

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS : UNEMPLOYMENT

The cumulative influence of the economic crisis together with demographic and social factors has inflated unemployment in Belgium between 1970 and 1980 to unheard-of proportions and it has given birth to veritable distressed areas. The object of this map is essentially to give a better appreciation of the spatial distribution of unemployment as well as its changes from the regional point of view.

The principal map at 1 : 500 000 represents the distribution by commune and by sex of those fully unemployed with unemployment benefit at 30th June 1980. For each commune three sets of information are given : absolute numbers of unemployed, the breakdown into male and female numbers and the proportion of unemployed to the total active population.

The absolute number of unemployed (males plus females) is represented by means of a circle whose area is proportional to the total of fully unemployed, as registered by the National Office of Employment at 30th June 1980. By unemployment one understands not only those in the group « normally » apt but also those with « partial » or « limited » aptitudes. The partly unemployed, those who have been provisionally deleted from the unemployed list, similarly those compulsorily listed but not paid have not been retained; these categories indeed are not available at the scale of the commune. The demand for work is therefore undoubtedly under-estimated by so limiting the concept of the « unemployment » to those persons receiving unemployment benefit because their work contract has finished or because they are favoured by the fact that they have not yet started work after completing their studies. The analysis of unemployment is best effected on the basis of the situation at the 30th June because at that date unemployment is least influenced by seasonal fluctuations or by chance circumstances (e.g. school-leavers not yet included), so that the figures give a better image of the unemployment at the level of the commune.

The proportion of males/females is shown by sectors of the circle, the percentage of women followed by that of men, reading clockwise from the vertical line of partition.

The relative place of the unemployed as a percentage of the active population is shown by means of colours on the main map. A clear picture is thus given of the rate of unemployment respectively for men and for women. The most significant relative value is calculated by taking the numbers of unemployed as a percentage of the active population resident in each commune. The active population in each commune of residence is, however, only known for the census year 1970. For this reason the rate can only be approximately calculated for 1980 on the basis of estimates made by the Ministry of Employment and Work. The unemployment rate of the active population is obtained by multiplying the reported number of unemployed in the resident population by the ratio of the estimated resident population to the active population, i.e. 1.84 for men and 3.40 for women (national mean figures).

The two inset maps give, at commune level, comparable information on unemployment at 30th June for 1970 and for 1980. The total number of unemployed (men and women) has been related, by commune, to the total resident population for the corresponding year. In 1980 there were 596 communes in Belgium compared with 2 379 in 1970. In order to permit comparisons between the two inset maps, the commune situation in 1970 has been reduced to that of 1980.

On the 30th June 1970 the number of fully paid unemployed stood only at 64 935 (38 708 men and 26 227 women). This corresponded to 0.67 % of the total population, or 1.8 % of the active population, or, again, to 3 % of those covered by unemployment insurance. In 1970 unemployment was not yet a real national problem. The unemployed were, for the most part, men. Besides, more than half of them were aged fifty or more. The highest figures for unemployment were to be found in several types of activity, such as agriculture, diamond-cutting, hotels and mining. Geographically, however, unemployment was particularly strongly concentrated in two existing problem regions : the Borinage and the Liège-Verviers area. The problem was due to the fact that these old industrial regions belonged to the Walloon industrial zone with its west-east alignment where the activities were essentially based on the production of coal, steel and textiles. Flanders did not number so to speak any regions of well marked unemployment despite the appearance of the first signs of structural weaknesses, notably in the Campine and in the Aalst (Alost) region.

At the 30th June 1980 there were 294 870 fully unemployed registered in Belgium (106 393 men and 184 477 women). This represented 2.99 % of the total population or 7.2 % of the active population, or, again, 11.8 % of the total number covered by unemployment insurance. Compared with 1970, unemployment in 1980 had become a very serious national problem to be even further accentuated thereafter. At the end of August 1981 there were 400 000 unemployed in Belgium. The branches of activity most affected are : clothing, shoes and leather, mining, construction; but in food and tobacco, paper and timber industries, figures for unemployment are equally very high. It can therefore be said that the entire secondary sector is in a crisis.

From the regional point of view the problem of unemployment is very much more complicated and complex in 1980 than in 1970. There is an enormous increase in unemployment involving considerable spatial shifting, and very accentuated modifications according to the affected group.

In 1980 the Walloon industrial zone was still characterised by marked unemployment levels compared with other regions. On the map, the region of Liège can be easily distinguished as well as the Borinage. But the area of marked unemployment now extends beyond the Borinage to the east and to the south, extending over the area called the Centre, to the Charleroi region, and farther south in the Hainaut (Thuin) and even into the province of Namur (Philippeville). Even the Flemish regions with little unemployment in 1970 are now hit severely. But nevertheless in 1980 the highest figures for unemployment are recorded, not in the above-mentioned regions, but in the North-East where the golden age of the Sixties had led to a considerable economic expansion marked by new industrial installations. The North-East extends far beyond the coalfield region of the Campine and includes the major part of the province of Limburg together with bordering regions of the provinces of Antwerp and of Brabant. There are other Flemish areas which are also very deeply affected by unemployment, such as the regions of the river Dender (important commuter area for Brussels) and of Kortrijk (Courtrai) with some tentacles on the other side of the language divide.

The increase in unemployment between 1970 and 1980, along with shifts in the spatial pattern, have fundamental causes which are to be found in the labour market.

In the first place, it may be noted that the distribution of unemployment is to a very large part determined by the female component in the work force. The unemployment rate amongst women (number of unemployed compared with those at work) reaches more than 12.7 %, compared with 4.5 % amongst men; in the North-East there are several communes where more than 30 % of the female work force is unemployed. With regard to numbers covered by unemployment insurance in Belgium as a whole, there are 21.0 % females without work compared with 6.6 % males. In the North-East of the country above all, the rate of employment amongst female workers increased considerably during the Seventies; this appeared as a new feature on the labour market far from the principal poles of growth which constitute, for example, Brussels and Antwerp.

In the second place, it is established that unemployment is particularly great amongst young people. In Belgium, at the 30th June 1980, 25 % of the male unemployed and 32 % of the females were less than 25 years of age. In the North-East of the country the birth rate had been markedly higher than elsewhere until the middle of the Sixties, leading to the appearance in 1980 of more young people on the job market. The catastrophic aspect of regions so strongly hit is due to the fact that the shrinkage of employment (the economic crisis presses hardest in the remote regions with industrial enterprises using much manual labour) at this time coincides precisely with an unprecedented upsurge of demand for work by young people (demographic evolution) and a great increase in the rate of work amongst females (sociological factor).

Finally it must be noted that in 1980 the greater part of the unemployed had received only primary education or incomplete secondary education. The importance of the group of unemployed graduates should not be ignored, but all in all one can suggest that in 1980 the rate of unemployment was inversely proportional to the level of education. On the other hand, in Belgium there are many foreign unqualified manual workers; this group is even more important than those unemployed Belgians who are not qualified. Indeed the presence of foreign workers has considerably aggravated the problems of unemployment.