



Publication of the 4th Socio-economic Monitoring: people of foreign origin still have fewer opportunities on the labour market

The fourth report of the Socio-economic Monitoring shows that in our labour market people of foreign origin are still more often excluded than those of Belgian origin. We are, however, seeing some improvements, but at this rate it will take decades before the gap is closed. The employment and activity rates of people of foreign origin are very low and the difference with people of Belgian origin is very large compared to our neighbouring countries. This is unacceptable in the center of the EU, in a country with a great tradition of social dialogue and good anti-discrimination legislation.

The report "Socio-economic Monitoring - Labour Market and Origin" is the result of a biannual cooperation between the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue and Unia, based on data from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security and the National Register. The combination of administrative data provides a unique compilation of labour market statistics. The report covers the entire population aged 18 to 64, combining data on their origin and migration background (length of stay, acquisition of nationality, etc.) with information on their labour market position during the period 2008-2016. In this fourth report, we have further refined the analyses by adding data on education, particularly on the field of study in which people have obtained a degree.

A labour market at different speeds

The new edition shows that the differences between people of Belgian and foreign origin remain significant, even with the same level of qualification and field of study. In terms of job quality (wages, professional mobility, sectors and types of contracts), the situation has improved for almost all groups of foreign origin. However, they remain over-represented in occupations and labour market segments where jobs are least favourable. Thus, labour market segmentation seems to persist, including in the public sector. Moreover, we find that persons of Belgian origin with degrees in a wide range of fields, are found in sectors where wages are relatively high - persons of non-European origin are found in those same sectors only when they have a specific diploma; at the same time, persons of foreign origin

with various educational backgrounds are more often found in sectors where wages are relatively low.

New themes for a refined analysis

In addition to a demographic description of the population with a special focus on the level of education and the field of study, and a general analysis of the Belgian labour market, the new edition contains some themes that analyse the situation of certain groups or local realities on the labour market. For example, the situation by origin in 17 Belgian cities is examined. The large local differences in the labour market participation of people of foreign origin suggest that local policy makers and their partners can create a positive dynamic.

We also study the specific situation of people with a European Union origin and that of people with an origin in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. When we break down people with an EU origin by their country of origin, we can identify large differences in their position on the labour market, which are often related, among other things, to Belgium's migration history. People from the DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi seem to fare better overall than other people from sub-Saharan Africa, but their employment rate remains low. Although higher education graduates from these countries have better opportunities to emigrate, they seem to have difficulties in accessing the labour market or find a job corresponding to their level of qualification.

We also take a closer look at people of the second generation, showing that labour market integration also differs between people with two parents born abroad and those with one parent born with Belgian nationality and the other born with a foreign nationality. When we analyse the trajectories of people who have worked under an Article 60 employment contract (an employment contract in the framework of the social welfare benefit), it appears that newcomers often have a higher potential than other people employed under an Article 60 contract. Unfortunately, the trajectories rarely lead to sustainable inclusion in the labour market.

Finally, in this edition, we refine two themes of the previous edition with new data and an improved methodology: the analysis of persons registered in the National Register according to their reason for residence and the trajectory of young people who register for a professional integration period. These chapters also show that the profiles of persons of foreign origin are multiple and that we continue to waste opportunities to integrate them sustainably into the labour market.

Explanations

The causes of the persistence of this gap between people of Belgian and foreign origin are also diverse and complex. In addition to conscious and unconscious discrimination, high entry barriers to the labour market, limited occupational mobility and unequal educational opportunities, there are also obstacles on the supply side. Not everyone who does not have a job necessarily seeks one, for example, because it is difficult to reconcile work and family life, or because, despite having a degree in hand, they do not have access to the desired sectors or jobs.

A comprehensive approach can make a difference

The road towards an inclusive and non-discriminatory labour market is still long, but the multi-layered analysis of the Socio-economic Monitoring can help to identify appropriate policy measures. As in the three previous editions, we consider it important to make several policy recommendations in this report. In doing so, we consider not only the functioning of the labour market, but also anti-discrimination and diversity policy. If the Socio-economic Monitoring can convey one message, it would be that the disadvantage of people of foreign origin in the labour market is a multifaceted problem. Individual policy measures have their effectiveness, but to make a real difference, a comprehensive approach is needed, where authorities at different levels and the social partners would align their actions.