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**HOW EFFICIENT IS CROATIAN GOVERNMENT MEASURE FOR
REDUCTION OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT: EXAMPLE OF
INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SCIENCE SECTOR**

**KOLIKO JE UČINKOVITA MJERA VLADE REPUBLIKE HRVATSKE
ZA SMANJENJE NEUPOSLENOSTI MEĐU MLADIMA: PRIMJER
KNJIŽNIČNOG SEKTORA**

ABSTRACT

In 2011 the Croatian Government issued the National Plan for Employment 2011-2012 (continued to the end of 2013) whose aim was to increase the employment and decrease the unemployment rate. One of its target groups are young people. Consequently, the Croatian Employment Service has, as a part of this plan, initiated the program entitled "Work, work experience and transport" whose aim was to enable young people, without professional experience, the possibility to gain the professional experience in the area of their education, pass the state exam and become more competitive at the work market.

This paper presents the findings of the online survey conducted in the period of November and December 2013 among the young people who took part in this Program working in either an academic or a public library in Croatia. The sample comprised of 59 respondents between 24 and 38 years of age who answered questions about their satisfaction with the library they were professionally trained within the Program, but also with the Program itself. Although majority of the respondents (85%, n=57) claims that they would recommend this Program,

there is a long list of negative comments the Program received that will be elaborated in the paper.

Key words: *unemployment, Croatia, Government measure, Croatian Employment Service, libraries*

SAŽETAK

Hrvatska je Vlada 2011. godine donijela Nacionalni plan za poticanje zapošljavanja za 2011. i 2012. godinu (nastavljeno i do kraja 2013. godine) s ciljem da se smanji postotak neuposlenih i poveća postotak onih koji rade. Jedna od ciljnih skupina ovog plana su i mladi. U skladu s time, Hrvatski je zavod za zapošljavanje u okviru tog plana provodio program „Rad, staž i prijevoz“.

Program „Rad, staž i prijevoz“ odnosi se na stručno osposobljavanje za rad bez zasnivanja radnog odnosa. Cilj je navedenog programa da se nezaposlenim osobama omogući stručno osposobljavanje za rad u zanimanju za koje su se školovale, stjecanje radnog iskustva, polaganje stručnog ispita za zanimanja za koje je to propisano zakonom, a time i lakši ulazak na tržište rada.

Ovaj rad donosi rezultate online istraživanja koje se provodilo u studenome i prosincu 2013. godine na uzorku od 67 mladih (između 24 i 38 godina) koji su sudjelovali u ovom Programu radeći ili nekoj od narodnih ili u nekoj od visokoškolskih knjižnica u Hrvatskoj. Većina ispitanika završila je studij iz područja informacijskih i komunikacijskih znanosti u Osijeku (28,36%, n=19), Zagrebu (26,87%, n=18) ili Zadru (10,45%, n=7). Ispitanici su u upitniku odgovarali na pitanja o zadovoljstvu knjižnicom u kojoj su odrađivali Program, ali i samim Programom kao mjerom. Iako je većina ispitanika (85%, n=57) iskazala svoju spremnost da ovaj Program preporuči drugima, zamjetan je značajan popis primjedbi i negativnih strana Programa koje sudionici navode i koji će se detaljnije obraditi u radu.

Ključne riječi: *neuposlenost, mladi, Hrvatska, Vladine mjere, Hrvatski zavod za zapošljavanje, knjižnice*

1. Introduction

Financial crisis caused by the bankruptcy of the American investment bank Lehman Brothers in 2008 paralysed first the American financial system only soon to turn into the global economic crisis (Obadić, 2010, 4). The economic crisis resulted in the decrease of the consumption which in turn resulted in the decrease of production and consequently in the decrease of the employment rate. Croatia entered the recession at the end of 2008 (Jurčić, 2009). The need for work is one of the basic human needs and ever since the start of the recession many in Croatia have been deprived of that basic human need. One of the particularly vulnerable target groups are young people who are just embarking on the work market.

Employment has a tremendous importance and a fundamental role in every society. In addition, employment (labour market), together with financial poverty (income), health and education, make four dimensions that influence the instigation of poverty and social exclusion (Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2005, 167). Social exclusion is understood primarily as exclusion from the labour market. For an individual, labour does not only mean economic security, it is also a source of self-esteem and the desire for advancement (Poverty, 2006, 12). Among social groups that are experiencing an increased risk for social exclusion are: the unemployed

(exclusion based on economic status) and young adults aged 15-29²²¹ (exclusion based on age) (Poverty, 2006, 14). The rate of unemployment among people aged 15 to 24 has, in certain periods, been nearly two and a half times higher (more precisely, 2.4) than the general unemployment rate (only Romania and Belgium with 2.5 and Italy with 2.9 have it worse than Croatia) (Ilišin and Radin, 2002, 235). Unfortunately, the more recent data show that the situation in Croatia has deteriorated. Namely, in 2013 the highest rate of youth unemployment was recorded in Greece (57.3%), which was followed by Spain (56%) and Croatia (52%). The lowest rate has Germany with only 7.7% of youth unemployment (European Commission, 2013). In Croatia, there are two main reasons for the exclusion of the young people: an unstable position at the labour market and dropping out of school (Poverty, 2006, 21). Following their studies, the majority of young people are forced to wait, usually for a long time, for their first job. Consequently, one of the main reasons young people were unable to find their first job was the lack of experience. This grim situation for young people in Croatia motivated Croatian Government to think of the possible implementation measures that would help Croatian youth increase their employability at the market. One of the ways to do so was to help young people gain necessary experience prior looking for the first job. This paper discusses the effects of the government's measure "Work, work experience, and transport" on young people looking for a job in Croatia in the area of information and library science.

2. Croatian national employment measures

At the beginning of 2008 the Republic of Croatia issued a Conclusion to adopt the *Joint Assessment of the Employment Policy Priorities of the Republic of Croatia* – JAP. Later that year the JAP was signed in Bruxelles by the representatives of the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of Croatia (Republic, 2011, 4). The JAP identified the challenges of the labour market in Croatia and named the key priorities of the Government's employment policy. Among those priority groups, besides prime-age women (especially those with low or inadequate skills) and older people, are also young people (Republic, 2011, 5). The document National Employment Promotion Plan for 2011 and 2012 offered measures for key priorities, and one of the measures for the increase of employability and participation of young people was the measure 3.3.1.13. *Provide employment subsidies for young, firsttime job -seekers who are unemployed and have no employment record or work experience*. This particular measure (along with others) was then taken on by the Croatian Employment Service and is now known as the measure "Work, work experience, and transport".

In 2012 the number of young unemployed people (between 15-29 years of age) in Croatia was 107.508 or 33% of the total number of the unemployed (324.324) (Hrvatski, 2013, 13). Croatian Employment Service recorded in 2012 the increase of the number of unemployed people across all age groups, but the lowest increase was recorded for the group with the lowest level of education. On the other hand, the biggest unemployment rate was noticed for the group with highest levels of education. Consequently, the increase of unemployment for the group with finished primary education increased only 0.4% in relation to 2011 whereas the increase of unemployment for the group with a finished first level of higher education (HE) (undergraduate level) increased for 20.6%. Similarly, for the group with a finished

²²¹ When speaking about young people one usually refers to those aged between 15 and 24. However, since in many cases the period of youth is prolonged due to the longer education and/or inability to find employment (which makes it impossible for young people to become independent and leave parental home), the period of youth is prolonged to 29 years of age (The State Institute, 2003, 11).

graduate level of HE, master or PhD level the unemployment increased for 18% (Zavod, 2013, 13).

As we can see, the situation regarding the employment of young people in Croatia is a difficult one. Government measures for the increase of the employment, especially the one that gives the young educated professionals the opportunity to gain experience and take the State Exam is gaining popularity and more and more young people decide to use that opportunity. Table 1 shows the number of participants of that measure since its start in 2010. The data clearly show that very soon after its start, the measure gained popularity among the young (2011 records over 900% increase of the number of the participants in relation to the previous year). Every following year recorded the increase, although not as huge as the year 2011. This trend will obviously continue in 2014 (till 27 February there were already 14.800 recorded participants)²²².

Table 1 Number of participants of “Work, work experience, and transport” measure

Year	Number (%)	Change (%)
2010	448 (0.9%)	
2011	4760 (9.7%)	962.5%
2012	9583 (19.6%)	101.3%
2013	19.322 (39.5%)	101.6%
TOTAL:	48.913 (100%)	

This paper describes the research conducted among the participants of this measure in the area of information and library science in the Republic of Croatia.

3. Research

3.1. Research methodology, instrument and sample

The goal of the research was to find out how effective this measure was among young people with educational background in the information and library science sector (ILS) who spent one year within this measure in one of the Croatian academic or public libraries. We wanted to find out how satisfied those young people were with the library they were with as well as how satisfied they were with this government measure in general.

The research was carried out in the period between October²²³ and December 2013. The call for cooperation in the research was sent out via e-mail to the directors of 362 Croatian academic and public libraries (87 academic and 269 public libraries). They were asked to forward the URL of the online survey to the current and former participants of this government measure in their library.

The online survey had altogether 20 questions. Next to the demographic data, the respondents were asked about their experience during the duration of the measure (type of library activities were they involved in, their satisfaction with the supervisor from the library, their satisfaction with the library in general), as well as about their opinions about the measure itself (the purpose and value of the measure, benefits of the measure).

Altogether, we received 67 responses, but only 59 valid ones. Slightly more than a half of our sample (33 respondents or 55.9%) came from public, and the rest (26 respondents or 44.1%) came from academic libraries. Unfortunately, it was impossible to find out the number of

²²² On April 3rd, 2014 Croatian government was forced to temporarily abolish this measure due to the budget deficit. This is, however, expected to be only temporarily.

²²³ In this period two calls were issued in order to increase the response rate.

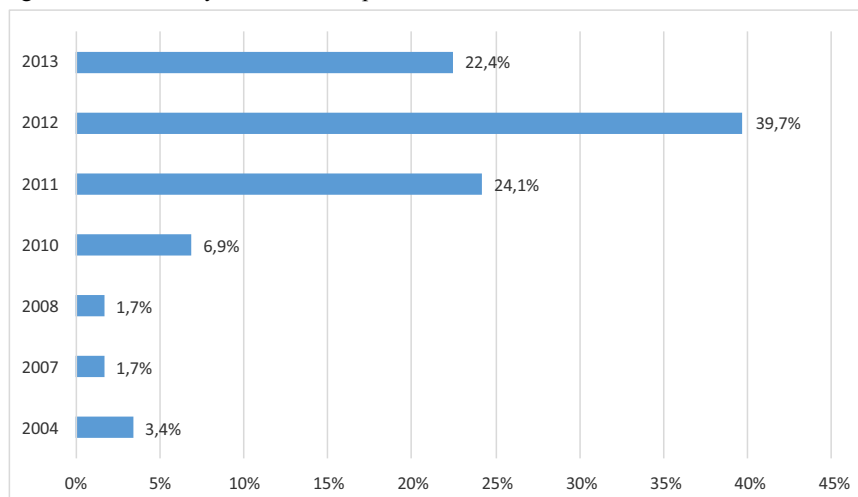
participants of this measure only for the area of ILS sector from the Croatian Employment Service, which obviously does not keep records of that kind. The results were analysed by the SPSS+ software.

3.2. Results

The age of our respondents varied between 23 and 37. The biggest age group is the one between 25-29 years of age (38 respondents or 64.4%), it is followed by the age group 30-37 (14 respondents or 23.7%), and finally 23-24 years of age (7 respondents or 11.9%). Majority of the respondents were female (44 respondents or 74.6%).

Majority of our respondents graduated in 2012 (23 respondents or 39.7%). They were followed by those who graduated in 2011 (14 or 24.1%) and those who graduated in 2013 (13 or 22.4%) (Fig. 1)

Figure 1 Graduation years in the sample



The highest number of respondents graduated from the Department of Information Sciences in Osijek (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) (19 respondents or 32.3%). They were followed by those from the Department of Information and Communication Sciences in Zagreb (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) (18 respondents or 30.5%) and those who graduated from the Department of Information Sciences in Zadar (University of Zadar) (7 respondents or 11.9%). One respondent (1.7%) graduated from the library school in Rijeka (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) and one (1.7%) from the Department of Culturology (Librarianship) (University of Osijek). 13 respondents (22.0%) graduated from various, usually non-library related, higher-education programmes of study²²⁴.

²²⁴One respondent graduated from the information and library science programme in Serbia, but the rest of the sample had little connection with ILS sector. The other programmes included for instance Croatian language and literature, history, Italian language and literature, business economy, maritime logistics and management, etc.

Half of the sample (28 respondents or 50.9%) spent between 10 and 12 months in the library, and the other half spent less. 10 respondents (18.2%) spent between 4-6 months, 9 respondents between 7-9 months, and 8 respondents less than 3 months (5 answers were missing). Most of our respondents (17 or 28.8%) were accepted by the first or second library they applied to. However, there were those who had applied to several institutions before they were accepted (one applied to 10, one to 25 and one even to 35 institutions).

Figure 2 illustrates the respondents' agreement with various statements regarding the library where they did their professional education. We can see that almost all statements received a mean of over 4 (on the scale of 5, where 5 indicated the highest level of agreement). The only two statements with means under 4 were "After the State Exam I plan to look for a job in EU" (mean 3.19), and "Library functions in accordance to what I learned at the University" (mean 3.93). The highest level of agreement was noticed for the statements "I would like to be employed by this library" (mean 4.56) and "I am satisfied with the professional education in this library" (mean 4.47). The statement "Library has the plan of professional education and my supervisor is following it" had a mean of 4.07. Only two respondents in the sample (3.4%) indicated that the library did not assign them a supervisor.

Figure 2 Respondents' attitudes regarding the library of their professional education

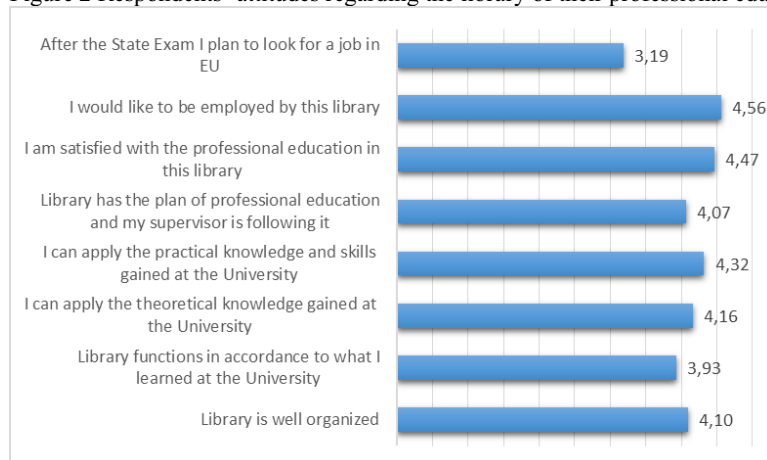
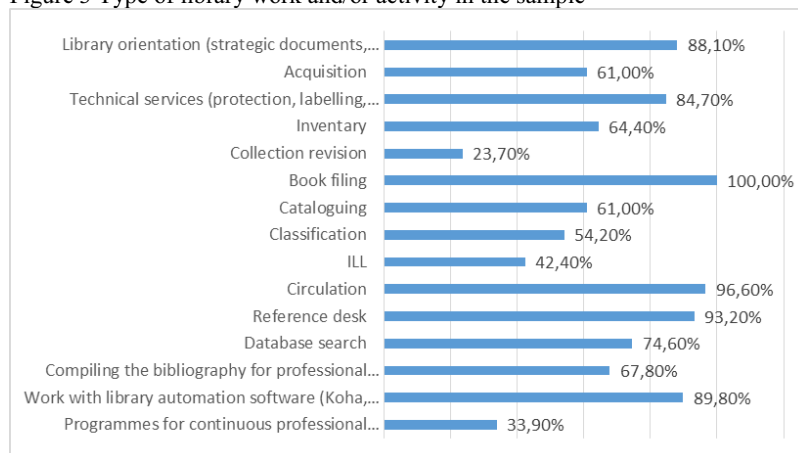


Figure 3 shows the type of library work and activities respondents were involved in during their professional education. The most represented activities in the sample were book filing (all 59 or 100%), work at circulation (57 respondents or 96.6%) and reference desks (55 respondents or 93.2%), work with library automation software such as Koha, Aleph, CROLIST, ZaKi, Metel, etc. (53 respondents or 89.8%), and material preparation (labelling, book protection, barcoding, writing call numbers, etc.) (50 respondents or 84.7%). Almost all respondents (52 or 88.1%) went through library orientation and got familiar with most important library documents (mission statement, rulebooks, manuals, etc). Activities that were underrepresented in our sample were collection revision (only 14 respondents or 23.7%), attendance of programmes of continuous professional education (20 respondents or 33.9%), and interlibrary loan (ILL) with 25 respondents (42.4%)

Figure 3 Type of library work and/or activity in the sample



Respondents in our sample were satisfied with this government programme (mean 4.41), even more with the work of their supervisors in libraries (mean 4.49)²²⁵. In addition, they also liked the atmosphere in the library (mean 4.24). 57 respondents (96.6%) would recommend this programme to their colleagues, whereas 56 respondents (94.9%) would recommend that particular library.

Respondents were also asked to point out positive and/or negative experience they had during their work in the library. Altogether, there were 100 comments, but they were more on the positive side (69 or 69%). However, there were also negative comments and they should be taken into consideration. Some of the negative comments are:

- this measure is nothing more than an exploitation of high-qualified workers
- all the work in the library was routine and monotonous. There was no proper plan of professional education and no chance of working on a higher-level work tasks (e.g. cataloguing).
- either no supervisor or supervisor in another library (another town)
- understaffing of libraries (respondents have to work on other 'pressing' work tasks and cannot follow their plan of professional education)
- financial compensation is too small
- library space is too small
- bad human relations
- inability to take part in the programmes for continuous professional education
- too short a period for in-depth familiarization with library work

Positive comments were mostly directed toward the good reception of the library staff (their friendliness, professionalism, etc.), but also many respondents recognized the unique opportunity to learn about all the segments of library work that this programme offers. Also, in some cases supervisors were praised, but also their Alma Maters which prepared them well for their future jobs.

²²⁵ However, 4 respondents (6.8%) were extremely dissatisfied (chose 1 on the Likert scale). This level of dissatisfaction was recorded neither for satisfaction with the programme nor for the atmosphere in the library.

No statistically significant differences were spotted in the sample. However, this should be attributed to the size of the sample, and does not mean that the sample is necessarily homogeneous.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Croatia has a huge problem with the unemployment of its citizens in general, but in particular with the unemployment of the young population. This is supported by the very age structure of our respondents. Namely, the 'Work, work experience, and transport' measure is aimed at young people up to 29 years of age, but in our sample we had a few respondents who were almost 10 years older (the oldest participant was 37). The biggest age group in the sample is still the 25-29 age group (38 respondents or 64.4%), but there were even 14 respondents (the second largest group) who were older than the specified age limit. This also means, unfortunately, that those people were unable to find work in their area of education even 9 after their graduation from the University (2004 was the earliest year of graduation in our sample).

As expected, the highest number of respondents came from the three biggest ILS schools in Croatia (from Zagreb, Osijek, and Zadar). However, there were also respondents that did not come from the ILS educational background, which we found puzzling.

Most of our respondents had no problems in finding the appropriate institution for their professional education. However, Osijek and Zadar students seem to have had it slightly easier than the students from Zagreb: Osijek and Zadar students have more often (83.3%) found the institution after the first or second application, whereas with Zagreb students it was the case in 53.3%. This might be so because the competition in Zagreb may be bigger than in Osijek and/or Zadar.

Also, almost half of our sample had spent between 10 and 12 months in the library, which means that they were able to get a good impression of the institution.

Our respondents seem to be quite satisfied with both the government's measure, and with the library as the place of their professional education. They were satisfied by the training received by the library and most of them would like to continue working in that library. Libraries turned out to respond well to the task at hand and they usually prepared a plan of professional education, which supervisors assigned to younger colleagues later followed during their mentoring work. Respondents usually felt that they could apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills gained at the University, but at the same time they thought that the library as an institution slightly less often functioned in accordance to what they had learned at the University. Our respondents do not seem to have a burning desire to leave Croatia and look for a job within the EU.

As far as the type of library activity is concerned (and which is consistent with some of the negative comments of our respondents) the majority of our sample seem to have been employed at lower-level activities in the library, activities that do not require a university education (filing of books, barcoding, labelling, circulation). Higher-level activities (such as cataloguing, classification, acquisition, etc.) were not that often present in the sample. The comments about exploitation and dissatisfaction in one part of the sample can be therefore well understood. All employers and institutions (in this case, libraries) must constantly be aware that this measure is primarily introduced in order to help the young, unemployed, people to find jobs, and the institutions that participate in that programme have a responsibility to professionally train young people and prepare them for future jobs. This

measure was not created so that our libraries (chronically understaffed) get cheap and educated young workers (although, one wonders sometimes).

The reasons for dissatisfaction in the sample are attributed to simple, routine and monotonous tasks, low monetary compensation, feeling of exploitation, etc. However, positive comments outweigh the negative and the majority of our respondents recognized this unique opportunity to gain experience in the real library and get a proper start in looking for a future job.

Our sample seemed to have been satisfied with both the Government measure and the libraries and the majority would recommend both to other colleagues, which is a strong confirmation of the level of their satisfaction.

One additional problem with this measure is that the librarians that are appointed supervisors for the young professionals that come to their libraries are not trained as teachers or instructors and some think that they should be offered appropriate training in that regard. Next to that, their supervisor activities usually come on top of their everyday work duties and their work has doubled, for the same pay. In the contract between the institution and the Croatian Employment Service there is a stipulation that they should receive a monetary reward for their supervision, but so far, that has not happened.

In the end, we would like to stress out that the findings of this small study are indicative and that our sample, although small, gave implications that the libraries are doing well and that the young people that get professionally trained by them usually receive a good preparation for their future jobs. In future, it would be interesting to conduct a research about the number of those who took advantage of this measure in the ILS sector, and managed to find a job!

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