

Blind and Partially Sighted People on the Labour Market and their Access to Lifelong Learning

Project SIZAR

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Goals of the Sociological study

- Last years' data about the situation of blind and partially sighted people in the Slovak Republic presented at the Trans-national meeting in Bratislava in October 2005 have been extended by a new large group of data obtained from a **sociological study**. This study has been realized in the context of project SIZAR.
- The sociological study was aiming to collect data and information about different aspects of **the situation** of the blind and partially sighted people **on the labour market and their access to lifelong learning**.

Extent of the Project

- It is important to stress that the extent of this project targeting various **questions around employment and unemployment of this group of population and their participation in continuous schooling** is unique till now in Slovakia.
- The target group included both employed and unemployed blind and partially sighted people, in total 445 persons (**303 employed and 142 unemployed**).
- The actual field work was done during the month of February 2006.

Work Profile of Blind and Partially Sighted People

- Thanks to the study outcome we were able to define the **work profile of blind and partially sighted people** which characterizes them as work force and provides information about
 - their professional use and the kind of positions they fill
 - describes the type of work they do and the worktime of blind and partially sighted people
 - their chances to find a job
 - the action they need to undertake in order to get a job

Profile of Unemployed Blind and Partially Sighted People

- At the same time we created a profile of unemployed blind and partially sighted people which describes in detail their position in this complicated situation and shows the possible ways out

- identifies the reasons of unemployment

- duration of registration as unemployed

- ways to look for work

- evaluates the help of authorities to make the job insertion easier

- and finally records the subjective impressions on the way to a job

Lifelong Learning of the Blind and Partially Sighted People

- Special attention has been paid to a wide variety of problems connected to lifelong learning of the blind and partially sighted people. Our study focus on
 - determining the achieved level of education as preparation for a job (school type, courses taken)
 - their participation in further study activities
 - characterizing the obstacles that prevent them from taking part in further education and training
 - identifying their level in 2 key competences that make insertion on the job market possible(language- and computer- skills)

Global Findings - study results

- a visual handicap on its own is not an insurmountable barrier for an attractive economical participation , a fully valid professional life and for taking part in continuing education

- it is clear that not only in the healthy population but also in the group of blind and partially sighted people the achieved level of education as well as continuing education play a key role in getting and keeping a job

- a visual handicap does not stand in the way of adaptability to the labour market and to an active approach to one's own fate

Results confirmed that :

- persons with a visual handicap are more represented in the **"secondary" positions**, meaning **positions that require lower qualification and have less stable work conditions with a high risk of losing the job and danger of unemployment** (more than half of the study group in both the employed as well the unemployed didn't complete more than lower secondary vocational education with apprenticeship licence; the unemployed group showed a strong unwillingness to pursue their further education and training)

Results confirmed that :

- there is no efficient support for hiring the visually impaired which makes them candidates for long term unemployment (58% of the visually impaired were registered more than 1 year, 60 % of which more than 2 years)
- study results indicated that the visually impaired have a more difficult access to education because of the low degree of flexibility and adaptability of the existing education system that does not correspond to the specific needs of this group but also because of other obstacles like distance to school and difficulty to travel

- the results showed the paradoxical fact that the development of communication technologies creates clear obstacles to access jobs for the blind and partially sighted people and multiplies the marginalization tendency of this group on the labour market (respondents of both groups showed very limited language – and computer skills)

The study results will be presented more in detail during the planned meeting in Bratislava coming autumn