

**Paper for the ESPAnet Conference 2010**

**Budapest, September 2-4<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Stream 11.2 [Fit for Work in Europe? Health, Employability and Challenges for Activation in an Era of Crisis](#)

**WHERE HARD-TO-EMPLOY CLIENTS ON UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL  
ASSISTANCE BENEFITS MEET  
AN ANALYSIS OF JOB SEEKERS FACING MULTIPLE BARRIERS TO  
EMPLOYMENT IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT OF A TWO-TIER SYSTEM**

**Ludo Struyven & Liesbeth Van Parys - HIVA, Leuven University**

Work in progress - feedback welcome

Contact details: Higher Institute of Labour Studies - Catholic University Leuven,

Parkstraat 47 – p.o.box 5300 - 3000 Leuven – Belgium - e-mail:

[ludo.struyven@hiva.kuleuven.be](mailto:ludo.struyven@hiva.kuleuven.be)

**Abstract**

In the region of Flanders (Belgium), as in many other countries, the government wants a growing number of harder-to-place job-seekers, whether on unemployment benefits or social assistance benefits, being activated. In spite of this obligation for all clients, many of them are facing multiple barriers to work. The public employment service (PES) and the social assistance service are therefore becoming 'activated' in their turn. In the Belgian context, and in contrast to some other countries, both types of benefit systems are still completely separated from each other. In so doing, they are discovering an increasingly overlapping segment in their populations of welfare recipients who face multiple barriers.

The central question in this paper is threefold: what barriers can be identified for both groups of welfare recipients, how these barriers tend to cluster among the long-term unemployed, and finally which institutional factors can help to explain the identified barriers and categories of jobseekers. These questions are answered using administrative data on the qualitative intake of welfare recipients and their trajectory to employment. These data contain rich information on the so-called 'soft characteristics', e.g. motivation, self-reliance, health, networks and childcare. All clients on the rolls of the PES and the social assistance service in the city of Antwerp (January 2009) are analyzed. The information on barriers is based on the diagnosis of the clients made by their consultants. We will then show which labour market instruments and tools are used to help them find an appropriate job or social activity in the local community. The analyses reveals that, although consultants are using a partly similar categorization of barriers to activation and employment, the assessment of clients is primarily led by the institutional setting of the employment or welfare service in question.

**Keywords:** multiple barriers to employment, activation, two-tier system, hard-to-employ job-seekers

### **The local context of a two-tier system**

This paper reflects the increasing interest both in Belgium and abroad in integrating hard-to-employ job-seekers and clients on social assistance benefits (in Belgium the basic 'integration income' or its equivalent) into society, and in particular into the employment market. After all, work has frequently proved to be the decisive factor in long-term social integration. At the basis of this activation policy lie budgetary as well as economic and demographic reasons. Thus it is expected that, for certain sectors and for Flanders as a whole, the surplus labour supply will turn into a labour shortage within a few years, depending on the duration of the current crisis on the employment market. For unemployed clients on social assistance benefits with multidimensional problems, this is a complex task: such clients do not just need to be supporting with the move into the employment market, but given assistance and support in other areas of their lives besides work. Conversely, it has been found that as the activation policy of the public employment service reaches the hard core of the unemployed, a proportion of hard-to-employ job-seekers need a multidimensional approach. The problems and hence the required approach for the two benefits groups in the so-called two-tier system thus start to resemble one another where labour participation is the common goal. This encourages new or improved cooperation between the employment service and social service in order to offer suitable activation services to more clients on social assistance and hard-to-employ job-seekers – services which meet the clients' requirements, taking their more restricted employability into account. In some countries the cooperation

moved already towards integration of service delivery, even with the merger of the two separate benefits systems (e.g. Germany).

These issues are gradually finding their way onto the policy agenda, but are becoming more rapidly, specifically and intensively urgent in the larger cities. This is largely if not entirely related to the problems of the employment market in large cities. Typical of the population of job-seekers in larger cities is the formation of a 'residual group' which is regarded as hard-to-employ or not (yet) placeable: a group with temporary or permanent handicaps for which appropriate tools (ranging from care and the provision of assistance to activation and employment intermediation) are deployed. This paper addresses three main issues: what barriers can be identified and assessed for both groups of working-age beneficiaries, how these barriers tend to cluster among the long-term unemployed, and finally which institutional factors can help to explain the identified barriers and categories of job-seekers.

### **On the classification of job seekers in terms of their employability**

There is no clear, scientifically tested definition of employability (Brussig & Knuth, 2009). Who is employable is determined not just by individual factors: structural and cultural factors also play a role, not least on the part of the employer and the local employment market. The concept has several dimensions, by Brussig & Knuth (2009) in their operationalization grouped in three distinct components: a work-related component of qualification and health, a labour market component consisting of job-search, willingness to make concessions and individual resources, and a third component of personal characteristics and conditions. Based on these and other factors, job seekers are divided into groups according to their presumed chances of a short-term job gain. From the social administration viewpoint, in practice a typology is used of the degree of

employability. Some countries use the concept of phasing or a yardstick based on 'distance from the employment market' (e.g. the Netherlands, Germany). This means that job-seekers are classified into phases, depending on the extent to which they are placeable: phase 1 clients are job-seekers with good placeability who could find work by means of intermediation without financial support within a reasonable time-frame; phase 2 clients are job-seekers with less good employability, but who are able to find work within a year with some support in the form of training or a subsidy; phase 3 clients are job-seekers who are so far removed from the employment market that they had little chance of finding regular work, unless they could become sufficiently qualified by means of other work or via training. Finally, a fourth category of clients consists of job-seekers who are not placeable at all. Although the latter category is not officially registered, in practice it may be that this category of 'unemployable' job seekers is still introduced in the file which correspond to them. Whether someone is placeable depends on age, education and work experience, as well as on personal qualities such as motivation, self-reliance and flexibility, and on mental, social and physical handicaps. It is presumed that job-seekers classified as phase 1 will find work quickly, without involvement by the public employment intermediation service. The distance between these job-seekers and the employment market is small. However, the gap rapidly grows, since finding work becomes harder the longer the period of unemployment lasts. The fact that the chance of success falls as the duration of unemployment increases is not just an expression of negative duration dependence: it may also be a selection effect (in other words, those who do not succeed initially had less favourable characteristics which had not been observed – the problem of non-observed heterogeneity). In recent research, little evidence in Belgium is found of genuine negative duration dependence (Heylen, 2009). The results are not very clear in the Netherlands either (Van Leuvensteijn & Koning,

2000). Previous research for other countries suggests that duration dependence does exist (Singley, 2003). Several mechanisms may contribute to this. The two major factors are skill deterioration and negative signals sent to employers, in the sense that employers use long-term unemployment as a proxy for productivity in the absence of any other information. In addition, socio-psychological research points to a barrier to employment by depressing the morale needed for job search. This has led to the construction of socio-psychological typologies of unemployed based on their self-reported physiological and psychological functioning – see for Flanders De Witte (1992) and for the Netherlands Engbersen (1990). What is important here is, as Singley in its literature review (2003) states, that both physical and mental health may be affected adversely.

Thus although the category ‘unplaceable’ or ‘unemployable’ is used in day-to-day activation and support practice, in research the term is treated warily, nourishing the idea that nobody is unemployable (Van Den Berg & Van Der Veer, 1992). In recent years, the category of unemployable is less political sensitive than it once was in the 1990s. In the Netherlands, for example, the Dutch Employment Service stated in 1994 that a quarter of the unemployed population would be catered for more effectively by other bodies, because they were regarded as unemployable. The public service in question paid a heavy political price for this pronouncement: the consequence was a substantial budget reallocation to the municipalities for subsidized employment – the so-called Melkert jobs (Struyven, 2006). In Flanders in contrast, the VDAB estimated in 2005 that 20% of the long-term unemployed would never find work again (*De Morgen*, 12/12/2005). The president of OCMW Antwerp estimated in mid-2008 that despite all activation projects, nearly 3,000 recipients of OCMW (out of approximately 5,000 on monthly average) support could not be deployed on the employment market.

In practice, the insight has grown that a classification should be based on as much identified barriers as possible, and not only on individual characteristics that are easy to observe. The concept of multiple barriers is based upon the finding that people who have one barrier often have other related barriers. Furthermore, not all barriers can be identified and assessed, nor are they as troublesome. When we talk about barriers to employment, two dimensions can be distinguished along which they can be classified. The first dimension is whether they can be observed, the second dimension whether they can be modified. In the beginning of the unemployment spell, barriers are not yet as severe as they are after a certain period of unemployment. There is broad evidence for the impact of the unemployment spell for both erosion of qualifications and broader socio-psychological skills, and arising mental and physical health problems.

### **Identifying barriers to employment**

An important step in the process of activation is the systematic intake interview for job-seekers at the start of a trajectory. For this, the consultants at employment service and social service use their own diagnostic tools to gain an understanding of the impediments and possibilities of job-seekers and social assistance recipients. The formal diagnosis of the client is indeed a crucial step for his or her further screening and referral to appropriate services.

In the case of the Flemish employment service, for most job-seekers this is the intake guideline, which starts from the job-seeker's preferred profession. The local social service, i.c. in the city of Antwerp, uses its own Professional and Social Activation Measurement Tool (MPSA) for all recipients of social assistance (more precisely, all clients with an offer to provide help for at least three months). These tools mean that the diagnosis is not just based on objective, 'hard' characteristics such as age, sex,

educational level and length of time out of work: 'soft' characteristics such as motivation, self-confidence, health, networks and care responsibilities also form part of the picture.

With regard to the identification of a broader range of barriers to employment, efforts have been made at both the employment service – the Flemish Public Employment Service called VDAB - and the local social service in the city of Antwerp to objectivize the client's possibilities and obstacles and to achieve a refined picture of them on the basis of an intake interview tool. These instruments are not perfect in the sense that all barriers are equally being identified and assessed. The major reason for this has to do with safeguarding and complying with privacy rules. This explains why legal and medical information (e.g. criminal convictions, well-defined diseases) are not likely to be registered. For the very same reason, transportation problems tend to be well known (this is also true for the research evidence). The lack of certain specific information on barriers is compensated by the subjective estimation of the consultant. The use of such tools will always leave a certain amount of discretionary power for personal assessment by the consultant. This is also the conclusion of an extensive survey of the process of screening and diagnosis in connection with re-integration on behalf of the Dutch Council for Work and Income (RWI, 2009). Information gathered via standardized tools is an important aid for the consultant and prevents arbitrariness (or the appearance of it), but can never replace personal assessment by the consultant (on the basis of his or her experience and expertise).

The instruments mentioned are designed within two different institutional contexts and have different purposes. This explains why the employment service and the local social service have a different perspective to look at the client.

The employment service aims at making a first screening and selection of job-seekers. With a view to creating a suitable trajectory, during the intake interview the VDAB looks

at how great the distance is from the employment market. This is called the assessment intake interview, and since 2008 it has been preceded by an intake phase based on the Intake Guideline. During the assessment phase, five areas of screening are distinguished:

- work-related skills and qualifications;
- job-seeking behaviour;
- social and communication skills;
- basic requirements (mobility, childcare, care responsibilities, unemployment trap);
- physical and psychological aspects.

The VDAB's Client Monitoring System (CVS) enables these data to be analyzed quantitatively. In addition, the consultant can add qualitative information to the file that gives more details about the job-seeker's problems. However, this information is not systematically recorded and cannot be quantitatively analyzed. This supplementary file information is therefore not suitable for research purposes.

The local social service has a Professional and Social Activation Measurement Tool (MPSA) to ascertain who can be regarded as professionally and/or socially activatable. Using this tool, the local social service records who belongs to which category and why. A distinction is made between those who are 'socially and professionally activatable' and those who are only 'socially activatable'. Social activatability refers to activities which contribute to a person's social integration. Such activities are mainly oriented around unpaid activities and networking ('work care', voluntary work, informal family care, etc.). This form of activation is offered to the group which is regarded as being separated from the mainstream employment market by a large and unbridgeable gap. (The possibility is not completely excluded that social activation could constitute a first step for this group towards professional activation.) Professional activation focuses on guiding the recipient into remunerated activity. Such activation can assume many forms (employment,

training, Dutch classes) and may be offered by the social service itself (e.g. social employment under the terms of the so-called 'article 60 §7') or by outside providers. The OCMW distinguishes five areas in which barriers can stand in the way of such activation:

- medical and/or psychological factors;
- housing;
- family;
- societal factors;
- other.

The data generated by this measurement tool form an important source of information for our research. This is not just because they allow the number of people who have not yet been activated to be estimated, but because they offer a better understanding of the barriers that stand in the way of professional or social activation.

Thus our research method takes as its starting-point the hitherto unexploited data from the databases of the employment service and local social service in Antwerp.

### **Data**

The data for this review cover the city of Antwerp. On a monthly basis, Antwerp counts approximately 32,000 job-seekers and 5,000 social assistance recipients. In the case of Antwerp in particular, both the employment rate and the unemployment rate are higher than the average for Flanders. Theoretically, there are 95 jobs available per 100 inhabitants of working age, but these positions are mainly occupied by workers from outside the city. As a result, a high rate of employment is coupled with a high rate of unemployment. This is the metropolitan employment paradox. Another trend which is important for the Antwerp employment market of the future is the pronounced rejuvenation of the population. Since 2002, the number of births has risen markedly. In the shorter term, this creates challenges for the capacity of the education system and of

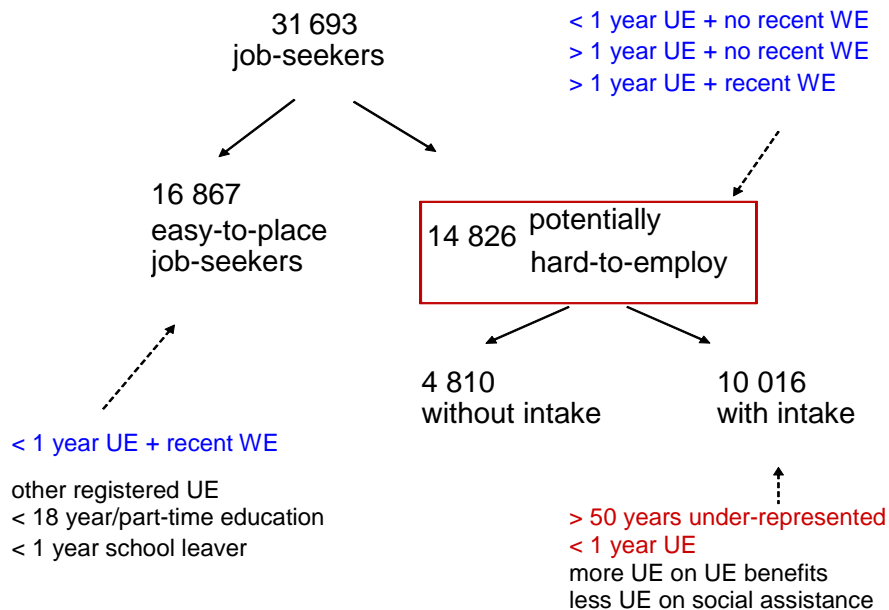
childcare facilities. A lack of adequate and flexible childcare has long been recognized as a prerequisite for job-seekers to get work.

The analyses in this research are based on the data for a specific moment: 31 January 2009. Thus the findings presented here form a snapshot, which can be supplemented in the future with more dynamic data about those who leave the databases and those who move from one database to another. Within the short-time compass of this research, it was not possible to follow-up people and to obtain a longitudinal perspective. Further research could enable us to explore more in-depth the relationships between identified barriers and their evolution, unemployment duration and transitions to employment.

### **The many faces of the hard-to-employ job-seekers**

For an initial delineation of (potentially) hard-to-employ job-seekers, we take as our basis a combination of two objective characteristics: duration of unemployment and whether or not the person has recent brief work experience (WE) (see Diagram 1). This is possible because the Dimona declaration means that all employment, even if it only lasted for a few days, is known. To be deregistered as a job-seeker, one must have been in work for three consecutive months. For potentially hard-to-employ job-seekers we then indicate to what extent intake information is available. The reason why to delineate the total group of job-seekers on the basis of both objective variables, has to do with the gradations within the category of 'hard-to-employ', depending on the seriousness of the obstacle to finding work and the combination of obstacles in the area of work and in other areas of life. Because of the above-mentioned interaction of unemployment duration and barriers, we are in particular interested in the unemployed who have been alienated from the labour market for a longer period of time in order to detect those with

severe barriers (the record files don't give us any indication of the severity of the identified factors).



**Source:** VDAB, data processed by HIVA

**Diagram 1:** Total job-seekers population in the city of Antwerp (on 31 January 2009), classified by placeability and availability of intake information

We include the following three subgroups in the subgroup of potentially hard-to-employ job-seekers: the short-term unemployed without recent (= within the past year) brief work experience, the long-term unemployed without recent brief work experience, and the long-term unemployed with recent brief work experience.

A first striking finding is that one-third (33.9%) of all long-term job-seekers have worked briefly in the past year. On a number of characteristics, this category scores noticeably better than the other long-term job-seekers. This finding is relevant for the activation policy: the VDAB can place more weight than it currently does on incorporating brief work experience in a trajectory into more permanent employment.

A second finding is that for the vast majority (67.6%) of potentially hard-to-employ job-seekers, an intake process has been recorded, looking over the past four years. The rate is lower among the subgroup of short-term job-seekers without recent work experience and the over-50s, who are known to be much less activated up till now in Belgium. Among the subgroup of short-term job-seekers, this includes clients on social assistance and those who have registered voluntarily. In the case of 70% of the voluntarily registered job-seekers in the group of short-term job-seekers, no intake interview has taken place. In the case of 64% of the job-seekers for whom the OCMW is responsible, no intake interview has taken place. When there is no intake process, in principle no trajectory can be started either. OCMW clients can register with the VDAB while still receiving social assistance, but at that point they do not yet constitute a target group for the VDAB. The following sections provide the results for the beneficiaries on unemployment benefits and those on social assistance benefits.

### **Barriers to activation for hard-to-employ job-seekers**

On the basis of the nature of the recorded barriers – individual barriers whether or not related to the employment market – we end up with three types (Table 1). With each type, there is still potential for activation.

**Table 1** Typology of potentially hard-to-employ job-seekers on the basis of recorded barriers (city of Antwerp, on 31 January 2009)

<i>Type 1: no recorded barriers</i>	633	6,3%
44,2% is receiving support		
<i>Type 2: only employment market-related problem: mainly job-seeking behaviour, work-related skills, command of Dutch</i>	4 112	41,1%
2.1 one work-related obstacle	1 505	15,0%
2.2 combination of obstacles	2 607	26,0%
52,1% is receiving support		
<i>Type 3: both work-related obstacles and other obstacles: mainly medical reasons</i>	5 271	52,6%
3.1 one single temporary other obstacle (care responsibility, lack of mobility, unfavourable age)	1 044	10,4%
3.2 one single non-temporary other obstacle	1 339	13,4%
3.3 several other, not of a medical or social nature	363	3,6%
3.4 several other, at least one of a medical or social nature	2 525	25,2%
51,9% is receiving support		
Total	10 016	100,00

**Source:** VDAB; data processed by HIVA

**Type 1** (6.3%) are those who are directly placeable among the subpopulation of potentially hard-to-employ job-seekers. They are a group of 633 job-seekers (not extrapolated to the entire population), who are directly activatable (unless barriers come into play for this group which have not been diagnosed and/or recorded by the consultant). Although they are registered as long-term unemployed, they have recent brief work experience. In this group a trajectory has only been set up for a minority (44.2%) at this moment (but this is only a snapshot: a trajectory may be under preparation in some cases).

**Type 2** (41.1% or 19.2% of the entire population) are hard-to-employ job-seekers with an employment market-related problem. Within this type we distinguish two subtypes: a less serious and a more serious subtype. The more serious subtype consists of hard-to-employ job-seekers with a combination of work-related obstacles. This applies to 2 607 hard-to-employ job-seekers (26.0% of the subpopulation). For them, an intensive,

lengthy trajectory is needed which takes sufficient account of basic skills and basic knowledge of Dutch if they want to be involved in the employment market. The less serious subtype consists of hard-to-employ job-seekers with just one work-related obstacle. These 1 505 job-seekers mainly need intensive support in their search for work or a training course, whether or not in combination with work experience. Of the type 2 job-seekers, only half are receiving support in a trajectory on this date.

**Type 3** (52.6% or 24.6% of the entire population) are the hard-to-employ job-seekers with both work-related obstacles and other obstacles in the personal or well-being area. These obstacles are mainly medical in nature. On average, half of the type 3 job-seekers are currently in a trajectory to work (in the snapshot), but the question is whether these trajectories are sufficiently intensive to provide a response to the numerous problems which arise for these very hard-to-employ job-seekers. Within this type we can distinguish four subtypes, depending on the seriousness of the issues. At one extreme is the relatively easy subtype of job-seekers contending with a single obstacle in addition to the work-related obstacles. More specifically, this might be a care responsibility, a lack of mobility or an unfavourable age, but without problems such as physical disabilities being involved. Thus this category is purely temporarily unplaceable (regarding the other obstacles we do not have more information which would enable us to discern whether they are temporary or not). This subtype consists of 1 044 hard-to-employ job-seekers (10.0% of the subpopulation) for whom unplaceability is only temporary, at any rate provided the measures are taken to make a suitable form of activation possible. This means appropriate arrangements for issues such as childcare, mobility or employment for the over-50s. At the same time, this subtype requires work to be done on employment market-related solutions for the identified problems. For the remaining 4 227 type 3 job-seekers, the problems are more serious (mainly of a medical nature). At

the most serious end of the spectrum is the subtype consisting of job-seekers with several non-work-related obstacles, including at least one of a medical or social nature, in addition to one or more work-related obstacles. Most job-seekers within type 3 belong to this most serious subtype: 2 525 job-seekers (25.2% of the subpopulation or, after extrapolation, 11.8% of the entire population). They form the hard core within type 3. Getting this group into employment is (as yet) a remote possibility; however, they may benefit from appropriate well-being trajectories or social activation trajectories. Although work on the ordinary employment market is no longer feasible for the majority of them, access to a professional trajectory leading towards (protected) employment is not ruled out a priori. In this latter case, more attention also needs to be given to offering support with job-seeking behaviour. This latter point is also necessary to encourage the transition into the mainstream circuit. The risk that is currently being exacerbated institutionally is that too few clients will move into a trajectory leading towards work. Social trajectories should in principle open up the path to a trajectory into mainstream work, even if this will only prove feasible for a small minority.

### **Barriers to activation in the case of social assistance recipients**

The Antwerp social service (OCMW) also sets itself the goal of supporting all activatable recipients of social assistance (or the equivalent) into the employment market. In order to form a clear picture of the clients, their trajectory into work and any associated barriers, it has been the practice since 2005 to fill in a detailed measurement tool with a proposal for at least three months of help. When it comes to activation, in practice one comes up against limits for this population, and the question arises whether one can identify a 'residual group' of people who are not (yet) placeable. On the basis of the

available information, various different scenarios are possible for delineating such a residual group. Three of these are described here.

In the first scenario we take as our basis the two-way classification which is used in the measurement tool itself, where a distinction is made between clients who are labelled 'exclusively socially activatable' and those who are labelled as 'socially and professionally activatable'. The exclusively socially activatable label is usually automatically assigned to those who are not allowed to work in Belgium or who are not regarded as placeable because of their age or the seriousness of their disability. People can also be assigned this label at the request of the consultant and by decision of the Special Committee on Social Welfare. For this group, social activation, i.e. working on the client's social integration by means such as unremunerated work, seems to be the only feasible type of activation. Under this restricted scenario, 23.7% or 1 094 of the 4 599 recipients of social assistance (or the equivalent) in Antwerp would belong to the residual group.

However, we may conjecture that this group can be extended to include people who are labelled as professionally activatable, but who contend with certain barriers in the way of getting into work. In a second, very broad scenario, in addition to the exclusively socially activatable, people who experience at least one of the 21 employment barriers recorded in MPSA and/or whose level of Dutch is inadequate are regarded as not (yet) placeable. This expanded definition leads to a residual group of 3 266 individuals, representing 70.6% of the total population.

The third scenario takes account of the type and seriousness of the experienced barriers. This refinement is based on a classification of the population into six clusters of homogeneous groups:

- individuals without (recorded) obstacles to employment;

- individuals with barriers in terms of psychological capital;
- individuals with barriers in terms of social capital;
- individuals with barriers in terms of family situation;
- individuals with barriers in terms of housing situation;
- individuals with barriers in several areas (mental and physical health, social capital, family situation and housing situation).

It turns out that two of these groups are being professionally activated significantly less often. These are firstly people whose barriers to employment lie in the area of psychological capital (including addiction issues, psychological problems, etc.). In addition, people experiencing barriers in several areas turn out to be more remote from the employment market. When these two groups are also included in the residual group together with the exclusively socially activatable, we end up with a group of 1 628 individuals, or 35.4% of the population.

As we did for the VDAB population, we next plot the entire population on a continuum in which a distinction is made between the directly placeable, the eventually placeable and those who are not placeable within a reasonable time period. Table 2 shows this typology for the Antwerp OCMW population.

**Table 2** Typology of clients on social assistance on basis of placeability (city of Antwerp, on 31 January 2009)

<i>Type 1: directly placeable in work</i> regarded as professionally activatable + no recorded barriers + adequate command of Dutch	1 333	29,0%
<i>Type 2: only in the long term placeable</i> assessed as professionally activatable but also one or more barriers to work or insufficient command of Dutch	1 638	35,6%
<i>Type 3: not placeable within a reasonable time period</i> residual group scenario 3: labelled 'exclusively social activatable' or regarded as professionally activatable with problems in terms of psychological capital or problems in several areas	1 628	35,4%
Total	4 599	100,00%

Source: OCMW; data processed by HIVA

**Type 1** is the 1 333 clients for whom there are no recorded barriers, who have an adequate command of Dutch and who are also regarded as professionally activatable. These people can be regarded as directly placeable in work. Usually, people in this type are in fact receiving employment support from the OCMW or are on another trajectory which focuses directly on work (e.g. professional activation at the OCMW, an active file with the VDAB). We believe that this group could be referred to the VDAB more quickly so that they can then be guided by the VDAB towards mainstream employment.

**Type 2** is the 1 638 recipients of social assistance (or the equivalent) who are assessed as professionally activatable, but who also experience one or more barriers to work. These people are eventually activatable, provided their barriers can be dealt with. The necessary activation trajectories for this group are highly diverse and may be intensive. Moreover, possibilities need to be arranged for a transition into mainstream employment market instruments such as the VDAB training courses.

**Type 3** is the 1 628 clients who because of age, disability or certain barriers are very remote from the employment market. This is the 'residual group' as delineated in scenario 3: people labelled 'exclusively social activatable' and people with problems in

terms of psychological capital or problems in several areas. The emphasis for this group is firstly on social activation, i.e. on the individual's (re)integration into society through unremunerated activities or personal networking. However, we would advise that although it is less likely, professional integration cannot ultimately be ruled out for this group either.

## **Discussion**

In this research, we adopt the definition that is commonly used in wider everyday practice: the group of 'those who are hard-to-employ or not (yet) placeable' is the group of those who have not been active for a considerable time (e.g. at least one year) in the (mainstream) employment market and face several disparate obstacles to finding work. If these obstacles can be eliminated, this group requiring more precise identification constitutes a group of those 'who are not yet placeable'. What constitute multiple barriers to job-seekers and social assistance recipients from returning to work? This question becomes all the more urgent as the activation policy comes up against a hard core of those who are 'hard-to-employ or unplaceable'. Since 2004, the activation of job-seekers has gradually been extended to all job-seekers for successive age groups. It started with the under-30s, and at present all job-seekers in the 40-50 age group are being systematically reached. Recently, in the light of the competency and empowerment approach, the emphasis has shifted somewhat to assessing the possibilities of individual clients or job-seekers. In a number of locations in Belgium and especially abroad, experiments are already being carried out with appropriate activation and support trajectories. In order to create space and a tailored approach in the policy for this group at urban level, the VDAB, the OCMW and the city of Antwerp have entered into a cooperation agreement. The city and the OCMW have set themselves the goal that all

'activatable' unemployed people will actually have been activated by 2013. This target continues along the same lines as the strategic target in the 2007-2012 government agreement of guaranteeing the right for every inhabitant of Antwerp to lifelong and lifewide competency development and meaningful activities.

The fact that hard-to-employ long-term unemployed can be brought back to the labour market is based on a twofold assumption. Firstly, it has long been assumed that these soft factors can stand in the way of actually getting back into work. In itself there is nothing new about this. In the past, however, this led to calls to exempt those who were hard to place and had already been unemployed for a long time, from any activation requirement, as these factors were believed no longer to be susceptible to influence once a person had been unemployed for a long time (cf. Bollens & Heylen, 2010). Today, a second assumption is instead made, namely that these factors can still be influenced to a certain extent by means of a suitable trajectory, as a result of which the chances of a job in the mainstream or social economy will increase.

## **Conclusion**

The intention of the present research is to delineate within the overall population of long-term job-seekers and social assistance recipients the 'residual group' of those who are hard-to-employ or not (yet) placeable. This is done on the basis of the barriers and obstacles to activation recorded by consultants, a rich source of information about 'soft characteristics'. These data hold the key to a comprehensive 'individually tailored' approach for those who are hard-to-employ or not (yet) employable. In this research, this information is opened up to scientific analysis for the first time.

As the activation policy for job-seekers and social assistance recipients reaches the hard core, a significant proportion of such people turn out to be contending with multiple

issues which prevent them from getting back into work. These problems have many faces.

A quarter of all long-term job-seekers registered with the VDAB in Antwerp contend with a twofold set of issues, with work-related shortcomings on the one hand and personal, well-being-related shortcomings on the other hand. At the LOCAL SOCIAL SERVICE in Antwerp, a third of all social assistance recipients are in a similar situation. Yet this does not mean that an activation policy for these groups is pointless, provided a trajectory is set up which works properly on the different obstacles which are identified. Only if this happens will the trajectory be successful. Moreover, the research has found that for 11.8% of all job-seekers, the problems are such that a return to work, even in the social economy, is not feasible within a reasonable time-period. For them, the solution must lie in unremunerated social activation. On the other hand, 29.0% of all social assistance recipients can be led to the VDAB or a mainstream job faster than is currently the case. However, this does require an integrated approach to be taken from the point of intake into a trajectory. In Antwerp, this integration is best prioritized in the context of the recent cooperation agreement between the city, the VDAB and the OCMW.

The big advantage of the systematic approach to the intake process based on a standardized intake tool is that consultants can gain a more accurate picture of their target group of clients. In general terms, this offers the advantage that a typology based on measurable characteristics can be developed. The consultant's judgement is important here, and alongside the characteristics recorded in the measurement tool a subjective assessment also always plays a role (based on the consultant's expertise and experience).

Of course it does not help the client if the tools used by the employment service and local social service are too remote from each other, as is currently the case. On the

basis of our findings with the intake tools which are used, we would therefore argue for an integrated approach to intake, based on a partly uniform tool. The development of a joint intake process should also ultimately make it possible for the transfer of individual trajectories to be made far more smoothly. Here there is still a long way to go. OCMW consultants have scarcely any access to VDAB files, and vice versa. At present, this is only possible in the context of the 'Werkwinkel' employment service, in which the OCMW is formally involved (Struyven & Van Hemel, 2009). Only in the case of the experiment with well-being trajectories in the Werkwinkels, in which OCMW consultants are responsible for helping resolve well-being problems, is information circulated more efficiently. One source of inspiration for broadening and deepening the intake process could be the OCMW's 'Professional and Social Activation Measurement Tool' (MPSA). For example, this takes a more explicit and thorough look at the difficulties to do with looking for work (an inflexible attitude, insufficient self-knowledge, frustration, difficulties with keeping to agreements, etc.). The housing situation and any relationship problems are also expressly examined. On the other hand, the MPSA does not examine the professional knowledge of the job-seeker in question. Comparing the VDAB and OCMW intake processes would thus lead to both tools being optimized.

The evidence in this paper shows that bringing down unemployment figures requires a focus on jobs but also on health and other (temporary) barriers. Those barriers are often clustered. The target groups' complexity is such that the support trajectory will increasingly need to be adapted to personal needs and take account of the range of barriers to activation, including for those who are already being reached and supported in a trajectory. These barriers are being diagnosed with increasing accuracy by consultants, partly on the basis of intake tools. To achieve lasting effects, all factors simultaneously have to be addressed. In the context of a two-tier system in Belgium as

in many other countries, the best way of making the policy 'watertight' is for the employment service and the local social service to work hand-in-hand from the moment of client intake onwards.

## References

- Bollens J. & Heylen V. (2010), *Determinanten van de inzetbaarheid en de mate waarin ze beleidsmatig beïnvloedbaar zijn. WSE Report*, Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie, Leuven.
- Brussig M. & Knuth M. (2009), 'Individuelle Beschäftigungsfähigkeit: Konzept, Operationalisierung und erste Ergebnisse', *WSI Mitteilungen*, 2009 (6): p. 287-294.
- Brussig M. & Knuth M. (2010), 'Rise up and Work! Workless People with Impaired Health under Germany's New Activation Regime', *Social Policy & Society* 9 (3): p. 311-323.
- Danziger S.K. & Seefeldt K.S. (2002), 'Barriers to Employment and the 'Hard to Serve': Implications for Services, Sanctions and Time Limits', *Social Policy & Society* 2 (2): p. 151-160.
- Dean H. (2003), 'Re-conceptualising Welfare-To-Work for People with Multiple Problems and Needs', *Journal of Social Policy* 32 (3): p. 441-459.
- De Witte, H. (1992), *Tussen optimisten en teruggetrokkenenen. Een empirisch onderzoek naar het psychosociaal profiel van langdurig werklozen en deelnemers aan de Weer-Werkactie in Vlaanderen*, HIVA-K.U.Leuven, Leuven.
- Engbersen, G. (1990), *Publieke bijstandsgeheimen. Het ontstaan van een onderklasse in Nederland*. Stenfert Kroese, Leiden/Antwerpen.
- Gelderblom A. & de Koning J. (2007), *Effecten van 'zachte' kenmerken op de re-integratie van de WWB, WW en AO populatie. Een literatuurstudie*, SEOR-Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Rotterdam.
- Heylen V. (2009), *Duration dependence in Flemish unemployment data. Research paper*, HIVA-K.U.Leuven, Leuven.
- Kerremans S. (2007), *De socio-economische positie van de Antwerpse bevolking, een verkennende analyse op gegevens van de Kruispuntbank Sociale Zekerheid, DSPA*, Antwerpen, 31 december 2004.
- Lindsay C. (2009), 'In a Lonely Place ? Social Networks, Job Seeking and the Experience of Long-Term Unemployment', *Social Policy & Society* 9 (1): 25-37.
- Minas R. (2009), *Activation in integrated services? Bridging social and employment services in European countries. Working paper*, Institute for Future Studies, Stockholm.
- OCMW Antwerpen, Lokaal Sociaal Beleidsplan 2008-2013.

- Perkins D. (2007), 'Improving Employment Participation for Welfare Recipients Facing Personal Barriers', *Social Policy & Society* 7 (1): p. 13-26.
- RWI (2009), *Diagnose bij re-integratie: analyse en aanbevelingen*, Raad voor Werk en Inkomen, Den Haag.
- Singley S.G. (2003), *Barriers to Employment among Long-term Beneficiaries: A review of recent international evidence. Working Paper*, Centre for Social Research and Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington
- Struyven L. (2006), *Hervormingen tussen drang en dwang. Marktwerking bij arbeidsbemiddeling*. Acco, Leuven.
- Struyven L. & Heylen V. (2010), 'Zachte kenmerken van werkzoekenden als drempel voor activering', *Over.Werk*, 20 (2): p. 90-95.
- Struyven L., Van Hemel L. (2009), 'The local integration of employment services: assessing network effectiveness of local jobcentres in Flanders', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* advance 27 (6): 1055-1071
- Van Den Bergh H. & Van Der Veer C.G. (1992), 'The Myth of 'Unemployable' People: an evaluation of a new employment service for the 'hard core' unemployed', *Journal of Social Policy* 21 (2): p. 177-210.
- Van Leuvensteijn M. & Koning P. (2000), 'On duration dependence and profiling for the unemployed', *CPB Report*, jrg. 4, p. 38-40.
- Van Parys L. & Struyven L. (2010), 'Een toenaderend activeringsbeleid voor moeilijk bereikbare jongeren. Wat we kunnen leren over het activeren van 'moeilijk bereikbare jongeren' uit de recente VDAB-experimenten', *Over.Werk*, 20 (2): p. 84-89.
- Waddell G., Burton K. & Main C. (2003), *Screening to identify people at risk of long term incapacity to work*. Royal Society of Medecine Press.
- Ziguras S. & Kleidon J. (2005), *Innovative community responses in overcoming barriers to employment. Prepared for the Department of Victorian Communities*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Fitzroy.