Opening the Black Box: Is there a Gender Gap in Digital Competences of Persons with Disabilities in Serbia?

Milena Lazic[a], Ivana Domazet[b] & Valentina Vukmirovic[c]
[a] *Research Associate, Department for Digital Economics, Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia*
E-mail: milena.lazic@ien.bg.ac.rs
[b] *Principal Research Fellow, Department for Digital Economics, Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia*
E-mail: ivana.domazet@ien.bg.ac.rs
[c] *Research Associate, Department for Digital Economics, Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia*
E-mail: valentina.vukmirovic@ien.bg.ac.rs

Abstract

It is estimated that more than 700,000 individuals in Serbia face some form of disability (physical, sensory, intellectual), of which between 215,000 and 300,000 are part of the working-age population. Nevertheless, only about 13% of the total number of persons with disabilities in Serbia is employed. Persons with disabilities usually perform work tasks that are below the level of their qualifications, while employers tend to give them a reduced amount of work and less demanding tasks which are generally lower paid. As a consequence of facing discrimination, persons with disabilities have a greater tendency towards long-term unemployment and complete withdrawal from the labor market. However, the world of work is in constant change with the emergence of gig or platform work as one of the latest trends and digital labor platforms as one of its critical components For years, Serbia has been ranked as one of the leading countries in the field of crowdwork on digital labor platforms. Moreover, digital labor platforms and the usage of advanced digital technologies create almost equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to engage in the virtual labor market and generate income. In order to have sufficient capacity to meet the maximum estimated requirements of their distant employers, remote workers are required to possess an adequate level of digital competences, skills and knowledge. Accordingly, the subject of this paper is the evaluation of the level of digital competencies of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia in order to identify gender-related differences in that regard. The results obtained aim to identify the gap between the existing and required competences for starting an entrepreneurial venture or finding a job using digital (freelance) platforms. The paper's main contribution reflects the fact that digital competences of persons with disabilities in Serbia in the context of their self-employment are a topic insufficiently explored in the existing literature.

Keywords: digital labor platforms, freelancing, digital inclusion, digital competences, persons with disabilities

Jel codes: J21, J24, J81