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**Article**

## Vulnerable Groups at Lithuanian Labour Market

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NEVERAUSKIENĖ<sup>\*\*</sup>**

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## **Vulnerable Groups at Lithuanian Labour Market**

### **Abstract**

*Despite the economic growth and favourable situation in national labour market in 2004-2008 in Lithuania several groups of population still had restricted access to employment. The period of economic recession has revealed sore problems of vulnerable groups in the labor market. Based on statistical data and the research the dynamics of the situation of disabled, youth and older people situation in the labor market are examined in this article as well as the main obstacles to their participation.*

*The increased number of the research aimed to analyse the situation of vulnerable groups in Lithuania and still persisting severe problems in national labour market stimulated to inventory recently cumulated knowledge about the groups that are at the high risk for unemployment. The research review covers studies conducted in the period between 2004 and 2010. It includes surveys carried out by competent researchers by the request of public authorities or other concerned authorities as well as doctoral dissertations. The groups of socially vulnerable people most often analysed in the labour market in Lithuania include the following: disabled, youth, and older people. The review showed that special research on labour market risk groups is the valuable search of information, whereas the shortage of statistical information has been noticed in the country. Further examination of the issues of the mechanisms to integrate and reintegrate the vulnerable groups into labour market is purposeful.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The high unemployment rate was the main distinguishing feature for Lithuanian economic and social life in 2009 – 2010. For the meantime the economic stabilization and timid signs of recovery are still not encouraging the employers to expand labour costs. The situation at Lithuanian labour market remains difficult: the number of employed population decreased, the rate of wages fell, the number of unemployed remains extremely high.

The number of employees that reached a peak in the middle of 2008 in the end of that same year was 2.8 percent lower than a year ago, and in 2009 it was 10 percent lower. The employee engaged in the domestic market-oriented activities were most affected during that time. The builders ranks has melted by almost 40 percent., the sectors of domestic trade, accommodation and catering services, and mining and quarrying sector that is closely related to the construction lost about 17 percent. of employee.

Drastic economic downturn in Baltic states led to an unprecedented growth in unemployment. Jump in the unemployment rate in Lithuania in 2009 and 2010, was originally one of the largest in the European Union. The incidence of corporate bankruptcy and the extended cost reduction process in the rest of the economy contributed to greatly increase of the number of people unable to find the jobs. The Labour Force Survey carried out by Department of Statistics shows that the number of unemployed reached almost 225 thousands in 2009 and it was 2.4 times more than in 2008. In 2010 the number of unemployed people in Lithuania was 291 thousand.

The high unemployment rate and perspectives of slow economic growth stimulate people to look for work abroad. The data from variety of recruitment agencies shows that the number of people interested in working abroad the last year increased by three times. Such a mass phenomenon could have a positive influence to the unemployment rate, however, it causes a number of undesirable consequences: population aging, lower budget revenue, sluggish innovations, etc.

Given the pace of economic recovery and future growth prospects, as well as in the context of demographic situation, more careful examination of available local manpower resources is needed. In order to increase the inclusiveness of Lithuanian labour market the efforts to minimize the barriers for labour market access for vulnerable groups should be taken.

## 2. National economic context and the situation of vulnerable groups in labour market

Together with unfavourable demographic situation in Lithuania, the rapid growth of unemployment during economic recession caused the decrease in the number of employed population.

**Table 1. Core labour market indicators**

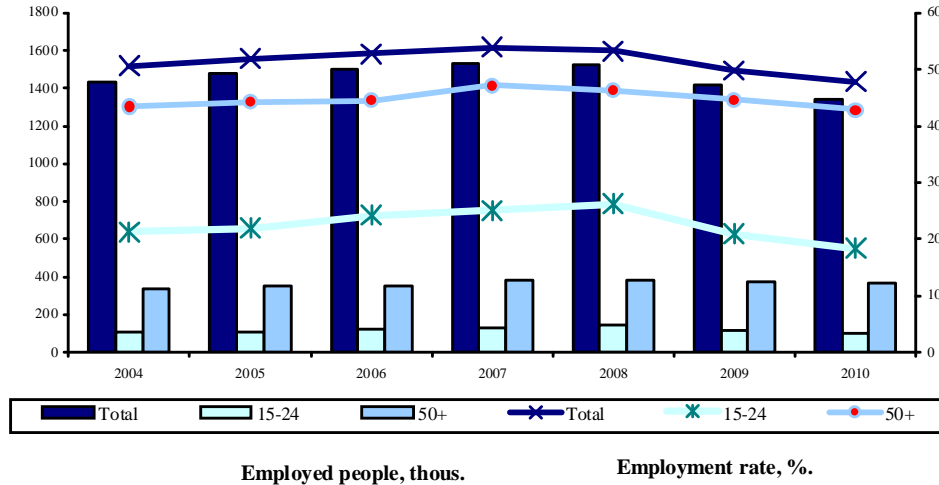
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
The total number of employed, thous.	1436.3	1473.9	1499.0	1534.2	1 520.0	1415.9	1343.7
Employment rate, total (population aged 15-64) percent	61.1	62.6	63.6	64.9	64.3	60.1	57.8
The total number of unemployed, thous.	184.4	132.9	89.3	69.0	94.3	225.1	291.1
Unemployment rate, total, percent.	11.4	8.3	5.6	4.3	5.8	13.7	17.8

*Source:* Department of Statistics.

According to data from Lithuanian labour exchange in the beginning of 2010 there were 311 thousands of officially registered unemployed people. Since 2008 the proportion of unemployed men exceeds the share of unemployed women. Analysing the data from public employment services the sharp growth of number of unemployed people without vocational education and those without work experience was noticed since the beginning of economic recession.

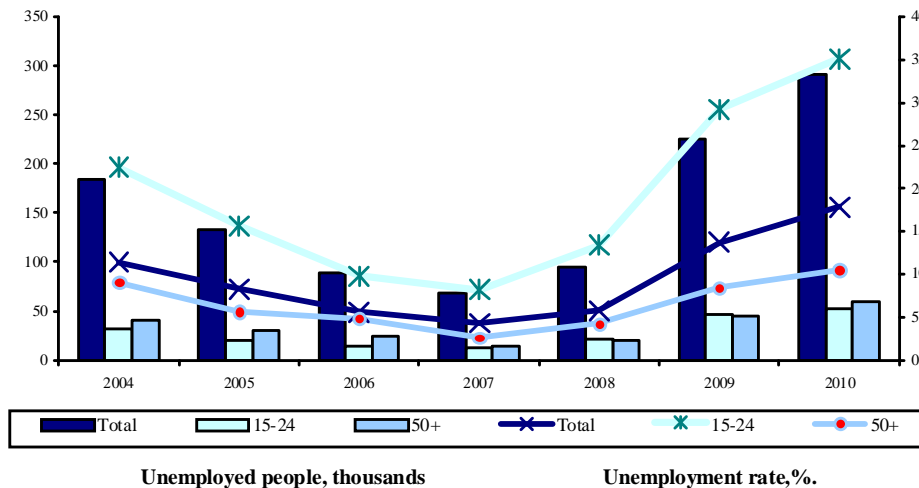
The young people were mostly affected by decrease in job supply. The other group of population that faced severe problems in labour market was people in “before retirement” age. Though the participation rate of people above 65 was not high, it decreased even more after 2008.

Total employment rate (15-64) in Lithuania in 2010 was 57.8 % and was lower than in 2004. The youth employment rate dropped from 27% to 19% since 2008.

**Graph 1. Core employment indicators by age groups**

Source: Department of Statistics.

The total unemployment rate rose up to 18% in 2010, while the youth (15-24) unemployment rate reached 35%. Despite the fact that unemployment rate of population older than 50 is lower than average, the lost of job for people in this age usually means drop into long-term unemployment.

**Graph 2. Core unemployment indicators by age groups**

Source: Department of Statistics.

In Lithuania, the problems and opportunities of people vulnerable in the labour market have been explored quite intensively. The increasing number of research of the situation of different risk groups in the labour market is supposed to be indirectly conditioned by Lithuania's obligations assumed upon its accession to the EU to contribute to the implementation of EU employment strategy objectives.

Researchers exploring into the problems of vulnerable groups in the labour market usually identify the following target groups: women, youth, older people and long-term unemployed people (Matiušaitytė, 2001) as well as specific groups of the unemployed such as older unemployed, disabled persons, people without basic education (Gruževskis et al., 2006b). Analysis of the research conducted in 2004-2010 suggests that groups of socially vulnerable people most often analysed in the labour market include the following:

- (a) disabled,
- (b) youth,
- (c) older people.

### **3. Key research findings**

#### **3.1. The disabled**

Analysis of the labour market of the disabled from the supply perspectives (Skučienė and Šumskaitė, 2005) leads to the identification of the following facts: working-aged disabled persons account for slightly more than a half of the total number of the disabled; persons with severe disabilities make some 10% of the total number of the disabled; two thirds of the disabled are urban residents; rural unemployment of the disabled is higher; most of working-age disabled persons are unskilled, one fourth of them have no vocational training and one tenth – no education at all (conclusions are based on the 2001 population census data and 2004 data of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Statistics Lithuania and Lithuanian Labour Exchange).

A complicated situation of the disabled is also evidenced by later research. Analysis of situation in labour market of people with employment difficulties and measures to improve their employability (Gruževskis et al., 2006b) suggests that as few as some 15% (28–29 thousand) of the disabled participate in the labour market, of which some 5% with a status of the unemployed. According to the Labour Exchange data, it is incomparably more

difficult for disabled persons to get employed, as compared to persons without disabilities: disabled individuals who find jobs account for as few as 2% of total registered unemployed individuals.

Rates of participation of the disabled in vocational training and reskilling programmes do not reflect high activity. Disabled women more actively participate in vocational training and reskilling programmes compared to disabled men. In addition, women participation has remained quite stable for a number of years, while men demonstrate varying rates. Women are also more active in visiting day centres (DC), as compared to men, though the number of both of them in DC activities has been growing.

Though being on quite a low level, social services to the disabled (provision of compensatory techniques, translations into sign language, adaptation of housing and environment) that are likely to contribute to better employability are constantly growing. Supplies of the aforementioned services to rural disabled people are lower compared to the urban disabled.

According to the disabled people themselves (Skučienė and Šumskaitė, 2005), the main obstacles preventing them from participation in the labour market are as follows: physical health, negative employer's attitude towards disabled people and low wages. In addition, disabled people are dissatisfied with insufficient attention paid by the labour exchange to employment of the disabled, limited mobility of the disabled and environment not adjusted to the disabled. Findings of interviews with disabled people suggest that the following measures would contribute to ensuring better participation of the disabled in the labour market: application of more flexible labour organisation forms, provision of more opportunities for upgrading of skills. A problem of workplace adjustments is faced by every tenth interviewed disabled individual. Likewise, there are impediments to business development of the disabled: insufficient information on business start-up; low level of vocational training among disabled people; insufficient professional knowledge to start business; insufficient starting-up capital; other obstacles.

Activities of social enterprises are underdeveloped in Lithuania. Žalimienė L. and Bagdonas A. recommend the following trends of the development of social enterprises: wider involvement of other social groups in addition to the disabled (usually only disabled people are employed in social enterprises; likewise, low involvement of mentally disabled people is observed); activities of social enterprises should be developed not only in large cities, but also in other territories of the country; it is reasonable to expand types of corporate activities; it is necessary to ensure economic stability of social enterprises (Žalimienė and Bagdonas, 2007).

Disabled people constitute one of regularly researched groups in the context of analysis of ALMP measures. A survey conducted in 2007 suggested that despite pessimistically seen employment opportunities, the disabled target group demonstrated the best post-ALMP employment results compared to all other vulnerable groups participating in these measures (Okunevičiūtė Neverauskienė et al. 2007a).

More serious disability and resultant lower capacity for work (0-40%) still represent a critical obstacle to labour market integration of the disabled. Disabled people with higher-degree capacity for work (40-55%) easier anchor in the labour market. Basing on survey findings (Okunevičiūtė Neverauskienė et al. 2008a), persons with lower-degree capacity for work are much more passive in the measures offered by the labour market. However, for those who decide to participate, the ALMP measures help retaining contacts with the labour market and society. Involvement of project participants in the measure definitely improves their psychological state and increases their self-confidence. The survey demonstrated that employers, who participated in the measures, notably improved their attitude towards disabled employees; previously sceptic opinion of employers as to employment of the disabled started disappearing. This fact evidences that projects of such a nature contribute to anti-discrimination approach vis-à-vis disabled people. Application of flexible forms of employment in placing the project participants for part-time employment is also an important condition for successful employment of the disabled.

The above-described research results could be supplemented with the below insights into the issues of labour market integration of the disabled. The research aimed at individual groups of the disabled (by the type of disability), as conducted in Lithuania:

Research on integration of people with hearing disabilities in to labour market (Bikmanienė et.al. 2007a) suggests that prevailing difficulties faced by people with hearing impairments in the labour market are communication-related problems. Insufficiently adequate training and workplaces not adapted to the deaf also constitute important obstacles to labour market integration of the deaf.

Employers are critical, usually negative, about labour market integration opportunities for people with mental disabilities. This implicates that fear and lack of self-confidence enhance stigma and discrimination of people with mental disabilities. Reasons of unemployment, as identified during the research, are similar (negative attitudes of the society, insufficient support from the State and public authorities, absence of mediators, etc.) (Veniūtė 2007).

As it was mentioned before, anchoring of the disabled in the labour market is badly impeded by their insufficient education and vocational training.



A research carried out by the Lithuanian Student Union (LSU), “Students with disabilities at Lithuanian universities” (Lithuanian Student Union, 2009) shows a prevailing trend of improvement in the situation of students with disabilities at universities, but the pace of such improvement could be faster. In 2010 the number of disabled students was growing slower in Lithuania as compared to the last year; Lithuanian universities remain undiscovered by foreign students with disabilities; insufficient funds are identified as the main obstacle to improving conditions for the disabled.

### **3.2. Youth**

Youth problems and needs in relation to labour market integration appear to be best explored. An extensive study of assessment of the consequences of unemployment in Lithuanian youth was carried out by Dr. L. Okunevičiūtė-Neverauskienė in her doctoral dissertation *Assessment of the Socioeconomic Consequences of Youth Unemployment and Reduction Thereof* (Okunevičiūtė-Neverauskienė, 2006). The doctoral dissertation substantiated the existence of a close connection between the overall employment level and employment in the youth age group. The research demonstrated that youth employment was falling in a line with decreasing overall employment in 1997–2005. However, a more detail analysis of statistical data revealed that changes in the labour market had very different impact on different demographic groups – decrease in employment *most of all manifested* in people attributed to youth age group.

In addition, estimates suggest that economic loss caused by decreasing employment was also influenced by increasing *youth emigration*. In 1997–2005, the share of non-gained GDP as a result of the migration of the Lithuanian population increased from 3.5% to 7.1%, including increase in the youth group from 4.0% to 9.1%. Therefore, migration with predominance of younger individuals is an important factor slowing down economic growth in Lithuania. Findings of the research allow for analysis of broader social consequences of unemployment: 68.6% of the respondents pointed out youth crime to be a consequence of living conditions and as many as 72.8% supported the opinion that employment is the main factor reducing youth crimes.

The research conducted within the framework of the doctoral dissertation suggests that youth unemployment is a result of insufficiently efficient education, vocational training (in its broad sense), social security, labour market and economic policies as a whole. The paper argues that ensuring systematic and complex decisions is the most important thing in tackling youth unemployment problems in terms of both improving labour potential building and youth

employment measures. A flexible complex youth unemployment prevention and minimisation system should start at comprehensive schools and end up with a variety of tax privileges to employers placing young people from relevant groups.

The conclusions above are also supported and supplemented by other research carried out in the country. Sociological survey of the youth situation, as conducted in 2005, revealed quite complicated situation of youth in the Lithuanian labour market. 36% of the respondents were employed during the survey; most of unemployed young people said they were studying. Most of the employed said they were satisfied with the job; most of the respondents were employed on a full-time basis. The respondents were employed in jobs that both match and don't match their professional qualifications (36% and 39% (!) respectively). 22% of the employed respondents didn't have any qualifications at all. Most of the respondents said they work under employment contracts and 10% indicated having their own business. (Spinter tyrimai, 2005).

Exploring into particularly employment-vulnerable youth groups aged 15-29 (convicted without the sentence of imprisonment; persons treated at addiction rehabilitation centres; young dropouts), much attention is paid to vocational training and practical work experience of the respondents, as these factors play an important role in the situation of individuals in the labour market (Okunevičiūtė-Neveauskienė and Moskvina, 2008). The survey disclosed that most of the respondents didn't have vocational training and as many as 44% of them didn't have secondary education. Despite poor education, majority of the respondents declared having at least some experience of self-employment or work under employment contracts.

Inadequate vocational training, dissatisfaction with offered wage and insufficient work experience are primary factors determining unfavourable situation of youth in the labour market. Better competitive opportunities of youth in the labour market are guaranteed by higher-level education (Okunevičiūtė-Neveauskienė and Moskvina, 2008; Okunevičiūtė-Neveauskienė et al., 2007b).

Findings of the analysis of the characteristics and problems of unemployed youth target groups in relation to labour market integration (Okunevičiūtė-Neveauskienė and Moskvina, 2008) once again reiterate a determining role of vocational training and work experience in employment efforts. However, there are many other subjective factors impeding the start-up or resuming of employment. These include the lack of general competences and social skills, addictions, tendency to deviant behaviour, insufficient awareness of labour market opportunities. It is supposed that under favourable conditions in the labour market the elimination and prevention of the mentioned obstacles through combined efforts of labour market authorities and social partners (non-

governmental sector first of all) will effectively contribute to better economic activity of young individuals.

Youth is a common target group in research aimed at assessing the need for labour force. Particular emphasis is placed on a detail analysis of employers' requirements raised for the competences of present and future employees. Personal attributes play an important role for employers when admitting young individuals without vocational training (Šileika et.al., 2005). A survey of employers' attitudes conducted in 2007 (Rosinaitė et.al., 2007) also reveals the importance of general competences for labour market integration. According to employers, general competences are one of the most important factors determining successful employment.

The above-described surveys demonstrate that inadequate vocational training is the main obstacle to participation in the labour market faced by young individuals. A share of children and youth absent from the education system is not shrinking. Lithuanian prevention policy against early dropouts is aimed at children under 16, as this age is related to the obligatory learning age limit. There are quite many State's interventions foreseen to tackle the problems of early dropout of the education system. However, these interventions are not consistently integrated into a system. The reasons of early dropout are complex and relate to individual situations of a person. Therefore, for the prevention policy to be effective it is not enough to apply measures relating to the improvement of education service delivery only; it is necessary to combine them with other policies such as social, employment, crime prevention and other policies (Institute of Public Policy and Management, 2007).

### **3.3. Older people**

The first research on the transitioning from employment to retirement was conducted by the Statistics Lithuania in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2006 (Ambrozaitienė, 2007) and covered interviews with people from 50 to 69 years of age. 2.3 thousand individuals aged 50 to 69 were interviewed during the survey. Most of the respondents (53%) were not able to say what age they plan to retire. Every third employed individual planned to retire at age of 60–64. About 10% (34 thousand) of employees planned to work until they reached 65 or as long as possible; most of them were males (60%). The survey helped to obtain information on the willingness of employed and unemployed people of this age to continue working. More than a half of individuals of the above-mentioned age would continue employment, if working conditions were better. Some 70% of the respondents would continue employment, if there were opportunities to

improve their qualifications. 52% of them would continue employment, if more flexible working hours were offered and 51% would stay longer in employment, if work and health care conditions were improved.

Data of the survey of the Statistics Lithuania shows quite high employment motivation of older people. This motivation could be even more enhanced by better vocational training opportunities (qualification improvement opportunities), wider range of available atypical forms of employment and workplace adjustments to the changed physical possibilities of older people.

The situation looks different in case of older people registered with the labour exchange. Analysis of situation in labour market of people with employment difficulties and measures to improve their employability (Gruževskis et al., 2006b) suggests that current older unemployed people registered with the labour exchange do not constitute a big reserve likely to supplement the labour market later (at pension age). The analysis was based on a sociological survey of unemployed older people (55+) registered with the labour exchange. It was observed that it is quite difficult for older unemployed people (55+) to engage in active occupational activities. The analysis of distribution of the respondents by vocational training showed that as many as 47% of the respondents had had no professional qualifications and 53% of them had acquired vocational training. Changing industrial conditions, new technologies devalue earlier acquired education diplomas and urge to acquire new professions or qualifications. It is therefore necessary to develop continuing learning opportunities for older people, to promote vocational and territorial mobility, and to assist in acquiring new and marketable qualifications or professions.

Older people registered with the labour exchange seem to represent a stratum of the least-endowed people in Lithuania. They have poor qualifications and therefore are often offered very low wages by employers. In addition, approximately every second older individual get registered with the territorial labour exchange for reasons other than job search. This is a fact of great concern. Vocational training/reskilling motivation of these people is low too. The research data demonstrate that employment of older people is also restricted by unadjusted workplaces, frequent non-compliance with occupational safety and health requirements, insufficient application of flexible forms of labour organisation. Therefore, a special emphasis should be placed on the role of social partnering in delivery of employment services to older people (55+) (Gruževskis et al., 2006b).

We can conclude that motivation of older customers of labour exchanges is poor – many of them look forward to finishing their occupational career as soon as possible and do not plan to continue participation in the labour market at

pension age. In order to enhance labour market integration of older people, it is important to create opportunities for retired individuals to continue employment without any interruption, as their employment motivation falls down later (Gruževskis et al., 2006b). This conclusion is indirectly supported by findings of the survey on the needs of older Lithuanian residents in the fields of employment, education and culture (Gruževskis et al., 2006a) suggesting that 89% of the respondent seniors are unemployed. It's worth noting that most of the interviewed unemployed individuals at pension age were satisfied about it (61%) and only 14% of them said they were not satisfied about being unemployed. The respondents' answers lead to a presumption that there is a small portion of seniors (~15%) potentially ready to return to the labour market. Accordingly, employment motivation is quite low in older people. Education and training services are relevant for older people (the survey covered 2,000 people aged 60+), but they are little interested in labour market integration opportunities (Gruževskis et al. 2006a).

Older people also represent one of the least post-ALMP (active labour market policy) employed groups of people. As we can see from the evaluation of the effectiveness of active labour market policy measures (Okunevičiūtė- Neverauskienė et al., 2007a), lower employment after Lithuanian Labour Exchange ALMP measures (supported employment, aided creation of jobs), as compared to 50+ individuals, is seen only in the long-term unemployed. It's worth noting that the mentioned two attributes of support for employment are characteristic at the same time for a big portion of ALMP participants, and this even more aggravates the process of labour market integration for them. The survey also demonstrates that older people especially underrate their opportunities in the labour market (Okunevičiūtė- Neverauskienė et al. 2007a).

#### **4. Conclusions**

Employment situation of vulnerable groups reflects rather poor level of inclusiveness of the Lithuanian labor market. The increased demand for labor during the economic growth facilitated participation of vulnerable groups only partially, and the economic downturn showed that those groups are least able to compete for jobs. The conducted research obviously demonstrated a complex character of problems faced by persons in risk groups in the labour market. The research disclosed the lack of institutional cooperation, thus opening wide opportunities for analysis in the area of management and public policy sciences. There are grounds to suppose that supra-individual factors have considerably bigger effects on the labour market situation of risk groups than it is currently

believed. The structural changes of national economy suggest that labour supply and demand balance in Lithuanian labour market will be uneven. Emigration process and shortcomings of national education and training system could be indicated as the main reasons for the lack of qualified labour force. Also the long term unemployment will hamper the process of adjustment.

Results of various measures used for the evaluation of social projects constitute an important source of qualitative information, but it is necessary to create a reliable and expeditious monitoring system for persons in risk groups with the view to more objective nationwide evaluation of the situation. For example, for the analysis of the trends of dynamics of labour market situation of the disabled, it is important to rely on statistical data. However, relevant information on the situation of this risk group is badly missing. It's worth noting that evaluation of the labour market situation, as provided by the Statistics Lithuania in the 2006 review of social integration of the disabled on 27 July 2007, is confined to labour exchange data only. There are no other sources of information as to unemployment of disabled people, while employment data is not available at all. In such a situation, every special research dealing with the problems of labour market integration of the disabled is a source of valuable information. It's worth noting that, in a rapidly changing social and economic space, there is bad shortage of expeditious information describing nationwide labour market situation of persons in all risk groups (not only that of the disabled).

Despite sufficiently analysed reasons of unemployment of different groups vulnerable in the labour market, there is a lack of more in-depth information to enable development of more effective unemployment prevention mechanisms. While admitting that vocational training is of exceptional importance for the situation and employment perspectives of people facing difficulties in the labour market, researchers underemphasise the process of vocational training itself. Likewise, it's worth noting that monitoring of participation of vulnerable groups in education and training is actually absent at all. Scarce and fragmentary data suggests poor participation of disabled, older people and other persons in risk groups in the process of lifelong learning.

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## Streszczenie

### GRUPY PROBLEMOWE NA LITEWSKIM RYNKU PRACY

*Pomimo wzrostu gospodarczego i pomyślnej sytuacji na litewskim rynku pracy w latach 2004-2008 kilka grup społecznych nadal miało ograniczony dostęp do zatrudnienia. Okres recesji uwypakował kolejne problemy osób należących do grup zwiększonego ryzyka. W niniejszym artykule dokonano analizy sytuacji osób niepełnosprawnych, młodych i starszych na rynku pracy oraz głównych przeszkód dla ich aktywności zawodowej w oparciu o dane statystyczne oraz wyniki innych badań.*

*Zwiększona liczba opracowań, których celem jest analiza sytuacji grup zwiększonego ryzyka na Litwie oraz utrzymujące się problemy na narodowym rynku pracy zachęcają do podjęcia próby zestawienia najnowszej wiedzy dotyczącej osób o wysokim prawdopodobieństwie bezrobocia. Przegląd badań obejmuje prace powstałe w okresie pomiędzy rokiem 2004 a 2010. Analizie poddano zarówno opracowania przygotowane przez specjalistów na zlecenie władz publicznych i innych właściwych podmiotów, jak również te powstałe w ramach rozpraw doktorskich. Do grup znajdujących się w szczególnej sytuacji na rynku pracy, które były najczęściej analizowane na Litwie, zaliczyć możemy: osoby niepełnosprawne, młode i starsze.*

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*Przegląd wykazał, iż badania ukierunkowane na ocenę sytuacji grup problemowych są cennym źródłem informacji, istnieje natomiast niedobór danych statystycznych w tym zakresie. Wskazana jest dalsza analiza mechanizmów umożliwiających integrację i reintegrację grup problemowych.*

*Artykuł powstał w ramach projektu badawczego pt. "Wpływ polityk rynku pracy na stan zatrudnienia podczas różnych cykli ekonomicznych" (No. Sin-04/2010), realizowanego w ramach narodowego programu naukowego „Wyzwania społeczne dla bezpieczeństwa narodowego” przez Radę Nauki Litwy.*