

**Master in European Integration and Development: Social  
Integration**

**Academic year: 2007-2008**

**Good Practices of Labour Integration of Persons  
with Intellectual Disabilities in Belgium  
Recommendations to Bulgaria**

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**Thesis submitted to obtain the degree of Master in  
European Integration and Development – European  
Politics and Social Integration**

## Preface

I got the idea about presenting the Flemish labour system and models of good practices of labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities during my work visit to Leuven in September 2007. I was impressed by the good cooperation between the regional government and the NGO sector, the various stakeholder involvements in the process, the person-centered approach and the availability of options for employment depending on the personal choice and the degree of the disability of the clients. What struck me most was the fact that there was always an option.

At the same time Bulgaria is still making first steps towards labour integration of people with disabilities. It is a slow process related to a change in the societal prejudices towards people with physical disabilities. And regarding persons with intellectual disabilities it has not even started yet.

Thus I hope that the Flemish experience and the recommendations, based on it and on Bulgaria's specific situation, will provide Bulgarian authorities and nongovernmental organizations with ideas about how the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities can be successfully be launched and implemented.

I would like to thank Prof. Jack Vilrocx for his support and supervision during the process of shaping and development of my thesis as well as to Prof. Theo Jans and Prof. Jan De Schampheleire for their insightful advices. I would also like to thank to Phil Madden from the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) for his consultation as well as all the interviewees who kindly answered my questions and were always willing to provide me with additional information, namely: Karolien Stockx from Job-Link, Jan Daemen from Begeleid Werken, Mark Vanhamme from GTB – Leuven, Eric Samoy from the Department of Work and Social Economy at the Flemish Government, Maryana Branzlova from Network Education Team building (NET), Marina Hlebarova from the Bulgarian National Employment Agency, Evdokia Tasheva from the Bulgarian Agency for People with Disabilities.

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## Introduction

People with disabilities are significantly under represented in the work force throughout the European Community. This is particularly the case for people with intellectual disabilities. Indeed in some member states there is resistance to the very possibility of their employment. In order to tackle this problem various legally binding, financial and policy instruments have been adopted on the EU and international level. They will be summarized in the first part of my thesis.

Nevertheless, recent reasoned opinions, sent by the European Commission to 10 Member States to fully implement EU rules prohibiting discrimination in employment and occupation on the grounds of religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation show that the link between the legal and political EU framework and its actual implementation in the Member States has not been very coherent (European Commission, 2008). Flexicurity<sup>1</sup> is still a hollow concept without practical content when applied to the lives of people with disabilities.

The re-launched in 2005 Lisbon Strategy has put stronger focus on growth and jobs. The first three year cycle of reforms to be undertaken by the Member States under the National Reform Programmes has already generated results in achieving the target for "more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". Almost 6.5 million new jobs were created between 2005 and 2007 and another 5 million are expected to be created up to 2009 (European Commission, 2008). According to the European Commission data unemployment is expected to fall to under 7%, which would be the lowest level since the mid-80's.

The creation of new jobs however and the general reduction in unemployment have not improved the position of people with disabilities in the labour market. Annex 1 to the Commission Communication on the "Situation of disabled people in the European Union: the European Action Plan 2008 – 2009" concludes that people with disabilities are still more likely to drop out of the labour market altogether and specifies *that people with learning or intellectual disabilities<sup>2</sup> are much less likely to work* than those with physical disabilities.

Integrated employment is an expression of, and an opportunity for, social inclusion. Properly remunerated employment gives financial autonomy and inclusive opportunity. Thus employment is a direct expression of fundamental human rights. People with intellectual disabilities are the most disadvantaged group regarding being given the chance to exercise their human rights and to lead a life of dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> Flexicurity promotes a combination of flexible labor markets and a high level of employment and income security. More information on flexicurity will be provided below in section 2.2.

<sup>2</sup> In the United Kingdom the term learning disabilities is used instead of intellectual disabilities

Despite the general lack of political and legal action for making a change for people with disabilities in the Member States, there are nevertheless examples of good practices of their successful labour integration within the EU. Among them is the Belgian Flanders region labour model, which outlines clearly defined and regular cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental sectors. The person centered approach and the active stakeholder involvement characterize the model, which is an object of the second part of my thesis, are the main reasons for deciding to explore and present the Flemish experience. Due to the combined efforts of the state, the NGO sector, the employers and – where present – the families many persons with intellectual disabilities have been successfully labour integrated in Flanders. Moreover the Flemish model offers different employment options to persons with intellectual disabilities depending on the degree of their disability.

This kind of approach is still lacking in Bulgaria where the only option for most people with intellectual disabilities is still the public institutions, where they lead a segregated life, deprived of personal choice and dignity. Hence their employment is not even yet an object of public discussion. And employment is both an end and a means to inclusion. It is a valued role in its own right and an opportunity to have own income, but also a way of establishing social contacts and experiencing a feeling of personal satisfaction.

Using the positive experience of the Belgian Flemish region I will make a roadmap for Bulgaria for launching action towards complete social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. And inclusion is not possible if the right to employment is being refused.

# **I. EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR LABOUR INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

## **Chapter 1**

### **European and International Legal, Policy and Financial Instruments for Integration of Persons with Disabilities**

The issue of employment is best seen within the general context of the European and international initiatives setting the scenes for its increase among vulnerable groups. The European Union and other international organizations as the Council of Europe and the United Nations have adopted different legal, policy and financial instruments which support the realization of the general target for full employment and labour market inclusion of people with disabilities. The chapter will summarize only those measures which could have direct effect on the labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities.

#### **1.1 Legal Instruments**

A number of legal instruments at EU and international level together comprise the legal scope for action and legislation-shaping the integration of disadvantaged people at national level. This study will focus on the European Employment Directive, the State Aid Regulation and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability in relation, particularly regarding labour integration of people with disabilities.

##### **1.1.1 The European Employment Directive**

The Council Directive, establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation or the European Employment Directive was issued on 27 November 2000. The Directive prohibits any "direct or indirect discrimination" (Chapter 1, Art. 2) on the grounds of "religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as regards employment and occupation" (Chapter 1, Art. 1).

The Directive also obliges employers to provide "reasonable accommodation" to persons with disabilities (Council of the European Union, 2000). It specifies the meaning of reasonable accommodation as "appropriate measures, taken by employers where needed to enable a person with a disability to have access to, participate in, or advance in employment, or to undergo training, unless such

measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer". The Directive clarifies that this burden shall not be disproportionate when it is sufficiently remedied by measures existing within the framework of the disability policy of the Member State concerned (Ch. 1, Art. 5).

It also obliges Member States "in accordance with their national traditions and practice" to take adequate measures to promote dialogue between the social partners with a view to fostering equal treatment, including through the monitoring of workplace practices, collective agreements, codes of conduct and through research or exchange of experiences and good practices (Council of the European Union, 2000). Art. 14 of Chapter 2 binds the Member States to encourage dialogue with appropriate nongovernmental organisations which have a legitimate interest in contributing to the fight against discrimination with a view to promoting the principle of equal treatment.

#### 1.1.2 State Aid Regulation

State Aid Regulation, the latest draft of which was introduced by the Commission in October 2007, aims to reduce overall aid levels, which could hamper the fair competition within the EU, and simultaneously to facilitate a better targeting of state aid towards measures that really contribute to the Lisbon objectives of boosting economic growth and creating jobs.

It contains a separate Section 8 "Aid for disadvantaged and disabled workers" through which it promotes the recruitment and retention of disabled workers. The Regulation obliges Member States to create financial incentives for employers and to provide, where appropriate, specialised workshops to recruit and retain them (European Commission, 2007).

#### 1.1.3 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The UN Convention on the rights of persons with a disability was adopted in 2006 and entered into force on 3 May 2008. The condition for receiving "moral legal" (though no sanction) power was its ratification than at least 20 UN member countries.

Among the basic principles of the Convention are "full and effective participation and inclusion in society" and "equality of opportunity" (United Nations, 2006). Its Article 27 proclaims that "States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market



and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.”

The same article prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment. It also promotes vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities. Article 27 stands for equal treatment and opportunities for persons with disabilities in all forms of employment.

## **1.2 Policy Instruments**

In addition to the legally binding instruments, different policy shaping instruments related to labour integration of persons with disabilities have also been adopted.

This study will summarize a number of them, including the Open Method of Coordination, European Disability Strategy, Active Inclusion of People Furthest from the Labour Market, Green Paper on the Modernization of Labour Law and Council of Europe Disability Action Plan.

### 1.2.1 Open Method of Coordination

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was introduced at the Lisbon European Council of March 2000 in order to provide a framework of political coordination without legal constraints, so called “soft law”. In this framework Member States agree to identify and promote their most effective policies in the fields of social protection and social inclusion with the aim of learning from each others’ experiences. The OMC is also the engine of the European Employment Strategy to which the Second Chapter of Part I is devoted.

### 1.2.2 European Disability Strategy

The European Disability Strategy 2003 – 2010 was introduced in the Commission Communication "Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities - A European Action Plan" in October 2003. This reflects the fact that the European Community is a signatory to the UN Convention of the rights of People with Disabilities, and is based on four pillars: 1. EU antidiscrimination legislation and measures; 2. Mainstreaming of disability issues; 3. Accessibility; and 4. Mobilising stakeholders through dialogue.

The Strategy is organized around bi-annual action plans. The goal of the Action Plan is to mainstream disability issues into relevant

Community policies and develop concrete actions in crucial areas to enhance the integration of people with disabilities. The 2008-2009 Disability Action Plan sets two main priorities:

- Actions for inclusive participation through accessibility and
- Actions towards full enjoyment of fundamental rights.

Labour integration of people with disabilities is an object of the first priority under the title "Fostering accessibility of the labour market". The Action Plan underlines the necessity of a comprehensive approach to increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities through a combination of flexible employment schemes, supported employment, active inclusion, and positive measures complementing the existing European legislation on non-discrimination (European Commission, 2003).

### 1.2.3 Active Inclusion of People Furthest from the Labour Market

A public consultation on active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market was launched by the Commission in February 2006. It was focused on possible further action at EU level, including a strengthened Open Method of Coordination, the establishment of common principles, social dialogue, legislation and the use of financial instruments to help and promote the rights and access to services needed for the integration of excluded people. The aim was to ensure that social protection policies effectively contribute to mobilising people who are capable of working while achieving the wider objective of providing a decent living standard to those who are and will remain outside the labour market.

Based on the results of this first-stage consultation the Commission called in 2007 for a renewed commitment to social justice by proposing a new, holistic approach to tackling poverty and promoting inclusion of people furthest from the labour market (European Commission, 2007). The new strategy for "active inclusion", which is taking shape through a second stage wide-ranging public consultation, is a key element of the European Social Agenda. 2007 Communication is built on 3 main pillars:

- Minimum income schemes
- Inclusive labour markets
- Access to quality social services

#### 1.2.4 Green Paper on the Modernization of Labour Law

The Green Paper on the Modernization of Labour Law, published on 22 November 2006, launched a public debate in the EU on how labour law can evolve to support the Lisbon Strategy's objective of achieving sustainable growth with more and better jobs. It looks at the role labour law might play in advancing a "flexicurity" agenda in support of a labour market which is fairer, more responsive and more inclusive.

"Vulnerable workers" and their better labour integration are also an object of the Green Paper (European Commission. 2007).

#### 1.2.5 Council of Europe Disability Action Plan

The Council of Europe Disability Action Plan, adopted by the Committee of Ministers at the Council on 5 April 2006, includes an action line on employment – "Action line No. 5: Employment, vocational guidance and training".

The document states that "improving the employment situation of disabled people would not only benefit the disabled persons but also employers and society as a whole" (Council of Europe, 2006).

It also underlines the important role that vocational guidance and assistance play in helping people to "identify activities for which they are best suited and to guide training needs or future occupation" (Council of Europe, 2006). The Action line seeks to form the basis for greater participation of persons with disabilities in employment, to ensure career choices and to lay the foundations through structures and support in order to ensure real choices. It identifies the following objectives: 1. to promote the employment of people with disabilities within the open labour market by combining antidiscrimination and positive action measures in order to ensure that people with disabilities have equality of opportunity and 2. to tackle discrimination and promote participation of people with disabilities in vocational assessment, guidance, training, and employment-related services. The Plan lists 27 specific actions (See Annex I) to be undertaken by the Member States in order to achieve the set objectives.

### **1.3 Financial Instruments**

These legal and policy instruments cannot be put into practice without sufficient financial means. The European Union has been providing financial support for implementation on labour policy to its Member States through the Structural Funds and more precisely the European Social Fund and the Progress programme.

The new Life Long Learning Programme provides financial support for education and training activities.

Last but not least the EQUAL initiative played an important role for creation of equal opportunities in the labour market and discrimination fighting between 2001 and 2007.

#### **1.3.1 European Social Fund (ESF)**

The European Social Fund (ESF) is one of the European Union's Structural Funds. It was created in 1957 as the Union's main financial instrument, supporting employment and helping people enhance their education and skills. The ESF is also a means for achieving the main Lisbon strategy objective for more and better jobs.

The ESF has identified four key areas of action:

- Increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises;
- Enhancing access to employment and participation in the labour market;
- Reinforcing social inclusion by combating discrimination and facilitating access to the labour market for disadvantaged people;
- Promoting partnership for reform in the fields of employment and inclusion.

ESF funding is available only through the Member States and regions and not directly from Brussels.

Over the period 2007-2013 some EUR 75 billion will be distributed to the EU Member States and regions in the ESF framework (European Commission).

#### **1.3.2 PROGRESS**

Progress is the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity. It has been established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the fields of employment and social affairs, as set out in the Commission Communication on the Social Agenda (European Commission, 2005), and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy. PROGRESS supports the implementation of the European Employment Strategy as well as:

- the improvement of the working environment and working conditions, including health and safety at work and reconciling work and family life;
- the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality and promotes gender mainstreaming in all Community policies;
- the implementation of the open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of social protection and inclusion;
- the effective implementation of the principle of non-discrimination and promotes its mainstreaming in all Community policies (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2006).

### 1.3.3 Life Long Learning Programme

The new Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission with a budget of nearly EUR 7 billion for 2007 to 2013 has replaced the existing education, vocational training and e-Learning programmes, which ended in 2006 (European Commission).

Through its four sub-programmes - Comenius (for schools), Erasmus (for higher education), Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational education and training) and Grundtvig (for adult education) - Lifelong Learning Programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe.

The Leonardo Da Vinci sub-programme is most closely related to the subject of this study. It focuses on the teaching and training needs and transnational mobility of those involved in vocational education and training. Thus it gives also an opportunity to the staff at the services, mediating employment process and/or providing jobs to persons with intellectual disabilities to visit other EU Member States, to exchange practices and acquire knowledge.

### 1.3.4 EQUAL

The EQUAL Initiative was launched in 2001 and continued to 2007. It contributed to the development of even stronger transnational cooperation between Regions and Member States in the new ESF during 2007. EQUAL was related again to the European Employment Strategy and the Social inclusion process. Its mission was to promote a better model for working life by fighting discrimination and exclusion on the basis of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The EU contribution to EQUAL of 3.274 billion EUR was matched by national funding (European Commission).

There is a large variety of EU and International legally binding, policy and financial instruments in support of the labour integration of persons with disabilities.

The European Employment Directive and the State Aid Regulation set the scene for harmonizing legislation in the EU Member States for better and full labour integration of persons with disabilities whereas the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with the Disabilities expand the scope internationally.

The policy instruments which have been presented make clear references to labour integration of persons with disabilities to enforce the need for the Member States to make real changes.

In addition the EU has provided significant financial means through its funds and programmes to the Member States to enable them to put its labour integration related legislation and policies into force.

Therefore there is a sufficient legislative, policy and financial framework on the international and the EU level for obliging and stimulating the Member States to take a decisive action and create jobs for persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities.

## **2. European Employment Strategy and the Lisbon Process**

The European Employment Strategy (EES) was launched at the Luxembourg Jobs Summit in November 1997 as primary and by which the European Council aimed to tackle high unemployment in the EU (European Commission, 2007).

The scene had previously been set by the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. The Treaty spelled out the commitment to achieve a high level of employment as one of the key objectives of the European Union, put an emphasis on the employment as an issue of "common concern" and on the principle of "mainstreaming" employment policy. The Treaty also obliged Member States and the Community to work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment. Its new Article 128 TEC instituted a framework for developing national employment policies on the basis of shared European priorities and interests.

As a result the Luxembourg Jobs Summit launched the implementation of the new, open method of co-ordination introduced by Article 128 TEC and endorsed the first set of Employment Guidelines. These guidelines were presented under four integrated strands of action, or the so-called pillars of the Employment Guidelines: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunities.

Three years later, at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the Union started the so called Lisbon strategy setting the ambitious goal to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, by 2010. This had an impact on the EES as well, refocusing its target from reducing unemployment to creating conditions for full employment.

After a revision of the first five years of the EES the 2003 Employment Guidelines were therefore articulated on the three overarching priorities of full employment, quality in work and social inclusion, as well as a number of newly defined targets. Later that year, a taskforce headed by Wim Kok, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, was charged with carrying out an independent in-depth examination of key employment related policy challenges. The taskforce report ("Jobs, Jobs, Jobs – Creating more employment in Europe") presented the main challenges and priorities for increasing employment in Europe: increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises; making work a real option for all through strengthening active labour market policies and targeting more vulnerable groups, investing in human capital and improving governance for employment by mobilising all actors in society. The findings of the report inspired the 2004 Employment recommendations to Member States (covering the ten new Member States as well) and were mainstreamed in the 2005 Employment Guidelines.

The next milestone in the shaping of the EES was in early 2005 with the revamping of the Lisbon Strategy which made the delivery of stronger, lasting growth and more and better jobs its main priority. It was a result of the new pressure on the European social model, caused by the aging population and the decline in economic performance. The consequences for the EES were a complete revision of its governance in order to improve the harmonization between the actions and policies at Community and national level and to make them more efficient.

The first step in achieving these targets was the approval by the European Council of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008). The Employment Guidelines, reduced from ten to eight, have become part of the overall Lisbon Strategy package of 24 guidelines. The Guidelines are presented in conjunction with the macroeconomic and microeconomic guidelines for a period of three years.

They are grouped under three priorities, identified by the European Employment Taskforce established in 2003. The first priority is to attract and retain more people in employment and increase labour supply and modernise social protection systems. The second is an improvement of the adaptability of workers

and enterprises and the third is to increase investment in human capital through better education and skills.

The three-year reporting cycle is based on the Employment Guidelines, National Reform Programmes, Joint Employment Report, Recommendations and the EU Annual Progress Report. The EES uses an "open method of co-ordination", based on five key principles: subsidiarity (balance between European Union level and the Member States), convergence (concerted action), mutual learning (exchanging of good practice), integrated approach (structural reforms also extend to social, educational, tax, enterprise and regional policies) and management by objectives. It relies on quantifiable measurements, targets and benchmarks, to allow for a proper monitoring and evaluation of progress.

The indicators are a support for the analysis of the National Reform Programmes and will inform the EU annual progress report which will integrate the Joint Employment Report. They are agreed in the Employment Committee (EMCO) on an annual basis in co-operation with the Employment Committee's working group on Indicators, representing the Member States. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities co-operates to a large extent with Eurostat in update and reliability checks of databases.

The concept of flexicurity as a new way of looking at flexibility and security on the labour market has a core position in the EES as well (European Commission, 2007).

The EES envisages not only the economic but also the social role of employment. The progressively aging population of the EU needs a higher number of workforces to finance social spending. Employment also guarantees social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, including people in disadvantaged situations, and diminishes the costs of their social allowances and compensations.

I will go through the different components of the EES, applied to Belgium and Bulgaria, starting with a more detailed explanation of the Flexicurity concept.



## **2.1 Flexicurity**

In its communication "Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security" the Commission describes flexicurity as a "comprehensive approach to labour market policy which combines sufficient flexibility in contractual arrangements" – to allow firms and employees to cope with change - with the provision of security for workers to stay in their jobs or be able to find a new one quickly with the assurance of an adequate state provided income in between jobs (European Commission, 2007).

The Communication, based on extensive consultations with key stakeholders, identifies the main flexicurity policy areas (flexicurity components) and sets out proposals for eight common flexicurity principles (see Annex III), including supporting gender equality and promoting equal opportunities for all.

The Communication also presents four typical "pathways" (see Annex III) for Member States to develop their own flexicurity strategies suited to their national challenges, analysed by a Group of Experts on flexicurity and its rapporteur, Professor Ton Wilthagen.

Clear reference to the situation of people with disabilities is made in Pathways 3 and 4. Pathway 3: "Tackling skills and opportunity gaps among the workforce" promotes opportunities of low-skilled people to enter into employment and develop their skills in order to obtain a sustainable position at the labour market.

Pathway 4 "Improving opportunities for benefit recipients and informally employed workers" concentrates on the development of effective active labour market policies and lifelong learning systems combined with an adequate level of unemployment benefits. It recommends facilitation of conditions for the integration of people with disabilities into labour markets and improvement of portability of social security entitlements in order to encourage on one hand people on benefits who can work to look for jobs and on the other hand employers to create new jobs.

## **2.2 Employment Guidelines**

The Employment Guidelines set out common priorities for Member States' employment policies. They are proposed by the European Commission in compliance with the Spring European Council conclusions and adopted by the Council of Ministers. The first set of employment guidelines was introduced at the Luxembourg Jobs Summit in November 1997. They were organized around four pillars: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunities (European Commission).

The Guidelines outline the common priorities for the Member States' employment policies. In 2005 they were included in the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs. The Guidelines may be adjusted each year in line with the provisions of the Treaty. The national programmes may also be amended by the Member States to take account of domestic policy requirements.

In its Communication "Disability mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy" the Commission emphasizes the potential of the Employment Guidelines for 2005-2008 for disability mainstreaming (European Commission, 2007). They are almost literally repeated in the new guidelines for 2008-2010. The Guidelines identify three core objectives: achieving full employment, improving quality and productivity at work and strengthening social and territorial cohesion. Each of these guidelines can be used for creating more jobs for people with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities (see Annex II).

### **2.3 National Reform Programmes**

Every Member State should prepare a programme in which it explains how the Commission Guidelines are going to be designed and implemented nationally (European Commission). The National Reform Programmes should be the result of a national debate involving competent parliamentary bodies and the social partners, in accordance with the traditions of each of the Member States. Until 2005, the employment parts of these programmes were known as National Action Plans for Employment.

These parts in the National Reform Programmes of Belgium and Bulgaria are an object of the current study which will try to ascertain whether the Commission guidelines have been implemented properly.

#### **2.3.1. Belgium**

In the National Lisbon Reform Programme 2005 – 2008 of **Belgium** integrates well all the Employment Guidelines. It however does not mention disability issues and opportunities for people with disabilities under each of them (Belgian Federal Government, 2005) .

The National Lisbon Reform Programme defines six tracks<sup>3</sup> for more growth and more jobs aiming at welfare and social protection. Only one of them however makes possible reference to labour integration of people with disabilities. Track "(3) reforming the labour market and investing in training" envisages particular

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<sup>3</sup> As defined in the "National Lisbon Reform Programme 2005 – 2008"

attention to “such target groups as the long-term unemployed, migrants and benefit recipients”.

Six main lines<sup>4</sup> of the reform priorities are identified for Flanders on the employment level, one of which indirectly refers to persons with disabilities: “Promote the participation of migrants and *other underprivileged groups in the labour market*” (Belgian Federal Government, 2005).

There is no clear reference to the problem among the five priority actions<sup>5</sup> recognized within the Wallonia region; nor among the two priority goals<sup>6</sup>, determined for the Brussels Capital Region under the Lisbon strategy, one of which is related to the object of this study: “*Fight discrimination based on sex, origin or disability when hiring workers*”.

The programme contains as well the four “lines of force”<sup>7</sup> of the reform priorities for employment and training. As it can be seen from the provided information only the priorities of the Brussels Capital Region make clear reference to people with disabilities and highlight the importance of the fight with their discrimination. The promotion of the participation of migrants and other underprivileged groups in the labour market, included in the priorities of the Flanders region could also be recognized as friendly to people with disabilities even if it does not name them concretely. But the priorities of Wallonia do not refer directly to this group at all.

The programme further makes a statement that more people must join the Belgian labour market so as to maintain economic growth, bolster social cohesion, and safeguard the financial sustainability of social security. It admits that “job creation has been insufficient in Belgium in the past, even when the overall context was positive” and makes the conclusion that “challenges are of such magnitude as to require structural reform” (Belgian Federal Government, 2005).

The programme also refers to flexicurity. According to it companies must be offered sufficient flexibility in their personnel policy while guaranteeing workers a high level of protection. However people with disabilities are not specifically included among the potential beneficiaries of the flexicurity approach.

Chapter 3 “Good Jobs for all, young and old” reformulates the main priorities for the whole country, including also “the integration of certain risk groups into the labour market”.

The same chapter contains a section on inclusion and social aspects of employment. Section 3.3. “An inclusive labour market in an inclusive society” uses

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<sup>4</sup> As defined in the “National Lisbon Reform Programme 2005 – 2008”

<sup>5</sup> As defined in the “National Lisbon Reform Programme 2005 – 2008”

<sup>6</sup> As defined in the “National Lisbon Reform Programme 2005 – 2008”

<sup>7</sup> As defined in the “National Lisbon Reform Programme 2005 – 2008”

as a starting point the assumption that obstacles to employment for many workers or certain categories of people constitute "a major social problem in Belgium". According to the federal government however "employment is not enough in and of itself: the Belgian social model aims to provide sufficient social protection for *all those who are unable to join the employment market and to be attentive to their social inclusion.*"

In the subsection 3.3.2. "Opportunities for less-favored groups" it is underlined that every opportunity "*must* be seized if Belgium is to increase the employment rate". And it continues with the proclamation that the employment services of the communities and the regions have adopted a mainstreaming policy that consists of "guaranteeing equal opportunity for access to their services, in particular for job-seekers who are difficult to place, i.e. *the disabled*, unskilled, long-term unemployed and migrants".

"Making work pay" (European Commission Employment Guidelines, Guideline (21) approach is also presented but again without referring to people with disabilities.

Subsection 3.3.6. "A labour market for a social society" reflects the Open Coordination Methods for Social Inclusion, Pensions and Healthcare in its statement that "a policy of more and better jobs must be geared to a better society, with a high level of social protection".

The authorities plan to develop efficient cooperation between the local social welfare services and the employment services of the regions and the communities. The programme emphasizes the importance of the social economy in the Belgian policy mix and sets an aim of creating jobs for "*less favored groups*" (Belgian Federal Government, 2005) while meeting unattended social needs, in particular by creating neighborhood and local (or "proximity") services. In connection to this it enhances the federal government's intention to create some 20,000 additional jobs by the end of 2007, including 2,000 for people on subsistence income.

Under Subsection 3.4.2. "Acquisition and recognition of skills" the federal authorities declare that "special attention will be paid to bridging the digital divide, so as to facilitate the integration of the more disadvantaged members of society".

### 2.3.2 Bulgaria

In its National Reform Programme (2007 – 2009), Bulgaria sets overarching medium-term targets for sustainable growth of GDP at a rate of 6% per year; an unemployment level of 61%; and narrowing the income gap with the rest of the European Union (Bulgarian Government, 2007). In order to achieve them the country focuses on five challenges as a matter of priority (see Annex V)

The programme lists the actions which will be undertaken in order to ensure the achievement of each of these priorities. Activities, related to labour integration are grouped around “Challenge 5: Activating labour supply”. The implementation of three main measures is envisaged in the programme. The first one is the continuation of the implementation of the National Reform Programme “From Unemployment Benefits to Employment” and it aims to guarantee employment to two groups: 1. long-term unemployed who live only from unemployment benefits and 2. persons who work in the grey economy sector without a contract and besides their wage take advantage of the state unemployment benefits.

People with disabilities are not an object of this measure but of the second one - implementation of the measures envisaged in the Law on Employment Promotion. The programme informs that although the number of unemployed in Bulgaria has been decreasing in the last few years, the share of unemployed among certain groups remains high: young persons, disabled persons, persons in pre-retirement age and persons with low educational attainment (Bulgarian Government, 2007). The target of this measure is to provide employment to 24 061 persons and training to 23 200 persons in 2007. A total of EUR 17.08 million from the state budget is meant for its implementation in 2007-2009 under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The third measure is the implementation of the National Programme „Assistants to Disabled People”.

Further the Programme describes the policy measures to meet the four priority actions of the 2006 Spring European Council. Under the third priority action: “Improving the employment opportunities for the priority categories (target groups)” the National Reform Programme defines as a main goal the increase of employment as a “source of higher incomes and effective integration on the labour market of persons from disadvantaged groups, incl. unemployed young people, women and persons over 50 years of age; *disabled persons* and persons from the minority groups”. The main policies in this area include the promotion of the life cycle approach to work to stimulate the activity and the adaptability of the labour force through the different stages of work life.

The National Reform Programme includes Specific measures concerning the flexicurity, mentioning the Ordinance on the Structure and the Organization of Wages, adopted by the Council of Ministries and expected to enter into force on 01.07.2007. The application of this Ordinance, drawn up with the participation of the social partners, is meant to regulate the elements of wages, including the types of extra labour remunerations. It is also declared that measures will be taken to encourage employers to hire unemployed persons with permanent disabilities for fixed-term, seasonal or hourly work.

Further the programme envisages special measures to encourage employers to employ unemployed persons with permanent disabilities for fixed-term, seasonal or hourly work. According to the data, provided in the programme, the unemployment rate of the persons with permanent disabilities is relatively high (13.5% in 2005). The measure aims to ensure employment opportunities to 545 persons and training for professional qualification acquisition for 40 people in 2007. The measure is planned to be fulfilled through the implementation of the National Programme for Employment and Vocational Training of Persons with Permanent Disabilities. The Programme foresees the provision of employment to working-age people with permanent disabilities through employment in integrated work environments (Bulgarian Government, 2007).

#### **2.4. Joint Employment Report**

The Joint Employment Report is adopted by the Commission and Council, which reviews the progress made at both national and community levels in response to the Employment Guidelines (European Commission). Since 2005, the Joint Employment Report constitutes the employment chapter of the EU Annual Progress Report on the Lisbon Strategy. This study will focus only on the Joint Employment Report for 2007/2008 since Bulgaria only joined the EU in the middle of the previous period.

The summary of the Report contains its essence: "Harvesting the first fruits of reform but concerns remain" (European Commission, 2007). The Commission and the Council find it very encouraging that about half of the Member States have now developed or are developing comprehensive flexicurity approaches but the performance within the various underlying components is less positive. The report states that 2006 saw employment intensive growth for the first time in almost a decade. Nearly 4 million new jobs were created during the period and unemployment reached the lowest levels in years. Another positive development, according to the data, was the decline in structural unemployment. Although the

employment rate climbed to 64.3% in general, it was only 50% with people with disabilities and thus they remained a “potentially large untapped resource of additional labour supply” (European Commission, 2007).

The report states that in 2007 in the framework of the open method of coordination in social protection and social inclusion, Member States have continued focusing their policies on fighting and preventing child poverty and promoting the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market through an approach combining income support with activation policies.

The Report recommends social protection reforms, with the adequacy of social benefits linked to employment activity and defines this as a “pre-condition for a well functioning flexicurity approach” (European Commission, 2007).

It also states that efforts have increased in integrating people at the margins of the labour market and in an "active inclusion" approach. Bulgaria is pointed out as one of the countries where subsidies are given to employers to hire disabled people and to adapt their workplace to their needs.

The report highlights the need of combining the labour market policies with an active inclusion strategy to combat poverty. It underlines the great importance of increasing employment rates of older workers, young people, the foreign-born, and *persons with a disability* if Europe is to successfully include people outside the labour market and counter-balance the effects of an ageing population.

## **2.5 Country Specific Recommendations**

The Council adopts, following a proposal by the Commission, country-specific recommendations on employment policies which need to be considered by Member States in drawing up their National Reform Programmes (European Commission).

According to the report for the 2005-2007 period *Belgium* has made good progress in implementing its National Reform Programme (European Commission, 2007).

Regarding disability related issues the Commission recommends continuing the implementation of the measures to increase the employment rate for older workers and vulnerable groups, monitoring their impact and, if need be, taking further activation measures.

The assessment for *Bulgaria* concludes that, overall, the National Reform Programme focuses on the right challenges, but “in some areas lacks concrete and substantial measures” (European Commission, 2007). The report indicates that it is particularly important for Bulgaria to accelerate the implementation of its National Reform Programme in order to create the necessary conditions for sustainable

growth and jobs in the medium to longer term. It identifies the following policy areas in the Bulgarian National Reform Programme where challenges need to be tackled with the highest priority and budgetary impacts of measures and details on the monitoring and evaluation procedures: administrative capacity; macro-economic imbalances; red tape; and the functioning of the labour market. The report also recommends that Bulgaria completes the lifelong learning strategy and increases participation.

## **2.6 Annual Progress Report**

In the Annual Progress Report the Commission reviews progress made at both national and Community levels, based on regular monitoring and on evaluation of the implementation of the Member states national programmes.

### **2.6.1 Belgium**

In its Report on the progress made by Belgium during 2007 the Commission marks an advance related to encouraging adaptability in the labour market, including diversity plans, one-to-one coaching, and concentration of older workers and vulnerable groups in active labour market policies (European Commission, 2007). The Commission suggests that further reductions of the tax burden on low wages may improve the integration of outsiders and underlines that this is “a necessary policy response to Belgium's challenges in this area”.

Regarding the flexicurity approach the Commission refers to the recent policy initiatives such as a rebalancing between social security and active labour market policies (European Commission, 2007). It however adds that overall Belgium is not yet addressing flexicurity in a fully integrated way; measures to tackle segmentation remain at the conceptual stage. Although the National Reform Programme underlines the importance for Belgium of enhancing participation in lifelong learning to foster flexibility and security in the labour market, opportunities for lifelong learning should be improved, particularly in-company training (European Commission, 2007).

The Report highlights the success of Belgium in implementing measures to deliver on the employment policy commitments, expressed in its National Reform Programme, between 2005 and 2007. It also draws the attention to the “first important package of measures” (European Commission, 2007) which have been taken towards increasing the employment rate of older workers and vulnerable



groups. The Commission emphasizes the need of monitoring checking whether further measures are required.

In addition it concludes that Belgium requires a comprehensive labour market strategy to improve the performance of the labour market across the territory (European Commission, 2007).

### 2.6.2 Bulgaria

According to the Commission in 2007 Bulgaria faced increased labour shortages as a result of fast growth, strong job creation, outward migration and insufficient skill levels in specific sectors (European Commission, 2007). The employment rates however remained low and structural unemployment relatively high and the report assumes that there is "still a large source of untapped labour" (European Commission, 2007). It also reminds that activating the labour supply and improving access to and quality of education and training are rightly addressed as main priorities in the National Reform Programme.

The Commission notes that labour market policies focus on activating vulnerable groups and increasing literacy among low-skilled persons. It however also warns that sustainable economic growth is at risk if further measures are not taken to put into place an integrated active labour market policy approach. The report underlines that although some initial measures have been taken, there has been limited progress to reform the design and scope of active labour market policies as employment programmes tend to create predominantly subsidised low-skilled jobs providing little opportunity to increase workers' employability through training.

It highlights the need of further efforts to assess, analyse and improve the effectiveness, efficiency and adequacy of active policies. In addition the report notes that more sustainable and integrated policies are necessary to encourage people to participate in the labour market and remain in employment through further opportunities for vocational training and through more far-reaching youth employment policies facilitating school-to-work transition.

Another area to which the country should take the initiative is strengthening the capacity of labour market institutions to implement policies and adequately deliver employment services (European Commission, 2007). The Commission ascertains that there have not been foreseen further actions to address the need for strengthening the capacity of the National Employment Agency and improve its effectiveness, including its role in unemployment prevention.

It acknowledges also the necessity of the adoption and the implementation of a comprehensive and coherent life-long learning strategy to increase participation levels while encouraging employers to invest in training.

The report assumes that the already adopted legislative amendments are first steps towards introducing a flexicurity approach in Bulgaria but emphasizes that an integrated approach must be further elaborated (European Commission, 2007). It draws the attention as well to the involvement of social partners in all policy areas and particularly in life-long learning where their role “has been weak” (European Commission, 2007).

The Commission concludes that Bulgaria has made some initial progress in the employment policy field but despite the current trend of falling unemployment the country needs to take more integrated and better-sequenced approach to increase activity and employment in the formal economy for all; ensures correspondence between skills and labour market needs; and raises the skills potential of the labour force.

European institutions have constructed the policy framework for creation of “more and better jobs” through the enhanced European employment strategy, the Lisbon process and the monitoring and regulating the implementation measures in the Member States. Moreover the European Commission has taken the initiative to support the Member States with recommendations for the sufficient usage of its employment guidelines for ensuring full social inclusion of people with disabilities.

The National Reform Programmes of Belgium and Bulgaria have adopted the Employment Guidelines - Belgium more fully than Bulgaria – and have made references to people with disabilities.

The need for more concrete action towards job creation in the case of Bulgaria is underlined in the Commission specific recommendations in its 2005-2007 report while Belgium is considered to have made good progress in its programme implementation and is recommended to continue in the same direction and to take further measures in case of necessity.

The Annual Progress Report for Belgium also emphasizes the success of the country in implementing measures to deliver on the employment policy commitments, and mentions the package of measures which have been adopted and implemented in order to increase labour participation of vulnerable groups. It draws the attention to other problematic areas as the need to improve the performance of the labour market across the territory.

The Report for Bulgaria highlights the need of strengthening the capacity of its employment institutions, of involving more stakeholders in the employment

process and of providing vocational training as well as encouraging employers to invest in training. These findings are supported by the overview of the labour systems in the two countries, presented bellow.

## **II. LABOUR INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES – THEORY INTO PRACTICE**

### **1. Good Practices of Labour integration of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in Belgium – the Flanders Region Model**

After presenting the legal, policy and financial framework at the EU and international level and the European Employment Strategy this study will focus on their practical implementation in one of the EU Member States – Belgium. The federal system of Belgium is more complicated, being comprised of three regions – Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia. Each of them has its own regional government and employment system. This study will present the employment model and good practices of labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities in the Flanders region on the basis of interviews conducted with representatives of the Belgian and Bulgarian authorities and of the three Flemish NGOs.

#### **1.1 Definition of “Model of Good Practice”**

Before going further however it is necessary to define the model of good practice. The book “Hop Skip Jump - Through Stakeholder Cooperation Towards Empowerment and Employment” (Multinational Team of Stakeholders, 2007) proposes the following definition for a model of good practice: “Good practice can be described as learning from other organizations that have developed successful projects or approaches to problems. Based on this description models of good practice can be defined as examples of successful projects or approaches to problems which allow other organizations to learn from them”. The main criteria for a good practice in this study therefore will be:

- finding a match between the individual employment preferences of persons with intellectual disabilities and the labour market
- finding a match between the skills and capacity of the employees with intellectual disabilities and employers’ expectations
- stakeholder involvement and building a network around the person with intellectual disability to support him/her in his/her labour integration.

## 1.2 Flemish Labour System – an Overview

The labour system of Flanders region is organised at both federal and regional level. The federal institutions are responsible for labour law and social security, including unemployment benefits and reductions on social security contributions. There are two agencies, functioning at this level - the Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening (RVA), the National Employment Office and the Rijksdienst voor Sociale Zekerheid (RSZ), the Office for Social Security Contributions. The Activa measure, which will be presented below, is arranged by the second agency.

The Flemish Administration is organized in clusters of departments and agencies which belong to separate policy field such as employment, education, etc. Four departments operate within the field of "Werk en Sociale Economie" (Work and Social Economy). They are the "Departement Werk en Sociale Economie", Department of Work and Social economy, responsible for policy development and evaluation; the "Vlaams Subsidieagentschap voor Werk en Sociale Economie", the Flemish Subsidy Agency; the "Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming - Syntra Vlaanderen", the Agency for Independent Workers and the "Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB)", which is the Flemish Public Employment Service.

The "Vlaams Agentschap voor Personen met een Handicap (VAPH - former abbreviation VFSIPH), the Flemish Agency for Social Integration of Disabled Persons, operates within the field of Social Welfare, Health and the Family (Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin).

The two institutions which have been most closely related to the labour integration of person with disabilities are the VAPH and the VDAB with its local branches of over 100 local job shops.

All the jobseekers that do not find a job after a few months or have special needs are entitled to help from an advisor for pathways to work (trajectbegeleider). Most of the advisors are employed by the VDAB and people with disabilities can use their services but when they have special needs, they are referred to these pathway-advisors. They work within the VDAB but are employed by a special agency, the "Dienst voor Gespecialiseerde Trajectbegeleiding" (GTB, formerly ATB).

This study will provide special attention to the area of activities of GTB bellow, in section 2.1.

Until March 2006, all the special employment services for the disabled were funded by the VAPH, but from then on the VDAB took over that task, except for the funding of sheltered employment which was transferred to the "Vlaams Subsidieagentschap voor Werk en Sociale Economie". Currently the VAPH is still

responsible for the determination of the eligibility of persons to special services in the field of work but from October 2008 this function will move to VDAB as well. The main reason for these changes was a move towards a more inclusive policy. The idea is that disability matters should be part of the responsibilities of the departments that deal with a specific subject matter and not within a separate agency or department that deals with everything (as was the case with the VAPH). This move towards a more inclusive policy started in 2006 and will be accomplished in October 2008.

Every person who is looking for a job can register with the VDAB. Most of the jobseekers receive unemployment benefits from the RVA, but there are also jobseekers with disability benefits. VDAB monitors the process of job seeking through regular meetings with the person and if it becomes clear that he/she is not actively looking for a job, it informs the RVA and the person can lose the benefits. For most jobseekers with disabilities the monitoring is done by the GTK pathway-advisor.

### **1.3 Employment Stimulating Measures for People with Disabilities**

Several employment programmes for special groups, such as the long term unemployed and young jobseekers, are organized at the federal level. All the special programmes for the disabled are organized at regional level.<sup>8</sup>

Persons with a disability can acquire recognition by the VAPH and take advantage of a number of employment stimulating programmes, providing incentives to employers. The usual approach however is first to look at the potential employee as a non-disabled person and try to figure out whether he/she is a long-term unemployed, older person etc. and the employer could take an advantage from this kind of subsidies. Then the attention focuses on the disability and on the possibilities for additional subsidies.

Four kinds of subsidies stimulate the employment of persons with disabilities:

1. Two types of wage subsidies – Collectieve ArbeidsOvereenkomst 26 (CAO 26, Collective wage agreement 26) and the "Vlaamse InschakelingsPremie" (VIP) (presented in detail below)

2. Two types of subsidies for adaptation of the working environment – provided to the employer for arranging accessibility of the working place and

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<sup>8</sup> In fact it is even a bit more complicated that this, because there are "regional competencies" such as support in job seeking and other competencies, such as vocational training, are at the level of the communities (Flemish, French, German). The distinction between 'region' and 'community' should not bother us here, because in Flanders both go together and there is only one Flemish Government (the situation differs in Brussels and in the Walloon part of Belgium).

provided to the employee for the purchase of the necessary equipment to enable him/her doing the job despite his/her disability. After finishing the job, the employee takes this equipment with him/herself.

3. Interpreter for hard of hearing and deaf people

4. Travel expenses to the job and back are reimbursed for people with disabilities, often completely.

The wage subsidies and the federal ACTIVA programme are presented below in more detail.

### 1.3.1 Wage Subsidies

There are two programmes under which employers can receive wage subsidies – the VIP and the CAO26.

In the framework of the *CAO26* programme the employer who hires a person with a disability, recognized by the VAPH, can receive a subsidy from 5% to 50% of the total labour costs. There is a long procedure to identify the exact percentage of loss of productivity and its accuracy is subject to a yearly check. This measure is temporary, the employer who hires the person with a disability gets the subsidy for one year but it is renewable and nearly always gets renewed.

Under the *VIP* programme the employer can have a 30% subsidy, calculated on the base of the minimum wage in the sector.

The VIP is entitled to the person with a disability for the rest of his/her life, and for every employer within the private sector.

It is the employer who decides which of the two programmes to apply for after receiving sufficient information from a job coach. The exact percentage of the subsidy in the CAO26 programme is determined by an inspector from the Federal Inspectorate of Social Law (*Inspectie van de Sociale Wetten*). In most cases the inspectors agree with a percentage that is proposed by a specialist from the VDAB.

The two programmes will be influenced by the forthcoming changes as well. From October 2008 they will merge into a single programme: the "Vlaamse Ondersteunings Premie – VOP". The new programme will provide one wage subsidy, based on the total labour cost. During the first year of employment the employer will get 40% of the total labour cost, during the second, third and fourth year - 30%, and from the fifth year on it will be 20%. This basic scheme will for most disabled people be unlimited in time, but for some there may be a re-evaluation of the entitlement after a number of years. An employer will have the option to ask for a higher subsidy with an upper limit of 60%. That higher percentage will always be

set for a certain period but will be renewable. The bottom limit will never be lower than 20%.

The main reason for this move is that the two programmes do not work effectively anymore. Employers ask for both and choose what pays best. And since the percentage of VIP is known in advance and guaranteed in many cases they prefer not to make the effort to apply for CAO26.

The new programme VOP will provide higher stimulation to employers to employ persons with disabilities. The switch from 30% of the minimum wage to 40% of the actual wage will create a much stronger incentive. Another significant advantage of the new programme will be that it will be extended to the field of the local public services and education, which have been excluded from the two current programmes. The third advantage is that independent labourers will get this subsidy as well whereas there has not been such a possibility so far. Therefore the aim of the new programme is not only to pay more but also to more people.

### 1.3.2 ACTIVA

There are different programmes at federal level but the one which is most used in combination with the current VIP and CAO-26 is the ACTIVA measure. The target group of ACTIVA are the long term unemployed. The programme allows employers a reduction in the employer's social security contribution to the amount of either EUR 400 or 1000 per quarter for a period of one to five years for a fulltime worker. The amount of the subsidy depends on the length of unemployment and the age of the person.

Persons with recognition by VAPH can take advantage of this programme as well since the period since they have received the recognition is viewed as a period of unemployment. Employers use this programme nearly always when they hire someone who has not been employed for at least one year and has a disability.

ACTIVA can be combined with the other two programmes and from October 2008 with VOP.

## **1.4 Application of Criteria for a Model of Good Practice**

CAO 26 and VIP are meant for people with a clearly defined disability. In most cases their clients are both persons with disabilities and long term unemployed, which makes them "cheap" employees. These measures are therefore essential tools during the job application or placement from the point of view of the person and GTB. They assure better chances for a specific job for these clients. In addition



they provide an incentive for employers to keep the person in employment. ACTIVA is a subsidy that stimulates employers to hire long term unemployed people. As it has been already stated, persons with disabilities and especially persons with intellectual disabilities are often long term unemployed. The system therefore encourages employers to hire persons with intellectual disabilities and provides a possibility for a higher salary for the employee.

In July 2007 there were in total 4980 disabled employees for whom an employer in the private sector received a wage subsidy. CAO-26 subsidy was provided for 2302 employees (47%) and VIP for 2588 (53%). As one employer can have several employees with a subsidy, the number of employers (3565) was lower than the number of employees (4980).

The new programme VOP will provide stronger incentives to employers and will increase the chances of people with disabilities for getting a job and staying in it.

The Flemish labour system has been very dynamic throughout the years. The inclusion policy process, which started in 2006 and is going to be finished in October 2008, has been directed to persons with disabilities and their better and complete integration on the labour market. The transfer of functions related to employment of persons with disabilities, from the field of Social Welfare, Health and the Family to the field of Work and Social Economy is a way of ceasing the marginalization of this group of people and shifting the focus from their disability to their ability as a labour force.

What is striking about the Flemish labour system is the good and regular cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental sector. The GTB organization has become part of the Flemish labour system but kept its non-governmental status.

The availability of three programmes stimulating employers to hire persons with disabilities has been a flexible approach towards their labour integration. The merge of two of them into a new one, even more favorable for employers, has meant a clear intention for fulfilling the Lisbon objectives and guaranteeing "more and better" jobs for persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities.

## **2. Models of Labour integration of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities**

Employment is both an end and a means to inclusion. It is a valued role in its own right and a means of networking, social contact and income. There has been a continuum of ideas about employing people with an intellectual disability, from not even thinking about it, to thinking about it and consciously believing it is not possible, to believing it is possible but only in segregated settings<sup>9</sup> and as a way to "occupy" people, to giving people real things to do but still in segregated settings, to offering integrated "jobs" but offering no real pay, all the way through to real jobs on equal pay. The general trajectory is towards the last position, even though there is a long way to go. However employment on the open labour market is not, at any one moment, and in any one context, necessarily an option for every person with intellectual disability.

Each stop in this chain provided there was a belief in the possibility of some sort of employment, could be the end target, or at least progress for a person depending on his/her individual situation. Thus the focus should be put not on the target itself but much more shaped by the person centered approach

A person centered approach is at the core of the practices of the three non-governmental organizations which will be presented in this study. The three of them are based in Leuven, the capital of the Brabant province of the Flanders region and execute different but related functions in the employment of people with intellectual disabilities process.

### **2.1 GTB Network**

Gespecialiseerde Traject Bepaling en Begeleidingsdienst (GTB Network), specialised trajectory determining and trajectory guidance service, started its existence in 1999 as Arbeids Traject Begeleiding (ATB Network), work trajectory guidance, as a result of the merger of two other organizations in the region. It covers the whole of Flanders region through five different services which merged in 2008 under the name GTB. The network, currently employing a staff of over 100 persons, allows the efficient cooperation between different organizations that

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<sup>9</sup> Segregated settings or so called sheltered employment – a sheltered work environment is a workplace that is created especially for disadvantaged persons that temporarily or definitely cannot be employed in the regular job market (Zelderloo & Reynaert, 2007)

support persons with work disability<sup>10</sup> in their search for a job. Before the establishment of ATB people with disabilities had to find and contact these organizations by themselves whereas now they are guided and supported by GTB. The network is funded by the ESF and by VAPH.

### 2.1.1 Description of the Model

The clients of GTB network reach them in different ways. Some are directed by VDAB whereas others are on health care or on social benefits. There are also many clients who are without any income.

The first step when a client reaches GTB is to prepare an individual plan that fits him/her best. The plan must always ensure the client will keep liberty of choice. The purpose of the plan is to create a picture of the person and his/her abilities, skills, problems and to enable GTB to specify further steps.

After the plan is prepared either GTB executes it with the client or it sends him/her to another centre or organization. Normally the clients who stay with GTB are the more self-reliant ones who are almost ready or capable to start a job. The network helps them to look for vacancies, to write a CV and a covering letter and keeps a regular track on his/her professional development. GTB also organizes test days with an employer to trial the job before the client officially starts it.

Persons with intellectual disabilities who get support by GTB are usually with a slight disability. Most of them are capable of performing routine work but they still need help with finding an employment themselves

The other group, which GTB supports, are people who cannot go to paid employment because of their severe disability or need a long time to get up to the speed of a normal life. These GTB directs to voluntary work. There are a number of organizations in Leuven which specialize in providing voluntary work with additional guidance. For example second hand shops are subsidized organizations and they get also subsidies to guide and counsel people in their work. And if a person with a severe intellectual disability manages voluntary work, it is much easier for him/her to grow into a paid work.

The other part of the group of the clients, who do not stay with GTB, are usually those who decide together with the network job consultant that they need more education, orientation or training. They are directed to a centre of vocational education where they receive further training and job guidance, followed by

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<sup>10</sup> Work disability (een arbeidshandicap) – disabled persons in the field of work, who have problems with getting a job, keeping it and advancing in it. The term is included in the Decree of the organization of VDAB, which is to be approved in the coming months.

training-on-the-job which is free for the employer. The client is insured by the centre for vocational education. During this apprenticeship, the client can prove him/herself in the job and learn the tasks and acquire the skills at his/her own rhythm. If needed, the training period can be continued, depending on the learning speed of the client and the job demands. Employers are not obliged to hire clients after a period of training on the job in their organization. One of these centers is Job-Link which will also be presented in this study.

But even in this case GTB follows the client through the execution of his/her job. Its job consultants have regular conversations with each client and job coaches who work with them. When the education or training is not at first successful a GTB consultant and the job coach discuss it and make a decision about the continuation – whether to leave the client with the same organization or to send him/her to another one.

When supported employment<sup>11</sup> is not a possible option for the client, then they are directed to sheltered employment.

There is also another option – the so called “social sheltered employment” for persons who have not been working for five years.

GTB also operates a small service for employers who can contact them for an advice regarding employment of people with disabilities. GTB informs them about the formalities, including the type of documents they should prepare, the type of state incentives they can receive etc.

The third task of GTB is to support those whose placement on the labour market is difficult. If the organization has several clients who are not able to adapt, they go to the government and propose ideas, programmes and projects in order to support them.

### 2.1.2 Stakeholder Involvement

The coordinators of the ATB-network have frequent conferences. The operational employees of the different organisations in the network discuss the progress of their clients, often with other people involved in the assistance of the clients. The consultants of ATB have frequent meetings with the employees of the other organisations that coach them.

During the on-the-job-training and job application training, the job coach of the centre for vocational education speaks to employers, sensitizes them, gives

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<sup>11</sup> Supported employment – Supported employment aims to guide persons with disabilities to and in a remunerated job in the regular economic circuit. A wide range of instruments for reaching this goal is available, such as support by job coaches, wage compensation, helping to find a job etc. (Zeldereloo & Reynaert, 2007)

information about what is possible and assists them during apprenticeship and during the application procedure.

A job coach can rely on a list of employers who are already experienced in working together with people with a disability. To match client and employer the job coach has to know the needs of the employer. The job coach will make the employer a tailored offer and convince him/her to offer the client an apprenticeship for one month.

After the training, the job coach, employer and other colleagues evaluate the work of the client and consider if there is a possibility that the client can fill in the vacancy. Before recruiting the client, the job coach will inform the employer about the employment subsidies he/she can get when hiring the client.

The organization has just started a project, called Reset, which targets people who have a tendency not to show up for appointments and at the same time are surrounded by lots of organizations, trying to help them. The idea is to get all these organizations together to create a single plan for the client. It is very common that such clients go to different organizations and tell them different stories as a result of which they could start working "against" each other. When the organizations sit together, they formulate a common message which each of them sends to the client in order to be more successful.

### 2.1.3 Application of Criteria for a Model of Good Practice

The pathway of the client is designed together with the client, based on the client's needs and abilities and the possibilities of the labour market. The consultant will offer the client as many options as possible, given the possibilities and limitations, but the client has the final say and he/she can always have a discussion with the consultant. The needs and preferences of the client always predominate..

The communication between the job coach and the employer ensures better understanding of the client's disability and a better chance to find the best occupation for the client during his/her on the job training and possible subsequent employment.

The continuous follow up by the GTB consultants at the working place and contact with the job coach and the employer helps ensure the suitability of the place to the client's needs and his/her personal satisfaction and integration.

A total of 8.327 persons entered all the branches of Job-Link in 2007. The number of those intakes was 5.402 and 5.040 were with new trajectory and a plan. A total of 1.898 was placed on the labour market.

## 2.2 Job-Link

The centre for educational training for people with work disabilities Job-Link was established in 1984 and has offices in four cities in the Brabant province - Halle, Kortenberg, Lovenjoel and Brussels. All of the staff has a degree in human sciences, including psychological, pedagogical or social education. The staff includes job coaches, project workers, administration, accountant, a PC specialist and instructors who train the clients.

Until 2007 Job-link had been funded by VAPH as well as by ESF for training projects for the period 2001 – 2007. In the beginning of 2008 the organization started new programmes funded again by ESF.

### 2.2.1 Description of the model

Job-Link supports people with work disabilities, directed to them by GTB, to find a job in the regular labour market. In case of several failed attempts for placing a person in the regular market, he/she would be employed in a sheltered workplace.

People with intellectual disabilities who are directed to them by GTB have 50% and upwards production capacity.

The organization provides different kinds of training in order to reach this target. They include: 1. orientation training; 2. internal training; and 3. external trainings.

Orientation training is designed for people who have not made a choice of a profession. Job-link offers them the chance to acquire practice in a number of jobs – worker in a shop, in a bakery, in a cleaning team, gardener and all other professions for which a degree is not required. The clients have short trial periods at these jobs to check whether they like and are able to do them. Once they make up their mind, there are two possibilities in front of them – to have an internal training in a vocational centre or an external training at a workplace.

The internal training is held in one of the centres of Job-Link in which people are trained in a job by a person who has been in the profession for several years and now works in Job-Link as an instructor. In Kortenberg a training, called “kitchen help”, is provided and the instructors are qualified people who have worked for several years in the catering industry. Other clients are trained as garden – assistant, member of a cleaning team, assistant to a handy-man, for example they learn how to assist to a welder, a plumber, a house painter. The training consists of doing the job in practice. The clients in Kortenberg, trained in the kitchen, make the food for an abbey which is operating as a conference centre.

Another example is the cleaning training in Lovenjoel where the clients clean the organization buildings as well as the school and the cultural centre. The clients are not paid during the training but if they are registered as unemployed, they keep the unemployment benefits and if they have other income, they keep it too.

The external trainings consist of apprenticeships at a workplace. Job coaches contact an employer and ask him to accept their clients at his workplace. The apprenticeship is free of charge for the employer but he/she must commit to investing some time in supporting the person.

Normally orientation is done only with clients who are not sure about their job preferences. Those who have worked before and want to continue in this type of job do not have to go through an orientation period.

An interviewee provided the following example of the individual approach towards every client: "This is the story of a young boy with an intellectual disability, who went to Job-link directly after finishing school and did not know what he would like to work. He started with an orientation and after it decided to become a handy man. Then he did an internal training, during which the instructor noticed that he was very motivated but worked really slowly. He had a lot of problems to learn new things and was not able to read schemes or plans. As a result he always needed a person, showing him how to do something in a very concrete way. The instructor suggested to find a place for him which is not too big and with a close relation to the manager. After the internal training the job coach went with him for an apprenticeship at a car repair workshop. At this place they get all sorts of cars with accidents and they need to give new paint to the car. When you want to paint a part of the car, you need to put the old paint off. It became his main task. I didn't think that he would get a job since he worked so slowly, he was not very productive. After four months of apprenticeship the employer was willing to hire him, since he was always on time, never sick, always very motivated and always very happy. He was the sun in the house, making coffee for the other employees. The job he does is very annoying for other employees, even if he doesn't produce a lot, other people don't have to do it anymore."

When the external training is over Job-Link helps its clients to apply for other jobs. They look for vacancies at job websites (such as VDAB), but also call employers and explain to them that the person can start working in their company initially for free for a limited period and if the employer is satisfied with him/her, then he/she can give him the job.

Here is the explanation of the interviewee: "In that way we avoid the strict procedure – interview and application forms. It is not what persons with disabilities are good at. They are good in doing a job in practice. This approach is efficient with

small companies, whereas at the large ones it is more difficult since usually they require strict procedures”.

### 2.2.2 Stakeholder Involvement

Job-Link works in close cooperation with GTB which directs clients to them. The consultants of GTB follow the clients through their training in Job-Link. There are frequent discussions between the job coach and the consultant of GTB about the progress of the client.

In conversations with and about its clients, Job-Link can involve others, like parents, people who help the client with living alone, people who help the client with finances.

The job coach also has conversations with employers, familiarizes them, gives information about the possibilities and assists them during his/her clients' apprenticeship and during the phase of hiring someone new, including the application for wage subsidies.

### 2.2.3 Application of Criteria for a Model of Good Practice

Job coaches at Job-Link support their clients, including clients with intellectual disabilities, in their job orientation and help them to make their own career choice.. Then they start looking for an apprenticeship or a job, matching his/her desire.

Job-link gives also the employers the opportunity to have a trial period for people with a labour disability which is free for them and enables the smoother match-finding between the skills of the employee and the work options at the company/organization.

Both the client and the employer are assisted by the job coach during the process in order to assure the better integration of the person with intellectual disability at the workplace.

In 2006 JobLink guided 253 persons with a work disability. From this group, 42 persons were persons with intellectual disability. 26 of the latter had also received special education.



## 2.3 Begeleid Werken

Begeleid Werken started providing supported employment in 2000 as a cooperation of four institutions<sup>12</sup> for persons with intellectual disabilities. Covering the whole area of Brabant province, it is the largest cooperation in Belgium and therefore its service is being recognized and entirely funded by the government through the Flemish Agency for People with Disabilities. The cooperation headquarters, based in Leuven, employs six job coaches.

Their clients usually have below 50% level of work ability.

### 2.3.1 Description of the Model

Some of the clients of Begeleid Werken live in the four institutions, but most of them live on their own, or at home. When a new client visits the service, the job coaches arrange a number of meetings with him/her to find out what he/she would like to do as a job.

An interviewee from the organization explained their approach in the following way: "We focus on what they want and not what they are able to do, because if the focus is on what their abilities are, the result could be very negative – that lowers the target, the goal the job coach wants to achieve for them. So we ask them: "What is your dream?" If he/she says: "I want to work with animals" we find such an occupation".

A good example of this person centered approach is the story of a man who wanted to have a job like his father, who was a director of a big firm. The job coach, working with him, interpreted this to mean "I want a big desk, lots of papers around and a secretary to bring me the coffee". The person was multiplying handicapped - in a wheelchair and with intellectual disability. The interviewee commented that "If the job coach goes out of the description of his possibilities, he/she would go nowhere. If he/she looks at client's dream, then he/she would think: "Let's see what we can do".

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to make a distinction between the two types of institutions, mentioned in the study. In this case institutions do not exclude the community living. The envisaged institutions consist of a building for the administration and the persons with most severe intellectual disabilities who need 24-hour care. The rest of the clients live in houses in the community, owned by the institution. Groups of 5-6 people live in some of the houses with the staff supervision during the night. There are also persons who live on their own and are visited by the institution staff only from time to time (Interview with Jan Daemen, Manager, Begeleid Werken, Leuven, 27 March 2008). In the case of Bulgaria an institution consists of one or two big buildings, where all the clients live together in shared rooms.

Begeleid Werken has found a job for this man in the regional government - he makes leaflets, folds them and sends them out, but he is sitting in on a desk and a secretary is bringing coffee to him twice a day. And here is his dream fulfilled.

The interviewee pointed as a good aspect of the service work the fact that they are not faced with competition. They are mediating the process so that their clients stop being just "handicapped" people inside an institution, but become workers who do something. The advantage for the employer is that part of his job is done and he does not need to pay for it. The Belgian legislation does not allow people to work for less than the minimal wage unless it is without any pay. Instead of financial payment the service job coaches ask the employer to pay special attention to the person with intellectual disability – to ask him how he is doing and to check whether the employee adapts well to the place.

One full time job coach has to assure jobs for a minimum of nine persons and to spend at least 800 hours a year on the worksites of his/her clients, observing the process. The job coach is the leading person in the process and the one who takes the initiative. He/she goes out to look for a job for his/her client. Once he/she finds the job to match the desire of his/her client the job coach makes a deal with the employer on working time, activities, etc. The service has standard forms to be filled in for the insurance in case of social inspection. Every employer is registered in a central data bank and an inspector checks whether everything is correct. That is why the employer needs a paper that that his/her employee has a special status. The insurances are paid by the service with part of the state subsidy.

The work of the job coaches is not over with finding a job for their clients. During the first working day they accompany their client- sometimes from their home to the worksite to teach him how to reach it.

They also spend the day with the client at the worksite to make sure everything goes fine and - if it is necessary - they would rearrange the job. Job coaches spend as much time at the worksite together with their client as necessary. Some people can manage after one day, for other it takes 20-30 days before getting adapted to the work.

The aim is that the clients be able to work without the presence of the job coach. But even this is reached the involvement of the job coaches is not over. They keep in touch with the clients and make a follow up for all of them. The target is to reach the level of one visit per month.

Another important aspect of the work of the job coaches is the mediation they make between the clients, his/her parents, the employer, and other relevant

agencies. Besides going to the sites they are always available for their clients if they wish to call them.

The service uses "Easy To Read" versions of the job advertisements and sends them to every institution. The main principle of the job coaches is empowerment – knowledge is power. If people in an institution know a job exists, they have the power to decide whether they want to do that.

Begeleid Werken is connected also to 12 more institutions which look for jobs only for people who live in them. Some of these institutions work with personal future planning systems and they have a group which discusses every week the future of the clients. These job advertisements could be also an object of the discussions. The idea is again to make persons with intellectual disabilities think about what they want.

The interviewee clarified that "The question is not what is better – working or not working fulfilling the needs of people. If they think it is better to go out and work, then we arrange it for them. Living is more important than working".

He underlined the importance of flexibility with another example. One of the clients of the service spent most of his time in a day care centre, but he was bored and wanted to work. The job coach arranged a job for him so he started working. He later needed time for his house and the job coach in support of this project decreased in his working hours. Soon the client fell in love with a woman, visiting the day care centre and the only way to see her was to be at the centre. This has led to another change in his plan. Now he works one and a half day, spends one and a half day in the day care centre to be with his girlfriend and he uses the rest of the time to take care of his house.

"And he has a good life" is the conclusion of the interviewee.

### 2.3.2 Stakeholder involvement

The successful operation of the service depends on the good cooperation between the directors of the four institutions which have established it and the job coaches working in it. The cooperation between the service and the other 12 institutions is equally important in enabling the integration of more persons with intellectual disabilities in the labour market.

The role of the employers and their willingness to accept a service client as an employee at their worksites is essential. Frequent interaction with the job coaches facilitates this process and helps employers realize that the abilities of the service client could be useful for their production. Another big advantage for the employers

is that they do not have to pay for the work done and their employees with intellectual disabilities benefit from the work.

Parents and other relatives of the clients are also involved and have a significant role for the better labour integration of the person with intellectual disability.

### 2.3.3 Application of Criteria for a Model of Good Practice

The basic principle for Begeleid Werken is the person centered approach. The clients are not paid for the job which they do but the target in this case is not the payment but their personal satisfaction. They still get a sense of being useful and for socializing in the ordinary environment of their work places. Having flexible individual plans, prepared in compliance with their current preferences and desires, they receive more than a job but a quality of life.

Employers are satisfied as well receiving a support for their production process and not having to pay for it.

The integration of the client with intellectual disability at the workplace is observed by the employer in return of the free labour he/she receives and is supported by the job coaches for as long period and as frequent as needed.

Begeleid Werken has at the present time 116 clients. A total of 95 of them are currently working whereas the rest are looking for a job or are in between two jobs.

The models of good practice of the three organizations from the Brabant province of the Belgian Flemish region, presented in the study, are all based on a person centered approach, notwithstanding that they have different functional responsibilities and focus.

The second common and important principle for the three organisations is how they measure success. They do not evaluate only by numbers of clients placed. They also evaluate according to the degree of personal satisfaction of each client, and by the overall quality of life and degree of integration.

The third main principle is a demonstrable commitment to mutual cooperation and support among all stakeholders involved in the process, a principle which clearly contributes to success by all the criteria mentioned above.

As a result those people with intellectual disability who are supported by the organizations not only attain their right to meaningful employment, but also, largely via this process, receive general respect and recognition of their fundamental human right to choice and to active participation in all aspects of life.

### **3. Situation in Bulgaria. Recommendations from the Flemish Experience**

There are an estimated 49,000 people with intellectual disabilities in Bulgaria, extrapolating from the statistical data in each district. However, the study "Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities, Access to Education and Employment" (Open Society Institute Bulgaria, 2005) shows that this data does not include all people with intellectual disabilities and concludes the lack of standardised diagnosis procedures makes its reliability to be probably a significant underestimation.

A total of 26 institutions provide boarding to 1766 children with intellectual disabilities at the age from 3 to 10 and from 3 to 18, according to the data of the executive Agency for Social Support under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. There are also 9 Social-Educational Boarding Schools (SEBS)<sup>13</sup> offering 1347 places for young people with moderate intellectual disability. Another 2513 persons with intellectual disabilities live in 29 institutions. Some 300 persons are on the waiting list for being accepted in an institution.

Both plenary and partial guardianship exist in Bulgarian law. People under guardianship retain the right to work. Those of them however who are under plenary guardianship can be employed with the signature of the guardian on the employment contract on behalf of the ward. This can in practice "be a serious impediment to employment", the study proclaims (Open Society Institute, 2005).

Guardianship is a problem especially for people in institutions, who are likely to be under the plenary guardianship of the institutional director. It often leads to conflict of interest since the ward cannot leave the institution or find employment without the guardian's permission. There is no effective oversight as to whether the wards' interests are respected.

Youngsters who live in SEBS are trained in different crafts simultaneously with the obligatory educational programme but do not receive a certificate at the end. After graduating from the school most of them have only one option - living for different periods in the 17 temporary boarding homes in the country. Most of them are unemployed and those of them who get a job can hardly afford to pay rent and accommodation and other costs. There is no unified state strategy for their labour and social integration.

Currently there are 49 group homes in Bulgaria with an average number of eight persons with intellectual disabilities, living in them, according to the Agency for Social Support.

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<sup>13</sup> The SEBS are residential institutions, providing full room and board

In recent years Bulgaria has introduced a number of programmes aimed at improving the employment situation for persons with disabilities as a whole. The main principle of these programmes is stimulation of a move away from dependence on benefits and towards self-reliance. Adults with intellectual disabilities however, whose opportunities for education and training have been extremely limited, require greater help to succeed in supporting themselves.

According to the Open Society study no official statistics on the number of people with intellectual disabilities who are employed are available, but all indicators point to an extremely high level of unemployment in this group.

There are 134 sheltered workshops and enterprises in the country, registered at the Agency for People with Disabilities until 31 March 2008. Nevertheless the number of the employees with intellectual disabilities who work in them is below 1.0% of all the employees in the enterprises. Only one person with an intellectual disability was employed at a sheltered employment in 2007 and not a single person has been registered so far in 2008. The number of people with intellectual disabilities working on the open market is still extremely limited as well.

The application of the medical model, defining disabled people by their illness or medical condition and promoting the view of them as dependent and needing to be cured or cared for, is still in force in Bulgaria. This stigma is particularly strong regarding persons with intellectual disabilities which only consolidates their social exclusion. The societal focus stays on the disability instead of the abilities of these persons and therefore makes their labour integration impossible.

There is no vision, supported by a strategy, at the state level for changing this model and for shifting towards the social model of disability understanding, according to which disability is caused by the society in which we live and is not the immutable "fault" of an individual disabled person, or an inevitable consequence of their limitations.

The National Employment Action Plan for 2008 includes measures for social inclusion but they do not envisage labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities. Nor are there any real concrete examples.

Labour Offices of the National Employment Agency are trying to provide a person-centered approach but there is still a lot to be done for achieving satisfactory results in practice. In addition, good cooperation among different actors in the employment field and stakeholder involvement is still lacking despite the intention declared in the National Employment Action Plan for 2008.

### **3.1 Bulgarian Labour System – an overview**

On the top of the pyramid of the Bulgarian Labour System is the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with its main employment executive beneath - the National Employment Agency. The Agency functions through the Regional Employment Services at regional level and through the Labour Offices at local level.

The unemployed or those who would like to change their job register with the Employment Offices. If a person has not been offered a job within one month of being registered or has not started working he/she is being assessed regarding the possibilities for getting a job and an individual plan is being prepared by an office employee and agreed with him/her.

The plan includes a schedule for meetings with the office employee as well as concrete measures for placement in the labour market.

The client has different obligations among which is not to refuse the offer of appropriate work by the Labour Offices and/or attendance and completion of a course to gain a professional qualification as well as of employment programmes and measures. When the unemployed do not keep their obligations, their registration is cancelled. They have the right of a new registration in 12 months after the cancellation date of the previous one.

There is not a special employment trajectory for persons with disabilities. The assessment for determining temporary or permanent incapacity to work is performed by the Labour Experts Medical Commissions (LEMC) and the National Expert Medical Commission (NEMC), which are under the authority of the Ministry of Health Care.

Eligibility for social welfare benefits is determined through a series of means tests, carried out by the local social assistance department. An individual case reaches NEMC only when the person is not satisfied with the decision of LEMC.

The LEMC determine the disability degree for between one and three years depending on the disability type and the possibility for restoring his/her work ability. When there is no option for partial or complete restoring of the work ability the person could be entitled life long disability recognition. When a person has a 50% and more loss of work ability LEMC (NEMC) determines his/her capacity for a workplace and if it is necessary, it transfers him/her to a more appropriate job.

The inspection and observance of labour legislation in ensuring occupational safety and health is carried out by the executive agency General Labour Inspectorate of the Ministry for Labour and Social Policy.

## **3.2 Employment Stimulating Policies, Measures, Programmes and Campaigns**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has been creating annual national employment action plans since 2000. After the plan is approved by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry delivers to the National Employment Agency a list of programmes and measures for their execution together with the supporting budget. The financial means are further redistributed to the Regional Employment Offices and to the Labour Offices.

The National Employment Agency provides three measures and operates two programmes focused on labour integration of persons with disabilities.

Another agency, the Agency for People with Disabilities, operates under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. It provides programmes under which it funds projects for job creation for persons with disabilities.

The main and only campaign for promoting employment of persons with disabilities has been the Career Day for Persons with Disabilities.

### **3.2.1 National Employment Action Plan**

The National Employment Action Plan for 2008 with subtitle "For more flexicurity on the labour market" is created in compliance with the Lisbon process targets and is based on the flexicurity concept. The Plan contains also the renewed Employment Strategy of Bulgaria for 2008 - 2015.

The effective labour integration of persons from the disadvantaged groups is among the four main directions for actions and measures. The other three ones are- 1) actions for achieving full employment, high quality and productivity; 2) flexicurity and 3) education and training, supporting the transition towards knowledge based economy. (Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2008).

The Strategy pays more attention to social inclusion in its last chapter. It focuses on the person centered approach towards the potential employees; continuation of measures for employers stimulation to hire persons with disabilities; regular monitoring of the demand and offers on the labour market and change in the attitude of the employers towards persons with disabilities through media campaigns, seminars and discussions.

Neither the Plan nor the Strategy pays special attention nor makes a reference to persons with intellectual disabilities and their integration into the labour market.



### 3.2.2 Employment Stimulating Measures

The first employment stimulating measure, provided by the National Employment Agency, is in the form of incentives to employers for hiring unemployed persons with disabilities under the age of 29, disabled soldiers as well as youngsters from the institutions who have finished their secondary education. The measure guarantees employment for 24 months.

The Agency covers the salary, which is the minimum salary for the country, of the unemployed person, all the additional payments, stated in the Labour Code, the paid yearly leave of the person and the insurances. The period of funding is 12 months and the employer should cover the second year from his/her budget.

The target group of the second measure includes unemployed persons with disabilities or disabled soldiers over 29. All other aspects of the programme are the same.

The third measure is for stimulating employers to create temporary, seasonal or part-time jobs for a period of six months. The Agency again covers the salary and all social and health insurance of the employees.

The employers are selected on the basis of a competition, organized by the Labour Offices, in accordance with the Code for implementation of the Employment Law.

These measures do not exclude persons with intellectual disabilities but do not highlight their participation either. There is no information on the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities under the measures. The administrative data does not register the disability type.

### 3.2.3 Employment Stimulating Programmes

The National Employment Agency provides two programmes for labour integration of persons with disabilities.

The first one, called "Credit without interest to persons with disabilities", is directed to persons with reduced work ability who would like to start their own business.

The second one, the National Programme for Employment and Education of Persons with Permanent Disabilities aims at increase of the work ability of persons with disabilities and guaranteeing employment to those of them who have been registered in the Labour Offices. Employers open jobs for them for the period of 36 months. If an employee, participating in the programme, leaves earlier than this,

the job is offered to another person until the completion of the fixed period. The programme participants are also offered a training when necessary.

A total of eight persons with intellectual disabilities were registered in the programme during the first quarter of 2008 out of 148 programme participants. In 2007 the number of programme participants was 1211, of whom 854 persons with and over 71% decreased work ability. A total of 85 persons with intellectual disabilities participated in the programme.

The Law for Integration of People with Disabilities creates conditions for employment under three forms: regular employment, sheltered employment and incentives for starting an own business. The Agency for People with Disabilities implements the law through launching tenders for projects.

In the first half of 2008 the Agency opened tenders for funding projects for start and development of own business by persons with a decreased work ability, for rehabilitation and social integration of persons with disabilities and for integration of persons with permanent disabilities in normal labour ambience through assuring accessibility, adaptation and equipment of the work places.

The Agency also accepts projects from the sheltered enterprises of people with disabilities as well as projects from the nationally represented organizations of and for people with disabilities.

#### 3.2.4 Career Day for People with Disabilities

The Bulgarian Association for Personal Alternative (BAPA) started the initiative Career Day for People with Disabilities in 2005 in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Sofia Municipality and the national private television BTV. The initiative had been organized once a year in the country capital Sofia until 2007, when it was also held in the city of Varna.

The main idea of the Career Day is increasing the chances for employment of people with disabilities who would like to work. The event puts the potential employees and the employers together. It also introduces the employment stimulation programmes and measures to employers.

The focus however has not shifted yet to persons with intellectual disabilities and usually they are not represented at the event.

### 3.3. Recommendations to Bulgaria

The last part of this study has the ambitious task of providing Bulgaria with recommendations for better labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities, mainly based on the positive Flemish experience, though some of the recommendations stem directly from the situation in Bulgaria. They are related to practices which are currently missing in the country and from which it would probably benefit:

1. It is crucial that the Government ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to actively promote and implement it, with particular reference to employment

2. The Government could take advantage of Article 12<sup>14</sup> of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to propose law amendment to the Bulgarian Parliament, replacing the concept of guardianship by the concept of “supported decision making”<sup>15</sup>

3. It is essential that the Government starts promoting the real and positive existence of persons with intellectual disabilities and provide society with more information about them in cooperation with national media and through public debates

4. The Government could consider better acquisition of the EU funds and programmes in order to support the labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities

5. The Government could consider launching stronger incentives for employers who hire persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities, and so that employers become more interested and persons with disability receive a higher salary than the national minimum wage

6. It would be beneficial for the labour integration process if the Government stimulates the NGO sector to help establish positive and effective interaction between future employees with intellectual disabilities and the employers

7. The Government should encourage the NGO sector to become integrally involved in its labour integration policy and practice regarding persons with intellectual and other disabilities

8. The Government should consider getting more stakeholders involved in practice in the process of labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities as their parents, employers etc.

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<sup>14</sup> Article 12 declares that disabled people should enjoy “legal capacity on an equal basis with others”

<sup>15</sup> “Supported decision making” means that there is no transfer of rights to other persons: disabled people fully enjoy their rights

9. It is of great significance for the equal participation and the right of choice that the Government start providing “Easy To Read” versions of legislation and strategic documents related to training and employment of persons with intellectual disabilities

10. The Government should consider assuring financial support to the municipalities for establishing in cooperation with the NGO sector career centers at SEBS to support youngsters with intellectual disabilities with computer and other training and in finding a placement on the job market after graduation

11. It is essential that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy creates a vision, concept and action plan for full social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities, including support to municipalities for the successful completion of the deinstitutionalization process and the development of community living

12. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy could consider establishing employment services specifically for persons with intellectual disabilities, which include the provision of counseling, job searching and coaching, as well as supported employment services. The Government should ensure these services are staffed by people who have received training in working with people who have intellectual disabilities.

13. Both, the National Employment Agency and the Disability Agency could consider launching programmes for funding projects, which assure training and create jobs for persons with intellectual disabilities as sheltered, supported and regular employment.

14. It would be of a great advantage for youngsters in SEBS if they receive qualifications in the crafts in which are trained during their studies.

### **III. Conclusion**

The problem of integration of people with disabilities has been recognized and tackled on the EU and international level through the creation and combination of various legal, policy and financial instruments. This gives a large platform for action to the EU Member States in the employment field.

The legal base is shaped by the European Employment Directive, the State Aid Regulation and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The European Employment Directive prohibits any form of discrimination based on disability and obliges MS to guarantee reasonable accommodation to people with disabilities, whereas State Aid Regulation binds MS to provide financial incentive to employers for employing these people.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will have international "moral legal" (though no sanction) power after the completion of its ratification, also requires recognition of the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others.

The above presented policy setting documents, the Open Method of Coordination, the European Disability Strategy, the Active Inclusion of People Furthest from the Labour market, the Green Paper on the Modernization of Labour Law and the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan, create a larger framework of and perspective to the labour integration of people with disabilities.

In addition the financial instruments, available at the EU level, including the European Social Fund, the Progress Programme, the Life Long Learning Programme and in the recent past the EQUAL initiative, provide the Member States with the financial support for the implementation of the legislation and policies in the field of employment and could be a strong incentive for guaranteeing jobs to people with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities who are in the most disadvantaged position regarding social and labour integration .

Despite the solid legal, policy and financial base Employment of people with disabilities remains a serious problem within the EU. The Commission Communication on situation of disabled people (European Commission, 2007) emphasize that they are still in a vulnerable situation regarding their labour integration. Therefore Member States have not implemented sufficiently the EU legislation and policies and have not taken full advantage of the provided funding to assure more chances for employment for persons with disabilities, and particularly to persons with intellectual disabilities.

The creation of "more and better" jobs is also the main objective, set by the European Employment Strategy and followed through the EU Lisbon process

together with the flexicurity concept. The EU supports and monitors the implementation of the Strategy at the national level in the Member States through a set of employment guidelines which should be the milestones for the national reform programmes, followed by a joint employment report and country specific recommendations. The study analyzes each of these components applied to the two countries which are its object.

Both, the Bulgarian and Belgian National Reform Programmes make a clear reference to the employment guidelines and to the social inclusion and labour integration of persons with disabilities but without mentioning persons with intellectual disabilities nor envisaging measures and ways of monitoring which would lead to concrete actions. The Belgian National Reform Programme however demonstrates clear vision about the inclusion process whereas the Bulgarian Programme lists already launched programmes but lacks a perspective, supported by effective actions.

The thesis presents the Recommendations and the EU Annual Progress Report for the two countries but its main focus and reason is the situation in Bulgaria. The main problematic area for Bulgaria, related to the topic of this study, is the lack of participatory and inclusive policy, and involvement of stakeholders in the employment process.

Although Belgium itself has employment and flexicurity related problems to solve, there have been lots of changes for the last two years in the labour system and in the provision of employment stimulating measures of its Flanders region.

The Flemish Government has carried on a continuous reformation as part of its inclusion policy.

Part of this reform is the restructuring of the scheme of employment stimulating programmes in order to provide stronger incentives for employers which should result in more jobs for persons with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, and higher wages.

Another strong side of the regional labour policy is the strictly defined and regular cooperation with the nongovernmental sector, presented by the mutual work with the GTB Network.

The federal level also participates in the labour integration process through the provision of the ACTIVA programme which is an additional incentive for employers to hire long-term unemployed, including also persons with intellectual disabilities.

The main mediator in the process of employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in the in the Flanders region is the NGO sector. The presented experience of the three NGOs from the Flemish Brabant province demonstrates the

significance of availability of more services in the chain leading to a sufficient placement on the labour market. The three crucial characteristics of their practices are the person-centered approach, the active involvement of a variety of stakeholders in the labour integration of persons with intellectual disabilities process and the additional definition of success as being the personal satisfaction of their clients.

The Flemish experience is also good example of the implementation of the EU and the international legal, policy and financial instruments. It is a base for the recommendations to Bulgaria.

Bulgaria has made steps towards assuring inclusion on the labour market of people with disabilities but persons with intellectual disabilities have been left out of its political agenda so far. There is not a clear vision and action plan on national level, focused on improvement of their situation. Persons with intellectual disabilities are still mostly boarded in large institutions which deprive them from having a normal life of dignity and personal choice. The number of group homes and community based services for these people in the country is also low.

The national programmes and measures do not provide strong enough incentives to stimulate employers to hire persons with disabilities. Moreover these programmes do not put special focus on persons with intellectual disabilities. Thus their employment is not an object of discussion or consideration yet.

The Recommendations to the Bulgarian government and institutions come from the Flemish experience and from the concrete situation in the country. They aim to provide the Bulgarian authorities with working ideas, many of which already successfully implemented in practice in the Belgian Flanders region. The Recommendations are also made in the light of the Flexicurity concept and in line with the Lisbon objectives and – more importantly – with the objective of guaranteeing the basic human rights to work, inclusion and life to persons with intellectual disabilities.

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## Annex I

Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015

“Action line No. 5: Employment, vocational guidance and training”

Specific actions by member states

i. To mainstream issues relating to the employment of people with disabilities in general employment policies;

ii. to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to an objective and individual assessment which:

– identifies their options regarding potential occupations;

– shifts the focus from assessing disabilities to assessing abilities and relating them to specific job requirements;

– provides the basis for their programme of vocational training;

– helps them find appropriate employment or re-employment;

iii. to ensure that people with disabilities have access to vocational guidance, training and employment related services at the highest possible qualification level, and making reasonable adjustments where necessary;

iv. to ensure protection against discrimination in all stages of employment, including selection and recruitment, as well as in all measures related to career progression;

v. to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities by:

– applying recruitment procedures (for example advertising, interview, assessment, selection) which ensure that job opportunities are positively made available to people with disabilities;

– making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or working conditions, including telecommuting, part-time work and work from home, in order to accommodate the special requirements of employees with disabilities;

– increasing the disability awareness of management and staff through relevant training;

vi. to ensure that general self-employment schemes are accessible and supportive to people with disabilities;

vii. to ensure that support measures, such as sheltered or supported employment, are in place for those people whose needs cannot be met without personal support in the open labour market;

viii. to support people with disabilities to progress from sheltered and supported employment to open employment;

ix. to remove disincentives to work in disability benefit systems and encourage beneficiaries to work when they can;

x. to consider the needs of women with disabilities when devising programmes and policies related to equal opportunities for women in employment, including childcare;

xi. to ensure that employees with disabilities enjoy the same rights as other employees in relation to consultation on employment conditions and membership and active participation in trade unions;

xii. to provide effective measures to encourage the employment of people with disabilities;

xiii. to ensure that health and safety legislation and regulations include the needs of persons with disabilities and do not discriminate against them;

xiv. to promote measures, including legislative and integration management, that enable persons who become disabled while employed to stay within the labour market;

xv. to ensure that especially young disabled people can benefit from employment internships and traineeships in order to build skills and from information on employment practices;

xvi. to consider, where appropriate, signing and ratifying the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163), in particular Article 15;

xvii. to implement Resolution ResAP(95)3 on a charter on the vocational assessment of people with disabilities.

## **Annex II**

### Employment Guidelines:

(16) To implement employment policies aimed at achieving full employment, improving quality and productivity at work, and strengthening social and territorial cohesion.

(17) To promote a lifecycle approach to work.

(18) To ensure inclusive labour markets for job-seekers and disadvantaged people.

(19) To improve matching of labour market needs.

(20) To promote flexibility combined with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation.

(21) To ensure employment-friendly wage and other labourcost developments.

(22) To expand and improve investment in human capital.

(23) To adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements.

## Annex III

Common Flexicurity principles and pathways:

- Flexicurity is a means to reinforce the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, create more and better jobs, modernize labour markets, and promote good work through new forms of flexibility and security to increase adaptability, employment and social cohesion.

- Flexicurity involves the deliberate combination of flexible and reliable contractual arrangements.

- Flexicurity approaches are not about one single labour market or working life model, nor about a single policy strategy: they should be tailored to the specific circumstances of each Member State.

- Flexicurity should promote more open, responsive and inclusive labour markets overcoming segmentation. It concerns both those in work and those out of work.

- Internal (within the enterprise) as well as external flexicurity are equally important and should be promoted. Sufficient contractual flexibility must be accompanied by secure transitions from job to job.

- Flexicurity should support gender equality.

- Flexicurity requires a climate of trust and broadly-based dialogue among all stakeholders, where all are prepared to take the responsibility for change with a view to socially balanced policies.

- Flexicurity requires a cost effective allocation of resources and should remain fully compatible with sound and financially sustainable public budgets.

Pathway 1: tackling contractual segmentation

Pathway 2: developing flexicurity within the enterprise and offering transition security

Pathway 3: tackling skills and opportunity gaps among the workforce

Pathway 4: improving opportunities for benefit recipients and informally employed workers



## Annex IV

### Belgium's National Lisbon Reform Programme

The main lines of the reform priorities for Flanders are as follows:

1. On the macro- and micro-economic level
  - Create an integrated industrial policy;
  - Make the entrepreneurial climate more service-oriented and more incentive-oriented;
  - Focus on innovation;
  - Keep pace with European frontrunners of the information society;
  - Invest in a healthy environment.
2. On the employment level
  - Encourage active ageing through tax relief for older workers;
  - Improve the transition between education and the labour market;
  - Provide career guidance during transitions and enterprise restructurings;
  - Provide individualised guidance and training for the unemployed;
  - Promote the participation of migrants and other underprivileged groups in the labour market;
  - Promote the reconciliation of work and family life.

Wallonia's five priority actions for the future are as follows:

1. Create competitiveness centers;
2. Stimulate business creation;
3. Lower taxes for companies;
4. Promote research and innovation in companies;
5. Improve skills for employment.

The two priority goals of the Brussels Capital Region under the Lisbon strategy are

as follows:

1. Access to employment, in particular for unskilled young people;
2. The development of economic growth, in particular in rundown urban areas.

The lines of force of the reform priorities for employment and training for the Brussels

Capital Region are:

- Raise the training level of job seekers by creating reference centers in job-creating

sectors;

- Intensify the use of 'language vouchers', create 'training vouchers' and 'ICT vouchers';
- Offer young people, especially unskilled young people, an initial 'on-the-job training experience' in both the private and public sectors
- Fight discrimination based on sex, origin or disability when hiring workers.

## **Annex V**

### Bulgaria's National Reform Programme (2007 – 2009)

Challenges set in the Reform Programme, as a matter of priority:

1. Maintaining macroeconomic stability (containing the external deficit and further reducing inflationary pressures based on a prudent policy mix which combines structural reforms, a strong fiscal position and further measures to improve the quality and efficiency of public spending);
2. Modernisation and development of infrastructure, in particular transport and energy networks, as well as ICT infrastructure;
3. Improving the business environment (incl. better regulation, implementation of internal market legislation, competition and key priority actions identified by the 2006 Spring European Council);
4. Improving the quality of human capital through improved access of all to quality education and training (incl. life-long learning) with a view to increase productivity and better match skills with labour market needs;
5. Activating labour supply through introducing a flexicurity approach notably through active labour market policies (focusing on efficient employment services, job assistance and upgrading of skills).