

Anna Ziętek

Ph.D. (Social), Assistant Professor at Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczno-Techniczna (Pedagogical and Technical College) in Konin, Poland, annazietek@wp.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-0173-3594

SUPPORTING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE POLISH LABOR MARKET

Abstract. *The article presents a concept of social approach towards individual support for persons with disabilities, which aims at levelling their opportunities in social and professional life. It suggests the introduction of tasks related to vocational activation and availability through co-operation and support in such areas as education, employment and social welfare system. It is pointed out that the implementation of changes and improvement of vocational education will enable persons with disabilities to prepare and adapt to employment and social life. The article presents solutions for improving the cooperation of individuals and supporting organizations in performing tasks involving employment and integration in the local community. The cooperation of parties involved and local integration is a significant element in the suggested model which is to improve the process of employment and activity of disabled persons. The article indicates the need to introduce more flexibility in the process of vocational preparation with the labour market and to increase the level of awareness of individual problems persons with disabilities face. It shows that introducing changes and improving existing solutions related to the system will increase the participation of persons with disabilities in professional and social life. The article presents a model solution of vocational education adjusted to persons with disabilities, taking into account patronage specialist workshops. It suggests implementing an additional career counselling subject in the curriculum, which by achieving objectives and carrying out teaching contents, would enable persons with disabilities to create individual career development plans. Persons with disabilities, being the subject of the functioning of schools and workplaces, should have the possibility of self-fulfilment and fulfilment of their vocational development. Vocational preparation of persons with disabilities requires strengthening with new elements and activities. It requires the implementation of solutions in the field of assistance and availability as well as support based on the individual needs of persons with disabilities, which will increase employment and activity in the labour market.*

Keywords: *persons with disabilities, education services, social assistance, vocational preparation, needs of persons with disabilities, career counsellor.*

JEL Classification: I29, I38, J23.

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The problems of persons with disabilities in the social and economic environment have determined the need to change and improve modern solutions to support the challenges associated with their educational, social

and professional activities. Given this, today there is an urgent need to study the main determinants that improve the system and equalize the opportunities in the social and professional life of persons with disabilities in order to

further successful employment in the labour market in Poland.

According to the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities that was adopted on 13 December 2006, persons with disabilities «include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others» [1]. Also in this Convention, the following guiding principles are defined, namely: respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons; non-discrimination; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; equality of opportunity; accessibility; equality between men and women; respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities. It should be noted that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified in Poland on 25 September 2012.

The legislative framework on the rights and social protection of persons with disabilities in Poland includes the Constitution of Poland [2], Reports on monthly and annual employment status, education and activities of persons with disabilities [3], Regulation on Assessment of incapacity for work [4] and other regulatory legal acts. Among the researchers who have studied this topic, it is worth mentioning Chorążuk J., Garbat M., Grzegorzewska I., Grzywacz R., Janocha W., Kacperczyk A., Loska M., etc.

It is an indisputable fact that the educational training and professional development of persons with disabilities is an important factor in determining employment, social and professional activities in the labour market. The flexible integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market needs to improve the relationship between professional qualifications and the expectations of employers and the labour market. Since the professional qualifications obtained through the process of vocational training should be correlated with the expectations of employers and the labour market needs [5]. This is precisely the purpose of this study.

It should be emphasized that the process of vocational training involves the cooperation of educational institutions with potential employers through information, counselling and support activities. This means that the vocational training of persons with disabilities should take into account the results of the labour market needs analysis [6]. Thus, special programs should be developed for persons with disabilities to improve their professional competencies arising from the needs of the labour market [5].

An important factor in increasing the professional motivation of persons with disabilities is the adaptation of the education and professional development system to the needs of the labour market [7]. It is also important to improve vocational training programs that support persons with disabilities in order to address their labour market challenges. That is why such vocational training should be flexible, taking into account the expectations of employers [7]. The introduction of flexible training enhances their competitiveness in the labour

market, particularly, by adapting education institutions programs and jobs to the needs of these people, reducing discrimination, architectural accessibility and social barriers, and thus increasing integration into the labour market and society in general.

The main purpose of such a flexible system is to increase the employment and professional activity of persons with disabilities by organizing vocational education in the labour market in the process of obtaining education. Decisions to improve vocational training will also have a positive impact on the individual development of persons with disabilities, and then will ensure their professional qualification. Thus, it will make it easier for persons with disabilities to be involved actively in the needs of the modern labour market. The linkage of vocational education to the labour market will become the basis for determining special requirements for the preparation of secondary school curricula, the organization of practical classes, which will lead to flexible vocational education [8].

The effectiveness of the specific tasks performing in their professional activities depends on the promotion of adaptation activities aimed at the needs and capabilities of persons with disabilities. In particular, these measures should include.

The effectiveness of specific tasks in their professional activities depends on adaptation measures aimed at the needs and capabilities of persons with disabilities. These measures should concern, in particular:

- integrating the content of theoretical and practical education with the requirements of employers in the labour market;

- creation of workplaces adapted for persons with disabilities;
- reduction of architectural and technical barriers;
- training teachers to work with persons with disabilities;
- creation of individual development plans/programs for persons with disabilities with the support of external and internal specialists and professional consultants (employed in schools and workplaces);
- promoting social and professional integration, as well as supporting employment and professional activities.

The above-mentioned actions concerning persons with disabilities form a fundamental relationship between vocational training and the opportunity to participate in social and professional life. They also enable the acquisition of skills for which there is a demand in the labour market, as well as to get a job and remain in the employment structure, while at the same time meeting individual needs [9]. The use of the above-mentioned elements is an important part in maintaining the professional activity of persons with disabilities, which requires continuous improvement for quality service delivery and reinforce new tasks. This is important because it gives persons with disabilities equal opportunities in the labour market. The effectiveness of these measures depends not only on improving the system through cooperation between local governments, employers, education institutions, parents and the local community. An equally important factor is the ability to adapt and open up the education and the employment systems to the special needs of persons with disabilities.

In 2018, a monitoring research was conducted in order to examine the main

determinants of the education system and the sphere of employment which affect the choice of the professional activity of persons with disabilities. That is why the main objective of the research was to study the problems of persons with disabilities in the system of social and professional activities, in particular, their vocational training, employment and professional work, as well as the possibilities of helping and supporting persons with disabilities throughout their lifetime. Thus, the conducted study concerned the identification of factors influencing the flexibility of integrating persons with disabilities to work and their further professional development. The tool used to achieve the goal of the study was a questionnaire. The study was carried out in 6 cities of Lubuskie Voivodeship of Poland (namely: Żary, Szprotawa, Nowa Sól, Zielona Góra, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Wschowa). Among the respondents, there were 123 teachers from 13 schools, 355 persons with disabilities employed in the labour market and 33 employers.

The first part of the study was to determine the appropriate choice of educational institution and future profession, as well as plans for further professional careers of persons with disabilities. Analysis of the study showed that the family (62%), reference groups including friends, colleagues, neighbours, aspiration groups and dissociative groups (24%) had a great influence on school and career choices (14%), as well as the role and personality status (14%). The results of the study showed that the satisfaction level of persons with disabilities from the chosen profession is rather high and is more than 70%. However, answering this question, 30 % of the respondents showed some

dissatisfaction as they experienced difficulties in mastering theoretical and general subjects for their profession. They also emphasized that the choice of education in their case was influenced by vocational training in a particular field of employment corresponding to their interests (50%), as well as the lack of other education (38%), establishing cooperation with a prospective employer (4%) and adjustment of the direction to their own psychophysical capabilities (7%).

Research findings also indicate a growing interest in the chosen profession and work. Data collection shows that the degree of identification with the profession gradually increases during the direct performance of work duties and depends on both relationships with managers (4%) and teamwork (4%), social adaptation (9%) and professional development planning strategy (4%). The respondents emphasized that identification with the profession greatly depends on the proposed professional development strategy defined in the compliance plan with the job description and responsibilities.

According to the surveyed employers, the lack of further employment, reduced activity, and the inhibition of vocational rehabilitation are mainly caused by the rejection of company standards, the lack of their profession identification, and the low interest in professional development. The results of the study show that persons with disabilities plan professional development primarily in the workplace (36%) and in a format organized by the relevant labour institutions (12%). Assessing the level of professional activity, it can be noted that employers generally appreciate the results of their work, as well

as improving and deepening of their knowledge gained through vocational training (49.1%). It has been found that crucial job satisfaction depends on the support they receive in the workplace. In fact, the support contributes to the integration and activities of persons with disabilities in the labour market and needs to be improved, especially in the areas of individual and social problems of these persons. The results of the survey also show that persons with disabilities receive support in the workplace, and usually, it involves both the organization of work, professional knowledge, and the solution of social problems and conflict situations. According to a significant part of employers (43%), persons with disabilities receive little support from institutions and organizations operating in the labour market today.

The table below provides data on institutions and organizations supporting persons with disabilities. Thus, they receive the greatest support from the branches of the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (15%), county labour offices (15%), county family support centres (17%) and local authorities (31%). According to them, local authorities support persons with disabilities by providing special consultations and financial assistance. Family Support Centres provide assistance by organizing and delivering care services, as well as providing and paying periodic benefits. Branches of the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities within the framework of the Trust Fund Office support persons with disabilities in the field of social and professional rehabilitation, thus increasing their activity in the labour market. The proposed financial support includes i. a., the removal

of architectural barriers, co-financing, training and retraining, the supply of rehabilitation equipment, orthopaedic items and aids, as well as the removal of transport and communication barriers [10]. Unfortunately, persons with disabilities make little use of the support from education institutions (12%), NGOs (10%) and Centres for social information and professional activation (5%).

The survey results obtained from representatives of organizations that most often support persons with disabilities can become a starting point for finding further solutions in the area of assistance in the local labour market. Persons with disabilities need support and assistance for social and vocational rehabilitation in various ways. They also use employment support to varying degrees. This depends on the support received from the families of persons with disabilities, as well as from organizations that provide assistance, including education, rehabilitation and vocational services [11]. In the field of employment, according to the respondents with disabilities, especially important is job search assistance (10%), career guidance and counselling (10%), access to vocational training and professional integration (12%), as well as the opportunity to study in order to improve professional skills and competencies (15%).

Interviewing persons with disabilities revealed that they expect support in employment and the labour market, including through:

- access to psychological seminars aimed at increasing professional activity (6%);
- access to training, which improves the ability to work in a team and as a team (12%);

Some results of the survey of the main Polish organizations providing assistance and support in solving problems of persons with disabilities

Name of the organization	Degree of Importance										Together	
	Definitely yes		Yes		Definitely no		No		It is difficult to say			
	Response rate	%	Response rate	%	Response rate	%	Response rate	%	Response rate	%	Response rate	%
The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych - PFRON)	4	15.4	8	14.8	1	6.7	18	11.6	1	7.7	32	12.2
Non-governmental organizations (Organizacje pozarządowe)	2	7.7	1	1.9	3	20.0	16	10.3	1	7.7	23	8.7
Provincial Labor Office (Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy)	1	3.8	1	1.9	1	6.7	17	11.0	2	15.4	22	8.4
Powiat Labor Office (Powiatowy Urząd Pracy)	4	15.4	8	14.8	2	13.3	13	8.4	2	15.4	29	11.0
Education institutions (Instytucje szkolące)	3	11.5	3	5.6	3	20.0	15	9.7	1	7.7	25	9.5
Local self-government (Samorządy terytorialne)	7	26.9	18	33.3	2	13.3	19	12.3	1	7.7	47	17.9
Powiat centres for family support (Powiatowe Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie)	3	11.5	11	20.4	1	6.7	18	11.6	3	23.1	36	13.7
Municipal social assistance centers (Miejskie Ośrodki Pomocy Społecznej)	1	3.8	3	5.6	1	6.7	19	12.3	0	0.0	24	9.1
Centre for social inclusion and laboractivation (Centra Informacji Społecznej i Aktywizacji Zawodowej)	1	3.8	1	1.9	1	6.7	20	12.9	2	15.4	25	9.5
In total	26	(100.0)	54	(100.0)	15	(100.0)	155	(100.0)	13	(100.0)	263	(100.0)

Compiled by the author, based on research results.

- availability of workshops to develop alternative forms of work (7%);
- assistance in finding employment in the international labour market (1%);
- changing social attitudes and social integration (8%);
- financial support for the purchase of rehabilitation equipment (5%);
- financial support in removing architectural barriers (5%);
- compensatory support in the form of financing material measures to increase labour market activity (5%);
- support at work (1%).

In addition, respondents emphasize the need for assistance in the form of providing funds to start up their own business (7%). It is significant to note that 27% of respondents believe that starting their own business is a chance for employment and professional activity. This is probably due to a negative experience in the labour market, in the workplace and the lack of social integration and acceptance. A large number of respondents (38%) believe that starting your own business requires tremendous support from the relevant organizations and institutions that provide assistance. In their opinion, support for starting an own business is associated with receiving a grant from the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (11%), obtaining qualification and entrepreneurial skills (27%), developing the documentation required to establish a company (11%) and gaining access to the infrastructure of the supporting institution (11%). This clearly indicates a reluctance to start one's own business. More than 43% of persons with disabilities stressed that starting their own business is difficult, needs support and does not ensure long-term

employment and activity in the labour market.

Data analysis leads to the conclusion that the most effective help for persons with disabilities in performing complex professional tasks is the assistance of external social organizations and professional consulting. According to 87% of employers, the creation of a flexible supporting system for persons with disabilities in the labour market will ensure effective satisfaction of their individual needs, as well as increase their motivation to develop professionally and find the desired job. The interviewed employers believe that the qualifications received by persons with disabilities are not fully relevant to the skills and expectations in the workplace [12]. When faced with complex tasks, they need help in their work and a person (career counsellor) to help them complete the task. It is also important that the fulfilment of their tasks and professional responsibilities requires them not only to have professional qualifications but also to improve their professional skills.

The study also found that special training seminars aimed at increasing labour market activity should occupy an important place in the system of professional assistance [10]. According to the surveyed employers, the most frequently proposed form of professional development should be training to increase motivation (46%), overcoming difficulties (31%) and perseverance in overcoming such difficulties (77%). Therefore, an important task is to strengthen the cooperation of secondary schools with the professional environment and with institutions and organizations that provide social assistance. This will help persons with disabilities to acquire professional qualifications and professional

experience according to their capabilities and needs. The issue of strengthening the cooperation of labour institutions with organizations that offer targeted programs to support the professional activities of persons with disabilities also needs to be addressed. Targeted programs not only enable persons with disabilities to acquire a new profession or better adapt to an existing one, but also increase motivation and self-esteem, diligence, openness to other people, or openness to change [12]. More than 36% of surveyed employers believe that the vocational training of persons with disabilities should focus on interpersonal communication, negotiations, motivation and overcoming difficulties. Improvement targets should include a system of incentives for employers to encourage them to join the training process.

Thus, the initiated changes and possibilities for improving the educational and professional process will contribute to an increase in professional activity and employment of persons with disabilities. In addition, the

created flexible system of education and professional support will provide professional training for persons with disabilities, as well as increase their professional activity and employment in the labour market. The analysis of the presented data shows that the proposed additional measures are characterized by homogeneity, which is understood as the ability to reveal the professional needs of persons with disabilities. They benefit greatly from the assistance of institutions supporting labour market activities. Local self-government and public authorities monitor the problems of persons with disabilities and develop assistance programs. Persons with disabilities can also benefit from provided by law support and assistance in the field of social and vocational rehabilitation activities. Therefore, persons with disabilities should be provided with a flexible system of support, as well as information on the accessibility of social assistance, professional support and individual assistance, not only for them but also for their families.

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Зентек Анна

кандидат соціальних наук (доктор філософії), доцент Педагогічно-технічного коледжу, Конін, Польща, annazietek@wp.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-0173-3594

ПІДТРИМКА ПРОФЕСІЙНОГО РОЗВИТКУ ОСІБ З ІНВАЛІДНІСТЮ НА РИНКУ ПРАЦІ У ПОЛЬЩІ

Анотація. Стаття присвячена вивченню особливостей надання освітніх, соціальних та професійних послуг особам з інвалідністю у Польщі для забезпечення рівних можливостей та подальшого успішного працевлаштування. З'ясовано, що освітня підготовка та професійний розвиток осіб з інвалідністю є важливим фактором, який впливає на зайнятість, а також соціальну та професійну діяльність на ринку праці. Особливу увагу у статті акцентовано на важливості отримання якісної професійної підготовки для осіб з інвалідністю, що повинна враховувати результати аналізу потреб ринку праці та очікування роботодавців. Окреслено основні бар'єри, що перешкоджають розвитку професійної самореалізації осіб з інвалідністю у Польщі. З метою вивчення ключових детермінантів освітньої системи та сфери зайнятості, що впливають на вибір професійної діяльності, фахову підготовку та проблеми працевлаштування осіб з інвалідністю було проведено моніторингове дослідження, у якому брали участь викладачі закладів освіти, роботодавці та особи з інвалідністю, які працевлаштовані на ринку праці Польщі. Отримані результати дослідження дали змогу запропонувати шляхи соціалізації та професійної активізації осіб з інвалідністю, соціальна політика, а також усіх зацікавлених сторін. Зроблено висновки про те, що процес професійної підготовки осіб з інвалідністю повинен бути більш гнучким щодо очікувань ринку праці. Разом з тим, важливо активно доносити інформацію про отримані результати дослідження до всіх зацікавлених сторін.

Ключові слова: особи з інвалідністю, освітні послуги, соціальна допомога, професійна освіта, потреби осіб з інвалідністю.