

BARMIG Policy Brief

Since 2016 post-socialist EU member states have experienced an acute labour shortage, due especially to the outmigration of workers to Western EU labour markets. The resulting labour shortage has increasingly been compensated by the employment of migrant workers from neighbouring non-EU countries, especially Serbia and Ukraine. The Bargaining for Working Conditions and Social Rights of Migrant Workers in Central East European Countries (BARMIG) project assesses the role of established industrial relations institutions in addressing the effects of migration on changing labour markets. It also examines how trade unions and employer organisations in Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland respond to these changes.

In Hungary the main regulation of employment and labour market integration of migrant workers who are third-country nationals is protectionist, rigid and restrictive. This reinforces the precarious, temporary character of migrant worker presence in the labour market. Social partners must deal with an information deficit, and they have modest to low capacities for working with special groups of migrant workers and their integration in workplaces and on the wider labour market. Furthermore, they are not involved in designing economic policy or in developing regulation.

The available data suggests that the employment of third-country nationals is typically temporary in nature and uneven across time and space, primarily consisting of seasonal work, fixed-term contracts and work via intermediaries. In general, migrant workers' presence in the Hungarian economy is uneven. They are instrumentally "inserted" in certain labour intensive and lower-wage sectors, and present in greater numbers during seasonal peaks in business cycles. They work in jobs that typically do not require knowledge of the Hungarian language, in roles more hidden from the public gaze. Migrant workers' problems have stemmed from the absence of integration infrastructure (a lack of Hungarian language courses and no information) and their very high dependency on employers, intermediaries or both.

Employer organisations and trade unions have no staff specialised to deal specifically with migrant workers. What both parties have in common is an instrumental approach that acknowledges the increased and enduring presence of migrant workers in the Hungarian labour market; however, they have not developed specific strategies to deal with this presence. The employment and integration of migrant workers is not subject to collective bargaining.

Recommendations

- Revision of regulation on third-country nationals' employment is necessary to remedy the non-transparent and unfair policies that hamper fair competition and increase the risk of social dumping
- Social partners should be involved and consulted regularly on the regulation and monitoring of migrant workers' employment
- Economic policy and migration should be broadly discussed in Hungarian society among various social groups and should involve civil-society organisations, experts and social partners