



Faces of Joblessness

Towards People-centred Employment Support*

The lives and circumstances of jobless people are rarely simple. They are often confronted with complex and inter-related employment barriers, such as skills deficiencies, health problems, financial disincentives or care responsibilities. Understanding these barriers is essential for designing policy interventions to overcome them, but systematic and good-quality information on the nature and extents of employment obstacles is currently missing. The Faces of Joblessness project aims to fill this gap and shed light on the web of individual barriers that stand in the way of stable employment and stronger labour markets. The main objective is to assist policymakers in tailoring and targeting activation and employment support in a people-centred manner, and to make existing programmes more cost-effective.

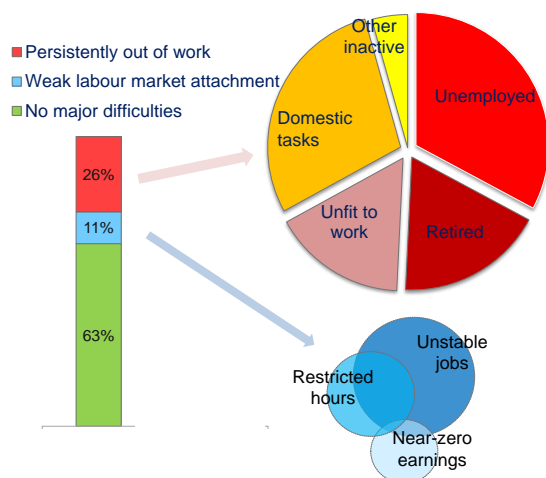
At a glance

- 1 Employment support policies seek to address specific employment barriers, but too little is known about the most pressing barriers that people face
- 2 A newly developed tool enables policymakers and practitioners to identify common combinations of employment obstacles in specific population groups
- 3 Results are used to assess whether the right policies are in place for each of the targeted groups, and which reforms should be pursued as priorities

Tailoring policies to address the most relevant employment barriers

Employment difficulties may result in joblessness, low-work intensity or unstable employment. Together, these groups represent the scope for future employment growth. However, not all of them may be equally “on the radar” of existing activation and employment-support policies.

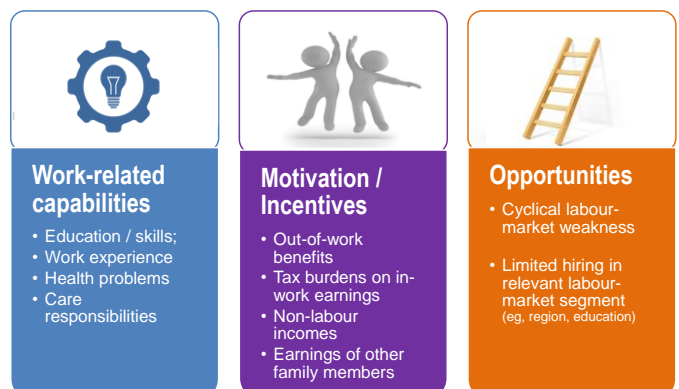
Untapped sources of employment growth



Joblessness, low work intensity and unstable employment. Average across selected participating countries: Australia, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain.

A range of barriers may hold these groups back from fully engaging in the labour market, such as limited work-related capabilities, poor incentives, or a lack of job opportunities. This project uses detailed individual and family-level data to provide concise statistical portraits of the circumstances of individuals with labour-market difficulties. It then identifies groups of people who may benefit from different sets of policy support, providing novel views on the nature and incidence of employment problems, and a rich basis for people-centred policy interventions.

A typology of employment barriers



* An initial phase of this project, covering six countries, was undertaken with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents are the sole responsibility of the OECD and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Anatomy of employment barriers (illustration)



Distances between groups and barriers reflect prevalence of the barrier for individuals in each group. Bubbles represent group sizes.

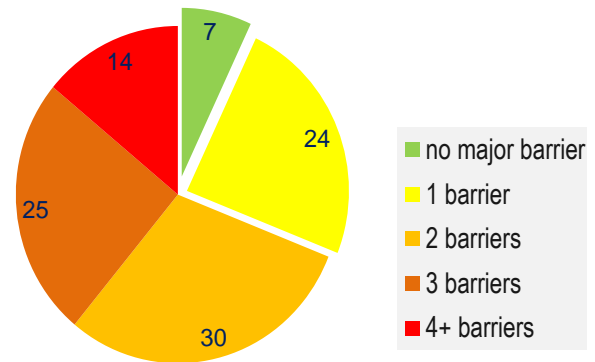
What can policymakers get out of the project?

- ❖ A **“bird’s eye view”** on individuals with labour-market difficulties, capturing the diversity of policy clients, and the resulting need to tailor policy responses across government institutions.
- ❖ A **concise map of policy challenges**, including how many people face which type of employment barrier, and in what combination (see illustration above).
- ❖ **In-depth profiles of different labour-market groups**, to help identify priority groups and optimise the use of scarce financial resources.
- ❖ Concrete information on the extent of **multiple barriers** (see Figure), informing and supporting efforts to **integrate support across institutions or levels of government**.
- ❖ A **policy inventory and gap analysis** examining the alignment between key labour-market obstacles and existing policy measures seeking to address them.

Data and statistical approach

- ❖ **Survey data** is used to identify individuals with labour-market difficulties and assess their employment barriers. Additional data from administrative sources may be used as relevant.
- ❖ Latent Class Analysis, a **powerful statistical method**, distinguishes clusters of individuals facing similar sets of employment barriers.
- ❖ The approach can be **tailored to the context of each country**, but relies on common concepts and definitions to aid **knowledge sharing and exchange** between participating countries.

Most face not one barrier, but many



Shares with different numbers of simultaneous barriers.
Source: [Faces of Jobless in Ireland](#).

How can countries participate in this activity?

Countries and policy institutions interested in participating in this activity are invited to contact the project coordinator (see below). Country studies can be undertaken by the **OECD independently, or jointly** with national experts and data providers.

The scope is flexible. It can map out the circumstances and barriers of all those facing labour market difficulties (as in existing studies on the [Faces-of-Joblessness website](#)). Alternatively, country studies can focus on **specific labour-market groups** of interest, such as a particular region, the long-term unemployed, those with health problems, youth, or migrants.

Analytical outputs can be adapted and extended to suit country needs and priorities, for instance through:

- ❖ Development of a **tool to enable the periodic monitoring** of the incidence and severity of employment barriers;
- ❖ Adaptations of the method for **profiling uses in ministries, employment offices or benefit administrations**, e.g. by drawing on available administrative data sources;
- ❖ Examining the **importance of different employment barriers as drivers of labour-market outcomes**.
- ❖ In-depth [policy reviews](#) to assess the alignment of existing labour-market integration measures for particular groups with the barriers that these groups face.

This project is **financed through voluntary contributions** to cover the costs involved. The terms can be discussed with the OECD Secretariat and will depend on the scope of the work to be carried out.

Further reading and related OECD analysis

www.oecd.org/social/faces-of-joblessness.htm

Policy Review Series [Connecting People with Good Jobs](#)

Immervoll and Scarpetta, 2012, [Activation and employment support policies in OECD countries](#)

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