

Young people making transition from school to the labour market

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Abstract

The transition from school to work, especially the first job, is a difficult step for young people, even more so for young people with special needs. Data indicate that only a few become employed after finishing their education, some apply to the employment services, some are involved in vocational rehabilitation, but the majority is passive with regards to employment and remain at home. As a result, their basic skills, professional knowledge, working habits, etc. decline.

These people need support during their schooling and then as part of the transition from school to the labour market until they are settled in a job. Within the project Young People Making a Transition, co-financed by the Republic of Slovenia and the European Social Fund, a system offering help to young people with special needs to make a transition to the labour market is developing. In terms of social responsibility, this is important for young people as well as business enterprises and other organisations.

Young people who invest time, effort and means in their education add value to society by finding work in their field after completing their studies.

Business enterprises and other organisations that get involved with a young person with special needs at school through practical training can develop his/her skills according to their needs and in line with the labour market.

Each young person with special needs has abilities, competence, knowledge and creativity. No society should ignore this, making it is wise to develop a system that ensures professional, organisational and financial resources to tackle this problem. This is a component of social responsibility of society.

Keywords: youth, special needs, transition, education, labour market, social responsibility



Mladi pri prehodu iz izobraževanja na trg dela

Povzetek

Prehod mladih iz izobraževanja na trg dela je za vsakega mladega zahteven proces, še toliko bolj pa za mlade s posebnimi potrebami. Podatki kažejo, da se le redki zaposlijo potem ko končajo izobraževanje, nekateri se prijavijo na Zavod za zaposlovanje kot brezposelni, nekateri se vključijo v zaposlitveno rehabilitacijo, vendar velika večina ostane pasivna doma. Njihove veščine, znanja, delovne navade itd. pa pri tem upadajo.

Za uspešen prehod na trg dela je najbolj učinkovita pomoč že med šolanjem, ki se nadaljuje pri prehodu na trg dela, dokler osebe s posebnimi potrebami niso stabilne v zaposlitvi. V projektu Razvoj in izvajanje prehoda mladih s posebnimi potrebami na trg dela, ki ga sofinancirata Republika Slovenija in Evropski socialni sklad, razvijamo socialno odgovoren sistem glede mladih s posebnimi potrebami, kot tudi delodajalcev in ostalih pridruženih organizacij pri prehodu na trg dela.

Mladi, ki investirajo čas, trud in sredstva v izobraževanje, so dodana družbena vrednost pri zaposlitvi na trgu dela.

Delodajalci in druge organizacije, ki se angažirajo pri vključevanju mladih s posebnimi potrebami v času njihovega usposabljanja pri tem lahko razvijajo njihove veščine glede na potrebe in v skladu s trgom dela.

Mlade oseba s posebnimi potrebami imajo zmožnosti, kompetence, znanja in kreativnost. Vsaka družba bi morala razviti sistem, ki zagotavlja strokovnost, organizacijske in finančne vire, da bi reševala ta izziv. To je del družbene odgovornosti družbe.

Ključne besede: mladi, posebne potrebe, prehod, izobraževanje, trg dela, družbena odgovornost

1 Introduction

Young people in Europe have been facing increasing uncertainty in the labour market. The transition to the labour market is a very demanding question for youth, and especially for youth with disabilities. Policymakers and experts in the European Union have therefore developed programs for social inclusion, improved access, achievement, and integration of young people with disabilities into the labour market. This is a part of society's social responsibility.

Studies of youth with disabilities, dealing with the transition from school to labour stressed important conclusions regarding disclosure, services, pathways, stigma, prejudices, and costs:

- students with disability frequently do not disclose their disability during higher education due to a perceived fear that they may not be offered a place on the course of their choice. On that basis, reasonable accommodation may not be available for them. Therefore, they recommend more proactive policy; 50% of disabled students did not have any contacts with the university careers services and those who did found the advice to be limited in relation to specific issues around employability (Vickerman and Blundel, 2010, pp. 26-28);



- what school leavers do in the first year after the school was especially important, and this decides on the good or bad transition from school to work (Winn and Hay, 2009, pp. 104);
- “society tends to view disability in isolation, that is, without reference to other social issues. Stigma and prejudice are perpetuated by schools, employers, society as a whole, and even by the families of disabled people. Employers tend to assume that a person with a disability is unable to handle the competitive work environment” (Roggero et al., 2010, pp. 647).

Costs of youth unemployment are high for society. The Eurofound study concentrated on the costs for young persons who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET's). The data for Slovenia in 2008 showed that the cost per person is 9,937 euro, and with adding costs of institutions dealing with youth unemployment, it becomes 0.92 GDP (Eurofound, 2012, pp. 76). The costs for 2011 are even higher – 10,766 euro per person and 1.31 per GDP (Eurofound, 2012, pp. 79).

EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 addresses the issue of transition of youth with disabilities and promises that “EU will pay particular attention to young people with disabilities in their transition from education to employment” (European Commission, 2010 pp. 7).

In EU countries, youth unemployment dropped from a peak of 24% in 2013 to 14.6% in February 2019 (European Commission, 2019, pp. 3). Also, ILO monitors unemployment data and reports that recently it has fallen considerably since the height of the crisis in 2009. However, youth unemployment rates are still higher than pre-crisis levels in much of the world. ILO reports that in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe youth unemployment rate was 16% in 2009 and in 2018 17,8% (ILO, 2018).

The youth unemployment rate in Slovenia averaged 15.67% from 1996 until 2019, reaching an all-time high of 25.20% in April of 2013 and a record low of 6.60% in October of 2018. Youth unemployment rate in Slovenia remained unchanged at 7.80% in March from 7.80% in February of 2019 (Trading economics, 2019). Regarding youth population with disabilities, there is no data to follow their employment or unemployment levels.

However, access to the labour market remains one of the main challenges for people with disabilities today. The economic crisis made it difficult to improve the employment situation of persons with disabilities. At only 48.7%, the employment rate of people with disabilities remains much lower than the one of people without disabilities (72.5%) (European Commission, 2017, p. 4). 14% of citizens of EU-28 countries reported disability in working age. Comparing activity and unemployment levels for persons with disabilities differ from the population average. At the EU-28 level, 46% of people with disabilities were inactive versus only 26% of the population without disabilities. The employment rate of persons with basic activity difficulties reached 47%, a rate of almost 20 percentage points below that of persons without difficulties (Eurostat, 2015, pp. 123).

So, to implement a successful and effective model for employment of youth with disabilities, based on transition from education to labour market in Slovenia, European Social Fund and Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in cooperation with Slovenian Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Providers, launched a four year project which started in January 2018 and it closes in December 2021.



The project is being implemented in entire country of Slovenia and will include 2100 youth with disabilities. National coordinator is Association of providers of vocational rehabilitation in the Republic of Slovenia, project partners are providers of vocational rehabilitation.

Project's target group are young people with disabilities, aged up to 29 years, with different disabilities: intellectual disabilities, mental health issues, deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, speech or language impairments, physical disabilities, long-term illness, emotional and behavioural problems and autistic disorders. Involvement in the project is voluntary for all young people with disabilities and is free of charge. All young people with disabilities are being monitored for at least 6 to 24 months until they are successful in transition to employment, the next level of education, or applying to the Employment Service of Slovenia. This prevents a young person from losing himself or herself in the system. Even after the transition, we are monitoring them for at least another 6 months until they are stabilized in the new environment.

The main goal of the project is a comprehensive and systemic regulation of this problem. Our proposal is to include services, verified during this project, to other services of vocational rehabilitation.

2 Findings

State of the art in Slovenia reveals that many institutions take care of youth with disabilities, but their activities so far were not connected: Employment Service of Slovenia, school counsellors, Career centres at Universities, Association of students with disabilities, The National Education Institute, providers of employment rehabilitation, and University Rehabilitation Institute.

When education institutions close their door, it is hard to find appropriate information and the best possible outcome in the unfamiliar area covered by many institutions. That is especially true in times of rapid legislation, crisis, and institutional changes— in recent years, the changes in the labour market have been substantial in Slovenia; many employers have shut down their facilities, and legislation changes have been comprehensive. The knowledge about the possible engagement is not so easy to be assured for youth with disabilities and their parents since usually professional workers know only the area they cover in their institution and rarely what other institutions can do.

In 2014 action research study of the transition from school to the labour market of youth with disabilities was prepared within EU European Social Fund project “Transition”, revealed positive impact from persons with disabilities, their parents, and school counsellors. From the qualitative analysis, it was evident that young people with disabilities gained numerous benefits from the transition activities (Tabaj, Dolinšek, and Bitenc, 2014, pp. 18):

- useful information that helped them in planning their life, search, and assistance in finding employment opportunities;
- feelings of not being alone, having much-needed support and knowing that whenever help is needed, they have someone they can turn to for advice and help;
- a better insight into their abilities, improved self-esteem, new knowledge about the labour market and the sources of assistance that is available; timely detection of problems and dealing with them appropriately;
- moral support, encouragement, and confirmation that the young person with disability is on track to reach his or her goal;



- assistance in getting a suitable employer when a young person seeks professional school practice or internship,
- help in learning for school exams and getting proper meta-skills as well as social skills;
- becoming familiar with the options of vocational rehabilitation at the Employment Service of Slovenia;
- assistance in preparing for a job interview and knowledge on how to write a good CV and job application;
- new knowledge about employment rights and duties;
- assistance in finding a suitable employer for the employment of a young person with disability and establishing contact with him or her.

The positive influence of the project on young people with disabilities was certainly not overlooked by their parents as well as their school counsellors, who were also included in the activities. Parents observed positive impact regarding personality, motivation, and aims. School counsellors reported the impact of improved motivation, challenging stigma and prejudices and also the interest of other schoolmates without disabilities for transition activities, which they saw beneficial for all youth, not just for youth with disabilities (Tabaj, Dolinšek, and Bitenc, 2014, pp. 18-20).

After concluding project activities, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities expressed interest in piloting the national project. Due to the fact that no relevant information about how many youths with disabilities would need a transition from school to work, thematic analysis was prepared in 2016, assessing how many youths with disabilities would need transition services. Besides that, systemic issues were analysed and discovered, that new classification of special needs decisions from Placement of Children with Special Needs Act in 2015 (Uradni list RS, 2017) was no longer in line with Instructions for completing the insurance application form for the disabled (Uradni list RS, 2012), on the basis of Act on training and employment of persons with disabilities (Uradni list RS, 2014), which influences the pathway to employment.

In the Table 1 data on decisions from Placement of Children with Special Needs Act, collected at National Education Institute Slovenia, is presented, covering years 2013 to 2015 through different types of disability and impairments. Yearly, numbers of decisions, vary from 5,400 to 5,800.

Table 1: Data on decisions from Placement of Children with Special Needs Act 2013-15

	2013	2014	2015
SLOVENIA			
Children with intellectual disabilities			
- mild intellectual disability	503	534	492
- moderate intellectual disability	141	171	164
- severe intellectual disability	39	46	28
- profound intellectual disability	40	57	40
Partially sighted			



- severe	33	38	32
- profound	13	17	7
Blind			
- blind with residue of eyesight	7	11	4
- blind with minimum residue of eyesight	13	10	14
- blindness	8	10	6
Children with eyesight impairments	0	8	13
Children with hearing loss			
- mild hearing loss	48	48	41
- moderate hearing loss	57	52	53
- severe hearing loss	57	30	27
Children with deafness			
- profound hearing loss	22	17	19
- complete hearing loss	32	23	22
Children with speech impairment			
- mild	906	784	719
- moderate	548	577	652
- severe	113	118	120
- profound	29	30	18
Physically disabled children			
- mild	229	238	255
- moderate	75	81	100
- severe	120	119	84
- profound	95	113	66
Chronically ill children	2,100	1,849	1,894
Children with emotional and behavioural deficits/disorders	187	160	115
- emotional	0	66	153
- behavioural – mild deficits	0	13	52
- behavioural – severe deficits	0	1	9



Autistic spectrum disorders	0	133	135
- mild deficits in social communication and interactions	0	50	97
- moderate deficits in social communication and interactions	0	71	115
- severe deficits in social communication and interactions	0	20	26
- mild deficits in behaviour, interests and activity	0	55	90
- moderate deficits in behaviour, interests and activity	0	53	115
- severe deficits in behaviour, interests and activity	0	22	29
TOTAL	5,415	5,625	5,806

Source: Tabaj, Dolinšek, and Destovnik, 2016, pp. 60-61.

In Table 2, only decisions for receiving the status of the person with disability under Instructions for completing the insurance application form for the disabled, based on the Act on training and employment of persons with disabilities are presented for 2013 to 2015. According to the extraction, in Slovenia:

- in 2013 there are 1,016 youth with disabilities, who have been delivered special needs decision and at the same time also the status of the person with disability would be recognised if a person was employed;
- for 2014, there are 1,089 youths with disabilities and in 2015 971 persons.

The average number of persons from the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act who meet the criteria for persons with disabilities under instructions from the Act on employment and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, from 2013-2015 is 1,025. Concerning the fact, that categories of partially sighted children, children with eyesight impairments, hard of hearing and children with autism are not automatically included in those numbers, we can conclude, that these numbers are even higher as an only direct translation of categories. We think that also in those categories are persons with disabilities who should be entitled to transition processes for persons with disabilities from education to labour market.

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- profound	95	113	66
TOTAL	1.016	1.089	971

Source: Tabaj, Dolinšek, and Destovnik 2016, pp. 61-62

Conclusion

Researches revealed lack of services and fear to be discriminated with potential risk of not offering reasonable accommodation, importance of activities in the first year after concluding education, stigma and prejudice from schools, employers, society as a whole and even from families of young persons with disabilities, with regard of high costs of youth unemployment. On the contrary to that, numerous benefits and positive influences were discovered in Slovenian research from transition projects so far.

Access to labour market is today one of the key topics for persons with disabilities, where youth with special needs/disability are disadvantaged group on the labour market. As we discovered in Slovenia, this group represents more than 1,000 persons per year. To address this issue, systematic and comprehensive model for transition from education to labour market from 2018 – 2021 works on preventing long term unemployment of youth. This is a part of social responsibility of society.

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