

The fifth Socio-Economic Monitoring of the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue and Unia shows that the position of people of foreign origin on our labour market has improved in recent years. However, their employment rate is still much lower than that of people of Belgian origin, especially compared to our neighbouring countries. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic showed how vulnerable their position remains. In the heart of Europe, in a country with a strong tradition of social dialogue and good anti-discrimination legislation, this is not acceptable. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to provide solutions.

### **A labour market with different gears**

The Belgian labour market evolved favourably between 2017 and 2019, with the employment rate rising from 64.7% in 2016 to 67.1% in 2019. This increase was observed for everyone, although the extent can differ between groups.

Unfortunately, this new report still points to the phenomenon of segmentation of the labour market and structural discrimination. For people of foreign origin, job opportunities are scarcer as a result.

- People of foreign origin find it more difficult to find a job, even with the same level of education and field of study. Even though the difference in **employment rate** relative to people of Belgian origin has narrowed since 2016 for every level of education, it is striking that this difference remains very pronounced in the case of a higher education degree. For people of foreign origin, it appears more difficult to valorise that degree on our labour market. Moreover, the **wage gap** is wider: 21.9% of higher education graduates of foreign origin are in the lower wage brackets, compared to 8.2% for people of Belgian origin.
- The **quality of work** (wages, mobility between statutes, sectors, and types of contracts) has improved, but people with a migrant background are still overrepresented in less qualitative and less sustainable jobs. They are more regularly unemployed or often work as temporary workers or laborers. And it is even more difficult for them to find a job if they have at most a certificate of lower secondary education, are older than 55, are women or mothers, or have only recently arrived in Belgium.

### **COVID-19 confirms vulnerability of jobs**

Analysis of the labour market in 2020 shows that fewer people of foreign origin could telework - and were therefore more exposed to the risks of infection - and that they worked more often in sectors that had to shut down. As a result, they were more likely to lose their jobs and it was more difficult to return to work. The situation was even more complicated for those with lower secondary education certificates and low-wage workers.

### **New themes for specific challenges**

Every edition contains a number of focus chapters looking at specific groups or phenomena. This newest edition contains a focus chapter on the characteristics of student work. And the differences between origin groups when it comes to working a student job.

Secondly, it focuses on grade repetition, which is a barrier to accessing higher education and negatively affects employment rates at later stages in life. The report shows the gap between people

of Belgian origin, 72% of whom obtained their upper secondary education diploma without grade repetition, compared to less than 40% for people of foreign origin.

And finally, the Monitoring also looked at the growing phenomenon of posting: in 2020, 21% of posted workers were of non-European origin, compared to only 8% in 2010. They are generally posted by an employer based in one of the EU-15 member states, with the Netherlands having a wide lead (26%), followed by Portugal (7%), France (5%) and Germany (4%). This fundamentally changes the size and especially the profile of labour migration to countries such as Belgium.

### **A comprehensive approach to make a difference**

The road to an inclusive labour market without discrimination is still long and winding. The report shows that this is a multi-faceted phenomenon. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is therefore required from the various governments, in cooperation with the social partners. The solution lies in improving labour market mobility, greater attention to the problem of segmentation and quality of labour, a stronger education system that provides opportunities for all, and adapted migration and integration policies.

The report is available for download in the section Publications.

The statistical annexes (Excel-files) are available in the section Statistieken/Statistiques (Dutch and French versions only).