

ESF-project “Bridging severe disabilities @ work”

The working language between all partners will be English

1. Information about the partners

This project will be a cooperation between 2 “official” partners that participate in the official ESF Transnational programme: SOCOM from Finland and Groep Maatwerk from Flanders (Belgium).

Considering the rationale, objectives and methodology of the project, we also incorporate some “unofficial” partners in the project. These partners are

- Samhall from Sweden
- Dr. Stephen Beyer from Cardiff University, Wales
- SBCM and Cedris from The Netherlands

Partner Flanders

Groep Maatwerk is the umbrella organisation that represents all (48) customized work companies in Flanders, Belgium. These companies are employing +/- 21.000 people, whereof 17.500 persons with disabilities. About 70% of them has an intellectual disability. From labor law perspective, all workers in the companies are considered as “fully-fledged” workers.

Customized work companies in Flanders are mainly of the “industrial” type with a lot of subcontracting work. Although the companies receive funding they have to be profitable to be able to pay the wages (at least the minimum wage). A customized work company is primarily a place of employment for people with an (occupational) handicap who want to work but who are not, not yet or not anymore ready to work in a regular company (the Flemish employment office assigns the right to work in a customized work company, due to the severity of their disability). Customized work companies aim to assign as much as

possible jobs to people with a disability, paying special attention to the most severely handicapped.

2. Rationale and objectives

The labour market in Europe is changing. Knowledge and technology are becoming the real drivers of productivity, and workers increasingly need to acquire skills and to continuously adapt these skills. These evolutions are making educated and skilled labour more valuable, and unskilled labour less attractive.

This is especially problematic for disabled/disadvantaged people. And extremely problematic for people with severe (intellectual) disabilities. In a working environment, people with severe (intellectual) disabilities are mainly capable to perform simple, basic tasks, but these jobs are disappearing. Manual simple activities are subject to an increasing competition and automation and are moved to other (non-European) countries. The labour market and employers are demanding more complex and flexible competences.

The basic and common project challenge is then: how can we contribute to a working framework that is most appropriate and thus best fitting for people with severe disabilities?

Also other countries may face the same challenges for this group. But their answers may be different: another setting (collective and/or individual setting), in a paid/partly/non-paid working environment or a mixture. Also the way the border between non/partially paid and paid work is organized, and especially how transition between these environments is achieved, can be very relevant to offer new answers in the light of valuable employment/labour-like and other activating activities.

3. Target group

We conclude that the target group of the project consists of people with (mainly but only) an intellectual disability (they may have other health-problems on top) who are severely disabled and although capable of some (paid) work, certainly need support to achieve it and will probably need some other occupation on the side. As it is hard to locate the entire group, for practical reasons we will look in the following environments:

- People that are not (yet) ready to execute a paid job, but have at least a perspective.
- (Especially) aging workers with *severe* disabilities who are not capable anymore to work in a paid working setting, as we see that this group *ages* faster than regular workers. So disabled people who have a hard time keeping up.
- Influx of students from (special) education, and especially people with (mainly but not exclusively intellectual) disabilities, as we see that the transition to the labour market is becoming more complex for them. We intend to follow up on school leavers,

4. Deliverables

In this project we want to find out which are the future work opportunities for these (mainly but not exclusively intellectual disabled) people with quite limited capabilities. The fundament of the project is to determine how to get a well substantiated view on their aspirations/abilities, and indicate their ideal pathway to become (for younger people) or to remain (for elder people) active in working society.

Therefore we will, in a transnational partnership, together develop a tool that enables us to assess the aspirations/ability of working-aged individuals, and inform us about the desirable social inclusion framework.

The tool will be developed and tested during the whole duration of the project.

The content and development of the tool will be “fed” by analysing some detected fields of impact.

We will analyse “Fields of impact” of which we assume that they can be relevant to create successful activating and/or working opportunities for people with severe disabilities. Together with the other partners in the project we want to analyse these “Fields of impact” broadwise, and expand knowledge.

By comparing different fields of impact between the transnational partners (activities/tasks eligible for this target group, use of technologies, cumulate salary and handicap related allowances, vocational training/internship, work-life balance, ...) we will:

1. Feed the content of the tool. At the end of the project, the tool should enable us to get a validated view on the different impact fields from the perspective of the people with severe disabilities.
2. Detect critical success parameters to elaborate and improve work opportunities for people with (severe) disabilities.

The final product consists of:

- A tool to assess the target group
- A user manual for the tool
- A report of the critical success parameters of the different impact fields.