

ICF, ICT and labour policies: the Italian initiative

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ABSTRACT

The definition of Disability is difficult because it is a multidimensional concept. In Europe, over the last 40 years different perspective were developed, influencing either disability's assessment either social integration. The ICF classification puts the notion of "health" and "disability" in a new light, taking into account the social aspect of disability and valorising the social inclusion of disabled people in the labour market. In this issue, the Authors show the Italian initiative that has fostered the wide integration of disabled people in the labour market, tanks to an advanced Information System and the common use of ICT in the workplaces.

Key Words: ICF, ICT, labour policies, disability definition, accessibility, social integration, indicators, data sources

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization calculated that in 1990 there were 500 million people with disabilities in the world, and that by the year 2000 the number would reach 600 million. (13)

According to these figures, 10 % of the total world population suffers from some type of physical, mental, or sensory disability. (12)

This is a serious problem, especially in developing countries where the greatest

number of individuals with disabilities is reported to live. (12)

Many surveys indicate a gap between the employment rate of disabled and non-disabled people, and they show that disability causes an early retirement. (5)

The lack of common definition of disability constitutes an obstacle for an efficient data collection and analysis throughout Europe. (10)

It is difficult to define "Disability" either because it is a multidimensional concept either because there is a strong correlation

between the number of the people with disabilities and the increasing aging of the European population. (2)

The consequence is that the inactivity rate of disabled persons is twice that of non-disabled.

In Italy, different perspectives were developed, influencing either the disability's assessment or social integration. (3)

Researchers have modified their point of view over the last 40 years: from an impairment perspective considered as an health problem or an abnormality that is situated in an individual's body or mind, to a new suggestion not only associated with a pathological states or functional limitations but as the result of an interaction between physical/mental conditions and social and environmental context in which people live. (4)

In this case, disability is seen as resulting from the interaction of impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions in a specific social or physical environment such as home, school, or work. (5)

These perceptions are the basis of ICF (international Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) approved by the 54th International Assembly of WHO in the year 2001. (13)

The ICF puts the notions of 'health' and 'disability' in a new light. It acknowledges that every human being can experience a decrement in health and thereby suffer some degree of disability. (13)

ICF takes into account the social aspects of disability and does not see disability only as a 'medical' or 'biological' dysfunction. (13)

This approach is the starting point to guide policies and actions in favour of people with disability. (4)

In order to get a complete social inclusion of the people with disability and to remove

any physical or cultural barriers, the policies in favour of disabled should be based on close integration of social and health assistance and on the implementation of active policies in several fields, first of all, school, work and home. (4)

2. Integration of people with disabilities in the labour market

Employment is considered central for social inclusion of disabled people, because the lack of a job is a factor that contributes to poverty and social exclusion. (5)

Italian legislation is ahead of those of the other European countries (3)

In 1999 it was enacted a specific law to encourage active inclusion of disabled people.

The law has allowed taking a significant step forward towards an increasing presence of disabled people in the labor market.

It is based on the concept of "targeted inclusion". (3)

Targeted inclusion means to create the necessary conditions to accomplish the facilitation access to a fruitful employment by evaluating their skills and creating a services network aimed at backing them. (10)

The law promotes the establishment of labour market, integration for people with disabilities, including work experience, wage subsidies, work experience schemes, temporary sheltered employment, active labour market policies, and other intermediate labour market steps. (10)

It involves periodic controls in the working environment to verify the correct path of

the integration of the disabled workers and to avoid discrimination. (3)

In Italy, we should become aware of the importance to promote the full integration of people with disabilities into the labour market, either because this is a tool for their social inclusion or because Italy is one of the oldest country in the world and the share of working-age population is decreasing due to ageing demographic trends.

The disabled working-age population is an important and underused reserve of labour, which could contribute to overall economic growth. (3)

3. ICT and information System

The Disability information System was created in the year 2000 to promote statistical surveys in the field of disability. (3)

The system provides statistical information on disability by integrating and coordinating data sources available on this subject in Italy and to establishing new sources that are suitable for filling the current information gaps.

The whole information structure is made up of the indicators system that contains about 2,600 tables with more than 600 indicators broken down by sex, age group, and region. (6)

The specific areas of surveys are: Health and Social Assistance; Families. Incidents, Non –profit Organizations, Education and School Integration, Work and Employment, Social Protection, Health, Transport and Social Life. (6)

The indicators system is based on various data sources that gather the information for their own purposes using their own methods, and adopt different definitions of disability. A meta data analysis was set up

in order to support the correct interpretations of data. (6)

It comprises of three elements:

- The data source schedules that show the main characteristics of various sources utilized;
- The indicators schedules that appear before each table explaining: the purpose of indicator, the type of data source, a definition of disability, the years to which the data refers and any other useful information;
- The glossary containing the meaning of technical terms

The information system activity not only arguments the flow of information, but it also seeks to implement new flows. (3)

In 2004 a survey on “Social Integration of People with Disabilities” was carried out to draw up a wide-ranging, detailed picture of the characteristics of disability and their quality of life,

The survey gathered data on health status, occurrence of the disability, diagnostic process, health and social intervention, education, work, mobility, social participation and architectural barriers. (10)

Attention was therefore also given to the major aspect of social integration needs and difficulties that people with disabilities encounter in social relations, school and work contexts, dealing with the institutions involved, the services used and required. (2)

In Italy, surveying aspects that act as a barrier for process of social inclusion of people with disabilities was considered for the first time.

Seeking solutions to the problem connected with care and treatment of people who are not self-sufficient coupled with the definition of new organizational services models remains the priority of the disability policy. (11)

In this sense, it seemed necessary to

estimate the number of these people and to measure, in terms of quantity and quality, the needs to satisfy and those needs not yet met and what would be required to meet these needs.

This information is essential in order to identify adequate policies and plans of action. (4)

Employment placing is a crucial element for facilitating the social participation of people with disabilities. (5)

The study set itself the goal of providing a fact- finding reference framework that is up- to -date and complete, analyzing both the different paths to employment placement for people with disabilities and the characteristics of the Employment Services activities and information concerning people who are objects of this study.

The analysis made it possible, on one hand, to highlight any obstacles encountered by people in the employment word, and, on the other, to analyze the extent of using recent instruments for employment placing provided for in legislation. (7)

In Italy, it is estimated that there are between 8.3 and 11.7 million people with a disability or impairment that is considered by the Disability Discrimination. (8)

Approximately,4 million people, in Italy, have a mobility impairment :

- 25% of Italian households have a disabled member
- 2% of Italian households have a member who uses a wheelchair
- 5% of cars bought in the each year are for use by people with a disability and acceptable quality of access.

500.000 disabled people are enrolled in the waiting lists seeking employment. (8)

In order to meet the needs of disabled people, the Italian initiative has focused on the use of ICT. (1)

Accessibility to their use has been considered the first step to increase employment of the disabled. (8)

ICT opens up great opportunities to improve the quality of life of disabled people, overcoming environmental barriers, in may fields, especially in that of the employment. (1)

For disabled and elderly people, ICT is something far more important than for most others, because ICT allows them to be independent in performing their tasks. (9)

Analyzing the international context we can say that the third millennium society is strongly characterized by communication, knowledge and information, which represents a primary need. (12)

ICT are the most powerful mean to communicate, to access knowledge and information, to spread and preserve it. (12)

The access to ICT and the possibility to master it must be granted to everyone, without exception.

Accessibility in terms of ICT focuses on the use of assistive technologies and adjustments to hardware and software that make it easier for people with a range of disabilities to integrate into society and live independently. (8)

The first point is to make services and workplaces accessible to people with disabilities. ICT can be made to work in ways that improve the quality of the organization's work and extend what it can achieve. (4)

The Italian initiative promotes ICT in issues related to e-inclusion for the disabled, the elderly and disadvantaged classes, because the employability of significant number of disabled persons can

increase dramatically using ICT, allowing different way of working, such as working at home, teleconferencing and flexible hours. (5)

These kind of possibilities can help circumvent the prohibitive constraints imposed by the traditional working hours and job requirements, while allowing the employee to be equally productive. (2)

Access to education and training should be ensured, in terms of mobility (physical accessibility and transport) and also in terms of the choice of mediums used for knowledge transfer. (2)

In this regard, proper use and implementation of ICT holds great promise

for disabled people, who wish to maximize their abilities. (12)

Online training courses, computer based training, and educational software are among the possibilities which can promote the inclusion of disabled persons, who for varied reasons might not benefit fully from other forms of education or training.

It is important to ensure access to information and communication technologies, as a means to participating fully in the society at an equal level to others. (12)

4. Conclusion

It is evident there is a need for a substantive debate concerning social policies and the right of disabled people to achieve equality in social field. (11)

To meet the needs of the people with disabilities and to enact suited social policies, it is important to have information, aimed at understanding the numerous aspects that characterize the actual condition of disability in our country. Despite the processes of rationalizing resources, the policies must

be able to effectively meet the current needs as well as anticipate those of the future. What is needed is investment in ICT and informatics system. (2)

Gathering information on people with disabilities is very complex task, because of the characteristics of the phenomenon itself, the variety of existing conceptual paradigms, and the diversification of the survey and the instruments used. (2)

Although some steps forward have been made to promote greater integration of the sources, further efforts must be made in terms of the quality of the data gathered, and on the reorganization and integration of currently available information flows. (3,10)

ICT, in accordance with the present technological knowledge and its limits, can supply services and provide information which can be used without discrimination, also by those who, due to some disability, need supporting technologies or specially designed accommodations.

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