



Measuring functioning of people with chronic diseases for integration and reintegration policy development in the workplace: the EU PATHWAYS Project "Participation To Healthy Workplaces And inclusive Strategies in the Work Sector".

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On behalf of PATHWAYS Consortium

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Abstract PATHWAYS is a 3-years EU project that focuses on the development of innovative approaches to promote the professional integration and reintegration of people with chronic diseases and improve their employability. PATHWAYS aims are a) to identify integration and re-integration strategies that are available in Europe and beyond, b) to determine their effectiveness, c) to assess the specific employment related needs of persons with chronic diseases and mental disorders d) to develop guidelines supporting the implementation of effective professional integration and reintegration strategies. The mapping of policies, systems and services facilitating the inclusion of persons with chronic disease performed in the first year of the project has revealed that in most cases people from this group are considered as part of a group of "persons with disabilities". All the countries included in the study have legislative frameworks against discrimination and provide some support to persons with disabilities, but policy-level strategies targeted at activating persons with chronic diseases are, on the other hand, more limited. Through stakeholder consultations, including advocacy organizations, employers, policy makers, international organizations, and European Union delegates, PATHWAYS will provide useful insights as to the development and implementation of policy recommendations to improve their integration or reintegration into the workplace.

Introduction

Chronic diseases, or non-communicable diseases (NCDs), are broadly defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as diseases of long duration and generally slow progression that are not passed from person to person. NCDs pose a serious threat to society and future development. Long-term health problems constitute to a greater risk of income poverty, social exclusion, severe material deprivation, and lower work intensity (ANED, 2013). Persons with longstanding health problem face higher rates of unemployment and inactivity (Corral et al., 2014). The rising prevalence of chronic diseases as well as the current economic crisis make this issue even more problematic, requiring actions in terms of innovative strategies to improve the participation of these persons in the labour market.

PATHWAYS is a 3-years EU project that focuses on the development of innovative approaches to promote the professional integration and reintegration of people with chronic diseases and improve their employability. PATHWAYS involves **12 partners** with vast expertise in the area of chronic conditions and employment from **10 different European countries** and this allows to compare strategies between different European regions, taking into account cultural, social, and political differences. The mapping of professional (re-)integration strategies carried out is expected to lead in the later phases of the PATHWAYS project to the development of guidelines supporting the implementation of effective professional (re-)integration strategies for persons with NCDs.

Methods & Materials

The objective of the first year of the project was to provide a detailed overview of existing European and national strategies aimed at integrating persons with chronic diseases and mental health issues in the labour market. Strategies considered in this study include strategies at the level of **policies, systems, and services**. The following seven categories of chronic diseases were selected based on their

contribution to years lost to disability, (using the 2012 estimates of the WHO): **mental health issues, neurological diseases, metabolic disorders, musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases and cancer.**

The countries considered in the study are: **Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom.** The countries represent one of five European welfare models: Scandinavian, Continental, Anglo-Saxon, Mediterranean, and "Post-Communist" models. Identifying strategies in countries from different welfare models allows exploring potential commonalities and differences and identifying possible trends in the region. The information concerning strategies available in each country has been collected by means of questionnaires and interviews conducted in each country with relevant stakeholders.



Figure 1: European Pathways Consortium

Results

- To a large extent, existing European and national policy frameworks on employment activation are not specifically targeted at the employment activation of persons with chronic diseases. Instead, they target broader categories, such as persons with disabilities, long-term unemployed, vulnerable groups, etc.
- Emphasis should be made on the lack of **policy strategies specifically targeting the employment activation of persons with chronic diseases** and on the fact that strategies targeting persons with disabilities do not

necessarily address the needs of patients with chronic diseases and mental health issues since the employment needs of these two groups are not the same.

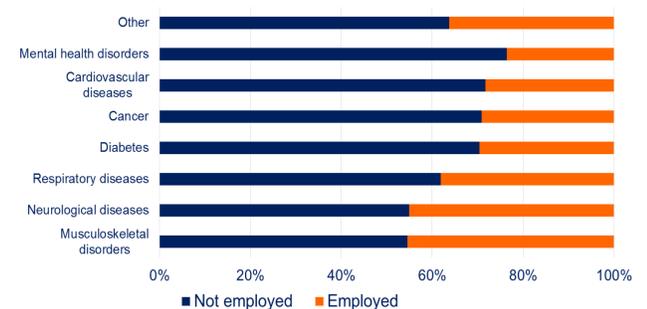


Figure 2: Employment rate of persons with limitations in work, EU-28 - 2011

Conclusions

Why is it important to help persons with chronic diseases and mental health problems to find, keep or remain in employment?

The number of persons with chronic diseases is expected to grow in Europe due to the ageing of the population. If no measures are taken to accommodate their professional integration, various socio-economic problems may arise:

- Inactivity and unemployment among persons with chronic conditions may result in income poverty, material deprivation, and social exclusion.
- The lack of integration and activation strategies for persons with chronic diseases can lead to the increased use of passive compensation measures, which can in turn result in the "benefit trap" and growing public expenditures on benefits.
- Unemployment and social exclusion can contribute to the worsening of the health condition, while employment can have a positive impact on the well-being and mental health.

Acknowledgements or Notes

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