

Abstract

THE WALLOON PLAN FOR TRAINING AND INTEGRATION

The training and integration plan aims at furthering the integration of employment seekers in the private sector, with employers who have vacancies requiring a specific qualification. In practice, this initiative allows the firm to implement an adapted training, under advantageous conditions, while the worker has the guarantee to be employed under the terms of an employment contract for a period at least equivalent to that of the scheme.

The Court of Audit analyzed how the "Office wallon de la formation professionnelle et de l'emploi" (Regional agency for employment and vocational training - Forem) got organized to conclude the required number of training contracts, while guaranteeing the relevance and the quality of the training dispensed to the worker. It also evaluated the efficiency of the training and integration plan in terms of integration in the labour market.

1. The implementation of the plan

At the quantitative level, the Forem almost reached the objective assigned to it, with 8.225 contracts concluded in 2002, that is, an increase of almost 50 % in four years. It should however be taken into account that close to 25 % of the contracts are prematurely terminated. One termination out of five is caused by the departure of the trainee for another employment.

In the *Plan d'action national belge pour l'emploi 2002* (Belgian national action plan for employment 2002), set up in reply to the recommendations of the European Council to the Member-states, the training and integration plan is presented as a tool intended to prevent long term unemployment and youth unemployment and to promote equal opportunities between men and women. However, the recipients of the measure are mainly young graduates of the upper secondary education, whereas long-term unemployment concerns mainly the least qualified youth. Among the trainees, 11 % are long-term unemployed, a category that represents 40 % of employment seekers and 28,3 % of women. The latter constitute 55,8 % of employment seekers (they are certainly, on average, more qualified than male trainees). In view of the major role employers play in the selection of the candidates for training, it is hard for the Forem to target certain publics.

The training and integration plan should help to reduce the inadequacy between the qualifications of the employment seekers and the requirements of the employers. Actually, it does not relate specifically to trades for which it is difficult to find personnel; moreover, it is used in training employment seekers where there seems to be a pool of labour. The lack of attractiveness of some trades and the theoretical nature of some pools of labour are, among others, factors likely to explain this paradox.

With regard to the evaluation of training needs and the relevance of the training scheme as well as its pedagogical follow-up, the Court stressed the initiatives taken by the Forem to gain in efficiency. It nevertheless recommended, on the one hand, to reinforce the quality of the preliminary analysis of the firm's request by emphasizing as a priority the competences required of the trainee and the competences acquired by the latter (experience and qualification) and, on the other hand, to analyse the training schemes already carried out within the firms, in order to exclude the employers who might try to misuse the system (for instance, by organizing a systematic turn over of trainees).

The savings achieved by the firm in terms of wage costs and social security contributions amount to between 7.400 euros and 12.400 euros per trainee, in the event the contract for training and integration lasts six months. For lack of information, the Court was unable to put into perspective the cost of the training dispensed by the employers. In any event, the Forem should seek to evaluate the extent to which employers would have provided an equivalent training if they hadn't benefited from the training and integration plan.

2. The results of the training and integration plan in terms of the integration of the recipients in the labour market

Generally speaking, the results of the quantitative integration indicators are positive. However, integration rates vary appreciably when the analysis is refined at the level of the various publics that have benefited from the plan. Particularly people whose training scheme was interrupted for another reason than departure for another job generally present a less favourable profile than the others where employability is concerned; their later career path shows that they have far fewer chances of integrating themselves durably and in a stable way into the labour market. Consequently, if the plan opens up more to the weakened publics, the Forem will have to pay an unremitting attention to them, which seems hardly compatible with an increase in the volume of training contracts to manage.

It can be concluded from the - more qualitative - evaluation, of the impact of the training scheme upon former recipients that it had effects (with regard to training, contact or injecting enthusiasm) for 65 % the people whose career path was analyzed.

In his answer, the minister indicated that the Forem was inspired by the recommendations made by the Court and that he intended to reactivate the inter-sector follow-up commission, while hoping that the report about the training and integration plan will be used as starting point for the consideration process within that commission.