



Latvijas prezidentūra
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Society „Latvian Association of the Deaf”, project „Active for the Future”, agreement No 2014.LV/PR/12/11

PROJECT „ACTIVE FOR THE FUTURE”, AGREEMENT NO 2014.LV/PR/12/11, SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS - RESOLUTION

1. PREAMBLE

The purpose of the Project „Active for the Future” is to promote the development of an inclusive labour market by discussing the experience, current situation and potential solutions in the field of employment of the deaf in the European Union; the discussion involved 120 employees and members of the Latvian Association of the Deaf and of EU public organisations of the deaf.

The direct activity of the Project – a discussion session “A Deaf Individual in the EU Labour Market” – was held in Riga (Latvia) in the period 14-16 May 2015 and focused on the following topics:

- 1) „Employment and the Freedom of Movement”, workshop, 14 May 2015;
- 2) „Inclusive Labour Market”, seminar, 15 May 2015;
- 3) „Employment of the Deaf in Future. Approaches, Actions, Steps”, final discussions within competence groups, 16 May 2015.

The discussion session was implemented in the framework of the Latvian State budget funded programme “Support for Public Participation in Implementing the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union”, project “Active for the Future” of the society “Latvian Association of the Deaf”, agreement identification No 2014.LV/PR/12/11.

Representatives of the public organisations of the deaf from the European Union Member States participated in the discussion session, 120 in total, including government officials: a member of the Saeima and the Chair of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee in the Saeima *Aija Barča*; the Minister of Welfare *Uldis Augulis*; the Head of Unit for Employment Measures of the State Employment Agency of Latvia *Solveiga Kabaka*; members of the European Parliament, Co-Presidents of the Disability Intergroup Mr *Ádám Kósa* and Ms *Helga Stevens*; a policy assistant for the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Unit: Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ms *Tania Tsiora*; the Vice-president of the European Disability Forum and the President of the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability organizations *SUSTENTO Gunta Anča* (Latvia); the President of the World Federation of the Deaf Mr *Colin Allen*; the President of the European Union of the Deaf Dr. *Markku Jokinen*; the Executive Director of the European Union of the Deaf Mr *Mark Wheatley*; a policy officer of the European Union of the Deaf Ms *Petra Söderqvist*, as well as the President of the Latvian Association of the Deaf (LAD) *Edgars Vorslovs* and board members of the LAD,

employees and members of the LAD regional branches (Riga, Valmiera, Smiltene, Plavinas, Rezekne, Daugavpils, Liepaja, Kuldiga and Ventspils).

The resolution includes key conclusions on an inclusive labour market and its specifics in employing the deaf, the current situation and development priorities and solutions in the field of employment of deaf individuals in the European Union as well as proposals aimed at increasing the employment of the deaf and individuals with special needs.

In the resolution, the term *deaf individuals* refers to people with hearing disability and those with hearing impairments that limit their ability to independently hear and understand sonic information as well as to take part in voice-language communication.

2. SITUATION CHARACTERISTICS

The situation characteristics are based on reports by the participants of the Project's discussion session and the exchange of opinions on problems in employing the deaf and describe the similar features in Latvia and in other EU member States.

In Latvia and in other EU member States:

- 1) there is no official statistical data on the deaf: their number, socio-economic characteristics, geographic locations. For this reason, it is not possible to identify and assess the stratification of the target group from various aspects;
- 2) employment and unemployment statistics do not include data on working-age people with hearing disability or hearing impairments; therefore, it is not possible to analyse labour market demand and supply in the context of change in the economic activity of the deaf, including broken down by region, gender, age group, profession and education;
- 3) a government support system for the deaf exists – legal acts with regard to assistance to people with disability and special needs have been adopted. However, such assistance in the EU Member States differs both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The case of Latvia

1. Disability Law. Adopted: 20.05.2010. Published: "[Latvijas Vēstnesis](#)", 91 (4283), 09.06.2010. Available: <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=211494>;
2. Cabinet Regulations, including:
 - Cabinet Regulation of 23 December 2014 No 805 „Regulations regarding the Criteria, Terms and Procedures for Determining Predictable Disability, Disability and Loss of Ability to Work”;
 - Cabinet Regulation of 15 December 2009 No 1472 “Procedures how the Latvian Society of the Blind and the Latvian Association of the Deaf Provide Social Rehabilitation Services and Supply Technical Aids – Adaptive Equipment for the Deaf and the Blind”, with amendments (Cabinet Regulation of 26 August 2014 No 505)
 - Cabinet Regulation of 4 January 2011 No 9 “Regulations regarding the Individual Rehabilitation Plan for a Person with Predictable Disability and a Person with Disability”;

Available: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/2209>

3. Institutions: the responsible institution – the Ministry of Welfare, a consultative institution – the National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA), cooperation partners and service provision organisations;
 4. dynamic growth – changes in benefits and in the provision of services for people with disability take place (Annex 1 – changes in benefits and in the provision of services for people with disability in Latvia from 1 January 2015).
- 4) there is a government policy for integrating people with disability into the labour market and a set of measures for its implementation; yet, there is no single understanding of the basic idea of the policy and of the measures for integrating people with disability into the labour market;

The case of Latvia

Active employment measures and training measures are available for people with disability („Measure for Certain Groups of Persons”).

Available: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=313&txt=2908&from=0>

Available: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=311>

- 5) there are informal obstacles in employing the deaf – prejudice exists in the labour market regarding employing the deaf, which is caused by communication constraints and the lack of information on the target group;
- 6) there are formal obstacles in employing the deaf, which are caused by the low level of education and skills of the deaf;
- 7) there is a regulatory framework and a system for acquiring a guaranteed education, support measures for further education and some measures to make information available by means of a sign language interpreter (in Latvia – a service provided by the government). Yet, these measures do not ensure the deaf can acquire a competitive education, have an opportunity to equally participate in public activities, cultural events and acquire urgent information and/or communicate using modern IT solutions, which leads to the isolation and exclusion of the deaf in society and does not meet the social needs of the deaf within their community (their formal organisation);
- 8) the deaf are quite passive outside their associations (communities), they lack extensive individual experience in public and political participation and have poor experience and skills in establishing common discussion platforms together with normal people;
- 9) in recent years, the capacity of organisations of the deaf and their employees and the popularity of the organisations have significantly increased in the society. The development strategy of the organisations has to also involve staff training, experience exchange at national and international levels, raising funding for this purpose from funds and as earmarked donations; yet, due to limited resources, training within the organisations is not widespread;
- 10) particularly the organisations of the deaf in all the EU Member States are the representatives of interests of the deaf in society. However, the organisations have to be more engaged in politics through nominating their leaders and representatives in order to ensure the interests of the deaf are represented at local, national and EU levels. At present, their engagement is low and fragmented. Cooperation between the Latvian Association of the Deaf and the Parliament of Latvia, the Welfare Ministry of

- Latvia and municipalities may be viewed as an example of good practice;
- 11) unemployment and social problems of the deaf are less obvious, as they usually are silent in society and thus do not inform the public. In the result, the public is not aware of and does not understand the needs of the deaf, which reduces the chances of the deaf to be employed.

3. PROPOSALS

The proposals apply to all organisations of the deaf in the EU Member States and are set as strategic goals for 2020. The proposals contain the suggestions and ideas made by the working groups that have to be further discussed by the EU organisations of the deaf engaged in the Project, and the opportunity to set quantitative targets for 2020 has to be considered.

- 1) To promote the solution of the target group's problems, among them – in the field of employment – the identification of labour market demand/supply and an analysis of market change, the responsible institutions (national government institutions, statistical bureaus, municipalities) are advised to establish a single system of statistics on people with special needs in the country, singling out the group of deaf individuals. The data should include socio-economic characteristics of the deaf: their total number, age groups, education, occupation, place of residence (at least by planning or statistical region) and other indicators;
- 2) to continue enhancing the national support system for the deaf, increasing the availability of sign language interpreters:
 - to provide (or continue providing) government support for training sign language interpreters and building their skills;
 - to increase the number of individual hours of the availability of a sign language interpreter, to introduce the cumulative hour approach to sign language interpreter services (for example, by setting the total number of hours of the availability of a sign language interpreter for a three-year period);
 - to contribute to raising the education level of the deaf, setting 100% support of a sign language interpreter during training in at least government-defined priority education fields and professions in secondary and higher education;
 - to promote the use of modern IT in communication, including for the accessibility of sign language interpreters;
- 3) organisations of the deaf have to engage in social dialogue on the unemployment of the deaf to a greater extent;
- 4) in order to promote the acquisition of competitive education and skills by the deaf, the role of education in employment has to be popularised in the deaf community, informative support in various education-related issues has to be provided and the use of IT in mutual communication has to be encouraged;
- 5) organisations of the deaf have to be inclusive and reduce stereotypes on the deaf and their organisations, involving social partners, responsible institutions, employers, public organisations, etc. in the activity of the organisations – social events, projects and activities;
- 4) organisations of the deaf have to initiate dialogue in the society and to establish a common platform for discussion on lifelong learning opportunities for the deaf in

- order to contribute to equal opportunities to be employed;
- 5) to promote the improvement of knowledge of the employees of organisations of the deaf and the exchange of experience at national and international levels in order to build their skills in dealing with unemployment problems at various levels;
 - 6) to contribute to the engagement of representatives of organisations of the deaf in tackling political issues of various levels;
 - 7) to promote discussion in the society on the unemployment and social problems of the deaf within the development of an inclusive labour market and to start discussion and define the term prudent adaptation in order to adapt work places to the needs of the deaf;
 - 8) EU organisations of the deaf have to share their experience in identifying or tackling unemployment problems at national level and in their progress in implementing the decisions made.

Thanks to all the participants, volunteers, guests and organisers of the Project for their fantastic being together, inspiration and participation! Together we can do more!