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Finland

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Employment of persons with disabilities: an assessment of the effectiveness of national policies

Finland

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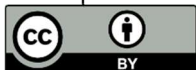
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1 Executive summary

1.1 Analysis of the employment situation of persons with disabilities, including the disability employment gap

The employment situation of persons with disabilities has not improved in the past decades, and employment remains one of the least realised disability rights in Finland. The gap in employment between persons with and persons without disabilities is not narrowing, despite existing disability policies, and this is alarming.

1.2 National targets for the employment of persons with disabilities, including monitoring of the targets

There is no specific target for the employment of persons with disabilities. Finland's Government Programme highlights employment as central and has set a rate of 80 % for employment and increasing the number of employed people by 100 000 as goals to achieve economic growth and prosperity.

1.3 Identification and evaluation of employment measures over the last decade

Several concrete efforts were made but they were not successful. Työkanava, a state-owned company, was established in 2022 as a new instrument to facilitate the employment of those with partial work ability, including persons with disabilities. However, it was terminated in 2025 because it did not achieve its goals. The Government's Work Ability Programme (2019-2023) support for reasonable accommodations in the workplace and wage subsidies, that have also not resulted in their employment.

1.4 Future plans and overall assessment

The overall evaluation on the employment sector in the commissioned study of the National Advisory Board on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is negative and critical, as the situation has not changed at all, in particular for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The forthcoming Action Plan (2024-2027) for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) contains various measures to increase employment for persons with disabilities, including legal changes, awareness-raising and concrete support for employers.

1.5 Recommendations on effective target setting and monitoring

The Action Plan (2024-2027) will be monitored annually through meetings of the Advisory Board on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (VANE) and evaluated in collaboration with stakeholders and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. As monitoring has not led to achieve the expected results of employment in the previous two action plan periods, much more rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, along with sufficient and regular resource allocation, are needed in Finland, such as annual monitoring and comprehensive evaluation studies that also involve persons with disabilities. Setting a concrete target in number, however, is difficult in Finland as there is no disability registry. Official statistics cannot be disaggregated by disability due to

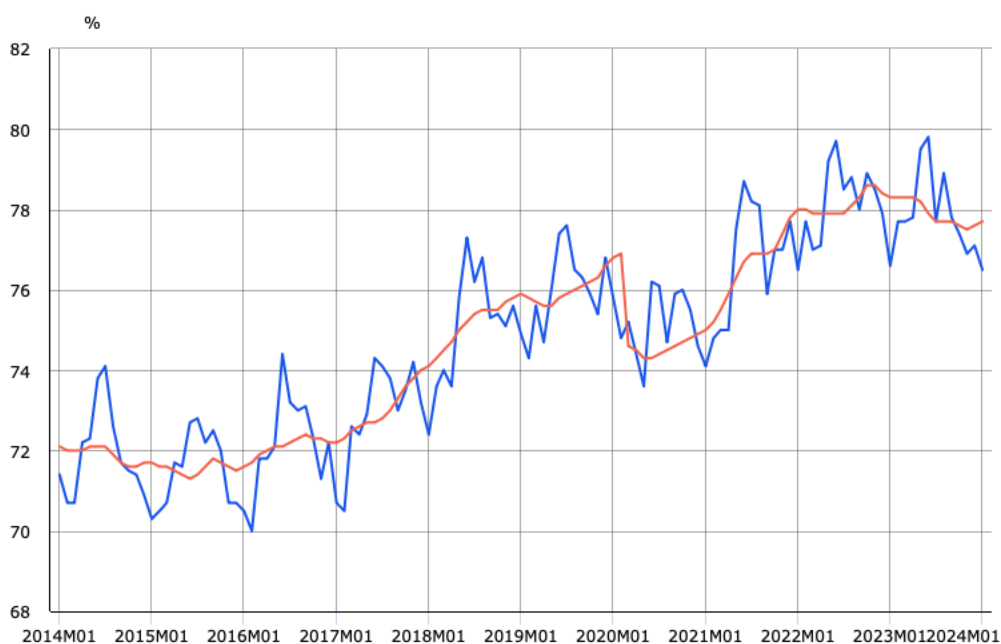
strict privacy protection. Disability data is regarded as personal health information, that cannot be used without the consent of the individual.

2 Analysis of the employment situation of persons with disabilities, including the disability employment gap

2.1 Overall employment rate and trends

The current Government Programme¹ indicates that the employment rate has risen significantly in recent years and that Finland has a shortage of skilled labour. The statistics below reiterate this trend. The employment rate has risen from 69.5 % (2010, month 1) to 77.8 % (2024, month 2), which is equal to 2 593 000 persons (margins $\pm 29\ 000$).²

Figure 1: Employment rate of population aged 20-64 and its trend between 2014 and 2024



(Blue is the employment rate; red is the trend)

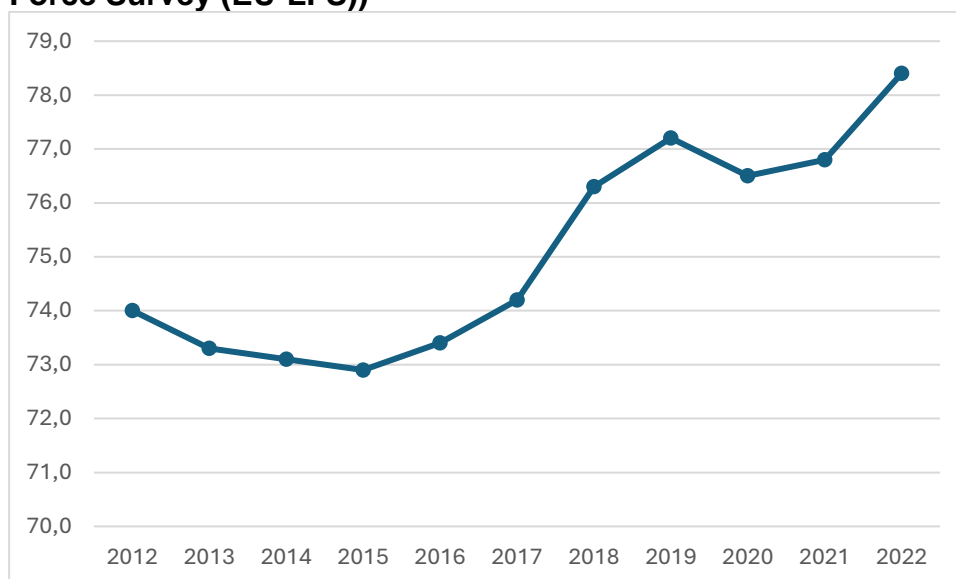
Source: Statistics Finland³

¹ Government of Finland (2023), *A strong and committed Finland: Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government*, Publication of the Finnish Government 2023:60, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/governments/government-programme/>.

² Statistics Finland (2024), 'Työllisten ja työttömien määrä kasvoi helmikuussa 2024 edellisvuoteen verrattuna' (The number of employed and unemployed people increased in February 2024 compared to the previous year), <https://stat.fi/julkaisu/clmhqnhxn0meq0bvxultmarty>.

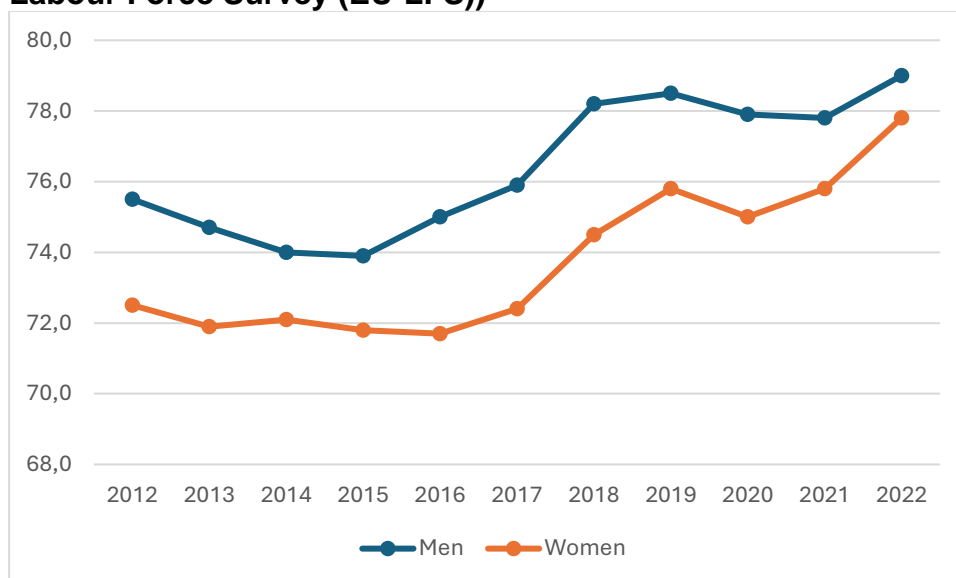
³ Statistics Finland (2024), 'Työllisten määrä pysyi lähes ennallaan ja työttömien määrä kasvoi tammikuussa 2024 vuoden takaiseen verrattuna' (The number of employed remained almost unchanged and the number of unemployed increased in January 2024 compared to a year ago) <https://stat.fi/julkaisu/clmhqbil30gie0bw3l3m479l9>.

Figure 2: Employment rate of population aged 20-64, all (%) (Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS))



In 2022, the employment rate for persons aged 20-64, according to Eurostat, was 78.4 % (Figure 2), but according to national statistics, it was 78.1 % (Figure 1).

Figure 3: Employment rate of population aged 20-64, by sex (%) (Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS))

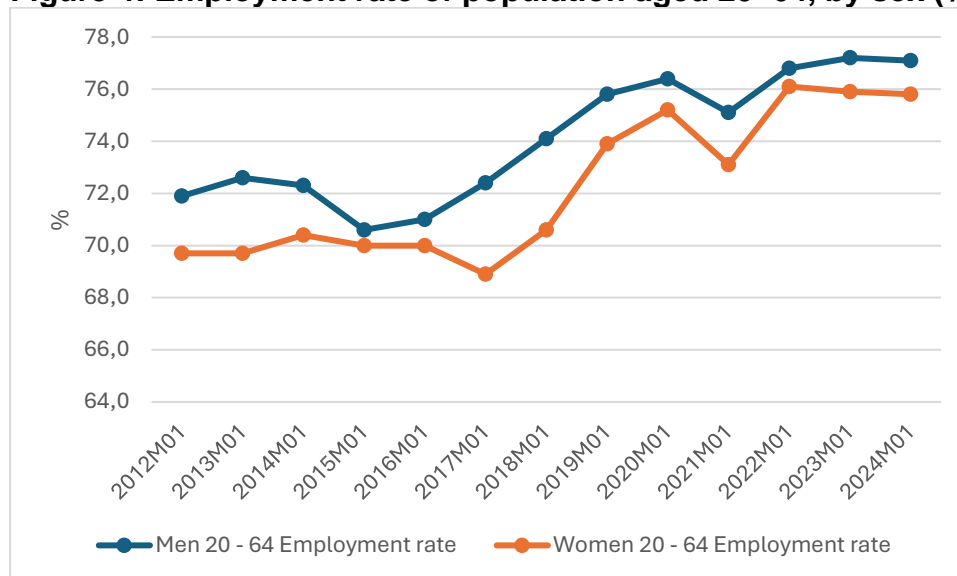


The employment rate according to the Finnish national statistics body, Statistics Finland, differs from that according to the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).⁴ The trend figures in the Finnish Labour Force Survey, published by the European Union's statistical office, Eurostat, also differ from those published in Finland, due to different calculation methods. Eurostat uses indirect adjustment, according to which the trend of a time series is calculated from the trend figures of its sub-series/sub-groups. For example, the trend for the unemployment rate published by Eurostat is calculated from

⁴ Statistics Finland (2024), 'Työllisten määrä pysyi lähes ennallaan ja työttömien määrä kasvoi tammikuussa 2024 vuoden takaiseen verrattuna' (The number of employed remained almost unchanged and the number of unemployed increased in January 2024 compared to a year ago), <https://stat.fi/julkaisu/clmhqbil30gie0bw3l3m479l9>.

the trends for the sub-groups of unemployed and employed persons by age and gender. In contrast, the trend for the unemployment rate published by Statistics Finland is produced by seasonally adjusting the unemployment rate as already calculated. Statistics Finland's practice is called direct adjustment. In 2022, the employment rate was lower for both men and women in the national statistics, by 2.2 % for men and 1.7 % for women.

Figure 4: Employment rate of population aged 20–64, by sex (%)



Source: Statistics Finland⁵

2.2 Description of the employment rate of persons with disabilities and trends

Data from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) indicate that the employment rate for persons with disabilities in Finland was 59.4 % in 2022 (EU27 average: 54.3 %), in comparison with 77.5 % for persons without disabilities (EU27 average: 76.2 %). The 2022 employment rate for persons with disabilities was 20.6 pps below the national 2030 headline target⁶ of an 80 % employment rate. Men with disabilities had an employment rate of 59.6 %, and women with disabilities had a rate of 59.3 %. The trends remain the same: persons with disabilities are less often employed than persons without disabilities.

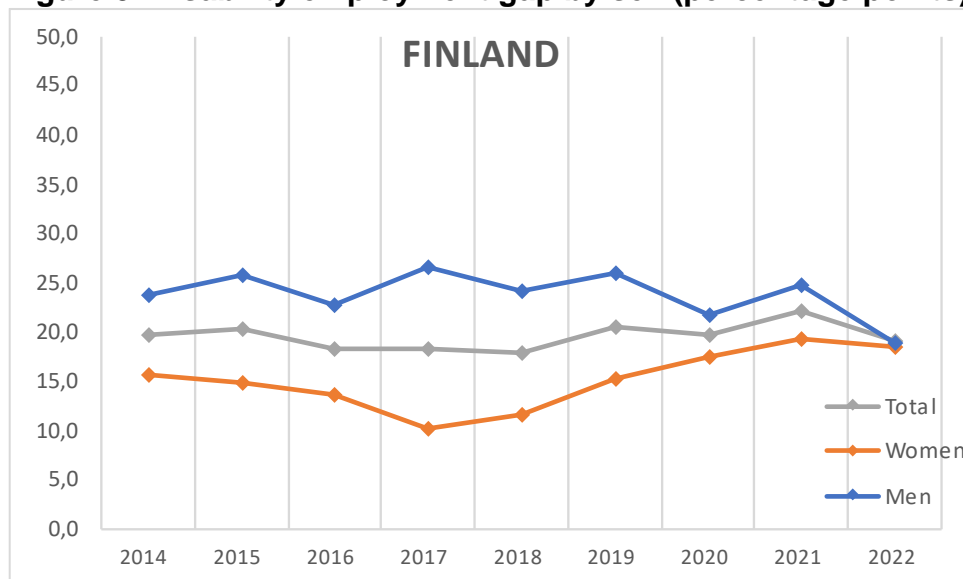
2.3 Description of the disability employment gap and trends

According to the EU-SILC statistics, in 2022 (figure 5), the difference between persons with and persons without disabilities resulted in a disability employment gap of 19 pps (estimated EU27 average gap: 21.4 %, see tables 2-4) or an employment opportunities ratio of 0.8. Women with disabilities had an employment gap of 18.5 pps (EU27 average: 18.9 pps) and men with disabilities had a gap of 18.8 pps (EU27 average: 23.3 pps). The most current Eurostat data estimate a disability employment gap of 19.4 pps for 2023 (EU27 average: 21.5 pps), which means that the gap is growing

⁵ Statistics Finland (2024), 'Työllisten määrä pysyi lähes ennallaan ja työttömien määrä kasvoi tammikuussa 2024 vuoden takaiseen verrattuna' (The number of employed remained almost unchanged and the number of unemployed increased in January 2024 compared to a year ago), <https://stat.fi/julkaisu/clmhqbil30gie0bw3l3m479l9>.

slightly. According to the Action Plan (2024-2027), at the end of 2023, 30 500 persons with disabilities and long-term illness were unemployed.⁷

Figure 5. Disability employment gap by sex (percentage points)



Source: EUROSTAT, EU-SILC

According to the study commissioned by VANE that was conducted by the University of Helsinki in 2023,⁸ the employment situation for persons with disabilities has not improved in recent years (2020-2023), and employment remains one of the least realised disability rights in Finland. Many other reports also underline this situation for persons with disabilities,^{9 10 11} including deaf people and sign language users.¹² In addition, the gap between persons with and without disabilities is not narrowing.

⁷ National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2024), 'Oikeus osallisuuteen ja yhdenvertaisuuteen: YK:n vammaisten henkilöiden oikeuksien yleissopimuksen kansallinen toimintaohjelma 2023-2027' (The right to participation and equality: the national action programme for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2027), Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Helsinki, p. 111.

⁸ Katsui, H., Mietola, R., Laitinen, M., Honkasilta, J., and Ritvaniemi, A. (2023), *Epävarmuutta ja vaihtelevaa osallisuutta: Selvitys ihmisoikeuksien toteutumisesta vammaisten henkilöiden arjessa* (Uncertainty and variable inclusion: a survey of the realisation of human rights in the everyday life of disabled people), National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Helsinki.

⁹ Kyröläinen, A. (2020), *Vammaisten henkilöiden työllistymisen rakenteelliset esteet* (Structural barriers to employment for persons with disabilities), <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/162325>.

¹⁰ Non-discrimination Ombudsman (2016), "Vammaisena olen toisen luokan kansalainen" – Selvitys vammaisten syrjäytymiskokemuksista arjessa' ("As a disabled person, I am a second-class citizen": a study of disabled people's experiences of discrimination in everyday life), Ministry of Justice, Helsinki, <https://syrjinta.fi/vammaisselvitys>.

¹¹ Hoffrén, T. (2017), *Kysely oikeuksien toteutumisesta vammaisten henkilöiden arjessa. Raportti keskeisistä kyselytuloksista* (Survey on the realisation of rights in the everyday life of disabled people – report on key survey results), National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Helsinki, <https://vane.to/documents/2308875/2395516/Raportti+kyselyn+tuloksista.pdf/e6bd3b12-1554-43b4-8f6a-38a21143e419>.

¹² Katsui, H., Koivisto, M., Tepora-Niemi, S-M., Meriläinen, N., Rautiainen, P., Rainò, P., Tarvainen, M. and Hiilamo, H. (2021), *Viitotut muistot. Selvitys kuuroihin ja viittomakielisiin Suomen historiassa 1900-luvulta nykypäivään kohdistuneista vääryyksistä sekä niiden käsittelyyn tarkoitetun totuus- ja sovintoprosessin käynnistämisen edellytyksistä* (Signed memories : A report on the injustices committed against deaf and sign language users in Finnish history from the 1900s to the present

2.4 Employment of persons with disabilities in ‘sheltered workshops’

The term ‘sheltered workshops’ is no longer used in Finland in relation to work or day activities. Work activities can be facilitated on the basis of the Social Welfare Act (1310/2014)¹³ and the Act on Special Care for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (519/1977).¹⁴ Under the Social Welfare Act, ‘work activities’ refers to activities that maintain and promote functional capacity, awaiting a broader legislative reform relating to supporting employment and inclusion through social welfare measures.¹⁵ Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities are often engaged in different kinds of activities, including unpaid ‘work activities’ (*työtoiminta*), for which the costs of transport to commute to work and activity day centres are covered. The scope of ‘work activities’ is stipulated in the new Disability Service Act that entered into force on 1 January 2025. These activities are intended to support the functional and work ability of persons with intellectual disabilities and promote their entry into working life.

Work and day activities include individual supervision and guidance, group activities and evaluation of the person’s work capacity. However, it often becomes a permanent service for this group of people, which is problematic because it generally does not lead to any employment opportunities in the open labour market.¹⁶

2.5 Additional national indicators / data regarding employment of persons with disabilities

There is no registry of persons with disabilities in Finland, as a result of which their employment rate cannot be accurately identified, which is problematic in terms of monitoring and evaluation. In short, there is no representative and generalisable data on the employment of persons with disabilities. In the Action Plan (2024-2027)¹⁷ for the implementation of the CRPD, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is estimated to be one third of the rate for the general population. Based on the non-representative survey conducted in 2018 by the Finnish Disability Forum and the Human Rights Centre,¹⁸ the rate is 20 %. The Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired keeps a registry of all persons with visual disabilities. Based on its latest statistics, 24.8 % of such persons are fully employed and 15.6 % are partially employed.¹⁹ Inclusion Finland, an organisation that works for persons with intellectual

day and the prerequisites for initiating a truth and reconciliation process to deal with them), Government investigation and research activities: publication series 2021:61, Helsinki, <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-241-1>.

¹³ Social Welfare Act 1310/2014 (*Sosiaalihuoltolaki*), <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2014/20141301>.

¹⁴ Act on Special Care for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities 519/1977 (*Laki kehitysvammaisten erityishuollosta*), <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1977/19770519>.

¹⁵ Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2023), ‘Työ ja työtoiminta’ (Work and work activity), <https://thl.fi/julkaisut/kasikirjat/vammaispalvelujen-kasikirja/tuki-ja-palvelut/tyo-ja-tyotoiminta>.

¹⁶ National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2024).

¹⁷ National Advisory Board on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2024).

¹⁸ Vesala, H., and Vartio, E. (2018), *Miten vammaisten ihmisten oikeudet toteutuvat Suomessa? Vammaisfoorumin vuonna 2018 toteuttaman kyselyn tulokset taulukkomuodossa* (How are the rights of disabled people ensured in Finland? The results of the survey carried out by the Disability Forum in 2018), Finnish Disability Forum, Helsinki, https://vammaisfoorumi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/VFKyselyn-perusraportti2019_2.pdf.

¹⁹ Tolkinen, L. (2022), ‘The Finnish Register of Visually Impairment: Annual Statistics 2022’, National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, <https://cms.nkl.fi/sites/default/files/2023->

and developmental disabilities, estimates that only about 500-600 of 30 000 persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities are in paid jobs.²⁰

[12/VALMIS%20Annual%20Statistics%202022.pdf?_ga=2.209707089.2120393947.1715850074-1067996476.1700829627](https://www.valmiste.fi/VALMIS%20Annual%20Statistics%202022.pdf?_ga=2.209707089.2120393947.1715850074-1067996476.1700829627).

²⁰ Kehitysvammaliitto. (2016), Employment, <https://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi/in-english/intellectual-disability/employment/>.

3 National targets for the employment of persons with disabilities, including monitoring of the targets

3.1 National targets for employment of persons with disabilities

No specific target has been set for the employment of persons with disabilities. Finland's Government Programme highlights employment as central, and has set an employment rate goal of 80 %, with increasing the number of employed people by 100 000 as a goal to achieve economic growth and prosperity in general.

3.2 Indicators to monitor the targets

The Action Plan (2024-2027) for the implementation of the UNCRPD includes structural indicators, process indicators and results indicators under the theme of 'right to employment'.

These structural indicators include legal changes in the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014) to strengthen reasonable accommodation in the employment sector by clarifying its definition.²¹ The discrimination Ombudsman has a new mandate to deal with the employment sector, and this is expected to play a role in making the employment sector inclusive. From 2025 onwards, the employment sector will be the responsibility of municipalities and should, according to the Action Plan, be guided to support fair employment for persons with disabilities. It is also expected that salary support for employers of long-term unemployed persons with disabilities and unemployed persons with disabilities will continue. Workplace adjustment support for employers of persons with disabilities will also continue. The employment activities of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities will continue under the new Disability Service Act.

The process indicators include the governmental programme to increase the capacity of the labour market to include marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities.²² The Government Programme sets out the Government's plan to raise awareness among employers of existing services that are intended to facilitate their employment of persons with disabilities. Some incentives for employers are planned, though these are not specified in the Action Plan.²³ Dissemination of information on the various laws is also planned, in order to prohibit discrimination in the employment sector. As there are currently no relevant statistics, it has been acknowledged that such statistics would be useful. In 2023-24, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health allocated EUR 4.5 million in governmental support to six 'wellbeing services counties' to increase the work capacity of employment services. The digitalisation of services is another strategy under consideration for sustainable development.

The results indicators include non-discrimination in respect of persons with disabilities in recruitment and at work, as many persons with disabilities have experienced discrimination over the past five years in the employment sector – according to a report

²¹ Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014), <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20141325.pdf>.

²² Government of Finland (2023), *A strong and committed Finland: Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government*, Publication of the Finnish Government 2023:60.

²³ National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2024).

by the Ministry of Justice in 2021, the percentages were 64 % of men with disabilities and 59 % of women with disabilities.²⁴

Three goals have been set for employment rights:

1. building the capacity of Government officials in employment services by preparing sufficient training materials;
2. developing a support system and raising awareness among employers and experts in the employment sector; and
3. Finland will study employment quota systems in different European countries to learn from existing reports and studies.²⁵

3.3 Timeline of monitoring

The Action Plan (2024-2027) will be monitored annually in VANE meetings. The evaluation timeline follows the state report submission period that is stipulated in the CRPD, namely four years after the Initial State Report.

3.4 Evaluation of targets

The four-year implementation of the Action Plan will, according to the plan, be evaluated by VANE in collaboration with stakeholders and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.²⁶

²⁴ Nenonen, T., Kivelä, J., Ervasti, E., Joronen, M. and Villa, S. (2021), *Perusoikeusbarometri*, Publication of the Ministry of Justice 2021:17, p. 140, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163261/OM_2020_17_SO.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

²⁵ National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2024).

²⁶ National Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2024).

4 Identification and evaluation of employment measures over the last decade

4.1 Evaluation of national measures

The employment of persons with disabilities is supported by a number of measures. Disability services such as personal assistant services, transportation services and assistive devices are essential for realising the right to employment as well as other rights. This chapter, however, focuses on four employment-specific measures. The first is reasonable accommodation support for employers in the workplace when they first recruit persons with disabilities. The second is a subsidy in the form of pay support for persons with disabilities. The third is Työkanava, a state-owned company that was established in 2023 and the fourth is the work ability programme.

4.1.1 Measure 1: Reasonable accommodation support in the workplace

Reasonable accommodation is outlined in both the CRPD and the Non-Discrimination Act 1325/2014. TE Offices (Public Employment and Business Services) offer their services to both employers and employees. Employers can receive reimbursement for reasonable accommodation costs up to EUR 4 000 per employee with disabilities, either from the TE Office or the municipality through local government.

Another form of support from the TE Office is a payment to another employee who supports employees with disabilities. This support is paid for a maximum of 20 hours per month for up to 18 months, to a maximum of EUR 400 per month. The employer receives a subsidy of EUR 20 per hour. However, Kyröläinen points out in her 2020²⁷ report that this support has been underutilised because employers and employees with disabilities have not been aware of such measures. Nevertheless, the measures are effective when they are used.

4.1.2 Measure 2: Wage subsidies

The Act on Public Employment and Business Services (916/2012)²⁸ regulates wage subsidies. Their purpose is to enhance the professional competence of prospective employees through short-term wage-subsidised employment, assisting them to find work in the open labour market. From the beginning of 2025, this Act was replaced by the Act on the Implementation of the Act on the Organisation of Employment Services and Certain Related Acts 383/2023.²⁹ Wage subsidies offer an unemployed jobseeker the possibility of being hired, and the subsidies can be granted to the prospective employer if the TE Office has assessed that the person's disability or illness will have an essential, permanent or continuous effect on their work in the position offered. The TE Office decides on the duration and amount of the subsidy on a case-by-case basis. The length of the subsidy period depends on the duration of the individual's unemployment; the impact of the disability or illness on their work performance; and the employer. The maximum wage subsidy is set in the state budget. In 2022, the maximum wage subsidy was EUR 1 400 a month, with a percentage of holiday pay,

²⁷ Kyröläinen, A. (2020).

²⁸ Act on Public Employment and Business Services 916/2012 (*Laki julkisesta työvoima- ja yrityspalvelusta 916/2012*), <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2012/en20120916.pdf>.

²⁹ Act on the Implementation of the Act on the Organisation of Employment Services and Certain Related Acts 383/2023 (*Laki työvoimapalveluiden järjestämisestä annetun lain ja eräiden siihen liittyvien lakien voimaansaantonsta*), <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2023/20230383>.

up to the level of the wage subsidy decision. If the subsidy is granted due to shortcomings in the jobseeker's professional skills, the amount and duration are determined by the length of the unemployment period of the person hired for the job. The longer a person has been unemployed before receiving the wage subsidy, the higher the amount and the longer the duration of the subsidy. Asplund, Kauhanen, Päällysaho and Vanhala (2018)³⁰ assessed the impact of wage subsidies in general in Finland and found it to be small. They found that the wage subsidy extended the employment period for two months and reduced unemployment period for less than one month. Men enjoyed slightly better impact than women, but with little statistical significance. Among the people who benefit from the wage subsidy, 4 % were persons with disabilities and long-term sickness in 2017. They have called for an entirely different measure in order to provide a more effective solution.

4.1.3 Measure 3: Työkanava

The Government-owned company Työkanava Oy was established on the basis of the Työkanava Act (242/2022) to promote the employment of persons with partial work ability who have been unemployed. It is modelled on the Swedish company Samhall AB. Työkanava's target group was persons with partial work ability, including persons with disabilities. Partial capacity has been a largely neglected area in the employment sector and was thus central to this new initiative. In practice, however, Työkanava has not really succeeded: it aimed to employ 400 persons with partial work ability in 2023. However, in 2023, only 17 persons had gained employment through this scheme, while EUR 1.5 million was spent mostly on human resources. As the data are not disaggregated by disability, it is unclear whether persons with disabilities have benefited from this company at all. The company was dissolved on 1 January 2025, in conjunction with a number of austerity measures from the current Government, led by Prime Minister Orpo,³¹ as suggested in the updated Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP).^{32 33} In addition, the target to find employment for 650 persons with disabilities has been deleted from the RRP, with the RRF funds reallocated to other measures under the RRP investment for the development of work ability, productivity and well-being at work.³⁴ The Government's submitted its proposal to repeal the act establishing the company Työkanava in September 2024 and it entered into force on 1 January 2025.³⁵ Researchers were already critical of the ultimately unsuccessful Työkanava even during its planning stage,³⁶ pointing out that it could become simply another segregated employment space for persons with disabilities.

³⁰ Asplund, R., Kauhanen, A., Päällysaho, M., and Vanhala, P. (2018), *Palkkatuen vaikuttavuus – palkkatukijärjestelmän ja sen uudistuksien arviointi* (The impact of wage subsidies – An evaluation of the wage subsidy system and its reforms), Government investigation and research activities: publication series 75/2018, <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161235/75-2018-Palkkatuki.pdf>.

³¹ 'Hallitus aikoo lakkauttaa osatyökykyisiä työllistävän valtionyhtiön, jonka Marinin hallitus perusti', *Helsingin sanomat*, 14 April 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000010359299.html>.

³² Ministry of Finance (2024), 'Finland updates Recovery and Resilience Plan to secure EU funding', <https://vm.fi/en/-/finland-updates-recovery-and-resilience-plan-to-secure-eu-funding>.

³³ Government of Finland, 'Proposal for updating Finland's Recovery and Resilience Plan', <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/paatokset/paatos?decisionId=1415> (link at the bottom of the page).

³⁴ Government of Finland, 'Proposal for updating Finland's Recovery and Resilience Plan'.

³⁵ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland, 'Työkanava Ltd'., <https://tem.fi/en/special-assignment-company-tyokanava>.

³⁶ Mustaniemi-Laakso, M., Katsui, H., and Heikkilö, M. (2022), 'Vulnerability, Disability, and Agency: Exploring Structures for Inclusive Decision-Making and Participation in a Responsive State',

4.1.4 Measure 4: Work Ability Programme

The Government launched the Work Ability Programme in 2019-2023, targeting 65 000 persons with partial work ability, including persons with disabilities, who are outside the labour market, to investigate solutions for their employment. One important part of this programme was aimed at building the capacity of professionals in supporting people with partial work ability by developing training modules. The final evaluation report³⁷ states that much more tailored supervision support is necessary for persons with disabilities, especially persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are largely still outside the labour market.

4.2 Factors influencing the employment rate of persons with disabilities

A study of the realisation of disability rights covering the period 2020-2023 highlighted many factors that may lead to a persistently lower employment rate among persons with disabilities.³⁸ Discrimination was widely experienced by the survey respondents: 40.4 % had experienced discrimination during the recruitment process and 33.8 % had experienced discrimination at work during the previous 12 months. The majority of those with physical disabilities and those with psychosocial disabilities had experienced discrimination. Similarly, the majority of those in eastern, central and northern Finland had experienced discrimination during the recruitment process. Only 5.1 % perceived that the employment situation of persons with disabilities was good and on an equal basis with that of others without disabilities.

Discrimination has many forms: both direct and indirect, such as subtle discrimination by employers and/or colleagues of persons with disabilities, their assistive devices, guide dogs or assistants and interpreters. When persons with disabilities write about their disability in their job applications, they do not receive invitations to interviews; this was a common experience among many respondents. According to the same report, even when persons with disabilities were invited to interview, they had to prove their work ability much more often than others without a disability. At work, the needs of persons with disabilities were too often undermined and underestimated. Treating everyone the same was often considered the norm, rather than reasonable accommodation being provided. Moreover, some respondents to the survey pointed out that they received a lower salary, even though they did similar work to that of their peers without a disability. It is evident, therefore, that many kinds of discrimination take place at work. Media was identified as one of the sources of prejudice, as media outlets still use many controversial approaches in their representation of disability.³⁹

International Journal for the Semiotics of Law 36, pp. 1581-1609,
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11196-022-09946-x>.

³⁷ Saikku, P., Joensuu, M., Männistö-Inkinen, V. and Poutanen, J. (eds.) (2023), "Täällä ei sanota, että ei kuulu meille": Työkykyohjelman arviointi- ja seurantatutkimuksen loppuraportti ("They don't say it's not up to us here": Final report of the evaluation and follow-up study of the Work Ability Programme), Institute of Health and Welfare and Institute of Occupational Health, Helsinki, https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/146472/URN_ISBN_978-952-408-023-1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

³⁸ Katsui, H., Mietola, R., Laitinen, M., Honkasilta, J., and Ritvaniemi, A. (2023).

³⁹ Hakala, M., and Katsui, H. (2024), 'Media representation of disability', in Katsui, H. and Laitinen, M. (eds.), *Disability, Happiness and the Welfare State: Finland and the Nordic Model*, London, pp. 111-138, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-edit/10.4324/9781032685519/disability-happiness-welfare-state-hisayo-katsui-matti-laitinen>.

Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities have been trapped in existing work-related services such as work activities, and have not been able to move into the open labour market. Their compensation fees are very low in comparison with a salary. Many are even automatically moved on to a pension and day activities when they reach adulthood, without their work capacity being carefully considered or their right to self-determination respected.⁴⁰ This is also a form of discrimination.

According to the survey report, an inaccessible work environment is another factor. This includes not only physical inaccessibility, but issues with accessibility of information and the digital space. Furthermore, it is very often employees with disabilities themselves who carry the burden of having to arrange measures to fill the gaps, such as arranging for sign-language interpreters or other types of disability services. However, disability services, in particular personal assistant services,⁴¹ transportation services and sign-language interpretation services,⁴² have become increasingly difficult to obtain.⁴³ In addition, even when people are granted such services, the actual arrangements can cause problems. Therefore, disability services themselves have also become a burdening factor. This is called the disability tax, and it constitutes a specific burden in the Finnish welfare state.⁴⁴

The study also explored the rights to education of persons with disabilities, and found multilayered factors that prevent the realisation of these rights for such persons on an equal basis with others. The educational level of persons with disabilities continues to be lower than that of their peers without a disability, whereas inclusive education is too often wrongly understood as merely involving physical integration.⁴⁵ Even in higher education, there is a low level of knowledge about reasonable accommodation, and a low level of provision, which result in problems with internship and exchanges that make it hard for students with disabilities to engage. This results in applicants with disabilities having fewer opportunities to obtain jobs in the open labour market.

⁴⁰ Mustonen, L., and Katsui, H. (2024), 'Employment, the Finnish disability pension system, and self-determination of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities' in Katsui, H. and Laitinen, M. (eds.), *Disability, Happiness and the Welfare State: Finland and the Nordic Model*, London, pp. 158-178.

⁴¹ Nurmi-Koikkalainen, P., Korhonen, M., and Väre, A. (2021), 'Vammaisten henkilöiden kokemuksia koronaepidemian ajalta: tuloksia henkilökohtaisen avun asiakaskyselystä' (The experiences of disabled people during the coronavirus epidemic over time: results from the personal assistance customer survey), THL, Helsinki, https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/142612/URN_ISBN_978-952-343-657-2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

⁴² Katsui, H., Koivisto, M., Tepora-Niemi, S-M., Meriläinen, N., Rautiainen, P., Rainò, P., Tarvainen, M., and Hiilamo, H. (2021).

⁴³ Katsui, H., Mietola, R., Laitinen, M., Honkasilta, J., and Ritvaniemi, A. (2023).

⁴⁴ Katsui, H. (2024), 'Disability Tax in the Welfare State: Uncertainty and Resentment about Disability Services in Finland', *Disabilities* 4(2), pp. 413-428, <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-7272/4/2/26>.

⁴⁵ Honkasilta, J., Pihlaja, P., and Pesonen, H. (2024), 'The state of inclusion in the state of inclusion? Inclusion as principal practice in Finnish basic education', in Katsui, H. and Laitinen, M. (eds.), *Disability, Happiness and the Welfare State: Finland and the Nordic Model*, London, pp. 83-110.

5 Future plans and overall assessment

5.1 Planned reforms

Some extensive reforms concerning the employment rights of persons with disabilities are planned for the near future. First, the responsibility for organising employment services will be transferred from central Government to the municipalities. From 1 January 2025, the responsibility for organising public employment services was transferred to 45 employment areas or municipalities. Of the total number of municipalities, 39 will organise employment services using the host municipality model; four will organise employment services themselves (Lahti, Kouvola, Helsinki, Vantaa) and two will organise employment services using the joint municipal authority model (the employment areas of Suupohja and Kymppi). The reform aims to create a service structure that will contribute to the rapid employment of jobseekers and increase the productivity, availability, effectiveness and diversity of employment and business services. It will also take into account equal access to services.

Secondly, the new Disability Services Act entered into force on 1 January 2025, with several newly stipulated services and wider coverage including persons with diverse disabilities, although the budget will remain the same, as the additional budget was cut in April 2024 in the Government's budget discussion. According to the Government's decision of September 2024, the budget for disability services for 2025 is EUR 24.8 million; for 2026, it is EUR 31.2 million; for 2027, it is EUR 37.3 million; and for 2028, it is EUR 29.4 million.⁴⁶ In 2023, the budget was EUR 36 million. This discussion of budget is still ongoing at the time of finalising this report.

5.2 Potential impact of planned reforms

The new Disability Services Act is considered controversial by many stakeholders. It was expected to introduce missing services such as supported decision-making and personal assistant-like services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and various disability services for persons with social disabilities such as those with neurodiversity, who have so far not greatly benefited from the existing disability services. However, it seems that the budget allocated is not sufficient to cover all the stipulated services for the people who are entitled to them; as a result, a level of fear can be observed among persons with disabilities that they may not be granted services or may lose their existing services.^{47 48} As the budget for disability services was already gradually shrinking before the reforms, the introduction of the new Act with a limited budget allocation might potentially cause not only confusion, but actual damage, as services are lost despite being their being necessary. At the level of daily life, losing an essential disability service can be catastrophic for an individual, and can hinder many from participating in society altogether. In this regard, the implementation of the new Act must be closely and critically monitored and evaluated.

Employment and business services as well as integration services were transferred from the state to the responsibility of employment areas formed by municipalities on 1 January 2025. There is no evidence of impact assessment of the reform from the

⁴⁶ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2024), 'Vammaispalvelulain uudistaminen' (Reform of the Disability Services Act), <https://stm.fi/vammaispalvelulaki>.

⁴⁷ Katsui, H., Mietola, R., Laitinen, M., Honkasilta, J., and Ritvaniemi, A. (2023).

⁴⁸ Katsui, H. (2024), pp. 413-428, <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-7272/4/2/26>.

perspective of persons with disabilities. In August 2024 the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman sent a letter to the service providers. The aim with the letter was support employment areas in implementing statutory measures to promote equality, including functional equality planning. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman suggests several actions that should be taken in order to promote equality and equity. For example the employment areas must give special attention to promoting the employment of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, with adequate and tailored services. Also, the changes in the financing and resourcing of employment services must be carefully assessed for their equality impacts.

5.3 Key lessons from national measures

All these measures are difficult to assess if there are no statistics illustrating the employment situation of persons with disabilities. There is a great need for statistical information.

One example of low-hanging fruit would be to launch an awareness-raising campaign and inform the public of existing support as well as legal stipulations and obligations, including the non-discrimination principle and subjective rights. However, this would be nowhere near sufficient. Much more drastic and systemic changes are needed, as the employment situation of persons with disabilities in Finland has been stagnating for many decades. Affirmative action policy in the employment sector can be carefully considered,⁴⁹ although further research is needed to investigate its feasibility in the Finnish context. General accessibility is the foundation for realising the right to employment.⁵⁰

5.4 Key lessons from evaluation and monitoring of measures

The Action Plan (2024-2027) will be monitored annually in VANE's meetings, and its four-year-implementation will be evaluated by VANE in collaboration with stakeholders and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. This has also been the case for the previous two action plans, which did not achieve the expected results in the employment sector. Much more rigorous and critical monitoring and evaluation systems, along with sufficient and regular resource allocation, are needed in Finland, such as annual monitoring and comprehensive evaluation studies involving the participation of persons with disabilities. Public testimony from representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities, and online surveys of privileged persons with disabilities who have access to the internet and devices and IT skills, are not sufficient to enable a true understanding of the situation of the majority of persons with disabilities. The reality for many persons with disabilities is presumably much worse than it may seem, as the gaps between the personal experiences and the general situation of persons with disabilities clearly indicate in the survey results.

The Government Programme's measures to enhance the employment of persons with partial work ability are not focused specifically on persons with disabilities, and are

⁴⁹ Rautiainen, P., Ahonen, K., Ikimeri, R. and Urhonen, A. (2023), 'Miksi Suomessa vastustetaan työelämän vammaiskiintiötä?' (Why is there opposition to disability quotas in working life in Finland?), *Työpoliittinen aikakauskirja* (Finnish Labour Review) 1/2023, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, pp. 73-79, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/164738/TAK_1_2023_web.pdf.

⁵⁰ Rautiainen, P., Ahonen, K., Ikimeri, R. and Urhonen, A. (2023).

therefore not actual indicators that can enable an assessment of the employment of persons with disabilities.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for Finland

- The Finnish Government should launch a campaign to disseminate information on legal obligations, including non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation and disability rights.
- The Finnish Government should reconsider the exceptional plan to cut the budget for disability services. Disability services such as personal assistant services, transportation services and interpretation services are fundamentally important for persons with disabilities, not only for their lives in general but also to ensure their equal employment rights with others.
- The Finnish Government should make drastic, systemic changes to finally improve the stagnated employment situation of persons with disabilities by making society fully accessible, and consider an affirmative action policy.
- The Finnish Government should plan, implement and assess the measures supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.
- The Finnish Government should regularly and rigorously monitor and assess disability rights bearing carefully in mind that in the Finnish context disability registry does not exist and disability information is considered personal health-related information, of which the persons with disabilities have the right to decide how it is used. Much more rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, along with sufficient and regular resource allocation, are needed in Finland, such as annual monitoring and comprehensive evaluation studies that also involve persons with disabilities.

6.2 Recommendations for the European Commission

- The Commission should place disability rights high on the political agenda so that its Member States are encouraged to prioritise disability rights over many competing issues.
- The Commission should continue the European Disability Expertise programme so that the Member States have the opportunity to produce comparable reports on disability, which is unfortunately undermined by a lack of resources for expert analysis within some countries.

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