

IMMIGBEL

Improving the Labour Market Position of People with a Migration Background in Belgium

DURATION
15/12/2016 - 15/03/2021

BUDGET
1.120.710 €

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Context

Belgium has become an immigrant society. First generation migrants account for more than 15 percent of the Belgian work force and for over 50 percent of labour force growth. The socio-economic position of migrants in Belgium leaves much to be desired. Nowhere in the EU15 is the employment rate gap between migrants and natives as large. First generation migrants' poverty rates are of the worst in the EU15. In no other EU country are first generation migrants so strongly overrepresented in minimum income protection schemes.

Even though we know that the employment rate of people with a migration background is lagging, we know less about the causes behind it, a lacuna that IMMIGBEL aims to fill. Research on the position of people with a migration background in Belgium is based almost exclusively on cross-sectional data. This project aims to use longitudinal data, spanning up to 18 years, to examine the labour market trajectories of immigrants at the individual, household and firm level.

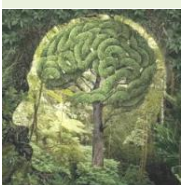
General objectives and underlying research questions

As our team consists of sociologists, demographers, economists and legal scholars - working both in academia as in the federal administration - our approach will be multi and interdisciplinary. Linking rich administrative datasets and surveys, we aim to get a thorough understanding of the complex dynamics of the socioeconomic trajectories of people with a migration background. With sophisticated longitudinal analyses we hope to break new grounds in how migrants fare. We will also pay particular attention to an underexplored subgroup of migrants: posted workers, of which there are many in Belgium.

Individual level

At the individual level we aim to enhance our understanding of the employment trajectories of people with a migration background from an individual perspective. The pathways that first generation migrants follow reflect the interplay of opportunities and barriers during their entire period of residence and first generation migrants' own strategic responses.

Availing of a linkage of rich administrative datasets and surveys existing in Belgium, we use large scale longitudinal data to map labour market trajectories of people with a migration background. Our contribution lies in the fact that we analyse, at a considerable level of detail and within an extended longitudinal scope (consecutive quarters over a 18 year longitudinal time span), the role of determinants such as origin, migration history, gender, age, household characteristics, on the labour market trajectories of people with a migration background. We additionally focus on subsidized and public employment schemes aimed at improving the labour market situation of people with a migration background.



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Household level

At the household level we study labour force trajectories in relation to family composition with particular attention to the uptake of work-family policies. We use longitudinal microdata from the Belgian National Register and the Crossroads Bank for Social Security to document trajectories of labour force participation and the uptake of work-family policy among migrants and native parents between 2000 and 2014. In addition, we assess to which degree migrant-native differentials can be explained by pre-birth differentials in employment opportunities and income positions. Besides the availability of unique microdata, Belgium provides an interesting case as the country is a forerunner in the development of work-family policies such as formal childcare and subsidized outsourcing of domestic labour. But Belgium also exhibits the largest native-migrant differentials in the labour market.

Firm level

Finally, our project analyses labour market performance through the lens of the Belgian firms in which immigrants find work in this country. The objective of the ULB/Mons work package is to use longitudinal panel data of Belgian firms and their employees to shed light on various aspects related to the presence of immigrants in Belgian firms that have so far not been studied, namely: 1) the role of product market competition for wage discrimination against immigrants; 2) the incidence and determinants of over-education among immigrants; 3) the effects of educational and skills mismatch on the wages for native and immigrant workers; 4) the consequences of over-education in terms of productivity, wages and profits according to the origin of workers; 5) the policy implications of the collected evidence on all of these issues.

Potential impact of the research on science, society and/or on decision-making

The expected impact will be on two major fronts:

- a. We aim to make significant contributions to the international scientific literature and debate
- b. We aim to contribute to a better informed public debate and policy making process on pressing policy issues relating to migration. The process and outcome of the project will provide valuable information for both researchers and policy makers. The topic is of extreme policy urgency. The project has scheduled specific activities to enter into dialogue with stakeholders and policy makers and to communicate the outcomes to policy makers and a wider audience (e.g. through policy papers, media, final conference).

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