

**Report to the Federal Parliament :**  
**The “starter job agreements” for young people, an instrument in the fight against unemployment among young people.**

**In its report to the Federal Parliament the Belgian Court of Audit examined the follow-up and the assessment of the federal policy against youth unemployment implemented since 1999. This policy scheme, that provides for one-year “starter job agreements” was originally aimed at offering young people a job opportunity within six months after they had left school. The Court found that the legislation that established this policy scheme was repeatedly amended and that amendments were not founded on ample satisfactory monitoring and assessment instruments. In the wake of the Court’s findings and recommendations the ministers for Social Affairs and Employment made significant commitments towards this aim.**

The starter job for young people (the so-called “Rosetta jobs”) is one of the measures adopted by Government to fight against youth unemployment. The starter job agreements have been in existence since 1999 and were originally targeted at the school leaving people so as to avoid they would plunge into unemployment. This objective is particularly important, as a person’s first experience in the labour market, either as employed or unemployed, largely determines the development of his future professional career. For certain target groups legislation also provided for a reduction in employers’ contributions.

The Court examined the follow-up and assessment of this policy scheme.

It found out that the government department (SDP/FOD) Employment set up a data base and financed studies on youth unemployment, but did not draw up the mandatory yearly statistical report and did not either implement this policy into objectives or indicators that would allow an assessment of the policy outcome. The yearly evaluation by the Central Council of Economy (CRB) and the National Labour Council (NAR) could not be implemented according to the law.

As these evaluations were deficient the lawmaker had no insight into the outcome obtained at the time he introduced the amendments to the law.

The development of the law from 1999 to 2006 revealed that the successive later amendments were not consistent with the original objective. The mandatory nature of the law was drastically weakened : in the first version of the law, employers from the private sector were each year obliged to offer a starter job agreement to young workers under the age of 26 that had left school less than six months before up to 3 % of the total staff but in the present legislation the obligation is to have 3 % workers under the age of 26 on its staff. Changes in the legislation reflected a policy reorientation whereby the mandatory requirements on employers were gradually reduced. In so doing, it became easier to reach the quota and the amount of social security contributions’ reductions increased.

The successive amendments to the legislation changed the nature of the controls carried out by the government department Employment and the National Office of Social Security (ONSS/RSZ) to ensure compliance with the obligations to engage young people. The Court found that the control campaigns conducted by the government department Employment up to 2003 were not followed by the enforcement of the penalties provided by law. Since 2004 the recruitment obligation has not been really subject to any more check, even in case of contributions reductions.

Moreover the Court pointed out that Government had not put in place the follow-up procedure with respect to the specific obligations the public sector has to abide by in terms of recruitment of young people (compliance with the quota, integration of workers primarily in overall schemes that fulfill societal needs, etc.).

In their joint answer the minister for Social Affairs and the minister of Employment stressed that they agreed on the Court's recommendations. The pledged that the government department Employment would draw up the yearly statistical report and work out the indicators. They also added that the National Office of Social Security would regularly supply the Employment department the list of employers that according to the National Office of Social security might not necessarily comply with their obligation to engage new workers. Partly on the basis of the outcome of a study carried out by the CRB and the NAR they would consider whether it is necessary to adapt the law on the starter job agreements. With this in mind the CRB and the NAR would also check how big the impact of reduced employers' contributions was on employment of young people and the various target groups. Finally the ministers also promised that they would call on the other Government members to see to it that Government as an employer abide by the obligations regarding to the starter job agreements.