

MISSOC - INFO 2 / 2009 –Synoptic Report

(Re)integration of people with disabilities into employment

I. Introduction

I.1. Background and approach

This report presents a synopsis of the measures, embodied in the social security schemes of the MISSOC countries, to promote the (re)integration into employment of people with disabilities. These measures will be reviewed against the backdrop of European policies in regard to labour market participation and disability. The focus of these policies changed overtime. Initially, the Union's employment strategy primarily focused on raising the employment rates in ways that promote competitiveness and economic growth.¹ Later on, it has been recognised that a strong economy not only needs higher levels of employment and budgetary discipline in order to increase competitiveness and economic growth; it also needs proper protective measures to ensure that disadvantaged groups have equal access to the labour market and receive effective support to integrate into employment. Thanks to this recognition, the focus shifted towards a more 'inclusive' approach, which seeks to make sure that labour market reforms run in parallel with the Union's policies on social protection and social inclusion.²

Member States are asked to take due regard of the social dimension when designing their national employment strategy, for example, by including measures that address existing inequalities in the labour market and the specific needs of vulnerable groups.³ People with disabilities can in this respect definitely be considered as a major target group. After all, especially in times of economic hardship the focus should be on empowering individuals to realise their full potential and on supporting those who are unable to do so.

The main findings of this report are based on information provided by the national correspondents in their national reports, which are also part of this publication. However, the report also takes some additional information from European documents into account in order to be able to identify broader reform trends stemming from European policies to foster labour market participation. After a short overview of the most relevant developments at the European level, the synoptic report will focus on measures addressing people with disabilities on the one hand, and policies that target employers on the other hand. Finally, the report will present some concluding observations regarding the way in which the social dimension is reflected in the national schemes to promote the (re)integration into work of people with disabilities.

¹ The European Employment Strategy (EES) is based on Art. 2-3 and 125-128 of the EU Treaty. See for further details, the Commission's Communication, Com (1997), 497 final, presenting the agenda for the EES for the year 2000.

² See for example the Social Policy Agenda, Com (2000), 379 and the Commission's Communication 'Scoreboard on implementing the Social Policy Agenda', Com (2001), 104 final. See also the Joint Employment Report 2002, Com (2002), 621 final.

³ Commission's Communication 'Renewed social agenda; opportunities, access and solidarity in the 21st century Europe', Com (2008), 412 final.

1.2. Scope of the report

The measures described in this report do not only focus on people who receive a disability benefit. Confining the analysis to this particular group would, in many cases, only present a part of the picture. For example, in some countries, the measures to promote labour market integration are not primarily designed to address recipients of a disability benefit, but rather concentrate on people who face difficulties in finding or retaining an appropriate job as a result of health-related conditions in general, provided that they are registered as an unemployed person. In these cases, also people with disabilities who receive an unemployment benefit or social assistance may have access to the measures that aim to promote their (re) integration into work. Sometimes, also non-benefit recipients belong to the target group. Examples of this can be found in Austria, Germany, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and the UK.

It is also possible that the national schemes provide specific support to persons who are registered as a disabled person. In general, this requires proof of a reduced capacity to work in a certain degree or a vulnerable position in the labour market due to physical, mental or social impairments. Specific schemes for disabled persons exist, for example, in France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania. Furthermore, there may be specific schemes to support the integration in employment of young people with disabilities. Examples of this can be found in Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Liechtenstein and the Netherlands.

Another approach is to explicitly focus on early intervention in order to prevent people from becoming fully or partially incapable of work on a permanent basis as a result of illness or physical or mental impairments. In some countries, this strategy goes hand in hand with the principle of 'rehabilitation before disability pension'. Accordingly, a disability benefit or -pension will only be granted on the basis of an assessment stating that the ability to work cannot be improved by means of medical and/or vocational rehabilitation and/or other measures that help people with disabilities move into employment. During the process in which this is examined, the person concerned may be entitled to a 'temporary' disability benefit or a 'rehabilitation' benefit. Examples of this approach can be found in Austria, Germany, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Hungary.

It is also possible that an early intervention strategy concentrates on preventing long-term incapacity for work in an earlier stage, for example, by primarily seeking to keep people with disabilities in employment during the period in which they receive a sickness benefit. Illustrations of this approach can be found in Finland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Suisse and the UK. In countries where a specific scheme for victims of occupational injuries or diseases exists, the measures to promote the (re)integration into work also primarily focus on job retention, either by enabling the persons concerned to resume their work, if necessary through workplace adaptation, or, if this is not possible, by supporting them to find a new job either within the company or with another employer.

The synoptic report takes these different approaches into account with the aim to present a full picture of the different types of measures that exist in the MISSOC countries, thereby reckoning with the fact that these measures may be part of different branches of the national social security schemes.

II. The European Policy context

II.1. The EU approach to disability

Fostering the participation of all potential workers in employment is part of the Union's ambition to create socially inclusive economies. Obviously, this is of particular importance for people with disabilities. After all, they tend to have a vulnerable position in the labour market. At present, the inactivity rate of people with disabilities is twice that of non-disabled persons. Only 50% of them are engaged in employment and amongst those who are not, there is a substantial group who could work if adequate assistance were provided.⁴ The exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market is regarded as a matter of serious concern, not only from the perspective of equal opportunities, but also in the light of the shrinking workforce resulting from demographic change. For this reason, Member States are encouraged to make specific efforts to raise the employment and activity rates of people with disabilities. The 2006 Spring European Council identified them as a key group for action.⁵

The Commission developed a disability strategy which strives for making equal opportunities for disabled people a reality.⁶ As such, the Union's disability strategy builds on the social model of disability which starts from the assumption that all people are equal and have a right to fully participate in society and to non-discrimination.⁷ The social model acknowledges that, for people with disabilities, specific support measures are required to remove the barriers that prevent them from exercising these rights. As such, it constitutes a basis for measures and interventions that address the heterogeneous needs of people with disabilities in an integrated manner, also in relation to employment and work-related activities.

The policy priorities to be pursued under the Union's disability strategy are spelled out in Disability Action Plans (DAP). The DAP 2006-2007 focused on raising the employment rate of people with disabilities as one of the four areas to promote independent living of people with disabilities. In this context, the DAP 2006-2007 called for a combination of measures geared to fight discrimination, to provide active support and to remove accessibility barriers.⁸ The DAP 2008-2009 identified accessibility to the labour market as a key priority for action. In this light, it makes an explicit plea for flexible employment schemes, supported employment opportunities and positive measures complementing the existing European legislation on non-discrimination.⁹ Member states are expected to take these issues into account when they implement the Union's broader employment strategies.

II.2. The EU's broader employment strategies

⁴ See the Commission's Staff Working Document accompanying the Commission's Communication on the situation of disabled people in the EU: the European Action Plan 2008-2009, SEC (2007), 1548, p. 2-3.

⁵ See Conclusion 34 of the 2006 Spring European Council.

⁶ Making equal opportunities for people with disabilities a reality has been the objective of the Commission's disability strategy since 2003: See Com (2003), 650.

⁷ See the Commission's Communication on the situation of disabled people in the EU: the European Action Plan 2008-2009, Com (2007), 738 final, p. 4. The main objectives of the European approach towards disabilities are also the core issues of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By jointly signing this UN Convention, the EC and its member states confirmed the view that disability is a broad human rights issue and deserve a rights-based approach.

⁸ The DAP 2006-2007 also calls for determined action to encourage: 1) quality support and care services, 2) accessibility of mainstream goods and services and 3) increasing the Union's analytical capacity. See for further details: Com (2005), 604 final.

⁹ See the Commission's Communication on the situation of disabled people in the EU: The European Plan 2008-2009, Com (2007), 738 final, p. 8.

- *Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs*

The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs highlights the importance of attracting and retaining more people in stable employment positions for a longer term. Within this framework, Member States are encouraged to improve the adaptability of workers and enterprises, whilst at the same time increasing their investments in human capital so as to enable workers to be equipped with the right skills and competences for the current labour market. This sort of measures should be backed up by contractual arrangements that put in place the right conditions for skills- and career development, and flexible employment schemes. On top of that, Member States are asked to modernise their social protection schemes in ways that ensure that those who are excluded from the labour market receive effective support to find a job. Within this context, the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs accentuates the importance of personalised guidance and job search assistance, and the accessibility of services that disadvantaged groups may need to integrate into the labour market. Member states should also take steps to develop new sources of jobs, for example in local businesses or in services for individuals which are not provided by the market economy.¹⁰

- *Active Inclusion Policies*

The EU's active inclusion approach calls for measures that, on the one hand, seek to ensure that *those who cannot work* are provided with a decent standard of living and can contribute as much as possible to society. On the other hand, it asks particular attention for measures that adequately address the hurdles which *those who can work* may encounter in entering and progressing in employment. In this respect, it stresses the fact that, for most disadvantaged groups, labour market integration is a two-staged process. In many cases, they first need adequate support to strengthen their employability and to enhance personnel development, before they can cope with the demands of the current labour market. For this reason, member states should provide measures that offer disadvantaged groups a ladder of opportunity to strengthen their ability to integrate into employment. Member states are also encouraged to explore the conditions under which supported employment opportunities can be a useful first step towards performing employment on a regular basis, for example, within the framework of the social economy.¹¹

This sort of measure should be accompanied by schemes that provide adequate income support during the process in which disadvantaged groups work on enhancing their capacity to participate in the labour market. In addition, measures are to be taken to ensure that a broad variety of social services is available and accessible for disadvantaged groups so that they can count on receiving personalised support of good quality at a reasonable price. By focussing on these particular aspects, the active inclusion approach brings the social dimension of active labour market programmes to the forefront.

¹⁰ See in this context the Commission's Communication 'Working together for growth and jobs: a new start for the Lisbon Strategy, Com (2005), 24, p. 9 and 26. The key priorities for action under the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs have been confirmed in the Joint Employment Report 2006-2007 as adopted by the Council at its session of 22 February 2007, 6706/07, p. 9.

¹¹ See the Commission's Communication 'Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest away from the labour market, Com (2007), 620, p. 5.

- *Stimulate employers*

The active inclusion approach is not blind for the fact that the strategy it promotes will only bear fruit if employers are willing to offer disadvantaged groups a suitable work environment in which they can blossom and develop their full potential. In fact, it asks particular attention for measures that aim to encourage employers to recruit and retain disadvantaged groups in employment. In this light, it calls for including measures that promote job retention, for example, by offering employers grants for creating training opportunities on-the-job and/or flexible work arrangements that can help vulnerable groups to reconcile work with their disadvantages¹². Furthermore, it urges the Member states to intensify their actions to combat discrimination in employment. These actions should include specific measures for people with disabilities, for example, by refining the employers' obligation to provide a reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities through the adoption of specific provisions that oblige employers to provide access to work and training facilities and to create real prospects to move into good quality jobs.

The DAP 2008-2009 follows this approach, thereby asking particular attention for the creation supported employment opportunities for people with disabilities who have not yet reached their full potential. The DAP also underlines the importance of taking the requirements of enterprises into consideration in the process of designing measures to promote the active inclusion of people with disabilities. The Commission will support the Member States' efforts in these fields, for example, by encouraging the providers of employment services to involve employers in the development of vocational training and rehabilitation services.

A recent study¹³ that the Austrian Institute for SME Research carried out for the European Commission on 'Reasonable Accommodation' concluded that adequate information and support to employers is a critical factor for making employment policies for people with disabilities successful. Recommendations in this respect included publicity, awareness raising and one-stop-shops as a single information point bundling the know-how on disability issues. Besides, the study made a plea for flexible and easy to administrate financial funding systems and flexible labour market instruments that minimise the risk of the enterprise and the disabled person. It also stressed that employers need tailored support services and expertise in this area which could be offered by specialised service providers and other sectoral stakeholders.

At the same time, research from the ongoing OPTIWORK project indicates a chronic lack of services oriented towards employers needs in most EU countries (OPTIWORK has conducted interviews with employers regarding employment and retention practices in 15 countries – see <http://www.optiwork.org/>). The study indicates that many employers would be favourably disposed towards retention or recruitment if they had the knowledge and skills needed.

¹² See in this respect the Commission's Communication 'Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest away from the labour market, Com (2007), 620, p 3 and 5.

¹³ Practices of providing reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the workplace, contract VC/2007/0315, downloadable from DG EMPL website <http://ec.europa.eu/social>

III. National policies and measures to promote the (re)integration of people with disabilities into employment

III.1. Support measures for people with disabilities

The national reports reveal that the measures that have been implemented in the national social security schemes of the MISSOC countries to promote the (re)integration of people with disabilities indeed reflect the features of the social dimension, albeit in different ways and to different extents.

III.1.1. Personalised support services

As to the availability of personalised support measures, the national reports confirm that the social security schemes of all the MISSOC countries include this sort of measure. In many cases, these measures are provided by the Employment Office on the basis of individual needs. In Norway a written ‘service-guarantee’ was introduced which obliges the Employment Office to provide immediate and effective personalised support to both the employer and the person concerned. In other countries, personalised rehabilitation plans are used as a means to specify the support to be provided in individual cases. Examples of this can be found in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia and the UK. Cyprus is in the process of developing new methods to improve the possibility to identify individual capacities and needs and Malta is studying good practices of other Member States in order to design a new system for providing support tailored to individual circumstances.

Almost everywhere people with disabilities have access to vocational rehabilitation, vocational training, skills-upgrading in employment centres or on the job, personalised job search assistance and counselling and/or occupational guidance or job coaching, in order to find and/or retain an appropriate job. In most cases, these measures are designed to help people with disabilities to conquer a stable position in the labour market by addressing their personal barriers and by supporting them to realise their full potential. Various national reports point out that the support provided in this way, aims at enabling people with disabilities to fully participate in society without being discriminated. As such, this reflects the social model of disability upon which the Union’s disability strategy is built. In general, this translates into a multidisciplinary, rights-based approach, and the availability of a wide range of services to promote social inclusion, primarily through employment or, if need be, in other way. Countries following this pattern are, for example, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain.

In Ireland, an ESF-funded pilot project was launched in order to develop and test a new comprehensive employment strategy, based on individual case-management, to increase the employment rate of people receiving illness- or disability related payments. In Iceland, the key players responsible for providing work-related rehabilitation concluded contracts in order to ensure that those who, due to illness or health-related problems, receive the support they need to integrate into employment. In France, a concerted regional policy was developed in which the key players involved in vocational rehabilitation also joint forces in order to promote job retention by providing individuals and employers with support tailored to their needs.

III.1.2. Supported employment opportunities

Several countries implemented measures that acknowledge the fact that for many people with disabilities, labour market participation is a two-staged process, which is one of the main strands of the Union's objective to promote active inclusion. In a number of countries, this resulted in comprehensive rehabilitation programmes which promote the gradual integration into employment by offering people with disabilities a ladder of opportunity to strengthen their employability and/or to enhance their personal development in specialised institutions. Sometimes, these institutions are qualified as special employment or rehabilitation centres and sometimes as sheltered workshops or social enterprises. Illustrations of this approach can be found in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Suisse.

In other countries, this sort of support is also available, albeit primarily on the workplace. Often, personalised guidance and assistance on the job or a jobcoach are provided in order to help the person concerned to develop their full potential. In many cases, this also goes with workplace adaptations in order to adjust the workplace to the particular needs of the person concerned either through the provision of equipment or technical assistance or in the form of flexible working-time arrangements or flexible work conditions. This sort of support on the workplace is provided in, for example, Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Suisse. In the UK an individually tailored, work-focused Work Preparation programme was designed, which prepares people with disabilities to access the labour market with the necessary confidence to achieve and sustain their job goal. This programme can also be used to help people who are at risk of losing their job because of their disability to overcome difficulties that are affecting their work. Unemployed disabled persons with complex needs who cannot enter a work-based environment without the appropriate preparation may also benefit from specific work focussed training and development programmes provided by a specialised Residential Training College.

Supported employment or job retention schemes are often completed by the right to flexible employment arrangements. These provisions may include several rights, such as the right to training or skills-upgrading on the job, the right to adjust working-time, the right to additional breaks, the right to paid leave to participate in specific training or rehabilitation programmes and the right to work at home or at a workplace which is near to their home. In addition, restrictions may apply to the general rules in regard to dismissal. In principle, this sort of rights serve as a means to strengthen the employment position of people with disabilities. In general, these rights are embedded in the general labour law scheme, but it is also possible that these rights are incorporated in a special scheme for disabled persons.

III.1.3. Financial allowances to compensate for disability-related costs

The support provided to help people with disabilities move into employment often includes financial allowances to cover disability-related costs. In many cases, these allowances take the form of a financial compensation for additional costs associated with the participation in vocational rehabilitation or training programmes (such as cost related to transport, accommodation or a special treatment) or associated with employment or workplace adaptation (such as cost related to equipment to function well or cost related to personal

assistance on the workplace). Examples of this sort of allowances can be found in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the UK. Sometimes, there are also financial allowances available that compensate for the cost related to education (for example in Finland and Norway) and sometimes people with disabilities may be entitled to specific allowances which are meant to compensate for the cost of public transport (for example in Norway, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

In general, these allowances are paid by the competent authority to the person concerned on the basis of an assessment which proves that certain conditions are fulfilled and that the cost are actually made. In Germany however, persons with a disability may apply for of a 'personal budget' out which the rehabilitation- or work-related cost can be paid by the persons themselves. On the one hand, this method offers them, within certain boundaries, the opportunity to make their own choices as to the kind of support they wish. On the other hand, it also serves as a means to accentuate the personal responsibility of persons with disabilities in regard to their (re)integration into work.

III.2. Social security incentives to take up employment

III.2.1. Conditionality of social benefits

The availability of specific support measures is of course of high importance for people with disabilities. However, this may not always suffice to enter and progress in the labour market. Sometimes, people with disabilities need an extra boost to encourage them to take up work. The national reports reveal that various methods are used to suit this purpose. For example, in some countries, the entitlement to disability benefits has been made conditional to active job search or the participation in training programmes or work-related activities, that intend to help people with disabilities to move into employment. In countries where this approach has been adopted, this sort of measure is often linked up with sanction rules. In general, these rules will lead to a temporary or permanent reduction of the benefit level when the persons concerned refuse to cooperate with measures that aim to help them move into employment. Possible is also that the entitlement to claim the benefit is suspended for the period that the person concerned refuses to participate in vocational rehabilitation or training programmes or to perform work-related activities. In that case, the entitlement to the benefit will be reinstated as from the moment that the person concerned decides to cooperate. Examples of these sorts of measures can be found in, for example, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Suisse and the UK.

III.2.2. Review eligibility criteria for social benefits

The national reports show that people with disabilities can also be encouraged to take up work or work-related activities in another way. For example, some countries adjusted the conditions for claiming invalidity benefits in order to make benefit recipients more aware of their remaining capacity to work. Often, this sort of measures aims at the same time at putting a stop to the previous practice of awarding invalidity pensions to persons who still have and/or can improve their ability to work. The national reports show that various methods are used to accomplish this. For example, in Slovenia a new method for the assessment of invalidity was introduced in order to accentuate the importance of labour market participation for those with

a remaining work capacity. In general, this method results in a lower benefit level which in turn puts beneficiaries under pressure to take up work in order to have a decent standard of living. Also in the Netherlands, the benefit system has been transformed into a system that provides a strong financial incentive to the employer as well as to the employee who has remaining work capacities in order to encourage them to take up work. In the UK, the Incapacity Benefit and Income Support based on incapacity or disability has been replaced by an Employment and Support Allowance. At the same time, a new medical assessment was introduced in order to be able to tailor the support needed to get back into work to a person's work capacities (Work Capability Assessment).

III.2.3. Granting disability benefits on a temporary basis

Other countries opened the possibility to grant a disability benefit on a temporary basis in order to encourage those with remaining work capacities to participate in employment. Examples of this approach can be found in Austria, Hungary, Iceland and Norway. The national reports show that the duration of the temporary benefit may vary. For example, in Hungary, a rehabilitation benefit was introduced which is granted for a period of three years. In Norway, on the other hand, temporary invalidity benefits can be granted for a period varying from one to four years, whereas in Austria people with disabilities may be entitled to a temporary disability benefit for a period of two years. Where this system applies, a reassessment will follow after the period for which the benefit was granted, expires. The moment of 'labelling' a person as a permanently disabled person is thus postponed. For the persons concerned, this can serve as an incentive to make their remaining ability to work productive through employment during the period in which he or she is entitled to the temporary disability benefit.

III.2.4. Possibilities to combine work with receipt of social benefit

Another way of motivating people with disabilities to take up work or work-related activities is to allow benefit recipients to combine work or work-related activities with a continued entitlement to receive their benefit. The national reports show that the social security schemes of the MISSOC countries often include this possibility. Sometimes, there are no specific restrictions involved as to the amount which the person concerned is allowed to earn. Examples of this approach can be found in Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania and Romania. In other countries, the possibility to combine work or work-related activities with benefit receipt may be subject to certain conditions. For example, in several countries, there is a threshold above which earnings will be taken into account. In general, this implies that earnings exceeding the threshold will be deducted from the benefit. This method applies, for example, in Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Slovakia. In Iceland, the threshold was quadrupled in 2008 in order to encourage people with disabilities to participate in employment and thus to raise employment and activity rates. In the UK, people with disabilities are, under certain conditions, allowed to earn up to a certain amount a week with work that can be qualified as Supported Permitted work in order to test their capacity for doing some work and/or gain some new skills.

III.2.5. Possibilities to suspend entitlement to the benefit

Taking up work may involve risks for people with disabilities. It may, for example, be regarded as an increase of the remaining earning capacity, which in turn may imply that the conditions for claiming a disability benefit are no longer fulfilled. In some countries this will require the person concerned to start a new procedure in order to reclaim the benefit when an attempt to take up work fails. Illustrations of this can be found in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, and Slovakia. Other countries created the possibility to suspend benefit entitlement for a certain period of time. This allows the person concerned to fall back on the benefit without having to start a new procedure. As such, this offers people with disabilities a certain period of time to test their ability to work without running the risk of losing their entitlement to the benefit when it does not work out. Such a 'trial period' may serve as an incentive to take up work. Countries following this approach are, for example, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Norway and Portugal.

III.3. Measures to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities

III.3.1. Financial incentives

Where financial incentives were introduced, there is no fundamental difference as to the type of incentive to which employers may be entitled. Practically everywhere, employers who hire a person with a disability are entitled to wage subsidies and/or exemptions from the obligation to pay social security contributions for the person concerned. These financial incentives primarily aim at covering the cost for reduced productivity. Often, these financial advantages are combined with grants that aim to compensate for the cost related to adapting the workplace to the particular needs of people with disabilities. These grants may include a financial compensation for the cost related to improving the accessibility of the premises, providing personal assistance or a jobcoach and/or creating flexible work conditions. Examples of this can be found in Austria, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal and the UK.

Some countries also provide grants to compensate for the cost associated with the participation in training or rehabilitation programmes in order to encourage employers to cooperate with these programmes. Examples of this can be found in Austria, Malta, Portugal and Spain. Other countries introduced 'trial periods' which offer the possibility to employ persons with a disability for a short period of time (for example, up to a maximum of three months) without the obligation to pay wages; in stead, the person concerned is entitled to receive a social security benefit or a minimum wage provided by the state. Examples of this can be found in Malta, the Netherlands, Liechtenstein and Romania. In Germany employers can be reimbursed for employing people with (severe) disabilities on probation. In the UK, the Job Introduction Scheme was introduced which offers a weekly grant to employers during the first six weeks of the employment of persons with disabilities. This period serves as a 'trial' period in the sense that it offers both the employer and the person concerned some time to gain the reassurance that the job can be carried out with confidence. Finland, is experimenting with 'work banks' in order to diminish the risks involved in employing people with disabilities for employers. The general idea behind this initiative is that these 'banks' hire persons who face difficulties in finding a regular job. The 'banks' will train them and subsequently 'rent' them to employers. In principle, this creates a no risk way for employers

to engage people with disabilities in employment since the person concerned remains employed by the 'bank'.

In several countries, grants are available to compensate the employer for the cost related to the creation of supported employment opportunities for people with disabilities either within the company or within a sheltered workplace or a social enterprise. This possibility exists, for example, in the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Switzerland. In some countries, entitlement to this grant is subject to the condition that the employer employs a certain number of people belonging to a specific target group such as people with disabilities.

It is also possible that entitlement to financial advantages requires the employer to keep people with disabilities in employment for a certain period of time. For example, in Malta some grants are only awarded under the condition that the persons concerned continues to be employed for at least a year after the grant expires. In Bulgaria, a similar system applies, albeit that there, the required period is three years whereas in the UK, the financial grant provided under the Job Introduction Scheme is subject to the condition that the job offered under this Scheme is expected to last for at least six months after the end of the 'trial period'. In other countries, the employer needs to offer the person concerned an employment contract for an unlimited duration (Portugal) or at least for a period of three years (Spain). In Spain, the employer may also be entitled to a higher reduction of social security contributions when a fixed-term contract is transformed into a contract for an indeterminate period of time. In Luxembourg, employers have to pay a financial compensation when they dismiss or refuse to offer an appropriate job to the person concerned.

III.3.2. Service centres for employers

In some countries, there are special service centres for employers in order to support them in creating a suitable work environment for people with disabilities. For example, in Austria service centres have been set up to provide advice and assistance to small and medium enterprises regarding, for example, the recruitment of people with disabilities, ways to adapt the workplace to their particular needs and ways to promote job retention. In Norway, the government, social partners and employers concluded a triple agreement to foster the integration of people with health-related problems in employment. Specialised work centres have been established to support this, for example, by providing information, advice and assistance and by coordinating support for enterprises. In France, the government works together with local authorities and an association which specifically focuses on promoting the professional reintegration of disabled persons within the context of a concerted regional policy in order to provide both the persons concerned and the employer with the support they need to realise labour market integration. In Denmark a new strategy was launched which, inter alia, seeks to promote the exchange of relevant information between employers.

III.3.3. Quota systems

The national reports show that in several countries a quota system has been put in place in order to ensure that there are workplaces available for people with disabilities. This may relate to people who are registered as a disabled person, persons that have reduced work capacity of a certain degree, or people who suffer from a sever disability. Sometimes, this

system only applies to the public sector. At present, this counts in particular for Ireland. However, Belgium will follow this example as from 1 January 2010. In Cyprus a proposal has been launched recently to do the same. In other countries where quotas apply, employers in both the public and the private sector are obliged to employ a certain number of people with disabilities.

In some countries, such as Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain, employers who employ at least 50 employees are obliged to ensure that a certain percentage of those employed are people with disabilities. Other countries, such as the Czech Republic, Luxembourg and Poland, require employers with at least 25 employees to do so, whereas in Germany, France, Slovenia and Slovakia, employers who employ at least 20 employees are under the obligation to ensure that a certain percentage of their staff are people with disabilities. This percentage may vary from 2% (Greece, Spain; in Bulgaria and Slovenia this percentage only applies to the public sector) to 7% (Italy). In Romania and the Czech Republic, the percentage is 4%, in Germany it is 5% and in France and Poland 6%. It is also possible that the percentage varies depending on the sector in which the employer operates. For example, in Bulgaria the percentage for the private sector varies from 4-10% and in Slovenia from 2-6%. In Norway, on the other hand, quotas apply only on a voluntary basis.

In general, sanctions are involved when employers do not comply with their obligation to employ a certain number of people with disabilities. Some countries oblige employers who do not respect the quota to make a monthly payment to a fund or to the state budget which is 'earmarked' to finance specific support measures for people with disabilities. In that case, the employer does not actually employ the required number of people with disabilities himself, but rather financially supports their integration into employment in another company or in a social enterprise or sheltered workshop.

It is also possible that employers are left the choice to comply with their obligation either by taking the required number of people with disabilities on board themselves or by financially supporting the participation in employment of people with disabilities somewhere else. Examples of this system can be found in the Czech Republic and Romania, where employers can choose to purchase goods or services from social enterprises or sheltered workshops in which at least 50% respectively 60% of the total staff are people with disabilities. In the Czech Republic, employers are also allowed to award orders to these organisations or to purchase goods or services from people with disabilities who operate as self-employed persons. In Slovakia, a similar system applies. In Spain, employers who fail to meet their obligation can choose to make a donation to a social enterprise or special employment centres for people with disabilities. Another possibility is to conclude a contract with these centres on the basis of which the employer is to create supported employment opportunities for people with disabilities in his own company ('labour enclave'). Also in France, employers are left the choice to comply with the quota system either by recruiting the required number or by concluding subcontracts with sheltered workshops or sheltered enterprises or by signing an agreement on the basis of which people with disabilities are entitled to vocational training or professional integration within the company. Another possibility is to make a monthly contribution to the national association which specifically focuses on promoting the professional reintegration of people with disabilities.

In other countries, employers are encouraged to comply with the obligation, set by the quota system, by excluding them from the entitlement to financial grants for as long as the required

quota has not been fulfilled. Countries following this approach are, for example, Poland and Luxembourg. In Germany, employers are encouraged to meet the obligations related by the quota system in another way. There, employers may be entitled to several financial grants if they recruit or retain people with severe disabilities in employment. In that case, the entitlement to these grants rather serves as a means to reward employers for their willingness to employ people with severe disabilities.

In some countries, employers who are *not* under the obligation to employ a certain number of people with disabilities (for example small companies) or employers who exceed the required percentage, are rewarded for their efforts by entitling them to a bonus. This bonus may take the form of an exemption of the obligation to pay social security contributions for each employed disabled person above the required percentage (Slovenia) or may manifest itself in a tax reduction (Spain). In Bulgaria, financial grants to compensate for the cost related to creating supported employment opportunities for people with disabilities within the company also takes the form of a tax reduction. However in Bulgaria, this grant is subject to the condition that the money saved in this way is reinvested in the company, for example, by using it for the purchase of special equipment or machinery that people with disabilities need to function well or to cover the cost associated with creating flexible work conditions. In Germany, bonuses are also available, for example, for creating employment opportunities for older persons with disabilities or for persons who participated in special training programmes to enhance their employability, but were forced to leave this programme as a result of the economic crisis. In the Netherlands, an employer may apply a contributions reduction concerning elder persons receiving a disability benefit in the case he employs such a person. The reduction can be awarded for a maximum of three years. Besides, an employer may apply a contributions reduction concerning persons with a disability receiving a disability benefit in the case he employs such a person. The reduction can be awarded for a maximum of three years.

IV. Conclusions

On the basis of the information provided in the national reports it would seem justifiable to conclude that serious efforts have been made to translate the Union's objective to promote the active inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labour market into a wide variety of measures that aim to suit this purpose at the national level.

In general, the measures that have been implemented in the national social security schemes to promote the (re)integration into work of people with disabilities reflect the main objectives of the Union's Disability Action Plans which build upon the Union's active inclusion approach. Evidence of this can be found in, for example, the availability of a wide range of personalised support measures that aim to remove barriers that people with disabilities may encounter in entering or progressing in employment. In addition, the national social security schemes include in many cases specific provisions to encourage people with disabilities to take up work and to motivate employers to offer them a real chance to conquer a stable and appropriate position in the labour market.

The national reports show that in many cases also particular attention is paid to the importance of creating supported employment opportunities and flexible work conditions for those who have not reached their full potential yet. In several countries, this has been translated into a variety of measures to encourage and support both the employer and the person concerned to make remaining work capacities as productive as possible. In quite a number of countries this goes hand in hand with reforms of the disability benefit scheme which aim to make people with disabilities more aware of their remaining work capacity by postponing the moment of awarding a disability pension.

All in all, the combination of these measures can make an essential contribution to the overall goal of enabling people with disabilities to enjoy their right to fully participate in society. Indeed, there are differences in the national approaches towards reaching this overall goal across the MISSOC countries. However, this does not alter the fact that all these approaches eventually strive for the making equal opportunities a reality for people with disabilities.

Seen in this light, the statistical data on the employment position of people with disabilities are hard to explain. After all, these data show that only 50% of them are engaged in work and a substantial part of the remaining group believes that they could be engaged in work if adequate assistance were provided. These findings suggest that there is ample room for improvements. In this context, it certainly would be rewarding to unravel the factors that still contribute to the exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market, despite the comprehensive set of measures available in the MISSOC countries to support them to integrate into employment. However, this requires additional research focussing more strongly on, for example, the effectiveness of the available measures and possible counterproductive effects of the conditions attached to them.