

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The subject of this evaluation is rating of the implementation and benefits of projects focusing on employment and employability of young people, implemented as part of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in the Ústí and Karlovy Vary Regions. To that end, one-on-one in-depth interviews and group interviews with project participants, and one-on-one interviews with project implementers were conducted.

In principle, the projects followed their respective schedules and their implementation did not exhibit major variances. A project implemented by the Labour Authorities of the Czech Republic (LACR) in the Karlovy Vary region faced a lasting problem with personnel; the project *Nestůj a pojd' II* (Do Not Stand and Come II) involved a minor shift in the schedule with the *Návrat do vzdělání* (Return to Education) activity, the Transfer project faced an issue with recruiting the target audience, and the implementation of the *Rekvalifikace* (Requalification) and *Pracovní diagnostika* (Labour Diagnostics) activities as part of the *Cesta* (The Way) project was delayed. The projects targeted a very wide audience, which in some cases caused difficulties in organising project activities. Several principal groups were identified: participants with primary education needing further education, people with incomplete secondary education needing experience, and young people with specific problems who needed to change their field. The projects organised by the LACR involved a great number of graduates who had just registered with the authorities. The applicants for the regional projects were primarily persons with primary education, persons who had been registered by the LACR for a long time, people with lower motivation or associated social problems (executions, criminal records, etc.), individuals from excluded locations or outside the welfare system, and young people below age 18 without education.

Three groups of participants were identified based on the recruitment method across the evaluated projects. The first group of project participants were the people who obtained information about the project from their prospective employers and had already pre-negotiated their jobs (in particular with projects implemented by the LACR). They were primarily individuals who did not perceive any barriers to finding jobs, although their perceptions could be distorted since the participants' perceptions can sometimes be at odds with the realities of the current labour market. The next group identified was people registered with the LACR who felt that they were participating in the project involuntarily (probably under a threat of being excluded from registration), though even in this case some participants perceived their involvement in the project positively. The last group was persons participating in the project voluntarily, expecting help from the project personnel. The evaluator believes those participants were motivated to participate in the project; for them, the project was a tool greatly improving their ability to find a job (they were involved in both types of projects). A creaming-off effect was identified primarily with projects implemented by the LACR.

According to the implementers, the principal barriers that participants in projects implemented by both the LACR and the regions faced include insufficient experience, their inability to "sell themselves" to employers and low motivation for entering the labour market. Depending on the participants' needs, the implementers identified several groups: participants with primary education needing further education, people with incomplete secondary education needing experience, and young people with specific problems who needed to change their field. Some of the participants did not perceive any barriers preventing them from finding jobs. The principal barriers involved with the other project participants (for projects implemented both by the LACR and by the regions) included a

vague idea of occupation, incompatible education or incompatible qualification, and insufficient experience. Only female participants in regional projects faced barriers involving child care. Barriers on the part of individuals from the lowest social strata, who were more frequent among regional project participants, also include problems with housing, drug addiction, debt and rejection from the family. While the implementers believe that success was achieved in eliminating barriers related to insufficient experience, incompatible qualification and a lack of self-presentation capabilities, the barriers that are part of a broader social problem are more difficult to eliminate or not eliminated at all.

For graduates without working experience (in particular with projects implemented by the LACR), the barrier can be eliminated using the activity *Odborná praxe* (Field Experience). High school and university graduates with incompatible qualification (both types of projects) undergo activities such as *Rekvalifikace* and *Odborná praxe*. Single mothers need to re-qualify for their chosen field and find a job that is compatible with child care. Adolescents aged under 18 with primary or incomplete primary education are offered the activity *Návrat do vzdělání* (both types of projects). The participants were presented with the possibilities of finding a job and provided with support in seeking jobs reflecting their needs and interests. The improved standard of life and independence resulting from a steady job motivated the participants to seek jobs on the labour market in the future.

The majority of interviewees (37 out of 46 participants) underwent hands-on training (in a subsidised position). The participants either chose their subsidised jobs, or jobs were found for them based on their preferences, or recommended to them based on the participants' characteristics. With minor exceptions, participants rate the work as good; they either did a job that was compatible with their abilities and knowledge or they acquired new knowledge and skills on the job. In many cases, the subsidised jobs were close to the supported persons' ideas of their future jobs. Subsidised employment was terminated prematurely primarily due to disagreements between the participants and the employers.

Under all projects, the participants who used the support provided by the project personnel had positive things to say about the approach of the project personnel (such being personal, helpful and individual) and about the job and education offers extended to them by the project personnel. The implementers also believe the approach to the participants was very individual, stemming from the variety of the target audience and from the specific needs of the individual participants. This was especially the case in regional projects that addressed a more diverse target audience with a greater percentage of problematic applicants. The project personnel generally tried to adapt the form and content to the specific members of the target group. Due to the target group diversity, however, it was sometimes difficult to choose a suitable form or content (lower motivation, lower education, underprivileged participants). The participants who had found an employer even before entering the project and did not perceive a problem with finding a job saw a weakness in delaying the start of their employment. In this respect, we could speak of the occurrence of the lock-in effect; however, the implementers believe this effect did not occur.

Both the participants and the implementers of the projects operated by the LACR and the regions found the *Odborná praxe* and *Rekvalifikace* activities to be the most useful. The first activity offers the participants the experience that employers demand, and the subsidised jobs are also positive in that, with a subsidy, employers will employ even people who they distrust and who they would not employ if not for the subsidy (a significant aspect in employing the members of the Roma ethnic group). Some project personnel believe that a segment of employers has formed on the market (for example large companies such as

municipal technical service firms) that can pay the employees on their own, yet they use the subsidies. The implementers believe that the subsidies are beneficial through their instant, tangible effect in terms of increasing the rate of employment.

By contrast, the *Cvičné dílny* (Practice Workshops) activity as part of the Transfer project has been perceived as problematic due to low interest among the target group because of lacking financial motivation. Other problematic activities were *Rozjezd podnikání* (Business Launch) and *Podnikatelské vzdělání* (Business Education; both as part of regional projects) where the implementers struggled with finding suitable applicants with prerequisites for a successful completion of the course. Furthermore, the implementers encountered a very low rate of demand for the *Práce na zkoušku* (Trial Job) and *Stáž v zahraničí* (International Internship) activities. Some implementers of projects run by the LACR believed that *Návrat do vzdělání* was time-consuming and rated it as having low impact due to a low number of participants. In turn, other implementers believe that even low rate of success is highly positive because its impact on the participant's life is considerable.

Participants across projects agreed that project activities gave them a lot of new knowledge and skills. Development is apparent primarily with participants with primary education and those who had their first job ever in the project. Participants in projects implemented by both the LACR and the regions rate their participation as beneficial in particular for giving them new insights and options for finding jobs. Participants rate the contribution to their quality of life ambiguously. Prior to joining the project, interviewees faced no major issues in general. When it comes to improving the quality of life, finding out whether this was thanks to their involvement in the project is problematic. The participants who believed the project improved their standard of life saw the improvement primarily in terms of professional career, self-fulfilment and social inclusion. Three-quarters of the interviewees were successfully employed when the projects finished. Those unemployed (except for women on maternity leave and students) are primarily those who are currently going through job interviews and expect to be employed soon, and also the participants (5 out of 46) who have no clear idea about their future direction (in particular participants in regional projects). The participants in *Odborná praxe* improved their income thanks to employment. The financial situation for some participants (8 out of 14) who had to leave their jobs after the subsidy was discontinued is the same as prior to their employment.

Implementers noted different views regarding the necessity of the projects. LACR project personnel believe the projects are still needed, in particular for graduates who remain numerous despite a change in the labour market. The implementers of regional projects are convinced that the target audience has been depleted in certain respects (the Transfer and Cesta projects). Projects are still desirable primarily for groups whose problems persist despite the overhang of demand for labour. The implementers believe that the Transfer project is needed primarily for the target group that lacks education. According to Nestůj a pojd' II implementers, the project is necessary for people without education or those excluded from LACR registration, facing severe social problems as a result. A Cesta implementer believes the project is necessary because employers require specific qualifications that schools do not provide, resulting in the need for re-qualification. Also, the implementers suggest designing more specific projects with a narrower focus on the individual groups.