

Project finds that persons with disabilities are not well represented in the European labour market

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With one person in six being affected in Europe, it comes as no surprise that full rights and participation in society for people with disabilities come at the top of the EU's wish list. This notably translates into a ten-year European Disability Strategy, a European Day for People with Disabilities, and various programmes and policies in EU Member States. But there is still much room for improvement, as demonstrated by recent observations made under the DISCIT project.

Roy Sainsbury, leader of DISCIT's work package 5 focusing on labour market participation, made a presentation on the 'Perception of the situation of persons with disabilities in [employment](#) in the EU' at the 2014 edition of the European Day for People with Disabilities which took place in early December. Employment is one of ten key focuses of the project, which also include new social inequalities, community living, the use of new technology, fiscal innovation, [political participation](#) as well as theoretical, operational and measurement challenges.

'We are exploring what it means for persons with disabilities to be active citizens and what policies and programmes can help,' Sainsbury told the audience. In order to do this, project participants from nine countries representing four different political contexts have been reviewing labour market data, policies and programmes, as well as interviewing both [people with disabilities](#) (200 'life-course' interviews) and key stakeholders.

Sainsbury's conclusions are quite worrying. 'Persons with disabilities are not well represented,' he observed. 'For people without disabilities in the OECD we are looking at an employment rate of around 75 %, but only about 40 to 45 % for people with disabilities. That's a massive gap and of course those broad figures hide a multitude of other interesting facts such as the employment rate for people with mental health problems which is around 25 %.'

This result is in spite of these countries committing to 11 responsibilities related to employment of people with disabilities, largely followed by concrete political measures. According to data and information gathered by the project team, these measures have largely failed to show evidence of positive impact. This is particularly true for measures to actively promote self-employment, for which none of the reviewed countries were able to provide such evidence.

'We are not saying that these policies are not working at all, but we have not seen significant improvement in employment rates of people with disabilities,' Sainsbury insisted. 'Now what's emerging of the early analysis of the life-course interviews is the important role employers play in treating disabled and non-disabled people as equals. Perhaps this gives an indication of where more policies might be developed in the future. It's certainly positive to improve the supply side of labour by providing training and helping disabled people gain qualifications, but policies aimed at the demand side of labour – employers – are less developed, with many employers choosing to pay fines instead of employing people with disabilities.' Some countries like the UK have even abolished quota systems, and the employment of people with disabilities is proving highly unpopular in some countries.

While Sainsbury and his team still have to complete the full analysis of the data gathered from interviews with people with disabilities, he insists that positive case studies have been gathered, and that they show what is it possible to achieve in Europe.

DISCIT is due to be completed in January 2016. The results of its various working packages are expected to support the redefinition of the European Social Model, where full and effective participation of persons with [disabilities](#) can become a reality.

More information: For more information, please visit DISCIT: discit.eu/

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