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ACTIVATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON THE LABOR MARKET

Abstract: Social and professional inclusion of persons with disabilities is a big challenge to the state, local authorities and other people responsible for administration as well as institutions supporting persons with dysfunctions. Determining the situation of persons with disabilities on the labor market and proper identification of its causes results in effective development of the state policy for those persons and efficient activities of the institutions which support them in professional activation.

Keywords: activation, disability, persons with disabilities, labor market, professional activity of persons with disabilities.

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Introduction

The situation of persons with disabilities and the phenomenon of disability itself are studied by numerous sciences such as medical, engineering and technical, and social ones, including sociology and economy. In medical sciences, disability is related to health impairment, diseases and their direct consequences. Disability researchers considered it in biological terms as well: “a person with a disability is someone with biological and social, intellectual, or moral deficiency as long as the deficiency significantly impedes or prevents the person from exercising basic life function” (Ochonczenko 2003, p. 5). This meant, among other things, that the body was unable to realize its functions. Technical solutions facilitating the everyday life of persons with disabilities as well as architectural adjustments, including those in broadly defined infrastructure, are developed by engineering and technical sciences. In economic sciences, disability is often considered in terms of the labor market and professional activation. Social exclusion, discrimination and people’s attitudes toward disability are all sociological aspects. Note that the job was a factor in class division along with status and power in industrialized countries. This fact led to the discrimination of those outside the labor market. In the framework of the ‘industrial army’ concept, people with disabilities were not considered workforce except in a time of war or during economic booms when there was not enough workers (Barnes, Mercer 2008).

Authors underline that labor is the main means of satisfying human needs (Górka 1991, p. 37; Szlosek 2014, p. 31–38; Świtłała 2015, p. 57–68). Labor promotes activity because working allows one to meet the needs which have not been satisfied yet. People initially strive to meet their basic needs and then the grow needs (including, among other things, self-actualization). In addition, work creates social prestige, increases recognition, assigns social roles, and determines one’s position in the societal hierarchy (Mikusińska 2008). For people with disabilities, economic activity brings independence and self-sufficiency combined with social integration and belonging. Long-term unemployed and inactive people often tend to grow isolated. It is of vital importance that everyone have equal opportunities and be equally able to undertake activities.

The essence of disability and professional activity of persons with disabilities

The fundamental challenge in researching the situation of persons with disabilities on the labor market is defining disability. Literature and practice utilize various criteria and definitions of this term. Disability is a multifaceted, diversified and dynamic phenomenon, so providing its unambiguous definition is difficult (Kołaczek 2006).

Disability was associated with faulty body and mind in the twentieth century. People with disabilities depended on others. Their education took place in

dedicated facilities where the process could be adapted to their specific needs. This system prepared people with disabilities for work in special cooperatives without joint education and work with people without disabilities. This system was inadequate; Talcott Parsons (1951) compared it to a social deviation, a threat to normal functioning and growth in economic productivity and efficiency (Barnes, Mercer 2008).

In economy, disability means reduced abilities to earn money, medicine defines it as limited fitness of the body, while sociology perceives it as difficulties with social adaptation (Garbat 2013). Economics included a change in production methods, the production and technology approach, in the discussion on disability. It is related to industrialization and competitive capitalism set for highly organized and efficient work, which resulted in labor segmentation according to the ability to work. With the advent of new technologies and industry, where organized manual labor was no longer so vital for growth and production, the approach became obsolete (Golinowska 2012).

Social sciences were the first ones to undertake a scientific analysis of disability. It was viewed as a personal tragedy (Oliver 1990) because persons with disabilities are often dependent on physically healthy and socially productive people (Safilios-Rothschild 1970). Nowadays social sciences discuss disability in two dimensions, the individual and social one, as a problem which affects broad communities (Marszałek 2007). Consequently, the medical definition of disability is different than that in the economic and social sciences. One of the widely adopted definitions of disability in the medical field was formulated in 1980 by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to that definition, disability is *any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being*¹. Critics believe that WHO's definition was based only on medical premises and therefore it omits the social and cultural aspects. Those convictions led to the creation of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) in 2001. It does not divide persons with disabilities into the three abovementioned groups, but it does classify features of the health status in relation to life situation and the surroundings (Kabsch 2001). Polish legislation governs the affairs of persons with disabilities via the Act of 23 February 2021 on the professional and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons. Article 2 of that Act provides that disability is a permanent or periodic lack of ability to fulfill social roles due to (permanent or long-term) limited body fitness which results in the inability to work (Journal of Laws: Dz. U. from 2021, item 573, art. 2). Article 1 defines a disabled person as one whose disability has been confirmed via a certificate issued by competent bodies (Journal of Laws: Dz. U. from 2021, item 573, art. 1). The Polish Act on social welfare

¹ Quotation source: *Encyklopedia powszechna PWN*.

defines disability as a partial or permanent limitation or prevention of independent life due to physical, intellectual or mental impairment (Garbat 2015).

Even though definitions of disability are considerably diversified, they feature certain mutual points. The official definitions of disability put forward by the World Health Organization and legislation, for instance the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) or the Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act 2010, Part 2, Chapter 1. Retrieved from: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15>, access: 15.12.2021), point to two properties:

1. They highlight bodily dysfunctions: disability is a mental or physical impairment of the body recognizable in and characteristic for a particular condition.
2. They underline the individual and social limitations which are related to the physical or mental disturbances and exert a significant, long-term negative impact on the ability to perform normal everyday activities.

Like disability, professional activity has many different definitions, which confirms its multifaceted nature and the interest of researchers from many sciences in this topic.

In terms of economy, professional activity is understood as a set of activities taking place on the labor market. The scope of those activities includes performance of work, its active search, registration in a labor office as well as improvement of the professional qualifications and skills which increase the probability of finding a job (Becker-Pestka 2012). In other words, professional activity means performance of work and receiving remuneration (payment) in return. It is a fundamental activity of every person, whether fully abled or with disabilities. It leads to fulfillment of a professional role, performance of the tasks defined by the social and professional model of a given job, and fulfillment of the obligations assigned to a given type of occupation.

Professional activity is very important in every person's life as it permits self-actualization in the social and professional life by fulfilling social roles and performing the basic activities in the professional sphere. Persons with disabilities are covered by a special form of restoring their professional activity – professional rehabilitation, which aims at improving their everyday functioning. Activation includes them in social life, while employment allows them to function on the labor market in the conditions close to those offered to fully abled persons. Despite those facts, persons with disabilities encounter employment-related difficulties which frequently manifest themselves in unequal treatment and discrimination.

Persons with disabilities caused, among other things, by the health status, face numerous barriers and limitations in undertaking professional activity, the latter being an important form of participation in the social and economic life from their point of view. Professional activity gives persons with disabilities a feeling of self-actualization and financial independence, preventing in particular social exclusion. It is a way of achieving social and professional integration.

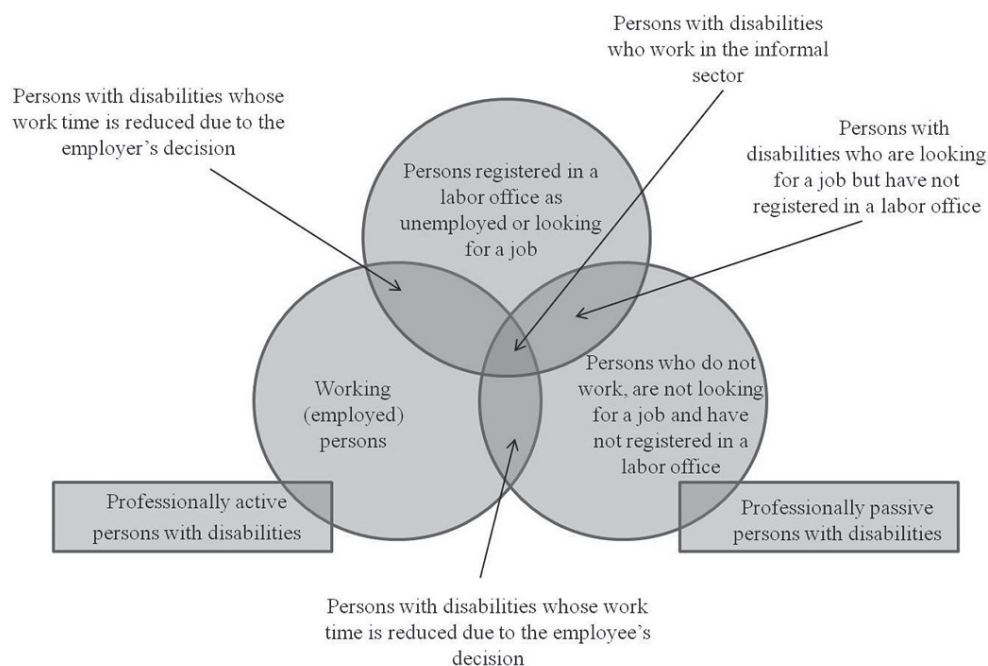


Figure 1. Categories of professional activity of persons with disabilities

Source: Garbat M. (2007). *Aktywność i aktywizacja zawodowa osób niepełnosprawnych – czynniki bariery i uwarunkowania*. "Aktywizacja Osób Niepełnosprawnych", no 2–3, p. 63. In: Garbat M. (2013). *Aktywizacja zawodowa osób z niepełnosprawnością: bariery i koszty*. Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, p. 33.

Persons with disabilities are categorized according to their status on the labor market, as are fully abled persons (Figure 1). They are divided into a professionally active group (persons with disabilities who are employed or looking for a job) and a professionally passive group (persons with disabilities who do not work, are not looking for a job and have not registered in a labor office).

A factor very closely related to professional activity is professional activation, which consists in activities aimed at taking up a job or helping one enter the labor market. It is directed mainly at unemployed persons as their situation on the labor market is special. Professional activation is undertaken by numerous entities functioning in the economy. It is a long-term process which requires financial outlays, appropriate institutional activities and creation of conditions suitable for seeking, taking up and performance of professional work (Buchwald 2015). Professional activation depends on many factors on the part of its present or future recipient and their broadly defined environment. Article 8 of the Act on the professional and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons defines the aim of professional rehabilitation and the activities leading to its accomplishment. According to the Act, "professional rehabilitation aims at making it easier for a person with disabilities to obtain and maintain appropriate employment and promotion by providing that person with access to career counseling, vocational training and employment exchange services" ("Journal of Laws", Dz. U. from 2021,

item 573, art. 8). To achieve that aim, it is necessary to: assess the ability to work via medical examinations and determination of qualifications, provide career counseling as well as select a workplace suitable for a person's limitations and fit it with the equipment which permits and facilitates performance of the work. Enabling persons with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment constitutes an additional factor motivating them to pursue self-actualization and to function in the social and professional life. Assisting persons with disabilities in achieving those aims is carried out via specifically designed activities such as employment exchange services, career counseling and vocational training.

Instruments and institutions of professional activation of persons with disabilities in social policy

The Polish Act on the promotion of employment and the labor market institutions of 10 March 2022 ("Journal of Laws", Dz. U. from 2022, item 690) governs the policy, institutions, services and activation instruments of the Polish labor market. The labor market institutions perform tasks concerning activation of the unemployed as well as activities which support employment and mitigate unemployment effects. According to the abovementioned Act, the labor market includes the following ("Journal of Laws", Dz. U. from 2022, item 690, art. 6):

- public employment services,
- voluntary labor corps,
- employment agencies,
- training institutions,
- social dialog institutions,
- local partnership institutions.

Public employment services include employment entities as well as district and voivodeship labor offices. Their tasks cover, among other things, defining and coordinating the regional and local policy of the labor market. They also cover the development and implementation of activities concerning employment support and activation of unemployed and professionally passive persons. Detailed tasks of the public employment services are defined in section 4 of the Act on the promotion of employment and the labor market institutions ("Journal of Laws", Dz. U. from 2022, item 690, section 4). Nonpublic institutions include employment agencies. Their operation concerns employment exchange in Poland and abroad, personal and career counseling as well as employment support. Social dialog institutions, such as trade unions which represent the interests of employees, the unemployed and employers, play a significant role in terms of cooperation with the public employment services and voluntary labor corps. Social dialog institutions also include nongovernmental organizations such as associations and foundations. Literature frequently points to the leading role of nongovernmental organizations in the social and professional rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (Piotrowicz,

Cianciara 2013). The last group includes local partnership institutions which carry out projects on the labor market. Their activities concern, among other things, activation of the unemployed community (Skrzypiec 2005). Good examples of the activity of local institutions, the society and enterprises are various associations and local action groups operating within a specific territory (Pomianek, Kowalczyk 2016). It should also be stressed that the statutory authority responsible for labor market operation in Poland is the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy.

Under the Act on the promotion of employment and the labor market institutions (“Journal of Laws”, Dz. U. from 2022, item 690, art. 49), people with disabilities constitute a special category of employees. Therefore, the law provides for specific amenities and obligations when employing members of this social group. These persons can be employed in the open labor market and in organizations that are part of supported employment schemes or professional activity facilities that comprise the supported employment market. The objective of supported employment is to create conditions for people with disabilities to work through such amenities as accessible rooms or equipment adapted to their needs (Brząkowski 2014). People with disabilities can work under supported employment schemes or in professional activity facilities, participate in occupational therapy and other forms of segregated activities. Some people are confined only to such forms of activities. Still, if possible, employers are encouraged to hire and people with disabilities to work under open labor market principles to avoid occupational segregation. Even though it is advantageous for their societal and professional activity, people with disabilities have problems finding jobs when the unemployment rate is high (Tomczyszyn 2020). Active participation in professional and societal life is one of the areas covered by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its Articles 26 and 27 provide that states take effort to enable people with disabilities to achieve and maintain the maximum independence, physical, social, and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of societal life. This objective calls for habilitation and rehabilitation in such areas as health, education, employment, and social services; and above all, the recognition that the right to work is the same for every citizen (regardless of their level of ability) (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

Marcin Garbat defines four groups of labor market instruments which support the activation of persons with disabilities (Garbat 2013):

- activating instruments – they include, among other things, programs developed and implemented by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (PFRON);
- integrating instruments – broadly defined specialist family counseling for persons with disabilities aimed at professional integration via e.g. local activity centers, foundations and associations;

- supporting instruments – the biggest group. It has a diversified scope which includes e.g. employment subsidies, graduate apprenticeships, promotion of entrepreneurship or employment exchange;
- governing instruments – these are standards, provisions and legislation which cover various aspects of professional activation of persons with disabilities.

Regardless of the form or the instruments used, the support should be appropriately adjusted to the supported person and their needs, which is a precondition of its effectiveness and usefulness in professional activation.

People with disabilities in the labor market

Disabilities affect over 650 million people globally (www.unic.un.org.pl/niepelnospawnosc/, access: 15.12.2021). There are many people with disabilities in Poland. According to the National Census 2011, the number of people with disabilities approached 4.7 million, or 12.2 pct. of Poland's population. In late 2011, the largest groups of people with disabilities were those with moderate (42.5 pct.) and mild (36.6 pct.) disabilities. Less than 21 pct. of people with disabilities were certified to have a severe disability, while nearly 800 thousand had a complete disability.

The economic activity of the population is most often measured with the following metrics (Ulman ed. 2015, p. 63):

- economic activity rate,
- employment rate,
- economic inactivity rate,
- unemployment rate.

The situation of people with disabilities in the labor market has been presented with the aforementioned metrics and data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland collected under PEAS (Population Economic Activity Survey) and data from the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy. The economic activity of people aged 16 and more from 2004 to 2020, including a comparison of people with and without disabilities, is presented in Table 1.

In Poland, the employment rate among people with disabilities is much lower than the EU average of 47 pct. (quarterly and annual data from PEAS, CSOP). That Poland is among the countries with the lowest employment rate among people with disabilities is further confirmed and emphasized by Andrzej Juros and Arkadiusz Biały (Juros, Biały 2017).

Table 1 shows how basic labor market indicators changed in Poland from 2004 to 2020 for people with and without disabilities. The 17 years was a time of positive labor market changes for people with disabilities. Since Poland joined the EU, the economic activity rate has grown to reach 17.5 pct. in late 2020. The employment rate has also grown year on year to reach 16.7 pct. in late 2020 compared to 13.1 pct. in 2004. Still, the value is rather low compared to the employment rate for people

Table 1. Economic activity of people aged 16 and more from 2004 to 2020 [pct.]

	People with disabilities aged 16 and more			People without disabilities aged 15 and more		
	Economic activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate	Economic activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
2004	16.2	13.1	19.6	60.6	49.2	18.9
2005	16.2	13.1	19.3	60.7	50	17.7
2006	15	12.6	15.8	59.4	51.2	13.8
2007	15.1	13.2	12.9	59.0	53.4	9.5
2008	15.6	13.7	12.3	59.4	55.3	6.9
2009	15.7	13.8	12.1	59.8	55	8
2010	16.8	14.4	14.4	60	54.3	9.5
2011	17	14.5	14.6	60.2	54.5	9.5
2012	17.4	14.7	15.5	60.5	54.5	9.9
2013	17.3	14.4	16.9	60.6	54.4	10.1
2014	17.4	14.8	14.8	60.8	55.5	8.8
2015	16.5	14.5	12.3	60.8	56.3	7.3
2016	16.3	14.6	10.9	60.9	57.2	6.0
2017	17.6	16.1	8.4	60.8	57.9	4.8
2018	17.3	16.2	6.5	60.7	58.4	3.8
2019	17.1	16	6.5	60.6	58.6	3.2
2020	17.5	16.7	4.7	60.4	58.5	3.1

Source: original work. Retrieved from: <http://www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl/container/niepelnosprawnosci-w-liczbach/rynek-pracy/bael/bael2018/akt/KWARTALNE%20i%20roczne%20dane%20z%20BAEL%20GUS%201993-III%20kW.%202018.xls> (access 15.12.2021).

without disabilities. The unemployment rate among people with disabilities was 19.6 pct. in 2004, and shrunk by 14.9 pct. to 4.7 pct. in 2020.

When juxtaposed, the indicators for people with and without disabilities exhibit disparities. The unemployment rate is higher among people with disabilities than among people without disabilities, and the difference was 1.6 pct. in 2020. Note that the last three or four years in that period show a general improvement in the labor market. The year 2020 was a time of changes in the economy and the labor market. In the late first quarter of 2020, the state of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 was announced in Poland. Many employers changed how work was done and switched to remote work. There are no differences for pre- and post-pandemic values of the indicators in the table. Nevertheless, the shift from commuting to remote work can be an opportunity to increase the economic and social activity of people with disabilities.

Registered people with disabilities are presented per voivodeship to illustrate their situation better. As stressed by Zdzisław Kazanowski and Agnieszka Żyta (Kazanowski, Żyta 2021), the place of residence is one of the drivers of attitudes towards people with disabilities and their acceptance. The structure of people

with disabilities registered with job centers in 2020 varied in terms of the place of residence and sex (Figures 2. and 3.).

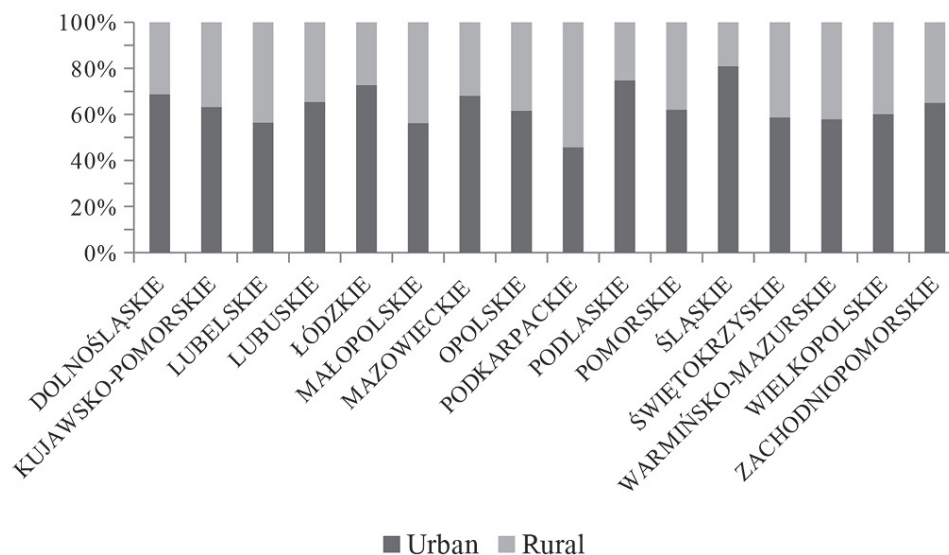


Figure 2. People with disabilities registered as unemployed by voivodeship and place of residence [pct.]

Source: original work. Retrieved from: Report 07 by the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy for the second half of 2020.

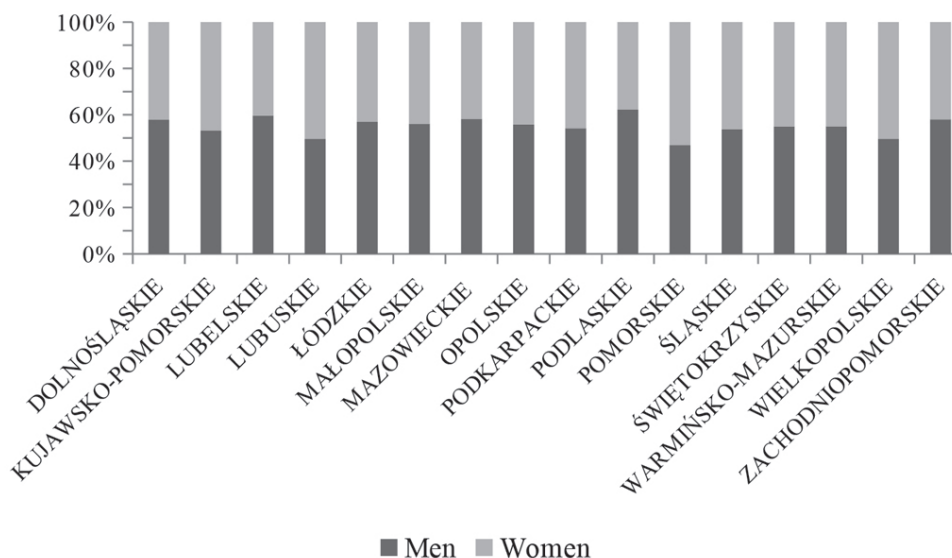


Figure 3. People with disabilities registered as unemployed by voivodeship and sex [pct.]

Source: original work. Retrieved from: Report 07 by the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy for the second half of 2020.

Almost all voivodeships were dominated by the unemployed from urban areas. The most conspicuous voivodeships were Śląskie and Podlaskie. Only Podkarpackie Voivodeship had more registered unemployed people from rural areas.

More men with disabilities were registered than women. It was only in Pomorskie Voivodeship that unemployed women constituted 53 pct. of the registered unemployed in the voivodeship. In capital Mazowieckie Voivodeship, the registered unemployed population consisted in 58,1 pct. of men and in 41,9 pct. of women.

Labor market support for people with disabilities

The statistical data demonstrate that people with disabilities exhibit a low level of economic activity and low employment rate. The national policy is now facing a significant challenge of preventing unemployment and economic inactivity repercussions. A failure to implement stimuli can lead to exclusions within the group. Tadeusz Majewski emphasized that the state can shape the situation of unemployed people with disabilities to a large extent. The objective of the national policy should be to guarantee equal employment opportunities to people with disabilities. State agencies should help people with disabilities search for the right jobs and aid employers with issues related to employing someone with disabilities (Majewski 2006).

There are many reasons people with disabilities can count on support regarding finding employment. The aid is divided into two categories (*Badanie potrzeb osób...*, 2017):

- direct – targeted directly at the person with disabilities,
- indirect – received vicariously through the employer.

Direct support includes reimbursement of social security contributions for farmers and their families. Business owners can count on reimbursement of disability and old-age pension contributions. Funds are also available to those who want to start a business or a farm. People other than business owners can expect assistance with finding employment or career advice, which is available to unemployed people without disabilities as well (Jarmołowicz, Knapińska 2005). These actions are aimed at helping the unemployed find employment or resume work. People with disabilities are offered retraining, training, and professional development. It is an opportunity for those who used to work but can no longer perform the same tasks. Finally, direct support involves instrumental aid in the form of care for a dependant.

Employers of people with disabilities play an important role in indirect support. If an employer employs a sufficient number of people with certified disabilities, they are exempt from payments to the State Fund for Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities. It is available to those businesses with employment over 25 full-time equivalents, including a required number of people with disabilities. It entices employers to employ people with disabilities. If a person with disabilities is aided by another at work, the employer is reimbursed the cost of training and employing the

assistant. Another important matter is the partial reimbursement of remuneration for people with disabilities. When a company does not have a job adequate in terms of the employee's specific disability (limitation), the employer may adapt the workstation with cost reimbursement. Just as in direct support, indirect aid also includes the possibility of reimbursement of training for an employee with disabilities (*Badanie potrzeb osób...*, 2017).

In addition to the direct and indirect support discussed above, people in need can be supported through active and passive labor market instruments. Passive labor market policy includes unemployment benefits intended to alleviate the impact of unemployment on one's life. Active instruments include funds for retraining or remuneration subsidies. Those who take advantage of passive instruments and receive disability pension are less eager to look for job because they are afraid of losing the benefit. People with disabilities choose grey economy or low-paying jobs (Giermanowska 2016). Note that people who receive disability pension may refrain from working because of their health.

Despite so many types of support to foster economic activity, people with disabilities face barriers that discourage them. The most common cause of staying out of the labor market is poor health and reluctance of people involved (including employers), according to inactive people with disabilities. Regrettably, they are often perceived as less effective, dependent, and tending towards excessive absence. The today's labor market prefers people who are skilled at handling problem situations, productive, able to work under time pressure, independent, living up to employer's expectations, and bringing in the most profit.

Ewa Oleszczak aptly summarized employment aid and support for people with disabilities that effective employment requires a comprehensive employment aid, implementation, and formal and legal functional standards model. It should be founded on the individualized approach to the person with disabilities (Oleszczak 2015).

Conclusions

People with disabilities are the untapped potential of the labor market, which should be unlocked in the context of various social processes. Aging populations pose a challenge to many countries. If no actions to improve the use of the workforce in the economy are taken sufficiently in advance, economies can wobble in a failure to provide adequate goods and services to the public. Part of this challenge includes actions to mobilize people with disabilities. Therefore, it is important to identify causes of inactivity of those economically inactive to activate them and act to improve their chances in the labor market and prevent their exclusion.

The problem is the group's low economic activity level and high unemployment. The labor market situation of people with disabilities is a particular one. People with disabilities are at risk of unemployment more than people without disabilities

because of their lower activity level or inability to perform certain tasks due to health limitations.

The effort to aid the employment of a particular group will fail if they remain socially inactive. Hence the support aimed at the social mobilization of people with disabilities, for example, through social rehabilitation. This type of rehabilitation eliminates functional limitations for people with disabilities in the professional and social domains.

The analyses indicate that although the labor market situation of people with disabilities improved from 2004 to 2020, there is still a significant difference between the groups with and without disabilities. People with disabilities are much rarer participants of the labor market than people without disabilities. Their economic activity rate is much lower than for people without disabilities. What is more, people with disabilities exhibit higher unemployment and lower employment rates.

Support for people with disabilities in Poland consists mainly of passive labor market instruments. Their primary objective is to help people with disabilities who are outside the labor market: unemployed or in financial difficulties. Social policy instruments (such as benefits) provide financial aid and encourage active participation in the labor market.

People with disabilities are considered inefficient, less productive, and potential barriers to achieving the best possible results for market players. Therefore, the reluctance on the part of employers and stereotypes concerning people with disabilities contribute to their reduced societal and vocational activity.

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AKTYWIZACJA OSÓB Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIAMI NA RYNKU PRACY

Streszczenie: Włączenie społeczne i zawodowe osób z niepełnosprawnościami stanowi duże wyzwanie dla państwa, władz lokalnych, osób zarządzających w kraju, a także instytucji wspierających osoby z dysfunkcjami. Określenie sytuacji osób z niepełnosprawnościami na rynku pracy i właściwa identyfikacja ich potrzeb przekładają się na skuteczne kreowanie polityki państwa wobec tych osób oraz aktywizację zawodową osób z niepełnosprawnościami przez instytucje wspierające.

Słowa kluczowe: aktywizacja, niepełnosprawność, osoby z niepełnosprawnością, rynek pracy, aktywność zawodowa osób z niepełnosprawnościami.