

Executive summary

Throughout the OECD, mental ill-health is increasingly recognised as a major issue for social and labour market policy since it creates significant costs for people, employers and the economy at large by harming well-being, lowering employment, raising unemployment and generating substantial productivity losses. The Swiss approach to dealing with this problem presents a mixed picture. Its institutions in the fields of health, education and social insurance are well resourced and therefore provide good opportunities in principle for adequate action. However, policy making in Switzerland is complex due to the involvement of an unusually broad set of stakeholders, including 26 very independent cantons and a large and influential private sector. Policy co-ordination is therefore a difficult task, as reflected in the long and winding process of “inter-institutional co-operation”. Despite the pro-active stance of the disability insurance and the significant success of the recent disability benefit reforms, a number of problems remain – as reflected in persistently large and not falling number of disability benefit claims with a mental disorder. Further change is needed in order to improve the situation significantly, and more generally a stronger focus on mental health is required in Switzerland’s health, social and labour market policies.

The OECD recommends that Swiss policy makers:

- Strengthen the prevention and management of sickness absences at the workplace in order to foster greater job retention.
- Move the disability benefit system closer to the work sphere with a focus on the role of employers and workplace-oriented early interventions.
- Enhance the capacity of employment services and social welfare offices to deal with the frequent mental health problems of their clients.

- Broaden inter-institutional co-operation by including the health system as an equal partner, building networks with employers and strengthening the financial incentives to co-operate for the main actors.
- Assure that the well-resourced mental health system delivers better employment outcomes also by promoting a better allocation of resources toward adequate doctor training and treatment practice with an employment focus.
- Place a greater emphasis of the education policy on ensuring that students with mental health problems do not leave the education system early as a result of school drop-out or through the take-up of a disability benefit.