

Christopher Prinz (Ed.)

European Disability Pension Policies

11 Country Trends 1970-2002

With an Introduction
by Bernd Marin

European Centre Vienna

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This book is the result of an extension of the European Centre's research on disability benefit policies which has been partly funded by the Swiss Federal Office of Social Insurance. It contains an introduction and theoretical overviews by Bernd Marin and Philip R. de Jong, respectively, as well as chapters on the following 11 European countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

During the last twenty years, the longer-term sustainability of social insurance systems has become a major issue in all European countries. The debate is generally dominated by a focus on the rising costs of old-age pensions, driven by rapidly changing population age structures. In recent years, however, analysts and governments increasingly started to worry about the growth in the number of disability benefit recipients – a growth with significant variations in the composition of new recipients in terms of age, gender and health conditions.

After a long phase of expansion of disability benefit schemes via increasing benefits, broadening coverage and easing access (in particular for elderly unemployed people), since the late 1980s and the beginning 1990s more and more countries have started to reform their systems – ranging from piecemeal changes (e.g. in Switzerland) to more far-reaching reorientation (e.g. in Germany) or even fundamental reconstruction (e.g. in the Netherlands). While policy measures differ widely, policy goals tend to converge. Some policy elements, such as the identification of and benefit provision for partial disability, seem particularly controversial.

The purpose of this book is to analyse and compare disability benefit policies in eleven European countries in the last two or three decades, and to examine the outcome of these policies. Often policies appear to have immediate short-term effects, while being much less effective in a longer perspective, thus asking for continual reform. For some of the newer challenges, such as the rapidly increasing number of benefit claims on psychological grounds, responses have yet to be found.

Christopher Prinz is Project Co-ordinator at the OECD Social Policy Division, Paris, and External Research Associate of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna.



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