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## Review article

# Economic activity of the visually impaired: An evaluation of the successes of the visually impaired with regard to the market economy



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 19 November 2013

Accepted 14 May 2014

Available online 23 May 2014

#### Keywords:

Visually impaired

Economic activity

Employment

Disabled

Unemployment

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the participation and the degree of success of the visually impaired in the labor market with regard to the market economy in the Czech Republic.

The method used consisted of the application and comparison of statistical information on persons with disabilities, collected by order of the Czech government, the Czech Statistical Office in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports.

The economic activity of the visually impaired was not a direct focus of the statistical survey. The data was collected for the disabled as a whole. However, at the personal request of the author, the Czech Statistical Office has recalculated the data and provided us with it.

This paper briefly describes the situation regarding the workplace activities of the visually impaired before 1989 in the former Czechoslovakia. It recognizes the impact of unemployment and the importance of work for people with disabilities, as well as briefly glossing over the most common hurdles preventing them from finding employment.

In other parts, statistical data is compared from a nationwide survey which presented the fact that the Czech Republic has an estimated 1,015,548 persons with disabilities.

As seen in the results, the number of people with some form of visual disability is approaching ninety thousand. In the group researched, there were 6331 persons economically active who were visually impaired; from that number, women accounted for less than one-third. Similarly, in the whole group of people with disabilities and even the visually handicapped, information shows that in the group of economically active persons, the majority hold proper employment. Roughly 15% of those economically active are self-employed.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.kontakt.2014.05.006>

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## Introduction

Those with visual impairment and who are in the labor market represent one of the most difficult groups of people with disabilities to employ. Poor or complete loss of vision, for example later in life represents the loss of nearly all activities for the person, as well as the contacts and skills he had in his previous life. The gradual or sudden loss of vision generally means a below-average quality of life, disintegration, and oftentimes a personality disorder. Being independent and having the ability to look after themselves is essential in shaping the personalities of children and those blind since birth. In addition, it plays a big role in their integration into a group. Their socialization moves on a different level, not being subjected to such psychological pressure as people who lose their sight later in life.

Integration into everyday life is complicated in varying degrees depending on the nature and extent of the visual impairment and on the abilities of the individual. A man suffering from visual impairment later in life is removed from everyday life, and must again relearn the basic skills. If they are of working age, they must acquire the skills necessary for the chosen profession, since most of those suffering from loss of vision almost always lose their jobs.

### *The participation of the visually impaired in the labor market*

#### *A theoretical basis*

“Work is the strongest tie to reality!” – is defined by Sigmund Freud as one of the reasons to work [1]. One's job ranks first among the activities through which a person comes to a self-realization, and in the case of the visually impaired, it is the cornerstone of their social integration. The importance of work to human life is undeniable; it contributes to the shaping of one's personality [2] and the socialization of the visually impaired in the workplace also influences their quality of life [3].

The practical application of their own work potential for the visually impaired, of course, is different for each of them and is dependent on the extent of their impairment. Jesenský [3] claims that through the socialization and the personality development of visually impaired people, they will achieve their integration.<sup>1</sup>

For some with visual impairment, work is self-fulfillment, achieving a sense of validity for others to the betterment of their own economic situation. Ideally, the job would fulfill all of these requirements simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Integration is a state where the visually impaired do not consider themselves to be a special part of a company and neither does the company see the visually impaired as its own special sector, i.e., when they have adapted to each other and when the visually impaired's faults have disappeared and with those who can see, their false compassion, embarrassment, and prejudice” [3]. Faults here mean as a result of visual defects [3].

<sup>2</sup> A number of authors write about the value and importance of work in Czech literature, such as Petr Mareš of FSS MU Brno, Jiří Večerník of the Institute of Sociology ASCR, and more.

During the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, practically all those disabled were clients of the welfare state and their jobs usually involved work in production cooperatives, similar to present-day sheltered workshops. These entities, however, disappeared in the nineties, with some exceptions,<sup>3</sup> due to their lack of competitiveness. The market economy, on the one hand, gives everyone space for implementation, but it is difficult for a handicapped person to meet the requirements of the free labor market. Paradoxically, in a free society, they are gradually excluded from public life, become completely dependent on state support and insignificant for the labor market.<sup>4</sup> According to Sirovátka [4], “marginality is seen as the opposite of participation”. Møller [5] characterizes marginalization in a similar way. According to him, marginalization in the labor market concerns people of working age who are permanently or have for a long time been excluded from the everyday labor market.

Not all people with disabilities see this fact as unchanging and do participate in the open labor market. This paper<sup>5</sup> is an evaluation of the success of the visually impaired with regards to the market economy, clearly showing which part of the handicapped are gainfully employed, receiving either a wage or salary,<sup>6</sup> or by being self-employed.

### *The participation of the visually impaired in the labor market*

#### *The sources of the data and achieved results*

The degree of success in employment in the labor market comes primarily from a level playing field regarding their access to education and employment and certainly from the situation in the labor market concerning the experience, qualifications, and willingness of the candidate to work.

All the above conditions are often only an ideal, which, especially for the disabled, is not able to be met. In comparison: in 1984, roughly 30% of all the visually impaired found a job in

<sup>3</sup> These include the Karko Cooperative in Ústí nad Labem, founded in 1953, which currently employs nearly 300 disabled people in three workshops. There's also Spektra, a Prague manufacturing cooperative for the blind, whose activities date back to 1989 and who specialize in computer technology and compensational aids for the visually impaired. The manufacturing cooperative Obzor, in Zlín, founded in 1965, focuses mainly on the production and distribution of small electromechanical products and parts for the automotive industry.

<sup>4</sup> Mareš [15] refers to marginalization as the “reduction of chance, pushing workers with certain social characteristics into unfavorable or marginal positions in the labor market and exposing them to a higher risk of unemployment, or into a period of long-term unemployment”.

<sup>5</sup> While this article was being processed, there was no more up to date information from the Czech Statistical Office available. Another collection of data concerning people with disabilities will be published in 2014; after the results are released there may be an opportunity to draw up a comparison of the data from the two researches.

<sup>6</sup> According to Murray [16] however, a salary is also a symbol of status through which it is possible to satisfy existential certainty. The extent of the salary did not lose its motivational effects. People are influenced by money and money can in turn “buy” its social status.

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