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Determinants of Unemployment among Persons with Disabilities in Poland

Abstract: The aim of this article is to identify factors limiting the chances of people with disabilities to find a job in the labor market in Poland in the years 2013–2017. Statistical and empirical material in Poland provided by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) as part of the Labor Force Survey (LFS), reports of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy was used to analyze occupational activity. In spite of the fact that work is an important part of every person's life — disabled people in Poland exhibit low occupational activity. From a social point of view, work creates opportunities for the development of human personality, enables and develops their contact with non-disabled people and creates a chance for realizing common ideas. From an economic point of view, a wage getting from work becomes a source of livelihood and a means of satisfying basic needs. What is more a working disabled person pays taxes and contributes to the increase in the local budget.

Key words: disability, occupational development, unemployed, economically inactive

JEL: J14, J64, J71

Introduction

Unemployment affects everyone regardless of whether they are disabled or not. From a theoretical point of view, it is a situation where a person is earnestly looking for a job, but cannot find a job under the circumstances. There are those who believe that there is no problem at all and those who claim that people with disabilities, even though they are listed in the District Labor Offices, actually rarely try to find a job and are not significant beneficiaries of the support provided by the District Labor Offices [Magnuszewska-Otulak 2011, pp. 28–39]. First, we assume that people with disabilities, in spite of great difficulties, often of biological and physical nature, earnestly look for a job. They do not want to remain economically inactive, and the fact that they are entitled to social security benefits does not force them to this activity. The unemployed disabled can choose at least one of the two paths. Either they surrender and fail to show any activity, or the other path, when, despite the many, often growing difficulties, they will stubbornly seek work.

In Poland, according to the results of the quarterly Labor Force Survey (LFS) conducted by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) in year 2017 the number of disabled people in the working age was almost 1.7 million, which accounts for 7.9% of population of this age. If we only include data on economic activity of people with disabilities in Poland in 2017 we note that the activity rate was 28.9% (in 2015 — 25.9%, 2013 — 27.3%)¹; employment rate was 26.3% (in 2015 — 22.5%, in 2013 — 22.4%)², while the unemployment rate was 9.3%³ (2015 — 13.0%, 2013 — 17.9%)⁴. By comparison, the above-mentioned coefficients for the population of all persons in Poland (i.e., both disabled and non-disabled people) were: 75.9%; 72.1% and 5.0% respectively. The economic activity rate and employment rate of people with disabilities in 2017 were almost three times lower than those for the total working-age population, while the unemployment rate was almost half higher than that of the non-disabled people. Undoubtedly, the economic activity of people with disabilities differs significantly from the economic activity of the general population in Poland, including the non-disabled people [Kobus-Ostrowska 2011, pp. 235–253]. If, among the unemployed who are disabled and job seekers, (who do not have the status of an unemployed person, even if they are listed in the register

1 According to the LFS, economic activity rate means the share of the economically active population in the total number of population aged 15 years and more.

2 According to the LFS, employment rate means the share of the employed in the total working-age population.

3 According to the LFS, the unemployment rate is the percentage of the unemployed in the economically active population, if they meet certain conditions. See more: *Quarterly information on economic activity of the population [Quarterly information on the labor market]* www.stat.gov.pl, access: June 25, 2018.

4 Biuro Pełnomocnika Rządu ds. Osób Niepełnosprawnych, [online], www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl, access: June 21, 2018.

and have an adjudicated level of disability), we take into account all those who remain in the registers of district labor offices for more than 2 years, it turns out then that the disabled account for 60% of the long-term unemployed. This confirms the hypothesis that despite the (extremely difficult and costly) actions of many institutions, it is still very difficult for the disabled persons to find employment not only in the open, but also in the protected labor market.

The status of an unemployed disabled person and of a job seeker

In Poland a person with a disability can acquire the status of an unemployed person or a job seeker. The following documents should be taken into account to determine the disability status of the unemployed disabled person: the Act on Occupational and Social Rehabilitation of the Disabled [Act of 27 August 1997] and the Act on Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions [Act of 20 April 2004]. In the first case, in accordance with applicable law, the disabled person acquires the status of the unemployed person if he or she fulfills the following conditions for example [pursuant to Art. 33 sec. 5 of the Act of 20 April 2004]:

- is not employed, i.e., does not work under employment relationship;
- does not provide services on the basis of an agency contract, mandatory contract (of specific services), or contract of specific work;
- is capable and ready to take up employment or other paid work in full- or part-time employment if the state of health permits employment;
- is 18 years old, does not study in full time school;
- has not acquired the entitlement to an old age pension, disability pension due to incapacity for work, a social pension or a rehabilitation benefit.

A person with a disability may also be registered as a job seeker and not as an unemployed person if is not liable to disability pension insurance, social pension or rehabilitation benefit (*in the amount of more than 50% of minimum remuneration*). A precondition for the disabled person applying for registration as an unemployed person or a job seeker is to submit documents confirming the degree of disability [Regulation of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of 12 November 2012, § 5, item 2]⁵.

⁵ Regulation came into force on December 11, 2012 with the exception of § 2, item 1, pt. 2 and item 2, pt. 2, § 3, § 5 items 9–11, § 8, item 1 pt. 2, items 3, 8 and item 9, pt. 2, § 9 pt. 4 and § 10 item 1, pt. 2, which entered into force 6 months after the date of publication, i.e., on May 22, 2014.

Analysis of the population of the unemployed and job seekers

In order to comprehensively analyze this issue, the first part includes data on people without work in Poland in the years 2013–2017, broken down into non-disabled and disabled persons. Finally, the population of unemployed persons with disabilities was characterized in terms of gender, age, education, job search methods and time spent without work taking into account data for the years 2013–2017. The absolute values of the registered unemployment in Poland in the years 2013–2017 are presented in Table 1.

When analyzing the information contained in Table 1 it is worth pointing out that in the years 2013–2014, in each of the analyzed groups, the number of the unemployed steadily increased. After the year 2014 number of the unemployed as disabled and non-disabled people systematically decreased (Table 1). Therefore, how do people with disabilities seek work?

Analysis of data presented in Table 2 leads to the following conclusions. The vast majority of people with disabilities — over 70% of both women and men are looking for work through contacts with friends — regardless of the year under study. Women more often use the help of friends and relatives than men, and taking into account the place of residence, people living in rural areas more often use this kind of help than those living in urban areas. Only half of the LFS respondents are determined to seek employment through a district employment office. However, fewer and fewer people with disabilities choose to seek work through direct contact with the employer.

In this place it is worthwhile to examine the structure of total unemployed and the unemployed disabled by the time of staying without work in Poland.

During the period under review, the share of the unemployed disabled people remaining unemployed for more than 24 months increased systematically. In 2017 almost every fourth person with disabilities (excluding job seekers), was unemployed for more than 2 years and every second disabled person sought work for more than 12 months. For comparison in year 2013, it was less than 40% of unemployed people with disabilities.

Another criterion taken into account in the analysis is education. The most numerous group of unemployed in Poland in the years 2013–2017, both in relation to the total unemployed and the unemployed with disabilities, were the persons with basic vocational and lower education — 66%, although unfortunately, in Poland, also every fourth disabled person with post-secondary and vocational secondary education remained unemployed.

Table 1. Total unemployed and unemployed disabled registered in the District Labor Offices of Poland
(as at 31 December 2013–2017)

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	T	T/D	T	T/D	T	T/D	T	T/D	T	T/D
Total	2 157 883	116 354	1 825 180	108 902	1 563 339	95 247	1 335 155	82 211	1 081 745	66 827
Females	1 099 456	56 085	939 648	51 904	816 138	45 612	712 227	38 904	595 529	30 918
Males	1 058 427	60 269	885 532	56 998	747 201	49 635	622 928	43 307	486 216	35 909

* T — total unemployed

* T/D — total disabled unemployed

Source: Author's own compilation based on the MPIPS-01 report, annual GUS data, and LFS for the years 2010–2016 www.niepelinosprawni.gov.pl (access: July 2, 2018).

Table 2. Number of unemployed people with disabilities by selected methods of job search in selected years 2010 and 2016

Specification	2010					2016				
	Total	M	F	Urban areas	Rural areas	Total	M	F	Urban areas	Rural areas
	<i>in thousands of people</i>									
Total	92	52	40	65	27	48	24	25	36	13
Seeking employment through the district labor office	57	31	26	39	18	34	16	18	24	10
Announcements	34	19	15	26	8	14	7	6	12	–
Direct contact with the workplace	52	30	22	37	15	18	9	9	14	–
Relatives, friends	77	43	34	53	24	34	16	18	26	8
<i>Percentage</i>										
Seeking employment through the district labor office	62.0	59.6	65.0	60.0	66.7	70.8	66	72	66.7	76.9
Announcements	37.0	36.5	37.5	40.0	29.6	29.2	29.2	24	33.3	7.7
Direct contact with the workplace	56.5	57.7	55.0	56.9	55.6	37.5	37.5	36	38.9	30.8
Relatives, friends	83.7	82.7	85.0	81.5	88.9	70.8	72.0	72	72.2	61.5

* The sum of search methods may be higher than the total number of respondents, since the respondents could indicate any number of responses.

F — Females, M — Males

Source: Annual data of GUS, LFS www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl (access January 29, 2017).

Table 3. Structure of the total unemployed and the unemployed disabled by time of staying without work in Portugal in the years 2013–2017 (in %)

Specification	Unemployed non-disabled				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Up to 1 month	8.9	9.6	10.3	10.1	10.3
1–3	17.4	18.3	19.4	19.1	19.9
3–6	16.8	14.8	15.2	14.6	14.8
6–12	18.9	15.9	15.8	15.9	14.7
12–24	18.4	17.9	15.3	16.1	15.4
Over 24 months	19.6	23.5	23.9	24.1	24.7

	Unemployed disabled				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Up to 1 month	7.4	7.6	7.9	7.4	7.7
1–3	15.1	15.6	15.5	15.5	16.4
3–6	15.5	13.6	13.2	13.4	13.4
6–12	18.2	16.9	16.8	16.0	15.8
12–24	18.9	18.5	17.3	17.3	17.6
Over 24 months	25.0	27.7	29.3	30.4	30.1

Source: as in Table 1.

Table 4. Structure of the non-disabled unemployed and the disabled unemployed by the level of education in Poland in 2013–2017 (in %)

Poland	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
		Non-disabled unemployed			
Tertiary	12.3	12.8	13.2	13.7	14.3
Post-secondary and vocational secondary	22.2	22.1	21.9	21.8	21.8
General secondary	10.8	10.7	10.7	10.7	11.0
Basic vocational	27.7	27.2	26.7	26.1	25.5
Lower secondary and lower	27.0	27.2	27.4	27.6	27.3
	Disabled unemployed				
Tertiary	5.8	6.0	6.3	6.6	6.9
Post-secondary and vocational secondary	19.8	19.7	19.9	19.9	19.5
General secondary	7.8	7.6	7.8	7.6	7.8
Basic vocational	34.3	34.3	34.0	33.9	33.9
Lower secondary and lower	32.3	32.4	32.0	32.1	31.9

Source: As in Table 1.

When analyzing the structure of the unemployed from the point of view of education, it can be shown that the unemployed people with disabilities are worse educated than the non-disabled unemployed persons. Thus, the largest group of unemployed people with disabilities — above 66%, were those who declared basic vocational education and lower. Similarly, it was 52.87% among the non-disabled unemployed persons. There are, however, some signs of improvement. In the years 2013–2017 the

number of disabled people having at least general secondary education, was steadily increasing. If we take into account the share of people with disabilities in the unemployed, we will notice that the share of the disabled unemployed with lower secondary education among the non-disabled unemployed has declined. Additionally, more and more people declare general secondary and tertiary education.

Social dimension of disability

At the end of 2017, people with disabilities accounted for 5.1% of the total number of people registered as unemployed in the District Employment Offices in the country. Although this percentage seems to be small, it means that every tenth unemployed person was disabled and remained unemployed for more than 12 months. The disabled are a disadvantaged group on the labor market, and remaining unemployed for a long time only deepens the problem of returning back to work [Erenc 2008, pp. 93–139]. Vulnerability often turns into helplessness, which is the beginning of economical inactivity among these people [Barabas 2015, pp. 34–53]. It is extremely disturbing that a significant number of people with disabilities resign from their job search or do not declare their willingness to take up employment, thus losing their status as unemployed. A person with a disability cannot be viewed only through the applicable laws, as this interpretation is certainly very limited, and in many cases even unfair. Especially support important for the activities they undertake by the institutions set up for this purpose, friends and relatives [Banach 2014, pp. 35–51]. Important is their acceptance in the environment in which they live and look for work [Buliński 2009, pp. 17–21]. What is more growing globalization and the dynamics of change, also today make people with certain health dysfunctions more difficult to adjust to ever-changing reality. In the result they have real problems in adapting to new conditions without adequate help from others [Renwick, Brown, Nagler (red.) 1996, pp. 112–143]. Unfortunately, in many cases, the help is either of an ad hoc nature or there is no help at all, and the disabled themselves are still perceived as individuals with limited capacity for self-direction and self-fulfillment, thus requiring mainly help and protectionist care [Neesham, Tache 2010, pp. 23–74].

It turns out that the longer persons with disabilities are seeking work to no avail, the greater is their unwillingness to take up any activity. If, in addition the disabled person's family has been for many years convinced that this condition reflects limited abilities of the disabled person, then over time these negative experiences may lower their self-esteem [Żuraw 2008, pp. 68–85; Regionalne obserwatorium rynku pracy w Łodzi 2011]. But the economic activity of a disabled person, especially if it was paid by a hard adjustment to an often not very gracious reality, should be noticed and even rewarded

[Wolan-Nowakowska 2013, pp. 67–92]. Especially those people with disabilities deserve to be recognized, who despite their entitlement to social benefits are working or actively seeking work, often to earn money to have a family to keep, and to be appreciated and noticed by others [*Disability in the Workplace*]. Therefore, there are also those, who broke down stereotypical thinking and earnestly searched for work, found it in rare cases, and accomplish their goals [Barnes, Oliver 2012]. The term ‘in rare cases’, unfortunately, has its pejorative dimension, because only one in five disabled people, defined as economically active, had a chance to get a job during the period considered. In many research we can find that entrepreneurs often fear losses, predicting, the absence of a disabled employee due to health condition. Unfortunately, they do not appreciate the professional preparation of disabled employees or their creative abilities [Kawczyńska-Butrym 2006, p. 202].

Economic dimension of disability

From an economic point of view the factors determining the situation of persons with disabilities in the labour market include: the level of benefits, salary expectations, the costs incurred the employer in connection with the establishment and termination of employment.

The amount of benefit for the unemployed, as well as their salary expectations decide whether they accept or reject the job offer. It seems that if the amount of benefits increase, the interests in finding a job will decrease, the unemployed will reject unattractive wage offers and wait for “better”, higher paid, vacancies. In Polish reality we should consider two approaches. The first, if the earnings do not cover the burden related to taking up work, (unfortunately, too often the disabled receive a minimum wage in the economy) and will not guarantee financial stability for the disabled and their family members, the disabled will not find the earnings as sufficient and satisfactory.

On the other hand, two issues need to be considered: The amount of unemployment benefit and the impact of the unemployment period on the intensity of the job search. In the first case, the amount of unemployment benefit and the expectations of a job seeker are important because they affect the acceptance or rejection of the job offer. It turns out that if the amount of benefits increases, the interest in finding a job will decrease, resulting in the unemployed rejecting unattractive pay offers and will wait for “better”, higher-paid, vacancies. In the second case, the unemployed who remain unemployed for longer periods not only lose motivation to seek employment, but their skills are gradually becoming outdated. [Atkinson, Micklewright 1991, pp. 1679–1726]. As a result, there is a very high probability of the outflow of these people from the unemployment stock and “entry” into the economically inactive group, because the intensity

of the search for jobs is falling, and this effectively limits the chances of an individual of being employed [Jackman, Layard 1991; Jackman 1992]. In the end, the persons concerned lose, but also the economy, due to increasing social benefits.

In the context of this discussion, we should mention that employers, often show a discriminating attitude consisting in not employing people who are identified with the high costs potentially incurred to employing a person with a disability adapts their workplace for them [Becker 1971, pp. 31–45]. Although this view is certainly humiliating for the interested parties, i.e., potential employees, it turns out that G. Becker has sought the causes of this behavior deeper by touching the sociological and psychological problems, i.e., in ignorance and superstitious present in a given society. The theory of K.J. Arrow throws some light here. His theory, on one hand is a continuation of that of G. Becker, but on the other hand — it is its criticism. According to Arrow, the phenomenon of discrimination in the labor market is the result of deliberate actions by employers who, based on full knowledge of the costs of employing or dismissing the persons with disabilities, choose a solution which will bring positive net benefits. Since an employer at the very beginning is convinced of the lower productivity of certain groups (including people with disabilities), he will not take effort to employ them and will therefore not bear the cost of adjusting their workplaces. That is why an employer almost at the beginning rejects this possibility.

Conclusion

To sum up, unemployment among people with disabilities is not only a result of the difficulty for such persons to get on their feet again in the labor market [*Disability in the Workplace*]. Undoubtedly, the current condition of people with disabilities is difficult. Comprehensive measures are needed to support the entry of people with disabilities into the labor market, both legislative and mental. The disabled themselves encounter a barrier they cannot overcome. On the one hand, there is a problem of psychological nature, on the other — a problem of economic nature. It is also necessary to change the entrepreneurs' perception of disabled people [Giermanowska, Raclaw 2014, pp. 107–127]. A disabled employee is a loyal person who is fully committed to his or her job. These qualities foster a climate of mutual learning and a climate of tolerance in the enterprise or institution, i.e., wherever the disabled have a chance to fulfill themselves in society.

Among people with disabilities, as in any group, there are those who want to work and earnestly look for work and those who prefer to remain inactive for various reasons. However, those people with disabilities deserve to be recognized who, despite their entitlement to social benefits, are working or actively seeking work. It is worth noting the people with disabilities who have a moderate degree of disability, but are classified as job seekers. Although they are entitled to benefits, they want to stay economically active. They are more likely than the disabled people with light degree of disability to report to employment offices in the country, seeking to obtain money to have a family to keep and be appreciated and considered by others. The professional activity of these people, especially if it was paid by a hard adjustment to an often not very gracious reality, should be noticed and even rewarded.

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