



Report on the employment of disabled people in European countries

Country: Sweden
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Background:

The [Academic Network of European Disability experts](#) (ANED) was established by the European Commission in 2008 to provide scientific support and advice for its disability policy Unit. In particular, the activities of the Network will support the future development of the EU Disability Action Plan and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.

This country report has been prepared as input for the *Thematic report on the implementation of EU Employment Strategy in European countries with reference to equality for disabled people*. The purpose of the report ([Terms of Reference](#)) is to review national implementation of the European Employment Strategy from a disability equality perspective, and to provide the Commission with useful evidence in support of disability policy mainstreaming. More specifically, the report will review implementation of EU Employment Strategy and the PROGRESS initiative with reference to policy implementation evidence from European countries, including the strategies addressed in the EU Disability Action Plan (such as flexicurity and supported employment).

PART ONE: GENERAL EVIDENCE

1.1 Academic publications and research reports (key points)

There is a special research council in Sweden to support research on persons with impairment and employment called the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Life. This area of research is highly prioritized, resulting in a relatively extensive research with good scientific publication. Results from the research show that generally people with impairment are to a larger extent than others excluded from the working force. Furthermore it is clear that the group, people with impairment, is a heterogeneous group. The relationship to working life varies in regard to among other things, age, gender, education, ethnicity, type of impairment and whether working capacity is reduced or not (see e.g. Szebehely, Fritzell & Lundberg, 2001). Analysis show that persons with impairment to a larger degree than persons without impairment remain outside the employment market; but at the same time they do not leave the employment market at a higher rate than the population on the whole. The employment level of the group that was less vulnerable, persons with hearing impairment was at the same level as the population on the whole. However, the group though is considered to have a psychosocial vulnerability that leads to among other things a larger extent of early retirement (Danermark & Coniavitis Gellerstedt, 2004). As far as other groups having various forms of mobility impairment, vision impairment, people with intellectual disabilities and people with prolonged psychiatric problems, unemployment levels were considerably lower especially in regard to those with mental problems.

During the years 1988/1989 and 1998/1999 there was a general reduction in the level of employment by nine percent pertaining to both men and women and for persons with impairment. Worth noting is that women with impairment, irrespective group, had a higher

employment rate than men. Working life has a structure that often favors men and research has not given the gender perspective enough consideration (Tideman, 2000), and women with impairment are exposed to a double vulnerability (Barron, 1999, 2004; Jansson, 2003; Michailakis, 2000).

Upswing of the market influences the possibility in getting a job. A good economy, as the case in recent years, has meant irrespective age it has been easier than before to find work. As many impairments, are obtained through age and people with impairment have a higher average age, this could partly explain why they have a lower employment average than persons without impairment (Göransson, 2002). The largest percent of impairments are found in the group over 50 years of age, and studies show that employment levels for the group lessen remarkably after 40 years of age, especially concerning persons with a high school education (Statistics Sweden, 2005) The fact that the level of employment decreases for the group of persons with impairment at the age when they are most attractive for the employment market is an indication of the difficulties the group has in keeping its position within the employment market.

Research on ethnicity and disability (Bohlin & Erlandsson, 2002; Integrationsverket; 2006; SIOS & SIH, 1998) shows that persons with immigrant background have a considerable higher average of unemployment than persons born in Sweden. To have an impairment and in addition to be an immigrant means according to Bohlin (2001) and Söderlindh (1992) a double vulnerability, poor health compared to Swedes, and that for this group the employment level is lower than their level of education.

Several studies show that education has an impact on the possibilities to obtain employment (Boman & Nilsson, 1998; Göransson, 2002; Integrationsverket, 2006; Lindqvist, 2007, Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2003; Sjö Dahl-Holmlid, 1996). These studies together show that people with impairment have a lower level of education compared to the population on the whole and that students with impairments are faced with more hinders than those students without impairment. In addition one finds more often persons with impairment within professions that are monotone.

Persons with impairment having reduced capacity to work are a group with large difficulties in regard to the employment field, as they have a lower level of education and higher level of unemployment and in general lower levels of income in comparison to other persons with impairment (AMS, 2006; Statistics Sweden, 2005; SOU, 2001). It is of most importance to gain more knowledge of the situation of persons with impairment having a reduced capacity for employment.

1.2 Employment statistics and trends (key points)

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 of ten persons, approximately 600 000 persons, and judge that their working capacity is reduced. This means that within the whole population between the ages of 16 – 64 about one out of ten individuals have a reduced working capacity. 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, which means a fall

compared to the levels of 2000 and 2002. The proportion of employed persons with impairment went from 65% to 62%. The rate of unemployment for persons with impairment was 6,3% which is higher than the general population where the rate of unemployment 2007 was 3,7%. Unemployment has decreased over the past few years for persons without impairment but not for persons with impairment.

The Swedish Social Insurance Agency (2003) carried out a study "Inequality's life conditions – a comparison between people with impairment and the general population", a questionnaire where about 7000 persons with impairment between the ages of 23 – 64 were asked about their life situation. The results of the report made evident that of the people questioned only 22 % had an unsubsidized employment in the open market. At the same time the survey indicated that people with impairment have significantly more often economic problems, a circumstance which corresponds with the results of the studied carried out by the National Board of Health and Welfare on healthcare in Sweden (2005). The report pointed out that persons with impairment have on the average lower income levels (concerning both salary related income and disposable income) than the general population.

1.3 Laws and policies (key points)

Several measures have recently been taken for persons with impairment with the purpose to increase possibilities and reduce hindrances for employment within the ordinary employment market. The most important measure during this period is "Prohibition of Discrimination in Working Life of People with Disability Act" (1999:132)" [<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/108/a/2535>]. However, the law has been criticized for individualise the problem and not address the behaviour of the market (Michailakis, 2000). Another important measure has been the indication through the Work Environment Act that the working environment must be accessible for all employees' special needs. It has been considered especially of significance to support and stimulate young persons with impairment to look for employment in the open market.

Employment training and different forms of vocational training are other measures to increase possibilities for persons with impairment in obtaining an adequate work activity. The most extensive measure is that of wage subsidies. These allocations have created possibilities for a more concrete and resolute support directed to individuals with impairment with the intention of aiding persons in acquiring some kind of activity in the open employment market and therewith achieving participation and a sense of belonging.

With the purpose of coordinating support for in particular the most vulnerable group, persons with psychiatric problems, the government in 2003 appointed a national coordinator for psychiatric issues. The national psychiatric coordinator wrote in the report "I begynnelsen var organisationen..." (Socialdepartementet 2006) that unemployment is especially great among persons with psychiatric problems. Unemployment is twice as high in comparison to other groups with impairment and at the same time the group is over represented with persons under 30 years of age who have been granted sick allowance and/or activity grants. Two of three persons receiving early retirement 2004 suffered from psychiatric problems.

Marginalization in regards to the employment market, as well as dependence on social grants has increased for persons with psychiatric problems. Between 1990 and 2004 the government's measures for young persons receiving early retirement have increased by

300% to 16 billion kronor. In the report the national coordinator stated “Research show that integrated support taking the individual needs and resources as a starting point should be given, not in artificial environments, but at real life working places” (p. 12). The system with four different responsible authorities (The Swedish Public Employment Service, The Swedish Social Insurance Agency, social services and health care) counteract such an individual based support as often organization’s own needs and interests steer the choice of support offered. It is necessary to develop cohesion with one organization having financial, political and organizational responsibility for rehabilitation of persons with psychiatric problems.

1.4 Type and quality of jobs (summary)

In spite of a general decrease in employment rate in Sweden over the last decade (in the year 2007: 3.7% for the general population) the unemployment rate is not reduced for people with impairment (in the year 2007: 6.3% for people with impairment). The possibility for persons’ with impairment to find work correlates with type of impairment and education level, work capacity, gender, ethnicity, age and area of residence (e.g. the possibility is greater with a post secondary education, no reduction in work capacity due to the impairment, among men and among people with Swedish origin) The group that has the most difficulty in keeping employment is the group with mental problems where only 53% have any kind of employment compared to about 90% among the general population. The number of people that have wage subsidy increased over the period 2000 to 2007 with 20% to 58,700 people with disability but at the same time the number of people with sheltered employment decreased over the same period with 20% to 21,200.

One positive change is that “monotone employment” and “psychically unsuitable employment” has decreased among disabled people. At the end of the 80s it was about 50-100% (depending on type of impairment) greater risk to have such type of employment but at the end of the 90s it had reached a level where there is no longer any great difference between groups with impairment and the general population.

PART TWO: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

2.1 Supported Employment

One method that has been successful in a number of Swedish projects has been the implementation of supported employment. The method has developed during the past 10 years and has been evaluated a number of times. The evaluation cases have shown the method to be effective (see e.g. Antonson, 2002). To reach an employment, to be employed and to keep an employment are three problematic phases for the complex process a persons with impairment have trying to become established within the market. To “reach an employment” means that the person is active, and maybe with some kind of help and support, procures competence for the job. The person has with his/her own energy and motivation shown an interest and in several cases gotten an education and can even show other qualifications for employment on the market. A period of job training is also required in preparation for entrance to the job market.

“To be employed,” means that an employer employs a person with impairment and as a rule receives for having employed the person a wage subsidy from the government. The person is now employed and is no longer in training for a job. But can be on trial. The work that the person performs is a necessary job that has to be done at a place of employment and which could be performed by a person without impairment. It is possible to formulate a job

description and to give a title to the specific job function. The employee with impairment is needed for his/her capability and competence.

“To keep an employment,” means that the person with impairment continues to want to work and considers himself/herself capable to work. It also means that the employer protects the employee, and within the person, sees an important person for the job to be carried out, the job’s quality and for the working environment at the place of employment. The employee with impairment as the other employees can through his/her contract receive an increase in salary, receive the possibility to training or education in order to raise competence and to development through the employment. The person is now “as everyone else”, there is a job description and a title of profession. She/he is a natural part of the team, a colleague as the other colleagues.

The method of supported employment is practiced with great success at Misa AB in Stockholm, as well as, and at The Activa Foundation and the employment office’s rehabilitation program (SISUS – project) in Örebro. Through a close cooperation between these three organizations and the Swedish Institute for Disability Research at the University of Örebro supported employment has developed and been implemented.

Misa means “Method of development, Individual support, participation in Society and sympathy at Work” and Misa AB offers work related activities to people that have acquired obstructions for work. The aim is to give individual support in work, for example in the form of rehabilitation, mapping of work abilities and daily training for the person that has acquired obstructions for work. Misa AB receives assignments from the municipalities according to the law concerning support and service for persons with certain functional impairments (LSS 1993) and the law about social services (SoL). The company has 110 employees. Currently there are 10 units within Misa AB. The units are specialized according to the various obstructions for work.

The Activa foundation is located in the county of Örebro and has 29 employees and activities in the county’s twelve municipalities. The foundation offers help and support to unemployed people who experience difficulties accessing the labour market; they help the applicant to find permanent employment or training and educational programs in order to reach a higher education level. The applicants are sent to the foundation from the local insurance office, the social services or the employment service, where a consultation procedure takes place. People with impairment can contact the foundation directly, but the foundation can only offers help if one of the above-mentioned authorities has given their consent.

2.2 “NTG – Nya vägar till arbetsmarknaden och kvalitetssäkring av samverkan” (New ways into the employment market with cooperation quality security)

“NTG – Nya vägar till arbetsmarknaden och kvalitetssäkring av samverkan” (*New ways into the employment market with cooperation quality security*) is a National Theme Group within the Equal-program which started 2006, when Sundsvall’s municipality requested money from the Swedish European Social Fund and Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communication. The theme group’s purpose is to develop instruments and methods to secure quality in cooperation between actors working for marginalized groups such as people with impairment, mainly youth who are on their way into the employment field.

The background of the establishment of the national theme groups was the discovery of a lack in cooperation between organisations, authorities and the business world concerning measures for employment rehabilitation. Examples of the actors concerned are the social service offices, employment offices, county governments and the Social Insurance office. The



idea is to have an effective method to establish a better cooperation between the various partners, in order to hinder the persons to be supported from a situation where no authority takes responsibility. Such situations can result in that cases take longer time, meaning that it takes more time for an individual to enter the employment market.

An absolute condition for reaching the goals of good cooperation regarding disability and employment is a careful planning of the cooperation. The project shows that in all fields of activities there are a number of factors that either obstruct or promote cooperation. The core message in the theme group report is that cooperation requires a careful analysis of such factors (Danermark & Germundsson, 2007). The authors discuss three types of factors. Factors related to legislation and internal rules, organization and social representation, i.e. the view of the object for cooperation, a view which is intended to organize behavior and communication. These views have a function of orientation and justification of practice. Through the analysis of several projects the authors identified about 30 essential factors influencing successful cooperation.

For more information about the project see <http://www.sundsvall.se/ntg>



PART THREE: SUMMARY INFORMATION

3.1 Conclusions and recommendations (summary)

An important measure from the recent past was the introduction of the "Prohibition of Discrimination in Working Life of People with Disability Act" (1999:132)". This law concerns both direct and indirect discrimination of persons with impairment. The law applies in spite of the employer's intentions.

The relation between disability and employment is complex. A number of factors influence the possibility to reach and keep a job. The relationship to the employment field varies depending on e.g. age, gender, education, ethnicity, type of impairment and whether or not a person's capacity to work is reduced or not. Young persons with impairment are especially marginalized as well as persons with psychiatric problems. The Swedish government has therewith both through legislation and direct measures tried to contribute to an increase in possibilities of employment. Though it can be established that these measures have not been enough as the trend shows that unemployment is decreasing for persons without impairment yet increasing for persons with impairment. The measures to facilitate and support groups taken at local levels have met with problems regarding cooperation between concerned partners.

We want to point out three areas that need further reinforcement:

1. Research on the relationship between impairment and working life, which shows the complexity and the need for further illustration. A valuable step for knowledge development would be to stimulate projects where with country comparisons are carried out.
2. Continued development, implementation and evaluation of Supported Employment.
3. Knowledge on how cooperation between concerned partners needs to develop and then its implementation in practical activities.

3.2 References

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