

International Congress on Interdisciplinary Business and Social Science 2012

(ICIBSoS 2012)

Flexible Working and Employment of People with Disabilities at Customs Brokerage Firms in Turkey: A Social Responsibility Project

Serpil Aytac^a, Nuran Bayram^a, Ahmet Özenalp^b, Serhat Özgökçeler^a, Sanem
Berkun^c, Ali Ceylan^b, Hasan Erturk^{b,*}

^aUludag University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Bursa, 16059, Turkey

^bBursa Industrialists and Businessmen Association (BUSIAD), Bursa, Turkey

^cCanakkale OnSekiz Mart University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Biga, Çanakkale, Turkey

Abstract

The ratio of the disabled population is higher in Turkish society than the world average. Previous studies on this topic have been limited to statistical surveys and no firm theoretical bases have been established in the investigation of the perception of disability in Turkish society. Approximately 8.5 million disabled citizens in Turkey -- about 12 % of the overall population -- face many difficulties, the greatest of which is unemployment.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the employment of disabled people as tele-workers working from home for Turkish Customs brokerage companies. This project is a social responsibility project to enable participation in social life and provide a career for disabled people in Customs brokerage firms. This project was implemented by Uludag University in partnership with the Bursa Industrialists and Businessmen Association (BUSIAD).

In this study, we will discuss how Customs brokerage firms can employ disabled people working at home using a tele-working system.

© 2012 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of JIBES University, Jakarta

Keywords: *Tele-working, disabled people, Flexibility, Employment.*

1. Introduction

The mid-20th century was the period when discussion began regarding the employment of the disabled in the formation of state social policies. With an increasing disabled population, many academic studies

* Corresponding author. Serpil Aytac. Tel.: +90-224-2941131; fax: +90-224-2941003
E-mail address: saytac@uludag.edu.tr.

have been carried out on policies directed to the disabled and calling attention to the problems of employment within applications and how the disabled can be employed. These studies have collated the discussions on the subject of which method is most suitable for the employment of people with disabilities.

The United Nations defined a disabled person as ‘any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being’ (Hazer and Gül, 2008:1197).

2. Developments which triggered the compulsory employment of the disabled

People with disabilities first started to enter the labour market at the beginning of the 20th century. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, whether able to work or not, the disabled were generally supported by their families and made a living by begging (Seyyar, 2001, Boylan et al, 2002).

Over time, on the one hand, particularly in Europe in the early Industrial Age before working conditions had been regulated, the handicapped birth rate increased due to heavy metals and water pollution and on the other hand there was a rapid rise in the number of disabled adults from severe working conditions and then from the First World War. The period following WWI saw acceleration in studies directed towards the medical and occupational rehabilitation of the disabled, whereas immediately following World War II, studies directed towards the disabled concentrated on policies to protect people with disabilities in employment. (Özürlüler Şurası, 2009).

Recent developments have shown that most people with disabilities can be a part of the labour market in both social and economic terms. At the same time, employment is seen to be one of the best resolutions for the disabled as there is a significant relationship between employment and economic security, and in parallel terms, both employment and the self-confidence of the person with disability and feelings of self-worth (Cohen, 2008). Young people with disabilities are often unwilling to go on to further education or start working life due to difficulties they have experienced at school and during adolescence (Knapp et al, 2007: 3). If an appropriate atmosphere is not provided, the disabled individual loses confidence and feels useless. Therefore, employment plays an important role in disabled people being able to make a place for themselves in society without being a burden to others (Karataş, 2001)

In addition, the disabled as a part of the labour market is a reality which increases both individual and societal prosperity. Moreover, the employment of people with disabilities has become mandatory by preventing disadvantaged situations experienced in the workplace and through current technological developments and flexible working practices which help in the employment of the disabled (Lin et al, 2002). The current prevalence of working from home, part-time work and technological equipment which facilitates the employment of the disabled (such as computers and assistive devices) allows people with disabilities to enter the labour market comfortably (Thornton and Lunt, 1994). The importance of factors such as workplace entirety has ended due to flexible specialisation brought about by the post-Ford production system. Thus a disabled individual can be employed, even from home

3. Methods for the Employment of the Disabled

There are seven methods for the employment of disabled people: the quota system, sheltered workshops, self-study method, the employment of the disabled without the obligation of employers, working at home, cooperative working method and employment in selected jobs where only disabled people are employed.

In the western world there is a history of a quota system in the employment of the disabled. The quota system is stated as a political approach with a European context based on social obligation to provide

employment for the disabled (Delsen, 1996: 12). Over time the quota system expanded to include those disabled by war, industrial accidents or without insurance (Thornton 1998). This system is based on the compulsory employment of a specific rate or number of disabled personnel in the workplace (Mag. 2009).

The quota percentage of disabled to be employed varies according to the level of economic and social development in each country. For example in Turkey, according to the Employment Law (2003) Item no 4857, a private sector workplace with more than 50 employees must employ 3% disabled employees and in the public sector this rate is 4%.

The quota system is widely applied in the employment of the disabled in Turkey. However, other unemployed individuals seeking work may have false perceptions of disabled workers and the quota system in the labour market. The quota system also has regional differences. Generally, employment of the disabled covered by the quota is realised in industrial regions and less so in areas of small workplaces. In the form of protected employment, several countries have expanded different types of applications which recommend increasing numbers of disabled who wish to work. (Visier 1998). Particularly in countries such as Austria, Germany, Finland, Italy, Luxemburg, Holland and Portugal, there has been a rapid increase in the number of sheltered workshops (Martin 2001, Samek and Ara,2002). In fact, in Slovenia sheltered workshops are the main employers of the disabled (Greve, 2009:15).

According to the Regulation for Sheltered Workshops (30.05.2006), for workplaces to have the status of sheltered workshops, the employers are required to apply to the Provincial Directorate of the Turkey Business Association with workplaces comprising 75% disabled of at least 30 employees working within the bounds of the Local Authority, and at least 15 outside the bounds of the Local Authority (Item 4). [*To be eligible for employment in a sheltered workshop (item. 17/1); a) Be at least 40% physically, mentally or behaviorally disabled or over 60% disabled from another group of disabilities; b) Be registered with the Turkey Business Association; c) Be older than 15 years of age*]

In our country, in the past sheltered workshops came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry for the Disabled, but they now come under the Family and Social Policy Ministry, General Management of Services for the Disabled and Elderly. The most important advantage of these workplaces compared to other modes of employment is that these workshops provide work possibilities for severely disabled individuals beyond what is covered by the quota (disabled rate of 40-80%). However, these methods have not provided work opportunities for a sufficient number of disabled people in Turkey.

From these various methods, the most widely used employment method in recent years has emerged as working from home. In this study, an examination is made of how a social responsibility project can be formed based on the application of the afore-mentioned method.

4. Employment of the Disabled in the Light of Flexible Working Systems in Customs Administration as a Social Responsibility Project.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) data, generally in any society approximately 10% of the population (1 billion people) and according to World Bank (WB) data, approximately 20% of the world's poorest populations consist of disabled individuals. The rate of disabled in the total population of Turkey is 12.29% (approximately 8.5 million individuals).

Disability is evaluated as both a cause of and a result of poverty. According to United Nations (UN) data, 82% of people with disabilities live in developed countries below the poverty line. This number is at higher levels in countries ravaged by civil war or natural disasters.

Discrimination against disabled individuals is encountered throughout the world and generally these individuals are excluded from the economic, social and political arenas of the society in which they live. In under-developed countries, the main reason for poverty among people with disabilities is 'exclusionary attitudes'. Disabled people who feel exposed to exclusionary attitudes are not only affected

psychologically in a negative way, but are also, by the increasing difficulty of being employed in the labour market, deprived of the basic human right of ‘the right to work’. In developed countries, the disabled are among the most excluded groups and for the previously mentioned reasons are left to struggle alone with life-threatening problems. Employment enables participation in working life, thus fulfilling the most basic requirement for an integrated social life for people with disabilities.

With this point in mind, the *Employment of the Disabled in the Light of Flexible Working Systems in Customs Administration (GOZIS)* project, which was started in 2011, is of great importance in being able to resolve the employment problems of people with disabilities in Bursa. This social responsibility project was planned to be launched within Customs brokerage firms with the aim of participation in both working and social life for the disabled and the creation of employment opportunities in Customs brokerage firms in Bursa. The project was based on flexible working systems. Customs procedures require the processing of documents, so by creating a tele-working/working from home method and through payment per transaction, an encouraging work system for the disabled was planned.

5. Working from home (tele-working)

Work which has the freedom to be able to define matters such as the social aspect of the type of work and the desired conditions to be able to keep pace with rapidly developing technology and international competition in a rapidly globalising world of changing economic and social conditions, is known as flexible working (Tuncay, 1995:5). This flexibility is experienced in working life by the conformity of workplace flexibility, work and worker flexibility, duration of work flexibility, payment flexibility with employment regulations (Sönmez, 2006:186).

The development of working from home is one of the forms of flexible work which has been efficient in cases of strong competition, particularly with ever-changing and diverse demand, developments in information technology and its usefulness and the effective use and appropriacy of computers in organisations (Drucker, 1993).

Tele-working has been widely applied in the USA with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the work being performed at home or another place without going to an office for regular working hours in the classic sense.

Internet technology has created many areas of work where people with disabilities can work from home. In this way, the disabled can carry out many activities from home such as accountancy, marketing and even legal work or consultancy by processing work via the internet. This reduces their need for mobility or reliance on others for help (Sheldon, 2003:2).

6. The Project Methodology

This project was supported by Uludag University Scientific Research Projects Commission with the basic aim of training people with disabilities who are ‘capable of work’ and for them to acquire a profession. Thus it was aimed for the disabled to participate in both work and social life and also to create public awareness of the employment of the disabled.

The project was based on ‘tele-working’ as one of the flexible working systems. For the Customs processes within Bursa Customs Brokerage, documents are required to be transferred to computer, so a total of 10 disabled individuals were selected from associations in the regions of Bursa. These individuals were able to use a computer, were qualified to diploma or degree level and were classified as ‘orthopaedic’ or ‘spastic’ (cerebral palsy) disabled.

The first stage involved in-depth interviews with the people with disabilities for them to obtain information about ‘employment’ and ‘tele-working’, then for one month they received training from

Customs brokers on data entry and the ‘Impex’ program used for data entry in Customs procedures. The 10 individuals undertook an internship in the Customs workplace and then started to work from home within the system.



Fig. 1. Photos of them from certificate ceremony

As an example for other workplaces in Turkey, the outcomes defined below were expected:

- the employment of the disabled will enable their generally unappreciated intellect, talents, capacity and similar skills to be a part of production
- the employment of the disabled will have a positive effect in respect of participation in social life and thereby an increase in self-confidence
- this work can be considered as an alternative to unemployment for the disabled
- a higher quality of life can be experienced by the disabled
- it will be possible for the disabled to have greater participation in local events
- Bursa will be a ‘leader’ with this study, which will be able to be applied throughout Turkey
- by giving appropriate occupational training in information and communication technology (ICT) to the disabled, they will have the opportunity to become qualified or more highly qualified
- from the employer’s perspective, the general expenses of the firm will be reduced (electricity, staff transport food etc)
- confusion arising from workload in the workplace will be removed
- employee motivation will increase
- it provides a more economical office-premises

- as the annual Customs declarations in Bursa are nearly 300,000 and the national number of Customs declarations is generally 3 or 4 million, it is thought that many more employment opportunities will arise for the disabled.

7. Evaluation and Conclusion

When existing forms of employment for the disabled are examined, it can be seen that these methods have not been able to fully resolve the problem of employment for the disabled. This situation can only be resolved if the factors hindering the employment of people with disabilities are revealed and improvements made in these factors to create the necessary climate for the employment of the disabled.

The most important obstacles to the effective implementation of methods for employing the disabled, are the reasons which hinder employment of the disabled. These reasons indicate that an institutional and cultural infrastructure for the employment of the disabled has not been created.

The disabled are not a homogenous group. The characteristics of disability vary according to the type and severity of health status (Steventon and Sanchez, 2008: 9). As people not born with a disability take little notice of disability and the disabled, there may be the question of discriminatory practices (Heron and Murray, 2003: 2), thus leading to the person feeling alone and desperate (Havle, 2009). Therefore, the most important function of social policies formed in a modern society directed at the disabled, is to provide integration of people with disabilities into society (Leonoviç, 2008). With this project as a pioneer in Turkey, a process of disabled integration has been started.

One of the most important functions of social integration is to enable disadvantaged and defenceless members of society to protect their own economic life and to provide full integration and at the same time to provide equal access to education, information and technology.

Finally, the digital revolution and the reflected experiences in both social life and the business world should be seen as an opportunity for the employment of people with disabilities. With the transition from an industrial society to an information society and the shift from a production economy to a service economy, the results of both the view of work and newly-created branches of work present the potential to create new areas of employment for the disabled. The evaluation of this potential depends on the success of policies formed as a result of co-ordinated effort between the disabled, families, the state and educational institutions. If this is successful, people with disabilities will reach their potential of contributing to the economy and production in the same way as non-disabled people, and the markets will have the chance to benefit from the skills of the disabled.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported and granted (project number: UAP (i)-2011/83) by the Scientific Research Projects Commission of Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey.

References

- Boylan, Ann and Tania Burchardt (2002) Barriers to Self-Employment for Disabled People, Report Prepared for the Small Business Services. [www.bis.gov.uk/files/file38357.pdf] (19.03.2012)
- Cohen, Marcy (2008) Removing Barriers to Work, Flexible Employment Options for People with Disabilities in BC, An Economic Security Project Report, February, CCPA: Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives BC Office.

- Delsen, Lei (1996) *Employment Opportunies For The Disabled*, International Handbook of Labour Market Policy and Policy Evaluation, Working Paper, 96.02.
- Drucker, Peter F. (1993) *Gelecek İçin Yönetim: 1990'lar ve Sonrası*, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
- Greve, Bent (2009) *The Labour Market Situation of Disabled People in European Countries and Implementation of Employment Policies: A Summary of Evidence from Country Reports and Research Studies*. Academic Network of European Disability Experts (ANED) – VT/2007/005.
- Havle, Nedim (2008) *Yabancılaşma*, <http://psikiyatri.org/online>.
- Hazer, Oya, Aynur Gül (2008) *Fiziksel Özürlü Bulunan Kadınların Konut Mutfaklarında Karşılaştıkları Sorunlar*, Öz-Veri, Cilt: 5, Sayı: 1, 1195-1213.
- Heron, Robert and Barbara Murray (2003) *Assisting Disabled Persons in Finding Employment A Practical Guide*, International Labour Office.
- Karataş, Kasım (2001) *Engellilerin Topluma Kazandırılması*, Ufkun Ötesi Dergisi, s: 10-19, Ankara.
- Knapp Martin, Margaret Perkins, Jennifer Beecham, Sujith Dhanasiri, Charlotte Rustin and Derek King (2007) *Transition Pathways for Disabled Young People with Complex Needs: Exploring the Economic Consequences*. LSE Research Online.
- Lin, Micha Van, Rienck Prins and Jan De Kok (2002) *Active Labour Market Programmes for People with Disabilities Facts and Figures on use and Impact*, EIM Business and Policy Research, Zoetermeer, July.
- Mag, J. Derling (2009) *Quota System for Employment of Disabled Workers*, [<http://www.newsgroups.derkeiler.com>] (04.04.2011).
- Martin, Tom (2001) *Sheltered Employment Are view of the Literature*, Dublin: Priory House.
- Özürlüler Şurası (2009) *İstihdam Yöntemleri ve Yeni Yaklaşımlar Komisyonu, Başbakanlık Özürlüler İdaresi Başkanlığı*, 4. Özürlüler Şurası, Ankara
- Samek Manuela and Giuliana Ara (2002) *Active Labour Market Programmes for People with Disabilities, Country Profile: Italy*, Institute of Social Research
- Seyyar, Ali (2001) *Sosyal Siyaset Açısından Özürlüler Politikası*, İstanbul: Türdav Yayınları.
- Sheldon, Alison (2003) *Changing Technology*, London: Sage.
- Sönmez, Pelin (2006) *Küreselleşme, Avrupa Birliği ve İstihdamı Çalışma İlişkilerinde Yaşanan Dönüşüm*, Ankara Avrupa Çalışma Dergisi, Cilt: 5, No: 3, 177-198.
- Steventon Adam and Sanchez Carlos (2008) *The Under-Pensioned: Disabled People and People from Ethnic Minorities*, London: Pensions Policy Institute.
- Thornton, Patricia (1998) *Employment Quotas, Levies and National Rehabilitation Funds for Persons with Disabilities: Pointers for Policy and Practice*, Cornell University, USA.
- Thornton Patricia and Neil Lunt (1994) *Employment for Disabled People Social Obligation or Individual Responsibility*, [<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/spreport2.pdf>] (05.04.2012)
- Tuncay, Can (1995) *Çalışma Süreleri ve İstihdam Türlerinde Esnekleştirme*, İstihdam Dergisi, Sayı: 20, Temmuz-Eylül, 1995.
- Visier, Laurent (1998) *Sheltered Employment for Persons with Disabilities*, International Labour Review, 137-3, p: 347-365.