

# Social innovation for work inclusion of people with disabilities

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# Brief overview of the workshop

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- Let's start with a question
- Unemployment of people with disabilities - a human rights issue!?
- Who needs adaptations in their jobs?
- Research in progress: Work inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities by means of social innovation
- Some critical issues – and discussion

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# Let's start with a question...

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- As a social worker, how can you contribute to work inclusion for people with disabilities?
- First, give it a few minutes thought for yourself...

# Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006)

## (Article 27 Work and employment)

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- States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, **on an equal basis** with others; this includes the right to **the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen** or accepted in a labour market and **work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible** to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia (specified in 11 points)
- However, in all countries people with disabilities are much less likely to be employed than the population average
- Industrialisation, work capacity and health, knowledge-based economies, unemployment...

# Adaptations at work

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- A challenge in all employment relations is to strike a balance between the needs of the employer and the competencies and capacities of the employee
- There is always a gap between such needs and demands
- In practice, employers are constantly making small adaptations in jobs to cater for employee needs, but this is typically not seen as a problem
- The adaptations people with disabilities need are often different from those of other employees – thus unusual, often visible, and not within what is seen as «normal» adaptations
- Seen like this, part of the challenge is changing the boundaries for what is seen as normal adaptations in jobs

# What we take for granted – people with intellectual disabilities

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- In Norway, people with intellectual disabilities are automatically entitled to lifelong disability pension. It is mostly taken for granted that they are unable to work in the ordinary labour market
- As adults, people with intellectual disabilities participate in day centres, shielded workshops, or... nothing. Increasingly, they have to compete for positions in shielded workshops with other groups, and increasingly they end up with nothing
- Low expectations are contagious. But the new generation seems to have higher expectations
- Everybody with intellectual disabilities cannot work in ordinary jobs, but many can
- Anyway, who cares about people on the margins of employment when even people with higher education struggle with unemployment, and automation will make jobs even more cognitively demanding?

# Social innovation and social entrepreneurship



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# Social innovation and social enterprise: The potential

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Social innovations are new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively. The European Commission's objective is to encourage market uptake of innovative solutions and stimulate employment.

The European Commission's 'Social Business Initiative' (2011) positioned social enterprise at the centre of developing the social economy and generating new solutions to societal problems:

- Innovative and sustainable solutions to intractable social challenges, in particular poverty and exclusion
- Contribution to job-creation and inclusion in labour markets
- Contribution to the sustainability of welfare systems

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# Characteristics of the Norwegian context

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- Strong emphasis on state responsibility for social problems – freedom from dependency
- Long tradition for collaboration between the public, voluntary and private business sectors
- The relationships between the three sectors are becoming less static
- Widespread scepticism towards privatisation of social services
- Comparatively speaking perhaps weak incentives for social enterprise

# The social enterprise «All in!»

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- «Business» idea: People with intellectual disabilities on disability pension are entitled to meaningful activities. Day centres and shielded workshops are expensive. At 25% of the cost they can generate jobs in the ordinary job market, facilitate the hiring process, and provide necessary guidance at work
- Employees typically get 20% pay (and retain their disability pension); some may enter the labour market permanently
- Ultimate goal of «All in!»: To provide career opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities – flexibility so as to realise equal opportunities to meaningful activities
- Developed by two experienced professionals (one social worker, one psychologist) knowing how to generate interest and support from employers, from government, from unions, from civil society
- Formally owned by a voluntary organisation, impossible to generate profit that could be taken from the enterprise
- Potential win-win-win-win: Employees get jobs they enjoy and fairly decent pay, employers get good employees and a good reputation from taking social responsibility, the government pays less to secure the disabled's rights, and a more inclusive labour market and society is a bonus for all

# Some critical issues

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- Can private businesses be trusted to take responsibility for solving social problems? Why don't they pay more taxes instead of engaging in philanthropy?
- Will not disabled employees be exploited and caught in a «poverty trap» (social dumping)?
- Will private businesses become truly more inclusive, or will work inclusion of people with disabilities be encapsulated into something only some in the business engage in?
- And what about the competencies of social entrepreneurs – isn't there a huge risk that they are amateurs with shining ideas generating new, unanticipated problems?
  
- Clearly, all these concerns are relevant, and...

# As a social worker, how can you contribute to work inclusion for people with disabilities?

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- What will the labour market look like in the future? Collapse of capitalism? More hybrid organisations with different sources of income? More interest in «meaningful activities»?
- Automation, cognitively demanding jobs, bullshit jobs, universal basic income...
- Understanding both social problems and how the labour market works!? Student social enterprises and Innovation camps; preparing for the unknown
- Working within and between various (increasingly hybrid?) organisations providing meaningful activities, with a critical view on philanthropy, social dumping, exclusion at work, and competence in helping people