



**ZAGREB SUPPORTS EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH MAINTAINING PUBLIC GREEN SPACES. LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE WORK IN THE CITY'S PUBLIC GREEN SPACES IN EXCHANGE FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN FIELDS WHICH ARE IN HIGH DEMAND IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY. THIS HELPS INCREASE THEIR COMPETITIVENESS ON THE LABOUR MARKET AND THEIR CHANCES OF FINDING A JOB.**



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#### KEYWORDS

green spaces, education and training courses, social inclusion, long term unemployment

# ENGAGING THE LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED BY GREENING PUBLIC SPACES AND TRAINING

## CONTEXT

In 2011, there were 45,916 registered unemployed in the city of Zagreb, of which 19.1% were people without a formal high school education and 9.4 % were war veterans. It is difficult for these groups to acquire new skills and become active on the labour market, meaning many remain on social benefits for extended periods of time and face social exclusion and poverty.

A significant amount of city resources are also spent on maintaining the city's green spaces like Medvednica and Park Maksimir. These nature parks and green areas require significant resources for their preservation and cleaning due to the amount of rubbish illegally disposed there including: vehicles, tires and household appliances.

## SOLUTION

The education and training project is designed to activate unemployed people by having them work on the preservation and clean up of green spaces. In return they are entitled to attend education and training courses, which improve their chances on the labour market. The city covers the cost of the courses, which range from €400 to €1,000 per course per participant.

The participants choose a programme according to their needs and interests. The courses range from elementary, secondary and high school education to vocational training. The latter includes:

- **18 occupational trainings:** with the majority of participants selecting trainings to become shop sales assistants, hotel maids, assistant cooks and accountants.



- **11 educational programmes in the healthcare and beauty sector:** with the majority of participants selecting trainings to become physiotherapists, nursery assistants, nannies, hairdressers and beauticians.
- **5 trainings in catering:** with the majority of participants selecting trainings to become cooks or assistant cooks.
- **4 occupational trainings in office administration:** among which the most frequently selected occupation is office administrator.
- **8 educational programmes in electricity and gas installations:** with the majority of participants selecting occupations as

installers of gas and heating equipment, and installers of air conditioning devices.

- **21 educational programmes in construction:** among which the most frequently selected occupations are painters and bricklayers.

The participants work full time on green space maintenance, but they are registered at the Croatian employment service and receive unemployment benefits. The national Act on Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance allows people to retain their right to unemployment benefits while participating in the project. The participants are trained on how to treat particular types of waste and pass a health and safety course before they start working in the parks and green spaces. Two experts manage the participants on site.



## IMPACT

The project motivates people who have been long term unemployed to enter the labour market and engage in ambitious educational programmes. With new competencies and skills, their employability, competitiveness and self-confidence increases.

Since 2005 over 3,000 unemployed people have benefited from the programme. Around 30% of the project participants subsequently found employment, which has had a positive effect on poverty reduction and has decreased pressure on the social budget and social services. According to the participant feedback, most people find employment as beauticians and hairdressers, hotel maids, assistant cooks and confectionary makers.

Most of those who find jobs are employed as seasonal workers during the summer, but approximately 1/3 of the participants succeed in securing long term employment.

About 300 unemployed people have participated annually since 2005 in the process of greening, cleaning and preserving the green public spaces. All of the activities are implemented manually, without chemicals that could have a negative effect on the environment. In addition to park maintenance, a significant number of streams and lakes have been cleared of debris. The project participants also regularly remove illegally disposed waste from forests, lawns, lakes and other water reservoirs.

## CHALLENGES

The main challenge that occurred during the design and implementation of the project was the question of how to encourage people who are long term unemployed with low educational attainment to pursue ambitious educational programmes. It was discovered that long term unemployed people need to see clear job prospects for themselves to stay motivated. To address this, the training offers were closely aligned to existing opportunities on the local labour market.

This is even more challenging during the economic crisis, since there are even fewer jobs for people with low qualifications. However, since craftsmanship and skilled manual labour is currently the main generator of employment in Croatia, the city is now adding a new training offer to the project to support self employment in these sectors. This is being implemented by the Development Agency Zagreb, which provides basic education for prospective entrepreneurs, including developing a business plan, project planning, marketing and sales, investment analysis, financial planning and legal aspects. There are also plans to include new educational programmes related to the green economy such as training as an ecological technician.



## FUNDING

The city of Zagreb manages the project and cooperates with the regional employment service and the local education institutions. The project is fully funded by the city. The expenses are offset by a reduction in the cost of the regular maintenance of the city's green spaces.