



Involving all in working life

Results and recommendations from the OTE key project 'Career opportunities for people with partial work ability'

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Päivi Mattila-Wiro, D.Sc.(Econ.) and Raija Tiainen, M.Soc.Sc.

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

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| <p>Abstract</p> <p>'Career opportunities for people with partial work ability', also known as the OTE key project, was one of the key projects of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government. The project was carried out in 2015–2018. The objective of the OTE project was to improve the labour market opportunities of people with impaired capacity for work by supporting them in continuing their work or finding new employment more easily than before. In addition, the project aimed to foster more positive and open attitudes towards greater diversity in working life.</p> <p>As many as 1.9 million Finns of working age have some type of disability or chronic disease. A third of them, or about 600,000 persons, find that the disease or disability affects their work or work opportunities. The number of people with partial work ability is estimated to rise as the population ages.</p> <p>The key project has, for its own part, contributed to increasing the employment rate and reducing the labour shortage. From the individual's viewpoint, work promotes wellbeing, health and economic independence, and has a positive impact on the quality of life. People's right to work is secured and their work identity grows stronger. This reduces inequality and poverty and increases equality in society.</p> <p>The OTE key project has been a programme aiming to achieve change in society. It has helped to increase the employment rate of persons with partial work ability, promote more positive attitudes toward their access to employment, improve their access to rehabilitation, and provide publicly accessible information concerning the means, benefits and services helping people to find employment or continue working. Some legislative amendments were also made as part of the key project.</p> <p>The OTE key project was carried out as a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.</p> | | | |
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| Referat | <p>Väger in i arbetslivet för partiellt arbetsföra (OTE) var ett av de spetsprojekt som statsminister Juha Sipiläs regering hade beslutat om och som genomfördes 2015–2018. Syftet med projektet Väger in i arbetslivet för partiellt arbetsföra var att stärka partiellt arbetsföras ställning på arbetsmarknaden så att de kan fortsätta arbeta eller ha bättre möjligheter att få arbete. Ett mål var också att göra attityderna i arbetslivet positivare och mer öppna för mångfald i arbetslivet.</p> <p>Rentav 1,9 miljoner finländare i yrkesverksam ålder har någon långtidssjukdom eller skada. Av dem bedömer 600 000 personer, dvs. en tredjedel, att sjukdomen eller skadan påverkar deras arbete eller arbetsmöjligheter. Det bedöms att antalet partiellt arbetsföra kommer att öka bland annat på grund av att befolkningen åldras.</p> <p>Spetsprojektet har bidragit till att höja sysselsättningsnivån och minska arbetskraftsbristen. Ur individens synvinkel främjar arbete välbefinnande, hälsa och ekonomiskt oberoende och inverkar positivt på livskvaliteten. Rätten till arbete tillgodoses och arbetsidentiteten stärks. Detta minskar ojämlikhet och fattigdom och ökar jämlikheten i samhället.</p> <p>Spetsprojektet Väger in i arbetslivet för partiellt arbetsföra har varit ett samhälleligt förändringsprogram. Med hjälp av det har man höjt sysselsättningsnivån bland partiellt arbetsföra, förändrat attityderna kring deras sysselsättningsmöjligheter i positiv riktning, förbättrat partiellt arbetsföras tillträde till rehabilitering och gjort information om metoder för att få arbete och att orka arbeta samt om förmåner och tjänster tillgänglig för alla. Som ett led i spetsprojektet har det också gjorts lagändringar.</p> <p>Spetsprojektet genomfördes som ett samarbete mellan social- och hälsovårdsministeriet och arbets- och näringsministeriet.</p> | |
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TO THE READER

'Career opportunities for people with partial work ability', also known as the OTE key project, was one of the key projects of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government. The project was carried out in 2015–2018.

The objective of the OTE project was to improve the labour market opportunities of people with partial work ability by supporting them in continuing their work or finding new employment more easily than before. In addition, the project aimed to foster more positive and open attitudes towards greater diversity in working life.

As many as 1.9 million Finns of working age have some type of disability or chronic disease. A third of them, or about 600,000 persons, find that the disease or disability affects their work or work opportunities¹. The number of people with partial work ability is estimated to rise as the population ages.

Increasing the employment rate is vital in order to secure the welfare services. The key project has, for its own part, contributed to increasing the employment rate and reducing the labour shortage. From the individual's viewpoint, work promotes wellbeing, health and economic independence, and has a positive impact on the quality of life. This reduces inequality and poverty and increases equality in society.

The primary goals of the OTE project were based on the observation that the employment obstacles faced by persons with partial work ability are prejudice and lack of information, lack of trust, work incentive traps, risks experienced by employers and the unclear support and instructions provided for the persons with partial work ability².

¹ Statistics Finland, Survey on employment and work ability, 2011. (Performed in conjunction with the Labour Force Survey)

² Lehto, M. 2011. Kaikki mukaan! Osatyökykyiset työmarkkinoilla. Selvityshenkilön raportti. Working group memorandum by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2011:5

The OTE key project is based on the 'Persons with partial work ability at work' programme, several ESF projects (Jamit, Tempo) and their results and long-term operations of several organisations.

The group that performed an external audit on the OTE key project stated that OTE is a prime example of a thematic area that achieved continuity of development and succeeded in implementing previously identified development needs in its daily development work³. The continuity must be ensured during subsequent government terms, for example in the revision of social security.

The OTE key project was carried out as a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Experiments in different parts of Finland played a key role in the implementation of the key project. The experiments were coordinated by the National Institute for Health and Welfare and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

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March 2019

³ External audit of the OTE key project Authors: KPMG Oy Ab. 78 pages. 1 February 2019. To be published in March 2019.

1 Benefits and key results

The 'Career opportunities for people with partial work ability' (OTE) key project was a programme that aimed to achieve a change in society. It has helped to increase the employment rate of persons with partial work ability, promote more positive attitudes toward their access to employment, improve their access to rehabilitation, and provide publicly accessible information concerning the means, benefits and services helping people to find employment or continue working.

The change was implemented by turning attention away from the problems associated with partial work ability towards skills, strengths and other resources, as well as a culture of collaboration.

OTE used and promoted a networked approach in which the network acted as a resource for the client. OTE shifted the focus away from a culture of sending away to a culture of inviting to participate. As a result, the client gets the support he or she needs to become employed or continue in his or her current job.

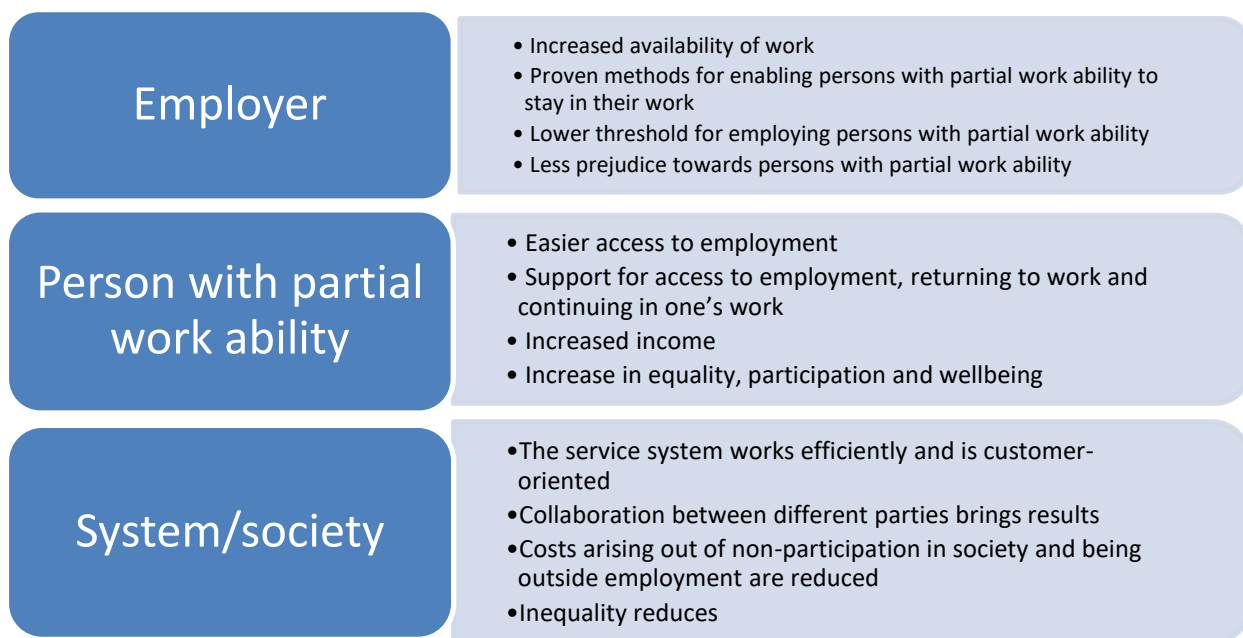
The methods for implementing the change were training for work ability coordinators, the 'Tie työelämään' (Road to employment) online service, regional experiments, research and studies, collaboration between employers and workplaces, collaboration with central labour market organisations as well as health and social service organisations and disability NGOs, several seminars and events on working life, active communications, widespread media visibility and legislative measures.

Results, videos, blogs and podcasts about the project are available in the 'Tie työelämään' online service at <https://tietyoelamaan.fi/> and on the project website at <https://stm.fi/osatyokykyisyys/hankkeen-toimeenpano>.

It is important that the results, operating models and services be used even after the conclusion of the project. Increasing the employment rate of persons with partial work ability forms a part of the foundation of the Finnish welfare state. Work and employment are citizens' fundamental rights.

The project sought to have an impact on the operations of three parties: employers, persons with partial work ability and society (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Benefits sought by OTE



Brief summary of the most important changes and successes achieved by OTE:

- **Increased employment rate of persons with partial work ability:** the employment rate of persons with partial work ability⁴ increased and their access to employment became easier. Demand for labour now also reaches persons with partial work ability. The number of unemployed persons with partial work ability is now significantly lower than in 2015 when the key project started.
- **Employers' attitudes towards persons with partial work ability became more positive:** In 2006, Finnish employers had a very negative attitude towards hiring a person with partial work ability. In 2017, 80% of employers

⁴ A person with partial work ability is a person whose ability to work is limited. The characteristics of partial work ability vary from one individual to another and are tied to the reason for the limitation, the person's occupation and the requirements of the occupation. People whose work ability is partial are a diverse group: for example, the disabled, people with a chronic disease, people recovering from a serious illness, people who have experienced a crisis and unemployed people whose ability to work and function is reduced due to an injury, disease or social reasons, such as prolonged unemployment. Work ability might vary in different phases of life. Partial work ability might also be temporary. If a person's health and other individual characteristics are in balance with the requirements of his or her job, the person's work ability is not partial, but full.

had a positive attitude towards job applicants who had partial work ability, and considered motivation and skill the most important factors when recruiting an applicant. Persons with partial work ability and employers were provided support for and information about access to employment, returning to work and continuing in one's work.

- **Legislation was passed to improve the position of persons with partial work ability in the labour market and society:** both the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment made several changes to legislation during the key project. For example, a linear model was prepared to coordinate partial disability pension and earned income better.
- **The service system was made more efficient and customer-oriented:** 700 work ability coordinators were trained and they now work in a wide range of services and workplaces, offering personal support for their clients and acting as coordinators for services and collaboration networks. The Tie työelämään (Road to employment) online service was launched. It currently attracts 11,000 users per month. Rehabilitation paths were made clearer. Easily accessible centres for functional ability were set up. Limited work ability or even disability pension no longer means that a person becomes excluded from employment as in the past.

2 An increasing number of persons with partial work ability are employed

At the end of November 2018, Employment and Economic Development Offices had a total of 28,841 unemployed jobseekers with partial work ability. This is 4,784 persons less (14.2%) than at the same time the year before (2017).

The year-on-year number of unemployed persons with partial work ability has been decreasing for 35 consecutive months. During the OTE key project, the number of unemployed persons with partial work ability decreased by 30.2%. The number of long-term unemployed people with partial work ability has decreased as well.

Persons with partial work ability have found employment mostly in the open labour market and all sectors.

Reduction of unemployment can be explained by the fact that the shift from employment to unemployment has been reduced significantly. In an increasing number of cases, periods of unemployment last only a short while.

The reduction in the number of persons with partial work ability who are unemployed jobseekers cannot be solely explained by a favourable phase in the economic cycle – instead, the demand for labour now genuinely applies also to persons with partial work ability.

The Competitiveness Pact made in summer 2016 increased the competitiveness of the Finnish economy and improved the employment rate by freezing the salary levels, increasing the number of working hours, cutting holiday bonuses and reducing employer contributions. This undeniably improved Finland's competitiveness regarding the cost of labour. Consequently, Finland's ability to compete globally have certainly not taken a turn for the worse, which has encouraged companies to seek revenue growth through hiring employees.

More than 300,000 persons with partial work ability are constantly in an employment relationship in Finland. The most common way of entering into an employment relationship is moving from one job to another, i.e. there are no unemployment days in between. Of the unemployed people who become employed, some are employed part-time, some temporarily and some permanently. No statistics are available on the difference in employers in these cases.

Various part-time solutions have become more common. In 2007, approximately 66% of people on a partial disability pension worked at the same time, but in 2017, the percentage was as high as 79%.⁵

2.1 Access to employment results in direct savings

At present, there are 12,000 less unemployed jobseekers with partial work ability than at the start of the key project. This alone will generate direct savings of EUR 100 million per year as unemployment costs are reduced.

The increased consumption creates indirect economic benefits, such as new jobs, increased tax revenue and reduced health and social expenditure.

2.2 Threshold of recruitment has become lower

The recruitment threshold was made lower by e.g. changing the Employment Contracts Act (HE 105/2016, <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2016/20160105>). Lengthening of the trial period and providing an opportunity for its extension if the employee is absent during the trial period due to disability was one of the elements that met the employers' wishes associated with lowering the recruitment threshold of persons with partial work ability.

A change in legislation that allowed employers to make a temporary employment contract with a person who has been unemployed long term without a separate justification increased the employment opportunities of persons with partial work ability. The project also modelled the Employment and Economic Development Offices' (TE) collaboration with employers on the recruitment of persons with partial work ability and the model was adopted in practice.

⁵ <https://www.etk.fi/julkaisu/elakkeella-ja-tyossa-tilastoraportti-elakelaisten-tyonteosta/>

2.3 Social criteria in public procurements would increase opportunities for employment

Public procurements and the use of social criteria may have a significant effect on creating new employment opportunities for persons with partial work ability. The service providers would be selected from among parties who promote employment of persons with partial work ability, i.e. parties who actually employ such people.

Even if using social criteria result in a higher purchase price, it still creates savings on social and health care expenditure in the long run.

There is an increasing number of good examples of the use of social criteria in public procurements. The sum spent annually in public procurements is approximately EUR 35 billion, representing about 16% of GDP.

2.4 Entrepreneurship is not always an attractive option

Two publications were created on the incidence and growth potential of entrepreneurship among the disabled and persons with partial work ability, as well as factors hindering or promoting entrepreneurship⁶.

Based on the results, most people who consider becoming an entrepreneur would rather be in an employment relationship with an employer. Entrepreneurship seems like a forced choice in a situation without alternatives. As a result, developing the labour market towards support for inclusion on a wider scale is a better option than just encouraging entrepreneurship.

The hindrances to entrepreneurship of persons with partial work ability are the same as the factors that limit a person's opportunities in the labour market in general: low level of education, difficulties in coordinating earnings and social benefits and the

⁶ Niemelä, P., Renko, M., Nikoskinen, T., Heinonen, J., Hytti, U., Lindberg, J., Ray, K., Kaarnasaari, A., Savela, K., Kallionpää, P. Kämäräinen, V. and Pakarinen, J. (2017) Vammaisten henkilöiden yrittäjyys ja sen tuki. Publication series of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities, 22/2017. <https://urly.fi/19Ls>

Tötterman, P. & Tauriainen, L. (2018) Voisiko yrittäjyydellä lisätä osatyökykyisten työelämäosallisuutta? Työpoliittinen aikakauskirja, 4/2018, pp. 48–61. <https://urly.fi/19Lu>

availability of help (equipment and people) that supports working. Thus, the removal of these obstacles should take higher priority than the promotion of entrepreneurship when planning for political actions that seek to increase the inclusion of people in working life.

2.5 Recommendations

- A single labour market is the best way to promote access to employment of persons with partial work ability. Segregated employment management structures, such as separate employment offices, do not benefit anyone.
- As work and working life keeps changing, continuous access to the adoption of new skills must be available for all. For persons with partial work ability, continuous development of skills and identification of strengths are the key methods for becoming employed and continuing in one's work now that working life is undergoing a change.
- Opportunities for part-time work and other flexibility in working life must still be increased.
- The adoption of social criteria in the public procurements of municipalities, regions and government administration should be increased to promote access to employment.
- The promotion of entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities should be integrated with the general promotion of entrepreneurship.

3 Attitudes towards partial work ability are increasingly positive

In 2006, employers had a predominantly negative attitude towards recruiting persons with partial work ability. According to a study performed in 2017,⁷ the majority of employers now have a positive attitude towards recruiting persons with partial work ability.

Now, the majority of employers think that the essential qualities are skills, attitude and motivation. The perspective has shifted away from thinking along the lines of illnesses, defects or handicaps.

Assessment of disability or even assessment of work ability has given way to assessment of professional skills.

3.1 The willingness to recruit people is affected by the availability of support for the assessment of work ability

It is difficult for employers to assess the competence or capacity of a job applicant, including the effect an injury or chronic illness has on the person's performance, tasks or occupational safety.

If an employer gets support for the assessment of these factors and is given practical advice for solutions, the employer's willingness to recruit increases. The support provided by work coaches or other players in the field of vocational rehabilitation improves the employment opportunities of persons with partial work ability.

⁷ Ala-Kauhaluoma, M., Kesä, M., Lehikoinen, T., Pitkänen, S. & Ylikojola, P. 2017. Osatyökykyisistä osaavaa työvoimaa. Publications of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. 42/2017 Link to the publication (in Finnish): <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-327-252-1>

Ala-Kauhaluoma, M. and Härkäpää, K. (2006) Yksityinen palvelusektori heikossa työmarkkina-asemassa olevien työllistäjänä. Työpoliittinen tutkimus 312/ 2006. Ministry of Labour. Helsinki.

Employers who have received support for the planning of reasonable adjustments have usually been satisfied with them and consider them as factors that increase productivity, improve the working environment and reduce absence from work⁸.

3.2 New models to help in recruitment

The Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Southwest Finland set up a project on work ability coordinators. The outcome was an operating model for providing employers with information on persons with partial work ability as potential recruits and means to determine a job applicant's suitability for the job from the perspective of the employer.

The project also produced a model for a more extensive support for managing work ability, including information on the means, services and methods that can be used for identifying suitable tasks within the company for a person with partial work ability, ways of finding the right people for the job and means of providing support for coping on the job. Employers and supervisors provided positive feedback on the work ability coordinator's expertise in providing support for recruitment and the management of work ability.

3.3 Increased level of commitment among the organisations

At OTE's initiative, central labour market organisations, disability NGOs and health and social care organisations issued a joint statement by which they commit to promoting the access to employment of persons with partial work ability. This represents another change in attitudes. OTE arranged several discussions in which organisations could discuss the actions they could take to promote the access to employment of persons with partial work ability.

The pledge signed by the organisations and an associated video can be seen here: <https://stm.fi/ote/jarjestojen-lupaukset>.

⁸ Tötterman, P. & Tauriainen, L. 2016. Osatyökykyisestä uusi työntekijä? Sidosryhmien mielikuvat työnantajien rekrytointihalukkuudesta ja sitä ennustavista tekijöistä. Työpoliittinen aikakauskirja 4/2016, 16-27. Link to the publication: <https://urly.fi/19DS>

3.4 Media visibility has caused a change in attitudes

The change in attitudes is also reflected in the media and in the tone used by the media.

Access to employment of persons with partial work ability has been discussed in the media perhaps more than ever before and partial work ability has been viewed from many perspectives, ranging from the level of an individual to the level of society.

Expertise comes before a disability or illness: in a suitable task, a person with partial work ability actually has full work ability. Career stories and case studies shed light to the opportunities offered by working life. Employers' opinions have also been covered extensively in the media, and they clearly indicate that the recruitment threshold has indeed become lower.

To support the media, the project has arranged events and published videos, blogs and press releases in its main communications channel at stm.fi/ote.

3.5 Recommendations

- Information is provided for supervisors on the available compensation opportunities as well as subsidies for employment and rearrangement of working conditions. A sufficient amount of resources is allocated for the purpose, including wage subsidies and subsidy for the rearrangement of working conditions.
- Workplaces are encouraged to rearrange work and customise working conditions and to provide alternative work⁹ in order for the employee to continue in his or her job in spite of an illness or injury. The rearrangements and customised working conditions should be a normal part of the operations at the workplace, and employers should be encouraged in this.

⁹ For further information, please see: Nevala N, Pehkonen I, Koskela I, Ruusuvoori J, Anttila H. Workplace Accommodation among Persons with Disabilities: A Systematic Review of Its Effectiveness and Barriers or Facilitators. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 2015; 25(2): 432-448. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10926-014-9548-z/fulltext.html>

Willpower, the supervisor and an occupational health physician helped Jukka Tolonen to return to his work as a physician after a stroke. Work tasks can be modified even when a person has suffered a severe illness. See a video of Jukka's story at <https://urly.fi/1aFH>

Emmi Hirvonen helps people to return to work. See a video of Emmi's story at <https://urly.fi/1aJv>

- Workplaces are encouraged to adopt a HR policy that is based on diversity and pluralism.
- Supervisors are encouraged to use work ability coordinators and the occupational health care system, for example, as support for the management of work ability.
- The government, labour market organisations and other organisations will continue the work to influence attitudes. Successes, opportunities and proven models will be made available to all parties, especially workplaces and recruiters. To see some examples of the above, visit <https://tietyoelamaan.fi/tyokyky-kayttoon/>
- The collaboration initiated by OTE between disability NGOs, social and health care organisations and central labour market organisations for improving the access to employment of persons with partial work ability must continue. Furthermore, sufficient resources must be secured for the management of this collaboration on both the practical and the strategic level.
- Information on partial work ability must be disseminated more actively and in a more diverse way to workplaces and employers.
- Communication between organisations must be increased to allow an efficient allocation of resources.

4 Changes in legislation

4.1 Changes to legislation by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment

During the OTE project, changes were made to the legislation that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment are responsible for preparing. The changes help persons with partial work ability to get access to employment and continue in their work.

Regulatory changes by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in the current Government term:

- Compensation for Kela's rehabilitative psychotherapy was increased and the level of compensation for adults was made equivalent to the level of compensation for young people. The Government decree came into force on 1 January 2016.
 - The increase of compensation level supports and improves the work and study ability of persons with partial work ability and thus improves their access to employment and continuing in their work. In 2015, approximately 27,000 persons received rehabilitative psychotherapy. After the change became effective in 2016, the number increased to 31,000. In 2017, there were approximately 37,000 recipients and in 2018 approximately 44,000.
- The minimum amount of the rehabilitation allowance for a young person and the allowance paid for vocational rehabilitation was increased to the level of the guarantee pension. The Act entered into force on 1 January 2017.
 - This change encourages young people with partial work ability and adults with partial work ability who do not have a job to participate in vocational rehabilitation, studies and employment, which in turn prevents them from being transferred to disability pension.
- The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) arranges vocational rehabilitation for young people whose functional capacity has weakened

significantly and who have a need for rehabilitation. A diagnosis of an illness or injury is not required. Young people are paid rehabilitation allowance for the duration of the vocational rehabilitation. The Act entered into force on 1 January 2019.

- As a result of the change, young people outside studies or working life or otherwise in danger of becoming socially excluded have easier access to Kela's vocational rehabilitation and can thus continue their studies and become employed. Each year, approximately 3,200 young people participate in vocational rehabilitation for the young.
- The minimum amounts of sickness allowance and rehabilitation allowance were increased to the level of labour market subsidy and the 55-day waiting period for the minimum amount of sickness allowance was eliminated. The Act entered into force on 1 January 2019.
 - The change encourages persons with partial work ability to seek sickness allowance if necessary, as the allowance grants access to the process in which their need for rehabilitation is determined and rehabilitation is provided.

Legislative changes made by Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment:

- Government Proposal HE 105/2016 on the change of the Employment Contracts Act.
 - Lengthening of the trial period
 - Making a temporary employment contract without a separate justification with a person who has been unemployed long term.
 - Making the re-employment obligation more flexible
- Government proposal HE 227/2018 for acts on the amendment of chapter 7 section 2 of the Employment Contracts Act and chapter 2 a section 1 of the Unemployment Security Act.
 - The proposal suggests an amendment to the provision on terminating an employment relationship on the grounds related to the employee. According to the proposal, the overall assessment on whether the grounds for the termination are factual and important would take into

account the total number of employees the employer has and the overall situation of both the employer and the employee.

- The change in legislation seeks to ensure that the special circumstances of small employers would be sufficiently taken into account when assessing the grounds of termination related to the employee.
- The purpose of the proposal is to lower the employment threshold of small employers.
- The proposed change to the Unemployment Security Act would shorten the compensation-free time following a termination of an employment relationship from the current 90 days to 60 days in cases when the employer has terminated the employment relationship on grounds related to the employee.

4.2 Proposal by the working group: A linear model for reducing incentive traps

The objective of the OTE key project was to find ways of coordinating disability pension and earned income to reduce incentive traps arising out of the current limits for earned income. The working group¹⁰ investigated various linear models for reducing incentive traps from the perspective of both full and partial disability pension.

The working group proposes a linear model for coordinating partial disability pension and earned income. This would increase the employment opportunities of people on partial disability pension. The partial disability pension would become a part of the national pension system in cases in which partial disability pension is also paid from the earnings-related pension system.

The linear model would have a ceiling rule, i.e. the partial disability pension and earned income could not exceed the established earnings level. The minimum earnings used in the application of the ceiling rule would be specified during the

¹⁰ The members were experts from the Finnish Centre for Pensions, Kela and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and representatives of the central labour market organisations, the Finnish Disability Forum and the Finnish Pension Alliance TELLA.

preparation of the government proposal. The amount of earnings to be taken into account in the linear model would be the average over the six preceding months.

The labour market organisations support the proposal of the working group. The disability NGOs do not fully back the proposal. Their opinion is that the linear model should also be adopted for coordinating full disability pension and earnings. Kela supports most of the proposal, but is of the opinion that partial disability pension should be possible for everyone in the national pension system.

The execution of the linear model requires that the Incomes Register is operational and this allows the implementation of the linear model. Earnings and pension would be coordinated monthly without appealable decision, but an appealable decision on the coordination would be issued annually.

The working group proposes that the government proposal on the linear model be presented to Parliament in the autumn of 2020 and the laws come into force on 1 January 2022, which is also when the Incomes Register will be operational.

The working group carried out its task in two phases; the report on the first phase is available at: <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/80691>. In the second phase, the working group investigated a linear model for full disability pension, but decided not to propose it. The working group's proposal is described above. The proposal is described in more detail (including impact assessments) at: <https://stm.fi/osatyokykyisyys/hankkeen-toimeenpano>

4.2.1 Recommendations

- The OTE key project proposes an experiment on how well the linear model works in the full disability pension of the national pension system. This experiment would require access to the Income Register and changes to Kela's IT systems in order to coordinate earnings and disability pension linearly. The experiment would reveal whether the linear model would increase salaried work of people on full disability pension paid from the national pension system and whether the recipients of disability pension consider the model as having an incentive effect. The model might especially help people with developmental disabilities and young people on disability pension. The pension expenditure costs of the experiment would depend on the amount of the protected portion¹¹ and by what percentage the pension

¹¹ The sum of money one can earn on disability pension without a reduction in the pension.

would be decreased as earnings exceed the protected portion. The changes to Kela's IT systems would also cause costs. With an earnings limit of EUR 600 and the decrease in pension at 50%, annual pension expenditures would reduce by almost EUR 5 million per year, excluding the behavioural changes triggered by the new model¹².

4.3 Report on the amendments needed to the Social Welfare Act

The OTE key project prepared amendments to the legislation on activities that support disabled persons' access to employment under the Social Welfare Act, work activity of disabled persons, work activity under the Developmental Disability Act as well as work coaching and rehabilitating work activities. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health ordered a report¹³ on the employment and social rights characteristics of activities that support disabled persons' access to employment. The Ministry also requested concrete proposals for amending the legislation.

In particular, the report proposes changes to the work activities of persons with developmental disabilities. A disabled person must be covered by a suitable service. This requires an increasing amount of coordination across the different actors in different branches of administration. The revision of activities that support employment and work activities (including so-called community employment) provided by social welfare organisations to disabled people and people with developmental disabilities will continue.

¹² The experiment requires the preparation and enactment of an experimental act.

¹³ Paanetoja, J. 2019. Vammaisten työllistymistä tukevan toiminnan ja työtoiminnan uudistaminen, Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö, Raportteja ja muistioita 2019:20. Link to the publication: <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161425>

5 The service system was revised towards a more efficient and customer-oriented approach

The OTE key project sought to change the system of services towards a model that would provide the necessary help and support for everyone as well as increase the skills of the professionals providing the services. The project also sought to come up with new ways of providing the services.

The work towards the changes was performed in collaboration with experts from a wide range of services, including social and health care professionals.

5.1 From a silo-like system of services towards a customer-oriented approach

Finland boasts a wide and diverse range of services, benefits and means. The problems of the Finnish system are its fragmented and silo-like nature and the fact that many people are left without the personal support and help they need.

In fact, the system of services is so extensive that few professionals working in the provision of these services master it fully. For customers, the services might appear as a challenging mess. This is why many people need a professional to help them along the way.

Methods and operating models have been developed for the service system in order to:

- Speed up the transfer from work to rehabilitation and back to work
- Speed up the transfer from work to health care operations and back to work
- Speed up the transfer from the services to the labour market
- Speed up the transfer from studies (for example special vocational institutions) to work.

All interruptions in the service system or delays in these transfers are costly and place a heavy burden to the employers, professionals and the affected persons themselves, and are particularly harmful to the young.

In practice, the key project used the following means to affect the system of services and improve it:

- Training of work ability coordinators
- Modelling of treatment and rehabilitation paths
- Producing operating models for people who need special support for access to employment and social participation
- Creating an open online service with a low threshold of access

5.2 The work ability coordinator model and training of the coordinators

A work ability coordinator is a professional of working life, rehabilitation, the service system and customer work who works with people seeking access to working life, people already in working life and students.

A work ability coordinator investigates the customer's situation, helps him or her to identify personal strengths and opportunities and find a place in working life. The coordinator helps the customer along the way, assumes responsibility for the process, provides encouragement and coordinates services. The coordination of services involves connecting the services to each other, tailoring them to the customer's needs and making agreements on the division of work and responsibilities.

Work ability coordinators work in social care services, health care, occupational health care, TE Offices (Employment and Economic Development Offices), educational institutions, companies, workplaces and organisations. Their role might be full-time, a part of their other tasks or they might assist the HR function.

5.2.1 Hundreds of work ability coordinators trained

The training of work ability coordinators strengthened the expertise of experts working in the system of services. The OTE key project trained nearly 700 work ability

coordinators (for more information, see <https://urly.fi/1aaj> , <https://urly.fi/1aak>). The training drew together people working in different parts of the service system on the public, private and third sector. The participants also included supervisors of the trainees.

Furthermore, approximately 200 work ability coordinators graduated in the OSKU programme and ESR project launched during the previous government term.

Altogether, 92% of the participants said that their goals for the training were met extremely well or well and 84% were of the opinion that they can apply the training in practice extremely well or well.

5.2.2 The training was considered effective – the level of expertise increased

According to the impact assessment study¹⁴, the participants' expertise strengthened in a statistically significant way in all areas.

Networking between the actors increased during the training. The strengthening of the network manifested itself as an increase in both personal and regional collaboration or an increased awareness among the local actors of each others' operations.

After the training, the participants could utilise their network to search for solutions that support their customers' work ability. A solution-oriented approach also became more common.

As their expertise strengthened, the professionals became increasingly adept in implementing the following in services associated with access to employment, continuing in one's work and returning to work:

- 1) a wide-ranging utilisation of the means available in the service system and collaborating with the customer to tailor the services to the customer's particular situation,
- 2) engaging in goal-oriented collaboration with the customer, the network and superiors,

¹⁴ The assessment is being performed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The assessment will be complete in April 2019.

- 3) concentrating on the employee's professional skill and strengths, and
- 4) modifying the work and working conditions to match the employee's work ability

The new skills and solution-oriented approach of the work ability coordinators improved the efficiency and results of the service system.

An employer's feedback on the performance of a work ability coordinator:

"One of the values of our company is responsibility, and in our opinion, the work ability coordinator helps us to put this value into practice. For example, we remain committed to the employee even if his or her work ability becomes partial – we make arrangements and look for solutions. We take care of our employees."

5.2.3 Recommendations

- All people of working age – jobseekers, students and working people – must have equal access to the services of a work ability coordinator or other professional coordinator. The services of a work ability coordinator must also be provided for entrepreneurs and SMBs.
- Services for people of working age should increasingly adopt a solution-oriented approach. This means looking for solutions in collaboration with the customer. The focus is shifted away from the customer's problems and restrictions to his or her skills, abilities and strengths.
- Training of work ability coordinators must continue even after the conclusion of the OTE key project. There is a large nationwide demand for the training, arising not only from individual professionals, but also entire sectors and various parts of the service system.
- The training of work ability coordinators should be provided increasingly to people working in services that support access to employment.
- Training of work ability coordinators should be provided for professionals working in services for immigrants.

- Training of work ability coordinators should be arranged for people working in occupational safety and health care. Supporting the work ability of people in employment requires intensive collaboration between the employer, occupational safety and health and occupational health care.
- Training of work ability coordinators should be provided for professionals working in the field of adult social work, substance abuse and mental health services, as well as for health care professionals carrying out health checks of unemployed people. In addition, the training should be extended to professionals working in the defence forces, Criminal Sanctions Agency, One-Stop Guidance Centres and special educational institutions.

5.3 Appropriate services at the right time

5.3.1 Professional service path that supports work ability

The service path that supports work ability was created in collaboration with six regional OTE trial projects.

The path is intended as a tool for professionals who work, for example, in social and health care, occupational health care, economic and employment services, educational institutions, Kela, insurance institutions, workplaces or rehabilitation services.

The service path consists of nine individual sections that the professionals can utilise in the provision of services for people of working age. The sections of the service path can be used as needed by the customer. The customer's goal might be getting a job, getting a place to study or returning to work after a sickness absence.

To see the service path and associated open online training, visit <https://polku.tietyoelamaan.fi/>.

5.3.2 Regional experiments to develop the service system

Regional experiments created new concepts that work well to increase the efficiency of the service system.¹⁵

Good examples of a service system that works well were the *Seamless care chain and rehabilitation path for people of working age* project of the Central Finland Health Care District and the *Centre for functional ability* project set up in Pirkanmaa and Southern Ostrobothnia.

Thanks to the first project, people who had undergone back surgery were able to return to their work or become jobseekers more quickly than before. Specialised care and occupational healthcare agreed upon mutual collaboration, exchange of information and the role each organisation will play. As a result of the experiment, the period the patients spent on sickness allowance was cut by almost half, which saved approximately EUR 2,280 per patient in Kela's sickness allowance expenditure. If this operating model were adopted nationally for all back surgery patients, Kela savings in sickness allowance expenditure would be in excess of EUR 4,000,000. For more information, see: <https://urly.fi/19L6>.

The model for a centre for functional ability (TOIKE; <https://urly.fi/1apx> and <https://urly.fi/19L5>) was developed in Pirkanmaa ja Southern Ostrobothnia. The centre is a low-threshold service for all people of working age. The service is accessible without a referral, and people can visit it at their own initiative or as directed from other services. The service uses a solution-oriented approach that is based on the customer's needs.

The TOIKE network consists of a total of 170 professionals (120 at Pirkanmaa, 50 in Southern Ostrobothnia) from Kela, the third sector, private service providers, insurance companies and other organisations. Calculations performed by TOIKE indicate that their support for work ability generated significant savings for society.

We would also like to mention a policy used in Oulu in which a multidisciplinary summary created in collaboration with the customer replaces a 'B Statement' issued by a physician. This gives people access to a vocational rehabilitation examination without a medical diagnosis. For further information, see: <https://urly.fi/19KU>

¹⁵ For more information about the regional experiments, see <https://urly.fi/1aCJ>

5.3.3 Recommendations

- The service path for supporting work ability should become a part of the professionals' work.
- The unemployed should be provided with better access to rehabilitation and preventive health care services.
- Low-threshold centres for functional ability should be established in as many regions as possible. The regions should have easily accessible low-threshold services for people of working age, and these services should be accessible without a referral. Low-threshold services would quickly launch the necessary support measures.
- During their basic training and in-service training, physicians are provided with more information on rehabilitation and how to assess and support work ability and functional ability.

5.4 Special support for access to employment and social participation

Operating models were developed for people who need special support for participation and access to employment. These models help an increasing number of people to proceed in their path to employment, participation and self-determination. The models are described on the Innokylä website at <https://urly.fi/19Bn>.

The project also published the following materials:

- A guidebook for people transferring from studies to work
<http://urn.fi/URN:978-952-00-4017-8>
- A checklist on the support for access to employment for persons with partial work ability <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161317>
- A county-level model for supporting the access to employment and participation of persons with partial work ability
<https://www.innokyla.fi/web/malli7551736>

Consensus agreements and other methods were employed to engage a range of actors in regional experiments on work with clients and the development of operating models. For more information on the consensus agreement, please see <https://www.innokyla.fi/web/malli6703029>. New collaboration was established with One-Stop Guidance Centres, special vocational institutes and organisations. Work ability coordinator training sessions formed the basis of multidisciplinary professional networks. Thanks to the networks, services can now be linked more flexibly and steering people to services has become more efficient. Permanent collaboration groups were established especially for young people that need special support¹⁶.

5.4.1 Recommendations

- The 'From studies to work' guide should be adopted in educational institutions to promote the access to employment of students that need special support. The Expert One-Stop Guidance Centre network set up by One-Stop Guidance Centres and special educational institutions should be adopted nationwide <https://urly.fi/19Bt>
- People working in vocational institutes should be provided with more special training on the guidance of students who need special support.
- People who need special support in access to employment should be provided with access to the services of a work ability coordinator or work coaching for subsidised employment.
- The use of peer support and experts by experience in the services should be increased.

5.5 One-stop shop for all information: tietyoelamaan.fi

Information on the different services, subsidies and benefits has been fragmented across a multitude of sources, which has made it difficult to find for persons with partial work ability and even professionals.

¹⁶ Sources include Saikku, P. & Blomgren, S. 2018, among others. Models for access to employment and participation (OTE 4 project), final report of the regional experiments.

The solution was to create an online service [Tietyoelamaan.fi](https://tietyoelamaan.fi), <https://tietyoelamaan.fi/>. The service contains up-to-date information on the services for persons with partial work ability (and for persons of working age in general), benefits, methods and their effectiveness, research and current legislation.

Tietyöelämään.fi is a popular online service that is administered by The Rehabilitation Foundation.

Users of the service consist of persons with partial work ability, professionals working in the service system, employers, supervisors and work ability coordinators. The users also include insurance institutions and public sector organisations. The primary user group are social and health care professionals. In nearly two years, the service has attracted approximately 57,600 identified users and a total of 258,000 visits. Each month, the service is used approximately 11,000 times. The service is unique both in Finland and internationally. The professionals are of the opinion that the service makes their work more efficient.

5.5.1 Recommendations

- The continuity, development and maintenance of the Tie Työelämään (Road to Working Life) must be ensured.
- The service should be adopted at workplaces and among professionals.

6 Closing words

During the OTE key project, an increasing number of persons with partial work ability have found employment and have succeeded in staying in working life.

A change of this magnitude has required the elimination of prejudices. A person with partial work ability in employment is a part of the normal diversity of modern working life.

Anyone's work ability can vary during their career. People whose work ability is reduced due to an illness or injury can often return to work or remain in their job when some modifications are made and suitable flexibility is introduced. It is easier to modify the work, adjust the working conditions and arrange alternative work than to restore the lost part of work ability.

Major changes require a coordinated joint effort that uses jointly agreed means. OTE's extensive collaboration with a wide range of organisations has produced practical and working solutions – which is exactly what was needed to increase the employment rate of persons with partial work ability.

Public discussion on the employment opportunities of persons with partial work ability has been lively and has also helped collaboration and affected attitudes. We hope the public discussion will continue. Discussions like these can create new innovative solutions and can present practical examples.

Many services for persons with partial work ability are also intended for all people seeking employment or who are currently employed. Ultimately, the work done to improve the employment rate of persons with partial work ability improves everyone's services.

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