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“Nothing About Us, Without Us”: Disabled People in the Greek Labour Market

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Key points

People with disabilities throughout Greece are plagued by unemployment. In 2015, 1 out of 3 of those having a “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment” was out-of-work. This policy brief outlines the causes of the limited recruitment of disabled, the repercussions to both individuals with impairments, as well as society, and finally, the urgency of their absorption in the labor market. It also suggests:

- The overhaul of workplaces
- The enhancement of Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs)
- The creation of training programmes and vocational guidance for the disabled and non-disabled employees

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Introduction

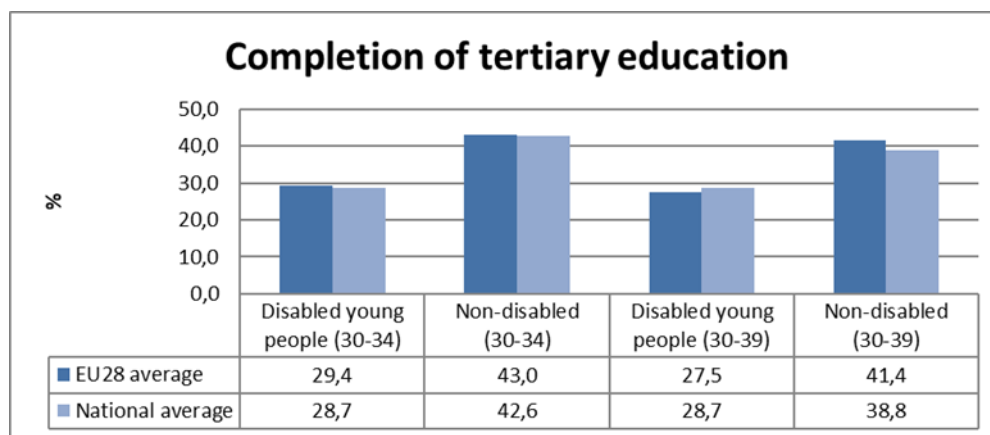
The right to work is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Nowadays, however, in Greece, this is not implemented practically. People with disabilities are constantly experiencing difficulties in labor market, in a country where general unemployment is already augmented. The European Disability Strategy (2010-2020) managed to highlight disability issues in the European Semester process and to launch policy initiatives on employment, but it goes without saying, that further changes are required. The Greek government defined the guidelines of this issue for 2019, but more emphasis was given to the handouts than to the creation of new working positions for people with special needs. The most pivotal fact is that this category of people has a lower chance to prove their capacities and be recruited in higher positions. The change of this situation will grant them their well-deserved independence and the labor market will be enhanced by a well-trained work force. Consequently, this issue does not only affect people with disabilities and their families, but the whole society.



Evidence & Analysis

The reasons behind the unemployment of the disabled

Inadequate education. According to the statistical table below, there is a huge disparity between people with disabilities and non-disabled in tertiary education. Only 28,7% of people with impairments complete their university studies, while on the contrary, the non-disabled are cited in a percentage of 42,6%. It is noteworthy, that even though entrance in tertiary education is provided to them without exams at a 5% quota of placements, only 1,340 students with disabilities entered university in 2016-2017, while there were 3,572 places available. Lack of parallel support and integration classes from specialized teaching stuff combined with the difficult access in the school area, create the notion that they are not welcomed in the educational field. Thus, their absorption to the workforce is considered unapproachable.



Source: EUSILC UDB 2015 – (October 2017)

Stolidity and unawareness of fundamental rights. Still today, many disabled and non-disabled Greek citizens are not familiar with the rights of this special section. Employers and enterprises take advantage of this, by not hiring disabled people or hiring them only for blue-collar occupations and part-time jobs with lower incentives. The problem becomes more severe when the person with an impairment is not seeking for a work position at all. This can be explained by the dependency of disabled people on the allowances given by the state. Similarly, the Greek government prefers this passive measure instead of an active system that will create more working positions and provide the necessary support in the field.

Prejudices and misconceptions by the employers. In European and national legislation, the right of equal employment opportunities for the disabled is legally protected. However, most employers regard people with impairments as incapables of handling the load of work and they fear that they might be self-injured in the workplace. Additionally,



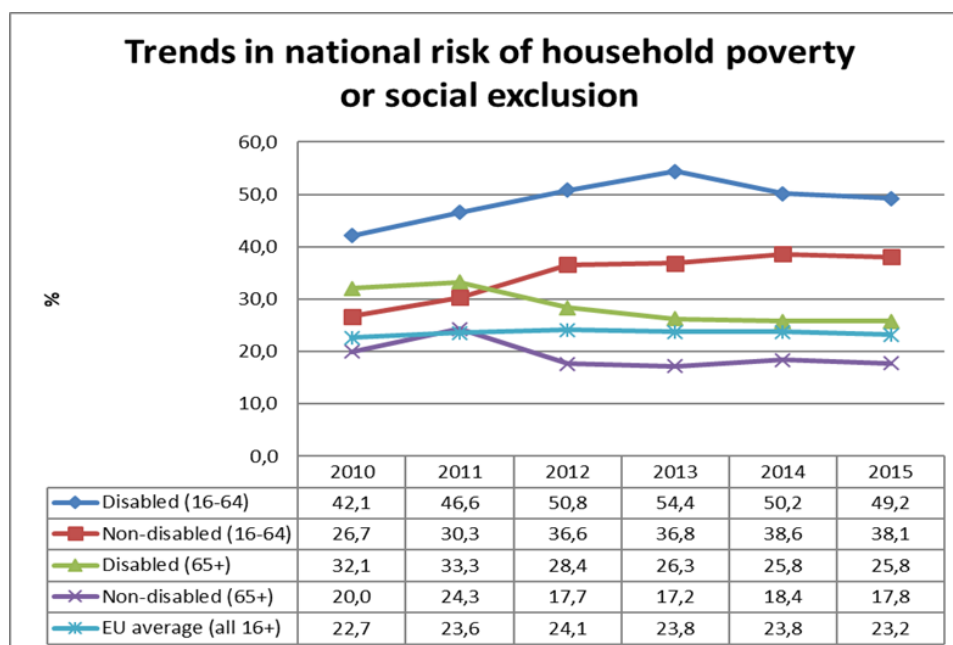
they do not hire them, even though they have the qualifications, considering that the creation of an accessible workplace is high-cost. This tactic is opposed to Article 27 of the UNCRPD concerning the reasonable accommodation in the work area. Finally, although it is referred in Greek legislature that those with 50% level of impairment have the right to be placed in public sector, measures concerning the private sector are not reported thoroughly.

The implications of this key issue

- To the disabled people

Working age adults with disabilities are the first to face directly the repercussions of unemployment. The most apparent of these consequences is poverty and social exclusion. According to the statistical table below, 1 out of 2 disabled people, at the age of 16 to 64, is at the risk of poverty throughout Greece. This percentage is higher in comparison to those who are not disabled, as well as, the average of the EU-28.

Additionally, the feeling of isolation and marginalization of these people due to the lack of work, is also reflected to their personal relations. What is more, disabled people face pay inequities and are often occupied with an underemployed job which is irrelevant to their skills or expectations. With this way, they become introverted and financially dependent on their families and the governmental policies.



Source: EUSILC UDB 2015 (October 2017)



- **To the society**

The multiple disadvantages that these people face, affect society too. This can be mainly explained with financial terms, as the unemployment of this wide subpopulation causes a wastage of the country's productive forces and concurrently leads to the reduction of public spending power.

Moreover, government's budget is constantly burdening by the unemployment benefits and as a result higher taxes are imposed. These allowances are necessary for people with disabilities, but simultaneously, they must not substitute working positions. A society that promotes inequalities in the workplace leads to its degradation and creates the sentiment of unreliability and irresponsibility to its citizens.

The lost contribution of disabled people

It is urgent for people with disabilities to be considered as potential members of the workforce, because, having a job that will coincide on their qualities, will assist them integrate into other social fields, such as the politics. Similarly, employment has a social and physiological value, that will aid people with impairments gain their independence, enhance their self-esteem and strengthen their personal relations. In the long term, the indicator of social prosperity will be enhanced. In this way, their buying power will augment as they will be no longer economically dependent on their families or the state. Finally, if society utilizes all the available workforce, levels of unemployment will decrease, economy will boost and equality and justice will eventuate.

Recommendations

1) The most significant limiting factor for the disabled, in their effort to find a job, is the absence of reasonable accommodation in the workplace. It is critical that alterations should be made at two levels:

a) Physical environment. According to Greek legislature, employers are obliged to proceed to all the necessary overhauls in order to make the workplace more accessible, as long as they do not aggravate their financial situation disproportionately. For this reason, Greek government needs to fund private companies that hire people with disabilities. These companies need to install ramps in the entrances and the exits of buildings, lifts in every floor and wide corridors for their easy transfer. Inter alia, parking spots and accessible toilet facilities are also important in the business premises.

b) Working methods. For people with impairments, assistive technology is required in the workplace, so as to develop their full potentials. More specifically, companies need to install braille terminals, screen readers, sign language apps and assistive listening devices. For those who are handicapped, wheelchairs and transfer devices are necessary for their



easy access in the workplace. Apart from that, employers could utilize physical activities and create relaxation rooms to make work a more comfortable and friendly environment.

2) Mass unemployment of the disabled in Greece was a result of the recession and the consequent ineffectiveness of OAED to support those job-seekers find work. This situation could be ameliorated by ALMPs (Active Labor Market Policies).

The goal of ALMPs is to aid the unemployed find work, to create job vacancies and to invest on adult learning schemes, apprenticeships and vocational education, that are necessary tools for the disabled, due to the competitiveness of the labour market. They also help people with impairments prepare their CV and assist them in their job interviews.

However, according to statistics from 2015, Greece's expenditure on ALMPs was only 0,04 of the national GDP, which sets the country at the bottommost place in comparison with the other members of OECD. Therefore, instead of disbursing the funds of EUROFOUND for the unemployment benefits, the Greek government could use them for the enhancement of ALMPs by making them more approachable to people with disabilities. By overhauling ALMPs in a cost-effective way, the participation of disabled people in these special programmes will increase and long-term employability will improve.

3) Vocational orientation from specialized staff with programmes adapted to the needs of the disabled are required, as it is ordered by European Social Charter and the UNCRPD. The vocational guidance needs to be free of charge in order to improve their occupational and social skills. Before their recruitment, it would be wise for the disabled to go through evaluation programmes, that will define their working ability.

Training programmes should be accessible to managers of the enterprises and all the other employees, so as to learn how to cooperate with disabled people and especially, how to manage a case of emergency. Employers have to show impartiality among the employees without using any form of clemency or discrimination in order to help the disabled strive even more. Enterprises could cooperate with organizations such as ESAEA, so as to learn which practices are ideal for the disabled. In case of encroachment of their rights, the intervention of the Greek Ombudsman is essential.



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