


Social work has an essential role in the employment services, and accordingly it should have a stronger organizational status. The employment services should be supplemented by services enhancing life coping skills and employability of the clients. Activation focusing on labour supply should also be supplemented by measures increasing labour demand and abolishing mechanisms of exclusion.

ROMA CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK IN SWEDEN

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The National Board of Health and Welfare is the Swedish national expert and supervisory authority that works with issues concerning social services, and health and medical services. In early 2006 the board received a commission from the Swedish Government concerning social work with Roma families. The background for the coming of the Commission was that the Roma representatives lodged a complaint to the Government about the way social services worked with Roma families. The representatives said that it was more likely for a Roma family compared to the families of the majority population to have their child taken into care, and that the number of Roma children taken into care had increased. Their opinion was also that social services took Roma children into care on the basis of incorrect reasons. They also claimed that Roma children seldom were placed in Roma families, therefore the Roma children lost contact with the Roma society while they were in care.

In 2000, Sweden ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and acknowledged the Roma group, among four others, as a Swedish national minority with specific rights.

The National Board of Health and Welfare started a project that included Roma representatives. The main issue and focus of the project was to clarify whether Roma children and their families were discriminated by the social services.

The main results from the project are:

Social workers have no or very limited knowledge about the Human Rights of the Roma group as a national minority group.

Social services seldom include relatives and friends of the Roma family during the assessment which is a reason why they do not find families with the same culture to place the children in. The social services generally end up placing Roma children in families of the majority population.

The efforts of the social services to ensure that Roma children in care can maintain and develop their language, traditions and cultural heritage, are insufficient.

During an assessment the social workers seldom ask the Roma children and their parents about their view on what is important for them in their culture to maintain and develop. The social workers often have their own (biased) opinion about a child and its parents and about Roma culture.

The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that the social services train their social workers in minority status and what the social work with Roma families can mean.

The Board also recommends that social services should work more systematically in the assessment to ensure that issues regarding identity and culture are not overlooked.

The Board has experienced that co-operation with the representatives of the Roma group is productive. But it is obvious that the group seldom participates in the Swedish society although many of them lived in Sweden for many generations. The Roma group in Sweden has a long history of exclusion from the society and has not had satisfactory access to and attendance of school. The Board wishes to stress that it is important that the group becomes and is treated as a full member in the society without giving up their culture, language, etc. The society has to make sure that the Roma group is participating in an equal way on all the arenas of the society.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN AUSTRIA

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With an amendment of the Austrian Constitution in 1997, Discrimination on grounds of Disability was prohibited.

In the year 2003 a fresh impetus was given to the disability policy in Austria from the European level:

- the European Year of Persons with Disabilities 2003 created a rising awareness of the situation and the problems of disabled persons,
- the EU Framework Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation had to be transposed into the national law.

On 6 July 2005, the Austrian Parliament adopted a Disability Equality Package including the Federal Disability Equality Act, as well as amendments to the Disability Employment Act, the Federal Disability Act, and the Constitution. This package is a milestone in the Austrian disability policy. For the first time it offers an enforceable protection against discrimination for persons with disabilities and enshrines legal consequences if the prohibition of discrimination is violated.

The key elements of the Federal Disability Equality Act are as follows:

- discrimination on grounds of disability is prohibited in many areas of life (that goes far beyond the EU-directive);
- application: the act covers the federal administration, including self-governing bodies, private contracts, as well as public goods and services;
- some family members are also protected by the law;
- prohibited is direct and indirect discrimination and harassment;
- barriers: can be a discrimination unless their removal would be a disproportionate burden;
- a solution of the conflict is tried in a compulsory conciliation procedure in the Federal Social Office, mediation is possible;
- sanction: a claim on financial compensation can be brought to the court;
- burden of proof: is regulated in favour of the persons with disabilities;
- the Umbrella Organisation of the Austrian Disability Organisations can apply in cases of general interest;
- buildings and Public Transport: for existing barriers in buildings and in the public transport the law enters into force step by step in a transition period of 10 years.