

Activation and job search support

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Within the overall framework of helping unemployed people find a job and limiting the duration of unemployment, the 'Activation and job search support' scheme consists of a mix of mandatory guidance sessions and benefit sanctions imposed on the unemployed person if they fail to meet certain job search requirements. One of the most positive impacts of the practice has been to encourage unemployed people to undertake professional training, improving their chances of finding a job.

Name of the PES

RVA – Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening
National Employment Office

When was the practice implemented?

2004 – on-going

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

Numerous private companies and NGOs collaborate with the Regional Employment Services to provide training and other specific services to unemployed people that can facilitate entry into the labour market.

Which social groups were targeted by the practice?

- ▶ Jobseekers
- ▶ Long-term unemployed

In the beginning, the scheme only targeted the 25-30 age group, but all long-term unemployed people under 50 are now targeted.

What were the practice's main objectives?

The main aim is to motivate unemployed people to actively search for jobs. This scheme was part of an overall strategy initiated in 2004 that regulates collaboration between the federal and regional governments on labour and unemployment. The scheme was presented as a sustainable way of fighting unemployment.

The Belgian labour market shows the paradox that thousands of vacancies remain unfilled while there are a relatively high number of unemployed people. This is due to a lack of skilled workers, while there is an oversupply of low-skilled workers. The gap between supply and demand for skills is especially true for young unemployed people.

What activities were carried out?

The activities are as follows:

1. Letter to initiate the 'activation' procedure – The National Employment Office makes all unemployed people aware of the 'activation system'. The unemployed person can then either contact the Regional Employment Office or wait for an invitation to the first guidance session.
2. First guidance session – The unemployed person must prove that they have taken the initiative in finding work. If they fail to do so, a signed action plan is drawn up and a second session is scheduled.
3. Second guidance session – Efforts made to find work are evaluated, and if the action plan was not followed, temporary sanctions may be imposed. A new action plan is drawn up.
4. Third guidance session – If the third guidance session does not help to fulfil the action plan, the unemployed person is excluded from the benefit system.
5. Sanctions system – The unemployed person must attend the sessions. Failure to comply may result in sanctions.

What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?

The National Employment Office (RVA, ONEM) manages the unemployment benefit system. At the regional level, the National Employment Office collaborates with the Regional Employment Offices (PES), whose core business is to activate unemployed people.

The PES guides unemployed people individually towards finding a job. If the unemployed person does not show enough motivation to find a job sanctions, such as a reduction in or loss of unemployment benefit, may be imposed. The PES gives feedback to the Federal Employment Office on these issues.

Source(s) of funding

National budget (tax revenue)
Regional budget (tax revenue)

<p>What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?</p>	<p>People reached:</p> <p>Since the start of the practice (mid-2004) until 2012, 1 255 537 letters were sent to initiate the procedure. In total 421 000 people did participate in at least the first guidance session. In 2009, when the scheme was fully operational, 2.5% of all people registered as unemployed received a letter each month from the National Employment Office initiating the 'activation' procedure (corresponding to 11 556 people out of a total of 462 057 unemployed people).</p> <p>Products:</p> <p>No specific product was developed.</p> <p>With regard to the guidance system, the regional PES offer a number of on-the-job-training courses, sometimes in collaboration with private companies, to assist people in finding a job.</p>
<p>What outcomes have been identified?</p>	<p>Between 2005 (40 864) and 2009 (95 058), the number of sanctions more than doubled. This is partly because the communication of social security data to the PES and the National Employment Service became more efficient. This trend continued in 2010 (114 500), but the number of sanction has since fallen (97 468 in 2012).</p> <p>In the Walloon Region, positive employment effects are recorded among the highly educated in low unemployment areas. In the Flemish Region, positive results affect both the low and highly educated groups. However, there are indications that unemployed people tend to accept low-quality jobs because they are afraid of the sanctions. In Flanders, the scheme has been shown to have a negative impact on salaries accepted. On a positive note, the guidance system has encouraged unemployed people to undertake professional training, which improves their chances of finding suitable work.</p>
<p>What are the lessons learnt and success factors?</p>	<p>In 2008, an evaluation of the scheme was carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Employment. This evaluation could not determine whether the 'activation' scheme improved the chances of finding work. A second evaluation gathered the following findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Unemployed people who find work through the guidance system more often find temporary employment compared to the general working population. ▶ Some people accept jobs that they would otherwise have refused because they fear being sanctioned. This results in lower salaries than expected by the unemployed person, though not in a serious drop in average earnings. ▶ The proportion of unemployed people who undertake professional training as a result of the scheme is higher compared to average unemployment activities. ▶ The federal monitoring effort is a necessary aspect in a country where the lack of a clear time limit for unemployment benefits raises the question of job-search incentives.
<p>More information on the practice</p>	<p>http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/empl_portal/weesp/BE-2.pdf</p>



Contact details for further information

Websites: RVA: www.rva.be (Flemish)
ONEM: www.onem.be (French)