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Is an equally integrated society for the physically challenged possible? A case study on the Norwegian social welfare system

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1. Introduction

In general, people care about their own existence¹. Human beings acquire meaning of their existence from activities that stretch well beyond mere survival². Financial security and hence being able to provide for life's necessities such as shelter, food, water and heat, is important³. When an individual cannot meet their own basic needs, governmental and private social welfare systems may take responsibility by providing support systems such as unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, health care, poor relief, working conditions and other social-security measures^{4 5 6}.

Unfortunately, individuals may be subject to unforeseen circumstances that compromise their ability to secure their own basic needs⁷. Such factors include but are not limited to acute or chronic illness and injuries or disabilities resulting from

1 S. McLeod, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. SimplyPsychology. 2014. <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>, (17.04.2015).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Collins English Dictionary: Welfare State. 2003, HarperCollins Publishers, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Social+welfare+state>, (14.03.2014).

5 Ibid.

6 American Heritage Dictionary: Social Welfare. 2009, The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Social+welfare+state>, (27.11.2014).

7 S. McLeod, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs...*

accidents at work or leisure, for example. Clearly, financial penalties are greater and more enduring when recovery times are long rather than short. Furthermore, certain disabilities can prevent individuals from becoming economically viable and hence this sub-section of society cannot meet their own basic needs. Nevertheless, every human being has the right to have their basic needs met. For all of these reasons it becomes obvious that social welfare can alleviate financial hardship. One country that has an advanced and well established social welfare state is Norway and this article centres on that system.

By definition “social integration is the means through which people interact, connect and validate each other within a community”⁸. Positive social integration comes from a person being connected and validated by a reference group⁹ ¹⁰. After all, a lack of positive social integration and acceptance causes negative consequences from an individual, family community and societal perspective¹¹. To that degree, successful social welfare systems are a mechanism by which a person can achieve positive social integration, since the reference group, society as a whole, provides validation and acceptance through the provision of basic needs and meeting human rights. At first sight, it might seem fair to distribute social welfare evenly among those who need it. In this model, individuals, irrespective of circumstance, would be given the same level of financial support. A ‘one glove fits all’ approach of his kind, however, fails to take into consideration variability in the needs of individuals. A chronically ill single mother of two toddlers clearly has different financial needs to that of single man whose dominant hand was amputated as a result of an industrial accident, for example. Lower limb patients also vary tremendously. Some require crutches, others need wheelchairs, whilst others still need electric wheelchairs. These examples make it abundantly clear the obvious flaw to the ‘one glove fits all’ model. It is a nonsensical waste of resources and a failure to meet need if a lower leg patient is given an electric wheelchair, when crutches might be fit for purpose. Likewise, if a severely disabled patient is given crutches instead of an electric wheelchair, their needs will not be met either. This kind of problem concerns not only the permanently physically challenged but also those who suffer temporary setbacks, both physical and mental, such as injuries limiting mobility and depression respectively. In addition, abilities, talents, and potential vary

8 C.L. Hardy, *Theory of Social Integration*. eHow. 1999-2015. http://www.ehow.com/about_5399164_theory-social-integration.html, (18.04.2015).

9 Ibid.

10 Open Education Sociology Dictionary. Social Integration. OpenStax College. 2012. <http://sociologydictionary.org/social-integration/>, (18.04.2015).

11 C.L. Hardy, *Theory of Social Integration...*

widely between individuals. To maximise all three of the latter factors people must have flexibility. Consequently, individuality and flexibility are crucial matters for social integration and hence any welfare state should attempt to meet these needs.

Citykirken, a church in Oslo can be used to illustrate social integration in action. On one occasion, during a church service, a middle aged woman suddenly became irritated and shouted-out aloud, a string of sentences, apparently at no-one in particular. In response, a male church usher sat next to her which appeared to calm her down. The usher did nothing more than listen to the woman and eventually she became almost still¹². It was seemingly a normal scene that often occurred in church services. In this case the woman was mentally impaired but nonetheless the usher's actions illustrate that the woman was integrated into the body of the church. Effective social integration is not limited to the church setting. There are examples from other domains of society that reveal how people with various kinds of difficulties have also been positively integrated. Integration of the physically challenged into the workplace is now not an exception. Norwegian society, it appears, has worked on their advanced welfare by emphasizing individuality and flexibility. Governmental institutions, non-profit organizations including Trade Unions, as well as privately owned companies co-operate and together have improved Norway's social welfare system. Governmental foundations such as the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV), National Insurance Scheme, and IA Agreement exist. The aim of this paper is to determinate the circumstances of social integration for the physically challenged in Norway. Through qualitative methods using in-depth interviews and questionnaires, this research was conducted in order to evaluate how governmental institutions, non-profit organizations, and companies work together to provide social welfare. Obstacles to social integration will also be examined.

2. Governmental institutions

Before discussing issues related to social integration of the physically challenged, it is important to make reference to preventative measures of physical and mental disabilities first. As the EU health policy points out, some sicknesses, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and mental illness are to some degree preventable if measures to reduce smoking, alcohol use and misuse, unhealthy

12 Observation made by Kaori Yamashita during a service at church "Citykirken" Norway (summer 2013).

diet and sedentary lifestyle are put into place¹³. In addition to making lifestyle changes, people can extend their lives by engaging in risk-avoidance behaviour. People can keep themselves from harm by driving more slowly, in the hope of avoiding crashes. Caution can also be used in everyday life, by avoiding circumstances that expose people to falling objects, for example. Driving behaviour can be deleteriously affected by fatigue as can decisions in everyday life. Fatigue can affect mental judgement. Thus, with impaired mental ability, individuals may fail to pay attention to aspects of their environment that have the potential to cause harm. Sufficient rest, then, is critical for survival. Its absence can impair mental judgement and also result in the loss of physical condition, by compromising immune function.

Schroeder stresses that long hours at work can be psychologically and emotionally damaging¹⁴. Scales, a research lecturer at the Health and Social Services Institute in Britain, writes that “there is evidence that working long hours over a long period of time is raising stress levels and reducing emotional well being”¹⁵. Rest, particularly with reference to paid holidays, seems to be an important factor in helping people relax. According to Rezenbrik, individuals in Germany, France, Spain, and Denmark generally receive thirty days paid holiday. For Norway, United Kingdom and Sweden the equivalent figure is twenty-five days. In the US that figure drops to fourteen days, on average, and in Japan it drops even further still to eleven days. In Addition to annual leave entitlement individuals can receive extra days of paid leave for special occasions such as a birthday¹⁶ ¹⁷. That entitlement, however, varies considerably between corporations. In Japan, the number of paid holidays increases incrementally according to time of service. In the majority of corporations, annual leave is increased at the end of the first 6-12 months of service, for example¹⁸. Norwegians’ allocation of paid holiday then, in comparison with Germany, France, Spain, and Denmark isn’t particularly generous and to that degree it could be argued that as a country Norway does not concern itself with social welfare issues. Nevertheless, another factor,

13 European Commission. *MAJOR AND CHRONIC DISEASES*. Policy. PUBLIC HEALTH. 2014. http://ec.europa.eu/health/major_chronic_diseases/policy/index_en.htm, (05.12.2014).

14 J.R. Schroeder, *Why We Need a Weekly Rest Day*, The Good News. A Magazine of Understanding. 2003. <http://www.ucg.org/doctrinal-beliefs/why-we-need-weekly-rest-day/>, (18.04.2015).

15 Ibid.

16 A. Rezenbrik, *What country gets the most vacation?* CNN BUSINESS360. 2012, <http://business.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/16/what-country-gets-the-most-vacation/>, (14.03.2014).

17 Nagoya International Center. *Paid Holidays, Days Off, & National Holiday*. 2012, <http://www.nic-nagoya.or.jp/en/e/archives/350>, (14.03.2014).

18 Ibid.

paid sick leave, is worth considering. Even if people have longer paid holidays, these holidays, at times, are not sufficient for proper rest and recuperation because some groups of the physically challenged and also people with chronic sickness need to use paid holiday for their physical maintenance. In short, these paid holidays fail to help people recover from sickness. Therefore, paid sick leave is a crucial element of a successful social welfare system.

Even so, why is paid sick leave necessary? The healthy majority might think that longer paid holidays are sufficient for proper rest. However, there is a minority who often get sick and need hospitalisation may be required. Clearly the sickness-prone have the same human rights as their healthy counterparts. Both groups have the right to work, for example. If the sickness-prone use up paid holidays to manage their illness, instead of taking paid sick days, salaries or status, will be negatively affected. If individuals continuously use this strategy for dealing with their malaise they might feel valueless to stay and perhaps resign from their workplace. This kind of problem is not only for the fragile minority but also the healthy majority. For instance, car accidents are so common today that even healthy people may be involved in a collision that results in their being injured. Whiplash can result in hospitalisation because it can cause long-term pain and discomfort¹⁹. Pandemic diseases, such as influenza, can also affect healthy people. Thus both the sickness-prone and their healthy counterparts have the need to work as well as the need to secure social welfare benefits when they cannot. Paid sick leave is a vital component of social welfare systems.

Paid annual leave and paid sick leave are not the only yard sticks to measure a successful social welfare system against. Scheil-Adlung and Sandner write that research findings should be interpreted with caution and must not be compared without taking other variables into consideration²⁰. Qualification criteria for sickness benefits vary widely between countries. As examples, in the US there is no national policy requiring employers to provide paid sick leave for workers who become mildly sick²¹. Canada and Japan do not have national policy for mild illness either although they do have other kinds of paid sick leave for serious illness, such as cancer²². In Japan, if employees fall mildly sick with a non-work related illness or injury, employers are not re-

19 S. Johnson, *Whiplash*. Healthline. 2012. <http://www.healthline.com/health/whiplash#Symptoms2>, (02.11.2014).

20 X. Scheil-Adlung and L. Sandner, *The Case for Paid Sick Leave*, World Health Report. Background Paper, 9, Health System Financing, World Health Organization: 2010, p.11.

21 J. Heymann, H. J. Rho, J. Schmitt and A. Earle, *Contagion Nation: A Comparison of Paid Sick Day Policies in 22 Countries*, cepr (Center for Economic and Policy Research), The USA: 2009, pp.1,8.

22 *Ibid.*, p.9.

quired to grant paid sick leave. Instead workers' absence from work is subtracted from paid annual leave allocation²³. In contrast, many European countries have, arguably, sympathetic paid sick-leave systems. For instance, in Norway, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, and some other countries, employees are guaranteed full pay whilst they recover from a mild illness, such as a five-day flu. However, some European countries only pay employees a proportion of the total number of days they are absent. For a five-day flu, Greece and the Netherlands will give 3.5 days pay, in Sweden it is 3.2 days pay, in France it is 1 day, in Ireland it is 0.7 days, and in the United Kingdom it is 0.4 days²⁴. In more severe cases, such as fifty-day cancer treatment, Norway and Luxembourg provide full pay for the entire period of absence. For the same fifty-day cancer treatment, employees will be paid for 44 days in Germany, 39 days in Belgium, 38 days in Sweden, 36 days in Denmark, 35 days in the Netherlands, 29 days in Greece, 24 days in France, 17 days in Ireland, and the United Kingdom is for 10 days²⁵. Thus, using sick leave as a measure, it becomes apparent that Norway has one of the most advanced social welfare systems in the world.

Social security also seems to be a critical element for an advanced welfare system. Social security is the principle or practice or a program of public provision for the economic security and social welfare of the individual and his family²⁶. A social welfare system then, is essential to achieve social integration for diversified people. In Norway, one of method to provide social security is the National Insurance Scheme. Employees in Norway, generally become a member of that scheme. It seems effective in preparing support and help when people need to go to a hospital²⁷. If an employee becomes too sick to work, he gives a notice of self-declaration for sick leave to his employer without medical certificate. Self-certification can be given up to three days at a time. It is not permitted for more than eight days per sick leave incident. Moreover the maximum number of days sick leave, by self-certification, in any 12 month period is limited to a total 24 days. Self-certification is permitted once an employee has been employed for 2 months, but it is not permitted before that time. On top of that other

23 Nagoya International Center. *Paid Holidays, Days Off, & National Holiday*. 2012, <http://www.nic-nagoya.or.jp/en/e/archives/350>, (14.03.2014).

24 J. Heymann, H. J. Rho, J. Schmitt and A. Earle, *Contagion Nation...*, pp.1,8.

25 Ibid., p.9.

26 Merriam-Webster. Social Security. (n.d.). <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20security>, (18.04.2015).

27 A. Strøm, The Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD) (Norges Handikapforbund/NHF), (Interview: 11.12.2013).

conditions of self-certified sick leave vary widely between companies^{28 29}.

Some kinds of illness can be recovered from quickly, and employees can return to work within a couple of days. In contrast, some other kinds of illness require considerably longer to recover from. In Norway, if an illness falls into the latter category employees are expected to obtain a medical certificate from a doctor for their sick leave entitlement. In this instance employees can be absent from work for the total period of their illness. Simultaneously, a doctor makes an assessment about the whether the sick employee should receive 100 percent (full) sick leave or 50 percent sick leave. If the doctor's assessment is 50 percent sick leave, the person will work 50 percent of the time with some adjustment, which the employer provides when it is necessary. For other circumstances, "Ny Arbeids- og Velferdsforvaltning" (NAV), which in English translates as, "the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service", is important. NAV has roles among the social welfare for especially working life. When people suffer from poor health NAV make assessments to help people return to work^{30 31 32}. A detailed description of NAV is explained in the latter part of this paper. There is also another kind of support, called sickness benefit which employees can claim for lengthy periods of sick leave. With documents of self-declaration or medical certificate by a doctor, the employee can receive sickness benefit, which is 52 weeks maximum. The condition is that the employee must have been working for the company for at least four weeks prior to start of sick leave. In this case, an employer will pay sickness benefit for the first sixteen days after that, the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme takes it over for the employee³³.

In Norway companies are generally supportive to employees and focus on individuality and flexibility. Different companies have various strategies in their approach

28 The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), *Self-certified sickness absence*, c.2013, <http://www.nyinorge.no/en/Ny-i-Norge-velg-sprak/New-in-Norway/Health/Illness-when-you-are-employed/Self-certified-sickness-absence/>, (02.03.2014).

29 GOVERNMENT.NO, *Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life 1 March 2010 – 31 December 2013* (the IA Agreement), 2010, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/AD/publikasjoner/web-publikasjoner/2010/IA-avtale_24022010_eng.pdf, (04.03.2014), p.6.

30 REHABILITATION INTERNATIONAL NORGE, *Arbeids- og velferdsforvaltningen*, 2014, <http://ri-norge.no/no/a-leve-med-funksjonshemning/lov-og-forskrift/arbeids-og-velferdsforvaltning>, (03.03.2014).

31 NAV, *Other Language*, 2014, <https://www.nav.no/Andre+spr%C3%A5k>, (02.03.2014).

32 The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), *Sick leave.*, c.2013, <http://www.nyinorge.no/en/Ny-i-Norge-velg-sprak/New-in-Norway/Health/Illness-when-you-are-employed/Sick-leave/>, (02.03.2014).

33 Ibid.

to sick leave. After an absence most people return to work fully recovered. However, if an employee is not fully recovered after a sickness absence, his work quality might be poor, and his sickness might deteriorate. In one study, a Norwegian respondent who worked at a government agency, noted that employees received paid sick leave for as long as they needed, providing a document from a physician was given as proof of illness. In that same workplace paid sick leave it was not counted into paid holidays, which are five weeks each year³⁴. In a different study, a manager reported having twenty-four days sick leave, twenty-five days paid vacation³⁵. A respondent who worked at a government agency also described follow-up systems that are engaged when an employee is absent for a long period of time. For example, other employees may take on the responsibilities or tasks of the absent employee or a temporary worker may be employed instead. Temporary workers may be hired the company itself or by a temporary employment agency³⁶.

Illness and accidents that cause long-term or permanent difficulties, are perhaps unavoidable. Some people have difficulties from birth. Human rights need protecting and one way to do that is to integrate such people into the society. Most European countries spend the majority of money allocated to social security benefits on old-age benefits and on sickness/health care. By contrast the Norwegian government spends just 32.2% of its social security funds on sickness and health care. 30.7% from the same money-source is spent on old-age benefits and 19.1% spent on disability care. By contrast the German government spends 43.5% of their total social benefits on old-age benefits and 27.3% on sickness/health care and only 7.7% on disability. In Belgium, they spend 44.7% on old-age benefits, 27.1%, on sickness/health care and just 7.0% on disability care. The French government spends amount 43.9% on old-age benefits, 29.8% on sickness/health care, and 5.9% on disability care. Sweden spends 40.5% on old-age benefits, 24.3% on sickness/health care, and 15.4% on disability care³⁷. Norwegian society focuses on old-age benefits but spends money almost evenly between sickness/health care and disability care. These percentages point to the focal points of various social welfare systems. From the data presented it becomes obvious that the Norwegian government facilitates the social integration of the physically challenged people, since its social fund is fairly distributed to the disabled.

People are classified for entitlement of benefits if they are judged to have at least

34 B. Flak, at a Government Agency, answered questionnaires to Yamashita, (E-mail: 27.12.2013).

35 On condition of anonymity: a manager of Quality and HR section at a company, answered questionnaires to Yamashita, (E-mail: 20.12.2013).

36 B. Flak, at a Government Agency...

37 A. Petrasova, 2008. Population and Social Conditions Eurostat Statistics in focus European Commission: 2008, p.5.

a fifty percent reduction in their physical function due to illness, injury, or impairment. In addition for the classification, a person is examined by NAV, who assesses them against the necessary requirements for disability entitlement^{38 39}. As mentioned above, NAV has important roles for the social welfare, particularly in relation to workers. NAV receives contributions from employers and employees across the country. It thus manages the distribution of these monies to individuals who need it when they fall sick or become injured. With financial contributions, NAV is treated as a decision making organization for both employers and employees. NAV is divided into central government and local authorities, which cooperate to support unemployment benefit, work assessment allowance, sickness benefit, pensions, child benefit, and more. NAV consumes a third of the national budget, and currently all 456 NAV offices are work toward their main goals of having “more people active and in work, fewer people on benefits” and achieving “a well-functioning job market”. Accordingly, they appear to take a less generalized but more individualistic approach to people. Although every local authority and NAV agree on local authority services,⁴⁰ NAV vary their service upon individual circumstances.

In Norway, being a member of the National Insurance Scheme provides help and support over the course of an individual’s working life, since membership is key to eligibility for the right to receive various help and support from NAV. In general, if a person lives in Norway for a long period term, he will be a member of the National Insurance Scheme, and when certain criteria are met even foreigners can become members. Individuals become members of the National Insurance Scheme, through contributions paid via their taxable income and pensions^{41 42}.

Contributions vary according to individual conditions. How much an employee pays toward the National Insurance Scheme is calculated by the Norwegian Tax Administration is based on taxable income. The size of contributions and its deduction are determined from an employee’s income including their pension. For instance

38 The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), *Disability pension*, c.2013, <http://www.nynorge.no/en/Ny-i-Norge-velg-sprak/New-in-Norway/Work/Working-environment/Disability-pension/>, (02.03. 2014).

39 The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), *Impaired work ability*, c.2013, <http://www.nynorge.no/en/Ny-i-Norge-velg-sprak/New-in-Norway/Work/Working-environment/Impaired-work-ability/>, (02.03.2014).

40 NAV, *The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (2013) NAV*, 2013, <https://www.nav.no/English/The+Norwegian+Labour+and+Welfare+Administration>, (02.03.2014).

41 NAV, *Membership of the National Insurance Scheme*, <https://www.nav.no/English/Membership+in+The+National+Insurance+Scheme>, (02.03.2014).

42 A. Strøm, The Norwegian Association of Disabled...

according to the annual tax assessment notice in 2011, the rates of contribution showed as “7.8 percent of personal income”, “11.0 percent of personal income from self-employment” and “4.7 percent of pension”. Although there are people in National Insurance Scheme who do not pay taxes in Norway, NAV will set and collect the contributions from such people⁴³.

Although it is an obligation of the membership to pay contributions to the National Insurance Scheme, people will receive better help and support through the system. Since there are also voluntary members such as foreigners, the entitlements of claim depend on an employee’s agreement conditions or what kind of membership a person has. Then received coverage is determined. If it comes from the health section, there are health service benefits, lump sum grants for births and adoption, sickness benefit, and parental benefit. If it comes from the pension section, there are old-age pensions, disability pensions, benefits for surviving spouse, orphan’s pensions, unemployment benefits, single mother or father benefits, funeral grants, basic and auxiliary benefits, medical rehabilitation and occupational rehabilitation, and grants to former family carers⁴⁴. Still more, employers have to pay their own employers’ contributions. Ratio examples in 2011 are described as “6.8 percent for health section”, “6.8 percent for health section with entitlement to sickness benefit” and “14.3 percent for pension section”. Including voluntary members, the situations are various, and with conditions some employers are not required to pay⁴⁵.

Over the working life of an individual, NAV and the National Insurance Scheme play vital roles, yet, on their own these two mechanisms do not provide a fully integrated society. There is also another essential factor to improve employment of diversified people. It is the IA agreement (IA-avtale in Norwegian). Following the guidance of IA agreement is important for managers. In a study, a Quality and HR manager, noted that companies under contract with the state, in accordance with the IA agreement are effectively working on integration among diversified employees⁴⁶. Consequently, they can facilitate their work and give employees help and more time to work. It will encourage each employee to work through individual and flexible working conditions. IA agreement in English depicts as the Agreement on “a more

43 NAV, *National insurance contributions*, 2014, <https://www.nav.no/English/Membership+in+The+National+Insurance+Scheme/National+Insurance+Contributionse>, (02.03.2014).

44 NAV, *National insurance coverage*. 2014, <https://www.nav.no/English/Membership+in+The+National+Insurance+Scheme/National+Insurance+Coverage>, (02.03.2014).

45 NAV, *National insurance contributions*...

46 On condition of anonymity: a manager of Quality and HR section at a company, answered questionnaires to Yamashita, (E-mail: 20.12.2013).

inclusive working life". The Norwegian government and social partners work for the benefit of the employees, the workplaces, and society through this IA agreement for including physically challenged people⁴⁷.

The IA agreement was created through systematic cooperation of Norwegian government, the Minister of Labour, employer organizations, and also several employee organizations including Trade Unions. Several objectives are outlined in the IA Agreement, such as to "help bring employees back to work" and "prevent withdrawal from working life". However, the goals are individual and flexible, and vary between companies since the agreements are based on the challenges of each enterprise. Accordingly, a document of this agreement states that "the good results of good IA work are created in the individual enterprise" under "strong management engagement, long-term thinking and systematic cooperation over a long period of time"⁴⁸.

Cooperators of the IA agreement seemingly know well that good work requires spending time and effort. Every workplace is different, and the nature of businesses vary greatly as do their size and facilities. Moreover, every company has individual needs and seeks and has their own different kinds of workers. Some companies cannot allow every candidate to join if he fails to fulfil requirement of the company. For the meaning, there is no difference between the physically challenged and physically non-challenged people that if a candidate cannot meet the company's requirement, he cannot be hired. No matter how the company tries to expand employment among various people. Therefore, it is important for each company to clarify their employment processes and equipment preparation.

In Norwegian society the IA agreement aims to achieve a good working environment and emphasises tolerance and diversity. Furthermore, after employees have had an absence resulting from illness enterprises are asked to follow up activities of absentees with a view to encouraging them back into work. This method is helpful because people previously having illness find it difficult to adjust to the working life, since their physical condition may not have recovered to 100 percent. In addition, the working routines or priorities might have been changed to accommodate current business circumstances. Under the IA agreement, "more inclusive working life", Norwegian organizations work together with a strong commitment for involving diversified employees.

47 GOVERNMENT.NO, *Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life 1 March 2010 – 31 December 2013* (the IA Agreement), 2010, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/AD/publikasjoner/webpublikasjoner/2010/IA-avtale_24022010_eng.pdf, (04.03.2014), p.1.

48 Ibid.

Upon first sight it seems that companies are required to invest heavily in preparation for the IA agreement. Nevertheless, that investment comes with a benefit, namely, NAV will grant employers facilitation subsidies and remuneration for company health services. By facilitation subsidies, employers gain compensation for additional expenses or efforts for the purpose of helping and supporting employees. For example companies receive NAV financial support for testing and training employees in new tasks and providing employees with practical assistance. With reference to remuneration for company health services, companies can receive full or partial refunds for their expenses if, for example, they assist a person on sick leave or a person with reduced ability to return to work, following an absence⁴⁹. A good example was obtained by Telenor Group, which is one of largest telecommunications companies in Norway. The female interviewee was wheelchair user, their hands and fingers also impaired. When she showed up for the interview, a female assistant was with her. The respondent mentioned that with the help of NAV, her company hired the assistant for her, which enabled her to work as a “normal” person. Her position was the director of a section⁵⁰.

With a strong commitment to the IA agreement, Norwegian companies are better able to manage a diversified work force. Unfortunately, however, not every Norwegian company has signed-up to the agreement. It is self-electing as the following excerpt makes clear “all enterprises in Norway can participate in this cooperation by signing a cooperation agreement with the NAV working life centre and the employee representatives in the enterprise”⁵¹. As previously mentioned, companies come in different sizes and each has different facilities. In reality, not every enterprise can accommodate the agreement, in practice. Nevertheless, if the goal is to establish integrative workplaces for diversified employees, then the IA agreement will play a serious role. Indeed, Norwegian work places are becoming ever more diverse as a result of initiatives like the IA agreement.

3. Other organizations and enterprises

The Norwegian government hopes “that disabled people can protect their rights and obligations as citizens under ensured living conditions and a quality of life equal

49 GOVERNMENT.NO, *Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life 1 March 2010 – 31 December 2013* (the IA Agreement), 2010, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/AD/publikasjoner/web-publikasjoner/2010/IA-avtale_24022010_eng.pdf, (04.03.2014), p.6.

50 A. I., Ihme, Telenor Group, (Interview: 18.12.2013).

51 GOVERNMENT.NO, *Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life 1 March 2010 – 31 December 2013...*, p.5.

to the general population⁵². As a step toward achieving this goal for the physically challenged, the Government and NAV have worked with and improved conditions for employers and employees alike. Many non-profit organizations including Trade Unions have also helped to improve equality in the work place. In Norway, many such organizations are actively helping and supporting socially marginalized groups. Some focus on issues associated with race, others focus on transgender issues, and others still focus on physically challenging issues, some organizations handle several issues simultaneously.

Several interviewees and respondents from organizations explained that they worked within political affairs and aimed to improve some situations and amend laws. For example, a male staff member of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) (Landsorganisasjonen i Norge in Norwegian) referred to an instance where the union had to fight to secure employees basic right for sick-leave entitlement⁵³. Two organizations, the Norwegian Federation of Organizations of Disabled People (FFO) (Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon in Norwegian) and the Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD) (Norges Handikapforbund in Norwegian), made reference to the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (the Act), which was adopted in 2008 and entered into force 1 January 2009. A respondent from FFO pointed out that people with disabilities did not have legal protection against discrimination before the Act was adopted. After that, two supporting laws were also adopted for the Act, the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud Act (the Ombud) and the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal (the Tribunal). The Ombud mandates to give non-biased decisions, and the Tribunal claims legally mandatory bound decisions and imposes sanctions for non-compliance^{54 55}.

The leader of a section from NAD described prolonged lobbying activities until the Act became law. She stressed that it would take longer time when governmental laws adopt amendments. Her organization started to lobby in 1995 with a view to appealing for the necessity to Parliament. They were lobbied politicians at conferences and used

52 GOVERNMENT.NO, Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, *Disabilities*, 2013, http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/bld/topics/equality-and-discrimination/disabled-people/disabilities.html?regj_oss=1&id=670388, (02.03.2014).

53 Ø. Nilsen, The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) (Landsorganisasjonen i Norge), (Interview: 5.12.2013).

54 K. Jüriloo, 2013. Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (FFO) Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon. answered questionnaires to Yamashita, (E-mail: 10.12.2013).

55 A. Strøm, The Norwegian Association of Disabled...

the media. Although the steps for their aims were small, eventually their appeals became the Act. Moreover, some physically challenged people are working at FFO and NAD. They are experts in appealing for their aims and know well what their necessities are. Offices of both organizations are barrier-free and have wide corridors. The leader of a section of NAD described mentioned their office doors, which are a little smaller than the whole size and do not have door rails on the floor. The reason is to make the doors smooth and easy to be opened and to be shut by the physically challenged. These designs are especially important for people having difficulties of their legs⁵⁶.

These supporting organizations are not only politically active but they apply realization to company managers. Some interviewees and respondents prepared seminars and meetings in order to enlighten employers, managers and employees on methods for improving the workplace. For example, an interviewee from the Diversity at Work (MiA) (*Mangfold i Arbeidslivet*, in Norwegian) described how best to teach diversity management to hospital managers. In this case, members from MiA provided an opportunity for employees to discuss their views on management. Using their own methods, staffs and management at MiA introduced how much their seminar attendees did not understand about each other. During the process, managers had opportunities to reflect on their own attitudes toward diversified employees⁵⁷. Moreover, a respondent from FFO stressed that companies can hold prejudices against the physically challenged. Physically challenged employees can be treated as a burden to a company because employers may prioritize commercial purposes and lack of sympathy for the physically challenged. Consequently mutual understanding is necessary to combat deep-seated prejudices. People with challenges can work if they are equipped to do so. FFO has supported to establish a trainee program for the physically challenged with higher education among workplaces in the public sector⁵⁸.

For breaking through the prejudices and building up equality for the physically challenged, mutual understanding between them and the able bodied is needed. Unfortunately prejudices are hard to remove. Nevertheless, a prominent program, "Telenor Open Mind", run by the Telenor Group provides training for the physically and mentally challenged. Their aim is to secure long term employment for these minority groups. The program supplies two kinds of training. The first three months of the program are given over to computer training and coaching courses. Such training

56 Ibid.

57 E. Langset, 2013. Diversity at Work (MiA) (*Mangfold i Arbeidslivet*), (Interview: 02.12.2013).

58 K. Jüriloo, 2013. Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (FFO) *Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon*. answered questionnaires to Yamashita, (E-mail: 10.12.2013).

aims to promote confidence of the participants. In the second part, which lasts for 21 months, participants enter work based-training in various departments such as administration, accounting, management, surveillance and customer service. There are almost no prerequisites to become a participant. Instead, it is the motivation and desire to work that are used as the criteria for being entered into the program. This program has been running more than 15 years, and 75 percent of participants are offered permanent jobs at Telenor Group or other places^{59 60 61}.

The director of this program is a physically challenged woman, as above-mentioned. She explained NAV systems and also non-profit organizations, which have fundamental ideas of working conditions for integrating the physically challenged. And the ideas are settled in Telenor Group. The Headquarters of Telenor Group was established by wide buildings in a large area. Their corridors and doors are also wide, and even with tables and chairs in the cafeteria there is enough space for wheel chair users to navigate the space comfortably. Moreover, benefits of the “Telenor Open Mind” project can be seen in individuals both with and without physical impairments. Telenor Groups calls it as a “Win – Win – Win” situation. Projects like that run by Telenor along with NAV and non-profit organizations are successful when employers properly use them for equal employment. The first Win is for the participants who gain work experience, a chance to prove their abilities and add meaning to their lives, acquiring social integration in workplaces. The second Win is for the company, Telenor, to acquire motivated and qualified employees. Their public image is also improved by the program. The third Win is for the society since people have benefits from a larger tax-paying population. Moreover, when physically challenged people earn their own salary and are able to self-support no longer require social security. That in turn can serve to alleviate financial pressure on the remainder of entire society, as a whole^{62 63 64}.

With these untiring efforts, Telenor Group has been one of the major mobile operators with 166 million mobile subscriptions in the world. Moreover, they have more than 30,000 employees over eleven countries. “Telenor Open Mind” was also

59 Telenor group, *Including the Physically Challenged*, 2014, <http://www.telenor.com/career/programme-for-work-integration/for-the-physically-challenged/>, (06.03.2014).

60 A. I. Ihme, Telenor Group, information booklet of “Telenor Open Mind”, c.2010. p.7.

61 A. I. Ihme, Telenor Group, (Interview: 18.12.2013).

62 Ibid.

63 Telenor group, *Including the Physically Challenged*, 2014...

64 A. I. Ihme, Telenor Group, information booklet of “Telenor Open Mind”, c.2010. pp.3 and 4.

introduced into their offices in Sweden (2007) and Pakistan (2008)^{65 66}. The director asserts that the program aims to enlighten and educate people about how to break through prejudices against the physically challenged. Although many non-physically challenged people hold negative images of the physically challenged, and consider them slow, weak or sickness-prone, the director and other employees of Telenor Group have welcomed the physically challenged with positive attitudes and openness⁶⁷. Furthermore, after the end of the program, many physically challenged people are hired not only at Telenor Group but also at other companies. As a result the program is held in high regard and is one of the more successful efforts of a private company to address issues associated with social integration of the physically challenged.

4. Conclusion

In comparison with many other countries, it is apparent that Norway has an advanced social welfare system. As above-mentioned, NAV systems, National Insurance Scheme, IA Agreement, non-profit organizations and companies represented by “Telenor Open Mind” have been strenuously advocating social integration for diversified people. Through individuality and flexibility, they have built a meaningful foundation: mutual understanding, it is hoped will help break through prejudices and create integration. Nevertheless, promoting employment of the physically challenged is still at an early stage of development compared with their goal of fully integrating the physically challenged into the work place. Annual statistics produced by the Norwegian government reveal that for people who are employed, aged between 15-66 years, in 2012, 521,000 individuals were described as being physically or mentally challenged. Despite the best cooperative efforts of NAV other governmental systems, non-profit organizations and privately owned companies, only 40 percent of individuals assessed as physically challenged have obtained employment. In contrast, 75 percent of non-challenged individuals, of a working age are gainfully employed. 60 percent of challenged people did not have a job even though they had potential and were eager to work. In Norway, the unemployment rate in the population as a whole for 2011 was 3.3 percent. The equivalent figure for the physically challenged in the same year was six percent. The disparity between these groups, the physically challenged and their

65 Telenor group, *Telenor at a Glance*. 2014, <http://www.telenor.com/about-us/telenor-at-a-glance/>, (06.03.2014).

66 A. I. Ihme, Telenor Group, information booklet of “Telenor Open Mind”, c.2010.

67 A. I. Ihme, Telenor Group, (Interview: 18.12.2013).

healthy counterparts, has hit a plateau in current Statistics^{68 69 70 71}.

In Norway, there are numbers of helping and supporting systems. Such as barrier-free buildings for workers have been prepared in many areas. The Norwegian government and non-profit organizations including Trade Unions also support companies to employ the physically challenged in accordance with capacities of each company. In spite of these efforts, what are the obstacles in the way of integrated society for the physically challenged? Two answers became conspicuous in the course of this research. The first was negative mind-set of human beings, and the second was requiring much more time and effort.

With reference to the first answer it is not only prejudices such as “slow to work” or “being a burden” in the workplace that act against the physically challenged but also the negative mind-set of the able-bodied reference group. Together all three factors may serve to keep the physically challenged out of the workplace and it is this that prevents the physically challenged being successful in the workplace^{72 73}. People sometimes unconsciously imagine that some minority group members, the physically challenged, for example, share particular characteristics and act in accordance with stereotypical patterns, through a process not unlike and intragroup homogeneity effect⁷⁴. This tendency of the able bodied to view those with physical disabilities as similar can lead to discrimination and social marginalization of the physically challenged. In reality, however, everyone has individual characteristics with different abilities, talents, and potentials, despite sharing common traits. And so it is with the physically challenged. Despite intergroup differences non-challenged people, often judge the physically challenged to be similar and draw upon negative images to do so. Often the non-physically challenged judge their less able counterparts to be insufficient in some way or other. If this negative image persists eventually, no matter how well a physically challenge person performs, they will despite their best efforts, always

68 Ø. Nilsen, , The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions...

69 Strøm, A., The Norwegian Association of Disabled...

70 GOVERNMENT.NO, Norwegian Ministry of Labour, *JOBS STRATEGY for People with Disabilities*. Report 2012 – Measures 2013, c.2013, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/AD/publikasjoner/rapporter/2013/AD_Jobbstrategi_Kortvers_Engelsk_web.pdf, (02.03.2014), p.9.

71 TheGlobalEconomy.com, *Norway Economic Indicators*, 2014, http://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Norway/Unemployment_rate/, (05.03.2014).

72 A. I. Ihme, Telenor Group, (Interview: 18.12.2013).

73 K. Jüriloo, 2013. Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People...

74 B. Simon and T. F. Pettigrew, *Social identity and perceived group homogeneity: Evidence for the in-group homogeneity effect*. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 2012, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ejsp.2420200402/abstract>, 22.04.2015.

be judged insufficiently. Unfortunately, people rarely examine their own mind-sets or personal biases. A negative mind-set is difficult to transform into a more positive one, though this is necessary the physically challenged are to be integrated socially. Actually one member of staffs at MiA has introduced one method to modify mind-set, “mind-set realization” that proves to be effective through their held seminars⁷⁵.

With reference to the second answer, social integration of the physically challenged requires time and effort on behalf of society as whole. As an example, a political affairs leader from NAD explained that no matter how fervent their lobby activity is, a change in government might render their efforts worthless. The introduction of a new government then would cause the lobby process to begin again⁷⁶. A better way forward would be to make social welfare systems immune to political influence as well as the influence of impartial mind-set. Nevertheless, Norway appears to be in the middle of the process for their higher goals through individuality and flexibility. Further work will build a more advanced integrative society with mutual understanding. The task of an equally integrated society for the physically challenged is far from over. An interviewee from The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud (LDO) (Likestillings - og diskrimineringsombudet in Norwegian) asserted that there will always be new problems when people have aims for higher and better goals. Each day will be a developing process⁷⁷. People in Norwegian society have nonetheless been fighting for the creation of an advanced social welfare state.

Summary

Norway has an advanced social welfare state, which influences workplaces and promotes social integration. Three fundamental entities manage social integration: governmental institutions, non-profit organizations including trade unions and companies. Governmental systems such as NAV, the National Insurance Scheme and the IA Agreement help promote social integration for the physically challenged. Some companies, such as the Telenor Group, also have their own training programs to promote social integration, which other organizations then adopt. Mutual understanding is essential for integration to break down obstacle. Although there are some left obstacles to achieve full integration, the three entities have, to some degree, helped create an integrated society.

75 E. Langset, 2013. Diversity at Work (MiA) (Mangfold i Arbeidslivet), (Interview: 02.12.2013).

76 A. Strøm, The Norwegian Association of Disabled...

77 C. Jervell, The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud (LDO) (Likestillings - og diskrimineringsombudet), (Interview: 13.12.2013).

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