



## People with disabilities on the labour market

Levers for a higher employment rate



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 This study

### 1.1.1 Background

*“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly include persons with disabilities in several of their targets and indicators, including on full and productive employment and decent work.” (ILO)*

Employment rates for persons with disabilities reveal great differences throughout Europe (Geiger, van der Wel, and Tøge, 2017). For instance, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland and Italy perform relatively well, while Belgium, the Czech Republic, Norway and especially Hungary perform poorly. While it is not easy to explain these differences, international research suggests they cannot only be attributed to the situation and conditions on the labour market, to the severity of the disability or to the sociodemographic and economic profile of persons with disabilities in the different countries. The explanation may very well be found in the complex interplay of these different factors, as well as in the role of directly and indirectly related policy measures and initiatives on different levels, introduced to improve the employment rate of persons with disabilities (Holland, Burström, et al., 2011).

Most European countries are shifting from a focus on generous benefits (compensation) to activating and enhancing the integration of persons with disabilities (Scharle, 2013). Although there is some convergence between European countries in terms of labour market policies for integrating persons with disabilities, great differences still remain in the degree and speed at which these processes occur and in the specific measures that shape such developments.

In addition to integration or activation, there has also been a recent shift towards long-term employment in decent jobs as well as a critical look at policy that is aimed purely at increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities, regardless of how sustainable and qualitative that employment is. Sustainable employment of and decent work for persons with disabilities has become the new target, with adequate remuneration, job security, motivating tasks, career perspectives, and further training opportunities (Greve, 2009).

From this perspective, the impact of further digital transformation and so-called new forms of employment (for instance platform work) deserve special attention. While offering possible opportunities for persons with disabilities, they also include new challenges and risks for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market.

### 1.1.2 Research questions and methods

This study intends to supplement existing research with insightful policy examples from across Europe that offer learning potential in the field of employing people with disabilities.

The study is based on the following main research questions:

- 1. What can we learn from good policy practices on the national level?**
  - How can the difference between employment rates in various countries be explained?
  - What is the role of directly and indirectly related policy measures and initiatives on different levels? What are the most important explanatory elements (with an additional focus on innovative policies and practices, as well as looking at specific groups facing specific challenges, especially the group with psychosocial problems)?



2. **How can decent, sustainable work be guaranteed?**
3. **Discussion on possible risks and opportunities related to new forms of employment**

Attention will also be paid to involving workers' organisations (on different levels) in formulating and supporting strong and excellent innovative measures, with an emphasis on opportunities and risks.

In order to increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities, policies should focus on the one hand on the so-called 'labour reserve' that is available, i.e. the group of jobseekers with a disability who are looking for work but find it difficult to find, and on the other hand on the 'potential labour reserve', i.e. the group of persons who are currently not actively participating in the labour market. To raise the employment rate of people with disabilities, a great effort needs to be made to lower the thresholds experienced by this group, both when entering the labour market (the regular labour market as far as possible) and throughout their career.

This research project will look at the causes and mechanisms providing an insight into the low employment rate (and work ability) of persons with disabilities. What are the barriers to employment for persons with disabilities? What are the challenges? The low employment rate is the result of different factors on different levels, on the micro, meso and macro level; on the level of the individual, on the level of the organisation and on the level of social structures, broader policy frameworks, welfare systems... There are possible (unintended) thresholds on both the supply and demand side, on the level of the services provided on both the demand and supply side, and on the level of the policy pursued and the various measures and benefit statuses. We will explore possible (innovative) policies, practices and levers that can provide an answer to the identified thresholds and challenges.

Special attention will be paid to employment sustainability and work ability. This refers in particular to persons with disabilities who are in employ-

ment but working below their level (degree of underemployment) or in less workable jobs, thus putting pressure on the sustainability of this employment.

Finally, technological innovation and digital transformation will have a significant future impact on labour in general, and probably even more so on people with disabilities in the labour market. While offering opportunities, this also comes with risks and challenges. It is important to actively engage in ways to ensure that the benefits of these developments are made available to the widest possible group.

A literature review provides more insight into good practice that can be learnt from different countries in the field of sustainable employment for persons with disabilities. Which (innovative) answers have been found to the identified challenges and thresholds and on which levels? What can be done to improve the employment rate for people with disabilities? Which innovative policy responses can increase the employment rate and improve decent work for persons with disabilities? How can new forms of employment offer new opportunities? How can possible risks be prevented?

Besides reviewing literature, the study also looks at four countries, selected for the significant learning potential that they offer. Another decisive factor was the innovative aspect. Most of the selected countries (Sweden, Finland and France) focused on specific projects that could be used as an example for other countries, looking at specific projects that could serve as 'good practice'. With regard to the Netherlands, the learning potential lies more in the problems experienced and the corresponding solutions that were devised. A qualitative case study approach was used to examine these projects and policy choices. Contacts were made with the relevant actors on site, consisting specifically of academics and researchers, political representatives and staff members, employees of client organisations, interest groups and civil society organisations.

These actors were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire based on how the initiatives functioned, together with the corresponding context and subsequent evaluation.

In Sweden, three experts were interviewed who all played an active role in either implementing or evaluating the SIUS project. The four experts interviewed in Finland were again all directly involved directly in the OTE project, including the former project director. In the Netherlands, six people were interviewed from different civil society organisations, including a staff member of the trade union FNV. Finally, in France two Agefiph employees were contacted.

### **1.1.3 Added value for the social dialogue**

People with disabilities still face major difficulties and discrimination in the workplace. The progressive aging of Europe's population in general means that there are more people with chronic diseases and disabilities in the working population, due partly to the fact that older people are more likely to be confronted with chronic disease or disability. Social dialogue is an appropriate instrument for transforming the social and economic aspects of labour systems so as to provide decent work for persons with disabilities. With social dialogue taking place on the local, regional and international level as well as in companies and sectors, it influences and improves the labour market prospects for people with disabilities in a variety of ways. It affects both international and national policy, it impacts the sectoral level and also the daily working life of employees on the organisational level.

This research project hopes that the study results will inform workers' representatives and help them to promote access to decent work and sustainable careers for persons with disabilities.

## 1.2 Structure

The study has the following structure:

1. A short overview shows the importance of including people with disabilities on the labour market.
2. The theoretical framework is then presented on three levels: the micro, meso and macro level.
3. The core of the study features four different country cases (Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and France). In each of those countries, a project or policy measure has been chosen for in-depth study. The various country cases are preceded by a short chapter with quantitative and comparative data on the EU level.  
All four country cases follow the same structure. A brief look at the general policy background is followed by a description and explanation of the project/policy in question. Finally, each country case is evaluated and discussed.
4. The country cases are followed by an additional chapter on platform work and its opportunities (or lack of them) for integrating people with disabilities in the labour market.
5. The report closes with conclusions and several recommendations based on the various cases. These recommendations are divided into two categories, one for the demand side and one for the supply side, ending with a reflection on the possibilities for (further) trade union involvement.

## 1.3 Importance of labour market participation for persons with disabilities

### 1.3.1 Importance for the economy

There are several economic arguments in favour of encouraging the labour market participation of persons with disabilities. The greatest possible activation of people with a work-limiting disability is considered increasingly important from a purely economic point of view. The progressively aging population is shrinking the working-age population and causing labour shortages in certain countries. As a result, companies cannot fill job vacancies and are seeing productivity decrease.

The extension of working lives is making the active population older. As a result, a higher percentage of the active population is likely to be confronted with some form of disability: the percentage of chronic diseases and other medical problems increases with age. More attention therefore has to be paid to efforts to keep work both “workable” and sustainable throughout people’s lives.

European research shows that these demographic changes will have a negative impact on up to every third EU Member State (Vornholt et al., 2018). The most problematic consequences in economic terms consist in decreasing competitiveness and increasing costs. The extent to which these demographic developments will influence the economic growth of a country therefore also depends on the extent to which people with a certain distance to the labour market can participate. The group of persons with a work-limiting disability can offer important potential here (Vornholt et al., 2018).

In addition, there are also indirect economic and non-economic costs associated with disabilities and corresponding policies. The loss of certain taxes is a significant cost for governments. This loss is even greater if

family members or other informal carers reduce their working hours to help care for the person in question.

Very few estimates are available of the exact cost of disability to national economies, due to the interplay of many different factors. This is combined with the difficulty, for example, in making advance estimates of productivity levels if someone were to return to work after a period of inactivity. In 1998, an attempt was made in Canada to estimate the short- and long-term costs of illnesses and injuries within the policy context at the time, based on the National Population Health Survey. The loss of income from work as a result of the failure to employ and activate persons with disabilities was estimated to amount to approximately 6.7% of the national GDP (World Health Organization, 2011).

### **1.3.2 Importance for society**

Societal interests are also important arguments for promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market. For instance, poverty rates for persons with disabilities are significantly higher on a global scale. As a result, the issue is also featured on the agenda of the United Nations and has been included in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Work has a positive influence on people's health and well-being. This is particularly the case for persons with a work-limiting disability, as they are more likely to be at risk of social isolation. As well as improving social interaction, work usually also has financial benefits on an individual level. These can help to ensure that the person in question is better able to live independently and is less reliant on benefits, allowances and external assistance. Finally, all of this is also related to people's mental health. In addition to the direct benefits of social contacts, mental health will also improve because being in work has a positive impact on many other areas

of life (Vornholt et al., 2018). Having a (sustainable) job is therefore an important catalyst for the general well-being of many people.

Finally, the WHO emphasises the importance of integration and participation for persons with disabilities, regardless of the (macro)economic costs. They, too, recognise the problems caused on an individual level by insufficient participation. These are not only problematic in themselves, but often also have a negative impact on other areas of life (Officer & Shakespeare, 2013; World Health Organization, 2011).

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter summarizes a number of insights that offer a theoretical framework for identifying additional barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from participating in work.

### 2.1 Social model of disability

The first aspect is the social model of (work) disability. This model has triggered important international development in how disabilities are considered and how labour market policy deals with these problems.

Until a few decades ago, persons with disabilities were mainly seen in terms of their medical conditions and limitations, while less attention was paid to the role that society plays in limiting these persons in social participation, such as in the labour market.

Since the early 1970s, more attention was paid to the social and political conditions in which persons with disabilities find themselves (Officer & Shakespeare, 2013). The social model of disability argues that disability is socially constructed and that it is primarily society that creates social and structural barriers (Shakespeare 2005, 2012). The model has a clear focus on the economic, environmental, social and cultural barriers that individuals with disabilities face in different areas of life, including the labour market. It is an approach which assumes that disability is not inherent to the individual and therefore views the inclusion of persons with disabilities as a public responsibility.

Such social approaches also increasingly focus on the right to sustainable and quality employment for persons with disabilities, and on the elimination of existing barriers (material and physical barriers and also invisible social structures, policies, norms and values). The focus has shifted from



people's limitations and disabilities to their strengths and work capacities. This social approach is gradually gaining acceptance in the academic world and has also found its way into the policies of several European countries.

## 2.2 Barriers

The integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market can be seen as a dynamic process in which individual characteristics (education, nature of the disability, age, gender etc.) interact with the nature of the work and the presence or absence of certain support services and facilities (Vornholt et al., 2018).

Several barriers impede labour market integration and lower the (sustainable) employment rate of persons with disabilities on a global scale. These barriers can be situated on different levels: the micro (individual), meso (organisation), and macro level (society, social security, policy), and often concur. The barriers are to be found on both the demand and the supply side.

### 2.2.1 Micro level

Various elements are involved on the individual level and can be broken down into the nature of the disability and other factors.

#### 2.2.1.1 Nature of the disability

A first factor distinguishing individual barriers is the nature of the disability. People with mental health issues or intellectual disability appear to be the most precarious group in the labour market and they tend to be overrepresented in sheltered workplace facilities. The stigma involved (and the anticipation of this stigma by the person with the disability) and

the potentially difficult social interactions make it harder for this group to find and keep a job (Scheid, 2005).

Other studies look for the causes in a general lower level of education (see below). However, this effect is not found in all studies. Various studies do show that within the group of persons with disabilities, individuals with mental problems are more likely to work below their educational level (Boman et al., 2015a).

The deaf and hard of hearing and those with reduced mobility generally appear to have the highest chances of employment within the group of persons with disabilities. Reasons for this include the fact that these disabilities are relatively visible and known among the broader population and employers. In addition, stronger networks and client organisations have been built up over time around these types of disabilities and address the specific problems faced by the target group. People with hearing disabilities are also more often highly educated, which can be an additional explanation for their higher employment opportunities. Finally, an important role is also played by the severity and impact of the medical problems. The complexity resulting from the concurrence of certain medical problems in the same person is often highly detrimental to the employment opportunity (Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006).

### 2.2.1.2 Other individual factors

Besides the nature of the disability, other factors play a role on the individual level. Extensive international scientific literature is available in this context.

With regard to age, the risks appear to be greater for older people with a work-limiting disability (Boman et al., 2015b). Furthermore, young people and especially school leavers are also a particularly precarious group. The connection between education and the labour market is problematic for some young persons with a work-limiting disability. If they cannot find

the necessary support and guidance, they run the risk of falling between the cracks and participating neither in education nor in the labour market. Research shows that a considerable share of the NEET youngsters has some form of work-limiting disability (Beyer & Beyer, 2016).

The background characteristics with the most obvious impact on the chances of success in the labour market are the education level and the nature of the disability (Scharle, 2013). The impact of the nature of the disability was discussed earlier. As far as education is concerned, research shows that persons with disabilities have a lower average level of education.

Barriers in education itself and individual problems caused by the disability can make it difficult for affected individuals to keep up with their education (Boman et al., 2015b). Persons with a work-limiting disability can fall behind at school because of medical problems related to their disability, certain complications, side-effects of medication or the need for certain forms of treatment. Other accompanying problems include stigma, social isolation or a lack of self-confidence. All these factors lead to a lower average level of education.

Moreover, a form of double exclusion can also be seen in this area. For instance, people with disabilities often encounter higher demand-side thresholds for jobs with a lower level of education than for jobs that require a higher level of education (e.g. more demanding physical requirements, less autonomy and flexibility in performing tasks etc.). The combination of factors on the supply and on the demand side makes disabled persons with a lower level of education more vulnerable on the labour market (Holland, Burström, et al., 2011; Holland, Nylén, et al., 2011).

In addition, data show that persons with disabilities are less likely to participate in lifelong learning and will experience more difficulties in participating.

There is another important double exclusion (double disability) problem in terms of individual background characteristics. It appears that people of foreign origin (migrant background) with a disability often experience even greater difficulties in the labour market than others with a similar disability (Edwards, Praat, and Baker 2005).

Apart from these individual characteristics, research shows that there are several types of personal and individual obstacles that apply specifically to people with a work-limiting disability (Corbière, Mercier, and Lesage, 2004): (lack of) self-confidence, (lack of) motivation and health (including medication and possible side effects).

It is important to note that there can be reciprocal effects between the various barriers within the levels. For example, someone whose self-confidence has been impaired by previous negative experience may possibly no longer be sufficiently motivated to enter the labour market or to carry out their current job.

## **2.2.2 Meso level**

Numerous good examples show that there is indeed a willingness among employers to give persons with disabilities a chance to work. However, there is often a need to overcome certain barriers, which can include weighing up the (social and economic) costs and benefits.

### **2.2.2.1 Lack of knowledge and experience with disability**

On the organisational level, a general lack of knowledge in the work environment may constitute an important barrier, primarily in terms of the needs and possibilities of persons with disabilities (Honey 1993; Pearson et al. 2003). However, this lack of information affects several areas.

Estimating the productivity and flexibility of (potential) employees with a disability is a first aspect that impairs clarity and impacts the (perceived) cost of employing someone with a disability. Certain stereotypes and prejudices often (still) play a major role in this respect. A lack of predictive information means that both employers and colleagues often revert to certain stereotypes that translate into a distorted estimation of the productivity of the employee in question.

Moreover, there can also be the perception of a lower quality of work (than if the job were done by someone without work-limiting disability) or higher absenteeism.

Aspects involved here go beyond the perception of lower productivity and quality (compared to competitors for a certain job). In addition, employers or colleagues may also think that recruiting someone with a disability will force colleagues or the employer to take on additional tasks to compensate for this 'loss' of productivity.

Research also shows that employers often overestimate the costs of certain adjustments involved in employing people with disabilities (Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017). Small companies, in particular, may struggle with the expected investment in terms of time and resources. This partly explains why, in general, large companies score better in terms of inclusive recruitment and employment policies (Jasper & Waldhart, 2012).

People with mental health issues or intellectual disabilities are more likely to suffer from certain stereotypes and prejudices than people with a physical disability. The rather "invisible" nature of these problems is an important additional factor, as it is difficult for an outsider to assess what the problem actually means for the person concerned. There may also be certain apprehensions in terms of possible instability, or difficulties in managing the person, or potential problems in following instructions. The phenomenon of 'aesthetic anxiety' can also play a role, whereby some employers are afraid of the image that certain customers will form about

their organisation when they recruit someone with a work-limiting disability (Vornholt et al., 2018). Logically, however, the recruitment of persons with disabilities can also create a positive perception among customers.

### 2.2.2.2 Lack of knowledge with regards to services

Besides a lack of knowledge about the disability and its direct consequences, there is also a lack of knowledge about available means of support and guidance. Many employers are not aware of the options that are available for more fluent and efficient recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities. This is certainly the case in smaller companies with less developed HR services for keeping an eye on the situation. Given the general complexity and the potentially customized character of such support tools, there is no doubt that this can demand a considerable effort from the employer.

All these problems and ambiguities thus increase the perceived costs of persons with disabilities when they present themselves as potential employees. Beyer & Beyer (2016) have listed the various economic considerations that could potentially impair the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities:

- Extent to which additional supervision is required
- Extent to which the employee can arrive on time and work regularly
- Productivity and quality of work delivered
- Compensatory government measures (or lack thereof)
- Duration of employment
- Potentially increased risk of work-related accidents

- Claims for insurance costs provided by the employer
- Costs of making certain adjustments (including the extent to which this is refunded by the government).

Literature cites elements for compensating and optimising the competitive potential of persons with disabilities on the labour market. Previous positive experience is an important factor in enhancing the recruitment chances of persons with disabilities. The chances of subsequently recruiting another disabled person are higher if the employer has had such positive experience.

Furthermore, a good match between job and person is crucial, in combination with making the right modifications. Besides previous experience, employers also benefit from knowledge provided by external stakeholders and from good contacts with external services that can offer support (Kaye, Jans and Jones, 2011).

### 2.2.3 Macro level

Research shows that the economic cycle has a certain influence. An increase in demand for labour and lower unemployment levels also have a favourable influence on the employment rates of persons with disabilities. Labour shortages lower the threshold and act as a lever. Labour market activation of persons with disabilities is often easier in periods of increased labour demand and lower unemployment levels than in times of recession. Moreover, more money is usually available for governments to finance support measures when the economy is booming (Dempte & Ford, 2009; Holland, Burström, et al., 2011; Holland, Nylén, et al., 2011).

An important question here is whether this is the case for most people with disabilities, or mostly for those who are less distant from the labour market. A significant share of persons with disabilities is currently inactive

because they are so remote from the labour market that they already face a major obstacle in starting to search for work.

During periods of economic downturn, the shrinking number of jobs makes it more difficult for persons with disabilities to compete with persons without disabilities, largely due to fear of reduced productivity. Moreover, companies will want to put limited resources to more efficient use and therefore make higher demands on their employees. Employers will thus be less willing to make substantial investments and take financial risks when hiring (Holland et al., 2011).

An additional problem is posed by the macro-economic shifts in work that have taken place in recent decades with an increase in the requirements for employees.

Examples here include the increasing robotisation and digital transformation of the labour market. As demonstrated earlier, persons with disabilities are over-represented in low-skilled jobs. Research shows that the various scenarios concerning the future of low-skilled labour will often lead to jobs (a) disappearing, (b) becoming more demanding for employees, (c) changing to other types of jobs, (d) remaining stable (Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2016). Each of these scenarios will usually have greater implications for people with disabilities than for people without. In the case of low-skilled jobs disappearing (scenario a), alternatives for such job losses will have to be found for the target group. Considerable challenges are involved here as the target group is generally less educated and has greater difficulties in getting additional training or retraining. If jobs become more demanding (scenario b), this also has negative consequences for many in the target group as it will raise the barriers to employment even further. Also, in the case of scenario (c) with jobs changing to accommodate a modified range of tasks, due consideration must also be given to the obstacle of retraining and reduced permanent training in the target group. Even in the most conservative scenario (scenario d) where jobs remain more or less stable, there is still a considerable



amount of catching up to do to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. Moreover, there is a real chance that the competition for such jobs will increase, since persons without disabilities will also experience problems with upskilling and increased flexibility. On the other hand, the growth and digitalisation of technological progress can also have a positive influence on the employment of persons with disabilities. Developments in these areas result in more advanced physical means of support which become cheaper and more accessible to persons with disabilities. A recent example of this are co-bots, intended to work alongside people to help them fulfil their task. There is also great potential in software-based innovations such as AI. If used correctly, such innovations can, for example, enhance the efficiency of certain parts of the service process for people with disabilities. In line with growing digitalisation, de-industrialisation has been taking place for several decades now. Besides the service economy, the manufacturing industry is an important sector for the employment of persons with disabilities. The jobs that remain in such sectors entail a certain degree of upskilling, which poses its own problems, given the reduced uptake of ongoing training among persons with disabilities (Holland & Burström, et al., 2011).

## **3 LESSONS FROM GOOD PRACTICE ACROSS THE EU**

### **3.1 Introduction**

It is difficult to determine exactly which aspects of policy in a certain country are the determining factor for good or poor labour market participation of persons with disabilities. The degree to which a country succeeds in this respect depends on a multitude of factors that go beyond purely policy-related considerations. On the one hand, the financial, institutional and labour market contexts play a major role. Specific examples include the size and organisation of the primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors, the budgets available to governments, the flexibility/rigidity of the labour market etc. On the other hand, cultural and historical factors are also important. Examples include general views on inclusion and participation in a society.

### **3.2 Data**

Despite the difficulties in comparing national statistics and figures from various countries, it is still possible to make certain comparisons on the basis of surveys. Examples of such surveys are the LFS (Labour Force Survey) and the EU-SILC (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions). Neither survey focuses primarily on the occupationally disabled; often, a form of proxy will be used to determine whether someone is categorised as occupationally disabled. The answer to the question is based on a self-assessed situation so that one is not bound by definitions, and it is possible to make comparisons between countries.

### 3.2.1 EU-LFS

Figures resulting from the EU-LFS are based on the separate disability module in the 2011 Labour Force Survey<sup>1</sup>. The wording used for the questions here ensures that it addresses work limitations that are related to restrictions in daily activities or health problems. A respondent falls within the group of people with a work-limiting disability if they give a positive answer to one of the following questions:

- Do you have a limitation in the number of hours you could or do work per week?
- Are you unable to perform certain activities, such as heavy lifting, working outside, sitting for long periods of time?
- Is there a limitation in terms of transport to and from work?
- Do you need personal assistance to work (person without employment) or do you use personal assistance to work (person with employment)?
- Do you need special equipment or an adapted workplace to work (person without employment) or do you use special equipment or have an adapted workplace (person with employment)?
- Do you need or do you have any special working arrangements to be able to work, e.g. sedentary work, teleworking, flexible working time or less demanding work?

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 LFS survey was used out of necessity, as this is the most recent edition with the addition of the 'ad hoc module on employment of disabled people'. Comparisons between countries are only possible with the data from this module.

### 3.2.2 EU-SILC

The EU-SILC aims to collect comparative, cross-sectional and longitudinal multidimensional microdata on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions on the country level in Europe. The figures for each country are discussed in more detail in the individual chapters.

Identifying someone as a disabled person in the EU-SILC is based on self-assessment by the respondents and the extent to which health problems hamper them in their daily activities for a period of at least six months.

A person is categorised as employed if he/she works full time or part time as an employee or is self-employed.

It is thus possible to distinguish between persons with a severe disability, persons with a limited disability and persons without a disability, which is an important advantage of EU-SILC compared to the EU-LFS.

The prevalence of disability in a country must also be taken into account in the interest of reliable comparisons. Caution is therefore required when comparing two countries with great differences in the prevalence figures.

Based on the EU-SILC data (enriched with Eurostat data), it is estimated that in 2018, about 17.9% of the people between 16-64 years of age in Europe live with some form of disability that hinders them on a daily basis.

If the total group of disabled people over 16 years of age (25%) is divided according to severity of disability, this translates into 17.6% of 16+ year olds with a moderate disability and 7.4% with a severe disability.

### 3.2.2.1 Employment rate

On the basis of the EU-SILC, there is a clear difference in employment rates between persons with and without disabilities. For example, in 2018, approximately 52% of people with a work-limiting disability were employed compared to 76.2% of people without a work-limiting disability; the disability gap is therefore 24.2 percentage points.

When broken down by gender, the employment rate on the European level for women with a work-limiting disability was 49.3% and for women without a work-limiting disability 70.2% (disability gap: 20.9 ppt). For men the employment rate is 55.1% and 82.2% respectively (disability gap: 27.1 ppt). The disability gap on the EU level is thus greater for men than for women.

It is clear that the severity of the disability has a major impact on the employment rate. This is also reflected in the figures on the EU level. For example, in 2018, 29.9% of people with severe work disabilities were employed compared to 60.4% of people with moderate work disabilities and 76.2% for people without work disabilities.

In general, most EU Member States show an increase in the employment rate in the years following the economic crisis.

The countries that perform best in terms of employment rates for persons with disabilities based on the 2018 EU-SILC figures are Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark and the Netherlands. However, as stated above, such a comparison is not so simple, and the prevalence rates should always be taken into account. Perhaps it is more interesting to look at the employment disability gaps in the various countries.

### 3.3 International comparisons

The inherent difficulties stipulated above mean that relatively few studies have attempted large-scale international comparisons. Existing research often shows differing results according to the methods and data that were used. This chapter presents an overview of research results that featured in such international comparisons.

Recent research using EU SILC<sup>2</sup> data between 2004 and 2017 shows some interesting international differences based on the disability employment gap<sup>3</sup> (DEG). The calculations show significant variation in the DEG, which varies between 10-42 percentage points. Another important finding is that the DEG can still be large even in countries with high probabilities of employment for people with disabilities. This is the case, for example, in Denmark, the Netherlands and Austria. When the gender dimension is added to the equation, it transpires that the DEG for men is the smallest in Italy, Finland, Portugal and Slovenia. It is the largest for men in the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and the UK. For women the gap is the smallest in Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Greece and the largest in Denmark, the UK, Lithuania and the Netherlands.

The research also looked at the relationship between policy characteristics and employment for persons with disabilities. A first finding is that the presence of employment protective legislation (EPL) also proved to have an effect on the DEG. Countries that implement stricter EPL measures have smaller DEGs for both men and women. Secondly, the correlation between expenditure on active labour market policies (ALMP) and the DEGs is negative and applies to women, indicating that the likelihood of employment for women with disabilities is smaller in countries

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2 European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

3 The disability employment gap is the difference in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people.

spending a higher share of GDP on ALMP. One possible reason for this proposed by the study is that ALMP for women might trigger lock-in effects that hinder them from entering employment, for example if they are enrolled in certain programmes.

The study also looked at the relationship between the way countries rely on disability benefits and the employment rates of people with disabilities. Two hypotheses were formulated, one with a sceptical view of welfare (lower reliance on disability benefits increases disability employment rates) and the other with the opposite point of view (greater reliance on disability benefits increases disability employment rates). There was no proof for the sceptical view of disability benefits. The other hypothesis that believes in more generous disability benefits was confirmed only for men. However, the researchers believed that reversed causality may be involved here, whereby countries with high employment rates of people with disabilities may have a larger share of the disabled active population entitled to a disability benefit. In turn, this leads to higher spending on disability benefits. This interesting finding should be taken into account when looking at the Finnish and Dutch cases later in this research.

Finally, the study looked at the relationship between flexicurity (higher EPL) and the DEG. The analysis showed that less flexicurity in a country raises the probability of employment for persons with disabilities compared to persons without disabilities (even if temporary contracts are taken into account). This suggests that employment protection provided by governments is beneficial for persons with disabilities and reduces the DEG (van der Zwan and de Beer, 2021). Once again this will be an interesting finding when looking at the Dutch case (see chapter The Netherlands).

Further research by Baumberg Geiger, van der Wel and Tøge explored the DEG in Europe between 2002 and 2014. The DEG is an important indicator as it compares the unemployment rates between persons with and without a disability. The study makes use of the European Social Survey (ESS),

due to the inherent issues with many employment-related data sources due to national differences in data collection methods.

The study compares data from the EU-SILC, EU-LFS<sup>4</sup> and ESS to establish rankings in disability employment. The three surveys reveal some general trends, with countries such as Sweden, Finland and Switzerland showing consistently high performance. In contrast, countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Norway and Hungary perform poorly overall. The ESS results for Italy were surprising, as the data showed that persons with a disability had 5.4% higher employment than non-disabled persons. There was no explanation for this outlier. Italy also scored well in the other surveys. However, it was not included as a case for further research in this study because of the data anomaly.

The inconsistent ranking of some countries is a clear indication of the difficulties encountered when comparing countries. Denmark, for example, was one of the higher-ranking countries according to the ESS data, mid to-low ranking in the EU-SILC and among the lower ranking countries according to the LFS.

The study also revealed some inherent downsides in using the employment disability gap. One clear example is the comparison between Norway and Spain. Based on the disability gap, Norway would be expected to have a significantly higher DEG than Spain (21.5% vs 14.8%). However, Norway has a much higher overall level of employment. The difference in the number of people said to be disabled in the national surveys is a further complexity, implying that more people with less severe disabilities were included. They in turn have higher employment chances. In specific terms, the study shows that the employment gap declines by 0.38% for each additional 1% of the population that reports a disability. The study proves that it is difficult to compare country data on disability employ-

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4 European Union Labour Force Survey



ment, largely because none of the existing international comparative datasets are sufficiently aimed at disability employment. There is a great need for datasets that address the issue specifically with consistent data collection in order to guarantee comparability (Geiger et al., 2017).

One first important conclusion based on this chapter is that there is a general scarcity of research comparing disability employment on an international level. This is due in part to the complexity of these comparisons as well as the lack of comparable supranational data. The large datasets that are currently available (such as the EU-SILC, LFS and ESS) are not without faults when trying to compare various countries. A certain degree of caution has to be taken into account when drawing conclusions based on these datasets, as evidenced by the inconsistent results that are sometimes obtained.

Another conclusion is that there are significant differences among European countries, with variations of 10-42 percentage points in the DEG (EU-SILC). Some states such as Sweden and Finland have consistently good scores for the DEG, regardless of the dataset used. This is also the case for Switzerland and Italy (even though the data anomaly requires further investigation). Other countries produce consistently poor scores, namely Belgium, the Czech Republic, Norway and Hungary.

It is difficult if not impossible to pinpoint the differences in DEGs, as many factors are at play and interplay with each other. This was made clear by the first research that was discussed (van der Zwan and de Beer, 2021). Different policy-related factors were analysed and discussed, but no strong conclusions could be made and only a few institutional characteristics could be taken into account. The correlation between ALMP (active labour market policies)<sup>5</sup> expenditure and the DEG was only valid for

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5 Defined as measures targeting the unemployed in order to improve the functioning of the labour market' (Calmfors 1994)

women. It revealed the possibility of lock-in effects in systems with a strong emphasis on ALMP. In addition, it transpired that countries implementing stricter EPL measures have smaller DEGs for both men and women. Another look at benefits generosity provided the insight that countries with more generous disability benefits systems have smaller DEGs. However, more research is required to prove or disprove this. Finally, the research showed that countries implementing strong protective measures for employment of people with disabilities have lower DEGs than countries with more flexicurity-based systems.

Countries in the EU have been making increasing use of Active Labour Market Policies. Such measures are often at the centre of modern employment policies, in contrast to the mostly passive benefits-based policies that were dominant in the past. This can clearly be seen in the various case studies that are presented in this research. The Finnish case study, in particular, clearly shows that policy in Finland is shifting away from a strong focus on benefits (see chapter Finland). ALMP policies are generally considered to be beneficial for the employment chances of people at a distance from the labour market. There are, however, significant differences between ALMP policies. Choosing the most effective ones for a specific nation or region is a difficult and complex undertaking. Some general insights from research on ALMP policy are presented below. Broadly speaking, ALMP measures aim to have an impact in three areas. First of all, employment services aim for greater efficiency in matching vacancies and jobseekers. One important focus for the labour market consists in training to improve the skills of jobseekers and match them with the labour market. Jobs are created through public employment and through subsidies to private employment (Yalcin, 2016).

ALMPs can take very different forms, which literature divides into four categories (Gilbert & Besharov, 2011).

1. Measures that increase the benefits of work, such as increasing the remuneration of work through tax breaks and reducing benefit entitlements.
2. Measures that increase the costs of not working, such as penalties for non-participation in job search programmes. This is also impacted by reducing replacement rates and cutting the duration of benefits, as well as increasing eligibility criteria for benefits.
3. Measures to increase the availability of work. This includes increasing employment in the public sector by subsidising labour costs. Intervention in the private sector is also possible through direct or indirect payments to employers, the provision of flexible working conditions, sheltered employment or micro-credits to encourage business start-ups.
4. Measures that increase the willingness to work. Examples include providing education and training as well as opportunities for improving soft skills to make jobseekers more employable.

Despite the growing focus on ALMP measures, the effectiveness of these policies has rarely been compared on an international (European) level. Some insights are provided by one meta-analysis from 2010 that compares 137 programme evaluations from 19 different countries. The analysis provides some interesting results for different types of ALMP programmes. A first finding is that there is little systemic relationship between the effectiveness of a programme and most other contextual factors, even including the macroeconomic environment and institutional factors. Other interesting findings were related to programme type and their post-programme success:

- Traditional training programmes have a modest likelihood of having a significant positive impact on post-programme employment rates.

- Compared to training, both private sector incentive programmes and services and sanctions programmes<sup>6</sup> show better performance. In specific terms, the likelihood of such programmes having a positive impact seemed to be around 30-50 percentage points higher than training programmes.
- However direct employment programmes were around 25 percentage points less effective than regular training<sup>7</sup>.
- The same goes for programmes targeting young people, which also seemed to be consistently less effective.

The research also indicated that strict dismissal protection regulations are associated with lower programme effectiveness. Finally, it appears that active programmes are more effective when the unemployment rate is higher, in particular with regards to training programmes (Kluve, 2010).

Another study carried out by the OECD came to interesting conclusions with regard to the combination of passive<sup>8</sup> and active labour market policies based on macroeconomic analysis of the impact of overall spending on active and passive labour market policies. At first glance, the OECD analysis showed that additional spending on ALMP decreased unemployment, whereas PLMP (passive labour market policies) increased unemployment. To a certain extent, this is to be expected as ALMPs are aimed at activating unemployed people, whereas PLMPs reduce the cost of unemployment and increase the reservation wage. More interesting results become visible when both types of policies interact. According to the research, interaction between both types of policy has significant beneficial

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6 A category of programmes comprising all measures aimed at increasing job search efficiency, such as monitoring, counselling, job search assistance, and corresponding sanctions in case of non-compliance.

7 Programs that focus on the direct creation and provision of public works or other activities that produce goods or services.

effects with regard to unemployment and employment. More specifically, greater spending on one type of policy makes the other type of policy (ALMP or PLMP) more effective. This means that the aforementioned disincentive effects of PLMPs disappear and even become positive if enough resources are invested in ALMPs. More details about types of measures are also provided. In short, combinations of ALMPs (public employment services, training, employment incentives, direct job creation and start-up incentives) and unemployment insurance seem to have favourable outcomes, with a decrease in unemployment and an increase in employment and labour force participation. However, the interaction of ALMPs and unemployment assistance appeared to have an opposite effect (Pignatti and Van Belle, 2018)<sup>8</sup>.

Both research and the growing reliance of modern welfare states on ALMP measures indicate clear advantages with ALMP. However, the broad nature and definition of these measures makes it important for them to undergo further investigation and evaluation. This applies all the more, seeing that their success is heavily dependent on a wide range of contextual factors and their specific implementation. This is illustrated by the different cases presented in this research. For example, the Netherlands have opted for a strong emphasis on activating measures, with services and sanctions programmes, stronger regulation of benefit entitlements, flexible working conditions etc. The same applies to Sweden, that has invested heavily in an active role of the public employment services (PES) via supported employment. In addition, measures such as wage subsidies have also been an integral part of Swedish employment policy. However, although both countries rely on ALMP measures, there are significant differences between the outcomes of both policies in each case. Sweden is considered effective in aiding employment amongst people with disabilities, whereas the situation in the Netherlands is being scrutinized and is

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8 Passive policies are focused on instruments such as replacement income during periods of joblessness or job search.

deemed by many to be counterproductive. Finally, the OECD research shows there are clear advantages in combining both PLMP and ALMP measures. Once again, there is no one-size-fits-all rule that applies to every national context.

### 3.4 Choice of countries

As mentioned in the introduction, four different countries were chosen for further research, mostly for different reasons. Sweden, Finland and France were chosen because they score well in terms of employment of persons with disabilities (see 'Data') and also have interesting innovative projects. Each has their own vision and their own approach to addressing the issues arising from labour market participation of people with disabilities. The Netherlands, on the other hand, was included more as a 'learning case'. In addition, more attention is being paid to the issue of employing people with disabilities in the Netherlands, where there have been significant changes in recent years.

#### a) Employment rates of countries under review

Sweden is one of the countries in Europe scoring better, as is generally the case in all Scandinavian countries. However, Sweden appears to score lower than the neighbouring countries Finland and Denmark, based on the EU-SILC figures. But the highly differing prevalence figures make this kind of direct comparison difficult. The Netherlands also scores strongly and according to the EU-SILC figures even slightly stronger than Finland. The disability prevalence rates<sup>9</sup> of these two countries are also similar, which makes this comparison relatively reliable. The chapter on the Netherlands will show that there are clear questions about the quality and durability of work in the Netherlands in particular. France also scores

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9 The percentage of people within a country that is considered to have a form of disability.

strongly in terms of EU-SILC data, with employment rates similar to Finland (although the prevalence rates differ).

As far as the employment gap is concerned, Sweden achieves an average score, but Finland scores much better with a gap that is 10 percentage points smaller than Sweden. The Netherlands in turn is between the two countries and is among the better European averages in this area. The figures for France are similar to those for Finland, also in terms of disability gap.

It is also important to look at the data according to the degree of disability. Here Sweden scores significantly better than the European average. In the EU, an average of 29.9% of people with a severe disability are employed, compared to 35.9% for Sweden. Finland achieves a far lower score here with 25.7% of persons with serious disabilities in employment. This is less than the European average and certainly less than Sweden. One important reason for this difference is probably the Finnish system that has had a strong focus on guaranteeing income, with relatively few activating aspects (see chapter on Finland). When it comes to employing people with serious disabilities, the Netherlands is about 5 percentage points below the European average (23.1%), achieving the lowest score of the various country cases here. Finally, France scores significantly better than the other country cases and much better than the EU average in terms of employment of persons with disabilities (40.9%).

**Table 3.1 Labour force participation by persons with a disability in % (EU-SILC) (selected countries are bold)**

|                | Disability prevalence rates (15-64) | Employment rate by persons with a disability (20-64) |             |             |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|
|                |                                     | Yes  | No          | Gap         |
| Austria        | 27,3                                | 55,7   | 74,2        | 18,5        |
| Belgium        | 20                                  | 42,4   | 70,6        | 28,2        |
| Bulgaria       | 9,2                                 | 34,8   | 71,4        | 36,6        |
| Cyprus         | 16                                  | 48,5   | 69,9        | 21,4        |
| Czech Republic | 18,6                                | 51,8   | 79,1        | 27,3        |
| Germany        | 17,7                                | 49,5   | 78,7        | 29,2        |
| Denmark        | 25,5                                | 59,2   | 74,5        | 15,3        |
| Estonia        | 29,9                                | 63,5   | 80,8        | 17,3        |
| Greece         | 10,6                                | 31   | 57,4        | 26,4        |
| Spain          | 13,5                                | 42,5   | 66,2        | 23,7        |
| <b>Finland</b> | <u>28,5</u>                         | <u>56,6</u>  | <u>71,3</u> | <u>14,7</u> |
| <b>France</b>  | <u>18,4</u>                         | <u>55,6</u>  | <u>69,8</u> | <u>14,2</u> |
| Croatia        | 22                                  | 33,9   | 63,9        | 30          |



|                          |             |             |             |             |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Hungary                  | 16,7        | 47,4        | 73,7        | 26,3        |
| Ireland                  | 11,9        | 35,8        | 70,6        | 34,8        |
| Italy                    | 12,9        | 51,5        | 63,4        | 11,9        |
| Lithuania                | 19,4        | 48,3        | 75          | 26,7        |
| Luxem-<br>bourg          | 22,2        | 49,5        | 66,1        | 16,6        |
| Latvia                   | 29          | 59,9        | 74,3        | 14,4        |
| Malta                    | 7,6         | 41,8        | 71,4        | 29,6        |
| <b>Nether-<br/>lands</b> | <u>26,1</u> | <u>58,9</u> | <u>77,8</u> | <u>18,9</u> |
| Poland                   | 16,3        | 39,6        | 71,2        | 31,6        |
| Portugal                 | 23,5        | 57,2        | 72,1        | 14,9        |
| Romania                  | 16,5        | 44,4        | 69,2        | 24,8        |
| <b>Sweden</b>            | <u>10,1</u> | <u>49,8</u> | <u>74,5</u> | <u>24,7</u> |
| Slovenia                 | 28,7        | 54          | 70,9        | 16,9        |
| Slovakia                 | 22          | 55,6        | 74,4        | 18,8        |
| U. Kingdom               | 21,8        | 56,8        | 80,9        | 24,1        |
| EU-coun-<br>tries (28)   | 17,9        | 51          | 65,5        | 14,4        |

### 3.4.1.2 Unemployment rates

In the context of employing persons with disabilities, the unemployment rate is probably a less clear indicator than the employment rate. There are difficulties in comparing countries on the basis of such figures, including for instance the previously mentioned complexities associated with the prevalence rate. Another difficulty is posed by the need to consider inactivity. The way in which inactivity or unemployment is defined will differ according to the nature of the figures and the survey. This is certainly the case for cross-country comparisons. The employment rate is therefore probably less ambiguous than unemployment and inactivity. Nevertheless, a brief explanation is given below.

The EU-SILC figures for 2018 indicate that the unemployment rate in the EU was 16.7% for people aged 20-64 years with a work-limiting disability and 8% for those without (giving a total of 9.2%).

According to gender, the unemployment rate for men with a work-limiting disability in the EU is 17.2% (2018). For men without disabilities this is 7.5%. For women with a work disability, the EU average is 16.3%. For women without work disabilities this is 8.5% in the EU.

#### a) Unemployment rate in the countries under review

As far as the unemployment rate is concerned, it is especially the younger group up to 35 years old of persons with a work-limiting disability that proves problematic in Sweden, with a significantly higher unemployment rate than their peers without work-limiting disabilities. Compared to the European average for young people with disabilities, Swedish young people with disabilities also score less well. This problem also exists to some extent for France and Finland, although less than in Sweden. The level here is about equal to the European average. In the Netherlands, the pattern according to age is less clear.

### 3.4.1.3 Activity rate

There is logically a strong link between activity and employment rates. According to the EU-SILC data, the activity rate on the EU level in 2018 was 62.4% for people aged 20-64 with a work-limiting disability compared to 82.9% for people without a work-limiting disability (the overall activity rate is 79.1%). According to gender, the activity rate for men with disabilities amounts to 66.5%. For women with disabilities, this is 58.9%. For persons without disabilities the percentage for men is 88.9% in the EU. Finally, for women the percentage is 76.8%.

One important conclusion when studying the EU figures in the longer term is the fact that there is a clear correlation between the activity rates of persons with a moderate work-limiting disability and persons without disabilities, but this is not the case for persons with a severe work limiting disability. In specific terms, this could mean that in certain cases, general measures do not have a positive influence on the extent to which people with a severe work-limiting disability participate in the labour market, with the need for additional specific adjustments and supplementary measures for this group (Grammenos, 2013).

### 3.4.1.4 Education

In addition to disability severity, the lower average level of education is also a clear problem for people with disabilities. On the European level, in 2018 the percentage of people who have completed tertiary education in the 30-34 age group was 44.9% for people without disabilities and 31.7% for people with disabilities, based on the EU-SILC figures.

## 4 SWEDEN

### 4.1 General background

Disability policy in Sweden has changed a great deal over the past 50 years, in conjunction with the development of Swedish welfare policy.

Since the 1950s, the use of counselling has gained ground in Swedish society as a way of helping people who have not been able to work for medical reasons or have only been able to work to a limited degree. Technical aids were used to an increasing extent and efforts were made to create jobs for people with disabilities in the regular labour market.

The real breakthrough of ALMP policy took place in the 1960s. An increasing number of policymakers started to see labour market policy and training as important instruments in facilitating mobility in the labour market, leading to the vision that this mobility was also important for a healthy labour market and economy. There was a strong focus on measures to promote mobility in the labour market for the entire working population, to the benefit also of persons with work-limiting disabilities.

In the 1970s, the perspective on people with disabilities started to change under the influence of the public sector. The approach broadened from a purely medical view of disability to one that also considered the bigger picture. Taking the environment into account made the concept more political, since political decisions about how society is organised also have an influence on whether a medical disability becomes a work-limiting disability or not.

## **4.1.1 Support measures for employees, jobseekers and non-professionals**

The following section presents a short overview with some characteristic measures of the Swedish policy for labour market integration of persons with disabilities. The list is not exhaustive and mainly contains the measures that research has shown to have some activating effect and/or offer support in the search for work, and/or offer support at the workplace for persons with disabilities.

### **4.1.1.1 Unemployment benefits**

In formal terms, nobody in Sweden is obliged to register as a jobseeker.

However, anyone wanting to claim financial benefits such as incapacity benefit needs to go through formal assessment regarding the degree of incapacity for work. If the assessment reveals a certain capacity for work, the person is referred to the public employment services for support, in addition to the benefit. Accordingly, most people in the target group have some kind of contact with the employment services sooner or later.

In Sweden, work disability benefit is reassessed every few years by the social insurance institution. If it transpires that the person has regained some capacity to work, from then on they must also register with the employment services in order to retain their benefits.

Exceptions apply to people with virtually no working capacity who are not expected to see any improvement in their situation.

## **4.1.2 Support measures for employers**

Several measures, rights and obligations are legally defined in Sweden for employers who hire persons with disabilities.

#### 4.1.2.1 Allowances

A first financial measure includes the rule that employers who hire persons with limited working capacity are entitled to wage subsidies (lönebidrag) from the public employment services. This also applies to those incumbent workers whose capacity to work diminishes throughout the course of their working life. The subsidy consists of a fixed percentage, calculated on the basis of the employee's salary and the degree of capacity to work. The subsidy is limited to four years; exceptions to this are possible if the subsidy is deemed to be necessary for the employer to keep the employee in the company for a longer period of time.

There is also the so-called 'Technical Support and Adaptation Scheme', which grants financial compensation to employers implementing workplace modifications required for an employee who needs this to do the job. The reimbursement is available for both new and existing employees.

In addition, financial resources are available to employers if other employees (colleagues) in the company have to support an employee with a work-limiting disability. However, if both professional and personal support is required, funds are available to finance a personal assistant to provide the necessary support for the affected employee.

Finally, financial support is available for employers who hire persons who have been disabled for two years or more and who could no longer work in their previous job for medical reasons. Employers who decide to hire someone in this category may be entitled to reductions in welfare contributions.

### 4.1.3 Good practice: the SIUS programme

In Sweden, the research team decided to look into the SIUS project. This is one of the largest implementations of supported employment in Europe, making it an interesting case for taking a deeper look at a promising concept.

As stated, the purpose of the overview on the one hand is to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the methodology (and project). On the other hand, this case study also wants to offer an insight into how the method was implemented on a much larger scale than in most other countries. Certain choices were made in implementing the methodology. The experience gained over the years can be instructive for possible further development of supported employment in other European countries. Moreover, the project was followed by an extensive experiment that compared the method with two alternative working methods.

Including the SIUS project as good practice is therefore seen as an example for large-scale implementation of a method that has been scientifically proven to be efficient.

### 4.1.4 Design

#### 4.1.4.1 Supported employment

The supported employment method is a guidance method for people with a distance to the labour market that originated in the United States in the late 1970s. Initially, it functioned as an alternative to sheltered workshops and day centres. The model was further developed and adopted in several other countries. Certain variations in the concept and approach exist today, yet the methodology is based on a number of fixed principles (Heylen & Bollens, 2007).

The central element is the guidance process, which is always made up of five steps: (1) customer involvement, (2) profession-oriented profiling, (3) job finding, (4) employer involvement, (5) support on and off the shop floor.

One specific characteristic is the ‘first place then train’ principle: specifically, this refers to prioritising a first work experience for the person in question as soon as possible. Once they start working, attention shifts to the necessary training, which is often very specific and provided at the workplace itself as far as possible (in many traditional methodologies, this is usually the other way round). The training is partly provided by the job coach, who acts as the main contact as well. It can also be combined with other external training.

Another important focus consists in offering support after placement on the shop floor, with the job coach following up on the employee for some time in order to provide support if necessary. Much attention is also given to the guidance for the employer and the immediate working environment of the person in question.

Supported employment is usually the approach taken for jobseekers looking for a job in the regular economy. It is important to note that in theory, the final goal of supported employment is always paid work and not voluntary work or knowledge acquisition.

#### 4.1.4.2 The SIUS programme

Sweden has a relatively long tradition of supported employment. However, the SIUS programme is an example of a broad structural elaboration of the methodology: supported employment is a fully-fledged trajectory within the Swedish employment services with its own structural financing. The programme has long outgrown the pilot phase.



The programme dates back to the mid-1990s. Initially, 500 persons with disabilities who registered as jobseekers were guided by 100 job coaches (Heylen & Bollens, 2007). Over the years, the number of coaches/employees working full-time in the programme has increased to approximately 900 SIUS consultants. The programme has grown from a pilot project to a full national employment programme, providing guidance for approximately 10,000 jobseekers with disabilities each year.

The success rate is high; about 5,800 of the 10,000 jobseekers who received assistance in 2018 found a paid job through the SIUS project. Of the total group of people with disabilities that the Swedish public employment services succeed in helping into work each year, 10% do so as a result of the SIUS programme.

The two main actors involved in the programme on the national level are the public employment service (Arbetsförmedlingen) that organises the guidance and support, and the social insurance institution (Försäkringskassan) that takes care of the payment of possible supporting benefits. However, the actual implementation takes place at the level of the municipality, resulting in some regional differences in the design and implementation of the programme.

#### 4.1.4.3 Target audience SIUS programme

The programme aims to assist people with partial working capacity in both finding and keeping employment. The use of the term 'partial working capacity' is important here: this is the broad concept that is equivalent to the ICF concept, emphasising that a medical problem reduces the possibility of working to a certain extent.

As mentioned before, the Swedish public employment services use their own functional assessment, which is very important in further determining the path followed by a jobseeker in the service. It is only under certain conditions and with the approval of an employment officer that someone

with a partial working capacity will be able to move on to the SIUS programme.

Given the underlying supported employment methodology, the programme is in theory open to all persons with a work-limiting disability. However, the government sometimes puts an additional focus on sub-groups in the target group that need additional attention. Although supported employment is theoretically an open programme, interviews with local experts show that potential candidates go through a certain selection. Despite the fact that there is no official emphasis on a specific subgroup among those with work-limiting disabilities, interviews with local experts show that in practice a considerable share of the participants have relatively mild mental retardation or psychological problems. The approach taken by the programme seems to work best for these groups.

By contrast, persons with very severe mental retardation, serious psychological problems or very serious physical disabilities are not usually included in the programme; instead, they receive guidance from specialised municipal services. However, these trajectories are not aimed at employment in the regular circuit.

#### **4.1.5 SIUS consultants**

The aim of the programme is to guide persons with disabilities towards sustainable employment. At the centre of the programme are the 'SIUS consultants'. They help the jobseeker to find a job, providing assistance at the first meeting and when it comes to integration in the workplace as well as subsequent counselling. Another important task performed by the consultants is to offer information and guidance for the employer in question.

The SIUS consultants are specialised employees, employed by the local public employment services and therefore only active for a specific region.

They deal exclusively with their tasks in the SIUS programme and are specialised in providing guidance and follow-up for people with a work-limiting disability, based on the SIUS methodology.

In addition to the basic training (lasting several days) offered to every employee in the public employment service, they also receive additional follow-up training of four days with a focus on supported employment and the specific SIUS way of working. However, interviews with the various local experts showed that professional expertise is based to a great extent on accumulating experience and developing knowledge and networks within the job itself. Certain regions (e.g. Stockholm) provide mentoring programmes for the SIUS consultants: new employees are paired with others who have more experience and know-how, going through the first cases together. This is given great significance: it would seem that in addition to knowledge of the target group and knowledge of the SIUS methodology, the success of an SIUS consultant also depends greatly on experience and contact with the local labour market. After all, they have to actively search for work for the person (see above).

#### **4.1.6 Operation**

As described in the explanation of the methodology, the total supported employment trajectory consists of five phases. In SIUS, the assessment and screening for this SIUS trajectory is done by the general employment services. Once someone has been admitted, they move on to the programme and the assigned SIUS consultant. This is followed by the job-matching phase, obtaining a job, workplace analysis, workplace support and the follow-up phase. The following paragraphs explain the various steps. The terms used may differ slightly from those mentioned above, as they are based on the explanations given by the interviewed consultant at the Swedish Employment Service.

#### 4.1.6.1 Assessment

Before the SIUS trajectory actually starts, the jobseeker has to register with their local employment office, just like regular jobseekers would do. After an exploratory interview, a questionnaire is completed (digitally if possible), accompanied by possible medical documentation; the jobseeker is then referred to a certain route within the employment services, of which SIUS is one. If the jobseeker has certain medical problems, doctors and psychotherapists are also consulted for more information on the subject and for corresponding documentation. The employment officer then uses all this information to determine whether the person is a suitable candidate for the SIUS trajectory.

Although there is still a first step before the supported employment route, the aim is to let the eligible jobseeker flow through as quickly as possible, based on the philosophy behind the supported employment method of prioritising a fast first work experience.

According to an interview with a local expert and co-founder of the SIUS-programme, this phase is considered one of the most crucial and difficult phases in the whole trajectory. It is where the available information is used to assess whether someone is a suitable candidate for the guidance that SIUS offers. Sometimes candidates are 'over-qualified' for the track, sometimes they are not (yet) ready to work towards the regular labour market and it would be better to refer them to, for example, sheltered employment via Samhall or labour-based daytime activities.

Another important aspect is that the actual SIUS trajectory is almost always preceded by a work placement of about three to six months. During this period, the individual possibilities and difficulties of the person in question are examined, together with the degree of necessary support. In practice, it is expected that participants need to work in the company for at least half of this period before the placement can be considered

successful and the SIUS trajectory can be continued (Försäkringskassan, 2017).

It is worth noting that the intensive support that is characteristic of the final SIUS counselling is not provided during the placement. In this phase the focus is mainly on making certain essential modifications to the workplace and/or improving corresponding mobility. This is not insignificant, since it also introduces a selection effect. If the person in question cannot complete the placement adequately, they run the risk of having to discontinue the SIUS trajectory.

If after the placement the jobseeker is deemed by the employer and the counsellor to be sufficiently capable of participating in the regular labour market to some extent, the actual trajectory is then initiated. Ideally, they can start working under an employment contract with the employer where the internship took place. Otherwise, another employer is sought (Petrelius & Johansson, 2016).

#### 4.1.6.2 Job matching

In practice, after a successful initial placement, the jobseekers have between one and three initial interviews with the SIUS consultant, in which the SIUS consultant and the jobseeker look at their needs, preferences and possibilities. The main questions asked here are: What kind of work is the jobseeker considering? What issues should we be alert to when looking for work? How do we present the jobseeker to the potential employer? How do we communicate the additional needs of this person to the employer?

Job carving is an important tool in this respect, taking certain sub-tasks from a broader job/vacancy to create a 'new' job. More difficult tasks can be omitted from the 'new' job and outsourced instead to another colleague, for example, or cast in a different vacancy. It is thus possible to

bypass various bottlenecks for a person with work-limiting disabilities and ultimately provide them with workable employment.

#### 4.1.6.3 Job acquisition

Subsequently, the SIUS consultants search the available databases to find out which jobs are in line with the jobseeker's expectations and within their possibilities. In principle, every vacancy on the labour market can be considered, so employers do not have to inform the employment services that they are willing to take applicants with disabilities.

In this phase, the SIUS consultants' knowledge of the local labour market plays an important role, since they may already have an idea from previous experiences which employers are willing to hire persons with disabilities. The chance of employment is also higher with companies that already hired someone from the SIUS programme in the past. These employers may have a lower apprehension threshold, and certain investments and modifications that have been made may also be useful for the new employee. According to the various experts who were interviewed, this is a strategy frequently used by SIUS consultants.

Once a potential match is detected, the employer with a vacancy is contacted by the SIUS consultant about an initial meeting. During the first meeting, the SIUS consultant explains the programme, with a special focus on the support they will offer to both the employee and employer. Such support often consists in wage cost subsidies combined with reimbursements for workplace modifications and possibly other means of support. Finally, additional emphasis is given to the pathway's objective of eventually reaching permanent employment, making it clear that the pathway cannot be of a purely educational nature.

Furthermore, the SIUS consultant will assist the jobseeker in preparing a presentation about themselves.

The SIUS consultant is therefore very much present right from the start for both the employer and the employee. It is the SIUS consultant who (with input from the jobseeker) searches through available vacancies, and who makes the first contact with the potential employer. Deviations from this procedure only occur in the rare cases that the jobseeker has a personal relationship with the employer and is therefore in a position to make the first contact themselves.

#### 4.1.6.4 Analysis of the workplace

Consultation with the employer also plays a central role in this phase, looking at their expectations of the employee, the skills needed for the job etc. The employer's expectations are checked in terms of the quality of the delivered products or services. The workplace is also mapped out: this is a fairly general 'scan' of the work environment.

If everything goes well and there is a sufficient match between both parties, an agreement can be reached on what the jobseeker's contract of employment will look like and whether or not a work placement period would be suitable.

The SIUS consultant also deals with any doubts the employer may still have, and can propose and offer additional guidance and training for the employee. Such training is financed or organised by the public employment service if necessary. But for the main part, the SIUS consultant will aim to work with 'on the job training'.

#### 4.1.6.5 Support at the workplace

Especially at the start of the employment, the SIUS consultant will often be present at the workplace in order to personally accompany and familiarise the disabled employee. The frequency, duration and manner of guidance differs from case to case and depends to a great extent on the medical condition of the employee and the nature of the work. There are

cases in which the SIUS consultant stays at the workplace full-time during the initial period, and other cases in which this is much more limited. Apart from training job-relevant skills, the SIUS consultant also provides social support for the employee, for example during coffee breaks or lunch with colleagues.

In addition, the SIUS consultant accompanies the manager/employer and colleagues with whom the new employee has daily contact. If necessary, the programme also offers scope for consulting additional specialists such as psychologists and therapists. However, this is currently less common than before due to the present uncertain situation in the Swedish Public Employment Service. There is growing political pressure to privatise certain parts of the employment services and to cut back on others.

#### 4.1.6.6 Follow-up

In practice, the maximum duration of the entire course is usually limited to two years, although certain exceptions are possible. The follow-up period is usually the longest. At the start, this often involves a monthly work visit by the consultant. The frequency is then gradually reduced, although this can vary greatly from one individual to another and can be adjusted over the course of the project if certain unforeseen circumstances arise.

After twelve months, there is usually a review to see whether further follow-up by the consultant is required, both for the employee and the employer. The ultimate goal is to phase out the counselling gradually, with the employee and employer monitoring the situation together and making adjustments where necessary. If follow-up is necessary for a longer period of time, this will usually take place by telephone.

Given the importance of this phase in strengthening the chances of sustainable employment, 45% of the total number of participants are currently in this phase. A considerable lead time is foreseen in order to



prevent certain circumstances from jeopardising an initially favourable employment. A multitude of medical, social and business factors can change and cause problems for the person concerned.

The interview with the local expert who helped to evaluate the project shows that the contracts offered are often for an indefinite period of time. On the one hand, this is a defined goal from the beginning and is also communicated as such to the employer. On the other hand, the Swedish context also plays a role here, with there being generally fewer temporary employment contracts. Extensive use is made of work placements to evaluate employees and their capabilities on the shop floor. However, these placements are always with the aim of eventually being employed by the company. If the employer has no intention of hiring the person after the placement, they will not choose to continue the placement here.

With regards to the working regime, most employees end up working part-time. According to the interviewed expert, this is partly because it is common practice in Sweden to adapt the working hours of employees to their needs, rather than adjusting how work is organised or carried out.

## 4.2 Scientific evaluation

Both evaluations and interviews with local stakeholders show a largely positive perception of the SIUS and supported employment in Sweden.

The effectiveness of the method in the Swedish SIUS context was mainly assessed in a scientific evaluation project commissioned by the institutions involved (Försäkringskassan, 2017).

The methodology was compared with two alternative methods, namely case management (CM) and strengthened cooperation (SC). In the interests of fairly accurate comparison, altogether 1,000 participants were selected and shared out among the three methods. Supported employment

guidance was provided by SIUS consultants, so that in fact this was a test of the SIUS 'version' of supported employment, rather than the strictly theoretical methodology. The participants in question were then followed up for a period of 15 months.

Supported employment was the most efficient method. After 15 months, altogether 26% of the participants in the programme were in paid employment, compared to 20% in the more intensive case management respectively 18% in the more classic strengthened cooperation approach.

#### 4.2.1.1 Participant experiences

In addition to more quantitative analyses, the research also included a large number of interviews with participants who had completed the various pathways either successfully or unsuccessfully.

From the interviews, it appears that the participants in the SIUS trajectory were generally satisfied with the operation and with their progress since taking part. The structural survey of a group of participants shows that their experience of the entire programme depends greatly on three crucial factors: (1) the quality of the counsellor, (2) the extent to which the participants felt they were able to actively participate in the programme, and (3) whether the jobseeker was able to find work in a work placement or paid job.

The quality of the service itself and the support offered plays a primary role in the general assessment. In addition, some of the most crucial points in the participants' evaluation of the operation include the feeling that they were listened to and that their needs and desires were taken into account. Another very important aspect is the impression that the consultant takes enough time for counselling, together with the feeling of being actively involved in the whole process. For example, the participants questioned appear to have a certain degree of understanding if the consultant is too busy to make enough time available for counselling.

However, if the jobseeker's perspective and personal goals were ignored, this had a far more negative influence on how the guidance was finally evaluated, thus emphasising the need for dialogue and participation in an intensive guidance process such as SIUS (Försäkringskassan, 2017).

Whether or not this results in specific work experience also has a clearly positive influence on the assessment of the entire programme. The SIUS programme with its strong focus on rapid employment therefore emerged as the most positive in comparison with the other two programmes. Even if the work experience did not ultimately lead to permanent employment, it still had a positive influence on the person's overall experience. They are still able to accumulate experience and knowledge, which is an important added value throughout their working lives. Making social contacts and breaking through social isolation also appears to be very important for a large number of participants. The 'place then train' strategy that is fundamental to supported employment and SIUS thus has a direct, positive influence on the experience of the participants in the programme (Försäkringskassan, 2017).

For the group of participants who had succeeded in obtaining employment, the financial benefits were also one of the most important consequences of the programme. In addition to an increase in income, the stability that comes with a permanent job is also very important for many participants. The feeling of starting a (more) independent life and of being part of society should also not be underestimated.

Besides these various impacts of the programme, a few indirect benefits were also mentioned, as briefly discussed below.

#### 4.2.1.2 Changes in perception

In addition to the research report, the study also included an interview with one of the researchers. Besides the individual benefits for the participants, she also cited the change in social perception as one of the pro-

ject's main achievements. In her opinion, people with disabilities used to be seen as a (growing) problem. She sees a certain change in this perception, as there are now more and better opportunities for people who would previously have fallen back on benefits from a young age (and who often never got out of this benefit system). According to the interviewee, previous programmes were often not suitable for this group, or just had a limited focus on transitioning to the regular labour market.

Another important advantage to be mentioned was the broad range of guidance that the programme provides. Not only is the employee followed and supported from the beginning to a certain point in his working life: the immediate work environment and employer can also call on the programme for support and information. In that respect, the programme is unique in Sweden and is considered to be the most intensive guidance available for people with disabilities.

#### 4.2.1.3 Risks

The trajectory is not equally positive for all participants. Participating in the programme may have some negative consequences. A first risk is the possibility of health impacts from increased stress. Those participants who start the programme very positively and then encounter disappointments run the risk of experiencing a dip. This can come from long waiting times to start the programme or if no response is received from employers etc. The evaluation showed that participants with fewer expectations tend to suffer less from such repercussions.

#### 4.2.2 Critique

From a moral point of view, the selection effect gives grounds for critical objections, especially with regard to starting a work placement with minimum supervision. This criticism was raised by the interviewed scientific evaluator. The minimum expectation in SIUS is that the person in ques-

tion must be able to successfully complete one and a half months of work placement with limited supervision in order to qualify for further support in the project. People who cannot meet this requirement are referred to other services with a greater focus on meaningful daytime occupation rather than paid employment in the regular economy. Such services are also organised at municipal level.

On the other hand, this principle can also be seen as an efficiency-based choice, prioritising those who (in theory) have the highest chance of success. In practice, the Swedish public employment services often look at it from that angle. As mentioned earlier, the interviewed advisor from the employment services also saw this screening as the most difficult point: how do you determine who is eligible and has a certain chance of success? There is currently talk of putting more effort in future into a computer system to make the selection process more efficient and simpler for those conducting the intake interviews with jobseekers. However, details are still being elaborated. For the time being, those responsible at the Swedish Public Employment Service are trying to find a middle ground between people who could still get a job with more limited support and people whose situation is too difficult to have a significant chance of success. But the question is, to what extent can this be predicted in advance? In the end, a lot depends on the motivation and commitment of the person in question; it is sometimes hard to gauge such factors based on the relatively limited number of interviews before the trajectory.

Another point of criticism that was raised in interviews with consultants during the evaluative research is the lack of explicit description for the guidance in its final form. The quality of such guidance therefore varies greatly according to the commitment, knowledge, network, resources and experience of the SIUS consultant. The interviewed researcher confirmed this and stated that there was a clear variation in success rates depending on the SIUS consultant. In addition, staff turnover at the employment service is also a problem. This has a greater impact on the efficiency of the guidance than would be the case with more traditional guidance, with

SIUS consultants putting more emphasis on building a relationship of trust and an individualised approach. Participants who took part in an evaluation afterwards also indicated that the (frequent) staffing changes diminished their sense of security and that they did not like having to explain their situation over and over again. The staff members also formulated this as a structural problem that affected operational efficiency.

But above all, it must be said that despite the programme's individual successes, on a national scale it has had relatively little effect in narrowing the disability gap. For example, currently 5,800-6,000 participants find employment each year, spread across the whole country. For the project to have any significant impact on a national scale, it needs to grow further and may require significant additional investment and time.

It is important to note that, despite the pragmatic selection of candidates, these are often people with a considerable distance to the labour market. Without such intensive guidance they might not have found employment in the regular economy and would have moved on to sheltered employment via Samhall or labour-based day care.<sup>10</sup>

### 4.2.3 Cost effectiveness

There are few quantified evaluations for the cost of a SIUS trajectory, and few evaluations available at all in general. Even interviews with former project managers showed that the cost price tends to be an unknown fact

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<sup>10</sup> A remarkable finding emerged from the scientific evaluation of the project. Statistical models set up for the evaluation show that the programme only has a significant positive impact on employment opportunities for men. Despite interviewing both the target group and various SIUS consultants, no conclusive explanation could be found as to why there was no significant positive effect among female participants. The evaluation project consisted of 1,000 randomly selected jobseekers followed up by approximately 40 consultants and should therefore be fairly representative. Follow-up research is planned and should build on the earlier study to investigate the reason(s) for this difference.

to date. However, according to the interviews, the general rule in the project was that the guidance was considered cost-effective from an employment period of nine months. On average, the investment cost of the previous project was recouped from that moment onwards.

The scientific evaluation of the programme listed the five main specific cost items (no amounts were mentioned):

- Time invested in the jobseeker by the counsellors/consultants
- Time and resources invested in the project by the public employment service
- Costs for personal support and adaptation in the workplace
- Costs for other contributions provided by other organisations
- Costs for activities organised by the public employment service

However, the scientific evaluation also showed that the SIUS method is more cost-effective than both the case management method and the strengthened cooperation method. The higher employment percentages play a major role in this. After 15 months in the programme, 26% of the participants in supported employment were in work compared to 18% and 20% for strengthened cooperation and case management respectively. The difference in employment of the participating respondents was apparent mainly from a period of approximately seven months, with the SIUS methodology indicating clearly higher employment figures than both case management and strengthened cooperation. Furthermore, the higher costs for the more intensive guidance with SIUS compared to the less intensive strengthened cooperation method are also partly compensated by quicker placement in the workplace with less need for preliminary interviews/preparation and/or training. The case management method was even more intensive (and more expensive) than SIUS coun-

selling, offering personal support that went beyond just searching for work and a job. Finally, in some cases the costs of the SIUS trajectory vary greatly between participants. Certain participants for example require relatively little familiarisation time and can switch fairly quickly to a follow-up by the SIUS consultant largely on the phone (Försäkringskassan, 2017).



## 5 FINLAND

### 5.1 General background

In recent decades, Finland, like many other countries, has made the transition from a traditional strictly medical view of (work) disability to a broader definition that also takes contextual factors into account. Furthermore, given its membership in the UN and the European Union, Finland has also taken steps to reduce discrimination for the target group and to prohibit discriminatory measures against the target group by law.

As far as employment is concerned, it was recognised that the previous activation policy (pre-2010) did not sufficiently succeed in getting persons with disabilities into work. One important reason for this was seen in the failure of people taking part in work-based rehabilitation (see section Rehabilitation) to then actually move on to the labour market, regardless of whether their working capacity increased or not.

With a view to improving both participation in society and combating labour shortages, in 2010 the Finnish government set itself several objectives and benchmarks for 2015 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2012).

Paid employment was thus seen more as the basis for participation and economic independence. The goal here must always be (as far as possible) for people to be employed in the regular labour market. This entailed a shift in policy towards a greater emphasis on the active search for work, moving away from solutions that require an intervention from social security.

One possible course of action mentioned at the time consists in developing possibilities that allow part-time work for certain target groups, for whom this is probably the only option. The OTE and OSKU projects that

will be dealt with in this study make clearly use of part-time work as an instrument to promote integration.

In addition, there is a stronger focus on individual guidance towards the regular labour market (if possible) and on improved cooperation between the employment sector and education.

Furthermore, it was considered important to invest more in adapting the workplace (in terms of both tools and financial intervention). Wage subsidies are considered an important element here, especially for people moving (back) onto the labour market after receiving a replacement income. Such subsidies must therefore be easily accessible, with a minimum administrative burden for employers.

Employers were also provided with targeted information to enhance their awareness of which resources and services are available to support them in hiring persons with disabilities (Valkama, Katsui, and Kröger, 2017).

The Finnish government has now set itself the target of raising the employment rate to 75% by 2023, which will require about 75,000 new jobs for persons with disabilities. One important way of achieving this is to invest in activation policies. People with mental health problems in particular are seen as a key group for reaching this figure. For example, about half of Finnish disability pensions go to people with mental health problems (51.5% in 2018). Moreover, the dropout rate due to mental health problems also continues to increase. In 2018 alone, there were 74,000 new recipients of sickness benefits due to mental health problems. Supporting this target group early in the process should prevent them from ending up in the system of disability pensions as well.

## 5.1.1 Support measures

Finland is characterised by a highly decentralised approach to almost all services concerning persons with disabilities. Persons with certain medical problems have to turn to their municipality when in need of information, support and help to find a job.

As with the discussion of the Swedish support measures, the following list is not a complete overview of all available measures. More specifically, it concerns the measures that are most often discussed in studies and evaluations about the employment of persons with disabilities.

## 5.1.2 Support measures for employees/jobseekers/ non-active people

### 5.1.2.1 Replacement income ('disability pension')

The Finnish social insurance institution, Kela, provides a disability pension for people who have lost at least one year's income for medical reasons.

People are entitled to a full disability pension if their capacity to work is at most 60%. The accompanying evaluation of this working capacity by Kela takes account of the medical aspect, as well as the possibility of the person in question being active in jobs that are realistic for them. Factors such as education, previous activities, age, place of residence and other background characteristics are taken into account. This evaluation is of course important in the further (re)integration process so that the moment when the person has to fall back on a full-time disability pension can be postponed as long as possible.

Disability pensions can be temporary or permanent, depending mainly on the extent to which a certain working capacity can be expected to be possible again in the long run. If someone receives a temporary disability

pension, the situation is reviewed after a certain period of time in order to determine the best way to proceed in future. Among others, this looks at whether the disability pension will be extended further or changed to a partial disability pension (see below), or whether certain rehabilitation routes (see below) are an option.

People are allowed to earn an income on top of a disability pension. In the case of a full disability pension, they can earn up to 40% of the income they earned beforehand. The underlying idea here is to continue to promote employment as much as possible. The benefit payment can be suspended (from three months to a maximum of two years) once this income limit is exceeded.

The disability pension in itself is not an activating measure. However, over the years the focus has clearly shifted from the purely passive payment of a replacement income towards an approach offering more options to guide the person in question towards the labour market in a certain way. There is an awareness of the real danger of benefit traps within the Finnish system, which was also an important reason for starting the OTE project (discussed below).

### 5.1.2.2 Partial disability pension

In recent years, the growing emphasis on activating measures to support persons with disabilities on their way to the labour market has generated an increasing awareness of the problems associated with the large group of 'disability pensioners in Finland'. This is a large non-working group that places a great financial burden on the Finnish government and society. Systems of partial replacement income (in combination with part-time work) are now therefore also being used, health permitting. There has been a strong increase in the use of such systems especially since 2010. According to figures from the Finnish Pension Service, about 17% of all disability pensioners were using the partial variant by the end of 2017.

The partial replacement income is specifically designed for people whose capacity to work is reduced, but who are still able to perform certain light work.

In specific terms, they are still entitled to earn 60% of the income from work prior to the application (40% with a full disability pension). This income from work is then combined with the benefit.

People who already receive a full disability pension can switch to a partial scheme. This is only possible if the income from work after the change is expected to be between 40% and 60% of the income of the previous twelve months. This switch can be made at the request of the person concerned or after the expiry of the benefit period and the corresponding evaluation.

If the competent institution expects that the person in question will make a full recovery, some variants are available that are valid for a certain period of time, referred to as 'rehabilitation benefit' instead of 'disability pension'. It supports the return to work and is combined with a rehabilitation trajectory (see below).

### 5.1.2.3 Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is an important cornerstone in the Finnish policy for people with disabilities. It accounts for a considerable part of the total funding for integrating persons with disabilities in the labour market.

There are different variants, each with their own outcome, depending on the situation in which the person finds himself or herself.

The routes are mainly organised by the social insurance institution, but several routes are also managed by private insurance institutions.

As far as possible, the Finnish system includes structured monitoring to see whether someone is entitled to certain forms of rehabilitation. Within 60 days of paying the first sickness benefit, the social insurance institution (Kela) is obliged to determine which rehabilitation pathway applies to the person in question. People are also only entitled to a disability pension after all applicable rehabilitation possibilities have been exhausted.

Participation is always voluntary, but it has an impact on the possible granting of a disability pension. It has no impact on the eligibility for sickness benefits.

Since 2003, vocational rehabilitation is probably the most important variant for persons with a work-limiting disability. It consists of forms of support for those who have already been employed (or are still working) but who, for medical reasons, can no longer work in their previous job. Previous employment is therefore a first criterion. Another criterion is that the person has a disability pension or that there is a risk that the person will fall back on it within five years (both partial or full). The support is thus available on the one hand for people who are already suffering from a disability due to medical reasons, while on the other hand also offering a preventive approach for people who are at risk in their current function.

In specific terms, it includes forms of individual counselling, work placements, training and education as well as support for start-ups with health problems. The aim is to get the person in question back to work in their previous position (with adjustments) or to retrain them for work that is more feasible.

Subsequent 'rehabilitation allowances' are also important in supporting people financially and encouraging them to embark on such a programme. The initiative is always with the person themselves to join the programme. If someone enters a rehabilitation scheme with a disability pension, they are entitled to a 33% increase of their disability pension

(Kořánová et al., 2015). This is another example of trying to get non-active persons to take steps towards the labour market.

Occupational rehabilitation is not the only form of rehabilitation that applies to the target group; rehabilitation can also be more medical in nature and focus on the health and welfare of the person in question. This is largely carried out in local rehabilitation and care centres. Here too, there is a specific rehabilitation allowance.

Another form of rehabilitation addresses young people with a work-limiting disability (16-19 years) and is available to all young people who experience a reduction in their ability to work, study or look for work due to medical reasons.

This form of rehabilitation aims to support these young people in work and/or study and, as such, to prevent them from ending up in the most precarious group of NEET young people. In addition, this pathway also aims to stimulate the activation of these young people if they are already not professionally active. It is also linked to a specific payment. As with work-based rehabilitation, the rehabilitation allowance for young people also provides for a training or employment plan, which is followed up by Kela.

#### **5.1.2.4 Partial sickness benefits**

If an employee has been absent for at least nine consecutive working days due to their illness or disability, they can apply for a partial sickness benefit on return. The purpose of this benefit is to enable people to return to work quickly on a part-time basis and to compensate for their loss of income. The benefit is paid directly to the employee, but the employer must always consent to them switching to part-time work. In addition, the occupational doctor must confirm that returning to work part-time would not have any harmful consequences for the employee's health.

The employee himself, the employer, the occupational health service and the family doctor can all suggest switching to part-time work in combination with the partial sickness benefit (after the aforementioned nine days of absence).

### 5.1.3 Support measures for employers

#### 5.1.3.1 Wage subsidy

The wage subsidy is meant for employers and refunds them with part of the labour cost. The subsidy can be up to 50% of the labour cost, depending on how the labour disability impacts productivity. This stimulates the employment of persons with a disability.

The wage subsidy is not applied for by the employer; this is done by the jobseeker on receiving approval from the local employment office. When applying for work, these jobseekers thus already know that they are entitled to compensation and are encouraged to always mention this fact during job interviews.

It is important to note that the subsidy is limited in time; employees are entitled to claim this subsidy for the employer for a maximum of two consecutive years.

#### 5.1.3.2 Funding workplace modifications

In Finland, it is possible to modify working hours, tasks, workplace accessibility and/or assistive devices. This is the employer's responsibility as part of their legal obligation to ensure healthy, safe working conditions for all employees. The employer can claim subsidies to fund such modifications, with a ceiling of 2,500 euro per person which can be increased to 3,500 euro for severe disabilities.



The modifications can also be requested by the employee at the start of a job, during a consultation about workability or on returning from absence due to illness or disability. A review of what is desirable and possible then takes place in consultation with the employer and the occupational health service provider. Databases with information on good practices help to simplify the process. In addition, employees can call on a patients' organisation to support them in this.

Funding is also available to the employer if certain colleagues provide structural support to the person with a work-limiting disability. This amounts to a maximum of 250 euro per month for a maximum period of 12 months and can be increased to 350 euro per month for a maximum period of 24 months for severe disabilities.

## 5.2 OTE/OSKU projects

The main pathway scrutinised in Finland for this study is the OTE key project. The OTE project stands for 'career opportunities for persons with partial working capacity'. It was one of the largest employment projects during the previous Finnish legislature.

The project ran from 2015 to 2018 and aimed to improve the working (market) conditions of persons with partial working capacity by helping them to also stay in their current job (if possible).

Furthermore, the project also addressed people with partial working capacity who often fell back on disability pension, with the intention of guiding them towards the labour market.

Thirdly, the project aimed to improve labour market perceptions of the target group. For example, research from 2006 showed that Finnish employers had a very negative attitude and perception towards people with partial working capacity.

The OTE project was a cooperation between the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economy and Employment. The design of the project distinguished between eight different focus elements. In the end, it was not possible for all the elements to be worked out as explicitly as they should have been in the three-year period; nevertheless, the overall results of the project have been received with great enthusiasm. The improvements referred to in the project are being continued in Finnish employment policy.

Several of the project's components are therefore still running to a greater or lesser extent. For example, training is still being provided for work ability coordinators (albeit on a smaller scale) and the online platforms can still be consulted (see below). The work ability coordinators who have already received training are also still active. Meanwhile, other (research) projects are being prepared that will build on the results that have been achieved.

In total, the costs of the entire project were estimated at around 11.5 million euro.

The project's objective was clearly defined at the outset, with the aim of influencing and improving the various levels for the whole of Finland.

For employers:

- Increase the supply of available workforce
- Provide methods for people with partial working capacity to keep and perform their jobs as far as possible
- Reduce barriers to entry for people with partial working capacity into the regular labour market
- Reduce prejudice against people with partial working capacity

For people with partial working capacity:

- Facilitate access to paid work in the regular labour market
- Provide support for accessing, keeping and continuing employment
- Increase income
- Improve equality, participation and well-being

For Finnish society:

- Improve and increase the efficiency of existing services
- Improve cooperation between different stakeholders
- Reduce costs caused by non-participation in the labour market
- Reduce inequality

The OTE project builds on recommendations from the OSKU pilot programme that ran from 2013 to 2015. Its objectives were similar to those of the OTE project, specifically: to improve the situation and opportunities of persons with disabilities in the labour market and to improve perceptions regarding the group.

### **5.3 OSKU project (2013-2015)**

The main focus of the OSKU project was to introduce the “work ability coordinator” (WAC). This is a counsellor who acts at different points in the employment process and whose aim is to support people in finding and keeping a job. One very important task is to familiarise people with the complex Finnish system. In fact, this is one of the main problems to be

faced: many different stakeholders offer support to persons with disabilities who are looking for work. However, the landscape is fragmented and differs from place to place. Both jobseekers and many professionals are often not fully aware of the different stakeholders and services.

The work ability coordinators have not only an informative function but also an important role in coordinating the pathway. As well as increasing efficiency, they must also ensure that the threshold to further support is lowered.

To facilitate this, specific additional training is provided for the WACs to familiarise them with the Finnish employment and support landscape. The central role they play in coordinating all the different forms of support is clear. The information and guidance that they provide must aim to lower the thresholds caused by complexity and a lack of information.

From the government's point of view, the effect of the WACs in lowering the threshold should help to reduce the number of people who fall back on disability pension and enable as many people with partial working capacity as possible to get a job.

This is important because empirical research shows that people who have applied for full disability pension are only rarely offered any form of rehabilitation or other employment pathway. This is remarkable since, in theory, the disability pension should only be a final measure after all other instruments and rehabilitation routes have been exhausted. As mentioned earlier, the social security institution is even obliged to present the different possibilities to the person in question 60 days after the payment of the first sickness benefit. This often does not seem to work.

Another important argument that served as a driving force comes from research which shows that more goal-oriented work-based rehabilitation is a cheaper solution for getting people back to work than using tradi-

tional, more medically oriented rehabilitation on its own (Allaire 2003; Försäkringskassan, 2017).

The project ran for altogether two years. The multifunctional nature of the ASC made it possible to implement the programme in different types of organisations. The ASCs had the same training, but their function differed according to the role of the organisation. The participating organisations were three employment agencies, three large companies, two public institutions (municipality and hospital), three facilities for well-being and health at work and one educational institution. The transferability does not imply that the ASC is multi-purpose, but that they all received largely identical training despite the fact that they perform different tasks in different organisations (Försäkringskassan, 2017).

### 5.3.1 Implementation

As mentioned earlier, the tasks of the work ability coordinator differed depending on the organisation where they were employed. Those employed by a company or a public institution in an HR position were more likely to monitor and support employees with a work-limiting disability and their environment in their own organisation. On the other hand, WACs employed by local employment agencies supported jobseekers with partial disabilities in their search for work. Those working for a welfare and health institution worked as part of a multidisciplinary team and supported the various stakeholders involved in the process. Their clients were workers employed by companies belonging to their respective welfare and health organisation. The WACs in educational institutions focused more on supporting and informing colleagues and possibly students with disabilities.

## 5.3.2 Evaluation

The research project evaluated the effect and usefulness of WACs from different angles. These included interviews with the clients of WACs, analysis of company data of two participating organisations and a survey of the WACs themselves.

### 5.3.3.1 Evaluation by client

The OSKU project evaluators conducted eleven interviews with participants and stakeholders from the various participating organisations who had received some form of support within the OSKU project.

In general, these people judged the process as positive. In their perception, it took some time to get used to in the initial phases and they sometimes felt like objects of study at the start. After a while, as the interaction progressed, people felt more like partners and were satisfied with the cooperation.

Especially when faced with setbacks, the WACs proved to be very important to the interviewees, both in resolving the setbacks and in terms of support. The WACs were seen as a kind of intermediary between the employee/jobseeker and the employer. In situations where the client came up against barriers, the WACs were able to represent the client's perspective to the employer and possibly suggest alternatives. They also acted as communicators in the work environment, if this helped the client. It was often "one less burden" on the shoulders of the interviewees when a third party stepped into a situation with a comprehensible, objective explanation.

### 5.3.3.2 Evaluation based on company data

The economic impact of the OSKU programme was mapped with a limited sample of the participating organisations. Company data was used from two organisations, one from the private sector and one from the public

sector, comparing the participating organisations with similar control cases (Nevala et al., 2016).

A number of changes were revealed. It appeared that there was more investment in preventive actions within the organisations. However, this did not result in a significant increase in costs.

The evaluation showed that the number of internal transfers within the companies in the pilot project had increased over the last 12 months. Intra-company mobility was therefore increasingly used to employ people with partial working capacity.

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from such a small sample over a relatively short period of time, but some interesting differences have already emerged (Nevala et al., 2016).

### 5.3.3.3 Evaluation by supervisors

On the organisational level, the immediate supervisors appear to be the key figures in successful integration of workers with partial working capacity. The evaluation of the OSKU project therefore recommends that strong efforts are made to enhance their knowledge, to make them, in turn, more alert in detecting problems in their employees. Managers are thus able to refer their employees to the right support services and/or a WAC before it is too late. Ideally, supervisors should also be (more) aware of what it means and what is needed to support a person with partial working capacity; they should also know about the facilities available to provide support and guidance on the company level (e.g. adjusting how work is organised and modifying the physical working environment, as well as possible redeployment within the organisation).

This requires the availability of low-threshold training for managers about partial working capacity and the resources available to facilitate employment.

#### 5.3.3.4 Evaluation of the organisational changes

The ex-post evaluation revealed a number of aspects where the OKSU methodology has had a positive influence on how the participating organisations function:

- *Management*

Managers have assumed a more structured approach to supporting persons with disabilities. In addition, there have been positive changes in their perception of persons with disabilities.

- *Competences*

OKSU allowed for swifter detection of changes in working capacity, which in turn enabled more rapid intervention. Awareness of the available tools and services was increased.

- *Cooperation*

Cooperation between and within organisations improved.

- *Processes and means*

The entire service process became clearer for the parties involved. New tools were used.

Another finding of the pilot project was that where WAC was implemented in the workplace, attempts were often made in the company or organisation to introduce new practices to support persons with partial disabilities. Examples include new tools, ways of documenting things, training and making information available.



In addition, companies appeared to have more uniform procedures and processes (such as work disability management, procedures regarding well-being at work and a general awareness for the needs of employees with certain problems or risks). This ensured that they were handled more efficiently, and that the overall policy ran more smoothly, which ultimately also promoted equality between employees.

### 5.3.3.5 Evaluation by the WACs

The WACs themselves found the training they received to be the main positive (success) factor of the whole project, both in terms of improving their skills and expanding their network. The training gave them more knowledge about the different stakeholders present in the field and provided them with contacts they can use if necessary.

The training consisted of nine days of lectures, the development of a more individual role, a focus on one's own organisation, a regional day of cooperation and a regional seminar. In addition, WACs in training also had the possibility of requesting professional support when guiding clients or organisations.

The evaluation shows that the WACs need clear, validated ways of working. In addition, the WACs also need up-to-date online support and process management tools to make it easier to deal with different clients at the same time (Nevala et al., 2016).

## 5.4 OTE project (2015-2018)

The OTE project builds on the OSKU principle and also makes intensive use of the WACs to improve the flow of information and access to the labour market for persons with disabilities. It is a continuation of what was learned from the smaller-scale OSKU project, which mainly focused on implementing the WACs. However, the OTE project aimed for a much

broader approach and consisted of a series of other sub-projects with their own focus and objectives.

### 5.4.1 Target group

The target group of the OTE project is once again people with partial working capacity and is therefore conceived on a fairly broad scale. It is a diverse group. It can include persons with a disability, those who are chronically ill, recovering from a serious illness or whose ability to work is impaired for social reasons. In addition, the duration of the partial working capacity can also vary and be either temporary or permanent.

### 5.4.2 Operation

As mentioned above, the programme is made up of several subprojects:

- Training and development of work ability coordinators (building further on the OSKU project)
- Online platform
- Lowering the recruitment threshold
- Pathways to employment

Efforts were also made to influence perceptions in the media, the general public and employers through a media campaign about employing persons with partial working capacity.

In contrast to the SIUS project in Sweden, for example, the OTE project is less of a self-contained pathway or programme in which the individual can participate. Instead, it is focused on improving existing processes and incorporating new initiatives into existing services. It is worth noting that

the size and broad conception of the project resulted in many subprojects developing quite independently from each other.

### 5.4.3 Subproject: work ability coordinators

The broad introduction of specific work ability coordinators (WAC) was a significant innovation in guiding persons with partial working capacity towards employment. Based on the knowledge gained from the earlier OSKU project, the aim was to increase the scale with more participating WACs and organisations.

First of all, a training programme was offered to professionals who have contact with jobseekers and/or employees with a work-limiting disability. These can be HR professionals, employees in local employment offices, occupational nurses and doctors or personnel employees in the education sector. As was the case in the OSKU project, the diversity of the group participating in such training with the same goal was also one of the most key assets, according to the interviewed experts.

The Finnish system of guidance and support for persons with disabilities is notoriously complex and highly fragmented. Even professionals who are involved on a daily basis are often only familiar with what is possible locally and with only part of the entire process. Many professionals are scarcely aware of the role that other actors play in the whole guidance process. Besides broadening and deepening theoretical knowledge about activating persons with disabilities, the participants also considered networking to be very important. The training takes about nine to ten months in total. It is identical for all participants, regardless of their background.

There are also applied assignments where people work with their own experience and in their own context. Examples include holding training and information sessions on their own work floor, starting up a local on-

line platform, or enhancing cooperation between the workplace and local services, etc.

Besides establishing contact between the different 'worlds', the interviewed expert who analysed the training for WACs also saw the introduction of a solution-oriented mindset as one of the main innovations of the course. The focus was shifted from the work disability to opportunities and solutions. In her estimation, counselling was often based on the disability of the person in question. The training and implementation of the WAC's tries turn this mindset so that people begin with the possibilities.

In total the target was to have around 910 work ability coordinators active in Finland by 2020, some of them on a full-time basis (mostly those active in the local employment centres), others as part of their regular tasks. As the project phase of the whole OTE programme is largely over, there will probably now be less growth in new WACs than in previous years. Just one educational institution still offers the training.

#### **5.4.4 Subproject: online platform**

The online platform<sup>11</sup> developed as part of the project was considered to be another important aspect and should centralise the information that is available about the support offer.

The platform addresses persons in the actual target group and also all possible professionals involved in the support, as well as employers. In practice, the main users are care and social service providers who use the site to check and explain issues to their clients. The site has a simple, step-by-step structure and tries to shield the user as much as possible from the underlying complexities.

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11 <https://tietyoelamaan.fi/>

Firstly, users are asked to indicate whether they are already working or wish to enter the labour market. Eventually, they arrive at pages listing all possible forms of support in an orderly manner, together with explanations about benefits and interventions as well as forms of guidance.

The innovative aspect of the platform in Finland was therefore its accessibility, but also the completeness of the information. Information was provided about almost all possible forms of support, guidance and actors. The information was not limited to the competences of an organisation but tried to give an overview of what was available from a wide range of stakeholders.

#### **5.4.5 Subproject: lowering recruitment thresholds**

In the project, lowering the threshold to employment was largely conceived from the point of view of the employers. For instance, they were often uncertain about the productivity of people with a partial working capacity. In addition, employing a person with reduced working capacity often involves a lot of additional paperwork (for claiming additional support and resources). Combined with the lack of accessible information, these aspects were important obstacles, which the initiators of the project wanted to reduce through the development of available knowledge, as well as specific legislative proposals and changes.

##### **5.4.5.1 Explorative research**

In a first step, a research project was set up to investigate the role that part-time work can play in lowering the recruitment threshold. This entailed looking at what employers see as barriers to and possibilities for recruiting people part-time. The main conclusion was that employers are willing to invest more in part-time work and people with partial working capacity if there is sufficient compensation from the government for potential risks and lost productivity. This emerged as the main facilitator.

Subsequently, WACs were recruited and employed in public employment services. Among others, they supported employers and jobseekers with partial working capacity. They also developed a new service process for part-time workers (and jobseekers who are only capable of doing part-time work). This included implementing a system that provided the employer with additional information before recruiting the person with a partial working capacity, so that the employer was better able to assess whether the potential employee would be able to work in the organisation (possibly part-time). Here there is a strong focus on lowering the threshold linked to the perceived risk for the employer.

#### 5.4.5.2 Amendments to legislation

One key aim of the subproject was to lower recruitment thresholds by adapting and improving existing legislation. Changes to legislation were implemented by both the Ministry of Social Affairs and Welfare and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Additional attention was paid to activating young people and NEETs with a work-limiting disability.

A first measure looked at increasing both the sickness benefit and the work-based rehabilitation allowances provided for persons with a work-limiting disability. Previously, work-based rehabilitation allowances were lower than the 'disability pension', so that some people opted for the security of a stable replacement income rather than taking the risk of entering the labour market. This has been overcome by raising rehabilitation allowances to at least the level of the disability pension. One important aspect is that people can enter the rehabilitation process; if it does not work out, they can then always fall back on the disability pension to which they are entitled.

In addition, a number of changes were made to the legislation on employment contracts. The most important amendment consisted in extending the work placement period (used frequently, for example, in labour rehabilitation trajectories). It was also made possible to extend the

work placement period if the employee concerned was absent during the placement due to their work disability. The philosophy behind this was that if the employer felt it was not possible to adequately assess the employee due to absence, the employee in question would still have the opportunity to prove themselves on the shopfloor.

Furthermore, an amendment was introduced allowing employers to conclude a temporary employment contract with a person who has been unemployed for a long time (more than two years), without having to provide an additional explanation. In Finland, contracts of indefinite duration are still generally the norm, so that an employer has to provide grounds to hire someone with a fixed-term contract. This requirement is thus dropped here in order to boost the recruitment of persons in long-term unemployment (this group includes many with a partial working capacity).

Another remarkable and somewhat experimental measure means that young people with decreased working capacity no longer need an official diagnosis in order to be entitled to an occupational rehabilitation pathway (and the accompanying allowance).

Interviews with the local expert involved in evaluating the project show that this measure is very popular with the target group. For the most vulnerable group of NEET youngsters in particular, it can lower the threshold even further for taking steps towards proper services and support (and eventually the labour market). One related risk is that it might become too accessible and cause high costs. Furthermore, the competent authorities do not have sufficient resources to offer proper support for this entire group.

The official evaluation has not yet been released, but surveys of local employment officers indicate that they view the change positively. In theory it is not necessary to have a formal medical diagnosis during the process, but in practice generally the participants come to realise that an official

medical diagnosis is desirable. This makes a considerable difference for many of the NEET youngsters with social and/or mental issues, as it is an important first step towards further guidance and support such as rehabilitative psychotherapy or further work-based rehabilitation.

#### **5.4.6 Subproject: pathway to work**

Another sub-project entailed creating a so-called 'pathway to work'. The aim was to establish a general model to support work and employability. There was a strong focus on the online aspect to increase accessibility while also making it easier to expand in future. Regional experiments were also set up.

This 'pathway to work' was addressing three problems:

- The need to support those with working capacity problems is often identified too late.
- Rehabilitation measures start too late.
- There is no client-oriented service package and service pathway to support employees/jobseekers and non-professionals with partial working capacity.

The main goal of the sub-project was to build a seamless, timely and appropriate service offering to support people with disabilities in returning to, retaining and seeking employment.



### 5.4.6.1 Website

A website was created for professional service providers<sup>12</sup>. It offers information about the developed support service path and available e-learning modules. The path consists of nine modules:

- Self-care
- Goal setting
- Tools and methods that support working capacity
- Identification of service needs
- Service and activity planning
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Identification of disability support needs
- Coordination of services and cooperation
- Client participation.

In contrast to the online platform in the other subproject, this website specifically addresses service providers in the broad sense of the word: professionals in social, health and occupational health services, educational institutions, KELA, insurance or revalidation services, in both the private and public sector.

The website and its contents are managed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

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<sup>12</sup> Website: <https://polku.tietyoelamaan.fi/>

### 5.4.6.2 Regional experiments

Another important part of the pathway to work entailed setting up a number of regional projects. The aim was to test new concepts and make the system more efficient. The focus was therefore mainly on sequencing the various services, as well as elements such as participation and online services. The experiments took place in 2017 and 2018.

The experiments are largely considered successful and a number of them are going through further development. They were relatively independent from the rest of the OTE project. As a result, the flow of information was less efficient than in the other subprojects.

The most relevant (to this study) of the regional projects was conducted in central Finland and addressed people who had undergone major back surgery. The aim was to integrate occupational healthcare into the medical rehabilitation process of both employed and unemployed patients.

Specific adjustments included giving patients only two weeks of sick leave after the operation instead of three (with the possibility of an extension). Immediately after these two weeks, they had an appointment with a key focus on the possibility of them returning to work, with close cooperation between the medical service provider and the work ability coordinator (WAC) of the employment service. The medical service provider thus takes more account of the work-related aspect from the start, while the WAC also has a clearer view of the medical side of the story.

The overall result of the project was positive, with participants returning more quickly to the labour market or to their previous work. On average, people returned after 40 days, instead of 82 days previously. Sick leave also decreased. Furthermore, there was a smoother flow of information and cooperation. Estimated savings amounted to around 2,280 euro per person in terms of health insurance costs.

## 5.4.7 Evaluation

The project initiators are generally very positive about the results of the project, putting forward four points as the main achievements:

- The employment rate for persons with partial working capacity has been increased by lowering the employment threshold. The increased demand for labour after the economic crisis is now reaching more people with a work-limiting disability. The number of persons with disabilities who are unemployed has decreased significantly since the start of the project in 2015.
- The perception of persons with partial working capacity has improved: research from 2006 shows that Finnish employers had a very negative approach to employing persons with disabilities. This improved significantly in 2017: 80% of the surveyed employers indicate that they are positive about hiring a jobseeker with a disability. In addition to an information campaign, another very important aspect was the guidance provided to the parties involved.
- Legislation was implemented to improve the position of people with a partial working capacity: both the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment implemented several amendments to legislation during the project. These often lowered the threshold.
- Service delivery is now more efficient and client-oriented: 700 work ability coordinators were recruited and trained in addition to the existing 200 WACs from the previous OSKU project. The ‘path to work’ online service was successfully set up. Rehabilitation processes are now clearer and more efficient.

An external audit was also carried out by a private research firm. Here again the results are generally positive, showing the project to be an ex-

cellent example of successfully developing things that respond to previously identified needs. In their view, the continuity of the project should be ensured and supported by future governments. Their views are explained in more detail below.

#### **5.4.7.1 Increase in employment**

The auditors state that the project has brought about a clear growth in employment in the group of persons with partial working capacity. 28,841 jobseekers with partial working capacity were registered at the end of 2018, which is 14.2% less than in November 2017 (4,784 persons less). Moreover, this is a long-term decline that was already noticeable in the data at the time of measurement (after 35 months). Over the course of the OTE project, the total number of unemployed persons with partial working capacity fell by 30.2%, including some who had already been out of work for a long time.

Since 2018, altogether approximately 300,000 persons with partial working capacity have found permanent employment (without intervening periods of unemployment). This can be part-time, on fixed-term or indefinite contracts. In 2007, about 66% of persons with a disability pension combined their benefits with income from work; in 2017, this had already increased to 79%.

#### **5.4.7.2 Adjustments in service provision to enhance efficiency and customer orientation**

There have been various attempts to make Finland's complex, decentralised services more accessible to employees, jobseekers and professionals alike. One example consists in using and training work ability coordinators. Following the OSKU project, 700 additional WACs were trained in addition to the 200 existing from the earlier OSKU project. Of the 700 WACs, 92% said that their objectives at the start of their training had been met. 84% found that they were well able or very well able to apply their newly acquired skills in their regular work.

As in the OSKU project, the WACs were satisfied with the knowledge they received during the training and the possibilities they had to expand their network. For example, they indicated that they saw an improvement in both personal and regional cooperation. It was also considered important that stakeholders working in the same region were better informed about each other. Finally, there was a strong focus on developing an accessible online platform for people with partial working capacity (tietyoelamaan.fi) and another platform specifically for service providers with remote learning when it comes to guidance methods ('path to work').

### 5.4.7.3 Cost savings

The changes are estimated to save around 100 million euro in costs, mainly due to reductions in benefit payments. This is coupled with other indirect benefits such as increased consumption, new jobs and an increase in tax revenues.

### 5.4.7.4 Presence in the media

Today, persons with disabilities are more prevalent in the media than in the past. This also applies on a broader scale, from the point of view of both the individual and society in general. The OTE project did not have a separate sub-project dealing with media presence. Nevertheless, the central organisation put a lot of effort into this aspect, publishing videos, blogs, press releases and websites.<sup>13</sup>

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13 [https://stm.fi/hankeet/osatyokykyisyys?p\\_p\\_id=56\\_INSTANCE\\_7SjjYVdYejHp&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&p\\_p\\_state=normal&p\\_p\\_mode=view&p\\_p\\_col\\_id=column-2&p\\_p\\_col\\_count=1&\\_56\\_INSTANCE\\_7SjjYVdYejHp\\_languageld=en\\_US](https://stm.fi/hankeet/osatyokykyisyys?p_p_id=56_INSTANCE_7SjjYVdYejHp&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-2&p_p_col_count=1&_56_INSTANCE_7SjjYVdYejHp_languageld=en_US)

### 5.4.8 Recommendations

A number of recommendations were formulated by the project organisation in the framework of promoting the employment rate for the target group (Matilla-Wirolahti & Tiainen, 2019). These were based on the lessons learned throughout the OTE project and are intended to inspire future measures and projects:

- Persons with limited working capacity are best supported within mainstream employment policy. It is not conducive to integration to have separate employment agencies, for example; the same also applies to separating the support of persons with disabilities from the general group.
- Everyone must be guaranteed access to acquiring new skills. Persons with disabilities, in particular, need to be able to develop skills and knowledge. It is also important to identify the strengths of the people concerned.
- Additional effort should be made to provide (viable) part-time work and the system should also be flexible enough to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities.
- There must be greater use of social criteria in public tenders.

A number of recommendations were also formulated for changing the perception of persons with disabilities:

- Employers should be informed about possible compensation and subsidies available, e. g. for adapting conditions in the workplace.
- Employers should be given incentives to adapt work and working conditions, if necessary. Alternative work should be possible if this would allow employees to continue working despite their illness or

disability. The system and philosophy of adapted conditions and work should become fully integrated in the daily operations of organisations and promoted as such among employers.

- Organisations should be encouraged to embrace diversity in their HR policies.
- Line managers should be encouraged to make use of professional support (WACs in the case of Finland).
- Government, labour market organisations and other organisations must work together to improve perceptions and attitudes towards persons with disabilities. In the case of Finland, successful activities in this regard are tracked on a common website and shared with both employers and recruiters.
- Efforts and resources should be devoted to cooperation between NGOs, health and welfare organisations and labour market organisations.
- Information regarding employment of persons with disabilities should be (more) actively shared with employers.

Recommendations for improving services and client orientation:

- Everyone of working age; jobseekers, students and employees alike should have equal access to services provided by the work ability coordinator or a similar professional counsellor. Such support must also be available to employers.
- These services must grow towards a client-oriented approach, working together with the client to find solutions to problems. At the same time, the focus should go beyond problems and limits and extend to the strengths and skills of the person concerned.

- The training of work ability coordinators should continue after the project and be extended to healthcare professionals and prevention advisors.



## 6 THE NETHERLANDS

### 6.1 General background

In terms of general employment, the Netherlands is one of the better scoring countries in Europe, with an employment rate of 81.5% in 2017 (EU-SILC). Persons with a work-limiting disability score less well with regard to employment. Figures from Statistics Netherlands show that the employment rate in 2017 for people with disabilities is only 58.5% compared to 81.5% for people without disabilities.

One problem related to these statistics is that a considerable share of persons with disabilities in the Netherlands today remains economically inactive.

In recent years, the Netherlands has had a strong focus on making the labour market more flexible (for persons both with and without disabilities). This is probably an important factor contributing to the high levels of general employment. In recent years, however, excessive flexibility has been increasingly seen as having a negative influence on the quality and sustainability of jobs. Therefore, there is currently an increasing call for more security and protection for Dutch jobs.

One prominent and recent example consists in the findings of the Borstlap Commission, which examined the state of the current Dutch labour market and came to the same conclusions that many have suffered from the degree of flexibility in the Dutch labour market. The Commission also raises the alarm about the growing group of self-employed people working in the Netherlands and performing tasks that would previously have been taken on by dependent employees. This is often not only detrimental to the quality of work for these people, but also reduces the financial tax income for the Dutch government.

In addition, the Commission specifically points out that more than 1 million people on benefits who could potentially participate in the labour process are currently not employed. In their opinion, not enough effort is currently being made to help this group find work (Commissie Regulerend van Werk, 2020).

## 6.1.1 Support measures for employees

### 6.1.1.1 Provisions in the workplace

Employees and jobseekers can apply for refunds from the UWV (NL: Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen / Institute for Employee Insurance) and/or the municipalities for (partial) funding towards certain facilities; this may be a writing or sign language interpreter, an adapted car, orthopaedic shoes, etc.

### 6.1.1.2 Job coaches

Job coaches are available for employees with a work-limiting disability. These are requested from the UWV or the municipality. External job coaches can be used for this purpose. Internal job coaches are also a possibility, for example colleagues who have received additional training for this purpose.

An external job coach may be requested by the employee, an internal job coach by the employer. In the case of the internal job coach, subsidies are available to the employer wishing to use them.

The coaching lasts for a minimum of six months, followed by a six-monthly evaluation by the competent services of the UWV or the municipality as to whether further coaching is needed/wanted. In total, the job coaching should not last longer than three years (except for certain ex-

ceptional situations). After that, the employee is expected to be able to work independently.

The frequency of coaching is limited in time and is degressive. In the first year, the coach accompanies the employee for a maximum of 10% of their working hours (or 15% in exceptional cases of more severe work-limiting disability), 5% (7.5% in exceptions) in the second year and 3% (6% in exceptions) in the last year. The number of job coaching hours therefore also depends on the number of hours worked.

## **6.1.2 Support measures for employers**

### **6.1.2.1 Facility allowances**

Employers are entitled to compensation for facilities that they have to make/modify in order to hire employees with a work-limiting disability. Non-portable modifications directly at the workplace have to be requested by the employer; portable modifications are the responsibility of the employee, who has to arrange for a refund from the relevant authorities.

### **6.1.2.2 Internal job coach**

If employers so wish, they can use an internal job coach to assist an employee with a work-limiting disability. They will often be colleagues who have received corresponding additional training. The employer can apply for a subsidy to pay for this.

### **6.1.2.3 Wage cost advantage**

Since 1 January 2015, employers who hire someone from the target group register (NL: Doelgroepregister) (see target group register) have been able

to claim labour cost benefit (NL: Loonkostenvoordeel). This is an annual allowance for employers who hire someone from a group that is difficult to activate (including people with a work-limiting disability) or who need to re-hire an existing employee in a new or adjusted position due to an acquired/recent work limitation.

#### 6.1.2.4 Wage subsidies

Wage subsidies are an important instrument. Since the introduction of the Participation Act, this has become a new competence for the municipalities. It was conceived by the legislator as a means of intervening in order to meet the labour-related supply and demand of persons with disabilities.

In specific terms, it can be used for persons who are not capable of earning the legal minimum wage in full-time employment, but who do have possibilities for labour participation. If employers decide to hire these persons with a labour disability, they pay the minimum wage to the employee concerned and may receive compensation for losses in productivity because in practice, the employee in question cannot be productive enough to earn this minimum wage.

The employer receives this compensation from the municipality, amounting to the difference between the 'wage value' of the person hired and the legal minimum wage. The wage value of the person hired is determined by the municipality. The result is that the employee in question receives at least the regular minimum wage. The employee has full pension rights on their full salary (depending on the applicable collective labour agreement in the sector).

Another important aspect is that persons entitled to a labour cost subsidy are also entitled to workplace support (e. g. job coaching) (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

## 6.2 Policy

As briefly mentioned above, the Participation Act of 2015 is the focus of current Dutch labour market policy for persons with disabilities. This section provides more detailed discussions of the various changes introduced by the Act.

More insight into the former Wajong Act and Social Work Facilities Act is also needed to put these changes into context, which will be discussed first.

### 6.2.1 Wajong Law

The Young Disabled Persons Disability Act (NL: Wet Wajong for short) is intended for persons who become (occupationally) disabled before the age of 18.<sup>14</sup>

Specific benefits are available for this target group. For instance, (former) Wajong persons who have no opportunities on the labour market or who are still looking for work are entitled to an additional benefit. In addition, intensive forms of guidance towards work have also been available for this target group since 1 January 2010.

Despite what the name might suggest, the law is therefore not only aimed at young people.

The Wajong law was amended with the introduction of the Participation Act in 2015. As a result, only people with a work-limiting disability who

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<sup>14</sup> Wajong benefit is also granted to persons who became ill or disabled after their 18th birthday but before their 30th birthday and who were in education for at least six months in the year before this happened.

are no longer able to work now and in the future are eligible for a Wajong benefit from the UWV.

However, this only applies to persons who had not yet applied for Wajong benefit before 2015. Those with a work-limiting disability who had already received approval for Wajong benefit before 2015 remain in this category. As a result, the group of former Wajong persons is currently still fairly heterogeneous, consisting of people with a minor disability (and some capacity for work) and people with a major disability.

Admitting people to the group of Wajong persons is the responsibility of the UWV, using the 'assessment of capacity to work' procedure. With the introduction of the Participation Act, newly disabled persons who are capable of working (and who would have received a Wajong benefit under the old Wajong system) are now entitled to welfare benefits rather than Wajong benefit. Since 2018, the Wajong benefit amounts to a maximum of 70% of the minimum wage (Sadiraj et al., 2018).

### **6.2.2 Social Employment Act (NL: Wet sociale werkvoorziening (WSW))**

The Social Employment Act dates from 1 January 1969. It regulated the Dutch system of social employment facilities (= sheltered employment that was coordinated nationally before the Participation Act).

Amendments were made to the law over the years, mainly to define the target group more clearly and to improve its functioning. During the 1990s, the decision was therefore taken to reserve social employment facilities for persons who are capable of regular work, but who can only work under modified conditions due to a physical, mental or psychological handicap.

The most important actor in allocating a WSW attestation was the CWI (Centre for Work and Income). People claiming a WSW attestation and wanting to move up the waiting list had to apply to one of the 28 CWI facilities. The municipalities played a secondary role in this, with the municipal advisory committees giving them a say in the procedure.

After the law was implemented, one major criticism was the long waiting times, which amounted to about 23 months in the later years. At peak times, there were more than 21,000 people on this waiting list.

Within the WSW group, approximately 63% were employed in a social employment facility, 25-30% of the WSW employees worked in individual or group secondment, whereby a department of the social employment facility was implemented in a regular company. Approximately 6% worked with a supported employment contract. Only these 6% therefore worked in a regular company (social employment remained the de facto employer also in the case of secondment) (Sadiraj et al., 2018).

However, since the introduction of the Participation Act (see below) on 1 January 2015, the inflow into social employment has been cut off and reduced through natural outflow. In 2014, 90,000 people were still in social employment. In time, this will be reduced to 0 as there is only outflow and no inflow. In order to compensate for such a decrease in employment for this target group, at the start of the Participation Act the municipalities were tasked with organising sheltered work themselves. The Act provides that the number of people in sheltered employment through the municipalities should increase slowly to 30,000 jobs. Initially, it was not an obligation for the municipality to do this. However, once it transpired that not enough places were being created in sheltered employment, it became mandatory for the municipalities as of 2017.

### 6.2.3 Participation Act

Everyone who can work but needs a certain degree of support to do so comes under the Participation Act. It is intended to ensure that more people find work, including those with an occupational disability.

One first crucial element that has already been mentioned briefly is that the law resulted in further decentralisation, with fewer tasks and responsibilities for central services such as the UWV. Instead, the municipalities now play a larger role in supporting persons who are looking for work and they are given more autonomy, not only in the organisation of the services but also in the budget. In specific terms, the main instruments available to the municipalities include measures, such as organising sheltered work, providing cost subsidies, job coaching, workplace modifications and trial placements.

Secondly, the law also attempted to simplify the existing regulations for the different target groups and to make them more comprehensible for all stakeholders. Separate regulations for each target group were replaced with one regulation for all jobseekers with disabilities. This should simplify the process and reduce the employment barriers for both jobseekers and employers. The law therefore replaced the Work and Assistance Act (NL: Wet Werk en Bijstand: WWB) which regulated the welfare payments, the Social Employment Act (NL: WSW) (as mentioned above) and a large part of the Wajong Act (Sadiraj, Hoff, and Versantvoort, 2018).

Thirdly, the Participation Act attempted to reduce benefit dependency in the target group by encouraging people to provide more of their income themselves. The idea behind this was that the people in question would be more able to support themselves and would probably need less or no benefits. Besides reducing the burden on the Dutch welfare system, this was also intended to help safeguard the existing system of benefits and provisions in the future (Sadiraj et al. 2018).



In brief, the reasoning behind the Participation Act (and the Job Agreement, see below) to help more people with disabilities find work is as follows (Kok et al., 2018):

- As already mentioned, the intention is that there will only be people who have no permanent working capacity in the 'new' Wajong scheme. People who do have working capacity will switch to welfare benefits. Replacing these Wajong benefits with the lower welfare benefits creates a financial incentive (push factor) to encourage those with working capacity to look for work more quickly.
- As a result of decentralisation, the municipalities are responsible for paying the benefits from a fixed budget. The underlying thought was that the municipalities now also have a financial incentive to help people find work and to handle these budgets efficiently.
- The accompanying Job Agreement encourages employers to hire people with a work-limiting disability. The Job Agreement – with a target for reaching certain employment figures by 2026 – and the related quota must act as a means of pressure (see Job Agreement). Furthermore, measures such as the no-risk policy (see below) are intended to mitigate the risk of employing someone with a work limiting disability as far as possible.

Besides these three major aspects of the Participation Act, various other measures were also included or amended, as explained below:

#### **a) Workplace modifications**

One new responsibility given to the municipalities by the Participation Act is to give employers an incentive to hire persons with disabilities. Facilitating workplace modifications plays an important role here.

Workplace modifications are divided into two categories: ‘portable facilities’ and ‘non-portable facilities’. Non-portable facilities include, for example, automatic doors, stair lifts, etc. The employer receives refunds for such items. Portable facilities include adapted office chairs, Braille material for blind employees, etc. These are owned by the employee who receives a corresponding allowance.

#### **b) No-risk policy**

Another measure is the so-called no-risk policy. Employers can make use of this policy if they hire an employee with a disability.

The no-risk policy ensures that the employer receives a compensation for the wage costs from the UWV when the employee with a disability is ill. The employer’s risk of having to pay the employee’s wages in case of illness (which in the Netherlands is set to a period of two years), is thus eliminated. The aim is to reduce the threshold on the demand side so that it becomes a valid option for employers to hire persons with disabilities.

The no-risk policy for persons with disabilities is valid as long as the employee is professionally active and is paid by the UWV. The policy is valid for the entire target group covered by the target group register.

#### **c) Trial placement**

If an employer considers hiring someone with a disability, it is possible to opt for a trial period through the UWV. This period may last for a maximum of two months, during which the employer does not have to pay any wage. Instead, the UWV still pays the benefit. However, after this trial period the employer may no longer insist on a regular trial period for the person. Moreover, to prevent abuses, the employer must issue a written declaration at the outset that there is a real intention to hire the person with a contract of at least six months if the trial placement is successful.

#### d) Stricter conditions for income support

In addition to the other measures and amendments implemented, the Participation Act also tightened the conditions determining whether someone is entitled to various forms of income support (van Echtelt et al., 2019). On the one hand, the intention is to save costs for the Dutch social security system. On the other hand, this is also seen as a way of using benefits more as a push factor and more forcefully steering people towards the labour market.

##### - *Stricter Wajong*

One first amendment that has already been mentioned consists in tightening the categories for Wajong people (including the accompanying Wajong benefit). In the pre-Participation Act scheme, the target group was much broader and included people who had become occupationally disabled before the age of 17 years. Since the Participation Act was introduced in 2015, the Wajong target group has been narrowed down. In theory, the Wajong benefit is only intended for people who no longer have a permanent working capacity and who either already had a work-limiting disability before the age of 18 or were confronted with it between the ages of 18 and 30.

##### - *Cost-sharing standard (NL: kostendelersnorm)*

The next change consists in introducing the so-called cost-sharing standard. This means that the amount of welfare benefit will depend on the number of adults in a certain household. If there are several adults in a household, the benefit will be adjusted accordingly. Living together with a partner or with parents will therefore lead to a lower benefit.

– *Expectations in return and quid pro quo*

One much debated aspect of the Participation Act is that it introduces higher expectations in return for people to be entitled to certain benefits. A first example here is that the work obligations linked to the right to welfare benefit have been tightened up and made more specific. In detail, the work obligations are formulated as follows (source: Dutch Government):

*“You are obliged to do everything to find paid work as soon as possible. The municipality can help you with this. You must cooperate with the help that your local authority imposes or offers you. You must accept the work offered to you and try to keep it. You must also improve your chances of getting a job by dressing, grooming and behaving properly. It is also important that you have sufficient command of the Dutch language. This increases your chances of finding and keeping a job.”* Subsequently, the sanctions are also increased if someone does not correctly fulfil the obligation to work. In that case, benefits may be temporarily suspended and/or reduced.

Another much-discussed measure is the quid pro quo. This means that municipalities may demand and expect a quid pro quo from people on welfare benefits. Every municipality must draw up a regulation that stipulates the type of quid pro quo, its content, duration, and extent. Here again, sanctions are possible in case of non-compliance.

Since 1 January 2015, the municipalities have also been entitled to implement sanctions by reducing benefits for ‘misbehaviour’. Examples include serious misconduct towards a municipal official or damage to a building.

## 6.2.4 Job Agreement (NL: Banenafpraak)

In 2013, the government and social partners signed a social agreement stipulating that 125,000 additional jobs should be created by 2026 for persons with a disease or disability who can work (even part-time) for regular employers. 100,000 such jobs should be created in the private sector and 25,000 by the government. Employers with a workforce of 25 people or more must employ a certain percentage of people with a work-limiting disability. This percentage is called the employment restriction quota.

If employers fail to meet this quota, a quota levy may be imposed which can amount to as much as 5,000 euro per unfilled job per year. The level of the quota percentage is set annually by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). For 2018, this is 1.93% of the employees for the public sector (because they did not reach the quota in the previous year). The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) publishes the quota annually in the jobs monitor.

Within the definition of this law, a job entails working for at least 25 hours/week. According to the most recent figures (reference date 31 December 2017), approximately 26,000 additional jobs have been created, including (only) 550 by the government and 25,500 by companies. In addition, another 11,000 jobs have been created in the temporary employment sector or through secondment.

The target group of the Job Agreement includes a number of categories: people with a WSW attestation (who are currently still employed in social work facilities), (former) Wajongers with working capacity, and also former pupils from secondary special education or practical education. All these groups are included in the so-called target group register (see below).

Employers can then verify with the UWV whether a certain job applicant or employee is included in this register. If so, this person will count towards filling a position within the quota of the Job Agreement. The ad-

vantage for the employer is that he can claim provisions such as the wage subsidy or the no-risk policy (see above), a job coach or compensation for workplace modifications. Employers are thus encouraged to hire people from the target group register.

The social partners and the municipalities have also agreed that Wajong people and people on a waiting list for social employment services will be given first consideration for these newly created jobs (Sadiraj et al., 2018).

### **6.2.5 Target group register (NL: Doelgroepenregister)**

One important element in the monitoring and follow-up of the employment of persons with disabilities is the target group register. To be included in this register, a person must demonstrably have an illness or disability that makes it impossible for them to earn the statutory minimum wage independently.

However, this implies that the municipality in question needs to decide who is and who is not capable of earning the legal minimum wage. In practice, they often base this on a jobseeker's education, and more specifically whether they received practical education or secondary special education. Municipalities are therefore increasingly asking about the educational background when someone applies for welfare benefits on a structural basis. If the questionnaire shows that they attended practical education or secondary special education, they automatically become part of the target group register and the corresponding support and benefits. However, one problem here is that not all training courses are equally well-known and followed up by municipalities, even though the applicant in question could possibly benefit from inclusion in the target group register (Kok et al., 2018).

## 6.2.6 The Broad Offensive (NL: Het breed offensief)

In 2018, the so-called 'Broad Offensive' was launched by Tamara van Ark, Secretary of State for Social Affairs and Employment. Basically, it consisted of a letter setting out a number of ambitions, benchmarks and proposals to help more persons with disabilities find work. In practice, it is a follow-up of the Participation Act by the Secretary of State herself, and drafted on the basis of the experiences since 2015. The letter itself has no binding character but is nevertheless seen as an important proposal for amending the Participation Act and is currently being worked out and followed up in various areas.

Here again, the essence of the letter is that it must become easier for employers to hire persons with disabilities and that it must become more attractive for the occupationally disabled to work (more). The Secretary of State's proposal breaks down into six elements:

### a) Simplification of wage subsidies

Paying wage subsidies is often a complex procedure for municipalities due to the various possible methods of applying for them. In this light, the Secretary of State argues for a standard national method for determining the wage value (see above) and for clearer communication about how wage subsidies are granted and paid.

### b) Work must pay off

Especially for persons with a work-limiting disability who start working, this work should also be financially rewarding. However, this is not the case in the current system of wage cost subsidies because they still only receive an amount equal to the minimum wage. The Secretary of State therefore proposes a so-called release regulation (NL: vrijlatingsregeling) to ensure that persons with disabilities who work part-time can keep a

larger part of their income from labour. In that way, (more) work will always pay off.

### c) **More efficient employer/employee matching**

The efficiency with which employers and jobseekers find each other is not always ideal. Moreover, regional differences are noticeable. A central and recognisable contact point per labour market region could help.

### d) **Simplifying the Job Agreement Act and related quota**

The Job Agreement Act stipulated that 43,500 jobs for people with a work-limiting disability had to be created in 2018. This was achieved and even exceeded, reaching a total of 53,300 jobs, almost entirely due to the good performance of the private sector. In the public sector, the intended results failed to materialise. A quota was imposed in 2018 whereby 1.93% of the workforce in the public sector must consist of people included in the target group register.

The bottlenecks in the Jobs Agreement Act must therefore be tackled. A first proposal in this respect is for the purchase of services to be included correctly in the quota scheme. A simpler system is also needed that gives employers more opportunities to create extra jobs without any additional administrative burden. Also, employers who make an effort and hire more persons with disabilities should be rewarded for doing so.

### e) **Simplifying Wajong**

Despite the harmonisation, the Wajong regulation is still a complex matter. At the moment, the target group remains heterogeneous and consists of persons with some capacity for work under the old system and persons without any capacity for work under the new system (people with some capacity for work under the new system usually come under the welfare benefit scheme). Here too, the Secretary of State advocates a



comprehensible scheme that makes work pay off, does not penalise studying and does not let people who work run the risk of losing their benefit entitlement.

In specific terms, less ambiguous and more explicable income support is on the table. This should give Wajong people more incentives to work or study. There would also be more resources for the UWV to help Wajong people find and keep a job.

#### f) **Extra incentives for sheltered employment**

The ‘Learning from each other’ project, which is part of the Broad Offensive, encourages municipalities to share their experiences and practices as much as possible and to learn from each other.

### **6.2.7 Simple switching in the participation chain (NL: *Simpel Switchen* (in de participatieketen))**

The ‘Simpel Switchen’ project is another follow-up after the Participation Act. It was launched at the end of 2018 and looks at enhancing cooperation between Divosa (the interest group for supervisors in the social domain), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Secretary of State. For example, the Secretary of State wants more focus on a change in culture, both on the shopfloor and in the supporting services, giving the target group sufficient confidence to take steps towards work, with the possibility of a way back if necessary.

The lack of security in terms of income when switching from benefits to paid work also remains a considerable problem in the Netherlands. Increased labour market flexibility makes it more likely that employees will perform the same job for the same employer for a shorter period of time. This applies equally to employees with and without a work-limiting disability. However, the latter group faces problems and complexities, since

they often combine/compensate their (limited) income from work with certain allowances or a replacement income (welfare benefits). This insecurity prevents a large number of people from entering the labour market as they prefer the security of a replacement income, despite the fact that they have a certain capacity to work.

The aim of the 'Simple switching' project is to make it easier and safer for persons with disabilities to take certain steps in their career. Barriers should be removed, making it easier to transition between day care, sheltered work and regular employment. Sufficient attention must also be paid to the way back. If, for example, someone can no longer be employed in regular work for any reason and would benefit more from sheltered employment, this should be accompanied by the lowest possible financial risks and minimum administrative complexity.

At the start of the project, all the organisations involved (both implementing organisations and interest groups) came together to discuss various bottlenecks. Four main bottlenecks were identified, and corresponding solutions devised by the Ministry in cooperation with Divosa.

1. *Bottleneck: It should be easier for people on benefits to start working and they should be able to fall back on benefits if they are (temporarily) unable to work.*

People with a work-limiting disability experience obstacles in their steps towards work because they do not always earn more, and they are uncertain whether they will be able to fall back on their benefits if they are unable to keep their job. There is a lot of uncertainty in the target group, particularly regarding temporary work.

Solutions: First, more attention should be given to harmonising the various Wajong schemes (pre- and post-Participation Act). This should make things simpler for people in the target group, since there is currently still talk of old and new Wajong. However, the ef-

fect of this harmonisation has not been well received in general as it has caused income to decrease for certain groups under the scheme.

One example of progress consists in the longer period of time in which the Wajong right can be revived for persons from the old Wajong (provided that there is some capacity for work). Previously, someone who had been working for a long time after receiving Wajong benefit could have this right revived (brought back into existence) for five years without having to go through the entire approval procedure again. This period has been extended to retirement age. This means that once someone has received a Wajong attestation, they can always fall back on it if necessary. This should ensure that people no longer choose to remain inactive for fear of losing their Wajong benefit.

2. *Bottleneck: Little insight into the financial consequences of going to work.*

People who accept work under the Participation Act are often faced with varying amounts and payment dates. This creates increased uncertainty and instability.

Solutions: To investigate this situation, an interdepartmental policy study is being set up to look for improvements in the current benefits system. An interdepartmental investigation into part-time work and benefit entitlements is also under way.

Specific solutions are being examined in the short term. One possibility would be a combination calculator, which would give people a clear idea of what impact working would have on the amount of their benefits and allowances, as well as an insight into their final net salary.

The municipalities will also endeavour to ensure that people suffer as little as possible from set-offs. These occur, for example, when someone receives benefits in combination with income from employment. If, however, after a time it turns out that the salary was higher than initially expected, the person in question must repay part of the benefit to the municipality.

'Surplus' is a local initiative that ties in here: with the consent of both employee and employer, the competent municipality sets up an intermediate account into which the salary is paid. This is used to pay the beneficiary an amount that is equal to the benefit level applicable to their situation. The municipalities can then make the necessary recalculations afterwards. This ensures a stable income for the person in question, less administration for the municipality and more clarity regarding the overall income situation.

### 3. *Bottleneck: Participation in the most suitable place*

The third bottleneck involves transitioning between labour-based day care, sheltered work and regular paid work within the framework of the Job Agreement.

Solutions: Additional attention is given to the group of people who are employed in sheltered work and have the potential to make the transition to paid work. In this respect, efforts are made to support sheltered employment with regular employers and to focus more on secondments of sheltered work units in regular companies. For many, a considerable threshold could be removed by making it possible to stay in the same physical workplace when making the transition from sheltered work to regular employment in the scope of the Job Agreement.

In addition, there should be better regulation of the possibility of falling back on sheltered employment. It is important to note in this

respect that someone who is currently considered capable of making the transition to paid employment within the Job Agreement loses their entitlement to sheltered employment. They can only claim it again after renewed assessment by the UWV. The Secretary of State also wants to lower this threshold and ensure that the sheltered employment entitlement can be revived again quickly as soon as it becomes apparent that regular employment is no longer considered feasible by the employer, employee or municipality.

## 6.2.8 Assessment of the reforms within the Participation Act

Given the radical changes in Dutch labour market policy since 2015 for persons with disabilities, the impact of the Participation Act has been assessed by evaluations from various angles. The most important evaluation is probably that of the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) in 2019. The SCP report (van Echtelt et al., 2019) classified the results in a number of target groups. The most important results are discussed below.

### 6.2.8.1 General

The Social and Cultural Planning Office paints a gloomy picture of the general results. Only the group of young disabled persons scored better in terms of employment than before the law was introduced, although questions were raised here about job sustainability and income levels. The other target groups in the investigation (i.e. those entitled to welfare benefits and those with a WSW attestation) saw noticeable deterioration almost across the board, with almost equal or lower employment opportunities combined with a loss of income and job sustainability.

Research by the Research Institute Nivel confirms this. Their study saw no general increase in the labour market participation of persons with disabilities between 2008 and 2016 (Hees et al., 2018). They estimate a

paid employment rate of 29% for persons with physical disabilities and 35% for persons with mild to moderate mental disabilities (both paid and unpaid employment). This compares to 70% for general employment in paid labour.

### 6.2.8.2 Young disabled people

This concerns people with some form of working capacity (approximately 30,000 people in 2018). They have felt the main impact from the changes (tightening) of the Wajong category due to the Participation Act.

The SCP report shows that the chances of employment for the target group have increased in the new system (since 2015, new Wajong claimants now fall back on welfare benefits instead of Wajong). In the old system, 29% of the young disabled persons were in employment in the third year after intake. Under the Participation Act system, this was 38%, an increase of 9 percentage points.

However, one key finding is that despite the average higher employment rate, these individuals had less income on average. The reason for this is that many of these young disabled persons receive lower (or no) welfare benefits. Many of them work part-time in temporary jobs and the income they receive for their labour is often no higher than it would have been before (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

### 6.2.8.3 People on welfare benefits (NL: Bijstandgerechtigden)

There has been little change in the situation for people on welfare benefits, which is currently the largest group with approximately 440,000 persons in 2018. Their chances of employment were already low (7%) before the introduction of the Participation Act and have hardly changed since (8%). However, as with the category of young disabled persons, they have seen a decline in the quality of work. On average there are fewer contracts

for more than twelve months or for an indefinite period of time, and fewer full-time jobs (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

#### 6.2.8.4 People with a WSW attestation (social employment services/ sheltered workshops)

Closing the pathway to social work facilities, as previously regulated by the WSW Act, has had considerable consequences for the people in this target group. Under the Participation Act, the pathway through to these workplaces has been completely cut off; even people who were still on a waiting list for a placement in social employment in 2014 were no longer able to make use of the former scheme. Instead, they had to look for work through the municipality (preferably in regular employment). Only when all alternatives have been exhausted can they be placed in the sheltered workshops on the municipal level.

The Social and Cultural Planning Office launched a cohort study to analyse this transition from the old system to the decentralised system of the Participation Act. The study focused specifically on the WSW target group which includes persons with some form of limitation who were able to work in social employment facilities before the introduction of the Participation Act.

One interesting cohort featured in the study consists of those in 2014 who were on the waiting list to move on to social work facilities. These individuals have now lost their WSW attestation. Since 2015 they belong to the target group of the Participation Act. In total, this concerns approximately 11,000 individuals. Since 2015, this group has had to make use of support from their municipality and/or the UWV and preferably move on to the regular economy. For control purposes, the study also included cohorts that were already active before the introduction of the Participation Act (2010-2013). (Sadiraj et al., 2018).

The main conclusion of the study is that the situation for this cohort (individuals on the WSW waiting list in 2014) has deteriorated in many respects since the introduction of the Participation Act when compared to the trajectory they would have taken if the old WSW regulation were still in force, and they could move on to the social employment services:

#### **a) Sustainability of work**

In terms of sustainability, there is a first clear difference. People with a WSW attestation in the old system had a somewhat privileged position in terms of employment conditions. In most cases, jobs in social employment were under an open-ended contract. Furthermore, the salary was regulated and fixed higher than the minimum wage by means of an own collective agreement (CA). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that 90-95% of the people in a WSW job at the end of 2014 were still working there twelve months later.

For people on the WSW waiting list in 2014, with the same background characteristics as those in a WSW job but covered by the Participation Act since 2015, the situation is often quite different. The share of such people in long-term employment was 51%, which is considerably lower than the percentage in the old system.

#### **b) Employment chances**

The chances of getting a job have also decreased drastically under the new regulation. For example, individuals on the WSW waiting list in 2010 were compared with the 2014 cohort under the Participation Act. This shows that 51% of people with a WSW attestation in 2010 found a job within two years. For the 2014 cohort, this was 30%. Moreover, within this last group, 32% were employed in less permanent temporary jobs or in on-call work (Sadiraj et al., 2018).



### c) Reducing benefit dependency

Another important aim of the Participation Act was to reduce benefit dependency in the target group. Accordingly, the study shows that in the group of people working for longer than twelve months, the 2014 cohort (still on the WSW waiting list in 2014 and subsequently covered by the Participation Act) received benefits in addition to the job (65%) more often than earlier cohorts (58-60%). Benefit dependence thus seems to have increased in the target group. This is probably due for the most part to the strong increase in the proportion of people in temporary employment after the Participation Act was introduced. The average lower income from this work makes it more likely that the labour income will have to be supplemented with benefits. In addition, some of those with a job are not able to earn the legal minimum wage and therefore rely on Wajong benefit or welfare benefits to supplement the earned income (Sadiraj et al., 2018).

#### 6.2.8.5 Job Agreement

The SCP states that the Job Agreement has a stimulating effect on the employment of some of the persons with disabilities. It has ensured that a number of employers have given someone with a work-limiting disability a chance within their company and have hired them.

According to the SCP evaluators, the categories of the target group register are currently still too restricted in certain respects. For instance, the welfare benefit scheme also includes people whose medical problems are the main reason for their distance from the labour market. However, they are not automatically part of the target group register (Van Echtelt et al., 2019).

### 6.2.8.6 Underlying reasons for the Participation Act outcome

The evaluation by the SCP also tries to ascertain why the Participation Act has had such a negative outcome, working on the basis of various assumptions:

1. *Assumption: People in the target group must be able to work and must be willing to do so.*

The idea behind the Participation Act is to make it possible to bridge the gap to the labour market for the people who come under the Act. To this end, the right conditions must exist, and proper support must be provided. Individuals without working capacity do not come under the Participation Act.

However, the SCP evaluation reveals differences of opinions among the stakeholders. For instance, 60% of people on welfare benefits say they are unable to work at the moment. This is also the case for 50% of the young disabled and 75% of those with a WSW attestation. Some think they will be able to work in due course, while others are not convinced. As far as the willingness to work is concerned, 50% of those on welfare and those with a WSW attestation and 60% of the young disabled people agree with this. A survey conducted in several municipalities tells the same story, indicating that a large part of the group is in fact not capable of working and that other problems are often involved here.

There are also differences among employers in their willingness to hire people, especially according to the type of disability. For instance, 51% of the employers are willing to give a chance to persons with a physical disability, while this is reduced to about a quarter for persons with psychological and intellectual disabilities. The visibility of the disability appears to be the main limiting factor, together with the extent to which the employer can estimate the

productivity, problems and quality of the employee (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

2. *Assumption: Instruments have a stimulating effect and contribute to matching supply and demand.*

As mentioned before, support tools must be actually used in order to have an effect. The SCP evaluation shows that this is often not the case. For example, many employers are not aware of what is available to make it easier to hire someone with a work-limiting disability. Furthermore, employers say they find a personal approach important, especially when it comes to workplace modifications. At the moment there is still not enough focus on this in the Netherlands. Employers also experience several barriers to recruitment, including high administrative costs, the costs of guidance and lower productivity of accompanying colleagues.

Municipalities interviewed in the study drew attention to another problematic effect which is inherent in the philosophy of giving municipalities more responsibility and letting them manage their own costs and revenues. A municipality that is successful in guiding and placing someone with a work-limiting disability who previously received benefits will eventually see a reduction in costs. However, if the person is not on benefits (often due to excess equity), there is far less financial incentive for the municipality to help this person find a job.

In addition, the municipalities also have the right to keep any funds left over after providing assistance. However, this has led to the pernicious result that more expensive forms of guidance were sometimes not applied due to the cost involved. In some cases, this also leads to a preference for counselling people who are already closer to the labour market, because this is relatively cheaper. This concurs with findings from the target group itself, where there was

often criticism about the quality and added value of the support offered by the municipality. The municipalities have instruments at their disposal such as test placements, job coaching, wage subsidies, etc., but the quality and whether someone is entitled to them differs between municipalities.

Finally, interviews with the municipalities also indicated that they do not have a clear picture of some of the target group which therefore cannot be reached with the available support resources (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

3. *Assumption: One scheme is simpler and increases opportunities for the target group.*

One of the main goals of the Participation Act was to simplify and merge the various kinds of existing legislation. This would lead to a more integrated approach on the municipal level and more customisation. In practice, this has not had the desired result. For instance, there are still different WSW and Wajong groups, which leads to considerable complexity.

Moreover, the municipalities have a certain amount of freedom in implementing the Participation Act in their territory. Taking account of regional variations complicates operational aspects for companies that are active in several municipalities.

Employers surveyed in the study indicated the importance of relieving them of such administrative burdens. This is also illustrated by the fact that there is no growth in the number of employers hiring persons with disabilities (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

4. *Assumption: Obligations and financial instruments have an incentive effect.*

According to the philosophy of the Participation Act, the stricter follow-up and sanctioning of persons with disabilities should help them move towards the labour market. Almost all municipalities in the Netherlands have imposed such obligations on jobseekers, with measures if people do not comply with them. For example, these can be administrative fines or the imposition of certain tasks. However, research among municipalities does not show that this obscure threat has any activating effect (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

#### 6.2.8.7 Proposals for action

Finally, the evaluation also made a number of proposals to improve the results and employment of persons with disabilities.

1. *Involving employers*: Employer involvement is a crucial element in the whole issue of employing persons with disabilities. In total, approximately one third of the employers have persons with disabilities in their workforce. But the evaluation shows that it is mostly the same group of employers that pays attention to this and also takes on more persons with disabilities. However, it would not seem that government services were able to convince these employers, who often acted according to their own intrinsic motivation and social sense of responsibility. Wage subsidies in particular still appear to play a role; these subsidies also seem to be a decisive factor for certain employers to hire and/or retain employees with disabilities. As a solution to this problem, the SCP mainly looks at the role of intermediaries who assist with workplace modifications. In the current implementation of the Participation Act, it is mainly the intermediaries from the municipalities who should play an important role. The SCP insists on an active approach towards employers to support them in job creation and guidance.

2. *Matching process:* The chances of succeeding in sustainable employment depend to a great extent on the person in question. However, the evaluators also see an important role here for intermediaries with experience in bringing employers and the target group closer together.

It is also important for all stakeholders (the municipality, the employer and the jobseeker) to be actively involved, participating in the process as early as possible. There must be clear agreements between all the parties, but also sufficient flexibility if these prove not to be feasible in retrospect. Good communication and information sharing is crucial here.

3. *Personal approach:* The counsellor needs to take a personal approach to gain a good view of the problems, possibilities and solution of each case. Such knowledge is also important for the employer who has to make sure that the workplace situation is sufficiently modified to the person in question. This requires a certain openness from the client and a certain trust in the other actors. Safeguarding privacy will always be a problem in this respect, where the counsellor again has an important role to play as an intermediary.
4. *Health amongst the wide target group:* There should be a focus on health within the whole process. In certain cases, support should be provided to encourage the jobseekers to become healthy and fit enough to start looking for work.

## 7 FRANCE

### 7.1 General background

Compared to other European countries, France scores well with regard to the employment of persons with disabilities. The country's extensive public sector accounts for a significant share of this employment. Furthermore, quota systems have been used in France since 1924 to stimulate the employment of persons with disabilities (in both the private and the public sector), with levies imposed on larger companies if they do not succeed in meeting the quota. The income resulting from these levies is then passed on to the employment services for persons with disabilities. A substantial part of it serves to finance sheltered and social employment. The amounts resulting from these taxes are considerable, for example, in 2014, 60 million euro was spent on training for persons with disabilities, 100 million euro on measures to promote guidance to the labour market for persons with disabilities and 92 million euro on retention-oriented measures including advice to employers and funding for workplace modifications. In specific terms, this has led to the financing of more than 71,000 pathways to employment, 18,000 measures to promote job retention and 2,500 training contracts (Corby, William, and Richard 2019).

Investment has been made recently in more modern guidance techniques. Instruments such as supported employment (SE) and individual placement and support (IPS) have been used in the last few years. Both aim for paid work as an end goal. However, the problem here is that the financial framework for such programmes on a long-term basis is currently underdeveloped, so that some employers are reluctant to use them. But recent reforms in labour law allow for more flexibility in funding guidance projects, which may lead to a significant increase in the use of these instruments in the future (Meziani et al., 2014).

According to comparative research, one important advantage of the French system consists in strongly developed networks of closely cooperating actors. These are organisations such as CAP Emploi (aimed at the search for employment in the target group), SAMETH (specifically aimed at retention policy for persons with disabilities), Agefiph (public service in charge of budget management for projects concerning employment of persons with disabilities), social and health service providers, local initiatives, employer networks, etc.

Evaluations show that education is still a clear problem: young people with disabilities are generally at a disadvantage and there is a significantly higher chance that those in the target group will leave school early. However, there has been considerable investment to deal with this in recent years.

Another problem is that few measures are currently available for the long-term follow-up and guidance of persons in their work. Most of the current support measures are rather ad hoc (Meziani et al., 2014).

### **7.1.1 Support**

In recent years, the French government has implemented a number of measures to improve the employment of persons with disabilities, including administrative simplifications to facilitate the search for employment, the maintenance of employment and workplace modifications (Meziani et al. 2014). Furthermore, several other measures are in place to promote the employment of persons with disabilities.



## 7.1.2 Support measures for employers

### 7.1.2.1 Loi numéro 2005-102

The main legislation concerning the support of employers when hiring persons with disabilities is the 'Loi numéro 2005-102 du 11 février 2005 pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées' (Act no. 2005-102 on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of disabled persons). It includes regulations that employers are entitled to support from the employment services if they hire employees with a work-limiting disability or employ them through subcontracting.

A one-off bonus of 1,600 euro becomes available to employers who hire someone with a work-limiting disability for twelve months or more.

Other measures provide compensation for approximately 80% of the additional costs faced by employers when hiring an employee with a work-limiting disability, ranging from workplace modifications to additional training. This also applies if an employee suffers from a work-limiting disability. In specific terms, this can range from refunding workplace modifications to covering the costs for additional training.

## 7.1.3 Support measures for workers/jobseekers/inactive people

### 7.1.3.1 Loi numéro 2005-102

Act no. 2005-102 also contains a number of provisions to support employees with a work-limiting disability.

Firstly, it regulates and allows for the necessary workplace modifications and adjustments to the actual work. Another important element is that

employees with a work-limiting disability are given priority for education and training if they so wish.

Moreover, the notice period in case of dismissal is twice as long as for employees without disabilities.

A special mention should also be given to the ruling that allows persons with disabilities to take early retirement from the age of 55 if they have worked for 30 years with the status of disabled person.

In addition to these measures, Act no. 2005-102 also contains measures to combat discrimination against persons with disabilities. For instance, no difference may be made between people with and without disabilities when it comes to recruitment or offering training. Also, an employee may not be dismissed because of their disability. Legal action may be taken against infringements of this rule. There is also a specific institution responsible for handling complaints related to discrimination, HALDE (Haute Autorité De Lutte Contre Les Discriminations et pour l'Egalité). It acts as an important contact point for persons with disabilities who experience discrimination when searching for work or doing their job.

### 7.1.3.2 Quota

As mentioned above, quotas play a very prominent role in the employment policy for persons with disabilities in France. As a rule, both private and public organisations with more than 20 employees must have 6% of persons with disabilities in the workforce. This system dates back to 1924, when the fixed quota was 10%. In 1957, it was lowered to 3% and finally raised again to 6% in 1987 (until today).

Workers are counted in this quota system if they have received official recognition, better known as 'Reconnaissance de la Qualité de Travailleur Handicapé' (RQTH). This can be granted from the age of 16 and can vary in time from 1 to 5 years. After this period (of max. 5 years) the recogni-

tion has to be renewed. If someone has received such recognition, they are also entitled to various forms of support organised by different service providers such as Cap Emploi, Agefiph and Sameth. Decisions concerning the award are taken by a specific commission consisting of a multidisciplinary team: Commission des Droits et de l'Autonomie des Personnes Handicapées (CDAPH). In addition, RQTH recognition is issued automatically if someone has a disability allowance or an allowance as a result of a work-related accident. Someone with RQTH recognition is not obliged to inform the employer, although this becomes necessary when applying for certain modifications and aids because the consent of the employer is required in this case.

Apart from actually employing persons with disabilities, there are also other ways for companies to meet the quota. Employees in sheltered employment or self-employed persons with disabilities can also be counted under the quota if they supply goods or services to the company. However, only up to 3% of the total 6% may be filled by the employer in this way. The other 3% must be filled by recruiting and hiring employees in the target group. Also, persons with disabilities pursuing training may be counted in the percentage up to a maximum of 2%. Finally, the quota can also be met by drawing up an agreement stating the steps that the company will take to promote the employment of persons with disabilities; this step-by-step plan then has to be approved by the employment service.

Companies that fail to meet the quota must pay compensation to the 'Association de Gestion du Fonds pour l'Insertion Professionnelle des Personnes Handicapées' (AGEFIPH) in the private sector or the 'Fonds pour l'insertion des Personnes Handicapées dans la Fonction Public (FIPHFP)' (Funds for the integration of disabled persons) in the public sector. In 2018, this compensation amounted to 400 times the minimum hourly wage per missing person with a disability for organisations with 20,199 employees, 500 times for organisations between 200-749 employees and 600 times for organisations with more than 750 employees. However, if

organisations have made no progress since 2009 in increasing their proportion of employees with disabilities, the compensation is increased to 1500 times the minimum hourly wage per missing employee with disabilities.

Research has shown that in 2012, 22% of companies in the private sector had to pay the maximum amount of compensation. 40% had at least one employee with a disability, which means they had to pay partial compensation. 27% of the companies complied with the 6% requirement and 11% drew up an approved plan, so that no levy had to be paid in both cases.

From an academic point of view, several criticisms are made of the French (and other) quota system. For instance, a certain lack of intrinsic motivation could be a potential problem if employers only hire employees because they are obliged to meet certain quotas. This may lead, for instance, to a lack of concern about the quality of employment and the provision of support (Waddington, 2000). Furthermore, quotas can send a double signal, with persons with disabilities being seen as an asset to an enterprise on the one hand, while not being able to compete on an equal footing with other jobseekers on the other (Meziani et al., 2014). Another side effect of quota systems for people with disabilities is that they may increase competition within the target group: employers will be more inclined to recruit people with mild disabilities to meet the quota (Meziani et al., 2014). At the same time, however, it appears that France is not doing badly in terms of integrating persons with severe disabilities. The final design of the quota system is therefore crucial, and it must be sufficiently accompanied by other measures. An important advantage of quotas is that they force employers to give some thought to the employment of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, hiring a person with disabilities (even if extrinsically motivated) gives employers more experience and knowledge so that they will adopt a more positive attitude in the long run.

This is an important observation (Grammenos, 2013). Moreover, quotas are used by many of the EU countries achieving the best scores in terms

of the disability gap (Austria, Germany, France, Luxembourg). The extent to which such measures are effective therefore remains a subject for debate to this day.

### 7.1.3.3 Law on a Professional Future of 5 September 2018

The 'law on a professional future' (loi n°2018-771 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel) was recently amended with a number of adjustments that came into effect on 1 January 2020, impacting on the employment of persons with disabilities.

Firstly, as of 1 January 2020, if someone has obtained the status of disabled worker and it is determined that the situation cannot be changed, this status becomes permanent. Previously, this status was only valid for a period of one to five years and therefore had to be renewed regularly.

Another somewhat innovative change is that companies with at least 250 employees are obliged to designate a person who informs and supports people in case of a work-limiting disability in the company (disability officer). This person is entitled to three days of training by Cap Emploi.

Since the introduction of the law on a professional future, mention should also be given to the measures taken by the company in question to support persons with disabilities within the company.

In addition, employers (including smaller companies) are obliged to draw up a so-called 'déclaration sociale nominative' (DSN) every month. This includes information about the individuals in their workforce who are recognised as having a work-limiting disability. This information can be consulted by the local employee representation and allows them to draw the employer's attention to the fact that the company does not have not enough employees with disabilities.

From 2021 onwards, companies with more than 20 employees must also draw up a 'déclaration obligatoire d'emploi des travailleurs handicapés' (DOETH). The information contained in this document is confidential in nature and may not be shared with other employers, for example. These documents are used to evaluate the company's social policy and must be passed on to the competent OETH institution (which is not the case with the DSN).

Moreover, this system also emphasizes the employment of older persons with disabilities. Consequently, since 1 January 2020, persons with disabilities aged more than 50 years count for 1.5 persons in meeting the quota.

## 7.2 AGEFIPH-HANDINOV

The French institution in charge of managing budgets to improve the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector is AGEFIPH (Association de Gestion du Fonds pour l'Insertion Professionnelle des Personnes Handicapées). This institution regularly organises umbrella financing programmes for innovative projects that aim to support persons with disabilities in their path towards the labour market. This has been done on an annual basis since 2013.

Some of the projects that have been established over the years are highlighted below. The funding programme provides financing for a wide range of projects. Some aim to make education and the transition between education and the labour market more inclusive, while other projects deal with health-related issues.

Here we will be discussing two projects financed by the Handinov project that fit the scope of this research. Both are specifically good examples of how technological developments can be used and can offer benefits in the employment of persons with disabilities.

## 7.2.1 Handimooc

### 7.2.1.1 Introduction

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are an emerging trend in the field of training and education. The idea behind MOOCs is that they offer the user a fully-fledged educational package, combining various digital forms of learning material. They often make use of videos, lectures, interactive lessons, forms of self-study and self-assessment, etc.

The Handimooc project uses the concept of MOOCs and adapts it on the paths towards the labour market for persons with a disability. The project was announced in June 2017 and became operational in June 2018.

It was funded and supervised by Agefiph and 12 private companies (BNP Paribas, Bayer, Dior, etc.). One important advantage emerging from this collaboration is that these organisations are committed to making the platform known in their own networks, which greatly benefits further dissemination and awareness of the project.

The aim of the programme is to provide specific, operational tools to help persons with disabilities who want to take steps towards the regular labour market. The tools are quite generally applicable to all jobseekers with a work-limiting disability and should enable them to be more efficient and self-confident in their search for work. Great attention is paid to communicating with potential employers about their own needs and possibilities that go with the work disability. In addition, separate modules are devoted to preparing for job interviews and to what extent the medical condition should be mentioned, etc.

### 7.2.1.2 Operation

One important conceptual framework in the training courses is the idea of the entire job search as a project, whereby the work disability is just

one aspect within this process but not the main one. Also, much of the support is highly practical. For example, attention is paid to common mistakes in CVs, tools are provided to follow up applications, etc.

When developing the MOOCs and the website, there was a particular focus on accessibility for the entire target group. For example, a digital assistance provides help in completing the course and the various modules.

As well as developing relevant skills for jobseekers, the website provides clearly structured information with specific relevance for the target group of people with a work-limiting disability. This includes a discussion of the various relevant stakeholders in the entire process, as well as available tools and possible allowances.

Finally, community building is also fostered with a forum which is open to all participants. It gives people an opportunity to ask questions according to the specific module, and to share information and experiences with people in a similar situation.

The programme consists of three main parts, each built around a number of key questions:

- Definition of disability and the project towards work
- What is a project towards employment?
- Which stages does it consist of?
- What place does my disability have in this project?
- Available benefits
- Main stakeholders



- Organisation and available tools
- How to promote my CV
- How to apply in the private and public sector
- RQTH recognition (reconnaissance qualité de travailleur handicapé) on the CV: why or why not?
- Disseminating and following up my CV
- Communicating about the disability in a professional setting
- How to prepare for a job interview
- Why talk about disability at a job interview
- How to talk about disability in a job interview
- How to make use of the available tools
- Communication at work.

### 7.2.1.3 Evaluation

The site's main strengths are its accessibility, user friendliness and interactivity. The website and the MOOCs focus on the specific issues faced by persons with a work-limiting disability when looking for work in the regular labour market, and they offer specific tools to participants. The needs of people with intellectual disabilities have been taken into account in the design, including subtitles for example for people with hearing disabilities. It should serve as a way of dispelling some of the ignorance and uncertainty by focusing on specific problems and offering guidance in a pleasant way.

In total, the website currently has a reach of about 10,000 to 15,000 users per year. Participating companies, and also government institutions responsible for activating and reintegrating persons with disabilities use it as a complementary tool in the daily guidance they provide. Surveys of the participants indicate that about 78% were satisfied with their participation and were able to get to work effectively.

## **7.2.2 Humanlab**

Humanlab is another project funded by the Handinov project.

### **7.2.2.1 Introduction**

The Humanlab project started in 2012 on a very small scale with one person with a working disability who was looking for a custom-made prosthesis (as a result of a work-related accident). This prosthesis had to meet a number of specific conditions and had to be made to measure. Given the cost price of a custom-made medical prosthesis, the decision was made to develop it by Humanlab itself using 3D printer technology.

After a few years, this small-scale initiative was picked up by Agefiph, which decided to provide structural funding for the project. As such, it eventually evolved into a full organisation, which since 2017 has a permanent site in Rennes and is supported by Agefiph. Furthermore, the relatively low cost and the availability of the technology has made it possible for the project to be developed and implemented in different places in France.

### **7.2.2.2 Operation**

Like the Handimooc project, the Humanlab project has a clear focus on using technological innovation. The core of the programme does not necessarily consist in producing medical support equipment. In specific

terms, the project wants to enable people with a work-limiting disability to learn and use recent technological innovations themselves, in order to come up with solutions for certain problems they encounter in daily life and also on the labour market. The Agefiph support also strongly emphasises this aspect.

In specific terms, the project collaborates with various workshops providing production resources (3D printers, laser cutting machines, etc.) for developing small-scale, personalised products. Full-time employees have also been taken on to support the (growing) group of participants.

On the one hand, the project wants to teach certain technical skills that have a practical application and added value for the person in question, while on the other hand also aiming to develop skills that are in demand on the labour market, now and in the future.

Moreover, there is also a strong focus on cooperation and knowledge sharing with existing technology companies. The aim here is to make both parties more familiar with each other. The project also plays a role on the social level. It wants to give people with disabilities more self-confidence while also focusing on developing a community of people with disabilities who are interested in technology and science.

The project's main challenge was to bridge the digital and technical gap for the widest possible group of participants and to ensure that the project remained accessible enough, despite its technical nature. Remarkably, a lack of knowledge was not the only barrier: the project also encountered a certain culture shock prevalent among many people with disabilities. The participants themselves sometimes had to be convinced of the need to bridge the digital divide and to get involved in challenging technological projects.

Cooperation with Agefiph also gave the project an additional educational function specifically aimed at persons with disabilities. For example, the

participants received about two weeks of training to familiarise themselves with the various devices and technical processes. This knowledge can be used by the participants both in the workshops and outside in the labour market.

The other public institutions that are competent in integrating persons with disabilities in the labour market, such as Cap Emploi and Pôle Emploi, look within their clientele for potentially interested people who might benefit from participation in the project, and refer them if necessary.

Finally, the project is strongly committed to knowledge sharing between all the different branches and is also trying to build an international network by cooperating with contacts in Africa and India, among others. Technical examples of products that have emerged from the project include the BionicoHand project, in which a bionic hand was developed in 2013 that could be powered by muscles from the forearm. This hand is considerably cheaper to produce than many existing alternatives being developed by medical companies.

Other examples include apps to support people with visual impairments, wheelchairs powered by self-built electric motors, etc.

### 7.2.2.3 Evaluation

Inevitably, due to its technical nature, the project has a certain threshold for persons with specific problems. However, one significant asset of the project is to be an important stepping stone for certain people in the target group who are interested in science and technology. It is one way for them to build up knowledge in the technological sector without having a degree in computer science or engineering. It thus provides persons with disabilities an opportunity to enter the labour market. It also offers potential for people confronted with a medical restriction at some point in their lives to retrain and regain a strong position in the labour market. The fact that technical profiles are in demand on the labour market is a

very important factor, and one that is unlikely to change in the near future. Moreover, diplomas are less and less important for jobs such as programmers, where having certain technical skills (e. g. mastering certain programming languages) is what matters. This can ensure that the disadvantages often encountered in schooling will be less of an obstacle in the further career of the participating disabled persons.

The project is currently still in full growth, especially since cooperation with Agefiph started in 2017. Around 110 people with disabilities have been trained in modern production processes in 2017. The project has also gained significant media coverage across France, contributing to the perception and awareness of the labour market potential of persons with disabilities.

## 8 PLATFORM WORK

### 8.1 Introduction

Platform work is a modern example of an innovative approach to organising employment. The phenomenon has been on the rise internationally in recent years and has increasingly triggered debate. Platform work is a broad concept that covers a considerable diversity of types of jobs. In specific terms, it is defined as: “the matching of supply and demand for paid employment through online platforms” (De Groen et al., 2018).

### 8.2 Disability in platform work

Little research has been done currently into the relationship between work disability and platform work. Up to now, general studies that examine the composition and profile of platform workers have rarely taken health or disabilities into account. One study investigated the motivations of platform workers. This survey showed that about 25% of the respondents indicated health reasons or work disabilities as a factor in their decision to opt for platform work. The results of this survey therefore already give an indication that there may indeed be a link between platform work and health problems (De Groen et al., 2018).

Another study looked at the motives of platform workers and whether these may include certain care commitments, a disability or older age. This study shows that 36% of the persons who indicated that they needed to work from home said that this was because of health reasons. Approximately 9% of the entire group of respondents can be categorised as having a form of limitation, whereby the medical condition lasted longer than 12 months. Further questioning shows that doing platform work for medical reasons enables people to earn an income on their own which would not be possible through regular work (Berg, 2015).

Platform work could therefore provide certain benefits for specific target groups with a work-limiting disability. However, little additional information is currently available about sustainability for example, or job quality and the profile of the people involved. As will be discussed further, background characteristics such as the level of education or having certain technical skills are also very important for platform work.

### **8.3 General characteristics, opportunities and issues with platform work**

There has been considerable growth over the years in the amount of literature on the opportunities as well as the challenges associated with platform work. The following section looks briefly at the opportunities and challenges described in research. These are not the result of research specifically about persons with disabilities, but are often applicable to them nevertheless. Studies tend to discuss general characteristics and properties of platform work. However, the various types of platform work can differ considerably.

#### **8.3.1 Autonomy in task allocation**

One important characteristic of platform work is the higher degree of autonomy people have to take on tasks and plan them according to their own wishes. This is presented as an important advantage compared to more traditional work. However, much depends on the way the work is distributed; whether this is done (1) by the platform, (2) by the client (for whom the work has to be done) or (3) by the platform worker.

This last form offers the most autonomy to the platform worker since they can decide which tasks to take on. There are considerable advantages here for persons with a work-limiting disability, as they are best

placed to assess which tasks are possible for them. There must be sufficient tasks available (preferably more tasks than platform workers) for an autonomous choice to remain possible. Otherwise, there is a risk of accepting tasks out of necessity, with little question of autonomy.

Moreover, when platform workers choose their own tasks, other factors such as online reputation also have to be taken into account. This is also the case with platforms where the client designates the worker. Such mechanisms in turn create certain barriers for people who are less strong on the labour market.

The level of autonomy is lowest when the platform allocates tasks, often with fewer advantages for persons with disabilities. Moreover, some platforms impose sanctions if certain tasks are refused. However, it is precisely these platforms with limited autonomy for the platform worker that generally offer tasks for persons with a less strong profile on the labour market, including meal delivery drivers, chauffeur services, etc (Kilhoffer et al., 2019).

In short, the increased autonomy typical of certain platform jobs may imply certain advantages for persons with disabilities. However, the jobs and platforms with the greatest autonomy appear to apply mainly to people with a stronger position on the labour market and who are able to compete. Persons with a less strong profile usually find themselves in the segment where platform work is allocated by the platform itself, with far fewer benefits in terms of autonomy.

### **8.3.2 Autonomy with regards to work organisation and task content**

In addition to autonomy in terms of taking on and planning tasks, another important aspect is autonomy regarding task content. This autonomy is also often higher in platform work than in regular work and is considered



an important reason why some people prefer platform work (Yordanova, 2015).

As with allocation autonomy, task autonomy also varies considerably between platforms. Here too, it is mainly the highly skilled jobs that offer the greatest autonomy. Examples include certain ICT specialists who, in view of their expertise, are best placed to decide for themselves how to tackle a particular problem or task. Tasks intended for lower-skilled people generally consist of fairly straightforward tasks with little room for variation in execution.

### 8.3.3 Intensity and work pressure

Research shows that the competitive aspect of platform work in particular has a clearly negative impact on the perceived workload of platform workers.

The open market gives people the impression that they can be replaced more quickly. They also have less opportunity to build up a relationship of trust with an employer than is the case with regular employment. If they cannot meet the productivity expected of them because of their medical problems, they will usually not (be able to) report this, let alone seek a solution in cooperation with the employer (Kilhoffer et al., 2019). There is therefore great pressure to perform well all the time and to definitely meet the expectations of the employer. This can cause problems in the long term.

For many, the uncertain nature of platform work also contributes to work pressure and stress. The need to take on many tasks for the sake of security is felt more quickly, resulting in greater work pressure.

The nature of a large part of platform work also requires a certain speed of delivery. Deadlines can be very specific and direct, especially in the case

of low-skilled platform work such as transport and passenger transportation. Time pressure and competition also often apply to highly skilled, specialised platform work. However, people in this group usually see competition as part of the job which may also give them an opportunity to build up their own portfolio. These more sought-after profiles also tend to have more options to fall back on in the event of setbacks.

### **8.3.4 Working environment**

A suitable, safe working environment is a much discussed and sometimes problematic topic in platform work. Much of the work performed will not differ greatly from that done in a traditional company. Drivers face the same risks regardless of their status and cleaning staff still have contact with the same chemical substances. And yet there are also certain risks in working online from home in terms of prolonged sitting and screen use. Platform workers are often expected to provide their own materials and take care of their own working environment, with very little control over potential health and safety risks. Even if the platform worker pays attention to this, problems can still occur as people do not have the necessary knowledge to deal with certain issues or risks (Pesole et al., 2018). Furthermore, little specific training, if any at all, is available for platform workers. In addition, people frequently switch between tasks on certain platforms, so that they cannot build up the necessary experience for proper risk assessment. Finally, the nature of the work often results in people failing to observe precautionary measures; time constraints or the payment methods mean that many platforms will require their workers to perform tasks as quickly as possible and often on a continuous basis (Cottini & Lucifora, 2013).

### 8.3.5 Terms of employment

The difference in employment conditions for platform workers compared to regular workers is probably the most discussed subject in ongoing debates. It is this difference that ensures on the one hand that platform work can often be offered more cheaply than regular work. On the other hand, these differences can also imply disadvantageous consequences for the platform worker. The discussion about bogus self-employment is the most prominent example. Here platform workers do the same tasks that were previously performed by regular employees, but now under the status of being self-employed. Certain labour costs can be avoided, as these do not apply to the self-employed. However, the platform worker also faces the loss of certain rights, conditions and benefits.

A first problem in this context consists in the lower level of social security for those who are self-employed. They do not build up rights in the same way as regular employees and this can have important consequences in case of problems or for their further career. In addition, they often do not enjoy the same protection, in terms of either dismissal or discrimination, for example. Employees who feel that they are the victim of discrimination at work can usually turn to their trade union. For self-employed people, and therefore for many platform workers, this will be difficult because they will often not be unionized. Especially in cases where the platform or client retains extensive control over how tasks are allocated and executed, platform workers are often in a more vulnerable position because they have little or no say in or insight into the matter.

Another problem inherent to the operation of platforms is the lack of career opportunities. People usually work from task to task and for different clients. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to build a career in the same way as people in regular employment. In addition, there are usually few or no training possibilities and therefore fewer opportunities to build up knowledge and skills. These problems are more prevalent for low-skilled platform work with no requirements for specific skills or

knowledge. Research shows that this problem is less pronounced for people with certain technical skills and also creative professions. These platform workers appear to be more aware of the risks involved here and are more likely to try to build up some kind of portfolio through the tasks they perform in order to make some progress (Kilhoffer et al., 2019; Larke et al., 2019).

Differences are also noticeable in terms of hours worked compared to regular employment. Theoretically, there are advantages in terms of greater flexibility. However, especially lower-skilled platform workers without specific skills are more likely to be forced to work quickly and for long hours on a certain task in order to be able to switch to the next one as soon as possible. Another problem is that there are not always enough tasks available within certain types of platform work so that people are forced to take on whatever is available at certain times. All of this can cause highly fragmented working hours that are distributed irregularly with peaks and troughs.

### 8.3.6 Representation

Given their status and the lack of clarity that often accompanies this, there is also a problem with platform workers in terms of representation. Here too, self-employed people have different rights to those in regular employment. The channels for making their voices heard and exerting their influence are not always clear.

It is also more difficult for trade unions to reach the target group of platform workers, given the fluid nature of the work and the grey zone that their status puts them in.

Platform workers involved in remote work also have little contact with colleagues or other platform workers. The solitary nature of these jobs makes it difficult for platform workers in certain branches to organise

themselves and make their voices heard. There have already been many attempts to enable some form of representation especially with regard to on-site work (see below), where the problem of false self-employment is the greatest.

## **8.4 Opportunities offered by platform work for people with disabilities**

There are clearly problems and risks involved in the forms of platform work existing today. Nevertheless, platform work also has a number of advantages that can possibly offer solutions for overcoming certain thresholds faced by persons with disabilities.

Discrimination is a first aspect where the nature of platform work may offer certain solutions. Algorithms replace most of the subjective human aspects in the recruitment process. Generally, there is no need for people to mention their health when registering on a platform. There is therefore no risk of being discriminated against by the employer/platform as they do not have this information. Platforms where tasks are assigned by the client or the platform may have a more level playing field with the work-limiting disability not playing a role in obtaining assignments. Usually, the only determining factors are the quality and speed with which the tasks can be performed. It is therefore crucial that platform workers with a work-limiting disability are able to compete with others. Otherwise, they run the risk of facing indirect discrimination if they cannot show the same productivity as the other platform workers. In this case, ignorance of the work-limiting disability on the part of the platform/employer can even have a negative effect, because they cannot take it into account if they do not know about it. No support or adjustment can be offered to the platform worker to improve workability, even if the employer were willing to do so.

Another advantage consists in the relatively low barriers to enter the platform economy. The flexible nature and organisation of the work ensures that there are few commitments between worker and employer/platform. If platform workers find that the tasks are too heavy or not suitable for them, termination will have fewer consequences than in case of regular employment. In addition, this can also be an opportunity for people to get acquainted with different jobs and types of work. People come into much faster contact with a wide range of jobs which they can try out with a relatively low threshold. This is much more difficult in the regular job market where people find themselves being automatically pushed more quickly in a certain direction.

## **8.5 Types of platform work; opportunities and risks for persons with disabilities**

It is important to emphasise that there is considerable heterogeneity in platform work. The corresponding advantages and disadvantages for persons with disabilities can therefore also vary greatly. The following section divides platform work into two major types. However, the final shape and conditions of platform work depend on a multitude of factors, and considerable differences are still possible even within these two types.

### **8.5.1 Online work**

In this first type of platform work, the work is organised through an online profile that the person has created on a platform. People can accept the task or not if they find it suitable. They usually also have a relatively large amount of control over the time of execution, as long as they meet the deadline.

One very important feature of online work for persons with disabilities is that the place where they do the work does not matter. If so desired, they can work from home to complete the task in their familiar environment. This flexibility offers potential for people with disabilities. First of all, they can focus on the tasks they find feasible when looking for work. Tasks can also be planned at times that suit them. This makes it easier, for example, to combine work with doctor's appointments or therapy sessions.

Another important advantage of this type of work is the fact that it automatically solves certain mobility problems for persons with disabilities. It can also be a solution for people who have problems with social interaction or who have difficulty with a change of environment.

One disadvantage of online platform work is that the platform worker is very dependent on the design and elaboration of the platform. People with a visual impairment for example can find it impossible to participate in such platforms if they are not sufficiently adapted.

American research has looked at the profile of persons with disabilities who perform small online tasks via a platform. The group proved to be fairly heterogeneous in terms of actual disability, including people with visual or hearing impairments as well as those with intellectual or learning disabilities. However, the majority had some form of tertiary education and were surprisingly aged over 50 years (Zyskowski et al., 2015).

Other research conducted in Europe examined the advantages and disadvantages by means of interviews with experts and with platform workers who had disabilities. In general, potential was seen in the possibilities that platform work offers people with disabilities when it comes to obtaining an independent income. One important aspect here is the possibility of partially avoiding barriers on a physical level and also in terms of employer attitude and perception. In general, people are not obliged to provide information about their health, so that (unconscious) discrimination is not possible. Other crucial points consist in flexible working

hours and the fact that location does not matter (working from home). Another indirect effect appears to be the fact that platform workers with disabilities are also more likely to use platforms to purchase services themselves, for instance to make certain journeys (Kilhoffer et al. 2019).

However, a number of clear disadvantages also emerged in this research. For instance, it appeared from the interviews that access to digital channels is far from self-evident for everyone and in particular for people with a work-limiting disability. There are still considerable barriers for certain groups, not only due to the nature of the limitation (e. g. visual handicap) but also in the lower average level of education. The interviews indicate that this is a disadvantage not only in the field of technology and IT.

Another point made in the interviews is that digital platforms are developed with a great focus on creating a user-friendly, accessible interface for the consumers of the services. This would appear to be much less the case for the platform workers themselves. It has been argued that digital accessibility for platform workers is usually regarded by developers as a cost without any demonstrable benefits. Corresponding demand is so low that it currently does not outweigh the potential benefits that increased accessibility for platform workers can offer for the developers and operators of the platforms (Kilhoffer et al., 2019).

The often precarious financial situation in which many persons with disabilities find themselves can also be a barrier, since they do not have the possibility of equipping themselves sufficiently to work from home in fully digital mode. However, people were somewhat optimistic in this respect, since technological development is also making this equipment cheaper. Finally, there is also the risk of social isolation. Regular employment outside the home provides an opportunity to build up social contacts and to participate in society. However, these advantages are lost when someone only works from home. A counterargument could be that social contacts can also be cultivated on a virtual level.



A form of segregation may also emerge with the risk that a certain group will become virtually invisible and thus lose the opportunity to have their voice heard in society. This can go against making people with disabilities known and promoting them as employment potential.

### 8.5.2 On-location work

Another type of platform work is described in literature as on-location work. This concerns work that has to be done for one or several clients on site. Depending on the platform, the work is either assigned automatically once someone is a member, selected by the worker or the client. This aspect has significant consequences for the flexibility of the platform worker. The benefits of the aforementioned online work for people with reduced mobility or certain social problems do not apply to this type of platform work, as people are still required to work on site. For people with visual or hearing impairments, the condition remains that the platform must be adapted to their needs in order for them to participate.

As with the broader group of platform workers, the status given to people remains very important for the quality and sustainability of their work. Here too, there is considerable heterogeneity. For instance, some platforms hire people as employees, while elsewhere people perform the same tasks on a self-employed basis. This, of course, results in considerable differences both financially and in terms of social security. Furthermore, employees are usually also entitled to additional protection in terms of welfare and health or with regard to certain benefits. People who are self-employed will find that this is often less the case. The discussion about the status of platform workers is therefore even more important for persons with or without a work-limiting disability (Kilhoffer et al., 2019).

## 8.6 Good practice

Efforts have already been made by a number of digital platform operators to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. Some of them are briefly explained below.

### 8.6.1 Uber

Uber's business model is to match their drivers, who are self-employed (or employees in some countries), with consumers looking for transport. Uber's flexible system with drivers logging in and out themselves means that this concept potentially offers opportunities for people with disabilities.

Uber has also focused on improving accessibility for both users and drivers. For example, they have ensured that their various websites comply with the so-called WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), a set of rules that ensures broad accessibility of online content. In addition, channels have been introduced for people with disabilities to report if certain information is not accessible to them.

Specifically for drivers with a work disability, facilities have been provided for persons with hearing disabilities. If desired, certain auditory signals from the app (e. g. when a consumer arrives) can also be visualised. There is also the option to switch off the driver's telephone accessibility in the app and let the consumer communicate via text message. The consumer is also informed that their driver has an auditory disability.

As a result of these measures, altogether about 6,000 hearing-impaired drivers currently work for Uber in the United States. In Europe, too, several thousand drivers are already working in this way. In addition, Uber is also running campaigns to raise awareness of hearing disabilities and is

working with client organisations to improve services for both users and drivers with hearing disabilities (Kilhoffer et al., 2019).

### 8.6.2 Ilunion

Ilunion is an organisation operating mainly in Spain. It aims to match supply and demand for labour via a platform and does this in the manufacturing, retail and healthcare sectors, among others. There is a great focus on employing people with disabilities. They are recruited as employees by Ilunion and carry out tasks for them on site with various customers. In total, about 40% of the Ilunion workforce has some form of disability. Depending on the employee and the assignment, the task can be performed on the client's premises, at Ilunion itself or from home.

In addition, training is provided for the employees in both technical and social skills. Companies are also offered consultancy to evaluate and improve their policy on work-limiting disabilities in the workplace. These consultancy tasks are also partly carried out by persons with disabilities.

Employment through Ilunion has a number of advantages. The organisation is actively involved in achieving qualitative employment for persons with disabilities. It also encourages and supports companies to become more inclusive and socially responsible.

Strictly speaking, Ilunion is not just an online platform, as its operation is broader than that. However, the organisation tries to use technology as much as possible to let persons with disabilities participate in the labour market (Kilhoffer et al., 2019).

## 8.7 Conclusion

In summary, platform work can offer certain opportunities for persons with disabilities on their way to employment.

People with a stronger profile on the labour market will find clearer advantages in platform work. Platform work can offer specific benefits for people with skills that are in demand on the labour market. For example, in an ideal situation, people can use the greater flexibility in terms of task allocation and task content to adapt their work to their own needs and wishes. They can assess which tasks are suitable and realistic, and often schedule them more flexibly during the day than is the case with regular employment.

There are also potential advantages for people with disabilities in cases where the tasks are assigned by the client or by the platform and where less specific knowledge or skills are required. However, this also depends on them being able to compete with others on the platform on a more or less equal basis. If the end result is the only factor in the employment, on the one hand this can eliminate discrimination, while on the other hand also entailing certain risks.

People with a greater distance to the labour market may find that platforms are a suitable testing ground for becoming familiar with different types of work. In addition, this can also be a way of becoming more independent through experience and familiarity with a certain work setting. The flexible, transient nature of platform work may therefore offer potential in this respect, with less far-reaching consequences in any possible failure.

It is important to note, however, that these advantages and opportunities are currently still accompanied by a large number of disadvantages and risks, particularly those associated with platform work. These apply to the entire group of platform workers, but can have more negative con-

sequences for persons with a work-limiting disability, given their generally more precarious situation.

One important obstacle in this respect is currently the status of platform workers, with many of them being self-employed. This can have several negative consequences. For example, they enjoy less protection in various areas, have less opportunity to organise themselves or to have a say in the organisation, and do not build up social rights to the same extent.

Moreover, the advantages of theoretically higher flexibility and autonomy appear to apply mainly to people with a stronger labour market profile. People who do not have distinctive advantages on the labour market will usually find that the situation is much more difficult: they will often be forced to accept certain assignments that are not entirely suitable or realistic or that are more difficult to fit in with their daily life.

Furthermore, the opportunities for advancement towards sustainable employment are unevenly distributed. There is almost no indication that employment via the platform economy increases the chances of sustainable employment later in people's working life. Only stronger profiles will usually be able to convert tasks into portfolio additions. For low-skilled workers, this is usually much less the case. There are limited possibilities for validating performed tasks. Moreover, the platforms often provide almost no training to acquire new skills.

There are also clear differences in the working environment, depending on the profile of the platform worker. If people have the skills and equipment to work from home, there are advantages for persons with reduced mobility or certain social barriers. This is usually the case for more specialised tasks and often requires certain basic equipment, with the need for corresponding investment. People working on location via platforms find it much more difficult to ensure a safe, appropriate working environment. There is far less control from the client/platform and they are often under less legal obligation to do so when hiring people who are self-employed.

As is the case for all platform workers, many obstacles have to be eliminated and regularised to make platform work a valid option for a larger group of persons with disabilities. In particular, the unclear status and lack of supervision are problematic for a group where security and guidance are very important. Generally, the advantages such as increased autonomy, higher flexibility and reduced discrimination only outweigh the disadvantages for a specific group of people with skills and knowledge that are in demand on the labour market. For example, online work can provide an income on a self-employed basis for IT specialists with mobility limitations or accountants with certain social problems. But the dangers inherent in permanent, solitary working from home should still not be overlooked even for people with these stronger labour market profiles. However, most people with work-limiting disabilities will find that the framework and safety net accompanying platform work is currently still too limited to be more than a testing ground for becoming familiar with many different tasks and jobs in a short period of time.

The discussed case studies are steps in the right direction for persons with disabilities and the platform economy. The fact that a large, prominent platform such as Uber takes a proactive approach to the inclusion of persons with hearing disabilities sends an important signal. However, this still does not eradicate the often precarious situation in which Uber drivers operate. Ilunion, in turn, is a very different example. They came from a social perspective right from the start and have set the explicit goal of helping people with a disability to get paid employment. To this end, they try to make maximum use of modern technologies to match supply and demand. Crucially, however, they also offer training, guidance and coaching within the organisation. Another crucial fact is that profit is not the only end goal at Ilunion, and that priority is also given to socially responsible entrepreneurship. However, this is not the case with the vast majority of platforms today.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of this study summarises the main points from the various cases and presents recommendations that influence the demand side (employers) and the supply side (employees).

### 9.1 Demand side

#### 9.1.1 Stimulating the mind shift among employers

One crucial factor in the employment policy of persons with disabilities is to support and stimulate the demand side. Several examples of good practice over the years show that many employers are willing to give a chance to people who have a certain distance to the labour market. However, this way of inclusive thinking is not yet widespread and there are currently not enough entrepreneurs with a proactive policy for employing people with work-limiting disabilities in their workforce (OECD 2013).

Many employers find the uncertainties associated with recruiting someone with a disability sufficient reason not to take the plunge. Questions concerning productivity, absenteeism and the need for support probably play a role for every employer who considers hiring someone with a disability. Communication and information are equally important in this respect. An accessible and unambiguous point of contact is probably a crucial first step in the right direction, as demonstrated by a large number of the various initiatives that were discussed. Many of them focus on communication and a smoother flow of information. Not every employer can be expected to know and keep up to date with all the regulations and procedures involved in the employment of persons with disabilities. Incomplete or unclear information can be detrimental and lead to missed

opportunities. Moreover, corresponding expectations on the part of employers would only raise the threshold even further.

#### 9.1.1.1 Developing a single point of contact for employers with accessible, comprehensive information

One important goal of the Finnish OTE/OSKU projects was to reduce the complexity typical of the system by making information more easily accessible. Work ability coordinators (WACs) were specifically used to do this on the local level in Finland. As far as employers are concerned, it is mainly the WACs in the HR services who are relevant here. They are trained in the regulations and support tools and can therefore inform both the employee and the employer. Evaluations of how WACs work showed that companies used WACs for the following:

- To put more emphasis on preventive measures in the field of occupational disability policy
- To make more use of transfers within the company
- To make more use of work-based rehabilitation
- To enhance cooperation inside and outside the company
- To progress from a problem-oriented to a solution-oriented approach.

In the Swedish SIUS project with its supported employment approach, the point of contact for the employer is clearly the SIUS consultant. Before recruitment, the consultant goes through a number of steps with the job-seeker and the employer so that all parties have the same information. The SIUS consultant has a significant role to play in initial contact with the employer. It is important to ensure that the available support is explained clearly: for many employers this is a key factor in the decision to proceed



with recruitment/placement. This support consists of accompanying measures such as wage cost subsidies and refunding for workplace modifications.

In France, the law on a professional future stipulates, among others, that larger companies must appoint a contact person within their company. This function can also serve as a source of information for employers. Implementing this role in companies is still very new, so its impact is not yet clear. However, having a designated person on the shopfloor who understands the issue and has received corresponding training (provided in France by the relevant employment services) may be beneficial.

In the three country cases, a local point of contact assists the employer with questions or problems. In Finland and Sweden, external services are used for this purpose, while in France, this role is played by a member of staff who has received corresponding training and has the possibility for further specialisation along these lines. However, it is important that the contact point is easily accessible for the employer, has a good overview of what is available for supporting persons with disabilities and is well acquainted with the local level.

### 9.1.1.2 Boosting online information for employers

A second Finnish sub-project with a different approach to informing employers looked at creating an online platform with complete, accessible information. It provides an overview of the available support means and information about the corresponding stakeholders and procedures.

A low threshold and complete overview of the support measures and stakeholders may also be of interest to employers. Currently, the information is often still fragmented and prior knowledge is needed in order to have an overall picture of the different measures. This can form a serious barrier for certain employers who are less intrinsically motivated to give people with disabilities a chance in their company.

### 9.1.1.3 Reducing risks for employers

In the Netherlands, the perception of a higher risk when hiring persons with disabilities was addressed by means of the no-risk policy which refunds employers for the labour costs if a person with a disability is absent due to illness. The policy is one of the few components in the Participation Act that most of the various stakeholders see as a positive instrument.

Recent research shows that the no-risk policy convinced a quarter of the surveyed employers to hire jobseekers with a disability. However, it also transpired that the concept was still relatively unknown among both employers and jobseekers. Only about half of the participating employers were familiar with the measure. Clear dissemination and communication about such favourable measures is therefore at least as important as their implementation. Moreover, the positive impact was most noticeable when the policy was used in combination with other measures such as wage cost subsidies or wage dispensation, job coaching, workplace modifications and/or test placement. In general, 35% of the surveyed employees said that they thought the no-risk policy had had a positive influence on the employer's decision.

### 9.1.2 Improving employer perceptions of disability in the workplace

Clear, accessible information may be a first important condition for improving participation. In line with the earlier point about mind shift, there should be more emphasis on the added value and potential of persons with disabilities, shifting the focus from 'what are the problems' to 'what are the possibilities and opportunities'.

### 9.1.2.1 Enhancing awareness among employers with media campaigns

A number of factors such as a lack of information but also stigma and a lack of experience mean that many employers today have not yet undertaken steps to hire persons with disabilities. They also often have the perception the existing work environment offers no possibilities for productive participation of persons with disabilities.

In Finland, targeted media campaigns were used to create a more positive perception of the target group in terms of labour market participation. This is because earlier research more than ten years ago showed that Finnish entrepreneurs often had a very negative perception about the added value of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

The campaign aimed primarily at bringing about a mind shift to give first consideration to the skills of the person with a disability, rather than their illness or limitation. The campaign thus presented employers who act as good examples, explaining their approach to implementing an inclusive recruitment policy and the benefits they have gained from it.

A second aspect that was strongly emphasised in the media campaign consisted in the usefulness of part-time work as an instrument to activate and (re)integrate people.

Instructive examples were collected and made available online, with the aim of informing and inspiring employers and employees alike. This resulted in a 2017 survey showing that 80% of the employers were positive towards the (part-time) employment of persons with disabilities, which was a considerable improvement compared to the previous survey ten years earlier.

### 9.1.2.2 Setting measurable targets and promoting them widely

A specific media campaign was not an explicit goal of the Participation Act in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the whole topic often gets media attention, in many cases because of the controversy surrounding it. Then again, there have been active campaigns by several clients' associations, deliberately seeking public debate to address their point.

On the other hand, the Participation Act with its decentralisation effect has brought the issue down to the local level where it is now being discussed more by the municipalities, as indicated by many evaluations carried out by the various municipalities and the many regional experiments that some have started (e. g. Apeldoorn, Amsterdam, etc.). However, it is also important to note that this decentralisation effect has had a clearly negative impact in other areas.

Finally, the numerical nature of a measure such as the Job Agreement (including the annual evaluations and updates) lends itself well to public debate by stipulating clear target figures. Clear quantification makes it easier to identify problems with policy and its implementation. Despite the shortcomings of a measure such as the Job Agreement, it does put the subject and possible problems on the map.

### 9.1.3 Increasing the value of part-time employment as a tool for inclusion

The horizons of employers can be further broadened in terms of how work is designed and organised. There should be continued emphasis on the potential of part-time work, which should be presented as an opportunity rather than a constraint.

In addition, an employer mind shift is necessary even before the recruitment process begins. Vacancies still focus too often on finding the picture-perfect applicant, thus creating high thresholds.

Furthermore, instruments such as job carving need to become more established among employers. This is probably still unknown territory in many companies. A potential employee with a work-limiting disability can be perfectly suited for many of the tasks involved in a vacancy, with just certain points causing obstacles. Greater flexibility in this context with the possibility of an alternative division of tasks can ultimately lead to a win-win situation for both the employee and the employer.

Policy should also focus more on such measures and take these forms of flexibility into account.

### **9.1.3.1 Media campaigns for enhancing employer awareness of part-time work opportunities**

The Finnish OSKU and OTE projects are particularly aimed at stimulating part-time employment. This was clearly emphasised in the media campaigns (as described above). The focus was on the opportunities of part-time work, rather than the more traditional view of part-time work as an alternative for those unable to work full-time. Positive examples were offered and featured in various media channels. This is therefore a first general approach towards creating more awareness.

### **9.1.3.2 Job carving as a tool to make part-time work more realistic**

Part-time work is an important aspect of the broader supported employment methodology and is therefore also part of the Swedish SIUS project.

The 'place then train' principle is based on quick steps towards the shop floor, with part-time work as an important instrument to facilitate participation by the jobseeker.

Job carving is also an important aspect here and is often proposed in the first exploratory talks between the employer, the SIUS consultant and the jobseeker. Together with the consultant, the latter always prepares a presentation about themselves and their skills and possibilities. This provides a basis for examining which aspects of the job are realistic and which are not. Certain tasks are often filtered out of a specific job and converted into a new part-time job.

#### **9.1.4 Opportunities of technological innovation**

Technological progress in the form of robotisation and digitalisation for example can lower the threshold for some jobseekers and employees to take up certain jobs. However, it is undeniable that these changes will also cause certain jobs to disappear or to move abroad, a development that is already taking place in certain sectors.

Nor does the use of robotised and digital support tools necessarily make activation and reintegration easier in all cases. Everything still starts from the willingness of the employer to make a commitment, with various factors still involved. Less competitive jobseekers/employees will still be confronted with employers who would prefer to hire someone without a work-limiting disability.

One important additional element here is that persons with a work-limiting disability to varying degrees are more often unskilled and/or often only capable of performing low-skilled labour. This should be dealt with carefully when formulating policy and deploying technology, to avoid creating a group of "losers", as is the case with globalisation.

Proactive approach to technological progress and people with disabilities  
Proactive use of the various technological developments is beneficial and desirable in the context of persons with disabilities.

One specific example showing the advantages of technological innovation when employing people with disabilities is the French Humanlab project. Such use of technology offers clear advantages to all parties involved (even if on a small scale in this case): (1) The persons with disabilities are able to participate in projects that offer tailor-made tools to improve their own individual situation. (2) In addition, they also learn technical and digital skills that are in great demand on the labour market. (3) On the other hand, certain technology companies come into contact with the target group and discover the workforce potential that is available to fill their specific labour bottlenecks. (4) Finally, the knowledge remains open and accessible, with the solution potentially benefiting other persons with disabilities in a similar situation.

Interesting and important aspects in this respect include not just the project itself but also Agefiph's decision to get involved. Such technological tools are often developed primarily for a medical/care setting to support people in their daily activities. By contrast, this case puts important emphasis on the work aspect.

In future it will be important to stimulate and emphasise cooperation between technology and labour market stakeholders.

Just as employers, employees and jobseekers need a mind shift, technology companies must also be encouraged to offer inclusive products and services. Sufficient economic potential will be necessary here. This could consist, for example, in government funding for the development of certain products and services. In France, this was done through the Handinov project in cooperation with Agefiph, Pôle Emploi and several private companies. The provision of such funding will result in technological progress on a larger scale than when individuals and organisations act solely out

of intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, it gives those people and/or organisations remuneration for their commitment and an opportunity to take a more professional approach.

The use of co-bots is an interesting example that demonstrates the need for a mind shift in this area. Co-bots are currently being implemented in specific companies, revealing certain potential in the technological field. However, in the regular economy co-bots are mainly used to focus on increased productivity and ergonomics. Technology definitely offers possibilities in terms of participation, but this requires a mind shift that has not yet really penetrated the regular economy.

The link between technology and inclusion must be proactively pursued to ensure technological progress is not used primarily to improve efficiency in the workplace, but rather than as a means of enabling more people to participate.

#### **9.1.4.2 Flexible framework for using technological tools and promoting cooperation with the technology sector**

The proactive approach to technology described above requires a flexible framework for responding to rapid technological changes and advances. This applies especially in view of the fact that these tools in future will probably come from more angles, and also from smaller and less well-known manufacturers or projects. Indeed, high-tech production tools are becoming more and more accessible to a wider group of entrepreneurs and are no longer reserved for the big industrial players.

One specific example that can already be seen today consists of the French Humanlabs/My Human Kit, where a large number of technological tools have already been developed for specific cases of people with disabilities in a relatively short period of time. The accompanying policy should ensure such developments are followed up with a good framework that is flexible enough to respond to innovations. Care is needed to



prevent bureaucracy and regulations from stifling the funding and implementation of new technological aids. The role of the national public employment services is crucial here: these organisations must be sufficiently aware of innovations and their potential usefulness as technological aids on the shopfloor.

Closer cooperation with the manufacturers as in France might therefore make sense. The Humanlab project, for example, already existed for several years before Agefiph was funded. However, direct partnership between Agefiph and the inclusion of Humanlab in the Handinov project has increased the scale and maintained the link with the world of work. This cooperation has clear advantages for both stakeholders. Humanlab can count on reliable funding. In turn, Agefiph has a clearer view of Humanlab's operations and the latest innovations in terms of technological support. Such funding projects therefore have both short- and long-term potential.

Using and promoting such technological innovations also has an important function in creating a market for the producers. If people can use technological aids smoothly and correctly, the increased demand will then give companies an incentive to make use of them and proceed with further specialisation. This in turn will enhance efficiency, trigger innovation and make products cheaper, which can only benefit the end user.

#### **9.1.4.3 Increasing the potential of job carving due to technological change**

Continuous technological progress means that certain forms of support will become increasingly important, including in particular job carving possibilities (whether in part-time work or not).

Future technological progress will increasingly provide machines to compensate for certain limitations or to support job performance when adapting and shifting tasks.

Consequently, this development will make it even more important to subsidise technical modifications in the workplace. The possibilities of technological aids will indeed increase in future, with swifter individual application.

### 9.1.5 Additional incentives for employers

Several of the country cases featured in the study use financial incentives to stimulate recruitment and implement additional push factors to make employers adopt a more inclusive hiring policy. The aim is to lower the threshold for employers. Even so, recruitment in the end depends to great extent on the goodwill of the individual employers and their perception of the added value of hiring a person with a work-limiting disability.

Financial compensation for hiring employees at a distance to the labour market can therefore be an additional incentive for employers to make this decision.

Other aspects such as quotas in combination with accompanying levies or benefits can work this way, or as an obligation. However, caution is always required when using such measures: such extrinsic motivators must always be of secondary importance to the employer. If there is no intrinsic motivation for the employer to adopt an inclusive recruitment policy, there is a risk that this will have an impact on the guidance, cooperation and collegiality shown to the employee in question. In the interest of sustainability and quality of work, this is therefore an important counterargument for such policies. However, country cases and academic research also show the potential of quotas. Research indicates a certain correlation between countries with good employment rates for persons with disabilities and the application of quotas. In addition, there are also real advantages because it puts the subject on the map for employers and may also have long-term benefits.

One alternative is to include social criteria in public procurement. This is not a new concept but may have considerable growth potential in several countries. The instrument should be used to encourage employers to also give persons with disabilities a chance within their company. Furthermore, the policy should focus on long-term qualitative employment within the regular economy over and beyond the duration of the government contract.

However, in both cases it is important to provide sufficient accompanying measures to ensure sufficient support for the disabled person in question and the employer (in terms of both guidance and financial support).

#### 9.1.5.1 Exploring the potential of rewards for recruitment (beyond mere compensation)

In the Netherlands, the wage cost advantage has been in place since 1 January 2018. Accordingly, employers receive a fixed amount for every hour that they employ a person with a disability. Currently, that amount is 3.05 euro per hour for a person with a work-limiting disability, with a maximum of 6,000 euro per year per employee.

In Finland, the social security contributions paid by employers are reduced if they hire someone who has been unemployed for more than two years (of which persons with disabilities form a considerable group).

In France, compensation is provided by the 'Loi numéro 2005-102'. Employers are entitled to compensation if they employ someone with a work-limiting disability for at least 12 months. As with other measures, here again it is not easy to demonstrate the actual effect of the above measures, since they are always part of a broader package. It is difficult to assess their added value, especially with the issues of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation in mind. However, such measures could initially give employers a somewhat extrinsic motivation to hire persons with disabilities. When they have gained more (positive) experience and knowledge,

this in turn could lead to more intrinsically motivated recruitments. To a certain extent, it is thus possible to overcome the threshold caused by a lack of employer experience with the target group.

Finally, and just as significant as correct implementation, it is also very important for the stakeholders to be aware of such support measures even before the recruitment process begins. Jobseekers can refer to it when applying and employers can take it into account during their selection procedures.

### 9.1.5.2 Social criteria in public procurement

Social criteria in public tenders are increasingly seen as a good way of structurally integrating persons with disabilities in new workplaces. None of the cases in the study addressed this aspect specifically. However, the recommendations in the OTE project do mention its importance.

The Netherlands is an often-cited positive example in this regard. Moreover, Dutch research and case studies tend to be quite positive about the outcome. For example, employers who have made efforts based on such social criteria indicate that it has brought them into contact with a target group that they otherwise might not have considered. On the other hand, some employers saw the additional administration in particular as a disadvantage.

Research was also conducted into the potential of such social criteria in government tenders for employing people with disabilities. This looked at a series of government tenders to see how many jobs could be suitable for employing persons with disabilities. Special attention was paid to cleaning or catering jobs where the threshold is usually low enough for a broad group of persons with disabilities. The results show that persons with disabilities could perform approximately 10% of the cleaning and catering jobs in government tenders. However, it should be noted that this is only the case if sufficient efforts are made to make it easier for the per-

sons in question to perform these jobs and if there is a good communication between the client (the government) and the supplier.

### 9.1.5.3 Quota

As far as quotas are concerned, France is and remains one of the frontrunners in Europe. Quotas have been used here extensively for decades. There is still much debate about the advantages and disadvantages of such systems.

One significant aspect of the French system is that the levies paid by employers (on failing to meet the set targets) are allocated to the fund responsible for stimulating the employment of persons with disabilities. This system, too, has its drawbacks: the money is not always spent in the most efficient and correct way. But the underlying ideas do have their advantages, making the goals and the employment of persons with disabilities much more specific for employers. Even if they do not succeed in employing people from the target group, this is still a point for discussion on the agenda. Furthermore, it may mean an additional source of funding that could be very useful for many service providers.

In the Netherlands, the Job Agreement also combines such a 'stick and carrot' dimension. The concept uses levies as an incentive for employers; at the same time people on the target group register receive certain benefits to support them on the labour market (as well as the wage cost advantage for the employer).

As with the Participation Act, there are also reservations about the broader elaboration of the Job Agreement. Employers have complained in particular about the additional administrative burden.

Nevertheless, a combination of push and pull factors is an interesting route to explore. This also transpired from the interviews with the various experts, where they were not necessarily negative about the measure as a whole and the concept certainly has its merits.

It is also interesting to note that as far as quotas are concerned, research shows that the six countries with the lowest ‘activity gap’ in Europe (Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Slovenia) all use quotas as part of their employment policy (Grammenos, 2013).

## 9.2 Supply side

Supply-side measures can also play an important role in ensuring that more people make the choice to enter or return to the labour market.

### 9.2.1 Better information

To start with, there is a need for clear, accessible information for the target group. Accessibility is also crucial, particularly since the target group is generally less well educated and/or given the existing limitations. This is a considerable challenge due to the diversity of each individual situation and the range of stakeholders involved in the activation/re-integration process.

In order to reach the broad group, the first step is to use a central platform/information point where the jobseeker or employee can take their questions. Information in clear, unambiguous language is of great importance here to avoid problems. The most suitable medium is probably a well-designed online service. It has a relatively low threshold (if this was taken into account in the design) and is available at all times.

However, it is also critical to have an accessible physical point of contact, as was the case for the employers. Even when online information is designed with a simple interface and language, face-to-face consultation between jobseeker/employee and service provider is still indispensable. Ideally, the two should be well-matched and complementary, with face-to-face meetings to address individual and specific aspects, and the online

approach for general information and the possibility of accessing important information on a stand-alone basis. As for employers and service providers, Finland has focused on online services for employees and job-seekers. The website established as part of the OTE project is a good example of a central information point where people with disabilities can find answers to various questions that may arise, also in their job search.

One important concept is the idea of the 'one-stop shop' as implemented in Finland. This pays attention to both activation and (re-)integration, to professional and medical aspects, as well as providing information about benefits. Persons with a work-limiting disability can always find their way to this site, whether they have any prior knowledge or not, whereas elsewhere a basic knowledge of the stakeholders present in the field is often needed in order to find/frame the available information. Information found online is often rather fragmented and presented separately for each stakeholder.

In addition, the Finnish website put great emphasis on health and well-being as a fundamental condition for moving towards the labour market. To this end, information is provided about the medical rehabilitation route that is offered, support for psychological problems and information about sleep, stress, exercise and nutritional support. There is also a separate section for people who are interested in becoming self-employed. This includes information about the specific support for people with disabilities as well as more general support available to all aspiring entrepreneurs (such as start-up and business management support).

The WAC training includes a link to the sub-project and a specific section dedicated to becoming familiarised with the platform.

### 9.2.1.1 Local contact point for employees/jobseekers

If someone drops out (or risks dropping out) from work, it is not always easy for that person to find the correct procedure. There are many stake-

holders in the whole process, and it is not always clear where to turn to when problems arise. People with difficulties in participating in the labour market for health reasons may feel a kind of diffidence and choose not to inform the employer or HR department about the problem. Here there is a risk of the situation escalating further to the point where things become significantly worse than if there had been timely intervention. A clear point of contact acting as a confidential advisor can be a useful alternative for dealing with such problems in good time. The prevention services have an important role to play here. This can be reinforced by additional training that goes deeper into the issue of work disabilities in the work context (e. g. disability management training).

According to the French law on a professional future, large French companies must appoint employees who are competent to support persons with disabilities in the company. The necessary expertise for the target group is thus located on the company level in a (normally) clear and accessible place.

Alternatively, a contact point with a more coordinating role such as the work ability coordinator or SIUS consultant could also provide valuable additional assistance for persons with disabilities. In Sweden, the contact point can be found externally with the employment services. As mentioned earlier, the follow-up period is very important here during the first two to three years. Afterwards, the employment service can be called upon for external assistance if necessary.

In Finland, this role is played by someone external or internal to the company. Depending on the size of the company, this could be an existing member of the HR staff.

Another important advantage of the Finnish OSKU philosophy is the fact that the similar training given to WACs in employment agencies and HR services means that they speak the same language to a large extent, with potentially significant gains in efficiency. It is precisely these efficiency



gains that can be crucial, as early management of employees with medical problems in the workplace can prevent the situation from escalating with resulting long-term absences.

The situation may be more difficult in smaller companies where HR staff have less scope for looking at the specifics. In very small companies, the HR role may also lie mainly with the manager. Such internal role conflicts may be problematic because the employer has to provide support but can also punish a lack of productivity. An accessible external point of contact may be a preferable option here.

In the countries under review, clear contact points were available in the services that are specialised in guiding, supporting and providing information about the employment of persons with disabilities.

## **9.2.2 Creating a pathway-to-employment mindset**

As with the employers, there also needs to be a mind shift among employees and jobseekers. All too often they start out thinking that a traditional full-time job would be ideal.

Part-time work can be both a stepping stone and an end point, depending on the possibilities of each individual. However, clarity is needed in terms of guidance, support resources, income and the possibility of failure.

Literature shows a lack of self-confidence to be one of the most crucial thresholds on the individual level. As a result, the employee or jobseeker needs to have a path-to-employment mindset. It is a path that comes with opportunities but also setbacks and failures. All of this, of course, requires a well-developed safety net and guidance. Accordingly, progressive employment must be stimulated and made more user-friendly, so that it becomes an established instrument.

It is also necessary for part-time work to be a better financial option than the available benefits. This must also be clear to the person in question to ensure that there will be no surprises when they actually take the step towards paid employment. Otherwise, they won't dare take the step for fear of the uncertainty. When work and benefits are combined, it must also be clear what the total income is going to be at the end of the month.

### 9.2.2.1 Reducing the risks of moving towards the regular labour market (and back again)

Reducing risks of movement towards participation is the specific goal of the 'Simpel Switchen' programme in the Netherlands. People with a distance to the labour market should be able to move towards the labour market safely and unhindered by uncertainty and a lack of knowledge. Social work facilities (sheltered workshops) should no longer be the end point for people with the potential to participate in the regular labour market.

One important focus of the Dutch 'Simpel Switchen' programme is to remove barriers to moving backwards in the participation chain. For example, where benefits are concerned, the revival of the Wajong benefit has been extended. If someone with a work-limiting disability still proves to be unable to participate in the labour market, it is easier for them to receive their Wajong benefit again without having to go through the entire approval process once more. The revival period used to last five years, after which the entire approval process had to begin again. This took time (and therefore resulted in a period with less income) and caused uncertainty. Consequently, this period has been extended up to retirement age. Everyone entitled to Wajong benefit has the right to revive it throughout their career.

Furthermore, the Netherlands is currently looking at revising the sheltered employment attestation. This is currently lost when someone moves on from the social workshops into the regular economy. If regular

employment proves to be too difficult, they have to go through the whole procedure of obtaining an attestation again, which results in loss of time and income. One way of lowering the threshold between sheltered and regular employment could be to grant the attestation again sooner or for a longer period of time. This would also eliminate the fear people have of taking this step.

Finally, an accessible calculation tool is currently being developed that allows people to check for themselves what impact X number of hours of work would have on their benefits and total income. This should help them to assess whether it would also be financially worthwhile to take certain steps towards the labour market.

### 9.2.3 Improving service continuity

One common problem is a lack of resources and time to invest in clients along their path to employment. Even in the Nordic countries, cutbacks and privatisation are not uncommon.

Service providers are often overwhelmed by demand; the continuous pressure of work has a direct negative impact on the service provided by both mediators and occupational physicians alike. Time pressure may mean that in some cases it is not possible to provide the necessary support that a client should receive. Furthermore, the loss of service providers is jeopardising service continuity, although this is particularly important for more vulnerable target groups: a good relationship of trust is crucial due to the more intensive support that they need.

Enhanced efficiency may help to alleviate certain tasks and leave room to focus on the crucial guidance and support tasks. Most service providers have seen their tasks change and diversify over the years. Here, too, using more comprehensive online services may improve efficiency.

Other countries have also focused on this aspect, shifting the focus as much as possible to the core tasks where face-to-face guidance is needed.

### 9.2.3.1 Technology and online tools for more efficient services

One design choice in the SIUS project is to put certain questionnaires online if possible. It is important to maintain a balance here and not simply shift the administrative burden to the client, particularly in view of the lower average level of education of the target group and the complexity of many of the cases.

Complete, accessible information can also help to a certain extent so that clients in guidance can also check things on their own or figure out certain paths for themselves. This gives the client a more active role in the integration/activation process with more interaction between client and service provider.

### 9.2.3.2 Consequences of service personnel turnover

Evaluation of the SIUS project shows that in practice, the high turnover of individual service providers was a major problem for the operation. This is also one permanent aspect of the SIUS project that is difficult to solve.

On the one hand, the staff providing guidance are largely young women. They tend to move on relatively quickly to other work (or are temporarily absent more often for personal reasons such as pregnancy). On the other hand, work pressure also plays a role here with the job requiring a considerable degree of flexibility. In addition, counselling is often organised on a project basis with new people being recruited all the time. There is therefore less opportunity to develop expertise and acquire experience. This work is often done by school leavers and people with little experience.

The problem as such is not unique to the SIUS project or supported employment in general, but it does become more pronounced as greater effort is put into intensive, individual guidance of clients. Sufficient attention should be paid to staff retention, since experience is very important for the quality of the service as well as just education. Given the profile of many of the service providers, efforts must be made to facilitate a good work-life balance for employees and to enable them to make the best possible use of their knowledge and experience. Work pressure must not be allowed to become a push factor for service providers.

### 9.2.3.3 Improving information sharing between service providers

The third element for facilitating continuity is to improve sharing and contacts between the different service providers. This refers not only to the more labour-oriented service where some stakeholders already work together on a fairly structured basis. There is a special need for greater interaction between the strictly medical field and the work-oriented field. Additional information combined across all domains can lead to a better quality and more efficient service (OECD, 2013).

The Finnish OTE project included a specific sub-project that was devoted to developing a more continuous service. The online 'path to work' platform was developed in this context, aiming to support service providers in the field, with training to make them aware of the broader support process. The online training programme is freely accessible with understandable explanations for the different principles of the path to work. It acts as a channel to teach good guidance practice in a way that is accessible to all interested service providers.

One of the main aspects consists in developing a seamless service chain. In addition, small-scale experiments were carried out to make the labour market-oriented service more compatible with the medical one. For example, the project targeting patients with back problems experimented with closer cooperation between the medical service provider and the

work ability coordinator. Furthermore, the follow-up was scheduled for two weeks instead of three. During this follow-up session, the three parties sit down together to discuss the medical and work-related issues and the combination of both. With a fairly simple approach, the project thus works on a number of points that could be important in Finland and also elsewhere:

- Improved communication and flow of information between service providers: on the one hand, the WAC/counsellor has a clearer view of the medical situation, and on the other hand, the medical service provider has more of an incentive to look at a possible return to work or search for work.

- Reduced complexity for the person involved: the situation becomes less complex for the employee/jobseeker because, ideally, the medical and work-related aspects merge into one single story, instead of two separate worlds that they have to try to combine to some extent.
- Early intervention: the return to work/search for work is addressed early on in the treatment process. This is important for preventing long-term absence.
- Cost savings for the various parties involved: the return to work is usually faster and fewer days of sick leave have to be taken afterwards. This saves costs for both the worker's company (if they were working) and for society in general.

Although this was a small-scale, local project, a few targeted and relatively simple interventions generated a number of important advances.

### 9.2.3.4 Facilitating follow-up to increase chances of success

The Swedish SIUS project showed that the follow-up phase was one of the most important parts of the supported employment process. A significant amount of the project's time and resources is spent here.

It is estimated that 45% of the entire group of SIUS participants is currently in such a follow-up phase, which can last for two to three years. The SIUS consultant contacts the employee with a work-limiting disability regularly (by phone) to monitor the situation. Contact with the employer also continues, whereby the employer can still contact the SIUS consultant to ask questions. The consultant is thus able to gauge whether the resources and support offered to the employee are actually being used in the right way.

## 9.2.4 Flexibility

### 9.2.4.1 Enabling flexibility within services

A pathway to employment for people with disabilities largely needs to be customised and adapted to the needs of the individual. Sufficient flexibility plays an important role in making this possible. Firstly, the guidance and support services themselves should be sufficiently flexible.

In addition, the various benefits need to be flexible enough for adjusting to the ways in which persons with disabilities acquire their income. This income can come from a combination of labour and benefits and allowances, which is often a complex matter. The situation can often become unclear and cluttered for the person concerned, also due to the fact that certain forms of benefits and allowances are dependent on the family situation and others are not.

The supported employment used in the SIUS programme is especially aimed at such customisation and flexibility. Already in the assessment phase, it looks at what is possible and desirable for the client, ascertaining what kind of support is needed. The interviews revealed a clear difference in intensity between counselling trajectories, depending on the needs of the client. Flexibility is also possible and built into the follow-up. For instance, an employee can inform the SIUS consultant when the needs for support change in the course of the trajectory because of certain individual or external factors.

#### 9.2.4.2 Exploiting the potential of flexibility in working conditions

Making employment conditions more flexible is a harder balancing act. If not designed and implemented correctly, excessive flexibility can significantly undermine the quality of work for the person concerned and even lead to abuse.

Greater flexibility in handling employment contracts of people distant from the labour market is currently a matter for discussion in the countries featured in this study. This is the case in Finland (as part of the proposed legislative changes) and in particular in the Netherlands, where over the years the realisation has grown that flexibility has gone too far. At the same time, flexibility in contracts, for example, can also be used as a tool to lower thresholds for employers and to give people with disabilities a better chance. This potential is revealed both by the various measures and by the interviews with experts from the different countries.

In Finland, the previous right-wing liberal government eased some aspects regarding placements, recruitment and dismissal in order to lower thresholds for employers. Firstly, work placement periods were extended. Such traineeships are a much-used instrument in the Finnish employment services for activating persons with disabilities. It is quite common in Finland for trainees to receive some kind of remuneration or benefit for the days that they work in their placement. The main difference for



regular employees in the Finnish setting consists in greater flexibility with regard to dismissal. Trainees on work placement on the other hand can be dismissed without justification.

Greater flexibility was also introduced for the long-term unemployed. It was made possible for employers to hire these people on a temporary contract with no additional explanation. In Finland, employment contracts are usually offered for an indefinite period of time, and a valid explanation is prerequisite for hiring someone with a fixed-term contract.

Work placements are also usually the rule with SIUS and supported employment in general. The SIUS project seems to have triggered some discussion about their use. Certain people interviewed during this research criticised the use of work placements as a kind of selection mechanism. Less support is offered during the work placements than during the actual SIUS supervision. This can be described as a kind of 'cherry picking'. People who are not able to participate sufficiently during work placements with reduced support will not be admitted to the final guidance trajectory; instead, they end up in trajectories with sheltered employment or labour-based daytime activities. It is a somewhat pragmatic approach to the difficult balancing act between 'zero exclusion' (as prescribed in SE) and the choice for a higher success rate. In fact, available time and resources play a crucial role in practice. The choice of who is and who is not admitted was described by the interviewed SIUS staff as one of the most crucial and also most difficult steps in the entire process. On the one hand, people are admitted who are far enough removed from the labour market to make optimum use of the most intensive form of assistance, but on the other hand, they are not taken too far.

Despite these critical considerations, several experts from Finland and Sweden see work placements as being indispensable for giving persons with disabilities a fair chance in the regular labour market. For many employers, the associated flexibility brings about a necessary lowering of the thresholds for taking a leap into the unknown and hiring a person with

disabilities. However, guarding the quality of the work placements and carefully shaping the framework created around them is important in order to prevent abuse. Another not insignificant aspect is that in Finland it is quite common for trainees on work placement to receive compensation, as remuneration or in some other form. This can give some people additional motivation to acquire work experience in a safe way. During the work placement, sufficient attention should be paid to possibly subsequent selection procedures, both at the organisation where the work placement is taking place and elsewhere. It is thus possible to further increase the chance of regular employment in the future, besides merely enhancing skills and acquiring experience.

### 9.3 (Possibilities for) trade union involvement

A perusal of the various innovative projects reveals that there is little to no trade union involvement in most of the highlighted cases. Despite the fact that many of the trade unions in the various countries are actively involved in publicly defending the rights of persons with disabilities on the labour market, they rarely participate in designing or implementing the various projects.

The fact that most of the highlighted projects are organised by governments or national public employment organisations might make it harder for trade unions to become actively involved. However, there are definitely possibilities for trade unions to play a greater role, which could improve the labour market chances for people with disabilities while at the same time increasing membership and support for the trade unions themselves.

1. The main similarity between all countries featured in the study consists in problems related to the complexity of support systems and services. This was clearly the case in Finland and Sweden, where many different service providers are involved. Both countries have

opted to introduce new functions that centralise knowledge and provide single access points for information and support for people with disabilities. Furthermore, both programmes clearly acknowledge how important it is to know about the local labour market in order to increase opportunities for persons with disabilities. It is safe to assume that trade union representatives and employees have knowledge that is similar and perhaps complementary to that of local public employment service (PES) providers such as the SIUS consultants and work ability coordinators (WAC). Despite these possibilities, there have been no reports of such partnerships in either country.

2. Building on this basis, on the company level too there are also opportunities that are currently being underutilised. Here again, it is clear that trade union representatives can provide important insights into the more detailed workings of a workplace. Despite the intensive approach of methods such as supported employment or individual placement and support, it will be impossible for a supervisor or consultant to fathom the detailed workings and culture on a specific shop floor in a relatively small period of time. Furthermore, they will always be seen as an outsider by other personnel. Besides the short-term benefits, a partnership also has several benefits in the long run. On the one hand the trade union representatives are always present to provide information and support. The evaluation of the Swedish SIUS project indicated how important consistent, stable support is for enabling the jobseeker to set out on a successful trajectory. Even if there are changes in the PES consultant/supervisor, the trade union representative remains on site as an additional point of contact (staff turnover is a significant issue, as noted in the SIUS evaluation). Moreover, union representatives acquire knowledge and experience in supporting and guiding jobseekers in the workplace. As the quality of this support increases, pressure will be reduced, alleviating the need for intervention by the PES provider. Given the general lack of time and re-

sources for intensive long-term support, this is a significant positive element.

3. The belief that people with disabilities must be allowed to participate in the labour market has become increasingly widespread amongst employers and the general population in recent years. Most if not all projects mentioned in this research have actively contributed to spreading this belief in one way or another. The Swedish and Finnish projects paid specific attention to media campaigns, and many of the innovative projects in France used social media for promoting their work. In the Netherlands on the other hand, the Participation Act with all the resulting debates and issues has drawn a great deal of attention to the topic and to the need for persons with disabilities to be able to participate to their full potential on the labour market. However, despite these positive mind shifts in the general population and many employers, there still seems to be a gap between believing in the concept and actually doing something to increase participation. This gap has traditionally been bridged by trade unions in the past, for example with regards to gender equality, sustainable development, etc. Most trade unions are already proponents of equal rights for people with disabilities, but continued and active support is necessary. An equal labour market for all has to be propagated and the equality debate has to be extended beyond its more traditional aspects.
4. One crucial element in many of the various projects clearly consists in clear, centralised provision of information adapted to a target audience that is frequently poorly educated. Once again, trade union federations and confederations are well positioned to provide such centralised information. They also have experience with providing information to a wide audience of different education levels and backgrounds. In many countries, trade unions are closely networked with other civil organisations involved with health and wellbeing, education or welfare. Each of these organisations has

their own expertise which is often applicable to a certain extent to the needs of people with disabilities on the labour market. One realistic task would therefore entail combining this expertise and presenting it in an accessible manner with a structured approach and structured follow-up.

5. The chapter on platform work showed that there is currently little proof that platform work is a viable option or entry point into the labour market for persons with a disability. Mainly people with a certain skillset and strong profile on the labour market are able to reap the benefits of the flexibility that is offered by the platform economy. Individuals in a weaker position on the labour market will mainly be faced with the downsides related to this extensive degree of flexibility and less regulated market. The (theoretically) more neutral approach in hiring and firing in the sector might be beneficial to some. But the lack of (individual) support creates barriers that will make it a lot harder in general for many to compete on an equal footing with the general working population that is active in the platform sector. Workplace modifications or wage subsidies are non-existent. All of this comes on top of the already questionable employment conditions prevalent in the platform economy. Trade unions should therefore maintain their efforts to improve working and employment conditions in the sector in general, which in turn can allow the sector to be inclusive. There are currently only a few individual projects of a social nature that can be seen as good examples with regards to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market. Much can be learned from how they look at combining these new ways of working and including people with disabilities.

There has been significant criticism about the Participation Act and many of its accompanying measures since it was introduced in 2015. This criticism has been growing ever since, especially now that its problems are being highlighted by increasing numbers of prominent evaluation reports.

A large number of organisations involved in defending the rights of people with disabilities as well as other civil organisations have openly criticized many of the implemented changes and continue to do so. In addition, trade unions believe that there is insufficient regulation of employment conditions under the Participation Act. They are of the opinion that additional collective agreements with the employers' associations are an absolute necessity to guarantee proper working conditions for all affected employees.

On account of this commotion and the amount of outspoken criticism from the unions about the Participation Act and current Dutch labour market policy, a brief summary of their viewpoints on the situation is given below.

In September 2018, several associations jointly drafted a letter addressed to the competent authorities, denouncing the integration and labour market policies addressing people with disabilities in the Netherlands. The letter was drafted by interest groups, sectoral organisations and the main trade unions CNV, FNV and VCP.

The letter mainly criticises the intention of the Secretary of State for Social Affairs and Employment to introduce wage dispensation. Wage dispensation is a system where the employer (temporarily) pays less wage to the employee because of their lower productivity. In the case of the Netherlands, UWV would then compensate the employee for the difference between the minimum wage and the wage paid. Instead, the critics believe that the existing regulation on wage subsidies should be improved in a way that puts everyone on an equal footing and relieves employers of the burden of regulation and administration. For example, they advocate equal treatment in terms of a minimum wage, regardless of whether an employee has a disability or not. In their opinion, a wage consisting partly of a salary and partly of a benefit is not desirable. Employees with an official medical diagnosis which makes them able only to work part-time and not full-time should receive corresponding compensation and

still be able to earn an income at least equal to the minimum wage. There is also criticism of the recalculations and recoveries that take place when someone finds work after being on benefits. Here there is an increased risk of debt and an additional bureaucratic burden. In the end, wage dispensation was not implemented.

The letter also pleads for simplification of the current regulations concerning the employment of persons with disabilities. Great importance is attached to customised implementation, while aspects such as the application procedure, the conceptual framework and determining what is needed for the person in question should be uniform throughout the country.

Recruiting people from the target group is also too complex for employers. Particularly when it comes to wage subsidies, there are clear differences from one municipality to the next. The various associations therefore insist on a national regulation in three steps to simplify the procedure for determining the wage value (which in turn is used to calculate the wage cost subsidy).

In February 2020, the FNV trade union released an extensive evaluation of the Participation Act that is very critical of its trajectory so far and pleads for a total makeover. The report highlights several points that need to be altered in order to turn the Participation Act into an instrument that promotes activation and employment amongst its target group:

1. There should be a system that starts from a level of trust instead of suspicion towards its target group. In contrast to the current system which is heavily dependent on sanctions and a quid-pro-quo culture between client and benefit provider (which is usually the municipality), the alternative system should start with a rule-free benefits concept.

2. Another issue that is criticised heavily by the trade union results from devolving policy and responsibilities to the municipalities. The trade union believes that the tendency of the municipalities towards a more restrictive policy of benefits will in the end have a clearly adverse impact on activating people with disabilities. In their opinion, the current approach instigates a culture of fear, imposing more stringent conditions before certain benefits are granted, together with a quid-pro-quo mentality that sanctions people on failing certain tasks. According to research by FNV, approximately 52% of people coming under the Participation Act have experienced situations whereby they were forced to work for free to prove their intention and capability to work (and maintain the proper benefits). Only a minority were subsequently offered an employment contract. In addition, more than half of the respondents in this group had to pay for their own travel costs. Given the precarious financial position of many of these people, the trade unions see this as particularly problematic.

This point of view is in line with the aforementioned criticism by the SCP that a significant portion of persons with disabilities are willing to work but are (currently) unable to do so. The trade union is a proponent of a mind shift to a more client-centric perspective that starts with the wishes and capabilities of the client in question.

3. The position of the jobseeker has to be reinforced by means of customised, individualised trajectories towards sustainable employment. FNV believes that proper, extensive support across different areas of life is a necessary element to facilitate such sustainable employment. A proper employment plan is a necessary basis, with room for training and input from the client themselves. For these plans to be successful and based on proper information, the trade union pleads for independent 'employee service points' offering insights and individualised advice that can be included in the individual employment plan.



4. The current system and its inherent logic have led to various adverse effects on implementation. One that is considered to be particularly damaging is the fact that many of the municipalities seem to focus more on people at a lesser distance to the labour market, as it is easier and more cost-efficient to lead them towards employment. This has resulted in significant groups of people being in a particularly precarious position of being at a considerable distance to the labour market and lacking proper support. As mentioned before, some find it harder and even impossible to get into systems of sheltered employment. The alternatives proposed and implemented by the Participation Act are far from being able to provide employment for all those who are eligible. As a result, the trade union advocates setting up an organisation that they have named 'social development companies'. Their focus is to provide support and training, as well as acting as a fallback for people who are now ruled out of sheltered employment by the Participation Act. This differs in particular from the current approach that mostly starts from the perspective of employment in the regular economy whenever possible. Another focus that is emphasized by the trade union is the need for proper remuneration and employment conditions (via proper CAs) for people in these organisations.
5. A fifth point is the need for capital expenditure to realise all other points, as well as the proper services and staff to make them possible. The trade union believes that one possibility for financing their proposed alterations would be to abolish and re-invest the budget for the current control and sanctioning systems. They also believe that their changes would allow for more durable employment, leading to a reduction in the number of people on benefits. They are of the opinion that a society that is determined to include as many people as possible on the labour market should also be willing to invest accordingly.

6. The inclusion of young people is seen as a primary necessity within the general inclusion strategy of the trade union. Young people are confronted with several barriers often resulting from the Participation Act. Moreover, many young people in this situation who eventually find paid employment do so under precarious employment conditions. Many of them work on the basis of short-term contracts with inadequate remuneration. Those who are unable to find paid work are left at home with little to no perspective of paid employment or training.

The trade union strongly believes that this is a dire situation at risk of creating a 'lost generation'. One specific example of a current measure seen by the trade union as being strongly counterproductive for young people stipulates that jobseekers must prove that they have been looking for work for four weeks after becoming unemployed, before they are eligible for benefits. The trade union believes this just puts young people in debt when they are already in a precarious financial situation with little to no benefits in their employment trajectory. The trade union strongly advocates abolishing this rule alongside others that create barriers to both benefits and support for young people. On the other hand, one instrument seen as a positive development consists in the networks that have been created between education and the municipalities. Furthermore, the trade union believes that additional funding is needed for schools to provide pupils with more structural support towards employment. Such support should be available for up to two years. The focus here is on establishing a structured basis for this type of funding and support, which they see as the only means for a proper and sustainable approach.

The viewpoints of FNV (and the other unions) clash with the policy that has been implemented since the introduction of the Participation Act. They believe that instead of including many people at a distance from the labour market, the various measures have ultimately led to the opposite,

with many people now excluded and unable to make progress in their path towards employment. Statements published by the trade unions and interviews with trade union representatives clearly reveal their opinion that the Participation Act was primarily a means for the government to cut costs associated with employment support and activation of people with disabilities. Turning this development around is ultimately at the core of the changes proposed by the trade unions, with increased investment in new services and facilities to support and provide a fallback for people with disabilities in their path to the labour market. It is also clear to the trade unions that such investment is needed as soon as possible: it is their belief that the necessary know-how and experience in the sector is disappearing and that significant groups of people (in particular young people) are being distanced from the labour market up to a point that makes it significantly harder to turn back.

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