

Third national report on the implementation of the European social partners' autonomous agreement on active ageing and an inter-generational approach¹

In order to prepare this third report, contacts have been made with sectors and Regions so that they could both present an overview of measures taken at their own level and lay out their ambitions relating to this issue. In this context, the National Labor Council played a key role in centralizing the available information relating to social policies at federal, regional and sectoral levels.

At federal level

- Encouraging the retention, the integration or the reintegration of workers above 50 years of age in the Labor Market

Adoption of the collective agreement n° 146, setting at 57 years the minimum age for accessing to a regime of half time work during the 2019-2020 period for workers with a specific career (heavy work, night work, construction sector, long career, restructuring) for sectors that are not covered by an established joint committee. This minimum age has been set at 55 years for a reduction in working time to a 4/5-time job. These provisions shall be applied in a suppletive manner.

- Organization of work and Burn-out

The first round of pilot projects subsidized to prevent burn-out is presently being assessed at a final stage. This global assessment is scheduled to be completed during the first quarter of 2021. This assessment should allow the social partners to refine their own approach in preventing burn-out and to draw some conclusions and operational recommendations for sectors and undertakings.

Furthermore, a second round of projects was launched on 1 June 2019. In this context, 37 projects introduced by undertakings and 3 projects introduced by sectors have been selected by the Minister of Employment in December 2019, following an opinion issued by the National Labour Council in September 2019.

Because of the pandemic, no further round of projects will be launched in 2020.

- Voluntary return to work of workers with health issues

The social partners have continued their work on this issue. In this context, hearings have been held in February 2020, with a focus on the subject of work related disease prevention, and with the aim of shaping solutions for enhancing the remaining professional capacity of targeted persons. These hearings highlighted good practices, initiatives, tools and measures for ensuring that people suffering long-term illness stay at (or return to) work. The objective pursued by the social partners is to improve the existing measures and to complete this component with a component dedicated to prevention of long-term illnesses.

At regional level

- In the Brussels Capital Region, the new strategy Go for Brussels 2030 was adopted in January 2020 by the Brussels Government and the social partners. This strategy will carry on the economic and social work launched in the context of the previous strategy

¹ For further information, see the report n° Of the National Labour Council, 14 July 2020.

(Go for Brussels 2025) and will complete it with new elements provided for in the coalition government agreement relating to the years 2019-2024. It includes the assessment of several measures such as the “target group reduction”, intended to employers of workers aged 57 and above, and the “2020 training plan“, which notably benefits to workers aged 55 and above and which is aimed at improving participation in employment of the inhabitants of Brussels.

- In the Flemish Region, the scope of the “werkbaarheidscheque” (workability voucher), launched in May 2019, has been temporary broadened in order to meet the needs generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. It can be used by undertakings in order to identify difficulties related to feasible work. From now on, this instrument can also be used in order to take action and deliver trainings with a view to improving the feasible work. In order to facilitate career choices of workers and encourage job retention, the VDAB (public employment and training services) collected and made available all relevant data. Vocational training has been encouraged during the all pandemic by broadening the on line training supply.
- In the Walloon Region, the measures developed under the 2018 and 2019 Implementation Report of the Framework Agreement have been continued. Thus, the “Impulsion 55 ans +” measure, which includes a reduction in employer social security contributions for older workers, had already been granted to 65.000 full time equivalents in the third quarter of 2019, for a budget of around 120 million euros. A large evaluation process of Wallonian employment and training aids, of which these measures form a part, was launched in 2020.
- In the German-speaking Community, the AKTIF and ACTIF + support schemes are still relevant. These schemes allow granting subsidies to employers for hiring unemployed job seekers. The AKTIF scheme focuses specifically on workers aged 50 years and over who involuntarily lose their jobs.

At sectoral level

At sectoral level and regarding efforts in favor of at risk groups, targeted efforts towards older workers continued to increase compared with previous reports. Efforts focus mainly on three areas:

- training supply aimed at improving the skills of workers;
- financing of outplacement measures;
- financing of time credit measures.

In connection with the Employment Plan for older workers (collective agreement n° 104), sectors have introduced several measures such as the reduction of the workload or a smooth organization of the end of the working life with compensation for the loss of earnings sustained, the grant of a special supplement to unemployment benefits for unemployed aged 60, and the dispensation from week-end work for workers aged 55 and over in several sectors. Dispensation from work with full pay in the non-profit sector as well as the granting of days off depending of the age of workers in the context of the end of the career are all measures aimed at maintaining older workers in the labour force.