

SOCIAL FIRMS IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenia we've had experiences with social firms already since 70ties and 80ties of previous century. This is mostly on account of immediate closeness and long year cooperation with social cooperatives in Trieste, which have developed in Italy after the period of Franco Basaglia and transformation of psychiatric hospitals.

The Republic of Slovenia has a long year tradition in development and realization of vocational trainings and employment programmes for people with disabilities. National employment system has through different forms and possibilities for employment taken efficient care of the employment and training needs of this population. When talking about people with disabilities (invalid people) we are talking about persons who have been dealt a status of invalid person for certain disability (physical or mental).

There are four different types of organizations carrying out training and employment programmes, which differ regarding the objectives, organizational structure and population. These are:

- **CENTER FOR REHABILITATION OF INVALID PERSONS** the purpose of which is education and practical training. The status disabled persons joining this institution get is student.
- **TRAINING CENTRE** the purpose of which is assessment of abilities for work, vocational training and practical training. These centres are specialized for a group of persons with certain disability or handicap especially young people (blind, deaf,...). The status people receive upon arrival is a client or a person in the course of education.
- **CENTER FOR PROTECTION AND WORK** the purpose of which is protection at work and social training for protégées who are adult people with developmental deficiencies. The centres offer ways of constructive use of person's pastime, people are taught independent life and work habits. Protégées don't obtain a work contract, they receive their income in a form of reward therefore we cannot speak of employment in its rightful way.
- **ENTERPRISE (FIRM) FOR EMPLOYMENT OF INVALIDE PERSONS** the purpose of which is employment and training of people with disabilities. Enterprise presents the highest form of work rehabilitation for the hard-to-employ because it competes in the open market, people included have a status of employee, are employed with standard agreement and are receiving pay in accordance with payments in the open market.

There are 150 enterprises for invalid persons in Slovenia evenly spread throughout the country. This is quite a high number concerning the fact that Slovenia is quite a small state with just two million inhabitants. These enterprises employ 12000 people half of which are invalid persons (6200 – app. 50%).

Because of the characteristics of enterprises for employment of invalid persons we tend to compare them with social firms as they are regarded in European countries.

In the beginning of the 90ties, the transitional period, Slovenia found itself facing some hard problems which it didn't have to deal with for variety of reasons up until now. One of those problems was also unemployment.

In some regions unemployment rate rose up to 25 % and was almost nowhere under 10 % of active population. Level of unemployment was gradually lowered by active steps of employment politics and eventually stopped at transition of millennium at 10 %. Nevertheless there have been significant structure changes within the group of unemployed. In the group of unemployed predominates a group of *people with a status of hard – to - employ people*. This group includes disabled people, people who are long – term unemployed, people older than 45 years, people with low or without professional education, qualification or working experience, ex – alcohol or drug users, people with mental health problems and other people facing risk of social exclusion. In the past this group was quite small and poorly recognizable thus making at that time existing forms of work rehabilitation and employment sufficient. However now the problem has overgrown existing employment system which is still in the same state as it was in the past.

In the 90ties, ŠENT – Slovenian Association for Mental Health together with Italian partner from Trieste, Per l’Impresa Sociale carried out a joint Phare Lien project: “Trieste and Ljubljana for social enterprise”. We become directly involved in European network of social firms and other employment initiatives. This presented a good opportunity to present concept and ideology of social firm as defined in European countries, to Slovenian space. Association ŠENT saw social firms as new form of employing people with mental health problems. Slovenian employment system at that time didn’t provide any alternative forms of employment for this group neither for any other hard – to - employ people. Association ŠENT has established already three enterprises for people with mental health problems, which we consider as social firms under the criteria and ideology of CEFEC. However it is important to emphasize that the status of social firm in Slovenia is not legally regulated, so even though we are acquainted with the term and we use it, there is no uniform definition and explanation which would suit our needs and characteristics in the wide field of employment.

Slovenia also wants to approach to European models of employment for hard – to - employ people and tries to direct as much persons as it can into employment in the ordinary enterprises on open labour market. Still there will always remain groups of people, which will not be employable elsewhere than in the special forms of employment on account of their disabilities. Keeping this in mind while working on *the proposal of new law for employment rehabilitation and employing the invalid persons*, which will be valid at the beginning of year 2004, there are anticipated some steps for reduction of unemployment and increase of employment among hard – to - employ people. The new proposal anticipates supported and sheltered employment, employment rehabilitation for persons who are not employable without extra services and introduction of quota system as it is known in some European countries. In addition to this legislation National Programme for Development of Labour Market and Employment till year 2006 suggest possibilities of introducing some new, alternative forms of employment which besides intermediate workshops, educational enterprise, integrational enterprise, include also *social firms*.

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