

E-learning solution for education of women on parental leave

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Abstract

Women who have achieved a university degree and now are returning to the labour market are in a troubrous position. When these women are going to do their job, they have to face the problems with work mastering. The contact interruption with their professional area has the worst consequences in quick developing areas (e.g. information technology) and/or in areas based on currently valid rules and acts (law, accounting, taxes, etc.).

The goal of the paper is to inform the professionals about a project which helps to women in described situation. The name of the project is “Effective return of university absolvents to labour market after parental leave”. The project is supported by European Union by European Social Fund through operating programme Human Resource Development.

There is presented the methodology of e-learning project solution in the article. The goal of the performance is to induct the discussion about planned methods for determined goals achievement. Notes and remarks will be included into the project plan. It contributes to the improving the project quality and effectiveness the support for target group.

Key words

European Social Fund, Operational Programme Human Resource Development, Return to Labour Market, Women with University Degree of Education, Educational Courses, Balance the Differences Between Women and Men in the Labour Market

Introduction

Project „Effective return of women with a university degree to the labour market after parental leave“ (EVYNA) is a project under the European Social Fund, which supports the development of employment by encouraging employability, business spirit, equal opportunities and investment into human resources.

The project is solved within the Operational Programme Human Resources Development, Provision 3.2.2 – Equal opportunities for men and women on the labour market – and is coordinated by the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague (CUA). The project partners are:

- AGRIA – club of graduates and friends of FEM CUA
- Integrated Secondary School in Cheb
- Regional Agrarian Chamber of Hradec Králové region
- Ing. Tomáš Beneš – HELIA

- Regional Centre for Education and Training, s. r. o.
- Úhlava, o. p. s.

The project is focused on removing obstacles that women returning to the labour market after or still during parental leave have to face. These women had obtained a university degree in economics, however, partially lost their professional qualification due to a longer break in the work process. When reentering the labour market they have problems to manage activities and tasks previously done routinely. The contact interruption with their professional area has the worst consequences in quick developing areas (e.g. information technologies) and/or those which are based on knowledge of currently valid legislation (e.g. law, accounting, taxes).

Moreover, there are certain psychological handicaps that need to be taken in account. Women applying for a new job are not sufficiently self-confident, which is obvious during interviews. At the moment there is no systematic help for this handicapped group.

The project is therefore solving this situation. Its objective is to prepare a system of educational modules for courses, which help to these women to update their knowledge and work routines and again become attractive for employers.

The project is also focused on men who are in a similar position as the above mentioned women.

Project resources

Social relations between family members have to face impacts of changes which are brought by economic and social transformation. Both partners in the family are burdened. The current models of family life are, however, changing slowly since the change is determined by persistence of stereotypes of gender roles, which were accepted by both men and women in the course of historic development. Yet, it is possible to trace a trend in the society that clearly shows the view of woman's role in the family has been changing.

According to the study „Family and changing gender role – social analysis of Czech family“ (Čermáková, 1998), women often consider their social role from the man's point of view. They accept the dominant overwhelming opinion on the function of family in the woman's life. They regard their reproduction capability as an obstacle to hold the same position in the society as men do. Therefore, maternity/parental leave can be regarded as an objective factor of disadvantage on the labour market.

The research „Profession of woman and family life – differences in opinions of Czech men and women of two age categories on woman's role“, which was carried out in 2003 by Masaryk university in Brno together with the Sociology Institute AV CZ, proves this hypothesis. Based on this research, maternity leave meant an obstacle for 48 per cent and children guidance for 44 per cent of interviewed women.

Since most jobs are in fact indifferently defined, regardless the personal and family situation of an employee, which is, in our country, far more advantageous for men, it is difficult to coordinate career and family (Machovcová, 2003). Due to a high employment of women in the Czech Republic (women represent 44.8 per cent of employees on the Czech labour market) there is a necessity to create programmes for these women to ensure equal opportunities when applying for a job.

The EVYNA project responds to the above mentioned facts and offers a support of equal opportunities on the labour market for the specific target group – women with a university degree in economics. A discussion on pro-population government policy (Odehnalová,

Jarkovská, 2002, Gender centre FSS MU Brno) revealed that university-educated women taking care of their children lose a chance to apply the knowledge acquired at university and do not have a possibility to update their knowledge and skills, or even forget what they used to know. They had not experienced such a long practice before leaving for maternity leave to get accustomed to certain work routines.

There are many study programmes in the field of economics where it is particularly disadvantageous to interrupt the contact with practice. Informatics, economics (specially accounting and taxes), law are developing literally day to day and therefore, these fields have to be monitored inconsistently. When planning a return of women from this target group it is necessary to update their education in order to give them an overview of the current situation in the particular areas. Their study is now easier for they had previously studied at university for at least 5 years. They know how to work with scientific texts, how to learn, thus, there is an assumption that well designed courses of distant learning would efficiently eliminate their handicap on the labour market.

Objectives and methodology of the project

The objectives of the project are:

1. To increase opportunities of women (eventually men in the same family situation) with a university degree in economics to find a job on the labour market after they have returned from maternity/parental leave

The education of female students will be updated through educational courses within distant learning in order to become more attractive for employers.

2. To eliminate difference between women and men on the labour market in a particular field

Women will represent an overwhelming majority of students attending these courses. Thus, it is possible to design learning materials in such a way that is suitable for their way of thinking and learning. Consequently, differences resulting from the gender-unified conception of study materials at schools will be removed. This is, above all in exact sciences, designed rather according to the man's perception of the world (CERMAT, 2002).

3. To get a feedback for creating the educational programmes proper

The project will also try to find out what it is that female students remember from their previous university studies after a long time. The outputs will be used for enhancing and modernising education in the regional centres of FEM CUA. Projects which succeed in this respect will be submitted under appropriate provisions in the Operational Programme Human Resources Development.

In order to meet the above mentioned objectives the following procedure has been chosen:

phase – creating study materials

This phase will produce study materials in the form of eLearning courses, which will be provided to the target group in online version through the Internet as well as off-line version on the CD. In addition, consultation centres will be prepared and equipped in the premises of project partners in particular regions. These contact places will communicate with the target group and provide a comprehensive service during the study.

Educational courses will consist of these facultative eLearning modules:

- Informatics

- Economics
- Accounting and taxes
- English (focused on text analysis)
- Organization and management
- Labour law
- Communication and self-representation
- Civil literacy (society, sustainable development)

Each module will last one semester, i.e. 12 – 14 topics will be divided into theoretical and practical part with study cases. Stress will be put above all on the practical part. Students will be able to select themselves whether to study all the modules simultaneously or whether to divide them into several semesters or study only some of them. The acquired knowledge will be tested in the certification exams separately for each module.

phase – pilot course run

Created study materials will be used for the first – pilot – run of educational courses. There will be non-contact lessons. Self-studying through eLearning is the background of this course, however, there will be a possibility to consult the topics with a lecturer via modern communication technologies.

phase – regular course run

Based on the experience from the pilot run educational courses will be modified so that they respond best to the needs of the target group. Study materials will be updated before each run of educational courses in order to correspond with the current situation in the particular field.

A detailed process of project solution is shown in the following picture:

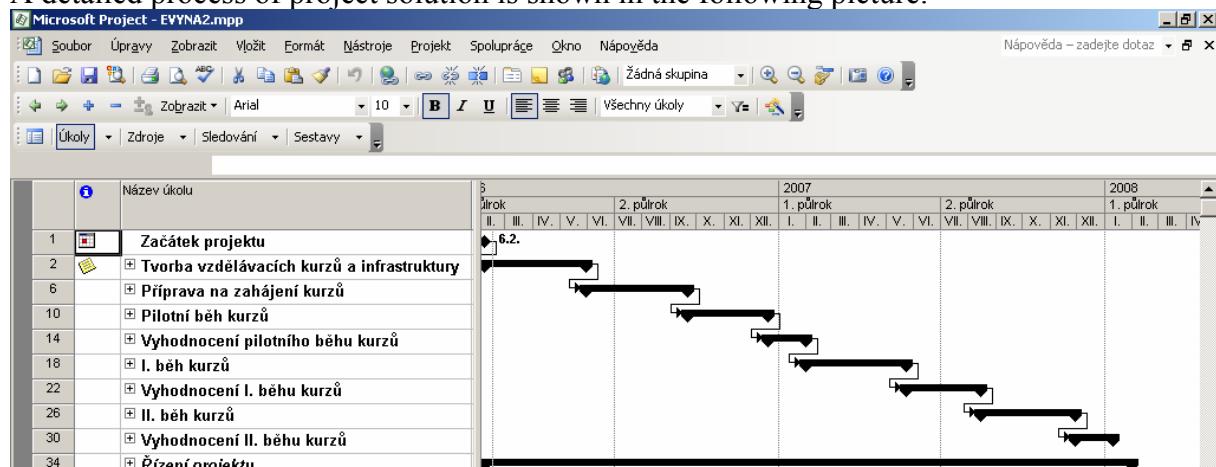


Figure 1: Project solution

Project benefits

Project will provide members of the target group with benefits in these fields:

Creating conditions for higher participation of women in the labour market

The project is to reduce the objectively given obstacles that women have to challenge on the labour market. It will encourage employability of women who attended the update courses.

These women will be more attractive for employers from these reasons:

- they have received update education and can start to work immediately,
- they will not have to persuade the employer that they can meet the job requirements (they are active, follow the trends in the field they studied),
- a part of the course will be directly focused on the issue of applying for a job.

Adjusting to new requirements on the labour market

By brushing up and updating their education these women will easily adjust to the new requirements on the labour market. These requirements will be highlighted throughout the courses and women will be prepared to achieve them.

Prevention of long-term unemployment of women

Women who are prepared to look for a job already during the maternity leave; renewed knowledge and skills significantly increase their chances to find a suitable job.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to introduce the EVYNA project and process of its solution to professional public. The results of a discussion – comments and ideas of those who participated in the discussion – will be included in another solution of the project, thus leading to further improvement of the support provided to the target group.

Dedication

Project „Effective return of women with a university degree to the labour market after parental leave“, No. CZ.04.1.03/2.2.15.1./0035, is cofinanced by the European Social Fund and national budget of the Czech Republic.

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