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Development Opportunities of Disabled People in Selected EU Countries: A Comparison

Abstract: The aim of the article is to identify good practices aimed at helping people with disabilities, carried out in such countries as Sweden, Denmark or Poland. Although all countries provide specific benefits for people with disabilities, there are, however, such solutions which are only available for the insured within the given system. And thus, actions supporting people with disabilities in the labour market are addressed both to those concerned and to their employers. Within the first category especially important for people with disabilities are: Personal and assistant's help which increase, due to their specificity, the possibility to learn, take up a job by a person with disabilities and stay in the labour market. The second category of activities is addressed to employers. These include: Co-financing the salary of a disabled employee, covering the costs of adjusting the workplace for a disabled employee, covering part of the costs of professional adaptation of the employee, if the disability arose at the workplace, and covering the costs of commuting to work of the disabled employee. And although the state creates employment policy through these instruments, unfortunately the effectiveness of these measures varies. Positive effects measured by the high employment rate in this group of people and the low level of their passivity are evident only in countries such as Sweden or Denmark which conduct active measures at the local and regional level. It is difficult, however, to notice them in Poland.

Key words: disabled person, entrepreneur, instruments, services, support, labour market.

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Methods and conditions to improve the situation of persons with disabilities

A characteristic feature of a social policy implemented in relation to the disabled is the fact that Member States take independent decisions, benefits of which should be provided to people with disabilities and those entitled to them. Increasingly visible is also another European trend: a disabled person is no longer a patient; he/she becomes a client who requires and is entitled to receive a high quality service. But the ultimate goal of vocational activation of people with disabilities is their employment in order to become economically independent individuals. Below are some models of support implemented in countries: Sweden, Denmark and Poland.

The Swedish model

Sweden is not without reason considered as the country having the best social services in the world. There are various solutions for the social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. However, they are systemic, complex, planned, early, and continuous in nature. A disabled person, to be able to lead an independent life and at the same time participate in social life, receives appropriate services and support. As much as 27% of GDP is spent on social purposes, which is one of the highest rates in the world [Swedish disability Policy 2015]. Currently, the most important determinant of social policy pursued in relation to persons with disabilities is finding a job, staying on the market and the full integration of this group with the society.

It is worth noting that Sweden is implementing a number of projects to support the functioning of persons with disabilities in the labour market. One of the biggest successes was the implementation of a supported employment. The project has been being developed for the last 14 years; dozens of studies have been performed during this period. Their results showed high effectiveness of supported employment as a tool of labour market policy addressed mainly to people with disabilities. The Swedish are convinced that the personal assistance and assistance services improve the opportunities to learn and take up work for people with profound disabilities.

Supported employment is also successfully implemented by **Misa AB company in Stockholm, Activa Foundation** as well as under a rehabilitation programme of the **Labour Office in Örebro**. Thanks to the close cooperation between these three institutions and the Swedish Institute for Disability Re-

search at the University of Örebro the concept of supported employment has been developed, extended and implemented. Thus, **Misa AB** company focuses on people who have experienced barriers to work. The purpose of this activity is to provide individual support at work, e.g. in the form of rehabilitation, assessment of professional skills and daily training. The Misa AB concludes contracts with municipalities on the basis of the existing law and provides multiple services for people with specific functional disorders, including social services. The company has 110 employees – currently **Misa AB** has 10 units specialized in combating all kinds of barriers to employment.

Activa Foundation is located in the district of Örebro and employs 29 workers [www.oru.se], who operate in twelve municipalities. This institution offers help and support for unemployed people, including unemployed people with disabilities who have experienced difficulties in accessing the labour market. The Foundation helps those people find lasting employment or sends them to adequate training courses in order to improve their education.

The **AMI** employment institutes operate throughout the country. They deal with professional counselling and organize training for all those who want to retrain and find employment. Disabled workers can also count on financing from the state budget of part of their salaries, purchase of equipment and adaptation of the workplace, as well as employ an assistant for up to 6 months. People, who have serious problems finding work because of social difficulties are employed in the public sector, while the more enterprising receive financial assistance of up to 6.5 thousand euros to set up their own business.

Employers who employ people with disabilities can obtain from the labour offices grants for:

1. Remuneration of employees with disabilities, accounting for 80% or 100% of their remuneration, in the period of up to 4 years, in the case of people with severe disabilities.
2. Professional adaptation of the employed disabled worker, which may include adaption of the workplace and workstation, the purchase of equipment and also the employment of a personal assistant – a lector for a blind employee or a sign language interpreter for a deaf employee.
3. Professional adaptation of the employee who became disabled during employment, in this case, the grant comes from the social insurance institution.

The Swedish model always focuses on preventing isolation of workers with disabilities. Its special example is sheltered employment implemented by a limited company called **Samhall**, owned by the state [Samhall 2013, p. 11]. The organization deals with the appointment and activities of sheltered workshops throughout the country. Thanks to **Samhall** severely disabled people can find employment (at least 40% of employees) that not only work there, but also undergo rehabilitation. In total, the network of more than eight hundred branches employs more than 24 thousand people with disabilities who represent more than 90% of company's total employment. The main objective of sheltered workshops is vocational activation focused on teaching certain groups of persons with disabilities to effectively seek jobs in the open market, outside sheltered employment [Holmqvist 2005, pp. 81–83]. Therefore, **Samhall** establishments are engaged in the production of furniture and packaging, sewing, electronics, catering, and business informatics. They provide extensive, very different services and thanks to the consistent policy are able to some extent to cope alone [Samhall 2013, pp. 45–47].

In addition, in Sweden, people with disabilities can count on many forms of social assistance offered by the state. Physically disabled are entitled to prostheses and wheelchairs, while the hard-of-hearing – hearing aids and warning lights for home use. Thus, the hard-of-hearing can take advantage of a sign language interpreter, in turn, the visually impaired are offered recorders to play recorded books and magazines. In addition, people with speech disorders have the right to the device which helps speaking. The disabled in Sweden may also benefit from financial assistance for the purchase of a car or apply for a grant to adapt their apartment to their needs. Rehabilitation services in Sweden are mainly the responsibility of local governments of cities and counties and finance: early intervention, medical care, provision of assistance and technical means, equipment and social services, and support of assistants. The responsibilities of local governments are included in the Act on Health and Medical Services, which clearly specifies that they are to be readily available to any person with a disability, quickly organized and implemented. Most of the social rehabilitation services are financed by local governments from their own local taxes, and only some are covered by the state budget, e.g., the work of an assistant of up to 20 hours a week is paid by local governments, the state finances the remaining hours [Swedish disability policy]. Expenditure on rehabilitation equipment is covered by the Swedish health insurance system, including the repair and maintenance of equipment. There is no specified limit for the needed equipment. Expenditures on technical aid,

such as computers, software, magnifying glasses, vibrating alarm clocks and Braille watches, are covered by counties, while the purchase and installation of video telephones and text telephones is financed by the government. In most counties, there are multilateral rehabilitation facilities, hearing and sight centres employing specialists, physiotherapists, prosthetists etc.

The Danish model

The objective of the Danish policy towards people with disabilities is to guarantee the conditions for normal life for every person. Employment policy in Denmark is based on the right to work and the prohibition of discrimination against people with disabilities. The role of government is to create conditions for these activities, which are implemented by local and regional authorities, as well as public benefit organizations [Bengtsson 2009, pp. 7–10]. In Denmark, there are no special laws protecting against redundancies of persons with disabilities. That is why local and regional authorities play a major role in employment policy. Public administration agencies are simply required to ensure priority to the employment of persons with disabilities, and they are responsible for sheltered workshops and rehabilitation of these people. Additionally, at the regional level, the labour office employs professional counselors for the disabled, who, being disabled, are required to disseminate information among employers and employees about possible programmes to support employment of disabled persons.

The Danish state creates the policy for employment of the disabled through various mechanisms, especially by material incentives for employers. Employers who employ people with disabilities can receive [Bielen, Dobrowolski 2014, pp. 31–35]:

- The reimbursement of remuneration of an employee with a disability up to 50% of the minimum wage;
- The reimbursement of costs of adaptation of workplace and workstation,
- The reimbursement of a salary of a personal vocational assistant, who is helping the disabled worker in a full vocational adaptation in the enterprise, 20 hours per week (supported employment); this form of support is mainly used for people with severe disabilities,
- Tax relief,
- Direct support for people with disabilities (e.g., reimbursement of travel costs, purchase of necessary working tools).

There are also sheltered workshops in Denmark, but these are increasingly being “reserved” for people with intellectual disabilities. At the same time, more and more emphasis is placed on the employment of people with physical disabilities and sensory impairments in the open market under supported employment [Najmiec 2007, pp. 30–31].

Some people with disabilities live in their own homes and receive practical and personal help from the municipality involving e.g., a wheelchair or other equipment, or support of an assistant. Other people with disabilities can stay in special centres, live in condominiums or apartments with round-the-clock care. Additional support measures for people with disabilities include:

- Vocational counselling,
- Flexible working time,
- Personal assistance at work.

The Polish model

In Poland, protection is granted to people with disabilities who wish to return to the labour market, although the scope of services is more limited than in Sweden or Denmark. A disabled person can receive funds for:

- Starting a business;
- Cash contribution required to open a social cooperative;
- Interest rate subsidies on bank loans taken out for running a business;
- Reimbursement of social security contributions.

Only a person who is registered in the labour office as unemployed or seeking job can apply for a grant for starting a business. A disabled person who completed a cycle of training courses, prepared a business plan approved by the group of specialists has a chance to receive this grant. The amount of funds granted cannot exceed fifteen times the average salary. A disabled person can benefit from this form of assistance, if previously they had not received non-repayable public funds for this purpose.

The second form of support is a cash contribution required to open a social cooperative. This is usually the initiative of several people, each of whom may receive no more than PLN 10 thousand intended for the selected activity.

The third form of assistance for the disabled involves interest rate subsidies on loans taken out, up to 50% of interest rates on bank loans to continue the business or to run their own or leased farm.

The fourth form of support for disabled businessmen involves reimbursement of social insurance contributions (during the last 12 months, the value of this financing was significantly reduced).

The last, fifth form of assistance is support for people with disabilities who are unemployed or seeking employment by means of labour market services or instruments. The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON), through the district labour offices, finances training courses, internships, intervention works, vocational preparation in the workplace [Paszko-wicz, Ochonczenko, Pietrulewicz, 2008, pp. 11–21].

In Poland, the employers employing workers with disabilities may obtain:

- Subsidies to salaries of disabled persons;
- Reimbursement of adjustment and adaptation costs of existing workstations for persons with disabilities;
- Reimbursement of training costs of workers with disabilities;
- Reimbursement of expenses borne for employing a worker assisting a disabled person at work.

In addition, employers can create sheltered employment facilities, and in consultation with the third sector also vocational rehabilitation facilities [Barczyński 2008, p. 18]. Specific types of deductions and exemptions have been provided for each of these institutions. For example, the employer can establish sheltered workshop if the province governor grants this right to him in the form of an administrative decision. Employers can apply for the status of a sheltered workshop if they:

- 1) have been running business for a period of at least 12 months,
- 2) employ at least 25 employees (calculated as 25 full-time employees),
- 3) during a period of at least six months, the employment rate of disabled people in the business was:
 - at least 50% and at least 20% of the workforce must be persons classified as having significant or moderate degree of disability;
 - at least 30% if the employer employs the blind or mentally ill or mentally handicapped persons classified as having significant or moderate degree of disability.

Vocational rehabilitation facilities are individual entities in terms of organization and finance, established in order to employ disabled persons classified as having significant and moderate degree of disability. These facilities can be established by counties, municipalities, foundations, associations, and other

social organization whose statutory tasks include vocational and social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

To obtain the status of a vocational rehabilitation facility, the facility must provide employment for at least 70 percent of persons with disabilities directed to work by the district labour offices, and are classified as having:

- significant degree of disability,
- moderate degree of disability².

It is also necessary to adapt buildings and premises used by the vocational rehabilitation facility to occupational health and safety rules and principles.

Summary

The most important tasks of the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities in countries in the field of work include:

- promoting labour market open for all, by facilitating entering or re-entering the labour market for people with disabilities, especially those who experience discrimination;
- the development and promotion of flexible forms of employment and work organization and supporting the employment of people with disabilities;
- supporting the vocational re-adaptation of people who experience health deterioration.

Employers who employ people with disabilities can obtain from the labour office: subsidies to salaries of disabled persons (Sweden, Denmark, Poland); reimbursement of adjustment and adaptation costs of existing workstations for persons with disabilities (Sweden, Denmark, Poland); reimbursement of adjustment and adaptation costs of employee who became disabled during employment (Sweden, Denmark); reimbursement of travel costs for persons with disabilities (Denmark, Poland).

It should also be remembered that some benefits are cash and serve as a kind of income. Still others, through of money nature, can be used for special purposes, such as purchase of equipment associated with disability. There are also benefits in kind, their tangible examples include: the number of hours of personal care or rental of equipment necessary for proper functioning. Finally, there are benefits which include free or preferential access to various services,

² However, the employment of people with a moderate degree of disability cannot be higher than 35% of total employment (author's note).

such as: public transportation, museums and other services provided by the public or private sector.

Summing up, fully developed models of actual assistance provided to persons with disabilities in one country inspire to take many actions in another country. We can find them in many countries being only slightly different from one another.

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