# Model for Long-Term Unemployed Social Benefits Recipients Career Management Improvement

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**Abstract:** the topicality of the research is that in Latvia in the beginning of 2023 labour market offers variety of job possibilities for people of different education and level of experience, but there is still a significant amount of long-term unemployed people who tend to use social benefits system but not trying to start an independent life. This group of society is not motivated to change their life, they are misusing public services and need help. Main changes that might be achieved are changes in consciousness. The aim of the study was to develop, characterize and justify model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement. Monographic method has been used for this study in the theoretical research section. The author created a model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement as a part of her PHD research. In the article theoretical basis of this model and how it can be used and what kind of changes are possible to achieve while using model is shown. During the empirical research, an expert survey was conducted on the suitability of the model developed by the author and the program based on it; the Friedman test was used in the statistical processing of the data. Results of the study confirm the assumption that the implementation of the model and program developed by the author in career support can improve the career management of long-term unemployed social benefit recipients; differences between experts' assessments are not statistically significant (p>0.05).

**Keywords**: career counselling, career management, long-term unemployed, adult pedagogy.

## Introduction

The level of unemployment in Latvia by the end of January 2023 was 6.3% (NVA, 2023). The level of unemployment is relatively low, but still there are people who cannot enter the labour market for 12 months or more and are considered long-term unemployed. There is no statistical data about how many long-term unemployed are in these 6.3% of general unemployment rate in Latvia, but in 2021 in United Kingdom research was conducted in *Learning and work institute* and they came up with information, that in 2021 in UK there were about 1 -1.5 million long-term unemployed. This is the highest rate from 1980s (Learning and work…, 2021).

Being unemployed for many months and even years in a row makes significant changes not only in financial situation, but also changes personality dramatically. In order to return to labour market it is important not only to find a job but also be able to hold it for a significant amount of time.

The long-term unemployed social benefits recipients are still managing their career but in a destructive way – not looking for a way to become independent, but relying on social benefits system, not participating in creating new products or services for society, but just using what society can offer.

Trying to get back into labour market and "socially accepted" life in general is important but hard work, since most of them are not motivated to change. So, the main result what career counsellor can achieve is a change in their way of seeing the situation and starting to wish for changes in their life.

The aim of the study was to develop, characterize and justify model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement. The author created a model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement as part of PHD research.

## Methodology

Monographic method has been used for this study. Available literature (printed and online versions) about career, career management and unemployment persons were used. The author used sources in Latvian, English and Russian. Previous research in the field related to the theme

of article was used. Statistical data from State Employment Agency was used in order to represent the current level of unemployment in Latvia. During the empirical research, an expert survey was conducted on the suitability of the model developed by the author and the program based on it; the Friedman test was used in the statistical processing of the data.

**Results and Discussion**

The term *career* is widely used in different media, but under career we often understand only a small part of it. Up to the end of the 20th century career was qualified very traditionally as change of job positions from smallest to biggest ones. D. Super in 1980 considered career as successive occupation, positions and jobs held or perform during individual lifetime (Super et al., 1996).

Starting form the end of 1980 career started to appear as we know it now. This idea started by S. Wolfe and D. Kolb – the development of career consists not only of employment, but a human life context in general and person's as well. The environment restrictions and restrictions are connected to family, relatives and social paradigms. The responsibility for kids, parents – that are all the points that need to be taken into consideration while doing career counselling (Wolfe et al., 1980).

That means that not only the technical part of a job searching like looking for a position, putting together CV, letter of application, is important. Especially for long-term unemployed who have been out of labour for more than 12 months in a row (SKDS, 2006). It is important to be healthy, mentally stable and ready to get and, most important, keep a job, to understand all issues that comes with employment. This is the place where career counsellor can start to work.

For model theoretical base are important D. Kolb ideas about learning and creating knowledge through transforming own experience (Kolb, 1984).

Working with the long-term unemployed social benefits recipients it is important for them to accept who they are – sometimes with negative experience, the lack of formal education, substance abuse and other obstacles that most likely are not going to help them develop into independent, employed personality. In case career counselor truly accept it, he/she will be able to show them their best parts, show them how to use their experience for good. The main idea is not to change them into a perfect human being, but help to change negative to positive, show new opportunities and ways how to deal with problems, show that they can change their future and create it brighter than they expect it to be. New information, knowledge that individual come across in positive, helpful environment can change their way of thinking and seeing society and their place in it (Brooks et al., 1999).

That's why a personal contact that career counselor builds with client is one of the keys in the whole process. The client feels and sees that career counselor is truly interested in helping him/her, he/she feels worthy. Career counselor will help to look at a situation from a different point of view but will remind a client that he/she is responsible for decision making. During the whole cooperation time with a career counselor's client has plenty of time to reflect on his own thoughts, emotions, ideas, he is able to see clearly with what he really wants and how he can achieve it, he has time to get over it and make a right choice just by his own, not being impacted by other people around.

Ideas from learning theory where used while creating described model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients. Learning "here and now", than analyse available data and, finally, reflection on new experience.

Jean Piaget in his theory described that adult learning and development main prepositions are experience, reflection and action. J. Piaget claims that human development happens only while interacting with surrounding environment (Piaget, 1972). Interaction itself is important, but doesn't do its job without adequate reflection and it is point where career counselor can offer support during sessions a help to maintain individual practice.

While working with adults it is important to emphasize the role of mind in decision making process, impact it and convince the client. According to this scientific way cognitive learning theory was used because it emphasizes all mind related processes; learning is focused on the successful problem-solving technics (Motschnig-Pitrik et al., 2002). In this way of learning individual relationship with environment are not included, but the author uses it as part of model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement. While creating a model for long-term unemployed social

benefits recipients career management improvement the author used some ideas from cognitive theory, but also included the ideas from other theories that fit into idea of this model.

Analysing adult learning process it is important to include J. Mezirow transformative learning theory where the main place takes the idea of "perspective". All of us are having different perspectives that depend on our age, education, sex, experience, and social situation. J. Mezirow splits learning into three fields:

- instrumental learning – taking over direct information, raising efficiency in a certain activity;
- dialogic learning – meets normal, everyday interests and develops a level of common communication;
- liberating learning – development of self-awareness, understanding of one's place in the world and one's identity (Mezirow, 1991).

J. Mezirow considers that traditional education looks for "what?" and "how?" answers, but it is more important to know "why?". When education focuses on transformation it prepares an individual for different stages of life, helps to be flexible. During the learning process new experience is gained that allows to interact with environment in a new quality (Mezirow, 1991).

Creating transforming learning model J. Mezirow was inspired by J. Habermas idea about comunicative action. Learning in different groups, clubs and activities might be considered the best option where individuals can meet different people, share experience and get knowledge from real people – that's important to modern democratic community (Mezirow, 1991).

For created model life-coaching ides are important – individual is able to take an active part in changing his own situation, be ready to take action and fully take responsibility for life (Kimsey-House et al., 2021). In general, holistic approach is used in the model – individual life is seen in general, as a whole picture, not only in employment context.

Counselors do not have and cannot have primary task of changing of life-style of long-term unemployed social benefits recipients during few sessions if the individual has not worked for several years, but survived on social benefits. In this case the main task is to develop cognitive dissonance – to show the difference between existing level and quality of life and what individual could achieve, to show that it is possible.

The founder of the theory of cognitive dissonance is Leon Festinger whose main insight is based on the idea that when individual form perceptions, ideas, thoughts that conflict with the environment, new information it creates internal discomfort in the individual, which as a result motivates the individual to change and move in the direction of eliminating discomfort (Festinger, 1985).

How to understand that you are experiencing cognitive dissonance:
- feeling uncomfortable before doing something or making decision;
- attempts to rationalize or justify their decisions;
- feeling embarrassed about actions of even feel ashamed and try to hide it from other people;
- regrets actions or something done in the past;
- do something because of social pressure or fear of missing out even if it is not what really desires (Cherry, 2020).

L. Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory is specific interpretation of problematic situation. That's why it is important to understand in what cases adaptive behaviour develops in order to get free from dissonances. Such strategy can be unsuccessfull and contribute to the reinforcement of dissonance and the formation of the new frustrations (Newby-Clark et al., 2002).

The author admits that working with long-term unemployed social benefits recipients it is especially important, because cognitive dissonance is the only thing that can be achieved doing consultative work. It would be too optimistic to hope for real result (found and hold a job), when individual is unemployed for years, but changes in way of seeing and thinking and being not satisfied with situation is the best possible results that could be achieved.

The career counsellor's cooperation with the long-term unemployed - social benefits recipients should be based on a scheme of cooperation between the career counsellor and the client, understanding each next step and considering the possible outcomes (Figure 1).
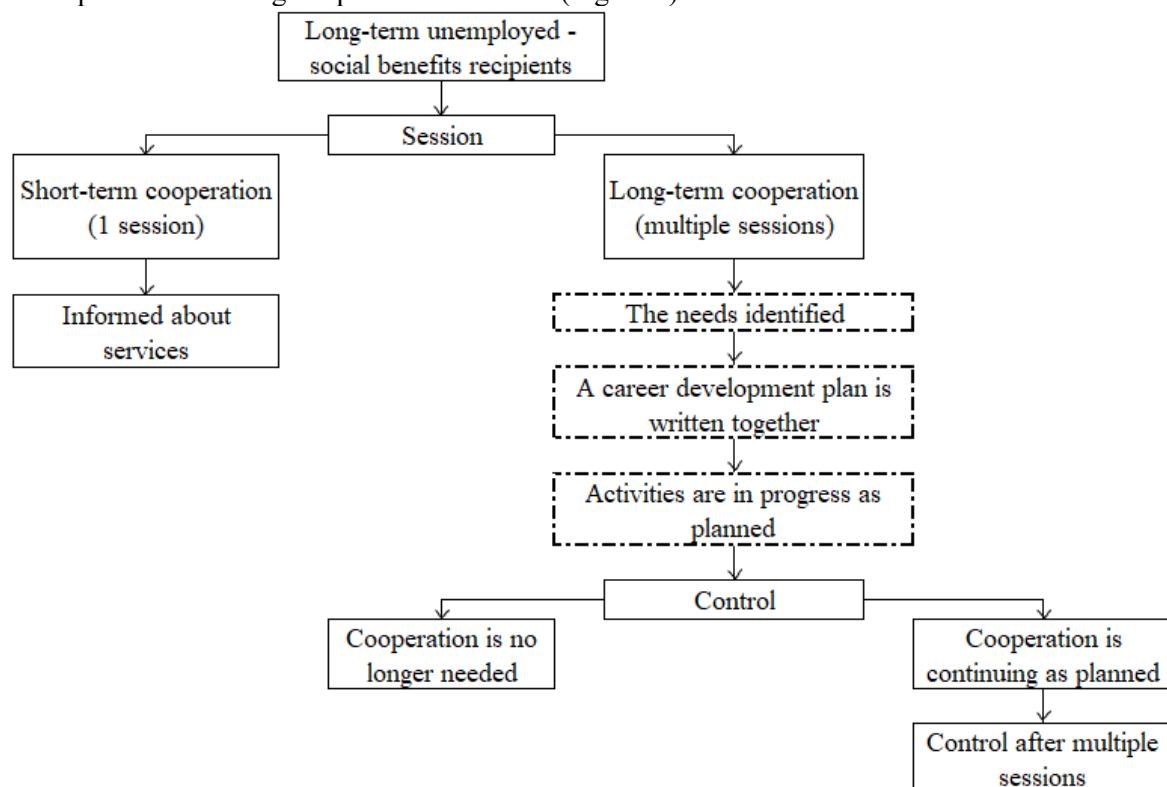


Figure 1. **Cooperation scheme between career counsellor and long-term unemployed person**

Career management improvement model (Figure 2) consist of three parts. Different knowledge and skills are developed in every part. Every part consists of different stages that allow participants to prepare for changes and future development.

- In the preparation stage, the situation the client is in today is analysed (individually and together with career counsellor). A participant is prepared for career management improvement programme using the model, a participant gets to know future activities, is informed about what level of involvement is needed in order to get the best possible result. The main idea of this part is to help a participant understand and accept his problem, to try to understand why it is not solved yet and what is possible to do. A participant needs to realize that he needs to try to solve his problem with new tools since old ones didn't give a positive result. A participant needs to understand that he needs help, and he will change. That can be named as a motivation of participant. The main changes supposed to happen in the mind of participant. In case everything goes well career counsellor prepares individual career development plan with a goal and tasks that will help to achieve the mentioned goal. In negative case nothing changes in participant's mind, participant doesn't realize his problem and is not willing to change.
- Development. At this point individual is working according to a personal development plan. He is motivated to use his previous experience, from his failures, use his own resources, strong parts of personality. Individual is regularly invited to career counsellor sessions in order to discuss a process, ask questions and receive support. Career counsellor controls the process, development of individual, follows accomplishment of tasks. In negative case, when individual is not motivated to do anything career counsellor is more involved and tries to find a way how to make this process more desirable for individual. Career counsellor asks the individual to reflect on the process, thoughts, reactions, emotions. The main possible results is changes in individual's attitude and way of seeing the situation. In positive case individual understands that he is able to change the situation, he understands how to achieve it and where to seek for help.
- Conclusion is the last stage of cooperation when work that has been done is analyzed, checked if the goal is achieved or not, what stopped a person from achieving the goal. Career counsellor

helps an individual to create personal development future plan allowing individual to move forward. The main aim of this stage for individual is to realize that he is able to work and develop alone, assistance of career counsellor is not the key. At this stage analytical skills develops, that allows to plan and achieve goals, reflect on it.

Before starting cooperation with a career counsellor long-term unemployed social benefits recipients need to understand that this whole process is not a guarantee for a successful employment in the end or any positive change in general. This is a tool that can be used to solve some problems. Career counsellors need to be very clear about the message of this model. That's why it is important to create a development plan that is connected with reality where long-term unemployed social benefits recipients live. The plan needs to be real, with achievable goals and tasks so it can result in happy and pleased long-term unemployed social benefits recipients who understand that he achieved the goal or understand what they need to do to achieve it.

It is important to realize that for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients there is no pill that will solve their problems. All different type of programmes, models, support, educational activities are not a guarantee for employment. The main result that can be achieved is changes in consciousness, in the way how a person sees himself, believe in his own strengths, new friends and new perspective on situation.

The model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement will be used in Riga Social Service as a part of PHD project. Working with a model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement cooperation is split into three levels.

Level 1 – the beginning of cooperation (defining goal and tasks).

Level 2 – the continuing of cooperation (correction of goal and tasks if needed; continue to cooperate with career counsellor or interrupt cooperation – according to goal and individual motivation).

Level 3 – the end of cooperation (the last evaluation of goal and tasks; giving feedback to each other).

Career counsellor defines and coordinate cooperation as well as determines the level of cooperation and work according to the developed model for career management improvement of long-term unemployed social benefits recipients.

Following indicators are taken into consideration when analysing changes in individual situation.

Indicator 1 – client is emotionally unstable – radical changes of mood – highly negative or positive.

Indicator 2 – client avoids straight answers, misses sessions, doesn't reply on phone calls.

Indicator 3 – client is not fulfilling the plan, avoids cooperation.

In cases when following indicators are met career counsellor arranges sessions with long-term unemployed social benefits recipients to discuss the following, try to define reasons and possible ways how to support the client if possible and needed. In case long-term social benefits recipients are not willing to find a way how to deal with situation and are not motivated to accept assistance cooperation with long-term unemployed social benefits recipients will be interrupted.

According to the author professional experience working with long-term unemployed - social benefits recipients criteria were created. Criteria describe long-term unemployed social benefits recipients' possibility to interrupt cooperation with career counsellor (in case in positive and negative outcome) are as follows:

1. criterion - client confidently expresses his opinion about situation;

2. criterion - client understands and is aware of his next steps in career development;

3. criterion - client is satisfied with the achieved result;

4. criterion - client is ready to continue his job search independently or to maintain already found job.

In case long-term unemployed - social benefits recipients meet several criteria (before or after evaluation) career counsellor is allowed to interrupt cooperation (the goal is achieved – client is ready to continue his life independently) (see Figure 2).
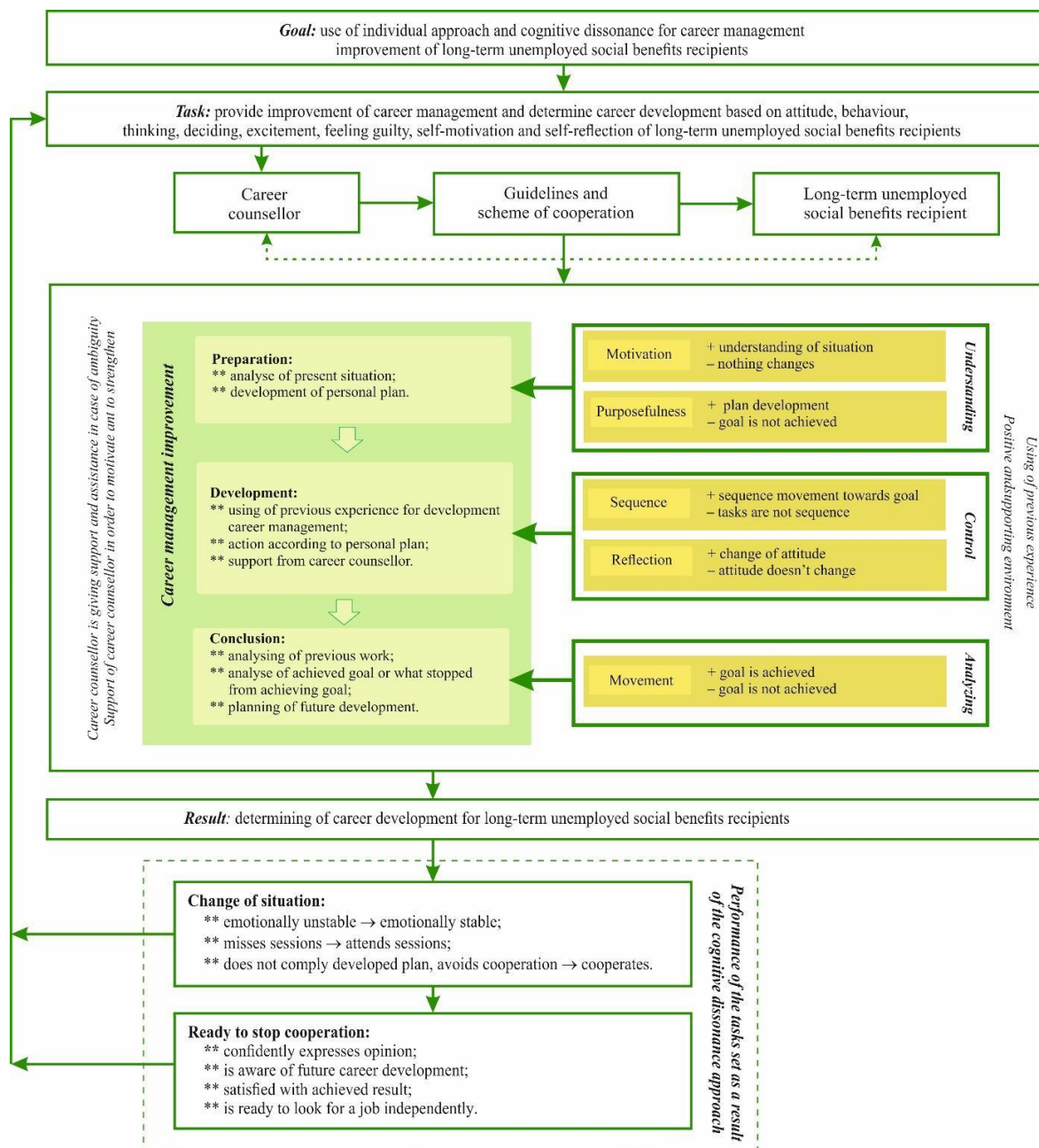


Figure 2. **Model for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients career management improvement**

Based on the model above the author created a programme for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients that was used in Riga Social Service, but also can be used in any other institution as well. The programme's **goal** is to improve career management skills for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients and to motivate them to change their attitude towards employment. All participants are taking part in the program on their free will, they are informed about the process and rules before joining the program.

**Short annotation of the programme.** By participating in the program, long-term unemployed social benefits recipients will have an opportunity to develop career management skills, to reflect about their situation, resources and plans; as a result the cognitive dissonance in participants should develop.

**Tasks of participants**
- Learn career management improvement programme.
- Promote motivation.
- Learn career management improvement skills.

**Expected results**
- Participants reflect on their previous employment experience.
- Cognitive dissonance develops in participants between reality and what they could achieve.
- Participants develop inner motivation to change their situation.

**Course of action.** The programme consists of 10 sessions, each 60 minutes long with additional 15 minutes for homework presentation for participants. Methods used – discussion, individual work, meditation, information search.

**Qualification of the programme coach.** Programme can be carried out by a social worker, career counsellor, teacher. During the research programme was held by social worker with career counsellor qualification.

Before starting the programme, expert survey was conducted. Following experts took part:

State employment agency career counsellor – experience with unemployed for 3 years;

Riga social service social worker who worked with unemployed (nowadays there is no special social worker for unemployed) – experience with long-term unemployed social benefits recipients for 8 years;

Lecturer with qualification in employment and career management – theoretical knowledge about job searching and career counselling for 11 years;

Riga Welfare Department staff member who works in a new social service invention in Riga – about possible use of the programme in Riga Social Service (work experience 5 years).

Four criteria were created to help experts to review the programme:

K1 – Does created programme develops long-term unemployed - social benefits recipients' interest in job searching?

K2 – Is created programme an effective tool for work with long-term unemployed - social benefits recipients?

K3 – Is created programme able to develop change of career management indicators?

K4 – Does created programme motivates long-term unemployed - social benefits recipients to look for a job?

To analyse experts' assessments and compare them following scale was created:

5 – the developed program meets the set criteria fully;

4 - the developed program meets the set criteria partly;

3 – no opinion about the created programme;

2 - the developed program does not match the set criteria partly;

1 - the developed program does not match the set criteria fully.

The author of the paper interprets the assessment obtained by the experts and concludes the following:
- The first expert, State Employment Agency career counsellor, highly appreciated career management development programme. The highest mark was given to the third criterion that means that the expert considers the programme can definitely develop and improve career management, as wells as motivate the long-term unemployed social benefits recipients to look

for a job. In all other criteria - the same result achieved – created programme partly meets set criteria.

- The second expert, Riga Social Service social worker, evaluated the programme from his professional point of view and considers that the programme is not able to develop additional interest in job searching for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients. Social worker considers that programme can improve career management indicators.
- The third expert - lecturer considers that programme can improve career management competences and motivate long-term unemployed social benefits recipients to look for a job. Programme can develop in depth interest in job searching and programme is an effective tool in work with target group.
- The fourth expert – Riga Welfare department employee indicates that the programme could possibly improve career management in long-term unemployed social benefits recipients, but the expert is worried about the problems the author of programme can face – low level of motivation and interest from participants. The expert considers it might be quite hard to motivate long-term unemployed social benefits recipients to look for a job within the programme.

The results of data analysis are shown in Table 1. To determine whether the consensus of experts is statistically significant Friedman test was used (Paura et al., 2002). Two statistical hypotheses were developed as follows:

$H_0$: there is no statistically significant difference between expert assessments;

$H_1$: there is statistically significant difference between expert assessments.

Table 1

**Results of Friedman test on experts' assessments**

|  | Answers |
|---|---|
| Number | 4 |
| $\chi^2$ actual value | 6.652 |
| Number of freedom degrees | 3 |
| p-value | 0.084 |

P-value = 0.084 > 0.05, then the null hypothesis cannot be rejected with a probability of 95%, which means that there is no statistically significant difference between the experts' assessments, or there is a consensus between the experts' assessments.

**Conclusions**

In case when it is relatively easy to find a job and a labour market offers a lot of different possibilities for people with different background long-term unemployed social benefits recipients need extra support.

- Long-term unemployed social benefits recipients need additional support and attention in order to change their social status.
- Long-term unemployed social benefits recipients need additional motivation to start independent way into labour market.
- There is no service, programme, model or any other activity that can guarantee that long-term unemployed social benefits recipients in the end will be willing to work and live independently – best possible result of participating in any of that type activities are changes in way of seeing the problem and thinking about it.
- Services for long-term unemployed should include more motivating and mind changing activities.
- There is a consensus between experts review on career management improvement programme for long-term unemployed social benefits recipients.

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