

1.4 Youth policy decision-making

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Structure of Decision-making

National level Unlike the French Community and the Walloon Region (which are separate administrative levels), Flemish politicians decided in 1980 to merge the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region. As a result, Flanders has one Flemish Parliament and one Flemish Government with competence over Community matters as well as over Regional matters. The Flemish authorities consist of:

- **THE FLEMISH PARLIAMENT** The parliament is directly elected by the Flemish population by way of five-yearly elections. The parliament has 124 members.
- **THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT** The government consists of nine ministers who are in office for a 5-year term. Sven Gatz (liberal party) is currently the Flemish Minister for Culture, Media, Youth and Brussels. Since 2004, the Flemish Government has allocated the 'coordination of the children's rights policy' and responsibility for 'youth' to the same minister. Jan Jambon (The New Flemish Alliance), Minister-president of Flanders, is also minister of the policy domain Culture (From 2019-2024).
- **THE FLEMISH ADMINISTRATION** The administration is subdivided into [11 policy areas](#). Each policy area is composed of a department and several agencies. One of these policy areas is 'Culture, Youth, Sports and Media'. Since the first of April 2015, a department of Culture, Youth and Media is established with different divisions. In all other departments and in the internal and external independent agencies, an official is appointed as the point of contact with regards to policy on the rights of youth and children. The network of these points of contact as well as the preparation of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights are coordinated by the administration.

Local level 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. Since 2016, the municipalities are no longer granted funding that is specifically meant for youth policy. The funds are integrated in one overarching dotation to local governments (Community fund/Gemeentefonds). The aim was to increase the integration of policy making

across different sectors. It also strengthened the autonomous authority of the municipalities concerning youth policy.

Main Themes

What informs the choice of themes During the Great Priorities Debate, several working groups and feedback through an online survey provided the seedbed for a framework of objectives around different priority topics: (1) Poverty, (2) Sustainability, (3) Being young, (4) Mobility, (5) Education, (6) Participation, (7) Space, (8) Well-being, (9) Housing, (10) Employment, (11) Cultural education. After that, the competent ministers were asked to submit their action plans. Finally, the administrations developed projects, processes and indicators. This whole set of objectives, indicators, projects and processes constitutes the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019. **Specific target groups** The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan mentions that extra efforts need to be made in order to guarantee an equal realization of the rights of all youngsters. Therefore, special attention has been asked for children and young people with disabilities, with a background of migration, living in poverty... This has also been stipulated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The National Agency for Youth

A department of Culture, Youth and Media was established on the first of April 2015. This department had several divisions within its remit, including the Division Policy and Knowledge, team transversal and international. The Division Youth 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 the website and an e-zine)
5. Representing Flanders at international forums

On the 21th of December 2017, the Flemish parliament approved the budget allocation of 2018. It also contains the budget for 'youth'.

The budget allocation in 2016 was approximately 62,8 per cent of the previous fiscal year. This decline wasn't due to a decrease of appropriations. The most notable change was the shift of budget allocation from the Act on local and provincial youth (work) policy to the municipalities Fund (Community fund/Gemeentefonds). Since 2016, the budget is directly allocated to the municipalities and they have the autonomous authority concerning youth policy (see also 1.7 Funding Youth policy). From 2018 onwards the budget allocation for youth augmented again. In 2017 the total amount was 42.462.000 euros; in 2018 it rose to 50.209.000 euros, in 2019 the budget for youth was 69.550.000 euro.

As mentioned, the department Culture, Youth and Media was totally restructured in 2018 to respond optimally to the needs of its stakeholders and target groups. The underlying idea was that more knowledge development and a stronger, integrated policy (encompassing the sectors Culture, Youth and Media) was needed. As a result of this restructuring, the existing divisions, including the division 'Youth' disappeared. All these divisions were brought together under one encompassing structure for the whole department. Three new divisions were thereby created: the division 'Knowledge and policy', the division 'Maintaining and managing' and the division 'Subsidising and recognising'. The division 'Knowledge and policy' is responsible for developing knowledge and expertise to support (youth-)policy and practice, the division 'Maintaining and managing' is amongst others responsible for the policy concerning youth institutions and infrastructure and the division 'Subsidising and recognising' is responsible for recognising, subsidising and evaluating amongst others support structures, youth organisations and youth projects.

Policy monitoring and evaluation

Youth specific monitoring

The youth monitor (carried out by Jeugdonderzoeksplatform or JOP)

The [Youth Research Platform \(JOP\)](#) was founded in 2003 by the Flemish government in response to the identification of several problems and shortcomings in the state of Flemish youth research. Since 2005 the JOP gathers empirical data on the social life of contemporary Flemish youth on a recurrent basis. Therefore, the Youth Monitor, a standardized questionnaire, has been developed, which monitors the life-conditions and activities of young people. The content of the survey is based on other research instruments and explicitly aims to document several topics relevant to Flemish youth. The first Youth Monitor was conducted in 2005-2006, on a sample of 2503 Flemish 14- to 25- year old respondents. Since the administration of the first monitor in 2005, three new versions of the Youth Monitor have been administered, each also in a random sample of Flemish youth. In 2008 and in 2013 respectively 3710 and 3729 Flemish young people between the ages of 12 and 30 filled out a questionnaire. In 2018, a first Child Monitor was undertaken on a sample of 1226 Flemish children between 10 and 13 years old. Besides, a Youth Monitor was undertaken on a sample of 1411 Flemish young people between 14 and 25 years old. The child and youth surveys cover topics such as general well-

being, school well-being, employment, school achievement, poverty, tolerance towards people from non-Belgian origin, and LGB people ... and relates them to different background indicators (gender, age, educational level, ...).

Next to these general surveys, 3 JOP city-monitors have been administered in the metropolitan cities Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. These studies aim to bring more insight into the specificity of growing up and living in contemporary urban environments in Flanders. These studies offer a more comprehensive and more nuanced insights in the living conditions, attitudes and behaviour of young people growing up in Flemish cities. Special attention is paid to the social vulnerable groups.

Based on these studies, the JOP has published several books on the living conditions, attitudes and behaviour of young people growing up in Flanders and in Flemish cities. Also it published two books with a specific focus, one on gender differences and one on diversity. At the moment, the JOP is working on several new publications, amongst others, two new theme books, one on pressure on young people and one on education.

All information on publications of the Youth Research Platform can be found on:

<http://www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/nl/publicaties>

Children's right monitor

A year before the end of the legislature, a report is prepared which incorporates all available material on children's rights. This [report](#) aims at deepening and consistency and to assist in the environmental analysis of the next policy period, the reporting of the youth and children's rights policy and reporting to the UN Committee.

In the monitor data is used of among other the youth monitors, EU-SILC, health survey, and different administrative data (e.g. of the Department of Education, the Department of well-being, ...). The monitor portrays the living conditions of children, as well as the context, processes and structures that have an impact on them. It provides materials to develop new or modify existing policies.

In depth studies

The Department of Culture, Youth, Media and Sport also commissions in depth studies on specific topics that are less measurable or specific target groups that remain invisible in surveys or registrations. Some examples of these studies are:

- De Pauw, P., Vermeersch, H., Cox. N., Verhaeghe, M. & Stevens, P. (2013). *Jeugdwerk met maatschappelijk kwetsbare kinderen en jongeren. Een onderzoek bij werkingen, begeleiding en deelnemende jongeren. (Youth work with disadvantaged children and young people. A study on youth work, its youth workers and the young people involved).*

Brussels: Departement Cultuur, Jeugd, Media en Sport ([report – only in Dutch](#))

- Schraepen, B., Maelstaf, H., Dehertogh, B., Halsberghe, M. & Van de Mosselaer, K. (2016) *Vrije tijd van jongeren in residentiële voorzieningen: persoonlijke ruimte of hulpverleningsruimte? Een onderzoek naar de vrijetijdsbesteding van kinderen en jongeren in de residentiële hulpverlening en de rol die het jeugdwerk daarin speelt. (Leisure of youth in residential facilities: personal space or assistance room? An investigation into the leisure activities of children and young people in residential care and the role of youth work therein)*. Brussels: Departement Cultuur, Jeugd, Media en Sport. ([report – only in Dutch](#))
- Schraepen, B., Maelstaf, H. & Halsberghe, M. (2016). *Vrije tijd als handicapsituatie. De rol van het jeugdwerk binnen de vrijetijdsbesteding van kinderen en jongeren met een handicap. Leisure as a handicap situation. The role of youth work in the leisure activities of children and young people with disabilities*. Brussels: Departement Cultuur, Jeugd, Media en Sport ([report – only in Dutch](#))