Working conditions of nationals with a foreign background

Executive summary

Increasing. But in most countries these people are not visible in statistics because most statistics only make a distinction by nationality.

Because NFB/NEA can be considered a potential disadvantaged group in the labour market, it is important to gain more information about their situation. However, some countries do not allow the collection of data on ethnic origin or the affiliation of nationals as there are (assumed) legal constraints to collecting ethnic data and privacy concerns. Other countries are starting to adjust their data collection system in order to reflect the multicultural dimension of European society in statistical work. Germany has been an interesting example in this regard.

Key findings

Relevant data on NFB/NEA are scarce in EU countries. Although recognising that data on foreign background are useful, many European countries are reluctant to collect these data due to the legal framework (and the guarantees that should govern the collection of this type of data) and practical objections. A fear of the risks of misuse also plays a crucial role. At European level and in various European countries, there has either been a debate on the use of sensitive, ethnic data or the debate is ongoing. Most countries have national legislation on personal data protection, which generally prohibits the processing of ethnical data, though including a list of exceptions. It is remarkable that the application of EU legislation on anti-discrimination and privacy is interpreted differently within these debates. Some country reports note the need to collect data on ethnic groups and NFB has increased because of the transposition of EU anti-discrimination legislation into national law and the creation of bodies to fight various forms of discrimination. Other country reports show

Introduction

This report presents an overview of the employment and working conditions of nationals in the EU with a foreign background (NFB) and nationals with a different ethnic affiliation (NEA). The concept of NFB encompasses people with a foreign background, having acquired nationality (by naturalisation or by birth), and their descendants.

Employment and working conditions data on NFB/NEA are scarce in EU countries. Although it is relatively easy to find data on migrants (as on non-nationals versus nationals), it is less easy to obtain data on nationals with a foreign background.

Nationals with a foreign background but also nationals with a different ethnic affiliation can be regarded as two groups that might suffer discrimination and could be treated differently in the labour market on the basis of a different origin (either national or ethnic). Research has shown that not only nationality but also ethnic origin can have an effect on employment status and working conditions.

The report was compiled on the basis of individual national reports submitted by EWCO national correspondents and is a follow-up for two previous studies on migrant workers. This study collects available information on the employment situation and working conditions of NFB and NEA in 27 European countries. It also examines the debate on the use of ethnic data in the different countries and policies for workplace promotion and combating discrimination in the different countries.

Policy context

With the increase in both immigration and mobility within the EU, the number of people changing nationality is also
the impact of anti-discrimination legislation in a slightly different light and argue that, in accordance with its anti-discrimination law, it is not legal to collect ethnic data.

When data are available, they are usually fragmented and incomplete, or based on ad hoc research. The use of different definitions makes comparisons between countries hard to accomplish.

The limited information available does not provide a straightforward picture of the labour market position and working conditions of NFB/NEA. The picture that is provided illustrates the huge diversity between these groups and how different countries tackle the issues.

There are large differences in the employment rates of NFB between EU countries. In some countries, the employment rate is lower than the employment rates of nationals with no foreign background; in other countries, there is not much different in their employment rates.

In some countries, the ethnic segmentation of the labour market is profound with NFB/NEA (and non-nationals) working in less ‘attractive’ occupations and sectors than nationals with no foreign background. In other countries, ethnic segmentation is almost non-existent.

Although NFB/NEA sometimes have a higher score in terms of precarious working conditions than nationals with no foreign background, non-nationals are often worse off. Note that only limited information was available on this issue.

The information that is available shows how important it is to also take account of the heterogeneity of NFB/NEA. In some countries, information is available for the first and the second generations, highlighting significant differences in the employment situation between these two. When available, detailed information about ethnic origin shows that the employment situation can be very different for NFB originating from different regions (for example, EU versus non-EU background). Gender also matters: the female NFB population from certain regions experience more difficulties in the labour market in some countries than their male counterparts. Other determinants are average level of education and qualifications and language skills. Some groups of NFB are better integrated in the labour market than others.

The determinants most mentioned to explain the labour market disadvantages in the countries under investigation are the prevalence of stereotypes, prejudices, negative attitudes and discrimination. A range of EU countries still lack action on tackling work-related discrimination complaints in these areas.

**Policy pointers**

Most correspondents state that their country had a general policy towards ethnic minorities, including nationals with a foreign background. Most frequently mentioned was the existence of anti-discrimination legislation. However, considerable progress is still needed in a range of countries in the registration and follow-up of work-related claims. Specific policies on working conditions that focused on NFB/NEA were almost never mentioned in the reports – with one exception, that is with regard to the Roma.

According to the national reports, the interest of the social partners in the work quality problems of NFB/NEA is limited to ad hoc initiatives. A more proactive stand seems necessary in this regard. Examples of such practices like the Irish tripartite ‘Action strategy to support integrated workplaces’, the Belgian ‘Job Channel’ project by the employers’ organisations or the Spanish trade union actions for Roma people are described in the report.

Employment policy towards these (possibly disadvantaged) groups of nationals (NFB/NEA) can be more effective when it is based on more detailed insights into their employment situation. But to monitor the situation of the increasing numbers of NFB/NEA in the labour market, it is vital that the necessary data are available.

**Further information**

The report on Working conditions of nationals with a foreign background is available at http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn1012015s/index.htm

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