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Increasingly polarised labour markets: the Dutch case

The composition of the labour market is showing a tendency towards two extremes: on the one hand there is an increase in low-skilled and unskilled jobs, on the other there is a decrease in medium-skilled jobs. This phenomenon is defined as "polarisation" of work and is observable and documentable in many OECD countries. It is a consequence both of globalisation and automation. However, there are differences between countries and even between regions within the same country. Raquel Ortega-Argilés, Professor of Regional Economic Development at the University of Birmingham, investigates how polarisation affects the various classes of workers. She has presented the results of a recent research on the Dutch labour market in the framework of the Festival of Economics in Trento.

The Dutch case is rather specific. In the Netherlands, polarisation is more evident in the male labour market at the national level but not at the regional level. For women, many of whom work part time and receive on average higher salaries, polarisation appears more in highly remunerated jobs. In specific regional labour markets, such as Groningen and Zeeland, polarisation is stronger among young people. In addition, the introduction of new technologies has effects that differ according to gender, and affects more men than women.

"Labour policies - this is the conclusion of Professor Ortega-Argilés - must be calibrated at the regional level. Interventions on mobility, apprenticeship and training can compensate for the decline in wages that is being recorded in medium-skilled jobs".

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