



Social protection and labour market policies for vulnerable groups from a social investment perspective

The case of Active Labour Market Policies for People with Disabilities in Latvia

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Executive summary

This report was prepared in the framework of the Europe H2020 project ‘Rebuilding an inclusive, value based Europe of solidarity and trust through social investments’ (RE-InVEST). The project adopts a participative approach that lends a voice to vulnerable groups and civil society organisations. The theoretical framework applied in the RE-InVEST project builds on a human rights and capabilities approach.

The evaluation of national/regional policies were carried out through participatory qualitative research from the perspective of the most vulnerable groups. Mixed focus groups were implemented this research in 8 countries (EN, IE, PT, CH, LV, BE, FR, AT). The analyses were carried out by the local partners, who consist of NGOs and/or research institutions.

The focus of the research on the disabled unemployed has been chosen because employment is becoming an increasingly more significant problem among persons with disabilities. In recent years Latvia has devoted increasing attention to ALMPs, which range from career counselling and job placement services to training programmes and hiring subsidies. In December 2015 the Government approved the Implementation plan from 2015-2017 of the Guidelines on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2014-2020. The Implementation Plan includes measures to promote people with disabilities’ integration into the labour market and their acquisition, development and improvement of work skills.

This report examines in what extend disabled unemployed have benefited from ALMP measures, how these measures meet their needs accordingly assessing the role of social protection and active labour market policies (ALMPs) from a social investment perspective. Particular attention was paid to the difficulties of integration into the labor market of the people with disabilities.

The disabled unemployed recommendations for improvement ALMP measures are the following:

- It is necessary to provide training for specialists of the SEA who work with disabled unemployed persons.
- One of the most significant problems that needs to be addressed to improve ALMP measures for people with disabilities is the implementation of a more personalised approach. The range of services should be developed and appropriate for the various types and severity of disability. It is necessary to expand the range of activities offered by the SEA to people with disabilities. In addition, it should be taken into account the regional specifics, labour market demand in the regions.
- The disabled unemployed need more support and encouragement from the staff of the SEA which also means that it is necessary to educate specialists of the SEA for work with the disabled unemployed taking into consideration their specific needs and options to ensure respect for their human rights and their freedom to make their own choices.
- Accessibility of the environment and the transport issues should be addressed. Much more attention should be paid to the quality of the offered jobs for the unemployed people with disabilities, they cannot be in their majority only low-paid jobs requiring low or no qualifications at all.

The RE-InVEST consortium has jointly developed the PAHRCA – a methodology that combines principles of Participatory Action research with Human Rights and Capability Approaches. This qualitative, participatory research does not produce representative results but rather aims to deepen the understanding of Active Labour Marketing Policies (ALMP) and Social Protection (SP) impacts on the lives of vulnerable people and give them a voice.

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1. Introduction

This report is prepared in the framework of the Europe H2020 project ‘Rebuilding an inclusive, value based Europe of solidarity and trust through social investments’ (RE-InVEST). The RE-InVEST project aims to contribute to a more solidary and inclusive EU, through an inclusive, powerful and effective social investment strategy at EU level. Moreover, the project itself adopts a participative approach that gives voice to vulnerable groups and civil society organisations. The RE-InVEST consortium consists of members of the informal network ‘the Alliances to fight Poverty’, a network of civil society organisations, trade unions, policy makers and academics coordinated by the Flemish Christian labour movement *beweging.net*, and committed to a more inclusive Europe. The consortium covers a broad range of European countries, both geographically (12 countries, 13 regions) and in terms of representation of different welfare and labour market traditions. The analyses are carried out by the local partners, who consist of NGOs and/or researchers.

In particular, this report is one of the seven national case studies that make up the qualitative research of the RE-InVEST work package ‘Investing in social protection and inclusive labour market policies’. The purpose of this work package can be summarised as follows:

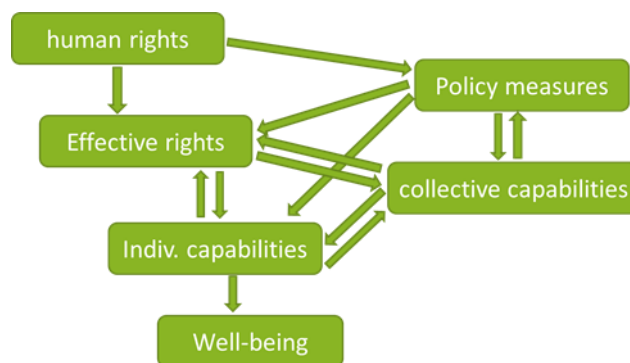
- Re-assessing the role of social protection and active labour market policies (ALMPs) from a social investment perspective. This means that our theoretical framework, which builds on the key notions of social investment, human rights and capabilities, will be used as the reference framework to evaluate the role of social protection and ALMPs in producing sustainable social inclusion.
- Applying this framework to the evaluation of national/regional policies through participatory qualitative research into specific measures in the field of ALMPs and social protection, from the perspective of the most vulnerable groups. Special attention is being devoted to recent reforms and innovations (the EC’s Youth Employment Initiative, social activation, social enterprises, tax-benefit reforms, etc.). Mixed research teams have carried out this research in seven countries (England, Portugal, Switzerland, Latvia, Belgium, France and Austria) between September 2016 and June 2017.
- In addition to the national case studies, a statistical analysis is focusing on the distributional effects as well as the effectiveness of social protection systems and ALMPs based on the EU-SILC data, by means of multilevel hazard models.
- The combined findings will result in a synthesis report as well as recommendation papers for the Annual Growth Surveys.

In Latvia, the study focuses on the research of the involvement of people with disabilities in the labour market. The study is conducted in collaboration with NGOs ‘SUSTENTO’ and ‘Apeiron’ representing people with disabilities.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Approach

From the theoretical and methodological approach proposed is through the intersection of capability and human rights approaches based on participatory action research. The Capability Approach (CA) developed by Amartya Sen (1999) brought a new framework towards economic development by focusing his analysis on what people are able to be (or to do) to achieve their well-being or quality of life beyond income factors. So the core issue for Sen is not only what individuals choose, but the choices that they would make if they had the abilities/freedom to lead their lives the way they want to. For instance to be able to hold a decent job and not any job. Speaking about human dignity and about what people consider they need and should have is very important to know how conversation factors like labour market policies and social protections measures and companies can constrain or enable people's capabilities.

Figure 2.1 From human rights and capabilities to individual wellbeing



For the implementation of basic rights, like economic, social and cultural rights, different types of policy measures need to be implemented: legislation, organisation of (public) services, subsidies, social transfers, inspection, judicial enforcement, ... Although some legal measures may establish effective rights (e.g. right to a guaranteed minimum income), most policies necessitate additional 'social investment' in individual and collective capabilities through public or subsidised service provision (e.g. training provided by the employment agency) and the transfer of power and resources – either directly to individuals/households (e.g. social benefits), or to companies and civil society organisations (e.g. employment or training subsidies). These 'collectives' in turn interact with individuals and may invest in their capabilities. Fundamental rights set up the standard of living conditions and the deprivation of needs can be as a denial of rights. In this context the Human Rights discourse can emancipate and transform through collective action and participation of who is excluded by their own rights.

The well-being of vulnerable individuals is reflected in their actual levels of functioning in various dimensions of life (family life, social and cultural participation, work, housing, education etc.) but also in the full range of available alternative options in each dimension. Freedom of choice is therefore an essential quality characteristic of social investment policies. For example, 'work first' programmes (prioritising the take-up of low-paid work over training, and irrespective of any match with the job seekers' competences or aspirations) may result in higher short-run employment effects; however, such measures may well constrain the beneficiaries' freedom and future employability to such an extent that their capabilities and well-being

are reduced. In the field of social protection, income transfers can be seen as resource supplements that enable households or individuals to invest in their own education, housing, health, mobility - as well as in their children or other dependant household members. From this perspective, generous social protection schemes can foster the employability and social inclusion of vulnerable groups: this perspective predicts the opposite of the 'making work pay' paradigm, which advocates lower benefits - of limited duration - as an incentive to take up work.

Across Europe, the 'active welfare' state has been shaped in different ways, depending on the ideological balance in different member states. Moreover, the picture keeps shifting across time due to shifting cultures and ideologies. ... three paradigms, each of which is based on its own theoretical framework and results in specific policy prescriptions:

- The neoliberal view: making work pay
- The conservative view: workfare, rights and duties
- The social investment approach (Nicaise)

The research clarified the views of Latvian social policy professionals and academic researchers of Latvia concerning compliance of the employment activation policy implemented in Latvia with the said paradigms (Chapter 4).

The Merging of Knowledge (MOK) approach involves a collective of mixed groups of researchers the co-construction of knowledge about poverty and social exclusion by discussion and reflection: people who experience poverty and social exclusion in first hand to talk about their needs. This process helps to raise awareness about their situation of rights denial and implies to the solution of the problem and policy recommendations.

RE-InVEST research approach is a Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA) developed in seven steps (Toolkit, 44-45): 1. Identify and meet partner NGO/gatekeeper, 2. Preliminary 'meet ups' (for trust building if necessary), 3. First meeting with participants – trust building, 4. Developmental: implement developmental human rights & capability approach, 5. Inquiry/data gathering, 6. Identifying patterns (key issues and themes of concern to the group) and 7. Undertake action/outcome using one or a combination of approaches.

Motivation of the selection of measures to be analysed.

The selected measures for the analysis:

- a) subsidized employment measures for people with disabilities;
- b) activation of the long-term unemployed and provision of services (information, profiling, support for long term unemployed people with disabilities, training courses).

1. During the crisis Latvia experienced a very rapid growth of unemployment. It started to gradually decline as the country started to recover after the most severe years of the crisis. Results of the Labour Force Survey show that in the 1st quarter of 2017 the Latvian unemployment rate constituted 9.4%. Even though Latvian unemployment rate keeps reducing, it still slightly exceeds the European Union (EU) average. Over the recent years there has been an increase in the registered unemployment rate of the disabled. Persons with disabilities have become more active in registering with the SEA to receive the status of an unemployed person, to be able to use services offered by the SEA as well as to apply for social assistance. The SEA offers only one ALMP measure targeting this particular group - the subsidized employment measure for people with disabilities - the 'subsidized work place'. According to the mass media and some research studies, the attitude towards this measure among the staff of the SEA as well as employers is somewhat ambiguous. In our participatory research it was important to

establish also the experience and assessment of the given service among its users (people with disabilities).

2. During the crisis the demand for SEA services increased several times; however, the SEA underwent significant staff cuts. In recent years Latvia has devoted increasing attention to ALMPs, which range from career counselling and job placement services to training programmes and hiring subsidies.

A new profiling system supports the State Employment Agency's (SEA) crucial task of assigning jobseekers to the most suitable programmes. But fiscal consolidation during the crisis resulted in substantial cuts of ALMP resources, especially in the area of employment services. As a result, caseloads/staff ratios have surged, reducing the SEA's capacity to devise and monitor effective activation strategies. Capacity constraints have also affected municipalities as the primary providers of social services, including for jobseekers (OECD, 2016).

In the adult population, disabilities are particularly frequent among less educated people and among those above the age of 45. Integrating assistance with activation measures for disabled clients has been an important policy concern and recent reforms have sought to bring disability assessments more in line with employment objectives.

Support to the disabled is provided also through various active labour market policy measures; however, in these measures the disabled are not singled out as a specific target group.

In view of changes in the work of the SEA and the significant increase in the use of the ALMP measures among the disabled unemployed, it was important for us to seek answers to questions related to accessibility of various ALMP measures organised by the SEA for the disabled unemployed and how these measures improved their integration into the labour market; if these measures strengthened the capabilities of service users.

Two organizations were selected as our partner NGOs - Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations SUSTENTO and Association of the Disabled and their Friends 'Apeirons'. We have cooperated with the SUSTENTO already earlier, in the course of working on WP3 and we have continued our cooperation in assessing the ALMP implemented in the country. We choose to work with 'Apeirons' as their staff offers consultation and guide people with any disability to involve themselves in the labour market. Organization is also dedicated to help the one who is looking for workers to find the perfect employee.

We chose a more individualized approach that employed during the preceding stage of research in cooperation with representatives of the target group who are exposed to long-term unemployed and the social exclusion risk.

There are three groups of disabled persons: group I disability, if the loss of ability to work is in the amount of 80-100 per cent, - very severe disability, group II disability, if the loss of ability to work is in the amount of 60-79 per cent, - severe disability, group III disability, if the loss of ability to work is in the amount of 25-59 per cent, - moderately expressed disability.

We involved persons representing all three groups of disability who had experience of employment and had participated in any of the reviewed policy activities in our research. Such people were recommended by the NGO. We also choose to have interviews with those people who hadn't participated in any of the reviewed policy activities in order to understand their vision of situation in the labour market and their possibilities to work. We have conducted individual interviews. We did it because employment problems differ depending on the disability group (at the same time have a lot of common issues). Moreover, we had already

come to the conclusion earlier in WP3 that the focus group was not always the most appropriate method for cooperation with the disabled (with different groups of disability) as everyone of them wants to tell his/her story and they do not like to be interrupted by interferences from other participants, so individual interview is more comfortable and suitable for them telling their experiences.

In comparison with the WP3 reflected in the report ‘Social disinvestment and vulnerable groups in Europe in the aftermath of the financial crisis: The case of people with disabilities in Latvia’ data acquisition process the range of persons involved in the research has been expanded. We decided to cooperate more with academicians, social workers, representatives of the NGO sector and other assistance and support provides to better understand motivation/ideological substantiation of policy activities as well as to assess the appropriateness of policy measures for the set aims. Experience of the preceding research (WP3) revealed that problems of the disabled were identified and addressed mostly in two ways: by discussing them within the frame of NGOs and then channelling them to the respective public agencies or by requesting help from the local government. We decided to discuss employment problems with NGOs that form their membership taking into account disability group.

The fieldwork included 9 semi-structured in-depth interviews with vulnerable people with disabilities, 4 interviews with representatives of NGOs (our partner NGOs), 2 interviews with representatives of policy makers: state level (representative of ministry) and municipality level (social worker), 2 interviews with employers and one focus group with 4 academicians and 3 specialists in social work (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 2.1 Involved target groups and research topics

Target groups involved	Grounds of social policy measures/paradigms	Subsidised employment measures	Activation of the long-term unemployed
Vulnerable people with disabilities		+	+
Employers (have experience employing people with disabilities)		+	
NGOs (Apeirons, Sustento)		+	+
Representatives of policy makers (state level and municipality level)		+	+
Lecturers, researchers (sociology, social work, social policy)	+		

Table 2.2 Research Methods

Target groups	Methods
Vulnerable people with disabilities	Semi-structured in-depth interviews (9)*
Employers (have experience employing people with disabilities)	Interviews (2)
NGO (Apeirons, Sustento)	Interviews with members of management board (4)
Representatives of policy makers (state level and municipality level)	Interviews with the representative of ministry and (2) social worker from the municipal social service
Lecturers, researchers (sociology, social work, social policy)	Focus group (7)

* Number of persons in brackets.

3. National Context

3.1 Relevant economic and socio-demographic shifts

As it has already been indicated in the WP3 Report ‘Social disinvestment and vulnerable groups in Europe in the aftermath of the financial crisis: The case of people with disabilities in Latvia’, in 2008-2010 Latvia experienced the hardest economic downslide among the EU member states. At the end of 2008 the state stood on the threshold of bankruptcy and it was forced to apply for assistance to international lenders (the European Community, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund). The government implemented a restrictive fiscal policy from 2008 onwards. Six consolidation packages were adopted from 2009 until 2012 with the purpose of ensuring midterm financial sustainability. Generally, consolidation measures in the amount of 16.6 per cent of GDP were implemented from 2008 until 2011: 6.6 per cent concerned budget revenues and the remainder budget expenditure. Fiscal consolidation in Latvia was among the most severe in Europe.

Over the recent years there has been evidence of an improvement in the macroeconomic situation and a gradual recovery of national economy in Latvia in the wake of the 2008-2010 crisis. The stabilisation of the economic situation has had a certain positive impact on the indicators describing the living standard of the population as well as changes in the key social indicators.

According to the Country Report Latvia 2017 (European Commission, 2017, p. 21), the decreasing working age population is a challenge for labour supply and for the social security and health systems. Since young people are overrepresented among emigrants, future dependency rates are projected to increase significantly.

The economic activity rate of the population in the labour market is growing: 60.8% in 2015, 61.6% in 2016 of the total population aged 15 to 74. However decrease of unemployment is rather negligible. In 2015 the unemployment rate shrank to 9.9%, in 2016 –to 9.6%, the share of long-term unemployed remains quite high -41.5% in 2016.

Data on registered unemployment provided by the State Employment Agency (SEA) also reveal a stabilization tendency for unemployment rate: in January 2016 the registered unemployment rate was 8.5%. Despite some slight improvements as disturbing trend that should be mentioned is the average length of the unemployment period for the long-term unemployed at the end of December 2016 the average unemployment period was 940 days 2.6 years (at the end of December 2015 -967 days). According to the report of the SEA, since 2010 there has been evidence of a decrease in the number of the unemployed with the unemployment period of 1-3 years and an increase in the number of the unemployed with the unemployment period of 3 and more years (State Employment Agency, December 2016).

During the crisis as well as in the recent years there has been an increase in the number of people with disabilities in Latvia. According to the data of the State Medical Commission for the Assessment of Health Condition and Working Ability (SMC) by January 2017 182,048 persons with disabilities had been registered (including 8,296 children), that is approximately 9.3% of the total number of permanent residents in Latvia (in 2015 - 8.1%) (SMS, 2016, p. 16). It is a comparatively high number that affects the total number of the working age population and likewise the labour market.

The high number of the disabled is influenced by the unfavourable social-economic situation in the country, inaccessibility of medical care services (mostly lack of financial resources, that long waiting lists for medical examinations and specialist consultations where people have to wait for months due to lack of quotas, the required rehabilitation activities have not been undertaken in due time or have not been undertaken at all) that is confirmed also by the severity of the conferred disability group (Group I) - for 28.4% of the new cases (even 39.0% for non-working individuals!), conferred repeatedly – for 16.1% of the disabled (SMS, 2016, p. 15).

Access to the labour market is viewed as the basis for the possibility of any individual to live an independent life. It requires the creation of such conditions where the individual has access to appropriate education, employers are open to employees with special needs, as well as access to the infrastructure and accessibility aids that enable each individual to apply his/her skills and abilities. The rate of unemployment as well as hidden unemployment is very high among the disabled, thus demonstrating that even though the motivation of the disabled to find employment is strong, the options of finding a job are comparatively low (SIA 'Baltijas konsultācijas', SIA 'Agile & CO', 2017, p. 49).

Table 3.1 Employment of people with disabilities in Latvia

September 2016			
Disability group	Number of unique individuals with disabilities	Including number of unique individuals with disabilities employed	Employment rate of disabled individuals
Group 1	26,439	1,190	4.5%
Group 2	83,887	17,650	21.0%
Group 3	66,227	29,012	43.8%
Total	176,553	47,852	27.1%

Source Data Ministry of Welfare

As concerns the employment of the disabled, it can be concluded that the highest employment rate is found among individuals with group III disability – more than 40% of individuals with group III disability are employed or self-employed (in compliance with the Law on State Social Insurance). A comparatively low employment rate is found among individuals with group II disability (21.0%) and in particular among individuals with group I disability (4.5%).

Policy developers point out that the above situation can be explained by the fact that individuals with group III disability have moderate disability where the loss of ability to work is 25-59%, thus the entry into the labour market is easier for these individuals because in this case functional disorders are less severe than in the case of group I and group II disabilities. An individual with group I disability has very severe disability with the loss of ability to work equal to 80-100% while an individual with group II disability has the loss of the ability to work equal to 60-79%.

As concerns the unemployment rate among the disabled, it must be pointed out that according to the statistics of the State Employment Agency, at the end of March, 2017, there were 9,532 registered unemployed individuals with disabilities, constituting 12.5% of the total number of the registered unemployed in the country (5.6% in 2008). The increase can be explained by the growth of the total number of the disabled in Latvia as well as the active work of NGOs representing interests of the disabled. In the end of March, 2017, half of the registered unemployed with disabilities were long-term unemployed.

More than half (58.8%) of the registered disabled unemployed individuals are 50 and over 50 years of age, young unemployed individuals (15-24) constitute 3.1% of the total number of the registered disabled unemployed. In the end of March, 2017, the average length of the unemployment period for the disabled unemployed was 367 days ~ 1 year (at the end of March, 2016, it was 402 days) (Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra, 2017, p. 8).

According to the data of SEA, in 2016 individuals with disabilities who had attended ALMP measures provided by the SEA, had found employment in the following groups of professions: unclassified workers not classified elsewhere cleaners of offices, hotels and other premises, salespersons and assistants to salespersons in shops, drivers of lorries with trailers and articulated lorries, drivers of automobiles, taxicabs, small capacity lorries and minibuses, janitors and workers of related professions.

3.2 National and Regional trends Social Protection and ALMP

The Latvian economy has begun its recovery from recession, with positive real GDP growth having resumed in 2011, but the effects of the crisis on the labour market are far from over. With fewer jobs on offer, the risk of staying unemployed for over a year is real for a substantial number of people (World Bank, 2013).

According to Country Report Latvia 2017, activation of the unemployed remains low. The involvement of the unemployed in active labour market policies (ALMPs) is lower than in most other EU countries and Latvia spends only around 0.22% of GDP on employment services and related ALMPs (OECD, 2016). The support measures are insufficiently developed for the low-skilled, long-term unemployed and persons with disabilities, with some improvements expected as of 2017. Financing of ALMPs largely relies on EU funds (European Commission, 2017). About half of the ALMP measures consist of training, which have been shown to be effective in improving the labour market prospects of the unemployed, based on past evaluations (World Bank, 2013). 'Employment incentives' and 'supported employment and rehabilitation' are targeted towards disadvantaged unemployed people. The former largely consists of wage subsidies, which are relatively expensive per participant and have not been rigorously evaluated yet.

The share of the public works programme has slowly decreased, but still remains the most popular measure for the long-term unemployed. Public works are generally considered to be among the least effective activation instruments. In spite of the observed regional disparities in unemployment rates, the take-up of regional mobility support remains below expectations, largely due to the fact that mobility to Riga is only partially eligible for support. Activation support for the disadvantaged unemployed is set to expand. Support measures for the long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged unemployed people will substantially increase and their share of financing in the total ALMP envelope is set to increase from 14% in 2015 to 32% in 2017 (European Commission, 2017, p. 21).

ALMPs and unemployment benefits are administered by the SEA and the Social Insurance State Agency, while social assistance and a large part of social services are the responsibility of municipalities.

Policy documents of Latvia list the following problems for the employment of the disabled. Firstly, it is lack of information and stereotypes prevailing in the society. Secondly, it is lack of interest among employers to employ individuals with disabilities, their complaints about inability to find solutions – transfer to a suitable work place or adjustment of the working environment as well as lack of information about support provided by the state. Thirdly, it is obstacles related to the quality of education and, in particular, the quality of vocational education that does allow acquiring competitive professions. Fourthly, special education and weak organisation of activities aimed at preparing the youths to the transfer to the labour market fail to prepare them for independent life. Career orientation is another weak link that has been identified (Labklājības ministrija, 2013, p. 9-13).

Different disability groups integrate into the labour market in various ways - using different ALMP measures; however, it is not possible to make a complete assessment of their integration as there are no data by type of functional disorders, group of disability and loss of the ability to work in percentage terms, by gender and other indicators. Thus it is not possible to draw clear-cut conclusions concerning the degree of involvement of each group in these activities and the number of employed individuals with moderate disabilities (group III) or more severe disabilities (group I, II).

On the whole, the SEA implements various employment promotion activities – training, support activities etc.; however, the disabled are not the main target group in most of these activities, and no data are publicly accessible concerning the number of the disabled who have participated in the all activities implemented by the SEA.

Currently services of the SEA are the main state support mechanism for promoting employment of the disabled; the SEA administrates the establishment of subsidized work places and directs the individual to training activities if they are required.

No quota system exists to disable people in Latvia; however projects implemented by the State Employment Agency ‘Subsidized work places for the disabled’ and ‘Support measure ‘Subsidized work places for the unemployed youths (activities for specific groups of individuals)’ try to motivate employers to hire individuals with disabilities. The service ‘Subsidized work places for the disabled’ has existed already for 12 years and it is also financed by European Union Funds. At present the disabled can qualify for ‘The activity for specific groups of individuals’ or the Youth Guarantee Measure ‘Subsidized employment activities for the unemployed youths’ where the disabled person can qualify as a disabled person or an unemployed person in a more unfavourable situation, including in the target group of the long-term unemployed, or an unemployment youth.

In 2016 the work/study place was adapted for 111 persons with disabilities, while 235 persons received services of an ergo therapist.

In Latvia, the beneficiaries of the wage subsidy program include the long-term unemployed (out of job for at least 24 months); the unemployed who are older than 50 years; the disabled unemployed, etc. Wage subsidies are provided from 12 months for up to 24 months for unemployed with disabilities. Wage subsidy equals 50 percent of the regular salary for particular job but not more than the national minimum wage. Based on the gross placement rates, the program seems to be quite efficient. In 2011, 1,272 individuals of all mentioned target groups participated in the program, and 1,023 or 80 percent of them retained their jobs with the same employer (SEA 2013, World Bank, 2013, p. 26).

Activities ‘Subsidized work places for the disabled’ and ‘Support measure ‘Subsidized work places for the unemployed youths’ aimed at integrating the disabled in the labour market lack consecutiveness and continuity. Most often they are implemented within the frame of projects supported by EU financial instruments and they are not based on a specific national long-term policy with appropriate funding. Moreover, participation in the existing activities often entails a considerable bureaucratic burden. Employers who want to cooperation with the SEA in employing the disabled often encounter various demands, which, if implemented, would require investment of additional resources and time. Therefore, employers who do not want to make these additional investments more often look for employees with disabilities with the help of NGOs and do not choose the SEA as their mediator.

However, it must be emphasized that these instruments have been implemented for a definite term, thus, on the whole, there is no permanent system in the country for motivating employers to hire individuals with disabilities.

The effectiveness of any ALMP activity is measured by the employment fact of participants of the activity during the six month period following the completion of the subsidized activity. Thus employment lasting only one day after the end of the subsidized activity period allows considering the said person as being or having been employed.

Experience of recipients of the ‘Subsidized work places for the disabled’ and suspicion of state institutions concerning credibility of measurements of the effectiveness of the service cannot be confirmed by data currently available. Lack of data does not allow identifying persons who use this service to get a work place, often known already earlier, for at least a short period of time – namely, to use the service for acquiring at least short-employment and socialisation but not for improvement of motivation and skills. However, it is recognised by the involved parties that this activity is maintained as actually it is the only targeted activity of the SEA for the disabled and it has no alternatives.

The Latvian SEA is utilizing the principle ‘first come – first served’, e.g., the waiting list is based on the order of registration to participate in the program.

As written in the public Report of the State Employment Agency, services of an ergo therapist, a sign language interpreter, support persons and other specialists are offered to ensure that the support of the SEA could be received by as many jobseekers as possible. The disabled unemployed who participate in SEA training activities, can use the help of the ergo therapist and the sign language interpreter during their training sessions and, if necessary, the place of studies is also adapted to the needs of the specific person. SEA stresses that agency has activated cooperation with non-governmental organisations representing interests of the disabled; an agreement was signed with the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations SUSTENTO within the frame of the ESF Project ‘Subsidized work places for the unemployed’ concerning providing consultations to employers on issues related to employment of the disabled unemployed. The SEA also organised training for their staff on work with the unemployed from this target group. (State Employment Agency, 2016).

By the Latvian ‘Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law’, the basis for the loss of unemployed person status shall be failure to fulfil the duties of an unemployed person without a justified reason.

The SEA (2013) has identified the following policy directions to improve wage subsidy arrangements: (i) implement differentiated wage subsidies, for example, depending on severity of the disability-to encourage employers to hire persons with more severe disabilities, as well as other vulnerable groups, such as long-term unemployed; (ii) gradually reduce wage subsidy over time; and (iii) implement a profiling system to better target wage subsidy measures (World Bank, 2013, p. 24) However, it is difficult to implement these principles as there have been attempts to gradually reduce the support payment, retaining the total amount of costs unchanged by year, but employers have not support such a scheme of funding.

In all Latvian social policy planning documents the disabled have been included in the group exposed to the poverty risk and social exclusion. There is a certain set of social protection measures in Latvia like in other European Union member states that is directed towards preventing the poverty risk. The material support is the disability pension and the social insurance benefit. According to Article 14 of the Law on State Pensions, ‘Insured persons with a length of period of insurance, which is not less than three years, have the right to a disability pension ... if such persons have been recognised as disabled persons, ...’.

The disability pension amount depends on the on the assigned disability group. In the case of group III disability the disability pension is granted in the amount equal to the state social insurance benefit – EUR 64.03, the disability pension for a person disabled since childhood is EUR 106.72.

The disability pension amount in the case of group I and group II disabilities depends on the following:

- the person's average insurance contribution wage that is established for any 36 successive months during the last 5 years preceding the allocation of the disability pension;
- the person's individual length of the insurance period;
- the possible maximum insurance period that is established from the age of 15 until the retirement age prescribed by law.

If the person has not been subject to disability insurance five years before the allocation of the disability pension, the disability pension is granted in the minimum amount:

- the group I minimum disability pension amount is equal to the state social insurance benefit, multiplied by coefficient 1,6 (EUR 102.45, for a person disabled since childhood – EUR 170.75);
- the group II minimum disability pension amount is equal to the state social insurance benefit, multiplied by coefficient 1,4 (EUR 89.64, for a person disabled since childhood – EUR 149.41).

There is additional income tax relief for persons with disabilities - 1,848 euro per year - for a person with a disability group I or II; 1,440 euro per year - for a person with a disability group III. Ordinary amount of income tax relief for pensioners is 2,820 euro in 2017. The average amount of disability pension in 2016 was 230.49 euro per month for the I disability group, 216.37 euro per month for the II disability group and 101.60 euro per month for the III disability group. It means that only few of disability pensioners can benefit from this tax relief.

For comparison, data of the State Social Insurance Agency show that in Latvia the average old age pension amount was EUR 288 in 2015.

4. Analysis of policy measures

4.1 Discussing social welfare paradigms

During the years when the crisis was at its severest (in 2009 and 2010) the unemployment rate in Latvia increased significantly with the subsequent considerable growth of the demand for active and passive employment policy measures. In Latvia labour market measures are financed by the European Social Fund, the allocated national funding is insignificant (World Bank, 2013). Starting with the end of 2011 unemployment began to gradually decline; however, it still remained higher than before the crisis.

The situation that has developed in Latvia does not allow speaking about the marked dominance of only one paradigm. The Latvian active labour market policy measures were discussed by a focus group that included 4 representatives of the academia (representatives of universities and research institutes) and 3 specialists of social work. The focus group participants have been unanimous in their opinion that, on the whole, already since the restoration of independent statehood of Latvia in 1991 the neoliberal approach has dominated in the politics of Latvia. During the recent years ministries and the State Employment Agency have borrowed more ideas from the conservative approach to implementing labour market measures – when the emphasis is on the approach of activation and workload to people of the working age. The comparison of the rhetoric employed in policy documents reveals frequent references to the social investment approach. However, in policy documents the social investment approach is understood in its narrower meaning (the economic understanding of the social investment approach. Ides Nicaise).

Participants of the focus group have emphasized that in reality it is not possible to speak about the social investment approach in its widest meaning. Therefore the Latvian ALMP cannot be described as the implementation of only one paradigm but rather as the implementation of elements from all paradigms. *Still it must be noted that the approach that is characteristic of the neoliberal paradigm with the lowest possible benefits and the shortest possible periods of benefit payment to ‘make work pay’, does not work in Latvia because the majority of workplaces offered to the unemployed (in particular to representatives of at poverty and social exclusion risk groups) are low-paid. It is, in particular, characteristic for people who are further away from the labour market as they are offered low-qualified and low-paid jobs.*

Likewise over the recent years the social insurance system has also undergone changes that are characteristic of the neoliberal paradigm (a stricter and more restrictive procedure for the receipt of the unemployment benefit, reduction of the period for the receipt of the sickness benefit). The consolidation of the conservative approach is characterized by an increasingly stronger emphasis on activation measures and a strict control over the performance of obligations by the unemployed. Support eligibility criteria prescribed by local governments are stricter and there is more concern about the dependence of a certain part of the population on social benefits. On local level part of social workers have opinion that for some social exclusion risk groups benefits become the main source of income and they no longer want to enter the labour market, thus the conservative paradigm is more dominant in their approach while the NGOs of the disabled are more aware of the necessity of the social investment approach in promoting the employment of people with disabilities because the disabled have to overcome more difficulties to be able to be competitive in the open labour market. .

Data of the European Social Survey reveal the attitude of the population in Latvia to justification of social assistance and argumentation provided in the above paradigms. Data for 2008 are the most recent available data about Latvia. Data of the said survey show that the majority of the population in Latvia do not agree to the argumentation about the negative impact of social benefits on their recipients, which is one of the cornerstones of the conservative approach. However, the population is not so unanimous in their judgement concerning the activity of the unemployed in job-seeking: 34% agree that the majority of the unemployed do not even make an effort to find a job while 48% do not agree to this statement. This could be an argument in favour of the neoliberal paradigm.

The fact that the majority of the population believe that it is not enough to provide a benefit to help people who need it, speaks in favour of the social investment approach. It is difficult to relate specific paradigms to the distrust of the population in the benefit allocation system that manifests itself in their conviction that benefit allocation is not fair and benefits can be acquired illegally.

Table 4.1 The assessment of social care and social benefits in 2008 by Latvian population

	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree and strongly disagree
... make people lazy	18.4	18.4	63.2
... make people less willing to care for one another	14.9	17.9	67.1
... make people less willing to look after themselves and their family	13.9	17.3	68.9
Most unemployed people do not really try to find a job	34.1	18.2	47.7
Many people with very low incomes get less benefit than they are legally entitled to	63.4	23.5	13.1
Many people manage to obtain benefits and services to which they are not entitled	55.5	26.5	18.1
There are insufficient benefits in Latvia to help the people who are in real need	69.9	19.9	10.5

Source European Social Survey Round 4 Data (2008). Data file edition 4.4. NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway - Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC

4.2 Employment problems of persons with disabilities

Basic Guidelines for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for 2014–2020 (2013) address, first and foremost, lack of information and stereotypes prevailing in the society as a problem for employment of persons with disability. Secondly, another problem that is highlighted is lack of interest among employers to employ individuals with disabilities, their complaints about inability to find solutions – transfer to a suitable work place or adjustment of the working environment as well as lack of information about support provided by the state. Thirdly, it is obstacles related to the quality of education and, in particular, the quality of vocational education that does allow acquiring competitive professions. Fourthly, special education and weak organisation of activities aimed at preparing the youths to the transfer to the labour market fail to prepare them for independent life. Career orientation is another weak link that has been identified.

As appeared in the interviews with people with disabilities and representatives of NGOs employers are very cautious to employ individuals with disabilities. To employers mind, often reasons for their caution can be found in regulatory acts (excessively rigorous protection).

Obstacles to employment of persons of disability that were indicated by Gunta Anča, Chairperson of the Board of the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations SUSTENTO.

1 A low level of education and skills (professional and social)

Until now the system of inclusive education has not yet been fully developed in Latvia. Irrespective of successfully formulated legislative acts, in reality children with disabilities or learning disorders acquire education at special educational institutions. Unpreparedness of the teaching staff and curricula, unadapted environment, the general attitude of the society do not develop inclusive education. Often the level of knowledge provided by special schools is insufficient to enable pupils to pass the final exams and to receive the respective certificate of education. Knowledge is not sufficient even for the performance of simple jobs where the certificate might even not be required. The lengthy study process in a segregated educational institution, away from the family and the community stimulates the isolation of these children; they do not develop communication and socialisation skills that are so necessary in the labour market.

2 Insufficient knowledge of employers about needs of employees with disabilities

In Latvia employers have not had the possibility to acquire skills and knowledge for communication with employees with disabilities. They follow all the stereotypes prevailing in the society – that these people are often sick and incapable of doing their job properly, that they will not be able to integrate in the work team and the work team will not be able to accept them. As a result it is complicated for the employer to hire a disabled person and later to maintain employment relations with the person.

3 The need to have special working conditions or equipment

Often special working conditions and equipment are required to enable people with more severe disabilities to have appropriate employment opportunities. It is possible that the required equipment is simple and easily available; however, sometimes costs of such equipment are quite high and unacceptable for the employer. Likewise, there is a high probability that the employer himself/herself does not know what equipment might be the most suitable. Sometimes special working conditions also mean the necessity to have shorter or changed working hours, special lighting at the work place or prevention of any background noise. The employer must be ready to understand these needs and to provide these conditions.

4 Inaccessibility of premises

Accessibility of premises is of particular significance for the employment of persons with motoric disorders as well as blind people. Doorways, which are not sufficiently wide, steps or even upper floors, lack of vādulu and reference points prevent hiring of persons with more severe disabilities. Often the environment can be adapted with the help of slight changes - access ramps, hoists, vādulu and other reference points. Sometimes the adaptation of the environment may become an unsurpassable burden for employers - not infrequently the instalment of an elevator proves to be too expensive and is not possible.

5 Imbalance of remuneration and benefits

In Latvia significant restrictions for employment are generated by the unsuccessfully implemented social insurance and social assistance policy. Persons with disabilities have access to state and local benefits in different situations. Several benefits offered by local governments are paid only to those persons who have been granted the status of a needy person, following the assessment of their income level; thus when the person starts to work, the income level rises and the person loses the status of a needy person and likewise the benefits paid by the local government. In Latvia incomes from salaried employment are comparatively low, in particular for people with more severe disabilities. It means that at times the money earned by work is less than the benefits the person receives if unemployed.

Representatives of the NGO ‘Apeirons’ who have been providing employment support services to persons with disabilities in Riga already for six years, have a brief comment:

“The main difficulties in the labour market are caused by stereotypes, thus part of the disabled conceal their disabilities, secondly, it is the low level of education, thirdly, it is the inaccessibility of the environment for persons with motoric disorders. These are the main problems. Certainly, it is also the age. And the workload which is too strenuous. There are no part-time jobs or jobs with shorter working hours”.

Even if the concealment of the disability helps to get a job it has negative consequences: people with disabilities take on the workload of healthy people, which they find too difficult to bear, and stereotypes about employment possibilities of the disabled remain unchanged. But we had also some good examples in our interviews. During the interviews the focus of attention shifted more on efforts of persons with physical disabilities and mental disabilities to find and to adapt work places to their needs.

The main unemployment problem for persons with physical disabilities is the accessibility of the environment. Work at home is recognised to be a good solution to the problem. Work at home can be organised in line with the person’s health – the person may take a rest when required, the premises are familiar and adapted to the needs of the disabled person, there is no need to leave home to go to the work place on regular basis.

“At home I can work mostly in bed. I fall back, take a brief rest and then get back to work again”. (a man, disability group I)

“When I do the work, is entirely up to me. At night, in the morning or ... I will never go to work where I have to sit all day somewhere away from my home. It is not possible physically. I know those who do work ... I must lie down during the day, I must have a rest”. (a woman, disability group I)

In the case of working at home communication with the employer and colleagues is particularly important; it requires certain understanding and desire on the employer’s part to cooperate; however, if these issues are resolved, it is a good opportunity to employ persons with physical disabilities.

“... there are no problems, we call each other, exchange emails, and I have not been to my place of work a single time”. (a man, disability group II)

Persons with mental disorders have different problems. They need work where they themselves can set the tempo of work and plan the scope of their output.

“Currently I take my medication every day and my disease does not cause any problems. I just have to be less nervous about everything. That is why I do not want to get involved in any permanent work that would require going to work every day for regular working hours. I like it that I can regulate my working time myself”. (a women)

Persons with mental retardation and psychic diseases gladly take on physical work, for example, Aina who is employed by the Social Service, provides assistance to the elderly *“... we go to aunties ... old aunties ... Well, we clean the rooms there, clean the windows, ...”.*

4.3 Activation of the long-term unemployed and provision of services

A disabled person can find a job himself/herself in consultation with a NGO, the social services; likewise several enterprises implement a policy of employing the disabled.

At present the main state support mechanism in stimulating employment of the disabled is NGO services; NGOs administrate the establishment of subsidized work places and refer the disabled for training measures if they are needed. The experience of the NGO ‘Apeirons’ reveals how support is provided to the disabled in their job-seeking efforts in practice and what main problems still exist in this field.

4.3.1 Employment support service for persons with disabilities in Riga: experience of the NGO 'Apeirons'

The target group is clients of the Riga Social Service who have functional disorders (speech disability, impaired eyesight, internal diseases etc. disabilities). The service is provided by the Association of the Disabled and their Friends 'Apeirons'. Since 2012 the service has been received by 353 persons with disabilities, of whom 102 have found employment (data of the Welfare Department at the Riga City Council).

Services provided by the 'Apeirons' are used by people over 50 years of age, with group II and group III disabilities. A view prevails among the people with disabilities themselves and also in the society that group I disability means the person cannot have salaried employment. Disabled people do not have good examples that could prove that persons with group I disabilities can also work. However, many people with group I disability have worked in the 'Apeirons' office and through this the organisation attempts to overturn the existing stereotypes.

It is difficult for the disabled to integrate into the labour market as often they cannot stand the same workload as people without restricted working ability. Thus part-time work is more suitable for the disabled.

"I would like to work. But I feel too bad, I can't work full-time. ... but in our small town...part time work, especially for a disabled person, cannot be found." (a woman, disability group I)

The main principle followed by the 'Apeirons' is individual work with every client – *"we take the person by the hand and go together with him/her all the way"*. Usually clients do not have computer literacy skills; they do not know how to perform simple functions, to use the e-mail, to prepare CVs, to find vacancies, to look for jobs.

The 'Apeirons' staff finds and selects suitable vacancies and sends them to the clients to contact their potential employers. Specialists - psychologists, social workers, career advisors - provide the necessary consultations. Consultations are also provided concerning the pension system. Last year computer training was provided specifically for job-seeking - what should be done step by step, which portals to examine, how to prepare the CV, how to upload it.

Jobs that are suitable for persons with disabilities and that the 'Apeirons' staff tries to find for their clients include on-duty-persons where no education and no skills are required, cleaners, janitors. The deaf are more frequently employed as cleaners or janitors as they are physically strong. Less often the disabled find jobs of salespersons, packers. Representatives of NGO were proud that *"At the moment a girl with the education of a social worker has found a job in her profession"*.

The disabled look for cleaning jobs because it is possible to work part-time and there are flexible working hours. The disabled apply and are hired as part-time on-duty- persons and cleaners because usually healthy people do not apply for these jobs in view of the low salary that they cannot survive on while the disabled receive also their disability pension.

As 'Apeirons' staff told in the interviews 'Even young people with disabilities and good education also find it difficult to get a job. They are not hired. Nobody is rejected directly, the employers say – we will call you but nobody calls.'

Vacancies are also offered by the State Employment Agency (SEA); however, they do not select vacancies that are suitable for the clients and on offer. *"They offer the old vacancies as well that have been already filled in already a long time ago, and it generates distrust in clients"*. The 'Apeirons' project manager recognises that the SEA does a lot for training of the unemployed, they have many short lectures; however, it is not enough as people need practical help. Individual practical assistance to every jobseeker is offered by the 'Apeirons' and it does

not duplicate the work of the SEA. Likewise it is important that the ‘Apeirons’ takes into consideration the abilities of the disabled: *“we take into account what people can do and what they cannot do and then we start our search”*. It happens that people without experience overrate their abilities - *“the person believes that he/she will be able to do the job while we have to explain it to the person that the job is not suitable”*. It is difficult for people who have not had salaried employment for a long time to get out of the routine daily life - people must change their life and many of them are not ready for that. Therefore specialists of the ‘Apeirons’ encourage and help to introduce these changes

4.3.2 Assessment of the employment support activities

Data acquired during interviews, focus group discussion and research reveal that lack of information is an acute and long-term problem that exists at several levels of the employment system. Complaints about lack of information are expressed by the disabled persons themselves as well as representatives of NGOs and employers involved in the process.

Persons with disabilities mostly emphasized lack of information about the available support measures and places where to look for information while concealment of the disability was mentioned as another obstacle to receiving support.

Lack of information as very critical issue was revealed in other studies as well. Employers are not sufficiently informed about possibilities of receiving support if they employ persons with disabilities while employees of public agencies express critical comments concerning the currently existing procedure when measures are financed in the form of projects and they generate competition between state and municipal institutions that obstructs the flow of information (SIA ‘Baltijas konsultācijas’, SIA ‘Agile & CO’, 2017).

Experience of the NGO ‘Apeirons’ shows that capabilities of the disabled are rarely taken into account in support measures for the unemployed organised by the SEA. The offer is general while each individual case is different. Other research studies have also highlighted the need for a differentiated approach - there are no guidelines concerning the offer or range of services that would be appropriate for the various types and severity of disability - the target group is not profiled according to the type of the retained capability for work.

Some people with disabilities had quite good experience with the SEA. The disabled, who were interviewed and were participated in some training courses offered by the SEA, spoke highly of the assistance provided to them in their job-seeking efforts as well as about the offered courses; however, they recognised that not always the disabled people could use them.

“No, I have gone to them a number of times (to the SEA) and I cannot say anything bad about them. They offer what they have, but there is nothing related to my profession ...” (a man, group II)

“When I was registered with the labour exchange, I trained to be a hair-dresser; however, I could not work as I was ill all the time ...” (a woman, group II)

It can be concluded that the approach followed by the ‘Apeirons’ is more in line with the capability approach as it takes into consideration the functioning capability of each client and encourages making one’s choice.

4.4 Subsidized employment measures

Subsidized employment as a support measures targets the unemployed in a more disadvantaged situation, as well as the long-term unemployed facilitating and motivating their entry into the labour market. Disability generates a more disadvantaged situation for persons who want to be employed and actively seek work as

well as for those who are not active in their job search. According to international experience, these are different target groups and usually subsidized employment is focused on stimulating motivation and development of work experience by activating the unemployed (SIA 'Baltijas konsultācijas', SIA 'Agile & CO', 2017).

The measure 'subsidized work place' has existed already for 12 years and it is also financed from the European Union funds. At present the disabled can qualify for 'The Activity for Specific Groups of Persons' or the Youth Guarantee Activity 'Subsidized Employment Measures for Unemployed Youths' (see the description of the service in Chapter 3.2). The aim of the measure is to facilitate the development of sustainable and long-term working places for unemployed with lower productivity level and preserve their skills and competencies. Financial support is provided for maximum period of 24 months for unemployed disabled people, and includes monthly wage subsidy which equals to the amount of minimum monthly wage. The following additional expenses are also covered from the state budget: wage supplements for supervisors during on-the-job training, training or working place adaptation for persons with special needs, involvement of different experts, such as assistants, silent language experts etc.

4.4.1 Experience of a subsidized work place

(Aivars, 44 years old, disability group II since childhood)

Aivars has used the service 'subsidized work place' twice - the first time he worked as an office administrator for the Diabetes Federation, the second time he worked at the Latvian Society of the Blind. After the interview Aivars shows his CV - it lists three unsubsidized work places and two subsidized work places. He has worked for a year and less at the unsubsidized work places, mostly in warehouses. The longest employment period has been with the Latvian Society of the Blind. Currently, Aivars is unemployed.

In the first subsidized work place the project had ended earlier (after a year and eight months) because the structure of the organisation was changed. Aivars had wanted to continue work at another subsidized work place without any delay; however, the State Employment Agency had informed him that he would be able to get a subsidized work place for a second time only after a year. During the interim period Aivars has placed ads in mass media and has looked for work but he recognised that it is difficult to find a job himself. The second subsidized work place was the Latvian Society of the Blind where Aivars worked for two years - from 2014 until 2016. He was informed about this option by the SEA. At the Society of the Blind Aivars worked in the archives, his task was to file documents and to upload them in the computer. Aivars did not need any special training as he had computer skills and could work with the Excel. His work place was a desk and a computer - 'everything that was needed', he says.

Even though Aivars had to traverse the whole of Riga, spending more than an hour on the way to his work, he is very positive about the time when he worked for the Latvian Society of the Blind. He liked that other staff members were very supportive, that he was also entrusted with the tasks of a courier. In his view, experience is the main gain acquired from this work. Currently he has improved his computer literacy skills; recently he helped an acquaintance to learn to use Word and Excel software. While working for the Latvian Society of the Blind Aivars got interested in the work of a project manager, and after the end of his employment he applied to the project management course offered by the SEA. He has completed the course and has received a certificate.

Aivars compares his work in a subsidized work place and a regular work place and points out that he had employment in a regular work place only for a short period time - as a substitute for an employee absent from work due to some reason. He speaks about his work in the warehouse where the end of the work day was the most difficult as most of the work had to be done in a short time. The subsidized work place is for

two years, it gives a feeling of security; work is also in line with the abilities, it strengthens self-confidence and stimulates the desire to work.

Aivars believes that the fact that he does not conceal his disability and seeks the assistance of the SEA is the main key of his success: *“Not everybody knows about these subsidized work places as not everybody who is out of job, goes to the SEA and tells them that he has a disability group and he would like to work ...”*

Aivars is very critical about the year between the subsidized jobs that must be spent without work. He would like to see these rules changed, excluding this compulsory interval.

The attitude towards the subsidized work places differs. Not all of our interviewed disabled people were so optimistic about this activity. Part of the disabled finds it difficult to find a job as not all employers want to employ disabled persons.

“Well, we have to look for that subsidized work place ourselves ... I have made many enquiries but nobody needs ... Taxes are to be paid all the same, the salary is not to be paid, but the tax still must be paid. And they still hold the opinion: “Oh, you have a disability. Will you be at work, will you absent from work?” And then they start thinking. (a woman, disability group II)

As it was stressed by active disabled person in one of the interview - one of the most essential factors of employment is activity of the person – the desire to work, search for solutions, reminding about oneself.

“Yes, many people like to go to the social service, to whine about their difficult life, get the benefit through their whining and moaning. Everybody chooses his/her own way to take. I know chaps who work and earn their living sitting in wheelchairs. One must move one, be in the circulation, people must know about you. If they know about you, they offer you a job”. (a man, disability group II)

4.4.2 Assessment of the subsidized work place

When assessing the appropriateness of subsidized work places for needs of persons with disabilities, representatives of NGOs and public agencies recognise that subsidized work places are the only employment opportunity for many people with disabilities:

It is clear that often there are cases when a work place has been established and an unemployed person is hired who has just been registered with the State Employment Agency - a disabled unemployed person who corresponds to the target group. In reality he has come because he knows that he will be hired for that work place. He works for two years and then, possibly, waits for his next turn. The problem that we encounter is that it is comparatively difficult for us to provide further long-term employment for these people. (Representative of policy makers)

Representatives of the NGO ‘Apeirons’ point out the difference between the theory and practice in the matter of subsidized workplace: *In theory ... the employer hires a person; the person works there for some time and stays on. In practice it happens very, very rarely. There are few work places, and people fight for them. Likewise the two-year period is considered to be too short - in a subsidized work place two years pass until the person is taught to work a full day, it is rehabilitation at work. That is okay, however, it cannot be said that it achieves the goal.*

People who have worked in subsidized work places would gladly continue working there also after the expiry of the two-year period; however, experience described above by Aivars shows that he will be able to apply for another subsidized work only after a year.

The question what happens to employees when the period of the subsidized work place expires has been put also in other research studies. As persons with disabilities often use the subsidized work place as the only employment option as they are aware that it will not be possible to find a job after the end of this period, social guarantees after the expiry of the period become particularly significant. A disabled person

who does not get any job option or the unemployment benefit after the expiry of the subsidized work place activity finds himself/herself in an unenviable situation. The person may feel resentment and it may affect the person's desire to participate in other support activities.

The unemployment benefit is important for preventing any rapid deterioration of the life quality after the expiry of the subsidized employment period and the loss of the job as the person has again to learn to live on a much lower amount of available funds that might prove to be particularly difficult if the work place has necessitated significant changes of the person's life style, for example, the person has changed the place of residence or bought a transport vehicle on instalment to get to the job (SIA 'Baltijas konsultācijas', SIA 'Agile & CO', 2017).

The subsidized work place has been developed to compensate expenses of the employer that may be incurred by hiring a disabled person who has been out of employment for some time, who has to be trained and who could have some constraints for work performance in comparison with other employees. It has been pointed out also by the representative of policy makers during the interview who has indicated that the service has been targeted to providing compensation to employers but has not been targeted to the actual needs of the person to be employed. The person does not always need some adjustment, for example, a person with a relatively small loss of the ability to work.

At present there is no differentiation or profiling of various target groups among the disabled.

Investment is made in the work place for a two-year period; however, practice shows that the established work places 'disappear' when the period is over; employees who were subsidized during this two-year period do not continue to work there and no other disabled people are hired. Thus investment in adapting a work place to the needs of disabled people is an investment only for two years. Taking into consideration the social investment paradigm, investment must be made in people as well but not only in short-term work places. Such investment would be long-term.

Participation of the disabled in the labour market may be facilitated by other conditions as well - part-time work is a very significant adjustment. This pre-requisite is mentioned not only as problematic in our research, but also by the research study conducted by the SIVA 'Research of the labour demand and identification of professions and skills required by the labour market for persons with severe disability and mental disorders' where it is pointed out that part-time employment is comparatively rarely available in Latvia and part-time employees are exposed to a much higher dismissal risk if the enterprise experiences difficulties.

4.5 ALMP from the Social Investment, Human Rights and Capability Approach perspective

Article 23 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that: Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been effective in Latvia on 31 March, 2010, but there are a lot of problems in its implementation.

This chapter discussed the practical implementation of the right of the disabled to employment through active employment measures and assessment of these measures mostly by the perspective of the people with disabilities (giving voice to users of these measures and to representatives of NGOs who represent these people).

Representatives of the NGO emphasize that the ratification of the above UN Convention by Latvia is a very important step towards respect for human rights of persons with disabilities as a mechanism has been

developed for the implementation of the Convention and the process is closely monitored. It forms the foundation for the practical implementation of human rights of the people with disabilities.

In 2015 the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia approved the Plan for 2015-2017 for the Implementation of the Basic Guidelines for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for 2014-2020. It is indicated in the Plan that the policy is developed in line with provisions laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure transition from the medical model, which emphasizes the person's inability and dependence on other people, to a human rights- based social model where the emphasis is on the right of the disabled person to independent life and active participation in social processes. The Plan also outlines the direction of changes - Latvia must continue moving towards the restructuring of the sector to stimulate the activity of the people with disabilities within the frame of their remaining ability to work; likewise support mechanisms must be developed to enable the disabled to enjoy opportunities and rights like the rest of the general public.

The above transition from the medical model to the social model means the application of the capability approach in respect of disability. The Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations SUSTENTO has developed a training programme for professions working with the people with disabilities. The essence of both models is explained within the frame of the said programme:

- According to the medical model the disability of the person is determined by the person's health condition and diagnosis. The medical diagnosis is used to regulate and control the person's access to work, social benefits, education and entertainment. The medical model is based on the belief that disability is the individual problem of each person that must be addressed at the individual level. An inseparable part of this model is specialists and professions who control and manage the life of persons with disabilities. Usually choices are made already in advance for the person or the person is offered very few options of choice, permitting only what has been prescribed by the expert.
- The social disability model has gradually emerged through the development of the opinion of the society itself about disability, its role and the place of every individual in the society. According to this model disability is not the individual's 'fault' or the irreversible consequences of the person's functional disorders; disability is caused by physical, organisation and attitudinal barriers in the society that lead to discrimination. To prevent discrimination the approach and thinking should be changed. In the social model the disabled person is part of the society. If any member of the society encounters obstacles in asserting himself/herself, that is the problem of the society but not the individual. The social model is based on human rights and its goal is to eliminate obstacles to ensure that the disabled have the same opportunities to decide their own life as any other person. The social disability model changes attitude to disability at its very basis. It determines that all people are equal and all people should be equal in rights as well as freedom of choice capabilities.

If assessment is made according to the following four features (*a humanistic vision of vulnerable people as citizens with equal rights and aspirations; a multidimensional framework for government action; a focus on the long-term (including intergenerational) sustainability of work; an emphasis on the degree of free choice as a key element of welfare*) that distinguish the social investment approach from the 'making work pay' approach and the workfare approach, it must be recognised that in Latvia the social investment approach is not applied in respect of employment of the disabled and the accessible ALMP measures. Even though it has been defined in the policy planning documents, in reality the neoliberal and conservative approaches dominate. Hopefully the social investment approach will start to gradually compete with the approaches followed until now; however, participants of the research point out that it requires significant changes in the thinking of policy planners and implementers and their perception of problems and their solutions.

A relevant aspect where solution is acutely needed in Latvia, is keeping the disabled in their work places. Many employers lack knowledge and experience to ensure that employment of the disabled is implemented

in a mutually acceptable way. Employers also need support consultations and educational activities. Currently the available solution in the event of the person losing his/her ability to work is the sickness benefit while for the employer it is the loss of an employee with certain capacity for work. According to experts, keeping the disabled in their work places imposes additional obligations to adapt the organisation and the environment of work. Employers also need support measures provided by the state; however, until now they have been insufficient.

4.6 Evaluation of 'effectiveness' at the collective level: NGO role

In Latvia NGOs are actively involved in changing stereotypes about the disabled that prevail in the society as well as to influence the policy in respect of the disabled in various areas through cooperation with various public and municipal institutions.

About 50 non-governmental organisations have been registered in Latvia that have listed the disabled as their target groups. People unite in organisations by type of disability as well as according to the territorial principle; in many of the registered organisations the disabled is only one of the indicated target groups. In 2002 an association of non-governmental organisations was established in Latvia that can represent interests of all the disabled at the local, national and international level. Currently the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability organisations SUSTENTO covers 48 various organisations with the membership of more than 50,000 people with disabilities or chronic diseases.

Positive understanding about people with disabilities and chronic diseases is developed in cooperation with the national and local mass media.

Non-governmental organisations also participate in various projects to promote employment opportunities for the disabled. Representatives of the NGOs recognised that cooperation with the ESA and local governments has been gradually improving and expanding. These are projects where assistance is provided to those unemployed people for whom state (ESA) - organised measures are insufficient and who need additional assistance and support. The staff of the ESA also takes an increasingly more active part in NGO projects, offering their support and knowledge.

NGOs are also actively involved in various educational activities. For example, courses organised by the SUSTENTO for professionals and employers of the people with disabilities constitute constantly increasing contribution in stimulating employment of the disabled. The courses offer three programmes: *Disability without barriers*, *Peculiarities of communication with the disabled* and *Social security systems*. These courses help to reduce stereotypes and to develop cooperation, based on mutual understanding and respect, among the disabled, employers and representatives of those institutions whose professional obligations include promotion of employment of the people with disabilities.

Another aspect of the activities of the organisations is expanding the capabilities of their participants. This aspect has been characterised in more detail by the above description of experience accumulated by the organisation 'Apeirons'. Better and more profound understanding of the needs of the disabled and the nature of their employment makes the provided assistance more targeted and effective.

On the whole, it can be said that it is the organisations of people with disabilities that have promoted compliance with principles of the capability approach in respect of the people with disabilities in Latvia. Understanding of employment problems, active involvement in addressing these problems, development of a favourable environment expand opportunities of the disabled in the area of employment as well as their freedom to make their own choices.

5. Conclusion

Our participatory research sought to answer the main research questions: Have the most vulnerable people with disabilities access to the ALMP measures? Do the measures enhance the capabilities of beneficiaries?

Persons with disabilities have the right to work on an equal basis with others, however, access to the labour market remains one of the main challenges for people with disabilities. Employment of the disabled in Latvia is closely related to two other areas of life of the disabled - education and health. The current employment level of the disabled is insufficient and a significant problem in employment is their insufficient education. The second range of problems is related to accessibility of health services and medical rehabilitation. It should be taken into consideration by the SEA in their work with unemployed people with disabilities and in offering and implementing ALMP measures.

On the whole, the SEA implements various employment promotion activities - training, support activities etc.; however, the disabled are not the main target group in most of these activities, only one ALMP measure is directly targeted to disabled people. No data are publicly accessible concerning the number of the disabled who have participated in the different activities implemented by the SEA.

The research has revealed that there is lack of information about measures and the functioning of the SEA not only among people with disabilities but also among the employers.

Representatives of NGOs stressed that it is not effective to adjust work places and employment -promoting measures, choosing concurrently all people with disabilities as the target group without taking into account the type of disability and its degree of severity.

It is mostly the disabled with motoric disabilities who work in subsidised work places organized by the SEA, less often these work places are taken by persons with impaired eyesight and hearing disabilities. These efforts should be evaluated positively; however, there are the several problems which should be solved in the future.

Employers and representatives of NGOs

- The state finances the equipment of special work places; however, the amounts do not often correspond to the current price level. Additional investments are required from the disabled themselves and their employers, which, in its turn, generates the necessity to increase employers' motivation to employ the disabled at their enterprises.
- Length of the working time (a full work day) offered by the SEA. Alternative forms of work (e.g., part-time, per-hourly work) have not been discussed and provided for within the frame of subsidized work places.
- The main problems encountered by the deaf, are related to communication with the employer and the fellow employees, thus there is a need for a sign language interpreter who is needed more at the beginning of work. Likewise the fellow employers should be trained to communicate with a deaf person.

People with disabilities and representatives of NGOs:

- Not all work places created under the ALMP measure 'subsidized work place' are long-term. With the expiry of funding the specific individual (person with disabilities) loses the job. Persons with disabilities

are employed while the project lasts and sometime after its completion while it is controlled by the SEA; however, later the work places are liquidated.

- Employers are not particularly interested in employing persons with disabilities even through the scheme of subsidized work places as in this case the enterprise is subject to inspections and reviews.
- The interviewed persons with disabilities recognised that they lacked knowledge, skills and experience to understand and interpret the labour market offer and that they did not have job-seeking skills.

The offer of the SEA for the disabled is viewed sceptically. Persons with disabilities hold the view that the SEA offers low-qualified and low-paid jobs.

The disabled unemployed recommendations for improvement ALMP measures are the following:

- It is necessary to educate not only the society at large about needs of the disabled, their options, communication etc. but likewise it is necessary to provide training for specialists of the SEA who work with disabled unemployed persons.
- One of the most significant problems that needs to be addressed to improve ALMP measures for people with disabilities is the implementation of a more personalised approach.
- The range of services should be developed and appropriate for the various types and severity of disability. It is necessary to expand the range of activities offered by the SEA to people with disabilities. In addition, it should be taken into account the regional specifics, labour market demand in the regions.
- The disabled unemployed need more support and encouragement from the staff of the SEA which also means that it is necessary to educate specialists of the SEA for work with the disabled unemployed taking into consideration their specific needs and options to ensure respect for their human rights and their freedom to make their own choices.
- More options are needed also in respect of offered ALMP measures and job vacancies.
- Accessibility of the environment and the transport issues should be addressed.
- Much more attention should be paid to the quality of the offered jobs for the unemployed people with disabilities, they cannot be in their majority only low-paid jobs requiring low or no qualifications at all.

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