

Some improvements in the lives of people with disabilities but disadvantage remains

There has been an overall improvement in the employment and social situation of people with disabilities in the EU with increased employment rates and greater levels of participation in society. But they still remain among the most disadvantaged groups in Europe, with a higher risk of mental health issues, and a lower tertiary education completion rate.

The new policy brief on the social and employment situation of people with disabilities uses data from the 2011 and 2016 European Quality of Life Surveys to assess changes in key issues such as employment, education and training, participation in society, social protection and healthcare. It shows that the employment rates for people with disabilities increased from 41% to 50% between 2011 and 2016. This growth in employment was greater than the non-disabled population which grew from 66% to 70% during the same period.

There has also been some improvement in the area of social inclusion, with fewer people with disabilities reporting feeling left out of society in 2016 than in 2011. This is reflected in the fact that more people with disabilities are participating in social activities than previously. In fact, there is no longer a gap in social participation rates between people with and without disabilities. Despite this, mental well-being remains a concern, as the risk of depression for people with disabilities is significantly larger than it is for the rest of the population: 46% of people with disabilities are at risk compared to 16% of their non-disabled counterparts.

The policy brief also highlights that there has been regression in the area of tertiary education. In 2016, people with disabilities lagged further behind their non-disabled counterparts in completion rates for tertiary education than in 2011. This finding is particularly concerning considering that the employment gap for disabled people with a tertiary degree is significantly smaller than it is for those with lower educational attainment. People with disabilities with a lower level of education find themselves at a particular disadvantage: just 26% of people with disabilities who completed primary education have a job; this figure rises to 46% for those with secondary education and 72% for those who completed tertiary education.

The overall improvements in the employment and social situation of people with disabilities are positive, particularly in relation to people in work and social participation. However, significant work remains in order to address the gaps in employment and quality of life between people with and without disabilities. Concerted effort is needed, most notably in the areas of access to tertiary education, provision of mental-health services, and boosting the employment opportunities for disabled people with lower educational levels, in order to move to a situation where having a disability

is no longer a determining factor of quality of life in Europe.