



University Rehabilitation Institute Republic of Slovenia



ZPZR

Zgodnja poklicna in
zaposlitvena rehabilitacija
v procesu vračanja na delo

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Early vocational rehabilitation in the return-to-work process

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URI – the largest rehabilitation institute in Slovenia,

*600 employees
more than 10,000 patients*



The main work areas:

- physical medicine and rehabilitation,
- **return to work programme – vocational rehabilitation**
- research, development and education,
- production and application of prosthetic, orthotic and technical aids,
- specialised supply of pharmaceutical products, rehabilitation aids and orthopaedic devices.



Return to work in Slovenia

Two systems of VR:

- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of PWD Act →
mainly unemployed, a biopsychosocial model, long-term expert support
- Pension and Disability Insurance Act →
mainly employed/insured persons, a medical model, focus on the assessment phase with limited possibilities of intervention, no professional support

the gap... **employees on sick leave** →

lack of systemic solution to provide professional support for early RTW



Sick leave in Slovenia – current situation

Total percentage of workers on sick leave in recent years is **between 4 and 4.5 %** → *comparable with Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain,...*

SLO legislation on sick leave is *the least restrictive* among European countries:

- generous compensation (on average 80 % of worker's wage),
- unlimited duration but
- no sickness benefit for unemployed.



Sick leave in Slovenia – current situation

2015 → 2019

- 45% increase of people with a sick leave of more than 45 days
- 82% increase of people on sick leave longer than one year

Increasing growth of sick leave over 5 years - 20.7% growth (2019: 279, 2020: 337)

Key questions:

- How to prevent further growth of the duration of sick leave?
- How to support employees in the early stages of sick leave?



Early VR in the Return to Work Process **Project**

- managed by URI
- duration: May 2019 – December 2022

The main objective:

- creating a new model of RTW of persons who had already been absent long-term due to illness, injury or disability.

The results of the project → the proposals for legislation changes.

- in cooperation with various stakeholders, relevant for RTW



Early VR in the Return to Work Process Project *in cooperation with...*

- the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities,
- the Ministry of Health,
- the Pension and Disability Insurance Institute of Slovenia,
- the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia,
- professionals:
 - appointed doctors from the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia
 - general practitioners
 - occupational health physicians
 - VR providers and
 - other professionals in the field of employment and disability management



Early VR in the Return to Work Process Project

- employers
- employees on sick leave:
 - after injury or illness → temporary or permanent reduction in their ability to perform the work (*complex health problems*),
 - especially those aged 45 and over,
 - who have been on sick leave for a minimum of **three months** →

Return to work studies: the probability of a successful return to work is highest in cases of short duration of temporary work absence



Demographic data – 52 participants (total 100)

Gender: 61.5 % male, 38.5 % female

Average age: 43 years (22–55y), 50% in the group 41–50 years

Completed education: vocational school: 46.2%, secondary school: 25 %, elementary school: 17.3 %

Residency: smaller towns: 80.8 %

Length of service: average 21.7 years (1–40y);

the majority: 16–20y (23.1%), followed by 31–35y (21.2%) and 21 – 25y (19.2%)

Occupation: manual workers in construction, food, metal industry ...,
larger companies



Duration of sick leave at the time of inclusion: average: 10 months (2m–16m)

63.5% - less than 1 year (average 5,8 months: 63.5%)

International Classification of Diseases:

diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissues.

...various injuries to the limbs and heart diseases, blood vessels and nervous system.

There are no cases with mental health problems.



1. Linking up 4 key institutions, relevant for RTW:

the Health Insurance Institute of SLO

(financing benefits and decide on the duration of each sick leave over 30 days)

**specialists in occupational
medicine**
(work capability assessment)

VR providers multidisciplinary team
(soc. worker, psychologist, occupat. therapist ...),
assessment of the work skills, abilities,
knowledge, interests

expert opinion & RTW plan

the Pension and Disability Insurance Institute of SLO

(grant disability status and VR: *education, on-the-job
training, technical adaptations*)

2. RTW process starts during sick leave,

even if medical rehabilitation is still in progress → enables early cooperation with employee and employer – ... early search for solutions

3. **biopsychosocial model** to assess work ability (ICF)

4. **employers** active participation

5. **professional support** during graduated RTW

(VR providers and specialists in occupational medicine)



ZPZR Project – the outcome of the RTW process

Possible outcomes and combinations of them:

- graduated return to work with professional support (2→4→6→8 h/day)
- disability status with defined limitation at work
- right to education, on-the-job training, technical adaptation
(VR under Pension and Disability Act)
- those who do not remain in employment may continue with *VR under VR and Employment of PWD Act*



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More information about the ZPZR project

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