



Targeting and mainstreaming disability in the 2008-2010 National Reform Programmes for Growth and Jobs

Report prepared for the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED)

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Background to the report

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 support the future development of the EU Disability Strategy and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.

During 2008 national experts from ANED reviewed the 2005-2008 National Reform Programmes¹ of each Member State in relation to current research and implementation practice on employment. Their national reviews (published on the ANED website²) provided source material for a synthesis report (also published in 2008). These reports were then updated in 2009. For more detailed information and evidence on each country it will therefore be useful to consult those reports. It would also be relevant to consult the ANED country and synthesis reports on social inclusion and social protection, which also contain examples relevant to employment³.

Subsequent to the first ANED country reports, the Commission requested a rapid response analysis of the 2008-10 National Reform Programmes plans submitted by Member States⁴. The authors were provided with final (or final draft) plans and asked to make evaluative comments in response to questions from the Commission. The first edition of this synthesis report was completed for this purpose. Examples from 22 Member States were available at that time (missing reports have been added in this revised version). Specific references cited in the text are drawn from English language versions of the Member State NRPs and Implementation Reports (or from personal translations of French and Spanish language documents). In this revised edition archive web links have also been included to each NRP documents.

In 2009, the report was updated from three sources. The missing government NRPs were reviewed to complete coverage of the 27 Member States. Brief flash update reports were commissioned from the ANED country experts to highlight recent evidence and change (e.g. in relation to statistical information, policy change and the economic crisis). Draft or final versions of the Member States' 2009 Implementation Reports were then received and rapidly reviewed for content. At the time of the initial review, Implementation Reports were available for 25 Member States.

Aims and focus

The purpose of this synthesis report is to contribute a high level disability perspective to implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, and to assess how Member States have responded to disability in implementing their 2008-2010 Reform Programmes.

The Member States' NRPs and Implementation Reports should be considered in the context of EU Employment Strategy and EU disability policies. The Lisbon Strategy emphasises the central objective to 'increase labour supply and modernise social protection systems', in which disability is an important dimension.

¹http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/national-dimension/member-states-2005-2008-reports/index_en.htm

²<http://www.disability-europe.net/en/themes/Employment>

³<http://www.disability-europe.net/en/themes/Social%20inclusion>

⁴http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/national-dimension/member-states-2008-2010-reports/index_en.htm

Disabled people are a key target group of those remaining outside, or marginal to, the labour force and work-related disability benefits have become a key feature of many national labour market policies.

The *Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2008-2010* emphasised the need for 'Equal opportunities and combating discrimination' towards 'active social integration of all' and the necessity to 'fight poverty and exclusion of those groups who are most marginalized in society'. Also relevant is the *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008*⁵, which highlighted widespread reforms in the Member States 'to reduce take-up of early exit benefits, focusing on the design of unemployment and early retirement benefits and access to disability pensions and rehabilitation' (p9).

In 2005, The Commission issued a guidance document on *Disability Mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy*⁶ (2005), which outlined the principles of mainstreaming, underlined its legal basis in the Directive 200/78/EC and provided a focus on accessibility. This guidance was framed within the Employment Guidelines 2005-2008. However, no specific guidance was issued in relation to the preparation of 2008-2010 National Reform Programmes.

By contrast, within the Open Method of Co-ordination for Social Inclusion and Social Protection guidance was provided to the Member States in a Discussion Paper from the Disability High Level Group on *Disability Mainstreaming in the new streamlined European Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process*⁷. The broad principles outlined in this document are equally applicable to the field of employment. For example, disabled people should be 'taken into account in the design and implementation of all policies and measures' and action should not be 'limited to those policies and measures which specifically address their needs'. The paper also requested that 'greater emphasis is to be given to data and indicators describing the situation of disabled people', and it is therefore relevant to consider how this is being applied in implementing the NRPs.

The 2008-2010 NRPs were read in the context of the EU Disability Action Plan (including its priorities for 2008-2009⁸). These included: full application of the Employment Directive (2000/78/EC); mainstreaming disability in policies; and accessibility for all (e.g. in goods, services and infrastructures). Also of interest were Member State commitments to the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁹, ratification of which would be expected during the period covered by the NRPs. Article 27 of the Convention includes specific reference to employment and affirms that disabled people should have opportunities to 'gain a living' through 'work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market ... that is open, inclusive and accessible'. Key issues identified in the UN Convention include:

- Non-discrimination
- Policies, affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;
- Reasonable accommodation in the workplace
- Return-to-work programmes and vocational rehabilitation
- Vocational guidance and training
- Employment in the public sector and the private sector

⁵ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st07/st07274.en08.pdf>

⁶ No longer available from the Commission (copy available at: <http://handicap-international.fr/bibliographie-handicap/4PolitiqueHandicap/thematique/Emploi/DisabilityMainstream.pdf>)

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2008/disability_mainstreaming_en.pdf

⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0738:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁹ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=259>

- Employment in the open labour market (vs. sheltered employment)
- Equal opportunities and equal pay
- Labour and trade union rights
- Self-employment, entrepreneurship, and starting one's own business

Considering the process since submission of the NRPs, it is relevant to note that disability did not feature notably in the Commission's 2008 *Annual Progress Report* following the publication of the NRPs. For example, in the *Annual Country Assessments*¹⁰ disability was highlighted only in relation to the need for Hungary to 'rigorously implement' its proposed reform of disability pensions (p37). However, specific attention was paid in one paragraph of the Annex to the joint *Strategic Report*¹¹. Here, disabled people were acknowledged within the context of 'disadvantaged people' as over-represented in their exclusion from national labour markets, along with 'Roma, immigrants, and low skilled' (p65) to the extent that...

'Whereas the employment rate for people with disabilities improved in some countries (AT, DE, DK, EE) it worsened in others (PL, SE, SK). Some groups are even more underrepresented in employment such as women with disabilities (ALL MS) and those with mental disabilities (DE, HU, UK). Supported employment to get people with disabilities into the open labour market should be encouraged, as some Member States have a rather strong focus on sheltered employment (DE, HU, SI). In others support measures concentrate on people with severe disabilities and exclude those with minor disabilities (AT, DE).'

Although this is brief, it is not dissimilar to the amount of attention devoted to women in the same document. The difference is that attention to disability is confined to a single paragraph in the sub-section on 'disadvantaged people' while the few scattered references to women and gender equality are slightly more mainstreamed.

The 2008 *European Economic Recovery Plan*¹² made no explicit reference to disability issues or disabled people (or to women or minorities). However, it does note the need for actions targeting 'vulnerable' groups (such as cutting energy costs through targeted energy efficiency schemes). The main emphasis is on action to minimise job losses and to help people return quickly to the labour market. Here, the example of 'temporary hiring subsidies for vulnerable groups' is included (p11). Action was also proposed to simplify and enhance ESF funding in 2009 to allow states to 'Refocus their programmes to concentrate support on the most vulnerable' (with the possibility of full Community funding). More generally, it is evident that the economic crisis has significant implications for national labour markets, welfare systems, public spending commitments, and so on, all of which may impact directly on the situation of disabled people. It is also relevant, therefore, to re-consider the implementation of the 2008-2010 NRPs in this changing context.

Updated Synthesis report

In response to the themes outlined in the introduction, and questions posed by the Commission, the following short sections summarise the visibility of disability issues in the 2008-2010 NRP documents; the types of actions that were proposed, their targeting to particular groups, and a brief assessment of their implications. More detailed country-specific examples and evidence are presented later in the report.

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/pdf/european-dimension-200812-annual-progress-report/annual_en.pdf

¹¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0034:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0800:FIN:EN:PDF>

In each case, the country annexes have been substantially updated with reference to the Implementation Reports submitted by Member States in 2009, and updates provided by the ANED country experts.

Visibility, targeting and mainstreaming

Overall there was a considerable range of visibility for disabled people and disability issues in the 2008-2010 National Reform Programme documents. Some reports made significant mention of disability. In a small number of NRPs, disability received little or no attention. Disability featured as a targeted theme in some country reports, in others disabled people were mentioned only in passing reference (e.g. as one amongst various disadvantaged or 'vulnerable' groups). However, comparing all of the countries, there was a lack of evidence of consistent, harmonised or systematic disability mainstreaming methodology in the process. In general terms, we use the following scheme to highlight levels of visibility in the 2008-2010 NRP documents:

Limited or no visibility	Moderate visibility (not a key theme)	A higher level of visibility (a key theme)
Austria	Belgium	Denmark
Bulgaria	Cyprus	Estonia
Finland	Czech Republic	Hungary
France	Greece	Luxembourg
Germany	Ireland	Netherlands
Lithuania	Italy	Portugal
Malta	Latvia	Slovenia
Poland	Slovakia	Spain
Romania		Sweden
		United Kingdom

Looking at the Implementation Reports submitted in 2009 there is no clear pattern of development. There is some cause for optimism in cases where there is evidence of an increasing recognition of disability, the emergence of strategic approaches to the situation of disabled people, or greater specificity in policy implementation. However, there were also cases where readily available information, even key policy developments, had been overlooked in preparing the Implementation Reports. In some countries there was evidence of increased attention to disability when compared to the 2008-2010 NRPs (e.g. CY, BE, DK, IE, LT, LV, SE, UK). Conversely, some countries that highlighted disability actions in their NRPs did not reported on progress in their Implementation Plan (e.g. AT, EE, ES, SI). Disability remained largely absent from some reports (e.g. BG, CZ, DE, EL, FI, IT, RO). Whilst a basic level of visibility is important, evaluation of mainstreaming and targeting requires a more nuanced approach.

Mainstreaming can be interpreted in a number of ways. For this report we interpret mainstreaming to be:

1. The inclusion of disabled people in services, programmes and provision designed to avoid segregation (spatial, temporal, or process of application) and/or where programmes are designed to exploit existing mainstream employment or employment access support. Examples would include pan-group approaches to job creation, work activation or facilitation/advice where disabled people's needs are recognised and actions that avoid and avert stigmatisation for 'special' client groups.

2. Where fullest links are made between policy initiatives in a way that ensures that disability policy and programmes are not ghettoised. For example, linkage between the UN Convention, the EU Action Plan, national disability strategies, and the National Reform Programme would help ensure that disability policies were mainstreamed in policy terms. Also of relevance would be evidence of disabled people's involvement in the policy process.

There was little mention of mainstreaming in most of the NRP reports (either in relation to disability or to other dimensions such as gender). In addition, very few of the NRPs made major reference to measures targeting disability as 'incapacity' for work, in stark contrast to the high profile that such reforms receive in the corresponding National Strategic Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection. Analysis of the 2008 NSRs revealed considerable attention to the connection between disability and employment, which was less evident in most of the NRPs (i.e. some countries that highlighted disability employment policies in their NSR did not highlight them in their NRP). Greater linkages between the NRPs and NSRs could be achieved. Where mainstreaming was apparent, it was often more implicit than explicit (e.g. responding to 'vulnerable' groups without a specific disability focus). Some country reports detailed excellent and innovative ideas for disability-related actions as separate sections or annexes that were not well integrated in the main document (e.g. Denmark).

As an example of 'special' approaches (non-mainstreamed) the Cyprus NRP highlighted a number of impairment-specific approaches to ESF-funded training projects, which emphasise particular impairments as the basis for receiving policy attention. A similar emphasis on special actions was evident in the Portugal report, which committed to a range of impairment-related services such as schools for 'the blind and the deaf as well as specialised units for disturbances (sic) in the field of autism and multiple disabilities'. Although impairment specific actions may be justifiable, in a macro-level report of this kind it is concerning that more generic support and inclusive programmes did not receive greater attention alongside impairment-specific approaches.

There were good examples of mainstreaming initiatives, for example the Estonian report noted the extension of general employment assistance schemes to disabled people as opposed to the proliferation of 'special' schemes for vulnerable groups. An example was the ESF-funded project 'Increasing the Supply of Qualified Labour Force' extending the existing labour market services to engage more inactive people and those in greater need. Another good example, this time of policy mainstreaming, was evident in the Slovenian NRP, which evidenced a strategic approach to disability policy making, linking to the national Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2007–2013 and implementation of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act. However, several countries with new or established national disability strategies that address employment issues did not mention them in their NRP. Similarly, there were few references to involving disabled people and their organisations in the formation and delivery of employment policy, although an exception can be found in the Annex to the Denmark NRP. There is clear evidence here that disabled people's organisations have been included in consultation within the mainstream process (although it is not so clear that their contribution has been mainstreamed elsewhere in the document).

There is a very significant absence of disability mainstreaming in the presentation of labour market statistics and indicators. In the majority of NRPs there were no identifiable statistics or quantified indicators at all relating to disabled people's labour market position or their activation through policies. Where statistics appeared they often failed to address the very significant category of 'inactive' disabled people, alongside those who are employed or unemployed.

Estonia provided a positive example, which recognised disabled people's situation (including economic inactivity) and set quantifiable targets to monitor progress. The Danish report included a helpful breakdown table (although the data was some years old). Some countries (like Romania) provided statistics on disabled people's use of employment services, or the number of beneficiaries of activation projects (e.g. Finland), but did not include disabled people in describing labour market position or trends. Bulgaria promised 'a specialised study and analysis of the possibilities for interventions upon vulnerable groups on the labour market and inactive persons'. The Czech report referred to declining unemployment of disabled people (but without source data).

Judged against the aspirations of EU guidance on disability mainstreaming (e.g. in guidance on the 2005-2008 NRPs or the 2008 NSRs) there was a significant deficiency in the absence of statistics, indicators or targets relevant to disabled people. Where possible, the country summaries presented later in this report make suggestions about possible sources of evidence and the need for reliable data.

Overall there was little evidence in the NRPs on which to judge whether labour market policies were sufficiently geared to the needs of disabled people. Comments related largely to targeted programmes or, in some cases, to statistical data on labour market representation. There were a small number of NRPs that connected these issues. Many attempted to conflate various disadvantaged, marginal or 'vulnerable' groups. In this respect there was insufficient mainstreaming of the particular factors that limit disabled people's employment and their access to generic initiatives; listing disabled people alongside older workers, those with low educational attainment and women with carer responsibilities is helpful in terms of visibility but limited in terms of specificity. Whilst there are overlapping issues (such as lower educational profiles and benefit disincentives to entering work) there are also unique issues related to, for example, the additional costs of transport, care/support, or workplace accessibility that would merit clarification in the specifics of the NRPs and Action Plans. 'One-size' responses do not fit all disadvantaged groups and successful mainstreaming should involve *both* the visible inclusion of disabled people *and* a response to the specific barriers they face.

Policy priorities and targeting in the 2008-2010 NRPs

A wide range of policy proposals were included in the NRP reports, sometimes new or, more typically, building on commitments made in the previous period (in some countries there was little at all of relevance, beyond reporting achievements up to 2008).

Several countries identified wage subsidies for disabled employees and job seekers (e.g. BE, FI, MT, NL, RO) yet most these subsidy programmes were time-limited and so it is important to review implementation over time, given past evidence of labour-dumping in job subsidy schemes at the end of the subsidized period (usually one year). Other financial incentives related to employer tax or insurance concessions to incentivise the employment of disabled people (e.g. CZ, ES, SE, CY).

Another common policy priority in the NRPs was related to education or training (mainstream) or vocational training and rehabilitation for disabled people (e.g. AT, ES, LV, NL, PT, SK, SI, UK). This often related to labour market skills for young disabled people and school leavers. There was a strong recognition in the reports that low educational attainment is a key factor in labour market disadvantage. Of note, there were very few references to broader advocacy and empowerment approaches or bridging approaches between school and work, involving voluntary or part-time work.



The emphasis on younger disabled people tended to obscure help for older disabled workers (who became largely invisible within the general category of 'older workers'). Training and education commitments often lacked the detail to assess the extent to which they addressed mainstreaming or specialised opportunities.

Other policy commitments included those focused on skills matching of disabled people to available opportunities (e.g. BE), policies focused on facilitating 'severely disabled' people into jobs (e.g. CY, DE), efforts to better bridge incapacity, wider disability benefits and entering paid work (e.g. DE, UK) supporting disabled people's entrepreneurship and small business start-ups (e.g. FI, LT, SE), counselling, information and bespoke job seeking services (e.g. LU, RO).

A small number of countries highlighted accessibility issues. The Estonian report was notable in its commitment to funding the additional costs of employment for disabled people, including transport and personal assistance, based on actual needs rather than functional impairment. This is a distinctive approach and one of the more far-reaching commitments. Latvia's report linked Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy initiatives with increased access to paid e-employment. This is very welcome. Similarly, Malta NRP noted the SmartStart PC provision schemes which harness second-hand technologies to aid employment options for disabled people. However, the overall impression was that accessibility had not been widely considered as relevant to mainstreaming disability within the NRPs (this was also a deficiency in the corresponding NSRs, although there were more examples there).

Compared to the emphasis given by the EU Action Plan and UN Convention there was insufficient attention paid to the accessibility of work and workplaces. Whilst para-employment benefits and support (training, skills, counselling) were highlighted; barriers in getting to and accessing the workplace were less commonly mentioned. There were some small exceptions. Estonia was notable in pledging to increase support for the additional costs of employment. This support will be given directly to disabled people for help with transport etc. The Czech report mentioned the value of ICT support for disadvantaged labour groups (although no specific reference was made to disabled people). Transport systems were mentioned in at least three reports, but references were limited. There would have been scope to make greater connections with the National Strategic Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, where there were more examples of employment enablers. However, it was of concern that neither the NRPs nor the NSRs made adequate reference to accessibility issues in considering access to employment.

There was some evidence of policies in support of flexible and secure work in a small number of the NRPs. These included, for example: incentives to create part-time jobs in the Czech Republic; promotion of 'flexi-jobs' in Denmark; informing employers and employees about flexible working in Estonia, legislation on partial capacity in the Netherlands. There were also examples of relaxations to time periods for accumulating pension contributions etc. It is relevant to note here a concern that part-time employment is often incompatible with, or difficult to combine with, disability benefit eligibility in many countries. Such incompatibilities were under-explored in the NRPs. It is also relevant to note that much more attention was given to flexible working guarantees and choices for the 'carers' of disabled people than for disabled people themselves. In this context, flexicurity was more clearly articulated as a gender mainstreaming issue than a disability mainstreaming issue. The question of flexicurity needs to be addressed more fully in the context of disabled employees and job seekers.



Implications of the 2008-2010 NRPs

One key concern in the field of labour disadvantage and disabled people is the risk of 'cherry picking' those closest to the labour market. This is often the case where employment policy is target driven or employment providers are paid by results (numbers placed in a given time period, number in sustained employment, reduced numbers of benefit claimants, etc.). It is therefore common for those in more 'employable' circumstances to be chosen ahead of those with more complex or costly labour market support requirements. There were no examples of explicit cherry picking but there are unintended examples (e.g. targeting young disabled people in education with relatively low labour costs in AT or, NL). However, given the significant challenges for young disabled people entering employment this is not a surprising focus.

It was encouraging to see at least some reference to supporting employment for those 'furthest from the labour market'. For example, although small-scale in ambition, the Germany and Cyprus NRPs committed to further ESF funded work to support those with the most 'severe disabilities' who are often furthest from the labour market.

Perhaps the highest risk of cherry-picking is implicit in those countries committing to reduce incapacity benefit claims and to create a work-first approach. The UK and to a lesser extent Denmark exemplify this stance (e.g. also implied in CZ, SI). Whilst laudable in aiming to avoid the long-term withdrawal of disabled people from the labour market, it is likely that practical implementation will target those closest to the labour market. There is a particular risk where distinctions are made between separate groups for 'employment' and 'support' (as in the UK). Flexible approaches to support partial work capacity are likely to be more inclusive than those marking disabled people as employable or not employable.

This brief summary provides a sense of the extent and range of commitment to disabled peoples' enhanced employment and economic security in the 2008-2010 National Reform Programmes. There was much promise to be taken from these reports but they also raised concerns. Notably, there was a lack of robust or comparable evidence on the situation of disabled people, and a lack of attention to accessibility. There was a tendency to view 'older workers' within a lifecycle approach only as 'older' when many, especially those on incapacity benefits, need to be acknowledged also as disabled. A parallel reading of the National Strategic Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection suggested that initiatives on disability and employment could be connected more systematically. It is also important to avoid drifting into an extreme work-first approach which, over time, fails to value the lives of those disabled people who cannot, for good reason, realise their personal potential in the world of paid work. The intellectual challenge is to see paid work as one important dimension of wider economic and social contributions to society. For example, it is also important to remember the contribution of disabled people through unpaid and voluntary work or civic participation, and to the employment of others through their consumption of direct payments, products and services.

Evidence from the 2009 Implementation Reports

There was no evidence of any significant increase in the use of evidence-based reporting, although there were again some examples of statistics and/or targets on the employment situation of disabled people (e.g. DK, IE, SE, UK). There remains a real lack of disability mainstreaming in the reporting of employment statistics (e.g. rates are often reported by gender and age but not by disability status).

This is partly reflected in a real lack of data, and some countries still rely on employment data from the 2002 LFS ad hoc module. However, even where recent national disability data would be available it was not included in the Implementation Reports (e.g. CZ, ES, SI, SK)

In terms of the work-welfare connection, there was evidence that some disability-related benefits have been frozen or cut (e.g. EE, HU) but in other countries purposefully protected or increased (e.g. BE, FR). There have been attempts to limit eligibility to disability-related benefits and to increase activation of disabled people in the labour market. In this context, there is some evidence of the adoption of more functional work capacity assessments, including partial work capacity (e.g. CY, FI, FR, HU, LU, MT, NL, UK).

Disabled people are often identified amongst target groups for vocational and skills training (e.g. AT, CY, FR, IE, LU, PT, SE, UK) and there were some specific examples of reporting on targets (e.g. LT, PT). EU structural funds, particularly ESF, continue to be used to target employment-related initiatives for disabled people in several countries (e.g. AT, BE, EL, IE, LT, MT, UK).

There is evidence of reform in public employment services affecting disabled people (e.g. in streamlining assessment process or in re-structuring to provide a greater focus on activation processes). Implementing changes in assessments, eligibility or training pathways also requires bureaucratic change, resources and training. There appears to be less attention to the re-organisation of public employment services in the Implementation Reports than in the original NRPs, although it is very evident in some (e.g. CY, FR). It may be that a focus on the economic crisis has delayed or de-prioritised a disability focus within the organisational structures for supporting for job seekers (e.g. DK, LT).

In terms of growth and jobs there was some evidence in the Implementation Plans of new focus on opportunities for job creation with some relevance to disabled people. For example, investment for growth in the social support sector may benefit disabled people both as service users and as activated employees (e.g. PT, SI). There appears to be quite extensive investment of increased wage subsidies to cushion, or give advantage, to the employment of disabled people in a difficult labour market (e.g. AT, BE, CY, IE, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL). There are also incentives through the development of diversity awards for employers (e.g. BE, FR). CY will introduce a new, ambitious, employment quota in the public sector, while NL decided not to introduce a quota system. Self-employment was mentioned briefly in only one country (EL).

Reflecting on the 2008-2009 Disability Action Plan priorities, there was, as in the NRPs, very little reference to accessibility. There were some references to e-accessibility projects or initiatives with the intention of greater labour market access for disabled people (e.g. MT, LV). However, there was little reference to workplace, environmental or transport accessibility (e.g. ES, IE).

It is also a matter of some concern that none of the 2009 Implementation Reports made any reference to the process of ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention has been ratified by AU, BE, CZ, DK, DE, ES, HU, IT, SI, SE, UK).

DK remains an isolated example of excellent practice in the prominence given to the input of disabled people's organisations. However, there were new examples of mainstreaming disabled people in the process of policy consultation and development. It was encouraging to see reference to evidence of new strategic consultation processes in CY and LV.



Country profiles

Austria

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/Ubersetzung_2_%20NRP_2008-2010_final_EN.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were very limited references to disability in the NRP (only 6 references in the text, and no direct reference to targeting disabled people in employment activation or benefit eligibility). Useful links could have been made to examples in the Austrian National Strategic Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, where there were additional examples relevant to employment policy.

There was no evidence of systematic mainstreaming, a strategic approach, or of supporting data on the situation of disabled people in the Austrian labour market.

Disability was discussed briefly in relation to lifelong learning policies to support employability and a skilled labour force, and in commitments to extend funding for specific targeted initiatives. There was no discussion of accessibility

Employment situation of disabled people

Disabled people were not included in the NRP discussion of the Austrian labour market situation. There was no reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people in the Austrian NRP. However, the Austria ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and examples that could have been usefully included.

In addition to the LFS, statistical data about the employment and support situation of disabled people with significant explanatory power in Austria is hard to obtain, as most administrative authorities have different definitions of disability depending on the forms of services or benefits they are managing. The number of “benefited/registered disabled” people (“Begünstigte Behinderte”) is published by the Federal Welfare Office in its annual report and contains information on employment. There has been a steady increase in the amount of people with disabilities who acquired this status.

The previous decade saw an improvement in the labour market situation of disabled people (perhaps as an effect of increased active support measures succeeding the implementation of the “employment offensive”) but worsened when measured as a percentage of the overall unemployment statistic.

Policy proposals

The proposed measures were mainly extensions of policies established in the previous period.

In response to the country-specific recommendation: "Improve education outcomes for vulnerable youth" (p10) there is commitment to 'reform of apprentice training at vocational training centres with effect from the 2008/09 training year' with a specific focus, amongst other groups, on 'young people with a disadvantaged background and with disabilities' (see also p39).

Continuing from the previous period, disabled people are also targeted in the 2007-2013 programme European Social Fund projects, where 'new ESF Programmes also include measures to integrate people with disabilities into sustainable employment' (p45).

Under 'Persons with health issues restricting their placement options' (p35) 'The employment initiative for people with disabilities is being continued and supported with additional funding. Some €161 million of funding has been earmarked for 2008'.

More detail is apparent in the following example:

'The role of integrative companies, providing a springboard into the general labour market for those with a disability, is to be further strengthened. With effect from 2008, this springboard function has not just been fulfilled by means of the career preparation module, but also through the employment module. Specific measures were prepared in 2008 to make the transfer from the employment module into the free market more attractive to those concerned. For the period from 2008 to 2010, the target is to achieve a ratio for placement in the primary labour market in the employment model of between 5 and 7% per year, followed by a level of 10% per year from 2011 onwards.'

2009 NRP Implementation Report

As in the 2008-2010 NRP, the visibility of disability in the Austrian Implementation report was again low (this may perhaps be attributed to the high level of regional devolution of responsibility for disability policies – i.e. devolution of responsibility to the Lander may limit the scope of national policy reporting). However, an opportunity was missed in terms of reporting employment data.

The re-organisation of government Ministries has increase the availability of basic data and the Austrian Government published its [Report on the situation of people with disabilities in Austria](#) in 2009 (using 2008 as the reference year). The Industrial Association ([Industriellenvereinigung](#)) also provides statistical information based on calculations of data from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK) and the Austrian Labour Market Service (AMS). It would have been possible to report the number of people with the legal status of severely disabled ('Begünstigter Behinderter') who were employed (64%) or self-employed (4%). The Austrian Labour Market Service changed its disability definition, now referring to people with health-related placement restrictions, which could also have been reported. However, significant numbers are not included in the official unemployment statistics and may therefore be considered inactive (those working in sheltered employment workshops are not included either). Due to the general increase in unemployment, the proportion of people with health-related placement restrictions decreased slightly to 14.58% in August 2009 (although the absolute number increased).

The Implementation Report presents little policy development but this appears to be a fair assessment, since disability issues seem to have become a lower priority (as a result of the economic crisis) and the last official BMASK press release on the employment of disabled people dates back to December 2008. However, new employment measures in response to the economic crisis do have implications that were not reported. For example, the 'combination wage model' for long-term unemployed people over the age of 50 explicitly mentions disabled people as possible beneficiaries.



The Implementation Report does mention the new wage subsidy (Kombilohn-Neu) of between €150-300 per month, implemented in July 2009 to encourage the take-up of lower-paid jobs by certain discouraged groups, including people registered as disabled for more than 6 months (although the primary target group for this scheme has been older workers, and those re-entering the labour market) (p21). Training for disabled people was also referred to as part of ESF funds allocated in Burgenland (p19). However, there was no reference to reform of apprentice training at vocational training centres (which was intended to target 'young people with a disadvantaged background and with disabilities'). There was no reference to strengthening the role of 'integrative companies' (where a target for placements had been set in the NRP) nor any reference to ratification of the UN Convention (ratified by Austria on 26 September 2008).



Belgium

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/NRP_2008_FR.pdf (French version)

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were few references to disabled people in the Belgian NRP (some 9 references to 'handicap' in the text and one reference to incapacity for work). The challenge of including disabled people was set in the context of heightened concern to expand the supply of labour, arising from projected demographic trends (p99). In general terms, the NRP pledged 'special attention' to groups 'less likely to enter the labour market' (p7). Although the lifecycle approach highlights younger and older workers it was acknowledged that 'the potential of disabled work also remains under-utilized' (also on p83). References to disability were primarily in relation to targeted training activities and to planned increases in disability benefit rates.

Employment situation of disabled people

Disabled people were not included in general discussion of the Belgian labour market situation. There was no reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people in the Belgian NRP. However, the Belgian ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and examples that could have been useful.

One of the key findings from research is that the number of people with functional limitations is much larger than usually estimated, somewhere between 12 and 16% of the working population (between 15-64 years). About 60% of disabled people do not work (around 1 in every 14 employees is disabled). Of those disabled people who work, there information is available on two groups, those who work in sheltered workshops (about 15,000 in Flanders) and those who work in the regular employment market and receive a wage subsidy (CAO-26 or VIP, about 5000). Both of these groups represent only 10% of people who work with functional limitations. Only two surveys Sociaal-economische enquête 2001 and the Enquête naar arbeidskrachten 2002) provide information about all workers with functional limitations.

Policy proposals

The NRP contained a general commitment that, 'The arsenal of plans for employment will be harmonized and simplified to increase the chances of those groups most vulnerable' etc.

From Autumn 2008, policy instruments relating to disabled people were to be strengthened. In particular, 'through increased subsidies in the cost of labour as well as support and adapted screening' (pp7-8).

Specific attention was drawn to the Formation professionnelle individuelle en Entreprise (FPI). Growth in this system has slowed recently but it was regarded as a key mechanism to 'ensure the interface' between risk groups and occupations in shortage. This measure aimed to encourage the commitment of job seekers by giving them the necessary training to match the position sought (when no candidate is available for the job given and there is no existing training in an approved centre or the wait is unacceptably long). Job seekers must be registered. Training time is 1 to 6 months full time or part time. The applicant continues to receive unemployment benefits or the right to social integration, throughout the duration of the training. The employer pays a productivity premium to the candidate calculated monthly on the basis of regular pay and service income of the candidate and ensures the candidate against accidents at work.

The Flemish government emphasised the 'skills-agenda' in seeking to increase participation in training, and 'training vouchers are used in Flanders to counter a decline in training participation (it was not clear if this had any direct relation to disabled people). Disabled people were also noted in reference to targeted actions on pre-qualification training projects (p115) where ESF funds would be used.

In the section on 'Strengthening social protection' and the fight against poverty (p40), it was noted that disability benefits were increased in line with the minimum pension (2%) and that 'The income of households with a disabled person is also increased by the partial exemption of the income of their partner in the calculation of the integration allowance'. There would be changes in the welfare benefit system from September 2008. Under the Law on Solidarity between the Generations, there would be an additional adjustment to welfare benefits in 2009 (affecting older and disabled people) and 'depending on the available budget margins, it is planned to...adjust allowances for disabled children' (p41).

In support of flexicurity, the Belgian social security system seeks to provide support for different types of employment career including periods of non-work. This included, 'the building of social security rights regardless of the type of contract'. The calculation of contributions and benefits includes so-called 'assimilated periods', which may cover long periods of unemployment or disability (p105).

There was an interesting example in the section on 'An open labour market in a society marked by diversity' where the Belgian authorities have developed policies that encourage diversity through the award of public recognition – 'companies will be encouraged through prizes and labels such as the federal 'diversity label', and supported by consultants in developing their diversity plans' (p99). This mirrors similar initiatives in France.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

There were more references to disability issues and disabled people than might be expected from the Belgian NRP (it is relevant to note the significant regional devolution of disability policies within the country, which may limit national reporting).

The Belgian government (like France) identified a need to support the purchasing power of the 'most vulnerable' during the economic crisis. There have been increases in allocation of income replacement for disabled people, minimum pensions and social assistance benefits (p146). The Government is using funds under the Law on Solidarity between Generations to increase the budget for social integration and the allocation of income replacement for disabled people. There has been a reduction of employer's tax to subsidise the wages of registered disabled people (raising the tax exemption from 0.25% to 1% in 2010) (p19, 53). With a view to expand labour supply, companies are encouraged to develop diversity plans (in 2008, Flanders had 572, Brussels 11, and Wallonia over 100 companies).

It has been long-standing practice for the regions to subsidise or reserve jobs for disabled workers. A new scheme in Flanders resulted in 5,700 premiums. The Employment Service implemented specific activation pathways for disabled people (9,000 in 2008, plus collaboration involving 118 people in the German speaking community). In Wallonia, the number of subsidized jobs increased by 130 (p144) and there has been increased support for family carers to work (p146).



Subsidy for social integration through training for disabled job seekers (and for 'immigrants') will be supported by ESF funding in the German-speaking community (p154). Similarly, ESF are used in the Walloon Region and French Community to target 'low-skilled' disabled people, amongst others (p164). In the Flemish and Brussels ESF programmes disabled people are also identified amongst the target groups for work experience, training or job creation (p168-9). In the Brussels-Central region the Employment Service has also targeted the involvement of disabled people through a website (www.wheelit.be) (p142).

There is no reference to ratification of the UN Convention, which was ratified by Belgium on 2 July 2009.



Bulgaria

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/NRP_2008_en.pdf (NRP)

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/AP_NRP_2008_en.pdf (Action Plan)

Visibility and mainstreaming

There was no reference to disabled people, sickness, work incapacity or carers in the Bulgarian National Reform Programme or the Annex (although there were equally no references to women and only two references to the Roma minority). In the Action Plan there was one reference to disabled people in the context of the Adoption of a National Programme for Accelerated Development of Information Society in Bulgaria (2008-2010), where the accessibility of portals and Internet sites was noted.

It is then only possible to infer examples of mainstreaming in relation to more general statements concerning vulnerable or inactive groups. This observation is of some concern and contrasts with the National Strategic Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, where there are more examples.

Employment situation of disabled people

Disabled people were not included in discussion of the Bulgarian labour market situation. There was no reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people. The NRP (p17) did include the following commitment (also itemised at action 71, p25 in the Action Plan document, and p4 in the Annexe).

'To conduct, in the third quarter of 2009, a specialised study and analysis of the possibilities for interventions upon vulnerable groups on the labour market and inactive persons within the Human Resources Development Operational Programme. By the end of 2008 the public procurement procedures will commence. The conduct of an in-depth study of the characteristics of inactive persons, including their geographical distribution, will provide valuable information for the better direction of the initiatives under the

National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) and the Human Resources Development Operational Programme. When determining the subsequent interventions, a compliance with the principle of complementarity will be observed and avoidance of overlapping between the initiatives financed under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme and the state budget will be avoided.'

However, the Bulgarian ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and examples that could have been useful (while also underlining the limitations of existing data). Due to the lack of reliable statistics it is hard to estimate current rates of unemployment among disabled people, though the National Action Plan on Employment for 2008 reports their average number for the first nine months of 2007 at 14,928 and for the whole year at 14,414, which is 9.4% less than in 2003. The same document states that the unemployment rate among disabled people over the last three years is approximately 5% of the overall number of registered unemployed. These numbers could be misleading, however, given that most disabled people are pensioners and anecdotal evidence shows that when unemployed they may be refused registration with Labour Offices.

NSI research in 2005 covered 3,000 people aged 16 to 64. The research reported that only 6% of those employed receive special on-the-job support, whereas 16% admit a need for such - 14% of the latter cannot specify the type of support needed, another 12% look for moral support and the same number claim a need for help related to their job.

Policy proposals

In general terms, the NRP made a commitment: 'To realise an integrated package of actions aimed at increasing the employment of elder workers, activating the long-term unemployed and the inactive people and developing the initiatives for providing a 'second chance' to people without education and/or qualification with the objective to reduce the hindrances for lasting work of people in most disadvantaged position on the labour market;' (p18). Disabled people could usefully be targeted in such a population.

There was only one reference to disability in the Action Plan under the heading 'Point to Watch 5. Completing the lifelong learning strategy and increasing participation' (p35, action 115) as follows:

'Adoption of a National Programme for Accelerated Development of Information Society in Bulgaria (2008-2010).

Intensive development and optimisation of the National Information and Communication Infrastructure; implementation of interoperability of the information systems in the state administration; expanding the accessibility of information resources and of participation in e-government to individuals and business; developing and ensuring various channels for provision of electronic services; ensuring a high degree of credibility of the functioning of information systems through achievement of a high level of information security.

The implementation of the document will also result in an increase of the total volume of Bulgarian-language useful information on the Internet, availability of a variety of public electronic services, accessibility of all portals and Internet sites to people with disabilities, as well as options for translation from and into foreign languages.'

2009 NRP Implementation Report

Mirroring the low visibility in the 2008-2010 NRP there were only two direct references to disability or related issues in the 2009 Implementation Report (neither of which were particularly targeted). There was no reference to the employment situation of disabled people in Bulgaria and no supporting data making specific reference to them. There would have been opportunity to improve on this, although there have been relatively few changes in the past year.

The situation with disability statistics remains unchanged (with substantial inconsistencies in definitions). For example, in research commissioned by the Agency for Disabled People (ADP) in 2009 the number of people with permanent disabilities is estimated at 715,500, or 9.31% of the population. According to the National Social Security Institute (NSSI), the number of pensions for 'health reasons and disability' in 2008 was 945,926, a decrease of 1.7% compared with 2007. Disability is not included in the mainstream labour and employment reports of the National Statistics Institute (NSI), which are issued on quarterly basis (access requires a request under the Access to Public Information Act). According to the Employment Agency the average employment rate among disabled people in 2008 was 5.3% (as compared to 5.0% in 2007).



Almost half of unemployed disabled people (45.6%) had completed only basic education; only 8.7% had a university degree, while 49.4% had no professional training or qualifications. There appears to be no data on the fulfilment of the disability employment quota.

There were few decisive policy changes in 2008 due to European and National elections. The new Strategy on Equal Opportunities for Disabled People 2008-2015 is largely a 'copy-paste' of the previous one, without substantive evaluation or consultation. Most of the political party platforms/programmes did not mention disability, focusing largely on the economic crisis and social inclusion in general.

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which Bulgaria has signed but not yet ratified.



Cyprus

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/RENEWED%20%20NRP%202008-2010%20Draft%20GSC%20%20%2023%2010%2008.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were several references to disabled people in the Cyprus NRP, although the emphasis was on actions already completed in the previous period rather than new measures. Most of the references were to EU co-funded pilot projects providing targeted skills training to specific impairment groups (the same examples were used several times in the document).

Employment situation of disabled people

Disabled people were not included in discussion of the Cyprus labour market situation. There was one reference to a new study on the role of local authorities in the promotion of care policies for the reconciliation of work and family life (p127), which had recently been completed and would be fully implemented by December 2008. But it was not clear if this would produce any useful statistics or indicators.

There was no reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people in the Cyprus NRP. In the broader context of social inclusion, Cyprus notes that 'Economic inequality, poverty and social exclusion are not major problems in Cyprus, however pockets of exclusion do exist' and disabled people are specifically identified here (p142). The Cyprus ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and some examples that could have been useful (while acknowledging the lack of robust data).

Employment data regarding disabled people is restricted in Cyprus. The only official source for such data are the Annual Reports prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance year by year, but again, restricted statistical data is reported. Statistical data recorded in the 2007 Annual Report (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2007) suggests that 4.3% of disabled people are employed in the protogenic sector (i.e. agriculture), 22.7% in the secondary sector (i.e. industry) and 73% in the tertiary sector (i.e. services). These percentages remain similar since 2002. Information is provided about the percentages of employment in specific job positions that correspond to each sector. It is reported that in 2007, 12,017 disabled people were registered as unemployed (5,209 men and 6,808 women). Information is provided about the types of job positions that are related to the unemployment of disabled men and women.

It is worth noting that statistical data from Cyprus remains absent from European reports. In particular, in the Study of Compilation of Disability Statistical Data from the 2007 Administrative Registers of the Member States of the European Union (APPLICA, CESEP and European Centre, 2007) data from Cyprus was not recorded in any of the areas investigated, including the share of disabled people in total population of working age, the share of employed disabled people in total employment, the share of unemployed disabled people in total unemployment, the share of inactive disabled people in total inactivity, and the employment, unemployment and inactivity rates among disabled people.

Policy proposals

The NRP reported on some existing actions and some new measures, but focused almost exclusively on targeted ESF-funded projects rather than mainstream employment policies.

It was noted that public assistance legislation had been revised in the previous period (p143) and that the 2006 Public Assistance and Services Law [Law 95(l)/2006] ‘contains increased activation incentives for lone parents and people with disabilities...’. These were not further developed in the 2008 NRP.

Disabled people were identified amongst the ‘vulnerable groups’ targeted in promoting ‘the enhancement and modernization of the Public Employment Services within the framework matching the needs of both employers and employees’. Development of the PES network (co-funded by ESF) was noted in response to EU Guideline 20 to ‘Improve matching of labour market needs’. (p14)

In the section on ‘Facilitating integration/reintegration in the labour market’ there was only reference to the Department of Labour’s ‘training scheme for the disabled, co-funded by the ESF aiming at the vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities’ (p14).

ESF funded projects were noted in reporting progress during the previous period under ‘3.5 Expansion and improvement of care services for children, the elderly, the disabled and other dependants, co-financed by the ESF (SWS)’ (p25). No new measures were proposed. This information was then repeated on p127 and further details provided at p143 as follows:

‘Vocational training program for persons with hearing impairment, completed in May 2008
 Computer Literacy training program for persons with severe motor disability, will be completed by the end of October 2008
 Computer Literacy training program for persons with visual impairment
 Computer Literacy training program for persons with hearing impairment
 Computer Literacy training program for persons with sever motor disability
 This measure will be fully implemented by December 2008.’

Plus, ‘Implementation of a scheme providing incentives for the employment of people with disabilities, co-financed from the ESF (DL): Under this scheme 35 job placements of people with severe disabilities were made from 31 employers. This measure would be fully implemented by December 2008.’

There were some links to actions in the 2008 NSR on social inclusion under section 4.9 ‘Further enhancement of social cohesion through social inclusion’ (p46). In this context there were some specific examples of employment related actions as follows:

‘The prevention of social exclusion of persons with disabilities through:
 Carrying out specialised training programmes for the acquisition of vocational proficiency for people with visual impairment, hearing impairment and severe motor disability.
 Promoting a scheme to provide incentives to private sector employers for the employment of disabled people and thus combat the employer’s reluctance in giving jobs to disabled people.
 Introducing by legislation of a quota system for the recruitment of persons with disabilities in the public sector by the Social Inclusion Unit.
 Developing and implementing of a new system for the assessment of disability and functionality with the aim, among others, to diagnose and utilize the prospects of persons with disabilities to be trained and employed according to the circumstances of each case.’

Re-organising the sector for vocational training and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities by modernization of the training programmes, the employment schemes and the procedures followed'

2009 NRP Implementation Report

Disability was again a very visible theme in the Cyprus Implementation Report (including at least 49 specific text references, much more so than in other countries). Compared to the 2008-2010 NRP there was also more evidence of consideration to developments within the plan period (rather than relying on actions in the previous NRP period). There is evidence of consideration to disability in several different parts of the report, including recognition in Priority Axis 2 (p151). There is also a targeted section on specific actions and measures (p141). However, no data or statistics were provided concerning the employment situation of disabled people in Cyprus, which would have strengthened the report.

There have been some significant developments reported, with new policies initiated if not implemented. This new activity reflects the creation in January 2009 of the new government Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and evidence of strategic consultation with the Cyprus Confederation of the Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (p141) is very welcome.

There will be the development of a new 'system for the assessment of disability and functionality', based on the WHO ICF, involving new Assessment Centres and specialist trained staff (p142).

The introduction of an employment quota system in the public sector should also be seen as a significant policy development (p38). It is notable that the proposal is for a 10% quota, which considerably exceeds the norm for EU countries using this mechanism (p141). New 'incentives to the private sector' (p38) include subsidised employment mechanisms implemented in July 2009 (p138) with further incentives to private sector and local authorities planned.

There will be a new semi-public Organisation for Vocational Training and Rehabilitation in 2010, specifically targeting disabled people, (p142).

Beyond the immediate employment context, disabled people are recognised amongst those experiencing poverty and exclusion (p138). There are brief updates and quantifiable outcomes from other ESF funded projects (e.g. p141) and proposals for new initiatives, including eGovernment initiatives in the provision and development of care services (e.g. Telecare services). It was encouraging to see promotion of intersectional discussions on gender and disability as part of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (p118). There was also reference to disability issues in the section on care for older people (p143).

Fiscal stimulus interventions in response to the economic crisis included increased budgets for subsidised domestic vacations for disabled people, along with other groups (p5) – a means of stimulating depressed local tourism in Cyprus.

There was no mention of the UN Convention, which Cyprus has signed but not yet ratified.



Czech Republic

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/National%20Reform%20Programme%20of%20the%20Czech%20Republic%202008%20-%202010.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

Overall, there was less evidence of visibility and mainstreaming in the Czech NRP compared to the NSR for social inclusion (e.g. there were 12 text references to disabled or 'handicapped' persons compared with 23 references to women). Positive unemployment trends were noted. Policy proposals were focused on reform of pensions and benefits. There was some implication for flexicurity in creating part-time work and balancing family/work, and one reference to accessibility.

Employment situation of disabled people

Disabled people were referred to very briefly in outlining the general situation (p69) focusing on 'the situation of those furthest away from the labour market'. Here it was noted that in the previous period there was 'a decrease in the number of handicapped persons' (presumably referring to a decrease in unemployment?) and this was attributed, in part, to favourable economic conditions affecting all groups. The only reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people in the Czech NRP was the statement of declining numbers of those unemployed (60,000 persons). No source was provided. However, the Czech ANED country report on employment also contained critical commentary and examples that could have been useful.

Data on employment of disabled people are available from The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Czech Statistical Office and online. However, comprehensive valid statistical data are still not available and estimates rely on sample inquiries and studies. The Czech statistical system on employment does not compile concise data according to categories of disability or ethnic minorities for example. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare registered 354,878 people unemployed (31/12/07) of which almost 20% (56,022) were identified as disabled people. There is no discrete statistical data available on the number of disabled people employed in the open labour market or in sheltered workplaces. The administrative statistics show that the number of people participating in quota schemes increased by 31% between 2000 and 2006. Most disabled people employed in ordinary jobs are aged 45 or over.

Policy proposals

Positive unemployment trends in the previous period were linked to implementation of projects in the framework of the Operational Programme Human Resources Development and of the unique programme document for the capital city of Prague' (p69). In this context there was specific reference to action on 'the Integration of specific groups of population threatened by social exclusion', the target groups of which included disabled people.

Disabled people were also identified as one of the target groups in actions to support flexible working, with the introduction of incentives for employers to create part-time jobs. In this context of this proposal, 'One of the discussed possibilities for such an incentive is a reduction of the social security premium. (p71).

As identified in the Czech NSR, reform of the pensions system was planned, including 'Raising the statutory retirement age, extending the mandatory minimum period for insurance and toughening conditions for collecting disability pensions' (p20). There had also been some revision affecting entitlement to temporary sickness/disability benefits in work. From January 2009, 'According to the Act on Illness Insurance the illness insurance benefits will be only from the 15th day of the work disability duration. During the first 14 calendar days of the work disability or quarantine the employers will provide compensation. There will be no salary compensation for the first 3 days of work disability' (footnote, pp21-22). The regulation had previously varied between 3 days and 30 days.

There was one reference to accessibility (p41) in relation to the use of ICTs for disadvantaged groups (addressed by the National Programme of the Preparation for Ageing for 2008 – 2012). The same strategy was noted more broadly in promoting a life-cycle approach to work, where there was also reference to 'the reconciliation of family and work life in connection with care for seniors and disabled persons' (p67).

2009 NRP Implementation Report

The 2009 Czech Implementation Plan (reviewed in draft) contained only two explicit references to 'handicapped workers' and one the 'transformation' of schools for 'children with mild mental disability' (section IG23). There is no reference to work capacity or health-related issues. In promoting the lifecycle approach (IG18) there was a brief outline of the 'family package' initiative, which includes reference to contribution subsidies for employers hiring disabled people. In matching labour market needs (IG20) there is reference to state support for sheltered workshops and 'employers employing high number of handicapped workers' (no specific mechanisms or examples are given). There is no data presented on the employment situation of disabled people in the Czech Republic, which could have been included. There were also other opportunities to develop the disability content of this report.

Available data from Ministry of Works and Social Affairs' Statistics 2005-2008 showed a general decrease in unemployment while for disabled people it has stagnated or even slightly increased (the number of unemployed people recorded by labour offices has decreased while the number of unemployed disabled people has increased). However, labour office records are not comprehensive as those who receive Full Disability Pension are not obliged to register. In 2008, the National Board of Persons with Disabilities conducted a survey on employment in public administration. This showed that most of the ministries, regional authorities and municipalities fulfil their legal quota duties (4% for companies employing more than 25 employees).

In 2010, a new disability policy plan will be introduced. It is expected that the Government will significantly change the structure used in the 2006-2009 plan. The UN Convention Article 27 will be a primary source in drafting the plan (first draft due in March 2010).

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which the Czech republic ratified on 28 September 2009.



Denmark

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/Denmark's%20National%20Reform%20Programme.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

Disabled people were more visible in the Danish NRP than some other countries (with around 50 text references to disability, sickness or incapacity for work in the document). There was some mention of employment trends, national disability strategy and interventions on flexicurity. There were some excellent examples, including evidence of direct contribution to policy from disabled people's organisations. However, these were not necessarily well integrated or mainstreamed in the proposals.

Employment situation of disabled people

Overall employment trends were recorded (briefly) with evidence, for example, 'In the period 2002-2006, estimated 50,000 more disabled people have become employed. (p34). Annexe 6 included two examples of relevant indicators. Table 6.9 reported 'The relative size of disadvantaged groups in the population' identifying 20% of the population as disabled (although this relies on weighted data from 2001). Table 6.10 gave a helpful and detailed breakdown by employment status, gender, age, etc. This data was somewhat dated but similar styles of reporting should be encouraged as good practice.

The Danish ANED country report on employment also contained some useful commentary. Danish employment statistics contain little reliable information on disability. There are statistics relating to those receiving disability and health related benefits, disability pension and sick pay, use of medical doctors and hospitals (but not for example about those receiving technological aids, house modifications or assistance in the household). Some evidence is available from existing surveys conducted by Statistics Denmark as a part of the European LFS, some by SFI.

Policy proposals

The Danish NRP contained evidence of a national strategic approach to disabled people's employment during the previous period, within the framework of the Government's 'Disability and work – an employment strategy for disabled persons'.

This approach demonstrates some evidence of policy development in support of the principle of flexicurity, and action for target groups, such as disabled people, includes 'trials and special effort on promoting flexi jobs' (p33). For example, in 2007, the introduction of 'flexi job certificates' was piloted: 'The certificate will clearly state that the person has been referred to a flexi job and which safeguarding requirements might be needed for employment. At the same time, the certificate informs of assistance schemes that may be granted.' (p34). In addition, the NRP noted that, 'Among other things, a trial was initiated with the allocation of social mentors to persons who have a temporary mental disorder. The trial shall clarify the need for support for these persons'.

The new Job Scheme (from 2008) would seek to encourage more people into work but included some guarantees to incapacity benefit recipients, such that, 'Disability pensioners who are under the old scheme have received full assurance that they do not risk losing the right to incapacity benefits if they work' (p30).

EU funds from the EQUAL programme were used, amongst other things, for 'Improvement of the integration and labour market opportunities of socially marginalised groups, including people with disabilities...targeting both job seekers and people in employment' (p67)

There was an example of very good practice in Annexe 8, which evidences the contribution of Disabled People's Organisations Denmark's in the process. The contribution set out a clear and coherent strategic approach over two pages (pp101-103). Including:

- Need for larger knowledge basis
- Greater focus on industries that expel the most to incapacity benefit
- The incapacity benefit reform functions – greater focus on prevention
- Need for an earlier and more holistic effort
- Need for a new rehabilitation effort and rehabilitation service
- Distribute personal assistance to persons with psychological disability
- Persons in protected occupation

Such practice should be encouraged in other Member States, although it is evident that the proposals in this Annexe were not systematically adopted or mainstreamed within the overall NRP.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

In a similar way to the NRP, there were a surprisingly large number of references to disability issues in the Danish Implementation Report (much in excess of most other countries).

There is specific note of the new national strategy on disability and jobs (issued in April 2009). Notably, this includes quantifiable targets for increase in share of employment, disability pensioners supported into employment, and public attitudes towards the employment of people with mental health conditions (pp36-37).

It was encouraging to see the number of disabled people entering employment quantified, at 17,000 between 2004-2008 (p36). There is also some data from the Danish National Centre for Social Research on disabled people and their employment situation, although it has not been updated from 2002 EU LFS ad-hoc module (p77-78). For example, it would have been possible to report on the SFI report 09:05 on the development in employment of people with disabilities in the period 2002-2008, and the longitudinal report 09:21 on the situation today of people who reported disability in the 1995 survey. The former identifies decreases in disabled people's employment of 2.4% and marginal increases in sheltered employment. Official statistics also appear to indicate a decline in disabled people in vocational rehabilitation.

It is again encouraging to see concrete evidence of the positive engagement of disabled people's organisations in the text (an example of good practice). The contribution is extensive (more than two pages). It appears to make reference to more recent employment data than evidenced in the official report. Attention is drawn to attitudinal barriers, and to specific concerns for people with mental health conditions (this fits well with the official strategy targets). Pressure on job centres, as a result of rising unemployment is noted – with a potential 'loss of focus' on disability. There are calls for protected jobs to be secured in the open labour market rather than in workshops (and to mainstream this provision within employment policy, rather than service policy) (p98).



There is no reference to ratification of the UN Convention, which was ratified by Denmark on 24 July 2009.

Estonia

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/2008%2010%2009%20Estonian%20Action%20Plan%202008-2011_EN_final.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

Disability had higher profile and greater evidence of mainstreaming in the Estonian NRP than in some countries (e.g. there are at least 30 references in the document, compared to 12 for women). There was no mention of disabled people in the initial assessment of the situation (e.g. employment/unemployment trends) but this is clearly identified later in the document. The analysis was also holistic and recognised enabling factors beyond employment.

Employment situation of disabled people

In recognising and evidencing employment figures and trends (see below) the NRP attributed disabled people's low level of employment in part to, 'the prevalence of only medicine-centred rehabilitation services for disabled people' and the 'insufficient availability of home care services' etc. In this way, the NRP acknowledged that certain structural and service interventions may be 'needed before starting to offer them active labour market measures to integrate them into labour market' (p75).

Disabled people were referred to in the NRP assessment of the Estonian labour market situation and including recognition of 'inactivity' (which is often ignored by countries in quoting disability unemployment figures). The following example illustrates a use of comparative and evidence-based indicators that is largely absent from other Member States NRPs.

'According to the labour force survey, 250,700 people or 27.4% of the working-age population (aged 15 – 64) were inactive in 2007; 40.5% of them were men and 59.5% women. With these figures Estonia is placed somewhere near the middle of a comparative list with other EU Member States. Over half (51.2%) of inactive people are young (aged 15-24), who are primarily engaged in studies. In the 25-49 age group the main reason for being inactive is maternity leave or child care leave (38%), illness, injury or disability (28%) and the obligation of caring for children and other family members (17%). Therefore, the objective in the next few years is to bring disabled people or those who have remained inactive to care for a family member back into the labour market.' (p75)

There was also evidence of quantitative target setting, on the same page, which is to be encouraged. Thus, 'The Estonian Government is aiming to increase the employment rate of disabled people and/or people with long-term health problems to 50% in the next 15 years (it was 32.6% in 2006)'. Within the objective on bringing risk groups into the labour market (p84) the employment rate for disabled people was also included in the indicators, as: 'Employed people with long-term health problems and/or disabilities as a percentage of the working-age population (15-64) of the target group. Source: Statistics Estonia'. The target is an increase from 32.6% to 36% by 2011.

The ANED country report on employment included further information that may have been useful. The approach to statistics on people with disabilities in Estonia distinguishes two different target groups: (a) based on self-assessment according to the LFS and (b) those with officially valid impairment ratings. Statistical data drawn from the databases of the Social Insurance Board registers pertain to the second group.

The employment rate for disabled people (in the LFS definition) was 32.6% as of 2006 (compared with 26% in 2002). The overall employment rate in the same year was 67.7% (compared with 61.1% in 2002). Employment statistics are available by gender, age, impairment etc (see ANED country report).

Temporary incapacity for work and permanent incapacity for work are distinguished in statistics. Permanent incapacity for work is divided into partial (loss of capacity for work 10-90%) and complete (loss of capacity for work 100%) incapacity. A person may be assigned either a rating of disability or incapacity for work or both. As of 2007, there were 67,459 incapacity pensioners registered by the Social Insurance Board. The biggest number of incapacity pensioners is in the age group 40-54 years (29,415).

New policies

Proposed policy actions included concerns with the 'long-term sustainability of the health insurance system' and decisions to 'move on with updating the conditions for paying social benefits to the disabled, which should improve support to the disabled who work and at the same time reduce the number of people receiving benefits' (p23). In this context, incapacity benefits would be updated in 2009-2010 'towards greater own responsibility of employers and employees' (p24). It was also proposed to reform the rehabilitation system to encourage employment in 2008-2009.

Some of the actions highlighted in the NRP related to the previous period, including the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, which added new labour market services 'four of which were directed primarily at the disabled unemployed' (p85). Recent action had included 'making the Estonian Labour Market Board more known among the inactive population'. The ESF-funded project 'Increasing the Supply of Qualified Labour Force' extended the existing labour market services to engage more inactive people and those in greater need. It was reported that the 'active job search requirement and legalisation of the individual job-search action plan resulted in an important increase in quality' (although it was not clear what this meant).

There were some good examples of specific and mainstreamed actions under the general heading to 'Broaden the range of active labour market measures for inactive people and employed disabled persons (2008 – 2009)' (p85). For example, there was action to 'Formulate a mechanism to compensate for additional work-related expenditure (including transport) and implement it for disabled people (working allowance)'. This appeared to be an action in the previous period but provided a useful example of good practice that could be evaluated and potentially transferred to other Member States. The principle was explained in more detail as follows:

'An amendment to the Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act was prepared in 2006. In December 2007, the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) approved the amendment to the law, according to which the principles for paying allowances to working-aged disabled persons were changed. According to the amendment, starting from October 2008, the size of the allowance for a working-aged disabled person will depend not on his/her degree of disability, but on his/her extra costs. A new type of allowance – a working allowance – was also created, which will be paid to employed disabled persons, who are at least 16 years old and who have extra costs related to their jobs conditioned by their disabilities (for example transport costs, greater necessity for an assistant or support person etc)'. (p85)

There was recognition of the principle of flexicurity under the heading 'Rigidity of labour legislation and combining work and family life'. This included proposals on part-time and flexible working that include disabled people and responds directly to EU level policy. Thus:

'In order to increase the share of flexible work forms we have to invest more in informing both employees and employers. The European Commission has highlighted this need during the evaluation of the Action Plan for Growth and Jobs. While promoting flexible work forms it is important to focus on people that find it impossible to reconcile normal working hours and a full-time job with their other obligations (e.g. disabled people, parents of small children, elderly people etc). Flexible work forms enable them to enter the labour market more successfully or to remain there. At the same time, it is important to ensure that the number of part-time workers does not increase in place of full-time employees, which would raise the number of underemployed people.' (p87)

The sub-objective on lifelong learning included reference to disabled people as a target group amongst 'employed people in risk groups' for 'labour market training normally only offered to unemployed people' (p84).

There were also actions in 2007-9 to create 'a disability-related information and technical aid centre' and 'counselling centres for people with special needs and those close to them'.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

Compared to the attention given in the original NRP, there were no explicit references to disability issues or disabled people in the Estonian Implementation Report. There is one reference to 'incapacity' benefit but this appears to relate to shorter-term sickness benefit.

As per the 2008-2010 NRP, there has been a reduction in the payment of incapacity benefit (from 80% to 70% of salary) and a marginal increase in employer/employee responsibility for the first 1-3 days incapacity (p7)

There are no updates on the other actions referring to disabled people in the original NRP. Nor is there any mention of the employment situation/rate of disabled people (although employment rates are reported by gender, youth and educational status). There is no reference to the target set for disabled people's employment in the NRP. This data would have been available from the Estonian national Labour Force Survey. From 2008, LFS data has been linked to data on disability from the Social Insurance Board. Employment indicators are obtained for disabled people in two ways – from the LFS in terms of the person's self-evaluation of health status, and from the Ministry of Social Affairs through linkage with Social Insurance Board data.

There was no mention that definitions of profound, severe and moderate degrees of disability have been established, based on the Social Benefits for Disabled Act (for the purposes of considering needs for personal assistance and additional expenses). Disability allowance for a person of working age will be paid monthly to compensate for the additional expenses caused by disability, except for activities financed from the health insurance and other state budget funds. It will be not less than 65% and not more than 210% of the social benefit rate. From 1 January 2009, the supported employment service for people with special needs was incorporated to the Social Welfare Act. This service aims to guide and counsel a person, support independent living and to enhance quality of life when looking for employment and working.



There is no reference to plans for ratification of the UN Convention (which Estonia has signed but not yet ratified).

Finland

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/FI_Lisbon_en.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There was little attention to disabled people in the Finnish NRP document. There was a general reference to employment trends and a few references to examples of past achievements. There were brief references to proposed actions but these were considerably lacking in specificity.

Employment situation of disabled people

The Finnish NRP contained only a very general comment on employment trends but unsubstantiated with any evidence or specificity to disability – e.g. ‘The number of hard to employ people has fallen faster than other unemployment, partly as a result of demographic change. A reform of the funding and terms of labour market support, the activity of employment service centres and the improved effectiveness of labour policy activation measures have contributed to the fall in structural unemployment.’ (p27)

The only reference to employment statistics or indicators of the situation of disabled people was a statement in response to EU employment Guideline 19. Here it was noted that ‘the activation rate for the unemployed was 29.1% and for people with disabilities 26.3%’ (p110). No other statistics were presented.

The ANED country report on employment contained some critical commentary and examples that could have been useful. According to the Ministry of Labour and the Statistical yearbook of the Finnish Social Insurance Institute 20% of disabled people have paid work and 70% of all people have a paid work,. However, these percentages are not necessarily valid because the statistical data are based on individual studies and have not been gathered systematically. The available data suggests an increase in employment in the 25-64 age group, from 17% to 24% between 2002-2006. The data suggests that 18% of disabled men had a permanent job and 16% of disabled women in 2002. A third of disabled people who have a work are in the age group 35-44 and have more acquired impairments than from birth.

Policy proposals

The NRP contained minor references to actions in the previous period. For example, it was reported that ‘employment subsidies for the disabled and physically impaired have been doubled’ (p27). There was also reference to provision in the 2004 Act on Social Enterprises in which ‘A social enterprise can be granted a wage subsidy for the employment of people with disabilities...for a longer time than other companies’ (p30). The number of such enterprises doubled from 2006 to 2007 (in part, funded by the EU EQUAL programme). There was also some critical comment on this in the ANED country report on employment.

The actions proposed in the new NRP lack detail in presentation, but may have significant implications. For example, it was stated that ‘Disability legislation will be reformed in stages’ (p42) but no further detailed proposals are presented. Under the heading ‘From outside the labour force into work’ there are commitments to incentivise employment security, in which context, ‘Opportunities for those who are on disability pension to try and return to working life will be pursued as part of the comprehensive reform of social security’. But again there is an absence of any further detail on this proposal.



There were no other references to actions mainstreaming or targeting disabled people in the NRP.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

In a similar way to the NRP there was very little reference to disability issues in the Finnish Implementation Report (there are only two explicit references). There are, however, a number of references to health care and social welfare provision more generally. There is considerable concern about the financial sustainability of the health, welfare and pensions systems (p17) (but also a shortage of labour supply in the health and care sector) (p101).

With reference to securing welfare services for an ageing population, there has been a comprehensive review of pension provision but the detailed policy outcome is not yet determined (although this will clearly suggest more emphasis on labour market activation policies for disabled people, and those with partial work capacity) (p54).

The new commitment to raise the minimum age of eligibility for old age pensions will also impact on disability pension provision, the extension of which may be challenging in the current labour market situation (p115).

There is no mention that the Act on personal assistance extends assistance to work places. Some €36m was allocated to disabled people's employment in the 2008 budget. The long-term process of developing intermediate labour markets is a current policy issue for the Comprehensive Reform of Social Protection (Sata)-Committee.

It is worth noting that there has been new evidence on the employment situation of disabled people in Finland (not included in the Implementation Report). Latest reports (Vates-säätiö 2009) estimate that the employment rate of disabled people fell by 4.4% between 2000 and 2008. Quantitative data is produced every month by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy and the latest report (July/2009) shows that 4,029 persons had subsidised employment and these usually are disabled people.

There have also been new published studies on the employment situation of disabled people in Finland in 2009 (showing, for example, estimates of employment rates, gross incomes and job opportunities). The precise impact of the economic crisis on the employment of disabled people is not yet clear, but it appears that subsidised work places may have decreased and labour market training and similar activities increased within the year.

There is no reference to the UN Convention (which Finland has signed but not yet ratified).

France

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/France_National_Reform_Programme.pdf (English version, French version used for analysis)

Visibility and mainstreaming

Specific references to disabled people were very limited in the French NRP (only two brief paragraphs). There was some evidence of a national strategic approach to disability employment policy but this was not elaborated.

Employment situation of disabled people

There was no reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people in the French NRP. However, the French ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and examples that could have been useful. Generally it is agreed by the French authorities that the employment rate is far below that of non-disabled people, but the level of the gap is different according to the definition of disability used to produce the data. The rate of employment is clearly below the legal quota target. The Ministry of Labour, Department of Statistics (DARES) produces data on employment in private companies through the quota system (mandatory reporting of employment) as well as specific studies. But data from DARES only relate to those registered as disabled people, and from companies that must comply with compulsory employment (at least 20 employees). Moreover, since the legislation changed in 2005 there is no data on the results of the new provisions. More comprehensive (but older) data are estimated by other studies. The Ministry of Public services (DGAFP) has published studies on employment of disabled people in public services. Since, in France, ethnic minorities cannot be registered according to law it would be impossible to produce a breakdown in this way. On migrants, as far as we know, there is no specific data.

Policy proposals

The only specific relevant proposal noted the launch, in June 2008, of a new reform plan concerning disabled people and their access to employment. This was intended 'both to raise the allowance for disabled adults and to create more favourable conditions for their employment' (p48 and again on p49). This suggests both general commitments to reduce discriminatory barriers to paid work and also financial support to make work a better financial option for disabled people.

On the question of discrimination, a note on Page 50 of the France NRP reported that the High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE) 'will investigate claims of discrimination directed to it'. HALDE received 6,222 claims in 2007, half of which cover employment (public and private). Of these, disability discrimination is the second largest after ethnicity at 22% of claims. France is the only country that mentioned legal enforcement, arising from the EU Directive.

The paucity of hard evidence on progress to date and the need for substantiated measures to make redress for discrimination are very important, as are evaluations of the effectiveness of enhanced financial incentives to disabled people.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

The French Implementation report includes some, but few, references to disability issues. With reference to important reform of the public employment service, the implementation of employment centres is highlighted. There has been some simplification of return to work courses (disabled people are targeted here, along with other disadvantaged groups such as unskilled youth, people over 50 and those from deprived urban areas). The major change, however, is that a more flexible system is intended to cater for real needs (particularly in relation to training and mobility) (p53).

A new Diversity Label was created in December 2008 (first issued in January 2009) to identify companies whose diversity practices are considered 'exemplary'. It addresses all forms of discrimination other than gender, which is addressed in a separate scheme (p66).

The report notes the Government's significant pledge that disabled people's purchasing power and access to employment should not be affected by the economic crisis. In this context, the benefit for disabled adults (L'allocation adulte handicapé) has been increased, with a Presidential pledge to increase by 25% by 2012 (p66). This appears broadly consistent with the Government's global approach to the crisis.

In some respects it is not surprising that no major new policy implementation on disability is reported since 2008, since the priority remains implementation of Law 2005-102. However, there was a national disability conference in June 2008 to establish progress and make recommendations (these include possible developments towards a more activation focused approach to non-contributory disability benefits). More significantly, however, the Government adopted a [National Pact for Employment of People with Disabilities](#) (Pacte national pour l'emploi des personnes handicapées) in 2009, which was not mentioned. The targets set were, among others: more cooperation and accessibility to improve employment in private companies and the public sector; a significant simplification of administrative procedures; the improvement of the assessment of vocational skills by MDPH; the formalization of concerted training plans at the regional level; the development of the formal enhancing of their working experience for disabled workers in sheltered workshops (ESAT); long term planning for hiring disabled people in the public sector; and, a reform of AAH (Allocation for disabled adults).

New, comprehensive data on disability and employment in France was provided by a complement to the Labour Force Survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) in 2007, and made available in 2009. This could have been usefully included in the Implementation Report. This suggests an employment rate of employment rate 35% (administrative definition of disability) or 65% (extended definition of disability) with an activity rate of 44% (administrative definition of disability) or 70% (extended definition of disability). The same data report 6,095,000 persons in the open labour market (including 26,851 in Adapted Enterprises), and 111,000 persons in sheltered workshops. Another national survey carried out by INSEE in 2008 will publish its first results in October 2009: 'Handicap – Santé' (volet ménage) (Disability and Health – household section). This includes questions on social and economic participation.

There is no reference to the UN Convention (which France has signed but not ratified).



Germany

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/National%20Reform%20Programme_Germany_2008-2010.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were very few references to disability or incapacity in the NRP (not more than 6 in the English text or 5 in the German). There was no reference in the description of progress or overview of the employment situation. There was very little reference to disadvantaged groups in general (although women were included more often in setting goals, e.g. strengthening educational qualifications, but not disabled people). Such limited reference to disabled people might be viewed as disappointing compared to the 2008 National Action Plan on social inclusion, where there were some examples that would merit inclusion in this document.

Employment situation of disabled people

There was one reference to statistical evidence on the situation of disabled people (on p35, para 80) which noted a decline of 13% in unemployment on the previous year. However, the ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and examples that could have been useful. The Federal Office of Statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland) is the most important source for and searchable online. Additionally, the state-funded Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung) offers both quantitative and qualitative data on the employment of disabled persons. The Ministry for Employment and Social Security (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales) and the Ministry for Health (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit) both provide information about special campaigns and programmes as well as statistical data and reports. The Ministry for Employment and Social Security offers a website with information and publications on disabled people's participation in working life.

There are two national surveys which are undertaken on a regular basis, but differ in their disability concepts. The official disability survey only counts 'severely' disabled people who are officially registered. According to this data in December 2005, there were 6.765 million persons living in Germany registered as severely disabled, roughly 8.2% of the German resident population. Of this group 52.1% were male, and 47.9% female (Statistisches Bundesamt 2007).

The highest rate of participation in the labour force can be found amongst disabled people aged 25 to 45 (men: 74%; women: 65%), although these rates are clearly below those for non-disabled men and women of the same age. With regard to older age groups there are gradually decreasing activity rates. The decrease is especially notable in the 60 to 65 age group (men: 21%, women: 14%). It is highly possible that early retirement schemes account for this drop. The gender reports illustrate that, especially in Eastern Germany, older disabled women and men have lost jobs and opted for invalidity benefits, although these payments usually imply a significantly reduced living. We could not find data about the employment of people with different kinds of impairments from birth or later in life. In relation to disabled migrants and members of ethnic minorities, the gender reports indicate that these groups have the lowest rate of employment participation. This applies especially to disabled women with migration and ethnic minority backgrounds. A comparison of the 25 to 55 year old age group reveals that only 23% of the women (40% of the men) with severe impairments and migration or ethnic minority status have employment, whereas this applies to 73% of all women (87% of all men) of this age.

Policy proposals

The Germany NRP report acknowledged the role of the economic upswing in the run up to the NRP report in aiding disabled people into the paid labour market, noting on Page 35 (para 80) that: 'Persons with severe disabilities are also benefiting increasingly from the upswing on the labour market. By the end of June 2008, the number of persons with severe disabilities who were unemployed was 21,000 lower than the previous year. This represents a decline of around 13 percent. The Federal Government supports this trend, amongst others, by implementing the "Job4000" initiative which offers grants to employers who hire a person with a particularly severe disability or who create an additional training place for a young person with severe disabilities.'

Job4000 aims to create 1,000 new jobs for persons with severe disabilities who have special difficulties finding employment on the general labour market as well as 500 new training places for young persons with severe disabilities and 2,500 special support measures for persons with severe disabilities who want to find employment on the general labour market. Support largely takes the form of grants to employers to take on a 'severely' disabled person. It has been implemented since January 2007 and will run until 2013 (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2008c). So far no reports or evaluations have been made available. a) the number of people who are supposed to profit from the programme is very restricted, b) there have been no evaluations to date of the Job4000 initiative. Some concern might attach to what look like 'special' support measures at the heart of Job4000. There has to be a clear and enduring rationale as to why 'special' measures are preferred and whether mainstream provision and incentives have been considered.

There was a specific commitment (p 66) to pension rights for those disabled people with reduced earning capacity/disability and access to Riester pensions. It was unclear how many disabled this initiative would benefit.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

Mirroring the low visibility in the NRP, there is no direct reference to disability issues or disabled people anywhere in the national Implementation Report. The Taxpayer Relief Act (Bürgerentlastungsgesetz) will also allow contributions for long-term care insurance to be tax exempt from 2010 (p10). There are, however, numerous references to health and some to long-term care (the document portrays a high level of confidence in the government's management of the crisis and the sustainability of the insurance and care systems). This despite rapidly a changing economic climate.

There is no mention of the newly published government report on disability (Behindertenbericht 2009) although the results are somewhat disappointing. The report does not present the latest data (it does not cover the years 2008-09) and its findings are somewhat vague. As above, it is possible to gain the impression that the prospect of the general election (27 September 2009) may have influenced the writing. However, official disability data indicates that, both in absolute numbers and in proportion, people officially registered with 'severe disabilities' are steadily increasing. Similarly, until 2008 disability related employment figures have increased and unemployment rates have decreased, but there are hints at a counter trend in the basic security for job seekers scheme (Social Code Book II). There is also a steady increase in the employment in sheltered workshops, even during years of economic growth.



In terms of policy change, there have been developments in vocational rehabilitation for disabled people that are not reported. There are some new approaches, such as supported employment in regular workplaces, and a job budget for clearing the path to an ordinary job etc. Most programmes offer highly individualized support. However, in general, impact assessments and evaluation studies are still lacking. For this reason it is difficult to present conclusions. There is some hope that the new expert report about vocation rehabilitation and its future will initiate new thinking but there are many stakeholders with vested interests, and the German rehabilitation system has been somewhat notorious for its fragmentation, complexity, bureaucracy and selectivity.

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which Germany ratified on 24 February 2009.

Greece

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/HELLAS_NRP%202008_EN.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

The Greece NRP made direct reference to disability and disabled people in three sections of the report, dealing with e-accessibility (p28), education (p62) and social cohesion (p84). There was one passing reference to 'handicapped' as a vulnerable group (p29).

Employment situation of disabled people

There was no reference to employment trends or indicators of the situation of disabled people in the French NRP. However, the Greek ANED country report on employment contained critical commentary and examples that could have been useful. As far as the general population is concerned, total employment and activity rates can be reported (with some positive trends). There is the potential to report on women and older workers but the situation is problematic when considering the labour market position of disabled people. Unfortunately, the available information is largely limited to the LFS survey data from 2002. At this time, the National Statistical Service reported that 18.2% of the population had a health problem or a disability, and that more than half of these were over 65 years old. The rate of unemployment was smaller than for the general population (8.9% against 9.6%) but 84% were economically inactive (against 58% of the general population). Among those in work differences were also visible according to sector. The highest percentage of workers with disability (14.6%) was in farming, although the age effect may significant here, with workers in this category being considerably older on average.

Policy proposals

New initiatives for improved accessibility were proposed, with a budget of €100m, plus investment in 'Digital Television for Persons with Disabilities' within the national Digital Strategy (p28).

There was a reference to 'support or/and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and socially vulnerable groups' under the heading of 'Human-rights centred education', although it is unclear what this refers to (p62). It was anticipated that a significant draft bill on 'Special education for providing equal opportunities to people with disabilities and special educational needs' would be approved (p64)

In relation to social cohesion, redefinition of the 'National Observatory for Persons with Disabilities' was proposed.

There would also be 'development of a registry and monitoring system'. A new Disability Card will be legislated, based on development of the WHO's ICF. The main benefit proposed here is to eliminate the 'painful and lengthy re-evaluation process of their status by Medical and Administrative Committees'. It was proposed to establish new supported living options to address 'to prevent the institutionalisation and stigmatisation of persons with disabilities'. The new cards will be issued (on a life-long, long-term or short-term basis) directly by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity (p84).

To support labour market access, the public employment services (DYA) would be strengthened by creating 'a network of Expert Advisors' and unspecified 'tools and methods' to facilitate entry into training. It was also proposed to promote 'alternative employment contracts' (p84).

A commitment was made to awareness raising and support for families to combat discrimination (again unspecified).

2009 NRP Implementation Report

There were few references to disability issues in the 2009 Implementation Report (only three direct references in the text). In the context of the economic crisis and social cohesion, the needs of disabled people were noted in relation to support for self-employment (p15), support for families (p30) and, briefly, education (p31). There will be an emphasis on health and education in the 2010 budget but there is, as yet, no reference to disability in the this context.

Funds from the National Strategic Reform Framework (NSRF 2007-2013) will be used for targeted support and subsidy concerning 'self-employed professionals' (p15). Disabled people are referred to here as receiving 'special treatment' but it is not entirely clear what this refers to.

In relation to social cohesion measures, there is provision for: 'Increasing the interest-free loans provided by the Labour Residence Organisation to families with 3 or more children who belong to certain vulnerable social groups (such as people with disabilities). The beneficiaries are 2,500 and the total budget amounts to € 250 million' (p30).

In the same section, apparently with reference to immigrants, there is reference to operating Law 3699/2008, 'which regulates the special education and training of people with disabilities or special educational needs' (p31).

There is, however, no reference in the 2009 Implementation Report to the employment situation of disabled people in Greece, nor any statistics to substantiate this situation in comparison to other groups. This underlines the absence of national data in the country, making it difficult to judge the impact of economic downturn in the disability field.

A recent update on unemployment figures by the National Statistical Service has shown that general unemployment reached 9.3% by the end of the first quarter of 2009 (compared to 8.3% in 2008). However, there has not been any new quantitative data regarding employment/unemployment rates for disabled people since ad hoc Labour Force Survey module in 2002.

Law 3731/2008 par. 8, art.30, published in February 2009, extended disability categories eligible for reduced working hours (by one hour, with pay) for public sector employees. The law update included people with last stage kidney failure, as well as parents with children with 67% disability and over. Previously, the policy for reduced working hours for public sector employees was restricted to people with visual impairments and paraplegia/tetraplegia.

On 1 April 2009 the Presidential Decree 37 updated law 3648/2008 (regarding entitlement to licenses for kiosks. This was previously restricted to disabled people identified as war victims, and has now been extended to all people with 67% or more disability.

On 21 November 2008, on the basis of Law 2643/98 promoting placement of people with disability, the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection published a call for the employment of 5,714 disabled people (and people with three or more children) in the private sector, through the Greek Manpower Employment Association (OAED). The Ministry of Education also announced the employment of 50 educational staff with disability in Primary and Secondary education for the school year 2009-2010, on the basis of Law 3699/2008 article 26.

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which Greece has signed but not ratified.



Hungary

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/HELLAS_NRP%202008_EN.pdf (NRP)

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/NAP_final-20081117.pdf (Action Plan)

Visibility and mainstreaming

Disability was more prominently featured in the Hungary Action Plan than in many other countries (and featured as a recurrent theme in a number of core actions). The main reason for this was the focus on reform of the disability pensions and work/welfare system (highlighted in the Community's country recommendations).

Employment situation of disabled people

The National Action Plan highlighted the low employment rate of disabled people and this was targeted for action through 'transformation of the disability allowances and the employment rehabilitation system'(p13). However, no figures were provided to evidence the current situation. The ANED country report provided some further context. The number of disabled people was assessed in the 1990 and 2001 censuses (368,000 in 1990 and 577,000 in 2001, or 5.7%) but data from the Central Statistical Office typically show an underestimation. Research suggests an employment rate as low as 9-12% (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2002, Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2004). Ninety percent of those who are employed work in segregated environments, mostly in large groups. Precise data are not readily available on non-segregated employment.

Based on the census data, 44.6% of non-disabled people were employed in 1990. By 2001, this was down to 37.8% that can be partly accounted for by demographic aging (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2001). According to the 2001 census (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2002), the employment rate of persons with disabilities was 9% as compared to the 16.6 percent in 1990. Simultaneously, the unemployment rate of disabled persons increased to 2% from 0.7%. This could be explained by the fact that those involved became inactive in the meantime (from 57.5% to 76.7%). Based on our knowledge it is evident that the position of disabled women is even worse than that of the men.

The National Statistical Data Collection Program (which, unfortunately, did not have a working website in 2008) collects much data but does not ask identifier questions about disability. A case in point is adult education and training statistics: the data can be broken down by county, location of training, gender and level of education, but not by disability status.

Policy proposals

The European Council had recommended steps to 'reduce the number of new recipients of disability pensions' as part of long-term sustainability measures (p19). Disability was thus seen as a key element within the development of active labour market policies in Hungary' NRP, while reforming disability pensions was viewed as a key element of 'modernising' the social protection system.

Due to a tightening of eligibility rules there was already evidence in 2007 of falling numbers of new disability pensions (a 12% fall between 2006 and 2007).

A radical reform of the disability pension system was being implemented in January 2008 that will move people assessed as having work capacity out of the benefits system, via a transitional rehabilitation benefit scheme. The aim was to constrain early retirement on grounds of disability and to remove historical systems in which permanent inactivity was viewed as a course of first resort (p113).

The new system of targeted rehabilitation support anticipated greater compliance/conditionality for claimants in exchange for greater guarantees of personal training support (based on individual development plans). It was envisaged that 10,000 disabled people would be eligible (p117).

2009 NRP implementation report

As with the NRP, disability features as a key concern in Hungary's implementation report and there has been 'rigorous reform' of the disability pensions system (including tightening eligibility criteria).

Legislative change has been enacted and it is still estimated there will be 10,000 fewer new disability pensions in 2009 (p24). There is, however, some concern about the practical management and administration of the new scheme, which is based on extensive assessments of residual health/ability, leading to some 15% to claimants being judged ineligible for disability pension (p65).

A Pathways to Work programme was introduced in 2009 (similar to UK model?) and includes a new system of vocational rehabilitation benefit targeting disabled people (p9). Disabled people are also targeted for reallocation of ESF funds to assisting disadvantaged job-seeker groups (along with Roma and people from deprived regions). However, there appear to be fewer people benefiting from or seeking actual training than was anticipated (p67).

The 2010 planned increase in disability pension rate has been cancelled (p25) but other cuts in child benefit and personal income tax allowance, and new dwelling taxes, have so far either exempted or cushioned disabled people (p23, 28, 29)

There is no reference to the UN Convention, which Hungary ratified on 20 July 2007.



Ireland

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/Ireland%20NRP%202008-10%20FINAL.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

There was evidence of recognition of disability issues within the Irish NRP, with passing references in sections on labour market training, benefits etc. There was also a new specific section devoted to the topic (p67-68). However, it is notable that there were very few new proposals in these references, referring rather to past actions or projects in progress (e.g. repeated from the 2007 implementation report).

Employment situation of disabled people

The NRP did contain specific reference to the employment of disabled people, quoting an employment rate of 37%. It was encouraging to see a stated target to increase the employment rate to 45% and the participation rate for education, training and employment to 50%, by 2016. (p61). This relies on 2004 data, while other groups are reported for 2006 or 2007 (this paragraph was also reproduced from the 2007 implementation plan). There was also a stated target to increase the employment of those closest to the labour market, and public sector recruitment target of 3%. It was useful to see evidence of research, showing that 36% of public employers had met this target (p68).

There was no reporting of disabled people's unemployment or economic activity and no breakdown by gender or age, for example. The 2008 ANED country report on employment contained some critical commentary and examples that could have been useful. The Central Statistical Office reproduced key questions from the ad hoc disability module in the first quarter of 2004 (this appears to be the basis for reporting in the NRP). In this survey, 10.9% (298,300) of all persons aged 15 to 64 indicated that they had a long-standing health problem or disability. This compared with 10.3% (274,200) in the second quarter of 2002. The reported 37% (110,800) employment rate compared with 63.8% for the total population. Of those in employment, the highest percentage who reported a disability or health problem were in the Agriculture, forestry and fishing (8.2%) sector. Other production industries had the lowest percentage at just 4.9%. Persons reporting a disability or health problem worked on average 34.9 hours a week. This compared to 36.8 hours a week for the total population in employment.

According to the 2006 national Census, disabled people constitute only 4% of those in employment overall (reflecting the age demographic). The Equality Authority and ESRI Report *The Experience of Discrimination in Ireland: Analysis of the QNHS Equality Module* identified disability as a strong effect on work-related discrimination, with this group being 2.8 times more likely to perceive such problems. In January 2008 the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) also commissioned independent market research to establish a broad overview of the employment situation of disabled graduates (a survey of 300 businesses). This suggested that more needs to be done in respect of disability training for employers, and that disability equality training correlates with larger numbers of disabled people employed.

Policy proposals

The NRP reported that income support levels had increased for people receiving disability allowance (p11).

Since the Lisbon employment rate target for 2010 had already been met for women females and older workers, activation programmes had focused particularly on disabled people (along with older workers and lone parent) (p13). ESF funding had been targeted also to skills training targeting groups marginalised from the labour market (p14).

There was attention to transport accessibility in the capital investment framework, and a sectoral disability plan for Department of Transport (p57). Disability remained a concern of the High Level Activation Group (p65) and the Preventative Process continues to target disabled people closest to the labour market, through training and support into employment (p66, 68). The Wage Subsidy Scheme and Supported Employment Programme had been reviewed and recommendations were being considered (p68). However, the NRP contained no new proposals in these various areas.

Work on a comprehensive disability and employment strategy is a significant development, achieved through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's *Sectoral Plan for People with Disabilities 2006-2010*, and the establishment of a Consultative Forum (p67). This strategy should be concluded during the period of the NRP. The budget for training was increased from €74m in 2007 to €77m in 2008, and a new 'bridging programme' between specialist and mainstream employment training was being developed by the HSE FÁS Working Group on Disability (p68)

2009 NRP Implementation Report

There was more clear evidence of attention to disability issues within the overall approach of the Implementation Plan than was evident in the original NRP. The stated approach is underpinned by development of a comprehensive national disability strategy, informed by national research, which has been drafted and is now under discussion (p72).

It was again encouraging to see reference to an employment rate of disabled people (although this was still drawn from CSO figures for 2004). There was also a quantifiable target to increase participation rates in education, training and employment (aiming towards 50% by 2016) (p62). More specifically, there is an express target 'to raise, by 7,000, the employment level of people with disabilities who do not have difficulty in holding down a job' (p73). However, the current rising unemployment situation is worrying, and there is a need for activation policies not to lose sight of disabled people who are amongst furthest from the labour market (p68).

The Commission's assessment of the NRP had noted the need to provide support to disabled people, amongst disadvantaged groups. There appear to be commitments to extend the unemployment Prevention Process to target disabled people (p70). A decision was taken to make permanent the Wage Subsidy Scheme for employees with partial work capacity of 80% or less (p72). Disabled people have also been targeted (along with other groups 'outside the workforce') for ESF funded intervention on employment activation (p11). This approach 'based on individual case management of people on illness/disability welfare payments' is currently being piloted (p71). There is a stated emphasis on 'mainstream training opportunities wherever possible' and a new 'bridging initiative' from rehabilitation training to vocational training was approved in 2009 (p73).

Turning to other areas of support, people in receipt of Invalidity or Disability Benefit are receiving subsidised assistance for remedial works as part of the Warmer Homes Scheme (p53).

Planned capital investment for the Transport 27 programme includes a specific commitment to improve accessibility by implementing the Department for Transport's sectoral plan in accordance with the Disability Act (p57).

This assessment seems broadly in line with expectation as Government policy on the employment of disabled people remains broadly the same in terms of the National Disability Strategy, the Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015, and Programme for Government 2007-2012. However, there must be concern about economic crisis. The Government commissioned the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes in 2009 'to examine the current expenditure programmes in each Government Department and to make recommendations for reducing public service numbers so as to ensure a return to sustainable public finances'. In its Report the Group recommended a reduction of 17,300 in persons employed in the public service, which may have negative implications for the employment of disabled people. The McCarthy Report also made a number of recommendations to cut funding for disability organisations and to education for disabled people (special needs assistants), and for the transfer of the disability functions of the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform to the Office for Mental Health & Disability under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children.

It could be noted that the National Disability Authority published its progress Report on 2007 target of 3% employment in public bodies. The main findings indicate that 87.5% of Government Departments, 76.9% of local government organisations and 51.3% of public sector bodies have achieved or exceeded the statutory minimum 3% target.

There is no reference to the UN Convention, which Ireland has signed but not yet ratified.

Italy

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/PNR_IT_EN_202008.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

Whilst disabled people were acknowledged in the 2008-2010 NRP, disability was not a prominent theme (and only appeared later in the document rather than in the overview, general situation and priorities). There were some reference to assistive home technologies, homelessness, pensions, job placements, and care systems. There were two references to 'the handicapped' in the English text, which might benefit from improved translation.

Employment situation of disabled people

Figures were provided for expenditure on labour market policies, in which expenditure on 'Incentives for the disabled' was indicated – rising from €74.6m in 2001 to €94.6m in 2005, but falling dramatically to €32.5m in 2006 (this was not explained, although there are reductions in other categories also, indicating more investment in passive than active policies recently) (p101).

There was no reporting of the employment situation of disabled people, although 'young people, women and elderly people' were identified in the category of 'less advantaged' workers (p13). There was more detailed commentary on the situation of women. However, the ANED 2008 country report included some critical commentary and examples. In Italy, statistical data about disability and employment were updated in 2005. Academic and Public Institutions are now collecting information about recent years. Official data will probably be available after 2010, when there will be a new Census. In 2005 the number of disabled persons, registered in the provincial list (according to Law 68/99), was 589.543 (North-west: 81.120; North-east: 52.096; Centre: 111.687; South: 344.640).

Policy proposals

There were few references to new initiatives or policies in the NRP. There was a commitment to 'targeted job placement' for disabled people. This involved simplification of procedure and an increase in the national fund that provides technical and financial support to employers (p107). A commitment was made in 2007 to fund €2.5m per year for a programme of work on assistive home technologies for older and disabled people (p55).

There were commitments to social inclusion and a report on inclusion forthcoming. In this context, 'families with physically or mentally handicapped children' are referred to amongst the priorities. In relation to health and social care (including support for disabled people) there was commitment to create a fund to be managed by the Regions and Autonomous Provinces. In the new scheme 'resources from the fund will be allocated to the beneficiaries through a single point of access to the network of services, including with personalised assistance plans and enhanced home services'. The investment will rise from €100m in 2007, to €400m in 2009 (p107). Unspecified 'measures' were noted to assist people assessed as having 66% disability who become homeless through eviction (along with older people and people on low incomes etc) (p107). Changes were proposed, for 2008, to increase welfare pensions for older people with high levels of disability (p107).



2009 NRP Implementation Report

The 2009 Italian Implementation Plan (reviewed in English draft) contained no direct references to disability issues or to the situation of disabled people, nor to work capacity or any related health, sickness, care policies.

The economic crisis has implications for disabled people, and mainly in employment. Several businesses and companies have ceased trading and the unemployment rate has risen in the last year. For example, Alitalia airlines no longer specifically recruit disabled workers (however, there is a lack of accurate quantitative data more generally). The only Act to come into force, as a consequence of the crisis is decree-law No. 78, 1 July 2009, becoming law No. 102, 3 August 2009, and which contains some positive news for the stimulation of public employment. The same law also establishes the opportunity for leave or work permits (with a reduction of salary) to people caring for disabled family members. The Ministry for Labour (Resolution No. 41, 15 May 2009) has established that tutors or administrative tutors of persons with severe disabilities cannot have work permits (according the art. 33, law No. 104/92), if they are not parents or members of the family.

It is worth noting that a new National Observatory on the Status of People with Disabilities was also initiated (Law No. 18/09).

The report makes no reference to the UN Convention on, which Italy ratified (with its Optional Protocol) on 3 March 2009.



Latvia

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/LV_Report_on_NLPL_Oct%202008.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were some references to disability in the NRP (at least 11 in the text compared to only 4 for women) which, although limited, should also be read in the context of Latvia's recent entry to the European Union.

Employment situation of disabled people

There was no reference to employment trends or quantitative indicators of the situation of disabled people in the Latvian NRP. However, the 2008 ANED country report on employment contained some commentary and examples that provide useful context. There are no definitive statistical data on the employment of disabled people in Latvia. Different state institutions have their own databases. The Ministry of Welfare produced a Statistical Bulletin on People with Disabilities 2002-2006. The State Medical Expertise Commission on Health and Working Capacities maintains a database on disability matters, including data about employment status, age, gender, impairment type, severity, etc. The State Social Insurance Agency maintains a data base on pension and social benefit recipients, amount of pensions, etc. The State Employment Agency registers and records unemployed persons and persons seeking employment. Their database contains general data on disabled people registered as employed or as job seekers.

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

Policy proposals

Reporting on progress since the last period, the 2008-10 NRP noted a general strengthening of efforts with disadvantaged labour groups: 'Several new measures have been expanded and started regarding the integration of youth, pre-retirement age persons and women after the childcare leave, as well as the disabled and persons of other social exclusion risk groups into the labour market' (p 12). Disabled people were also referred to in relation to action on 'Promoting an inclusive labour market' (see Measures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 of Annex 1). Measures 3.1-3.3 included commitments to wage subsidies for disabled people and other vulnerable groups: 'establishing subsidized work positions for the disabled and other social exclusion risk groups' (p 50).

Support for the implementation of projects aimed at provision of subsidised job places for social exclusion risk groups. 616 persons were supported in 2006, 202 in 2007. These are small numbers of beneficiaries and it is not entirely clear which groups these attach to. There was a reference to the co-ordination of employment policies and the use of EU structural funds.

The report highlights its proposed targeting of younger disabled people: 'To involve pre-pension age people in the labour market... By developing active employment policy measures organised by the SEA... the projects promoting employment measures by supporting social risk groups: economically inactive persons and unemployed persons, incl. persons in the age group of 15-24 years having difficulties to integrate in the labour market, disabled' (p34). There is perhaps some tension between the 'all groups' approach and the targeted approach to younger disabled people (also repeated later in the document).

Further financial commitments were made to aid employment integration via a range of measures: 'financing is planned to be used for improvement of education, employment and health care infrastructure. In order to improve vocational education infrastructure and modernize training equipment of higher education institutions, re-planning and renovation of training premises is supported in accordance with the study course standards and education programmes, as well as acquisition of modern devices and equipment... (p66)'. The exact levels of commitment were not stated, nor methods to ensure concordance with these commitments. These would be welcome.

Educational mainstreaming for young disabled people was also mentioned: In 2007, 21 projects had been approved within ESF Activity 3.3.7 'Integration of young persons with special needs into the education system'. Financing in 2007 would be LVL 0.46m, and LVL 0.5m. Similarly, commitments (although unquantified) were made to using enhanced social care to support disabled people's employment opportunities. Public social care institutions were to be modernised and adjusted to offer social care and rehabilitation services of a new type within or outside institutions, in order to promote return of disabled people and their family members to the labour market.

Priority 3 provided more specific commitments under the heading of enhanced human resources. Under priority 3 the report provided a statement on 'Development of Human Resources and Promotion of Employment' that included reference to special measures planned to promote involvement of social exclusion risk groups. Specifically, it planned to provide better accessibility to ICT by creating conditions for e-employment, distance education and development of professional skills. It aimed to provide ICT appropriate to particular types of impairment, for example, blind and visually impaired persons, persons with mental development disorders, etc. (p 67). Similarly, the report recorded efforts 'To adapt education services to socially excluded population groups... By introducing distance learning and modern information and communications technology methods more widely in the process of acquisition of professional education...ESF projects for implementation of professional rehabilitation and training of disabled persons are carried out. The financing figures suggest this was retrospective reporting rather than plans for 2008-2010.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

The visibility of disability issues in the Latvian Implementation Plan was slightly more prominent than in the original NRP, with evidence of involving disabled people in policy development. The creation of 'subsidised work positions' for disabled people in 2009-10 is identified (p39 and Annex 1, p35). There are proposals to target employment skills training for disabled people through a 'complex support programme' (p39) and to 'modernise' social care institutions with a view to promoting 'return of disabled and their family members to the labour market' (p51).

No comprehensive employment data appears to be available for the most recent reporting period, and this underlines the concerns raised last year about the availability and reporting of appropriate statistical information concerning the situation of disabled people in Latvia. According to State Employment Agency statistics, the general unemployment rate at the end of 2007 was 4.9%. At the end of 2008 it had risen to 7%, and in June 2009 11.5% (129,269 persons, and on 22 September 140,000 were registered as unemployed. The number of registered unemployed persons with disabilities receiving activation support is growing too: in 2007 there were 3,370 persons, in 2008 4,458.

It was very encouraging to see evidence of new strategic consultation with disabled people's organisations, as follows: 'To involve non-governmental organisations representing disabled persons in all stages of decision-making, in 2008, a new type of cooperation was launched with non-governmental organisations representing persons with disabilities. These organisations were provided the opportunity, via the National Council for the Disabled, to participate in the decision making at the highest national political level, thus ensuring an equal opportunity and the inclusion of important proposals in these decisions and their further implementation.' (p42)

There are plans to create e-employment opportunities through more accessible ICTs for disabled people (p53). A small number of work experience placements were funded for disabled school children (Annex 1, p31) and teacher training is also being implemented (Annex 1, p45). Educational disadvantage is acknowledged as a factor in employment disadvantage. Amongst initiatives co-funded by EU funds will also include 'day care centres for disabled persons' (p40).

The economic situation in Latvia is very difficult and is affecting state financed rehabilitation programs. In 2006 the state budget for social and vocational rehabilitation services was LVL 2,530,700 and in 2007 LVL 3,369,800. During 2008 the available state budget remained approximately stable, but during 2009 the budget was reduced to LVL 3,084,300, affecting the quality of services and the number of service recipients.

During 2008-2009 no new Laws or policies regarding the employment of disabled persons were developed, in part due to other tasks of Government and the Ministry of Welfare, mainly focusing on finding solutions to reduced finances in the state budget arising from the economic crisis. Reductions are leading to the reorganisation of several state institutions, including those working with disabled people, for example the Technical Aids Centre (a state agency provider of technical aids to disabled persons) was reorganized and incorporated with the National Rehabilitation Centre "Vaivari" (a medical rehabilitation institution).

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which Latvia has signed but not yet ratified.



Lithuania

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/27-10-2008_NRP_Lithuania_EN.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were a few references to disability in the NRP (11 compared to 26 for women – although two of these were an accidental repetition of an example in two places in the report). Disabled people were acknowledged in the main purposes of the plan but only in the context of health prevention (i.e. within a medical model). Disability was noted briefly in relation to action on vocational rehabilitation and access to lifelong learning.

Employment situation of disabled people

Employment trends were briefly noted (on p51) noting a small reduction in activity of the labour force. The 'rate of employment and economic activity' for disabled people was described as 'less than average in the country' but no figures were given. Intervention with disabled people was measured under Objective 9 with reference to the EU Guidelines on employment (p51) – 'during the 1st half of 2008 there were 5.2 thousand of unemployed people and those employees warned about dismissal from work sent to vocational training programs, including...0.3 thousand of disabled (5 per cent) were sent to vocational training.'

There was specific reference to disabled people in Measure 100.3, which included evidence of the numbers of people completing programmes (e.g. pp55-56) but these numbers were small (e.g. (154 individuals were sent to professional rehabilitation program'). Whilst evidence based monitoring is welcome, it would be helpful to see also more evidence of the bigger picture for disabled people.

The ANED country report on employment also contained some commentary and examples that could have been useful. It is estimated that 10.5% of all disabled people in Lithuania have a job. Employment data is collected and presented by the Statistical department of the State Government, by the Employment Exchange, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Safety. Each year the Ministry edits the Social Report where very general statistics on employment of disabled people are presented. Their reliability is questionable because the statistics are based on formal criteria (three levels of workability). More nuanced or detailed statistics are difficult to obtain. There are some comparisons of employment rates for disabled and non-disabled people. We observe a slow growth of employment for disabled people, partly because of employers motivation to obtain tax reductions or to participate in experimental initiatives with EU support. There are, however, also negative attitudes toward employment and fears about accommodations in the work place or bureaucratic requirements.

There is a general legal system of classification of disabled people based on concepts of workability and needs, or local (regional or institutional) initiatives and projects implementations, especially the employment situation of mental (psychical) disabled people. Only 1% of these people have a job, often this job has a very low social value. There no real discussion about gender, age, nationality of disabled people in the employment evidence. There are several studies and projects for people with mild intellectual disability or people with visual impairments, but studies and projects about others are more rare. There is insufficient evidence relating to some groups of disabled people.



Policy proposals

There were very few policy proposals in the NRP. On progress since the last report, there was one example of a limited project under Measure 50 on organising entrepreneurship promotion campaigns - 'the project of Training of Business Skills for Disabled of Public Institution Panevėžys Business Consulting Centre' (p33). Under Measure 100.8 there was intention to financial support to 'social corporations' and vocational rehabilitation (p56). There will be a new task force on social enterprises law, including social partners.

The significance of life-long learning for employment was recognised (pp77-78) and here the need to accommodate disabled people was demonstrated: 'The Strategy specifies the measures for adjustment of educational content, topics, measures and methods of general education programs for adult individuals as well as disabled adults, the elderly and social exclusion groups. It is planned to introduce various methods of studies organizations corresponding with needs of the individuals seeking to increase accessibility of science and studies system for working people or individuals occupied otherwise as well as for groups of socially vulnerable people.'

2009 NRP implementation report

There are more extensive references to disability in the Lithuania report than in many other countries, somewhat in contrast to the original NRP. There may be some concern that there has been some delay in implementing EC Regulation 800/2008 to co-ordinate support for employment of disabled people (p10).

Disabled people (along with youth and older people) are viewed as particularly vulnerable to labour market exclusion (p55) while amendment to the Law on Employment Financing targets long-term unemployed people with particular emphasis on family carers (p54). Specific initiatives include the project Provision of Vocational Rehabilitation Services at an investment of 14m Litass, which aims to refer 565 disabled people: 'During the 1st half of 2009 there were 217 persons with disabilities participating in the program of vocational rehabilitation. 18 persons completed the program with 4 of them getting a job' (p57). Such initiatives are clearly of a very small scale.

The project Support for Social Companies also involved some disabled people accessing training (p57) - 'In QIII 2009, wage subsidies will be paid to 971 people with disabilities, 100 persons will receive the assistant's subsidy and help 730 people with disabilities to perform official functions, and 163 individuals will be referred for general and specialised training' (p135). These projects funded by ESF (a further 42.4 million Litass is requested for structural funds). However, disabled people constituted only 2% of participants in vocational training (p62).

The employment of disabled people is a political objective, although this is not evident in the Implementation Report. However in 2008-9 there has been little policy change. The most important laws are the Law on Social Integration of Disabled People (2004), the Law on Support for Employment (for disabled people and other socially excluded groups) (2006), and the Order of Ministry of Labour and Social Safety for Conditions for Employment subsidy (2006).

It is worth noting that the number of disabled people recorded in official figures rose by 2.2% to 258,848 (7% of the total population) compared with 2007.



We still do not have disabled people's employment statistics and trends in 2009, but in year 2008 there were 14,653 registered unemployed disabled people and 5,668 of them were employed. In 2008 there were nine professional rehabilitation institutions, which provided professional rehabilitation services. These institutions offered opportunities to acquire professional qualifications through 139 programmes. 173 disabled people completed programmes, and 63 of them found jobs. However the employment of disabled persons remains critically low.

There is no concrete data about the influence of the crisis on disabled people's employment but there are clear general labour market tendencies, which have a direct influence. At the beginning 2008, the most important problem was the lack of skilled workers; by the end of the year there was an increased number of unemployed people. Compared to 2007, the number of unemployed persons increased by 47,500 (28.5%). In the first quarter of 2009, unemployment increased and opportunities were very limited.

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which Lithuania has signed but not yet ratified.



Luxembourg

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/08%2010%2017%20PNR%20Rapport%20Lisbonne%202008%20VF.pdf> (in French)

Visibility and mainstreaming

Disability issues were visibly addressed in the Luxembourg NRP (e.g. with more than 20 references to disability, handicap or incapacity for work, etc). There was a specific objective to improve support for disabled workers, with detailed actions listed. Attention was given to continuation of past policies and changes to public employment services.

Employment situation of disabled people

The situation of disabled people was recognised in attempting to measure employment trends. For example, 'The only category of unemployed people that continues to grow at a high rate is disabled workers and those with reduced working capacity (+30% per year over the last two years)' (p42). It was noted that '...the state does not currently fulfil obligations concerning the mandatory employment quota of 5%...its support for the employment of disabled workers for the year 2007 through the creation of positions equivalent to 2000 man-hours/week among administrations and ministries' (p50). Repeating points raised in the Luxembourg NSR on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, there was reference to the OECD country review of sickness and disability insurance in Luxembourg which suggested that 'so far the new procedure has essentially produced a new category of disabled unemployed without allowing a sufficient number of returns to employment' (p46).

The 2008 ANED country report on employment also included examples and sources that may have been useful. Luxembourg was included in the APPLICA/CESEP Study of the compilation of the disability data from the administrative registers of the EU member states in 2008. Data is also available from the Ministère du Travail et de l'Emploi/Administration de l'Emploi. Details can be found in the activity report of the employment office and in the Luxembourg's employment bulletin (ADEM) which publishes monthly statistics e.g. in August 2008. (pages 11-13). This information is easy to access, reliable and up to date. However, these numbers only refer to people who fit in the 'disabled workers' category. They give information about gender, but not of the nature, or origin of the impairment, nor of the ethnic origin of the subjects. They do consider the distinction between disabled workers in open or sheltered employment, and between the different measures. The employment rate for disabled persons is not as easy to establish as for non-disabled people. The number of disabled workers is known, but number of unemployed disabled persons is not. A change has been noticed since legal change in 2003, before there was no established distinction between 'disabled people' and 'disabled workers' and so disabled people did not have to sign up at the employment administration.

Policy proposals

Action measures in the NRP were focused on developments within the government employment agency (and partnerships with other agencies). Much of this represented a continuation of recent policies. There was no reference to accessibility in the workplace or wider social inclusion measures.

Under the Law of 12 September 2003 disabled people able to work can apply for the status of disabled worker (or claim severe disability income allowance if unable to work, or if a job is unavailable). Disabled workers must register with the relevant government department (ADEM).

A medical board decides on entitlement to the status (based on percentage disability). The Commission on guidance and vocational retraining then decide whether the person is directed to the labour market or to a sheltered workshop. The focus in the specific objective to improve support for disabled workers was on the Disabled Workers Service (STH), which is responsible for guidance, training, placement and rehabilitation.

'Various new initiatives are planned' for the STH, including an increasing number of reintegration measures to registered disabled workers, in collaboration with the youth employment service, 'personalized job seekers' and the National Social Action service.

There were proposals for 'niche employment for disabled workers' (e.g. in the public sector) and it is argued that '...the reoccupation of posts vacated by disabled workers could be achieved with the assistance of STH'. Mention was made of organising recruitment workshops in this context and educating businesses about the recruitment services offered by STH and the different measures and aid offered by the state in case of hiring registered disabled workers (also organising workshops and recruitment information for disabled workers themselves). These do not appear to be new measures. However, 'To optimize the selection of candidates, preselection by the STH and intensive coaching' was proposed (p50).

'In the context of vocational training for disabled workers, the STH is continuing its efforts to cooperate with institutions in the Greater Region and especially with the Euro-BBW (Bitbourg) where the first young disabled workers successfully completed their skills training in 2008.'

'As part of its employment retention policy, STH has increased its visits to employers to detect early onset of problems arising in relations between disabled employees and employers. The strategy is envisaged as a kind of mediation between the two parties with the aim of sustaining the employment relationship or, if this option is not possible, reallocation of the disabled worker to a new company and their replacement of another person' (pp50-51).

'In a focused approach to employability, the STH applied a scientific method for evaluating, on the one hand, the skills of a person and, on the other hand, the demands of the workplace to ensure a sustainable investment and quantify the loss of performance of disabled workers' (p51)

2009 NRP implementation report

Disability issues were again evident in the 2009 Implementation Report, although less so than in the original NRP document. In this sense, the issues are highlighted in a specific section of the report, addressing the specific objective on 'improving the care of disabled workers' (p60). There is no evidence of mainstreaming in other sections, although some of the measures suggest mainstreaming approaches. Unlike the 2008-2010 NRP, there is no reference to disabled people or disability issues in the general context of the report or substantiated by any data or statistics (e.g. in relation to the employment quota reported last year).

In relation to the specific objective, the Luxembourg Government makes commitments to develop aspects of the sheltered workshop system for those marginalised from the open labour market. This focuses on raising the visibility and availability of products manufactured in the workshops (p60). Strengthening the sheltered employment sector does raise some concerns in the context of European policy approaches.

However, there are then a number of actions related to the open labour market, which is very welcome.



These include vocational training for disabled workers and advocacy to increase employment in the municipal and para-state sectors (p60).

Mirroring actions in several other countries, there is the intention to develop a more 'scientific' and quantifiable approach to assessing employability, based on both the individual's skills and the demands of the workplace. It is encouraging here to see that both sides of the equation are at least mentioned (rather than only the functional capacity of the worker).

There are also two specific pre-emptive interventions of interest. First, there is commitment to a system of early detection and mediation to address 'problems between disabled employees and employers' with the goal of maintaining employment or reassigning the employee to a new company (p61).

The second suggests some evidence of an increasing understanding of supported employment concepts in the process:

'active involvement with *Job Coaching ATP* to educate disabled workers and employers to the concept of supported employment as an intensive and individualized support of a person to employment and the job with the emphasis on the empowerment and accountability of the person. It focuses on the development and the expression of the personal resources of the worker balanced against the needs of the business' (p61)

There was no mention of the UN Convention, which Luxembourg has signed but not yet ratified.

Malta

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/final301008.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were very few references to disability in the NSR (only 6 compared to 49 for women). There was very little evidence of disability mainstreaming, which is disappointing. However, there were references to including disabled people in major programmes and also in special targeted actions.

Employment situation of disabled people

The Maltese NRP contained no cited evidence on employment levels or trends for disabled people. However, the 2008 ANED country report on employment contained some following commentary and examples that could be useful. The Employment and Training Corporation (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. The NSO 2005 Census gathered information about the status of employment among disabled people. The National Commission for Persons with a Disability analysed existing data to report in 2008. The data should show differences between disabled and non-disabled employment rates. The data reveal, 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.

Policy proposals

The NRP noted the major Employment Aid Programme to be launched in 2008 (co-funded by ESF), which was also discussed in the Maltese NSR document. Under the new programme, 'A subsidy of half the wage cost and half the employer's social security contribution will be made available to employers who recruit persons from a defined list of groups and who retain them in employment for at least twelve months' (p71). This includes disabled people.

The public employment agency, The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) placed emphasis on increasing the role of specialist NGOs via its Social Inclusion Partnership Programme from 2009. These NGOs would provide 'prevocational and on-the-job training to clients in their field of expertise, will help them find work and will monitor and support them during the first months of their work placement' (p72). People with various impairments are targeted specifically here. Disability was also mentioned with reference to inclusion in the National ICT Framework (p10), including the provision of used PCs and software to registered disabled people under two schemes (p65).

2009 NRP Implementation Reports

There was some small evidence of disability mainstreaming in Malta's 2009 Implementation Report.

For example, the national ICT strategy is partially conceptualised as a means to address the social inequalities experienced by disabled people (p56), including the provision of refurbished computers (p59) as discussed in the original NRP. Physical accessibility is also noted when referring to development of college training infrastructure (p103).

Significantly, €10m of ESF funds have been allocated to support wage and employer subsidies to promote the recruitment of disadvantaged groups. Disabled people are targeted with a very substantial '75% of the actual wage for the first year of employment and 60% for the subsequent second and third year' (with expectation of continued employment for a further year). (p83). There is also a likelihood of some policy transfer from the UK, utilising the 'Pathways to Work' model (p86).

There is extensive concern to improve the sustainability of the health care system, although disabled people are not noted in this context.

The report seems reasonable in the sense that there have not been any major new policies specifically related to disabled people and employment. However, the government did adopt a tele-working policy in February 2008 aimed at enabling those working part-time or full-time to perform part of their work duties (where possible) from home. Although the policy was mainly aimed at increasing the employment rate of women, it can also help disabled people participate in employment by providing more flexible working arrangements (Department of Employee Relations). However, there is also the risk of increasing disabled people's physical isolation since they will remain at home.

Significantly, the National Commission (KNPD) had just issued a draft policy consultation document on employment and disabled people, which was not mentioned in the Implementation Report. This addresses enforcement of non-discrimination, increasing the employment quota from 2% to 4% (but making it voluntary), introducing a comprehensive assessment process, reform of training, and increasing flexible/home working options.

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which Malta has signed but not yet ratified.



Netherlands

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/NRP2008%20The%20Netherlands.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were high levels of visibility in the 2008-2010 NRP with a number of references to disabled people and employment. There was less direct evidence of mainstreaming, but some general policies would support unobtrusive mainstreaming of disability concerns.

Employment situation of disabled people

Although there were extensive references to disability and policies proposed, there appeared to be a lack of data or evidence about disabled people's employment situation in the NRP. The 2008 ANED country report on employment contained some commentary and examples that could have been useful. For example, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal Cultureel Planburo - SCP) Report (2007) provided employment statistics related to persons with 'physical disabilities', but did not include information on persons with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities (due to the lack of a national database or recent nation-wide study). The SCP Report referred to the situation up to 2003. Statistics on participation in employment were set out in Chapter 4 and additional statistical information was contained in the appendices. Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, CBS) compiles statistics primarily on the use of disability benefits. Employment statistics can only partially be derived from these figures. CBS conducts an ongoing survey of availability for employment within the potential workforce (Enquete Beroepsbevolking). Since 2002 this survey includes questions on disability - in this survey 1.8 million people report that they consider themselves disabled to some degree and that their disability or illness restricts their ability to work. Of this group, 685,000 (38%) have a job. Of those who have a job, almost 50% need some form of workplace accommodation. The statistics are disaggregated for gender and age. Disabled women and older disabled people are less likely to be employed than men and younger persons.

The SCP report also disaggregates statistics for severity of impairment and type of impairment, but only for visual, motor and hearing impairment. The estimated 110,000 persons with an intellectual disability in the Netherlands, for example, would not be included in this survey. Also not included in the statistics are the factors of race or ethnicity. The CBS survey includes only persons who are considered able to work for more than 12 hours per week. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport reports on the use of disability support measures, but since 2004 it has ceased differentiating age groups, ethnicity or types of impairment. Improvement in employment participation is not reflected in the statistics set out in the SCP Report, to the contrary, employment participation had worsened.

Policy proposals

There were many references to disabled people in the NRP and a very wide interpretation of the issues of disability and paid employment, ranging from open employment, through subsidised work, sheltered work and small business entrepreneurship. The range of governmental concerns was reflected in section 4.2.3 of the report:

'Some groups have proven to have great difficulty finding paid employment. The cabinet is taking additional steps so these specific groups will also participate more in the labour market and in society.'

These groups include the partially disabled (receiving disability benefits under the Work and Income (Capacity for Work) Act (WIA), Invalidity Insurance (Young Disabled Persons) Act (Wajong) or Sheltered Employment Act (WSW)), the long-term unemployed, people entitled to receive social assistance benefits, young people and minorities.’

The background policy context was provided with reference to the Bakker Commission, and its target of 80% employment participation by 2016 (see similar figure in the UK). There was evidence of options for those marginalised from the unsubsidised open labour market. This was especially the case for young disabled people (covered by then Young Disabled Person Act: Wajong) who struggle to make the transition from education to paid work. Efforts would be made to enhance access to, and maintenance of, paid employment and greater coordination of provision as... ‘regional Locations for Work and Income will provide integrated services’ (p10). Intervention to encourage employers to take on young disabled people received some attention here.

As with many country approaches, disabled people were recognised as a disadvantaged group and explicitly referred to as a ‘vulnerable’ labour market. Group-comparative data was provided to support this assertion. In response wage subsidy activity would be increased, whilst efforts would be made to prevent young disabled people slipping through the service net.

‘Employers will also receive incentives to hire older workers, the long-term unemployed and partially disabled persons (term partially disabled not defined). The Cabinet will also be taking other measures. The study-work requirement will be introduced for young people between the ages of 18 and 27, as a result of which young people will either be in school or working’ (p18).

In concrete terms, wage subsidies appeared as an important element, as this section of the NRP suggests:

‘The cabinet also wants to offer employers a financial incentive to help people who have been standing a considerable time on the sidelines to find work. Starting on 1 January 2009, the Employee Insurance Implementing Body (UWV) can grant a wage costs subsidy to employers for a maximum of one year for hiring employees under the age of 50 who are fully or partially disabled or have been unemployed for more than a year and are receiving unemployment benefits (proposed legislation to stimulate labour participation, STAP). One of the conditions for receiving the wage costs subsidy is that it must involve a real job: an existing job opening or a new job that will in principle continue after that year.’

Wage subsidies should not exceed half minimum wage and would be aimed at those closest to the labour market. The report also, rightly, includes a focus on those much further from the paid labour market:

‘Municipalities already have that option at their disposal. In addition, since 18th July 2008, municipalities have had more options for helping people who are far removed from the labour market to gain experience as part of an employment scheme to facilitate the creation of jobs for those receiving benefits under the Work and Social Assistance Act (‘participation jobs’), while retaining their social benefits’ (section 4.2.3).

The notion of participation jobs appears to be a recognition of the importance of stepping-stone opportunities to paid work via work experience, a halfway-house approach which avoids the full risk of the open employment without being overly protective and dependency creating.

Section 4.2.1 referred to Partial Capacity support policies. A major issue in controlling the numbers of disabled people entering the disability benefits system via the 'sickness system' is the process by which disabled people drift away from work. The following extension of work-based partial capacity sickness benefits points to a possible solution:

'Following the extension of the obligation to continue paying wages in the event of occupational disability to a total of two years, the Work and Income (Capacity for Work) Act (WIA) was introduced on 29 December 2005'

There was a less clear statement around the question of small businesses. Whilst a commitment to encouraging disabled peoples' entrepreneurship is made early in the report, it is less clear who would pick up the costs of adaptation: 'Possible measures could include eliminating risks for financing the workplace adaptations needed to hire young disabled people and limiting the maximum premium that small businesses pay in the framework of the partial occupational disability work resumption (WGA) scheme.' (p34)

Section 4.2.2 of the NRP referred to help for those unable to work. Although perhaps sounding more straightforward than in practice (e.g. who counts as disabled and the threshold for establishing inability to work) there was an unequivocal commitment:

'Income protection will be the first priority for people with severe physical and mental disabilities who have no prospects of work at all.' (section 4.2.2) This is reassuring, the need to keep under review who counts as able/unable to work and flexible porous boundaries between these two are important.

At a time when some governments were moving away from sheltered provision, the NRP acknowledged its growth. Future plans for sheltered work under the WSW Act were less clear. A statement of the implications of the De Vries Commission findings would have been welcomed.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

By comparison with the 2008-2010 NRP there was slightly less profile for disability in the Implementation Report, focusing on key developments only. There is a distinct lack of supporting data or statistics on the employment situation of disabled people in the Netherlands. Trends are presented, for example, for ethnic minorities (p80) but not for disabled people (with the exception of benefit claimants, see below). In the Netherlands there are still no reliable statistics available on disabled people's activity rates, duration of contracts, reasons for leaving workforce etc. National statistics concerning disabled people are available although no distinction is made between those relying on benefits and those who combine wages with benefits. In July 2009 a total of 817,000 people received disability benefit. That is some 10,000 less than a year before (UWV 2009).

As a consequence of the crisis, employment growth is assumed to be negative in 2009 and 2010, falling by around 1.25% and 2.25% respectively. Unemployment is expected to rise to around 3.9% in 2009 and 6.2% in 2010. However, youth unemployment remained well below the EU average in Q4-2008 (5.0% against 16.4%).

The lack of statistics on unemployment of disabled people makes it difficult to gauge specific impact. There is however an unexpected increased growth of young people applying for disability benefit in 2009. Whether this is due to economic crisis or fear of young people for the new law restricting the right to a disability benefit, is yet unclear. This is partially evidenced in the Implementation Report and attention is given to the declining number of disability benefit claimants (p81 and table on p82).

A significant development in the Implementation Plan is this new Invalidity Insurance (Young Disabled Persons) Act (p82). The new scheme aims for a positive effect for two thirds of those reaching the age of 18 (approximately 10,000 per year). A central part of the scheme is a new law, to come into effect as of January 2010. According to this law, young disabled people will have an individual participation plan, stating the available assistance to find a job or vocational training. There is no automatic right to a benefit but any wage will be supplemented to a level higher than the minimum benefit. When reaching the age of 27 a new assessment will be made to determine eligibility for permanent additional disability benefit (WAJONG). Each year 15,000 people apply for this benefit. It is estimated that two thirds would receive an individual participation plan, the remaining third considered too severely disabled to work and will receive a Wajong-benefit (75% percent of minimum wage).

New powers were acquired by the Social Security Agency (UWV) from January 2009 for employer wage subsidies of up to 12 months (p80). The Dutch Government also announced in September 2009 a temporary law allowing employers to pay disabled workers (whatever their age) less than minimum wage. Municipal governments are then obliged to supplement wages. Employers will also get full compensation for adjustments necessary in the workplace for particular employees with disabilities. This was not mentioned in the Implementation Report.

The government also considered introducing an employment quota but decided against this measure. Instead it stipulates that large national companies, employer organizations and trade unions make a hiring quota part of their new collective labour agreements. Such quotas are now part of least 21% of new collective labour agreements.

Along with this new regime the national government has made agreements with municipal governments, trade unions and national organizations of employers to begin several pilots to establish best practices in helping young disabled people to find regular jobs, best training and opportunities to move from sheltered employment to open jobs. Sheltered employment is discussed in the Implementation Report (p83) where a 'fundamental change' has been proposed in review. However, the government proposes to take a much more modest pilot project approach.

A UK-style 'two ticks' campaign is planned to start in 2009 in the Netherlands. In this campaign employers can use a national logo in recruitment advertisements show that they invite applications from disabled jobseekers. There will also be a campaign to lessen the bureaucratic burden for both employers and employees with disabilities. This was not mentioned in the Implementation Report.

There was no reference to the UN Convention, which The Netherlands has signed but not yet ratified.

Poland

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/PL_NRP_2008-2011.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were very few references to disability issues in the Polish NRP (only in relation to two points). However, amongst these, the continuation of key social insurance reforms had implications for changes in disability pensions (p13).

Employment situation of disabled people

There was no reference to statistical evidence on the situation of disabled people in the Polish NRP. However, the 2008 ANED country report on employment also contained commentary and examples that could have been useful. It would clearly be possible to include information that is missing from the NRP. Up-to-date and easily accessible statistics on disabled people and their situation are published by the Central Statistical Office on their website. There is, however, need for more consistent and complete information on the situation of people with different kinds of impairment. Information about the situation of disabled people in the labour market can be found in the quarterly national Labour Force Survey (LFS). Data on unemployed disabled people and those seeking a job and currently not employed can also be found in the statistical reports from labour offices (although this is not publicly available online). Some information is also published by the State Fund for Rehabilitation.

The unemployment rate in Poland fell continuously until 1998, then virtually doubled (from 10% to almost 20% by 2002) before dropping steadily to 9% at the end of 2007. However, between 2000 and 2006 employment of disabled people did not increase. The activity rate of disabled people is very low (16.1%) compared to the general rate (53.7%). The estimated employment rate was just 13.9%, compared to 48.5%. The situation of disabled women is more difficult than the situation of men. In the fourth quarter of 2007 only 10.3% of disabled women were employed (compared with 17.6% men) and their unemployment rate was higher (14.7% compared to 13.1%). The employment rate was particularly low among people with disability status 'of a significant degree' (3.2% in the last quarter of 2007). Most disabled people who are economically active are aged 45 and over (72%). The lowest employment rate was in the group aged 15-24; the highest in the group aged 40-44.

Policy proposals

As noted there were few specific policy proposals. There was concern to address the unemployment risk of disabled people (and young people and women) but this was not elaborated (p16). There was commitment to amend the Act on retirement pensions and disability benefits paid out of the Social Insurance Fund (and related legislation), in 2008, which would bring new methods for calculating incapacity benefits to all but the oldest claimants (p13-14). There was also commitment to amend the Labour Code (and related instruments) in relation to calculating insurance contributions (p17).

2009 NRP Implementation Report

As for the original NRP document, there is very little reference to disability issues in the Polish Implementation Report, which seeks primarily to address the economic slowdown. Economic stimulus measures will include a lowering of contributions to disability pensions (p5) although this does not appear to affect those receiving such benefits.

Disabled people are targeted (along with 'young people, women and the over-50s') in actions addressing those particularly vulnerable in the current labour market. For example, there will be protection of existing wage subsidy levels with additional incentives on employer costs for hiring disabled workers (p14).

In general, employment activation and social integration programmes targeting disabled people are under review, but there is otherwise no mention of relevant issues or specific initiatives.

It would have been possible to make reference to changing employment trends for disabled people in the Polish Implementation Report. 2008 brought a long-awaited increase in the employment rate as well as activity rate (rising by 0.5% to 15.6%, although this remained very low). Regrettably, the data in the Polish Labour Force Survey for the first quarter 2009 is not so optimistic, as both the employment rate and the activity rate of disabled people registered decreased compared to the average annual activity rate in 2008. On the other hand, the activity rate and the employment rate for the first quarter 2009 are still higher than in the first quarter of 2008 (+0.6% and 0.7% respectively).

Important changes were introduced to the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation which should have a positive impact on the employment of disabled people.

The economic crisis has not been affected by the crisis as much as many other European countries. Nevertheless, cuts in the State budget have been unavoidable. For instance, in 2009 the grant for the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons is PLN99 million less than planned (-13%). Interestingly, despite the crisis, at the beginning of 2009 the State Fund registered a significant rise in numbers of disabled employees in both the open and sheltered labour market within its system of subsidised employment (SOD). This is probably due to changes in the Act on Rehabilitation.

There was no mention of the UN Convention, which Poland has signed but not ratified (interpretation and legislative impact assessments are in progress).



Portugal

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/NRP_Report_2008_Portugal.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There was greater visibility for disabled people in the Portuguese NRP compared to some other countries (with at least 36 references in the text to disability or 'handicap' and approximately the same visibility as given to women).

Employment situation of disabled people

Whilst there was attention to specific interventions and policies in the NRP there was no reference to disability in any statistics, measures or evidence of the current employment situation. The 2008 ANED country report on employment also did not provide us with sufficient additional information to comment on alternative sources of evidence about employment trends (but did provide significant detail on employment policies and programmes). There should therefore be some concerns about the availability of useful data and statistics on the employment of disabled people in Portugal.

New policies

The NRP acknowledged a link with the National Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and with the national strategy on disability, by continually mentioning the 2006 Action Plan for the Integration of Disabled or Impaired Citizens (PAIPDI), the National Plan to Promote Accessibility (PNPA). Evidence of this joined-up approach is very much to be encouraged and should be highlighted (p28). Reference was made that 'An integrated strategy of active social inclusion is implicit in the policy priorities for the 2008-2010 cycle'. Specifically, commitments were made to 'overcome discriminations, strengthening the integration of specific groups, notably people with disabilities and impairments and immigrants.' The NRP adopts a fairly 'holistic' approach to employment by recognising social inclusion and cohesion as enablers. Some sections are derivative of the National Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion and require more detail and delineation to substantiate the points being made in relation to growth and jobs.

Broader commitments were bolstered by mention of specific past programmes, such as the Inclusive Labour Market Programme, the Professional Training and Employment for the Disabled Programme (benefiting 36,900 people), the Programme for the Extension of Social Facilities Network (PARES), and the Plan of Action for the Integration of People with Disabilities or Impairment (2007-2009) (P29). Greater quantification of recent and projected benefits would have been welcome. However, there should be some concern at the detail of the above, with specific action proposed under PARES being to: 'The boost the Social Facilities Programme (POPH) targeting the elderly, the disabled and impaired foresees the creation of 1,378 places in facilities for the elderly by 2010 (3,220 places by 2015) and of 1,408 places in facilities for the disabled by 2,010 (1,955 places by 2,015)' (p.68). This could be read as increasing sheltered or institutional provision rather than moving to inclusive and mainstream provision. Further clarification is required.

There was reference to: 'The Information and Mediation System for Disabled and Impaired Persons (SIMPD) database with information on legislation, existing resources and services destined for disabled or impaired persons, the implementation in 18 districts of the Information and Mediation Service and the functioning of the National Coordination Unit of the SIMPD'. The use of the database will be important alongside its maintenance. There was also a commitment to 'The National Plan for the Promotion of Accessibility, which fosters the creation of accessibility in buildings, transport and information and communication technologies and supporting technologies to all citizens without exceptions. Again a timetable and addition of substance would help go beyond very general 'paper' commitments and afford monitoring. (pp66-67)

One specific and welcome commitment was 'The Portuguese Sign Language Programme (LGP) which consisted of creating programmes for basic and secondary education, thus ensuring deaf children and young people access to learning Portuguese sign language in public educational establishments: pre-school education; 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle of basic education and secondary education in 2008'. Education is also mentioned later (but not necessarily integration/inclusion): 'In the area of special educational needs we note the creation of a network of reference schools for the blind and the deaf, as well as specialised units for disturbances in the field of autism and multiple disabilities (p 56)(137 autism units; 220 multiple disability units; 1500 trained teachers and 760 auxiliary staff in training; a further 31% of trainers and interpreters of Portuguese Sign Language).'

Another timely commitment referred to the 'Professional training and employment programme for disabled people' – 'To favour the public integration of disabled people, through the reinforcement of employment and training measures that aim at the professional rehabilitation of disabled people' [the] Next stage is an 'Action Programme for the inclusion of all in the labour market - disabled people (IEFP) - 2008-2010 target: physical 46,000 people and funding: 216,000,000€' (p 59). Monitoring protocols would have been welcomed as would specific notions to how inclusion would be measured as regards employment and the pathway to employment.

2009 NRP implementation report

There is less specific attention to disabled people in the 2009 Implementation report, although some specifics are evident (although they do not always closely mirror the commitments in the NRP). Disabled people are targeted in the programmes of Employment-Insertion Contracts, aimed at engaging people receiving out-of-work benefits in 'socially necessary work' (p22). There has been investment in a number of special schools and educational units, and expanded provision of sign language interpreters (p55). There is reference to new guidance on basic education competences for disabled people (p78). Specific intervention programmes are mentioned, targeting groups at higher risk of long-term unemployment (p91). Progress on the Programme for the Vocational Training and Employment of the Disabled is outlined. This engaged 22,000 people in 2008-9, although not yet half the planned target for 2010 (p94). Within the social welfare system there is continuing extension of coverage for workers' disability risks (p101).

No further employment data was included (and the 2009 data was unavailable at the time of the report). The absence of data on the labour market situation of disabled people in Portugal remains a concern.

To clarify progress, the government has presented a draft law on the new employment and vocational training system for disabled persons to the National Council for the Rehabilitation and Integration of person with disabilities (a consulting body of the Minister of Labour and Social Solidarity) and to the Economic and Social Council (consulting body of the social partners). Publication of the new law is expected soon and will reinforce the integration of disabled workers in the open labour market, shifting from a protected employment system to a supported employment system.

Importantly, in 2009 the new Labour Code, approved by Law No. 7 / 2009 of 12 February, entered into force. The principle of equal opportunities and combating discrimination on subjective grounds is established, including a subsection on 'Equality and non discrimination', and defining the right to equal access to employment and occupation (Article 24), as well as the prohibition of discrimination (Article 25). The Code addresses the particular situation of workers with reduced working capacity, disability or chronic illness. The legal regime applicable to Workers with Disabilities or Chronic Illness is provided in Articles 85 to 88. Article 85 stipulates that a worker with a disability or chronic illness has the right to equal treatment, and he/she is entitled to the same rights as other workers.

The violation of the rights of workers with disabilities is considered a serious violation of the law and is punished, giving the plaintiff a right to compensation. The Code also defines the duty of the employer to facilitate the employment of workers with reduced working capacity, providing them with appropriate conditions of work (reasonable accommodations), in particular, adaptation of the job, equal remuneration, vocational training and professional progression. Article 87 specifically stipulates that workers with disabilities or chronic illness can be relieved of their work, if it can harm their health or safety. The organization of working time should be adapted to the specific situation of the worker (adaptability, flexibility of working time and compensation of overtime work by free time when the worker decides (bank hours).

Nevertheless, according to article 88, workers with disabilities or chronic illness are not obliged to perform overtime work.

The economic crisis has led to a series of recent Government measures to support employment and to improve the skills of workers. At the beginning of 2009 several decrees entered into force. They did not address the specific situation of disabled persons/workers although they have an impact on them, namely: Decree No. 128/2009 of 30 January, which regulates the measures 'Contract employment-insertion' and 'Contract + job-insertion', contains one measure which provides increased support for disabled people, including Professional Training.

There was no mention of the UN Convention, which Portugal ratified on 30 July 2009.



Romania

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/IR_NRP_2008_RO_final_EN.pdf

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/plan_actiune_2008_aprobat_en.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There were limited references to disability in the NRP (e.g. not more than direct 7 text references). The focus appeared to be on reform of public employment services.

Employment situation of disabled people

Statistics were provided in relation to the use of employment services but not in relation to the general situation of disabled people in Romania. The 2008 ANED country report on employment contained some commentary and examples that could be useful. At this moment in Romania, only around 13,000 disabled people are recorded as having a job, representing 2.93% of the eligible population. This serious situation has several causes. The existing legislation provides some disincentives to employment. There are also a significant number of disabled people in large residential institutions, in particular for people with intellectual and mental health diagnoses. Romania therefore has much work to do to begin to tackle the issue of disabled peoples' labour market exclusion. There is, however, a marked lack of available data or statistics on the labour market situation of disabled people in Romania, which makes it very difficult to gauge progress.

Policy proposals

The development of the Public Employment Service was highlighted in the NRP, noting the continued implementation of 'information and counselling measures for jobseekers with a view to ensure a sustainable insertion on the labour market' (p19). The exact impact and coverage of these projects would need further evaluation.

The Employment Programme (PES) in Romania 'supported the employment of 235,990 persons out of 421,342 persons who participated in active employment services in the first semester of 2008. Special programmes to promote the employment of vulnerable groups have been implemented, as well. In the first semester of 2008...603 disabled people, succeeded to be hired.' (p 19). This was noted again under 4.4.3 'Special measures to activating social vulnerable groups and persons in rural areas'.

Additionally, 8 centres for counselling and mediation of disabled persons were established. The addition of 12 centres from January 2009 would create a 'network of 20 counselling and mediation centres for disabled persons' (p100). Once again, given the limited evidence of employment access and engagement, it is important that this situation should be reviewed carefully.

Section 4.5.2 entitled 'Promoting family life and career development balance' 'introduced a programme that supported families in order to bring up and take care of children'. This provided some evidence of connection with flexicurity. This relates to the needs of carers rather than extending to disabled workers and jobseekers.



However given the scant attention in this wider review of flexicurity this reference is welcome, further noting that: 'If the parent wants to return to work before the child is 2 years old, or 3 years old for a child with disabilities, he/she will receive a monthly incentive (for earlier employment).'

2009 NRP Implementation Report

There were no references at all to disability or the employment situation of disabled people in the 2009 Romanian Implementation Report (or to work capacity issues or accessibility issues). There are extensive references to health system reform and to reform in a number of key areas where disabled people would clearly be affected (including pensions, ICTs, adaptability of enterprises, equal opportunities, education and lifelong learning, etc.). No data are presented on the employment situation of disabled people.

Some information on disabled employees would be available from www.mmuncii.ro (e.g. showing the absolute number of recorded disabled employees in each region). Comparative figures for 2008 and 2009 suggest an increase of 825 employees between 2008 and 2009 (to 26,530). If the statistics are correct, it appears that the economic crisis may not have been as severe in Romania as in some other countries, and that it has not yet been a major unemployment risk factor for disabled persons.

Slovakia

http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/National%20Reform%20Programme%20SR%202008-2010_EN.pdf

Visibility and mainstreaming

There are some broad but unquantified commitments made in the Slovakia National Reform Programme report. There is a clear recognition that disabled people represent a disadvantaged labour group alongside women with children, school graduates (leavers) and those around retirement age.

Employment situation of disabled people

The ANED country report on employment and disabled people contains additional commentary and examples.

The main source of employment data is the Labour Force Survey compiled by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, published quarterly, easy to access and up to date. Detailed information is available from the 2002 ad hoc module on employment of disabled people and the employment rate for disabled people derived from this module is not comparable with employment rate of non disabled people. There are no available employment data of disabled population who are migrants or from ethnic minorities. No figures are provided however on the comparative employment or economic activity rates of disabled-non disabled people. The latter would help identify the extent of the issue of employment and economic exclusion and offer a profile of disabled peoples' current employment position.

Policy proposals

What is provided therefore in this NRP report are very 'broad brush' statements of commitments onto which more substantive programmes can be added as follows:

'After the extensive amendment to the [Slovak] Labour Code, the Government prepared another extensive amendment to the Act on Employment Services which entered into effect on May 1, 2008. The principal changes in active labour market measures were re-evaluated and new measures were introduced. These new measures on the labour market allow the Offices of Labour, Social Affairs and Family to select and target more effectively such instruments at disadvantaged groups which will allow them the opportunity to enter and remain on the labour market and increase their employability. The amendment constitutes a set of new active measures of the programme and project approach targeted at the prevention from exclusion and the support of the integration of disadvantaged groups regarding employment; this especially relates to school graduates, disabled, mothers with children and persons close to the retirement age' (p 8).

However, there are few references to material benefits that the reform programme will deliver to disabled people, for example in the form of a badge which recognises the additional needs of disabled people. The term severely disabled is used unproblematically here.

Page 9 of the report is more detailed in its commitment to increasing access for disabled people to the labour market where it refers to wider social inclusion legislation: 'The subject of the Act on the support of the social inclusion of severely disabled persons into society constitutes the legal relations for the support of the social inclusion of the severely disabled into society'. Further, the report details the: '...provision of a financial allowance for the compensation of the social consequences of a severe disability, the issuance of a card to a physical entity with a severe disability, to a physical entity with a severe disability with an accompanying person and a parking card for a physical entity with disability constitutes the means of inclusion'.

It is assumed that this allowance is paid to out-of work disabled people as opposed to a subsidy for those entering paid work. The construction of the category 'severely disabled' needs further elaboration in future reports as it seems to act as a passport to this level of support. The report is clear as to its wider aims: 'The goal is to provide assistance to severely disabled citizens in everyday life in order to provide them with equal opportunities as non-disabled citizens. This material is in the legislative process and it is expected to take effect on January 1, 2009'. The final commitment made in the report is to a programme of research into the efficiency (and one hopes effectiveness) of current schemes aimed at enhancing the labour market position of disadvantaged groups:

No details of current programmes are presented and it seems safe to assume that no hard evidence currently exists into the value and efficacy of current schemes and that there is a long road to travel in effecting good disability related programmes to enhance the labour market position of disabled people.

2009 NRP implementation report

There appears to be no reference to disability issues or the situation of disabled people in the Slovakia report (or to issues of work incapacity).

There is passing reference to revision of the active ageing strategy, and to improving quality of information in the care sector.

Employment rates are provided for women/men, older/younger workers, but not for disabled people. (Appendix 1)

Slovenia

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/SI-NRP2008-en.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

The Slovene National Reform Programme report makes more extensive reference to disability issues than most other countries (at least 42 references, compared to 26 for women and 3 for minorities) although the majority of these are in the special section on 'The situation of disabled persons in the labour market' (section D.1.3.3, p39-40).

Employment situation of disabled people

The ANED country report on employment also contains critical commentary and examples that could be useful.

Data on employment are generally provided by Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and by Employment Service of Slovenia. The latter provides monthly reports on people registered unemployed including the number of disabled people (e.g. June 2008 there were 10,140 disabled registered as unemployed or 16.7% of total number), on enacting the Occupational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (April 2008 there were 487 people in the rehabilitation process, 103 of them starting in that month). The Statistical Office provides the number of disabled persons employed (30,739 in 2007), number of unemployed (10,415), percentage of employed and unemployed according to age and sex, number of employed in the disability enterprises. The Statistical Office provides also some data on the Adult Training Centres. There is also data available from the Institute of Pension and Disability Insurance that has indirect implications – i.e. the number of people on the disability pension (total 93,558 in May 2008).

The available data are reliable in expressing the labour market position of disabled people for administrative purposes. However, these data may not be valid or even reliable. For instance, while the Compilation reports that the share of employed disabled people in total employment is less than 1%, the calculation of the data of the Statistical Office (the same body that purveyed the information for the Compilation) give a result of 3.84%. While unable to track the source of this error, we can have more reason to doubt the reliability of the Compilation than data closer to the ground. The share of disabled people in the unemployed is much higher 14.83%, while the unemployment rate within the unemployed is 23.4% as compared to the general unemployed rate of 7.3% (calculated on the data of Statistical Office and Employment Service). The trends are however encouraging and new employment of disabled people doubled from 987 in 2004 to 1,927 in 2007 (Employment Service). Better economic conditions, new regulations (Occupational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Act) and policies (Active Employment Policy) have produced positive trends in employment. However, the decrease in unemployed disabled people might be also a result of stricter regulations on attaining the disability status. However, there is a significant number of 'inactive' disabled people, about half of them in the working age, many of them prevented from entering the labour market by the virtue of their legal status. This needs further policy and programme attention.

Policy proposals

The priority measure proposed for 2008-2010 is provided on page 35 of the NRP reform noting an: 'increase in employment opportunities for the disabled with the implementation of the Vocational Rehabilitation and the Employment of Disabled Persons Act, and of the Action Programme'. Details of the proposed vocational rehabilitation programme needed further delineated.

A wider reading of the Slovenia NRP report suggests that overall there is evidence of a good strategic approach to disability policy making which mainstreams recent disability policy plans into the national Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2007–2013 and implementation of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (p 39). Slovenia is the only country that acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (noting Slovenia's ratification). The 2005 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act introduced employment quotas. Substantial increases (with unconfirmed claims of a doubling of employment for disabled people overall) in employment over the past two years are attributed to this. It will be important to ensure that data is collected rigorously and inferences correctly applied as there is more general evidence across Europe that some 'rises' can be artefacts of improved data collection techniques.

A specific reference is made in the report to the positive impact of vocational rehabilitation (P 39) noting: 'Expanded vocational rehabilitation programmes made possible a 27% increase of participation by disabled people. Despite all measures taken, the number of unemployed disabled people registered with the ESS remains high – 10,425 (in April 2008) – representing more than a 15.2% share of all registered unemployed people.' Clearly these successes are from a position of major labour market challenges for disabled people.

Some policy detail is provided however, with reference to the 'Vocational Rehabilitation and the Employment of Disabled Persons Act' (2005), whose objective is to improve the employment opportunities (effect on available income) and social inclusion of disabled persons, for example, the right to use sign language (Slovenian) under the terms of the Slovenian Sign Language Act.

The following will continue to be implemented as part of the Action Programme and with reference to the legal bases:

- active employment policy programmes;
- occupational rehabilitation;
- quota system;
- activities of the Disabled Fund and of employment centres;
- support for sheltered companies;
- social entrepreneurship projects;
- other innovative social projects.'

Part of Slovenia's range of employment activities is a commitment to sheltered employment (P 40) with a note in the report that: 'Sheltered companies are a rather widespread form of practice in the social economy in Slovenia; throughout 2008, 173 have been operating in Slovenia. Application of the new law gave rise to a new form of social economy, i.e. employment centres. In 2008, there were 17 such employment centres operating in Slovenia.

In 2008, both types of organisation gave employment to more than 6,500 people with a disability.' Arguably, the status of sheltered employment needs to be actively reviewed given the changing zeitgeist towards mainstreaming. The sheltering of disabled workers has therefore to be seen as a last resort where open labour market opportunities cannot reasonably be secured. Sheltered employment ought not to be a first port of call.

On page 42 of the report, policies on flexicurity are addressed and outlined, although (like many countries) these focus on carers and parents rather than flexible security for disabled people themselves in the labour market. For example, there is no equivalent statement to: 'Almost 20% of people who care for or nurse ill, disabled or elderly adults would prefer to take short-time employment in order to be able to take care for their own adult dependents'.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

Despite the attention given to disability in the NRP, there is no reference at all to disability issues or disabled people in the Slovenian Implementation Report (although it was reviewed by members of the Committee on Labour, the Family, Social Policy and Disability). However, there is similarly no reference women/gender equality or minorities. The emphasis is primarily on the impact of the economic crisis.

There is a commitment to use public investment and social entrepreneurship to create job opportunities in some public services (including some care services and home help). Targeted help to low income families may impact on families with a disabled member.



Spain

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/INFORME%20ANUAL%20DE%20PROGRESO%202008%20-%20PROGRAMA%20NACIONAL%20DE%20REFORMAS.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

There was a high level of visibility of disability issues in the Spain NRP country report. This included a dedicated 'Overall Strategy of Action for the Employment of People with Disabilities 2008-2012' (Annex 6.2.2). This would have been strengthened with the inclusion of relevant data or statistics on the employment situation of disabled people in Spain.

Employment situation of disabled people

The NRP identified that Spain was near to reaching its employment rate goal of 66% by 2010 with 20.4 million (65.5%) of the working-age population (aged 15-64) are employed (both sexes). The employment rate of women increased to 54.8% (goal 57%) closing by one percentage point the gap from the male employment rate. Nevertheless, there are large differences in employment rates by sector, with 10.4% unemployed in the construction area, for example. There is an emphasis in Spanish employment policy on increasing 'unlimited contract employment' (contrato indefinido de trabajo) to promote productivity and labour quality. In this way, the temporary employment rate has been reduced to 29.4% and the wage-earning employment rate has increased 4.1%. However, there were no specific statistics about disability and employment. The 2008 ANED country report on employment did not provide us with sufficient additional information to comment on alternative sources of evidence about employment trends (but did provide significant detail on employment policies and programmes).

Policy proposals

The NRP was notable for the inclusion of a specific disability strategy and the consideration of a Global Action Plan on employment and disabled people.

Under Axis 6, the measures on the 'Agreement to Improve Employment Opportunities' (Acuerdo para la Mejora del Crecimiento y el Empleo) have been applied attracting 3.2 million Euros in 2008. This has encouraged the contracting of disadvantaged employees through wage subsidy incentives, in the form of a fixed annual amount per employee hired within four years. Disabled people and those aged over 45 attract support throughout their contract of employment. To increase the employment rate and encourage a more inclusive labour market, a strategy of employment for disabled people has been created and the 'Assisted Employment Plan'.

Section 6.1 of the NRP noted that the law of 'Social Security Measurement' (Ley 40/2007) was implemented on January 2008 and incorporated the majority of the measures included within the previous Agreement attained in the Social Dialogue. Key amongst these are: a more generous minimum period needed to generate a retirement pension up to the 15 effective years and clearer rules on pension eligibility in cases of 'permanent incapacity'.

Section 6.1.9 highlighted the 'System of Autonomy and Dependency Attention [Sistema de Autonomía y Atención a la Dependencia (SAAD)]' Law 39/2006 which, implemented through to 2015.

With the 'Law of dependency' a new right guaranteed the attention and care of dependent people (elderly people and people with impairments that are not able to take care of themselves). The law guaranteed a number of benefits (economic and/or services) based on the level of dependency of the individual. The law was based on the principle of universal, public benefits. The exact extent to which this would combine personal assistance and enhanced paid work opportunities was unclear in the report.

Section 6.2.2 of the NRP report noted the significance of the Global Strategy Action of Employment for Disabled people (2008-2012). The strategy includes 93 lines of action grouped together in seven. The general objectives are

- To increase the rates of activity and occupation of disabled people and to promote their insertion into the labour market.
- To improve the quality of employment and to dignify the labour conditions of disabled people actively combating their discrimination.

The measures established for the strategy are coherent with the general policy on employment, due to the fact that problems related to the employment of disabled people (the insufficient creation of new labour places; unemployment, that particularly affects women, and temporary employment) are problems that affect the general labour market but accentuated. In response to this the following measures were outlined

- Integral guidelines:
- Inclusive labour markets and remunerated work.
- Security and flexibility
- Adaptations to the needs of the labour market

Challenges:

- To improve the functioning of the labour market
- Labour market segmentation

Steps:

- To modernize the employment protection
- To increase the levels of training and innovation

Recommendation Euro Area:

- Flexibility and security of the labour market

2009 NRP Implementation Report

By comparison with the more comprehensive approach in the 2008-2010 NRP there was considerably less detail in the 2009 Implementation report and little reported evidence of progress. There is again a distinct lack of any data or statistics on the employment situation of disabled people in Spain. For example, the Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal published a report on the labour market position of disabled people in 2008, which could have been used. This indicates an employment rate of 28.5% in 2008 (34.3% for disabled men and 21.7% for disabled women) with a decline of 6.54% on the previous year. The inactivity rate is estimated at 67.8%.

There has been a continuing and dramatic decline in general employment as a consequence of the crisis, measured in terms of full-time equivalent posts, of 7.1% during the second quarter of 2009 (INE, 2009). This amounts to a loss of almost 1.37 million net full-time jobs in one year. The most pronounced change continued to appear in construction, followed by services and industry services. Given that services and industry sectors groups have the largest number disabled employees, this group of workers may be significantly affected by the crisis (SPEE 2008). Sheltered Workshops have been also affected. There is evidence among the different Spanish regions of substantial reductions in monthly funding for these social enterprises, as well as reductions in hiring disabled workers. These issues were not mentioned in the Implementation Report.

Approval of the 'Overall Strategy of Action for the Employment of People with Disabilities' and its action plan is noted in the context of action on the economic crisis (p35) and reported in section 6.3.4. There is, however, very little detail here other than that implementation is 'ongoing', although budgets have been allocated.

In terms of specificity, there is commitment that: '7% of the positions offered in the civil servicing hiring process for 2009 will be reserved for persons with disabilities (Royal Decree 248/2009, of 27 February). Within that figure, 2% will be reserved specifically for persons with intellectual disabilities' (6.3.4) and an objective to 'progressively achieve the goal that 2% of all Central Government employees be persons with disabilities'.

Accessibility is mentioned briefly in two areas. The provision of concessionary travel on long distance buses was renewed with new provisions of accessibility of vehicles (p24, also 5.3.4). Accessibility is mentioned in relation to housing (5.5.1).

There was no mention of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Spain ratified on 3 December 2007.



Sweden

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/The%20Swedish%20Reform%20Programme%20for%20Growth%20and%20Jobs%20008%20to%202010.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

Disability received a good deal of attention and was a key theme in the Swedish National Reform Programme Report for 2008-2010.

Employment situation of disabled people

The NRP contained some data on 'sickness' (from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency). There was also a summary table on labour market gaps for disadvantaged groups (p109) from the Labour Force Survey which indicated disabled people as 15.7% of the workforce with 9.5% experiencing 'reduced ability to work'. The difference in labour force participation rates was identified as 11.1 percentage points lower than the general population and 21.6 for those with reduced work capacity (being slightly higher for men). The difference in employment rate was estimated similarly at -11.8 points and 23 points respectively. The difference in unemployment rates was more marginal, at +1.7 and +4.2 (but with slightly higher rates for women). Actual percentages were not cited alongside the differences. The date of the survey data was unfortunately not cited and there was no time series or trend comparison.

The ANED country report on employment also contained critical commentary and examples that could be useful. The appraisal of the number of persons with impairment in Sweden varies from one investigation to another depending on how the concept is defined and used. The national statistics office, Statistics Sweden, claims that there are a little more than one million persons (18.8%) between the ages of 16- 64 having some kind of impairment (Statistics Sweden, 2007). In this group six out of ten, approximately 600,000 people, judge that their working capacity is reduced. Statistics Sweden's figures from the fourth quarter of 2004 showed that the participation of persons with impairment in the employment market was back to the level of 1998, a fall compared to the levels of 2000 and 2002 from 65% to 62%. The rate of unemployment was 6.3% which is higher than the general population while the rate of unemployment 2007 was 3.7%. Unemployment has decreased over the past few years but not for persons with impairment.

Policy proposals

Attention was given in the NRP report to the overriding policy approach in Sweden characterised as a work-first approach. This reflects Sweden's long-standing active labour market approach, and distinct from some work first approaches rejects laissez-faire approaches, acknowledging the need to enhance labour market opportunities and support. The report focused on responding to reduced work capacity and the value of wage subsidies as part of targeted labour market support. At times, support was seen in the context of 'special initiatives' (for example via more 'active' sickness absence policies'), at other points in the report, mainstream financial incentives were mentioned in the form of contributory concessions for employers of those who have been out of the labour market for more than one year. There were some valuable references to business start-up funding for disabled people which recognised the value of self-employment for some disabled people.

The Work First Principle was captured in the following: 'A number of other measures will be taken to strengthen the work-first principle and lower thresholds into the labour market, such as...increased resources for wage subsidies for people with disabilities and reduced work capacity (see section 4.2 Special measures for people with disabilities)'. The exact understanding of the 'work first' concept shares some similarities with UK ideas, however it differed in focusing on the use of wage subsidies and employer tax benefits. The Swedish NRP also aimed to make in-work tax credits more beneficial for some disadvantaged groups (over 65s).

On the active approach to supporting more disabled people into work the report noted: 'As of 1 January 2008, new start jobs were enhanced in several respects. It then also became possible to get new start jobs in the public sector. A special new start job, ('well-again jobs'), which means that employers will get more tax relief, even bigger than employers' social security contribution for new employees who have received full compensation for at least a year in the form of a sickness benefit, rehabilitation cash benefit, or sickness and activity compensation, was introduced' (p.57). This approach appears to provide tangible financial incentives to employers employing disadvantaged labour groups.

Special measures varied from wage subsidies, through supported to sheltered (Samhall AB) employment: 'The total cost of these special initiatives was about SEK 14 billion in 2007, which is SEK 2.3 billion higher than in 2006. In order to get more people working who have reduced work capacity due to a disability, the Government has increased the resources available for wage subsidies and to Samhall AB (state funded sheltered employment employing 25,000 employees) by SEK 1 billion during its term of office' (p. 67). It was encouraging to see efforts to both reduce welfare dependency and support those traditionally furthest away from the labour market.

There was specific attention to Sickness Absence, aiming to add further measures to aid return to work and the reduction of numbers drifting into long-term sickness. The figures for duration of sickness absence are seen as a key performance indicator. Since a peak in 2003/4, the number on sickness absence for >1 year has reduced by 50% by 2008. The government aim to continue this trend (p.66). Further details would be welcome on this as such policies require careful handling to achieve the balance of not being too harsh or too lenient in the design of back to work policies. The role of physicians and employer occupational health staff in supporting appropriate improvements to sickness absence policies is important.

The Swedish NRP also referred to the need to go beyond special measures toward greater links to the open labour market. It referred to the importance of investing more fully in assistive devices, personal assistance and self employment, all of which may help facilitate open employment. Actual commitments were quantified' (p67): 'In the Government Offices, a review is under way of the support for this target group aimed at making these initiatives more effective and increasing the number of transitions to unsubsidised work. The aim is to get more people participating in the measures. In the 2009 Budget Bill the Government has proposed raising the maximum ceiling on vocational assistive devices and personal assistants. Support for vocational assistive devices given to employed people, the self-employed or participants in labour market policy programmes will be raised to a maximum of SEK 100 000 a year (currently SEK 50 000). Support for personal assistants should be raised to a maximum of SEK 60 000 per year for the employed (currently SEK 50 000) and to a maximum of SEK 120 000 per year for the self-employed (currently SEK 100 000). The aim is for employers to hire more people having a great need of support'.

Social Firms, a key bridge between more sheltered and open employment were evidence in the commitment to social firms: 'In November 2007 the Government gave the Swedish Business Development Agency (NUTEK) a remit to draw up a cross-sectoral programme with proposals for measures to provide a stimulus for more social firms to start and grow. A programme proposal was submitted to the Government in May 2008. Its aim is to stimulate organisations as well as individuals to risk starting social firms. The proposal is currently being studied by the Government Offices' (p.67). No firm targets of numbers placed and numbers likely to enter open employment were provided however. The question of the longer term financial sustainability and management of social firms in a period of economic downturn is very real and at this stage the commitment remained a 'paper' one in need of better quantification.

2009 NRP Implementation Report

Given the fairly high profile for disability in the 2008-2010 NRP there were an increased number of specific references in the 2009 Implementation report (most in a specific targeted section of the report, but also in reference to education). The data reported in the NRP is mirrored in the Implementation Report (appendix 3) based on the national Labour Force Survey. This suggests a marginal decrease in the proportion of people reported as disabled and with reduced work capacity. However, there should be some concern about the increase in the reported gap in participation rates (-12.4 points for disabled people and -23.5 points for those with reduced work capacity – and a deterioration from -21.8 to -26.4 points for men). The on-year same trend is evidenced in a wider gap in employment rates (now -12.9 and -24.7 points respectively) although there appears to be no change in unemployment differentials. The data is very welcome (compared to the absence for other countries) but, unfortunately, there is now date reference nor any commentary on the apparent trend.

Disabled people are again highlighted as a 'high priority' group for active labour market polices and routes into work, along with newly arrived immigrants (p51). This is noted in action to 'lower the thresholds to the labour market' (p60). The main attention is in a targeted section of the report on 'special measures for people with disabilities' (pp61-62). Secure employment has continued to increase but some negative tendencies were also noted, for example in the number of people receiving wage subsidies. This is attributed to demand side difficulties, such as reluctance amongst employers, but may also be due to success in more secure forms employment. In addition 'the Public Employment Service and the Social Insurance Administration in their joint action plan have agreed that as many participants as possible should get employment without support' (p61).

In addition there was a new mandate to the Swedish Agency for Public Management in September 2009 to review the provision of special support. Additional measures have included targeted in-work skills training. There is also reiteration of the move towards open market employment, and away from state managed sheltered workshop employment (Samhall had 19,400 employees in 2008 a reduction of 4.9% against a target of at least 5%).

It is worth noting that: 'Jobs with support for people with disabilities consistently have an unequal gender distribution (60 per cent for men and 40 per cent for women), which may be compared with the total number of people registered as disabled, 55 per cent of whom are men and 46 per cent are women. The most unequal gender distribution occurs in public sheltered employment, where not quite 30 per cent are women' (p62).



Beyond the employment sphere it is noted that the Act on Systems for Freedom of Choice (LOV) was implemented in January 2009 and regulates local government powers to introduce choice and competition for service users amongst health and social care providers, developing the potential for a more mixed economy of support providers from the private and NGO sectors (p22).

Disabled people are then noted in the section on adult education, where a new working group report concerns 'proposals on how adults' right to participate in upper secondary adult education and upper secondary adult education for the mentally disabled could be designed' (p80). This section also refers briefly to targeted concerns in the field of lifelong learning and digital participation for excluded groups (p81).

There was no mention of the UN Convention, which Sweden ratified on 15 December 2008.

United Kingdom

<http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/member-states-2008-2010-reports/UK%20NRP%202008.pdf>

Visibility and mainstreaming

There is perhaps less frequent mention of disability made in the 2008 NRP than would be expected from the amount of policy and programme activity initiated in recent years. There are 6 references to disability, but these are extensive references with some policy detail.

Employment situation of disabled people

The ANED country report on employment also contains critical commentary and examples that could be useful.

Although the UK reports one of the highest employment rates in the G7 (and exceeds the Lisbon targets) employment for disabled people remains much lower – reported at 26.9% in the National Reform Programme (p20) – although this is higher than rates for other marginalised groups (such as those with the lowest qualifications). However, data from the recent study *Compilation of the Disability Data from the administrative registers of the EU Member States* suggests that official low ‘unemployment’ rates are matched by high rates of ‘inactivity’ for disabled people (see Shima et al. 2008). The rate of improvement in unemployment is below the EU15 average.

The most reliable source of data is from the Labour Force Survey, although this covers only men aged 16-64 and women aged 16-59 (there are also three different definitions of disability used). The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) produced regular statistical briefings on disabled people’s employment until it was abolished in 2007. There is a need for this analysis to be continued. According to 2006 LFS data analysis for Great Britain, the DRC (2007) identified 6.9 million disabled people of working age (one in five of the population) – 51% men and 48% women (although, according to SILC data, the proportion of women and men receiving disability benefits in the UK are close to equal). There was an 8% growth in the working age disabled population from 1999 to 2006 (four times the increase in the non-disabled population). The employment rate rose from 47% to 50%.

The unemployment rate in 2006 was 9%, compared with 5% for non-disabled people and 2.4 million disabled people were out of work and receiving state welfare benefits. Disabled people with ‘mental health problems’ had the lowest employment rates (21%). Although half of disabled people were economically inactive, a third (1.3 million) would like to work according to one study. The data raises concerns about the lack of improvement in low educational qualifications in a high skills UK labour market, disabled people being less than half as likely to hold a university degree and twice as likely to have no qualifications compared to non-disabled people. The picture for younger age groups is slightly better, however evidence suggests a rapid reduction in employment aspirations between age 16-24.

Policy proposals

What links earlier policy reforms and this report on jobs and growth is the philosophy of a ‘business friendly’ but not overly interventionist approach to economic and social planning. Emphasis is placed on taking welfare reform further than the 1990s in a way that continues to emphasise personal responsibility and a work-first approach to social and economic security.



Welcome in the report is an emphasis on the nature of paid work, one which takes note of Dame Carol Black's report on health and the workplace (section 5.24, p. 36) and which will inform policies aimed to stimulate better and healthier working lives. The exact detail on how this can be achieved is not however provided.

There is a strong emphasis on skills in the report and the diagnosis of the 'problem' of labour market disadvantage is squarely placed at the door of the individual and their need to acquire current skills; this is reflected in the UK government publications: 'Opportunity, Employment and Progression' and 'Work Skills' and 'Leitch Review of Skills 14-19': 'The Government has recognised that, whereas in the past lack of jobs has been the main barrier to full employment, in the future it will be lack of skills'. This might be challenged given the sudden and dramatic growth in unemployment prompted by the downturn in world economic trading.

Section 5.5 lays out the relative disadvantage of disabled people in the UK labour market, however it points out the positive reduction in working age disabled people out of paid work, with an increase from 39% to 47% of disabled people working age in paid work (Labour Force Survey, 2008). However disabled people are still clearly a disadvantaged group alongside lone parents, ethnic minorities, over 50s, least qualified and those living in the most deprived wards in the UK. What the report does not acknowledge is that the spatial mismatch between opportunities and deprivation, with most difficulties in finding work being located in ex-heavy industrial areas where new opportunities may not have replaced the quantity of work or required the same skills set (Beattie & Fothergill, 2007)

In concrete terms the report lays out those mechanisms that are going to enhance disabled peoples' opportunities yet further. For example the establishment of a binding Public Service Agreement (PSA) to maximise employment opportunities for all. The exact functioning of this PSA is not outlined, and its achievement at a time of rapidly rising unemployment is a challenge for all EU countries. One major challenge in the UK government's policy approach is the discussion of aiding disadvantaged groups into the labour force. For example, section 5.21 notes the UK government target of 1 million less incapacity benefit recipients (from 2005 figures). This sort of quantified commitment, whilst very welcome is unusual in country reports and a question attaches as to just how this can be achieved without wholesale cherry picking of those nearest the labour market?

'No one written off: reforming the welfare state to reward responsibility' (2008)-Section 5.9 of the report highlights the latest welfare reform paper (above) which is a blueprint for reducing worklessness and increasing the engagement of disadvantaged employment groups. The focus of the report is on economic security for most disabled people through paid work and the ending of welfare dependency. The title 'no one written off' might however be viewed as ambitious in that the document makes clear that two distinct groups of disabled people will be established through the 'Employment and Support Allowance'. It is clear that those disabled people deemed fit for work (employment group) will be matched to any work that they can do, whilst those deemed in need of support (support group) will receive higher benefit receipts and not face the same exhortations to paid work. This looks feasible at first sight given its assumption that some people are more obviously 'disabled' than others. It is important to review the longer run working of the new policy and programme in a way that does not solidify into a binary of those who are seen as workable and those who are not. However, the desire to end the assumption that becoming or being disabled signals the inevitable end of paid work seems laudable. Other key objectives of 'No one written off' (2008) include:

- giving private and voluntary providers a Right to Bid to provide innovative back-to-work services;
- requiring people to take suitable available jobs and training, including doing full-time work in return for benefits at any stage where it would be effective, making it clear that there is no right to a life on benefits;
- giving more support and more responsibility to those on incapacity benefits to prepare for, and, when ready, to return to employment, plus offering disabled people more control over the support they get;
- increasing parental responsibility – for couples, lone parents and non resident parents completely disregarding child maintenance in the income related benefits; and
- simplifying the benefits system – as resources allow, abolishing Income
- support and moving people on to Jobseekers Allowance as part of a move
- towards a single working age benefit.

One concrete measure aimed to improve movement into or back to paid work is embodied in the Return to Work Allowance as detailed in section 5.23 of the report:

‘From April 2008, the Return to Work Credit of £40 per week tax-free for a year has been available to everyone who is eligible and who moves into work for more than 16 hours per week, earning less than £15,000 per year’

As with all previous job subsidy schemes it is hoped that employment can be fully supported and sustained beyond the period of subsidy. Disabled people that reach open employment are generally as productive as their non-disabled counterpart. With reasonable adjustments sustained employment should arguably be made easier in the UK.

The ability of the UK government to match personal employment motivation with rights to well paid, relatively secure and healthy jobs seems to be the major challenge. The geographical mismatch of disabled welfare recipients and job opportunities will likely prove a major challenge, especially in a period of economic downturn. The push away from sheltered employment towards open paid work although laudable, will also add to this challenge. It is important that disabled peoples’ human rights are fully preserved in the categorisation of disabled people as part of the new ‘employment’ and ‘support’ groups.

2009 NRP implementation report

There is no mention of disability issues in the general context of the 2009 NRP and specific references are all contained within the chapter in skills and employment. There are, however, more references to disability than in 2008.

Disabled people are identified as a key target group for European Social Fund programmes (p25).

Comparative employment rates are shown for six target groups, comparing 1997/2009. This shows disabled people with the lowest employment rate of all groups, but increasing in period. (p32)

The Welfare Reform Bill receives significant attention, focusing primarily on personalisation and conditionality in welfare benefits but also introducing provisions for the ‘right to control’ certain support service. (p32)



The new procedures for Employment Support Allowance (ESA) from October 2008 introduced new Work Capability Assessments. (p33)

There are some examples of specific targeted actions for groups at high risk.
Valuing Employment Now: Real Jobs for People with Learning Disabilities - new policy guidance promotes mainstream employment of people with intellectual impairments (whose employment rate is much lower than the average for all disabled people). (p33)

NGO vocational training for blind people (by RNIB) is highlighted with an example of social enterprise. (p34)

Disabled young people are identified amongst target groups in the Northern Ireland skills strategy (p29) and Steps to Work programme. (p35)

Initiatives in Scotland note the development of supported employment, including specific support for people with mental health conditions. (p35)