

Education is everyone's right – A review of accessibility to higher education for persons with disabilities

Article 1/2021

The author of the article is Specialist Anni Kyröläinen. The article is a continuation to the report entitled Structural barriers to employment of persons with disabilities, published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Kyröläinen 2020). The article focuses on the accessibility to higher education as a factor promoting employment. It provides a cross-sectoral review of the barriers to employment of persons with disabilities and it offers suggestions for measures to amend the situation.

Abstract

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) obliges the States to protect the rights of persons with disabilities across all administrative sectors. The UN adopted the Convention in 2006 and it was ratified by Finland in 2016. The Convention emphasises the inherent human dignity of persons with disabilities. It guarantees the same human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities as for other people. Article 24 of the Convention concerns the right of persons with disabilities to equal education.

The article aims to identify those essential factors that may place persons with disabilities in an unequal position in terms of education and, thereby, employment. It focuses on higher education as a factor promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. The purpose of the article is to make those changes visible that need to be implemented in society and especially in educational paths so as to enable persons with disabilities to study and complete a degree within higher education on the basis of equal opportunity, thus advancing their employment and inclusion.

In this context, the key elements include the provision of services for persons with disabilities, the availability and fluency of these services, as well as collaboration with educational institutions. Moreover, it is important to consider the special needs of individual persons concerning entrance examinations, studies and social activities related to the studies. Particular attention must be paid to accessibility in the institutions of higher education and society at large.

In order to advance the employment of persons with disabilities upon graduation, close collaboration between the educational institutions and the employment services is necessary. The article also highlights the role of study counselling; persons with disabilities should be equally provided with guidance to education that is optimal for them. The study counselling should specifically pay attention to inclusion in working life and the opportunities for employment opened by higher education within the constantly changing working life.