

Professional integration of persons with disabilities

Evaluation of the measures applied within the Federal Administration

Key facts

In 2010, an international audit on the professional integration of persons with disabilities, under the aegis of the European Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (EUROSAI) was conducted. One of the main objectives was to study how the public sector implements the various measures at its disposal and removes barriers to allow a greater number of disabled people to work. The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) decided to participate in this audit, although, due to some measures recently implemented at the Federal Administration, timing was suboptimal.

The Federal Administration, with some 36,000 people on its payroll, is one of Switzerland's biggest employers. Under the Disability Discrimination Act (SR 151.3, in effect since 2004), the Confederation is required to offer equal employment opportunities to the disabled. With the fifth revision of the Invalidity Insurance Act (SR 831.20) in 2004, the emphasis was placed on rehabilitation rather than disability benefits, also in terms of insurance, and specific measures for professional reintegration were added to the list of services covered.

As well as describing the status of professional integration in Switzerland, this evaluation also looks at the programme, implementation, outputs and effects of the various measures within the Federal Administration. A comparison is made with the situation of professional integration at the Swiss Federal Railways, which is also subject to the Disability Discrimination Act. The data was obtained by a document analysis and by means of a written questionnaire sent to the HR Managers of the administrative units of the Federal Administration as well as interviews and written surveys of those directly concerned. The results of the evaluation refer to the situation as it stood at the end of 2010.

First measures have been initiated but not yet incorporated into an overall plan for the professional integration of persons with disabilities

The Federal Office of Personnel (FOPER) offers the administrative units two instruments for concrete implementation of the legislation. The first of these is operational case management, which comprises early detection and early intervention as well as the case management of the Federal Administration's personnel and social counselling service. The other measure available is a system of financial incentives, which allocates funds earmarked for special personnel categories (CHF 12 million a year) to encourage employers to occupy and hire individuals with disabilities. This deserves a positive mention. However, these two measures are not yet incorporated into a programme that defines the objectives, indicators and resources for professional integration and clarifies the responsibilities and processes. Furthermore, the overall framework is vague, with no individual office or body combining the tasks and instruments of professional integration. Due to its centralised structures, the Swiss Federal Railways, unlike the Federal Administration, has a group-wide strategy with mandatory criteria and requirements – albeit without measures towards recruiting new persons. The fact that professional integration in the Federal Administration is a decentralised task assigned to the administrative units makes it all the more important to have a uniform set of guidelines.

So far, the Federal Administration does not set an adequate example with regard to the employment of individuals with disabilities

As regards awareness of the “professional integration of disabled people”, more than half of the HR managers surveyed saw any improvement. The conditions said to have changed the least were those regarding equal opportunities (employment, advanced training and promotion opportunities). These findings are corroborated by the actual figures on the number of disabled employees: The share of disabled employees amounting to barely 1% (around 300 employees) is considered rather low by the SFAO. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, the Federal Administration is supposed to do all in its power to offer equal opportunities for the disabled. The Federal Administration should serve as a role model in this respect, particularly in its recruitment policy. There is thus room for improvement here.

The Disability Discrimination Ordinance provides for the appointment of professional integration officers by the employer. Within the Federal Administration, the employers are the individual administrative units. If the situation is to improve, therefore, integration officers need be assigned within the individual administrative units. A number of isolated initiatives exist already. In most cases, however, the mission and the qualifications of such integration officers have not (yet) been defined, making it difficult to take appropriate steps. The evaluation of the benefit system will show to what degree this recently implemented measure can contribute to this.

Individual case solutions are commendable...

Compared with the Swiss Federal Railways, the results of reintegration efforts made to date are good, with Federal Administration staff returning to work without a pension in most cases. Only 3.7% of cases required termination of employment without any additional pension claims. As a general trend, the number of Federal Administration employees receiving disability benefits has fallen since 2005.

In addition, the outcome is regarded as positive overall. The majority of persons with varying degrees of impaired health are reintegrated into the workplace, to their complete satisfaction, recognised as having equal rights and fulfilling the requirements of the job. It should be mentioned, however, that there is a risk of jobs being adapted to more or less meet an individual's requirements; this is actually more of a social solution than a professional integration measure. Apart from the benefits paid through Invalidity Insurance, such case solutions can generate unspecified expenses for the Federal Administration as an employer. Case management and the financial incentive system, if put to use correctly, can help the administrative units adapt the relevant positions appropriately and offset any losses in performance.

... but the measures are not being applied uniformly

Implementation of the measures within the framework of the operational case management has revealed that certain aspects remain unclear and that coordination with Invalidity Insurance is not as smooth as it could be. There is a general sense of uncertainty regarding the use of appropriate measures. Early detection, in particular, is not applied consistently. For the individual concerned, the process of early detection and early intervention determines whether and when they receive the right type of support and from whom. In those cases in which a solution was sought at an early

stage, the process was frequently initiated by the individual themselves. More typically, in many cases, it is only after the second or even third extended period of absence that managers react, at someone else's initiative, and start to take measures. There is further potential for improvement in informing staff of the Federal Administration of the persons to contact and the various support possibilities available.

The recommendations drawn from this audit are as follows:

The SFAO recommends that FOPER formulate a plan for the professional integration of persons with disabilities and communicate this appropriately to the various target groups.

This plan should outline the concept of professional integration within the Federal Administration and define the objectives, resources, competencies and responsibilities. All Federal Administration employees should be informed of this so that they know whom to contact whenever necessary.

The SFAO recommends that FOPER set a hiring target with regard to equal opportunities for the disabled and demonstrate the financial incentives for the administrative units. A target figure for the hiring of persons with a disability (whether in permanent or temporary posts) may prove useful in encouraging improvement. FOPER can assist the administrative units in implementing recruitment measures and point out the associated financial costs and compensation.

The SFAO recommends that FOPER call upon the Federal Council, within the context of the rules on the employment and integration of persons with disabilities in the Federal Personnel Ordinance, to require that integration officers be appointed on the level of administrative units. Integration officers are needed on the level of administrative units if these are to be able to create non-discriminatory framework conditions as an employer. Apart from their advisory role, such integration officers should also be responsible for highlighting the issue in the administrative unit so that adjustments can be made as early as the planning stage.

The SFAO recommends that FOPER revise the “Guide to operational case management” and train managerial staff and HR managers in its application. The Guide should be revised so as to clarify the tasks and processes involved in Invalidity Insurance (with regard to the insurer) and FOPER (with regard to the employer). This should also include efforts to improve the early detection mechanism. In demonstrating what the various measures can achieve, the Guide can counteract the risk of social solutions being created as opposed to actual professional integration.

Meanwhile, FOPER has prepared several Federal Council Decrees towards a human resources strategy. In the area of “equal opportunities for disabled persons”, a setpoint value including new hires has been established. FOPER agrees with the recommendations but points out that the appointment of an integration delegate on the level of the administrative units lies in the responsibility of the Federal Ministries. In January 2010, the Ministry of Home Affairs (FDHA) published a concept for the professional integration of disabled persons within the FDHA providing for annual target figure for new hires as well as the appointment and training of integration delegates on the level of the administrative units.

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