

# Employment of People with Disabilities in Ireland: Research and Strategy

Mary Van Lieshout



**National Disability Authority**  
Údarás Náisúnta Míchumais

# What the National Disability Authority does

- Provides policy advice to the Irish Government and public bodies
- Undertakes, commissions and collaborates in disability research and assists in the development of statistical information
- Advises on standards and guidelines in services to people with disabilities
- Develops standards, education and awareness of Universal Design

# Data on employment of people with disabilities

- In the 2006 Census, the employment rate of people with disabilities was less than half that of those without, at 21.6% to 57.2%
- In the same census, people with disabilities made up 4% of the total number of those in employment
- According to a 2006 survey for the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database, 57.1% of respondents experienced participation restriction in the area of employment and job seeking
- Approximately 70% of people with disabilities acquired them since birth (QNHS 2002)

# Researching the employment of people with disabilities in Ireland

- Disability and Labour Market Participation, a 2004 report produced by the ESRI for the Equality Authority, notes that such surveys as currently exist are better at measuring levels of labour and employment than they are at measuring gradations of disability
- Different datasets such as the Census, the QNHS and the Living in Ireland Survey vary in their definitions of both employment and disability
- The NDA, on behalf of the CSO, has represented Ireland in the work of the Washington City Group on setting global standards of disability statistics

# Employment policies for people with disabilities

- The relevant chapter in *Disability and Social Policy in Ireland* (2003), identifies three modes of policy in operation:
  - Obligatory non-discrimination and actions to reasonably accommodate: legislation including the 1998 Employment Equality Act and the 2005 Disability Act
  - Voluntary positive action: including sheltered, supported and rehabilitative employment
  - Voluntary targets: the 3% quota for employment in the civil and public service

# The 3% Target

- Under the 2005 Disability Act the NDA has a statutory role in monitoring the compliance of public bodies with Part 5 of the Act

## Chapter 3: Analysis of data for 2008

### Introduction

The 381 organisations (255 datasets) reported on in the 2008 data together represent a combined workforce of just under 229,000. 2.7% of these were reported as having a disability as defined in the Act.

### Achieving the 3% employment target

Just over half (55%) of organisations reported reaching or exceeding the 3% employment target for 2007 (Table 3.1). This represents a slight increase on 2007 when 51% of bodies reported meeting or exceeding the target. A little over one fifth (23%) of organisations indicated that they had no staff with disabilities on their workforce. This represents a slight decrease on 2007 figures (26%).

Table 3.1 Achievement of the 3% employment target

Proportion of staff with disabilities	No.	%
Nil	58	22.7
0.1% < 1%	8	3.1
1% < 2%	23	9.0
2% < 3 %	26	10.2
3% +	140	54.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 2008 Report

# Welfare entitlements relating to disability and employment

- The main social welfare payments for people with long-term illness or disabilities are the invalidity pension, the means-tested disability allowance, and the blind pension
- Upon written approval, people receiving disability payments can engage in rehabilitative or therapeutic work while keeping their payments
- In addition, there are a range of secondary benefits due to those who are receiving social welfare disability payments, which may be retained according to earnings

# Difficulties

- A Strategy for Engagement: Towards a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (NDA, 2006) identifies persistent inequality both in the area of educational qualifications and dependency on welfare payments
- It also describes the pre-existing experience of people with disabilities in Ireland as one of 'unequal treatment' and the current system of welfare and employment measures as 'an outdated model'

# Challenges

- Further challenges observed in the Strategy for Engagement include:
  - The ‘moving on’ of the employment market towards more high-skilled jobs
  - Relatively few companies have experience in accommodating workers with less restrictions, and even fewer those with more severe restrictions (the demand side of employment of people with disabilities)
  - The heterogeneity of the population of people with disabilities in terms of their circumstances, needs and abilities, which must be taken into account in policy
  - Whether it is a voluntary choice to work fewer hours, in part-time or self-employment, or if it is an effect of the welfare system or the workplace

# Pillars of a Strategy of Engagement

- Six pillars are identified on which to base a comprehensive strategy:
  1. Removing benefit traps and disincentives towards working in the welfare system
  2. Enhancing the effectiveness of education and training to ensure that people with disabilities can compete in the current and future labour markets
  3. Ensuring demand-side awareness of disabilities in the labour market
  4. Devising preventative strategies to reduce early school-leaving, and to improve retention in employment following adult-onset disability
  5. Engaging with people with disabilities and their employment aspirations
  6. Ensuring that the provision of the above is sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, especially those experiencing severe disabilities

# Benefiting from the Irish experience

- From a recent speech by the Minister for Health, Dr. James Reilly
  - “Under the new Universal Health Insurance system everyone will have health insurance from their choice of insurance company. This insurance will guarantee every citizen equal access to a comprehensive range of hospital and medical services. Moreover, it will offer greater transparency for people by directly linking their payments on health insurance to an associated level of benefits or service entitlements.

The core purpose of universal health insurance is to achieve equity of access to healthcare. Similarly, the concept of equity will inform the internal design of the insurance system which will be based on community rating and a robust risk equalisation scheme, governed by a new Regulator – the Hospital Insurance Fund.”

# Accident insurance systems

- Ireland is keen to learn from international best practice in this area
- In order to advise our government, the NDA is keen to have access to further details on systems, costs, and outcomes for people for disabilities of such schemes