

Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries

Country: Norway
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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.

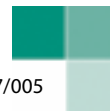
This country report has been prepared as input for the *Thematic report on the implementation of EU Employment Strategy in European countries with reference to equality for disabled people*. The purpose of the report ([Terms of Reference](#)) is to review national implementation of the European Employment 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 reports

In order to get an overview over the employment situation for disabled people in Norway, the employment statistics (see below) does in general provide more information than research reports. Research reports tend to focus specific issues whereas employment statistics provides the overview. There do exist a number of research reports on specific issues, for instance the experiences of young disabled people trying to enter the labour market (Anvik 2006), the impact of higher education (Bliksvær & Hanssen 2005), comparisons of policy measures in different countries (Econ 2006, Hvinden 2004) and general overviews (Hansen & Svalund 2007, Jakobsen 2006).

Very briefly key findings appear to be: 1) The differences in employment rates between disabled people and the total working-age population is much smaller among people with higher education (Bliksvær & Hansen 2006). Short term courses do not seem to work, but higher education does. 2) Young disabled people seeking help from the employment offices experience discontinuity, provisional arrangements, unpredictable transitions etc (Anvik 2006). More consistent and strategic behaviour from employment offices appear to be needed. 3) Norway spend quite a lot of resources on economic support and also employment measures, more than many countries, but this does not lead to higher rates of employment. 4) Policy measures geared towards employers appear to be under-utilised (Econ 2006), and a change in the profile of measures is currently discussed.



1.2 Employment statistics and trends

Four times each year Statistics Norway conducts labour market surveys. Since 2000, one of these surveys has included a supplement on the employment status and situation of disabled people. From 2002, this supplement was coordinated with similar surveys in the EU. Thus, since 2002, there exist time series data making it possible to study trends in the employment of disabled people. The latest report (Statistics Norway, report 2007/40) gives an overview of the 2007 survey and also trends since 2002.

The proportion of the population aged 16-66 years that are classified as disabled according to the criteria of this survey varies around 15% (from 14.4 to 15.7). There is no trend in the figures, thus the variation is most likely random. The proportion of disabled people that is employed varies around 45% (from 42.5 to 46.6). Even though changes from one year to the next sometimes are significant, there is no clear trend. Thus, most likely the changes are random. It is at least safe to conclude that during this decade, there is no evidence of changes or improvement in the employment situation of disabled people.

Compared to non-disabled people, the employment rate of disabled people is about 30% lower (the rate of the total population aged 16-66 is about 75%). There is however some variation according to age. Among people aged 16-24 years, there is no difference between disabled people and the total population – most likely because many are still within the school system. The differences also become smaller when the employment rates in the general population declines substantially, that is, after the age of 60. But from age 24 to 60, the employment rate of disabled people is about 30-32% below that of the total population.

The employment rate of disabled men is slightly higher than among women, 47.4 vs 43.5% in 2007. This equals the difference between men and women in the total population. There is no data on disabled people from ethnic minorities.

Unemployment rates of disabled people does not differ much from that of the general population (varies from 2-4% from 2002-2007). Non-working disabled people are thus rarely registered as unemployed, but rather as “outside the labour force”. Some would say that the social security system conceals the real unemployment rate. Basically the unemployment figures on disabled people are not useful for comparative purposes, whereas figures on employment rates are.

Part time employment is more common among disabled people. In 2007, 48.3% of the employed disabled people worked part time, compared to 26.6% of all employed. 30% of the employed disabled people worked less than 20 hours per week. The gender gap in part-time employment is slightly larger among disabled people. 66% of the employed disabled women work part-time compared to 29% of disabled men. In the total population 43% women and 12% men work part-time.

The proportion of disabled people working in the public sector is higher than in the private sector (11.6% vs 7.5% of all employed in the sectors). However, the employment rate in the state sector and public administration is not significantly above private sector. It is the local governments (municipalities and counties) that employ more disabled people, and in particular within health and social services.

From 2002-2006 about 25% of non-employed disabled people maintained that they wanted employment. This figure dropped to 17% in 2007, but it is still unclear whether this is a new trend or occurred at random.

More disabled people appear to have some kind of accommodations at work now than a few years ago. In 2007, 53% reported accommodations compared to 40% in 2003. The most common accommodations were “changes in work tasks” (34%), “physical accommodation of the work place” (26%) and “changes in working hours” (24%). See section 2.1 on funding of reasonable accommodation.

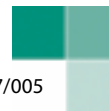
1.3 Laws and policies

The most important change recently in terms of law is the changes in the labour legislation in order to incorporate the EU employment discrimination directive. Furthermore, a general law to combat disability discrimination is proposed and will most likely be in operation in 2009.

As for policies there are constantly a number of minor reforms going on. Some relate specifically to disabled people, others to active labour market policies in general. Employment of disabled people is in general seen as an important issue for policy makers in Norway. The reason is partly because of the increasing numbers on disability benefits and partly because disabled people are a growing part of the non-working population. The last point is related to the fact that employment rates have risen considerably in recent years, for most groups – except disabled people. In the last white paper/government report on the labour market policies, the situation of people with ethnic minority background and disabled people were given special attention (White paper 9, 2006-07). Disabled people seem to be case in point showing that we have not succeeded in creating an inclusive working life. This does however not mean that when it comes to policy measures, that disabled people are treated as a separate group. Most measures would be relevant for all people in a marginal position on the labour market, few measures are exclusive for disabled people, but some will be relevant only for disabled people (such as subsidised technical aids, physical accommodation, combination of work and disability benefits).

As for the labour market administration, there is a reform with possible wide-ranging consequences under implementation. One is about to merge the social security administration and the employment administration. The idea is to be able to better coordinate measures operated by the two administrations, but of course also to try to counteract the increasing number on disability benefits. A number of the benefits operated by social security are clearly relevant for peoples’ employment careers – such as sickness and rehabilitation benefits for people that have become sick or disabled later in life, but also temporary disability benefits and combinations of benefits and work. The outcomes of this reform are as yet uncertain.

As for the minor changes taking place, it is only possible to give examples that may very well be outdated soon. Since those examples should be read in context, the risk of misinterpretation will be substantial in this setting. Therefore it is omitted here. One could however add that there has recently been a programme for employing more disabled people in the state sector, and also a trainee program. Both programmes are still running, but the recruitment programme is under revision due to lack of success.



1.4 Type and quality of jobs

Please see section 1.2 for data on full and part-time work, and public vs. private sector employment. As for industries or employment sectors, disabled people are over-represented in Health and Social Services (27% vs 20% in the total population) and underrepresented in financial- and business services (9 vs 13%).

The statistics on people in open labour marked jobs, supported employment and sheltered employment is scattered and it requires a thorough special analysis to come up with reliable figures. What exists is information on people registered with “work limitations” that are admitted to labour marked measures (White paper 9, 2006-07), and estimations of the total number of employed disabled people (based on labour market surveys, Statistics Norway 2007). To combine these statistics gives some indication, but it is not reliable. However, a rough calculation suggests that about 15% of all employed disabled people are in some kind of sheltered or supported employment (2005 data).

PART TWO: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

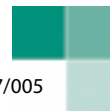
2.1 Reasonable accommodation

There exists a system for public support (financing) of reasonable accommodation at work, and as a general rule the national government (social security) will cover most expenses. However, it appears as if this system is underutilised, maybe due to lack of information. The package of supports includes possibilities for: (1) transport to job (and education), (2) financial incentives for trying out accommodations, (3) technical aids (including a “green card” system through which the technical aids authorities guarantees support for accommodation at the workplace), (4) personal (called function) assistants. The system appears to be fairly generous, but is considered to be underutilised. There is currently a couple of research projects digging into why, and it is suggested that there is both lack of information about the support system and the technical possibilities.

It is worth noting that the public funding of accommodations is likely to interact with the reasonable accommodation requirements in the labour legislation (the employment discrimination directive), in particular because the public funding will reduce the relevance of “undue burden” arguments from employers.

2.2 Other activation policies

One will find examples of both recruitment measures (an action plan in the state sector, and also smaller local projects), help with transport, job coaching, supported employment and training. Except for supported employment it is unclear if this increases employment among disabled people. The evaluation of the transport scheme suggested that it made life easier for people, but it did hardly increase the number of disabled people employed (Hedlund & Kongsvik 1998). The state sector action plan has so far had results that fall clearly short of ambitions, and it is currently under revision.



2.3 One best example

Even though it involves few people, the most frequently mentioned “best example” in Norway is Telenor Open Mind (<http://www.telenor.no/openmind/english/>). This is a program run by a large telecommunications company. It involves a qualification period where disabled people are taught relevant computer skills, and then a practice period with actual work experience. 75% of the people that have completed the programme are now in a permanent job. The programme celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2006, and about 100 people had completed the programme. It is largely financed through regular labour market funding/ measures (courses).

PART THREE: SUMMARY

3.1 Conclusions

Unfortunately the employment situation for disabled people in Norway is not improving, in spite of increasing attention and a number of measures/actions. Disabled people are included in the vision of active labour market policies, but current measures do not appear to work adequately. Most likely one needs more focus on employers, and more focus on young disabled people that are excluded from the labour market. The “insider problem”, that is to help people keep their job if they are disabled later in life and already holding a job, appears to be more adequately addressed.

3.2 References

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