

The problem of employment, not welfare

Presently, the advanced nations no longer put their emphasis on welfare which strives to protect the disabled. Their focus has instead shifted greatly towards support services and advocacy for activities aiming for social participation and autonomy. The necessity of realizing social participation through jobs and employment for disabled people in the productive (working) age range, excluding children and elderly over 65 years of age, has become a significant theme.

Former President Masao Ogura, who founded the idea of express delivery service, is setting up the creation of employment opportunities for disabled people. Under “Management to Change Welfare,” he criticized “welfare labor” (no relation to employment) in a welfare institution which can only make less than 10,000 yen a month. Insisting on “normalization in the market economy,” he advocated that a changeover to “the concept of making a system in which disabled people are able to work well in a market economy, and can be independent in basically the same ways as non-disabled people” is necessary. In advancing a strategy which utilizes diverse human personnel (diversity), the Japan Business Federation also took up the promotion of disabled employment, and described its importance as an employment issue (“Committee on Management and Labor Policy 2005).”

Two Approaches (quota-levy system)

Japan is not the only one late in addressing the issue of employing disabled people. Many challenges have been tried in all advanced nations, such as adding legal restrictions to the labor market. These can be divided into two major approaches. One approach is introducing a law prohibiting discrimination against disabled people to places such as England and Canada, with America’s ADA (Americans with

Disabilities Act) as a representing example. Another is introducing the “establishment of statutory employment rating: anti-discrimination legislation and quota-levy system,” which enforces an employment scale for companies in places such as Japan, Germany, and France.

The former approach enforces workplace environment reforms (accommodation) for companies and corresponds to individually disabled conditions. The latter approach is different in that procuring statutory employment rating becomes a duty, but leaves workplace environment reforms to the independent verdict of the companies. In the latter approach, the focus is not on the quality of employment but on its quantitative regulation. Because it cannot promote workplace environment reforms to correspond to the disabled people with diverse needs, there also exists the opinion that the latter approach ought to supplement legislation for prohibiting discrimination against disabled people. In any case, no decision has been currently made as to which of the two approaches is beneficial for the expansion of job opportunities for the disabled.

Approximately 480,000 workers with disabilities, and percentage of companies which have not attained the statutory employment rate at 58%

This table shows the current status of the employment of disabled people in private companies. Companies which did not attain the statutory employment rate constituted over half of the total at 58%, showing that the employment problem of disabled people is great. With the statutory employment rate designated for large companies, the potential contribution of large companies is significant, with a total number of 85,000 disabled workers at large companies with over 1,000 people.

In the future, large companies are expected to advance workplace environmental reforms by going beyond the scenes of employment and recruitment, and further expand job opportunities such as providing career-building support after entry into a company. Additionally, when paying attention to the fact that over half of all workers with disabilities are employed in small companies which employ fewer

than 55 people and are not subject to the establishment of employment rating, it becomes an important issue as well to strengthen the support for workplace environment reform. At present, there are approximately 150 thousand applicants with disabilities at public employment security office (PESO), and this figure is increasing every year.

16-1 The number of workers with disabilities and percentages of companies which have not attained statutory employment rate, by size of private companies

Classification of Companies by Worker Population Size		Number of workers with physical disabilities and mental retardation (people)	Percentage of companies which have not attained statutory employment rate (%)
Employment rate of target companies	Over 1,000 people	85,271	70.6
	500-999 people	24,274	68.1
	300-499 people	19,524	62.4
	100-299 people	40,747	57.4
	56-99 people	19,584	55.7
Under 55 people		294,000	—
Total		483,000	58.3

Note: Employment rate figures for targeted companies with over 56 people derive from the June 2004 Survey. The writer created the total figure based on each report from the November 2003 Survey.

Source: Disabled Workers' Affairs Division Survey Data, Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare.