

## 1.3 National youth strategy

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## Existence of a National Youth Strategy

The key instrument of the Flemish Government in the implementation of its youth policy is [the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#), which operates on a four-year cycle. It presents, for each policy period and within an overall vision on youth and the youth and children's rights policy, the priority objectives of the Flemish Government and defines the performance indicators. The Flemish Government has to present the plan to the Flemish Parliament no later than one year after the start of the Governments' term of office. What is new is that the Flemish children's rights policy has been integrated entirely for the present policy period (2015-2019).

The new Flemish Youth and Children's rights policy is been approved on May 18th 2018 by the Flemish Government. The Decree containing a renewed youth and children's rights policy of 20 January 2012 stipulates that, no later than one year after the beginning of each legislature, the Flemish government must submit a Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan to the Flemish Parliament. It establishes the youth and children's rights policy of the Flemish Government for the next policy period (2014-2019)

## Scope and contents

**Main elements and objectives** The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan describes the way in which the Flemish Government implements the following policy objectives within its competences:

1. to create and guarantee equal opportunities for all children and young people
2. to create and guarantee broad development opportunities for children and young people
3. to create space for children and young people

4. to increase the formal and informal participation of children and young people in society.

In the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan the Flemish Government also describes how it puts into practice the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The current Youth Policy Plan is valid for the period 2015-2019 and includes 12 strategic goals and 34 operational goals. The encompassing themes are (1) poverty; (2) sustainability; (3) being young; (4) mobility; (5) education 1; (6) education 2; (7) participation; (8) space; (9) well-being; (10) housing; (11) employment; (12) cultural education. **Specific intentions** Although some specific intentions are mentioned with regard to young people in poverty, young people of immigrant origin, young people in special youth care and other disadvantaged groups, the overall focus is on equalising the opportunities of *all youngsters* in Flanders.

### **Consultation of young people**

The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan tries to serve as an example of participatory policy with great involvement from children, young people, their organisations and experts.

The process for drawing up the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019 completed several participatory stages. In the spring of 2013, an extensive [environmental analysis](#) and the Great Priorities Debate, took place. The environmental analysis provide an overview of trends, figures, research and the voice of children, youngsters and experts. The analysis was grounded in the social and economic action programme 'Flanders in Action' (Vlaanderen in Actie, ViA) and international frameworks on youth. In a second stage, working groups composed of young people, youth workers, children's rights actors, civil society, civil servants and researchers worked together intensively for several months around nine selected themes to arrive at strategic and operational objectives on the basis of priority policy challenges. The Great Priorities Debate, several working groups and feedback through an online survey provided the seedbed for a framework of objectives around 12 priority topics.

## **Responsible authority for the implementation of the Youth Strategy**

### **National public authorities**

**FLEMISH GOVERNMENT** The Flemish Government is responsible for implementing the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy plan. Some of its most important tasks regarding youth work and youth policy are:

1. the preparation, execution and evaluation of policy, and following legislation
2. and the regulation and financing of youth work.

The government develops youth policy documents which present the overall vision for youth

and children's rights policy. An essential characteristic of Flemish youth policy is the implementation through explicit measures such as acts or decrees. These decrees define the instruments of youth and children's rights policy and the funding of local and provincial authorities and youth organisations.

For the policy period 2015 through 2019 it is the first fully integrated youth and children's rights policy plan. After two years (in 2017), interim reports with regard to the implementation of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan are issued. This allows for midterm adjustments to be made. The [interim report 2015-2016](#) is yet available. At the end of the Government's term of office (before the elections in 2019) a final report will be drawn up.

**MINISTER IN CHARGE OF YOUTH** The Flemish Government consists of 9 ministers, who are in office for a 5-year term. Minister Sven Gatz (liberal party) is currently the Flemish Minister for Culture, Media, Youth and Brussels (from 2014 until 2019). Since 2004, the Flemish Government has allocated the 'coordination of the children's rights policy' and responsibility for 'youth' to the same minister.

**DEPARTMENT CULTURE, YOUTH AND MEDIA** Until January 2018, the 'Division Youth' – embedded in the department of culture, youth and media – ensured the administrative follow-up of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights. Furthermore, the division implemented youth policy as a socio-cultural matter. It stimulated and supported a rich and varied offer of non-commercial socio-cultural activities for young people, mainly through subsidising organisations and local authorities. In short, the Division Youth had five main tasks:

1. Preparation, follow-up, evaluation and implementation of legislation (e.g. the Flemish Youth Policy Plan)
2. Funding support structures, youth organisations, youth projects, youth hostels and accommodation centers, as well as municipal and provincial youth (work) policy
3. Providing material support for youth work: e.g. the lending service for camping equipment for youth associations
4. Providing information on youth (work) policy (e.g. via website and e-zine)
5. Representing Flanders at international forum

In 2018, the department Culture, Youth and Media was totally restructured to respond optimally to the needs of its stakeholders and target groups. Therefore, more knowledge development was needed on the one hand and a more integrated approach to policy preparation and implementation on the other hand. Today, the department counts three divisions (each containing different teams) and two clusters.

- The division 'Knowledge and policy' is responsible for developing knowledge and expertise to support policy and practice. A lot of attention thereby goes to cross-sectional and international links.
  - The team 'Knowledge development' is responsible for scientific research, data processing and – analysis, legal services and the archive.
  - The team 'Transversal and international' is responsible for the integrated coordination of the culture-, youth- and media policy with specific attention for transversal and international aspects, amongst others the youth and children's rights policy.
- The division 'Maintaining and managing' is responsible for protecting, maintaining and managing cultural goods, infrastructure and institutions and for preparing, implementing, following up and evaluating the media-, game- and film policy.
  - The team 'Cultural goods' is responsible for the policy concerning the protection of cultural goods, locking intangible cultural heritage, managing the Collection Flemish Community, coordination of European Year Cultural heritage and heritage consultancy.
  - The team 'Infrastructure and institutions' is responsible for the policy concerning large and own cultural and youth institutions (following up contractual agreements), policy and management of infrastructure, policy concerning art in the public space and guiding external services.
  - The team 'Media and film' is responsible for the policy concerning media (frequency plans radios, written press and regional broadcasters, following up the VRT, Media knowledge centre,) game policy, policy concerning film (coproduction-agreements, film classification, ...), Tax Shelter film and performing arts.
- The division 'Subsidising and recognising' is responsible for recognising, subsidising, advising and evaluating the actors of the diverse decrees within the Flemish policy. The division has four teams. Three teams monitor the policymaking process sector by sector and one team is concerned with implementing the integral file management.
  - The team 'Social-cultural work and youth work' is responsible for the policy for social-cultural work for adults, amateur arts, circus decree, the Flemish sign language and the youth work policy.

- The team 'Arts and cultural heritage' is responsible for the Arts decree, the Cultural heritage decree, the Flemish Audiovisual fund and the Flemish fund for Letters.
- The team 'Transversal and (supra)local' is responsible for future supralocal decrees Youth- and cultural work, the transition regulation 2018-2019, the Participation decree, the youth residential centres, the former DAC-project, the National lottery, the local cultural policy, the local youth policy, partner projects, GESCO, the lending right, the supralocal libraries policy, youth work for all.
- The Team 'Files management' is responsible for the support service in the context of files management for subsidies and recognitions.

Next to these three divisions there is the cluster communication and intern organisation (responsible for personnel policy and IT support).

### **Other national public bodies directly involved in youth policies**

OTHER MINISTRIES All the departments and the internal and external independent agencies of the Flemish Authority who were designated for this purpose by the Flemish Government have to appoint an official as the point of contact with regards to policy on the rights of youth and children. The role of these points of contact for the said policy is as follows:

1. To contribute to the creation of future Flemish youth policy plans
2. To provide monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Flemish Youth Policy Plan
3. To estimate the impact on children and young people and their rights of the policy prepared or implemented by their department or agency

### **OFFICES**

A Parliament Commission in charge of youth issues – The Commission for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media – is in the area of youth responsible for:

1. Youth policy and film classification
2. Continuous education and cultural development
3. Leisure activities, with the exception of tourism
4. Coordination of children's rights policy

**Local public authorities with competences in the youth field** 5 provinces and 308 local authorities fall within the administrative supervision of the Flemish Region. Since the Flemish Parliament Act on local and provincial youth (work) policy came into force in 1993, steps were

taken towards a decentralized and complementary youth policy. Most local authorities nowadays have youth services or at least one officer who is responsible for youth matters.

## Revisions/updates

**Integration of youth policy and children's rights policy** The most notable change is the integration of both the youth policy and the children's rights policy in an all-encompassing and long-term municipal policy plan for the entire legislation. The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (for the policy period 2015 through 2019) outlines in one single plan all the concerns regarding children and young people and their rights which the Flemish Ministers will pay heed to in their policies in the coming years. This means that a separate Flemish Children's Rights Action Plan is no longer drawn up. **Environmental analysis**

In preparation for the Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan, an environmental analysis is drawn up each time. This document is a non-exhaustive compilation of recent figures and research on children and young people in Flanders. It contains administrative data, but also survey data and results of qualitative research that has been carried out in Flanders in recent years.

On Friday 26 April 2019, approximately 150 young people, youth workers, children's rights actors, middle-level actors, researchers, local and Flemish civil servants and policy makers came to the Big Priority Debate in the Herman Teirlinck building in Brussels. They debated the major challenges facing children and young people and ranked them among the thirteen targets for the new Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan 2020-2024. After a day of listening to motivating stories, exchanging arguments for or against the different goals, thinking about doom scenarios, speed dating and lobbying, the following five goals were considered to be the most important ones:

1. Reducing the poverty of children and young people
2. Strengthening mental wellbeing and positive identity development
3. Working towards sustainable and safe neighbourhoods
4. Giving children and young people a voice in the future of the planet
5. Ensuring that children and young people can make an active contribution to society