

## Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

# Slovak Republic case study report 3 Disabled Pupils' and Skills for Employment

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The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

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The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

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This project was partially funded through the ESF. It was realised at the Ladce Vocational Boarding School between March 2006 and August 2007. There were twelve events that took place during this 18-month period and several of them were sub-divided into separate activities. There were more than 125 pupils participating in the project, with the total costs of 1,640,000 SKK.

The project focused on providing assistance in developing new basic skills for entering the job market after the vocational school attendance. It was also aimed at providing the information that would prove useful for effective integration in future life. The focus was on the disabled<sup>1</sup> pupils from Ladce Vocational Boarding School.

The project goals include the following tasks, in particularly:

- to provide assistance in developing new basic skills and work routines that would allow the pupils to assert themselves in the job market after they complete their vocational school attendance,
- to use innovative and effective consultation methods and experience-based learning to provide grounds for social skills training,
- to create space for developing skills to overcome various obstacles related to mental stress and disappointments along the passage from the school environment to the so called world of work,
- to support practical skills and work routines development on various authentic workplaces in the form of practical training and excursions,
- to contact companies and develop communication with them.

These tasks might be viewed as means of attaining the main goal of the project, which concerns the efficient help for developing social skills and other abilities so that the project participants were able to assert themselves more effectively in the job market.

The project was realised in several forms, including the following as the main ones:

- Education programmes focusing on gaining social skills and suitable communication skills for the potential employer, and further training enhancing their development.
- Experience-based learning forms focusing on different ways (written or personal) of contacting pupils' future employers while looking for a job.
- Consultation activities aimed to provide a complex sum of information about the job market, including the latest information on work law codes and regulations, basic knowledge of psychology necessary for dealing with (un)employment and handling changes on the passage from the school environment to the world of work.
- Programmes aimed to provide practical skills and routines necessary for working on various work places and offering opportunities to obtain a job position in a company participating in the project after the end of the practical training.
- Excursions to the institutions orientated on services and activities for the disabled.

With a view of the chronological course of the project, it is possible to characterise the content of the project through the following activities:

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<sup>1</sup> The term disabled seems to have its roots in the contemporary stage of terminological development in the field of disability inequalities in Slovakia. The term disabled in the Slovak surroundings might be replaced by a term 'handicapped' or 'disadvantaged', and sometimes by expression 'persons with disability inequalities'. Although this way of referring to inequalities by using a kind of "inequality attributes" (in cases of terms: disabled and handicapped) might be interpreted as attributing the inequality to the human being existence itself as a basis for viewing the "disabled persons" as basis for discrimination by purpose, it is not a truism at all. The terms disabled, handicapped etc. are used even by persons volunteering in this field of social work and education, often even by experts on special pedagogy etc. The grounds for this usage and point of view seem to come from less intense attention paid to linguistic sensitiveness to these issues. However, the applied terminology might be interpreted as an indicator of the still outlasting view of the persons with these inequalities as of people who need help. Further in this case study the terminology is applied with respect to the contemporary usage in Slovakia and in the documents concerning the described project.

1. contacting and first meetings with the target group, basic information about the project,
2. project presentation,
3. monitoring participants and analysing information from the pupils' questionnaires,
4. consultation activities carried out through experience-based learning on various topics prepared to develop pupils' personalities,
5. contacts and further cooperation with companies in order to establish practical training for disabled pupils,
6. excursion I. in facilities that cater for the needs of the handicapped by offering services and activities for them,
7. gaining practical skills and work routines for specific company job positions – so called company practical training for the handicapped,
8. activities oriented on pupils' learning and developing social skills,
9. excursion II. in facilities that cater for the needs of the handicapped<sup>1</sup> by offering services and activities for them,
10. excursion III. in facilities that cater for the needs of the handicapped by offering services and activities for them,
11. digital literacy and PC skills-oriented educational activities,
12. project completion, outcome analysis, final assessment of the project.

The consultation activities for the Ladce pupils, which took place between April and June 2006, focused the following topics:

- job market and relevant institutions (job agencies); the Work Office, the Social Affairs and Family Office and their responsibilities,
- the policy of employment, active strategies etc.,
- what is a business enterprise – self-employment activities, accessible benefit claims, grants, preparations for opening own business,
- knowledge - abilities - skills, my personal inventory, what makes me attractive for the job market, what are my strong/weak points,
- communication – what is it?, how shall we communicate?, verbal and non-verbal communication, one-way and open channel communication, other communication factors, active listening,
- unemployment and its typology, unemployment as a phenomenon viewed from the psychological and economic points of view.

### ***Excursions I. – III.***

Excursion I. in an institution with its programme suited to similar pupils' needs as in Ladce Vocational Boarding School took place in Waiblingen, Germany, between May 26 and June 4, 2006. The goal of this activity was to show the mentally handicapped<sup>1</sup> pupils in Ladce how a different institution facilitates the passage from the school environment to the world of work. The Ladce pupils also learnt to orientate in a foreign language speaking environment. Two teachers and six pupils from the Ladce Vocational Boarding School took part in this business and study trip.

To strengthen their social skills, the pupils went shopping several times together with the German pupils and then prepared dinner, where they and their German counterparts compared education at both schools. Although the foreign language did make the communication more difficult, the Ladce pupils managed to share their experience and made new friends. They personally experienced the production process in a factory and in cooperation with their German counterparts they produced an item without being supervised by workshop masters. There was also a visit to a department of pupil-testing, where the Ladce pupils could try out most of the tests prepared for the future German pupils. As most of the pupils were gardeners, they became keenly interested in the process of

agricultural production and keeping the park green, therefore there was organised a visit to a specialised site for these activities, too.

Although the programme placed the biggest stress on practical skills and knowledge, it also included sightseeing in the area of Waiblingen. Naturally, one of the visit's highlights was a trip to the new Mercedes – Benz museum in Stuttgart, where the pupils could learn about the car-industry history, as well as about the historical milestones of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The schedule for April 12, 2007, saw the Ladce Vocational Boarding School pupils on an excursion to the Institute for the Handicapped Citizens' Work Rehabilitation with 58 pupils and ten members of the staff. The pupils learnt about the history of the institution, its study programmes and education system, as well as about its informal curriculum. They obtained interesting information about the assistance programme enabling the handicapped<sup>1</sup> pupils to improve their state of health through a physiotherapy programme. At the final meeting following the professional programme all the participants discussed the goals of the excursion. The pupils expressed their satisfaction with the excursion programme and left for home enriched with new experiences and information.

On May 31, 2007, in accordance with the project schedule, the Ladce pupils participating in the project (38 pupils and seven members of the pedagogical staff) visited some of the companies which employ the handicapped<sup>1</sup>. The first visit took place in the MONTRADE company in Povážská Bystrica, which employs more than 60 citizens with partial disabilities. Accompanied by the company workers, the pupils and staff could see two so called sheltered workplaces and they were informed about the conditions of employing the handicapped<sup>1</sup>. The second visit took place in the PILAMUS company in the village of Ihřišř near Púchov, which works in wood processing. The pupils had an opportunity to see the carpentry workshop and wood-drying facility and, as in the case of the first visit, they learnt about the rules of the handicapped<sup>1</sup> employment. The pupils were very satisfied with the excursion results and left for home enriched with new knowledge.

The project also comprised of activities oriented on digital literacy and PC skills, which can improve lifestyle and make many everyday activities more efficient.

### ***Digital Literacy in the Project***

The main goal of this activity was to increase digital literacy by focusing on practical PC skills, and especially on the Internet user skills, which can help to search for a suitable vacancy. The goal attainment was monitored continuously after each group had been through the total of eight PC work lessons focusing *Topic 1: Internet and electronic mail* and *Topic 2: Internet Search for Vacancies*. Girls had an opportunity to spend additional 8 PC work lessons focusing *Topic 3: Preparation for Providing Complex Household Services* and on *Topic 4: Practical skills and Household Appliances Operating Modes* (which appears to be a question for another, this time, gender-sensitive project, author's note).

### ***Lifestyle in the Project***

This activity was divided into four topics:

- health care theory (general information, healthy lifestyle and ways of its achievement, illness prevention, first aid and the importance of disinfection),
- responsible parenthood and sexual education, its influence on individual personal development,
- moral values, its establishment and influence on the lifestyle of an individual,
- etiquette and its rules.

The activity was designed to provide the pupils with information about lifestyle and ways of its improvement in an appropriate form applying teaching methods of the experience-based learning. Pupils were given a chance to become more aware of their own lifestyles and of their individual capabilities to healthier lifestyle.

## **Conclusion**

The project participants had an opportunity to work in companies situated not far away from school thanks to the sophisticated practical training scheme. They could use the knowledge and skills gained at school and compare them with the demands of their potential employers in the production process itself. The monitoring indicator of the number of pupils participating in the modernised professional education schemes was not, however, achieved due to the number of pupils leaving the school (The planned number was 574, whereas the actual attained number was 568). All the other monitoring indicators were achieved in a full extent. The pupils leaving the school also obtained more information on the questions linked to the employment of handicapped<sup>1</sup> citizens. The digital literacy lessons were greeted with much enthusiasm, too. Experience-based learning helped the pupils to master the social skills necessary for successful communication while looking for a job and for communicating with all the relevant institutions and partners in the area. The project yielded an important outcome – implementation of the programmes to the curriculum subject schedules (Civics, Ethic Education, Economy and Organisation, Practical Training), which means that not only the project participants will be able to benefit from the project and changes. The project participants answered two questionnaires in the course of the project. The results obtained from the final questionnaire show how beneficial the project was for its participants too.

## **References:**

*Program prípravy handicapovaných žiakov na trh práce spojený s nácvikom rôznych zručností.*  
Available at WWW: <http://www.oulad.edu.sk/projekty/esf/index.html>. [online], [cited 20/2/2008]