

2.3 National strategy on youth volunteering

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Existence of a National Strategy

There is no stand-alone national strategy on youth volunteering. However, in the Flemish Community, volunteering has been mentioned in different policy plans set up by the Flemish Government. For example, in the most recent Policy Paper on Youth (Beleidsnota Jeugd 2014-2019), the Ministry commits itself to maximally support volunteers in the context of youth work.

There is a general law on volunteering at the Federal level: the Act on the rights of volunteers, which entered into force in August 2006.

The Act on the rights of volunteers (2005) is a wide ranging law which applies to volunteering throughout Belgium and to volunteering activities abroad that are organized from Belgium.

- It provides a precise legal framework and ensures formal recognition of the status of volunteers;
- It protects individuals from certain abuses, promotes volunteering and gives newly defined responsibilities to volunteering organisations.

More specifically, the law on volunteering regulates the following aspects of voluntary work:

- the legal definition of volunteering
- issues of liability and insurance
- the relation between the law on volunteering and other legal areas
- the reimbursement of expenses
- the access to voluntary work

However, the law of 2005 on the rights of volunteers is revised as asked by the Minister of

social affairs. After all, the law of 2005 led to some interpretation- and other problems for volunteers and/or voluntary organisations. The cabinet therefore approved a new law on volunteering at 20 July 2018. This new law aims to better protect both volunteers and organisations that unite volunteers and tries to give them a clearer statute. The renewed law:

- Mentions that voluntary managers of non-profit associations fall under the scope of the law on volunteering.
- Clarifies the professional secrecy of volunteers.
- No longer refers to 'a reimbursement' but 'a cost reimbursement'.
- Stipulates that volunteers get a cost reimbursement for the use of their own car or bike. This cost reimbursement is similar to the cost reimbursement received by civil servants.
- No longer limits the allowances for expenses or mileage.
- Explicates that occasional gifts received by volunteers cannot be used to determine the maximum amount of allowances for expenses.
- Gives the High Council of Volunteers a more prominent role.

The board still has to give its final approval before the renewed law can come into work.

References:

<https://www.defederatie.org/vrijwilligers/de-vrijwilligerswet-van-2005-in-een-nieuw-kleedje>

Scope and contents

The Policy Paper on Youth (2014-2019) as well as the [Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#) (2015-2019) mention an engagement to support volunteering in youth work, mainly through:

- relieving the administrative burden for volunteers and voluntary organisations by trying to cut back on the regulations that prevent young people to take initiative
- strengthening the competences of youth volunteers, for example through training initiatives. A specific attention should be paid to an appropriate training of volunteers working with special target groups
- promoting international youth exchanges and stimulating youth workers to subscribe to the actions of the European Youth in action-programme by the organisation Jint.

Responsible authority

Flemish authorities campaign for the promotion of volunteer work in Flanders in collaboration with the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk (Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work) and the Provinciale Steunpunten (Provincial Support Centres).

Revisions/ Updates

18 November 2016, the Flemish Government approved a coordinated policy on volunteering across different policy domains, including youth.

The Flemish Minister of Youth pays attention to (1) the status of volunteers and the legislation for volunteers, (2) the fragmentation of information about and for volunteers and (3) the over-regulation. For youth in particular, the administrative simplification and the problems with volunteer work abroad are important in the coordinated policy plan on volunteer work.