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Employment Rehabilitation Developments, Innovative Solutions and Researches in Slovenia for Persons with Disabilities

Aleksandra Tabaj⁴

Abstract

The purpose of an article is to present innovative solutions in the field of employment rehabilitation in Slovenia in last five years. The basis act for this field is Slovenian Act on Employment and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (2004). All solutions described are nationally defined on the level of legislation, this is of highest importance.

Several innovative solutions occurred in Slovenia in the last five years:

- *Assessment of disability, based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, and its outcomes in ordinary employment, sheltered employment, supported employment and social inclusion programmes*
- *Social inclusion programmes for persons with disability who are not able to work*
- *Employment centres-sheltered employment, as new form of employment, for severely disabled persons*
- *The beginning of supported employment*
- *New model of employment rehabilitation network, combining employment rehabilitation providers and services, with standards of services*
- *Main evaluations of the system, carried through Development centre of employment rehabilitation, are presented in the text.*

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Assessment of Disability

Slovenian Act on Employment and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (Act, 2007) and its Rules on Criteria and Method for Acquiring Status of Person with Disability (Rules, 2005) provided several novelties in employment rehabilitation. Definition of disabled person and disability is based on International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, concerning the connection of disability and difficulties/barriers on the area of employment and linked with the right of employment rehabilitation. Five level degree of assessing disability was prepared.

Table 1: Assessment of disability

-	Level 0: No disability (0-4%), nor the right of employment rehabilitation services
-	Level 1: Mild disability (5-25%), no right of employment rehabilitation services
-	Level 2: Moderate disability (25-49%)→ status of person with disability→right to employment rehabilitation services
-	Level 3: Severe disability (50-95%)→ status of person with disability→ right to employment rehabilitation services
-	Level 4: Complete disability (96-100%)→ status of person with disability, but no right of employment rehabilitation services

Source: Rules (2005)

In the assessment, the level of functioning, and the level of barriers/difficulties and needs is assessed with connection of employment and health status and environment factors influencing on situation of a person. Orientation description of levels is attached to the rules.

Criteria for the right of person to get employment rehabilitation services are also described, and based on five level degrees, from 0 to 4. Criteria are:

- Level of motivation
- Level of knowledge
- Work experience
- Acquired competences

- Limitations of workability
- Psychosocial needs in accepting disability
- Employment profile needs
- Level of social skills
- Social support network
- Level of searching for work
- Level of barriers –movement, communication
- Need for analyzing workplace
- Need for adaptation of workplace
- Level of independence in training and education
- Level of independence after being employed

Criteria have to result in the employment rehabilitation services. Rehabilitation committees of Employment Service of Slovenia decide on status of disabled persons and on the right to employment rehabilitation services.

Table 2: Assessments of Status of Person with Disability with Decisions on Status and Right to Employment Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation committees	Status of PwD	Status of PwD with the right of VR	Right to VR
2006	110	228	160
2007	120	305	181
2008	105	367	181
2009	164	364	192
Total	499	1.264	714

Source: Vidmar, J. et al: Evaluation of employment rehabilitation for 2009 (2010)

Approximately, about 500 persons were appointed yearly from 2006-2009 to employment rehabilitation services.

Sheltered employment: Employment centres

Decision for sheltered employment is taken at the end of rehabilitation and for those persons who are assessed to be productive on the level 30-70%, so the loss of productivity is from 70-30% (Rules, 2005).

Data for the period 2006-2009 shows that 373 persons with disability, assessed having employment possibility in sheltered employment; and

63% of them are employed there (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Employment Centres in 2009 (2010)).

Employment centres are business subjects for employing persons with disabilities with decisions for sheltered employment. Minimum possible number of that kind of business is to employ five persons. People without disability can only be employed as supportive staff and management.

In Slovenia, 24 employment centers operated in December 2009, (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Employment Centres in 2009 (2010)).

What was exposed in evaluations of sheltered employment (employment centres):

- There were no financial resources for starting employment centre.
- All employed persons are persons with disability (except management and supported-professional staff).
- Management complained, that local community wasn't interested in their work.

Evaluation interviews in the period 2006-2010 with persons with disability in employment centres showed that:

- 90% are satisfied with their work and support they get
- 12% of them think they can do more, but they don't look for new job, because they are satisfied
- They are very happy, if they have celebrations, or other events, so that their routine is broken
- They are satisfied with mentors and management
- In 2009, minimum wage was increasing on the level of Slovenia, so they are very pleased with the salary
- They think they do not need further rehabilitation
- They feel useful and important

Table 3: Employment centres (EC), in the units of Employment Service of Slovenia



Source: (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Employment Centres in 2009 (2010).

Dynamics of establishing employment centres was not balanced over Slovenia. It was very developed in Maribor region, but regions Trbovlje and Nova Gorica didn't establish any employment centre. No. of persons with disability, with decisions of sheltered employment were there very low: only four persons in Nova Gorica and in Trbovlje one person.

Founders of employment centres were predominantly enterprises for PwD, associations or other persons. They are mainly the part of wider network on disability area, and they combine employment rehabilitation with other programmes for persons with disabilities. Their point of view is, that local community didn't recognise their role and it didn't support them at the beginning and later. They pointed out the view that they need financial resources for investments and starting new programmes.

They will need also promotion activities. Their programme of work is mainly appropriate for all disabilities.

Persons with disability employed received minimum wage, and additionally they can get benefits for good work.

Employment centres are very much dependent on quota system – they cooperate with businesses, which do not employ enough persons with disability, as an obligation in Slovenian quota system.

So far, they did all survive economic crisis and they have plans for widening their programme. In 2012 it is expected more challenging economic situation, not only due to economic crisis, but also connected with changes in legislation concerning state aid regulations.

Table 4 : Education of employed persons in employment centres

		Degree of education								total
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	
31.12.2008	PwD	58	36	44	32	23	0	1	0	194
	Staff				1	16	8	19	2	46
31.12.2009	PwD	62	47	64	29	28	1	1		233
	Staff		1		6	17	7	27	2	59

Source: (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Employment Centres in 2009 (2010)).

In 2009, there were 233 persons with disability employed in sheltered economy. Their employees had predominantly lower degrees of education.

Table 5: Age structure in Employment Centres

	till 18	18–25	25–30	30–40	40–50	50–60	over 60	Total
31.12.2008	0	11	40	77	51	15	0	194
31.12.2009	0	12	56	88	56	21	0	233

Source: (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Employment Centres in 2009 (2010).

Persons with disabilities of all ages are employed in employment centers. Predominantly are employed persons between the age from 30-50 years (61,8%), in the age up to 30 years, 29.2% and over 50 years, 9%.

Employment centers are financed through the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (33,35% of all resources), from Foundation for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities (12,32%), from subvention for wages (33,36%) and Pension and Disability Insurance Institute (20,72%).

On the level of active resources they earned 62,82% of resources, almost half in quota system contracts (36,40% of active resources).

In 2009, they employed 22,63% PwD more than last year (they employed 43 PwD). Also their incomes were bigger than last year for 23% (4,3 mio euro). Average income per person with disability is 18.406 euro, average cost is 17.873 euro.

Employment centres are non-profit organizations. Their resources could only be spent for costs and improvement of their work.

Programmes of social inclusion

Programmes of social inclusion are intended for persons who due to their disability are not able to work and their intention is to support their working ability. They have to achieve decision from Employment Service of Slovenia. Their workability is assessed lower than 33% comparing persons without disability, disability assessed as complete (96-100%), in accordance with the Act on Employment and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (Act, 2007).

The first public tender for social inclusion programmes was published in 2006, and it covered all Slovenia, for the period 2006-2010. 21 providers of programme were chosen. Providers at the beginning of the programme had to prepare an agreement for inclusion with person with disability. Programmes are running all year, at least 6 hours per day. Minimum obligation is also at least 6 users and up to 30 users. First programmes started in July 2006. At the end of 2006, we had 11 providers, with 121 users. At the end of 2009, we had 15 providers and 272 users. Persons with decisions reached the number 531. Evaluation noticed big dynamics when users went from one provider to another,

and some of them stopped going to the programme (65 persons), 19% of dropouts were found out (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Social Inclusion Programmes in 2008 (2009)).

Table 6: Network of social inclusion programmes, 2009

Source: Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Social Inclusion Programmes in 2008 (2009)

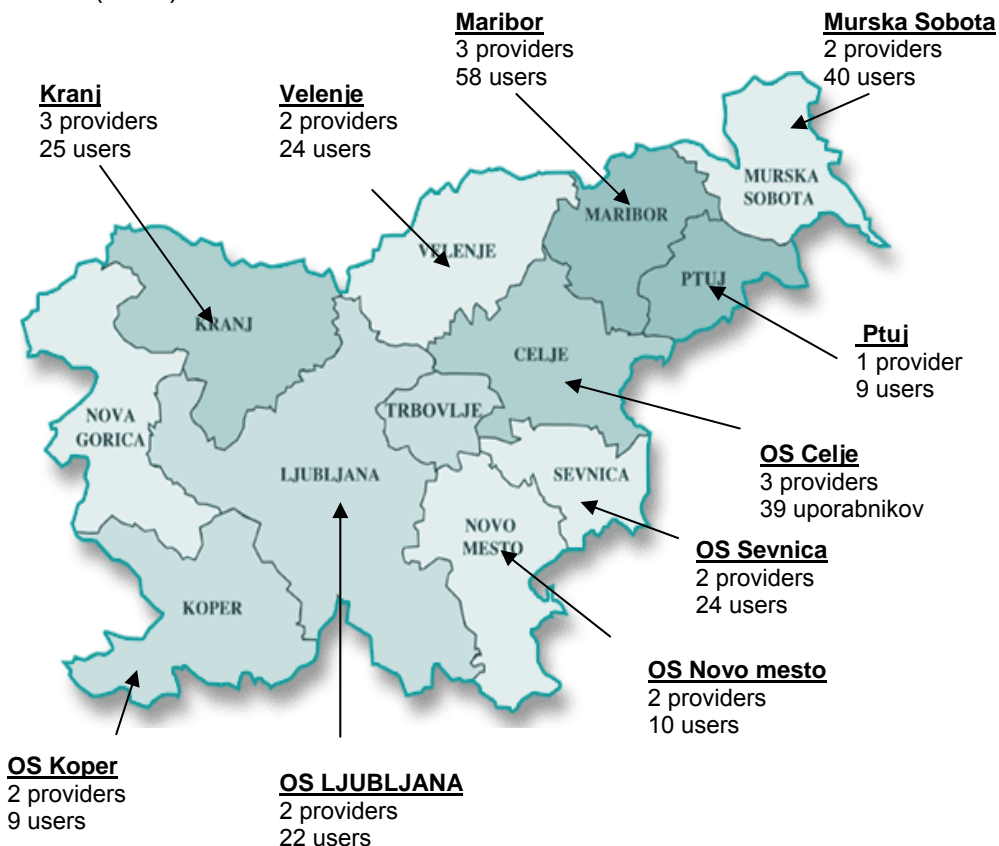


Table 7: Resources from the state budget

	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total 2006 to 2009
Costs of programme	147.133€ (80%)	589.134€ (82%)	750.120€ (82%)	1.107.236€ (82,4%)	2.593.623€ (82%)
Travel costs	36.321€ (20%)	132.079€ (18%)	165.545€ (18%)	236.533€ (17,6%)	570.478€ (18%)
Total	183.454€ (100%)	721.213€ (100%)	915.665€ (100%)	1.343.769€ (100%)	3.164.101€ (100%)

Source: Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Social Inclusion Programmes in 2008 (2009)

When programmes started, it was needed to agree with Centres of social work, the right of all users for social aid, not to cut off their social benefits. The benefit for social inclusion is cca 69 euro per month, a person also gets lunch and transfer costs reimbursed. The benefit for social inclusion, given by the provider increased, for almost 50% in average, through the years (from 2006 - to 2010). Additional right is also absence for 20 days and other absence due to the health reasons etc. In case of their changed workability status, person's workability can be reassessed.

Table 8: Comparison: decisions for social inclusion with inclusions

Year	No. of decisions	No. of included in programme	Percentage of included
2006	165	121	73 %
2007	85	39	46 %
2008	118	69	58 %
2009	163	59	36%
Total	531	277	51 %

In general, less than 10% of persons with disability, coming to employment rehabilitation programme, got the decision of non able to work. Half of all persons with decisions are included in the programmes. Reasons for dropouts are mainly alternative programme choices.

Economic crisis influenced on programmes. Providers decreased their costs for professional workers, but costs for users were increased. In 2009, it was noticed on the level of regions that programmes cover better the needs of population. What is also important, is the fact, that providers of social inclusion programmes as added value take care of additional activities – social skills, sport activities, creative workshops etc. Contacts with local community were strengthened. Majority of providers give higher benefits as demanded from rules.

The beginning of supported employment in Slovenia

When comparing possibilities for persons with disabilities, the weakest improvement was found out on the supported employment possibility. From 2004, it is possible to get support services for persons with disabilities as supported employment, in accordance with Slovenian act (Act, 2007). Necessary condition is a decision of Employment Service in Slovenia. On the basis of Employment and Rehabilitation of persons with disabilities Act, Slovenian Foundation for promoting employment of person with disabilities, has an obligation for paying supported employment, if person is employed at least for the period of 2 years, and employer fulfils the quota obligation. Support services can be given for max 30 hours per month. So far, such support from the foundation was given only in one case. Other possibility is to get supported employment services from network of providers of employment rehabilitation. In reality, numbers of supported services are very low, if compared with sheltered workshops/employment centres and social inclusion programmes. Reasons are several – there were no pilot projects of supported employment, no job-coaches as profession were raised, long procedures on the foundation were found out, etc.

Support could include expert and technical support, awareness raising activities/information activities, counselling, training, personal assistance, follow-up support at workplace and assessment to person with disability or to employer. Wage subsidy is also possible. Person has to be trained, motivated and having individual support plan. Employer has to be cooperative. These are necessary conditions from basic act on Employment and Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities.

Table 9: Supported services for persons with disability

Supported services For period 3-6/2010	No. of persons	No. of hours	Average of hours per person per month
March 2010	11	43	3,9
April 2010	12	25	2,0
Maj 2010	13	20	1,5
June 2010	9	51	5,6
Average per month	11,25	37,75	3,3

Source: Kovač et al., 2010)

Follow up for supported employment services was taken in 2010, from March 2010 to June 2010, on the level of network of providers of employment rehabilitation. The number of persons in this form of support found out was low, yet we know, that till the end of July, 126 persons with disability had decision of supported employment. From all persons with disabilities, who received support, only 9-13 got it, this represents only 7% of eligible persons. More coordinated action of Employment Service of Slovenia and providers of services will be necessary in the future for better results, if we compare figures with sheltered employment/employment centres and social inclusion programmes.

New model of employment rehabilitation network, combining employment rehabilitation providers and services, with standards of services

Employment rehabilitation is a public service and it covers in a network 14 providers - University rehabilitation institute as a public entity and 13 private entities. Teams of experts have to be chosen on the basis of necessary conditions (university degree, at least 2 years of work experience in disability). Each team has five members, one of them is medical doctor, others are occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers etc. Standardisation of services was made in 2006. Beside that, other necessary conditions like accessibility, respect of needs, ethical codes, are also respected. Employment rehabilitation follows the object to gain, retain, develop or change work for persons with disabilities on the labour market. Employment rehabilitation is provided through different services, which include:

- Motivating activities
- Employment assessment
- Psychosocial rehabilitation
- Vocational guidance
- Social skills development
- Job finding
- Work place analysis and accommodation
- Training
- Counselling in training and education
- Follow up professional support and supported employment

The network of providers covers all Slovenia territory and was settled as 17 teams, on the level of units of Employment Service of Slovenia, for the 4 year period (2006-2009 and 2010-2013).

System of employment rehabilitation is based on rights oriented and active approach, with person centred planning (individual rehabilitation plan) and working on constant improvement. Every provider also has to create and maintain a network with employers, and also annually report about this cooperation. What is of main importance is that outcomes of employment rehabilitation can be mainstreaming employment, supported employment, sheltered employment or social inclusion, with rules and criteria settled.

Population of persons with disabilities entering in employment rehabilitation, increased. In 2006, there were 885 persons included, in 2007, 1411 persons and in 2008, 1532 persons. Regarding their age structure, we discovered, that over 40% of the population were over 40 years old, with trends of aging in the structure. Education picture shows low education level. Also the level of work experience of persons with disabilities entering employment rehabilitation, in this three years period shows low results from their past work history. What is one of our biggest concerns is the period of unemployment – between 30-42% of population is unemployed more than 5 years. Unemployed less than a year, was only 7-11% of population. Analyse of criteria for rehabilitation discovered, that motivation is an important barrier, and the situation is getting worse year by year. Also we noticed a gap in knowledge and work experience, which they should result in training programmes. Assessment of workability also shows low levels. The need for support is increasing, and it should result in supported employment and sheltered employment. Vocational guidance should also be strengthened, and transition programmes from education to employment should be developed. Analyse of needs also shows increasingly psychosocial needs – coming from mental health problems and personal problems. Level of independence is also low. Outcomes analysis showed that population included in employment rehabilitation in 2007 resulted in employment in two years period in 51% of all cases. But there are big differences between regions. (Vidmar et al., Evaluation of Employment Rehabilitation Services and its Outcomes in 2008 (2009).

Conclusion

Basic questions, which we will have to answer in the future in Slovenia, regarding employment rehabilitation are concentrated on:

- Administration and long-term procedures
- Empty time between procedures
- Connection with other measures – Active labour market programmes, Centres for social work, tenders, – do we actually have holistic model and inter-institutional connection

- Disability: from disability into ability
- Multidisciplinary team approach
- Do we see right to rehabilitation before right of social transfer
- Are there separations between medical/employment rehabilitation/employment
- Are employers and local community included
- Is education of professional workers and committees guaranteed
- Do we have cost benefit studies
- Do we have analysis of rehabilitation, case studies, evaluations, and other development tasks – evaluations
- Working places: are they organized safe, efficient and so, that negative influences are minimized for the worker with disability
- Do we have measures for retaining workplaces for workers with disability, who are in dismissal procedure
- Do we respect reasonable accommodation as a right of person with disability
- Do we have benefit traps
- Considerable support should be put on supported employment services

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