



## **A red solution for everyone:**

### **H.Essers helps people find their way to the job market**

His Majesty King Philippe of Belgium will visit H.Essers on 6 October. With his visit to the company, the King expects to gain a better understanding of how the activity in our country's labour market can be increased and how vacancies can be filled more quickly. In the same context, he will visit Denmark at the end of October to find out how the country manages to employ such a high percentage of the active population.

#### **The Belgian labour market today**

There are a record number of job openings in Belgium at the moment. The same trend can be seen at H.Essers, where a staggering 350 open vacancies have led to a truly exceptional situation. More than ever, H.Essers is unable to find people for certain jobs, especially when it comes to shortage occupations such as warehouse operators, drivers, planners, technicians, logistics staff and IT staff. The war for talent is raging and the labour market seems to be saturated. As a result, unemployment figures in Belgium are at an all-time low: 4% in Flanders, 11.8% in Brussels and 8.5% in Wallonia. At the same time, the activity rate is also low: 72.4% in Flanders, 64.3% in Brussels and 65.3% in Wallonia. This means that many people do not find their way to the labour market.

This situation definitely applies to the Genk region (60.71%) and to the low-skilled population (40.7% in Flanders, 40.3% in Brussels and 34.1% in Wallonia), where we see an even lower activity rate. Now, this is exactly the region and the population group H.Essers wants to address, although they are usually hard to reach by traditional recruitment initiatives. That is why H.Essers is trying to find creative alternatives to actively approach this group and offer them opportunities.

There are various reasons why this target group finds it harder to enter the job market: lack of education, long-term unemployment, foreign language or difficult integration. These are all barriers that H.Essers wants to remove. With 'A red solution for everyone', they are helping to raise the level of job activity in Belgium.

Gert Bervoets, H.Essers CEO: "We want to give everyone the chance to work. That is why we do more than just write job ads. With targeted initiatives, we want to reach target groups that have difficulty finding their way (back) to the job market. We help them to grow in a job that suits them."

#### **Activation by opportunity**

##### **Stimulating lifelong learning and self-development**

H.Essers invests in the training and development of people. Through a personal talent growth trajectory, employees are prepared for the next step in their career. With the H.Essers Academy, the company has its own in-house training centre. Employees can attend training courses there, for example to obtain a driving licence or forklift truck certificate, or they can take language classes and receive specialist

training. In addition, they are collaborating with educational institutions to give pupils and students the opportunity to gain practical experience during postgraduate courses, internships, dual learning programmes, etc. But even people aged 55 and over are given every opportunity to use their experience and develop their talents.

### **Promoting reintegration**

H.Essers helps people who have been incapacitated for work for a long time to get back to the labour market at their own pace. With less stressful work, with a gradual reintegration, in a different or modified work environment, with ergonomic tools, etc. Via the Fit2Grow health programme, the company focuses on the prevention of mental and physical problems.

### **Even without logistical experience**

People without work experience in the logistics sector are just as welcome to join the H.Essers team. The company makes them job-ready by investing in training through the H.Essers Academy, internal buddy programmes and job coaching on the shop floor, but also through external logistics training courses. Drivers can obtain their CE driver's license through the so-called IBO tracks, in collaboration with VDAB. There is close cooperation with outplacement companies to help the unemployed or employees of a company undergoing restructuring to take a new direction and find a new job.

H.Essers also aims to reach talent in other sectors, such as retail, hospitality and domestic help. In this way, they appeal to people who work in shifts or in a sector with fewer prospects. This certainly applies to women. Currently, less than 20% of the employees are female, a figure that they would like to increase in the coming years.

### **Assisting non-native speakers**

Many job candidates who do not speak Dutch have difficulty finding a suitable job on the Belgian labour market. H.Essers offers them the necessary guidance and training to overcome this language barrier. For example, the company invests in language training and guidance on the shop floor.

### **Ensuring inclusion**

Together with local governments and administrations, H.Essers attracts people from underprivileged groups or people who have been inactive for a long time and need to be reintegrated.

Inclusion also means looking out for people and giving opportunities to those who are unable to use their talents elsewhere. By collaborating with social enterprises, H.Essers can still offer this target group the opportunity to develop and contribute to our society.

### **Promoting migration**

In order to fill vacancies, H.Essers is also looking across national borders. Both inside and outside the EU, we are looking for warehouse operators and drivers. Via external partners, the company provides accommodation and appropriate guidance.

Mike Dautzenberg, HR Director: "We want to give people who have difficulty entering the job market every opportunity for professional development. At H.Essers, we make sure we provide sustainable and enjoyable work. Because activating people is all about creating opportunities. Giving them meaningful work. We want to do this every day as one of Belgium's main employers."

### **The higher Danish activity rate as an example**

H.Essers has been active in Denmark for thirteen years, with warehouses in Allerød and Taastrup. Steven Swennen, Business Unit Manager Nordics: "Our focus in Denmark is on warehousing. We currently employ around fifty people there and are still looking for new recruits. Although the level of activity is higher than in Belgium, the unemployment rate is very low and it remains difficult to find candidates."

At 3.6%, unemployment in Denmark is lower than Belgium's 6.2%. At the same time, the activity rate in Denmark is 79.2%, which is 10% higher than the Belgian average.

There are a number of (possible) explanations for this higher activity rate in Denmark.

#### **Age**

Whereas the share of active population in the age category 25-54 is about the same, it is striking that Denmark counts many more active people in the youngest and 55+ segment than Belgium. This is because Danish students more often work as students and are therefore registered as active workers. In addition, fewer Danes take early retirement.

#### **Work culture**

The Danish work culture is characterised by a good work-life balance: working days are shorter, parents enjoy greater flexibility and, at the same time, the Danes are very productive. In addition, there is a focus on independence and self-reliance from an early age, which means that young people combine work and study very early on. Employees want to have their say and feel strongly involved, thanks in part to the flat hierarchy. There is a culture of trust, which means, for example, that sick notes are not required for short-term absence. All this means that Danes generally feel better about their jobs and are more positive about working.

#### **Lower unemployment rate**

Denmark has a number of measures to curb unemployment. There is the model of *flexicurity*, which provides very good support for the unemployed and strongly encourages them to go back to work. Unemployment benefits are accompanied by strict conditions to help them find a new job quickly. To this end, the unemployed can count on personal guidance through local job centres that offer many opportunities for free training and retraining. Finally, the relations between employers, trade unions and authorities are extremely good and they work together intensively and constructively for the benefit of society.

Gert Bervoets: "The Danish model is certainly an inspiration for Belgium. In the meantime, H.Essers and its partners are already taking initiatives to get more Belgians to work and thus support the increase in the level of activity in our country as well."

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