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## **THE ROLE OF THE EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE IN THE OCCUPATIONAL ACTIVATION OF DISABLED PERSONS**

**Abstract.** EQUAL's achievements should influence the implementation of other policies and programmes that are pursued at the local, regional, national and European levels. Employment strategies directed to the disabled persons are determined by different states' approaches, which fact is reflected in national legislations protecting equal treatment or ensuring non-discrimination in the labour market. The presented EQUAL projects show that disabled persons have problems with accepting themselves and with being accepted by their environment. It is easier for persons living in a non-discriminating environment to overcome obstacles and stereotypes and thus to adjust to the circumstances. The most difficult process the persons with acquired disabilities face is returning to normal life activity. The EQUAL programmes have undoubtedly played an important social role in increasing the economic activity of disabled persons.

**Key words:** Equal, unemployed, difficulties on the labour market, occupational activation of disabled persons

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One of the key elements of European Union's employment strategy is fighting discrimination in the workplace as well as obstacles impeding employment. EU's activities in this area include the EQUAL Community Initiative that was established in 2000 to promote a labour market that would not discriminate workers for their gender, race, ethnic origin, religion and denomination, disabilities or age. EQUAL seeks and tests new methods of fighting employment-related discrimination. The population of job seekers includes numerous risk groups that have problems with getting jobs for their personal traits and because of socio-economic or occupational determinants (Wiśniewski Z. [2002], p. 335). Specialists estimate the number of the disabled persons at 500,000,000, which accounts for around 10% of the total world's population. In the western European countries, as well as in Poland, the rate currently exceeds 14% and grows, mainly driven by civilisation changes.

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Disability is believed to be one of the major social problems of the modern world. In addition to psychological problems resulting from their health condition, the long-term unemployed disabled persons suffer from isolation, helplessness and passiveness. To encourage them to seek employment, a whole range of activating programmes has been implemented in Poland in relation to EQUAL.

This study aims to highlight the role and importance of some selected activities that were launched under EQUAL to help the disabled enter the labour market.

## 2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

EQUAL is an EU program that offers non-repayable aid to selected entities, such as local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and entrepreneurs in connection with the structural transformation projects they undertake in the member states (Ślusarczyk Z [2008] p. 28). EQUAL's principles build on the essential freedoms, such as the single European market and free competition stating that every person entering the labour market is entitled to the same employment opportunities and that employment should only depend on the person's meeting the functionality criteria (Becla A. [2006] p.207). The Polish EQUAL activities are divided into five themes:<sup>1</sup>

Theme A aims to develop mechanisms that provide social groups that are disadvantaged for their lack of skills and low educational attainment with equal employment opportunities, as well as ensuring that groups' participation in the development of an information society. This theme puts special emphasis on problems related to unequal treatment and discrimination of rural residents and persons living in areas undergoing restructuring in the labour market.

Subject D is intended to support the creation of a Polish model of social economy. Social economy involves participation in defining the economy's role and tasks so that the attractiveness of local labour markets and services can be increased and the national policy measures supplemented and strengthened. A special weight is attached to the development of methods making local communities use social economy instruments in activating occupationally groups of persons at risk of exclusion from the labour market, as well as launching actions facilitating the revitalization of local labour markets.

Theme F has been designed to facilitate and support the implementation of new ICT technologies and innovations to boost enterprise competitiveness and make entrepreneurs aware that both managers and workers must be trained to en-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl/equal.php?lang=pl>

sure enterprise development and retention of jobs (this especially applies to older workers and women).

Theme G involves the working out of model solutions helping improve work-life balance, as well as support for the development of institutional care for children and dependent persons.

**Theme I** focuses on improving the functioning of the institutional care system for persons seeking a refugee status and developing research and analytical methods for diagnosing and predicting refugee inflows, as well as on social education about the cohabitation of cultures.

– Each of the thematic fields is implemented and financed through the following four actions:

– Action 1: setting up a Development Partnership and starting transnational co-operation.

– Action 2: implementing the work programmes of the Development Partnerships

– Action 3: thematic networking, dissemination of good practices and influencing member states' national policies

– Action 4: technical assistance to support actions 1,2,3

Between the years 2004 and 2008, the European Social Fund earmarked €133.99m for EQUAL in Poland and the national budget allocated € 44.64m.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. DISABLED PERSONS IN THE POLISH LABOUR MARKET

According to the literature, the disabled population consists of legal and biological invalids (Kołaczek B. [1994] p. 9). The legal invalid holds a certificate issued by a competent medical commission for disability and employment issues, indicating the disability category and entitling to a disability pension. Biological invalids are persons who consider themselves disabled, or are considered as such by their families, but whose disability category has not been formally assessed and thus they are entitled to a so-called social pension but not to a disability pension (Mlonek K. [1999] p. 148). According to K. Głąbicka, a person whose mental or physical condition permanently or temporarily hinders, limits or totally disables the performance of life and social activities as defined by the relevant legal and social requirements is considered to be disabled (Głąbicka K. [2001] p. 244). Disability is defined by the degree of person's incapacity to work as indicated in the document certifying the disability category.

Persons with disability categories I and II are completely unable to work because of their permanent or long-term bodily dysfunctions. Disabled persons with disability category I additionally require continuous care and an assistant,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl/equal.php?CID=6&lang=pl>

while persons with disability category II can work, but their work environment has to be especially adapted to their needs. Employability of persons with disability category III is limited, but they can do a job other than the one they did before or work under conditions that either prevent the exacerbation of their disabilities or have a therapeutic effect.

Disabled persons have to struggle with both physical impairments and barriers existing in the labour market. Stereotypes in the thinking about the disabled cause that the persons' frequently relevant education and professional training are not convincing enough for employers to recruit them. Besides, the jobless disabled persons frequently encounter architectural barriers, such as a lack of wheelchair ramps or too narrow doorways. Analysing their employment we need to address the fact that in many instances such persons voluntarily relinquish economic activity. Because they are eligible for disablement benefits, they feel safe and this is a feeling they do not want to part with. The process of making them more active in the labour market is additionally hindered by their frequently low education, a sense of being dependent on others, low self-esteem and disbelief in their capabilities. Problems with getting, maintaining and doing jobs are indisputably felt the most strongly by the groups of disabled persons that view work not only as a source of income allowing them to meet their basic needs, but also as the most effective way of social and occupational rehabilitation (Mlonek K. [1999], p. 148).

Untypical forms of employment help some social groups with definitely fewer employment opportunities enter the labour force, for instance persons with certified disabilities. For such persons, the sheltered workshops offering special working conditions represent the major employment opportunity, but more and more of them find jobs in the open labour market too. For instance, telework allows persons with certified disability categories to be active members of the regular labour force. This employment system is not subject to any space or time-related restrictions and the work itself can be organized in a place that is friendly to a disabled person. Telework can be used by persons with different dysfunctions, metabolic diseases, circulatory system and respiratory system diseases. Their jobs should be created according to the general applicable rules and in compliance with the legal norms and regulations (Sadowska-Snarska C. [2008], p. 134).

Poland has one of the lowest employment rates for persons with disabilities in Europe. For several years now, the level of employment among such persons has invariably varied from 10 to 20%, while in the other EU member states every second disabled person has a job. Disabled persons' employment in the open labour market undeniably depends on the primary objectives of state's policy toward such persons, such as their integration into the society and giving work a role in the process. To mitigate employers' prejudices and provide the

disabled with equal employment opportunities, an aid system offering employers of disabled workers subsidies to jobs, refunds and other entitlements has been put in place. Sheltered workshops are an important element of the current Polish model of disabled persons' employment. The first workshops were established to replace cooperatives associating disabled persons, but then they were formed successively and increasingly as spin-offs of the already existing enterprises or in the course of a complete enterprise restructuring. At present, the sheltered workshops are the only employment opportunity that is available to the disabled persons, giving them the sense of self-esteem and of living useful lives. Only a state-guaranteed system with subsidies and relieves available to those who employ and create jobs for disabled workers may sufficiently encourage entrepreneurs do so. In other words, the labour market situation of people with disabilities is largely formed by government policy and this awareness essentially contributes to the sense of security felt by the disabled workers and their employers.

The disabled population in Poland accounts for over 3,703,000 persons, most of which have moderate and slight disabilities (table 1). As many as 3,105,000 of them are economically inactive, usually persons with moderate disabilities. In the group of 987,000 persons with considerable disabilities, the proportion of the economically inactive persons is the largest, amounting to 937,000. Most of the working disabled have slight disabilities.

Table 1. Economic activity of persons aged 15+ by degree of disability

| Specification  | Total | Economically active |          |              |           | Unem-<br>ployed | Economi-<br>cally<br>inactive |           |
|--|-------|---------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
|  |       | Total               | Employed |              | thousands |                 |                               |           |
|  |       |                     | Total    | Working time |           |                 |                               |           |
|  |       |                     |          | Full-time    |           |                 |                               | Part-time |
| GRAND TOTAL  | 3703  | 598                 | 534      | 343          | 191       | 64              | 3105                          |           |
| Holders of certificates<br>stating:<br>considerable disability | 987   | 50                  | 43       | 28           | 16        | 7               | 937                           |           |
| moderate disability  | 1432  | 225                 | 200      | 114          | 86        | 26              | 1206                          |           |
| slight disability  | 1284  | 322                 | 291      | 201          | 90        | 31              | 961                           |           |

Source: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL\\_pdl\\_aktynosc\\_ekonomiczna\\_ludnosci\\_IVkw\\_2008.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL_pdl_aktynosc_ekonomiczna_ludnosci_IVkw_2008.pdf)

Over 88% of the working disabled persons have limited physical ability, mainly caused by dysfunctional motor organs, diseases of the circulatory system and neurological disorders. An additional problem is the persons' levels of educational attainment. According to table 2, most working disabled persons have not gone beyond vocational education level (basic or secondary) that does not give them an advantageous situation in the labour market. However, many life-

long educational opportunities are available in Poland, also to this group of beneficiaries. Education-based self-development improves individuals' adaptability to their environment, in both the workplace and in other spheres of social life (Wieczorek I. [2008], p. 13). Several programmes promoting the lifelong learning concepts are available in Poland now under the Operational Programme Human Capital.

Table 2. Disabled persons by educational attainment in Poland

| Specification             | Total | Economically active |          |              |           | Unem-<br>ployed | Economically<br>inactive |              |
|---------------------------|-------|---------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------|
|                           |       | Total               | Employed |              | thousands |                 |                          |              |
|                           |       |                     | Total    | Working time |           |                 |                          |              |
|                           |       |                     |          | Full<br>time |           |                 |                          | Part<br>time |
| GRAND TOTAL               | 3703  | 598                 | 534      | 343          | 191       | 64              | 3105                     |              |
| <b>Education</b>          |       |                     |          |              |           |                 |                          |              |
| Tertiary                  | 220   | 65                  | 64       | 51           | 13        |                 | 156                      |              |
| Secondary vocational      | 703   | 163                 | 146      | 102          | 44        | 17              | 540                      |              |
| Secondary grammar         | 281   | 38                  | 30       | 14           | 16        | 8               | 242                      |              |
| Basic vocational          | 1084  | 210                 | 186      | 125          | 61        | 25              | 873                      |              |
| Junior secondary, primary | 1415  | 122                 | 108      | 51           | 57        | 15              | 1294                     |              |

Source: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL\\_pdl\\_aktywnosc\\_ekonomiczna\\_ludności\\_IVkw\\_2008.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL_pdl_aktywnosc_ekonomiczna_ludności_IVkw_2008.pdf)

Most disabled persons (136,000) have jobs in agriculture, forestry, hunting and fish farming. The next largest section is industrial manufacture employing 111,000 disabled persons, followed by trade and repair of motor vehicles – 59,000. The smallest number of disabled persons, merely 7,000, provide services in the real estate market ( table no 3).

Table 3. Economically active disabled persons by selected section of the Polish Classification of Activities

| Specification                                | Total     | Men | Women |
|--|-----------|-----|-------|
|  | thousands |     |       |
| TOTAL  | 534       | 340 | 194   |
| Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fish farming | 136       | 89  | 47    |
| Industrial manufacture                       | 111       | 76  | 35    |
| Building                                     | 29        | 26  |       |
| Trade, repair of motor vehicles              | 59        | 38  | 21    |
| Services to real estate                      | 7         |     |       |
| Health care and social aid                   | 24        | 5   | 19    |

Source: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL\\_pdl\\_aktywnosc\\_ekonomiczna\\_ludności\\_IVkw\\_2008.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL_pdl_aktywnosc_ekonomiczna_ludności_IVkw_2008.pdf)

The majority of the working disabled are aged 45 and older. The working age population of the disabled numbers accounts for 536,000 persons, while the post-working age persons stands at 61,000 (table 4).

Table 4. Economic activity of disabled persons by age

| Specification               | Total | Economically active |          |              |           | Unem-<br>ployed | Economi-<br>cally<br>active |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
|                             |       | Total               | Employed |              |           |                 |                             |
|                             |       |                     | total    | Working time |           |                 |                             |
|                             |       |                     |          | Full time    | Part time |                 |                             |
| Thousands                   |       |                     |          |              |           |                 |                             |
| 15-24                       | 129   | 27                  | 20       | 16           | 7         | 102             |                             |
| 25-34                       | 221   | 78                  | 67       | 50           | 17        | 144             |                             |
| 35-44                       | 248   | 80                  | 69       | 54           | 15        | 167             |                             |
| 45-54                       | 728   | 185                 | 171      | 123          | 48        | 544             |                             |
| 55-64                       | 1077  | 181                 | 160      | 88           | 72        | 896             |                             |
| 65 and older                | 1300  | 48                  | 46       | 10           | 36        | 1252            |                             |
| Working-age population      | 2208  | 536                 | 475      | 327          | 148       | 1672            |                             |
| Post-working age population | 1478  | 61                  | 58       | 15           | 43        | 1417            |                             |

Source: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL\\_pdl\\_aktynosc\\_ekonomiczna\\_ludności\\_IVkw\\_2008.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xber/gus/PUBL_pdl_aktynosc_ekonomiczna_ludności_IVkw_2008.pdf)

The analysis of statistical data spanning the years 2006-2008 also shows that the disabled persons have relatively short periods of workplace experience. Most of them have worked up to 10 years and only few can be proud of 30 years of service.

#### 4. SELECTED EQUAL PROJECTS SUPPORTING ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF DISABLED PERSONS

##### 4.1. "Developing the Life Skills of the Mentally Capable, but Physically Disabled Young People" – MISARN

Disabled persons are at particular risk of social exclusion and poverty. In recognition of this fact, the European Union and the member states have decided to extend all its social marginalization combating actions to disabled persons.

Disabled persons are a heterogeneous group as regards the degrees and types of their disabilities, so the assistance they should receive also needs to be diverse and customised. The responsibility for carrying out particular EQUAL projects lies with the Development Partnerships. A Development Partnership consists of several institutions and organizations that have decided to work together and join

their resources to solve a problem of inequality or discrimination in the labour market.

One type of the stereotypes affecting the disabled persons is that the physically disabled persons are perceived as mentally incapable or inadequate. This image is very unfair and leads to discriminatory practices at different life levels. It became a leading problem for the project „Developing Life Skills of the Mentally Capable, but Physically Disabled Young People” – MISARN.<sup>3</sup> MISARN was established to provide the mentally capable, but physically disabled people aged 18–24 years with equal chances of having independent personal, social and occupational life. The Partnership was initiated and coordinated by the Foundation „The Leadership Education Centre”. Its activities were supported by institutions and organizations helping the disabled, as well as entities that were interested in being actively involved in creating a labour market open to all.<sup>4</sup> The secondary project beneficiaries were the disabled person’s parents (or legal guardians), persons professionally assisting the target group of persons, staff of central administration or local government bodies in charge of the same type of activity, representatives of NGOs, as well as employers and representatives of some professions, especially within the public services sphere.<sup>5</sup>

Mental barriers can only be removed by a systemic therapy, i.e. one affecting not only the disabled persons, but also their direct and indirect environment. The first stage in the barrier removal process was a Model Life Skills Development Programme that intended to help young disabled persons and their guardians overcome the feeling of helplessness, change the existing stereotypes and relieve the participants of the sense of isolation. The Programme consisted of workshops during which the beneficiaries and their parents were taught to deal with disability. To influence the institutional environment, the MISARN Partnership trained social workers and professional trainers in the special requirements of working with physically disabled persons. Another activity that was meant to influence the environment of people with physical disabilities was training for the public transport drivers, who were taught to take care of the disabled passengers and facilitate their use of public transport services. The actions were innovative, because they aspired to change human mentality and competencies, rather than making physical changes to the environment, which made them simpler and cheaper to apply.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl/downloadphp/Mod=news&FID=117>

<sup>4</sup> Instytut Rozwoju Służb Społecznych ; Polskie Towarzystwo Chorób Nerwowo-Mięśniowych; Stowarzyszenie „Centrum Informacji Społecznej” CIS; Uniwersytet Warszawski; Zakład Elektroniki Profesjonalnej ASM (partner w działaniu 2); Przedstawicielstwo Programu Narodów Zjednoczonych ds. Rozwoju (UNDP).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl>



Two surveys were conducted in connection with the project: one assessing the level of beneficiaries' life skills and seeking to establish what else was needed to form or improve their skills, and another investigating so-called life trajectories. The surveys covered the beneficiaries, their parents and specialists professionally helping the disabled. The findings were then used to work out a model life skills development programme that was tested in the project course. Additionally, the participants took part in the following training modules:

- Civic counselling
- Physical activity training
- Summer school – integration and educational workshops
- From secondary schooling to the university
- From education to a labour market

The modules aimed to develop the beneficiaries' civic skills, improve their knowledge of their legal entitlements, promote active measures of taking care of their health, and familiarize them with the methods helping solve their life problems. Additionally, plans were made to create a new postgraduate major for people working with young disabled persons: a career-planning specialist. The graduates would specialize in helping their clients plan development paths corresponding to the clients' abilities and interests.

The social workers were provided with the training „Against helplessness”, which was designed to improve their professional competence and skills in dealing with their charges. A significant problem among the disabled persons is that few of them actively seek employment. Among the active disabled job seekers, the level of unemployment is comparable with that in the open market. MISARN representatives believe that the situation is partly caused by the special education system, since special schools offer inferior education than the regular state-run schools, so their graduates are in a disadvantaged position when starting into life. The other end of the problem is parents who frequently misidentify their children's needs. The disabled persons often give up examinations finalizing their secondary education, because they themselves and their guardians wish to avoid the related stress<sup>7</sup>.

#### **4.2. „Partnership for Man – Rain Man For Partnership”**

“Partnership for Rain Man – Rain Man for Partnership” was created for autistic persons and was executed between November 2004 and March 2008. „There are around 10,000 autistic adults living in Poland and 20,000 children that will complete their education in the next years and will reach working age. The group is completely excluded from the labour market, although European

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

experiences show that autistic persons want and can work, if provided with appropriate conditions. Work is extremely important in their therapy and rehabilitation, as it enhances their self-esteem and enables them to join community life.”<sup>8</sup>

Autistic persons have problems with verbal and non-verbal communication. Almost half of them never speaks and those who do acquire the skill very late. Accepting changes is difficult for them; they have problems with starting eye contact, sometimes show inadequate emotions and have problems with interpreting other people’s emotions.

The paramount goal of the „Partnership for Rain Man” project was the economic and social activation of autistic adults. Within the project, a replicable model of their employment in a social enterprise was worked out. The Partnership made efforts to provide the autistic adults with a possibility of doing useful jobs and thus having satisfactory lives. Accordingly, the project<sup>9</sup>:

- Established a model social enterprise („Miscellaneous Items Studio SYNOPSIS” in Wilcza Góra near Warsaw was implementing social economy concepts. One of its main activities was professional printing services, while the ceramic, stained glass and woodwork workshops produced handicraft);

- Worked out a model for incorporating the enterprise into a local community;

- Worked out the institutional and legal basis allowing replication of the model;

- Created a Team of Work Trainers (Poland lacks skilled specialists that could work with autistic adults. The team was trained by world-class European specialists. Innovative forms of therapy were created from scratch);

- Developed the market profile of a social enterprise (the conducted business analyses addressed the fact that the enterprise’s products have to comply with market standards while taking account of autistic persons’ special needs);

- Issued publications (a pictogram-based manual for the prospective enterprise’s workforce and publications showing how to establish a social enterprise in Polish circumstances).

The project provided a comprehensive, replicable and proven model supporting the economic and social activation of autistic persons, which can help remove one essential obstacle to making such persons part of community life<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl/baza.php?M=10&PID=47&lang=pl>

<sup>9</sup> [http://partnerstwo-synopsis.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcateg...](http://partnerstwo-synopsis.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcateg...)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl/baza.php?M=10&PID=47&lang=pl>

### 4.3. „The disabled – self-reliance, family, rehabilitation, education, work – an integrated system”

The Partnership „The disabled – self-reliance, family, rehabilitation, education, work – an integrated system” was intended for persons with certified considerable and moderate disabilities, however meeting the intellectual norm. This group is marginalized starting with pre-school and school education through medical and social rehabilitation to the employment system. The number of integration establishments is insufficient, inclusion education is not available, special schools teach trades that are incompatible with the persons’ dysfunctions as well as with the labour market’s needs. The public also shows negative attitude to disabled persons<sup>11</sup>.

Therefore, the Partnership’s main goal became the creation of a model ensuring integrated approach to individual disabled persons to benefit from the project, as well as identifying and testing these aspects of disabled persons’ lives that are central to their development. Consequently, the following activities were performed<sup>12</sup>:

- Methods for reaching out to the inactive disabled persons who live in isolation were created and tested, contacts with those who do not believe that things can change, lost hope and cannot surface without receiving support were established;
- A new profession of education broker was created, being a person specialised in cooperative matching of training options with individual’s needs and abilities;
- A community system offering support, education and complimentary access to information via the Internet, based on local internet cafes, („step 1 – I go out from home”) and a more general system allowing the users to participate in e-support groups („step 2 – I’m not alone”) were established;
- Activities aimed at opening up the labour market to the disabled persons were undertaken. The activities included the making of a diagnosis of the root causes of employers’ reluctance, work on changing their attitudes and encouraging them to employ people with disabilities;
- Activities designed to ensure that the disabled have equal educational opportunities were performed;
- Access to information on issues such as rehabilitation options, „how to live” in the community with a given type of disability, employment, making one’s home a liveable place, recreation options, etc., was provided via an information portal „We about ourselves” that was edited by various non-governmental organizations and self-help groups associating disabled persons;

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.samiosobie.org.pl/cele/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

- Customized strategies of gradual activation of the disabled persons and their families were prepared;
- Supranational Partners dealing with social policy (forms of disabled persons' employment) and educational policy (systemic solutions) in other countries were engaged in the Partnership's activities;
- People were mobilized to learn, work and recreate (so that they could develop their social skills) during support group's activities and in the course of a workshop set up for the beneficiaries („step 3 – I'm a member of a group”);
- The beneficiaries were referred to an occupational activation workshop with an occupational activation and social communication programme (full time training) to prepare them to work;
- The psychologists developed individual educational paths for each of the direct beneficiaries („step 4 – I'm developing myself”);
- The domestic Partnership was enriched by exchanging experiences;
- The domestic social policy was enhanced with the project's products: the title of education broker was put on the national list of occupations and some MPs were encouraged to submit a motion requesting the replacement of the Parliament's resolution „The Charter of the Rights of Disabled Persons” with the law „The Charter of a Disabled Citizen” in order to provide the disabled with equal opportunities.
- The Partnership's achievements were printed and disseminated.

One of the project's goals was making the labour market ready to receive disabled workers by educating the prospective employers. Additionally, the Internet (and specifically the project's portal „We about ourselves”) was used to disseminate comprehensive and multidirectional information that was intended to influence the formation of an information society and incorporate the disabled into the society. The assistance directed to the disabled persons' families allowed extending the project impacts to every sphere of life affected by disability. The Partnership's actions aimed to create social climate enabling systematic improvement of the quality of the disabled persons' lives. The tools used in the process ranged from studies discussing the correct quality of work of a disabled person's assistant and education standards applying to teacher's work with disabled pupils in the classroom to a local model of communication with persons affected by disability.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.4. „Telework”

The “Telework” project provided the disabled beneficiaries with free access to training and traineeships. Among other things, the project tried to improve

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.equal.org.pl/baza.php?M=10&PID=97&lang=pl>

SMEs' competitiveness and facilitate the organization of jobs for the physically disabled workers by implementing and promoting so-called telework. Another goal that the project executors assumed was creating an effective lifelong education system for both workers and prospective employers. The model they came up with consisted of one telecenter and six „telecottages” – computer workstations where the disabled persons could both work and take various types of training<sup>14</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

EQUAL's achievements should influence the implementation of other policies and programmes that are pursued at the local, regional, national and European levels. They have to be analysed, including comparative analysis, and then disseminated to ensure that the Member States and the whole European Union makes the most of them.<sup>15</sup> Employment strategies directed to the disabled persons are determined by different states' approaches, which fact is reflected in national legislations protecting equal treatment or ensuring non-discrimination in the labour market. Various EU member states apply different employment solutions and employment-supporting measures, otherwise known as the labour market programmes, that represent public intervention in the labour market, intended to secure its efficient functioning and improve its balance (Paszkowicz M.A. [2008], p. 91). The presented EQUAL projects show that disabled persons have problems with accepting themselves and with being accepted by their environment. It is easier for persons living in a non-discriminating environment to overcome obstacles and stereotypes and thus to adjust to the circumstances. The most difficult process the persons with acquired disabilities face is returning to normal life activity. The autistics persons' accounts indicate that they are aware of their situation and want to change it by joining the rest of their community. Their efforts can be facilitated by specialist assistance, customized therapy, and in the case of adults - employment. The EQUAL programmes have undoubtedly played an important social role in increasing the economic activity of disabled persons.

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<sup>14</sup> The main partners in the programme are: Fundacja Kształcenia Managerów na Pomorzu Zachodnim; Hogben SC Marcin Łuczyk, Piotr Wilanowski; Home.pl Jurczyk, Stypuła, Kapcio Sp.j.; Koszalińska Izba Przemysłowo-Handlowa; Kurier Szczeciński Sp. z o.o.; Polskie Towarzystwo Informatyczne; Polskie Towarzystwo Stwardnienia Rozsianego Oddział Wojewódzki w Szczecinie; Polskie Towarzystwo Walki z Kalectwem – Oddział Wojewódzki w Szczecinie; Powiatowy Urząd Pracy w Stargardzie Szczecińskim; Powiatowy Urząd Pracy w Szczecinku; Północna Izba Gospodarcza; Przedsiębiorstwo Usług Budowlanych Budo-Masz; Stargardzka Izba Gospodarcza w Stargardzie Szczecińskim; Szczeciński Związek Pracodawców; Unizeto Technologies SA.

<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Economy and Labour, the Foundation Cooperation Fund and EQUAL Community Initiative for Poland 2004–2006, p. 75.

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**ROLA I ZNACZENIE INICJATYWY WSPÓLNOTOWEJ EQUAL  
W AKTYWIZACJI ZAWODOWEJ OSÓB NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNYCH**

Rezultaty Programu EQUAL muszą stać się częścią systematycznego podejścia do innych polityk i programów, które są realizowane na poziomie lokalnym, regionalnym, krajowym i europejskim. Strategie zatrudnienia osób niepełnosprawnych opierają się na różnych podejściach. Znalazło to swój wyraz w opracowaniach ustawodawczych, zmierzających do zapewnienia równego traktowania czy niedyskryminacji w obszarze zatrudnienia. Z przedstawionych powyżej wybranych projektów IW EQUAL wynika, że osoby niepełnosprawne mają problem z akceptacją zarówno samych siebie jak i otoczenia. Dlatego też osoby, które żyją w środowisku, w którym nie są dyskryminowane, łatwiej przezwyciężają bariery i stereotypy a tym samym łatwiej jest im się przystosować do otaczającej je rzeczywistości. Najtrudniejszym procesem dla osoby z nabytą niepełnosprawnością jest proces powrotu do normalnej aktywności życiowej. Programy Equal odegrały niewątpliwie ważną społeczną rolę w aktywizacji zawodowej osób niepełnosprawnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** EQUAL, trudności na rynku pracy, aktywizacja zawodowa osób niepełnosprawnych, bezrobotny.