

Abstract

The overall aim of this study was to explore the situation of those who have disadvantaged position in the labour market. The main emphasis of my research focused on those people who have *partially-reduced work capacity* and in particular the study analysed the vocational rehabilitation system in Norway that aids their integration in society.

In this thesis I described and analysed the Norwegian vocational rehabilitation system in search of answers to my research questions such as; how is this system embedded in different organisations, what does the structure look like, what is the policy environment and context, individuals' attitude, wider social integration and finally how the political landscape enables or hinders the integration into society of individuals who live with partially-reduced work capacity.

During the study I looked at contemporary literature around the process of vocational rehabilitation and its participants, the relevant legal context, research and policies about the Norwegian labour market in relation to the main focus group. I have also described the type of benefits and services that are available.

Understanding the Norwegian vocational rehabilitation system requires us to understand the wider context therefore I dedicated part of my thesis to explore the Norwegian welfare society, its economic status and its connection within the society as a whole.

This thesis used the single case study design as its research methodology and *the Norwegian vocational rehabilitation system* is the case itself.

My hypothesis is that the only way that different governments can make an effective contribution to the lives of individuals, concerned in my research, is if they step beyond the ad hoc campaigns and invest in finding solutions for the root causes. This hypothesis was examined in light of these questions:

1. How does the Norwegian welfare state influence the shape of the vocational rehabilitation?

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2. How have active and passive employment policy instruments developed in relation to the vocational rehabilitation support system?

3. Who are the individuals in the vocational rehabilitation system?

4. How do government policies, legislation and international treaties and agreements influence the current vocational rehabilitation system?

5. What is the shape of the support structure that surrounds the vocational rehabilitation system?

6. What is the future direction of the Norwegian vocational rehabilitation system?

In summary it can be argued that governmental employment policies are the most influential themes in shaping the future of the vocational rehabilitation system and its associated organisational structures.

Initially, following the Second World War, the Norwegian employment policies were built on a foundation of 'passive' instruments to address the problem in vocational rehabilitation.

Thereafter, a new trend of 'active' instruments came to fore. 'Passive' allowances were more difficult to access and at the same time a plethora of services and monetary benefits were introduced. The support became more tailored to the individuals' needs and early prevention played an important role. These changes mirror the 'collective individualism' in the Norwegian society. Joining together and re-structuring several national organisations, such as The Social Security Insurance, the Employment Department and the benefit offices of Local Authorities, the current Norwegian government introduced the biggest welfare reform in its history (in Norwegian this is called the NAV reform).

The newly created Employment and Integration Ministry and within that the Employment and Welfare Directorate became the strategic lead to oversee and to move forward what is called

the '*arbeidslinja*' employment policy in collaboration with the Local Authorities, and support its reception in the society.

In past decades the increased allocation for 'active' instruments and the increased number of participants benefitting from these instruments illustrates the Norwegian direction of travel and its determination: the social integration.

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