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Abstract

Supported employment as an instrument of social and professional activation of people with disabilities in Poland (on the example of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)

The dissertation analyses the reasons for the unemployment of people with disabilities (PWD) in Poland and methods for reducing it. The reasons, as indicated by researchers, are the attitudes of the OzNI, maladjusted working environment conditions, and some aspects of the external environment and employers' attitudes.

In recent decades, significant progress has been made in Poland to understand the problems of people with disabilities and develop methods for their professional activation. One of methods, borrowed from US practice, is supported employment (abbreviated as SE).

Supported employment is about providing support to individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining paid employment in the open labour market. What is important in this method is the commitment and competence of people supporting the PWD. The most important role is taken by the employment coach, accompanied by the support of the psychologist and the employment advice worker, less often by a professional activation specialist or other coach. The fundamental principle of supported employment is that any disabled person should receive commensurate remuneration with work performed, but not less than the minimum wage or wage generally accepted for the selected job in the country. Supported employment arose as an alternative to employing people with disabilities in the so-called supported employment enterprises, that were the favoured solution throughout the second half

20th century. Since the beginning of this century it has been under growing criticism. Supported employment enterprises have often been described as ghettos for the disabled rather than temporary employment opportunities to result in taking up more demanding jobs on the open labour market.

The main aim of the dissertation is to determine the factors of occupational deactivation of people with disabilities and to assess the effectiveness of supported employment as a tool to reduce unemployment among the disabled.

The dissertation discusses the following hypotheses: high unemployment among PWD in Poland stems from poor institutional maturity of the labour market and social policies, as well as poor cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organizations; supported employment is currently the most effective way of socio-occupational activation of PWD in Poland; improving the status of people with disabilities in the labour market requires continuous improvement of PWD's socio-occupational activation instruments and their adaptation to changing conditions on the labour market.

To verify the hypotheses, a SWOT analysis of supported employment was carried out in Poland and a survey was conducted among the disabled participants of supported employment projects. The study covered the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, where the leading institutions for supported employment are: Elbląg Consultative Council for Disabled People (Elbląska Rada Konsultacyjna Osób Niepełnosprawnych – ERKON), Warmian-Masurian Sejm of Disabled People (Warmińsko-Mazurski Sejmik Osób Niepełnosprawnych – W-MSON) and Elbląg Foundation - Local Fund of the Elbląg Region (Fundacja Elbląg – FE).

The SWOT analysis was based on the knowledge and experience of 27 specialists (job trainers, vocational counsellors and psychologists). 108 people with disabilities took part in the survey. During the research period (July-September 2019), 10 supported employment projects were implemented in Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, where 60 specialists worked, and the beneficiaries constituted a group of nearly 200 people.

All the hypotheses were confirmed in the conducted research and analyses. The lack of institutional maturity of the labour market and social policy as well as poor cooperation of public administration with non-governmental organizations makes it

difficult to reduce the unemployment rate of people with disabilities. This is visible in the incoherence of the activities of public institutions and the supported employment services.

Social Benefits, on the one hand are required, but on the other hand discourage people from taking legal employment; this problem was clearly confirmed by the SWOT analysis.

Supported employment is currently the most effective method of tackling unemployment, although in the Polish institutional system it has only an auxiliary function in relation to the activities of labour offices and PFRON. This is mainly demonstrated by the scope of financing – labour offices cost PLN 4,000,000,000 annually, the PFRON budget is at a similar level (for 2019 it was PLN 5,000,000,000), and only a few million are allocated to supported employment programmes by non-governmental organizations. However, the employees of supported employment projects were rated very highly by the disabled participants. As many as 93% of respondents would recommend another unemployed person to participate in a supported employment project.

Improving the status of people with disabilities on the Polish labor market requires continuous improvement of OzNI's socio-professional activation instruments and adapting them to the changing labour market conditions. Over the past 30 years, after many years of neglect, experts for aiding people with disabilities have been catching up on methods and tools for activating OzNI, but new challenges that need to be addressed are constantly emerging. They are primarily associated with the education of people with disabilities and a change in the attitudes of these people and towards them.

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