



DOI: 10.18427/iri-2017-0085

The Role of Transit Programs for Low-Skilled

Balázs Gyula PÁL

**University of Pécs, "Education and Society" Doctoral School of
Education, Pécs, Hungary**

pal.balazs@kpvk.pte.hu

The flexibility of the labour market and the work safety of the employees are important factors of the economic and social competitiveness. To provide flexibility the aim of the government is to place the Labour Code on new footing; to establish unemployment benefits that encourages job search, to introduce active labour market measures and to provide opportunities for life long learning.

The aim of the measures is to provide a flexible employment framework for the players in the labour market to synchronize the individual and corporate supply and demand, to make the return to the labour market easier, especially for those who are not provided an opportunity within the traditional framework of labour market, first of all women with children, the young, the older employees and those with low level of education.

The government program and the New Széchenyi Plan both assume that only businesses can establish significant number of jobs that are sustainable in the long term, therefore the task of the government is to provide the favorable conditions for the businesses. For this, it is necessary to ease the operating conditions for businesses, to change the regulatory environment and to restructure the tax system. In order to have the extension of employment and growth go together, a employment policy is needed that supports and encourages all players of the labour market.

The primary aim is to establish more workplaces and for businesses to provide work opportunities either with support or without it. It is obvious that for many who have been permanently excluded from the world of work, the primary labour market cannot provide appropriate employment. Partly because they live in an area where the primary labour market is weak, partly because there is a need for social work and mentoring beside encouragement for employment, in order to employ them. This could be provided by the system of transit employment system that works as a lock when leading those from temporary employment to the open labour market.

There have been factors and reasons that confirm the need for transit employment projects from economic, demographic, and labour market

sides and its presence in a broader circle. The transit employment program is a complex activity and its primary aim is to provide training, development, service and employment unit for the target group through which it can provide greater employment chances for the participants regarding their opportunities and problems.

National demographic and labor market environment of the transit programs

Since the change of regime the structure of industry that determined our country's economy has broken up, the determining state enterprises disappeared together with mining and manufacturing that served as a base for heavy industrial axis, and the agricultural co-operatives have degraded in the communities. By the beginning of the '90s employment had significantly decreased and regions presenting changing unemployment rate were evolving. This process occurred particularly among those living in villages and having only lower education as at these places the employment was mainly connected to agriculture. The onetime great employers of the regions, the agricultural cooperations either changed or disappeared after privatization. As a result of this unemployment with dramatic tension has evolved (Vámosi, 2015).

The situation of Roma minority is extremely severe, as the Roma population became unemployed in masses and in a short time. The unemployment that has greatly exceeded the national average for years presents the extremely severe employment situation of the region. The changes of economy has established a social layer that has been marginalized in all segments of life: mostly described by low levels of education and residence in undeveloped areas with a high rate of Roma population among them (Vámosi, 2015).

The settlement structure of small villages specific for the region, plays an important role in the evolvment and strengthening of the other factors of the region's disadvantages: the lack of workplaces, difficulties of public transport, causing the problems of reaching workplaces, schools, and other services, finally the deficiencies of infrastructure. The subregion therefore has multiple disadvantages: there are no big employers, there is no settled industry, the quality of the soil is far below the national average, the number fo the unemployed is high; the road network is unspeakable, the public transport is not satisfying, the population of the settlements has continuously decreased since the 1990s, the villages are aging, their supporting capability lessens (Vámosi, 2015).

As a result of the above mentioned, social institutes, as well as social supply systems have great significance. Usually, the most requested forms are the regular child protection support and the compensatory payment. In many subregions lasting, even multigenerational unemployment has developed that results in lifestyle change and deprivation, short-term thinking has become typical, the preferences of aid and odd jobs. Starting

a family and raising kids early is quite common, which obstructs further education, especially in case of women. In families it is traditionally the females' task to raise the children and take care of them, to look after the elderly, that again obstruct education and employment. In case of the disadvantaged it is not easy to step out to the labour market so the transit employment is supposed to support this as its regional specialties were grabbed during the interviews and observations (Vámosi, 2015).

Presentation of the transit programs

Before the analytical presentation of the transit programs, the author finds it necessary to define the term transit employment. „Transit employment is a complex activity-system to be established among project-like circumstances. Its primary aim is to provide longterm employment possibilities in the primary labour market, for the project participants adjusting to the social, economic characteristics, opportunities, and problems of the given environment“ (Török, 2014).

There have been transit programs with variable numbers of participants in our country since 2002. The basic concept (model) has not been changed, but the program organizers have gained many experiences that were used at the start of the next project (Vámosi, 2015).

The primary *goal* of the transit program is to provide help for the members of the disadvantaged target group to get back to the primary labour market (or to get in) through giving them the opportunity to get a certificate for professions in demand (primarily physical qualifications) during the project implementation (that usually takes 12-24 months, and the follow-up of the participants). This means that the programs try to move the participants out of the state of lasting unemployment to continue with their lives in lasting employment. In many cases their return to the labour market is prevented by the obsolete, non-marketable qualification they have (Eszik, 2006:42). The specific goals of the program are:

- the increase of local sources supporting the unemployed,
- the involvement of participants in training,
- help to obtain qualification based on individual needs through complex improvement and psycho-social consultation,
- regular allowances for the participants (Vámosi, 2015).

The primary *target group* of the transit employment projects is the active aged unemployed and the inactives (economically not active). It is worth looking at how the statistics have changed regarding the latter and their education between 2003 and 2016:

Table 1. Inactivity rate at the educational attainment¹

<i>Educational attainment</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2016</i>
Less than 8. class of elementary school	85,2%	71,4%
Elementary school (finished the 8. class)	66,1%	56,8%
Vocational school or specialized school	24,4%	21,6%
High school	49,4%	38,7%
Other graduation	26,6%	19%
College	17,6%	16,2%
University	14,8%	10,7%

By getting regular income the circumstances of the participants, their self-respect, and their relation to work may improve. The achievement of these goals helps the strengthening of the participants' labour market position and their social re-integration (Vámosi, 2015).

The primary target group of the transit projects is made up of unemployed people of active age. It is worth take into consideration in case of the unemployed that there are many of them who are unregistered. In their case there are two layers: one group of them has already been deprived of all kinds of aid, the other group is on the periphery completely, has low qualification and as a result of this they will not cooperate with the labour authorities (Györgyi, Mártonfi, 2001:8).

When choosing the target group special attention must be paid to the following factors as well:

- women looking after large family, elderly, or sick relative,
- people between the ages 16-25 and the age over 45,
- inhabitants of places hard to approach,
- those of Roma origin,
- reduced ability to work,
- the under qualified,
- families with no income sufficient for the cost of living,
- families where unemployment is inherited through generations (Vámosi, 2015).

Taking the above mentioned modules into consideration transit programs are divided into three main phases:

1. preparatory phase (generally 1-3 months)
2. training phase together with employment (generally 13-15 months)
3. employment and follow-up phase (generally 6 months) (Eszik, 2006:44).

The *preparatory phase* is about the search for the project participants and giving instructions to them. From among the participants the most 'concerned' ones need to be chosen. A kind of attunement for the next tasks is part of the project. Their choice of profession/career, their catching up, which primarily mean the renewing and updating of their

¹ http://www.ksh.hu/thm/2/indi2_3_4.html (2017. április 6.)

knowledge takes place in this phase. All experts involved in the training are informed about the primary goals of the program, the special characteristics and circumstances of the participants (Eszik, 2006:44).

In the *training together with the employment phase*, the selection process will take place in a way that is adequate to the employment needs, it will be thematic part of the profession/career choice. Work motivation needs to be strengthened simultaneously with the attitude towards work so the work culture and the work ability of the participants should develop according to expectations. It is necessary that the theoretical and practical parts of the training represent an appropriate ratio. The improvement of a key ability or competence could be a goal as well. Beside the key competences the existence of skills is just as important, as it might determine the opportunities of employment (Eszik, 2006:44). The problem is, that from the side of skills many interpret the jobs and the acquired level of training together, at other times, only either one or the other. Many places these basic skills are examined as new elements, divided into several skills, such as social, technical, and personal skills (Fazekas & Varga, 2013:270). With transit programs it may happen that the above mentioned skills are simply 'missing' in the participants.

The third phase is *the follow-up, aftercare* and its aim is to help directly those leaving the project to fit successfully in their new workplace and to solve their incidental (personal, family, work place) problems and crisis. As a result of the project, the participant needs to be employed by the end of the sixth month of the follow-up phase. In this phase, the one involved in the training will not get salary within the frames of the project, at the same time the financing of the necessary supporting services in order to stay employed (for example, supporting work of the social workers) are available (Eszik, 2006:44).

The low-skilled target group and the transit programs

The interlacement of the low educational attainment and the transit employment programs was pointed out by the results of a research started in September 2015. The research was delivered by the PTE KPVK and the National Vocational and Adult education office (NSZFH) and its main aim was to map the inquiry of learning motivation of women with low level of education taking part in adult education. The following hypothesis were drawn up in connection with objectives:

1. Women of low level education taking part in adult education strongly believe during the training that their chances regarding the labour market improve. In case of the majority the most important motivational factor is the possibility of getting a given job (Vámosi, 2016:29).
2. For women of low level education family is not a motivational factor. Joining the adult education programs needs multiple compromises in case of women with family. Quite often they lack the supportive attitude of family, the main reason for that is traditional role

perception. Even if they get the help of the family, there is rather a financial motivation in the background (for example the eradication of a single-beam model. Therefore the participation of mothers with young children in adult education only works within certain boundaries (Vámosi, 2016:29).

3. Women of low level education may contribute to meet the needs of workforce in sectors requiring live work (Vámosi, 2016:29).

The target group of the research were the women of low level education. Unfortunately, a clear, adequate formulation has not been found concerning the target group classification, therefore the question rose what low level education means. The relevant literature presents individuals of low level education as underprivileged, as they have less chance to appear in the labour market (Bajusz, 2014; Mártonfi, 2007). From the point of view of labour market and employment, one of the most significant factors is the already acquired education. The professional practitioners (Kenderfi, Tibori, Cserné) defined the three groups of low level education (Vámosi, 2016:29):

- absolutely low level of education, are those, who did not finish the elementary school, or have no qualification at all. Their level of education is so low, that it would not make any sense to examine it in relation to anything, they have no qualification that could make them more competitive in the labour market.²
- relatively low level of education, are those, who belong to the lower part of society regarding their education; literature calls them „school poor”.³
- The third group is distinguished by measuring education within international relations, which means what is enough here, in Hungary, is not enough in the international labour market.⁴

The grouping of the above cannot be applied uniformly on a daily basis and during professional researches. Therefore the following statement can be accepted by everyone: *everyone can be considered to have low level of education who did not finish elementary school and those who have elementary school education but no competitive, easily convertible qualification either.*⁵

The choice of the target group was justified as they wished to assess what the aims, perspectives, and motivations of the individual will be when learning. As those of low level of education has the slightest chances

² http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop412A/2010-0019_foglalkozas_specialis_helyzetu_csoportokkal/ch11.html#id513557

³ http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop412A/2010-0019_foglalkozas_specialis_helyzetu_csoportokkal/ch11.html#id513557

⁴ http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop412A/2010-0019_foglalkozas_specialis_helyzetu_csoportokkal/ch11.html#id513557

⁵ http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop412A/2010-0019_foglalkozas_specialis_helyzetu_csoportokkal/ch11.html#id513557 [11.03.2017].

in the labour market to get a job or position, in both absolute and relative terms (Vámos, 2016:31).

The features and experiences of the research

During the research 112 targetgroup members had to fill the closed questionnaire, and beside that there was a focus group interview with five members, during which they got a shaded picture of the individual life situations, and the learning processes. Besides that they had a deep interview with leaders and experts of professional organizations (training and development) who have insight and experience regarding the target group (Vámosi, 2016:30-31).

Reaching the target group was difficult because of several factors. The mainly nonprofit organizations, delivering training, development, and transitemployment programs had a great role in providing the framework in search and research, where we could meet tthe members of the target group face-to-face. It is important to mention that some of them were specifically occupant, pessimistic, and id not wnat to take part in the research. The situation was solved by the social workers, who were more accepted and they made them fill the questionnaires (the social worker asked the questions and wrote the answers immediately). The completion of the questionnaire was preceded by a multiform conceptualization (for example defining the target group), then the operationalization of certain questions. The main reason for that was to have research questions that replicate the examined target group more lifelike. Durig the completion of the variables (questions) it was an emphasized viewpoint and a goal to define the answer alternatives more precisely. The aim was to whave simple, short questions that adjust to the aptitude of the target group (Vámosi, 2016:34).

The inquiry was delivered by a helping professional (social worker) in every case. He was the connection between the questionnaire and the person filling it. The individuals are not so keen on telling about their fate and goals, especially if they have to open up before a stranger. So the social workers asked the questions and they marked the answers instead of the individuals. It was the only way to gather valuable answers. Taking the importance and success of the research in mind the following methods were used to examine hypothesis:

- printed closed questionnaires,
- focus-group conversations with target group members,
- deep interviews with professional leaders of training institutes,
- deep interviews with training and employment project experts.

Following the questionnaire a focus group talking took place with some of the target group members, fortunately there were some volunteers. For the researchers these situations and information brought a lot of morals and experiences. The interviews took place by appointment, with the

administration the helping professionals (social workers) were there for the researchers. Apart from one exception the interviews were held in the beginning of the training day as the individuals were more 'fresh'. The location of the interviews (beside the buffet, corridor in front of the classrooms) was not the classroom or any other educational venue, but rather a neutral venue. The aim of this was to have the interview at an ordinary place that is familiar for the individual. This way, the incidental tension could be resolved. Due to time constraints these interviews were 15-20 minutes long at a time and took place several occasions. The interviews, apart from 2-3 introductory questions, flowed freely as the group members were communicative this way rather than answering given questions in order. It became obvious for the researchers that within small community (3-4 people including the researchers) the individuals gave their opinion regarding their fate and life much easier than if they had a questionnaire of many questions. Trust and honesty were better graspable during the interviews than while filling out a questionnaire – for example involving a helping professionals. The interviews were not recorded, only notes were taken (Vámosi, 2016:35).

Further research methodology was the *deep interview* done with the professional leaders of training institutes and external experts. Two organisations and two experts were chosen, and were cooperative, we went through the research content in details, primarily focusing on the hypothesis. The interviews were especially meaningful and instructive with plenty of information. In case of the organisations we focused more on the target group and the main characteristics, in case of the experts, beyond these we focused on the features of the different programs and the individual experiences. The interviews were recorded anonymously.

Results of the research

It is important to mention when evaluating the results that the results of the questionnaire cannot give the shaded picture that developed in the researchers during the deep and focus group interviews, therefore these events – wherever it was possible – are attached to the statistical approach. The target group can be divided into two in terms of participation:

- on one hand, those were able to join the offered training programs on their own, and still working on acquiring their qualification;
- *on the other hand – and unfortunately this is the majority – who learn in the 'more protected' medium, in other words in the transiemployment program, or take part in a training from project fund (plus maybe in an employment project).*

This situation is lucky in research terms, that the examination of motivations and features can be delivered widespread. When discussing

the results, the author takes the features of the second case into account with greater emphasis. During the research a tight connection seemed to be with the transiemployment programs, as the target group was primarily approachable through programs like that. We saw the significance, the efficiency, and the everyday life of the organisations delivering the programs up close.

The target group member is only motivated, can be involved to a greater extent in the training, if the following facts are typical: realistic, and gives a transparent chance for the individual to get employed, to extend their existential possibilities, the participation is feasible with their lifestyle, for example when having children. If the individual had only odd jobs, he or she should not fall from the possibility during the training. If they need to travel to the training, the cost of traveling should not be on them. The training materials and books should be free for the supported ones.

Trainings that are necessary in terms of labour market, the *individual development plans*, the support of keeping them in the program, and the competency-based, practice oriented learning material are important factors as well. *The specific features of the transiemployment program redounding learning motivation are necessary for the examined target group. This special need demands the establishment of great professional and financial investment, as well as the partnerships for the success of the program.*

Findings

The need for transit programs is indisputable for the long-term unemployed and the inactive as this employment together with training might be the only chance for them to get back to the labour market. Because the transit programs merge many specializations, social services, forms of service, it can provide help in a complex way to those involved in the training. It is able to integrate to a great extent as those finishing the course successfully manage to perform value and income-generating work.

The participants of the transit program get a chance to catch up on the road to the world of employment in spite of their shortcomings and disadvantages. The philosophy of the transit programs (Eszik, 2006:9), according to which 'it doesn't send those in need back to the infantile world of school', is boosted in the previously mentioned characteristics as the program provides some kind of income for them. Furthermore the programs provide help in the experience of the responsibility of the employer's role (Eszik, 2006:9).

The relationships formulated by the author and the 'best practice' methods presented by the transiemployment programs can live again the heyday in the future in our country, as there is the opportunity to apply

within the framework of Széchenyi 2020 for 'Support of transiemployment programs' (code: GINOP-5.1.4-17).

References

- Bajusz Klára (2014). *Felnőttekhez felnövő iskola? Az iskolarendszerű felnőttoktatás aktuális társadalmi alapproblémái*. Pécs: PTE FEEK.
- Eszik Zoltán (2006). *100 szó a tranzitfoglalkoztatásról*. Budapest: Országos Tranzitfoglalkoztatási Egyesület.
- Györgyi Zoltán, & Mártonfi György (2001). *Vissza a munkaerőpiacra – A tranzitfoglalkoztatási program tapasztalatai*. Budapest: Oktatókutató Intézet.
- Mártonfi György (2007). Elhanyagolt kompetenciák? Az alacsony képzettségűek munkaerő-piaci beilleszkedésének hátteréről. *Szakképzési Szemle*, 23 (3), 275-292.
- Vámosi Tamás (2015). *Felzárkóztató programok hatásvizsgálata című kutatás. A tranzitfoglalkoztatási programok*. Pécs.
- Vámosi Tamás (2016). *A felnőttképzésben részt vevő, alacsony iskolázottságú nők tanulási motivációjának vizsgálata*. Pécs: PTE-NSZFH.
- Török Béla (2014). *Tranzitfoglalkoztatás jellegű projektek – jó gyakorlat bemutatása*. Budapest.