ANNALS OF THE POLISH ASSOCIATION
OF AGRICULTURAL AND AGRIBUSINESS ECONOMISTS

received: 11.06.2019
acceptance: 09.07.2019
published: 20.09.2019

Annals PAAAE • 2019 • Vol. XXI • No. (3)

JEL codes: J21

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0013.2806

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SITUATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE POLISH LABOR MARKET

Key words: labor market, labor market participation, people with disabilities

ABSTRACT. Work is an important component of individual life. To disabled people, it is of particular importance because in addition to helping them address their material needs, it prevents social exclusion and is part of integration and rehabilitation processes. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to assess the labor market situation of the working-age disabled population. This paper also includes a comparative analysis between the situation of disabled and able-bodied persons to explore the significant differences in economic activity, employment and unemployment ratios. The data analysis suggests that the labor market situation of working-age disabled people was much more difficult than that of able-bodied persons. In 2011-2018, the average activity rate for disabled people was 27%, i.e. 51 percentage points below the corresponding ratio for able-bodied people. In turn, the average unemployment rate for persons with impairments was 13.3%, compared to 7.7% for people without impairments. The average employment rate for disabled and able-bodied persons was 23% and 72%, respectively. The disadvantages faced by disabled people are driven by many factors, including socio-demographic aspects. Legal regulations as well as attitudes of employers, collaborators, the society and the disabled people also play a considerable role.

INTRODUCTION

In their day-to-day lives, disabled people face multiple difficulties related to prejudice, discrimination and the architectonical and technical availability of public infrastructure. These restrictions prevent an active life and disturb the sense of social security, one of the basic individual needs. An active government policy should guarantee the enhancement of security, thus improving the population's quality of life as regards both financial and social aspects [Kalinowski 2014, p. 390]. Working is a way to address an individual's material and non-material needs, and an important component of individual life. It allows to enhance skills and experience, enables contact between people, and contributes to self-esteem and self-fulfillment. For the disabled, work has a particular importance, prevents social exclusion and is part of the integration and rehabilitation process.

In the recent years, the increase in the activity rate of disabled people has been a major topic of public discussion. The subject of special interest is the situation of disabled people on the labor market [Giermanowska 2016, Janowska 2014, Koza, Politaj 2013]. Many determinants of disability are discussed in the work of many researchers [Golinowska

2012]. Particularly noteworthy are comparative studies devoted to professional activity of disabled people in Poland and the European Union [Kryńska 2013].

In the immediate future, people with impairments will play an increasingly important role in labor resources. This is related to demographic changes, in particular the accelerated social ageing which contributes to a decline in labor supply and, as a consequence, poses numerous threats, including in the area of public finance and economic development [OECD 2010, p. 11, Giermanowska 2016]. Recently in Poland, there are over 3 million disabled people which make up ca. 10% of the total population. The extent of disability contributes to taking economic, social, political, educational measures, and to the development of social security solutions.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to assess the labor market situation of people with disabilities. This paper also includes a comparative analysis between the situation of disabled and able-bodied persons to explore the significant differences in economic activity, employment and unemployment ratios.

This publication relies on data delivered by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled Persons, the Central Statistical Office, the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons and Eurostat. Empirical data was analyzed with elements of descriptive statistics and metrics of the condition of the labor market (including the economic activity rate, employment rate and unemployment rate).

DEFINITION OF DISABILITY

"The definition of disability and of a disabled person continues to be debated. Today, disability is believed to be a process which varies in how it is manifested, and affects human lives in different ways, rather than a permanent condition. Different criteria on whether an individual should be considered disabled depend on the walks of life and the corresponding scientific disciplines" [Garbiec 2008, p. 147-148].

According to the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* [2006], "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (Article 1). According to the Charter of Rights for Persons with Disabilities [Journal of Laws, 1997.123.776], disabled people are "people whose physical, psychological or mental condition hampers, restricts or prevents their ability to live their daily lives, learn, work and fulfill their social roles". In turn, the Central Statistical Office defines disabled persons as those "who hold an appropriate certificate issued by a duly authorized body (a legally disabled person/holder of a legal certificate) or who, while not being a holder of the aforesaid certificate, feel to be restricted in their ability to perform basic activities adequate to their age (biologically disabled person)" [GUS 2015, p. 203]. In economic sciences and politics, disability is perceived in different ways. Economic sciences rely on the production and technology approach which classifies labor resources by their capacity to work, efficiency and degree of organization [Golinowska 2012, p. 32]. "The production and technology approach goes in line with the social approach, also referred to as the compensatory approach, which considers disability to be a social issue (social weakness) leading to poverty and social

exclusion" [Golinowska 2012, p. 32]. Conversely, in the employment policy, disability is related to an individual's ability to work, as assessed by medical examiners [Golinowska 2012, p. 41].

The Act of August 27, 1997 on the professional and social rehabilitation of disabled people [Journal of Laws, 1997.50.475] defines disability as a "permanent or temporary inability to fulfill one's social roles due to a permanent or prolonged dysfunction of the organism, resulting (without limitation) in the inability to work" (Article 2, item 10). The applicable regulations identify three degrees of disability, namely:

1. Advanced disability: a person who has physical impairment, who is incapable of work or capable of work under the conditions of protected labor, who is not able to live independently and requires permanent or long-term care and support from others in order to fulfill his/her social roles.
2. Intermediate disability: a person who has physical impairment, who is incapable of work or capable of work under the conditions of protected labor, or who requires temporary or partial care and assistance from others in order to fulfill his/her social roles.
3. Light disability: a person who has physical impairment which considerably decreases his/her capacity to work, in comparison with a person with similar vocational qualifications but without disabilities, or has limited ability to fulfill his/her social roles which may be compensated with orthopedic appliances, auxiliary means or technical equipment (Article 4 of the Act of August 27, 199).

According to the results of the labor force survey, the number of disabled people decreased from nearly 3.34 million in 2011 to 3.04 million in 2018. In the study period, the group of working-age persons made up from 60% to 53% of the disabled population, and was mostly composed of men (ca. 61%), of people with intermediate disability (from 41 to 48%) and of urban residents (from 60 to 58%). In the working-age disabled population, the share of people with light disability decreased from 39 to 27% while the share of people with advanced disability increased from 20 to 25%.

DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE LABOR MARKET

"Each country is required to fulfill its social policy tasks in a way to guarantee a sense of social security to its citizens. Each member of the society evaluates and perceives the way the national social policy operates through the lens of his/her personal needs and how they can be addressed" [Garbiec 2008, p. 147]. These needs also include work which plays a major role to disabled people as it contributes to meeting both material and non-material needs. For the disabled, working is the essence of their lives; it enables contacting other people and prevents social exclusion. "Work is what underpins social ties" [Orczyk 2005, p. 89].

The labor market situation of people with impairments is much worse than that of able-bodied persons. In 2011-2018, the activity rate of disabled grew from 26.3 to 28.3% but was much lower compared to that of able-bodied people (Table 1).

Similar conclusions may be drawn from the analysis of the employment rate. The difference in the employment rate between the able-bodied subpopulation and the disabled subpopulation varies in the range of 47 to 51 percentage points (p.p.). In other countries,

Table 1. Activity rates, employment rates and unemployment rates for disabled and able-bodied people in 2011-2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Activity rate [%]								
Disabled people	26.3	27.5	27.3	27.1	25.9	26.8	28.9	28.3
Able-bodied persons	76.4	77.1	77.7	78.6	78.8	79.4	79.8	80.5
Employment rate [%]								
Disabled people	22.2	23.0	22.4	22.8	22.5	23.7	26.3	26.2
Able-bodied persons	69.0	69.3	69.7	71.6	72.9	74.5	75.9	77.4
Unemployment rate [%]								
Disabled people	15.5	16.2	17.9	16.1	13.0	11.6	9.3	7.2
Able-bodied persons	9.7	10.1	10.3	9.0	7.5	6.2	4.9	3.9

Source: own study based on the labor force survey; annual average BAEL data [BPRON 2019]

disabled people are also observed to be less active. According to Eurostat data, in 2011, the employment rate of disabled people (experiencing difficulties in basic activities, e.g. vision or hearing problems) in the EU (28) was 47.3%, i.e. nearly 20 p.p. lower compared to non-disabled people. The lowest employment rates for disabled people were recorded in Hungary (23.7%) and Ireland (29.8%) while the highest were in Sweden (66.2%) and Iceland (66.9%). In Poland, it was 33.9%. In turn, the smallest difference in employment rates between disabled people and the able-bodied population could be observed in Luxembourg (2.4 p.p.) [Eurostat 2014, p. 1].

Over the study period, the unemployment rate for both the unemployed and the able-bodied population went down by 8.3 p.p. and 5.8 p.p., respectively. However, it was higher for the disabled group (17.9 to 7.2% vs. 10.3 to 3.9%).

One of the factors influencing professional activity is the place of residence. The rate of professional activity and the employment rate of disabled people living in rural areas is lower than those with disabilities living in cities. In 2011, the activity rate of people with dysfunctions living in rural areas was equal to 22.8%, in cities 28.6%, while in 2018 it was at the level of 21.4% and 31.5%, respectively. In turn, the employment rate determined for disabled people from rural areas was equal to 20.2% in 2011, 20.3% in 2018, and 23.3% for disabled people living in cities and 29.2% [BPRON 2019].

Education plays an important role in providing employment opportunities for disabled people. In 2011, 9.4% of the working-age disabled population had a tertiary education (compared to 10.8% in 2016). Although that ratio followed an upward trend, it was by 14 to 17.8 p.p. below that recorded in the able-bodied group [BPRON 2019]. The small share of disabled persons at tertiary education levels is caused by many factors, particularly including the "problems of a disabled student with being accepted by his/her able-bodied peers and the academic environment; with the architectural and financial barriers; and with access to information" [Gorajewska 2009, p. 74]. However, note that for persons with impairments, continuing their education at tertiary level means not only acquiring

knowledge; most of all, it is a way to contact other people and being socially active, and an opportunity to improve their quality of life.

The labor market situation of people with disabilities depends on many factors. The number of jobs and the architectural and technical accessibility of social infrastructure are matters of importance. Another major aspect are the attitudes of both the disabled themselves and of employers towards them. The main barrier to employment of disabled people is discrimination and the related prejudices and misconceptions about the working capacity of a person with disabilities. What also matters is the organizational culture, and the attitudes of managers and collaborators which can either increase or decrease employability of people with impairments [Gottlieb et al. 2010, p. 6]. Note however that despite the differences they struggle with, disabled workers are similar to their able-bodies peers in their level of commitment. Being aware of their impairments, disabled employees more frequently accept jobs which require less professional training. This, in turn, has a detrimental effect on their professional outlooks [Schur et al. 2017, p. 490].

In 2011-2018, the average employment rate for the working-age disabled population was 23%. In line with the "Europe 2030" strategy, it should reach 40% by 2030 [Kryńska 2013, p. 25]. The employment rate is affected by multiple factors, including the number of sheltered workshops and their employees. The 2011–2018 period witnessed a decline in the number of both sheltered workshops and disabled employees (by 49% and 41%, respectively) (Table 2).

The decrease in the number of sheltered workshops and their employees results from amendments to legal regulations, including the subsidies towards payment of remuneration for disabled persons and the conditions for granting the sheltered workshop status[1].

In the literature, sheltered employment sparks many controversies because of its segregationist nature. It is emphasized that in this segment of the labor market for the disabled, remunerations are too low and the jobs do not require special qualifications. Sheltered employment isolates disabled people from the society and, as a consequence, fuels negative attitudes in the society and poses a barrier to increased employment of

[1] The sheltered workshop status may be applied for by each employer who has been running business activities for no less than 12 months and employs no less than 25 employees on an FTE basis. Additionally, the facilities and premises used by the sheltered workshop must comply with occupational health and safety regulations and principles, must address the needs of disabled persons in terms of adjusting the workstations, hygiene and sanitary premises and passageways, and must comply with accessibility requirements. Also, emergency and specialized healthcare, medical counseling and rehabilitation services must be ensured. Until December 31, 2011, the operator of the sheltered workshop was required to maintain the total employment rate of disabled people for no less than 6 months at a level of no less than 40% (including persons classed as suffering from advanced or intermediate disability representing no less than 10% of the total workforce) or no less than 30%, if the operator employs blind or mentally ill people or mentally disabled people classed as suffering from advanced or intermediate disability. Meanwhile, since January 1, 2012, the employment rate of disabled people must be no less than 50% for no less than 6 months, including persons classed as suffering from advanced or intermediate disability representing no less than 20% of the total workforce; and no less than 30% of blind or mentally ill people or mentally disabled people classed as suffering from advanced or intermediate disability (Article 28 *of the Act of August 27, 1997 on the professional and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled people*).

Table 2. Number of sheltered workshops and disabled employees in 2011-2018*

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of sheltered workshops	1,797	1,454	1,416	1,278	1,179	1,102	1,038	922
Number of disabled employees	192,563	172,830	177,080	147,790	128,800	130,512	129,195	113,766

* As at December. Establishments who failed to meet their reporting obligation are not included

Source: own study based on data from voivodeship governors [BPRON 2019]

persons with impairments. In view of the above, sheltered employment has a limited impact on productivity and social integration of disabled people [Gottlieb et al. 2010, Giermanowska 2016].

According to data from the Financing and Reimbursement System of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, in 2011-2018, the number of subsidized jobs grew by 2.7%. This was accompanied by a 38% decrease in the number of disabled people employed in sheltered workshops and a 102% increase in the number of disabled people employed in the open labor market (Table 3). In the study period, the number of sheltered workshops decreased by 49% whereas the number of establishments in the open labor market grew by 93%.

Changes in subsidized employment are related to changes in the principles of financing the remuneration of disabled employees. Pursuant to applicable regulations, the monthly financing depends on the working time of the disabled employee, and on his/her disability degree and specific illnesses[2]. Note that in initial years of the study period, the monthly subsidy also depended on the type of the disabled person's employer. The subsidies for sheltered workshops were higher than those allocated to employers in the open labor market (Table 4).

[2] On April 1, 2014, new principles for subsidies towards payment of remuneration were adopted. Accordingly, the subsidy primarily depends on the employee's disability degree, irrespective of the employer's status. The monthly subsidies towards payment of remuneration are PLN 1,800 for people with advanced disability, PLN 1,125 for people with intermediate disability and PLN 450 for people with light disability. The above amounts are increased by PLN 600 in the case of disabled persons diagnosed with mental illness, mental disability, general developmental disorders or epilepsy, or people partially or severely blind. Operators eligible for subsidies towards payment of remuneration are: employers who run a sheltered workshop; operators who employ no less than 25 employees on an FTE basis and have an employment rate of disabled people of no less than 6%; and operators who employ less than 25 employees on an FTE basis. Operators who employ no less than 25 employees on an FTE basis and demonstrate an employment rate of disabled people of less than 6% are not eligible for financing. Operators who employ no less than 25 employees on an FTE basis and are exempt from compulsory Fund contributions shall not be eligible for subsidies towards payment of remuneration for disabled employees, unless they demonstrate an employment rate of disabled people of 6% (Article 26 of *the Act of August 27, 1997 on the professional and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled people*).

Table 3. Number of disabled employees and employers registered in the Financing and Reimbursement System of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in 2011-2018 (as at December)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total disabled employees [thous.]								
In sheltered workshops	173.8	163.1	166.9	139.4	124.5	124.2	122.5	107.0
In the open labor market	71.7	80.5	85.1	104.0	121.6	135.2	138.5	145.2
Total	245.5	243.6	252.0	243.4	246.1	259.3	260.9	252.2
Total employers								
Sheltered workshop operators	1,806	1,437	1,392	1,263	1,163	1,092	1,028	906
Open labor market	15,676	17,305	19,318	22,746	25,036	27,467	29,337	30,336
Total	17,482	18,742	20,710	24,009	26,199	28,559	30,365	31,248

Source: own study based on Financing and Reimbursement System of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons data [PFRON 2019a]

Table 4. Monthly subsidies towards payment of remuneration for disabled employees in 2011–2017

Disability degree	Open labor market			Sheltered workshop		
	advanced	intermediate	light	advanced	intermediate	light
2011						
Special illness	2,296.80	2,067.12	1,148.40	2,552.00	2,296.80	1,276.00
No special illnesses	1,429.12	1,250.48	535.92	2041.60	1786.40	765.60
01/2012-06/2012						
Special illness	2,411.64	1,894.86	1,033.56	2,679.60	2,105.40	1,148.40
No special illnesses	1,518.44	1,116.50	446.60	2,169.20	1,595.00	638.00
07/2012-08/2012						
Special illness	2,526.48	1,780.02	976.14	2,807.20	1,977.80	1,084.60
No special illnesses	1,607.76	1,027.18	401.94	2,296.80	1,467.40	574.20
09/2012-12/2012						
Special illness	2,744.28	1,933.47	1,060.29	3,049.20	2,148.30	1,178.10
No special illnesses	1,746.36	1,115.73	4,36.59	2,494.80	1,593.90	623.70
01/2013-03/2014						
Special illness	2,970.00	1,890.00	1,080.00	3,300.00	2,100.00	1,200.00
No special illnesses	1,890.00	1,050.00	420.00	2700.00	1,500.00	600.00
04/2014-2018						
Special illness	2,400.00	1,725.00	1,050.00	2,400.00	1,725.00	1,050.00
No special illnesses	1,800.00	1,125.00	450.00	1,800.00	1,125.00	450.00

Source: own study based on Financing and Reimbursement System of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons data [PFRON 2019b]

In view of their state of health, disabled people do not get the same job opportunities as able-bodied persons. They face barriers when looking for a job; for some of them, it becomes a stimulus to start and run their own business. From 2011 to 2018, the number of disabled entrepreneurs applying for a subsidy towards social insurance contributions decreased from 24,900 to 22,400. Disabled entrepreneurs are mostly affected by intermediate or light disability. Their population has changed both in absolute and relative numbers. The number of entrepreneurs with intermediate disability increased from nearly 10,000 (a share of 40%) in 2011 to 12,500 (56%) in 2018. In the study period, the share of people with light disability in the total number of disabled entrepreneurs decreased from 53 to 35%, and their number decreased from 13,200 to 7,900. People with advanced disability represented 7 to 9% [BPRON 2019].

The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons provides the disabled entrepreneurs with a refund of old-age and disability pension insurance contributions. The amount of the refund depends on the degree of disability and is as follows:

– 100% of the old-age and disability pension insurance contribution, in the case of people with advanced disability,
– 60% of the old-age and disability pension insurance contribution, in the case of people with intermediate disability,
– 30% of the old-age and disability pension insurance contribution, in the case of people with light disability (Article 25a of *the Act of August 27, 1997 on the professional and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled people*).

In the years covered by this study, monthly pension insurance contributions increased from PLN 514.33 to PLN 733.62 (Table 5).

Entrepreneurs with advanced disability were eligible for a total refund of contributions. In the case of people with intermediate disability, the refund varied in the range of PLN 308.60 in 2011 to PLN 440.17 in 2018. For people with light disability, the corresponding interval was PLN 154.30 to PLN 220.

Table 5. Monthly pension insurance contributions in 2011-2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Old-age pension insurance contribution	393.41	412.97	434.87	438.73	463.68	474.92	499.28	520.36
Disability pension insurance contribution	120.92	126.94 (Jan) 169.25 (Feb-Dec)	178.22	179.81	190.03	194.64	204.62	213.26

Source: own study based on Financing and Reimbursement System of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons data [PFRON 2019b]

CONCLUSIONS

The data analysis suggests that the labor market situation of working-age disabled people is much more difficult than that of able-bodied persons. Disabled people are largely affected by professional inactivity. In 2011-2018, nearly 3/4 of the disabled population were economically inactive working-age persons. The disadvantages faced by disabled people are driven by many factors, including legal regulations. Over recent years, the changes in the area of subsidized employment have contributed to an increase in employment of disabled people in the open labor market, accompanied by a decrease in employment figures in sheltered workshops. However, these measures seem insufficient, as attested by the high unemployment rate and low employment rate recorded in this population. In the group of people with impairments, the unemployment rate was higher (by ca. 6 p.p.) and the employment rate was considerably lower (on average by 49 p.p.) than in able-bodied population. The labor market situation is also significantly affected by attitudes of employers towards people with persons with impairments, and by attitudes of the disabled themselves, of their collaborators and of the entire society.

It may be therefore concluded that in order to improve the labor market situation of disabled people, measures need to be taken at many levels. First, steps should to be taken to eradicate discrimination and social exclusion of disabled people. Persons with impairments should be empowered to achieve an adequate level of education, qualifications and skills. Also, solutions should be implemented to promote employment of people with impairments and to motivate employers to hire them.

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SYTUACJA OSÓB NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNYCH NA POLSKIM RYNKU PRACY

Słowa kluczowe: rynek pracy, aktywność zawodowa, osoby niepełnosprawne

ABSTRAKT

Celem publikacji jest ocena sytuacji osób niepełnosprawnych w wieku produkcyjnym na ryku pracy. Ważnym elementem życia jednostki jest praca. Dokonano również analizy porównawczej sytuacji osób niepełnosprawnych i sprawnych pod względem istotnych różnic pomiędzy wskaźnikami aktywności zawodowej, wskaźnikami zatrudnienia i stopą bezrobocia. Dla osób niepełnosprawnych ma ona szczególne znaczenie, gdyż oprócz zaspokajania potrzeb materialnych zapobiega wykluczeniu społecznemu, jest częścią integracji oraz rehabilitacji. Z analizy danych wynika, że sytuacja osób niepełnosprawnych w wieku produkcyjnym na rynku pracy jest znacznie trudniejsza niż osób w pełni sprawnych. W latach 2011-2018 średni wskaźnik aktywności zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych wynosił 27% i był niższy od wskaźnika wyznaczonego dla osób sprawnych o 51 p.p. Z kolei średnia stopa bezrobocia osób z dysfunkcjami wynosiła 13,3%, a dla osób bez dysfunkcji 7,7%. Średni wskaźnik zatrudnienia osób niepełnosprawnych wynosił 23%, a dla osób sprawnych 72%. Niekorzystna sytuacja osób niepełnosprawnych wynika z wielu czynników, do których można zaliczyć czynniki społeczno-demograficzne. Nie bez znaczenia są również regulacje prawne, a także postawy pracodawców, współpracowników, społeczeństwa oraz osób niepełnosprawnych.

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