

A GRADUATE IN THE LABOUR MARKET - A PARTNERSHIP FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

INTRODUCTION

Finishing education and entering the labour market is a key step in the life of every young person. At this point the individual departs from their well-known environment. In this environment many convictions are acquired and strategies to handle the requirements of the system are learnt. Even though these strategies do not always lead to the development of the individual, they give them a sense of security. These mechanisms probably become automated and cease to be a cause of stress (Roznowski 2009: 21). The labour market, however, is a new environment which can cause some anxiety and lead to many stressful situations. The individual must find their feet in an environment where the consequences of failure to fulfil certain obligations can result in a significantly higher penalty than in the education system. *The labour market consists of potential employees capable and willing to work and employers willing to hire workers* (Szaban 2013: 15) and that is why, the lack of diligence and punctuality as well as the neglect of duty result in loss of employment and subsequent exclusion from that environment. Certainly, at certain stages of education, like for instance university, students can also be threatened with expulsion, but before it actually happens they have many more opportunities to rehabilitate themselves than most employees in the labour market.

The labour market conditions which are encountered by young people are also important because they directly contribute to their living situation. Young adults who live with their parents are considered to be lazy and unwilling to rise to the challenge of self-reliance. However, most frequently it is the lack of financial resources to rent a flat (not to mention to purchase it) that is the reason for this situation. In 2012, the percentage of people in Poland aged 18 to 34 living with their parents was 60.2% and 27 – 48.1% in the EU (Central Statistical Office 2013: 11).

The purpose of this article is to present the situation encountered by university graduates while seeking their first job. The present situation of the

labour market in Subcarpathian Voivodeship, the assistance offered to former students by the District Employment Agency, and their opinion on this aid will be discussed.

UNEMPLOYMENT IN POLAND

To begin discussing the topic of the labour market situation in Poland we must refer to the data collected on registered unemployment by the Central Statistical Office in 2013. It must be emphasised that the concept of an unemployed person should be understood as *not employed and not engaged in other forms of gainful employment, capable and willing to take up full-time employment, which consist of a number of working hours specified for a given profession, service or other gainful employment, or if said person is disabled, able and willing to take up part-time employment, which consists of at least half of the specified number of working hours, who is not attending school, with the exception of studying in schools for adults or taking extramural examinations based on that school's curriculum, or studying part-time in a higher education institution. This person must be registered in the District Employment Agency corresponding with their permanent or temporary place of residence and looking for any form of gainful employment* (Act of 20 April 2004). The registered unemployment rate should be understood as: *the ratio of registered unemployed to the economically active population, excluding active duty military personnel and employees of national defence and public security budget entities. The unemployment rate takes into account people working on privately owned farms (...) the number of which is estimated on the basis of census* (Central Statistical Office 2014a: 8).

The data provided by the Central Statistical Office shows that the number of unemployed registered in employment agencies across Poland at the end of 2013 amounted to 2,157,900 people. The data also shows an increase of 21.1 thousand people when compared with 2012. The unemployment rate in 2013 was 13.4% (Central Statistical Office 2014a: 13-14, <http://www.stat.gov.pl/16.04.2014>). By the end of February 2014, there were already 2,255,900 registered unemployed and the unemployment rate (in the economically active population) was 13.9% (Central Statistical Office 2014b).

Taking into account the education of the unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2013, it should be noted that the highest percentage of the unemployed was present among people with a basic vocational education (28.04%), lower-secondary education, primary and incomplete primary education (27.25%), which together accounted for 55.29% of all unemployed. People with a higher

education accounted for 12.18% of the number of unemployed and those with secondary education for only 10.58%.

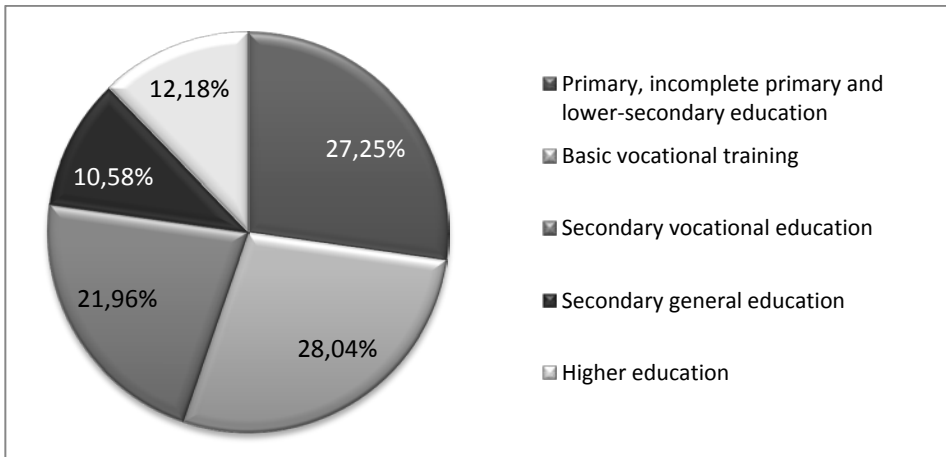


Figure 1. Unemployment rate by education level in the fourth quarter of 2013

Source: Central Statistical Office 2014a: 19.

What is more, it is notable that among the unemployed, women were more likely than men to have a higher or secondary education. Such women constituted 29.2% of all unemployed women, while men of similar education constituted 15.6% of all unemployed men (Central Statistical Office 2014a: 19).

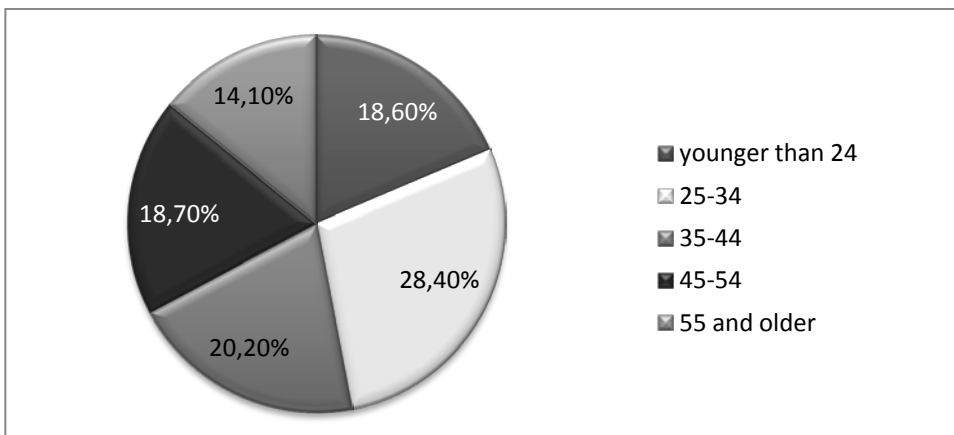


Figure 2. Unemployment rate by age in the fourth quarter of 2013

Source: Central Statistical Office 2014a: 18.

Nowadays, unemployment most frequently affects young people, since people under the age of 34 constitute 47% of all unemployed. The highest percentage of people aged 25-34 among the unemployed was recorded in the voivodeships of Lublin (32.8%), Subcarpathia (30.4%), Świętokrzyskie (29.9%), Podlaskie and Greater Poland (each 29.1%), and the lowest percentage in the voivodeships of Łódź (26.6%), Opole (26.7%), Lower Silesia and West Pomerania (each 26.9%) (Central Statistical Office 2014a: 18).

UNEMPLOYMENT IN SUBCARPATHIAN VOIVODESHIP

Subcarpathian Voivodeship is located in the eastern region, where the unemployment rate in 2013 was the highest. It reached 20.82% on a national level. A high unemployment rate was also recorded in the central region (20.15%), then the northern region (17.62%) and finally the southern region (17.27%). In the north-western region unemployment was at a level of 14.63% while the lowest percentage of unemployed people in Poland was in the south-western region – only 9.51% (Central Statistical Office 2014a: 98-107, <http://www.stat.gov.pl/16.04.2014>).

Chart 1. Unemployed in Subcarpathian Voivodeship by education at the end of December 2013

Regions	Total	Education:				
		Higher	Secondary vocational	Secondary general	Basic vocational	Primary, incomplete primary and lower-secondary
		by number of people				
Subcarpathia	154216	21146	39036	15841	46739	31454
Krosno District	37820	4840	10022	3107	12206	7645
Przemyśl District	32733	4524	7460	3988	9522	7239
Rzeszów District	42836	6253	11748	4041	12477	8317
Tarnobrzeg District	40827	5529	9806	4705	12534	8253

Source: Central Statistical Office 2014a: 102.

In February 2014, Subcarpathian Voivodeship was 12th when taking into account the number of unemployed in thousands, since in this voivodeship there were 160.3 thousand registered unemployed; and 12th when taking into account the unemployment rate, which reached 16.9%. The largest number of unemployed in 2013 was registered in Masovian Voivodeship (295.4 thousand) and the smallest in Opole Voivodeship (54.3 thousand). Furthermore, the unemployment rate was the highest in Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (22.3%) and the smallest in Greater Poland Voivodeship (10%) (Central Statistical Office 2014b).

As presented in Chart 1, the highest unemployment rate was recorded in Rzeszów District as there were 42 836 unemployed in this area. Moreover, this is where the largest number of unemployed graduates existed. Przemyśl District had the smallest total number of unemployed as well as the number of unemployed with a higher education. It should also be noted that in Subcarpathian Voivodeship the smallest number of unemployed was present among people with a general secondary education.

Chart 2. Unemployed in Subcarpathian Voivodeship at the end of December 2013 by age

Regions	Total	Aged				
		24 and younger	25–34	35–44	45–54	55 and older
		by number of people				
Subcarpathia	154216	32733	46948	31588	27607	15340
Krosno District	37820	7437	11554	8121	7068	3640
Przemyśl District	32733	7058	10314	6633	5705	3023
Rzeszów District	42836	9212	13022	8670	7478	4454
Tarnobrzeg District	40827	9026	12058	8164	7356	4223

Source: Central Statistical Office 2014a: 102.

University graduates are among the first two groups of people presented in Chart 2 because those graduates were able to acquire a university degree no sooner than the age of 22 (in the case of undergraduate studies) or later. It is also worth mentioning that people aged between 25 and 34 formed the largest group of unemployed in Subcarpathian Voivodeship, and the largest number of them was located in Rzeszów District.

THE OFFER OF THE DISTRICT EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

Young graduates either look for work on their own (e.g., on the Internet as discussed previously) or make use of aid provided by employment agencies. These agencies not only provide aid in finding a job, they also enable young people to undergo an internship, and to participate in training or assisted employment, the purpose of which is to increase their experience in order to appear more attractive in the labour market.

According to the Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions, an internship is *the acquisition of practical skills by the unemployed which allow them to perform their work by carrying out job-related tasks in the workplace without an employment relationship with the employer* (Act of 20 April 2004). Training means *extra-curricular activities aimed at obtaining, supplementing or improving professional or general skills and qualifications required to perform work, including the ability to look for employment* (Act of 20 April 2004). The concept of assisted employment should be understood as *the employment of the unemployed by the employer, which took place as a result of a contract with the District Staroste, in order to support people who are in a special situation on the labour market* (Act of 20 April 2004).

The offer of the Employment Agency concerning the occupational development of young people is the most interesting and diverse. However, it is important to understand whether graduates make use of such assistance in finding their place in the labour market. In order to answer this particular question, a researcher, using a standardized interview, spoke with 15 people who are or have been registered at the District Employment Agency in Tarnobrzeg. The respondents were 24 to 29 years old and had graduated from university in the fields of Management (3 respondents), Sociology (3 respondents), Pedagogy as well as Tourism and Recreation (2 respondents each). The remainder studied: Ethnography, Economics, Physiotherapy, European Studies and Geography. The research was conducted between 17 March and 8 April 2014.

The reason for registration at the Employment Agency is significant, for it indicates how the graduates approached this institution. As shown in Figure 3, the largest number of respondents came to the Agency to seek help with finding employment. Of the remaining eight, five people wished to acquire more experience through internships and training courses, whereas three respondents registered in the Agency in order to get insurance. It is worth noting that no fewer than seven people registered at the District Employment Agency in Tarnobrzeg immediately after graduation. Further, three people registered no later than 6 months after receiving their diplomas, and

two people had already registered while studying part-time. Two respondents stated that they registered more than a year after graduation. One person had registered after 6 months (before the end of the one-year period).

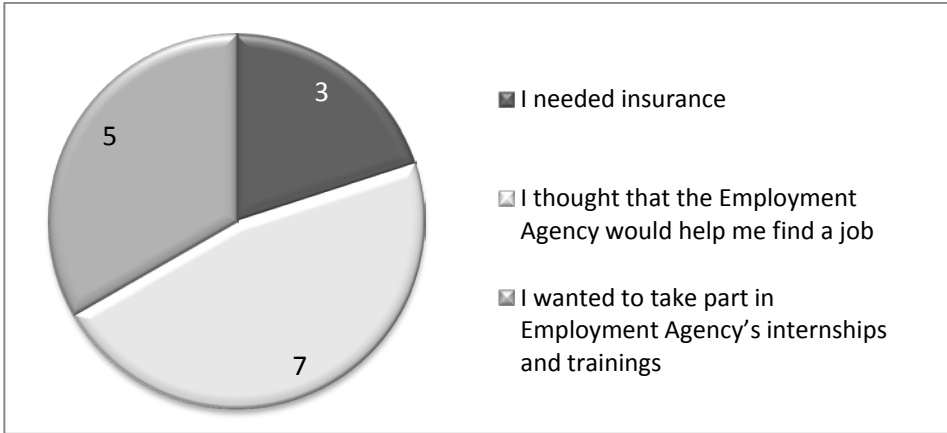


Figure 3. The reason for registering at the Employment Agency

Source: Personal research

The fact that as many as 7 respondents hoped that the Employment Agency could help them find employment and registered immediately after graduation shows that this institution is viewed in a positive light when it comes to the aid rendered to young people in managing the labour market.

Even though only 5 people stated their intention to participate in training and courses as a reason to register with the Agency, the majority of the respondents seized this opportunity, since 12 people attempted to get an internship. The remaining 3 people did not take this opportunity because, as they stated: *I had already received a job offer; I did not need it; I decided to try to find a regular job first*. It is important, however, that only in 7 cases the position for which the respondents applied corresponded with their education. These positions were: *Office worker; Shop assistant* (2 such replies); *Office Clerk; Preschool teacher; Physiotherapist; Training/recruiting specialist*. Other people did not provide an exact description of the position, but they gave a possible place of internship: *Internal Revenue Office; Town Hall* (2 such replies); *Library*. One person said that they were seeking any internship.

Although the majority of respondents applied for an internship, only 4 of them received it. Three people received a six-month internship and one person a five-month one. Out of those respondents, 2 people were trying to get an internship in the Town Hall, one person also wanted to be an office

clerk in the Town Hall, and one person applied for the post of training/recruiting specialist. Two of those people were not satisfied with the experience they had gained because when asked about the skills learned during the internship they replied: *I have learnt that office workers do nothing; I have learnt how to do office work and how various departments in the City Hall work*; while the other person stated: *Nothing but brewing coffee and organising old documents*. Another person who completed the internship in the Town Hall had a different view: *Servicing office equipment, managing official correspondence, filing, document circulation, etc. The internship helped me acquire additional skills and improve those I already possessed*. However, the person most satisfied with a completed internship was a man who did not work in the Town Hall but in one of the companies located in the Tarnobrzeg Economic Zone. He stated that he acquired many skills useful in his workplace, and that his superiors invested in him from the start as if he was a regular worker who should possess knowledge most useful for his post (position: Training/recruiting specialist). It is also important to emphasise that among those 4 people, only the latter received a job offer and it was for a period of three months. Of the remaining three, one person was offered another internship at the same post, while the next respondent did not receive any proposals, and the last person is still undergoing their internship.

Another way to make young people active in the labour market, as proposed by the Employment Agency, is participation in various types of training courses. Only 3 out of 15 respondents took part in them. Those who resigned from this form of qualification improvement stated that they were not interested in the courses (5 people), a further 2 people were not eligible for those courses because their registration period in the District Employment Agency was too short, and the remaining 5 people reported other reasons: *The date of the course and internship overlapped so I had to choose; I received no such proposal; There were no courses related to my profession; There were no courses planned by the Employment Agency*. The reason given by one of the respondents was worrisome as that person stated: *I did not know they existed*.

The courses in which these 3 people participated were: *Cash Register; How to get your first job, job interview. Learning more about seeking employment and the methods that can be used; Forklift operator*. One person stated that this course increased her chance of finding employment in her profession, while another decided that he indeed had a better chance of finding a job, but not in his profession. The last person said that the course she took part in would not help her find a job.

The final form of vocational development offered by the Employment Agency to university graduates, among others, is assisted employment. Only 4 respondents wanted to take part in it. Four of the remaining respondents did not participate because they had already received job offers or internships. Three people decided that they did not need this form of employment. The remaining four people stated: *I have not received any information on this subject; because I did not know about it; I started earning a master's degree; I intend to go.*

Although 4 people wanted to participate in assisted employment, it was granted only to 2 respondents. They were: *Filing; organising documents that should have already been organised a long time ago.* The employment lasted six months and three months respectively. The second respondent also signed a mandate contract for one month after the assisted employment ended. The first respondent also stated that during the assisted employment he learned: *To operate office equipment and the principles of filing.* The second respondent decided that assisted employment taught her nothing and did not help her gain valuable experience. It is worth noting that in the case of the 2 people who did not receive the opportunity to take part in assisted employment, the possible employment also dealt with filing and organising documents.

The final issue raised during the questionnaire-based interviews was an appraisal of the work done by the Employment Agency in Tarnobrzeg. 5 respondents out of 15 currently have a job; however, not a single person had found employment through the Agency. 4 of the remaining 10 people have been unemployed for less than a year, and 2 for about a year. The last 4 people have been unemployed for over 12 months, which means that this is a case of long-term unemployment.

The respondents also judged whether the District Employment Agency in Tarnobrzeg makes an effort to provide vocational development to graduates. Only 3 people responded in the affirmative: *Probably yes; they make an effort; they help in finding an internship that corresponds with the field of studies.* 2 respondents had no opinion on the subject: *I do not know; I do not have an opinion.* As many as 10 people, or the majority of respondents, decided that the Employment Agency makes no effort in providing vocational development to graduates: *No; Absolutely no effort on their part; Thanks to the Employment Agency I have insurance and that is all.*

Finally, the respondents were asked their opinion on what changes should be made in the Employment Agency. Only 3 people decided that no changes are needed, and 2 had no opinion in this matter. Other people had objections to the functioning of the Agency. 4 of them stated that the em-

ployees of the Employment Agency are the issue: *Workers, because they do not care about providing assistance or even giving information to the unemployed; The attitude of the workers, who treat the unemployed as if they simply came to the Agency out of boredom to cause an inconvenience; Kinder service; To reduce the number of 'quasi-working' people in the Agency.* Moreover, 4 people discussed internships and training courses: *Internships only apply to people who are 25 and younger. A person who went to technical secondary school graduates at 25, so it is not possible for them to take part in an internship; Processing internship applications should be done in a different way, not just first come, first served; More internship and courses offers; Yes, more training courses.* The remaining 2 people provided general comments on the functioning of the Agency: *I think that the Employment Agency should make a greater effort to encourage employers to use the Agency when seeking employees, and a greater effort in finding the right employee for a particular job; The Agency needs a lot of change, it is insufficiently efficient.*

To sum up, it should be noted that university students, when registering at the District Employment Agency in Tarnobrzeg, hoped that it would help them find employment or improve their qualifications. Unfortunately, despite their efforts, out of 12 people only 4 were granted an internship, of which 3 were in the Town Hall. Graduates were disappointed with the level of skills they could acquire. Moreover, as many as 3 internships did not end with further employment. It can be assumed that the candidates did not perform well, or at the moment of granting the internship it was known that this institution did not have a vacancy. Therefore, the suggestion appears that a better solution would be to place interns in companies located within the city since when they hire an intern they most often look for an individual who could be offered further employment. The Employment Agency should, therefore, make a greater effort in encouraging employers to seek future employees through the Agency.

Another issue is to encourage young people to take part in courses and assisted employment. However, to attract the interest of graduates, these projects should be more varied so that everyone is able to find something, even partly, for themselves.

SUMMARY

Currently, unemployment in Subcarpathian Voivodeship is a significant problem for graduates as well as other members of society. It is important that the Employment Agencies not only try to provide jobs for the unem-

ployed, but also make an effort to improve the attractiveness of individuals in the labour market. However, the battle with unemployment is not a simple matter and therefore some projects do not always bring intended results.

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to present the situation encountered by university graduates while seeking their first job. The present situation of the labour market in Subcarpathian Voivodeship, the assistance offered to former students by the District Employment Agency, and their opinion on this aid will be discussed.

Key words: unemployment, labor market, social problem, partnership