



QUALIFYING DIFFERENCES



# Report on support for adults with disabilities on the way to (the world of) work

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Choice of future profession  
and education (school)

**Key words:** *counselling workers at schools, counselling centres outside schools, career counselling at employment authorities*

Primary schools in the Czech Republic have counsellors (an educational counsellor, sometimes a special pedagogue, sometimes a school psychologist) who help pupils choose a future profession and a suitable school for their vocational training. In addition, of course, class teachers and teachers of vocational subjects will advise. The educational topic “Man and the World of Work” deals with these topics in teaching among other things. In secondary schools or during vocational training, counselling focuses on employment after the conclusion of vocational training.

Outside the school, there are counselling centres such as a **special pedagogical centre** (focused on children and pupils with special educational needs) or a **pedagogical-psychological counselling centre**.

Their tasks also include career counselling.

Employment authorities include **information and counselling centres focused on choosing and changing professions**. They provide pupils (teachers and counsellors) with information on fields of study, schools, and opportunities for further education, on the demands and requirements for individual professions, on the situation on the labour market in the region and the entire Czech Republic. They perform professional (job) diagnostics to evaluate professional prerequisites and determine professional interests.

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Support in finding or keeping  
a job and increasing the  
chances of employment

**Keywords:** *transit programme, supported employment, non-profit organizations, employment authority, occupational rehabilitation, social rehabilitation, social therapy workshops*

It is not easy for people with disabilities or disadvantages to find and keep a job. There are several reasons: low or insufficient qualifications, low self-confidence and interest among job seekers, lack of information, counselling and assistance services, prejudice, etc. (Procházková, L. 2015).

Towards the end of education, a transit programme can help young people with special educational needs (while they are still pupils). Its goal is to mediate experience in a normal work environment and increase opportunities in the labour market. Individual internships with assistance support are offered. The **transition programme** enables acquaintance with work in an ordinary work environment, development of skills and work, social and communication competencies (work at the workplace, journey to the workplace, division of labour, communication with colleagues, etc.), experience strengthens self-confidence, independence, and interest in work. It is offered by non-profit organizations.

People who are disadvantaged in the labour market (people with disabilities, social disadvantages, after serving a sentence, after addiction treatment, people with low or incomplete education, etc.) need specific, intensive, and individual support. This is offered to them mainly by the non-profit sector in the form of **supported employment**.

Supported employment is a set of services whose aim is to provide a person with such support, to find and maintain a place in the open labour market on equal pay. It is about helping to get or keep a job. Support is individual, personal, and ongoing and is offered before and after employment. Before starting, it focuses on helping to clarify what one would like and could do, how to write a CV and cover letter, where to look for a job, how to respond to a job advertisement, how to prepare for an interview, etc. After taking up the job, it can be help with induction at the workplace in the form of a work assistant in the initial period.

Supported employment emphasizes a person's active approach to their own employment and

inclusion. Supported employment has been in place in the Czech Republic since 1995. The first agency was called Rytmus and was established in Prague. It continues to provide its services, now in several places in the Czech Republic. Over the years, several other providers of supported employment have emerged. These are non-profit organizations. Some focus only on a certain group of people, e.g., Tichý svět (Quiet World) only on people with hearing impairment, others do not have a limited target group, e.g., AGAPO in Brno. Their role in promoting the integration of people at a disadvantage in the labour market is crucial.

**Non-profit organizations** offer people support in the fields of employment, housing, personal development and independence development during adolescence and adulthood and aim to increase the quality of life of these people and their families. The target group, people with disabilities and people with social disadvantages, is offered help and support by non-profit organizations as well as employers and families of people with disabilities.

The scope of support includes basic and specific counselling, supported employment (finding or keeping a job), social skills training (filling in forms and dealing with errands at public offices, travelling by public transport, using a mobile phone and computer, etc.), a transition programme (getting to know the work environment in the form of individual assisted practices). People can use online counselling and personal meetings. These services are called **social rehabilitation**.

Anyone looking for work in the Czech Republic can turn to employment authorities. They register a person as a job applicant or job seeker, provide basic information, and people with disabilities are offered occupational rehabilitation or retraining.

**Work rehabilitation** is one of the tools to support the employment of people with disabilities. It is a continuous activity aimed at obtaining and maintaining a suitable job for a person with a disability. It particularly includes counselling activities focused on the choice of profession, choice of employment or other gainful activity, theoretical and practical preparation for employment, mediation, maintenance and change of employment and creation of suitable conditions for employment or other gainful activity (Employment Act No. 435/2004 Coll.).

Specialized retraining courses can also be organized for people with disabilities.

However, there is several people with disabilities or disadvantages who do not find a job in the labour market. They can use social services.

**Social therapy workshops** are one of these. They are *“outpatient services provided to persons with reduced self-sufficiency due to disability, who cannot find a place through the open or protected labour market for this reason”* (Act on Social Services No. 108/2006 Coll., as amended). The aim of this service is long-term and regular support for the development and improvement of work habits and skills through social work therapy. Another aim is to prevent the social exclusion that can occur in people with disabilities or disadvantages who do not have a job.

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Examples of good practices

There are several materials that can help with orientation in employment of people with disabilities in the Czech Republic and which advise how to do so (**brochures, advisors, manuals, etc.**).

They inform about the specific target groups selected, they usually focus on areas in which these people may have difficulties, in which they need support and what their potential is. They specify what kind of support is appropriate to provide. They advise employers on how to proceed if they employ or want to employ a person with a disability (e.g., where to find information in legislation, whether they are entitled to financial support, how to adjust the working environment and working conditions).

They help counsellors, assistants, or teachers in supporting people with disabilities to find work, housing or in general in supporting their development and independence.

Last but not least, they help people with disabilities themselves, because they explain clearly and concisely how to proceed when looking for work or housing, communicating with others, dealing with things, and taking responsibility for themselves and their lives. They often lead step by step, offering templates for a resume, a cover letter, how to prepare for an introductory interview, but also how to realize what a person wants from life, what are their strengths and possibilities.

### **Brochures and manuals - a selection of examples:**

APLA Jižní Morava (2014). Metodika podpora osob s PAS při uplatnění na pracovním trhu. [Methodology of supporting people with ASD in finding a job on the labour market]. Brno: APLA Jižní Morava. (24 pages) – for employers and job seekers

Kavalírová, K. (2012). Nevidomý ve vaší firmě. [A blind person in your company]. Praha, Okamžik. (52 pages)

Sdružení Práh (2013). Jdu do toho! Rádce uchazeče o zaměstnání (pro osoby s psychotickým onemocněním). [I'm in! A jobseeker's guide (for people with psychotic illness)]. Brno: Sdružení

Práh. (31 pages + 4 appendices with samples of CV, cover letter, employment contract, termination of employment)

SENEL – portfolio for people with disabilities (Passport to Employment - <https://www.jamk.fi/en/Research-and-Development/RDI-Projects/senel/project-overview/passport-new/>) and a little guide for employers (Miniguide for Employers - <https://www.jamk.fi/en/Research-and-Development/RDI-Projects/senel/project-overview/miniguide-new/>) – both documents can be downloaded in four languages (English, Czech, Finnish, German)

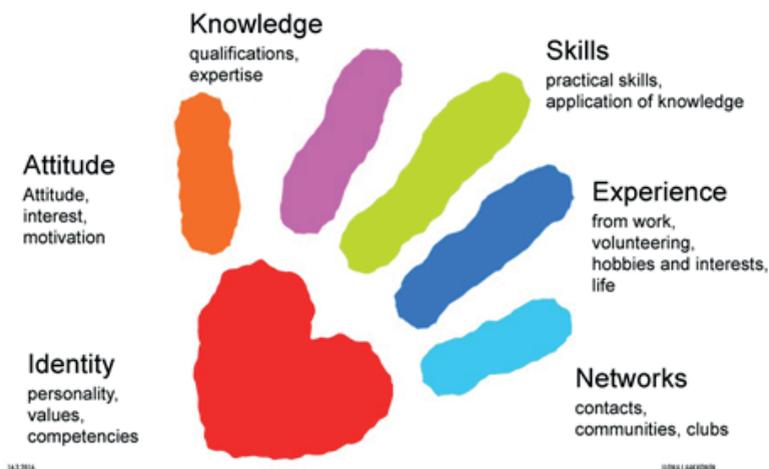
Rytmus (2005). O tom, jak Tom hledá práci... a agentura podporovaného zaměstnávání pomůže. [Tom is looking for a job... and a supported employment agency will help]. Praha: Rytmus. (18 pages of information + a game)

### **SENEL – A personal and professional profile (Passport to Employment)**

A personal and professional profile is intended for those who will be looking for a job. In it, they gather information about themselves, their skills, interests, and previous experience. It serves to make one aware of what one already knows, is able to do and what they can offer to the future employer. At the same time, one can point out what is causing them problems, where they need help and support, and what kind of problems they face. One creates a profile for oneself, but one can also provide it to the employer with whom they will apply for a job and to whom they want to introduce themselves. In creating it, one can work with a teacher, counsellor, parent, etc.

The profile is based on the idea that each person has individual strengths, skills, and competencies. A lot of space is also devoted to leisure activities and interests, because young people may not have enough work experience yet. It is divided into sub-parts. Each contains questions that make it easier for a person to present their competencies and expertise. It is possible to write information in the profile, but it is also possible to attach photos or video. The profile exists in pdf form for downloading, but it is also possible to create it using Google Sites and share it directly with the employer (or consultant) on the Internet. In addition to the profile, a template for creating a CV is also offered here.

This profile (passport) exists in four national variants and languages (English, Czech, Finnish, German), it can be found in pdf here. The profile was created during The Special Education Needs Employment Links (SENEL) project, which was co-financed by the European Union, the Erasmus+ Key Action 2 programme (co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus + Key Action 2 programme) (2015-2017).



Laakkonen (2016): <https://ilonalaakkonen.wordpress.com>

### Example 1 – Ms. L's path to work

Mrs L. has an intellectual disability. After primary school, she went on to a practical school (in the Czech Republic, a practical school is one of the secondary education options for individuals with intellectual disabilities). During her visit, she was offered an opportunity to take part in a transition programme - an individual workplace placement with an assistant.

She accepted this option after consultation with her parents and the school. Over the course of a year, she undertook work experience in cafes, an environment that interested her. She became familiar with the environment, activities, learned new skills, acquired new work competences, and developed communication skills, getting used to the work team and the

different number of visitors in the café.

After leaving school, she transitioned to a supported employment programme offered by the same non-profit organization as the previous transit programme. Ms. L. did not yet have clear ideas about what she wanted to do. The first step was to identify her skills, interests, strengths and difficulties, and a support plan was determined based on these. It focuses on finding jobs, applying for them, negotiating with the employer, and settling into a new job with the support of an assistant as part of supported employment. The aim is to develop Ms L's work skills and competences, to support her motivation and interest in work. Ms L wants to work, is caring, willing to learn new things, she has overcome her fear of asking when she did not know something, and she is trying to develop her communication and travel to and from the workplace. These are her strengths to build on.

***Important points:***

- Cooperation between the school and the non-profit sector - social services aimed at school-to-career transition offered during education.
- Follow-up services - appropriate support offered after leaving school.
- A person's disposition - interest in work, active attitude, willingness to work on oneself.
- Good previous experience - on the job during work experience, the possibility of support if needed, focused not only on doing the job but also getting to/from work, communication development.
- Supportive environment - family, assistants, colleagues
- Free services - transit programme and supported employment.

**Example 2 – Mr. H's path to work**

Mr. H. is a man with paranoid schizophrenia. Already at the time of his admission to the psychiatric hospital, cooperation with social services (communication with Mr H. and his family) about his life after leaving the hospital was taking place. Prior to discharge from hospital (3 weeks in advance) a job was found in a clothing sorting workshop of the Baltazar Charity shop, with working hours initially 4hrs/day/3 days/week, proper employment, 3

months' probation period.

The whole team was prepared in advance for the arrival of Mr. H. (the circumstances of his illness and behaviour were explained, the team decided to accept Mr. H).

Mr H.'s difficulties: delusions (initially so-called delusional tuning, later persecutory delusions), especially feelings of control, reading or embedding thoughts, hallucinations (perception disturbances), behavioural conspicuousness, sometimes even aggressive behaviour that is unintelligible and incomprehensible to those around him.

***Important points:***

- Treatment follow-up - psychiatric hospital cooperation with social services and family during hospitalization
- Job perspective - job offer immediately after the end of hospital treatment (feeling of meaningfulness, taking responsibility for one's life)
- Person-responsive working conditions - adjusting the workplace, job description and working hours, but with the usual 3-month probationary period.
- Training and preparation of the work team contributing to acceptance and willingness to help.
- Continued cooperation between social services, employer, and hospital (mediated by the social worker of the social service), intensive during the trial period, then reduced in intensity.
- Use of psychiatrist/psychologist support in an outpatient setting as a condition for admission (a monthly meeting with a psychologist at the workplace for 1 year)
- Initial employment in the form of community service
- After a year of good experience with Mr. H.'s approach to work, support for finding a main job - a position at the zoo taking care of large animal enclosures was found.
- Great efforts by all involved resulted in the successful reintegration of a person with schizophrenia into the work process.

## In conclusion...

### Essential in supporting people with disabilities or disadvantages on their path to work

**Connection** of services offering a comprehensive approach.

**Follow-up** of services (to school, treatment, release after serving a sentence etc.)

**Involvement of families and relevant persons** in the whole support process.

**Tailored job search** - willingness / necessity to adapt the working conditions to the person, but with adjustments / relief only when necessary.

**Ongoing support and accompaniment** – when clarifying abilities, competences, and possibilities, when looking for work, getting trained at the workplace; during any difficulties which may result in worsened performance and job loss).

**Focus** on a disabled person's **potential**, possibilities, and skills.

**Both the people with a disability and the employers need support**

### List of used sources:

Employment Act No. 435/2004 Coll., as amended, Part III - Employment of Persons with Disabilities, Part V - Active Employment Policy

PROCHÁZKOVÁ, L. (2015). Možnosti pracovního uplatnění lidí s postižením – současné trendy v České republice a v zahraničí. [Job opportunities for people with disabilities - current trends in the Czech Republic and abroad]. Brno: Masarykova univerzita. doi: 10.5817/CZ.MU-NI.M210-8135-2015. Pdf available at MuniSpace (<https://munispace.muni.cz/library/catalog/book/804>).

Social Services Act No. 108/2006 Coll., as amended



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