fund.

In 2005 we started our first **Federal Labour-Market Programme for PWD (BABE)**, which we adapted, due to the change of basic local and business parameters in 2008. At time we do face e.g. the situation, that we do receive during the existing ESF period 2007–2013 30% less funds for measures concerning vocational rehabilitation.

On the other side, also the **new Austrian Anti-Discrimination-Law** is to mention in that context. The Federal Disability Equality Act, which entered into force on 1st January 2006 demands the implementation of new duties and responsibilities, like investive measures, consultation benefits or the performance of the sign language.

Due to the new framework we **analysed the employment situation** of PWD in 2007 and **developed** the mentioned **broad strategy for a sustainable integration** of PWD in the employment sector, which emphasizes to PWD very different needs.

The following **remarks contain** some of the **key elements** and focus on selected innovative approaches & ideas. Austria is **interested in comments** from partners.

### III. Employment situation of PWD

PWD are at special risk. Key challenges are low employment rates, high dependences on benefits and an increase of poverty risk. In average PWD get more often unemployed and do stay longer without a job. But, the longer the unemployment, due to low level of qualification or personal obstacles, the lesser the chances are, to get and to be motivated, to find a job. Also social competences, as teamwork, time management or punctuality gets lost. Employers are aware of these negative effects of long-term unemployment and are therefore (additionally to other reasons) more reluctant to hire long-term unemployed. So the aim is to break this vicious circle and to stop the downward trend. The **appraisal of results** show that Austria has a high employment share, the employment of PWD has increased and the unemployment rate of PWD is since May 2007 continuous falling.

### IV. Structure of furtherance's

Employment Drive  
of the Federal Government

Federal  
Disability Employment Act

European Social Fund

**Aim** of all the measures financed by one of the above mentioned main instruments is

- the **integration** of PWD in the first labour market,
- the **backup** of existing jobs and/or
- the **establishment of equalities of opportunities**.

In practise that means, that only PWD, who are estimated to reach inclusion at least in a medium-term period in the first labour market can receive such furtherance's.

The **Federal Disability Employment Act** is the main instrument for sustainable integration of PWD. In reaching this aim the law comprises 3 pillars:

1. The Act provides an obligation of employers to employ PWD (**quota scheme**).
2. Employment contracts are specially **protected against termination**.
3. The Law offers a **variety of funding** for PWD and their employers, such as grants and subsidies.

Interventions from the **ESF** also do refer to a wide range of support.

All these legislative instruments, e.g. as employment quota schemes or anti discrimination legislation, which is also reflected in Directive 2000/78/EC do show the paradigm shift in moving away from passive to active labour market policies & measures and so to support the participation and inclusion of PWD as active participants expressing their needs and returning to work.

The Austrian paper **concentrates** in the following on **two issues** concerning the vocational rehabilitation: Firstly measures for young people and secondly new programmes for employers.

Respective to the **vocational integration of young people** there is to mention the project clearing and further measures like the integrative vocational training allowance, the work assistance allowance for young people as well as educational incentives and subsidies for qualification and training. These instruments for young PWD do show several new types of measures, which have been put into practise with the purpose of assisting people with disabilities to enter the labour market. They are concentrated on individual needs.

Related to the **needs of employers** the Employment-Service and the project Disability Flexicurity are no note. So the aim of the two new labour market measures is to facilitate and ease the matching process between PWD and employers backed by financial and administrative support.

Its worth to mention that the **Federal Social Office** is the central contact point for PWD. The staffs either supports itself or at least they refer PWD to a competent partner, as furtherance's often are co-financed by several authorities.

## V. Furtherance's for young people

Here you do find some selective examples of measures with regard to the vocational rehabilitation for young PWD:

- **clearing**  
The idea of clearing is to optimize the **interface between school and work** for young people with special educational needs (SEN). Therefore teams do speak with pupils in the last two years at school to develop together with them their parents and specialist's options of occupational development and a career planning. The model clearing was noted as a so called "Best Practice Example" by the European Commission in 2004.
- **integrative vocational training allowance**  
This offer refers to young people who are unable to attend a common apprenticeship. Through new and innovative forms of apprenticeship it is possible to consider individual needs. The aim is to **prolong the duration of the training** (maximum two years) or to **acquire only specific parts of the curriculum**. This alternative makes it possible for young PWD to acquire an individual apprenticeship and creates a more easy entry into the labour market.
- **individual workplace support (work assistance)**  
This instrument deals with special needs **in conjunction with the vocational rehabilitation**. The idea is to establish individual plans. Examples are to accompany s.o. on the way from home to work and back, manual assistance, help with personal hygiene during work hours or any other support needed, e.g. help when getting into and out of a car, putting on or taking off a coat or jacket, eating lunch.

- **education & further training allowance, qualification and transition projects** Disability related costs of educational and advanced training can be taken over, if the PWD is age 15 and older.

Due to increasing requirements at the labour market, for all PWD **qualification measures** are necessary to save job at risks. Under this title primarily qualification measures in projects learning goodness's at work (i.e. being on time, reliability) are to mention.

Also to note are so called **transition projects**, which offer an opportunity for limited employment relationships with the company of a well skilled care person. The aim is to stabilize and prepare PWD for the job-market.

In general there is to state that **measures are orientated on** abilities like writing, reading, arithmetic or in the lowering of deficits with regard to the general education. Background is that this group can be affected by a mental retardation or yet being not ready for a final career choice. From the background of the various existing capacities measures of qualification have to be individualised. Measures are orientated as well on the personal needs as well as on the requirements of the economy.

## VI. New approaches to employers

Employers always have been considered important partners with regard to the integration of PWD. Nevertheless the **main focus** was on grants & subsidies to the labour costs for the creation and maintenance of jobs. **In recent time** the range of service through independent organisations is to be considered as a key factor.

### Project "Employment Service"

The idea is to create a **long-time relationship to employers**, which is to be established on a service orientated on their needs. It's not the first job of the Employer Service to place PWD. Far from it, there should be an **objective, neutral & individualised consulting service**, based on the **employers needs**, and **without placement pressure**. As a one-stop-shop model the project covers the idea to establish a net of central contact persons for employers, who should offer a systematic, concentrated and coordinated advisory service. Essential is that this advisory service is supportive, neutral and orientated on the needs of the employers. The central point is to consult employers objective and in close cooperation with the Federal Economic Chamber, so to establish a long-term connection to them. The additional value for the Federal Social Office is to be perceived as a service-provider and competent partner in all matter related to PWD. This service is offered by external consultants. They either give professional advice or they refer back to experts. The idea is that employer do have a person (=consultant), whom they can contact in all issues related to PWD.

## Project Disability Flexicurity

From the background that employers hesitate, due to various reasons, employing PWD, this project holds the idea, that **employers should be encouraged to hire PWD** for at least a limited time of period. In this term they can prove the capability and effectiveness of the person concerned. The **mutual advantage** is, for PWD to be integrated at least for a limited period and for employers to get a qualified worker for the job without spending time with selection or the facing of any other risk (i.e. special protection clause against termination).

## VII. Conclusion

The **aim of the paper** is to point out a couple of general approaches and to present some innovative ideas with regard to the integration of PWD. As to the guidelines the paper can only contain components, which does not hinder to make an exchange of information and best practise, which is our very goal.

From that perspective Austria is interested in ideas & comments from partner, like:

- How do you face and tackle above mentioned issues?
- Which measures do you place, particular for young people and with regard to employers needs?
- What are your best practise examples in these fields?
- Do you face any “paradigm shifts” or new movements in these fields? Can you pick out any new ways, aside traditional furtherance’s to get PWD in employment? Which stories of success or other experiences you do face?
- What’s the very additional value you do see in your above mentioned policies & examples?