

UNUSED LABOR RESOURCES AND BARRIERS TO TAKING UP EMPLOYMENT BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The study concerns unused labor resources such as people with disabilities. The aim of the article is to present the situation of people with disabilities in the labor market and barriers to taking up employment. People with disabilities are in a more difficult situation in the labor market than non-disabled people, which is confirmed by the values of labor market measures. The barriers that make it difficult and sometimes impossible to find a job have been identified and characterized. **Methods:** The article uses secondary and primary data. Primary data came from research carried out in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. The participants of the study were people with disabilities of working age. The article uses descriptive statistics methods. The results were presented in tabular and graphic form. **Results:** The most important findings include the observation that the most common reason for people with disabilities not taking up work is poor health, which makes it impossible to take up employment. The second main reason is the fear and reluctance to lose the disability benefit, e.g., disability pension. An important finding is also that people with a minor disability have far fewer barriers than people with a moderate disability. **Conclusions:** The hypothesis that people with disabilities are a resource of unused labor due to external factors independent of themselves, such as the lack of job offers and the reluctance of employers to employ people with disabilities, has been positively verified. People with disabilities are unused labor resources that need to be activated.

Keywords: people with disabilities, unused labor resources, labor market, professional activity

JEL codes: J21, J71, J1, I14

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of an aging population puts many countries in a difficult situation. If measures are not taken early enough to improve the use of labor resources in the economy, it may turn out that economies will fall into serious turbulence, unable to provide adequate goods and services necessary for society. In connection with negative demographic trends, actions should be taken to activate people with disabilities as a social group that are capable and predisposed

to work. Potential employees who meet these criteria may also be people with disabilities who have a job adapted to their limitations.

That is why it is important to identify the causes of their inactivity and to take measures to increase their chances of entering the labor market and prevent social exclusion. People with disabilities belong to a group of people who are in a special situation in the labor market. People with disabilities also want and often can be professionally active. People with disabilities are untapped resources in the labor market.

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The labor force is a concept usually considered in relation to people of working age. In the literature, Owsiak and Czekaj [1992] state that the labor force consists of people of working age, capable of performing work and socially useful. On the other hand, work is considered to be one of the three basic factors of production (next to land and capital) [Jagoda and Klimczak 2011]. The demand for labor is related to the demand for labor resources (potential), which in the macroeconomic aspect applies to the entire economy, while in the microeconomic sense, it concerns the workplace and the demand for employees in terms of both quantity and quality [Kotlorz 2007]. The labor force (human capital) is a “commodity” which, as a result of its purchase (use) by the employer, is still the property of the person performing the work (employee) [Francik and Poczowski 1993]. A person makes a decision to start work as well as to look for a job or to end it [Szalkowski 1992].

The situation of people with disabilities in the labor market (aspects of professional activity and inactivity) has been an area of interest for many researchers. Barriers to professional activity are dealt with by Garbat [2013]. The phenomenon of disability (type of limitations, their duration and severity) and its impact on the labor market were analyzed by Jones [2021]. Researchers also note the shrinking workforce. Integration and activation of people with disabilities can be a solution to the shortage of labor [Birau et al. 2019]. Studies are also undertaken on good practices of employing people with limited mobility, which A. Woynarowska points to through the implementation of projects focused on the appropriate beneficiary group. These activities are carried out by various entities operating in the economy [Woynarowska 2020]. The forms (types) of disability vary according to the type, severity and duration. The approach of labor market policies to provide the necessary incentives and support for non-disabled people with a degree of disability could be more adapted and flexible. One of the newer studies shows that people with disabilities were even more excluded from the labor market during the COVID-2019 pandemic, despite the widespread provision of remote work [Blanck 2022].

The aim of the study is to present the situation of people with disabilities in the labor market in Poland

and the barriers to taking up employment with a more detailed analysis covering the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. A review of the literature on the subject allowed the formulation of the following hypothesis: People with disabilities are an unused workforce resource due to external factors beyond their control, such as the lack of job offers and the reluctance of employers to hire people with disabilities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The paper uses secondary data from the Labor Force Survey of the Central Statistical Office. Data from 2021 and 2022 (Q1–Q3) were used for the analysis. Due to the implementation of the methodological changes in the survey, the LFS results from previous years cannot be compared with data from the last two years [GUS 2020]. The study also uses primary data from own research carried out in the Mazowieckie Voivodship. The original data were collected using a survey questionnaire which was addressed to people with disabilities in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship via the Internet, public institutions (PUP, PCPR, MOPS, GOPS) and non-governmental organizations. The 301 questionnaires were accepted for analysis. Persons taking part in the study had an appropriate document confirming their disability. The study involved 154 women and 147 men of working age with a certified degree of disability. Respondents answered many questions about work, such as taking up work, a lack of work and obstacles to commencing employment. One of the issues was to identify barriers that prevent the provision of work – which is the focus of this study – assuming that these barriers are one of the key factors causing the non-use of people with disabilities. Descriptive statistics methods were used in the study. The collected data were presented in tabular and graphical forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The basic labor market measures, such as the unemployment rate, the activity rate and the employment rate, were used to present the current situation. Indicators were compared in two groups, i.e., among people with disabilities and within a community

Table 1. Basic measures of the labor market situation in Poland in 2021–2022 (in %)

		Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
		Persons with disabilities			Persons total		
2021	I quarter	18.5	17.2	7.5	57.3	55.0	4.0
	II quarter	19.4	18.1	6.7	58.0	56.0	3.5
	III quarter	20.1	19.1	4.6	58.3	56.5	3.0
	IV quarter	20.3	19.1	5.6	58.2	56.6	2.7
2022	I quarter	20.4	19.0	6.7	58.0	56.3	3.0
	II quarter	20.3	19.1	5.3	57.8	56.4	2.5
	III quarter	20.0	19.2	4.1	57.6	56.0	2.7

Source: own study based on LFS.

without a certified degree of disability (non-disabled community). Table 1 presents the basic labor market measures.

Table 1 presents how the unemployment rate, economic activity and employment developed in Poland in individual quarters of 2021 and 2022. In 2021, the economic activity rate in both groups increased from quarter to quarter, while in 2022, the situation was the opposite, and this figure decreased slightly from quarter to quarter. When comparing the situation of people with disabilities with people in general, large disproportions and differences in professional activity can be observed. The activity rate is almost 3 times lower among people with disabilities – in the third quarter of 2022, it amounted to only 20%. The unemployment rate is higher among people with disabilities than in the group of non-disabled people, and this difference in the last analyzed quarter of 2022 amounted to 1.4 p.p. The employment rate is also almost 3 times lower among people with disabilities and amounted to 19.2%. In the non-disabled population, employment oscillates around 56%. The values of the indicators show a more difficult situation for people with disabilities in the labor market. Low activity and employment rates and higher unemployment rates are associated with a high degree of professional inactivity. In the last quarter of 2022, there were 2,253,000 economically inactive people among people with disabilities compared to 565,000 economically active [GUS 2023].

Respondents participating in the study had the opportunity to choose (mark) several answers relating to the question of why they do not take up employment. Figure 1 shows the barriers that people with disabilities in the Mazowieckie Voivodship encountered in the process of looking for employment or not taking up this activity at all. The biggest problem they faced was poor health. This variant was marked by as many as 119 people, i.e., 29% of responses. The second most important reason for not taking up a job was the reluctance of employers to hire people with a certificate – this was indicated by 49 respondents (approximately 12%). The third most frequently mentioned barrier was the fear of losing benefits, e.g., disability pensions. This is an important aspect from the point of view of employment policy in Poland, and active and passive tools are addressed to people with disabilities. The next most frequently indicated answer was the lack of information on job offers addressed to people with disabilities (42 answers). Architectural obstacles had little effect on the discouragement associated with starting work. Respondents also did not take up a job because they did not want to work – the statement “I do not want to work” was marked by 25 people. Respondents had the opportunity to enter other variants not mentioned in the questionnaire. They indicated such barriers as: lack of experience, participation in the education process or in occupational therapy workshops. In addition, in both

questionnaire variants, namely in those with answers that could be marked and with the answers listed by the respondents, a fear of losing the disability benefit appeared.

There are two main systems of jurisprudence in Poland, i.e., disability and non-disability jurisprudence. They operate on the basis of different standards, are very poorly related to each other and are not very compatible [Mokrzycka 2012]. The Social Insurance Institution participates in the judicial decisions on disability issues related to the receipt of benefits in the form of a pension for total incapacity for work. On the other hand, non-disability jurisprudence is used to obtain the degree of disability and related disability rights [Strmiska-Mietlińska 2015]. People with disabilities are often afraid of losing their disability pension. From 1 March 2022, the lowest disability pension for total incapacity for work and the social pension is paid in the gross amount of PLN 1,338.44 (i.e., PLN 1,217.98 net). From 1 December 2022, the pensioner may additionally earn extra money: not more than PLN 4,536.50 gross per month – after exceeding this amount, the benefit collected is reduced. The next threshold is PLN 8,424.90/month gross – after exceeding this amount, the benefit collected is completely suspended [PZN 2022]. Both the pension and the amount to which one can “earn extra money” are not large. In the current situation, with such high inflation,

this may contribute to a reduction in the quality of life of people with disabilities, and in the long run, to an increase in poverty.

Studies by other authors confirm that health, the possibility of losing benefits, as well as the fear of the unknown in connection with employment are the reasons for the professional inactivity of disabled people [Kobus-Ostrowska 2018]. In addition, Giermanowska [2021] indicates not only the reasons on the part of the employee, but also the employer. Employers are often afraid that they will incur additional costs in connection with the employment of a person with disabilities – related to employee rights, e.g., additional leave or shorter working time (7 hours) etc. [Skóra et al. 2022]. As indicated by Gąciarz and Giermanowska [2009] and Giermanowska [2014], employers are afraid of excessive bureaucracy and control as well as lower work efficiency. A lack of knowledge about disabilities and the functioning of people with disabilities was observed, which raised concerns among employers related to other employees possibly lacking acceptance and reluctance to cooperate with disabled people. It would seem that the problem of prejudices and stereotypes in relation to people with different characteristics than the whole society is no longer relevant. However, those taking part in the survey also noticed signs of discrimination not only on the part of legislators, but also on the part of society.

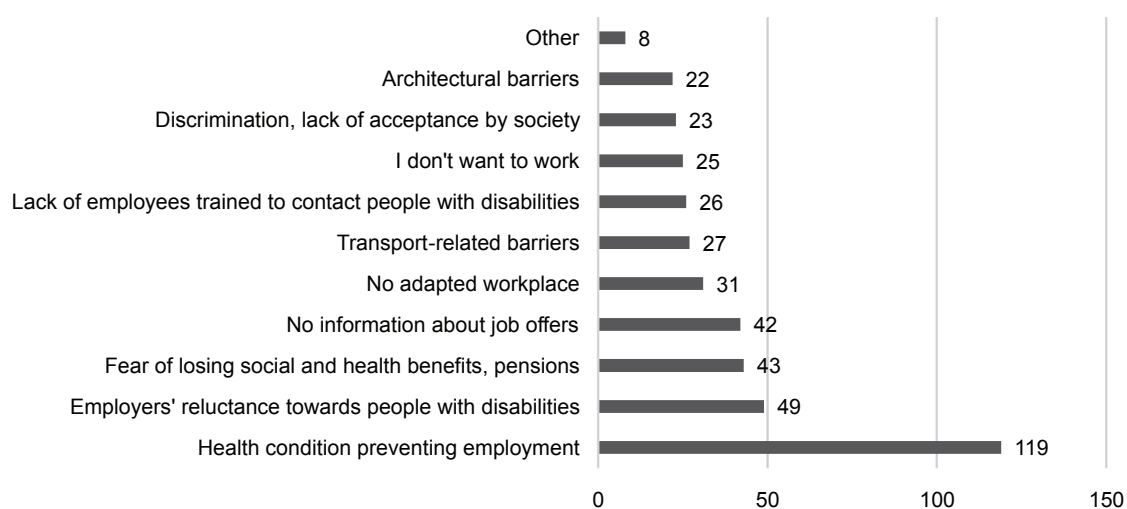


Fig. 1. Barriers to taking up employment by people with disabilities in Mazowieckie Voivodship

Source: study based on own research.

Due to the fact that the surveyed people consider poor health as the greatest barrier, the indicated answers were compared with the degree of disability of the respondents. In Poland, after the age of 16, one of three degrees of disability can be obtained, i.e., minor, moderate and severe. Depending on the degree of disability, persons are entitled to appropriate rights, e.g., shorter working hours, the right to additional holiday leave, the right to an additional break at work, and the right to take leave at work [<https://niepelnospraw.gov.pl/p,62>, disabled-employee, 16.02.2023]. Employers who hire people with disabilities also have appropriate improvements (facilitations) in this respect, e.g., reimbursement of the costs of creating a workplace, financing the wage costs of a disabled person, exemption from payments to PFRON, and reimbursement of the costs of equipping a workplace or training an employee with a disability [BON]. Respondents had a disability degree certificate issued by the Poviats Family Support Center and by the Social Insurance Institution (208 people had a certificate issued by the PCPR and 93 people by the Social Insurance Institution). There were 141 people with a moderate degree, 9 with a minor degree, and the rest with a severe degree of disability. Such a list is presented in Table 2.

The data presented in Table 2 show that people with a minor degree of disability did not notice any barriers to taking up work. Only three people with this degree marked variants such as: lack of health, the reluctance of employers and lack of information about job offers addressed to this group of society. People with a severe and moderate degree of disability most often did not take up work due to poor health. The lack of information about job offers for people with disabilities was a problem for people with a moderate degree. An important aspect of not taking up a job was the fear of losing an allowance, disability pension or another benefit. It should be noted that people with a moderate degree of disability are the most common active participants in the labor market among disabled people. This may be due to the fact that their health condition allows them to be employed at least partially, if not fully. This group of people is provided with facilities related to their professional activity, e.g., the adaptation of the workplace, in justified cases certified by a doctor – a seven-hour working time, as well as additional leave for treatment purposes. On the other hand, a person with a minor degree of disability is usually not entitled to such rights, and people with a severe degree are very often completely unable to

Table 2. Barriers to taking up work and the degree of disability

	Degree of disability		
	Severe	Moderate	Minor
Employers' reluctance towards people with disabilities	14	34	1
No adapted workplace	15	16	0
Architectural barriers	11	11	0
Transport-related barriers	10	17	0
Lack of employees trained to contact people with disabilities	12	14	0
No information about job offers for people with disabilities	10	31	1
Discrimination, lack of acceptance by society	11	12	0
Health condition preventing employment	66	52	1
Fear of losing your pension, benefit	11	32	0
I don't want to work	9	16	0
Other	3	5	0

Source: Study based on own research

work. What is worrying, however, is the reluctance of people with disabilities to work, as expressed in the answer, “I do not want to work”. There were 25 such answers, including more than half of the people with a moderate degree of disability, i.e., people potentially able to take up employment appropriate to their condition. The mere fact of having a disability makes it difficult for young people who have reached working age to enter the labor market. There are studies that confirm that the fact of young people having a disability is negatively perceived by employers [Achterberg et al. 2009]. A disability that appeared in childhood or early youth has an impact on time and taking up a professional activity. As emphasized by other researchers, disability should be approached broadly, focusing on remaining or partial working capacity rather than on incapacity for work [Eichhorst et al. 2010]. Such an approach to people with disabilities brings many benefits both for people with disabilities themselves as well as for the entire society and the entire economy. Professional activity is an extremely important area of rehabilitation for people with disabilities, but it also prevents social exclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

People with disabilities can take up employment in the open labor market. Their competition with non-disabled people requires an appropriate policy on the part of the state, e.g., appropriate regulations creating a coherent system of incentives for employers and support in the field of, for example, bureaucracy, which contributed to the reluctant employment of people with limitations. Active involvement of labor market institutions focused on active policy is also important. Labor market policy supporting professional activation should include assistance in adapting the workplace to the individual needs of people with disabilities or providing them with the necessary help. Increasing the amount that could be earned or not taking away the benefit in the form of a disability pension would also be a good solution because people with disabilities allocate funds to improve health and living conditions. Another important issue is to convince (encourage) people with disabilities themselves to take up a professional activity, not only in the form of contract

work but also self-employment. People with disabilities have health problems and are afraid of losing their pension, as well as the reluctance of employers to hire them are the biggest barriers that contribute to not taking up work. Educating society, increasing openness to various people in society, and sensitizing to the needs of other people whose disability is sometimes not visible to the naked eye, are good practices that should be followed. A positive aspect is the incorporation into Polish legislation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which refer to the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to employment. The aim of the research was to present the current situation of people with disabilities in the labor market and to identify the barriers that make it difficult or impossible to take up employment. The completed research confirms the assumed hypothesis that people with disabilities are an unused labor force.

The research carried out as part of the article indicates the importance of the issue of the activity of people with disabilities in the labor market. Their activity or inaction affects the economy. The phenomenon of professional inactivity and the unused potential of the labor force of people with disabilities may contribute to the lack of workforce, particularly in terms of the ongoing unfavorable demographic changes.

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NIEWYKORZYSTANE ZASOBY PRACY ORAZ BARIERY W PODEJMOWANIU ZATRUDNIENIA PRZEZ OSOBY Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIĄ

STRESZCZENIE

Cel: Opracowanie dotyczy niewykorzystanych zasobów pracy, jakimi są osoby z niepełnosprawnością. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie sytuacji osób z niepełnosprawnościami na rynku pracy oraz barier w podejmowaniu zatrudnienia. Osoby z niepełnosprawnościami są w trudniejszej sytuacji na rynku pracy niż osoby sprawne, potwierdzają to wartości mierników rynku pracy. Określono i scharakteryzowano bariery, które utrudniają, a niekiedy uniemożliwiają podjęcie pracy. **Metody:** W artykule wykorzystano dane wtórne oraz dane pierwotne. Dane pierwotne pochodziły z badania własnego zrealizowanego na obszarze województwa mazowieckiego. Uczestnikami badania były osoby z niepełnosprawnościami w wieku produkcyjnym. W artykule zostały wykorzystane metody statystyki opisowej. Wyniki zostały przedstawione w formie tabelarycznej i graficznej. **Wyniki:** Do najważniejszych wyników należy spostrzeżenie, że najczęstszymi przyczynami niepodjęcia pracy w przypadku osób z niepełnosprawnościami jest słaby stan zdrowia uniemożliwiający podjęcie zatrudnienia. Drugą główną przyczyną jest obawa i niechęć przed utratą świadczenia z tytułu niepełnosprawności np. renty. Istotną obserwacją jest również to, że osoby z lekkim stopniem zdecydowanie mniej barier mają niż osoby ze stopniem umiarkowanym. **Wnioski:** Hipoteza, zgodnie z którą osoby z niepełnosprawnościami stanowią zasób niewykorzystanej siły roboczej z powodu czynników zewnętrznych, niezależnych od nich samych takich, jak brak ofert pracy i niechęć pracodawców do zatrudniania osób z niepełnosprawnościami, została pozytywnie zweryfikowana. Osoby z niepełnosprawnościami są niewykorzystanymi zasobami pracy, które należy zaaktywizować.

Słowa kluczowe: osoby z niepełnosprawnościami, niewykorzystane zasoby pracy, rynek pracy, aktywność zawodowa