

Young and unemployed



Slovakia has one of the highest long-term unemployment ranks in Europe. Furthermore, the unemployment rate of people under the age of 29 is at an alarming 30%. We asked Slovak companies about their experience with young employees and candidates, and what they believe might be the cause of high unemployment with this group.

The first cause is related to perspective. Different generations always have different views of the world. This topic regains importance and debate begins again as Generation Y moves to relevancy in the workforce.

Young people are creative, innovative, and familiar with new technology. They also have a lot of energy and are ambitious. They are able to take on and tackle challenges. They are more willing to travel for work or move to another city or even abroad. They are not bound by conventions and they enjoy working in a functional team and on meaningful projects. "A young man is like a blank paper. He can be shaped and taught. He doesn't have conventional habits yet, therefore he adapts easier to the changing environment," explains Ivana Molnárová, Executive Director of Profesia. These are great qualities for any prospective job candidate to have. But some of these characteristics might put off potential employers. The process of interviewing potential candidates has brought to the attention of HR managers that "young people have requirements that do not correspond to their skills and experience."

Generation Y claims optimal work-life balance, they are not willing to work overtime. It seems that Slovak graduates usually work for their first employer for two to three years. Quickly, they

need a new challenge. What the young generation expects most from the employer are the following facilities: development opportunities, a pleasant work environment, good relationships in the workplace, and appropriate work-life balance.

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But young people also lack patience, and their initial drive doesn't always last. They want to see results immediately; they expect instant appreciation and work recognition. Nor does today's generation of young people easily take orders from their superiors. They want to be masters of their time and want to work on their own terms.

So while many of them successfully establish their own businesses or participate in various start-ups in the area of IT, mobile communications, and other technologies, others are left to flounder on the job market.

In the corporate world, young Slovaks are most often employed by IT, telecom, and global companies, and service centers. T-Systems in Košice is one such company; about 85% of its

employees are under the age of 29. Ladislav Chudý, Senior Project Manager of HR Share Service Center at T-Systems, sees that the second reason that young people are unable to compete on the labor market is that their education that does not satisfy market requirements and they lack practical experience.

"There is not a great difference in performance between the young and old generation. However, it depends on the expectations and on the distribution of tasks. Young people tend to be faster and more creative, although they often make mistakes," says Pavel Jireček, Vice President of Human Resources at T-Systems. Another interesting aspect is communication. "Based on my experience I can say that young people are often not able to communicate verbally and they are not good at presentations. Nowadays, every employee must be able to "sell" his skills, suggestions, new ideas, and the results of their work," says Chudý. But the Slovak school system does not provide sufficient space for development of these skills. This is one of the reasons young people are not persuasive enough in job interviews and they end up as unsuccessful candidates.

There are several ways in which we can deal with both causes of young people's unfavorable position in the labor market. One solution set must come from the employer's side. We

might address the demands of the new labor force by taking into consideration some of their requirements, suggests Molnárová, including for example more flexible working times. This is unfortunately not currently supported by legislation.

Otherwise, practical solutions for the youth include making a more relevant selection of vocational school or university, seeking career counseling, developing a willingness to improve themselves, and mastering the ability to "sell" their own skills. Students must choose their field of study wisely. "There is still a shortage of technically capable professionals at all levels – vocational schools, secondary schools, and universities. There is no need to worry about entering the IT sector. It is the industry of the future," says Pavel Jireček, Vice President of Human Resources at T-Systems. Regardless of field, however, is also important to acquire work experience during the studies to increase the chance of future success on the market. It is also very important for students to develop their knowledge of at least one foreign language.

These are just some of the suggestions that could help solve the problem with high unemployment rate not only in Slovakia but also in other European countries.



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