

EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES ON THE CHANCES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND ALTERED WORKING CAPACITY IN THE OPEN LABOUR MARKET

FACTS, FIGURES AND OPINIONS

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Executive summary

In Hungary, at least 5% of the workforce of every company with more than 25 employees should consist of people with altered working capacity. If this goal is not met, then the company is obliged to pay a so-called 'rehabilitation contribution' according to the difference in the quota. Nevertheless, most companies still choose to pay the tax rather than employ people with altered working capacity.

By involving stakeholders and experts from the field and reviewing previous research materials, the proAbility project sought to explore the reasons that some companies decide to pay a rehabilitation contribution and others to employ people with altered working capacity.

The goal of the research component of the proAbility project was to take a snapshot of the employment of people with altered working capacity. The qualitative methods that were employed – including many in-depth interviews and a focus group with the Hungarian Employers Forum on Equal Opportunities (Munkáltatók Esélyegyenlőségi Fóruma Egyesület, MEF) – allowed us to gain insight into how company managers commit themselves to employing the group

in question, how important economic considerations are in the decision-making process, and what the values are that help to promote and implement corporate social responsibility. Researchers from the project interviewed representatives of companies that already have experience employing people with altered working capacity, and also others that do not.

In addition to exploring economic considerations, the interviews provided some data about the efficiency of the rehabilitation contribution, even though the scope and depth of the research did not allow us to fully assess the impact of the new tax from every angle. The employment level of people with altered working capacity remains low, which suggests that the rehabilitation tax in itself is insufficient for enhancing their employment prospects.

The information provided in the interviews about the career paths, the characteristics of employment, and the employment opportunities of people with disabilities and altered working capacity fully confirmed the results of previous research. Although a great number of legal regulations have been adopted in the past 15 years, ensuring equal opportunities for people with disabilities is an issue that remains unresolved. Here, we are speaking of over one million people, approximately: their daily lives full of struggle, their livelihoods, parents and families, and ultimately about issues of human dignity, freedom and solidarity - or the lack thereof.

Facts and figures

In Hungary, one in every five persons of active age (21.5% of the age group 15-63) is affected by some kind of permanent health problem or other impairment. In the EU the respective figure is 16% (Hungarian Central Statistical Agency, 2012).

The chance that an employee with altered working capacity will lose their job is 2.5 times higher than in the case of other employees, and their chance of finding employment is one third that of the majority population.

As a result of the sharp increase in the rehabilitation contribution in 2010, the number of employees with altered working capacity increased by 28,000 (cc 33%) compared to the year before. Tax revenues from the rehabilitation contribution have been on the rise since 2012.

If every company that now chooses to pay the rehabilitation contribution decided to employ people with disabilities instead, then as many as 68 379 people with disabilities would get jobs (2014 data).

The employers' perspective

In her study, Orsolya Kurucz set out to explore the factors behind the employment of people with altered working capacity, highlighting the barriers and the drivers.

The research pointed to the following factors, which are key to the success of integrated employment: corporate social responsibility, the commitment and determination of the management, as well as effective intermediary organisations. Organisational culture, as well as the commitment of the management and employees, are also crucial. Emotional intelligence and social responsibility are at the root of any decision to recruit people with altered working capacity/PWD; economic considerations come after this.

Traditional HR and business processes have not been successful in integrating the channels, forms or tools that are relevant to people with altered working capacity/PWD. Employers that are committed to employing this employee group request and receive a great amount of help from NGOs and alternative labour market providers, starting with recruitment, selection, in-company sensitization, and job audits, to the integration of people with altered working capacity. However, it remains to be seen if the invaluable help of NGOs will remain accessible to companies, and if so, to what extent. The question arises because the current legislative framework does not benefit civil society organisations and successive cuts in funding opportunities undermine their operations, while state organisations – such as the National Office for Rehabilitation and Social Affairs (NRSZH), employment centres, etc. – are unable to efficiently perform these tasks.

There are problems on the supply side as well, even if there is openness on the part of employers. This is what the employers we interviewed told us, all pointing to the absence of suitable candidates as one of the biggest problems to employing people with altered working capacity/PWD. There is now a kind of 'pull' factor on the employer side in relation to people with altered working capacity, and the demand is not only for the highly qualified who speak several languages; employers have difficulty finding candidates even for non-specialised positions. Sometimes

the lack of resources relates to management. Ideally, an HR specialist would be employed whose main responsibility it is to develop and implement strategy for the recruitment of people with altered working capacity – this, however, is rarely the case at companies.

Increasing the employment level of people with altered working capacity is a complex task and one that cannot be resolved only using financial sanctions imposed by the government on employers. New regulations are needed to support a system of complex rehabilitation, as these are currently missing from the legislation, even though this would represent an important step towards the development and implementation of a complex rehabilitation system, as well as safeguarding equal opportunities. Considering that the state neither provides rehabilitation services for employees with disabilities and nor does it help employers to create the conditions for their employment, the compulsory rehabilitation quota and contribution are inefficient labour market tools, a fact which is evidenced by the figures cited in the economic overview. The pre-conditions of a feasible labour market integration system include an open and transparent education system, an efficient and person-centred service provision structure, and, last but not least, a taxation system that offers substantial incentives for promoting the expansion of the employment of people with disabilities.

The employees' perspective

Understanding the experience, the expectations and the dreams of employees related to employment and work – these were the main focal areas for Orsolya Polyacsó when analysing the interviews. The researcher sought to explore how people with disabilities assess their situation, what characterizes their employment careers, how they go about finding jobs, what the conditions of their employment are like, and what the – physical and mental – barriers are that they have to cope with on a daily basis. The resulting study complements the picture that emerges from research in recent years about the employment of people with disabilities/ altered working capacity.

The interviews suggest a patchwork-like employment history for our group in question, with periods of unemployment, and a variety of fortuitously acquired and typically unrelated jobs lasting either shorter or longer periods of time. It is mostly

simple – unskilled or semi-skilled – jobs that are open to this group, a finding which fully corresponds to what other researchers found.

The data clearly show that the labour market activity of people with altered working capacity is significantly lower than that of other employees.

A combination of factors is behind this low activity rate: family and social background, a low level of educational attainment, the degree of damage to health, prejudice, and the lack of rehabilitation services or the inadequate quality of those that are available.

The quality of the rehabilitation service that is received and its success are critical to individuals who have had an accident in terms of their coping with the trauma of having to rebuild their lives, mustering up the motivation to study, and dealing with life in general. It is especially tragic that it appears that medical rehabilitation continues to be “by and large an under-financed and badly structured shortage job that is uneven by regions” (Pulay, 2009)

Interviewees drew attention to the necessity of breaking down mental barriers as well, in addition to the physical ones by ensuring accessibility. Prejudice against people with disabilities continues to persist, and the people with disabilities we interviewed cited many examples of it. Prejudices arise partly due to a lack of information, as employers often do not know what people with altered working capacity and PWD are capable of.

Vocational rehabilitation and HR

Péter Kemény highlights in his paper that vocational rehabilitation – provided it is done in a well-planned, holistic way that supports the affected persons’ bodily, mental and psychological rehabilitation – has helped previously helpless people to reach the highest level of independent life; i.e. a full return to social life, or complete rehabilitation.

The areas of expertise related to human resources and vocational rehabilitation are similar, even overlapping, given that HR and vocational rehabilitation (VR) both focus on the person as a potential member of the workforce. HR planning and labour supply issues can be linked to the diagnostics and assessment processes that are undertaken during VR, as all of these areas imply the assessment of employees’

capabilities, the examination of employees and their inclusion into a system (a company). The issues of labour supply and performance assessment in HR may be linked with VR's planning for promotion at the workplace. Creating motivation and incentives are important issues in both areas. Human resource development may be associated with skills development and the promotion of inclusion. Safety at the workplace is related to making the workplace accessible and job analysis, and the dissemination of information is important in both areas.

The tasks that the employment of people with disabilities create for an efficiently working HR department are neither completely new, nor alien, as the tasks that HR performs can be positively compared with occupational rehabilitation.

It is often prejudice that prevents people from seeing the similarities between HR and occupational rehabilitation. Prejudice against people with disabilities usually arises because the very fact of disability is often magnified. That is to say, the behaviour, communication, habits and feelings of a person with disability are often attributed – mistakenly – to the disability itself. For instance, if we see a sad girl in a wheelchair, then we tend to think that she is sad because she has to sit in a wheelchair; it may not even occur to us that it may be that she is heartbroken because a love affair has ended.

People with altered working capacity within an organisation

In general, company management decides whether to employ persons with altered working capacity based on economic and/or social considerations. The first question that arises is, which jobs are these candidates suited for?

It is important to keep in mind that suitability does not depend on the job, but on the employee. If a person with altered working capacity applies for a job at a company, then we should not immediately try to find a job within the company that would suit them, but we should consider if they are suitable for the job that they have applied for (their level of motivation and commitment could be totally different if they were offered a job that is different to the one they had applied for).

The HR representative is the gatekeeper to the labour market. They play a crucial role in deciding whether people with altered working capacity (or other groups) remain excluded from the labour market or if they, as an integral part of it, contribute to the creation of value in society.