



Youth Wiki national description

Youth policies in Belgium (Flemish Community)

2021

The Youth Wiki is Europe's online encyclopaedia in the area of national youth policies. The platform is a comprehensive database of national structures, policies and actions supporting young people. For the updated version of this national description, please visit <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>

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Belgium (Flemish Community)

OVERVIEW

Youth Policy in Belgium (Flemish Community)

Belgium: a federal state

Belgium is a federal state, consisting of three communities and three regions.

Communities:

- the Flemish Community,
- the French Community
- and the German-Speaking Community

Regions:

- the Flemish Region,
- the Walloon Region

and the Brussels Capital Region

There is no hierarchy between the federal, the community and regional levels. This division into communities and regions is an unique characteristic of Belgian federalism. Both entities have their own exclusive competences (source: [Youth policy in the three communities of Belgium](#)).

Belgium: three ministers for Youth

There is no youth policy at the federal level. The federal 'Belgian' level only has limited competence in youth matters, such as some aspects of judicial youth protection.

On Community level, the most explicit youth policy instruments can be found. The three Communities are competent for youth and youth policy. Each Community have a minister responsible for Youth, a parliamentary commission and a number of administrative departments with youth in their title and a large number of specific youth-related budget items.

The current Flemish Minister for youth is Benjamin Dalle (term: 2019-2024).

The Flemish Community

The tasks of the Flemish public administration are organised on the basis of 13 policy areas. Each policy area is supported by a civil service department and a number of autonomous agencies. The departments support and advice the Government on policy-making, whereas the agencies apply the policy through services to citizens, companies and organisations.

A Flemish ministry was created for each of these policy areas. One of them is the Flemish Ministry for Culture, Youth and Media, which has a department and several agencies. The Division Youth – embedded in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Media- ensures the administrative follow-up of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights. The Division Youth implements youth policy as a socio-cultural matter.

Principles of Flemish Youth policy

Youth policy and related government measures are based on a **planned, comprehensive and integrated vision** of youth. The various elements in this definition are significant. Youth policy refers to an interrelated body of elements set in a time perspective. It covers

elements from every sphere of life deemed important for young people, in a coherent way. Youth policy is embedded in a model of society which expresses the desirable situation for young people (as individuals and in terms of their group development), how they are expected to grow up and develop and the place they have in society.

Youth policy is implemented through explicit measures: the specific actions undertaken by the government focusing on a particular category of the population: 'youth'. For the Flemish Community, this means approximately the age group between 0 and 30 years old, although different definitions are used in specific contexts.

Youth policy is based on the assumption that it is possible to implement a **group policy**. This is not self-evident, because the Flemish government applies a sectorial approach in most other domains.

A group policy is a different way of implementing policy: instead of focusing on one sector, the starting point is young people's lives across the board, their needs and requirements. That is why youth policy permeates almost every other policy sector.

A group-oriented implementation of policy creates a number of policy crossroads, where it encounters sectorial policies. Youth policy is based on an interactive, participatory style of government and a comprehensive or inclusive approach to policy. This makes youth policy a special and supplementary policy. It provides many opportunities for a more democratic and improved governance of policy implementation (source: [Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Flanders \(Belgium\)](#)).

1. YOUTH POLICY GOVERNANCE

Youth Policy Governance

Special feature

On Community level, the most explicit youth policy instruments can be found. The three Communities are competent for youth and youth policy. Each Community has a minister responsible for Youth, a parliamentary commission and a number of administrative departments with youth in their title and a large number of specific youth-related budget items.

Highlights

For the policy period 2015 through 2019 it is the first fully integrated youth and children's rights policy plan. What is new is that this plan includes both the youth policy and the children's rights policy. The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 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.

1.1 Target population of youth policy

The Flemish Community formally defines 'youth' as the group of children and young people up to and including the age of 30. This is a more gallic-inspired approach (including Belgium and the number of southern countries) in which young people are brought within wider age limits. For that reason, youth is the collective name of, among other things, children and teenagers. This has also been explicated in the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights.

At the same time, youth policy in Flanders covers several policy areas, which may be concerned with a specific part of this group, see for example:

- Decree concerning the organization of child care for babies and toddlers: focused on children who are not yet attending kindergarten.

- Decree on Integrated Youth Care: focused on minors (youngsters under the age of 18)
- Decree concerning the system of learning and working: focused on youngsters between the ages of 15 and 25

1.2 National youth law

Existence of a National Youth Law

The federal 'Belgian' level of government has limited competence in youth matters (e.g. some aspects of judicial youth protection), but there is no youth policy at the Belgian level. Person-related matters, such as education, health care, culture and youth are entitled to the Communities. Therefore, the most explicit youth policy and youth policy instruments can be found at this level. In the Flemish community, on 1 January 2013, the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy entered into force and replaced the initial decree of 18 July 2008 (see revisions/updates).

Scope and contents

Youth Policy is based on the assumption that it is possible to implement a group policy. This is not self-evident, because the government applies a sectorial approach in most other domains. A group policy is a different way of implementing policy: instead of focusing on one sector, the starting point is young people's lives across the board, their needs and requirements. That is why youth policy permeates almost every other sector. Thus, youth policy can be seen as a broad, cross-sectoral approach to young people - partly young, partly all young people - including children. The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 defines the policy for youth and children's rights as follows: *'the comprehensive and integrated vision and a government's resulting systemic and plan-based measures which aim to have a perceptible effect on youth, with a special focus on children's rights, as moral and legal framework'*. The act serves two major purposes:

1. It describes the basic instruments to implement youth policy. More specifically, five key instruments are mentioned:
 - Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan
 - Impact assessment of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER)
 - Contact points for the policy on youth and children's rights in all departments and agencies of the Flemish Authorities and increased coordination
 - A coordinating administration
 - A 'Youth Progress Report' to monitor the situation of youth

Furthermore, the act also defines that the Flemish Government provides for the establishment of a Youth Council. Every month, twenty-four individual youngsters and representative of youth organisations gather for the General Assembly. During this meeting, they discuss policy developments relevant to youth and approve advices. With regard to its advisory task, the Flemish Youth Council can give advice at its own discretion or at the request of the Government of Flanders or the Flemish Parliament. As stipulated by law, the Government of Flanders shall request advice when making legislation implementing the Flemish Youth Policy Plan. The Flemish Youth Council shall approve its advices at the General Assembly with a two-third majority of the attendees. Importantly, the Government of Flanders shall explain its decision on the policy advices relating to its competences to the Flemish Youth Council. The Flemish Youth Council can also give policy advices in case its members find it necessary in view of the interests of young people.

1. It specifies the conditions for accreditation and funding of a large number of private organisations and youth-related associations operating at a Flemish

level (i.e. not organisations operating at a regional or a local level as these receive funding by the municipalities, or by other parliament acts such as the Parliament Act on the support and stimulation of the municipal youth policy and the determination of provincial youth policy):

- Nationally organised youth associations
- Associations for participation and information
- Cultural education associations
- Political youth movements

The Flemish Parliament Act provides the coordination of youth policy as implemented in the different policy domains in Flanders. In an effort to mainstream youth policy, the policy plan is linked to other Ministries (and requires action from them) such as employment, education, welfare, urbanisation and mobility. The act addresses the youth population as a whole.

Revisions/updates

Overview

- The Flemish Parliament Act of 18 July 2008 on conducting a Flemish policy on youth and children's rights. *Validity: 1 January 2009 – 31 December 2012*
- The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed Flemish policy on youth and children's rights. *Validity: 1 January 2013 – ...*

Content of main revisions

The decree containing a renewed youth and children's rights policy was ratified by the Flemish Government on 20 January 2012. This new decree replaces the decree of 18 July 2008, which, after a thorough evaluation, had shown a number of amendments were necessary. The aim of the new decree is to facilitate a renewed youth and children's rights policy. It refers to 'renewal' because the decree does not make a tabula rasa with the previous decree of 2008. The previous decree has already brought about a major innovation in several areas. The evaluation of this decree showed a number of provisions needed to be refined and that a number of gaps had to be filled. However, the foundations of the integrated youth and children's rights remain intact. The Minister of Youth and a number of Flemish Members of Parliament want to turn the Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan into a more action-oriented plan. The aim is to come up with an action or project plan, in which a limited number of complex, cross policy themes per government period would be developed in an action-oriented/project-based way. An annual budget is then set aside for this purpose.

The most notable changes include:

- Continue and strengthen the integration of youth and children's rights policies
- Strengthen youth organisations through the unification of the status of nationally organised associations, information and participation associations and cultural education organisations on the basis of a number of objective parameters. As a result, these associations have a guaranteed fallback position.
- A separate arrangement for political youth movements
- A restructuring within the registered subsidised organisations whereby:
 - Support Centre Youth, Flemish Youth Council and VIP youth proceed to a merger.
 - Jint as a centre of expertise in the field of international mobility and the internationalisation of youth policy is maintained.
 - Expertise in the field of children's rights is developed with in Keki.

- VVJ works as an interface between Flemish youth policy and local youth policy.
- Revision of project grants

1.3 National youth strategy

Existence of a National Youth Strategy

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. This is the key instrument of the Flemish Government in the implementation of its youth policy and 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 Government of Flanders and defines the performance indicators. The Flemish Government has to present this plan to the Flemish Parliament no later than one year after the start of the Governments' term of office.

From the 2015-2019 policy period onwards, the efforts for children and young people in all policy areas of the Government of Flanders were bundled together into an integrated youth and children's right policy plan. The current Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024) is the second integrated one.

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 previous Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan was valid for the period 2015-2019 and included 12 strategic goals and 34 operational goals. The encompassing themes were: (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.

The current Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024) stipulates 5 government-wide and integrated priority strategic objectives. These are each divided into two tactical objectives, resulting in operational objectives which contain specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound actions. The priorities are:

- Well-being and positive identity development
- Healthy and liveable neighborhoods
- Civic engagement through volunteering
- Leisure for all
- Media literacy

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 program '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.

The 2020-2024 Flemish Youth and Children's Right Policy Plan was drawn up in several participatory stages. It started out with the preparation of the environmental analysis in the summer of 2018, followed by a period of participation sessions, discussions and debates. The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group XL – which encompasses different actors in Youth and Children's Rights policy, practice and research – acted as a sounding board group and was involved at various times. The output of the many participation sessions was processed and resulted in 13 cross-policy area priorities, which were further elaborated and ranked during the #Key Priorities Debate in April 2019. With the start of the current term of office, a round table discussion on the importance of the 13 proposed priority objectives was held by Minister of Youth Benjamin Dalle, who takes on the coordinating role of the Youth and Children's Right Policy Plan. The final choice of five priorities was approved by the Government of Flanders on 13 march 2020. The global framework was submitted for reflection and discussion to the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group XL in June 2020. The meeting of this Reflection Group was organized in five sessions, each focusing on one priority, and a total of 70 people took part in the discussions. The input given was, where possible and desirable, incorporated into the Flemish Youth and Children's Right Policy Plan.

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. 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 of 2019), a final report has been drawn. It provides an overview of the implementation of the actions stipulated in the plan and is based on information from the Youth and Children's Right Policy Plan monitor. Most of the data were delivered by the contact points for youth and children's rights policy within the various policy areas.

The progress and impact of the 2020 through 2024 Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan is monitored through annual reporting of actions within the framework of the policy and budget explanatory notes of each specialized minister concerned. On the basis of these reports, a mid-term review (2022), which shall also indicate whether and where adjustments are needed, will be provided. In 2024, a final evaluation shall be drawn up.

MINISTER IN CHARGE OF YOUTH The Government of Flanders consists of 9 ministers, who are in office for a 5-year term. Minister Benjamin Dalle (Christen Democratic Party) is since 2 October 2019 the new Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media (from 2019 until 2024).

The policy domain Culture is, since 2 October 2019, a responsibility of the Minister-president Jan Jambon (The New Flemish Alliance) (from 2019 until 2024).

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 300 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 policy plan for the entire legislation. The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (from the policy period 2015 through 2019 onwards) 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. The current Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024) is once again an all-encompassing plan.

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

1.4 Youth policy decision-making

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 300 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 1; (6) education 2; (7) participation; (8) space; (9) well-being; (10) housing; (11) employment; (12) 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.

The 2020-2024 Flemish Youth and Children's Right Policy Plan started out with the preparation of the environmental analysis in the summer of 2018, followed by a period of participation sessions, discussions and debates. The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group XL acted as a sounding board group and was involved at various times. The output of the many participation sessions was processed and resulted in 13 cross-policy area priorities, which were further elaborated and ranked during the #Key Priorities Debate in April 2019. With the start of the current term of office, a round table discussion on the importance of the 13 proposed priority objectives was held. The final choice of five priorities was approved by the Government of Flanders on 13 march 2020. The global framework was submitted for reflection and discussion to the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group XL in June 2020. The meeting of this Reflection Group was

organised in five sessions, each focusing on one priority, and a total of 70 people took part in the discussions. **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

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 euro; in 2018 it rose to 50.209.000 euros, in 2019 the budget for youth was 69.550.000 euro, in 2020 the budget for youth was 57.565.000 euro, in 2021 the budget for youth was 56.256.000, in 2022, the budget allocated to youth is 58.223.000 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 three books with a specific focus, one on gender differences, one on diversity and one about education. At the moment, the JOP is working on several new publications, amongst others, a new theme books, on pressure on young people.

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](#))

1.5 Cross-sectoral approach with other ministries

Mechanisms and actors

Youth policy in Flanders is at a unique crossroads: it is a categorical policy theme, focused on one category of the population: children and young people. But it also crosses sectoral policy domains such as sports, culture, social policy, education, spatial planning, health, housing etc. So the youth policy in Flanders is a sectoral policy domain with a categorical character. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of coordinating the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

Besides the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, the Act on a renewed Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- **Impact study** of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER) – this specifies that any draft Act affecting the people under the age of 25 and submitted to the Flemish parliament has to be accompanied by a report regarding its impact on children and youth.
- **Contact points** for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration – all bodies of the Flemish government have to appoint one staff member as the contact point for the youth policy. These individuals should be involved in the monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Youth Policy Plan and are responsible for estimating the impact of the policy of their institution on young people. The Division Knowledge and Policy is the coordinating administration in all these matters.
- **Youth Progress Report** – a scientific report, to be produced every five years, describing the state of the youth in the Flemish community.

1.6 Evidence-based youth policy

Political Commitment to Evidence-Based Youth Policy

Youth Research Platform (JeugdOnderzoeksPlatform, JOP) [The Youth Research Platform \(JOP\)](#) was created in the spring of 2003 at the initiative of the Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Culture, Youth and the Civil Service. The JOP has performed policy-oriented research activities since then. JOP is an interdisciplinary and interuniversity partnership of three research groups: (1) Research group Tempus Omnia Revelat (Vrije

Universiteit Brussel); (2) Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy (Ghent University); (3) Youth Criminology research group (LINC, KU Leuven). **Knowledge Centre for Children's Rights (KeKi)** Furthermore, the Parliament Act of 2012 on Flemish youth and children's rights policy also recognizes a '[Knowledge Centre for Children's Rights](#)' (KeKi). The main objective of this Knowledge Centre is to increase the (scientific) knowledge on children's rights on the national and international level.

Thematic research

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](#))

Cooperation between policy-making and research

Representatives of both JOP and KeKi participate in the 'Research network on children and young people in Flanders'. This assembly was set up in 2011 by the (at that time) Division Youth of the ministry. Today, the division 'Knowledge and Policy' organises the research network. It consists of youth policy makers and representatives of all relevant organizations that are involved in research on children, youth and children's rights.

Furthermore, the policy themes of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024) are based on an extensive environmental analysis. The environmental analysis is the foundation and gives an overview of relevant trends, figures and scientific research, such as the [Youth Monitor](#).

National Statistics and available data sources

'Cijferboek'

The Flemish government has been mapping the youth (work) policy of the local governments in a '[cijferboek](#)' (book with quantitative figures). 'Cijferboek' appeared every three years. It's a questionnaire, which monitored the policy of local governments concerning youth. This questionnaire resulted in quantitative figures on the local youth policy, such as political responsibilities, youth councils, presence and support of youth work, infrastructure of youth work, youth space, information for youth and communication and cooperation with other sectors. (<http://statistieken.vlaanderen.be/QvAJAXZfc/opendoc.htm?document=CJSM%2FCJSM%20-%20Cijferboek.qvw&host=QVS%40cww100154&anonymous=true>)

This regularity stopped in 2014. As a result of the introduction of the policy- and management cycle at 1 January 2014 the planning- and reporting obligations of the local authorities drastically changed. From then on, the objectives of the municipal youth policy were included within a broad municipal multiannual plan. A new 'cijferboek' was then developed, based on the situation of the municipalities at the start of this reform. The university KULeuven was given the task to perform a baseline measurement in the local authorities in 2014. The goal was to examine in which manner the local authorities give shape to their youth(work)policy at the beginning of the strategic multiannual planning. This study is not intended as an evaluation of the policy but has to reveal in which manner policy is/was executed, what are opportunities and threats and how the Flemish administration can support the local authorities. The aim is to get a clear view on how the local policymaking evolved after a period of four year.

In 2016 a 1-measurement was done. This 1-measurement – again – tries to gain more insights into the setting up and the execution of the strategic multiannual plan. Themes such as the role of the youth civil servant, participation of children and young people, financial youth policy, ... are addressed. Also concrete policy recommendations are formulated. Just like in 2014, an extensive web survey was used and completed by youth civil servants and youth council members.

A 2-measurement was done in 2021. The focus of this measurement was once again the setting up and execution of youth policy as part of the strategic multiannual plan (2020-2025) of municipal authorities. An extensive web survey on youth policy was sent to the youth civil servants, alderman of youth and chairman of the youth council of all Flemish municipalities. The data from this survey was complemented by 3 interviews with experts from the steering group and 5 focus groups with 28 key stakeholders. Just like in 2016, themes such as the role of the youth civil servant, participation of children and young people, financial youth policy...

Youth Monitor (carried out by the Youth Research Platform 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, ...).

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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 three books with a specific focus, one on gender differences, one on diversity

and one on education. At the moment, the JOP is working on several new publications, amongst others, a new theme book on pressure on young people.

All information on publications of the Youth Research Platform can be found on: <http://www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/nl/publicaties>

Research, monitoring, data collection are the basis for a knowledge based policy and a better insight of children and young people. Next to the youth Youth Monitor, also other research on specific themes concerning youth is executed ad hoc.

JoKER (Kind en Jongereffectenrapport – Child and Youth effects report)

Since 1997, the Flemish government is obligated by decree to make an impact report on draft decrees directly affecting the interests of children, persons under eighteen. By decree of July 18, 2008 (decree on the conduct of a Flemish youth and children's rights policy the child impact report (KER) has been extended to a child and youth impact report ([JoKER](#)).

Since 2013, the format of the JoKER is fully integrated into the regulatory impact analysis (RIA). RIA is a set of necessary and logical steps in preparing a policy measure. The aim is to ascertain the impact on children and young people under the age of twenty five. The JoKER, assesses the effects of new regulations on children and youth. Whenever a minister submits a draft decree to the Flemish Parliament that directly affects the interests of persons under 25 years, the draft must be accompanied by a JoKER. The Division Knowledge and Policy provides advice on JoKER.

Children's rights monitor

In the last year 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.

Budgetary Allocations supporting research in the youth field

The Flemish Government allocates funds to the Knowledge Centre for Children's Rights (KeKi) to increase the knowledge on children's rights on the national and international level.

Furthermore, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media has a line of funding for the Youth Research Platform (JOP) and for research on specific themes concerning children and young people or youth work. This research will be entrusted to an university, college, association or cooperation between an university and association.

1.7 Funding youth policy

How Youth policy is funded

Every year, the Flemish Government estimates the budget for the next year. This budget allocation will be presented to the Flemish Parliament and will be discussed in parliamentary committees. First, the Flemish Parliament has to accept the budget allocation and then the Flemish Government can use the budget. This budget allocation also contains the means for Youth policy.

The budget in 2015 In 2015, the Division Youth had a budget of 67.500.000 euros to achieve its objectives. Most of the money was allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy (18.877.000 euros) and the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's

rights (32.610.000 euros). Local and regional level have their own budget, next to the subventions of the Flemish Government.

The budget in 2016 In 2016, the budget allocation of the Division Youth was 42.266.000 euros. There is a decline from the budget allocation of 2015. The budget allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy have been reduced compared to the budget allocation of 2015. The remaining budget (1.254.000 euros) will help support youth policy in Brussels and De Rand ('the rim'). In 2016, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 32.509.000 euros and has been reduced by 21.000 euros.

The budget in 2017

In 2017, the budget allocated to youth within the Policy area Culture, Youth, Sport and Media was 42.462.000 euros. The budget allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy was still very low (1.185.000) and uniquely to support youth policy in Brussels and De Rand ('the rim'). In 2017, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 33.057.000 euros.

The budget in 2018

In 2018, the budget allocated to youth within the Policy area Culture, Youth, Sport and Media was 50.209.000 euros. The allocated budget increased because of the transfer of provincial responsibilities to the Flemish Community. This extra fund is needed to pay overcoming personnel and to subsidise those organisations that were initially subsidised by the provinces. In 2018, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 37.003.000 euros.

The budget in 2019

In 2019, the budget allocated to youth within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media was 69.550.000 euro. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 34.530.000 euro.

The budget in 2020

In 2020 the budget allocated to youth within the Departement of Culture, Youth and Media was 57.565.000 euro. The budget Allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on Youth and Children's Rights was 36.610.000 euro.

The budget in 2021

In 2021 the budget allocated to youth within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media was 56.256.000 euro. [The budget Allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on Youth and Children's Rights was 36.390.000 euro.](#)

The budget in 2022

The budget allocated to youth within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media is 58.223.000 euro in 2022. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 33.270.000 euro.

References:

<https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/vlaamse-overheid/werking-van-de-vlaamse-overheid/de-vlaamse-begroting-cijfers-2018#187606>

http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/begroting_uitgaven.aspx

<https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1553904>

<https://begrotingdigitaal.fenb.be/Klikmodel/Beleidsdomein/BeleidsdomeinDetail/H?jaarron=0&begrotingsronde=181025>

<https://ambrassade.be/nl/basiswerk-jeugdwerk/landschap/subsidiering-van-het-jeugdwerk>

What is funded?

Decrees define the instruments of youth and children's rights policy and the funding of local and provincial authorities and youth organisations. The Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy defines instances of youth work and recognises institutions and organisations involved with young people and also children's rights policy, defining at the same time the allocation of finances within the system. **Recent developments**

- A recent Parliament Act on 'the support and stimulation of the municipal youth policy and the determination of provincial youth policy' of 6 July 2012 came partially into force in October 2012 and replaced the former Parliament Act of 2003 in its entirety by the end of 2013. The most notable change is the integration of the former youth policy plans in an all-encompassing and long-term municipal policy plan for the entire legislation (in accordance with a new Parliament Act on the alleviation of regulations concerning local policy planning and reporting (Planlastendecreet)).
- The Flemish Government agreed on 25 June 2010 on the decision on the policy and management cycle ('Beleids- en beheerscyclus' or 'BBC') of the municipalities, the provinces and the public centres for social welfare. It contains a set of rules for the multiannual plan, budget, accounting and the financial statements of the local authorities and provinces. The BBC decision entered into force on 1 January 2014.

Financial accountability

Youth organisations play an important role in the implementation of Flanders' youth policy. Youth organisations or youth associations usually receive funding based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes. The criteria for types of organisations funded is described in the legislation.

Youth organisations or youth associations receiving an operational grant on the basis of the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on 'conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights' need to submit every year a financial report and a report of an independent auditor, who's a member of the Institute of auditors, to the Flemish administration. The date and formal requirements of the reports will be defined by the Flemish government.

Use of EU Funds

The Flemish Youth and Children's rights Policy Plan doesn't (directly) use EU funds.

Some youth organisations or youth associations are supported through EU funds. EU funds that have been used are:

- Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU funding programme for education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It runs from 2014 till the end of 2020 with a total budget of 14.7 billion euros. Within Erasmus+ there are different sections: one for education and training, one for sport and one for youth projects. The youth section of Erasmus+ is called Youth in Action. It funds projects for and by young people and youth organisations. It has a separate budget and specific project possibilities. In 2016, the Youth in Action-programme in Flanders has a budget of 2.445.718 euros. In 2018, there was a budget of 2.875.748 euros.

The Flemish government has designated Jint vzw to coordinate and to implement the youth programme in Flanders. Jint vzw is in charge of information and promoting, training, funding and assessment.

- ESF 2014-2020

The Operational Programme for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Flanders in the 2014-2020 period supports initiatives that increase employment and improve social cohesion in Flanders. In the years to come, 1 billion euro will be invested. The ESF programme lays down the priorities for the expenditure of 1 billion euros. 600

million euros is financed through the Flemish budget and 400 million euros through the European budget.

The Flemish labour minister, Philippe Muyters, states: 'We have made up a balanced investment programme, which enjoys the support from the European Commission. The programme places the right focus on creating the best opportunities for people in their search for a job, with specific attention for youngsters and the most disadvantaged people'

The Operational Programme of the European Social Fund has a cycle of 7 years. Preparations for the 2021-2027 operational programme are ongoing.

<http://www.esf-vlaanderen.be/nl/inspiratiebron/themas/jeugd/jeugd>

http://www.esf-vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/attachments/articles/op_esf_2014-2020_versie_20160201.pdf

1.8 Cross-border cooperation

Cooperation with European countries

Council of Europe

With the European Youth Centres and the European Youth Fund, the youth sector has important tools to achieve its goals. The structure of the youth sector is unique in its kind thanks to co-management. Representatives of governments and youth organisations are jointly represented in the decision-making bodies. The Flemish Government gives a yearly contribution to the European Youth Foundation. The representative of the Flemish Government is active in the CDEJ and in different expert groups. The Flemish Government supports 'Perspectives on youth: European Partnership Series'. This series aims to function as an information, discussion, reflection and dialogue forum on European developments in the field of youth policy, youth research and youth work. The Flemish Government supports the further exploration and development of the serie 'history on youth work and youth policy in Europe'.

Follow up of the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) on the national level

The Flemish Youth Policy Plan has a European perspective. It was closely connected to the endeavours of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council and to the 'European Youth Strategy 2010-2018'. After extensive consultations with young people and a series of youth policy stakeholders in the EU member states, eight priority themes were put forward. These themes provided an important framework for the development of the Youth Policy Plan. The Flemish Government will use its international cultural cooperation agreements to collect expertise and exchange approaches on these topics. The Division Knowledge and Policy is represented in the National Working Group of the Structured Dialogue and forseees representation in most of the expert groups and peer-learning exercises set up in the framework of the EU Youth Strategy.

International cooperation

Bilateral cooperation

The Division Knowledge and Policy has a direct bilateral cooperation with Luxembourg, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Catalunya. Seminars and study visits on specific youth topics are organised in the framework of a two- or three year work programme. For example, a study visit to Latvia on increasing participation of all young people in different decision making processes on national level. This study visit is part of the bilateral cooperation with Latvia.

Generally, youth also has a chapter in the cultural agreements the Flemish Government has with different countries.

International cooperation beyond the EU

Since 1996 the Division Knowledge and Policy has a direct bilateral cooperation with South-Africa. South Africa and the Flemish Government cooperated in the areas of culture, art, sport and youth. The basis of this cooperation are the three year work programmes. Up to 2006 these programmes have focused on two aspects:

- Capacity building of libraries and non-formal adult education
- Capacity building of young South Africans who were designated to elaborate a strong youth policy

Since 2006, a renewed approach is chosen. A transversal approach is promoted whereby special attention is given to the coordination of the policy areas youth, socio-cultural work, arts, heritage and sport. This new vision is reflected in the 'adoption' of four local community centres whereby attention is given to youth, culture and sport. The underlying idea is that those local community centres have to develop the capacities needed to operate. At the end of the collaboration, the four local community centres have to be an example of an integrated community centre. In addition, the educated South Africans can pass their knowledge on to actors who are involved in the community centres. In this way, they can inform and sensibilise the youth policy actors through activities and a course around capacity building. The selected community centres also have to be important actors in setting up the local cultural- and youth policy. After all, this stimulates the competences and the involvement of the local actors.

A publication about 20 years of cooperation has been released in 2020. It describes the formal cooperation between the two governments both from the Flemish and South-African side. It contains the quasi-exhaustive collection and classification of all documentation that has been gathered on this long-standing cooperation and offers a reflection on content, an interpretation of what has been organised and undertaken.

1.9 Current debates and reforms

Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy

This decree started in 2012. It allow a better transversal approach in order to respect in a more holistic way young people's life, enhance participation of young people and participation of the youth sector in the design and in the implementation of youth work, allow evaluation on the basis of quality and not only on the basis of quantity, reinforce the participation of the municipalities in design and implementation of youth policy.

Decentralisation (from 2017)

The Parliament Act of 6 July 2012 on 'the support and stimulation of the municipal youth policy and the determination of provincial youth policy' came into place. An all-encompassing municipal policy plan (term = 6 year) will replace the former youth policy plan and other domain-specific plans. Municipalities don't have to submit a youth policy plan to the Flemish Government. All legislation concerning local sectoral support (youth, but also culture, sport, ...) from Flemish level will be eliminated and the budget will be allocated directly to the municipalities. Municipalities have an independent authority in developing youth policy and are responsible for the establishment of a Youth Council.

Provincial tasks limited to a closed list of grounded-tied competences (from 2017)

The provincial governments will no longer grant 'provincial' funds to youth organisations. In accordance with a general political choice on the management of government, provincial youth policy too, is being confined within limits. Most competences that are person-oriented, such as youth and also culture and education, will be transferred to the regional or the local level.

2. VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

Special feature

The federal 'Belgian' level has limited competence in youth matters. Voluntary work (more specific the legal status of volunteers) is a competence that is regulated at the federal level. It is further promoted on the Flemish level, grants of the Flemish Community are allocated to a number of (semi)public and private organisations that support voluntary activities of young people. The chapter on voluntary activities illustrates measures on Flemish, federal and local level.

Highlights

Since 2016, the Flemish Minister of Youth focuses on an adequate support for (young) volunteers and voluntary work. Since November 2016, there is a Flemish coordinated policy plan on volunteering. This plan had three objectives: a better legislative framework and status, better information and support and fewer rules.

2.1 General context

Historical developments

Specifically concerning the development of youth voluntary work, little information could be found. However, Flanders has a rich and long tradition of volunteering in youth work. Although youth work is done by thousands of young volunteers, they do not consider themselves as volunteers.

Subsidiary and pillarisation

At the end of the 19th century, Belgian society was characterised by the principles of subsidiarity and pillarisation.

- The principle of *subsidiarity* means that state intervention was limited to the recognition and encouragement of the actions of essentially private operators, including associations.
- This went hand in hand with a relatively compartmentalised society, or *pillarisation*, based on three major ideological movements: Catholics, Liberals and Socialists. Citizens evolved around these politically marked pillars and all their associations (school establishment, health care funds, workers federations, trade unions, leisure time and so forth), which organised social life according to the same ideology.

As a result, the state tended to delegate a large part of its policies to the pillars, especially concerning youth. Voluntary activities were mainly developed through catholic and socialist movements, in the shape of charitable or philanthropic initiatives.

From charity towards self-fulfillment

Gradually, a shift could be noticed from the altruist initiatives of middle-class citizens (often women) targeted at families in poverty, towards activities that can also contribute to the self-fulfillment of the volunteer. Volunteering became an important way to participate in society and an instrument of social integration. More and more, participation in voluntary work became more important than the ideological message or the connection to one of the pillars.

Public authorities increasingly encouraged voluntary activities, under which voluntary work in the youth sector.

A political evolution

The UN International Year of Volunteers 2001 was an important trigger in Belgium. Public authorities became aware of the interest in voluntary activities and the necessity to think about a legal framework. During this year, the federal level took formal initiatives to improve the social and legal situation of volunteers. In 2005, the Act on the rights of volunteers has been adopted.

In 2015, the law on the rights of volunteers existed for ten years. On the occasion of this anniversary, Minister of Social Affairs Maggie De Block and Minister of Work Kris Peeters asked the High Council for Volunteers to analyse the law thoroughly and to indicate which points could be improved, taking into account the concrete problems in the field. At the request of Minister of Social Affairs, Minister Maggie De Block, the high Council for Volunteers has worked out an advice on the need for clarification and the creation of a separate semi-governmental organisation. They argue in favour of employment status that clearly distinguished itself from volunteering on the one hand and regular employment status on the other hand.

On the basis of this evaluation, both ministers have now adjusted the voluntary statute on various points. The draft was voted on January 2019 in the competent committee in the Chamber. This strengthened statute was implemented in the spring of 2019. Since 15 April 2019, this new statute for volunteers has been in force.

Main concepts

There is no specific definition of youth volunteering. However, the law related to volunteer's rights of 3 July 2005 introduced a common definition to be shared by everyone involved in voluntary work, included youth work. It defines volunteering as follows:

- Volunteering is unpaid;
- it does not involve obligation;
- it is undertaken for others or for society;
- there should be always a distinction between volunteering and professional activities.

Since the development of the Voluntary Service Act in 2005, the Federal Government has been applying a clear definition on volunteering, which has the following basic competents:

- an activity
- performed by a natural person
- on the basis of their own free will
- for the benefit of others or of society
- in a more or less organized context
- provided that such an organized associatio is non-profitmaking

2.2 Administration and governance of youth volunteering

Governance

Voluntary work of young people is not exclusively a youth policy theme (or any other policy area). Youth volunteering is regulated at federal level and further promoted on community-level.

Most relevant policy domains:

At federal level:

- Regulations on the legal status of volunteers ([Federal Public Service for Social Security](#))
- Advice and information on voluntary work (The High Council of Volunteers - [Hoge Raad voor Vrijwilligers](#))

At Regional (Flemish) level:

- Funding of voluntary activities and volunteer groups (organized volunteer work) in many sectors: welfare and health, sports, culture, education, environment, integration... (Flemish Government)
- Youth volunteer work opportunities through the recognition and funding of youth (work) initiatives (Department of Culture, Youth and Media – [Departement Cultuur, Jeugd en Media](#))

In the following we focus on the regional level and describe for each of the domains the relevant responsibilities.

Main public bodies at the community-level (Flemish Community)

FLEMISH GOVERNMENT

In the Flemish Community, the Flemish Government is the voluntary work's main funding source. Grants are allocated to a number of (semi)public and private organizations that support voluntary activities. The funding of voluntary activities and volunteer groups (organized volunteer work) in the welfare and health sectors is laid down in the Flemish Parliament Acts of the Flemish Community. In other sectors volunteer work is less regulated.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND MEDIA

The Division Subsidising and recognising - embedded in the Department of Culture, Youth and Media - helps to create youth volunteer work opportunities through the recognition and funding of youth (work) initiatives.

On 8 July 2016, the Flemish Government approved a **coordinated policy plan on voluntary work** ([Gecoördineerd Vlaams Vrijwilligersbeleid](#)). The Division Knowledge and Policy is responsible for the coordination of the cross-sectoral policy on volunteering in Flanders. In 2016 an action plan was made built on 6 pillars: 1) Keeping volunteer work 'pure'; 2) protecting volunteers; 3) focus on support and information for volunteers; 4) support association life; 5) give everyone the opportunity to volunteer and 6) promote and make volunteer work visible. The horizontal consultation on volunteering policy monitors the plan. This plan aims to install an improved and well-coordinated policy on volunteering across different sectors, including the youth sector.

The focus is on three major issues:

- the administrative burden for (young) volunteers and voluntary (youth) organizations
- provision of information
- common rules applicable to volunteers

The Flemish Government approved a revised and updated version of the coordinated policy plan on voluntary work on 10 July 2020.

In the **Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024** ([Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan](#)). 'Commitment in society through voluntary efforts' is one of the five priority themes. By choosing this priority, the Flemish government wants to encourage children and young people to voluntarily engage in society. With the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, Flanders commits itself to concrete, feasible and achievable objectives that have an impact and an observable effect on the lives of all children, young people and young adults in Flanders. Its operationalization takes place through a measurable set of actions.

Non-governmental actors promoting volunteering

THE FLEMISH SUPPORT POINT FOR VOLUNTARY WORK

The Flemish Support Point For Voluntary Work ([Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk](#)) - established in 1977 as 'Platform voor Voluntariaat' - is the community's central, national volunteer centre. It receives an annual financial support from the Flemish Ministry of Culture and from the Flemish Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family. It is flanked by a number of regional volunteer centres and provides support to voluntary activities and initiatives launched by Flemish people.

It aims to obtain favourable legislation and regulations for volunteers from the Belgian Government as well as from the Flemish Community, and to make voluntary work accessible to all. The Support Point provides support to voluntary activities and consists of advice, information and training.

Up to 2017 five provincial supported centres and one Brussels ('het punt') based support centre coordinated voluntary activities in the Flemish provinces and Brussels. They managed a decentralised database, acted as a mediator between organizations and candidate volunteers, got more people involved in volunteering and helped organizations enhance the quality of their activities by providing information and training and by setting up certain initiatives. Finally, there were local support centres for volunteering. Since 2018 Flanders has taken over the tasks of the provinces. The Flemish Support Point for Voluntary work became a Flemish knowledge center and received new tasks within the Coordinated Policy for Volunteering. For instance, they developed a central insurance for volunteers in small organizations without a legal ground.

THE KING BAUDOUIIN FOUNDATION

The [King Baudouin Foundation](#) (Koning Boudewijnstichting) was founded in 1976. It is an independent public benefit foundation which is active at the regional, federal and international level. For the King Baudouin Foundation, volunteers as well as the associations and institutions that provide opportunities for volunteering are important target groups. For many years, the Foundation has developed various projects and programmes for stimulating, rewarding and recognizing voluntary work, a.o. by means of research.

CERA

CERA is a cooperative financial group, whose mission is to invest in wealth and prosperity. It supports projects with social objectives and has created tools to support voluntary action in Belgium. CERA also intends to create debate and reflection on the theme of volunteering.

ORGANISATIONS WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Many organizations with a special focus on young people are commissioned to set up, support and monitor volunteer work within youth work: the ['Ambrassade'](#) (support centre for youth work and youth information, secretariat of the Flemish Youth Council), [JINT](#) (Co-ordination body for International Youth Work), nationally organized youth associations, NGOs in the field of development co-operation,... These youth organizations or youth associations usually receive funding by the Flemish government and funding is based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes. Voluntary organizations are relatively independently.

Voluntary organizations are relatively autonomous (e.g. concerning their policies on volunteering or the quality of their work), as long as they meet the regulations on the legal status of volunteers.

General distribution of responsibilities

The legal status of volunteers is regulated at the federal level and further supported and promoted by the Flemish Community. The regional level is also responsible for the

subsidisation and recognition of voluntary work and supports organizations that set up voluntary activities. Organisations at the local level then support and monitor voluntary work.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

As mentioned in 1.5 Cross-sectorial approach with other ministries, youth policy is a transversal policy. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

Besides the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- Impact study of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER)
- Contact points for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration
- Youth Progress Report

The Flemish Government decided to develop a cross-sectoral policy on volunteering. The Minister of Culture who is also the minister-president, is in charge. In the Horizontal consultation group on volunteering policy (Horizontaal Overleg Vrijwilligersbeleid – HOV) the administrations that work with volunteers are represented: a.o. Education, Welfare, Culture, Youth, Sports, Integration. Besides them the Flemish Support Point for Voluntary work takes part and there is a representation of the organization [Verenigde Verenigingen](#), this is an umbrella-organization for all organizations in the non-profit sector.

2.3 National strategy on youth volunteering

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 2019-2024), the Minister of Youth commits himself 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 (2005), which entered into force in August 2006 ([Vrijwilligerswet](#)).

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 organizations.

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

As mentioned under point 'A political evolution' ([2.1](#)), the law on the rights of volunteers of 2005 has been revised on its tenth birthday by the Minister of Social Affairs Maggie De Block and Minister of Work Kris Peeters, because it led to some interpretation- and other problems for volunteers and/or voluntary organizations. The Ministers therefore approved a new law on volunteering at 20 July 2018. This new law aims to better protect both volunteers and organizations 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.

Scope and contents

The Policy Paper on Youth 2019-2024 (submitted on September 8, 2019; [Beleidsnota Jeugd 2019-2024](#)) as well as the [Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#) (2020-2024) mention an engagement to support volunteering in youth work, mainly through:

- relieving the administrative burden for volunteers and voluntary organizations 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, for example youth volunteers working with children in poverty;
- recognising the competences resulting from volunteering.

In the Policy Paper on Youth (2019-2024) Flemish Minister of Brussels, Youth and Media Benjamin Dalle argues that youth work should be able to fully engage in the core of its mission: to empower and connect children and youth. Supporting the engagement of children and young people is a key challenge for youth and children's rights policy. Volunteers are the linchpin of youth work. The Minister will actively recognize the importance of volunteers from his Youth competence and continue to look for new levers of support.

Responsible authority

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

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.

2.4 Youth volunteering at national level

National Programme for Youth Volunteering

There are no national programmes for youth volunteering.

Funding

There is no funding available for national programmes, but there is support for the youth work volunteers by the Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy ([decreet van 20 januari 2012 houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid](#)).

Characteristics of youth volunteering

Data that was gathered in 2018 among a representative sample of Flemish young people between 14 and 25 old (called the Youth Monitor, carried out by the Youth Research Platform ([Jeugdonderzoeksplatform](#); analyses on volunteering are also reported in Dhoore, 2021) indicate that 35% of the young in this age group participate in voluntary activities. Boys and girls volunteer in approximately equal amounts: 33.6% of the boys surveyed and 36.3% of the girls volunteer. Young people who follow or have followed vocational or technical secondary education participate significantly less in volunteering (respectively 30.8% and 32.6%) than young people who follow or followed general or art secondary education (40.9%). Participation in voluntary work is also related to the place where young people live. Young people living in a metropolitan environment participate, on average, less in voluntary work (23.7%) than young people living in a non-metropolitan environment (35.9%). Age and subjective household income are not related to volunteering among Flemish youth.

Support to young volunteers

Types of support

Any volunteer can receive a reimbursement for costs made during his/her voluntary activities, provided that the organization is willing to pay (however, the Law does not provide a legal right to volunteers to receive this reimbursement of costs).

The Act on the rights of volunteers (2005, [Vrijwilligerswet](#)) defines two types of reimbursement to support (young) volunteers (more info: <http://www.vlaanderen.vrijwilligt.be/wetgeving/kosten-en-vergoedingen/>):

- The volunteer may either receive a fixed reimbursement (regardless of real costs): in this case, the volunteer can receive
 - a maximum of 36.84 Euro a day (2022), for a maximum of € 1473.37 a year (2022)
 - for some types of volunteers (volunteers in the sport sector, the voluntary night and daytime minders for people in need, volunteers in non-emergency patient transport and in 2022 also volunteers active in vaccination centers and crisis volunteers in care) the annual maximum is increased to € 2705.97
- The organization can opt for a system of "reimbursement of real costs". In this case, the organization only pays the expenses that are actually made by the volunteers (use of car, telephone, meals, etc) as proof has to be provided in for each expense.

The Policy Paper on Youth (2019-2024) mentions that attention should be paid to the support of volunteers, and that youth work organizations will be helped to find new volunteers. A type of support is the reimbursement of the registration fee of training courses for youth volunteers by local governments.

Social security provisions

The Act on the rights of volunteers (2005) contains provisions that refer to the legal status and social protection of (young) volunteers. In principle, liability for damage caused to

third parties by a volunteer lies with the organization (= immunity principle). If deceit, gross negligence or recurrent minor faults are involved, the volunteer him/herself can be held accountable.

The Act on Voluntary Work of 3 April 2009 of the Flemish government (for organizations in the fields of Welfare, Health and Family) provides social security to (young) volunteers. The organizations working with volunteers should be covered by insurances on:

- civil liability of the organization
- civil liability of the volunteer. Volunteers are ensured for damage done to the organization, volunteers or third parties during their voluntary work.
- accidents and health problems suffered by volunteers during their voluntary work

Since the 1st of January 2018, Flanders provides a free insurance for volunteers ([vrijwilligersverzekering](#)). This insurance replaces the former collective insurance for volunteers that was provided by the Provincial Support Centres. From then on, the Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work provides an authorisation number which is needed to apply for this insurance. This free insurance is especially interesting for occasional or temporarily activities or for extra activities. This insurance especially benefits the volunteers working in voluntary organizations in Flanders and Brussels. The organization can be an association or a non-profit private legal entity. From the 1st of April 2019 it got a new start.

Quality Assurance (QA)

There are no official regulations on standards of quality for voluntary youth work.

However, the five Provincial Support Centres, the Brussels Support Centre (Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk Brussel) and the Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work (Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk) are responsible for the coordination and support of voluntary work in Flanders. These Support Centres also strive for a broader social – and formal – recognition of voluntary work.

In addition, organizations working with volunteers usually provide a form of training, education or support for volunteers which may or may not lead to the award of a certificate. Although such certification is not legally recognized by the Ministry of Education, these initiatives give an indication of the basic quality.

On the other hand, youth work organizations organize lots of courses and give certificates for youth animators, which are nearly all volunteers. These certificates have a legal ground in the Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy.

There is also no system of quality assurance.

The Flemish Government dictates in the Act on Voluntary Work of 3 April 2009 some rules concerning voluntary organizations in the welfare and health sectors and defines conditions governing recognition and subsidies.

In addition, the Flemish Government defines some rules concerning youth voluntary work organizations at Flemish level in the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012.

Target groups

Policies and initiatives do not identify specific target groups.

2.5 Cross-border mobility programmes

EU programmes

European Solidarity Corps

The [European Solidarity Corps](#) creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects that benefit communities and people around Europe. It runs from October 2018 till the end of 2020. In the period 2018-2020, the European Solidarity Corps has a total budget of € 375.6 million. For the period 2021–2027 there is a total budget of € 1.009 billion.

[JINT](#) was founded in 1989 by the Flemish government, in consultation with the Flemish youth organizations. From there, JINT was given the task of stimulating and supporting the international mobility and cooperation of young people and youth organizations. JINT is structurally financed by the Ministry of the Flemish Community, Department of Culture, Youth and Media and by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture as a National Agency for the implementation of the European Programs. JINT vzw is the Flemish coordinating body for international youth work and implements the European Solidarity Corps in Flanders. . This European volunteer work component involves information and promotion, allocation of funds and evaluation.

Inclusion is one of the spearheads of the European Youth Programs. Young people and youth workers in a socially vulnerable situation or with fewer opportunities can count on extra support or more flexible conditions to participate. JINT also offers extra guidance to organizations that work with these groups. The SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre, housed at JINT, supports the entire Network of National Agencies to make European Youth Programs inclusive.

Research-based analysis and monitoring of the European Solidarity Corps is addressed to the RAY Network ([report](#)). Besides JINT monitors also the Flemish participation in the programme ([report in Dutch](#)). JINT has a budget of € 4,846,458.02 (period 2018-2020) for the European Solidarity Corp. In the period 2018-2020, JINT allocated funds to a total of 161 projects in the European Solidarity Corps. In this period there were a total of 898 participants. Of the Flemish participants in the European Solidarity Corps, 253 (29%) came from disadvantaged groups and 7 with a disability.

Other Programmes

There is the [Bel'J programme](#), supported by the three Belgian ministers responsible for youth and implemented by the national agencies, where young people can be supported to do an exchange or volunteering activities in another community of Belgium. Bel' J focuses on young people between the ages of 16 and 30 and gives youngsters of the three communities the opportunity to meet each other. Through Bel'J, the Flemish Community gives youngsters financial support for accommodation, meals and transport. JINT vzw is the coordinating body for the Bel'J programme in Flanders.

Legal framework applying to foreign volunteers

The Act on the Rights of Volunteers (2005, [Vrijwilligerswet](#)) provides the legal framework for voluntary work in Belgium. With regard to foreign volunteers, the Act stipulates that only people from the European Union and people who are married to a Belgian/European citizen can participate in voluntary work but, all people with a valid residence permit and certain asylum seekers are allowed to volunteer without any problems.

The High Council of Volunteers ([Hoge Raad voor Vrijwilligers](#)) has evaluated the law of 3 July 2005 related to the volunteer's rights. This evaluation included two appendices about youth volunteering. The first one addressed foreign young people volunteering in Belgium and the second one focused on Belgian volunteers abroad.

About young Belgian volunteers going abroad, the High Council observed the following issues:

- The upholding of family allowances and unemployment benefit while volunteering abroad.
- The terms used in the law about what can be considered as volunteering are confusing and must be clarified.

Regarding the issue about young volunteers coming from abroad, the High Council of Volunteers discussed the following points:

- Volunteering doesn't confer the right to get a visa according to the law of 15 December 1980 related to the territory access. Volunteering in Belgium for a period longer than 3 months is then compromised regarding the rules to obtain a visa;
- The hosting organization provides accommodation to the volunteer and is in charge of his/her daily expenses. In specific programmes such as the European Volunteer Programme, the volunteer can also receive a small allowance. Two problems arise in the fields of tax and labour law:
 - If this amount (accommodation, meals) exceeds the yearly maximal sum allowed by the law of 2005, the fees must be justified. This is a tedious process especially when it comes to long-term volunteering.
 - The provision in kind can be considered so that it is taxed and the volunteer runs the risk of losing his/her volunteer status. The hosting organization would then be considered as an employer with all the obligations it involves.
 - The law of 2005 must clarify that the provision in kind (accommodation, meals) is included in the volunteering activity and is not compensation.

JINT coordinates all discussing points and prepares policy notes.

2.6 Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities

Information providers

The promotion of voluntary work is one of the objectives of the Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work ([Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk](#)). Also local authorities play an important role in raising awareness about the existing opportunities for (youth) volunteering and in disseminating information.

Key initiatives

Community level

- The Week of Volunteers is organized by the Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work ([Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk](#)). It is an annual, recurring public appreciation campaign and its main objective is the promotion of voluntary work in Flanders. During this week, extra attention is paid to voluntary work and active volunteers. Each year the Support Centre for Volunteer Work also organizes seminars and workshops during this week. In 2021 these (online) seminars focused on the motivations of volunteers, in 2022 the focus was on dealing with change.
- The website '[vrijwilligerswerk.be](#)' promotes voluntary work to potential (young) volunteers. Its main objective is to combine supply and demand of voluntary work. Information is collected at the website, from which various links are made to a number of organizations and informative sites on volunteer work. One can filter searches on volunteer work for young people
- ...

Local authorities

- Many municipalities have a municipal one-stop-shop for volunteers, where information can be found concerning (the opportunities for) (youth) voluntary work. 'Het vrijwilligersloket' is often accessible online.
- Promotion is done at local level, in particular by the associations themselves, by means of flyers, posters, etc.
- The organization of courses (training initiatives, workshops) on a specific topic (e.g. EHBO,...) of youth work. The main goal of these courses is to strengthen the competences of (young) volunteers.
- ...

2.7 Skills recognition

Policy Framework

The Flemish Government is making efforts to better recognise voluntary activities and to value the social involvement of young volunteers and the skills they have acquired (EVC). The Policy Plan Youth (2020-2024) states that the Flemish Government aims to ensure that voluntary involvement is accredited and also in the Youth and Children's Rights Plan ([Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan](#)) one of the tactical goals is the recognition and improvement of the talent, quality and competence developments that result from voluntary commitment.

The Flemish Government built on skill recognition in youth work through new regulations for a 'certified training' (kadervorming). Where in the past, from 1980 till 2015, organizations had a great deal of freedom in setting up framework reforms. There were major differences in structure, duration and content. Yet they were all honoured with the same certificates. This freedom was in line with the great diversity in youth work but had the disadvantage that it became unclear what a volunteer should be able to do.

The Flemish Decree 'certified training' of 2014 ([Het Vlaams decreet Kadervorming](#) 2014), which provides a framework for recognised training courses, was a social recognition of the importance of training for youth workers. The new regulations harmonized the trajectories. The aim of the decree was to strengthen leadership competences and to honour youth work as a powerful informal learning environment. Volunteers can register their voluntary work at the website of the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) but they do not receive a certificate.

In the Policy Paper Youth (2019-2024), the Minister of Brussels, Media and Youth, Benjamin Dalle (Christian Democratic Party), will work on the amendment of the decree and the decision in the field of 'certified training' (kadervorming) based on the results of the study delivered in 2018 and the consultation that took place with the youth sector in 2019. The procedures will be simplified without affecting the quality of training. .

Existing arrangements

Labour market oriented initiatives

C-STICK JES created a [digital portfolio](#) with a personal development plan, a screening and scaling tool and a job application tool. The so-called 'C-stick' also includes a set of techniques for the identification of competences and competence development, with the core elements: observation of competences, feedback, group dynamics, peer learning and experiential learning.

Organisations' own initiatives

Organizations working with volunteers usually provide a form of training, education or support for volunteers which may or may not lead to the award of a certificate. Although

such certification is not legally recognized, these initiatives give an indication of the basic quality.

Accreditation of experimental learning for management volunteers

The Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work ([Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk](#)) initiated a project called 'Accreditation of experiential learning for management volunteers' in co-operation with Socius, the Support Centre for Socio-cultural work ([Steunpunt voor Sociaal-cultureel werk](#)).

'Certified training' - '[Kadervormingstraject](#)'

'Kadervorming' is a certified training explicitly meant for youngsters who (will) have leadership responsibilities in the context of youth work. The main goal is to strengthen their competences. One trajectory consists of a theoretical part, an internship and an evaluation. The training may lead to a certification (animator, chief instructor) delivered by the Division Subsidising and recognising.

The existing arrangements for skill recognition don't make use of European credit systems.

2.8 Current debates and reforms

Volunteers in the corona crisis

In 2021 and 2022, volunteers active in vaccination centers and crisis volunteers in care fell under the increased flat-rate expense allowance. Vaccination volunteers and crisis volunteers in healthcare could therefore count on the maximum expense allowance of € 2705.97 for the year 2022.

3. EMPLOYMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Employment & Entrepreneurship

Special feature

The Belgian federal system involves three Communities and three economic Regions. Regional and Community levels exercise their allocated competencies. At regional level, there are competencies, such as Employment and Active Labour Market policies and at Community level there are Education policies. Furthermore, the chapter illustrates how employment and entrepreneurship for young people can be a joint responsibility of the Minister for Employment, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Youth.

Highlights

Belgium presented a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan in December 2013, updated in April 2014. The scheme targets young people under 25 years. The implementation is coordinated by the regional Public Employment Service (in the Flemish Community: VDAB). However, VDAB has already implemented the Youth Employment Plan in 2007. With this plan VDAB want to tailor its standard services better to the needs of young job-seekers aged 18 to 25. Its goal is to stimulate young people to find a job as quickly as possible. In the light of Youth Guarantee, VDAB has decided not to create a new plan, but to strengthen the existing Youth Employment Plan. The plan is further described in the chapter.

3.1 General context

Labour market situation in the country

Labour market situation

The labour market in Belgium is the 'institutional system' in which supply and demand for labour meet. The labour supply is based on the employees, while the demand for labour is a matter for the companies. The other labour market player is the several governments (represented by the Public Employment Services and National Employment Service). Some authors use the term "employment system" to refer to the institutional architecture that regulates the meeting of supply and demand on the labour market. It is important to have a very broad picture of the instruments that guide employment systems. The interaction between supply and demand for labour is determined by a whole series of factors, such as education and training systems, labour regulations, social security and, in particular, its financing, taxation or the wage bargaining system (this list is not exhaustive). Moreover, employment policy explicitly aims at adjusting certain "natural" effects of these institutional instruments on the situation of certain groups in the labour market, for example when they give a particular target group a specific advantage in terms of recruitment (e.g. unskilled young people) that would otherwise be "disadvantaged".

The Flemish Government and the social partners are responsible for labour market policy in the Flemish Region. The trade unions and employers organizations together form [SERV](#) (Socio-Economic Council of Flanders) in which social consultation takes place. It is the main advisory body to the Flemish government on Flemish socio-economic policy. The Federal Government is responsible for monitoring employment and unemployment and develops the labour market policy in consultation with the federal social partners.

A specific characteristic of the labour market is the [social security](#). The approach to social security in Belgium is distinctive and unusual. It is conducted by the social partners - the employers and the trade unions - with the Government as an observer. The social security has three functions: In the event of loss of income from work (unemployment, retirement, incapacity for work), a replacement income is paid; In the case of certain 'social charges' (additional costs), such as bringing up children or medical expenses, there is a supplement to the income; if you do not have a professional income involuntarily, you will receive social security benefits such as the integration income. The unions actually pay the allowances to the unemployed while those who are not members of a trade union can go to the neutral government office.

Effects of the recent economic crisis

The global economic and financial crisis that was unleashed at the beginning of 2008 was not without consequences for the labour market in Belgium. The labour market in Belgium has faced additional challenges due to this world and European economic crisis, which initially affected employment in Flanders much more than in Brussels or Wallonia.

Young people within the European Union were badly affected by the economic crisis. Belgium was no exception and youth unemployment rose. Following general indicators, the youth unemployment rate in Flanders increased significantly between 2008 and 2009, from 10.5% to 15.7%. As might be anticipated, the unemployment rate among low-skilled youth was higher than among high-skilled youth, according to labour force statistics in 2010.

Nevertheless, the system of social security in Belgium considered to have been a restraint on the negative impacts of the crisis and as a result, Flanders was hit less than many other countries.

The rise in the number of unemployed job-seekers on an annual basis stopped accelerating in mid-2009, but slowed significantly only in early 2010 and not until October 2010 was the number lower than a year previously. The decline in unemployment rates was most marked in Flanders compared to Brussels and Wallonia. It was also in this region that the

impact of the crisis made itself felt the most: in 2009, the number of unemployed there had exceeded the level of the previous year by some 20%.

The labour market situation today

The Flemish unemployment rate has been declining since August 2015, with unemployment figures dropping. The Belgian and Flemish economy experienced modest growth and growth expectations are moderately positive.

The labour market in Flanders is also moving in the desired direction. Recent statistics of the VDAB demonstrate that in 2019 Flanders had 196,433 unemployed non-working jobseekers. On an annual basis, the Flemish unemployment rate decreases by 10,852 units or 5.2%, as reported by the VDAB. The jobseekers with an unemployment benefit application represent 64.0% of the Flemish registered labour reserve, young people in employment for 8.6%, freely registered jobseekers for 14.7% and the group 'Other' for 12.7%. 'Other' includes part-time learners without a job as well as job-seekers with a living wage, recognised refugees with integration income who register as jobseekers are added to 'Other'. The jobseeker with an unemployment benefit application decreases by 7.1%, the decrease in the period of occupational integration of young people is more than 5 percentage points lower than the average and amounts to 13.3%. For the other two groups we note an increase, for the freely registered jobseekers this is an increase of 2.6%, for the group 'Other' an increase of 2.3%. The annual difference in both groups is more than 5 percentage points higher than the average.

Unemployment among young people and the middle-age group fell by 7.4% and 6.4% in 2019. The slower decrease among the over -50s (-1.4%) results from the longer availability for the labour market due to changes in the regulations and the increase in the number of over -50s in the Flemish population due to the ageing of the population. The upward effect of this is concentrated among the over -60s (+26.9%). The 50- to 55-year-olds and the 55- to 60-year-olds do score lower (-9.0% and -15.2%). 56,395 or 28.7% of the jobseekers have a migration background. Unemployment among foreigners decreases by 1.2% on an annual basis, while unemployment among native Dutch people decreases by 6.8%.

Youth employment Flanders

In 2019, the Flemish youth unemployment rate is approaching thanks to the recovering economy, the generational change and later entry into the labour market of young people, back the very low level of 2008. The economic situation in recent years has created a favourable starting point for young people. In addition the exit of the baby-boom generation ensures a large replacement demand that also clashes on sparsely populated inflow age cohorts. The later entry into the labour market as a result of a rising participation in education, but also because young people do longer over the course of their studies, also bears to a reduction in youth unemployment. The ageing and dejuvenation in combination with the thriving economy inevitably leads to a "War on Talent", the labour market watchers shout in chorus.

Youth unemployment in Flanders exceeds the total unemployment rate. In 2019, Flanders has an unemployment rate of 17,73% for young people under the age of 25. At the same moment, the overall unemployment rate in Flanders was 7,48%. 22,15% of the total number of unemployed jobseekers was younger than 25 (source: [arvastat VDAB](#)).

EUROSTAT conducted a survey by the entire population older than 15 year-old. According to the EUROSTAT data, 7,5% of the 18-25 year-olds in the Flemish Community don't have a certificate of secondary education and are not in education (Numbers come from Department Education and Training, EUROSTAT).

Furthermore, the situation of low-educated young people and young people with a migration background in particular is not rosy. A successful employment policy starts at school. Too many young people leave education without a degree or certificate and consequently miss out on labour market opportunities.

The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019) mentions the following challenges:

- supporting young people towards sustainable employment
- providing high quality employment to ensure the opportunity to lead a qualitative life

Main concepts

The Labour Law of 16 March 1971 is regulated at federal level ([Arbeidswet van 16 maart 1971](#)). The Law is wide ranging and consists of individual and collective labour law, labour regulations and regulations covering well-being at work.

For the purposes of this law, "young employees" means: underage workers who are 15 years or older and who are no longer subject to full-time compulsory education. However, the King may make the provisions of this law relating to young employees applicable to employees between the ages of 18 and 21, if necessary under conditions to be determined by him.

3.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Employment and entrepreneurship are regulated at the federal level and further supported by the Flemish Region.

Most relevant policy domains are:

At federal level:

- Labour Law and Social Security legislation ([Federal Public Service for Employment Labour and Social Dialogue](#))
- Employment policy and policy on job creation promotion (High Council for Employment - [Hoge Raad voor de Werkgelegenheid](#))

At Regional (Flemish) level:

- Employment and social economy policy
- Educational policy
- Youth policy

In the following we focus on the regional level and describe for each of the domains the relevant responsibilities.

Main public bodies

FLEMISH GOVERNMENT

The funding of the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) and Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (SYNTRA Flanders) is laid down in Flemish Parliament Acts of the Flemish Region.

The funding for the implementation of the Youth Employment Plan (2008) in the context of the Youth Guarantee Plan is made available from the Government of Flanders.

MINISTER IN CHARGE OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL ECONOMY

The Government of Flanders consists of nine ministers, who are in office for a five-year term. Minister Hilde Crevits (Christian Democratic Party) is currently the Flemish Minister for Work, Economy, Innovation, Social Economy and Agriculture (from 2019 until 2024).

MINISTRY OF WORK AND SOCIAL ECONOMY

The Flemish Ministry of Work and Social Economy and the Department of Work and Social Economy within it are responsible for advice, evaluation, follow-up and coordination on

policy regarding work and social economy in Flanders, including youth employment/unemployment.

FLEMISH SERVICE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, VDAB)

The public employment services are also organised at regional level and are in charge of counselling, job search assistance, intermediation services and training of (un)employed workers.

The Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, VDAB) has, as the career director, the mission of creating for all Flemish citizens the space necessary for them to develop themselves and their careers as effectively as possible. The aim is to improve labour market functioning and promote prosperity for all. As a service provider, VDAB helps citizens to develop their careers according to market demand. VDAB cooperates strongly with other service providers and has a special focus on disadvantaged citizens.

As an external autonomous agency VDAB is not directly governed by the Minister of Employment but managed by a governing board. As part of the Flemish authorities, the agency is accountable to the Flemish Government. VDAB is financed by the Government and ministers determine its policy priorities.

The goals and objectives of VDAB for the period 2015-2019 and the accompanying actions for the year 2015 are geared to the European employment strategy, the Flemish Government Agreement 2014-2019, and the Policy Paper on Work, Economics, Science and Innovation 2014-2019. In its annual business plan, which reflects the policy priorities as determined in the annual Policy Brief on Work, VDAB indicates which projects will be elaborated and where the services must be continued, refined and/or adapted.

FLEMISH AGENCY FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING - SYNTRA FLANDERS

Since 2004 entrepreneurial training in Flanders has been coordinated by the [Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA Flanders](#).

SYNTRA Flanders collaborates with several entrepreneurial education and training providers in Flanders, in particular with the five regional SYNTRA Training Centres. These deliver apprenticeship programmes for young people aged 15 to 25. Apprenticeship trainees gain practical experience in a work environment (four days a week) under the guidance of a tutor-supervisor and attend classes, including General Knowledge modules, at one of the Training Centres (one day a week) which complement the practical work experience.

SYNTRA Flanders falls under the responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Work. The assignment of the agency is formalised in an annual business plan, which contains the strategic and operational goals of the agency.

MINISTER IN CHARGE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Minister Ben Weyts (The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Education and Training (from 2019 until 2024).

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Department of Education and Training together with the Minister in charge of Education and Training is responsible for the advice, evaluation and follow-up on education policy in Flanders.

MINISTER IN CHARGE OF YOUTH

Minister Benjamin Dalle (Christen Democratic Party (CD&V)) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media (from 2019 until 2024). Culture is a policy domain of the Minister-president Jan Jambon (The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)) (From 2019-2024).

Minister Benjamin Dalle is the coordinating minister for the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND MEDIA

The 'Knowledge and Policy' – embedded in the Department of Culture, Youth and Media – ensures the administrative follow-up of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights and is responsible for the coordination of a horizontal Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (leisure, education, work, equality, etc.).

Main non-public actors

TRADE UNIONS

There are three trade union confederations in Belgium, each reflecting a socio-political movement in the country. The two largest are ACV (Algemeen Vakverbond) and ABVV (Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond), affiliating with the Christian and socialist movements respectively, while the smaller ACLVB (Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België) is rooted in liberalism. Each trade union has departments in the Flemish Community.

The several trade unions in Belgium are responsible for:

- the Representing of employees in wage and collective bargaining in companies and economic sectors
- defending the interests of employees
- the payment of unemployment benefits and the integration allowance

ACV, ABVV and ACLVB use the following youth structures. Each confederation has a specific department or section for youth, with union officers working solely on such issues. In the case of ACV and ABVV, there are two national representatives, for the country's Dutch- and French-speaking parts respectively. There is also at least one regional youth representative in every province, working rather independently from the national level. This is different in the liberal trade union, which employs three national representatives, one for Brussels (part-time), one for Flanders (full-time) and one for Wallonia (part-time). Youth representatives at the regional level, in contrast, are mostly volunteers who take up this role on top of their normal functions.

REPRESENTATIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The Flemish Youth Council is the official advisory council for the Government of Flanders for all areas concerning children, young people and their organisations in Flanders. The Flemish Youth Council ensures that the voice of children and young people reaches the policymakers and defends the interests of youth work organisations in Flanders and Europe.

The Flemish Ministers must seek the advice of the Flemish Youth Council every time they want to take decisions that have an impact on children and young people. But the Flemish Youth Council also provides advice on its own initiative. In committees, working groups and other meetings, they prepare positions and advice. Each opinion then passes through the advisory council of the Flemish Youth Council, which consists of 16 elected youth and youth work advisers. The advisers deliver the final result to the Flemish government.

In this way, everyone can take into account the wishes and needs of Flemish youth and the interests of youth work. And this with one specific goal: to make policy in our country and far beyond more youth friendly. The Flemish Youth Council is supported by De Ambrassade vzw.

ORGANISATIONS WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE Many organisations with a special focus on young people are commissioned to set up, support and monitor youth employment and entrepreneurship: the Ambrassade (support centre for youth work and youth information, secretariat of the Flemish Youth Council), nationally organised youth associations, and NGOs in the field of development co-operation.

General distribution of responsibilities

As outlined above, employment and entrepreneurship are regulated at the federal level and further supported by the Flemish Region.

Cross-sectorial cooperation

In Flanders, youth employment and entrepreneurship are a joint responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Employment, the Flemish Minister of Education and the Flemish Minister of Youth.

As mentioned in other chapters, youth policy is a transversal policy. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

Besides the Flemish Policy Plan, the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- Impact assessment of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER)
- Contact points for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration
- Youth Progress Report

3.3 Skills forecasting

Forecasting system(s)

VLAMT – competence prognoses

The Flemish Government aims to have a coordinated and structured collection of information about future competence needs. In 2010, a pilot project has been launched to develop an instrument for the identification of competence needs for the Flemish region. In the European project 'Flemish Labour Market Research of the future' ([VLAMT](#)), funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), a concept was elaborated.

The project consists of:

- a quantitative model of changes in the labour market, undertaken by the Policy Research Centre Work and Social Economy, a centre of expertise in policy monitoring and analysis of the labour market, which support the Flemish Government
- 'Competent', a skills database maintained by VDAB
- strategic focus studies on competence needs

The Flemish Government intends to encourage and support focus studies through sectoral education and funds for training.

Job monitor

The Policy Research Centre Work and Social Economy also provides a Job Monitor ([beroepenmonitor](#)). The Job Monitor is an interactive tool with evolutions of the number employed in several professional classes. The Job Monitor is divided into characteristic such as gender, age and education level. The statistics are calculated on the basis of the Labour Force Questionnaire.

Skills development

The Policy Paper Employment, Economy, Science and Innovation (2014-2019) states that there will be investment in a strong connection between education and labour market to provide better developed and more agile citizens. In this way, citizens should be able to improve their competences and acquire qualifications.

3.4 Career guidance and counselling

Career guidance and counselling services

VDAB is a Flemish public service that brings together supply and demand on the labour market and whose main task is to mediate and guide jobseekers to work. If necessary, the skills of the jobseekers are increased in the competence centres of the VDAB.

VDAB is an external autonomous agency and is established by the Flemish Decree of 7 May 2004, offers career guidance services at its competence centres, for (young) people who wish to take charge of their own career. In these centres, VDAB career guidance counsellors help people with their career choices and provide assistance with drafting a personal development plan. VDAB is financed by the Flemish government. The Ministers of the Flemish Community define the policy priorities through a management agreement between VDAB and the Flemish Government ([beheersovereenkomst](#)). VDAB is part of the policy domain Work and Social Economy.

At the Flemish level, VDAB plays a leading and coordinating role in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Plan. In 2014, the Youth Guarantee scheme started in Flanders. However, in 2008 Flanders had already developed an impressive policy on unemployed youth, the so-called 'Youth Employment Plan' (YEP). VDAB implemented the YEP to tailor its standard services better to the needs of young job-seekers aged 18 to 25. Its goal is to stimulate young people (18-25 years) to find a job (possibly their first) and to provide them with the training and guidance they needed for long-term employment. VDAB has decided not to create a new plan within the context of the Youth Guarantee scheme, but to optimise and strengthen the existing YEP so that VDAB can offer every young person (i.e. a rate of 100%) either a job or personal counselling within 4 months after registration.

The VDAB chooses the most appropriate method to activate the young people, including:

- vacancy counselling
- guidance
- mediation, training
- work experience
- internship
- apprenticeship
- etc.

The method can be offered by VDAB itself or by a partner (TIBB - Trajecten met Intensieve Begeleiding en Bemiddeling: trajectories with intensive counselling and mediation). In addition, VDAB enters into flexible and wide-ranging partnerships with education institutions, companies and sectors. An example is the 'learning network', which was established in the context of the Youth Guarantee. The partners in the 'learning network' are VDAB, Department of Health, Department of Education and Training, Department of Employment, Department of Culture, Youth and Media, the ESF-Agency, the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and youth organisations that work with NEET's (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the field.

VDAB focuses on career guidance for all jobseekers and in particular special target groups, such as young job seekers (who are recently graduated). Young people below the age of 25 are counselled more intensively early on in their spell of unemployment than older job seekers. VDAB also focuses on early school leavers to make them aware of their rights and obligations and of the career guidance service through promotion in schools, payment institutions, media campaigns and e-services for young people.

In order to achieve this objective, the VDAB has various means at its disposal:

- providing information on job vacancies to jobseekers. To this end, vacancies (with their requirements) and jobseekers (with their qualifications) are linked to each other in a vacancy database: the so-called HIS computer (Job Seekers Information System).
- keeping statistics up to date, especially with a view to finding out trends in unemployment and employment; on this basis, the VDAB advises the government.
- providing job application training.
- Providing vocational training to jobseekers, especially for the so-called bottleneck professions, for which there is a shortage on the labour market. The Individual Vocational Training (IBO) is an example of this.
- Dedicated mediators for youth, especially NEET's

The promotion of further training and education, among other things by providing training cheques, which employees themselves can freely spend at recognised training institutes.

Funding

The work of VDAB is largely funded by the Flemish Government and in particular by the Flemish Ministry of Employment and Social Economy. VDAB operates under a management agreement with the Flemish government in this connection. The management agreement defines the policy priorities and the budget allocated to VDAB.

As well as the grant from the Flemish Community, there is also income from the European Union and from the invoicing of employers.

In 2017, the total operating budget was 833.144.000 euros. This budget includes employee costs, operational costs, cooperation with third parties, financial compensation and investments. (source: [Schriftelijke vraag Vlaams Parlement](#)).

Quality assurance

VDAB is accountable to the Flemish Government. The follow-up, reporting and evaluation of the management agreement is governed by a decree ([Decreet tot oprichting van het publiekrechtelijk vormgegeven extern verzelfstandigd agentschap "Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding"](#)). The Flemish Government is responsible for altering, complementing, replacing or removing the mission, tasks and authorities of the VDAB in accordance of the decree.

In accordance with the decree on 'Better Administrative Policy' ('Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid' or 'BBB'), the VDAB has to provide an annual business plan. All reforms and initiatives concerning (youth) employment are included in the annual business plan of VDAB. This plan is monitored, evaluated and adjusted (qualitatively and quantitatively) quarterly by the Ministry, the board of directors of VDAB and the experts.

The mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure the quality of the services and measures are described in the plan. The main mechanisms are: customer's satisfaction, evaluation reports and result measurements. Furthermore, there are operational objectives (e.g. 'to guarantee a comprehensive and tailored mediation and counselling offer to all registered job-seekers under 25 years'), objective indicators (e.g. 75% satisfaction rate, 60% of young job-seekers get a job 6 months after registration) and monitoring indicators (e.g. 17.800 IBOs on an annual basis) in the plan.

VDAB is responsible for overall quality assurance in the competence centres.

3.5 Traineeships and apprenticeships

Official guidelines on traineeships and apprenticeships

Federal level

The Royal Decree of 21 September 2004 concerning the protection of trainees ([Koninklijk Besluit van 21 september 2004 betreffende de bescherming van stagiairs](#)) applies to the employer, the trainee and the educational institution. The Royal Decree includes:

- a risk analysis carried out by the employer of the trainee and the associated prevention measures
- information exchange between the employer, trainee and educational institution
- health monitoring

Under Social security legislation, a Federal responsibility, two cases arise. Certain education programmes prescribe traineeship for students to obtain their degree. In addition to this compulsory traineeship, some students and graduates choose to do a traineeship. When the traineeship is not remunerated, a declaration does not have to be made to the Civil Service Social Security. When the traineeship is remunerated or compensation is given, the nature of the working relationship has to be verified. This defines whether or not the provider of the traineeship has to conclude an employment contract and pay social security contributions.

Traineeships and apprenticeships may be organised from the second-grade of secondary education and when the trainee/apprentice is 15 years old or no longer subject to compulsory full-time schooling under national law.

Flemish level

The Flemish Government describes a system of learning and working ([Stelsel Leren en Werken](#)) which refers to education systems in which trainees or apprentices acquire professional skills in a school environment (educational institution or training centre) and at the workplace. This concerns, in particular, vocational training where trainees are students or young poorly qualified jobseekers. The system of learning and working is a joint responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Work and the Flemish Minister of Education and Training.

The system of learning and working includes:

Students who are following a traineeship or apprenticeship in the context of their education:

- Part-time vocational education (dbso): when a pupil is 15 or 16 years old (s)he may enter a system of alternating learning and working. The young person in the dbso is taught two days a week at the Centre for Part-time Education. This is the learning part. All youngsters in part-time education are obliged to take part in learning and working for at least 28 hours a week. The workplace learning part depends on the results of a screening. That could be: 1. a real work experience (through two types of employment contract), 2. a bridging project: for young people who are willing to work but still need to develop their attitudes and skills, 3. a pathway: a specific training and guidance module for young people with inadequate attitudes and skills, 4. a personal development path: for vulnerable young people in problematic situations. Here both the teaching and the working part can be replaced. Such a personal development programme is organised by a Centre for Part-time Training. Part-time vocational education is organised in cooperation with a centre for part-time education or a centre for apprenticeships.
- Dual system of learning and working (Duaal Leren, pilot project): this is in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Employment, VDAB and Syntra Flanders and with youth work organisations that work with young people at work. In 2019-2020 the

pilot project stops and the dual courses will become part of the school structure. Dual learning gives pupils access to the workplace from the very beginning of their schooling. This also gives students the opportunity to gain work experience at a relatively young age, and thus to make a well-founded choice for a particular job. The agreements, conditions and obligations relating to the OAO (work-linked training agreement) or SAO (work-linked training traineeship agreement) were drawn up in close consultation with employers and employees. Furthermore, we would like to point out that the VDAB school-leavers' study shows that young people who have followed a work-linked training course in secondary education have a high level of employment at the end of their school career. In a broader sense, dual learning can prevent young people from ending up in a NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) position. The aim of dual learning is to bring education and the labour market closer together, to reduce the unskilled outflow and to reduce youth unemployment. As from 1 September 2019, dual learning will be rolled out across the board in secondary education, after a trial period of 3 years. From the next academic year onwards, experimental gardens will also be set up for dual learning in higher education. Dual learning is an integrated process in secondary education in which general education, vocational education and work experience form a whole. Young people acquire the skills they need to obtain a qualification both in the workplace and at school (or in a part-time education centre or a Syntra classroom). The learning pathway thus consists of a teaching and work component that are coordinated and together form a coherent whole. In 2015, the Flemish government resolutely chose to develop such a new system of dual learning, as a high-quality and fully-fledged alternative to the existing 'traditional' education systems. The draft memorandum-bis lays down the outlines for this and also defines the role of SYNTRA Flanders as a working director in the new system of dual learning. On 1 September 2016, the first pilot projects on dual learning were launched under the name 'School bench in the workplace'. Several innovative projects were also launched to further concretise certain aspects of dual learning. The first specific rules were laid down in the decree regulating certain aspects of work-linked training (10 June 2016). The conditions of the decree apply not only to workplaces in the dual learning pilot project, but also to workplaces in Part-time Learning and Working. Part-time Learning and Working is an existing system of work-linked training in which secondary school pupils learn several days at the workplace. The system is organised in part-time vocational secondary education and apprenticeship. In the part-time vocational secondary education and apprenticeship, the young people learn 3 days at the workplace and follow 2 days of lessons in a centre for part-time education or a centre for learning and working. In the apprenticeship, the young people learn 4 days at the workplace and follow 1 day of lessons in a Syntra workplace.

- Apprenticeship (leertijd): Apprenticeships form part of the alternating training system within secondary education. In Flanders apprenticeships are organised in a SYNTRA training centre. The apprenticeship system combines courses at a SYNTRA campus with working in a company under the guidance of an entrepreneur or training supervisor. Young people are only admitted to this system when they have been offered a contract by an employer. There are no alternatives in terms of work experience if the young person becomes unemployed. Most of the training is for three years. Apprenticeships fall under the minister responsible for education. This system runs in cooperation with SYNTRA Flanders.

Young job-seekers, such as trainees from training centres:

- Individual vocational training ('Individuele Beroepsopleiding' (IBO)): young people can start work under a training contract with VDAB for IBO, individual vocational training in which VDAB contracts its training assignment out to a company where the job-seeker will be taught his/her chosen vocation on the shop floor. The individual Vocational Training aims at fostering (youth) employment. During this individual training, the employer does not have to pay a wage or social security contributions.

- Traineeship agreement: this is available for (young) people who have formally left school. It comprises a work experience at an enterprise with theoretical entrepreneurial training in a training centre. This is undertaken in cooperation with SYNTRA Flanders.
- Job familiarity internship ('beroepsinlevingsstage' (BIS)): paid internship in a company to strengthen (young) people's skills and competences at the workplace. This is undertaken in cooperation with VDAB.
- Job exploring internship ('beroepsverkennde stage' (BVS)): this is used as an orienting tool to explore whether the jobseeker has clear and realistic job aspirations. The focus is on exploring sectors, jobs and/or functions. This internship can provide important information to develop an efficient trajectory. This is organised by the VDAB.
- Work experiencing internship ('werkervaringsstage' (WES)): this internship provides a jobseeker who has difficulties with finding work the opportunity to gain some workplace experience and to strengthen competences and skills.

VDAB has decided not to create a new plan regarding the Youth Guarantee Plan, but to optimise and strengthen the existing Youth Employment Plan (see 3.4). The added value of this strengthened approach specifically for traineeship and apprenticeship is the focus on workplace learning (IBO, 'Individuele BeroepsOpleiding' or individual vocational training), internships, apprenticeships, etc.), which becomes a standard module in the trajectory of unqualified young people and the cooperation with sectors to create forms of workplace learning.

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Promoting traineeships and apprenticeships

Facilitating the participation of young people and supporting providers of traineeships

The Royal Decree of 1 September 2006 concerning starting and tutoring premiums ([Start-en Stagebonus](#)) is a measure to facilitate the participation of young people and support providers of traineeship and apprenticeships. The Federal Government set up a system of financial rewards to prevent the dropping out of part-time students (who do apprenticeships as part of their alternating education in partial compulsory education) through start premiums and to encourage companies to employ them through internship premiums.

Since 1 September 2015, the starting and tutoring bonuses have been a responsibility of the Flemish Community. Since January 2016, the Department of Employment and Social Economy has been responsible for the payment of the starting and tutoring bonuses.

The Royal Decree of 16 May 2003 concerning the harmonisation and simplification of the regulations regarding the reduction of social security contributions mentions target group reduction for 'mentors'. The cost reduction is a measure to encourage employers to organise training at the workplace.

Raising awareness about traineeships and apprenticeships

VDAB promotes traineeships and apprenticeships and informs young people and providers. A [list](#) of all possible traineeships and apprenticeships is available on the website of the VDAB:

- individual vocational training,

- apprenticeship,
- starting traineeship,
- work experience agreement.

In addition, the VDAB organised in cooperation with Voka, VRT, UNIZO and Adecco the Experience Works-campaign in 2015 ([Ervaring werkt campagne](#)). Employees of VDAB, together with 1300 young people, visited 700 companies. These companies offers traineeships or apprenticeships. During these campaign, VDAB, Voka, VRT, UNIZO and Adecco also informed many young people and companies about the possibilities of traineeships and apprenticeships.

Recognition of learning outcomes

The following certificates recognise learning outcomes (under the Decree of 10 July 2008):

- A certificate (attest): if students successfully complete one or more apprenticeship-training years.
- A certificate (certificaat): if the youngster completes his training successfully.
- An apprenticeship certificate (certificaat leertijd): if pupils have successfully completed their entire apprenticeship training programme. An apprenticeship certificate is not the same as an education diploma, but has a lot of value and fulfils the requirements of business legislation for professional knowledge for most professions.
- A certificate of business administration basics (getuigschrift basiskennis bedrijfsbeheer): if the young person
 - has completed at least four school years in secondary education, apart from the first stage, or in an apprenticeship, and
 - has satisfied the conditions for basic knowledge of business administration.

A 'Flemish Qualifications Framework' is being developed, following the development of the 'European Qualifications Framework'. The Government of Flanders has formulated the intention to implement the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) in Flanders.

Funding

Flemish Government

The system of learning and working is allocated to the policy domain **Education and Training** of the Flemish Government. In 2017, the budget for the system learning and working is 10,6 million euro. The overall budget of the policy domain Education and Training is 11,3 billion (source: [Vlaamse Begroting in cijfers 2017](#)). In 2018, the budget for the system learning and working is 10,7 million euro. The overall budget of the policy domain Education and Training is 13,2 billion (source: [Vlaamse Begroting in cijfers 2018](#)). In 2019, the overall budget of policy domain Education and Training is 13,9 billion (source: [Vlaamse Begroting in cijfers 2019](#)). In 2020, the overall budget of policy domain Education and Training is 14,36 billion (source: [Begroting 2020](#)). In 2020, the overall budget of policy domain Education and Training is 14,36 billion (source: [Begroting 2020](#)).

The work of **VDAB** (such as Individual Vocational Training, Integration traineeship...) is largely funded by the Flemish government. VDAB operates under a management agreement with the Flemish Government in this connection. The management agreement defines the policy priorities and the budget allocated to VDAB.

The **SYNTRA** Flanders agency, which provides apprenticeships, is also subsidised by the Flemish Government under its employment policy area and receives European and Flemish contributions for specific projects. It subsidises the five recognised SYNTRA training centres for the self-employed and small and medium-sized enterprises. The centres receive:

- an operating subsidy for apprenticeships and certified and non-certified programmes. Those programmes that are recognised receive funding on the basis of the number of trainee hours of the trainees that take the exam. This is thus a form of output funding;
- an investment subsidy for the hire, construction or acquisition and owner maintenance of the buildings;
- where applicable, project funding.

Courses are only subsidised if they meet the recognition requirements.

European Social Fund

The Operational Programme for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Flanders in the 2014-2020 period supports initiatives that increase employment and improve social cohesion in Flanders. The ESF programme lays down the priorities for the expenditure of 1 billion euro, of which 600 million euro is financed through the Flemish budget and 400 million euro through the European budget.

One of the priorities of the ESF-programme is investing in sustainable and high quality jobs on the Flemish labour market and in vocational training and lifelong learning. Sixty per cent of the resources have been allocated to this priority. This corresponds with the Flemish career policy, which aims to bring about a more effective labour market. More specifically, Flemish ESF projects will focus on key transition moments in careers, such as the transition from school to work, from unemployment to work and from one job to another.

In the end, the Flemish Operational Programme will assist 250,000 people in finding or keeping a job, in setting up a company, or in participating in vocational training.

Quality assurance

Policy Domain Education and Training

The quality assurance system has the following goals:

- to ensure the constant improvement of the quality of education
- to account to the government for the use of public funds
- to provide information to students and parents about the quality of education

VDAB

All reforms and initiatives are included in the annual business plan of VDAB (beheersovereenkomst). This plan will be monitored, evaluated and adjusted (qualitatively and quantitatively) quarterly by the Ministry, the board of directors of VDAB and the experts.

VDAB is responsible for overall quality assurance in the VDAB centres.

SYNTRA Flanders

Both the Executive Board of SYNTRA Flanders and the Commission of Practical Training (responsible for apprenticeships) include members appointed by the representative organisations of employers and employees, small and medium-sized enterprises and agriculture that belong to SERV (Socio-Economic Council of Flanders).

SYNTRA Flanders evaluates the five SYNTRAs every three years with respect to how well known the programme is and its market share, customer satisfaction and effectiveness. SYNTRA also uses a self-evaluation tool coupled with an assessment panel consisting of both internal and external members. This panel assesses the self-evaluation, and the action and improvement plans developed by SYNTRAs, and engages in probing discussions with all actors in connection with the organisation of SYNTRA training activities.

SYNTRA Flanders is responsible for overall quality assurance in the centres.

3.6 Integration of young people in the labour market

Youth employment measures

Youth employment measures

The Flemish Youth- and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019) and the Policy Paper on Employment, Economy, Science and Innovation (2014-2019) mention the provision of a tailor-made service for all young job-seekers. Every young person is supposed to get a job or receive personal counselling within four months after registration. This objective includes the following projects and processes:

1. OKOT-VDAB ([Onderwijskwalificerend traject met VDAB Opleiding](#))

An OKOT-VDAB degree trajectory is a programme for young job-seekers who want to increase significantly their chances of getting a job by making one of the designated shortage occupations their job goal, but who do not have the required diploma and competences. Poorly skilled young people can obtain their secondary education diploma through OKOT's second-chance education.

1. WIJ! (Work Experience Programme for Young People)

The Government of Flanders offers a [WIJ!](#)-programme (Work Experience Programme for Young People) to strengthen the work competencies of unqualified young people and to guide them into work. The support provided by this programme leads to work experience or the beginning of qualitative training (vocational training or education).

1. YOUTH GUARANTEE PLAN

In the fight against youth unemployment the European Commission has launched the Youth Guarantee in 2013, which she formulated as follows: "All young people under the age of 25 years should receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education." (European Council, 2013). In addition, The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) has mobilised additional European funding for regions where youth unemployment is high, where, inter alia, it is high in Brussels-Capital Region.

With the [Youth Guarantee Plan](#), VDAB aims to guide young people as quickly as possible towards sustainable employment. In this context, the emphasis is on young people with a low or mid-level education.

VDAB has decided not to create a new plan regarding the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Plan, but to optimize and strengthen the existing Youth Employment Plan (2008). All young job-seekers under the age of 25 years will be offered a tailored trajectory with competence enhancement actions (technical and non-technical competences (attitude, application skills, etc.) within 4 months after registration as a job-seeker. All unqualified school leavers start by the end of the sixth month after registration on a vocational training and/or work experience. Those NEET young people who do not register with VDAB are tracked down and motivated to be counselled by partners at municipal level. The starting point for the non-registered NEETs is the moment they leave school. Essential administrative data (education, social services, municipalities, etc.) will therefore be combined.

VDAB also disseminates information about job opportunities. VDAB keeps an unemployment register with information (age, education, place of residence, work experience, job preferences, etc.) on people who are currently unemployed. At the same time, the VDAB maintains a database of the job vacancies that are currently available. The

databases are regularly compared in order to find suitable matches an unemployed person and a job vacancy.

The Flemish Government also has a measure providing targeted reductions in employers' social security contributions to foster youth employment in the private sector. The target group reduction has been transferred since the sixth state reform of Belgium. The 'Flemish target group reduction for young people' replaces the 'Federal target reduction for young employees', which was suspended 1 July 2016.

The Individual Vocational Training is a training measure aimed at fostering (youth) employment. During this individual training, the employer doesn't have to pay a wage or social security contributions.

Flexicurity measures focusing on young people

At the Flemish level, there are no specific measures to enhance flexibility and security in the labour market to boost youth employment.

The Federal social legislation envisages special assistance for unemployed youth after schooling. After a waiting period of one year ('beroepsinschakelingstijd'), they receive so-called waiting allowances ([inschakelingsuitkering](#)), which provide them with the means to live until they secure employment. The waiting allowances are available to every young person of minimum 18 and maximum 25 years old. When a young person receives a waiting allowance, he/she has to be available for the labour market and he/she should not refuse vocational training or appropriate employment.

The system of learning and working ([Stelsel Leren en Werken](#)) can also be seen as a flexicurity measure. Education in Belgium is compulsory until the age of 18. However, from the age of 15 a pupil can choose to combine part-time vocational schooling with a part-time job. For young people between 18 and 25 years old, specific legislation makes their entry into the labour market easier. Within the Belgian frame, the Government of Flanders pursues a particular labour market policy that aims to 'activate' people. Young people receive counselling and guidance services adapted to their specific situation. The Government of Flanders also supports dialogue between young people and actors in the labour market, in different ways and at different levels.

Reconciliation of private and working life for young people

There is no specific youth-policy measure or initiative supporting the balance between work and family at the Flemish level.

At Federal level, a Royal Decree of 13 June 2001 amending the Royal Decree of 25 November 1991 concerning the unemployment regulation within the scope of youth vacations ([Koninklijk besluit tot wijziging van het koninklijk besluit van 25 november 1991 houdende de werkloosheidsreglementering in het kader van de jeugdvakantie](#)). Young people under the age of 25 are entitled to a youth vacation in the first year in which they were not fully employed. The days of youth vacation are reimbursed through a payment of 65% of their wage by the National Employment Service.

Funding of existing schemes/initiatives

The Flemish Government

The work of VDAB (such as OKOT-VDAB, Youth Employment Plan...) is largely funded by the Flemish Government. As well as the grant from the Flemish Community, there is also income from the European Union and from invoicing of employers.

For the implementation of the Youth Employment Plan there were already sufficient resources made available from the Flemish Government and Europe. So for the successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee there is no need for extra funding. The amount of funding is not mentioned in the plan.

European Social Fund

The Operational Programme for the implementation of the ESF in Flanders in the 2014-2020 period supports initiatives that increase employment and improve social cohesion in Flanders. The ESF programme lays down the priorities for the expenditure of 1 billion euro. 600 million euros is financed through the Flemish budget and 400 million euros through the European budget. The programme aims not only to stimulate employment and social inclusion, but also to promote innovation and transnational cooperation. It supports targeted actions for more entrepreneurship and an increased flow from the social economy, as well as better integration and inclusion of unskilled youngsters and Roma.

For example, the project WIJ! (Work Experience Programme for Young People), as mentioned earlier, is financed by the ESF-programme, with a budget allocation in 2016 of 6.301.401,79 euros and in 2017 of 5.486.181,27 euros.

Quality assurance

All reforms and initiatives concerning (youth) employment are included in the annual business plan of VDAB. This plan is monitored, evaluated and adjusted (qualitatively and quantitatively) quarterly by the Ministry of Work, the board of directors of VDAB and the experts.

In the plan there are operational objectives (e.g. 'to guarantee a comprehensive and tailored mediation and counselling offer to all registered job-seekers under 25 years'), objective indicators (e.g. 75% satisfaction rate, 60% of young job-seekers get a job 6 months after registration) and monitoring indicators (e.g. 17.800 IBOs on an annual basis).

The initiatives in the context of 'Early School Leaving' are also listed in the 'Early School Leaving Action Plan'. This plan is monitored and adjusted by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Work, the technical workforce for early school leaving and the steering committee for early school leaving: every year at least three meetings of the technical workforce, at least one meeting of the steering committee, an annual evaluation report (qualitative and quantitative results), and an annual meeting between Ministries, inspectorate education and the educational counselling service take place.

Specifically, the following actions for young people will be registered and will be measured and followed up operationally 1, 4, 6 and 12 months after registration:

- The number of young people labelled for the youth work plan/youth guarantee
- The number of those with a job offer (offer of work):
 - of whom have an open job offer
 - of whom have a change to the vacancy (must go and apply in person)
- The number of those labelled with indicator screening = 'assessment', 'screening' (1) (diagnosis: measuring the distance to the labour market)
- The number of those labelled who have started a counselling or mediation process (trajectory/training course to strengthen competences)
- percentage who have left unemployment via action:
 - of those who started a job or transmission
 - cooperation rejected
 - with changed eurodat
 - not employable
- percentage conclusively reached (reach percentage of number of young people who come under the youth guarantee)

- not conclusive with invitation (percentage of those young people invited to come to the VDAB, but for whom no service provision has taken place)
- not (or not yet) processed (number of young people who fell through the cracks)

This report is evaluated at appropriate times and is intended to serve as a basis for improving the approach towards young people.

3.7 Cross-border mobility in employment, entrepreneurship and vocational opportunities

Programmes and schemes for cross-border mobility

Flemish students in higher education can do their internship in another country. Young people can also do an internship outside Belgium, even if this is not part of any education. There are opportunities to do holiday jobs, but also real jobs beyond the Flemish and Belgian borders. JINT (the coordination body for International Youth Work funded by the Government of Flanders) informs young people about international opportunities and helps young people and youth organisations to make their international plans a reality.

Go Strange

The website www.gostrange.be is one of the main instruments for cross-border mobility, as well as the bi-annual information fair 'Go Strange'. The information fairs in Brussels (2015) and Ghent (2017) have reached together 2330 visitors with plans to go abroad.

Go Strange is part of the information network Eurodesk and has partners in 33 countries. It is also powered by JINT vzw, the coordinating body for international youth work. JINT was commissioned by the Flemish government to make young people aware of their possibilities to go abroad for more than just tourism reasons. JINT informs, stimulates and supports Flemish youngsters to go international.

VDAB-EURES

The purpose of VDAB-EURES services is to provide information, advice and recruitment/placement (job-matching) services for the benefit of (young) workers and employers.

VDAB participates in the EURES-network, thus offering job-seekers support in finding a job abroad. VDAB has implemented an action plan for international mobility.

Flanders Trainee Programme

The Government of Flanders provides grants for traineeships in multilateral organisations such as the United Nations, OESO or the Council of Europe.

They are for young people under the age of 35. The traineeships last at least 2 months and maximum 6 months in an international organisation. The Flanders Trainee Programme reimburses travel and accommodation expenses.

MOBILE 2 – Mobility in apprenticeships

Apprentices are able to participate in a European international exchange project ([MOBILE](#)). During a traineeship abroad lasting a fortnight, apprentices can gain insights into a foreign company in the Netherlands, France or Germany. Apprentices receive a grant from the Erasmus+ programme.

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

[Erasmus for young entrepreneurs](#) is a cross-border exchange programme that offers new and aspiring entrepreneurs the opportunity to learn from experienced entrepreneurs, who run small businesses in one of the other cooperating countries.

The exchange of experience takes place during a stay with the experienced entrepreneur, which helps the new entrepreneur to acquire the skills needed to run a small business. The receiving entrepreneur benefits from new business perspectives and has the opportunity to work with foreign partners and learn about new markets. This European exchange programme lasts one to six months and is financed by the European Union.

Legal framework

There is no specific legal framework for the cross-border mobility of young workers, trainees and entrepreneurs. Most of the legal framework targets the population in general.

However, a legal framework for cross-border mobility of young workers, trainees and entrepreneurs depends on the international juridical context. Flanders (and Belgium in general) have bilateral or multilateral agreements with other countries. The agreements allow Belgian social rights to be exported abroad. The social rights of young workers, trainees and young entrepreneurs who stay in the European Economic Area or Switzerland are determined by European legislation.

References:

<https://www.gostrange.be/wie-zijn-wij>

<https://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/index.php?lan=nl>

3.8 Development of entrepreneurship competence

Policy Framework

The first strategy in Flanders dates back to 2007. The second strategy is the 2011-2014 Action Plan for the Promotion of Entrepreneurial Spirit and Entrepreneurship. The Government has confirmed that this strategy is still ongoing, despite being dated to conclude at the end of 2014. The second strategy identifies four priorities:

- supporting the development of the entrepreneurial spirit
- creating opportunities for practical entrepreneurial learning
- increasing people's motivation to become entrepreneurs
- and ensuring that teachers show entrepreneurial spirit and demonstrate a balanced view of entrepreneurship.

Actions address the need for a common vocabulary, support for teachers (including methods, networks and placements in industry), communicating with all partners and ensuring that learning progression takes place across education levels and phases of teacher education.

The Flemish Government launched a third specific strategy, the Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education 2015-2019 ([Actieplan Ondernemend Onderwijs 2015-2019](#)), at the end of 2015. This is a shared initiative between the Minister of Agriculture and Sea Fishing, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Economy, Science, Innovation, Employment, Professional education and Sport. The objective of the Action Plan is to prepare students for self-employment as well as providing teachers with the training needed to help them create positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and self-employment. The Action Plan is also a contribution to the economic growth strategy Flanders in Action 2020.

The Action Plan aims at fostering a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship in young people and adults through regular education. The following groups belong to the Action Plan's target group:

- pupils in nursery and primary education

- pupils in full-time and part-time secondary education, including apprenticeship and Se-n-Se (secondary after secondary education),
- pupils in part-time education in the arts
- students in higher education
- course participants in adult education, with the exception of the training course leading to the business management certificate.

Formal learning

Entrepreneurship has yet to be included in the curriculum. Nevertheless aspects of entrepreneurship such as creativity and sense of initiative are incorporated as cross-curriculum attainment targets in primary and secondary schools. Further up the educational ladder, business-related vocational education and training (VET) and higher education courses incorporate entrepreneurship in the attainment targets. Entrepreneurship education schemes are widely available but mainly optional. The extent of provision varies by educational level. Most of the opportunities are concentrated at the general secondary education level. The decision to get involved in enterprise education programmes is often taken at the school or teacher level. Statutory courses on entrepreneurship are only found in some fields of VET and higher education. However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of enterprise education across all levels.

The Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education (2015-2019) mentions that the Flemish Government will seek clarification of the role of entrepreneurial learning in the on-going parliamentary debate on secondary school graduation requirements (eindtermendebat). The Action Plan states further that a professional qualification Entrepreneur will be developed in the framework of the Flemish qualification structure.

Vlajo (Vlaamse Jonge Ondernemingen – Flemish Young Enterprises), a non-profit organisation, builds on its partnerships with education institutes, the Flemish Government and the business community to provide practical experience. Vlajo can be found in one out of two education institutions in Flanders. Vlajo specifically provides practical education projects to stimulate entrepreneurship and works with schools to engage students in mini-enterprises. It provides a framework for the creation and management of small businesses in a few months during the school year. Students (mini-entrepreneurs) develop skills by taking key positions in human resources, financial, technical, and commercial departments, and by working in management, advertising, marketing, accounting, and sales.

The Policy Paper on Employment, Economy, Science and Innovation 2014-2019 ([Beleidsnota Werk, Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie 2014-2019](#)) states that young entrepreneurs should develop and maintain their competences. For this reason, SYNTRA Flanders and the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship are the key partners in an integrated approach for the strengthening of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial training. They make people enthusiastic about entrepreneurship at all ages as an equal choice. Entrepreneurship pathways and entrepreneurship training remain important levers to encourage and strengthen entrepreneurship, both among jobseekers and those in work. Entrepreneurship skills will be strengthened in the future via a five-year Master Call at VLAIO, part of which will be a closed call (via the Syntra not-for-profit organisations with which a management agreement is drawn up) so that their knowledge, expertise and reach can be further exploited.

Non-formal and informal learning

The Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education 2015-2019 mentions support for youth cooperation. Youth cooperation schemes enable young people to experiment with their entrepreneurial skills in a supportive and safe environment. There are two types of youth cooperation: Haven is a cooperative of young people, youth centres and motivated partners. Together they provide a safe testing ground where young entrepreneurs are given the space and time to experiment with their own project. This allows them to safely

test the viability of their own business while developing the necessary entrepreneurial skills.

There is also a new statute 'student-entrepreneur'. From the 1st of January 2017, this statute enables students who combine their studies with enterprise to stay tax-dependent. This can be used for student-entrepreneurs who are between 18 and 25 years old and are subscribed for courses in an educational institution in order to receive a diploma that is recognised by the authorised agency. The statute provides a favorable system of contributions concerning the social statute of independent workers. As a result, young people whose income is limited to 6.505,33 euros will not have to pay contributions.

The Flemish qualification structure is a validation system to recognise and validate education, societal functions and non-formal and informal experiences. In this way, the Government of Flanders plans to work on an integrated EVC-policy (policy to value competencies acquired elsewhere).

In addition, there are also specific initiatives taken by Flemish youth organisations with the support of the Government of Flanders. JINT, a coordination body for International Youth Work, promotes Youthpass as an outcome of international mobility projects (Erasmus+: Youth in Action). JINT has also published a document that describes the main instruments for the recognition of competences in a European context. It highlights Europass, Youthpass and the European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders.

STEM-Action plan

STEM is an international acronym that stands for a range of technological, technical, scientific and mathematical training courses and professions. You may immediately think of engineers or programmers, but STEM is much more than that. Just think of it:

- The new techniques in agriculture and horticulture that help provide the food on your plate
- The modern equipment that saves lives in hospitals every day
- The computer screen that now allows you to read this text online

Today's society needs more people with a STEM profile. In order to stimulate young people to opt for STEM training and careers, the Flemish Government has drawn up the STEM action plan. This action plan came into effect in 2012 and should achieve 8 objectives by 2020:

1. Making STEM education more attractive
2. Support teachers, trainers and supervisors
3. Improve the process of study and career choice
4. More girls in STEM schools and professions
5. Commitment to excellence
6. Adapting the training offer
7. Encouraging sectors, companies and knowledge institutions
8. Improve the social appreciation of technical professions

In the plan, there is not only a role for the government. Education and training partners, schools, teachers, sectoral social partners and the media also help to achieve the objectives.

Educators support in entrepreneurship education

The Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education 2015-2019 mentions that educators should be able to facilitate entrepreneurship education. Educators should have the space, time, support and training to facilitate entrepreneurship education and the opportunity to share knowledge and experience. Their educational institution should bring in the expertise for support and training through cooperation with external partners.

In addition, educators and lecturers play a key role in providing Entrepreneurial Education. In this context, different types of support are offered: on-line support, face to face support by third parties, provision of a qualitative offer of activities and the creation of teacher placements in industry.

Online support

The Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education 2015-2019 mentions that [Competento](#), a virtual knowledge centre on entrepreneurial competences, ensures that educators can consult subsidised material and activities on the online platform [Klasceмент](#). Competento changed into [SOHO!](#) ('Stimuleer Ondernemend Hoger Onderwijs', 'Stimulate Entrepreneurship Higher Education'). SOHO! contains more than 500 links to various initiatives, training manuals and guidance documents, all of them focusing on entrepreneurship education at all levels of education. The aim of the portal is to help teachers design courses with embedded entrepreneurship elements. The portal offers access to information on existing initiatives, materials, tools and methodologies that can be used in transferring and developing entrepreneurial competences in the classroom environment and beyond.

Network

Furthermore, SOHO! has developed the [Forum Enterprising Higher Education \(Forum Oho\)](#) which is a stakeholder platform to stimulate and support entrepreneurship and enterprising spirit among higher education students. In particular, SOHO! is developing a learning network for teachers and external partners to translate and concretise the teaching of entrepreneurship.

The placement of teachers in industry

Teachers are also supported by giving them the opportunity to get a sense of entrepreneurship. Teacher placements in industry are an effective means of doing this, especially when the trainee is placed in a smaller enterprise.

3.9 Start-up funding for young entrepreneurs

Access to information

Access to information

There is no specific measure on access to information for a start-up launched by young entrepreneurs.

The Policy Paper on Employment, Economy, Science and Innovation (2014-2019) states that an integrated contact point for all entrepreneurs will be provided. This objective consists of two operational objectives: a Digital Counter and the establishment of the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Digital Counter

The integrated digital counter is a unique front office of the Flemish Government where every (future) entrepreneur can ask their questions about entrepreneurship.

Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship ([Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen](#)) provides information and makes the experience and knowhow of experts available for (starting) entrepreneurs. The Agency provides information on:

- how to create and start up an enterprise (preparatory work, start-up step by step, coaching and guidance)
- financing and support measures through a data base
- follow-up and acquisition of an enterprise

- energy
- intellectual property
- environment
- design
- international entrepreneurship (access to European Funds)
- ...

The Agency stimulates and supports innovation and entrepreneurship, and creates a favourable environment for business creation.

Access to capital

Most of the public start-up funding in Flanders is available for the population in general. The Flemish Government supports starting entrepreneurs with grants and aid. An overview of these grants and aid are available in the subsidy database of the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Start-up loan+

Participation Fund Flanders provides a start-up loan ([Startlening+](#)). It is a subordinated loan for starting entrepreneurs who have not been actively self-employed as their main job for four years. The loan has a maximum budget of 100.000 euro. The loan has a term of three to ten years and the interest rate applicable is set at 3%. Student entrepreneurs also benefits from the Start-up loan+.

Micro-loans of microStart

microStart finances starting and established entrepreneurs who cannot rely on financial institutes with micro-loans ([microkredieten](#)). A micro-loan can be used for renovation, supply, material, cash resources...A micro-loan is a budget between 500 and 15.000 euro. In addition, microStart provides free services and advice (coaching and education). These services are provided by experienced volunteers.

EIB and EIF

The [European Investment Bank](#) (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF) comprise the EIB-group. These European financial institutions provide: direct funding or funding through financial intermediaries.

The European Investment Fund develops, promotes and manages a number of risk capital and debt financing instruments. For example:

- [COSME Loan Guarantee Facility](#): this instrument is part of the European programme COSME. EIF provides, through the Loan Guarantee Facility instrument, guarantees to financial intermediaries who provide loans and leasing to entrepreneurs. In Flanders, Participation Fund Flanders is recognised as the intermediary.
- [EaSI Guarantee Financial Instrument](#): this instrument is funded by the EaSI-programme and focuses on the stimulation of microfinance to vulnerable groups, micro-enterprises and the social economy. It is the successor to European Progress Microfinance, including the financing of microStart in Flanders. Microstart meets the needs of (future) entrepreneurs who cannot rely on financial institutions.
- ...

3.10 Promotion of entrepreneurship culture

Special events and activities

Campaigns

A day for entrepreneurs ([Dag van de ondernemer](#)) is organised by the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and UNIZO. It is an annual recurring campaign whose main objective is the promotion of entrepreneurship and extra attention is paid to entrepreneurs.

Month of young entrepreneurs (Maand van de jonge ondernemer) is a campaign organised by Young VOKA ([Jong VOKA](#)), a network of young entrepreneurs. During this month, extra attention is paid to young entrepreneurs and professionals.

[Start Academy](#) for young entrepreneurs focuses on students from universities and colleges. It is an academy and contest organised by the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the ING bank and Flemish Young Entrepreneurs. During the year of the contest, several workshops and seminars are organised.

Initiatives to support activities to promote youth entrepreneurship in the field of social entrepreneurship

A number of youth clubs in Flanders can receive grants for the realisation of a supralocal project ([Bovenlokaal project Ondernemerschap](#)). With these grants, the Flemish Government encourages youth clubs to focus on artistic expression and (social) entrepreneurship among young people.

From 2013 until 2019, Youth centres could get grants from the Flemish Community for supralocal projects supporting entrepreneurship with young people. They got an amount of maximum 40 000 euro for wages, and maximum 5000 euro for the operational costs. From 2020 onwards professionalized youth centres can get an operating grant for 4 years when they respond to the priorities of the Flemish youth and children's policy plan, amongst others when they stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit. In the Decree on supralocal youth work, youth centres and youth work for special target groups of 3/04/2019: There are different perspectives to work on entrepreneurship: - Entrepreneurship as a source for competence building: young people who experiment with entrepreneurship consciously and unconsciously develop entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurial competences. - Entrepreneurship as a source of sustainable change: young people can contribute to sustainable changes within the society through social entrepreneurship. Their activities respond to social problems and take account of people and the environment. - Entrepreneurship as a way to work: as a side effect, entrepreneurship can be a gateway to the labour market within youth centres. Young people can create their own job or find their way to (paid) work through entrepreneurial projects.

Furthermore, there is the [Social Innovation Factory \(Sociale InnovatieFabriek\)](#). Challenges such as poverty, climate change and loneliness are important, complex and hard to solve. There are no easy solutions because such challenges result from certain persistent patterns and ways of thinking. But a lot of different social innovative experiments are undertaken in Flanders (e.g. by citizens, companies and associations) to handle such multi-layered problems in a creative way. Through critically reflecting on existing solutions and through searching together for improvements or new concepts, innovators can create social change. It is the mission of the Social Innovation Factory to stimulate such change.

The Social Innovation Factory promotes, guides and supports projects of social entrepreneurship and social innovation that are concerned with societal challenges. The main goal is developing a culture around social innovation in Flanders. They want to inform citizens about social innovation and social entrepreneurship, stimulate them to think about new concepts, activate them to take part in activities and help them in the realisation of their social innovative plans.

Although the Social Innovation Factory is not exclusively focused on young people, it attracts a lot of young people. With the Innovative Partner Projects subsidy call, various cultural organizations can enter into partnerships with organizations from other sectors. Partner projects for the cultural sector often open closed doors to other sectors and offer the means and time to explore new topics and questions. Cultural organisations step out of their comfort zone and, together with the partners, from known or unknown sectors, push their boundaries. The project grant runs for a maximum of three years and amounts to a maximum of €80,000 per project.

Networks and partnerships

Flemish Agency for Innovation and Enterprise Network (Vlaams Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen, VLAIO Network)

[VLAIO](#) is an initiative of the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship that tries to bring different partners together to support entrepreneurs. Examples are interest groups and federations, knowledge and research centres, cluster organisations, local authorities, private service providers such as banks, accountants, etc. The aim is to let them work together and inspire each other. In that way, an environment is created in which Flemish entrepreneurs are optimally supported and guided. The objectives of the VLAIO network are:

- Supporting Flemish entrepreneurs by stimulating partner organisations to work together
- Making (starting) entrepreneurs familiar with the services and products of the different partners

Network Entrepreneurship (Netwerk ondernemen)

Network Entrepreneurship ([Netwerk Ondernemen](#)) is a network of experienced entrepreneurs who help less experienced entrepreneurs to develop an enterprise. Netwerk Ondernemen is supported by the Flemish Government. The guidance provided includes individual and collective support from experienced entrepreneurs, access to an international network and exchange of experience with other starting entrepreneurs.

BRYO

VOKA is the Flemish Network of Enterprises and applies itself to the advocacy of Flemish enterprises. VOKA has therefore launched several projects. [BRYO](#) (Bright and Young) is an initiative of VOKA and the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and supports young entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 36 through a network of young entrepreneurs and individual coaching.

3.11 Current debates and reforms

In 2017, the Flemish Government approved the note '[Transition priority lifelong learning and a dynamic work career](#)'. This note reflects on the transitions that are needed to function well in the labour market and society anno 2050. Technology has an important impact on the labour market and society and creates chances and opportunities in the domain of jobs, qualifications and 21st century skills. Some jobs will disappear, other jobs will be created. The needed skills and competences are expected to change rapidly. Digital and complementary skills (handling information, solving problems, ...) will become more important. Furthermore, trends such as individualisation, flexibilisation and platformisation will redefine careers and labour market relations. This requires reflection about jobs and labour market relations, the division between the private and professional sphere and social risks (such as the quick obsolescence of qualifications). Guaranteeing sustainable jobs for all individuals remains a challenge.

Even though competencies will not last that long, gaining knowledge remains the key to innovation. And just as with jobs, the way we learn will change. Dual learning or learning

in the workplace is on the rise. This is possible both during the studies themselves - students who work and study - and in adult life. There will also be more forms of learning, such as flexible learning paths, open online courses and informal learning in leisure time. We go to learning in dialogue and cooperation with the wider society in general and with industry and the labour market in particular. The pupil has more say and the teacher evolves towards a coaching role. Finally, attention will be paid to equal educational opportunities.

References:

<https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/publicaties/detail/transitieprioriteit-leve...>"

<https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/publicaties/detail/transitieprioriteit-leve...>

4. SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social Inclusion

Special feature

Measures and initiatives to combat social exclusion (of young people) is streamlined across different policy domains at the federal and the Flemish level. Therefore the chapter on Social inclusion focus at the Flemish level and illustrates the relevant parts of strategies and policy documents pertaining to various policy topics such as youth, education and welfare.

Highlights

Policy makers today show an increased attention to disadvantaged young people. To cater to their specific situation, initiatives are taken to flexible supply of the youth care and to work more contextually and emancipatory. Moreover, partnerships are also being established between policy areas and sectors.

4.1 General context

Main challenges to social inclusion

In most Flemish policy areas, the following groups are referred to in the context of policies on social inclusion:

1. Persons living in poverty
2. Low-skilled people
3. People of non-Belgian origin
4. People with functional limitations (long-term illness, handicap, ...)

Below we give an outline of these groups and a current state of affairs concerning social exclusion within the relevant policy areas. We focus in particular on young people and also describe a number of social changes that entail additional challenges.

Before starting this outline, we would like to place one nuance. Although we discuss below all risk groups separately, all studies and data show that these vulnerabilities cannot be considered separately and that they often co-occur and mutually reinforce each other.

People living in poverty

Following the Europe 2020 Strategy, poverty in Flanders is measured based on three indicators:

1. Relative risk of poverty

The relative poverty risk measures the percentage of the population living in a household with a household income below the poverty threshold (60% of equivalent median disposable income).

2. A very low work intensity

A very low work intensity (population 0-59 years) occurs when adults (aged 18 to 59, excluding students) have worked on average less than one fifth of the time during the reference year.

3. Severe material deprivation

Severe material deprivation means that someone lives in a family that cannot afford at least four items from a list of nine (afford to pay rent or utility bills, to keep their home adequately warm, to face unexpected expenses, to eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent every second day, to go on a one-week holiday away from home, to have a car, a washing machine, a colour TV or a telephone).

A person is considered poor or socially excluded when he meets one of these three conditions. Measured on the basis of this composite indicator EU2020, 13.2% of the Flemish population lived in families at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2019 (EU-SILC Statbel, adapted by Statistiek Vlaanderen, [Statistics Flanders](#), 2020). Flanders scores very well in comparison with other European regions and scores also significantly better than the Walloon Region (24.6% of the population lives in families at risk of poverty or social exclusion) and the Brussels-Capital Region (37.8%).

In addition, it is also relevant to look at the individual indicators:

- 9.8% of the people in the Flemish region in 2019 live in households with an income below the Belgian poverty threshold. In recent years, the proportion of people below the poverty risk threshold remained stable; limited fluctuations are not statistically significant ([Statistics Flanders](#), 2020).
- 7.4% of the Flemish people live in households with a very low work intensity. The share of people living in households with very low work intensity decreased significantly between 2016 and 2019 ([Statistics Flanders](#), 2020).
- 1.9% of the Flemish people live in severe material deprivation family. Since 2004, the share of severely deprived people has fluctuated between 2% and 3% of the Flemish population ([Statistics Flanders](#), 2020).
- It is, however, important to note that the SILC survey was thoroughly reformed in 2019. As a result of these changes, comparisons with the results of previous years should be made with caution.

For each of these three indicators, the proportions are significantly lower in the Flemish region than in the Walloon and the Brussels-Capital-Region.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate used to be higher among elderly people, but the gap with the other age groups has declined sharply since 2006. In the age groups 0 to 15 year 14% lives in a family at risk of poverty in 2019 and in the age group 16 to 24 year 16% lives in an at-risk family. The at-risk rate among people aged 65 or older is 13% ([Statistics Flanders](#), 2020).

Poverty is in Flanders closely related to the other indicators of deprivation and social exclusion. For example, the risk of poverty rate is significantly higher among single-person (22%) and single-parent (35%) households, unemployed people (65%), lower-skilled persons (24%) and people born outside of Belgium, both people born in the EU (23%) and people born outside the EU (34%) ([Statistics Flanders](#), 2020).

The fight against poverty is a top priority for the Flemish Government. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Flemish Government has devised a new Flemish Action Plan for Poverty Reduction 2020-2024 ([Vlaams Actieplan Armoedebestrijding 2020-2024](#), 2020). The main policy measures in this plan are: preventing and combatting under-protection in order to avoid people ending up in poverty and social exclusion; launching targeted actions against child poverty; a focus on activation, empowering people and increasing self-reliance; supporting citizens in sudden changes in their lives so that the risk of ending up in poverty is limited; and committing to a quality, liveable and healthy environment for everyone.

Youth Unemployment

Financial difficulties are often at the same time cause and consequence of deprivation in terms of i.a. employment, education, housing, health and social participation. In this regard, special attention is paid to youth unemployment. The EU Member States are facing up to this day still the negative impact of the prolonged economic and financial crisis. Young people are particularly hit by this precarious situation (Schepers & Nicaise, 2014).

In Flanders, the youth unemployment rate is considerably lower than the European average, but also in Flanders this rate is strongly sensitive to economic circumstances. The difficult first labour market entry is one of the main reasons for this cyclicity of youth unemployment (Schepers & Nicaise, 2014). Young people are more than other age groups temporarily recruited. The high proportion of temporary contracts and the limited seniority makes it easier and cheaper to fire young people.

As a result of the crisis, the annual mean youth unemployment rate increased from 15.8% in 2012 to 17.7% in 2013 ([VDAB Arvastat](#), 2020). After 2013 the unemployment rate lowers again. In 2019, thanks to the improving economy, the generation change (exit of the baby boom generation) and the later labour market entry of young people, the Flemish youth unemployment was returning to the very low level of 2008 (13.2%) ([VDAB Arvastat](#), 2020). In 2020, the unemployment rate of young people has increased again to 14.3%, for which the COVID-19 pandemic seems like a logical explanation. It remains to be seen what the long-term impact will be.

In any case, youth unemployment remains strongly linked to education and ethnical background. Unqualified young people and young people with a migration background have significantly higher unemployment rates ([VDAB Arvastat](#), 2020).

Low-skilled and growing inequalities in education

Among adults it is invariably found that lower-skilled people face multiple problems. Problems of social exclusion on the basis of education do already appear among young people, even during their school career. To specify this exclusion on the basis of the educational career, it is important to reflect briefly upon a number of educational issues.

According to the EU framework an early school leaver (ELET) is defined as an 18- to 24-year-old who has a maximum qualification of lower secondary education and who no longer is in education or training. The EU2020 strategy of the European Union wants to decrease the proportion of early school leavers below 10% by 2020. Flanders had already achieved this goal at the start of the strategy. The target of the Flemish Pact 2020 is thus to halve the group of early school leavers in 2008 (8.6%) by 2020 (4.25%) ([Vlaamse Overheid](#), 2020). The latest data show that the amount of early school leavers in 2018 was still 7.3%. The Department of Education and Training of the Flemish Government, however, uses a more stringent definition in which young people who have completed compulsory education but left secondary education without adequate qualifications are considered as early school leavers. In 2008 the percentage of early school leavers as defined by the Flemish Department of Education and Training was 14%, in 2017-2018 that percentage was dropped to 11.9% ([Vlaamse Overheid](#), 2020).

Early school leaving is amongst others linked to unemployment, poverty and poor health. Because early school leaving is associated with social exclusion, it is also important to

focus on those factors which are known to be good predictors of early school leaving. Falling behind in school is such a characteristic. It indicates the number of years of delay that a pupil has accumulated compared to the year that he/she would stand if he/she would have followed a normal school path. In the second year of the third stage of secondary education (for the majority of the pupils the final year in secondary education), almost one in ten (9.2%) lays at least two years behind in school. There are considerably more boys than girls falling behind ([VRIND](#), 2017) and more young people of non-Belgian than of Belgian origin. In addition, the chance that a pupil has fallen behind is strongly related to the educational track one follows. The proportion of pupils that have fallen behind is the highest in vocational secondary education (BSO) and the lowest in general secondary education (ASO). Pupils in technical (TSO) and artistic secondary education (KSO) take a middle position.

In sum, Flanders is doing generally well in terms of these indicators and achieves also good average scores in international performance studies (e.g. PISA, TIMSS). However, Flanders faces also huge social inequalities in education. In Flanders educational mobility is relatively low. The children of parents with a low level of education often end up in the vocational track of secondary education and do not pursue higher education. While among young people with a lower educated mother 42% starts in higher education, no less than 83% of the young people with a higher educated mother initiate higher studies ([VRIND](#), 2017).

In addition, the Flemish education is strongly segregated and this in regard with several risk factors (Keppens & Siongers, 2014). Segregation on the basis of ethnic origin, social background and special needs are the most important. The spread of ethnic minority pupils and pupils with social disadvantaged backgrounds over schools is very uneven in Flanders. Compared with other Western countries, socioeconomic and ethnic school segregation is high in Flanders (Agirdag, Nouwen, Mahieu et al., 2012; Jacobs, Rea, Teney et al., 2009). This high level of school segregation is related to the specific educational policy of free parental choice. This freedom of school choice allows parents to choose or avoid schools with a certain composition. A lot of middleclass parents tend to avoid schools with a high share of working-class and/or immigrant pupils (Agirdag & Van Houtte, 2011).

In comparison with other European regions, The Flemish region had always a relatively large number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Flanders chose more than other regions and countries for a solution in separate schools. So, also with regard to special needs pupils, the Flemish school system is strongly segregated. The parliamentary act on pupils with specific educational needs ([M-decreet](#), see [4.2.1](#)) which became fully operational in September 2015 wanted to counteract this segregation. Since the introduction of the M-decree on 1 September 2015, the number of pupils in special secondary education remained however quite stable: in 2017-2018 4.6% of the pupils in secondary education are enrolled in special education; this is the same number as in 2012-2013. On the other hand, the percentage of pupils with an official decision of SEN in inclusive school settings remains one of the lowest in Europe (Ramberg, Lénárt & Watkins, 2018).

People of non-Belgian origin

Like other European regions, Flanders is facing a growing degree of ethnic diversity. In 2020 the percentage of people with a foreign nationality was 9.3% ([Statistics Flanders](#), 2020). Over the past 25 years, the proportion of foreigners has risen almost continuously in the Flemish region and in recent years this increase was quite strong ([VRIND](#), 2017). In 2009 about 15.3% of the inhabitants of the Flemish Region was of foreign origin; in 2018 this had risen to 21.9% ([Agentschap voor Binnenlands Bestuur & Statistiek Vlaanderen](#), 2020). However, Flanders has in comparison with other European countries (with the exception of Luxembourg), a higher proportion of EU citizens under its foreign population. Compared to the Brussels and Walloon region in Belgium the share of inhabitants with foreign roots is also rather low.

Among young people, this percentage is considerably higher. In the youngest age group (0 to 5 years) 38.6% is of foreign origin and in the age group 6 to 11 years 36.2% is of foreign origin. In urban and metropolitan regions, this percentage is substantially higher. In 2018 respectively 50.4% and 35.5% of the inhabitants of Antwerp were of non-Belgian and of non-EU origin ([Agentschap voor Binnenlands Bestuur & Statistiek Vlaanderen](#), 2020). This increasing diversity represents one of the major social challenges for Flemish youth policy.

The above numbers do not take account asylum seekers and persons who reside illegally in Belgium/Flanders. In 2020, the Immigration Office registered 13105 first applications for international protection. In 2020, the CGRS ([Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons](#)) took 14272 decisions concerning 17384 persons who applied for asylum ([CGRS](#), 2020). From 2015 to 2018, the protection rate had more or less remained stable around 50% (with a peak of 57.7 % in 2016). In 2019 and 2020, however, the protection rate has gone down to 36.9% and 34.1%. So in In 2020, the CGRS considered in 34.1% of its final decisions that the applicant was indeed in need of protection. There are no Flemish data available on refugees and asylum seekers.

A particular focus is currently on the spectacular rising number of unaccompanied minor youth among the refugees and asylum seekers. Minors made up 31% of the applicants for international protection in 2018 in Belgium. The share of assisted and unaccompanied minors fluctuated slightly over the past ten years (between 21% and 28% for accompanied minors and between 3% and 7% for UMs) ([Myria](#), 2019). Separate numbers for the Flemish region are not available.

Not only does the proportion of inhabitants of foreign origin increases, also the diversity among the "foreign people" increases. Indeed, we can hardly speak of 'the' foreigner today. The traditional dichotomy between 'natives' and 'foreigners', which was dominant during the past decades does less justice to the current complex reality characterized by a strong variety of ethnic and national origins (Cops, Pleysier, Put & De Boeck, 2015).

Administrative data and research (e.g. data from the Youth Research Platform and the Knowledge Centre on Cultural and Media Participation, the Flemish poverty monitor, ...) show that young people of non-Belgian origin are socially deprived in various domains. Young people of non-Belgian origin have, for example, a much higher probability of leaving education without qualifications, of having higher truancy rates etc. In addition, recent research indicates that young people of non-Western origin significantly less attend cultural performances, engage less in cultural activities and participate less in socio-cultural associations, including youth work (Elchardus & Smits, 2012; Lievens, Siongers & Beunen, 2015; Van der Eecken, Kemper, Derluyn & Bradt, 2015).

Therefore, in recent policy documents (legislative terms 2014-2019 and 2019-2024), a lot of attention is paid to the challenges of this growing diversity in terms of participation in society and to social inclusion. The Flemish Minister for Youth, Benjamin Dalle, also stresses the importance of diversity in youth work in his policy note for 2019-2024, stating that youth work is a right for all young people and that extra attention will be given to the increased diversity among the current generation of children, including those with a ethnic cultural background but also other socially vulnerable groups ([Vlaams Parlement](#), 2019).

People with disabilities

To date, there exist only limited statistics on the number of persons with disabilities in Flanders. Nor are there any concrete data on people with disabilities divided by type of disability (Intellectual, visual, auditive, physical or mental). Many researchers use different sources on which they base their estimates and consequently arrive at different figures and numbers. One of the reasons is the use of different definitions to describe this group. An often used definition is the one used by the VAPH (Vlaams Agentschap voor Personen met een Handicap) which defines a handicap as "*any long-term and significant participation problem experienced by a person and attributable to a combination of*

functional disorders of a mental, psychic, physical or sensory nature, limitations in the performance of activities, and personal and external factors”.

It is even more difficult to obtain exact figures on the number of children with disabilities in Flanders. Again, much depends on the definition used, source or applied parameter (Schraepen, Maelstaf & Halsberghe, 2016). In the school year 2019-2020, respectively 25.567 and 21.095 pupils attended school in special primary and secondary education ([Vlaamse Overheid](#), 2020). However not all children and young people with a disability attend special education institutions, and not all children in special education have a disability that effects their participation in social live. In the [Belgian Health Interview Survey](#) of 2018, 6.1% of the 15-24 year olds in Flanders reported that they have health-related activity limitations ([Global Activity Limitation Indicator](#)). In 2020 respectively 4.9% of the young people below 25 years old and 13.7% of the people aged 25 to 34 in Belgium were entitled to an income replacement and / or integration allowance because of a disability ([Federale Overheidsdienst](#), 2020).

More information on the effects of living with disabilities can be found. For instance, research indicates that persons with disabilities are in comparison with people without disabilities less educated (45% vs. 29%) and are often in the lowest income quintile in Flanders (27% versus 18%) ([VRIND](#), 2017). Also, in terms of social participation, people with disabilities are less active than people without disabilities. They participate less in culture, sport less and are less often an active member of a voluntary association. Internet use is also significantly lower in this group, and the same applies for the number of social contacts with neighbours and/or family (Moons, Pauwels & Noppe, 2014; [VRIND](#), 2017). Finally, also their participation rate in political life is a lot lower when compared to people without disabilities. This lower participation rate in socio-economic and socio-cultural life is partly due to the fact that the share of persons with disabilities is higher among the oldest age groups. However, even after taking into account age differences, the participation of people with disabilities remains significantly lower (Moons, Pauwels & Noppe, 2014; [VRIND](#), 2017).

Summary

Statistical data shows that young people in poverty, less educated youth and handicapped and disabled young people find harder their way to youth work or other forms of participation. One of the major challenges to social inclusion of young people, therefore, is to make youth work and other participation opportunities more accessible to disadvantaged young people and young people of foreign origin. A similar challenge is found in the policy for culture that is deployed on the participation in broader associations. Many of these groups are also concentrated in the metropolitan areas. The (big) city can be seen in this sense as the 'laboratory' of society, in which many social trends and developments occur first or more intensively (also the gap between rich and poor is larger in metropolitan areas).

Main concepts

Flanders has no singular or unifying definition of social inclusion.

In Flanders, social inclusion is often associated with the term social vulnerability. Socially vulnerable is the person or population group who in its contacts with the social institutions (including schools, employment, justice, etc.) especially and repeatedly is confronted with the negative aspects and who less benefits from the positive services. In Flanders, the term 'social vulnerability' is based on the theory of social vulnerability as developed by youth criminologist Nicole Vettenburg and her colleagues (e.g. Vettenburg, Walgrave & Van Kerckvoorde, 1984; Vettenburg, 1988). "Social vulnerability" refers here to the fact that some young people are more than other "hurt" by the public services and institutions. While social services and institutions give their peers access to information, education, support and/or assistance, vulnerable youth are repeatedly confronted with normative, sanctioning and monitoring mechanisms in social institutions.

In general, policy documents on social inclusion or exclusion refer to certain groups that are defined as groups who are at risk for social exclusion. The definition of such vulnerable groups can vary over policy domains, but in general the following groups are considered to have a high risk on social exclusion:

- *Young people who live in poverty*
- *Young people with no or limited educational qualifications*
- *Young people coming from lower cultural backgrounds (e.g. with lower educated parents)*
- *Young people with functional disabilities: poor health, long term illness, physical disabilities, ...*
- *Young people with a foreign origin*

Within equal opportunities policy, also the following groups are considered to be at risk:

- Girls / Women
- LGBTQI+ people

4.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Social inclusion of vulnerable young people is not exclusive a youth policy theme (or any other policy area). To combat social exclusion, the Flemish government works via both horizontal and vertical consultation and planning.

Most relevant policy domains are:

At federal level:

- Employment policy ([Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue](#))
- Social security policy ([Federal Public Service Social Security](#))
- Social Integration, Poverty & Social Economy policy ([Federal Public Planning Service Social Integration, Fight against Poverty and Social Economy](#))

At regional (Flemish) level:

- Youth Policy and the wider policy domain of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media
- Equal opportunities policy
- Educational policy
- Welfare, public health & family policy

In the following we focus on the regional level and describe the relevant actors (Minister, Departments and Agencies) and legislation for each of the domains.

Each policy domain consists of a department and one or more agencies.

- Departments are responsible for policy preparation and policy support. They work under the direct authority and under the responsibility of the minister.
- Agencies are primarily responsible for policyimplementing tasks and have a greater degree of autonomy.

Top level authorities

Policy domain of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media

- Minister in charge of youth: Flemish Minister of Brussels, Youth and Media, Benjamin Dalle (term: 2019-2024)

- Commission^[1] on Culture, Youth, Sport and Media of the Flemish Parliament ([Commissie Cultuur, Jeugd, Sport en Media](#))
- Department of Culture, Youth, and Media ([Departement Cultuur, Jeugd en Media](#))

Equal opportunities policy

- Minister in charge of social: Flemish Minister for Home affairs, Administrative affairs, Civic integration and Equal opportunities, Bart Somers (term: 2019-2024)
- Commission for Home affairs, Equal Opportunities and Civic Integration ([Commissie voor Binnenlands Bestuur, Gelijke Kansen en Inburgering](#))
- Agency of Home Affairs, responsible for Equal Opportunities ([Afdeling Gelijke Kansen](#)) and Integration ([Afdeling Integratie en Inburgering](#))
- Agency on Integration ([Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering](#))
- Agency for Accesible Flanders ([Agentschap Toegankelijk Vlaanderen](#))

Education policy

- Flemish Minister of education, Ben Weyts (term: 2019-2024)
- Commission on education in the Flemish Parliament ([Commissie voor Onderwijs](#))
- Administration: Department of Education and Training ([Departement Onderwijs en Vorming](#))

Welfare, public health & family policy

- Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health, Family & Poverty Reduction, Wouter Beke (term: 2019-2024)
- Commission on Welfare, Public Health, Family & Poverty Reduction in the Flemish Parliament ([Commissie voor Welzijn, Volksgezondheid, Gezin en Armoedebestrijding](#))
- Department of Welfare, Public Health & Family ([Departement Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin](#))
- Agency of Youth Wellbeing ([Agentschap Jongerenwelzijn](#))
- Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities ([Vlaams Agentschap voor personen met een handicap](#))

Main non-public actors taking part in the regulation and implementation of social inclusion of young people

Actors in the domain of youth policy

The [Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner](#) detects (warning) signs from children, young people, their immediate environment and professionals. It mediates, investigates complaints and provides policy advice - always with a view to compliance with and the application of children's rights in Flanders. The Children's Rights Commissioner is appointed by the Flemish Parliament. A consultative and advisory board provides support to the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner in the performance of its duties. It is composed of representatives of the political groups in the Flemish Parliament and representatives of civil society and the scientific world.

The Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner translates structural problems into dossiers, advice, opinions and reports on bottlenecks for the Flemish Parliament. It studies

⁽¹⁾ A commission is a group of Flemish representatives, who are specialized in a particular subject, such as education, welfare or economy. A commission has fifteen permanent members and fifteen alternates, divided according to the strength of the political groups. Commissions prepare the decrees, check the Flemish government policy (e.g. through questions or interpellations to the Minister).

certain issues related to children's rights and the underlying problems in depth in order to provide information and advice to the Flemish Parliament. It also indicates possible ways to translate these into Flemish regulations. It tests policy initiatives, such as draft of Decrees and proposals, against the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They for instance formulated advice and reports on:

- Advice on the Flemish action plan against poverty ([Advies Vlaams Actieplan Armoedebestrijding](#)), 2020
- Advice on inclusive education ([Advies over inschrijvingsrecht voor kinderen met specifieke onderwijsnoden](#)), 2018
- Advice on young refugees ([Kinderen op de vlucht: van crisis naar nieuwe toekomst](#)), 2017
- Advice on homelessness among children ([With\(out\) a home. Homelessness from a child's perspective](#)), 2016
- Advice on Early School Leaving ([Advies Samen tegen schooluitval](#)), 2016
- [Report on children's rights for specific groups in Flanders](#) (on young refugees, traveller children, young Roma and children with disabilities), 2015
- ...

[The Knowledge Centre on Children's Rights](#) aims to increase knowledge of children's rights at national and international level. The Knowledge Centre on Children's Rights takes an interdisciplinary approach to children's rights based on scientific research.

[The Children's Right Coalition](#) is an umbrella organisation of non-governmental organisations for the preparation, editing and distribution of a report on the way in which Flanders puts children's rights into practice.

[Uit De Marge](#) is a Flemish Centre for youth work with disadvantaged children and young people. "Uit De Marge" actively contributes to the realization of the rights and equal opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people in Flanders. They focus on building a high-quality youth work with disadvantaged children and young people and guide and support local and regional youth initiatives that (among others) work with disadvantaged children and young people. Uit De Marge also supports youth work in general in his efforts towards socially vulnerable children and young people and other social sectors in their relation to socially vulnerable children and young people.

[Youth Work for All](#) is a network organisation in Flanders, with a link to the Brussels Capital Region. Together with their partners, they try to ensure that children and young people with a disability and/or in socially vulnerable situations can participate in youth work as much as possible. Local youth work associations can come to Youth Work for All with training questions concerning vulnerable target groups, diversity and inclusion. The network organisation looks at each application individually and looks for the right partner.

Other NGO's (non-governmental organisations)

A brief selection of some of the most important NGO's in Flanders working on social inclusion (including substantial focus and work with children, youth and young people):

The **[Flemish network of associations against poverty](#)** (Also called Flemish Network of associations where the poor have a chance to speak - Vlaams netwerk waar armen het woord nemen)

In the Flemish Network against Poverty 59 associations work together with the ultimate aim of eradicating poverty and social exclusion. In the participating associations people living in poverty have a central role. For their functioning these associations can rely on the support of the Network team. The mutual exchange of experiences, visions, success stories and learning between the organizations is an important task for the Network. Based on the experiences and opinions of the people the associations and the Network construct dossiers on and communicate them to the government, the relevant departments, the

broad society and public opinion. The Network Against Poverty is also working to improve the image of people in poverty and the elimination of prejudice.

Up until 2010, issues related to youth, such as youth care, family, youth unemployment, youth work, education ... were followed by the respective consultative groups within the Network Against Poverty. These consultative groups composed exclusively of adult people in poverty who participate in associations to the theme groups. The result was that the positions of the Anti-Poverty Network on youth-related themes were determined primarily by adults (parents) and not by young people themselves. Since 2011, a group of young people in poverty has been meeting on a regular basis. Within the [58 associations](#) linked to the Flemish network against poverty, there are now 8 associations with a specific youth working.

De Link

De Link provides training to become an expert by experience in poverty and social exclusion, with the support of the Welfare and Society Division.

Minorities Forum

The Minorities Forum represents ethno-cultural associations in Flanders and Brussels and provides people with a migration background a voice. Within the Minderhedenforum specific actions are set up, e.g.: actions with the ethno-cultural associations in Brussels, contacts with the local consultative platforms and actions around the target Travellers and Roma. The Minorities Forum works also on a number of projects on specific subjects: "Work Up", poverty, culture, youth and sports.

Démos

Démos is a non-partisan public research and advocacy organization. Démos' role has been embedded in the wider cultural field of Flanders by the Participation Decree. They focus on social and policy developments in culture, youth work and sports. Within this focus they:

- publish books and a magazine, organise symposia, work shops, cafés and other gatherings.
- do research and advise organisations and governments
- contribute to the development of policy and practices that focus mainly on groups and practices that are under-represented and underexposed in our society.

Consultation of young people

The Flemish Youth Council (see chapter 5 for more information on the Flemish Youth Council)

The Flemish Youth Council which is the **official advisory body** of the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people, has formulated advice on e.g.:

- [Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#) (March 2020)
- [Opportunities at school](#) (November 2019)
- [Juvenile delinquency law](#) (October 2017)
- [Psychological wellbeing](#) (May 2017)
- [Young people on the run](#) (May 2016)
- [Positive development of identity](#) (with regard to the action plan on radicalization) (March 2016)

Next to the advises that the Youth Council formulates, the following initiatives within the Youth Council are also noteworthy with regard to the social inclusion of young people:

- They install [different working groups](#) each mandate. In 2018-2020 there were six working groups: diversity: representation in the media, feeling good: freedom-

restricting measures, education: unpaid school bills, sustainable mobility, UN: sustainable living and circular economy, Europe: Future of Work & European Youth Goals.

- The Youth Council sets up different projects in which young people are questioned on various topics, such as equal opportunities, poverty, consultation and participation, etc. ([De Touristenbevraging](#), 2020)
- About 25 young people between 16- and 26-years old work on the subject 'social inclusion' as a Youth Ambassador. They reflect on barriers for young people to participate fully in society. Together they formulate recommendations to combat social exclusion. The youth ambassadors shed light on social inclusion within the spheres of education, work and leisure. The youth ambassadors gathered input from 250 young people through focus groups and 500 youth through an online survey. They also went into dialogue with experts and policymakers. Based on this study a [report](#) was written.

Cross-sectorial cooperation

In Flanders, social inclusion is a joint responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Health, Public Health and Family, the Flemish Minister of Education and Training and the Flemish Minister of Youth and its administration and agencies.

As mentioned in 1.5 Cross-sectorial approach with other ministries, youth policy is a transversal policy. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

Besides the Flemish Policy Plan, [the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy](#) envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- Impact study of new legislation on children and youth ([JoKER](#))
- [Contact points for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration](#)
- [Youth Progress Report](#)

4.3 Strategy for the social inclusion of young people

Existence of a National Strategy on social inclusion

Flanders has no separate strategy plan on the social inclusion of youth but several separate strategies all catering towards social inclusion and children/youth. Below, we describe some of the strategies at the regional level (Flemish level).

Scope and contents

Relevant legislation within the domain of Culture, Youth and Media:

Participation Decree

[The Participation Decree](#) entered into force in January 2008. The Participation Decree is a mixture of structural and project-based support, of initiatives aimed at the participation of a broad audience and of specific underprivileged groups, of existing measures and new initiatives, of financing for public and private initiatives... Through subsidization via the Participation Decree, the Flemish government wishes to promote the active participation of vulnerable groups in culture, youth work and sports. The decree focusses inter alia on (young) people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, newcomers and (minor) refugees, people with an ethnic-cultural diversified background, disadvantaged groups in the youth care, (young) people with disabilities and families with children.

This Decree offers:

- policy instruments to stimulate the participation of the various groups

- subsidies for projects that encourage participation. This particularly concerns initiatives related to socio-cultural work, communication, circulation and dissemination of artworks, financial obstacles, and physical access; and
- grants for large scale cultural events.

Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan

The [Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#) outlines all the concerns regarding children and young people and their rights which the Flemish Ministers will pay attention to in their policies during the policy period 2020-2024. It is the fifth time that the Government of Flanders presents a youth policy plan to parliament. As decreed by Flemish Parliament Act, this must be done one year after the start of the Government's term of office.

The plan pursues five large priorities: (1) Wellbeing and positive identity development, (2) Healthy and liveable neighbourhoods, (3) Commitment to society through voluntary action, (4) Leisure activities for all, and (5) Media education.

Relevant legislation within the domain of Equal Opportunities:

Framework Decree on equal opportunities and equal treatment policy

The Framework Decree on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment Policy ([Decreet houdende een kader voor het Vlaamse gelijkheids- en gelijkebehandelingsbeleid](#)) of 10 July 2008 sets up a general framework for the implementation of a proactive and preventive policy on equal opportunities. The Flemish equal opportunities policies simultaneously take into account differences between social groups (diversity), the need for personal development (emancipation) of these groups' members, with no one being excluded (non-discrimination) and everyone feeling responsible for mutual well-being (solidarity). It seeks to counteract discrimination, whether it is based on gender, disability, sexual orientation, inaccessibility or ethnicity. This decree doesn't focus on young people but is also relevant towards them.

Action Plan 'Prevention of processes of radicalisation which may result in extremism and terrorism'

On 16 January 2015 the Flemish Government approved a concept note on radicalisation ([Conceptnota over preventie van radicaliseringsprocessen](#)), followed by the Action Plan 'Prevention of processes of radicalisation which may result in extremism and terrorism', ([Actieplan ter preventie van radicaliseringsprocessen die kunnen leiden tot extremism en terrorisme](#)) which was approved on 3 April 2015 by the Government. At the beginning of 2017, a profound revision and update of the action plan was prompted by, among other things, a changed policy context, new insights and changed threat. This resulted on 2 June 2017 in the updating of the existing action plan to the 'Flemish Action Plan for the prevention of violent radicalization and polarization' ([Actieplan ter preventie van gewelddadige radicalisering en polarisering](#)). The note and action plan contain twelve concrete policy priorities which are applicable to many (local) Flemish actors: youth work, community sports, assistance, Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency, education, community development, welfare, Integrated Youth Support and integration. These actors must prevent, detect and remedy radicalisation. The note assigns an important role to local governments in their cooperation with local actors.

The Agency of Home Affairs coordinated this Action Plan, but the actions related to different policy areas. With the concept note and action plan the Flemish Government aimed amongst others at centralising and disseminating the expertise which exists in a number of Flemish cities, at developing training packages for people on the ground such as youth workers, imams and teachers, and at filling the gaps which exist in the study of radicalisation. For education the aim was set to decrease the number of early school leavers. Parents who notice first signs of radicalisation may turn to the pupil guidance centre for answers to their questions. These centres must also be an important partner for

the teachers: when they notice signals of radicalisation, they can refer a pupil to the pupil guidance centre.

Strategies within the domain of Education:

Flemish parliamentary act on pupils with special educational needs (M-decree)

On 1 September 2015 the [parliamentary act on pupils with specific educational needs](#) (SEN-pupils), also called M-decree, became fully operational. Since that date every child in Flanders has the right to enroll in a school for mainstream education, on the condition that reasonable adaptations are made. Inclusive education is now the first option. The aim is that more pupils with special needs can enroll in mainstream education and that less pupils are referred to special schools. The implementation of the parliamentary act also allows to maintain a high-quality special needs education for those pupils for whom no reasonable adaptations are possible within a mainstream school. In 2019, however, the Flemish coalition agreement 2019-2024 stated that the M-decree will be replaced by a [new guidance decree](#), which will enter into force on 1 September 2022 at the earliest.

Education Decree XXIV

New regulations on synchronous internet education were integrated in [Education Decree XXIV](#), which was approved by the Flemish Government on 23 April 2014. The parliamentary act determines that from September 2015 on internet education becomes a right for all ill children. Since 2007-2008 distance learning for ill children is organised by [Bednet](#). The NGO offers synchronous internet education to long term or chronically ill children in Dutch speaking schools in Flanders and Brussels. It allows pupils to keep up with the subject material and avoids social isolation as a result of their illness. The services offered by the NGO are free of charge for both the children and the schools.

The Parliamentary Act of 28 June 2002 on equal educational opportunities

The Parliamentary Act on Equal Educational Opportunities ([Decreet Gelijke Onderwijskansen GOK](#)) guarantees the principle right for enrolment in a school of choice, independent of colour of skin, national or ethnic origin, religion or gender, unless of course if the school is full, if the pupil was expelled in a previous year or if the parents do not accept the pedagogical project and school regulations. Local Consultation Platforms watch over the implementation of the equal opportunities policy at the local level.

Action plan 'together against school drop-out' ([Actieplan Samen tegen Schooluitval](#))

On 26 June 2015 the Flemish Minister of Education presented, together with her colleagues from Welfare and Work, the concept note 'Together against school drop-out' ([Conceptnota Samen tegen Schooluitval](#)) to the Flemish Government. The concept note contains a comprehensive plan ([Actieplan Vroegtijdig Schoolverlaten](#)) with more than 50 action points. The goals of the note are to reduce the number of early school leavers, to push back truancy, and to guarantee study entitlement. A focus is put on prevention, together with actions against pupils playing truant.

With this concept note Flanders responds to the European recommendation to address in an integrated manner the problems of early school leaving and truancy by use of the European frame of reference. For this reason, measures are elaborated within the four domains of monitoring, identification and coördination; prevention; intervention and compensation.

The policy domain of education organises also **specific provisions for migrant pupils and pupils of whom Dutch is not the mother tongue:**

- **Reception classes for non-Dutch speaking newcomers** ([onthaalonderwijs voor anderstalige nieuwkomers OKAN](#)) are organized in primary and secondary education
- **The Brussels Curriculum** provides extra support for the language of instruction in the 1st stage of Dutch speaking secondary education in Brussels. Additional measures support the Dutch speaking elementary schools and the integration of not-Dutch

speaking children in the Brussels peripheral municipalities, in the municipalities along the language border and the neighbouring municipalities

Strategies within the domain of Welfare, public health & family policy

Decree on Integrated Youth Care

On March 1, 2014 the Decree on Integrated Youth Care ([Decreet betreffende de integrale jeugdhulp](#)) came into force. This decree entails a far-reaching cooperation between all anchors sectors involved in youth. The main objective is that every young person with a problem finds as quick as possible the appropriate help. By intervening in the organization and functioning principles of the existing youth care, the new landscape will be much clearer. The new act puts the young central. The inherent strength of children and young people and their immediate surroundings are considered the main source of assistance. The act anchors this principle and translates it into practical assistance to all amenities. They are also encouraged to cooperate across sectors and action is taken to ensure that there are 'no gaps' in youth care. When first aid is insufficient, social workers always point the way to more specialized or more substantial help. Therefore, the Act installs the intersectoral gateway for "non-directly accessible help". In total there are six sectors involved:

- Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities (VAPH)
- Youth Welfare
- Child and Family (K&G)
- General Welfare Work (AWW) with the Centres for Integral Family Care (CIG)
- Mental Health Centres (CGG)
- Centres for Educational Guidance (CLB)

Decree on Poverty Reduction (2003)

Within the Flemish Government the fight against child poverty is a top priority within the general fight against poverty. It is the priority focus of the [Flemish Action Plan for Poverty Reduction 2020-2024](#) (see below). In this fight against child poverty, also a strong emphasis is laid on young adults as they are crucial agents as (future) young parents.

In the Act on Poverty Reduction ([Decreet betreffende Armoedebestrijding](#), 21 march 2003) a permanent poverty consultation (permanent armoedeoverleg - PAO) is created to ensure the participation of people in poverty reduction policies in all sectors. This permanent poverty consultation consists of a horizontal and a vertical component. The horizontal consultations ensure an integrated approach. In the horizontal consultations the representatives of the various policy areas collaborate with employees of the Flemish Network against Poverty ([Vlaams Netwerk tegen Armoede](#)), The Link ([De Link](#)) and the inter-federal department for combating poverty, insecurity and social exclusion ([Steunpunt tot bestrijding van armoede, bestaansonzekerheid en sociale uitsluiting](#)). The vertical consultations are organized per policy domain. Main objectives of these vertical consultations are the testing of specific policy initiatives of the policy domain among people in poverty and the proposal of adjustments. The organization of these meetings is the responsibility of every Flemish minister in consultation with the Flemish Network of Associations against Poverty. The vertical consultation takes place at least twice a year for each policy domain.

Flemish Poverty Reduction Action Plan ([Vlaams actieplan armoedebestrijding 2020-2024](#))

The poverty decree (art. 5) and the implementing act (art. 2 and 5) determine the legal basis of the Flemish Action Plan on Poverty Reduction (or VAPA).

The Flemish poverty reduction policy is an inclusive policy. This means that every Flemish Minister, also the Minister of Youth, has the responsibility to devote attention within their policy area to reducing poverty. The Flemish Minister for Welfare, Public Health and Family

is responsible for coordinating the poverty policy. The Welfare and Society Division supports the coordinating minister and the Flemish Minister for Welfare, Public Health and Family, each for their competence in the area of poverty reduction.

The Flemish Action Plan on Poverty Reduction (VAPA) provides an overview of the efforts of the various Flemish ministers to fight poverty. The action plan includes specific objectives formulated for each of the fundamental social rights (participation, social services, income, family, education, leisure, work, housing and health).

The VAPA has three focal points: living, poverty reduction in families with young children and employment. Furthermore, it focusses on the impact and measures regarding COVID-19.

Responsible authority

Responsible authorities are mentioned in section above where the contents and scope are described:

- Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019: Flemish Minister of Youth and Division Youth
- Flemish Poverty Reduction Action Plan or VAPA (Vlaams actieplan armoedebestrijding 2015-2019): Flemish Minister on Poverty Reduction and the Department for Health, Public Health and Family
- Action Plan 'Prevention of processes of radicalisation which may result in extremism and terrorism': Flemish Minister of Local Government, Integration, Housing, Equal Opportunities and Poverty Reduction and many Flemish actors
- Action plan 'together against school drop-out': Flemish Minister of Education and Training, Flemish Minister of Welfare, Flemish Minister of Work and their departments

Revisions/Updates

The strategies on social inclusion of young people have no major revisions/updates. Minor updates of the separate strategies are mentioned in the section above where the contents and scope are described.

4.4 Inclusive programmes for young people

Programmes for vulnerable young people

The education system

There are a number of top-level programmes aimed at vulnerable young people:

- The [parliamentary act on pupils with specific educational needs](#) states that every child in Flanders has the right to enrol in a school for mainstream education, on the condition that reasonable adaptations are made. Inclusive education is now the first option. For more information see 4.2)
- **Reception classes for nonDutch speaking newcomers** ([onthaalonderwijs voor anderstalige nieuwkomers OKAN](#)) are organized in primary and secondary education
- The Flemish government provides **school allowances** to help to pay the school costs. The school allowances for nursery, primary and secondary education are automatically integrated in the Growth Package. This Growth Package is the whole of family benefits (the former child benefit) and other financial benefits that the Flemish government provides tailored to each child in every family. For children in higher education parents have to apply for school allowances. The amount depends on: the type of education, the family income, and the family situation (married, selfemployed, single). For students in higher education the amount depends also on the residence of the student (at home or in a student flat) .

The youth sector

Masterplan on diversity in/and youth work ([Masterplan diversiteit in/en het Jeugdwerk](#))

In 2018, the Flemish Government and the Minister of Youth Sven Gatz, together with the youth sector, launched a Master Plan on diversity in / and youth work. The actions in this master plan on diversity are set out in a process with different milestones. The aim is to develop even more inclusive and coordinated policies for vulnerable target groups, such as children and young people with disabilities, children and young people of foreign origin, children and young people in poverty, and this in an intergenerational relationship. The Master Plan must set things in motion, and this in a sustainable way. It transcends the current legislature and contains a laundry list of ambitious actions on diversity, both towards children and young people, and more specifically in youth work itself. The Master Plan is updated annually as a result of the Day of Diversity.

The action plan is divided into four major pillars:

1. Achieving a greater supply of youth work and provide more equal opportunities for all children and young people;
2. Achieving more social integration;
3. Detecting research needs, collecting data sources and making them accessible, weigh on the research agenda on diversity and monitoring;
4. Cross-sectoral and international networking and collaboration

This plan formed the basis for several programs and projects. Some examples of projects that have been realised:

Bridge builders ([Bruggenbouwers](#))

In 2016 the Flemish minister of youth Sven Gatz invested 750,000 euros in twelve projects that stimulate diversity in youth work in Flanders and Brussels. Main goal was to realize youth work for children and young people in vulnerable situations (e.g. children, young people and families in poverty, with a migration background, with disabilities, in closed institutions, ...). The projects had to build a bridge, therefore called Bridge builders, between existing youth organizations or other organizations that reach children and young people in their broad diversity.

Projects Social Integration ([Projecten Sociale Integratie](#))

In 2018, the Flemish Minister for Youth subsidized sixteen projects on Social Integration in youth work in Flanders and Brussels and this for a total amount of € 1.001.690. The selected projects bring children and young people in contact with various youth work organizations and this through meetings and cooperation. With this project call and the corresponding resources, the minister chooses to give an important impetus to the master plan and in particular to the connection between the regular and target group-specific youth organizations.

Network Youth Work for All ([Netwerk Jeugdwerk voor Allen](#) – JWVA)

The Network Youth Work for All (JWVA) is a demand-driven network that was rolled out across Flanders in January 2018. The network consists of various organizations that work with children and young people who are in a socially vulnerable situation and / or have a disability. The network is subsidized and coordinated by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish Government.

Local authorities and youth organizations can appeal to JWVA to learn how they can make their activities more accessible to children and young people with a disability or in a socially vulnerable situation. JWVA offers training and guidance and, through the cooperating partners, looks for an offer that best suits these children and young people.

Projects "bridges between sport and / or youth work and children in poverty" ***(Bruggen tussen sport, jeugdwerk en kinderen in armoede)***

The Flemish Minister for Poverty Reduction, Liesbeth Homans (term: 2014-2019), launched a call for projects "bridges between sport and / or youth and children in poverty. In total 100 project applications were submitted. From this, 19 projects were selected for a total amount of 860 432 euros. This funding allows non-profit organizations, local governments of the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels to lower the thresholds for vulnerable children and young people to participate in the existing sports and youth work by building bridges between organizations providing sports and youth work on the one hand and initiatives that reach children and young people in poverty on the other.

European Social Funds

The Flemish ESF operational programme will complement national and regional measures aimed at boosting employment and social inclusion. The programme aims to complement the existing Flemish employment and social inclusion initiatives and encourage innovative social measures and transnational cooperation. The **Flemish** ESF falls under the authority of the Flemish ministers of work and social economy.

Priorities for the Flemish programme with relevance to youth are e.g.:

- Promoting projects for sustainable, high-quality jobs and worker mobility; and investing in education, training and lifelong learning. These areas will attract some 60% of total funding and complement the Flemish career management policy which seeks a more effective labour market. In particular, ESF projects in Flanders will focus on important transition moments in careers, such as the transition from school to work, from unemployment to work, from work to other work.
- Some 20% of funding will support social inclusion, equality and anti-poverty projects. Projects will target the pathways into work and society for the most at-risk groups, such as Roma.

Funding

The education system

School allowances for less affluent families are funded by the Flemish Community. School allowances for pupils in nursery, primary and secondary education are incorporated in the Growth Package, the financial allowances that the Flemish government provide for every child in every family. The Growth Package is automatically paid to the families by the Flemish government service called FONS. School allowances for students in higher education are disbursed by the Flemish government service AVOHOKS ([Afdeling School- en Studietoelagen van het Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen](#)).

In the school year 2018/2019, the total amount of school allowances that were granted was € 187.537.649,08; in the school year 2017/2018 this was 175.544.625,91 €. The amount of school allowances that granted has grown sharply the last decade. In 2010/2011 143.704.197,83 € was granted in total. The increase is mainly due to the automation and simplification of applications. This ensures that those who are entitled to an education allowance now also receive it. In the school year 2017-2018, 1 in 4 primary school students received a school allowance, In 2013-2014 this was only 1 in 5.

The youth sector

Information related to funding is mentioned above in the description of the program (when available).

European social funds

The Flemish ESF operational programme is worth over 1 billion euros in total:

- 60% of total funding goes to projects for sustainable, high-quality jobs and worker mobility; and projects investing in education, training and lifelong learning.
- Some 20% of funding will support social inclusion, equality and anti-poverty projects.

Quality assurance

For ESF, the promoter or performer must only comply with quality registration insofar as it provides training, education, guidance, job placement, competence development and advisory services to citizens, businesses and third-party organizations. For example, promoters of ESF projects with a direct service to citizens, for example the guidance of job seekers, young people, the inactive, must comply with quality registration. For each ESF project, it will be determined separately whether the promoters and implementers must comply with the quality registration and this will always be included in the call file.

The quality assurance mechanisms for the other programmes are described where the programme / intervention is mentioned above (when available).

4.5 Initiatives promoting social inclusion and raising awareness

Intercultural awareness

Cross-curricular themes in Education

Most initiatives for promoting intercultural awareness among young people take place in formal education. Intercultural awareness is included in the transversal objectives for education, more specific within the context of the key competences for citizenship in the first and second grade of secondary education and the objectives concerning the socio-cultural society for the third grade (more information on the final goals for education can be found [here](#)). With regard to the key competences for citizenship, pupils must learn, among other things, to understand the formation and dynamics of (their own) identities and to deal with diversity in living and working together.

Young people's rights

Cross-curricular themes in Education

Most initiatives on young people's rights take place in formal education by means of transversal themes, more specific within the context of the key competences for citizenship and the juridical key competences in the first grade of secondary education (more information on the final goals for education can be found [here](#)). Pupils have to realise competences regarding children's rights (knowing what their rights are and respecting the rights of others).

The Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner (Kinderrechtencommissariaat)

The Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner detects (warning) signs from children, young people, their immediate environment and professionals. It mediates, investigates complaints and provides policy advice - always with a view to compliance with and the application of children's rights in Flanders.

The Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner was created by Flemish Parliament Act (Decree creating a Commission for Children's Rights and establishing the post of Commissioner for Children's Rights, 15th July 1997). The Children's Rights Commissioner is appointed by the Flemish Parliament.

It has two spearheads in its functioning:

- A Complaint Line for children and young people: investigation and mediation

- Advisory work for the Flemish Parliament, the Government of Flanders, administrations and agencies, international or foreign authorities.

The Children's Rights Coalition Flanders ([Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen](#))

The children's rights coalition brings together the forces of 25 civil society organizations around the theme of children's rights. The Children's Rights Coalition supervises compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Belgium by:

- Collecting and disseminating information and expertise on children's rights
- Actively promoting and raising awareness on children's rights
- Reporting to the Children's Rights Committee in Geneva

Unicef Belgium

The website of Unicef Belgium provides teaching resources (lesson plans, educational videos, information on children's websites, brochures, ...) for teachers on children and young people's rights. They also organize workshops and trainings for teachers.

Key initiatives to safeguard democracy and prevent radicalisation leading to violent extremism

Key initiatives by the Flemish Minister of Education

In 2018, the Flemish minister of education Hilde Crevits awarded 200,000 euros to seven projects to strengthen vulnerable young people and to combat polarization and radicalization. By means of these projects she wanted to strengthen pupils, teachers and principals in their fight against polarization and radicalization and to strengthen vulnerable pupils. The projects are subsidized on the basis of two calls. The first call focused on projects to strengthen the position of vulnerable young people, to promote a positive school career and to prevent school dropout, juvenile crime and radicalization ([more info in Dutch](#)). The second call concerned grants for the prevention of polarization at school and the management of difficult conversations and class situations ([more info in Dutch](#)).

Key initiatives by the Flemish Minister of Youth and Minister for Integration

At the end of 2015, Flemish Minister of Youth (Sven Gatz) and Minister for Integration (Liesbeth Homans) jointly launched the call for projects 'Positive identity development among young people'. With the project call, the ministers wanted to focus on strengthening the position of young people and young adults in society and on increasing their social involvement. The ministers mainly wanted to support projects that could turn feelings of exclusion or injustice into positive engagements and that would give young people meaning in the future. The call for projects was part of the Flemish action plan for the prevention of radicalization, which was approved by the Flemish Government in the spring of 2015. A total of seven projects were subsidized, which started on 1 March 2016. The projects have ended, but more information or material can still be found [online](#).

4.6 Access to quality services

Housing

The Government of Flanders acknowledges the right to decent housing of all children and young people. It wants to make progress in this field by extending the range of housing concepts, continuing to invest in social housing and increasingly publicising existing instruments.

In 2015, the Flemish Youth Council published a point of view on youth living in poverty ([Advies Wonen in armoede](#)). Based on this, the youth associations of the Network against Poverty, Uit De Marge/CMGJ and the Flemish Youth Council organised an action moment on this issue in October 2015.

Furthermore, the sixth state reform provides the regionalisation of the major pillars of housing policy: housing bonus and legislation on rents. The Flemish coalition agreement and the policy paper on housing conducted by Minister Homans ([Beleidsnota Wonen](#)) also contains opportunities to give young people in poverty a better perspective on the housing market.

Social services

Since January 2008, a **youth work plan** is operative in Flanders. Through an alert and individualised support for young jobseekers (-25) the [VDAB](#) (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling - Flemish Public Employment Service) wants to tackle youth unemployment. In concrete terms this means that support for young jobseekers will take place in a faster and more individualised approach with direct mediation in which the job choices are automatically linked to the available vacancies. Among young people of which the VDAB considers that mediation alone is not enough for a quick integration into the labour market, a thorough intake and screening is conducted. Those young people move on to an intensive supervision including job hunting and job coaching.

For more information on the integration of young people in the labour market, see 3.6.

Furthermore, based on federal legislation:

- The Federal Law of 26 May 2002 on the right to Social Integration ([Recht op maatschappelijke integratiewet van 26 mei 2002](#)) states that every person has a right to social integration. This right can be given in the form of employment and/or social security allowance, possibly accompanied by an individualised project for social integration. Only people who do not have sufficient resources to draw financial rights from, can ask for a social security allowance. The law differentiates between people between age 18 and 25 and people above age 25. These two groups are supported in different ways. In addition, this law specifically recognises students as target group among the people below age 25.
- People also have the right to social services as stated in the Federal Law of 8 July 1976 on the Public Centres of Social Welfare ([OCMW wet](#)). Social services can be provided in the form of financial help (e.g. contribution in moving expenses) or in material form (e.g. food packages). It also includes social counselling and advice. The Public Centres of Social Welfare provide the most suitable care.

Health care

In Flanders, youth health is mainly observed in the various Centres for Educational Guidance ([CLB's](#)). The doctors and paramedical workers (nurses) of the CLB carry out a number of free medical investigations during the school hours. Afterwards, the centres inform the parents of the results of medical examinations. The CLB conducts two types of consultations:

- General consultations address the general health of the pupils
- Targeted consultations are less extensive and focus - depending on the age- on certain health issues (growth and weight, visual function, color perception, eye separation, teeth ...).

Furthermore, based on federal legislation:

- (young) people who receive a social security allowance have the right to a **higher compensation in their health care** costs (e.g. for primary care they only have to pay 10% of the co-payment). Additionally, when the costs of medical care are still too high, some people can appeal to the system of the maximum invoice. This means that the costs, above a certain limit, are paid back in full.

See also 4.2.1 [Integrated Youth Care Act](#).

Financial services

The Flemish government is aware of and pays attention to the debt position of a large group of young people, but the financial services offered to young people remain largely limited to offering information and raising awareness.

The Flemish Support Point People and Society ([Steunpunt Mens en Samenleving](#), abbreviated SAM) is for instance a knowledge and expertise centre regarding vulnerable people subsidized by the Flemish government. On the basis of preventive actions SAM aims to contribute to the raising awareness on i.a. debt accumulation. In march 2016, the Flemish Centre Indebtedness (VCS), which is now integrated in SAM, has for instance launched the website [allesovercenten.be](#) (all about money), directed specifically at young people.

Quality assurance

Social services

VDAB is responsible for overall **quality assurances** of the VDAB services. See also 3.4 Career Guidance and Counselling.

Health care

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the **monitoring and quality** of the services by doing quality evaluations of the CLB services for schools.

Financial services

The Flemish Centre for Indebtedness have to submit annually a activity and financial report to the Flemish Government, according to the [Flemish Parliament Act of 24 July concerning the regulation for the recognition and subsidisation of institutes for debt mediation and the subsidisation of the Flemish Centre for Indebtedness](#). The Flemish Government defines the content and form of the report.

4.7 Youth work to foster social inclusion

Policy/legal framework

In Flanders, youth work with socially vulnerable children and young people has a great variety, both in the public targeted, in method as in activities offered. These initiatives align their leisure activities as much as possible with the situation of socially vulnerable youth.

Masterplan diversity in youth work ([Masterplan Diversiteit in het Jeugdwerk](#))

The previous Minister of Youth, Sven Gatz, presented the Masterplan diversity in/and youth work in the Flemish Parliament on 23 February 2018. This Masterplan for diversity in/and youth work is based on four major pillars:

- Realisation of a larger youth work offer and the creation of more equal opportunities so that all children and young people can fully enjoy the opportunities that youth work offers
- Making more connections between the separate circuits of the regular youth organizations and the target group-specific organisations, thus achieving more social integration
- Research and monitoring: Detecting research needs, collecting and making available existing figures, weighing on the research agenda for diversity and monitoring
- Networking and internationalization

Professionalized youth work with socially vulnerable youth

Once every six years, the Flemish Government can grant operating subsidies to professionalized youth work with socially vulnerable children and young people in order to create or stimulate the participation of socially vulnerable children and young people. This allows the children and young people involved to find connections with institutions or organizations that can help them integrate into society in order to overcome their deprivation or exclusion. For the period 2021 to 2027 the Flemish Government granted 7 organisations operating grants for a total of €1,473,780 per year.

In addition, the broader youth work sector also invests in accessibility and diversity.

Below the relevant structural subsidized youth work organizations are listed.

Main inclusive Youth-Work programmes and target groups

[Akindo](#)

Akindo organizes vacations for children, youth and families. They focus mainly on people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and guidance homes in Flanders.

[Arktos](#)

Arktos is a Flemish expertise centre for children and adolescents aged 6 to 25 years for whom the connection to school, work and society appears less evident.

[Bizon](#)

Bison is an association that organizes leisure activities for social disadvantaged children and young people. Their main focus is the organization of holiday camps, but via its actions Bison also pursues to contribute to a better understanding of and tolerance towards social vulnerability.

Construction Order ([Bouworde](#))

Bouworde aims to develop young people and make them aware of social reality. They pursue this goal by giving them the opportunity to express their solidarity by contributing to improvement projects. So, Bouworde is a youth organization that is trying to fight poverty and insecurity by providing assistance in the area of housing with the help of young volunteers. It does this through the organization of social, technical and ecological construction camps for young people between 18 and 30 years. Construction camps take place in Flanders, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

[Groep Intro](#)

Intro group (Groep Intro) is a training organization dedicated to social disadvantaged young people, with particular attention to low-skilled youth. The organisation wants to provide resources to encourage these young people's personal development and to increase their participation and integration in society through an education-oriented approach. Its main tasks are: sensitization, information, guidance and training of youth (assists) leaders and intermediates.

[Habbekrats](#)

Habbekrats is a training service for young people of marginalized groups aged 12 to 25 years. The service is a forum for different projects. Each project has a low threshold and works integrally. The actions of Habbekrats focus mainly on a preventive level.

[JKVG](#)

JKVG is an organization of young people (6-30 years) with and without disabilities. Under the name Hannibal JKVG organizes holidays and international group exchanges at home and abroad. For young people without disabilities and young people with a purely physical disability, there are training courses (animator, head trainer). JKVG also has a dozen local centers, which offer leisure activities for young people with and without disabilities. In its activities, the organization also focuses on employment for people with disabilities. With'

De Werkbank' (Workbench), they work towards an inclusive labour market. The workbench helps young people with practical questions about job applications, provides individual guidance or guides young people in finding a suitable workplace.

[KAJ](#)

KAJ is a youth movement which defends and works for, by and with all school-aged, unemployed and young workers between 12 and 30 years, with a specific focus on young people in vocational, technical and special needs education (educational tracks TSO, BSO & BUSO) and social vulnerable young people. By means of training and action KAJ guides young people in their growth to consciousness, individual and collective responsibility aimed at a democratic, grassroots-oriented and just society.

[Kei-Jong](#)

Kei-Jong wants to support work-able young people with intellectual disabilities in the field of integration, participation, self-development and self-determination.

[Lejo](#)

Lejo provides young people with a low level of education opportunities to develop their personality. The aim is to increase the participation of these young people in their own environment and in broader society. Moreover, Lejo defends their interests and acts as their spokesperson.

[Tumult](#)

Tumult is a youth service working on peace education. Tumult gives training to youth and youth workers and organizes educational activities for children and youth such as camps, peace travels, intercultural walks, immersion travels ... In addition Tumult develops a wide range of playful, often interactive products that reinforce peace education with children and young people. The association operates on the following themes: cultural respect, prevention of bullying, sustainability, dealing with conflicts and learning from war.

[Uit De Marge](#)

Uit De Marge is The Flemish Network for youth work with disadvantaged children and young people.

[Wel Jong Niet Hetero](#)

Wel Jong Niet Hetero (WJNH – Young but Not Hetero) regroups and guides local gay youth groups, organizes national initiatives such as the gay camp, meetings days, forum meetings, minus-19 (school activity), gay parties. WJNH also gives management training for LGBT youth workers. Furthermore, WJNH is the contact point regarding LGBT youth themes in Flanders.

[Youth for Understanding](#)

The purpose of YFU is to prepare young people over the world for their responsibilities and opportunities in a changing society in which people from different countries and cultures are becoming more interdependent.

Youth work providers in the field of social inclusion for young people

Same organisations as mentioned in section above.

Training and support for youth workers engaged in social inclusion programmes

Most training covers the general development of youth workers, but some workshops and trainings for youth workers focus in particular on social inclusion. Some examples:

Bizon vzw

In addition to the leisure activities that BIZON organizes for vulnerable young people (see above), the organization also puts heavy emphasis on the training of youth workers, volunteers or supervisors who come into contact with disadvantaged children and young people.

Motief vzw

The association Motief develops and organizes training at the intersection of religion/ ideology and society. At the moment (2016) they organize (in cooperation with 'Uit de Marge') a training called "Young people, Islam and identity". In this training youth workers develop a professional approach towards ideological identity and learn more about identity development of Muslim youth and the role of their organization in working met Muslim youth.

Tumult vzw

For information on the organization, see section "main inclusive youth-work programmes". They, for instance, organize a training on refugee children and how to reach, motivate and involve them in youth work.

Uit De Marge

Uit De Marge is The Flemish Network for youth work with disadvantaged children and young people. Their training is aimed primarily at youth workers who work with these groups, but their trainings are also open to members of youth services and other sectors who work with vulnerable children and young people in a voluntary setting. They offer both general trainings for youth workers who work with disadvantaged groups, but also thematic trainings. Examples of thematic trainings are:

- Poverty and youth (welfare) work
- Location-oriented working
- Suicide Prevention: How Can I Act?

Wel Jong Niet Hetero vzw

Wel Jong Niet Hetero (WJNH) regroups and guides local gay youth groups, organizes national initiatives such as the gay camp, meetings days, forum meetings, minus-19 (school activity), gay parties. WJNH also gives management training for LGBT youth workers. Furthermore, WJNH is the contact point regarding LGBT youth themes in Flanders.

Financial support

All the organisations mentioned above are structural subsidised associations. They qualify for structural funding and project funding of the Flemish Government ([Subsidies](#)). They receive an annual grant of 80,000 euros and can request additional variable subsidies. See also chapter 5.6 for more information.

Quality assurance

Each structural subsidized youth association must submit an annual progress report which entails among others a financial report and an activity report.

4.8 Current debates and reforms

Modernisation of secondary education

As mentioned in the general context section, Flemish pupils score generally high in international comparative research, but Flemish education also scores low on social inclusion and social mobility in education: The waterfall system, high school dropout, too many repeaters, inequality in educational opportunities...

On June 4, 2013, the Flemish Government approved the [Master Plan for the reform of Secondary Education](#). This lists the strengths and areas for improvement in our secondary education system and outlines 71 measures for reforming secondary education. In 2015-2016 a lot of these measures are implemented (M-decree, dual learning, an action plan for school dropout...). At the end of May 2016, the Flemish Government approved two concept notes containing the key ideas for the modernization of Flemish secondary education that start the rollout of the final measures of the master plan. A first concept note ([conceptnota](#)) comprises measures for primary education and the first stage (year 1 and 2) of secondary education, while [a second one](#) addresses the second and third stage of secondary education (year 3 to 6/7). In the first stage of secondary education general education is strengthened. In addition to the general education there will be an optional component to explore new subjects or to deepen others. In the second and third stages eight study areas will be offered instead of the current 29 areas. The modernization of secondary education started on September 1, 2019 in the 1st year of secondary education and will now be introduced progressively - year by year - and will be fully implemented by 2026. More information on the modernisation of secondary education can be found in 6.10.

5. PARTICIPATION

Participation

Special feature

The Flemish Community has youth councils at every level of policy-making. In these youth councils youth organisations and young people meet to advise on policy matters. The Flemish Youth Council regularly organises participation projects and ad hoc youth surveys to get to know the opinions of young people about specific topics.

Highlights

The Youth and Children's Rights policy plan focuses on policy participation. It is about what is very close to the hearts of children and young people, but most definitely also about themes in all policy areas affecting them. The Flemish Government wants to help create preconditions which will make a permanent participatory attitude the logical standard.

5.1 General context

Main concepts

Definitions according to the decree of January 20, 2012 on the renewed youth and children's rights ([Decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid](#)) :

- **youth work**: socio-cultural work based on non-commercial purposes by or for young people of three to thirty years, during leisure time, with educational guidance and to promote the general and integral development of the young people who participate in it on a voluntarily basis
- **A political youth movement** is a membership association of persons up to thirty years old, which encourages young people to take up active citizenship and that sensitizes and develops young people in view of their participation in political decision-making, in the operation of a particular political party and in public debate.
- **A political party** is defined as the association of persons participating in the elections for the Flemish Parliament, the House of Representatives, or the European Parliament.

In Flanders, political participation in elections is regulated in accordance with the Belgian legislation. All other forms of democratic and civic participation are specific for the Flemish community and region.

Institutions of representative democracy

Constitutional structure

Belgium is a constitutional parliamentary monarchy. It is a federal State composed of Communities and Regions. The country comprises three Communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) and three Regions (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Region). The power to make decisions is divided over different institutions, who independently exercise their authority within their domains. Each entity has its specific area of responsibility.

The concept of 'Community' refers to persons that make up a community and the bond that unifies them, namely their language and culture. So, the Communities have powers for culture (theatre, libraries, audiovisual media, etc.), education, the use of languages and matters relating to the individual which concern on the one hand health policy (curative and preventive medicine) and on the other hand assistance to individuals (protection of youth, social welfare, aid to families, immigrant assistance services, etc.). They also have powers in the field of scientific research in relation to their powers and international relations associated with their powers.

Regions have powers in fields that are connected with their region or territory in the widest meaning of the term. So the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region have powers relating to the economy, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, energy, transport (except Belgian Railways), the environment, town and country planning, nature conservation, credit, foreign trade, supervision of the provinces, communes and intercommunal utility companies. They also have authority relating to scientific research and international relations in those fields.

In the general interest of all Belgians, the Federal State manages the public finances, the army, the judicial system, social security, foreign affairs as well as substantial parts of public health and home affairs. The Federal Government's powers also cover everything that does not expressly come under the Communities or Regions. The Federal State also has powers for exemptions and restrictions on the powers of the Communities and the Regions.

Main representative institutions

In Belgium, elections are held at five different levels (see below). They are organised for legislative bodies only, and not for executive functions. Belgium has a multi-party system, with several political parties (with an electoral threshold of 5% since the parliamentary elections of 2003). Voting is compulsory and all elections use proportional representation which in general requires coalition governments.

The elections that are held in Belgium are:

- European elections (every 5 years)
- Federal elections (every 5 years)
 - the House of Representatives ([de Kamer](#)), which is composed of 150 members that are elected for five years. Based on the results of the elections of May 25, 2014 the House counts in this legislature 87 members of the Dutch language group and 63 members of the French language group.
- Regional elections for the legislative bodies of the communities and regions (every 5 years)
 - the Flemish Parliament ([Vlaams Parlement](#)): 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 Parliament consists of 124 Flemish representatives that are elected for a period of 5 years.

- The [Walloon Parliament](#)
- The [Parliament of the French Community](#)
- The [Brussels regional Parliament](#)
- Provincial elections for the provincial councils (every 6 years)
- Municipal elections for the municipal councils (every 6 years)

The last elections for the European, federal and regional level took place on Sunday, May 26th, 2019. The last elections of the provincial and municipal councils took place on Sunday, October 14th, 2018.

Voting in Belgium is done by paper voting or electronic voting on a computer depending on the place of voting. Belgian voters are given five options when voting. They may:

- Vote for a list as a whole, thereby showing approval of the order established by the party they vote for
- Vote for one or more individual candidate(s) belonging to the same party. This is a "preference vote"
- Vote for one or more of the "alternates (substitutes)"
- Vote for one or more candidates, and one or more alternates, all of the same party
- Vote invalid or blank so no one receives the vote

In certain circumstances, people have the possibility to vote by proxy (see 5.2).

Binding referendums in Belgium are not legally possible because of the constitutional principle that the country's powers are exercised by the nation and not by the people. Consequently, Belgium is a representative democracy, (almost) without any form of direct democracy.

5.2 Youth participation in representative democracy

Young people as voters

Voting age limit

Since 1981, every Belgian from 18 years of age has the right to vote at all levels, including for the – European Parliament elections. Belgium is one of the few countries where voting is compulsory. Belgian citizens are automatically registered in the electoral polls. However, the Belgian citizens are not required to cast a vote on a list or a candidate. Belgians can vote blank or invalid.

On February 20, 2004 the House of Representatives decided to also give voting rights to non-EU citizens in municipal elections. Migrants residing 5 years or more in Belgium, are eligible to vote in municipal elections.

Imminent plans to lower the voting age limit

At this moment, the lowering of the voting age is strongly debated in Flanders (See 5.10 Current Debates).

Special provisions for young people

There are no special provisions for young people in particular, but there exist a general legislation for persons who cannot attend the elections. For instance, in the following situations persons can vote by a proxy (meaning that this person can delegate his or her voting power to a representative, to enable a vote in absence):

- students for study reasons (e.g. because of exams or studies abroad)
- voters who are unable to go to the elections because of illness or disabilities
- persons who are abroad for professional or official business or who have to work at the moment of elections
- persons who are staying in jail or in a closed institution at the time of elections
- voters who for reasons relating to their belief are not able to go to the elections

Anyone who wishes to vote by proxy for the above reasons must prove the need with a written proof or authorisation from an accredited body (e.g. an educational institution in the case of exams or studies abroad, a doctor in the case of illness ...).

The turnout of young people

About 90 percent of the population takes part in the elections. In the elections of 2014, 92,67% of the (automatically) registered voters took part in the regional elections (Flemish parliament) and 91,38% in the European elections (Flemish districts). The voter turnout for the House of Representatives was a little lower: 89,64% (voter turnout Dutch speaking voters). Age-specific information about voter turnout is not available.

Since voting is compulsory, it makes however not so much sense to look at voter turnout in Belgium since it cannot be interpreted as an expression of political interest (Vanhoutte, 2009). The intention to cast a valid vote is often used instead, since people are not obliged to actually cast a vote, they can also decide not to vote, by voting blank or invalid. Because the ballots are anonymous, the proportion of valid votes according to age can only be measured by means of surveys.

A post-electoral study on the Flemish population about their voting behaviour in the elections for the House of representatives in 2014 indicated that invalid voting behaviour (not attending the elections, vote blanco or invalid) is the lowest among the youngest age groups (Abts, Swyngedouw & Meuleman, 2015). Invalid voting behaviour is significantly lower in the age group 18 to 24 year old: while in general 13,7% over the Flemish population at voting age casts an invalid vote, this is only 5,8% among the 18 to 24 year olds (percentages for the other age groups: 14,6% for age group 25-34; 19,4% for age group 35-44; 16,0% for age group 45-54; 17% for age group 55-64; 27,1% for age 65-100).

In a representative survey of young people (age 14-25, n=1326) in Flanders, called the Youth Monitor, carried out by the Youth Research Platform ([Jeugdonderzoeksplatform](#); analyses on political behaviour are also reported in Spruyt, Mastari & Van Droogenbroeck, 2018) in 2018 54,8% of the respondents indicated that they would turn out a vote if voting would not be compulsory. The intention to bring out a vote in case of non-mandatory voting increases by age (Spruyt & Van Droogenbroeck, 2014): 41,8% of the adolescents who are 14-15 year old would cast a vote, when young people reach the voting age (age group 18 to 19 year old) this is already 56,6% and the intention to vote augments further until the age of 24-25 where not less than 65,2% of the respondents indicate that they would vote even if voting wouldn't be compulsory. When asked for which party they would cast a vote if there were be elections for the House of Representatives the next day, 66,7% would bring out a valid vote, 17,3% would vote blanco or invalid and 16% indicates that they would not go to vote (although it is compulsory). Again there are strong differences according to age. The youngest age group (14-15) who are not yet at voting age indicate significantly less than the other age groups that they would cast a valid vote (48,6%). At

the age of 18-19 year 68,1% would cast a valid vote and at the age of 24-25 even 81,2% would cast a valid vote.

Young people as political representatives

Young people as members of political parties

The most recent survey data indicate that the membership of political parties in Flanders fluctuates around 5% (Bral et al., 2011). This survey data can be compared with the member numbers reported by the parties themselves. The self-reported member numbers clearly indicate a decrease in the number of party members in Flanders since the late 1980s: Approximately 373,000 members in 1987 to 214,000 in 2008 (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2010), but -due to the success of the Flemish nationalist party N-VA- this number has increased slightly in the period 2009 to 2014 (Hooghe & Boonen, 2014). In 2012, the Flemish political parties counted together nearly 240.894 members. However, in 2017 this number dropped again to 217.679. Disposed relative to the population this is about 4% of the respondents aged 18 and older.

Membership of political parties (including youth divisions) increases with age. A representative survey on participation ([participatiesurvey](#)) which was carried out in 2014 among 3965 Flemish people aged 14 to 85, indicates that 4,7% of the Flemish population is a member of a political party. Among the youngest age group 14 to 18 only 0,4% is a member of a political party. Among the young who have already reached the voting age (19 to 30 year olds) 3,1% is member of a political party or a political youth organisation.

Young people as candidates in federal/national, regional, local and European elections

For the Belgian and Flemish elections, the age limits for standing as a candidate are lower than for the [European elections](#); To be able to stand as a candidate one has to have reached the following ages at the day of the elections:

- European Parliament : 21
- House of representatives (Belgium): 18
- Regional, provincial and municipal elections in Flanders: 18

There are no quota of seats reserved for young people and there exist no special provisions to facilitate young people to stand as political candidate.

Young people as elected candidates

The average age of the Flemish elected representatives for the **House of Representatives** at the time of the elections in 2014 was 45.2 years (Put, Smulders & Maddens, 2015). The male elected representatives are on average 2.7 years older than their female colleagues. Groen, the green party, is by far the youngest Flemish faction in the House of Representatives with an average age of 39 years. The average age of the Flemish elected representatives dropped over the past 27 years by 1,9 years (Put, Smulders & Maddens, 2015). In 1987 the average elected was 47 years old. Especially between 1995 and 2007 there was a clear trend for rejuvenation, but since 2007 this trend seems to stagnate. This gradual decline in the age can be fully attributed to the elected females. There is a striking curvilinear pattern in the age of female elected representatives: between 1995 and 2007, a thorough rejuvenation took place, but in 2010 and 2014 the group of female elected became gradually older.

The average age of the members of the **Flemish Parliament** is 45 in 2019. 6,5% (or 8 of the 124 elected) of the parliamentarians were younger than 31 years old at the moment of the elections in 2019, the youngest member was 21. With regard to the European Parliament the youngest of the representatives of the Flemish Community was born in 1980.

5.3 Youth representation bodies

Youth parliament

Flanders hasn't a real youth parliament. However since 2013 on a yearly basis a simulation of the Flemish Parliament for and by young people was organised in the parliamentary benches. More information on this project ([Vlaams Jeugdparlement](#)) can be found in 5.7.

Youth councils and/or youth advisory boards

Youth Council

Already before the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy, Flanders had Youth Councils (Jeugdraden) at every level of policy-making (apart from the inter-municipality level), in which youth organisations and young people meet to give advice on policy matters.

LOCAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVEL

In the Flemish Parliament Act of 6 July 2012 on supporting and promoting local youth policy and youth work policy ([Decreet van 6 juli 2012 houdende de ondersteuning en stimulering van het lokaal jeugdbeleid](#)) it is stated that a local youth council should be established and recognised in view of the organisation of the consultation and the participation of children and young people in the preparation and implementation of youth policy. The youth council advises on all matters relating to youth policy, and in drawing up the multiannual plan.

The following persons are members of the municipal youth council:

- the representative of the interested local youth initiatives which can prove an active functioning or recruitment with regard to children and young people from the municipality;
- interested children and young people from the municipality, co-opted by the youth council

Political representatives cannot be members of the youth council. But, in addition to the members with voting rights there may also observers take part in the youth council. The Alderman of Youth, the municipal councillors or other political representatives and external experts can sit as observers in the youth council, and also the youth counsellor or other municipal officials may take part as observers of the youth council. On average, a local youth council counts 22 members with voting rights.

On average, the general meeting of the youth councils in the municipalities of the Flemish Region takes place 7 times a year. In 62% of the municipalities the youth council works with an executive board. In two thirds of the municipalities the Youth Council has a memorandum agreement with the municipal administration (n = 273) (Afdeling Jeugd - Departement Jeugd, Cultuur, Sport en Media, 2015)

NATIONAL LEVEL

The **Flemish Youth Council** ([Vlaamse Jeugdraad](#)) is laid down in article 7 of the Parliament Act on Youth and Children's rights policy ([Decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid](#)). The Flemish Youth Council is the **official advisory body** of the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people.

Every three years the Flemish Youth Council elects a new Assembly, existing of individual young people and representatives of youth organizations. All young people aged 12 to 30 can vote online. The last election took place in November 2020. The Youth Council is composed of 16 members: 8 youth advisers and 8 youth work advisers. At least one third of them has to be younger than 25 at the start of the mandate. Maximum two thirds of the members can have the same gender.

The Youth Council is supported by the 'Ambrassade' (<https://ambrassade.be>), an association recognized and granted by the Flemish Government and also responsible for the development, support and provision of information to the youth sector

The Flemish Youth Council is also supported in its work by the **Commission on Youth Work (Commissie Jeugdwerk)**. It is a monthly meeting that represents all organizations that are recognized and / or subsidized under the Flemish Parliament Act of 2012 on Flemish youth and children's rights policy ([Decreet Vernieuwd Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleid](#)). The youth work committee is an open meeting but works with a core group of fifteen people elected by name. For its composition it bases itself on the decretal diversity between organizations. This Commission carries out work in support of the youth council. They follow up youth work policies and prepare policy proposals, in which the interests of youth work organizations are reflected, for the General Assembly of the Flemish Youth Council.

Higher education student union(s)

Flemish Association of Students ([Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten](#))

The non-profit organisation Flemish Association of Students (VVS) is the umbrella organization of student councils of the Flemish universities and colleges and defends the interests of the students in Flanders and Brussels. The VVS defends students' rights in a broader context of democratization of education. This means that for VVS everyone, whatever their socio-cultural background (e.g. language delay, age, education, disability, ...) has the right barrier to follow the teachings of his or her choice and talents.

The Flemish Association of Students (VVS) has a dual role. On the one hand they represent the student voice in meetings of advisory bodies, working groups of the Ministry and various other places. This takes place at the Flemish, federal and European level. On the other hand, the VVS supports the student councils, by guiding them through difficulties and questions and providing tools.

Each college or university has his own student council and can join in Flanders the Flemish Association of Students. Dependent on their size, student councils have a number of votes in the General Assembly which meets at least monthly during the academic year. The General Assembly (GA) elects the Executive Board (EB), which in turn is assisted by a number of executives.

Funding: grants from the Flemish Government.

School student union(s)

Flemish Pupil's Umbrella Organisation ([Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel](#))

The Flemish Pupil's Umbrella Organisation or 'VSK' is an association by and for students. It supports pupil councils at secondary schools and represents them in Education Policy making. Together with the Flemish Pupils' Umbrella Organisation, the Flemish Government evaluated the [Flemish Parliament Act on participation in education](#). Based on this evaluation, a Flemish Parliament Act on the 'legal position of students in education' is being developed. In 2016, the VSK also held a consultation process with and by students about the contents of education.

The VSK exists of 30 pupils who govern the organization, five young people in the Board, more than 150 active students who regularly give their opinion on education, and more than 800 pupil councils that are members of VSK. The VSK orients his work to all pupils of secondary education in Flanders and Brussels. A team of ten staff members supports their work.

Funding: grants from the Flemish Government.

Other bodies

The Government of Flanders also funds non-profit organisations and provincial authorities to help develop mechanisms for youth participation and opportunities for debate between public institutions and young people. Important organisations are:

- The '[Ambrassade](#)', embedded in the Flemish Parliament Act of 2012, is responsible for the coordination and development of 'youth information' initiatives.
- [Bataljong](#) is member organization of cities and municipalities, which main task consists of informing and supporting Flemish cities and municipalities to prepare and implement local youth policy and youth participation. Goal is to strengthen children and young people, politicians and civil servants in implementing more, better and broader local policy for children and young people. In order to achieve this Bataljongconnects, informs and supports youth councils, youth officials and aldermen of youth. Bataljong also promotes the benefits of child and youth-friendly policy at Flemish, federal and European level, while representing the interests of cities and municipalities. In their activitie Today Bataljong can count on a team of 18 employees and has 303 members. With 290 of the 300 local authorities in Flanders that are member, Bataljong can count substantially all Flemish municipalities as members.
- Démos (<http://www.demos.be>) is a non-partisan public research and advocacy organization. Démos' role has been embedded in the wider cultural field of Flanders by the [Participation Decree](#). They focus on social and policy developments in culture, youth work and sports. Within this focus they publish books and a magazine, organise symposia, work shops, cafés and other gatherings and do research and advise organisations and governments. Démos also contributes to the development of policy and practices that focus mainly on groups and practices that are under-represented and underexposed in our society.

5.4 Young people's participation in policy-making

Formal Mechanisms of Consultation and actors

Great priorities Debate

The youth and children's rights policy plan tries to serve as an example of participatory policy with a strong involvement of children, young people, their organisations and experts.

The process for drawing up the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024 completed several participatory stages. In the spring of 2019, an extensive environmental analysis, the Great Priorities Debate, took place. About 150 representatives from the different policy areas of the Flemish government, experts, young people and actors from civil society and local authorities discussed there the most important cross-policy - or 'transversal' - challenges that affect children and young people, and what the focus should be in the coming years. This debate led to 13 priority themes that the broad youth and children's rights field would like to see included in the next youth and children's rights policy plan ([Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan](#)).

The ranked priority listed was passed on to the government negotiators and later to the new Flemish Government. Based on the priority list, the Flemish Government has selected five objectives:

1. Well-being and positive identity development
2. Healthy and livable neighborhoods
3. Commitment in society through voluntary efforts
4. Leisure activities for all
5. Media literacy

JoKER (Child and Youth effects report - Kind en Jongereneffectenrapport)

Since 1997, the Flemish government is obligated by decree to make an impact report on draft decrees directly affecting the interests of children, persons under eighteen.

By decree of July 18, 2008 (decree on the conduct of a Flemish youth and children's rights policy the child impact report (KER) has been extended to a child and youth impact report (JoKER). Since 2013, the format of the JoKER is fully integrated into the regulatory impact analysis (RIA). RIA is a set of necessary and logical steps in preparing a policy measure. The aim is to ascertain the impact on children and young people under the age of twenty five. The JoKER, assesses the effects of new regulations on children and youth. Whenever a minister submits a draft decree to the Flemish Parliament that directly affects the interests of persons under 25 years, the draft must be accompanied by a JoKER. The Youth Division provides advice on JoKER.

State of youth

The Flemish Government also committed to at least publish a 'State of Youth' every five years. This 'state of youth', the Flemish youth monitor ([JOP monitor](#)) measures the evolution of the living conditions of children and adolescents in Flanders. The last JOP-monitor has been carried out in 2018.

Local youth monitor ([jeugdmonitor](#))

The Flemish government has developed a local youth monitor and made it available to all Flemish cities and municipalities and the [Flemish Community Commission](#) (VGC) in Brussels Capital Region. With this online survey tool, local actors can question groups of children and teenagers from the third year of primary education up to and including the second year of secondary education. The tool includes questions about how they live and experience life in their neighborhood, city or municipality and is focuses on three themes:

1. Playing, being outside, doing things with friends
2. Doing something for other people, taking care of the neighborhood
3. School and hobbies.

Cities, municipalities and the VGC can choose themselves on which theme they set up a survey.

Actors

Youth Council

The main advisory body for youth consultation in the Flemish-Speaking Community in Belgium is the Flemish Youth Council ([Vlaamse Jeugdraad](#), see also 5.3).

Every month, the Youth Council holds a General Assembly. During this meeting, they discuss policy developments relevant to youth and approve advices. With regard to its advisory task, the Flemish Youth Council can give advice at its own discretion or at the request of the Government of Flanders or the Flemish Parliament. As stipulated by law, the Government of Flanders shall request advice when making legislation implementing the Flemish Youth Policy Plan ([most recent advice in Dutch](#)). The Flemish Youth Council shall approve its advices at the General Assembly with a two-third majority of the attendees. Importantly, the Government of Flanders shall explain its decision on the policy advices relating to its competences to the Flemish Youth Council. The Flemish Youth Council can also give policy advices in case its members find it necessary in view of the interests of young people.

Examples of recent advices are:

- At the start of the legislature, the Flemish Minister for Youth writes a policy paper on youth, in which he explains the plans for the coming policy period. Recently the policy paper for the legislative term 2019-2024 was written. In response, the Flemish Youth

Council wrote an advice in preparation for the discussion of this policy memorandum in the Commission on Youth of the Flemish Parliament ([in Dutch](#))

- advice regarding the decision of the Flemish Government on the financing of an innovative offer in preventive family support ([in Dutch](#))
- advice regarding an inclusive labor market that is 'youth-proof', now and in the future ([in Dutch](#))
- Advice to policy makers regarding children, young people, students, young jobseekers and youth organizations and the corona crisis ([in Dutch](#))

At the European level, the Flemish Youth Council has been actively engaged for many years. The Flemish Youth Council has been participating through the decision-making structures of the co-management system of the Council of Europe. Its representatives have sat down with officials to agree on priorities of young people and the youth sector.

The Flemish Youth Council regularly organizes participation projects and ad hoc youth surveys to explore the opinions of (other) young people about specific topics and to link new youth policy plans to the life world of young people.

Municipal participatory tools (see also 5.3)

Every municipality must prepare a multiannual plan for a new legislative period. This multiannual plan starts in the second year of the legislature and ends at the end of the year after the subsequent municipal elections. This multiannual plan contains the policy choices of the new board and its financial translation and consists of a strategic note, a financial note and an explanation.

The municipal youth council gives advice in drawing up the strategic multiannual plan at the municipal level. Every municipality must prepare a multiannual plan for a new legislative period which contains the policy choices and its financial translation. This multiannual plan replaces the earlier sectoral plans such as the youth policy plan, the sports policy plan, ...

In addition, a youth council advises on all matters relating to youth policy and can always make suggestions to the municipal administration. Consultations on youth policy deal with themes that are broader than youth work and youth work policy. Young residents can be involved in local policy in eight policy themes: strategic multiannual plan, culture, youth work policy, environment, mobility, sports, safety or as indicated by the municipality as other.

Formulating and following up advice are the core task of the youth council, but in addition the youth council can also organize activities.

In addition, a municipality can use other participatory tools to involve children and young people in their youth (work) policy. Other participation instruments that can be used by municipalities to give children and young people a voice are:

- Youth polls or surveys (e.g. by using the local youth monitor ([jeugdmonitor](#)))
- Children (municipal) council: consists of children, elected by other children. The Children's municipal council lets children hear their voices, accompanied by adults.
- The Youth paragraph is a policy tool that assesses certain municipal decisions on child-friendliness
- Online participation

Other actors: see also 5.3

Information on the extent of youth participation

At local level

The Department of Culture, Youth and Media ([Departement Cultuur, Jeugd en Media](#)), [Sport Vlaanderen](#) and the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG – [Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten](#)) monitors the local leisure policy by means of the local leisure monitor ([lokale vrijetijdsmonitor](#)). The local leisure monitor collects several data about leisure activities and participation within the Flemish municipalities and the leisure policy of these municipalities. From March to July 2018, municipalities could use the registration tool to share data with regard to their activities in the field of culture, youth and sport. Afterwards, this data was bundled together with data from other relevant sources available to the Flemish Government. All data is published online at the beginning of 2019.

Regarding the instruments of youth participation at local level, the leisure monitor shows that in 2017 (new data will be available in 2022 with information regarding 2021):

- 99% of the municipalities have a youth council (84% on a structural basis; 15% ad hoc)
- 67% of the municipalities organise online participation (5% on a structural basis, 62% ad hoc)
- 44% of the municipalities carry out surveys among young people (5% on a structural basis; 39% ad hoc)
- 30% of the municipalities have a child council (21% on a structural basis; 9% ad hoc)
- 8% of the municipalities have a youth paragraph (3% on a structural basis, 5% ad hoc)

Regarding the themes of participation in local youth policy, the leisure monitor shows that in 2017:

- In 87% of the municipalities youth councils were heard on youth work policy, in 70% on the multiannual strategic plan, in 49% on safety issues, in 46% on mobility issues, in 40% on culture, in 38% on environmental issues, in 25% on sports and in 49% on other issues.
- Online participation is most often used regarding youth work policy: in 42% of the municipalities young people are heard by means of online participation regarding youth work policy. Also one in four (26%) use online participation as a tool for youth participation in the multiannual plan.

Furthermore, there has been a baseline research before the integration of the youth policy plan in the multiannual plan (in 2013) and a research after the integration (in 2017). Based on these studies the researchers conclude that even though the youth council is still considered an important, if not the most important, instrument for policy participation, it has been much less involved in the policy planning phase than used to be when municipalities had to draw sectoral plans (Op de Beeck & De Peuter, 2017).

Outcomes

With the Youth and Children's Rights Plan ([Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan](#)) based on the great priority debate, Flanders commits itself to concrete, feasible and achievable objectives that have an impact and an observable effect on the lives of all children, young people and young adults in Flanders. Its operationalization takes place through a measurable set of actions.

The Flemish Parliament can consult young people through the Flemish Youth Council. The Flemish ministers always have to ask the advice of the Flemish Youth Council in case of decisions that affect children and young people or regarding the draft of Parliament Acts and regulations concerning the implementation of the Flemish youth policy. So, although the requested input can take various forms, often this concerns consultations on drafts of Parliament Acts or on amendments of Acts. However, the recommendations given by the Flemish Youth Council are not binding.

The input given by the Flemish Youth Council is public and can be found on their own website ([in Dutch](#)) and also in the reports of the Flemish Parliament. The input into policy-making can partly be traced by means of the reports of the Flemish Parliament but there exists no clear overview of the integration of young people's input in the policy-making process.

Also the legal provisions and outcomes of the [JoKER](#) and the '[state of youth](#)' can be found on their website.

Large-scale initiatives for dialogue or debate between public institutions and young people

Citizen's Cabinet for Youth ([Burgerkabinet](#))

In 2016 The Flemish Minister for Youth launched a Citizen's Cabinet initiative, focusing on youth in the Flemish Community. The goal was to bring together a group of 150 people to discuss youth affairs and policies and to give people a voice in culture and youth policy. Central question in this Citizen's Cabinet was how to make youth work more diverse. The Citizen's Cabinet for Youth gathered ideas and feedback online until 15 April 2016. Leading contributors were invited to the Flemish Parliament on 6 May 2016 to debate proposals and make recommendations to the Minister. 134 participants came together that day and talked about diversity in youth work. This resulted in the formulation of sixteen recommendations and lead to the [Masterplan diversity in/and youth work \(Masterplan diversiteit in/en het jeugdwerk\)](#), which was presented in the Flemish Parliament on 23 February 2018.

5.5 National strategy to increase youth participation

Existence of a national strategy to increase young people's political and civil society participation

There exists no specific strategy focusing solely on youth participation, but participation is one of the pillars of the **Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan**. The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan is a policy instrument of the Government of Flanders which bundles together the youth and children's rights policies in Flanders. The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 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 current legislative term. As laid down by decree, this must be done one year after the start of the Government's term of office. In 2020 the Government of Flanders presented for the fifth time a youth policy plan to the parliament ([Vlaams Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan 2020-2024; summary of the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019 in English](#)).

The child and youth perspective and resulting from this specific objectives and / or actions related to children and young people are also given a place within the most relevant horizontal policy plans, including the Flemish Action Plan on Combating Poverty, the Flemish Climate Plan, the Horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunity Policy Plan, the Coordinated Flemish Volunteer Policy Action Plan, the Action Plan to Combat Sexual Violence, the Homeless People Action Plan and the Action Plan to Prevent Violent Radicalization, Extremism , Terrorism and Polarization.

Scope and contents

The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan serves as an example of participatory policy with a strong involvement of children, young people, their organizations and experts. All objectives and actions start from the perspective of children, young people and their rights. Preparations started in the spring of 2020. A debate on the big priorities resulted in 13 priority topics (e.g. reducing poverty, well-being, sustainable and safe neighborhoods, giving children and young people a voice, media literacy, combating discrimination). Based

on the priority list, the Flemish Government selected five objectives for actions (see also 5.4).

The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024 pursues four large societal objectives for all children and young people up to and including the age of thirty: equal opportunities, broad development, space and greater involvement in society for all children and young people. This whole set of objectives, indicators, projects and processes constitutes the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020 – 2024.

Responsible authority for the implementation of the strategy

The Government of Flanders is responsible for implementing the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan and will issue interim reports after two years. A first interim report will be sent to the Flemish Parliament before the summer of 2017. This will allow for midterm adjustments to be made. At the end of the Government's term of office a final report will be drawn up.

Monitoring and evaluation

Two sets of indicators that will measure the policy impact are stipulated in the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan:

- The percentage of children and young people in Flanders that participate in a pupil council, a youth council and (children's) municipal council.
- The percentage of children and young people in Flanders that are organizing members of an association

These indicators will be measured by means of the Children Rights Monitor and the Youth Monitor.

Revisions/Updates

The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024 follows up the plan of 2014-2019 which was the first fully integrated youth and children's rights policy plan. For the first time this plan included both the youth policy and the children's rights policy.

5.6 Supporting youth organisations

Legal/policy framework for the functioning and development of youth organisations

Youth organisations play an important role in the implementation of Flanders' youth policy. There are several accredited youth organisations active at Flemish level oriented towards youth work and young people in leisure time settings. The Flemish government distinguishes the following type of associations : (more information in Dutch can be found [here](#)):

- Nationally organised youth associations (Associations of youth work with participants from at least four provinces of the Dutch-speaking region or three provinces of the Dutch-speaking region and the bilingual Brussels-Capital).
- Cultural-educational associations.
- Associations for information and participation. These associations perform one or more of the following objectives: 1) create or convey information for or about youth or child rights; 2) guidance of youth in their participatory processes in the policies of governments or institutions with the aim to involve the youth in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the policies of governments or institutions, 3) guiding media production by and about young people.
- Political youth movements

- Youth houses: In almost every Flemish municipality there is a youth house. A youth house are places where diversity, youth culture, attention for vulnerable groups, a sense of creativity and entrepreneurship are strongly encouraged. Youth houses are meeting places where activities take place for and by young people between 14 and 30 years old. They are run by young people themselves, who keep the youth house open and organize activities.

Except for the political youth movements, all accredited organisations receive grants. Besides there are also different types of grants for specific projects or type of youth work:

- Experimental projects or associations setting up an experimental project in one of the following areas:
 1. youth work,
 2. information to or about youth on youth policy participation,
 3. cultural education for young people.
- Innovative projects: The Flemish Government can launch one or more calls each year for the subsidization of innovative projects for the implementation of the Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan, the youth policy plan and the youth policy letters. In 2018, the Flemish Government launched a call for projects on social integration. This call for projects was part of the Master Plan for Diversity in / and Youth Work ([Masterplan diversiteit in/en het jeugdwerk](#))
- Youth work with socially vulnerable youth: Once every six years, the Flemish Government can grant operating subsidies to professionalized youth work with socially vulnerable children and young people in order to create or stimulate the participation of these children and young people. This allows the children and young people involved to connect with institutions or organizations that can help them to integrate into society in order to eliminate their disadvantage or exclusion.
- Youth work with youth with disabilities: Every four years, the Flemish Government awards operating subsidies to professionalized youth work organizations to organize supra-local youth work activities towards children and young people with a disability. This grant falls under the [decree on supra-local youth work, youth centers and youth work for special target groups \(Decreet bovenlokaal jeugdwerk, jeugdhuizen en jeugdwerk voor bijzondere doelgroepen\)](#).
- Volunteer organizations with youth with disabilities: The Flemish Government can annually award project subsidies to a voluntary organization to organize supra-local youth work activities towards children and young people with a disability. This subsidy line falls under the decree on supra-local youth work, youth centers and youth work for special target groups ([Decreet bovenlokaal jeugdwerk, jeugdhuizen en jeugdwerk voor bijzondere doelgroepen](#)) . The subsidy amounts to a maximum of € 5,000.
- Professionalized youth centers (jeugdhuizen): Once every four years, the Flemish Government approves operating subsidies for professionalized youth centers if they respond to the priorities of the Flemish youth and children's rights policy. They must stimulate artistic expression, entrepreneurship and social cohesion with the environment.
- Inter-municipal partnerships: The Flemish Government can award an operating subsidy every six years to inter-municipal project associations that stimulate cooperation and networking between local authorities and youth work within their operating area. The first six-year period runs from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2026.

Legal framework for the funding of youth organisations:

- The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy ([decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid](#), see section 1.2 for more information)
- The decree on the subsidization of supra-local youth work , youth homes and youth work for special target groups ([decreet houdende de subsidiëring van bovenlokaal jeugdwerk, jeugdhuizen en jeugdwerk voor bijzondere doelgroepen](#)) is new and applicable since 2018. Youth houses, youth work with socially vulnerable children and young people, supra-local youth work with children and young people with disabilities and intermunicipal project associations can make use of the subsidy lines described in this decree.
- The Flemish Parliament Act of 6 July 2012 on supporting and promoting local youth policy ([Decreet houdende de ondersteuning en stimulering van het lokaal jeugdbeleid](#)): There are no more resources related to this Parliament Act, but it still obliges every municipality to set up a local youth council or to recognize an existing youth council.
- The [decree of 6 July 2012 on subsidies for hostels, youth accommodation centers, support structures and the non-profit organization General Service for Youth Tourism \(decreet van 6 juli 2012 houdende subsidiëring van hostels, jeugdverblijfcentra, ondersteuningsstructuren en de vzw Algemene Dienst voor Jeugdtoerisme\)](#) has the general objective of promoting an adapted and varied accommodation capacity for multi-day stays for youth in general and youth work in particular. Associations or persons who make efforts to achieve this objective can be subsidized by the Flemish government.

Public financial support

Based on The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy plan the following types of organisations receive a structural subsidy for working costs (€ 80.000/year) and can also apply for project funding:

- Nationally organised youth associations; in 2021 69 organisations received structural funding. the total size of the subsidy envelope (includes the structural funding and any variable funding) for the period 2018-2021 is € 25.389.083,00.
- Cultural-educational associations; in 2021 16 associations received structural funding. The total size of the subsidy envelope for the 2018-2021 period is € 3.193.788,00.
- Associations information and participation; in 2021 12 associations received structural funding. The total size of the subsidy envelope for the 2018-2021 period is € 3.043.286,00.
- Political Youth Movements are no longer eligible for subsidization
- Professionalized youth centers (jeugdhuizen): 49 youth centers received funding for operational cost for the period 2020-2023. The total size of the subsidy envelope for this period is € 3.649.450.

Regarding the specific projects or types of youth work, the following subsidies were granted:

- In 2020 11 experimental projects received funding for a total budget of € 494 772
- Regarding innovative projects, the Minister of Youth launched the following calls in 2020:
 - the project call 'Connecting vulnerable children and young people with the neighborhood and society'. This call was launched to offer vulnerable children and young people a meaningful, challenging and creative leisure activity during the corona crisis. 59 projects received funding for a total of €2.125.000

- With the project call 'Connection ambassadors for youth work', the Minister of Youth and the Minister of Social Life joined forces to introduce more diversity within the different forms of youth work. 19 projects were selected and received funding for a total of €1.338.547,94
- In 2020, 14 supra-local youth work organizations that work with children and young people with disabilities received an operating subsidy for a total of €1.308.150 euros. It concerns an annual subsidy for the policy period 2020-2023. Also, The Flemish Minister of Youth decided to allocate € 19.965 in project subsidies to 5 voluntary initiatives with children and young people with a disability.
- For the period 2021-2026 7 youth work organisations who work with socially vulnerable youth receive an annual subsidy for a total of € 1.473.780
- For the period 2021-2026 5 inter-municipal partnerships for youth work were granted. Together, the five partnerships receive an annual funding of € 141.037.

Further, initiatives can be regional or local subsidised. However, there are no numbers available of this regional and local subsidised organisations.

Initiatives to increase the diversity of participants

In 2016, the **working group 'Diversity Policy'** within the Youth Work Commission worked on a vision note on diversity in youth work ([visienota Diversiteit in het Jeugdwerk](#)). Partly based on this vision, a roundtable discussion with the youth work sector was organized. Based on the vision statement, the Minister of Youth went in discussion with experts from different policy areas and about a hundred youth workers related to a wide range of youth (work) initiatives, focusing on two goals of the vision statement: "More equal opportunities" and "social inclusion". The entire process resulted in a set of policy recommendations and commitments in the sector.

Based on the recommendations of the Citizen's Cabinet on Youth and those of the working group on diversity policy, the Minister of Youth launched a project call in December 2016, called "Bridge-builders within and to youth work". The Flemish government invested 750,000 euros into projects that 'build bridges' within and towards youth work. The call for projects aims to realise youth work for children and young people in vulnerable situations. The intention is to provide financial support to organisations or groups of organisations that offer a youth work that better reflects the diversity of society.

These initiatives lead also to the [Masterplan diversity in / and youth work \(Masterplan diversiteit in/en het jeugdwerk\)](#) in 2018. The Master Plan must set things in motion, and this in a sustainable way. Therefore it transcends the previous legislature and contains a long list of ambitious actions on diversity, both towards children and young people and more specifically in youth work itself. The actions from the various target group-oriented policy plans are also included. Although the master plan is a joint commitment of the youth sector and the Flemish government, local authorities and any other actors from civil society, other sectors or other policy levels are also invited to commit and formulate actions. The Master Plan is updated annually on the occasion of Diversity Day. Actions in the Master Plan can be linked to four pillars:

1. Achieving a broader youth work offering and ensuring more equal opportunities for all children and young people
2. Achieving more social integration
3. Detecting research needs, collecting and disclosing existing figures, weighing on the research agenda regarding diversity and monitoring.
4. Cross-sectoral and international networking and collaboration

More information can also be found on <https://www.diversjeugdwerkvlaanderen.be/> .

Finally also the funding of supra-local youth work organizations for children and young people with disabilities, the voluntary initiatives geared towards children and young people

with disabilities, the youth work organizations that work with socially vulnerable youth and the projects funded based on the calls 'Connecting vulnerable children and young people with the neighborhood and society' and 'Connection ambassadors for youth work' (see above) have the goal to increase the diversity of participants.

5.7 “Learning to participate” through formal, non-formal and informal learning

Policy Framework

Most initiatives regarding “learning to participate” take place in formal education. “Learning to participate” is included in the objectives for education, more specific within the context of the **key competences for citizenship** in the first grade of secondary education (Decree concerning the educational objectives for the first grade of secondary education of 14 december 2018, [decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de eerste graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)) and the **cross-curricular final objectives concerning the politico-judicial aspect of a democratic society** for the second and third grade. More information on the final goals for education can be found [here](#) (in Dutch).

The cross-curricular final objectives for the second and third grade are minimum objectives which do not appertain to a particular subject of study, but which are pursued by several subjects or educational projects and activities (via formal learning as well as via non-formal learning). The cross-curricular final objectives entail an obligation of effort for the schools, not for the pupils. With the new key competences (at the moment only in the first grade) the distinction between subject-related and cross-curricular final objectives disappears. Students must achieve most objectives at the population level, though there remain attitudinal objectives that will only be pursued. The education providers are free to decide within which subjects they realize the different attainment targets.

Formal learning

Within the **first grade** of secondary education the following transversal themes and final goals are defined:

- Active participation in society, taking into account the rights and duties of everyone within the rule of law.
 - The pupils actively participate in school situations, taking into account the rights and duties of everyone. (attitudinal goal)
 - The pupils illustrate the importance of individual and joint actions and engagement for society.
 - The students distinguish between “being heard”, participation and decision making in school situations, taking into account the rights and duties of everyone.
- Democratic decision-making at local, national and international level
 - The pupils explain ways of representation, participation in power and democratic decision-making insofar as these are relevant to their own world.

The cross-curricular final objectives (VOET) and cross-curricular developmental objectives (apart from the cross-curricular theme learning to learn) apply to the **second and third grade** in secondary education. They have a common core of essential skills which are generically formulated and relate to: communication skills, creativity, perseverance, empathy, aesthetic skills, exploring, flexibility, initiative, critical thinking, media awareness, an open and constructive attitude, respect, collaboration, responsibility, self-image, independence, meticulousness, thoughtfulness. These skills are crystallized and integrated in 7 contexts: physical health and safety, mental health, socio-relational

development, the environment and sustainable development, the politico-judicial society, the socio-economic society, the socio-cultural society.

With regard to the politico-judicial aspect of a democratic society, particular attention is paid to four interrelated themes:

- active citizenship
- human rights
- democracy and
- the European / international dimension.

Goals are:

The pupils

- can indicate how they can participate in decision making and development of society;
- exercise involvement, participation and decision-making in real school situations;
- can show the importance and dynamic character of human and children's rights;
- are actively and constructively committed for their own rights and those of others;
- show that living together in a democratic state is based on rights and obligations that apply to citizens, organizations and public authorities;
- acknowledge the role of check and balance between the legislative, executive and judicial power in our democratic system;
- can illustrate the role of the media and organizations in the functioning of our democratic system;
- distinguish the main elements of the Belgian federal state structure;
- can compare the life in our democratic system with that in other forms of governance;
- illustrate how a democratic policy pursues the public interest and takes account of ideas, opinions and interests of different stakeholders;
- can explain the impact of European cooperation and of the EU policy and institutions for their own environment;
- can show the importance of international organizations and institutions;
- can give examples that illustrate how globalization entails advantages, problems and conflicts.

Non-formal and informal learning

The above mentioned cross-curricular themes can also be achieved by means (and even more) by non-formal and informal ways of learning, e.g. by social and civic projects, activities inside and outside the school walls, ... and also by organising pupil participation (mostly in the form of pupil counsels).

In addition, Flemish youngsters learn to participate 'by doing' in youth work, sports, culture, in formal education... In leisure-time organisations, young people do not only (have to) play together, they often have a say in organisational decisions and sometimes come to lead activities.

Student councils

In formal education, there are also opportunities for active participation in school policy, anchored in a Flemish Parliament Act on Pupil Participation ([decreet betreffende participatie op school en de Vlaamse Onderwijsraad](#)). Flemish primary and secondary schools, universities and university colleges are obliged to organise **student councils** (or

other participation mechanisms) if students request it. Only when the school regulations ensure pupils engagement in school policy in other ways (e.g. by surveys, e-participation), and on the condition that the establishment of a pupil is not requested by at least ten percent of the pupils (where this rate counts at least three students) schools are not obliged to establish a pupil council. At this moment, there are no national or large-scale policy initiatives and programmes to encourage student participation in the local community and wider society.

Youth Parliament ([Vlaams Jeugdparlement](#) - VJP)

Since 2013, the Flemish Youth Parliament ([Vlaams Jeugdparlement](#) - VJP) has been organizing an annual parliamentary simulation for and by young people in the Flemish Parliament. The VJP does this in collaboration with the sister simulations of the [Jeugd Parlement Jeunesse](#) and [Jeunesse Wallonie-Bruxelles Parliament](#). The Flemish Youth Parliament is a non-profit organization and can count on the cooperation and financial support of both the Flemish Parliament and the Flemish Government, as well as some private sponsors.

For four days, 120 young people between the ages of 17 and 27 are debating and negotiating three social issues in the Flemish Hemisphere. The participants are committed youngsters from all over Flanders and from different social background: from university students and college students to secondary school students to workers or job seekers. The Flemish Youth Parliament wants to introduce young people to the ins and outs of the Flemish Parliament, regardless of background or prior knowledge. On the basis of the necessary coaching, each participant participates in an educational and playful manner in the Flemish legislature in all its facets.

Youth participation projects

Under the heading 'participation and information' the Flemish Government funds [Bataljong](#) to support youth participation in Flanders. Bataljong (at that moment VVJ) organized for instance in 2018 the **youth project [Debattle](#)** together with the Ambrassade. Debattle was a project regarding the local elections and supported young people to have a significant impact on the policy choices of the new multi-annual planning. More concrete the project had the following four objectives:

- to provide young people with information about the elections and the local youth policy,
- helping youth in their communications to policymakers to make them clear what good local youth policy is about and to give them tools to ensure that policymakers commit to it,
- to stimulate young people and to provide them handles to organize a local debate towards municipal elections,
- to inform young people and provide them tools to weigh after the elections at the local level.

Under the heading 'participation and information' the Flemish Government also recognizes political youth movements (youth divisions of political parties) and other organisations that develop initiatives in this field. However, political youth movements are no longer funded within the youth policy domain.

Quality assurance/quality guidelines for non-formal learning

There exists no system of quality assurance/guidelines of non-formal learning activities/projects.

However, every student council is obliged to draw up internal rules. These internal rules specify agreements concerning composition of the council, support, gathering, budget, communication,...

Also each structural youth organisations must submit an annual report which entails among others a financial and an activity report.

Educators' support

Several organisations provide information, pedagogical material, tools, ...for teachers, trainers and non-formal education workers and youth-workers. Some examples:

The Power of your Voice ([De kracht van je stem](#))

The Power of your Voice is the educational project of the Flemish Parliament regarding formal education for democratic citizenship. The project is oriented to children, young people and their teachers and offers:

- educational materials for teachers and pupils to work in schools on democracy
- programs and activities for pupils in the Flemish Parliament
- education and training to teachers and students in teachers trainings

KLAScement

[KLAScement](#) is a free platform of the Flemish Government for teachers, where they inspire one another by sharing teaching materials for students of all ages. A large amount of learning resources can easily searched by topic, subject or level of education. Also teaching material for social and civic competences are available on the platform.

EDUbox Democracy ([EDUbox Democratie](#))

In the run-up to the elections of May 2019, VRT NWS (the news channel of the Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organisation) and the Flemish Parliament joined forces to inform students about politics and democracy with the EDUbox Democracy. The box introduces students in a comprehensible, playful way to different political systems and to democracy as we know it in Belgium. The box also contains a teacher manual.

5.8 Raising political awareness among young people

Information providers / counselling structures

Below are some initiatives towards raising political awareness on a Flemish level.

The Power of your Voice ([De kracht van je stem](#))

Since 2003, the Power of your Voice is the educational project regarding education for democratic citizenship of the Flemish Parliament. This project is supported and financed by the Flemish Government. The project is oriented to children, young people and their teachers and offers:

- educational materials for teachers and pupils to work in schools on democracy
- programs and activities for pupils in the Flemish Parliament
- education and training to teachers and students in teachers trainings

Debattle ([in Dutch](#)): Informing young people on elections and youth policy

Debattle was a project of the [Ambrassade](#) and the Vereniging Vlaamse Jeugddiensten (now called [Bataljong](#)) with support of the Flemish Youth Council and various youth work organizations. The major objective of Debattle was, towards the municipal elections of 2018 and the corresponding planning year, to inform, sensitize and activate as many young people and youth organizations as possible. More concrete the project had the following four objectives:

- to provide young people with information about the elections and the local youth policy,
- helping youth in their communications to policymakers to make them clear what good local youth policy is about and to give them tools to ensure that policymakers commit to it,

- to stimulate young people and to provide them handles to organize a local debate towards municipal elections,
- to inform young people and provide them tools to weigh after the elections at the local level

Flemish youth parliament (Vlaams jeugdparlement)

The Flemish Youth Parliament ([Vlaams jeugdparlement](#)) is an association that organises simulations of the Flemish Parliament for and by young people in the parliamentary benches. They did so in the autumn of 2013, 2015 and 2016. The project is aimed at Dutch-speaking youth living in Flanders who are between 17 and 27 years old. The Flemish Youth Parliament wants to make young people acquainted with the ins and outs of democracy in Flanders. Combined with the appropriate coaching each participant is allowed to participate in the Flemish legislature, and this in all its facets. Several days they are immersed in relevant and contemporary social issues on which they have to apply the democratic principles of debate, file knowledge and coalitions. The Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament cooperate in this project.

Next to these regional initiatives, there are also initiatives on a more local level, organised by municipals or by schools (often related to the above mentioned cross-curricular themes in education).

Finally, at national level there is also a [foundation](#) that fund projects that work on the development of citizenship among young people. The Foundation P&V supports active citizenship and fights against social exclusion of young people. In order to combat this 'political alienation', Foundation P&V's launched in 2016 a multi-year project that seeks to reintroduce young people and young adults to social engagement and the political system in general, by showing them that through collective action, personal problems can be solved and dreams can be achieved. In May 2016, they launched a call to organisations in the broadest sense of the word (non-profits, schools, de facto associations, ...) that work with and for young people and are able to coordinate a project that brings young people together who want to willingly start a collective project to find a solution to a problem they are experiencing or to realise a dream within the areas of work, health, neighbourhood, mobility, education, etc. The general aim is to make young people and young adults aware that through collective action and starting dialogues with (local) authorities and public institutions, they can solve personal problems or achieve their dreams. They also want to encourage political institutions to be more responsive to young people's problems and dreams.

Youth-targeted information campaigns about democratic rights and democratic values

At the moment there are no new youth-targeted information campaigns about democratic rights and democratic values. However, the Debattle website (see also 5.8) is still active and strives also after the municipal elections of 2018 for more participation of young people in municipalities.

Besides there is also the **Campaign "I am #youth policy" ("[Ik ben #jeugdbeleid](#)")**:

In February 2019, the [Flemish Youth Council](#), [Bataljong](#), [Debattle](#) and [VVSG](#) launched the campaign "I am #youth policy". With this campaign the involved organisations want to battle for a strong youth policy. With their campaign they wanted to reach every alderman (via e-mail or social media) with the message to increase youth participation, by taking young people into account, by questioning and involving them from the start.

Promoting the intercultural dialogue among young people

On 12-19-2016 the Flemish Minister of Youth Sven Gatz launched a call for in projects that promote diversity in youth work in Flanders and Brussel. The Flemish government will invest 750,000 euros into projects that '**build bridges**' within and towards youth work. The minister wants to encourage organizations in this way to work together, to know each

other better and broaden the participation offer for all young people. This way minister Gatz also wants to accomplish some of the recommendations of the Citizen's Cabinet for Youth (Burgerkabinet, see also 5.4) that took place earlier 2016. In this Citizen's Cabinet young people asked to organize local initiatives in order to reach more young people. With the call the Minister of Youth wants to provide financial support to organizations or groups of organizations that offer a youth work better reflects the diversity of society. Through their cooperation they can also contribute to increased solidarity and integration in a diverse society.

In 2016, the Working Group Diversity Policy of the Commission on Youth Work worked on a vision of diversity in/and youth work. Partly based on this vision, a roundtable discussion with the youth work sector was organized, which was built around four themes: the theoretical framework, the local policy, the integrated youth policy and the challenges of youth itself. The Youth Minister went there in conversation with experts from all policy areas and a hundred youth workers from a wide range of youth (work) initiatives. He follows the two goals of the vision statement: 'More and more equal opportunities' and 'social inclusion'. The call for projects aims to realize youth work for children and young people in vulnerable situations. The central element of the call is that projects should bridge the gap between existing youth actions in leisure and / or other organizations that reach children and young people in their wide diversity.

Promoting transparent and youth-tailored public communication

The Ambrassade

In the Commission Youth information The Ambrassade brings different information players across the sectors (youth, education, welfare, media, ...) together. This Commission wants to be a reference point for policy on youth information in different sectors, both at the level of regulation as that of the organizations. For both functions (bringing together organizations and inspire inclusion policy role function of youth information) to fully record, the Commission is working with two structures:

A core group, consisting of 10 permanent members, takes on the policy work and meets at least three times a year. The core group of the Committee on Youth Information has as main objective to monitor, discuss and try to influence youth information in Flanders. She does this by

- Analysis of policy texts
- Discussion of current topics
- Preparing opinions or positions for the Flemish Youth Council
- Exchange with the Flemish Youth Council
- Establish policy action ((open) letter, press release, playful action ...).

The Ambrassade also keeps its finger on the pulse when it comes to information needs of children and young people and creates, together with youth information actors, a diverse range of information tailored to children and young people under the name Youth Guide. Children and young people are involved in this.

Finally, the Ambrassade coordinates the website [WAT WAT](#) (on behalf of the Flemish Government). WAT WAT (WHAT WHAT) is a platform of more than 70 organizations (working on gender, employment, rights, culture, democratic participation, ...) that want to inform and guide young people for advice or help. By joining forces under one brand name, WAT WAT, the platform prevents the fragmentation of initiatives, websites and campaigns aimed at young people.

StampMedia

[StampMedia](#) is an organisation subsidised by the Youth Department of the City of Antwerp, the Flemish Community, Department of Youth and the City of Genk that aspires to strengthen the voice of young people between 16 and 26 years. They try to achieve this

close the gap between the media and young people. StampMedia teaches young people the tricks of the journalistic profession and disseminates what is being written in the mainstream press.

5.9 E-participation

There are no legal provisions for e-participation. In general, E-participation is often emphasised as the ultimate way to involve young people in policy and society. As indicated in paragraph 5.4, 67% of the municipalities organised online participation (5% on a structural basis, 62% ad hoc) in 2017.

On the website of [Bataljong](#) (Bataljong is an organization that connects and informs youth councilors, youth officials and youth aldermen in order to achieve a strong policy for young residents) some tips, tools and instruments for online participation are mentioned.

[Lomap](#) is one of the tools that is mentioned on the website of Bataljong. Lomap is a free smartphone app and photography tool. It allows children and young people in particular to express their opinion about a neighborhood or city in a fun and intuitive way, by adding color codes and icons. Children/young people can take pictures and indicate via color and text whether they like or dislike something in their neighbourhood. The app has already been used by different cities and municipalities.

5.10 Current debates and reforms

Voting age

The lowering of the voting age remains a hot issue in Flanders (See 5.10). In May 2016 the Flemish Youth Council voted an opinion pro-voting 16. Most of the Flemish political parties ((the green party 'Groen', the socialist party 'SP.A', the liberal party 'Open VLD', the Christian democrats CD&V) hold a positive opinion on the introduction of voting rights – not voting obligation as is now the case for Belgians from the age of 18 - at 16 years. On July 15, 2015 a number of party members of Groen and Ecolo (Groen is the Flemish green party, Ecolo the French green party) submitted a bill to lower the voting age for the European, federal, regional and local elections to 16 years. The right wing parties (Flemish nationalist party N-VA and Vlaams Belang) still oppose voting rights at 16 has not taken a clear stand. At 10 december 2019 SP.A and Groen submitted a motion for a decision concerning voting rights from the age of 16 in which the Flemish Government is asked to take the necessary measures to ensure that young people from the age of 16 are entitled to vote in the municipal and provincial elections in 2024. However, the motion was rejected in the plenary: 28 members voted in favor (all representatives of SP.A and Groen), 85 members voted against and 1 member of the liberal party abstained.

On 21 October 2021 the Council of Ministers of the federal government decided that young people **from the age of 16 will be allowed to vote at the next European elections** in 2024. At the moment, this is still a preliminary draft that has to be approved by the parliament. Once the parliament has approved the amendment, an estimated 270,000 Belgian young people between the ages of 16 and 18 will be able to vote in the European elections. Belgium is the fourth country, after Austria, Greece and Malta, to meet the European Union's request to give young people aged 16 and over the chance to vote. Now, the right to vote starts at the age of 18. The Flemish Youth Council sees the lowering of the voting age for European elections as only a first step towards an expansion that should also take place at the federal, regional and local level.

The voice of young people regarding COVID-19 measures

Certainly during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people were not heard about their experiences and worries regarding COVID-19 and associated measures. Already in May 2020, the Children's Rights Commissioner wrote an advice regarding the lack of a child perspective in tackling the corona crisis. The advice stated

that the right to participation of children and young people was barely given attention in the many decisions and asked the ministers to make extra efforts to guarantee children's rights. In the outlining of measures, children and young people's voice had to be heard in addition to that of economists or education specialists, for example. Also the Flemish Youth Council and other youth representative bodies addressed that the voice of children and young people was completely missing during the first months.

To raise the voice of young people the Children's Rights Commissioner, the Children's Rights Coalition and the Children's Rights Knowledge Center organized an online survey among 8 to 17-year-olds. In this survey children and young people were asked about their opinions and feelings regarding the corona pandemic and measures. Children and young people made themselves heard in droves and completed the online survey with more than 44.000: 17.000 children under the age of 12 and 27.000 plus 12-year-olds.

In later months steps were taken to incorporate more the young people's perspective in decisions regarding corona, but young people still feel that their perspective is insufficiently weighed against other interests.

6. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and Training

Special feature

Competence for education in Belgium has been transferred to the communities. Only the determination of the starting and finishing ages for compulsory education and minimum requirements for diploma conferrals are still federal matters. In the Flemish Community, the Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for all stages of education and training starting from pre-primary education. Childcare is a competence of the Flemish Ministry of Wellbeing, Public Health and Family.

Highlights

The Flemish Government is aware that educational policy should take regard of the highly diverse backgrounds of children and young people, their individual talents, society's different expectations and the aspirations of the labour market. The Flemish Government aims to make all children and young people stronger and give them every opportunity to develop a dynamic positive learning career. The Flemish Government try to ensure a better alignment with and transition to the labour market by strengthening the system of learning and working.

6.1 General context

Main trends in young people's participation in education and training

Social inequality in education

One of the main challenges for education in Flanders is to reduce the social gap in educational outcomes. Several studies, e.g. the [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA) and [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study](#) (TIMSS) show that in Flanders socioeconomic status has a large impact on school performance. Unlike other regions, Flanders does not succeed in reducing this gap; as seen in [the most recent PISA study](#) of 2018. Flanders combines a high average performance with large social differences compared to other European countries. PISA 2018 shows that differences are even growing. While the proportion of top performers remains relatively high, the proportion of pupils who do not reach the basic level for reading, science and/or mathematics increases (e.g. reading: PISA 2009: 13%, PISA 2018: 19%).

These differences are related, among other things, to differences in education and socio-economic composition of the pupil population. Research also shows that not only the socio-economic background of pupils themselves, but also those of their fellow students at school can impact their performance. The teacher and the school leadership also strongly influence school results. The gap not only occurs in terms of performance and skills, but also regarding other school career indicators (such as the probability of early school leaving). International Comparative Research (PISA) also shows that Flanders in comparison with most other countries counts a relatively large number of repeaters. Moreover, Flanders is also at the top in terms of the proportion of pupils with special needs taught in separate schools (special education). This primarily relates to pupils with a foreign or/and disadvantaged background. Repeating, reorientation (B certificate, cascade system) and referrals to special education are characteristics of the Flemish education to deal with pupils with deficits. In 2014 the "[M-decree](#)", a measure to provide inclusive education for pupils with special needs by enabling them to enrol and remain in regular education, was approved by the Flemish Parliament (see 6.6 Social inclusion through education and training for more information). In 2019, however, the Flemish coalition agreement 2019-2024 stated that the M-decree will be replaced by a [new guidance decree](#), which will enter into force on 1 September 2022 at the earliest.

For more information see also:

- OECD, [PISA 2015 key findings for Belgium, 2015](#) (last accessed 26/12/2019)
- Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, [Programme for international student assessment \(PISA\)](#) (last accessed 16/07/2021)

Early leaving from education and training (ELET)

Flanders has a relatively high number of high-performing pupils in compulsory education, of whom many attain higher education degrees. Nonetheless, many pupils, especially those from a lower socio-economic and/or immigration background, experience problems of grade retention and streaming down the hierarchically organized tracking system and finally leave education unqualified. Flanders uses two indicators on ELET, a European measure that is used to make comparisons with European countries and a Flemish indicator which is based on Flemish educational statistics and that is more reliable for the Flemish situation. The European indicator for early leavers from education and training is based on the labour force survey, which is a population survey. Based on this European indicator, Flanders is doing quite well. Numbers for early school leaving have dropped from 10% in 2006 to 7.3% in 2018, while the EU28 percentages were respectively 15.3% in 2006 and 10.2% in 2019. A percentage of 7.3% ELET is below the [EU2020](#) goal of 10% but still above the [Flemish PACT2020](#) goal of 4.25%. According to the [Flemish indicator](#) (in Dutch), an early school leaver is a young person who is no longer subject to compulsory education and who leaves a regular qualifying programme of Flemish secondary education without qualification. This Flemish indicator indicates only a small decline from 12% in the school year 2009/2010 to 9.5% in the school year 2014/2015. Since then, the share of early school leavers has slowly risen back to 12.1% in 2018/2019. This increase was the strongest among pupils in (part-time) vocational studies.

Social differences in ELET are huge. Until 2014/2015 a decline of ELET could be noticed by most social groups. However, since 2015/2016 most social differences increase again. For instance, the probability of early school leaving is significantly higher (based on the Flemish indicator) for young people:

- living in the Brussels Capital Region (14.1% in 2014/2015 and 17.9% in 2018/2019),
- living in metropolitan areas (e.g. Antwerp: 20% 2014/2015 and 22.8% in 2018/2019),
- in vocational education and more specifically in part-time vocational education (e.g. in 2014/2015: the percentage of early school leavers in general secondary education was only 2.3%, while this was respectively 14.3% and 52.2% in vocational education and part-time vocational education; and in 2018/2019 differences are even larger: 3.2% in

general secondary education versus 17.8% in vocational education and 59.4% in part-time vocational education),

- scoring high on the Education Poverty Indicator ([Onderwijs Kansarmoede-Indicator or OKI](#)). The OKI is calculated as the number of the following poverty characteristics that apply to the pupil: 1) family language is not Dutch; 2) mother has not achieved a diploma of secondary education; 3) lives in a neighbourhood with a high degree of school delay; 4) receives a school allowance (e.g. in 2014/2015: among the pupils with an OKI-score of 0 the percentage of ELET was 4.1%, among the pupils with an OKI-score of 3 or 4 this was 21.5%. In 2018/2019: among the pupils with an OKI-score of 0 the percentage of ELET was 4.8%, among the pupils with an OKI-score of 3 or 4 this was 26.5%),
- with a school delay (and increases with every year of school delay) (e.g. in 2014/2015: 1% for youngsters without a school delay, 10% for youngsters with a 1-year delay, 29% for youngsters with a 2-year delay and 44% of those with more than two years delay. In 2018/2019: 1% for youngsters without a school delay, 15% for youngsters with a 1-year delay, 37% for youngsters with a 2-year delay and 54% of those with more than two years delay),
- that are boys (in 2014/2015: 7.3% for girls and 11.9% for boys; in 2018/2019: 9.1% for girls and 15% for boys).

For more information see:

- Report on early school leaving in Flemish secondary education 2015/2016 ([Rapport vroegtijdig schoolverlaten in het Vlaams secundair onderwijs 2015-2016](#))
- Report on early school leaving in Flemish secondary education 2016/2017 ([Rapport vroegtijdig schoolverlaten in het Vlaams secundair onderwijs 2016-2017](#))
- [Smarter, greener, more inclusive?](#) – Indicators to support the Europe 2020 strategy – 2018 edition

Students' mobility

In 2018/2019, 6.008 Flemish students in tertiary education followed - by means of the Erasmus exchange programme - a part of their studies or internship in another European country. The international mobility of students in Flanders continues to increase year after year. Since the start of the Erasmus exchange programme, mobility increases annually: almost a doubling over the last 10 years (2008/2009: 3.243). On average, a student goes abroad for 4.6 months in the context of studies or 3.4 months as part of an internship. In higher education the five most popular countries in 2018/2019 were (in descending order: Spain, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany).

Pupils in secondary technical and vocational education can also follow an internship or training abroad by means of the Erasmus+ programme. During the school year 2018/2019 1.810 pupils from technical and vocational education went abroad.

On average, each year 4.000 students from abroad arrive on Erasmus exchange in Flanders.

For more information:

- Yearbook 2019 Erasmus+ - EPOS ([Jaarboek 2019](#))

Regular national surveys on young people's participation in education and training

[The Department of Education and Training](#) has a long tradition in (international) research and knowledge policy ([Onderwijsonderzoek Departement Onderwijs en Vorming](#)). On the one hand, it involves coordinating, setting up and financing research (see studies above). In addition, the Department of Education and Training also focuses on the disclosure, analysis and interpretation of available administrative data.

Since July 1, 2016, policy-oriented education research of the Department of Education and Training identifies 4 pillars:

- Support Centre for Educational Research ([Steunpunt Onderwijs Onderzoek](#) – SONO). SONO is an interuniversity and interdisciplinary consortium of Flemish researchers. During their 1st cycle (2016-2020) SONO focuses on 3 thematic research lines:
 - *The learner*: With an emphasis on optimal pathways for each student in an increasingly diverse society. A database is being built that maps out the actual study paths of pupils in secondary education. The finalities of compulsory education (a starting qualification for every young person and an optimal connection to the labour market) are examined. Other research lines in this section are the GOK-policy, the M-decree, language policy, dual learning and dealing with diversity.
 - *The teacher and the school as an organisation*: It looks at the role of teachers and educational professionals in the future and explores new directions for continuous professionalisation of teams of teachers and other professionals. The career policy with regard to these professionals is also considered from the perspective of school policy priorities.
 - *The organisation of education*: Attention is paid to the financial conditions and incentives, both for schools and for learners. It also addresses the problem of (de)segregation and the evaluation of the envisaged adjustment of the enrolment decree.
- Policy research centre for test development and assessments ([Steunpunt voor Peilingen en Toetsontwikkeling](#)). Primary goal of these assessments is to determine to what extent Flemish pupils reach final objectives or developmental aims at the end of particular educational levels.
- [International comparative studies](#) (e.g. [PISA](#), [ICCS](#), [PIRLS](#), ...)
- Construction and monitoring of indicators ([Onderwijsindicatoren en monitoring](#)). Since September 2016, the Flemish government's Education and Training policy domain has been building an overview of the education indicators and indicator sets being monitored in Flanders. Indicators make comparisons between education systems possible.

Based on administrative data, the Department on Education and Training publishes on a yearly basis:

- A statistical yearbook of Flemish education ([Statistisch Jaarboek van het Vlaams Onderwijs](#)): number of students in all educational levels, number of teachers, ...
- Statistics on the student characteristics used in the context of equal opportunities policy: home language, mother's level of education, neighbourhood indicator, school allowance ([Cijfermateriaal - Leerlingenkenmerken](#))
- A report on early school leaving ([Vroegtijdig schoolverlaten in het Vlaams secundair onderwijs](#))
- Statistics on problematic absences and disciplinary measures ([Cijfermateriaal - Problematische afwezigheden en tucht](#))

Organisation of the education and training system

Competence for education in Belgium has been transferred to the communities. Only the determination of the starting and finishing ages for compulsory education, minimum requirements for diploma conferrals and the pension system are remaining federal matters.

Education is **compulsory from 6 until 18 years old**. Compulsory education ends at the eighteenth birthday or on June 30 of the calendar year in which one reaches the age of

18. If a pupil stops going to school on his 18th anniversary and does not finish the current school year, he does not have the right to a certificate or diploma which is awarded upon completing the course. For young people who obtain a diploma of secondary education before the age of 18, compulsory education stops at that moment.

A pupil has to comply with full-time compulsory education until the age of fifteen or sixteen. Afterwards only part-time compulsory education is applicable (which is a combination of part-time learning and working). However, most young people continue to attend full-time secondary education.

Main organisation of formal education for young people

ISCED 3 – upper secondary education

Fulltime secondary education contains three stages in Flanders. ISCED 3 refers to stages 2 and 3. Each stage consists of two grades. After 2 comprehensive years, pupils make a choice of study at the start of the second stage. From the second stage onwards four different types of education are offered. In Flanders a pupil chooses a course of study within one of the following types of education:

1. **General secondary education** (gse), which focuses on broad general education. It does not prepare pupils for a specific profession, but rather lays a firm foundation for higher education.
2. In **technical secondary education** (tse) attention goes in particular to general and technical-theoretical subjects. After tse a young person may practice a profession or transfer to higher education. This type of education also contains practical training.
3. **Secondary education in the arts** combines a broad general education with an active practice of art. After secondary education in the arts one may practice a profession or transfer to higher education.
4. **Vocational secondary education** (vse) is a practically-oriented type of education in which the pupil receives general education but where the focus primarily lies on learning a specific profession.

Besides mainstream education, special needs secondary education is available. Special needs education (*buitengewoon onderwijs*) is organized for pupils who need **temporary or permanent specific support** because of a physical or mental disability, serious behavioural or emotional problems or severe learning disabilities. On 12 March 2014 the Flemish Parliament approved a parliamentary act on measures for pupils with specific needs (**M-decree**, [see section 6.6 for more information](#)) which aims to make education more inclusive. The decree contains measures which allow pupils with specific educational needs to participate fully, effectively and on equal terms in regular schools and classrooms. In 2019, however, the Flemish coalition agreement 2019-2024 stated that the M-decree will be replaced by a [new guidance decree](#), which will enter into force on 1 September 2022 at the earliest.

When a pupil is 16 years old or (s)he is 15 and has completed the first 2 years of full-time education (passed or not) (s)he may enter a system of alternating learning and working ([Systeem van deeltijds leren en deeltijds werken](#)). All pupils in part-time education are obliged to combine learning and working for at least 28 hours a week. There exist 2 pathways of combining:

- Part-time vocational secondary education: pupils follow courses for two days a week in a Centre for Part-time Education ([Centrum voor Deeltijds Onderwijs](#)). Based on a screening, the workplace learning section can be a real work experience or for those who are not yet ready to work in a regular economic circuit a preparatory pathway or a bridging project with a recognized promotor or with a personal development pathway in a Centre for Part-time Training

- A centre for apprenticeships (in Flanders organised in [Syntra training centre](#)): pupils follow a theoretical training in a Syntra training centre one day a week and a practical training in a company or with a self-employed person for four days a week.

The systems of learning and working have recently been reformed to a system of dual learning. Dual learning is fully implemented from 1 September 2019. In the coalition agreement of 2014, the Flemish Government raised the ambition to reform the system of learning and working into a system of dual learning. Dual learning can be considered a pathway that stands alongside full-time education. Both pathways are equivalent to each other and result after successful completion in a secondary education degree. How many hours a week a pupil will work in the workplace will depend on their field of study and the type of agreement. A workplace is guaranteed for every pupil that wants to do dual learning. Actors in both policy areas of education and training and employment have committed themselves to fulfilling the workplace guarantee. Furthermore, sectoral partnerships are created with the educational providers, the sectoral social partners, Syntra Flanders and the public employment services. Through this new system, young people will be able to obtain their qualifications on the work floor in more fields of study. Dual learning is also possible in special needs secondary education. More information can be found on the portal website on dual learning ([dual leren](#)).

ISCED 4 – post secondary non-tertiary education

In technical secondary education and secondary education in the arts, labour market oriented programmes can be organised after the second grade of the third stage. Since 2009/2010 these programmes are grouped under the heading of Secondary-after-Secondary ([Secundair-na-secundair](#), Se-n-Se). Se-n-Se programmes last one to three semesters and are organised by schools of secondary education. After successfully completing a Se-n-Se programme a pupil is granted a certificate.

Entrepreneurship education organized by a Syntra training centre is also considered ISCED 4 (see also chapter 3).

People of at least 18 years old and pupils which have completed compulsory education may enrol in adult education and may obtain a recognized diploma, qualification or certificate in adult education. Participants may choose between a generic training on the level of gse (formerly known as second chance education) and a diploma specific training.

ISCED 5 – Short-cycle tertiary education

On 1 September 2009 **higher vocational education** ([Hoger Beroepsonderwijs](#)) was introduced in the Flemish educational system. Graduate programmes of higher professional education (until the school year 2018-2019 they were called HBO5) are professionally oriented programmes situated in between secondary education and professionally oriented bachelor programmes. Participants follow this education in institutions for higher education, except for nursing which is followed in full-time secondary education.

ISCED 6: Bachelor's or equivalent level

Bachelor programmes in Flanders may both be professionally as academically oriented. Professionally oriented bachelor programmes are primarily aimed at practicing a profession and offer a direct access to the labour market. Academically oriented bachelor programmes focus on a broad academic education or an education in the arts. They aim at offering access to a master programme or to the labour market.

ISCED 7: Master's or equivalent level

Master programmes focus on advanced scientific or artistic knowledge or competences which are needed for the independent practice of science or arts, or for practicing a profession.

ISCED 8: Doctoral or equivalent level

A doctorate may be obtained after original scientific research and the public presentation and defence of the doctoral thesis. Only the universities may award the degree of doctorate in Flanders.

Doctoral schools stimulate and support doctoral studies. They organise courses tailored to the requirements of doctoral students, train researchers in general skills and monitor the employment market.

More information on the different stages of education can be found on [Eurydice](#).

Adult education

Adult education is unrelated to the initial educational career. Course participants may obtain a recognized diploma, qualification or certificate in adult education. Adults of at least 18 years old and young people which have completed compulsory education may enrol in adult education.

For further information, please consult the following pages of Eurydice:

- introduction articles of [Organisation and Governance](#)
- and of each educational level: [Secondary Education and Post-Secondary Non Tertiary Education](#), [Higher Education](#) and [Adult Education and Training](#).

Main concepts

Early Leaving from education and training (ELET)

At EU level, early leavers from education and training are defined as 18-24 year-olds with only lower secondary education or less who are no longer in education or training.

The Flemish Community of Belgium has also developed a [Flemish ELET-indicator](#) (in Dutch) which is based on administrative data that includes all pupils from Flemish education. In this indicator early leavers from education and training are defined as pupils who are no longer subject to compulsory education and who leave a regular qualifying program of Flemish secondary education without qualification with a professional finality or a finality of higher education.

Pupil Guidance Centres

The Pupil Guidance Centre ([Centrum voor Leerlingbegeleiding – CLB](#)) is a service which is financed or subsidised by the Flemish government. Pupils, parents, teachers and school boards may turn to a Pupil Guidance Centre with a question for guidance, information or advice.

A Pupil Guidance Centre is a multidisciplinary organisation cooperating with other external services within their network such as welfare and health institutions. The services of the CLB are free and can be situated within the following four domains:

- Learning and studying
- School career
- Preventive health care
- Socio-emotional development

6.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Main actors at central level

The Flemish Community is in charge of most matters of education, although the Federal State is still responsible for a number of matters, e.g.:

- the beginning and end of compulsory education,

- the subdivision into different levels of education,
- the minimum diploma requirements
- the pension scheme,
- language supervision in the schools located in the Brussels region.

Within the Flemish Government, the Minister for Education is responsible for the education policy (for the current legislature 2019-2024 this is Ben Weyts). At the beginning of a new legislative term the Flemish Minister of Education formulates the key objectives for education in a policy paper, which is presented to the Flemish Parliament. The most recent Policy Paper on Education is the one for the legislature period 2019-2024 ([Beleidsnota Onderwijs 2019-2024](#)).

Within the Ministry of the Flemish Community, The **Flemish education administration** implements ministerial decisions. The Flemish education administration consists of 5 autonomous organisations:

- **Department of Education and Training** ([Departement Onderwijs en Vorming](#)), in charge of policy support and development. The Department of Education and Training comprises several divisions that each provide specific services, including the coordination of the Education and Training policy area, communication, strategic policy support, policy preparation and evaluation, etc.
- And **3 agencies and the Inspectorate**, each in charge of policy implementation:
 - **Agency for Educational Services** ([Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten](#), AGODI) is responsible for the implementation of the education policy of primary and secondary education, the centres for part-time education, part-time art education, the centres for student counselling and the inspection and pedagogical guidance.
 - **Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study** ([Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen](#) - AHOVOKS), is responsible for the institutions, teacher staff, and students following higher education or adult education; the development of final goals and qualifications, and services to citizens (e.g. study allowances).
 - **Agency for School Infrastructure** ([Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs](#) - AGION) is responsible for subsidizing the purchase, the construction and the renovation of school buildings.
 - The **Inspectorate** ([Onderwijsinspectie](#)) monitors the quality of education for the following school levels: elementary, secondary and part-time arts education, secondary adult education and adult basic education. It is not competent for higher education. The Inspectorate performs the following tasks:
 - ❖ advising the accreditation of new institutions,
 - ❖ carries out full inspections of the educational institutions
 - ❖ tasks regarding the quality of education (e.g. controls, advise and research) that were assigned by decree or decision of the Flemish Government:

The **Flemish Education Council** ([VLOR](#)) functions as a strategic advisory council. All preliminary draft decrees should be submitted for the formal opinion of VLOR ([more information can be found in Eurydice](#)).

Further information is available in the article [Administration and Governance at Central and/or Regional Level](#) in the Eurydice national description for Flanders.

Organising bodies and educational networks

The constitutional principle of freedom of education is central to Belgian educational legislation (School Pact Act of 29 May 1959, art. 2). It gives every natural person or legal

person the right to establish schools (the 'organising bodies' or, in elementary education, the 'school boards') and to organise and based them on confessional or non-confessional principles or on specific pedagogical or educational ideas. On the condition that a minimum timetable is respected and that the curriculum is approved, the school may either be financed or subsidised. The organising bodies are responsible for the recruitment and appointment of staff and receive financial resources from the government.

To qualify for subsidisation/funding, schools must accept the educational structure imposed by decree, follow a curriculum that recognisably contains the attainment targets and development goals, submit to the supervision of the educational inspectorate, participate in an LCP (local consultation platform), adhere to the principles of participatory decision-making imposed by decree and apply a complete smoking ban.

The organising bodies can transfer some of their responsibilities to [educational networks](#), a representative association of organising bodies. In Flanders there are three educational networks. The school boards of an educational network may join an umbrella organisation. These umbrella organisations represent the school boards in government consultations and offers services to their schools such as drafting the curricula and timetables.

- **GO! Education** ([GO! Onderwijs](#)), is publicly run education organised by the public body called 'het GO! Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap' acting under the authority of the Flemish Community. Under the constitution, this GO! education is required to be neutral.
- **Subsidised private education** (catholic education, protestant education, Jewish education, non-confessional education, independent method schools) consists for the largest part of subsidized private [Catholic education](#).
- **Subsidised official education** includes municipal education (organized by the municipal authorities) and provincial education organized by the provincial authorities). The school boards are united in two umbrella organisations:
 - Educational Network for cities and municipalities ([Onderwijskoepel van Steden en Gemeenten](#), OVSG)
 - Provincial Education Flanders ([Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen](#), POV)

A small number of schools are not recognised by the government. These private schools do not receive funding from the government.

Cross-sectorial cooperation

There are a number of federal competences which confine Education and Training Policy. The most important of these are the regulation of access to certain professions, employee statuses that apply to on-the-job learning and paid educational leave. For a number of policy options, including truancy policy and monitoring school attendance, cooperation is required with Federal Government services, such as justice, and the other communities.

There is also cooperation with several other Flemish policy areas with protocol agreements being concluded between the competent ministers, including:

- the [policy area of Work and Social Economy](#) for the implementation of the qualification structure ([kwalificatiestructuur](#))
- the [policy area Welfare, Public Health and Family](#) for the medical examinations in the pupil guidance centres,
- the [policy area of Culture, Youth, and Media](#), in relation to Arts and Cultural Education, Previously Acquired Competences and Community Schools ([brede scholen](#)), the consultation platform of the officials within the Department Culture, Youth and Media who are involved in the theme cultural education and CANON Culture Cell ([CANON Cultuurcel](#)) of the Department of Education and Training actively network from a shared policy vision and sensitize in both sectors and at various policy levels,

- the [policy area Mobility and Public Works](#) for public transport of pupils

6.3 Preventing early leaving from education and training

National strategy

In January 2009, [Pact2020](#) was signed. This pact aims, among others, at decreasing the number of early leavers in the Flemish Community of Belgium to the regional 2020 target. In order to attain this objective, a comprehensive strategy has been developed in the Flemish Action Plan on Early School Leaving ([Actieplan Samen tegen Schooluitval](#)). On 23 June 2015, the Flemish government approved this integrated plan for action to combat problematic truancy and early school leaving. It went into action and is still ongoing. The action plan on early school leaving ([Actieplan Samen tegen Schooluitval](#)) was a joint initiative of the Minister of Education, the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family and the Minister of Work, Economy, Innovation and Sport during the legislative term 2014-2019. It required cooperation between the [Departments of Education and Training](#); [Work and Social Economy](#); and [Welfare, Public Health and Family](#). The Department of Education and Training is responsible for overseeing this action plan but collaborates with many different actors for the execution of the action plan (see below).

This action plan included 52 actions, including:

- Actions regarding monitoring, identification and coordination.
 - Monitoring and identification
 - Yearly updates of the figures on ELET and truancy at the level of Flanders, cities & towns and schools; identifying ELET students; linking databases between education and work; introducing simplified and stricter reporting of truancy.
 - In collaboration with: Agency for Educational Services ([AGODI](#)), Labour force survey ([EAK](#)), Flemish Employment Agency ([VDAB](#))...
- Coordinating actions
 - Cooperation across the different policy areas (horizontal cooperation) and cooperation between the federal, regional, local and school level (vertical cooperation)
 - In collaboration with: Agency for Educational Services ([AGODI](#)), Youth Welfare Agency ([Agentschap Jongerenwelzijn](#)), Flemish Employment Agency ([VDAB](#)), Agency for Integration and Inclusion ([Agentschap integratie en inburgering](#))...
- Preventive actions
- Care and language policy at school; study and vocational guidance; attention to wellbeing; creating a link with parents, supporting the development of flexible learning pathways; awarding qualifications; strengthening the relation to the work component...
- In collaboration with: Agency for Educational Services ([AGODI](#)), Youth Welfare Agency ([Agentschap Jongerenwelzijn](#)), Flemish Employment Agency ([VDAB](#)), Agency for Integration and Inclusion ([Agentschap integratie en inburgering](#)), Federal Public Service Justice ([federale overheidsdienst justitie](#)), schools, parents' umbrella organisations...
- Actions for intervention as soon as a student threatens to abandon student education
- Actions on the level of the school, the Pupil Guidance Centres (CLB) and the educational guidance services; reform of time-out projects; responsabilising of parents
- In collaboration with: Pupil Guidance Centres ([CLB](#)), Youth Welfare Agency ([Agentschap Jongerenwelzijn](#)), Police
- Compensatory actions for young people who fail to qualify

- Reflection tool; stimulating Educational Qualifications Training Pathways; appointing a Flemish truancy officer
- The Flemish Qualification Structure ([VKS](#)), Flemish Employment Agency ([VDAB](#))

Flemish policy is translated into the specific local context. This will involve all relevant local partners concerned with wellbeing, youth assistance, work, police or justice. Since September 2016 there are 6 networks working together against school dropout in Flanders, one for each province and one for the Brussels-Capital Region.

The Flemish truant-officer monitors, supervises and evaluates the implementation of the action plan. This person reports annually on the progress of the implementation of the plan.

Formal education: main policy measures on ELET

Monitoring and identification early school leaving

Early school leaving is in Flanders, as in many other countries and regions, high on the policy agenda. In a yearly report 'Early School leaving school in Flemish secondary education' ([Vroegtijdig schoolverlaten in het Vlaams secundair onderwijs](#)), the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training reports on early school leaving based on administrative data. These reports cover the most recent consecutive school years for which figures are available. The most recent report covers the school years 2011/2012 to 2016/2017. These reports report:

- The global Flemish figures
- Detailed figures of early school leaving according to student characteristics, such as sex, age, nationality, education and social-economic home situation
- Some key figures per province, for Flemish city centres and for Flemish education in the Brussels-Capital Region

Since the school year 2014/2015, the Department of Education and Training also calculates the following statistics of early school leavers:

- Objectives for Flanders at [steunpuntwerk.be](#): [Unqualified school-leavers](#) (choose indicator 'unqualified school-leavers')
- Statistics on [Flemish level](#)
- Statistics on [city- and municipal level](#)
- School specific statistics on My Education ([Mijn Onderwijs](#))

In 2020 the interactive tool '[Dataloop ELET](#)' was developed. Via this data application, you will find detailed figures on early school leaving for Flanders and for all municipalities. The application allows you to request figures with breakdowns by gender, age, nationality, socio-economic pupil characteristics, type of education, study area and educational career.

European comparative information can be found in the Eurydice and Cedefop Report '[Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe](#)'.

Attention points in Flemish policy against school dropout

In order to avoid early school leaving, the Department of Education and Training focuses on two mechanisms: repulsion and attraction. Problems often pile up before deciding to stop school and these two mechanisms play an important role in the decision to stop. Elements that can cause repulsion can be attributed to the education system (e.g. school fatigue, learning disabilities, incorrect study choice, truancy, ...) or to external features (e.g. problematic home and family situation, mental health problems, ...). The [Flemish policy regarding the prevention of ELET \(in Dutch\)](#), focuses on both. On the other side,

there is the attraction of the labour market, especially when youth unemployment is low ([Van Landeghem, De Fraine, Gielen & Van Damme, 2013](#)).

Compared to other European countries, the number of early school leavers in Flanders is still relatively low. Two characteristics of the Flemish school system contribute to this:

- Compulsory education up to 18 years
- A highly developed vocational education

On the other hand, the Flemish education system also provides a nutritional basis for ELET:

- Letting a student repeat his or her year is too often considered the best solution to remedy students with learning difficulties.
- Schools stick too closely to a year-class system, which sometimes inhibits them to make learning paths more flexible.

Prevention actions are based on these insights and foci. Some examples are:

Actions against absenteeism and truancy

Since 2013/2014, absenteeism is registered on a daily basis (via [Discimus](#)) for all students in primary and secondary education based on a unique identification record for each student registered in a Flemish school so that their progression can be tracked. The Educational Agency (AGODI) checks whether the regulations regarding compulsory education and attendance are respected.

The Flemish government also has developed a number of [guidelines to tackle truancy](#).

Differentiation through flexible learning pathways

Flexible learning paths provide flexibility in what, how, when, where and with whom students learn within the common curriculum. The goal is to provide as many students as possible with a chance to qualify.

Three forms of differentiation are distinguished.

1. **Internal differentiation:** The teacher differentiates between students of the same age within a particular grade. Examples are: flexible learning contents, individual learning lines with emphasis on independent work
2. **Structural forms of external differentiation:** Structural forms of external differentiation are flexible learning paths that transcend the year-class system. The school takes into account differences between pupils by grouping them differently. Examples are: multi-age classes, class or grade-crossing level groups, modularization, flexible timetables, structurally built-in hours for remediation, broadening and deepening, co-teaching, ...
3. **Practices for specific target groups:** With practice for specific audiences, teachers and schools differ only for certain groups of students. Examples are: specific actions for specific target groups; extra remediation, deepening or widening, flexibility in study time...

The Department of Education and training has bundled some examples on [flexible learning pathways \(in Dutch\)](#).

Educational career and learning guidance

The Department of Education and Training also developed the website [Onderwijskiezer](#). On this website students (and their parents) can find detailed information on disciplines and schools. In addition, the website offers some tests to help young people in their search for a thoughtful study choice that best fits their interests, competences and motivation. The tests measure the interest, study attitude and study method.

Young people who have not (yet) obtained their diploma of secondary education can find all possible learning paths on a specific page developed for people without diploma ([Geen diploma SO...Wat nu?](#)).

Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

NAFT projects

NAFT-projects (Seamless Flexible Trajectories, [Naadloze Flexibele Trajecten](#)) are geared towards young people who, due to pedagogical, legal, social or personal reasons, are at risk of leaving education. NAFT projects have a dual objective: the positive guidance of vulnerable young people and the support of the educational institutions. More specifically, young people who require temporary intensive guidance are offered a positive and tailor-made trajectory so that they can reconnect to a school trajectory. Regarding educational institutions and school staff, NAFT projects reinforce school and care policy in the light of dealing with vulnerable young people. During a NAFT both the pupil and the school get a rest period. A NAFT can be used preventatively or curatively.

School external organizations that offer NAFT can apply for grants to the Education and Training Department. An overview of all organizations that are subsidized can be found [here](#) (in Dutch). At the moment 20 organizations are subsidized. Each NAFT provider is a school-external organization that offers NAFT to all Flemish, recognized or subsidized schools for regular or special needs full-time secondary education, part-time secondary education, recognized training or apprenticeship in the region for which they have signed up.

Dedicated mediators

In 2018, the Flemish Employment Agency ([Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling](#), VDAB) and the youth expertise centre [De Ambrassade](#) started a project in which 'dedicated mediators' ([Dedicated bemiddelaars](#)), support NEET young people in their search for work. The mediators use methods derived from youth work, where they come out, approach young people in an approachable way and come up with out-of-the box solutions. In the learning network 'youth guarantee' of VDAB, in which De Ambrassade also has a seat, the cooperation between youth work and VDAB is strengthened at strategic level.

Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions

The action plan on early school leaving ([Actieplan Samen tegen Schooluitval](#)) was a joint initiative of the Minister of Education, the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family and the Minister of Work, Economy, Innovation and Sport during the legislative term 2014-2019. It required cooperation between the Departments of Education and Training; Work and Social Economy; and Welfare, Public Health and Family.

A thematic working group was established to address ELET and to develop the action plan on early school leaving in which many stakeholders were involved. Moreover, a cross-sectoral steering group meets at least once a year to implement the action plan. Both groups are also involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the actions.

Since September 2016, there is a network Together against School Dropout in each province and in the Brussels Capital Region, under the guidance of a network coordinator. These network coordinators mobilize the different local actors from education, welfare and employment to address ELET. As such, the Flemish policy on early school leaving is translated into the specific local context. They involve professionals such as school heads, teachers, guidance specialists, psychologists and social workers. More information on these local networks can be found [here](#) (in Dutch).

6.4 Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

In Flanders the term Recognition of Competences ([Erkennen van Competenties](#) – EVC) is used to refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is possible in institutions for higher education and adult education, in the field of work, socio-cultural sector, youth sector and sports sector.

Since 2011, the [Department of Education and Training](#) as well as the [Department of Work and Social Economy](#) and the [Department of Culture, Youth and Media](#) have been discussing the development of an integrated approach towards validation. In Flanders the procedures and practices of RAC vary amongst the policy domains on the basis of different regulations. In order to avoid this fragmentation, the Flemish government developed an integrated approach towards the recognition of acquired competences. The Flemish government approved on 17 July 2015 the [concept note](#) 'Integrated policy for the recognition of competences' ([Geïntegreerd beleid voor erkenning van competenties \(EVC\)](#)). The aim of this concept note is to create a single framework linking the validation process to the Flemish Qualification Structure ([Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur](#)) and creating common standards and quality assurance. On 26 April 2019, the Flemish Government also approved the decree concerning an integrated policy for the recognition of acquired competences (EVC, [Decreet betreffende een geïntegreerd beleid voor de erkenning van verworven competenties](#)). This decree ensures that individuals can have their competencies assessed in EVC test centres established within educational institutions or other public or private organizations. The new regulations determine the conditions for being allowed to act as a test centre and define the framework for the organization and financing of the EVC test centres in various policy areas.

To this aim the Flemish government approved on 17 July 2015 the concept note 'Integrated policy for the recognition of competences'. The aim of this concept note is to create a single framework linking the validation process to the Flemish Qualification Structure and creating common standards and quality assurance.

Procedure

An EVC-pathway consists out of [four steps](#) (in Dutch):

- Identification: to become aware of and appoint competencies
- Documentation: providing information, and (evidence of) material to illustrate and visualize skills
- Assessment: the evaluation of competencies on the basis of a recognized standard
- Certification: the formal recognition of competencies, based on the results of assessment of competencies

More information on this pathway can be found on

- the Flemish website on [EVC](#)
- the [Eurydice website](#)

Validation

Currently, in Flanders there are several validation strategies **in education and training**, according to the educational level ([De Rick, 2016](#)). None of these strategies was introduced recently. In the education system, validation strategies have been mainly developed in the higher education and the adult education sectors.

- **Secondary education:** Those who wish to obtain the diploma or certificate of secondary education at a later stage can take an exam at the Exam Committee

([Examencommissie](#)). This is possible for a selection of educational programmes offered in secondary education

- **Higher education:** Validation of prior learning in higher education is defined by the [Codex Higher Education](#) (11 October 2013). This system is decentralised with each association in higher education elaborating their own rules of procedure. The procedure result in a proof of acquired competences ([Bewijs van Bekwaamheid](#)) which can then lead to the appropriate exemptions/shortened study duration and credit certificates and/or a proof of qualification. Validation in this sector can be used to pursue education or for professional aims.
- **Adult education/** In the Flemish Decree of 15 June 2007 relating to (formal) adult education ([Decreet betreffende het volwassenenonderwijs](#)), exemptions linked to the modular organisation of educational programmes are defined. All programmes (i.e. modules) in the centres for adult education are developed based on course profiles approved by the Flemish Government. This implies that all (modular) certificates are mutually interchangeable. The centres for adult education provide an evaluation for each module. Each centre has a code of conduct that defines the procedures for exemption and disputes of evaluation. Exemptions can be granted on the basis of credits for prior learning and/or evaluation of competences.

The arrangements set up by the **Department of Work** essentially aim at the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through the 'Certificate of Work Experience' ([Ervaringbewijs](#)) created by a [decree approved on 30 April 2004](#). In short, people can receive a certificate of work experience if they demonstrate that they have acquired the skills needed to perform an occupation. Professional competence profiles are translated into standards by the [Flanders' Social and Economic Committee](#) ([Sociaal Economische Raad van Vlaanderen](#) – SERV) and the social partners. These standards are used in a test situation to assess whether people dispose of the required competences.

Within the **cultural, youth and sports sector**, and more specifically within youth work, consultation and debate long prevailed. However, several instruments have been developed over the past years to make competences visible. Overall though, certificates issued to participants in these types of learning or training activities are in general known as "certificates of participation", which are mainly based on self-assessment practices rather than on institutional or formal assessments, except for the – formal – procedures and diplomas within the Flemish School for sports coaches ([Vlaamse trainerschool](#) - VTS).

In the cultural and youth sectors the focus is for the moment only on validation in the sense of 'identification' and 'documentation' and less so on 'assessment' and 'certification'. Based on the concern that a higher degree of formalisation could undermine the voluntary nature of activity, there is no strong support in the **youth sector** in developing formal qualifications for voluntary youth workers. The City of Antwerp worked out **ComPas**, the Competence Passport. Schools or organisations accredited with the ComPas label can give a ComPas certificate to young people who followed their course and gained the competencies.

Since October 2015, there is a specific legal agreement with regard to the attestation of training courses for **youth workers** ([Attesten voor jeugdwerkers](#)), delivered by the Department of Culture, Youth, and Media (Youth). The validation of competences acquired through courses including apprenticeships, based on competence profiles, leads to the award of certificates.

At the moment, different recognized organisations can judge and officially acknowledge competencies. The following EVC providers can provide a formal proof of acquired competencies:

- The Examination Board of Secondary Education ([Examencommissie Secundair Onderwijs](#)) for diploma or certificate of secondary education
- Higher education (for the diploma of bachelor and master)

- [NARIC-Vlaanderen](#) (recognition of foreign study certificate)
- “Cel become teacher” ([cel 'word leerkracht'](#)) (recognition of useful experiences for teachers)
- Test centres experience certificate (experience certificates)
- [VDAB](#) (Flemish Public Employment Service) ([certificate of education or training](#); entrance ticket for a function at the Flemish government)
- [Syntra](#) (certificate or diploma)
- [SELOR](#) (Entry card for a job at the federal government; currently this card is only available for penitentiary security officers)
- [Flemish Training school](#) (VTS qualification: applicants who have successfully gone through the validation procedure can obtain either an exemption for a course or training programme or a full exemption which means that a proof of competences equal to a VTS qualification is awarded)

Information and guidance

So far, little information activities have been implemented in Flanders. Awareness-raising activities are undertaken independently by the respective governmental departments (the [Department of Education and Training](#), the [Department of Work and Social Economy](#) and the [Department of Culture, Youth and Media](#)) and/or by validation actors. However, in time a large, coordinated awareness-raising campaign will be needed to inform the public about validation. In the meantime, information regarding validation has been made available to the public via the website '[Erkennen van Competenties](#)'. In addition, intermediate organisations which are closely related to the target groups can function as information centres.

Quality assurance

An EVC-standard is developed with and by the stakeholders. This means that for the creation of EVC standards for one or a cluster of professional qualification(s), a working group or development committee is assembled consisting of, for example, representatives of the sector(s) involved, education and training providers or other organisations. The Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants ([AHOVOKS](#)) takes care of the process supervision and quality control. AHOVOKS developed a template for the EVC-standards, a manual for the layout of EVC-standards and a catalogue of assessment methods. In the manual there is a step-by-step description of how an EVC-standard takes shape and which principles are important. The composition and the assignment of the members of the working group/development committee are also indicated.

The quality supervision of the EVC-routes takes place in accordance with the applicable quality decrees at least once every six years. The external quality supervision of EVC-programs offered within education (with a test centre within an educational institution) will take place: For levels 1-4: according to the provisions of the decree of 8 May 2009 concerning quality of education, cf. Inspection 2.0; For levels 5-8 according to the provisions of the Codex Higher Education concerning the system of quality assurance and accreditation, cf. Flemish Universities and Colleges Council (VLUHR) and NVAO. The external quality supervision of EVC-programmes outside of Education will take place according to the provisions of the draft decree on quality supervision for professional qualifying routes based on a common quality framework that is currently being developed.

6.5 Cross-border learning mobility

Policy framework

As described in [Eurydice](#), Flanders has participated very actively in the European programmes (such as [Comenius](#), [Erasmus+](#) and [Leonardo Da Vinci](#)) right from the start. In multilateral cooperation (Unesco, the Council of Europe and the OECD), Flanders opts mainly for projects that tie in with Flemish education policy or where Flanders is able to make a structural contribution.

In the action plan "Brains on the move" ([Brains on te move - actieplan mobiliteit 2013](#)) the Flemish government stipulated that by 2020 at least 1 in 3 graduates from higher education must have followed part of their education or internship abroad, both inside and outside Europe. To this end, the Flemish government will provide the necessary grants, with extra attention for students from under-represented groups. These are students with a disability, scholarship students, immigrants, work students and students from cultural-ethnic minorities with a migration background.

Main cross-border mobility programmes for students in formal education

Programmes for pupils in secondary education

- **Twining (action of the Erasmus+ Programme):** Through eTwinning, primary and secondary schools can set up online projects in collaboration with schools in Europe. The use of eTwinning - the online community for schools in Europe - is free and low-threshold. An eTwinning project can be performed by teachers, teacher teams, directors, librarians, ICT coordinators and also by pupils.
- **Erasmus+, Individual learning mobility KA1** (Epos-Vlaanderen): Pupils who follow initial vocational education, such as technical and vocational education, can go abroad individually or in groups for 2 weeks to 12 months abroad.
- **Neighbour classes** (Epos-Vlaanderen) is a simple grant programme that allows class exchanges between 2 schools: 1 Belgian class and 1 class from a neighbouring country of Belgium. Schools in primary and secondary education of all levels and forms (including special needs education) can participate. Central to the projects are class exchanges, but these may not be the only project activities.
- **With Erasmus in Schools** (ESN Belgium) a school can invite an Erasmus student to class for one or more hours. In this way, students acquire knowledge of cultural diversity and international mobility.
- The Prince Philip Fund ([Prins Filipfonds](#)) provides financial support for language-crossing exchange projects in Belgium ([Scholen Swich](#)) that promote cooperation between schools, colleges and universities.

An overview of current possibilities for studying abroad can be found on the [Euroguidance - Vlaanderen \(in Dutch\)](#).

When they have reached the age of 15, pupils can also study abroad for a few months or a year on their own initiative. To go abroad during secondary education there are 2 ways: through a mediation organisation ([AFS](#), [Easy languages](#), [EF](#), [UWC](#), [YFU](#), [WEP](#)) or the student arranges everything himself.

See also the pages of the Department of Education and Training on cross-border learning ([de grens over met je klas](#)).

Programmes for students in tertiary education

The action plan "[Brains on the Move](#)" contains a wide range of initiatives that contribute to the further development of an international high-quality higher education in Flanders. The emphasis is on student mobility. The action plan contains not only measures for

Flemish students who go abroad, it also creates opportunities for attracting foreign students.

Erasmus Programme

The European Commission's [Erasmus programme](#) is the most prominent. Institutions in higher education (or a consortium of institutions) can apply for EPOS (the National Agency for the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders) for mobility of staff and students (including graduates) within Europe. This allows students to study, work internship or gain work experience at a company or educational institution in another European country. During the academic year 2016/2017, 6.008 Flemish students in tertiary education followed - by means of the Erasmus exchange programme - a part of their studies or internship in another European country.

Mobility outside Europe is also possible within **Erasmus +** through cooperation with international partner countries, also known as International Credit Mobility). Institutions in higher education (or a consortium of institutions) can submit an application to EPOS. Through this action, students and staff from one of these partner countries can also come to a European Higher Education Institution.

Other programmes

The Flemish Department of Education and Training finances, within the framework of the Mobility Action Plan, also the following scholarship programmes:

- **Priority Country Programme:** This programme promotes student exchange between Flanders and a number of priority countries, namely Brazil, Chile, Japan, Morocco, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, the United States of America and South Africa. Under the Priority Country programme, both an exchange of two students in a framework of a duo project is possible, as single outgoing mobility from Flanders. The total budget available for the Priority Country Programme in 2019/2020 is 450 000 EUR. Approximately 100 to 120 students can benefit from this programme in 2019/2020.
- **ASEM-DUO:** The purpose of this programme is to promote student exchange between Flanders and 4 countries in Asia (China, India, Vietnam and South Korea) on a balanced and permanent basis. In this respect, DUO-Belgium/Flanders requires that a pair (two persons) of students will be exchanged in the framework of a cooperative project. This can be done for one-semester mobility (with renewal of up to 1 year, where the grant amount is limited to 1 semester). The amount of the scholarships is standardized as follows:
 - €650/month (with a maximum of €2.600) for Flemish students and €800/month (with a maximum of €3 200) for Asian students
 - €1.100 for both the Flemish student and the Asian student for the purpose of travel costs.
 - an extra €200/month (with a maximum of €800) for Flemish students that belong to the underrepresented groups in higher education
- **The Washington Centre:** The Washington Centre is an independent, nonprofit organisation offering internships and academic seminars to students from Flemish universities and colleges. The Department of Education and Training offers 12 scholarships for Flemish students who want to do an internship at international organizations or companies in Washington during one semester. The scholarship amount is € 9.000 per student (academic year 2019-2020). For students from underrepresented groups the scholarship amount is € 12.000.
- **Generic scholarships ([Generiek beurzenstelsel](#)):** The Flemish government allocates generic scholarships for mobility outside of Europe to students in tertiary education (ISCED 5,6 and 7). The programme aims to stimulate mobility complementary to the possibilities within the Erasmus + program. Mobility of minimum 1 month and maximum

12 months refers to study, internship or research in the context of a final work. The selection of the students takes place within the institution of higher education. The funding is managed and supported by the [The Flemish Council of Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts](#) (VLOHRA) in cooperation with the [Department of Education and Training](#). The budget allocated for this action is € 1.781.955 (2018).

- **Erasmus Belgica:** This is a cooperation project between the three Communities of Belgium to enhance the mobility of higher-education students and to give them the opportunity to follow part of their programme at a university or university college in another Community. The programme follows the same principles as the European Erasmus programme. It concerns a study or internship period of minimum 2 (for internships) or 3 (for studies) months and maximum 12 months in a different community. Students receive a flat rate of 100 euros and a monthly scholarship of 100 euros if they can prove that they have specific accommodation costs for the duration of their stay in the other community.

More information on these programmes can be found on the website “Study abroad” ([Studeer in het buitenland](#)).

Promoting mobility in the context of non-formal learning, and of youth work

[JINT](#) was founded in 1989 by the Flemish government, in consultation with Flemish youth organizations. JINT's mission is to stimulate and support the international mobility and cooperation of young people and youth organizations. JINT is structurally financed by two institutions:

- The [Department of Culture, Youth and Media](#) of the Flemish Government
- The [Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission](#)

JINT promotes international mobility in the following ways:

- JINT builds bridges between international youth policy and Flemish youth policy, and between youth work abroad and in Flanders
 - Under the name [Go Strange](#), JINT shows individual young people their way abroad. Through Go Strange they find a range of international exchange opportunities, including volunteering, studying, internships and foreign camps.
 - JINT is also the National Agency for the [Youth in Action](#) section of the Erasmus + program in Flanders and for the [European Solidarity Corps](#). JINT takes care of the daily implementation of this subsidy program of the European Commission.
 - JINT is responsible in Flanders for implementing the Belgian subsidy program [Bel'J](#). The Bel'J program was established in 2009 and gives young people aged between 12 and 30 the opportunity to meet young people from the other Belgian communities by means of volunteering or a group exchange.
 - JINT houses the [SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre](#) that specializes in international projects with young people from vulnerable and diverse groups. It is one of the SALTO-YOUTH Resource centres set up by the European Commission to support the Youth in Action project applicants and the National Agencies.
- Offering young people, youth workers and their organizations tailor-made information throughout their international / intercultural trajectory. This goal is achieved by both online (e.g. newsletters, websites, social media) and offline information (e.g. info fairs, info sessions, help desk) channels. Some of the online information channels are:
 - The [Go Strange](#) website provides an overview of organizations that allow Flemish youth from 14 to 30 years old to go abroad. The website also provides information

about scholarships and grants and tips to prepare the foreign adventure (in 2015 a total of 94 626 users).

- The Quality Mobility App ([Q! App](#)): helps organisations to create learning mobility projects. It allows organisations to self-assess the quality of international youth projects and compare their assessment with colleagues. It can also provide organisations with an online platform to create their own project and cooperate with their partners. Several practical resources, tips, videos and checklists are provided to improve the quality of a learning mobility project.
- [Kamiel](#) is developed for young people between the ages of 16 and 30 who go abroad for a temporary, non-tourism activity. Kamiel informs young people on all practical issues when going abroad.

Quality assurance

Mobility in the context of formal education

Students in higher education can contact in their institution an internationalization service for general information on international mobility. The study or internship in another European country within the Erasmus+ programme must meet the following conditions for students

- meet the learning objectives of the degree to be achieved;
- meet the student's personal development needs;
- be an integral part of the student's study programme

Mobility in the context of youth work

Since 2011, JINT together with several other Erasmus+ Youth in Action National Agencies and research partners participate in the transnational, on-going [Research-based analysis and monitoring of the Youth in Action Programme](#) (RAY). RAY studies the impact of Youth in Action projects on participants, supervisors and their organizations.

JINT, together with the Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen (Howest) Department of Social Agogics, studied the learning effects and impact of Youth in Action in Flanders for projects in the period 2007 to 2013. The result of this study were written down in a final evaluation report of the Youth in Action program ([Eindevaluatie Youth in Action 2007-2013](#), an executive summary in English can be found on pages 107-108).

This final evaluation is limited to the work of JINT. It includes all sub-actions of Youth in Action program as executed by JINT in the period 2007 to 2013. The report is mainly based on data collected by the RAY-network in the period 2011-2014. In this period more than 610 participants and 179 project leaders of Youth in Action projects were reached through an online questionnaire. These quantitative data are complemented with qualitative data gathered in a focus group with project leaders, focus groups with social vulnerable young people and their project leaders and a written questionnaire with open questions for coordinators or staff members involved in the internationalisation of their organisation of seven big national youth work organisations. Finally, data from Youthlink (European Commission) and data provided by JINT are used. The report consists of the following parts:

- Statistics on input (personnel and financial resources) and output (number of projects, number of participants, ...)
- Assessment of the relevance and effectiveness with extra attention for social vulnerable young people and the impact of the program on the organization, their functioning and their policy
- Assessment of sustainability

This evaluation report also reports recommendations

- for improving the implementation of Youth in Action under Erasmus +
- and regarding the contribution of Youth in Action to the realization of the internationalization of youth work in Flanders.

6.6 Social inclusion through education and training

Educational support

Learners with a migrant background - OKAN (Reception Classes for Non-native Newcomers- Onthaalonderwijs voor Anderstaligen Kinderen)

To facilitate the integration of non-Dutch-speaking newcomers in mainstream education, schools can be granted supplementary teaching periods/extra teacher hours – and in primary education an extra operational allowance too – within the framework of OKAN, reception education for non-Dutch-speaking newcomers. OKAN-pupils in secondary education receive Dutch language lessons for one year. Afterwards they get guidance in further education.

Learners affected by physical or cognitive disabilities

On 1 September 2015 the Decree on pupils with specific educational needs (SEN-pupils – [Decreet betreffende maatregelen voor leerlingen met specifieke onderwijsbehoeften](#), 21 March 2014), also called M-decree, became fully operational. Since that date every child in Flanders has the right to enrol in a school for mainstream education, on the condition that reasonable adaptations are made. Inclusive education is now the first option.

The M-Decree also led to a number of changes in special education. Since the school year 2015/2016 there are new definitions for some types of special education. Currently the following types and forms of education exist in special needs education:

Types of education

- Type basic offer: Young people with special educational needs for whom the common curriculum with reasonable adjustments is not feasible in a school for ordinary education (will gradually replace Type 1), but these students could return to normal education over time; Type 1: For young people with a mild mental disability; Type 2: For young people with mental disabilities; Type 3: For young people with an emotional or behavioral disorder, but without mental disabilities; Type 4: For young people with a motoric restriction; Type 5: For young people in a hospital, a prevention or residential setting; Type 6: For young people with visual impairment; Type 7: For young people with auditory impairment or speech or language impairment; Type 9: For young people with autism spectrum disorder, but without mental disabilities (since September 2015)

Forms of education:

- Social participation and possibly employment in an environment with support; Social participation and employment in an environment with support, Social participation and employment in a regular working environment; General, Vocational, Artistic and Technical Education

More information on the M-Decree can be found [here](#) (in Dutch).

The current model for supporting pupils with specific educational needs in mainstream education will remain in force until the 2020-2021 school year. In the meantime, a new support model is being prepared (see 6.10).

In 2019 The Flemish Parliament approved a decree ([Onderwijsdecreet XXIX](#)) that provides for the introduction of an open-end funding scheme for blind and deaf pupils and pupils with a motor-skills impairment or mental disability in mainstream education. This means that for school year 2019/2020 all 9,500 blind and deaf pupils and pupils with a motor-skill impairment or mental disability receive certainty about the number of hours of guidance they receive. Schools offering mainstream education can, in consultation with

the parents of the children involved, decide which special education school they will collaborate with to ensure the child's support.

Ill or physically weak pupils

Bednet offers remote education for children and young people who are temporarily unable to go to school. The lessons that take place in their class are streamed live to their home computer or tablet. Pupils who are absent for a prolonged or regular period due to illness, surgery, accident or pregnancy can join the lesson and stay in touch with their friends. Bednet is free for families and the schools who want to use this service. On 1 March 2019, 2.4 million EUR grant was awarded to Bednet, which will help them to give more than 1,000 children access to their services, as well as to thoroughly renew Bednet's hardware and software.

Learners belonging to minorities or disadvantages communities

The **Decree on Equal Educational Opportunities** (28 June 2002) ([Decreet Gelijke Onderwijskansen](#) - [GOK-beleid](#)) in education contains three major provisions:

- **The right to enrolment:** Each pupil has the right to enrol in the school of his/her (parents') choice, Also foreign-language newcomers and pupils with a report for access to special education;
- **Legal protection and**
- **Extra support for additional needs provision in schools:** This support is aimed at schools that have a rather large number of pupils who meet certain socio-economic indicators. This extra support consists of additional teaching periods or additional teaching hours per teacher.

In mainstream secondary education, additional teacher hours are granted on the basis of the following five indicators: Student's home language; Receiving a school allowance; Highest level of education of the mother; The pupil is temporarily or permanently taken out of his own family; The parents belong to the migrant population. A pupil meeting at least one out of five equal opportunities indicators is a GOK-pupil. The school may obtain extra funds for these pupils. More detailed information on regulations can be on the section on equal opportunities in education of the Agency of Educational Services ([Gelijke onderwijskansen](#)).

Homework Guidance

At the beginning of 2017 the Flemish Minister of Education granted 100.000€ to three projects on homework guidance in Gent, Ostend and Bruges. In an easily accessible way these projects support homework guidance, the development of study skills and language stimulation while offering family support at home for 400 societally vulnerable families. In this way they contribute to the prevention of and elimination of learning backlog and the empowerment of parents and they offer parenting support in the framework of the school career of the children.

Social cohesion and equal opportunities

Fighting discrimination Cross-curricular themes in Education

Fighting discrimination is included in the citizenship competences for pupils in the first grade of secondary education and in the cross-curricular objectives concerning the socio-cultural society for pupils in the second and third grade of secondary education (in Dutch: [onderwijsdoelen](#), see also chapter 5.7 for more information). The cross-curricular objectives for the second and third grade entail an obligation of effort for the schools, not for the pupils. The citizenship competences for the first grade are minimum objectives, meaning: a minimum of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes that are considered achievable and necessary for a certain student population. Every school has the social task to achieve these at the population level of the pupils.

Gender equality

Gender in the class ([gender in de klas](#)) is an initiative by [RoSa](#) (Centre of Expertise, Library and Archives for Gender Equality and Feminism - Kenniscentrum voor Gender en Feminisme) and is a website with practical tips for teachers who wish to teach and bring gender consciousness to pupils.

Anti-bullying programmes

When a pupil is encountered with violence, bullying or sexually transgressive behavior at school, different steps can be undertaken:

- Inside the school by contacting a teacher, the principal or a coordinator or guidance.
- Contacting a Centre for Pupils Guidance ([Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding/ CLB](#)) where different specialist work like social workers, psychologists and pedagogues.
- External organisations like 'Awel', which is a free helpline where children and young people can anonymously tell their story. This is also possible at the JAC's (Youth Advice Centres - [Jongeren AdviesCentra](#)) who give practical tips, advice and information. Some centres provide courses to become more assertive.

[More information on bullying and anti-bullying programmes](#) can be found on the website of the Department of Education and Training.

Fighting radicalization

Further actions have been implemented to counter radicalization in accordance with the Concept note on the prevention of radicalization processes ([Conceptnota over preventie van radicaliseringsprocessen](#)). That note was followed by a concrete action plan that the Flemish Government adopted on April 3, 2015. At the beginning of 2017, a profound revision and update of the action plan was prompted by, among other things, a changed policy context, new insights and changed threat. This resulted on 2 June 2017 in the updating of the existing action plan to the 'Flemish Action Plan for the prevention of violent radicalization and polarization' ([Actieplan ter preventie van gewelddadige radicalisering en polarisering](#)). The updated action plan will be reported semi-annually to the Flemish Parliament on progress and implementation. The most recent report (December 2018, in Dutch) can be [downloaded here](#).

In line with the Action Plan several actions were taken and tools were developed to support primary workers which are confronted with radicalization. Some examples for the school context are:

- The Department of Education and Training developed a guideline for the prevention and approach of radicalization and polarization ([leidraad voor de preventie en aanpak van radicalisering en polarisering](#)). This guideline provides tools that can schools help to deal with radicalization and polarization, and to shape or adjust deradicalization policies.
- The Education magazine 'Klasse' published several online articles. In cooperation with experts, Klasse also created an online [dossier on radicalization](#) with interpretation and testimonials from teachers and fellow pupils. In addition, the dossier also contains practical tips on signal recognition, approach and prevention.
- The [CONNECT](#)-project of [Arktos](#) was funded. This project aims to deploy expertise quickly and efficiently in schools (in Flanders and Brussels) where a concentration of young people with extreme risk behavior exceeds the strength and resilience of the teachers team and the schools.
- In 2018, the Flemish Minister of Education Hilde Crevits awarded 200,000 euros to eight [projects to strengthen vulnerable young people and to combat polarization and radicalization](#) (see also 4.5.3)
- The educational resources website KlasCement has collected teaching materials and [educational material on the subject of radicalization](#). Teachers can source from these to inspire each other and share materials for pupils of all ages.

- Since 1 October 2015, a network of Islam experts ([Netwerk Islamexperten](#)) has been set up to launch a counter discourse. Through a network of experienced Islam experts who have a thorough knowledge of Islamic theology and are also familiar with the lifeworld of young people, interpretation on Islam and Islamic norms and values is given to young people, student groups and front-line workers.

More projects and actions can be found on the website of the Department of Education and Training ([Hulp en leermiddelen bij radicalisering](#)) and in the semi-annual report ([Actieplan ter preventie van gewelddadige radicalisering en polarisering. Tussentijdse rapportage](#), December 2018)

6.7 Skills for innovation

Innovation in formal education

STEM

In Flanders, innovation in education is strongly linked to the promotion of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)- disciplines. With the Lisbon Strategy (2000), the EU called for greater attention to be given to technological development and innovation in higher education. The 2012-2020 STEM action plan ([STEM-actieplan 2012-2020](#)) aims to stimulate study and working careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. In 2014, STEM education became more attractive thanks to improved STEM didactics. The focus is on strengthening competencies of teachers via refresher courses, encouraging school projects and deploying engineering coaches. The process of study and career choice is being optimized through study choice instruments such as the 'education selector' ([Onderwijskiezer](#)).

The Flemish government has developed a general framework containing the main STEM principles and objectives. This [STEM-framework](#) can be used by everyone in education. The framework focuses on both "STEM literacy" (the ability to understand and apply concepts from science, technology, engineering and mathematics, including computer science and interdisciplinary strategies, in order to make informed decisions, create new products and processes, and solve problems but also the awareness of the roles which science, technology, engineering and mathematics fulfil in modern society) and "STEM specialisation" (far-reaching STEM literacy and a deliberate choice for a STEM discipline and/or STEM profession). The framework is especially designed for (pre-) primary and secondary education.

STEM focuses on the following dimensions and principles:

1. Interaction and coexistence of the separate STEM components of the acronym with respect for each component's individuality
2. Problem-solving learning through the application of STEM concepts and practices
3. Researching and designing in a skilled and creative manner
4. Thinking and reasoning, modelling and abstracting
5. Strategically using and developing technology
6. Acquiring an insight into the relevance of STEM in itself and to society
7. Obtaining and interpreting information and communicating about STEM
8. Working together in team
9. Acquiring 21st century skills
10. Innovation

In 2016, The Flemish minister of Education subsidized 30 innovative STEM-Projects ([30 innovatieve STEM-projecten voor technisch en beroepssecundair onderwijs](#)). Pupils and

their teachers in technical and vocational schools were invited to participate in rethinking the construction of qualitative and innovative school buildings. The selected projects focused, on the one hand on building and equipping new schools, with attention to technical installations, energy efficiency and environmental comfort. On the other hand, there was also room for innovative STEM projects concerning attractive STEM education in vocational and technical education. These projects cover a wide range of themes, ranging from the cultivation of flour worms as a central element in a food security project, the analysis of the rollercoaster of a theme park, to perfecting the barriers in the car park of the school and the firm introduction of STEM into care education.

In 2017, Flemish Minister of Education Hilde Crevits subsidized 92 innovative STEM projects in Flanders on climate awareness. In these projects, pupils, teachers and external partners collaborate on a project to make young people aware of the climate problem.

The Regional Technological Centers ([Regionale Technologische Centra](#) of RTC's) ensure a better coordination of education and training with the needs of the labor market. The RTC's bring together partners from education and industry. They offer teachers and pupils in technical and vocational secondary education business-realistic, contemporary and socially relevant STEM projects. These projects are the result of intense collaboration between the business community and the educational actors and make an essential contribution to innovative, recruiting and high-quality STEM education.

On the STEM-portal site of the Department of Education and Training ([STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics](#)), information is offered on pedagogical tools and support ([Aan de slag met STEM](#)), e.g.:

- A reflection instrument ([Stem op School](#)) of the Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijs Raad -VLOR) that allows to evaluate the STEM education in one's own school, to further develop and possibly to adjust the STEM education in that school, both at school and at classroom level.
- Choosing for STEM ([Kiezen voor Stem](#)): The educational network KlasCement offers teachers a wide range of teaching materials for the sciences, computer science, technology, world orientation and mathematics.

On the basis of a social debate, also a decreed framework was developed in which 16 key competences were included. One of these key competences are the learning competencies. Learning competences include research competencies, innovative thinking, creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking, systems thinking, information processing and collaboration. Commissions, in which teachers were also represented alongside education providers and scientific experts, developed new final objectives for the first degree during the spring of 2018. On 9 November 2018, the Flemish Government approved the new final objectives for the first grade of secondary education ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de eerste graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)).

Development of Entrepreneurship Competences

The Flemish Government launched the Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education 2015-2019 ([Actieplan Ondernemend Onderwijs 2015-2019](#)), at the end of 2015. More information on this Action Plan can be found in chapter 3.8.

One of the 16 key competences of the new final objectives for the first grade of secondary education concerns the development of initiative, ambition, entrepreneurship and career competencies ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de eerste graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)). The goals related to this key competence are built up by analogy with the core components of the European [EntreComp](#) framework (The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework) and can be divided in three core components: ideas and possibilities, resources and action.

The final objectives for pupils in the first grade concerning entrepreneurship competences are:

- Seeing and exploring opportunities by means of a creative thinking process:
 - The pupils generate ideas for a challenge on the basis of provided techniques and methodologies and in a structured and defined framework.
- Exploring the feasibility of ideas, weighing up the use of resources versus objectives and realizing the chosen idea:
 - The pupils examine the feasibility of ideas taking into account the criteria that have been provided.
 - The pupils work out step by step a self-chosen idea through the effective use of time and resources.
- Making (sustainable) choices, taking into account short and long term consequences:
 - The pupils make substantiated choices on the basis of criteria and strategies.

All these goals are considered transversal goals, meaning that they are an integral part of other key competences, more in particular of: 'Competences in mathematics, exact sciences and technology', 'Competences in Dutch', 'Competences in other languages', 'Competences regarding historical awareness', 'Competences related to spatial awareness' and 'Economic and financial competences'.

Strengthening innovative learning environments

In the Policy Plan on Education 2019-2024 ([Beleidsnota Onderwijs 2019-2024](#)), Flemish Minister of Education Ben Weyts emphasized the strengthening of innovative learning environments. In collaboration with the Ministers responsible for Economy, Science Policy and Innovation and for Youth and Media he will develop and roll-out a new STEM 2020-2030 action plan.

Although the infrastructure has improved (including the rise of digital blackboards, wireless internet, PC per student ratio, ...) and its use has also increased the past decennium, there has not yet been a generalized and frequent use of ICT and digital media for teaching purposes (Heymans et al., 2018). The number of teachers who use ICT daily remains minimal. And according to (more than) half of the pupils, ICT is used in the classroom only a few times a year. This is partly due to a lack of IT competencies among many teachers, but also to the lack of high-quality digital learning materials and software, lack of clarity about learning objectives and insufficient pedagogical preparation for meaningful digital education.

In the context of its ICT and digital media policy

- the Ministry of Education subsidizes the course Media Coach ([cursus Mediacoach](#)) which is a training for professionals who work with young people or adults and who want to integrate media literacy into their own work practice.
- the [Department of Education and Training](#)
- established networks of innovative schools during the school year 2013/2014. These networks consisted of at least ten schools that tried new technologies and exchanged their experiences with other schools from the network. One of the main content areas of the network was working with tablets. The schools from the Innovative Schools Network studied the preconditions, the learning potential, the stumbling blocks, etc.
- bundled on the website KlasCement opportunities for training and teaching materials.
- the [Knowledge Center on Media literacy](#) (Kenniscentrum Mediawijs) developed learning resources, tools and methods and bundled them on the website as 'media signposts' (mediawegwijzers), e.g.:
- Classroom games ([games in de klas](#))
- Tools for reading and writing images ([beelden lezen en schrijven](#))

Fostering innovation through non-formal and informal learning and youth work

STEM-academies

The passion for STEM outside education is encouraged by means of founding a [network of STEM academies](#). In the STEM academy network all organizers of extracurricular STEM activities for young people are gathered. In this way, the government stimulates the interest of children and young people in science and technology in leisure time. In addition, communication campaigns promote social appreciation of STEM professions and the sectors are encouraged to undertake actions about STEM. Up to now, more than 100 organizations have been officially recognized as STEM academies. Some organize only one workshop per year, others have a wide range of camps, workshops, and series of classes. Besides formal learning organizations like colleges and universities and schools, it concerns also non-profit organizations, public observatories, ... The following youth work organizations are for instance recognized as a STEM academie:

- **Nature and Science** ([Natuur en Wetenschap](#), NeW) is a youth association that organizes activities about science and nature in class, school and leisure.
- **Youth, Culture and Science** ([Jeugd, Cultuur en Wetenschap](#), JCW) organizes cultural and scientific activities, camps and workshops for children and young people aged 6 to 30 years.
- **HUJO** ([in Dutch](#)) organizes workshops, called Sesam open-IT) in which young people aged 10 to 15 years learn to make and to program their own robots

Experimental youth projects

The Flemish government also subsidizes associations that set up an **experimental project** in one of the following areas:

- Youth work
- Information to or about youth and youth participation
- Cultural education
- Supralocal youth work for socially vulnerable children and young people and / or children and young people with a disability.

Experimental projects focus on new developments and needs that live in the youth sector and more generally in youth. They have to be innovative in terms of methodology or content. Examples are the startups of youth work through new methods or attracting new audiences. In 2020, The Minister of Youth subsidized 11 projects. A short description of the projects that have been funded the past years can be found on the website of the Department of Culture, Youth and Media ([in Dutch](#)).

6.8 Media literacy and safe use of new media

National strategy

On 9 July 2008, the Flemish Parliament adopted a Resolution, submitted by 6 parties, concerning the Support of the Game sector in Flanders. In it, the Flemish Parliament asked for the establishment of a [Media Literacy Knowledge Center](#) ([Kenniscentrum Mediawijsheid](#)). The Knowledge Centre on Media Literacy has the task of ensuring that all Flemish citizens have the necessary knowledge, insights and skills to use media in our highly mediated society. The Knowledge Centre Media Literacy unveils knowledge and insights about specific and diverse media themes such as cyberbullying, online privacy, gaming, ... It organizes a wide range of support and training initiatives for professionals and volunteers from the education, social, cultural, welfare and poverty sectors and the broad media literacy field. The Knowledge Centre for Media Literacy pays specific attention

to vulnerable groups such as children and young people. An additional focus is on target groups that can and should play a facilitating role in the development of media literacy competencies. For young people, it concerns mainly parents, youth workers, counselors in youth care, library staff and teachers.

During the past decade, more and more attention has been paid to digital and media literacy in Flemish policy with e.g. a special focus on media literacy in the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Plan 2020-2024 ([Vlaams Jeugd- en Kinderrechtenbeleidsplan - JKP](#), see below), an integration of media literacy into the curriculum and final objectives of secondary education (See section on [media literacy and online safety through formal education](#)), a joint concept note on Media Literacy by the Minister of Media and the Minister of Education in 2012 (see below), and the evolution of the reading promotion project Newspapers in the Classroom to a broader media literacy project News in the Classroom in 2017.

In March 2020, the Flemish Government selected five priorities for the new Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024). Media literacy is one of these priorities. For each of the five chosen priorities, the relevant ministers, experts, specific policy officers, youth (work) organizations and local authorities will now take further concrete action. These expert teams will give concrete substance to the priority. This resulted in the [definitive Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#) with a strategy and concrete actions on media literacy.

On 4 May 2012, the Flemish Government principally approved the Concept Note on Media Literacy ([Conceptnota Mediawijsheid](#)), a joint proposal of the Minister of Media and the Minister of Education. The concept paper on media literacy focuses on four important objectives:

- Creating a sustainable and strategic framework for media literacy.
- Stimulating and increasing competences: Dealing with different media in a critical and efficient way, but also in a responsible and safe manner, requires knowledge, skills and attitude competences.
- Eliminating the digital divide.
- Creating a safe and responsible media environment

In order to achieve these objectives, the concept note contained an action plan with forty concrete actions. Although the concept note focuses on everyone in society, special attention was paid in this document to children and young people. Some examples of actions regarding young people are:

- Starting up policy-relevant research on the interaction of children and young people with advertising.
- Anchoring media and image literacy in the educational curriculum
- An awareness-raising campaign concerning commercial communication which is primarily geared towards critical vision and awareness raising among children and young people
- An awareness-raising campaign on privacy, digital identity and the use of social networking sites. This should primarily focus on critical vision and awareness raising among children and young people.

Media literacy and online safety through formal education

Since September 2010 media literacy has been one of the cross-curricular goals for secondary education ([Vakoverschrijdende doelen voor secundair onderwijs](#)). Cross-curricular goals are minimum objectives with regard to knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes that do not specifically belong to a field, but are pursued by means of various subjects, educational projects and other activities. Each school has the task of pursuing

these cross-curricular goals (best effort obligation). Schools must be able to prove that they work on the cross-curricular goals.

On 9 November 2018, the Flemish Government approved the new final objectives for the first grade of secondary education. On the basis of a social debate, a decreed framework was developed in which 16 key competences were included. Digital skills are one of these key competences. The new final objectives for the first grade started on 1 September 2019. This means that from the school year 2019/2020 on, in the first grade of secondary education the following targets for media literacy have to be attained:

- The pupils distinguish between effects of possible addictive substances and actions on themselves and their immediate environment, including knowledge of possible addictive actions such as use of social media, games, virtual reality, gambling
- The pupils demonstrate basic skills to create and share digital content.
- The pupils demonstrate basic skills to digitally collaborate, communicate and participate in initiatives.
- The pupils distinguish building blocks from digital systems.
- The pupils apply a simple self-designed algorithm to solve a problem digitally and non-digitally.
- The pupils explain the influence of digital and non-digital media on people and society
- The students apply the rules of the digital world (e.g. privacy rules, ethical and social rules, author rights, ...)
- The pupils evaluate the possibilities and risks of their own and other people's media behaviour.

All these goals are considered transversal goals, meaning that they are an integral part of other key competences, more in particular of: 'Competences in mathematics, exact sciences and technology', 'Competencies in Dutch', 'Competences in other languages', 'Competences regarding historical awareness', 'Competences related to spatial awareness' and 'Economic and financial competences'.

On 10 February 2021, the Flemish Parliament approved the new educational objectives for the 2nd and 3rd stage of secondary education. The new educational objectives for the 2nd stage take effect in September 2021 and - just as in the 1st stage - are introduced year by year. Digital skills are one of the key competences here as well. This means that from the school year 2021/2022 on, in the 2nd and 3rd grade of secondary education the following targets for media literacy have to be attained:

- The pupils show self-confidence when exploring and using digital infrastructure and applications (attitudinal).
- The pupils use standard functionalities of digital infrastructure and applications purposefully and adequately to create, share and manage digital content.
- The pupils use standard functionalities of digital infrastructure and applications purposefully and adequately to communicate digitally, to collaborate and to participate in initiatives.
- The pupils explain how building blocks of digital systems relate to and interact with each other.
- The pupils design algorithms to solve problems digitally (only for students in general, technical and arts education)
- The pupils explain reciprocal influences between the individual and media, digital infrastructure and digital applications.
- The pupils apply rules of the digital world.

- The pupils evaluate the possibilities and risks of their media behaviour and that of others.

The Knowledge Centre on Media Literacy publishes on his website different tools and trainings developed/organised by themselves (in collaboration with e.g. research groups at universities and colleges, organisations ...) and by others for schools. Some examples are:

- An [EDUbox on fake news](#), developed by the Arteveldehogeschool and IMEC, which informs pupils in secondary schools on fake news
- teaching materials for OKAN classes (reception classes for non-Dutch speaking newcomers) on computer skills and safe internet use.
- Ad? Wise!, a teaching package on advertising literacy developed by the Department of Educational Science at Ghent University ([in Dutch](#))
- MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses) on media literacy

Knowledge Centre on Media Literacy 'Mediawijs' launched in 2015 '[Media Coach MOOC's](#)' (Massive Open Online Courses), online learning courses on media literacy. Through videos and background information, participants get to know more on various topics such as privacy, online identity and media & relationships. The Media Coach MOOC's aim at teachers, youth work, library staff and other professionals interested in media literacy.

- The Department Education and Training also provides information on media literacy and online safety on the website:
- Training on organizing safe internet for parents and teachers ([Vorming veilig internet voor ouders en leraren organiseren](#))

Promoting media literacy and online safety through non-formal and informal learning

[The Knowledge Centre on Media Literacy \(Kenniscentrum Mediawijs\)](#) is the most important actor in promoting media literacy in Flanders. A wide range of information about safe and critical internet and social media use can be found at their website.

The media literacy field is a broad field of actors spread over different sectors and policy domains. The Knowledge Centre on Media Literacy offers an [online map](#) of all organisations that organise activities related to media literacy. This online map identifies 750 organizations which organize projects on media literacy, but these entail also libraries and educational settings. A further search on this online tool indicates that (consulted the website on 28 December 2019) that 34 organizations can be situated in the youth sector and that 26 of this youth organizations target young people between 13 and 18 year old.

As described above, The Knowledge Centre on Media Literacy 'Mediawijs' offers '[Media coach MOOC](#)', an online learning course on media literacy, aimed at professionals (i.a. youth workers) interested in media literacy.

Raising awareness about the risks posed by new media

The [Veilig Online](#) – website (Save Online website) is an initiative of the Gezinsbond (Family Federation) in collaboration with Child Focus. The website provides advice to parents who suspect that their son or daughter is being cyberbullied.

The university college [Howest](#) (in a Multidisciplinary Cooperation between Social Work, Teacher Education, Applied Psychology and Digital Arts and Entertainment) developed a series of lessons and the [Re: Pests](#) game to tackle bullying in secondary education. Through the game, students learn to recognize and address bullying behavior.

[Villa Crossmedia](#), a European project, wants to make young people aware of the opportunities, but also the pitfalls that accompany the use of new media. Villa Crossmedia provides young people with the opportunity to fully experiment with media and tries to

make them more media literate at the same time. Villa Crossmedia devised, together with [Mediaraven](#), an expert in young people and media, a game to test and enhance the media literacy of young people: the [Caspar game](#). A game targeted at young people from 12 to 26 years old, with diverse difficulty degrees. The questions and assignments in the game came about in cooperation with [Sensoa](#) (Flemish expertise centre that promotes sexual health). The name of the game (CASPAR) functions as a 'mnemonic device' for items a young media maker has to think about and to take into account when producing media: Copyright, Audience /aim, Storytelling, Privacy and Authorship.

Campaign "Think before you post" (Campagne "Denk na voor je iets online zet"):

Flemish Minister of Education Hilde Crevits launched in 2014 (in collaboration with Mediawijs, the Department of Education and Training, Canon Cultuurcel, EMSOC, the Privacy Commission, Child Focus and the SPION project) a campaign on online privacy. The campaign aimed to sensitize teachers and pupils in secondary education to the theme of online privacy in the classroom. Goal of this campaign was to provide children and young people with skills for responsible and safe use of the Internet. The campaign entailed a book (Mediawijs Online), new course material on online privacy policy, a privacy manual for teachers and the "First aid kit for privacy and social media". All secondary schools have received this information.

The website [Clicksafe](#) is an initiative of Child Focus where information about safely and responsible internet use can be found for and by children and young people. Moreover, educational material, tips and training can be found.

The Flemish Department on Education and Training also provides [information on cyber-bullying and sexting on their website](#). On this page information is provided on different types of cyber-bullying, prevention and approach of cyber-bullying and help services and lines for victims of cyber-bullying.

Several other organisations and their websites warn for the risks posed by new media, e.g.:

- Cyberbullying. Educational website about bullying & cyberbullying ([Cyberpesten. Educatieve website over pesten & cyberpesten](#))
- Safe online ([Veilig online](#))
- No to cyberbullying ([Neen tegen cyberpesten](#))
- [Sexting.be](#) (in Dutch)
- MediaNest, website for parents on media education ([website voor ouders over mediaopvoeding](#))

Finally, also the website of the Knowledge Center on Media Literacy pays a lot of attention to cyberbullying (dossier [cyberpesten](#)).

Reporting cyberbullying, sexual cross-border behaviour on internet

In Flanders there is no specific reporting point for cyberbullying, but young people can contact a Centre for Pupil Guidance ([Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding](#), CLB) or a youth advice centre ([Jongeren Advies Centrum](#), JAC) in their area, the children's and youth helpline [Awel](#) (website in Dutch; offers a telephone line, chat functions, a forum, and mail services) or contact [Tele-onthaal](#) (in Dutch).

They can also phone, chat or email with [Child Focus](#). Child Focus' main focus is on sexual cross-border behaviour but in their prevention programme they also work on safe internet use. On their "[Click Safe](#)" [pages](#) they provide first aid assistance in case of cyberbullying and give advice to counteract cyberbullying. They inform also on issues like sexting, grooming and sextortion. Young people can contact the emergency number (116000) of Child Focus in case of cyberbullying issues.

6.9 Awareness-raising about non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

Information providers / counselling structures

Jeugdmaps.be is an online GIS tool which consists of:

- An online map to find information about youth work infrastructure (e.g. youth centres, youth houses, ...) and public places for youngsters (e.g. playgrounds, hangouts, ...) in Flanders and Brussels
- A web tool on which municipalities and youth workers in Flanders and Brussels can use to chart and manage their own youth space.

On the website of the Ambrassade (responsible for development, support and provision of information to the youth sector) an overview of youth work in Flanders can be found ([in Dutch](#)).

Awareness raising initiatives

Flanders has already taken steps, initiated initiatives and launched pilot projects, but mainly from a strong labor market focus. Top-level authorities' efforts in raising awareness among the public about the value of non-formal and informal learning in youth work are scarce.

Since 2001, "The Day of Youth Movement" ([Dag van de Jeugdbeweging](#)) has been organized in October. That day, all youth movements come together to ask for attention for their target group, youth, and their organisation, the youth movement. All children and young people who are members of a youth movement go to school in their youth-moving clothes that day. This day is organized by the Flemish youth movements themselves.

The Ambrassade also devotes a web page on the value of youth work ([in Dutch](#)).

6.10 Current debates and reforms

For information on recently adopted or planned reforms and policy measures, please consult the topic [Ongoing Reforms and Policy Developments](#) on Eurydice. While Eurydice provides comprehensive and comparable information, further information may also be found on the [website of the ministry of Education and Training](#) on the page on education policy and reforms ([Onderwijsbeleid en -Vernieuwing](#)).

Forthcoming policy developments

Modernisation of secondary education

In order to further develop the strong points of the system, to address possible points of improvement and to guarantee quality education for every pupil, a modernisation of secondary education in Flanders is carried out. More specific, the website of the Department of Education and Training mentions 6 reasons for the modernization of secondary education:

1. Modernization must reduce ELET
2. Pupils are not equally prepared for higher education or the labor market: the differences between disciplines are too big.
3. Retention is too often considered the only possibility to differentiate in case of substantial shortages.
4. The current education system does not succeed in eliminating social inequality, despite the many efforts and investments.
5. Final terms are insufficiently achieved in certain disciplines. There is also no unanimity about the content of general education.

6. International research shows that both our best students and the large middle group start to perform significantly less strongly.

On March 28, 2018, the Flemish Parliament plenary adopted the draft decree that establishes the modernization of the organization and the structure of secondary education ([Decreet tot wijziging van de Codex Secundair Onderwijs van 17 december 2010, wat betreft de modernisering van de structuur en de organisatie van het secundair onderwijs](#)).

This modernization will gradually be implemented in the Flemish schools. In the first grade (first two years) of secondary education, modernization will start on 1 September 2019. In the first grade of secondary education, basic education will be strengthened and all pupils have to reach a pre-determined level. In addition to basic education, there will be an optional component to enable better orientation for students. Where necessary, a compulsory remedy is provided to strengthen pupils.

In the second and third grade modernization will start respectively on 1 September 2021 and 1 September 2023. The new model comprises 8 study domains and is based on a stepped - and therefore more focused - study choice. The offer is built along a matrix with three dimensions, namely 'fields of study', 'finalities' and 'types of education'. The current 29 study areas will be reduced to 8 fields of study:

1. Languages and cultures
2. STEM
3. Arts and creation
4. Agriculture and horticulture
5. Economics and organisation
6. Society and welfare
7. Sports
8. Nutrition and catering

Within these 8 fields of study the courses of study will content wise be arranged from abstract to practical. For each field of study, the finality will be clearly determined: transition to higher education, entrance on the labour market or a combination of both.

New attainment targets first stage secondary education

The Flemish Government approved on 13 July 2018 the new attainment targets for the first grade of secondary education ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de eerste graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)). On 10 February 2021, the Flemish Parliament approved the new educational objectives for the 2nd and 3rd stage of secondary education ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de tweede en derde graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)). The new educational objectives for the 2nd stage take effect in September 2021 and in 1 September 2023 in the third grade.

These new attainment targets are developed in function of 16 key competences:

1. competencies in the field of physical, mental and emotional awareness and in the field of physical, mental and emotional health;
2. competencies in Dutch;
3. competencies in other languages;
4. digital competence and media literacy;
5. social-relational competencies;
6. competences in mathematics, exact sciences and technology;
7. citizenship competences including competences for living together;
8. competences relating to historical awareness;
9. competences relating to spatial awareness;
10. competencies regarding sustainability;
11. economic and financial competences;

12. legal competences;
13. learning competencies including research competencies, innovation thinking, creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking, systems thinking, information processing and collaboration;
14. self-awareness and self-expression, self-management and agility;
15. development of initiative, ambition, entrepreneurial spirit and career competences;
16. cultural awareness and cultural expression.

The attainment targets on basic literacy (Dutch, mathematics, digital and financial competences) have to be reached by the end of the first grade by every pupil individually. The distinction between subject-related and cross-curricular final objectives disappears. Students must achieve most objectives at the population level, though there remain attitudinal objectives that will only be pursued. The education providers are free to decide within which subjects they realize the different attainment targets.

Termination of the M-Decree (see 6.6. for more information on the M-Decree)

The implementation of the M-decree encountered a lot of problems, which also threatened to undermine the support for inclusive education. Therefore the Flemish Government stated in the Flemish coalition agreement 2019-2024 to replace the M-decree for students with specific educational needs with a new guidance decree (more information: [in Dutch](#)). The current model for supporting pupils with specific educational needs in mainstream education will remain in force until the 2020-2021 school year. In the meantime, a new support model is being prepared that will take effect at the earliest from 1 September 2021. The Flemish Government continues to support the principle of inclusion but wishes to work step by step. The aim of the new decree will be, just as the current M-decree, to take steps towards more social inclusion.

7. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health and Well-being

Special Feature

Measures and initiatives to strengthen health and well-being of young people are streamlined across different policy fields and in different action plans. The implementation of the Flemish action plans is part of the Flemish health objectives formulated in the health conference of 2016. Therefore the chapter illustrates the relevant parts of action plans pertaining to young people.

Highlights

The Flemish Government gives special attention to (organised) sporting opportunities for urban and disadvantaged youth by making use by the financial means of the Participation Decree and the Poverty Act. The Flemish Government funds non-profit organisations that encourage physical activities that have a beneficial effect on young people's health and fitness. Fitness can be interpreted more widely than only physical condition. Young people's mental health is important too. The Flemish action plans on tobacco, alcohol and drugs and on mental health focuses on youth.

7.1 General context

Main trends in the health conditions of young people

The Department of Public Health of the University of Ghent assesses the state among of young people every four years. This [survey](#) is part of the international study Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) and carried out under the supervision of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Health and psychosomatic complaints

Health is defined as a 'resource for living a productive life' in the WHO international study HBSC of WHO.

In 2014 in Flanders, the majority of young people believes that they have good health according to the survey of the Department of Public Health of the University of Ghent ([Factsheet Subjectieve gezondheid](#)). More males than females indicate that they have good health: respectively 83,2 per cent and 75,7 per cent. The survey also mentions that young people in vocational training and technical secondary education are less capable of estimating their health.

With regard to health problems, young people mention suffering from sleeping problems. More females than males suffer from headaches, nervousness and backache. The survey revealed that the prevalence of health problems has increased compared to 2010. However, the prevalence of medication for this complaints has been decreased.

We see an evolution over the years. In the sixth national health survey in 2018, commissioned by all ministers with competence in public health, almost one in four (23%) in the population aged 15 and over rated their health as moderate to very poor. There is also an increase in conditions affecting young people: asthma, allergies, long-term fatigue and depression. In the population aged 15 years and over, 23.3% indicate that they suffer from a long-term disease. This percentage rises sharply with age and is higher among women, the low-skilled and in the Walloon Region.

According to official Eurostat statistics in 2018, which compare some thirty countries, Belgium is the second country after Iceland to have the highest number of young people (15 to 24 years) taking prescription drugs. The Belgian percentage is one and a half times higher than that of neighbouring countries such as Germany and the Netherlands. A new study by the Independent Health Insurance Funds confirms that: in 2016, 55% of the young people (12 to 18 year olds) in our country took at least one prescription drug.

Physical activity and nutrition

Less than 10 percent of the Flemish youth, aged 6 to 17, moves sufficiently every day. This is evident from the Flemish exercise report drawn up by researchers from KU Leuven and UGent within the framework of the international network Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance, that was taken in 2018. The international balance is also negative: a global report shows that in 75 percent of the countries children do not exercise enough.

The percentage of young people who will achieve the recommendation of at least 60 minutes of moderate to high intensity daily exercise by 2018 is 21.3% for boys and 13.7% for girls. These are significantly fewer girls than boys who comply with the recommendation. In comparison with the findings from 2014, a favourable evolution can be observed. After all, at that time the proportion of boys who met the recommendation was 17.4%, while the proportion of girls was 10%. Depending on age, significant differences can be observed in the proportion of young people who achieve the recommendation. The prevalence is highest for both boys and girls in the youngest age group (11 to 12 year olds) and is 24% and 19.0% respectively. From 13 to 14 years of age there is a clear tipping point and the prevalence decreases to 20.7% for boys and 12.2% for girls. This level is maintained in the older age groups.

Depending on the type of education, there is a difference in the percentage of girls who achieve the recommendation, but not in the case of boys. The number of girls who meet the recommendation is the most prevalent in technical secondary education (15.2%) and the least prevalent in vocational secondary education (9.4%). In comparison with 2014, the proportion of boys and girls in general and technical secondary education showing a favourable increase in the proportion of young people with sufficient physical activity at medium to high levels is positive. In vocational secondary education, there is also an increase in the prevalence of boys and girls who meet the recommendation, but this is not a significant difference.

The prevalence of obesity and percentage of overweight males and females is more or less equal (16,4 per cent and 16,1 per cent respectively), according to the factsheet on Nutrition of the Department of Public Health of the University of Ghent ([Factsheet Voeding](#)). This is an increase compared to 2010.

Almost 12% of young people are overweight. Of the children aged 4 to 17 years old, 11.7% were overweight in 2018, of which 9% were moderately overweight and 2.7% were severely overweight (obesity). Moderate overweight is more common in 12-17 year olds, while severe overweight is slightly more common in younger children aged 4-11. These figures are based on self-reporting of height and weight.

According to the HBSC study in 2014, Flemish youngsters aged 11 to 18 usually skip breakfast. However, this is one of the most important eating moments in a day. 71% of boys and 66% of girls have breakfast every weekday. Daily breakfast on weekdays decreases with age. Approximately 19% of 17- and 18-year-old youths never have breakfast on a weekday, for 11- and 12-year-olds this is 5% for boys and 7% for girls. Young people in general secondary education (ASO) eat breakfast most often on a daily basis, young people in vocational education (BSO) skip this meal most often. The consumption of vegetables and fruit has stagnated compared to 2010. There is also a decrease in the daily use of soft drinks.

According to the HSBC Factsheet Nutrition in 2018, 14% of boys and 13,5% of girls between 11 and 18 are overweight. This is a decrease from 15,9% and 15,8% respectively in 2014. There's no significant difference between the distinct age groups of young people from 11 through 18. There are clear differences in prevalence of overweight and obesity among the different forms of education. In vocational secondary education (BSO), 24,6% of boys and 24,5% of girls are overweight or obese, whilst in general secondary education (ASO) it's only 10,1% and 9,1% respectively.

In 2018, 68,8% of boys and 67,1% of girls aged 11 to 18 report having breakfast every day according to the HBSC study in 2018. For the boys, this is a significant decrease compared to 2014. Daily breakfast on weekdays decreases with age. Approximately 19% of 17- and 18-year-old girls and 21% of 17- and 18-year-old boys never have breakfast on a weekday. For 11- and 12-year-olds this is 4% of boys and 5% of girls. Young people in general secondary education (ASO) eat breakfast most often on a daily basis, young people in vocational education (BSO) skip this meal most often.

Boys aged 11-18 show a significantly less healthy eating pattern compared to girls of the same age, according to the HBSC study in 2018. 18,6% of boys and 24,8% of girls adhere to a healthy diet, which is an improvement compared to 2014 for both boys (11,9%) and girls (18,3%). There is a difference among the age groups of boys, with a distinct decreasing trend between 11-12-year-olds (26,1%) and 17-18-years-olds (12,3%). Girls show a similar decreasing trend between 11-12-year-olds (32,3%) and 15-16-year-olds (21,3%). There is a slight increase in 17- and 18-year-old girls (22,1%). Young people in general secondary education (ASO) show a more healthy diet (20,5% of boys and 25,4% of girls) compared to young people in vocational secondary education (BSO) (9,4% and 12% respectively). Young people in vocational secondary education also show no significant improvement compared to 2014, whilst young people in general and technical (TSO) secondary education do

Substance abuse (alcohol, tobacco and drugs)

Despite recent signs of a decline in the prevalence of legal and illegal drug usage, the use of alcohol and cannabis remains widespread among adolescents and young adults in contemporary European society. Many people initiate alcohol and drug use during their years as a teenager. Research from the most recent student survey of the Flemish Expertise Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs (VAD) (2018-2019) shows that 56,7% of pupils in secondary education have drunk alcohol at least once before. 51,2% drank alcohol the year before. One pupil out of eight drank alcohol weekly to daily (12.2%). Although in general there's a trend of decreasing alcohol use between 2009-2010 and 2018-2019, there is a slight increase compared to the 2017-2018 study in both for the use of alcohol 'at least once before' and 'the year before'. Beer was the most popular alcoholic drink: 9,3% of all pupils drank beer at least once a week and 39,7% drank it at least once the year before.

There are large differences in alcohol consumption depending on the age of the pupils. 59.1% of young people under the age of 16 have never drunk alcohol before. This is more than a few years ago, although there's a slight increase compared to the 2017-2018 study. The average age of onset is also continuously rising from 2010-2011 onwards. This shows that the legislation prohibiting alcohol under the age of 16 is increasingly being complied with. The fact that alcohol is prohibited for young people under 16, is also increasingly seen as motivation not to drink. From the age of 16 onwards, a large majority of young people do drink: 65,5% of pupils drank alcohol in the last month and a quarter drink regularly. Of all 17- and 18-year-olds, 51,6.0% were drunk last year. The differences in prevalence of alcohol use between boys and girls were found to be minimal, although the age of onset is lower for boys compared to girls (14,5 years and 14,8 years respectively) and boys drink more frequent (14,6% of boys drink regularly compared to 9,7% of girls).

95% of the students in higher education in Flanders said in 2017 that they once drank alcohol. Almost all these students also drank alcohol last year (94%). During the teaching periods, the frequency of use of alcohol was higher than during the examination periods. Of the students who drank alcohol last year, 11% drank it weekly or more often (1), 15% drank it weekly or more often before going out, and 10% played drinking games weekly or more often. The survey of the Department of Public Health of the University of Ghent mentions that there are still significant differences between males and females ([Factsheet Alcohol](#)). Male students drink remarkably more. The results of the same survey reported that there are also differences regarding education level. Young people in technical education choose to drink beer every week, while young people in vocational education drink more often spirits and alcopops. Young people in general education are less likely than young people in other types of education to consume alcohol.

According to the most recent Student Survey in 2018-2019, 22.7% of young people between 12 and 18 years in Flanders have ever smoked. Last year, 18,8% of them smoked at least once the year before and 10,7% the month before. If we look at the evolution for the past 10 school years, it is noticeable that there has been a significant decrease in ever use, although there is a slight increase for 2018-2019 in both smoking once before, the year before and regular smoking. Smoking at least once before has decreased more than smoking the year before, which implies that less young people who smoked at least once before quit smoking. On the upside, regular smoking has the largest decrease relative to the 2009-2010 study.

The average age at which young people smoke a cigarette for the first time is 15,2 years. This is a small increase compared to the previous measurement (15,0 years). This means that the average age of onset has risen by more than one year since the first measurement in 2010-2011. Before 1 November 2019, the sale of tobacco products to young people under the age of 16 was prohibited in Belgium, even though 11,5% of young people under 16 stated to have smoked at least once and 8,8% stated to have smoked the year before. This is an increase relative to the 2017-2018 study (8,0%) and is not in line with the decreasing trend from 2013-2014 until 2017-2018. Four out of ten of the -16 year-olds

say they can easily get tobacco (for the +16-year-olds, it is more than 8 out of 10). The age of 16 is also too young: tobacco should not be offered for sale to minors (who are particularly vulnerable to addiction). In almost all European countries, cigarettes may only be sold to adults. This age limit is now raised to 18 years, as it already applies in France, the Netherlands and Germany. The seller may therefore ask the young person to prove his or her age by presenting the identity card.

Despite the downward trend, the differences according to education level still exist. According to the HBSC study Factsheet Risk-taking Behaviors (2018), significant differences between education modes will remain in 2018: Both for boys and girls, the prevalence is highest in BSO (36,1% and 33,9% respectively) and lowest in ASO (24,9% and 18,8% respectively). Pupils in TSO are somewhere in between. There is however a stark and significant improvement in life time prevalence among boys and girls in TSO and BSO compared to the 2014 study.

There are also more daily smokers among young people from vocational education and training than among young people from technical and general secondary education. However, the percentage of young people who smoke daily between 2014 and 2018 will decrease significantly within the educational forms: in the ASO it will go from 4.7% of boys and 2,5% of girls to 2,2% and 0,9% respectively, in the TSO from 13,3% of boys and 11,7% of girls to 8,8% and 6,2% respectively. In BSO it goes from 25,2% of boys and 22,9% of girls to 15,2% and 10,5% respectively. The conclusion of the HBSC study is that the inequalities between forms of education persist. More young people from vocational education and training smoke and start smoking at a younger age, which increases the risk of addiction.

The 2014 HBSC study on smoking habits states that the immediate environment is an important predictor of young people's smoking behavior. Young people with both parents smoking have a higher chance of taking up smoking themselves than young people with no or only one parent smoking. If the father smokes, the young person is 2.15 times more likely to smoke himself. If both parents smoke, 25.1% of young people smoke at least once a week. If no parent smokes, only 5.8% of young people smoke.

Cannabis was the most widely used illegal substance among young people in secondary education. During the 2018-2019 school year, 13,8% of young people aged between 12 and 18 said that they had ever used cannabis. Relative to the 2009-2010 study, the lifetime prevalence of cannabis follows a downwards trend from 2013-2014 onwards, being 8% lower in 2018-2019 compared to 2009-2010. 11,5% of the students used cannabis in the year they were surveyed. This rate remains relatively stable. 2.3% used cannabis regularly (weekly to daily). This rate also remains relatively stable. From the age of 15-16 years, cannabis use increased significantly. The average age of onset is 15,7 years in 2018-2019. More boys than girls used cannabis ever before and the last year before. There are differences between the educational forms. The BSO has the highest rate of pupils that used cannabis at least once (24,6%), whilst the ASO has a rate of 16,3% and the TSO is somewhere in between with 22,2% of pupils reporting to have used cannabis at least once.

3.7% of the students had once used illegal drugs other than cannabis. Among the oldest students (17 and 18), 2.5% used an illicit drug other than cannabis in the month before the survey. Xtc is the most common illicit drug other than cannabis: 4,9% of all 17-18-year-olds have ever used xtc.

In a survey in 2013, 40% of students in higher education in Flanders indicated that they had ever used cannabis. 22% had used cannabis in the past year. 21% of final-year users used cannabis at least once a week, i.e. regularly during the academic year. 5% used cannabis daily. Among students in higher education in Flanders, the use of amphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine in 2013 is limited to a small part of the student population: 3% had used ecstasy in the past year, 2% amphetamines and 2% cocaine.

Furthermore, there are significant differences according to education and age: the use of cannabis increases as people grow older. In addition, more young people in vocational

education use cannabis than young people in other types of education. In general, usage during the past year is at around 12 per cent. Young people using cannabis once a week is limited to 2 per cent and is lower than a few years ago.

Emotional and mental well-being

In 2013, there was a [Health survey](#),

commissioned by the Flemish and Federal Government. The emotional problems assessed in this health survey were anxiety disorders, depressive feelings and sleeping problems. Young people suffer with emotional psychological problems more than in the past. The prevalence of emotional problems among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 increased in 2013. Young women more than young men suffer from emotional problems.

The 2018 Health Survey concluded that, compared to girls, boys are more likely to develop attention and hyperactivity disorders, behavioral disorders and relational struggles with peers. Until the age of 15, emotional problems are equally prevalent in boys and girls. Between 15 and 18 years, girls are more likely to develop emotional problems. The level of education and family composition are correlated to some disorders.

In 2018, a survey of the Department of Public Health of the University of Ghent ([Factsheet Mentale Gezondheid](#)) also mentions that 13% of boys between 13 and 18 and 22,1% of girls between 13 and 18 had considered ending their life. For boys, this is a significant increase relative to the previous study in 2014 (11,1%). For the various age-groups in the study, the rate is stable compared to the 2014 study, except for 17- and 18-year-old boys. There is a remarkable increase in that age-group from 11,9% to 17,8%. For boys, there are no significant differences between the different levels of education. There is also an increase in suicidal thoughts in the ASO and TSO compared to the 2014 study (9,7% to 13,7% and 12% to 15,4% respectively). For girls, there are no significant differences relative to 2014. However, girls following vocational education more commonly thought about suicide compared to girls with other educational backgrounds. In 2018, 8% of boys and 20,8% of girls in secondary education have hurt themselves intentionally. This is a decrease compared to 2014.

In 2016, the Agency for Care and Health found on the basis of mortality certificates that 1.057 persons in the Flemish region committed suicide. This comes down to almost 3 suicides a day. Almost three out of four (72 per cent) were men. The suicide rate reveals a slight non-significant increase among men compared to the previous year (from 23,9 suicides per 100 000 inhabitants to 24,1) and a slight non-significant increase among women (from 9,1 to 8,9). Suicide is one of the most common causes of death among young adults between the ages of 15 and 54.

The Unity for Suicide Research (Eenheid voor Zelfmoordonderzoek (EZO)) from Ghent University estimates that in 2019 9.745 suicide attempts were undertaken in Flanders, which comes down to 27 suicide attempts a day. More women (62,5 per cent) than men undertake a suicide attempt.

Studies confirm that young people and young adults, more than other age groups, experience mental health problems such as loneliness, gloominess and anxiety as a result of the corona measurements. Therefore, extra funds have been made available for municipalities to offer young people and young adults in corona times more perspective. Municipalities are now faced with the task, in the short term, to strengthen the accessible, preventive support for young people and young adults.

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Main concepts

Three elements constitute the basis of well-being, as referred to in the [Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan](#) (2014-2019). Children and young people should feel good about themselves, not be afraid to say otherwise and know who they can turn to when they have questions. These three elements are the basis of the operational objectives. The Flemish Government wants to take measures to increase the resilience of children and young people by focusing on preventive work and investing in accessible support.

1. More than just a label

There is a growing tendency to apply labels to children and young people. As the number of labels grows, so does the use of medication by minors. The Government of Flanders is taking initiatives which will ensure a more conscious use of these labels. In sectors coming under integrated youth support the Diagnostics Quality Centre wants to develop instruments, conduct research and offer support in order to realise higher quality diagnostics. This should allow for the achievement of higher quality care. Efforts are also made towards developing a policy for pupils with special educational needs.

1. Help break taboos

The mental well-being of children and young people is often surrounded by taboo. Several methodologies and tools are already in place to open up discussion about this topic. However, the process used for this is mostly too complex or cumbersome. The Government of Flanders wants to do a thorough job in making information accessible with broad access to youth support. The accessibility to services and support is improved by extending the 'Children's Centres' (Huizen van het kind), organising parenting support for parents from disadvantaged groups and investing in extensive and easily accessible networks. In a 'Children's Centres' (Huizen van het kind), parents and children can enjoy everything about upbringing and growing up. It is a collaboration between organisations that help parents with childcare, health care, leisure activities, parenting support, workshops and much more.

1. There is someone who can help young people with questions

Every child and young person should have someone they can rely on for support. Attempts are made to establish a unique communication platform for children and young people.

We more widely publicise the helpline 1712 (violence, (child) abuse). Finally, we offer support to confidential advisers of minors in youth support.

According to the 2020-2024 Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, a targeted integrity policy will be pursued, which actively works to tackle violence against children and young people. In addition, there's stated that Flanders will stimulate initiatives both on a collective and an individual level that lead to encounters, enhance toughness and acknowledge the resilience of each child and young person. The voice, needs and competencies of the child and/or young person always takes centre stage. This is translated into two tactical objectives and several operational objectives.

7.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Governance

The health and well-being of young people is not exclusive a youth policy theme. The Flemish government works via both horizontal and vertical consultation and planning.

The most relevant policy domains are:

At regional (Flemish) level:

- Youth policy
- Health and well-being policy
- Sports policy
- Educational policy

Main public bodies at a community-level (Flemish Community)

Flemish Government

The Flemish Government is responsible for funding the policy domain and non-profit organisations in this field.

Flemish Minister in charge of Welfare, Public Health and Family

The Government of Flanders consists of 9 ministers, who are in office for a 5-year term. Minister Wouter Beke (Christian Democratic Party) is since 2 October 2019 the new Flemish Minister for Welfare, Public Health and Family (from 2019 until 2024).

Flemish Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family

The Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family ensures the administrative follow-up of the Policy Plan on Welfare, Public Health and Family. It is responsible for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the policy domain and consists of the Department Welfare, Public Health and Family, the Agency Care and Health, the Agency for Youth Welfare, the Agency Child and Family and the Flemish Agency for Disabled Children. Its aim is to help build the Flemish Government's policy, which organises responsive care in an effective manner, together with the agencies and partners in the field.

Within the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family, the **Flemish Agency for Youth Welfare** provides guidance to young people.

Within the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family, The **Flemish Agency for Youth Welfare** provides guidance to young people. It helps youth who are in difficult living conditions. Together with all the partners in the special youth care sector, the Youth Welfare Agency provides assistance to children and young people in problematic living conditions in order to maximize their chances of personal development. The Youth Welfare Agency coordinates prevention policy and provides assistance to minors through

committees for special youth care, social services, and legal assistance and arbitration committees.

The key tasks of the Youth Welfare Agency are:

- prevention and assistance
- recognition and funding of youth assistance facilities
- an educational, pedagogical and therapeutic provision
- counsellors in special youth care
- community institutions

Flemish Minister in charge of Sport

Minister Ben Weyts (New Flemish Alliance Party (N-VA)) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Education, Sports, Animal welfare and Flemish periphery (from 2019 until 2024). He is responsible for the Policy Plan on Sport.

Flemish Agency Sport Flanders

The Flemish Agency Sport Flanders ([Sport Vlaanderen](#)) supports the Flemish Government with the preparation and evaluation of grassroots sports and top sports policy in Flanders. The agency helps also with the implementation of the sports policy: financial support for boards, sports federations and sport clubs and monitoring and evaluation.

The main tasks are:

- the subsidising and coaching sports federations, local authorities and sport actors
- the development and recognition of sport education and valorising certificates and diplomas
- advising, coaching and supporting the extension of sports infrastructure
- the administration of 13 sportcentra
- sport promotion at Flemish level
- the implementation of top sport policy
- promotion of healthy and ethical sport
- the implementation of an anti-doping policy
- the focus on policy development for the sport sector
- the monitoring of international sports policy
- cooperation between the sport sector and other policy domains

Flemish Minister in charge of Education and Training

Minister Ben Weyts (New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Education and Training (from 2019-2024).

Flemish Ministry of Education and Training

The Department of Education and Training together with the Minister in charge of Education and Training is responsible for the advice, evaluation and follow-up on education policy in Flanders.

The Flemish policy on education of health and well-being is defined in Flemish policy documents, such as the cross-curricular attainment targets in education ([Vakoverschrijdende eindtermen](#)).

Flemish Minister in charge of Youth

Minister Benjamin Dalle (Christen Democratic Party) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media (from 2019 until 2024). He is also the

coordinating minister of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan. Culture is a policy domain of Minister-president Jan Jambon (New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) (From 2019 until 2024).

Flemish Ministry of Culture, Youth and Media

The 'Division Knowledge and policy' – embedded in the Department of Culture, Youth and Media – ensures the administrative follow-up of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights and is responsible for the coordination of a horizontal Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (leisure, education, work, equality, etc.).

A main priority in the horizontal Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2020-2024) is 'Well-being and positive identity development'. The Plan pursues four large societal objectives: equal opportunities, broad development, space and greater involvement in society for all children and young people. Other priorities in the plan are healthy and liveable neighbourhoods, civic engagement through volunteering, leisure for all and media literacy. The 2020-2024 Flemish Youth and Children's Right Policy Plan was drawn up in several participatory stages. It started out with the preparation of the environmental analysis in the summer of 2018, followed by a period of participation sessions, discussions and debates. The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group XL acted as a sounding board group and was involved at various times. The output of the many participation sessions was processed and resulted in 13 cross-policy area priorities, which were further elaborated and ranked during the Key Priorities Debate in April 2019. With the start of the current term of office, a round table discussion on the importance of the 13 proposed priority objectives was held. The final choice of five priorities was approved by the Government of Flanders on 13 march 2020, well-being and positive identity development being one of the them. The division 'Subsidizing and maintaining' of the department subsidises more than a hundred youth organizations, contributing to children's well-being in Flanders. They also subsidize cultural- (educative), social-cultural and artistic organizations.

Main non-public actors

Non-profit organisations working on health and well-being

The Flemish Government funds non-profit organisations in this field. Examples are (including a substantial focus and work with children, youth and young people):

Flemish Institute for Healthy Living

The Flemish Institute for Healthy Living (['Vlaams Instituut Gezond Leven'](#)) is a centre of expertise. Since 1991, this institute is recognised and funded by the Flemish Government. The Flemish Institute for Healthy Living helps the Flemish Government to achieve the Flemish Health Objectives.

YAC

The Youth Advice Centres ([Jongerenadviescentrum-JAC](#)) are part of the Flemish Centres of General Welfare (CAWs). The 11 regional CAWs have a total of 51 JAC's.

JAC's are financed through the CAW centres by the Ministry of Welfare. Most of them receive some additional money from local and provincial government and private sponsoring.

In Flanders, YAC's offer advice, support and guidance to young people between the ages of 12 and 25. All sorts of question are treated anonymously: housing advice, (student) work, sexual health, children's rights, emotional well-being, substance abuse, etc.

VAD

[VAD](#) (Vlaams expertisecentrum Alcohol en Drugs, Flemish expertise centre on alcohol and drugs) is an non-profit organisation and expertise centre for alcohol, drugs, psychoactive substances, gambling and gaming. VAD enables discussion within society about alcohol

and drug issues, expand (inter)sector networks with potential partners and support a high quality and scientifically based approach to deal with alcohol and drugs issues.

CPZ

[CPZ](#) (Centrum ter Preventie van Zelfdoding, Centre on suicide prevention) is a non-profit organisation on the prevention of suicide. CPZ enables discussion within society about suicide and helps people to get through a suicidal crisis.

The Centre for the Prevention of Suicide (CPZ - Centrum ter Preventie van Zelfdoding, Centre on suicide prevention) is a non-profit organisation whose basic objective is to prevent suicide. They have been doing this since 1979. The CPZ operates on the basis of three services, which are interlinked and complement each other: The Suicide Line 1813, the Training Service and the Study Service.

Since 2013, the suicide portal www.zelfmoord1813.be has been the central gateway for anyone looking for information or help. All services and products of the CPZ are accessible via zelfmoord1813.be.

The CPZ has been recognised by the Flemish government as an organisation with a field of suicide prevention through low-threshold telecare. In addition, the CPZ, together with the Unit for Suicide Research of Ghent University, forms the Flemish Centre of Expertise on Suicide Prevention, which was recognised as a partner organisation for the prevention of suicide.

In addition to Flemish subsidies, the CPZ also receives support from Actiris. The Brussels-Capital Region thus makes it possible to employ two full-time staff members.

SENSOA

[Sensoa](#) promotes sexual health as a centre of expertise in Flanders and does so with an international perspective.

Sensoa works on the basis of the World Health Organisation's definition of 'sexual health'. Sexual health is more than just the absence of disease and preventing the risks of unplanned pregnancy, sexual abuse, STDs or HIV. Attention should also be paid to the pleasurable and positive aspects of sexuality. This then translates itself into a constructive, respectful approach towards sexuality and sexual relationships.

For Sensoa, sexual health is inextricably linked with promoting and safeguarding sexual rights. They believe that sexual rights should be respected, safeguarded and upheld so that everyone is able to experience his or her sexuality free from coercion, discrimination and violence.

General distribution of responsibilities

Different policy domains at the regional level are responsible for the policymaking with regard to health and well-being.

A policy domain consists of a department and one or more agencies.

- The department is concerned with policy preparation and policy support. It is operating under the authority and the responsibility of the minister.
- An agency is primarily responsible for policy implementing tasks and has more autonomy. Therefore, we often refer to 'independent' agencies.

This structure was developed in 2006 with the reorganisation 'Better Administrative Policy' ('Beter Bestuur Beleid' (BBB)). However, in practice departments and agencies work closely together for both policy preparation and implementation. The department involves the agencies for the policy preparation and –evaluation and discusses policy intentions with them. On the basis of their experience with policy execution, agencies provide input to policymakers.

As described in the [Municipality Decree of 15 July 2005](#), the local authorities have to contribute to the lives of their citizens on a local level. In Flanders, the responsibilities of

the municipalities are not predefined – it is not that a list of concrete tasks and responsibilities is assigned to them - but there is the principle that municipalities are concerned with the communal interest and have to undertake all initiatives needed to protect this interest. The municipalities also have to take up those responsibilities and execute those tasks that are assigned to them by laws or decrees. The Municipality Act also stipulates that local authorities have to involve inhabitants as much as possible in the policymaking process.

A new decree on local government has been approved on 22 December 2017 (Decree concerning Municipal Government – Decreet over het Lokaal Bestuur). There are some big – mainly organizational – changes, but the key components remain the same. There's still described that local authorities (and Public Centres for Social Wel-being (OCMW's)) have to contribute lastingly to the well-being of civilians and have to ensure an execution of their responsibilities that is transparent, democratic, effective and close to civilians. Responsibilities are still not predefined, but the decree still states that municipalities are concerned with the communal interest and have to undertake all initiatives needed to protect this interest. They also still have to take up responsibilities and execute those tasks assigned to them by law or decree and have to involve inhabitants as much as possible in the policymaking process.

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Cross-sectoral cooperation

In Flanders, the health and well-being of young people are the joint responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Health, Public Health and Family, the Flemish Minister of Education and Training and the Flemish Minister of Youth and its administration and agencies.

As mentioned in 1.5 Cross-sectorial approach with other ministries, youth policy is transversal. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

The Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- Impact study of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER)
- Contact points for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration
- Youth Progress Report

7.3 Sport, youth fitness and physical activity

National strategy(ies)

There is no strategy specifically aiming at youth fitness and physical activity.

However, there is the Policy Paper on Sport submitted by the Flemish Minister of Sport Philippe Muyters for the period 2014-2019 ([Beleidsnota Sport 2014-2019](#)).

The Policy Paper consists of eight objectives:

1. facilitating grassroots sport (cf. sports open for all sections of the population) through various partnerships
2. optimising the offer in sport facilities
3. permanent strengthening of the healthy and ethical sports climate
4. aiming at doping-free sport in Flanders
5. investing in quality, professionalisation and employment
6. developing and sharing knowledge and promoting sport
7. achieving a return on the available top sport potential
8. contributing to an international sports policy

The Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019) focuses on the population in general and specifically on students and young people. The Policy Paper mentions also a specific objective targeting young people in vulnerable situations. It states that young people in vulnerable situations can be empowered through sports.

Measures and initiatives are taken to encourage youth fitness and physical activity by applying the EU Physical Activity Guidelines. Policymakers are developing a normative frame for 'medically and ethically sound' practice of sports. As is the case in many other sectors, the Flemish Government funds non-profit (sports) organisations that encourage physical activity. In Flanders, sports policy has a specific focus on youth sport activities, for instance, making use of the financial means of the Flemish Parliament Act of 2016 ([decreet houdende de erkenning en subsidiëring van de georganiseerde sportsector](#)). It also gives special attention to (organised) sporting opportunities for urban disadvantaged youth through the Participation Decree of 2008 ([Participatiedecreet 2008](#)). Youth fitness can be interpreted more widely than only physical condition.

Since 2016, the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders is responsible for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of sports policy in Flanders. In 2016, the budget of the Flemish Government allocated to the policy domain Sport was 121000000 euros. Every year, the implementation of the Flemish sports policy is evaluated in the business plan of the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders. In 2022, the budget allocated to the policy domain sport was 161.669.000 euros.

Promoting and supporting sport and physical activity among young people

Youth fitness and physical activity

Youth focus in the Flemish Parliament Act (2016) concerning the recognition and subsidisation of the organised sport sector

The Flemish Parliament Act entered into force on 10 June 2016 ([decreet houdende de erkenning en subsidiëring van de georganiseerde sportsector](#)). It organises the recognition and the subsidising of sport organisations. This Flemish Parliament Act has also a policy focus on youth sport activities.

The Flemish Government wants to increase the quality of youth sport clubs with a consequential increase of youth participation. The Flemish Government funds non-profit (sports) organisations that encourage physical activities that have a beneficial effect on young people's health and fitness.

In 2016, the expenditure of the Flemish Government directly connected with this decree was 25929000 euros.

Flemish Parliament Act (2012) concerning the stimulation and subsidisation of local sport policy

The Flemish Parliament Act entered into force on 6 July 2012 ([decreet houdende het stimuleren en subsidiëren van een lokaal sportbeleid](#)). It organises the subsidising of municipal and provincial sport organisations and the sport service of the Flemish Community commission. In 2016, the expenditure of the Flemish Government directly connected with this decree was 1299000 euro.

However, in 2014, the Flemish Government decided through a decree to change the budget allocation from the Act on local sport policy to the municipalities fund (Community Fund/[Gemeentefonds](#)). The budget is directly allocated to the municipalities and they have the autonomous authority concerning sports policy.

After-school activities

In 2010, the Flemish Government asked the Flemish School Sports Foundation ([Stichting Vlaamse Schoolsport](#)) to support and develop policies promoting sports and exercise in schools. At the same time, this Foundation also promotes sports and exercise after school through cooperation between schools and non-profit (sports) organisations in the school's neighbourhood (see also grassroots sports activities).

Since 2018, the Flemish School Sports Foundation no longer exists. The organisation has a new policy plan and a new name, namely [MOEV](#). MOEV aims to motivate and support schools and provides them with expertise for a qualitative and structured movement policy, embedded in a more wider health policy. They developed the MOEV-physical activity compass to inspire schools to develop a healthy mix of sitting down, standing up, exercising and working out. They give examples of activities, tips, materials, events and projects to stimulate sport and physical activity before, during and after school hours. Thereby, MOEV developed the instrument 'Sport moves the school 2.0' (see also further).

Flemish Outdoor Play Day

The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2014-2019) mentioned that the Flemish Government will organise and support the annual Outdoor Play Day ([Buitenspeeldag](#)). Since 2008, the Flemish Government organises Outdoor Play Days in cooperation with media partners and children's channels.

Once a year, children are encouraged to play outside: Flemish television channels, such as Nickelodeon, VTM Kazoom and Ketnet, cancel their broadcast for a day while parents, youth leaders, sports coaches and local governments organise all kind of outdoor games and activities.

The role of sport as an activity supporting teamwork, intercultural learning, fair play and responsibility

Flemish Parliament Act of 20 December 2013 concerning healthy and ethical sport

The Policy Paper on Sport 2014-2019 ([Beleidsnota Sport 2014-2019](#)) mentions strengthening a healthy and ethical sport environment by stimulating ethical exercising. The Flemish Government will support knowledge sharing, exchange of good practices, the development of expertise, instruments and quality standards through learning networks.

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 December 2013 ([decreet inzake gezond en ethisch sporten](#)) describes that ethical exercising as having three pillars: personal integrity (physical, psychological and sexual), fair play and social integrity (solidarity, diversity and inclusion). These three pillars have a special focus on the best interests of children and young people.

In 2016, the expenditure of the Flemish Government directly connected with this project is 45.000 euro.

In the Policy Paper on Sport for the 2019-2024 policy period, stimulating a healthy and ethical sporting mindset and -environment is once again a strategic goal. The Flemish Parliament Act on Healthy and Ethical Sport will be evaluated by the Flemish Government with the aim of improving on this policy. Personal integrity, fair play and social integrity remain the central pillars.

According to the policy paper, stimulating a healthy and ethical sporting mindset and -environment is supposed to contribute to a specific integrity policy which aims at an integrated approach to violence starting from the stories and needs of children and young people. This is in line with the goals of the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plans 2020 through 2024.

Sportmix

[Sportmix](#) is a multicultural sport event. Sportmix focuses on friendship, fair play and respect for different cultures. It is a sport event on which young people can learn more about other cultures.

Sportmix targets young people between the ages of 12 and 16. It is in the first place meant for schools.

Equal access to sport and physical activity for everyone

Participation Decree (2008)

The Flemish Government gave special attention to (organised) sporting opportunities for urban and disadvantaged youth, for instance by making use of the financial means of the Participation Decree (2008).

The [Participation Decree](#) entered into force on 1 January 2008. Through subsidies in the participation decree, the Flemish government wishes to promote the active participation of vulnerable groups in culture, youth and sports.

This Decree offers:

- policy instruments to stimulate the participation of various groups, such as young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, refugees, disadvantaged groups in youth care, (young) people with disabilities, etc.
- subsidies for projects that encourage participation. This particularly concerns initiatives related to socio-cultural work, communication, circulation and dissemination of artworks, financial obstacles, and physical access
- and grants for large scale cultural events.

Poverty Act (2003)

The Poverty Act ([Armoededecreet](#)) of 12 October 2003 provides grants for projects with an experimental and/or innovative nature. These grants are also meant for socially relevant projects ([projecten Armoededecreet](#)).

The most marked problems in accessibility of leisure (sport) activities for young people (and children) in poverty are located in three areas:

1. durable participation of vulnerable children and young people,
2. financial assistance to enable participation
3. skills and training of workers / volunteers / organizations to open up to (the environment and needs of) vulnerable children and young people.

An example of a call for projects in 2016 is '**Bridges between sport and/or youth work and children in poverty**'. The former Flemish Minister for Poverty Reduction, Liesbeth Homans (term: 2014-2019), launched a call for projects 'bridges between sport and/or youth and children in poverty' ([projectoproep bruggen tussen sport, jeugdwerk en](#)

[kinderen in armoede](#)). In total, 100 project applications were submitted. From this, 19 projects were selected for a total amount of 860 432 euros.

Grassroots sport activities

The Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019) mentions facilitating grassroots sport through various partnerships. The Flemish Government aims to stimulate people, including children and young people, to participate in sport on a lifelong basis through a dynamic grassroots sports policy. By doing so, the Flemish Government and the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders have launched the campaign 'Sporters experience more' ([Sporters beleven meer](#)). Under this campaign, cities and municipalities can receive an award if they succeed in reaching several sportive objectives.

Furthermore, the Flemish Government wants to ensure that this grassroots sports policy is qualitative, healthy and democratic. Increasing sports participation, stimulating physical fitness and strengthening social cohesion are central in this policy.

Grassroots sport activities for children and young people, mentioned in the Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019), aim at offering after-school sport activities (Sportsnack and Sport after School). They are organised by the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders and MOEV (see also extracurricular sports activities).

The Policy Paper Sport for the policy period 2019-2024 mentions the importance of investing in children and young people. According to the Policy Paper, a lot of sports start on the playground, so there must be plenty investment in sport and movement at school. Along with the Departments of Education and Health and MOEV, the efforts to make sports and movement during and after school something self-evident will be continued. Municipal governments will play a key role to achieve this. The options to establish a Flemish Youth Sport Fund (Vlaams Jeugd sportfonds) will also be investigated and efforts will be made to support less organized, trendy and more urban types of sports and movement and to inspire children and young people. Next to that, the Flemish Government will check if the SportCompass (SportKompas), which is meant to orient young people to the right sport, will be administered in all Flemish primary schools.

Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation

The Flemish Agency Sport Flanders and other sports organisations should present an annual activity and financial report on how they implemented the assignment of the decrees to the Flemish Government.

Physical education in schools

In Flanders, physical education is mandatory in secondary education. The compulsory taught time is two teaching hours per week. In secondary schools with study areas such as sports science (general education), physical education and sport (technical education) and top level sporting schools, physical education is taught more than two teaching hours per week. Students only are excused from physical education with a medical certificate.

Furthermore, the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders and [MOEV](#) stimulate and support schools to draw up a school sport policy to engage students in both physical education and local extracurricular activities outside school and to encourage students to participate in sports throughout the life-course (see sports activities outside the curriculum but within a school day).

The Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019) also mentions supporting a sports offer for students in tertiary education. By doing so, the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders continues to support the extension, coordination and promotion of sports in high schools and universities in Flanders. This support is also regulated by the Flemish Parliament Act of 3 April 2009 concerning the allocation of grants for the extension, coordination and promotion of the sports offer in Flemish universities and high schools and the recognition and subsidising of the Flemish overarching student sport associations ([Decreet houdende de toekenning van subsidies voor de uitbouw, de coördinatie en de promotie van het](#)

[sportaanbod van de studentenvoorzieningen van de Vlaamse universiteiten en hogescholen en de erkenning en subsidiëring van een Vlaamse overkoepelende studentensportvereniging](#)).

Pedagogical tools for teachers

The Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019) mentions investing in quality, professionalisation and employment by developing competences, knowledge and skills through training, by offering knowledge, information and practical tools and facilitating employment in the sport sector. The Flemish Agency Sport Flanders and the Flemish School for Sports Trainers ([Vlaamse Trainersschool](#)) have a role in the implementation of this objective.

For sports teachers in particular, The Flemish Agency Sport Flanders stimulates sports teachers to undertake further training. By doing so, the Flemish Agency Sport Flanders organises training and courses for sports teachers through the Flemish School for Sports Trainers (Vlaamse Trainersschool).

Under the authority of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and together with [Klascement](#), an educational portal site providing various teaching materials was developed. It makes the results of the Flemish Government projects available to a wider range of educational stakeholders.

The Policy Paper on Sport (2019-2024) states that the Flemish Government wants to ensure more qualified trainers in sport clubs by broadening the sport-technical training, investing in digital types of learning and professionalizing the sports management training. They also want to lead more active trainers to custom sport management training to further widen the pool of qualified trainers. The Flemish School for Sports Trainers will evolve to become a certifying instance for qualitative education for other trainers.

Physical activities outside the curriculum but within the school day

The Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019) states that it will strive for a tailor-made sports offer in every stage of life. In this connection, there is the organisation of school sport events and the stimulation of after-school sport. The Flemish Agency Sport Flanders and MOEV organise these school sport events during school days.

Furthermore, physical activities outside the curriculum but within the school day are implemented through the scheme 'Sports moves your school 2.0.' ([Sport beweegt je school](#)) of MOEV. 'Sports moves your school' is a tool which supports schools to draw up a qualitative physical activity and sport policy and to achieve realistic goals for implementing high-quality, integrated motion within classroom settings, promoting physical activity both within and between lessons.

The Policy Paper on Sport for the policy period 2019-2024 mentions the importance of investing in children and young people. According to the Policy Paper, a lot of sports start on the playground, so there must be plenty investment in sport and movement at school. Along with the Departments of Education and Health and MOEV, the efforts to make sports and movement during and after school something self-evident will be continued. Municipal governments will play a key role to achieve this. In addition to that, the Flemish Government wants to keep up it's efforts to arrange playgrounds in such a way they encourage to move.

Extracurricular sports activities

As mentioned in the Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019) and the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2014-2019), there is the organisation of [Sportsnack](#) for children aged between 8 and 12 years and the organisation of Sport after School ([Sport Na School](#) (SNS)) for young people aged between 12 and 18 years.

Since 2014, when the SNS project was launched in Flanders, teachers have granted half-hour exemption from their teaching assignment in order to develop, together with the municipal sports services and local sports providers, sports provision for young people aged between 12 and 18 years. This project is mostly aimed at young people who are not

yet members of any sports club and who do not want to commit themselves to a sporting activity on a regular basis. For a fixed (low) amount, the SNS pass allows these young people to practise organised sports immediately after school, free of obligation, throughout the school year. This initiative is being rolled out across Flanders during 2015.

Practical coordination is ensured at the level of each province, while central management and general promotion of the initiative are organised at Flemish level, by means of a partnership between Bloso and MOEV.

In addition, there is reinforced cooperation between the policy domains sport and education to expand and optimise the after-school sport offer.

The Policy Paper Sport for the policy period 2019-2024 mentions the importance of investing in children and young people. According to the Policy Paper, a lot of sports start on the playground, so there must be plenty investment in sport and movement at school. Along with the Departments of Education and Health and MOEV, the efforts to make sports and movement during and after school something self-evident will be continued. Municipal governments will play a key role to achieve this. The options to establish a Flemish Youth Sport Fund (Vlaams Jeugd sportfonds) will also be investigated and efforts will be made to support less organized, trendy and more urban types of sports and movement and to inspire children and young people. Next to that, the Flemish Government will check if the SportCompass (SportKompas), which is meant to orient young people to the right sport, will be used in all Flemish primary schools.

In addition to that, the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Paper (2020-2024) stresses the continued commitment to the promotion of low-threshold extracurricular sports and exercise initiatives at and near the school for the children and young people who need them. Stronger focus shall be placed on reaching children and young people in socially vulnerable situations.

Collaboration and partnerships

Community schools

The Policy Paper on Sport (2014-2019), the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2014-2019) and the Policy Paper on Sport (2019-2024) mention organising a qualitative after-school sports offer for children and young people. By doing so, the Flemish Government asked MOEV to support and develop policies promoting sports and exercise in schools. The Flemish Government also asked the Foundation to encourage sport after school through cooperation between schools, municipalities and non-profit (sports) organisations in the school's neighbourhood. This objective is in line with the concept of Community schools with sports ([Brede school met sportaanbod](#)). The Flemish Government also supports Flemish sport events which will contribute to several policy objectives on sport.

The organisation of Sportsnack and Sport after School (see also extracurricular sports activities) are part of the concept Community Schools with sports. Community Schools with sports have an active cooperation with sport clubs, youth work, etc. within a neighbourhood and increase the participation of children and young people in sports. The collaboration of Community schools with sports is supported by municipal subsidies. These municipal subsidies are provided from the Community Fund (gemeentefonds).

Call for projects 2016 'Bridges between sport and / or youth work and children in poverty'

See also 7.3 Sport, youth fitness and physical activity.

7.4 Healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition

National strategy(ies)

There is no strategy specifically aimed at youth health promotion.

However, there is a Policy Paper on Welfare, Public Health and Family submitted by the Flemish Minister on Welfare, Public Health and Family Jo Vandeurzen ([Beleidsnota Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin 2014-2019](#)). The Policy Paper covers 2014-2019. It targets the population in general, but a lot of the actions are meant for young people.

The Policy Paper consists of six objectives:

1. prevention of health and welfare problems and realisation of first line aid to strengthen the well-being of people
2. realisation of tailor-made care, on the basis of possibilities of people
3. strengthening support to families by aligning essential elements of the Flemish Family policy with each other
4. the recognisable position of law centres in the policy domain Welfare, Public Health and Family and better cooperation between assistance and justice
5. stimulation of quality of care and social entrepreneurship by focusing on regulatory and social instruments
6. cooperation with three other policy domains, administrative level, science, actors on the ground and users to answer the increasing complex care issues

The Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family ([Departement Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin](#)) is responsible for:

- preparation and evaluation of the policy plan, submitted by the Flemish Minister on Welfare, Public Health and Family and supporting the Flemish Minister in controlling and monitoring the policy implementation of the agencies
- policy implementation, including subsidising of welfare and health organisations

Encouraging healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition for young people

Youth health promotion

The policy domain Welfare, Public Health and Family intends to strengthen the well-being of (young) people by preventing health and welfare problems. The Agency Care and Health – embedded in the Flemish Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family – is responsible for the preparation and evaluation of this Preventive Health Policy. A lot of these preventive actions, mentioned in the Preventive Health Policy, are meant for children and young people.

This Preventive Health Policy ([Preventief Gezondheidsbeleid](#)) consists of two methods:

- health promotion
- disease prevention

Since 1998, the Flemish Government developed Flemish Health Objectives ([Vlaamse gezondheidsdoelstellingen](#)) to set priorities in the Preventive Health Policy. These objectives are measurable, general accepted and should be realised within a certain period.

Since 2017, there are five Flemish health objectives:

- Health objective on vaccinations
- Health objective on population screening of cancer
- Health objective on suicide
- Health objective on incidents in the private sphere
- Health objective on living healthier

These objectives were based on the 2016 health conference. These objectives are accompanied by several scientific-based strategies to reach those objectives. The health

objective 'living healthier' replaced the previous health objective on diet and physical activity and the health objective on tobacco, alcohol and drugs. The health objective on living healthier was accepted by the Flemish Government on 8 September 2017 and approved by the Flemish Parliament on 10 January 2018. For each of these five objectives, the Flemish Government draws up action plans. Some of the campaigns/action plans focus on young people, such as the strategy on living healthier and suicide prevention. These five Flemish health objectives should be realised by the end of 2025.

Healthy lifestyles promotion

The strategic plan '[The Fleming lives healthier in 2025](#)', created by the Flemish Ministry for Welfare, Public Health and Family, is implemented to realise the Flemish health objective on living healthier. The strategic plan replaces the previous Flemish Action Plan on Diet and Physical Activity 2009-2015 and the previous Flemish Action Plan on tobacco, alcohol and drugs 2009-2015. It focuses on a health policy in the domains of family, leisure time, education, work and neighborhood. In other words, an integrated policy is put forward with a focus on diverse groups of the population, amongst others children and young people. Specific attention is paid to vulnerable (young) people.

Main objectives:

- Take your health in your own hands
- The family as a context to stimulate a healthy lifestyle
- Leisure time, healthy time
- Health policy in education
- Health policy in working contexts
- More health in care- and welfare services
- Healthy neighborhoods
- Good governance, the way to a healthy life

(Preventive) strategies to reach those objectives are concerned with:

- Education
- Intervention in the environment
- Agreements and regulations
- Care and guidance

References:

- <https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/beleid/beleid-preventieve-gezondheidszorg/>" <https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/beleid/beleid-preventieve-gezondheidszorg/gezondheidsdoelstellingen/gezondheidsdoelstelling-gezonder-leven>

Healthy eating and nutrition promotion

The strategic plan '[The Fleming lives healthier in 2025](#)' promotes healthy eating and nutrition (see healthy lifestyles) and includes projects and initiatives in this field.

Prevention of risky behavior and substance abuse

The strategic plan '[The Fleming lives healthier in 2025](#)' focuses on the prevention of risky behaviour and substance use (see healthy lifestyles) and includes projects and initiatives in this field.

Funding available for the action plans

The budget of the Flemish Health Objectives and action plans is funded by the Flemish Government. The Flemish Government has annual budget allocated to Preventive Health Policy and this budget is allocated to actors, initiatives and projects in this field.

Monitoring and evaluation of the action plans

The partners, organisations and individual care providers which are recognised and/or subsidised by the Flemish Government for tasks of the Preventive Health Policy, are accountable and monitored. The Flemish Governments defines detailed rules.

Furthermore, there is policy evaluation of the action and strategic plans. An environmental analysis preceded the new (2016) Flemish Health Objectives.

Health education and healthy lifestyles education in schools

Health education

Every school in Flanders is expected to develop a health policy. This is not required by decree, but there is a regulatory framework for the development of health policy in schools:

1. the attainment targets/cross-curricular targets in school curricula ([vakoverschrijdende eindtermen 2010](#))
2. the assignments of schools regarding care (policy) and student guidance
3. the legislation on health policy, security and infrastructure

At secondary level, subject-related attainment targets for health education can be found in courses of physical education and natural science. However, health education in secondary schools is mainly cross-curricular (cf. physical education and security, mental health and socio-relational development).

The Flemish Institute for Healthy Living, with the support of the Flemish Minister of Education and Training and the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family, provides a [website](#) with pedagogical tools and teaching material to develop a health policy and to support teachers responsible for health education.

Sex education and personal relationships education

Every school in Flanders decides whether or not sex education and personal relationships is part of the curriculum. It is a cross-curricular attainment target in school curricula.

However, sex education and personal relationships are mostly part of the courses natural sciences and 'project general courses' (PAV). This involves knowledge about reproductive organs, contraceptive methods and sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, [Sensoa](#) (Flemish expertise centre of sexual health), with the support of the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family, provides pedagogical tools and training to teachers responsible for sex education. Sensoa has a database with teaching material on their website and also organises training in schools for students

Recently, the Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament were discussing with stakeholders the curriculum for the 21st century and the use of learning outcomes as final objectives. Hilde Crevits, Minister of Education and Training states that sexual education and personal relationships education is relevant to teach in a comprehensive manner. With the gradual introduction of the modernized curriculum, sex education and personal relationship education will be linked with several key competences (Physical and mental health, social-relational competences, digital competences...).

Peer-to-peer education approaches

There are no measures for peer-to-peer educational approaches aiming to enhance young people's knowledge and understanding of factors related to their health and well-being.

In Flanders, school governing boards have broad autonomy and can decide freely on their teaching methods, timetables and curricula.

Collaboration and partnerships

Every school in Flanders is expected to develop a health policy. The school health policy pays attention to collaboration with school services (centres for educational guidance and educational guidance services) and external partners (expertise organisations and local health organisations).

The (content-specific) collaboration with schools, CLB's (centres for educational guidance) and external healthcare organisations is regulated through protocols. At the school level, the policy contract with CLB also sets out cooperation arrangements.

Raising awareness on healthy lifestyles and on factors affecting the health and well-being of young people

Information providers

Agency Care and Health

The Agency Care and Health ([Agentschap Zorg en Gezondheid](#)) promote healthy lifestyles and nutrition. Together with the Flemish-funded partner organisations, the Agency provide advice and information on healthy nutrition, physical activity and mental resilience.

Flemish-funded partner organisations

These partner organisations, such as the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living and VAD, are expertise centres of preventive health care. They are also responsible for health promotion. They give information and advice, develop methodologies and other material and support the implementation and the use of it.

The cooperation between the Flemish Government and these partner organisations is defined in a management agreement and further concretised in annual plans and budget plans.

- **The Flemish Institute for Healthy Living**

The Flemish-funded expertise centre, [the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living](#) helps the Flemish Government to achieve the Flemish Health Objectives.

The Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family defines the policy priorities and budget allocation through a management agreement between the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living and the Flemish Government.

The Flemish Institute for Healthy Living, as partner organisation, is responsible for the general health promotion and for promoting health policy in settings (schools, local authorities, the workplace, etc.) and to target groups (general population, persons of lower socioeconomic status, etc.). By doing so, the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living has projects and campaigns for general health promotion.

- **VAD**

The expertise centre [VAD](#) is a partner organisation of the Flemish Government regarding the Preventive Policy on Alcohol and Drugs.

The Drugline is the public service of VAD for all questions about alcohol, illegal drugs, psychoactive medication and gambling. The Drugline is a telephone and online helpline. It offers information about drugs and helps with questions about assistance, prevention and documentation material.

Youth-targeted information campaigns

The Flemish Institute for Healthy Living sets up [different projects and actions](#) to encourage every Fleming to live healthy, eat healthy and exercise more. There are a lot of practical instructions to live healthy on their website. Some actions and initiatives target the population in general, others are specifically meant for young people. Examples of such projects and initiatives are:

- 'Eye for Tasty Stuff' ('[Oog voor Lekkers](#)') is a Flemish school project to promote the consumption of vegetables, fruits and/or milk at school. Together with the mascots, students discover different kinds of vegetables and fruits. They are also given a taste of milk. The aim of this project is to inform and sensitize students.
- 'Woogie Boogie': together with Disney Benelux, the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living tries to tackle inactivity among toddlers by the project Woogie Boogie (3-6 years).
- '10.000 Steps' to exercise enough. This project is organised by the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living.
- '[Healthy Guests](#)' is a project targeted at young people who reside in, or are guided by, child and youth care centres. Because these young people often have more difficult socio-economic living circumstances, they generally have less opportunities to develop a healthy lifestyle. To help youth care organisations to support their 'guests' to develop healthy habits, a Healthy Guests-methodology is developed.

References:

<https://www.gezondleven.be/projecten>

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/74-hea...>

<https://onderwijsdoelen.be/modernisering>

<https://www.sensoa.be/relationele-en-seksuele-vorming-de-vlaamse-eindtermen>

'Generation Smookfree'

'[Generation Smookfree](#)' is an initiative of the Alliance for a Smookfree Society. The organisation Fight against Cancer ('Kom op tegen Kanker') and the Foundation against Cancer ('Stichting tegen Kaker') launched the initiative. The implementation happens together with the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living, the Flemish association for Respiratory Healthcare and Combating Tuberculosis (VRGT) and the Foundation for Respiratory Infections (FARES). This initiative aims to contribute to the creation of a society – by 2019 – in which children and young people can grow up smookfree, can play and have fun in smookfree environments. Such smookfree environments are important because children and young people are likely to copy behaviour, also smoking behaviour. Children and young people who observe that other young people or adults smoke might get the idea that smoking is a normal aspect of daily life rather than an unhealthy addiction. A [website](#) is developed and provides an overview of different initiatives that are yet undertaken and that can inspire parents, schools, municipalities, etc. to create smookfree environments for young people.

'Flanders quits smoking'

Flanders quits smoking is a media initiative and [website](#) of the Flemish Government and the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living. The website offers anti-smoking support in Flanders. There is information for:

- smoking young people ([smartstop app](#))
- parents of smoking young people
- adults
- professionals in schools, workplace, municipality and care sector

Smartstop for young people is implemented in the second and third level of secondary education in Flanders.

'Don't be fooled' campaign

In 2014, there was the 'Don't be fooled' ([Laat je niet vangen](#)) anti-cannabis campaign of the Flemish Government. This campaign was a great success.

The Flemish expertise centre VAD wants to raise awareness of cannabis through their [Drugline](#)-project by boosting the 'Don't be fooled' campaign every two years.

The [new campaign](#) builds on the success of the previous campaign. This campaign is a media initiative and consists of videos for young people, their parents and other family members on youtube, facebook and public service TV.

'Condoshop'

[Joetz](#) (youth work division of the socialist health service) has awareness raising actions about safe sex. One of their projects is called '[Condoshop](#)', a web shop that delivers condoms at home by post.

References:

<https://www.joetz.be/projecten/project/pages/condoshop.aspx>

<https://www.vad.be/artikels/detail/procesevaluatie-cannabiscampagne-2014...>

<http://www.vlaanderenstoptmetroken.be/>

<https://www.gezondleven.be/projecten/generatie-rookvrij?qclid=EAiaIQobCh...>

7.5 Mental health

National strategy(ies)

Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health

The sixth State Reform and the growing demand for health have led to the decision of the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and family to develop a new Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health ([Vlaams Actieplan Geestelijke gezondheid](#)).

The Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health, that will cover 2017-2019, focuses mainly on strategies of prevention and the early detection of psychological problems. Specific attention is paid to children and young people. A target group within the youth population are those who slip through the net and have specific needs and requirements. The action plan focuses on the following actions:

- programme 'Early detection and intervention' for children and young people
- primary care psychology
- therapists for young people
- highly intelligent young people
- online help
- self-care for young people and vulnerable young people

The actions of the action plan are realised within the budgetary framework of the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family. The budget allocated to the action plan is two million euro.

The actions of the action plan are realised within the budgetary framework of the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family. The budget allocated to the action plan is two million euros.

A new long-term Action Plan on Mental Health has not yet been developed. However, during the corona health crisis in 2020, an Action Plan Mental Health Care for Tomorrow (Zorgen voor morgen) has been implemented to cater to the increasing mental health problems related to the pandemic, for which 25.585.000 euro has been provided in 2020. It aims to provide both long- and short-term solutions for the psychosocial effects of the corona health crisis, with a focus on prevention.

References:

https://www.zorgenvoormorgen.be/sites/default/files/media/NotaVR_20200515_actieplan_mentaalwelzijn.pdf

<https://www.zorgenvoormorgen.be/actieplan-zorgen-voor-morgen>

Flemish Action Plan on Integrity

A Flemish Action Plan ('[Vlaams Actieplan Integriteit Minderjarigen](#)') to improve and protect the physical, psychological and sexual integrity of minors in youth care, child care, education, youth work and the sport sector is launched at 29 January, 2016. It is a collaboration between the Ministers of Youth, Welfare, Work and Education. The goal is to work together to prevent and address violence on children and young people.

The key points are:

- Creating a learning- and living environment in which children and young people can develop physically, psychologically and sexually. The idea is that children and young people grow into persons that can deal with their peers, friends and all the other actors in school, the youth- and sport sector and the institutions in which children and young people reside in a positive, respectful and responsible manner.
- Rejecting all violations of the integrity of children and young people.
- Children and young people have to be protected against all forms of violence. Therefore, it is important that the debate about this is kept going and that situations of violence are effectively addressed.
- Children and young people who are the victims of violence have to find appropriate assistance. Thereby, working together with children and young people is needed to find constructive and lasting solutions.

Flemish Parliament Integrated Youth Care Act

Integrated Youth Care is a cross-sectoral policy programme of the Flemish government. It aims to establish a coordinated approach to help troubled young people and their relatives. The clients face multi-problem situations (e.g. bad family situation, skipping school, mental issues, etc.) that require a multi-faceted care strategy. The institutional makeup of the care (health, welfare, education) landscape in Flanders, however, is relatively fragmented and characterised by strong (sub-) sectors.

On 1 March, 2014 the [Integrated Youth Care Act](#) came into force. This act entails a far-reaching cooperation between all anchors sectors involved in youth. The main objective is that every young person with a problem finds as quick as possible the appropriate help. This renewed act puts the young central. The inherent strength of children and young people and their immediate surroundings are considered the main source of assistance. The act anchors this principle and translates it into practical assistance to all amenities.

Flemish Action Plan on suicide prevention

In the Flemish Region, the health objective suicide and the related Flemish Action Plan on Suicide Prevention were adopted on 7 September 2012 ([Vlaams Actieplan voor preventie van zelfdoding 2012-2020](#)). The Flemish Action Plan on suicide prevention (2012-2020) of the Agency Health and Care consists of five strategies:

1. mental health promotion regarding the individual and society
2. suicide prevention through a telephone helpline and online support
3. improving expertise and network formation among intermediaries
4. strategies for specific risk groups

5. development and implementation of recommendations and resources for suicide prevention

For the period 2014-2020, the budget of the Flemish Government allocated to the Flemish Action Plan on Suicide Prevention (2012-2020) is 3100000 euros. The Flemish Government and the Agency Care and Health are responsible for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the action plan.

The partners, organisations and individual care providers which are recognised and/or subsidised by the Flemish Government for tasks of the Preventive Health Policy and Integrated Youth Care, are accountable and monitored. They must submit an annual progress report to the Flemish Government. The Flemish Governments defines detailed rules.

However, a new Health Ambition on Suicide Prevention and a new Action Plan on Suicide Prevention is in the making. During the Health Conference on Suicide Prevention in 2021, a proposal for a new Health Ambition and Action Plan on Suicide Prevention, the result of a participatory process, has been released.

Improving the mental health of young people

Kopklanken – conference on the mental well-being of young people

In 2016, the Flemish Youth Council started the project [Kopklanken](#). Young people of the Flemish Youth Council gathered information and the advice of experts and policy makers. They conducted an online survey among 1100 young people and participated in two European youth conferences. This resulted in strong signals and a number of concrete policy recommendations on mental well-being of young people.

On 4 March 2017, these strong signals and policy recommendations were presented on the conference Kopklanken, which provided a forum for different voices (young people, policymakers, experts and youth workers).

'Fit in your head, feeling well' campaign

The Fit in your Head, feeling well campaign ([Fit in je hoofd, goed in je vel](#)) was launched in 2006 by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family and was further developed into a spin-off website.

The campaign and website of the Flemish Government aim at fostering resilience and ability to self-care among people aged over 16 years old in Flanders. The implementation of this action is part of the first strategy of the Flemish Action Plan on Suicide Prevention (2012-2020), namely the mental health promotion of the individual and the society.

For the period 2015-2020, the budget allocated to the 'Fit in your head, feeling well' campaign and website is 119.650 euro. This budget also contains the budget for the campaign and website Noknok.

Noknok

[Noknok](#) is a website and focuses on young people between the ages of 12 to 16 years old. It contains information and assignments to feel good about yourself. The implementation of Noknok is also part of the first strategy of the Flemish Action Plan on Suicide Prevention (2012-2020).

For the period 2015-2020, the budget allocated to the 'Fit in your head, feeling well' campaign and the 'Noknok' campaign is 119650 euros.

'Life without a filter' ('Leef zonder filter') campaign

'Life without a filter' is the 2018 campaign on Mental Health, launched by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family. This campaign wants to give young people between 16 and 24 years old the following message: go talk to friends, family,

classmates,... if you are not feeling well in your head. Do not be deceived by social media: dare to life without a filter. The campaign gives some tips to increase mental resilience.

Koppvlaanderen

[Kopp-Vlaanderen](#) has an attractive and youth-friendly website for children and young people of parents with mental problems. The implementation of 'Kopp-Vlaanderen' is part of the fifth strategy of the Flemish Action Plan on Suicide Prevention (2012-2020), namely the attention for risk groups.

Since 2014, the existing project was not renewed but the [Family Platform Mental Health](#) was created. This is a knowledge and experience exchange platform for children and young people whose parents have mental problems, parents whose children have mental problems and persons whose partner, friends and/or family members have mental problems.

'Two houses' (Tweehuizen)

'Two houses' is tailor-made website, supported by the Flemish Government, for children and young people from divorced parents. Parents also find information on the website to help their children and young people in a difficult period.

Awel

[Awel](#), the previous Children- and Youth Telephone, is a helpline for young people. There is also a chat function.

Tele-onthaal 106

Tele-onthaal is a helpline for people who are in a difficult situation. You can reach them 24/24u by phone on the number 106. They also have a chat function on their website. On top of that, every conversation with tele-telephone is anonymous. A phone call with Tele-onthaal does not appear on the invoice, the volunteer cannot see the number. A chat does not leave any traces on the computer.

Tele-onthaal does not ask for name or address. Sometimes the volunteer asks the age or region of the young person. This is only done in order to be able to help them better, for example in order to make a suitable referral to another organisation.

'Suicide1813' (Zelfmoord1813)

'Suicide1813' (Zelfmoord1813) is a website and suicide line to help young people of the Centre on Suicide Prevention (CPZ). CPZ has a management agreement with the Flemish Government.

The website contains also Thinklife, an online self-help course which teaches young people to cope with suicidal thoughts. The suicide line and chat function on the website is part of the second strategy of the Flemish Action Plan on Suicide Prevention (2012-2020), namely the accessible telecare.

For the period 2015-2020, the budget allocated to the suicide line and chat function of CPZ is 325000 euros.

References:

<https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/tags/kopklanken>

<https://www.fitinjehoofd.be/>

<https://www.noknok.be/>" <https://www.noknok.be/>

<https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/leef-zonder-filter-zelfzorgcampagne-ze...>

<https://www.vwvj.be/publicatie/website-kopp-vlaanderen>

<http://www.tweehuizen.be/>

<https://awel.be/>

<https://www.tele-onthaal.be/aanbod>

<https://www.zelfmoord1813.be/>

7.6 Mechanisms of early detection and signposting of young people facing health risks

Policy framework

Programme “Early detection and intervention” of the Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health (2017-2019)

The Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health 2017-2019 ([Vlaams Actieplan Geestelijke Gezondheid 2017-2019](#)) of the Agency Care and Health mentions providing additional funding for the realisation of the programme 'Early detection and intervention' with children and young people (0-23 years) who show signals of possible mental problems.

In this new programme, special attention will be paid to psychosis, suicide, eating disorders and addiction. Early detection results in specific interventions and partners in education and integrated youth care will be involved. This intersectoral approach will take shape in networks for children and young people and adults. This intersectoral networking is crucial. Networks on mental health of children and young people are responsible to streamline the early detection and intervention in their own region, in partnership with networks on mental health for adults. The development of a close connection between prevention, care on the first line and specialized services for mental health is essential and mutual exchange and promotion of expertise are two important points of attention. The funding will be arranged through an agreement a Mental Health Centre (CGG) picked by the network. A yearly budget of 2.310.344 euro is provided by the Flemish Government from 2017 onwards (1.000.000 euro extra funding, 1.310.344 euro existing funding).

References

<https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Template%20voor%20het%20programma%20vroegdetectie%20en%20interventie.pdf>

Flemish Parliament Act of 1 March 2014 on Integrated Youth Care

On 1 March, 2014 the [Integrated Youth Care Act](#) came into force. This renewed act entails far-reaching cooperation between all anchor sectors involved in youth and puts the young central. The main objective is that every young person with a problem finds as quickly as possible the appropriate help (see Mental Health).

If young people need specialised help they must first apply to the 'access portal' or 'intersectoral gateway'. Together with young people and their parents this access portal will then check which help would offer the best solution to a problem. In short: young people can no longer approach a specialised organisation for help themselves.

In total there are six sectors involved:

- Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities (VAPH)
- Agency of Youth Welfare
- Child and Family (K & G)
- General Welfare Work (AWW)
- Mental Health Centres (CGG)
- Centres for Educational Guidance (CLB)

Flemish Parliament Act of 1 December 1998 concerning Centres for Educational Guidance (see also 4.6)

On 1 December, 1998 the Centres for Educational Guidance (CLB's) Act came into force ([decreet betreffende de centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding](#)). The Decision of the Flemish Government of 3 July 2009 reformulated and updated the operational objectives of the CLB's. CLB is a service financed by the Flemish Government. In Flanders, there are 73 centres, which each belong to one of the three educational networks.

CLB's offer pupil-oriented services but can also support schools and parents in the optimisation of pupils' welfare and the pupils' functioning within the school environment. The care provided by CLB's covers four areas:

- learning and studying: problems with reading and spelling, speech and language, etc.
- the educational career: monitoring compulsory education, study-choice guidance, information regarding education and the link to the labour market, directing to and from special education, etc.
- psychological and social functioning: behavioural problems, social skills, emotional problems, etc.
- preventive health care: medical check-ups, vaccinations, taking measures in the event of contagious diseases, healthy nutrition, substance abuse, etc.

So CLB's provide multidisciplinary guidance. To this end, a CLB co-operates with welfare and health institutions. In a CLB, doctors, social workers, educationalists, psychologists, psychological assistants and nurses are employed.

The welfare of the pupil is central and guidance is based on trust and dialogue. Therefore the guidance only starts when a pupil or parent has taken an initiative in this respect. If a school asks the CLB to supervise a pupil, the centre will always first expressly ask for the parents' consent (for a pupil under the age of 12), or the pupil's consent (from the age of 12).

The Flemish Parliament Act of 1 December 1998 concerning Centres for Educational Guidance has been lifted and a new Flemish Parliament Act of 27 April 2018 concerning educational guidance has been developed. This changed the division of roles between the school team, the Centre for Educational Guidance (CLB) and the Educational Guidance Service ('Pedagogische Begeleidingsdienst' (PBD) from 1 September 2018. A more intensive cooperation is put forward.

The new Act stipulates that the school team has to:

- develop a qualitative policy about educational guidance with the pillars educational career, learning and studying, mental and social functioning and preventive health care
- make appointments with the CLB
- appoint a guidance counselor or care coordinator

The CLB has to:

- signal possible problems to the school (e.g. bullying)
- provide consultative guidance on demand
- organise systematic contacts (at the age of 3, 6, 9, 11 and 14 years old)
- assist students in home education
- share expertise with other centres (e.g. especially about topics such as radicalisation, truancy, early school leaving, etc.)

The PBD has to:

- support the school in developing the policy about educational guidance

- in case of problems, the PBD can start a project or refer to external services.

References:

<https://www.klasse.be/132832/2018-nieuw-decreet-leerlingenbegeleiding-clb/>

<https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=15236>

Stakeholders

Programme “Early detection and intervention” of the Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health (2017-2019)

The programme 'Early detection and intervention' focuses on inter-sectoral cooperation with general practitioners, services of paediatric, actors within integrated youth care, schools, CLB's, children's centres and centres for general welfare work.

Flemish Parliament Act of 27 April 2018 concerning educational guidance (see also 4.6)

School teachers are responsible for early detection and can notice unusual behaviour or worrying signals of students. If they have a suspicion that the physical safety and mental well-being of a student will suffer, school teachers should involve the teacher who is responsible for care and well-being of students (i.e. the guidance counselor or care coordinator). The school in consultation with the student and his parents can decide to refer the student to a CLB.

Guidance to stakeholders

There is no further information on guidance provided by public authorities to guide stakeholders.

However, the Flemish-funded partner organisations of the Flemish Government, such as the Flemish Institute for Healthy Living and VAD, provide information, guidelines and (teaching) material for stakeholders on their website.

Target groups

The action plans focus on vulnerable groups and people with increased vulnerability, such as young people with mental problems.

Funding

The funding of the Flemish Government is provided to actions of the Flemish action plans and to organisations in this field.

Funding mechanisms are described where the programme / intervention is mentioned above.

7.7 Making health facilities more youth friendly

The Policy Paper on Welfare, Public Health and Family ([Beleidsnota Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin](#)) and the [Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2014-2019](#) mentions that children and young people feel good about themselves, are not afraid to say otherwise and know who can help them with questions.

In this connection, each municipality in Flanders must have better management to help find children, young people and adults their way to information on mental health and to help break taboos of mental well-being.

Some actions target minors (0-17 years) and others focus on young adults (17-30 years). The following processes and projects will be undertaken in the policy period 2014-2019:

- the organisation of the 'wide entry' ([brede instap](#)) accessible for young people with a request for help, apart from characteristics of problems

- the extension of 'children's centres' ([Huizen van het Kind](#)) that will regroup all child-related health services and cooperate closely with general practitioners.
- parenting support for parents in vulnerable situations
- increasing the access of social services with community-oriented networks
- realising a wide, accessible and integrated welcome (network) within welfare work

The monitoring and evaluation of these actions is done by the Flemish Government. Each structural subsidised youth associations responsible for these actions must submit an annual progress report. The Flemish Government defines detailed rules.

7.8 Current debates and reforms

The Sixth State Reform

The institutional agreement of December 2011 on the sixth State reform, entitled 'A more efficient federal State and more autonomous entities', provides for substantial State reform that will take place over several stages. This State Reform has led to the transfer of competences from the federal level to the communities and regions. Communities are now responsible for family policy and also competences for mental health.

Draft act provides the foundation for the mental health care of the future

The Flemish Government has approved the [draft act Mental Health on 14 September 2018](#). With this Act, the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family provides the foundation for the future organisation of the mental health care in Flanders. The act includes all existing regulation and legislation and the foundations of the Flemish Action Plan on Mental Health that is already under implementation. Concepts such as networking, functions and programmes but also experience experts play a key role.

Some central points are:

- The fight against stigma and prejudice by increasing knowledge about mental health
- Experience experts – people who have or had some mental health problems – have to play a more important role (in care and policy)
- Mental health care – today still fragmented in sectors and governments – has to be organised in networks
- A divide is made between different care levels: self-care and care of parents, partners, etc. as well as initiatives of informal care; generalist basic care; specialised mental health care.
- A uniform terminology will be used in the networks

8. CREATIVITY AND CULTURE

Creativity and Culture

Special feature

Measures and initiatives of creativity and culture is streamlined across different policy domains at the Flemish level. Creativity and culture is a joint responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Youth, the Flemish Minister of Education and Training and the Flemish Minister of Culture. The Flemish Government also funds organisations active in this field.

Highlights

In 2010 and 2011, the Flemish Government took many measures to support cultural expression and access to culture for young people. Youth culture was put forward as a

priority for local and provincial youth policy. This led to many cooperation projects between different local actors on this theme.

8.1 General context

Main trends in young people's creativity and cultural participation

Participation survey

Every five years a large-scale [participation survey](#) (participatiesurvey) is organized, in which a standardized questionnaire is presented to a representative sample of the Flemish population. This study has to provide the Flemish government with reliable figures on the degree of participation in the domains of culture, youth, media and sports. Furthermore, the participation survey has to provide answers to key questions concerning the barriers to participation, modes and contexts of participation, the degree of overlap in participation in these domains and mechanisms that influence participation. In 2020 the [Knowledge Centre on Cultural and Media Participation](#) will conduct this survey for the 4th time. The previous three surveys have been carried out in 2003-2004, 2009 and 2014. In 2014 3965 Flemish people between 15 and 86 years old participated in the study; 949 of them were 30 years old or younger.

This participation survey of 2014 shows that young people in Flanders are actively involved in culture. Certainly the youngest group is highly active. For instance, 59% of the young people between 15 and 17 year old exercises at least monthly a creative hobby. Among young people aged 18 to 25 this percentage drops to 38% and among 26 to 30 year olds to 34%, but also among these age groups active cultural participation is still significantly higher than among adults.

Regarding receptive cultural participation (e.g. visiting museums, going to the theatre, visiting cultural heritage sites), the participation of young people differs less from that of other age groups than the differences regarding active cultural participation. See table below.

	Young people			Adults
	15-17	18-25	26-30	31-86
Exercises at least monthly a creative hobby	59,0%	37,6%	34,3%	20,6%
Receptive cultural participation past 6 months				
Visiting museums and exhibitions				
Occasional (<3 times)	28,9%	24,3%	24,5%	18,9%
Frequent (at least 3 times)	15,7%	9,1%	11,3%	11,2%
Going to the theatre				

• Occasional (<3 times)	26,5%	18,2%	17%	16,7%
• Frequent (at least 3 times)	6,6%	2,3%	4,5%	5,1%

Visiting cultural heritage

• Occasional (<3 times)	23,5%	21,7%	18,9%	16,6%
• Frequent (at least 3 times)	29,5%	20,8%	27,2%	22,2%

So, cultural participation of young people is certainly not lower than that of adults. However trend analyses on those participation surveys indicate that among more recent generations younger age groups tend to participate less in highbrow cultural activities than they used to do in previous generations (Van Steen, Willekens, Beunen, Siongers, & Lievens, 2015).

On the website www.participatiesurvey.be more information on the previous Participation Surveys is available. On that website you can also find web tools that allow to generate tables and figures from the datasets. The web tools contain the answers to a selection of questions from the surveys of 2009 and 2014 and a selection of trend data from the surveys of 2004, 2009 and 2014.

Survey on Cultural Education – ([Cultuur leren smaken. Een onderzoek bij Vlaamse jongeren naar cultuurparticipatie en cultuureducatie](#) - [Webtool on study](#))

In 2013 the **Cultural Policy Research Centre** (CPRC; now called the [Knowledge Centre on Cultural and Media Participation](#)) conducted a survey on cultural participation and education in Flemish secondary schools. In order to grasp the complexity and diversity of cultural participation and education two samples of secondary schools were drawn: a representative sample of secondary schools, and an extra sample of secondary schools in metropolitan areas. The first sample allowed to draw a detailed portrait of cultural participation and education among young people in Flanders, the second sample allowed to zoom in on the cultural participation and education of the less privileged groups (which are overrepresented in big cities). Based on these two samples the study reached 84 secondary schools in which a total of 5086 pupils (from 1st to 6th grade of secondary education) completed a questionnaire on cultural activities and cultural education in both a school and a leisure context. The survey also addressed both receptive (visiting or attending cultural activities) as active cultural participation (the practicing of a creative hobby).

Almost all young respondents (95%) reported that they had attended at least one cultural activity during the six months previous to the study. Most visited are movies, libraries and musical festivals. Not only the receptive participation rate is high among young people, also their more active participation is high: 61% of the young performed at least once a creative hobby the previous 6 months. Creative working with multimedia was most mentioned as a creative hobby, followed by singing, visual arts, playing music and photography. Most creative hobbies are performed alone or with friends, whereas a considerable smaller share of pupils chooses to perform a creative hobby in part-time arts education or other forms of arts education (mostly for learning to play a musical instrument or drama lessons). Being culturally active in less formal associations is less common except for dancing which is often practiced in dance clubs.

55% of the young respondents had followed or were still following an out-of-school arts education class. When young people attend these arts classes, most of them choose for

highly formal institutions of which part-time arts education (Deeltijds Kunst Onderwijs or DKO) is the most important one. More than a third of the young people in Flanders attend or have attended courses in part-time arts education (DKO). Focus is here on highbrow expressions of art. Non-formal education offered by e.g. youth centres, cultural centres and associations, reaches less young people, except for dance courses. The figures on arts education outside the school show in general a focus on more 'traditional' cultural forms: young people follow arts education classes in visual arts, dance, music or drama. While multimedia and photography, singing and writing are the most performed creative hobby's, they are seldom practiced in arts education classes. They are mainly performed alone or with friends.

Besides, both formal and non-formal arts education classes during leisure time seem mainly practiced in primary education. There is a large backdrop in participation in arts education when young people enter secondary education. This is the case for both formal and non-formal forms of arts education. For instance, while 40% of the young respondents once followed classes in part-time arts education (DKO), this was at the moment of the survey only 15%. During secondary education the participation rate decreases further: in the 1st grade of secondary education (youngsters of approximately 13 years old) a quarter still follows arts education. Among the pupils in the final year of secondary education (approximately 18 years old) this number has declined sharply.

Already at the start of secondary education, **social differences** can be observed. In the first grade (first two years) of secondary education, the social differences are not that big, but are already visible and young people in the vocational tracks (vso) attend significantly less cultural activities than pupils in general education (gso). In upper secondary education, the differences are becoming more pronounced. For instance, only 32% of the pupils in vocational education have been to a library outside the school hours during the previous 6 months, while this percentage in general education is 70%. Also 35% of the pupils in general education have visited at least once a monument, noteworthy building or archaeological site over the past six months while only 12.5% of the pupils enrolled in vocational education have visited such a place. Pupils in technical education take an intermediate position. With regard to active participation or amateur arts the social differences are more pronounced in upper secondary than in lower secondary education. Largest differences are found for playing a musical instrument. In upper secondary education, 27% of the young people in gso plays a musical instrument, while only 9% in vocational education does (See also [Siongers, Lievens & Beunen, 2016](#)).

Also **ethnic differences** are huge, certainly with regard to receptive cultural activities. With regard to active participation, the ethnic differences are less pronounced and even non-existent for some activities. This is for instance the case for dancing, acting and singing. However, again for playing musical instruments differences are large.

Although schools invest in cultural participation and education, the study shows that **schools fail to bridge the social gap**. Moreover, the results indicate that schools perpetuate and even worsen inequalities. Young people from less privileged backgrounds and who participate less during leisure time are overrepresented in vocational education, where they have fewer opportunities to participate in cultural activities.

Administrative data

The Department of Education and Training publishes annually an overview of the most important statistics on Flemish education, e.g. on the school population, staff, infrastructure, ... In these statistical overviews, also figures on Part-time Art Education are included. During the school year 2019-2020 201.238 persons were enrolled in part-time arts education; 75% of these participants were young people (specific age is not mentioned in the publication) with an overrepresentation of girls. The number of girls enrolled in arts education is twice as high as the number of boys (100.854 versus 50.585). This overrepresentation of girls is the largest in dance (only 310 of the 11.601 students are boys), but also in the other domains (visual and audiovisual arts, music, speech arts and drama, dance and cross-domain) girls are overrepresented. Most popular among

young people are the disciplines visual and audiovisual arts and music, with respectively 49.416 and 65.360 young people enrolled in during the school year 2019-2020.

Most recent publication:

- [Flemish Education in figures 2019-2020](#)

Main concepts

Amateur arts

In Flemish cultural policy, a broad concept of amateur arts is used. It entails associations as well as individual artists who are active in the field of theatre, dance, music, (audio)visual arts, and writing. In the [Amateur Arts Decree](#) it is furthermore defined as: every form of art that in the context of socio-cultural life gives each citizen the opportunity to develop oneself through the practice and experience of art and to develop potential creative skills on a voluntary and non-professional basis. More in particular "amateur arts" refers to the following disciplines: theater, dance, photography, visual arts, painting and sculpture and related, music (including instrumental and vocal music, light music, folk music and jazz), literature. More information on amateur arts in Flanders can be found on www.amateurkunsten.be (in Dutch)

Cultural heritage and immovable tangible heritage (<https://www.vlaanderen.be/cultureel-erfgoed>)

In Flanders, a clear distinction is made between policy on **cultural heritage** (moving and intangible) and **immovable tangible heritage** (e.g. monuments and landscapes), see 8.2 for more information cultural heritage policy in Flanders.

Cultural heritage is described as all the valuable that we received from our predecessors, but also objects, stories, documents and traditions that we pass on to these and next generations.

Moving cultural heritage is the heritage that is preserved in museums, archives, libraries, documentation centers, churches and monasteries, theology circles, heritage associations, schools and theaters ...

Intangible heritage also includes less tangible things, such as stories, traditions, parties, songs, dialects ...

Immovable tangible heritage includes architectural, archaeological, landscape, heraldic and maritime heritage.

8.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Main actors in policy making

Cultural responsibilities in Belgium and Flanders

In **Belgium**, the **Communities** have exclusive competence for cultural policy and its implementation. The **Government of Flanders** ([Vlaamse Regering](#)) can issue laws to that effect, called **Flemish Parliament Acts**. This implies that there is no Ministry of Culture at national level, but three Ministries of Culture at Community level, respectively for the Flemish, French and German speaking communities. Each community has developed its own policy with specific instruments and structures for implementation. In Flanders the Department of Culture, Youth and Media has been entrusted with this task.

Cultural Heritage policy in Belgium is however a shared competence amongst **communities and regions** (for the difference between communities and regions, see the [official information site on Belgium](#)).

In Flanders the **Flemish community**, within its cultural competence, is responsible for movable tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It concerns policy regarding institutions and their collections, cultural heritage expert organisations, heritage objects such as paintings, sculptures, machines, furniture, ... and also policy regarding transmission of habits and traditions, knowledge and competences, feasts and everyday life, ...

The **Flemish Region** is responsible for immovable tangible heritage e.g. monuments, sites, landscapes, archaeology, ...

Certain **large cultural institutions** in **Brussels** remain the responsibility of the federal government of Belgium.

Ministries and policy areas

In Flanders, there are two policy areas with responsibilities regarding creativity and culture for young people:

- The policy area of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media
- The policy domain of Education and Training

The policy area of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media

The competent ministers regarding creativity and culture for young people within this policy are the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Youth.

The Department of Culture, Youth and Media within the policy area of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media is the main governmental authority responsible for creativity and culture for young people. Also, this policy area focuses on cultural learning within the non-formal and informal sphere, especially within family context (s) and in leisure time. Various organizations explicitly or implicitly assume a cultural educational role:

Within **cultural** policy, cultural education towards young people is one of the objectives of organizations in the sub-sectors of cultural heritage, arts, circus, amateur arts, literature, and film.

In addition to supporting cultural education associations, **youth policy** also focuses on supporting experimental projects on the cultural education of children and young people, and on supra-local projects to promote the artistic expression of young people in youth homes.

In the context of **media policy**, the Flemish Knowledge Center for Media Literacy teaches people to deal more critically and consciously with our mediatised society.

The policy domain Education and Training

Within the [Policy domain Education and Training](#) the **Flemish Minister for Education** is responsible for formal cultural arts education within the school context.

More information on the constellation of this policy domain and the underlying structure can be found in 6.2.

Of specific importance towards arts education is CANON (**CANON Cultuurcel**). CANON Cultuurcel

- provides information, inspiration and financial support to teachers regarding cultural education
- conducts research and consultations on cultural education at Flemish and European level.

Cross-sectorial cooperation

Between culture, youth and education

The Flemish government has recognized the importance of arts and cultural education for a long time. In a protocol agreement dd. 18/02/2002, the Flemish Ministers of Education

and Culture at the time agreed to develop a policy on the different levels of culture and education. Both ministers jointly and separately took various initiatives to implement this protocol.

In order to conduct a structural dialogue between the two policy areas, four advisory groups and one steering group were installed, including representatives of both departments in addition to a number of external experts. The Steering Group's objective was to set up a concrete timetable and action plan to achieve the objectives of the protocol while the advisory groups had the task of giving concrete recommendations and advice to the steering committee to achieve structural cooperation. These advisory groups focused on the different fields within which cooperation between Culture and Education can be formed, respectively, school time, leisure time, professional time and teacher education. The conclusions and recommendations issued partly led to the respective policy papers of both ministers, after which the steering and advisory groups were dissolved.

Yet the focus on this issue and - correspondingly - the need for close cooperation between the policy domains Culture, Youth and Education only gained momentum in later years.

Since then, regular consultations have been held between both administrations for information exchange and cooperation on the above topics. CANON Cultuurcel is the partner within the Policy Domain Education and Training. For example, various studies and publications have been prepared together ('Heritage Education in Flemish Education and XS-About Children, Culture & Communication', 2007).

Important documents in this regard are the concept notes 'Growing in Culture' ('[Groeien in cultuur](#)', 2012, see section 8.3) and 'Continuing to Grow in Culture' ('[Doorgroeien in cultuur](#)' 2013, see section 8.3). Based on these memoranda, a joint strategic policy framework was developed on cultural education for children and young people.

With the action plans 'Education and Culture: together for more and better' ('[Cultuur en Onderwijs – Samen voor meer en beter](#)', 2016-2017, see section 8.3) and 'Education and Culture: together for even more and better II' ('[Onderwijs en Cultuur: samen voor nog meer en beter II](#)', 2018-2019), steps were taken towards such a joint policy.

8.3 National strategy on creativity and culture for young people

Existence of a national strategy

Currently, the Flemish government implements a transversal policy for **cultural education**. The policy is not organized by sub-sectors, but runs across the different cultural sectors. Therefore one speaks about cultural education in a broad sense, of which art education, social-artistic work and heritage education are part of.

In recent years, the respective ministers for culture and education worked more closely together in their policies on cultural education and joint initiatives were taken. This led to a joint strategy, which was included in the following four official documents.

1. Concept note 'Growing in culture' ('[Groeien in cultuur](#)', 2012):

On January 20, 2012, the Flemish Government approved the concept note "Growing in culture". The note addresses the need for more transversal policy attention for cultural education, outlines the contours of a common strategic policy framework and a first action plan. This made it possible to develop a joint policy in the long run, to build a single quality framework for cultural education, to better align existing regulations and to set up joint actions. All actions, mentioned in this policy paper, aimed at providing children and young people with all opportunities to develop their creative talents, thus enabling a lively interaction between culture, youth and educational practice.

2. Concept note 'Continuing to Grow in Culture' ('Doorgroeien in cultuur', 2013)

The Flemish government approved the concept note on Cultural education "Doorgroeien in Cultuur" on July 19, 2013. This note sets out a strategic policy framework for cultural education for adults (18-plus) and explains the policy vision and objectives. Also, the note entails some actions and initiatives that contribute to these objectives.

Doorgroeien in Cultuur is an additional complementary note on "Groeien in Cultuur", starting, like the previous note, from the need for a more overarching culture education policy, this time for 18-plus. In *Doorgroeien in Cultuur*, the key question is: how can we appeal to 18-plus people to "grow in" in different life stages and in different life domains? Also in this document the interfaces between Culture, Education and Youth remain as a starting point. Making connections between the different types of learning environments (part-time arts education, social association, art or heritage organization, an amateur company ...) is a priority.

3. Action Plan 'Culture and Education: Together for more and better' (Actieplan 'Cultuur en Onderwijs – Samen voor meer en beter', 2016)

On 14/10/2016, the Flemish Government adopted the "Action Plan Culture and Education: Together for more and better". Based on this plan, Flemish Ministers of Education and of Culture strengthened their cooperation. It was their ambition to enjoy each child and every young person, regardless of the home and socioeconomic background, of culture. Professional organizations from the cultural sector are given a more pronounced role.

4. Action Plan 'Education and Culture: together for even more and better II' (Actieplan 'Onderwijs en Cultuur: samen voor nog meer en beter II', 2018-2019)

With this action plan, the policy areas culture and education wished to anchor their joint policy even more firmly. This through a multi-year plan with a clear mission and vision that is propagated by the competent ministers and senior officials and further concretised in operational annual plans with concrete actions.

This action plan provides a more formal and structural framework that includes the following:

- (1) both competent ministers and senior officials of the relevant departments and agencies endorse for a period of 2 years (2018-2019) a number of shared challenges and interests at strategic level;
- (2) each year an operational plan (action plan) with a linked financial plan is drawn up in implementation of these strategic choices;
- (3) a sounding board group is set up from the relevant sectors and involved in the preparation and realization of these plans.

Scope and contents

Scope:

With the current Action Plan 'Education and Culture: together for even more and better II' and the previous concept notes, it is the ambition to let every child and every young person enjoy culture, regardless of the home and socio-economic background.

Professional organizations in the cultural sector are given a more pronounced role in this objective. Cultuurkuur.be will be further developed as a digital platform to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between culture and education, both virtual and in reality.

Content:

The action plan takes as a reference the theory of 'Culture in the Mirror' ([Cultuur in de Spiegel, CiS](#)), a theory which defines culture as a cognitive process of giving meaning by means of four cultural skills: observing, imagining, conceptualizing and analyzing.

Actions are rolled out over three domains.

- Further roll-out of CiS: information and communication on the theoretical framework "Cultuur in de Spiegel"
- Facilitate dialogue and cooperation between the policy domains of culture and education, e.g. by the optimization of the digital platform "[CultuurKuur](#)", the organization of a yearly conference on cultural education
- Providing professionals in both cultural and educational sector, possibilities for training and networking to work within the theoretical framework, to work together and to learn from each other
- Deepening content knowledge: This entails supporting, disseminating and facilitating knowledge building and sharing (e.g. by means of pilot projects, seminars, ...).

Responsible authority for the implementation of the strategy

Existing channels within the culture and education policy areas will be activated to achieve the goals. In particular CANON Cultuurcel (within the Communication Division of the Department Education and Training) and the Department of Culture, Youth and Media will be responsible for implementation of the strategy. They will for instance:

- be responsible for the communication of the theoretical framework and empirical results
- be in charge for the training of experts in cultural education
- guide pilot projects

There hasn't been yet an evidence-based monitoring or evaluation of the implementation of the action plan been conducted.

Revisions/updates

The action note sets out a number of objectives for 2018 and 2019. However, the two policy areas wish to go beyond the stated objectives and actions in this short-term plan and to set benchmarks in the long term.

To do this substantiated, the note and follow-up trails will be followed by a group of educational and cultural professionals with experience in the practice of cultural education. This focus group will be tasked to monitor closely the policy developments and monitor the actions listed in the note, and to report and make proposals for adaptation or improvement where necessary.

8.4 Promoting culture and cultural participation**Reducing obstacles to young people's access to culture**

In Flanders different policies, programs, projects and initiatives are introduced to facilitate access to cultural activities. Most of those initiatives are however not exclusively directed to young people, but often they have a large impact on young people. However, in several museums, concert halls and theatres there are reduced fees for people under 26 years old.

UiTPAS-Vlaanderen (UiTPAS Flanders)

The [UiTPAS](#) is a card developed by public (see 8.2). This card combines attractive benefits for all cardholders with financial discounts for people with low or fixed incomes. In this way people in poverty can participate in leisure activities with reduction rates but without

stigmatization. The UiTPAS-card is not specific directed to young people, but a lot of young people make use of it. This is among others due to the fact that many schools use the UiTPAS system to apply it in a structurally way to let young people participate in (compulsory) school trips. Some schools also decided to provide all their pupils with an UiTPAS. In this way, they avoid the stigmatization of pupils in poverty. Besides, a toolkit for youth associations was launched in 2021. This toolkit shows how the UiTPAS can be used to make youth associations more diverse and inclusive. So, also youth associations are increasingly using the UiTPAS.

UiTPAS was launched in June 2012 as a pilot project in Aalst and surrounding municipalities. After a positive evaluation by the Flemish government, the program started in Brussels (under the name of Paspartoe) and in Ghent. In 2015, Ostend and the Southwest region also started implementing UiTPAS. Several other regions and cities followed in the next years. In 2019 the UiTPAS was already active in 47 cities and municipalities.

In 2019 there were approximately 227.322 cardholders. Of this total number of cardholders approximately 121.574 were people with low or fixed incomes who could use the UiTPAS with reduction rates.

Publiq who guides and follows up the UiTPAS registers anonymous real-time data on the participation patterns and preferences of UiTPAS users. This way, governments can gain a better insight into the participatory behavior of their citizens in general and of people in poverty in particular.

[Demos](#)

Demos is a public research and advocacy organization that has been active since 2008. They focus on social and policy developments in culture, youth work and sports. Demos contributes to the development of policies and practices, especially with a focus on groups and practices that are underrepresented and underexposed in society. The emphasis is on research, knowledge building and dissemination in these sectors. One example regarding their work on cultural participation is their program line on participatory art practices which are an important lever for cultural participation of groups that are underexposed or underrepresented in our society.

Disseminating information on cultural opportunities

[Publiq](#)

At the request of the Flemish government, publiq facilitates participation in culture and leisure. Publiq is a non-profit organization with a management agreement with the Flemish government. Through targeted programs and data driven marketing, publiq aims at connecting people with activities and removing barriers for participation. Publiq **informs** about cultural and leisure activities in Flanders and Brussels. In order to do that publiq has developed the UiT network of more than 250 regional partners in Flanders and Brussels. Websites, magazines and brochures of local governments feature a recognizable UiT label, which shows the way to activities in the neighbourhood.

Public has also a wider **activating** mission. They offer local governments within the UiT network a useful set of tools with which they can develop policies to encourage public participation.

Publiq pays special attention to children and young people, e.g.:

- the label '[Vlieg](#)' ('Fly') announces cultural activities for the very young (under 12). [UiT met vlieg](#) is part of the UiT Database and is a leisure agenda focusing on children. On [UiTmetVlieg.be](#) one can find tailored information on trips and activities for and with children. The label Vlieg (Fly) makes the culture and leisure offer for families with young children (-12 years) visible and recognizable. In view of the frequently-addressed needs of parents regarding the timely finding of creative holiday camps, publiq also decided

to adopt and integrate the website "[Kampzoeker](#)" (*Camp finder*). Cultural centers and leisure services are using this fly-label extensively in their communication.

- [UiTX](#) (previous called BILL) informs young people on cultural activities and events in Flanders and Brussels and Europe through collaboration with the European Youth Card Association. With UiTX, 16 to 26-year-olds in Flanders and Brussels can discover more culture: a tailor-made agenda, inspiring selections via email and social media, competitions, campaigns or actions in schools... UiTX communicates to young people via Instagram, Facebook and website. UiTX is being developed in collaboration with young people and several volunteer youth reporters are involved in the content of UiTX. UiTX uses also low-threshold and original awareness-raising campaigns and actions in school campuses and cities to reach young people. Also, the youth information platform "[WAT WAT](#)" uses the UiTX youth agenda widget to inform a broader range of young people. In 2020 there were 284,637 consultations on BILL.be, a lot higher than the year before and this despite corona.
- Publiq focuses also on cultural education during leisure time. With the Network Vitamin C ([Netwerk Vitamine C](#)), publiq connects actors from the broad cultural-educational field. Vitamin C is a learning network of field workers and policy-makers who want to connect children and young people with art and culture.

Cultuurconnect

Sectoral plans, such as a cultural policy plan or a youth policy plan, do not exist separately and must be integrated into the strategic multiannual planning of municipalities. Cultural education falls under the decree on Local Culture Policy ([decreet Lokaal Cultuurbeleid](#)) identified as one of the Flemish policy accents. For the local youth policy, 'youth culture' has been put forward as a Flemish priority, which includes:

1. the way the municipality wants to respond to youth cultural expressions of children and youth and how they want to support, stimulate and facilitate;
2. the way the municipality wants to stimulate, support and facilitate the artistic expressive experience of children and young people. This also includes aspects of cultural education.

Cultuurconnect supports cultural actors in integrating cultural education in an integral (with all partners from local cultural policy) and transversal (in collaboration with other partners, such as education, community development, youth, social services or other services) way.

Cultuurkuur

[Cultuurkuur](#) is a platform where culture and education meet and is an initiative of [CANON Cultuurcel](#) and [publiq](#) on behalf of the Flemish Government. On the platform cultural-educational organizations and artists introduce themselves and their activities (workshops, shows, lectures, etc.) to schools. This way schools get an overview of all cultural activities offered to schools.

Teachers can browse through the range of activities and make a choice that suits the age of their pupils, the learning objectives, the region or the fields of interest. Teachers and schools can contact the organizers directly to make further arrangements. In addition, Cultuurkuur publishes practical examples and informs about subsidies for cultural projects in schools.

The site also encourages interaction. Teachers can recommend or discuss activities and by doing so, inspire other teachers. They can also follow the pages of cultural providers to keep up with their new projects.

Knowledge of cultural heritage amongst young people

In 24 February 2017, the Flemish Government ratified the new Cultural Heritage Decree. This decree regulates the support of organizations in Flanders who occupy with cultural heritage activities. The Cultural Heritage Decree of 24 February 2017 draws the framework of support for the cultural heritage field in Flanders. The decree aims to promote care and dealing with moving and intangible heritage by developing the cultural heritage field, promoting qualitative and sustainable cultural heritage work and enhancing the social embedding of cultural heritage. However, there is no explicit focus on young people.

A focus on young people in awareness-programs was until recently rather rare in Flanders, but in recent years more attention goes out to making young people more aware of cultural heritage.

[FARO](#), the Flemish support center for the cultural heritage sector, pays for instance special attention to cultural heritage and young people. In 2021, together with Canon Cultuurcel and the Department of Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish government, they organized the Day of Cultural Education (more information – in Dutch- can be found on this [padlet](#)). Recently FARO contributed also the EDUbox Culture ([EDUbox Cultuur](#)). On the basis of this EDUbox, secondary education teachers can stimulate young people in their reflection on and experience of culture. In this EDUbox special attention is paid to cultural heritage.

Regarding the development of knowledge of cultural heritage amongst young people FARO developed (together with other partners) also:

- The publication "*Heritage is*" ([Erfgoed is](#)) with reflections on the significance of heritage for education and society
- The digital curriculum [My past future](#) for the second and third stage of secondary education (in cooperation with [Canon Cultuurcel](#) and [de Veerman](#)).
- The digital block calendar *Heritage: stoneware!* ([Erfgoed Steengoed](#)), a calendar developed for tablets and smartboards. Several heritage organisations worked on this calendar and in this way they bring a wide range of interesting images and stories into the classroom
- *Heritage Wise* ([Erfgoedwijs](#)), a site developed by [FARO](#), [Histories](#) and [Herita](#), in cooperation with [Klascement](#). where everyone can share educational resources (teaching packages, excursions...) related to heritage to a community of more than 250,000 teachers.
- *Heritage game* ([Erfgoedspel](#)): FARO and [Oetang Learning Designers](#) created a heritage (night) game for youth organisations. The game is geared towards members of youth organisations between 13 and 16 years old and can be played in every municipality.

Another example is the project "Young saves Old" ([Jong redt Oud](#)), initiated by the Provincial Cultural Heritage Center (PCCE) and the Limburg municipal councils. The project *Jong redt Oud* is an educational and participatory project in which children and adolescents "adopt" a heritage site, monument or landscape with heritage value in their area.

Heritage Classes & Citizenship ([Erfgoedklassen en Burgerschap](#)) is an initiative of the Brussels-Capital Region. Since 2005, the Heritage and Citizenship project has been focusing on Brussels schools through activities such as walks and quests by roaming the school district. These activities, where the heritage is approached in an interactive manner, bring young people into contact with immovable heritage. Since 2012, the Heritage Classes provide a set of educational packages that allow teachers with a young audience to actively discover the Brussels heritage. These files are available for free on the website of Heritage Classes with the aim of reaching a much larger number of students.

8.5 Developing cultural and creative competences

Acquiring cultural and creative competences through education and training

Formal education in regular education

Formal compulsory education

From 1 September 2019, new educational objectives for secondary education are gradually introduced. The Flemish Government approved on 13 July 2018 the new attainment targets for the first grade of secondary education ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de eerste graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)). The attainment targets for upper secondary education will be implemented on 1 September 2021 in the second grade of secondary education and on 1 September 2023 in the third grade.

The new attainment targets are developed in function of 16 key competences. One of these 16 key competences is cultural awareness and cultural expression. The 10 final objectives related to cultural awareness and cultural expression for the first grade of secondary education are:

- The pupils recognize the importance of perceived artistic and cultural expressions for themselves and their own environment. (transversal - attitudinal)
- Based on observations of artistic and cultural expressions pupils distinguish the sensory perceptible, the intentions and the subject matter of it. (transversal)
- The pupils describe the interaction between the perceptually perceptible, the intentions and the subject of art and cultural expressions on the basis of criteria that have been provided. (transversal)
- The pupils relate art and culture expressions to the context in which they occur. (transversal)
- The pupils express their thoughts and feelings when observing art and cultural expressions. (transversal)
- The pupils use their own expressive experience to express their appreciation for art and cultural expressions. (transversal)
- The pupils create artistic work from a defined assignment and their own imagination.
- The pupils experiment with various artistic elements such as language, body, space, time, form, colour, sound, digital data.
- The pupils show their artistic work using elementary presentation techniques.
- The pupils reflect on the basis of provided criteria about their artistic product and process and about that of fellow pupils.

Some of these goals are considered transversal goals, meaning that they are an integral part of other key competences, others are considered content objectives. The division into subjects or subject clusters is the domain of school boards, school teams and teachers. This applies both to the transversal and the content key competencies/objectives.

Separate subjects

In policy documents such as the Policy Note on Culture 2014-2019 ([Beleidsnota Cultuur 2014-2019](#)), Policy Note on Education 2014-2019 ([Beleidsnota Onderwijs 2014-2019](#)), and the Action Plans 'Education and Culture: together for more and better' ('**Cultuur en Onderwijs – Samen voor meer en beter**', 2016-2017, see section 8.3) and 'Education and Culture: together for even more and better II' ('[Onderwijs en Cultuur: samen voor nog meer en beter II](#)', 2018-2019, see section 8.3), the importance of cultural education and the need to promote the artistic and creative abilities of young people was strongly emphasized. In the current Policy Notes on Culture ([Beleidsnota Cultuur 2019-2024](#)) and

Education ([Beleidsnota Onderwijs 2019-2024](#)) cultural education is however less emphasized.

Also, in the educational practice the status and provision of cultural education is less prominent. Cultural education is only a compulsory subject in the first two years of secondary education. In these first two years goals are defined for musical and arts education. In upper secondary education schools are not obliged to offer courses on culture or creativity.

In Arts Secondary Education (kunst secundair onderwijs or kso, see also [Eurydice](#) for an overview of the educational streams in Flemish education; approximately 2% of the pupils are enrolled in this track) art courses are compulsory. The type of art courses that are offered differ according to the specific discipline the pupil follows. Disciplines that are offered in arts education are e.g. architectural education, artistic education, audiovisual education, ballet, ...).

In general (algemeen secundair onderwijs or aso), technical (technisch secundair onderwijs or tso) and vocational educational (beroepssecundair onderwijs or bso) tracks art subjects are optional and it is up to individual schools whether they offer the subject and often also up to individual students whether they study the subject when offered.

Integrated in other subjects

In upper secondary education cultural education is mainly integrated in other courses (see also –in Dutch- [Onderwijsdoelen](#)). For instance, dance education is integrated in sports, literature in the language courses, cultural heritage in history courses.

In the discipline human sciences (offered in general secondary education) more attention is paid to cultural education. Their main courses are behavioral and cultural sciences. Cultural sciences is broader defined than cultural education as defined in the above mentioned policy documents, but the curriculum on cultural sciences does entail some final goals on arts.

For instance, in the second grade pupils must know to ([in Dutch](#)) :

- Describe how art works can express values
- Compare different appreciations of arts

And in the third grade in human sciences, pupils must know to ([in Dutch](#)):

- Illustrate and analyze the role and social meaning of artistic expressions for society
- Analyze artistic expressions from an art-critical, historical and cultural angle

In vocational education, one of the final goals for the subject PAV (project general courses) in second grade is to respect the historical-cultural heritage.

Cross-curricular theme ([vakoverschrijdend thema](#))

Creativity and cultural education is mainly addressed as a cross-curricular theme ([vakoverschrijdend thema](#)) in Flemish education and this for all pupils in upper secondary education. These cross-curricular final objectives are minimum objectives which do not appertain to a particular subject of study, but which are pursued by several subjects or educational projects and activities (via formal learning as well as via non-formal learning). The cross-curricular final objectives entail an obligation of effort for the schools, not for the pupils.

The cross-curricular final objectives apply to all grades in secondary education (see Chapter 6 on education and training for more information). They have a common core of essential skills which are generically formulated and relate to different skills and attitudes. Two of those are relevant in the development of creativity and culture, namely:

- Creativity
 - pupils can develop and implement original ideas and solutions

- pupils take steps to realize innovations
- Aesthetic skills
 - pupils can experience beauty
 - pupils can create beauty

These skills and competencies are crystallized in 7 contexts: physical health and safety, mental health, socio-relational development, the environment and sustainable development, the politico-judicial society, the socio-economic society, the socio-cultural society.

Art-related cultural exploration as part of social identity development, social interaction and social participation is one of the focal points in the context of the socio-cultural society. Objective is that when dealing with art, media and heritage, pupils take on individual and social learning processes. This is concretised in two goals (both in second grade):

- Pupils are actively involved in the culture and art that surrounds them;
- Pupils illustrate the mutual influence of art, culture and technology, politics, economics, science and philosophy of life

Art academies or part-time arts education ([Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs](#))

Part-time art education ([Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs](#) or DKO) is education in leisure time aimed at both children, young people as well as adults. It allows students to get acquainted with art in all its expressions, to develop a critical approach towards art, and to practice certain forms of art themselves, individually or in group (e.g. in an orchestra, a dance group, or a theatre company). Part-time art education also prepares some young people for a professional artistic career in higher art education.

On 28 January 2018, The Flemish Parliament approved a Decree on part-time artistic education ([Decreet Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs](#), published on 11/05/2018). The new policy was launched on 1 September 2018.

Part-time art education offers four fields of study:

- Dance
- Music
- Visual and audiovisual arts
- Word Art - Drama

Participants in part-time art education enrol on a voluntary basis and pay a registration fee. Children can start from the age of 6 in 1 of these 4 domains or they can opt for a cross-domain initiation course, in which at least 2 domains are covered simultaneously. Each domain consists of different stages. When a student successfully completes a stage (s)he receives a final certificate which indicates the level (s)he reached.

The programs in part-time art education comprise an entire school year of maximum 40 weeks, which lasts from 1 September until 30 June. Some schools combine the weekly teaching periods of certain subjects into fortnightly or monthly classes.

Non-formal learning and youth work

Non-formal arts and cultural education in Flanders is mainly the responsibility of the Culture and Youth policy fields of the Flemish Community (Department of Culture, Youth and Media). Four types of subsidies are relevant with concern to non-formal learning on creativity and culture, namely subsidies for cultural education associations, subsidies for experimental youth work, general national youth work organizations and youth houses.

1. Youth Work – associations for cultural education

Youth work organizations can apply for subsidies as an association for cultural education ([cultuureducatieve vereniging](#)). To be subsidized as an association for cultural education, the organization must first meet a number of general conditions (see Article 17 of the Decree of 20 January 2012 on the implementation of a renewed youth and child rights policy - [Decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid](#)).

To be recognized, the association must realize at least six times a year one of the following modules:

- organizing a cultural educational activity offer for young people in leisure time;
- organizing a cultural educational activity offer for the youth outside of leisure time;
- training of cultural education counselors;
- guiding young people to an artistic product;
- guiding local cultural education initiatives for youth

When an association is recognized then

- this recognition is valid for an indefinite period, provided that the association continues to act in concordance with the conditions for grant and recognition,
- receives a basic operating subsidy of 80 000 € per year;

The cultural education associations that receive an operating grant may also receive project grants for initiatives that

- stimulate the artistic creativity of children or young people
- (or) children or young people learn to understand the language of the arts.

Only projects that respond to developments or opportunities that could not be met when drafting the policy note and which have a special character for the association are eligible for subsidization.

In 2021 16 associations were recognized as cultural education associations and received operating subsidies (in total for 3.193.788€) . Only some of these organisations focus exclusively on children, the others focus (also) on young people:

- **Artforum** (Artforum recently merged with Urban Words to form [Trill](#)): Artforum is a national youth service that gives children, young people and young artists the opportunity to participate actively and/or receptively in professionally framed arts and culture activities and projects. These activities and projects are located within the broad field of creativity, cultural education, social-artistic and/or artistic work .
- **Casa Blanca**: Casa Blanca is an association that aims at developing, executing and supervising art projects for children and young people. They offer activities in a leisure context as well as in school, their activities include e.g. cultural educational programs and workshops.
- **Compagnie Mila**: Compagnie MiLa gives children the opportunity to develop their talents in theater, musical, dance, film, circus, song and spectacle during culture-educational camps.
- **Danskant**: *Danskant* uses dance, music and movement as an educational and active cultural experience with the aim of promoting personality development, social integration and participation among children and young people.
- **Das Kunst**: Das Kunst wants to stimulate active art experience from a playful angle. Through musical projects and multi-day camps for schools and youth services, children and young people have the opportunity to actively and creatively participate in the activities and come into contact with the various musical domains. Das Kunst aims at

children and adolescents aged 6 to 18, in school and leisure time, and to their supervisors.

- **Youth and Dance** ([Jeugd en Dans](#)): *Jeugd en Dans* propagates amateur dance in all its diversity, by organizing and supervising youth work activities, and providing information and documentation.
- **Youth Theater Ondersteboven** ([Jeugdtheater Ondersteboven](#), JTO) : Youth Theater Ondersteboven is a youth theater company in Waasland. JTO is mainly a home for short workshops, longer courses, courses and vacations. In addition to training, JTO also produces theater and musical productions for children and young people.
- **Kamo** (became [Amadeo Kollektif](#)): Through active arts education Kamo wants to develop the personal, creative, social and communication skills of children from 2,5 to 12 years.
- **Larf!**: Larf! is an arts education association that represents a youth theater where theater projects are made with children and young people. Children and young people can discover and experience the game of theater in an open house. By means of workshops and performances, Larf! reconciles theater and education.
- **Bamm**: Bamm's general objective is 'active arts education': learning, over and through the arts through active forms of work. Bamm wants to bring children and young people into contact with theater, music, dance, visual arts and audiovisual arts through their own expressive activity. In addition, Bamm offers contemporary arts education at existing art exhibitions.
- **Musical On Stage**: Musical On Stage's main objectives include practicing theater arts and musicals, contributing to general cultural expansion, organizing educational projects and internships, composing music, organizing cultural excursions and organizing workshops and training.
- **Muzische Workshops**: Muzische Workshops stimulates art and cultural education by organizing activities in which experiencing, experimenting and creating are central.
- **Passerelle**: Passerelle wants children and young people to discover the world of contemporary dance. They bring young amateurs in dialogue with young choreographers and artists from other disciplines. This way, they bridge the world of professional dance with that of the amateur.
- **Piazza**: Piazza is a mobile multidisciplinary educational art organization, which gives every youngster the opportunity to develop creatively by means of different multimedia techniques. The organisation focuses on young people from the age of 12 in schools, neighborhoods, youth events, youth houses and cultural centers.
- **Spelenderwijs**: Spelenderwijs specializes in educational projects and workshops on science and cultural education. They also bring theater performances and science shows.
- **Villa Basta**: Villa Basta wants to discover and stimulate creative enjoyment in all young people from 6 to 30 years to develop it into creative talent. Through workshops and projects on site, children and young people are stimulated. This growth is realized by means of several workshops and studios.

2. Experimental projects ([Experimentele projecten](#))

Since 1 January 2013, the Flemish government (based on the Decree of 20 January 2012 on the implementation of a renewed youth and child rights policy - [Decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid](#)) grants subsidies to associations that set up an experimental project in the following areas:

- Youth work
- Information to or about youth and youth participation

- Cultural education

Experimental projects focus on new developments and needs that live in the youth sector and more generally in youth. They are innovative in terms of methodology or content, for example startups of youth work through new methods or attracting new audiences.

In 2020, 11 projects were subsidized. Five of them are geared toward young people and focus on the development of culture and creativity competences:

- **MatheMagic (project of Dig-IT):** Dig-IT links mathematics to visual art through workshops for children. The project tries to stimulate a positive view on mathematics through art & cultural education.
- **Breakthrough with Glass (Doorbraak in glas, project of Gent Glas):** various workshops for young people that focus on a range of artistic techniques including drawing, sculpting with glass, glass painting and glass fusing.
- **Homaar** (project of Villa Omaar): Homaar is a place for psychologically vulnerable young people between 15 and 23 years old, who need a temporary break and guidance. During a few weeks the youngsters stay in a small group to catch their breath. During their stay the adolescents can follow diverse creative workshops (e.g. on music, arts, words), tailored to the demands of the young people involved.
- **Steam** (project of [Nerdlab](#)): Nerdlab is working on the development of a STEAM technique in which the A (arts) is added to the STEM methodology.
- **House of the Wilderness (Huis van de Wildernis, project of Sering):** House of the Wilderness offers an imaginative and educational creation process for children with the main objective of restoring the bond between child and nature. By intertwining methodologies from participatory theater and theater therapy with the natural sciences, one comes to a "played" science, in which children rediscover nature and put old knowledge in a new coat to be able to pass it on themselves.

3. National Youth Work ([Landelijk Georganiseerde Jeugdverenigingen](#))

Also within subsidized national youth work, some organizations focus on cultural participation, some examples (other examples can be found in 8.7):

- **Young Heroes (Jonge Helden):** *Jonge Helden* aims to promote game and play to children and youth in a framework of creativity and with attention to participation, environment and community life. To this end, CREFI organizes vacations and courses, youth hosts are supported, and play-offs have been worked out.
- **King Kevin (Koning Kevin):** Koning Kevin aims to stimulate and develop a playful, creative and artistic attitude. Therefore Koning Kevin programs a range of initiatives in which dance, drama, music, image, media, game, but also creative thinking, figurative theater, cooking, writing are addressed.

4. Youth houses ([jeugdhuizen](#))

Youth houses are open and low-threshold meeting places for young people, which can be found in almost every Flemish municipality. Youth houses are considered to be places where impulses are given for diversity, youth culture, attention to vulnerable groups, sense of creativity and enterprise.

On 19 June 2013, the Flemish Parliament asked the Flemish Government to recognize youth houses as 'anchor points' for young people in local communities and to consider them as partners, especially in domains that are also part of the Flemish youth policy plan: diversity, youth culture, broad schools, vulnerable groups and sense of creativity and enterprise (see: Resolution on Flemish policy regarding youth houses – [Resolutie betreffende het Vlaamse beleid ten aanzien van jeugdhuizen](#)).

With the subsidies for supra-local projects of youth houses, the Flemish government wants to respond to changes that occur in the youth house sector and give impetus for creativity and innovation.

Once every four years, the Flemish Government can grant operating subsidies to professionalized youth houses if they respond to the priorities of the Flemish youth and children's rights policy. Stimulating artistic expression is one of the three priorities.

Specialised training for professionals in the education, culture and youth fields

Training for teachers in formal education

Since the academic year 2019-2020, pre-service teacher training programmes have been set up exclusively by higher education institutions (see also [Eurydice](#)). Since September 2019, there are six types/types of teacher training programmes in Flanders with, in addition, the specific teacher training programme being temporarily phased out. Each teacher training programme has its own finality and is aimed at a specific group of prospective teachers:

- Educational graduate programme (non-university higher education first degree qualification) for secondary education (for VET subjects only)
- Educational bachelor's programme for pre-school education
- Educational bachelor's programme for primary education
- Educational bachelor's programme for (lower) secondary education
- Educational master's programme for (higher) secondary education
- Educational master's programme for art subjects

There are different organizations (non-profit organizations, university colleges, universities, etc.) that offer in-service training projects. These are recorded (purely for information reasons, with no evaluation purpose) in an in-service training database ([nascholingsdatabase](#)) on the Klascement-website that can be consulted online. And also on the [Cultuurkuur](#) site, professionals in education, culture and youth work can find some trainings and workshops on teaching methodologies for cultural education.

A special form of in-service training is **Kunstkuur** ([in Dutch](#)). Kunstkuur stimulates and finances collaboration between a primary, secondary or higher education school and a nearby arts academy. For a period of three school years, arts teachers of the arts academies share the classroom with teachers from a school or higher education institution. This way teachers of arts academies bring artistic expertise into the classroom and art teachers become more skilled in dealing with diverse class groups and refine their didactic actions. Also third cultural education partners can be involved. Support is given in the form of extra hours for the arts academy and operating resources.

Training for professionals in non-formal education

In 2012, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media ([Departement Cultuur, Jeugd en Media](#)) and the Department of Education and Training ([Departement Onderwijs en Vorming](#)) made a description of the occupation cluster 'cultural educator' and developed a competency profile for facilitators for artistic practitioners. The described competencies are intended as an in-depth guide to education, training and recognition of acquired competencies (EVC).

Several of the organizations mentioned in 8.5.1. offer management training and animator courses, e.g. [Mooss](#), [Jonge Helden](#),

Since 2017 [Canon Cultuurcel](#) and the Department of Culture, Youth and Media organize an **Expert Training Cultural Education**. This training is aimed at directors, policy staff, practitioners, educators and pedagogical counselors ... from the wide field of culture and education. Participants are immersed in the theory, policy and practice of cultural

education for a number of months, focusing on the framework of “Culture in the Mirror” ([Cultuur in de Spiegel](#)).

Providing quality access to creative environments

There is a great diversity of cultural and youth infrastructure in Flemish cities and municipalities. This infrastructure is managed by several actors.

Cultural and youth infrastructure can be owned by private legal entities (including non-profit organizations), municipal authorities or the Flemish government.

The infrastructure of the cities, the municipality and the private legal entities falls under the competence of the local authorities. The Flemish government is competent for the Flemish Community’s own cultural and youth accommodation.

The Flemish government provides investment subsidies for large (urban) and sectoral accommodations in the youth and culture sectors. The Cultural Infrastructure Fund is responsible for managing its own cultural infrastructure and granting investment subsidies for culture and youth infrastructure.

As mentioned in the section ‘Acquiring cultural and creative competences through education and training’ youth houses are open and low-threshold meeting places for young people, which can be found in almost every Flemish municipality. They are considered to be places where impulses are given for diversity, youth culture, attention to vulnerable groups, sense of creativity and enterprise.

8.6 Developing entrepreneurial skills through culture

Developing entrepreneurial skills through cultural activities

Formal education emphasizes the link between of creativity in entrepreneurship, but no specific programs or initiatives are set up on cultural activities and entrepreneurship.

In non-formal education and youth work more attention is geared towards the connection between cultural activities and entrepreneurship. The Action Plan for Entrepreneurship Education 2015-2019 ([Actieplan Ondernemend Onderwijs 2015-2019](#)) mentioned support for youth cooperation (see also chapter 3). Youth cooperation schemes enable young people to experiment with their entrepreneurial skills in a supportive and safe environment. This has led to some initiatives.

One example is **Haven**. Haven is a cooperative of young people, youth houses and motivated partners. The co-operative was founded in May 2016 by ten youth houses, Format (the Federation of youth houses) and the Artevelde school (more specific ArtePreneur within the Artevelde school). They provide a safe experimental space where young entrepreneurs get the space and time to experiment with their own project. This way they can safely test the viability of their own businesses while developing the necessary entrepreneurship skills. This project is supported by VLAIO, the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Support young entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors

[Kopiloot](#) is an initiative of [Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship](#) (Agentschap Innoveren & Ondernemen - VLAIO, the contact point for entrepreneurs in Flanders) and [Flanders DC](#) (Flanders District of Creativity is the contact point for entrepreneurs in the creative industries in Flanders). Through the Kopiloot platform young creative entrepreneurs can ask questions to experts with experience in the cultural and creative sector. They provide advice or draw up a guidance process in which they share their knowledge. In addition to the individual approach, young creative entrepreneurs can also register for group programs via Kopiloot.

[Flanders DC](#), or Flanders District of Creativity in full, is the unique point of contact for entrepreneurship in the creative sector. It supports, promotes and connects creative entrepreneurs from Flanders through:

- the entrepreneurs guide: a guide with practical information and tools to get started
- tailored advice
- promotions for the design, fashion and gaming sector
- an online magazine, for and about creative entrepreneurs
- an activity calendar for the creative sector

[Cultuurloket](#), founded in 2016 (before it existed as Kunstloket but with a narrower scope on the arts sector) and funded by the Flemish Government, provides first-line advice to individuals and organizations active in the cultural and creative sectors. Young entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors can go there with questions about business and legal aspects. They offer:

- an online knowledge base that collects business economic and legal information, useful for the cultural sector
- advice, both by telephone and through personal conversations
- info sessions (e.g. about contracting and negotiating in the performing arts) or round table discussions, for those who also want to exchange ideas with others
- brochures and documents on various topics, such as VAT in the artistic sector, crowdfunding, ..

8.7 Fostering the creative use of new technologies

New technologies in support of creativity and innovation

There exists no specific funding for fostering the creative use of new technologies, but some of the subsidized youth organisations focus on the creative use of new technologies, for instance:

- [Graffiti](#) youth service wants to provide children and adolescents (6-30 years) the space and resources to experiment creatively with various (alternative) forms of communication (paint, drawing, fashion, theater, film, photo, music and text).
- [Piazza dell'Arte](#) is a mobile multidisciplinary educational arts organization that aims to give young persons (from the age of 12 years) the opportunity to develop their creative talents through various multimedia techniques.
- **Youth, Culture and Science** ([Jeugd, Cultuur en Wetenschap](#)) wants to involve young people in cultural and scientific activities and to stimulate interest in culture and science among young people aged 8 to 25.

Facilitating access to culture through new technologies

[Cultuurconnect](#) (see also 8.4) is an organization of the Flemish government with the mission to support and guide the local cultural policy and its institutions in focusing and achieving their goals in the digital society. More specific, it supports municipalities in the digital challenges of their cultural policy, with an emphasis on public libraries, culture and community centers and attention to cross-sectoral connections. The organization takes strategically-based initiatives with regard to the development and exploitation of digital services.

In 2017, Cultuurconnect organized for instance, sessions on digital culture education, focusing on digital tools (e.g. the use of Augmented Reality (AR), e-books made by pupils, virtual reality, ...). In 2019 Cultuurconnect developed an inspiration guide ([inspiratiegids](#)) with examples of youth work that can inspire cultural centers to set up their own youth

activities. Working with new technologies and digital content are important aspects in these examples.

Also in Flanders, online sources and technologies are becoming an increasingly prominent place as a means of communicating and participating in art and culture. Information on cultural opportunities are disseminated online by e.g.:

- apps, e.g.
 - [UiTX-app](#) (with this app, young people get access to all UiTX and EYCA discounts and have always an overview of activities and events in the neighbourhood, see also 8.4),
 - [Erfgoedapp](#) (an app for news on cultural heritage, information on cultural heritage in the neighbourhood, and extra information at exhibitions),
- online-databases, e.g. the UiT-database ([UiTinVlaanderen](#)). Since 2020, one can find in the UiT database also cultural activities that take place online

Besides online information persons can also visit online catalogi and collections of exhibitions and musea in Flanders.

Especially since the Covid-19 pandemic initiatives regarding digital cultural are booming. One of the (temporary) examples was [Podium 19](#). Podium 19 is a pop-up arts channel that is created, programmed and curated by seven Flemish Art Institutions ([Ancienne Belgique](#), [Antwerp Symphony Orchestra](#), [Brussels Philharmonic](#), [Concertgebouw Brugge](#), [Opera Ballet Vlaanderen](#), [deSingel](#) and [Arts Centre Voo?uit](#)). It can be seen as a joint, virtual stage, where (new) productions were performed from January 21, 2021 to the end of April 2021.

8.8 Synergies and partnerships

Synergies between public policies and programmes

The implementation of cultural policies aimed at young people is most often based on joint work between the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Education and training.

Synergies between the policies of Culture, Youth and Education have been described in 8.2 Cross-sectoral cooperation and 8.3. It concerns (see 8.3 for a description of these plans):

1. Concept note 'Growing in culture' (['Groeien in cultuur'](#), 2012):
2. Concept note 'Continuing to Grow in Culture' (['Doorgroeien in cultuur'](#), 2013)
3. Action Plan 'Culture and Education: Together for more and better' (Actieplan ['Cultuur en Onderwijs – Samen voor meer en beter'](#), 2016)
4. Action Plan 'Education and Culture: together for even more and better II' (Actieplan ['Onderwijs en Cultuur: samen voor nog meer en beter II'](#), 2018-2019)

Outside these policies areas synergies are limited, but there are some examples. For instance:

Between youth/culture and equal opportunities:

The Flemish equal opportunities policy aims to combat discrimination mechanisms. It wants to make them visible and discussable, combat them and prevent the emergence of new mechanisms. The equal opportunities policy does this on the basis of the equal opportunities decree ([gelijke kansendecreet](#)) with a focus on gender, sexual diversity, disability and accessibility. The horizontal integration and equal opportunities policy plan

2020-2024 ([Horizontaal Integratie- gelijke kansenbeleidsplan 2020-2024](#)) contains several transversal actions to achieve equal opportunities. One of these actions concerns strengthening the cultural participation and lowering the thresholds to cultural activities of young people and children of foreign origin.

Partnerships between the culture and creative sectors, youth organisations and youth workers

As illustrated in section 8.5 there are many partnerships between culture and creative sectors, youth organisations and youth workers. These partnerships are linked to the four types of subsidies described in section 8.5, namely subsidies for cultural education associations, subsidies for experimental youth work, general national youth work organizations and youth houses.

Many partnerships exist also at the local (municipal) level, but these are at the initiative of the local associations themselves and there exists no exhaustive overview of these initiatives.

8.9 Enhancing social inclusion through culture

Fostering equality and young people involvement through cultural activities

The Participation Decree (participatiedecreet)

The Participation Decree ([Participatiedecreet](#)) aims to support, enrich and strengthen participation in culture, youth and sport policy.

The Participation Decree is a mix of structural and project support, initiatives aimed at the participation of a broad audience and of certain groups of events, existing measures and new initiatives, subsidies for public and private initiatives.

All these different measures are aimed at two central objectives:

- The decree wants to be a lever for more community building and more opportunities for the general public to taste culture, youth work and sport. To achieve this, there are various actions: embedding communication and raising awareness about culture, youth work and sport, supporting major events, appreciating hobby associations,
- The decree aims to support disadvantaged groups by means of a number of specific actions and the development of good, innovative projects that focus on disadvantaged groups. There is a solid investment to stimulate participation among people in poverty, through local networks of local poverty associations, CPAS and municipal services. In addition, there is a participation institution that helps stimulate participation policy for disadvantaged groups.

Unlike most other decrees, it does not regulate a specific sector or a targeted and delineated form of support but it supports what is developed within sectors of culture, youth work and sports and stimulates ideas and enables new methods or collaborations. Based on this participation decree, The Flemish Government subsidizes annual participatory projects that help group groups on their way to the cultural, youth or sports offer or valorises initiatives based on groups of people. In this way, the Flemish Government wants to promote a diverse, sustainable and active participation of opportunity groups in culture, youth and sport. Some examples of projects that received grants since 2017:

- **Urban Words Youth radio:** program for young people from disadvantaged groups linked to Urban Words ([Urban Woorden](#)). The project aims at young people with a migration background or in poverty with an interest in urban arts, radio (or media),

public debate or the activities of Urban Words. Young people receive training, feedback sessions, and create programs and debates about self-chosen themes.

- **Bric a Brac** (a project of [Rest for the Wicked](#)): With BRIC A BRAC, Rest for the Wicked wants to set up a process on vulnerability, failure and resilience. The project starts from the experience and expertise of people in poverty and young people with a diverse ethnic-cultural background to draw a number of lessons for artistic and cultural projects. This is used to initiate new participatory trajectories that thematize the interaction between art / culture professionals on the one hand and their target group on the other.
- **JoCult Light** (project of De Wissel, MFC Combo, Artforum and Barranja): Project to give disadvantaged groups in youth care (12 - 21 years) opportunities to participate in culture. Based on the first successful experiments, the organisers work with the young people towards a sustainable broad platform for youth care and the cultural sector.

Based on the participation decree, the Flemish Government also subsidizes two transversal participation institutions. Both are non-profit associations that work on increasing and broadening participation and renewing and deepening the participation of disadvantaged groups:

- **Publiq** aims to stimulate and facilitate participation through communication, marketing and information services. The association focuses mainly on the public-oriented active exploitation of a cross-sectoral database on leisure activities - with an emphasis on the sectors of culture, youth work and sport. In addition, publiq is commissioned to roll out the Flemish leisure pass ([UiTPAS](#)) across Flanders. People in poverty receive discreetly a social rate on UiTPAS activities (for more information, see section 8.4).
- **Dēmos** is a non-partisan public research and advocacy organization which focuses on social and policy developments in culture, youth work and sports. They focus mainly on groups and practices that are under-represented and underexposed in our society. Dēmos has the following assignments:
 1. Providing support on request to:
 - private socio-artistic and participation-promoting projects for disadvantaged groups in the culture, youth work and sports sector;
 - local projects related to culture, youth work and sports participation;
 - the development of an 'agreement memorandum on leisure participation' for the local poverty networks;
 - and the opening up of good practices.
 2. Establishing or enabling:
 - partnerships and networks in which different partners make an effort to enable the participation of people living in poverty;
 - concrete projects for disadvantaged groups.
 3. Stimulating and developing the social debate about the participation of disadvantaged groups.
 4. Setting up a system of financial allowances to remove financial barriers to participation in culture, youth work or sports - in the form of Vrijuit.

Combating discrimination and poverty through cultural activities

In December 2016, The Minister of Youth launched a project call called "**Bridge-builders within and to youth work**". The call aimed to realize youth work for children and young people in vulnerable situations. The intention was to provide financial support to organizations or groups of organizations that offer a youth work that better reflects the diversity of society. The Minister of Youth decided to subsidise twelve 'bridge builders' projects. The selected projects focus strongly on reaching children and young people in vulnerable situations or with a different cultural background and show them the way to

youth work. This way, these young people can also get to know the youth work and enjoy a suitable leisure time. The selected projects were evaluated by the jury as very strong, innovative, realistic and feasible. Also a couple of cultural projects received a grand, such as the 'Caravan Project' of the Circusplaneet.

See also sections above.

8.10 Current debates and reforms

When a new Flemish Government takes office, the services of the Flemish government write policy recommendations to the government negotiators. In the spring of 2019, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media prepared such policy recommendations. In this document, the Department formulated seven spearheads. **One of these seven spearheads is cultural education.** The Department Culture, Youth and Media wants to give cultural education a central place in the culture, youth and media policy fields, but also in related fields such as education, welfare and science. Initially, this approach will focus on those sectors with which cooperation is already taking place, in particular education and welfare. In addition, partnerships are encouraged between the cultural sector and other policy areas such as Economy, Science and Innovation, Education and Training, , Public Health In the long term, this should lead to the explicit attention to cultural elements in all policy areas ("culture in all policies"). However as already mentioned, in the policy notes of the ministers cultural education receives less attention than in the previous legislature.

The Ministers of Culture and Education wish to establish a cultural **Canon of Flanders (Canon van Vlaanderen)**. This canon has to cover the history, culture and people of the Flemish region, from its earliest habitation to the present day. The canon will pay attention to the highs and the lows, to influences from elsewhere and appearances to the outside world and to both famous and ordinary people. To this end, an independent and pluralistic scientific committee has been established at the beginning of 2020. The committee exist of nine experts of diverse backgrounds, which are assisted by external experts. The committee will present the canon to the Flemish government in the autumn of 2022. They will also develop suggestions for the use of the canon in education (as well as for use in other sectors such as the heritage and museum sector, tourism, integration, etc.).

The Flemish Government approved on 13 July 2018 the **new attainment targets** for the first grade of secondary education ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de eerste graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)). On 10 February 2021, the Flemish Parliament approved the new educational objectives for the 2nd and 3rd grade of secondary education ([decreet betreffende de onderwijsdoelen voor de tweede en derde graad van het secundair onderwijs](#)). The new educational objectives for the first year of the 2nd grade took effect in September 2021, in September 2022 the second year of grade 2 will follow and in September 2023 the new attainment targets will take effect in the third grade. These new attainment targets are developed in function of 16 key competences. One of these key competences concerns "cultural awareness and cultural expression". It consists of four pillars:

- Perceiving and conceptualizing expressions of art and culture;
- interpreting expressions of art and culture in relation to the social, historical and geographical context in which they manifest themselves;
- experiencing expressions of art and culture and expressing appreciation for them;
- Using imagination in a targeted way when creating artistic work

9. YOUTH AND THE WORLD

Youth and the world

Special feature

Several Flemish-funded youth organisations take up the task to raise the awareness of young people about global issues such as human rights and sustainable development. On the other hand, different ministries of the Flemish Government carry out a global plan for sustainable development. Many organisations have initiated projects about sustainable development and have developed methods, instruments and campaigns targeting young people.

Highlights

Sustainability is an interplay between ecological, social, global and economic dimensions. In the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights policy plan the Flemish Government places the emphasis on the ecological component. Children and young people can make their own active contributions to a sustainable living environment. Structural measures are to ensure embedment. Several social actors play a role in this.

EU cooperation with partner countries is aimed at contributing to human development and engagement of young people worldwide and is core to more resilient societies and to enhance trust between cultures and stability for the EU itself. In addition, it seeks to promote active participation in society at global level. EU is supporting young people to engage with regions outside Europe and become more involved in global policy processes regarding issues such as climate change, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, human rights, etc. In particular, this means:

- raising awareness of global issues among young people
- providing opportunities for young people to exchange views with policy makers on global issues
- fostering mutual understanding among young people from all over the world through dialogue
- encouraging young people to volunteer for environmental projects ("green volunteering") and to act green in their everyday life (recycling, saving energy, using hybrid vehicles, etc.)
- promoting entrepreneurship, employment, education, and volunteering opportunities outside Europe
- promoting cooperation with and exchanges between youth workers on different continents
- encouraging young people to volunteer in developing countries or to work on development issues in their own country.

9.1 General context

In order to involve young people in global issues, it is important to know what they think about the world, and their role in it. According to a survey carried out by NDCO 2013, three quarters of young people between 15 and 25 years of age continue to feel involved with the world. A majority of young people are interested in what is happening in our society and in the world. Almost half of the young people are worried about how we care for the earth and want to do something for a better world themselves.

In addition, a majority of young people are interested in what is happening in our society and in the world. Half of the young people are worried and want to do something for a better world. More girls than boys worry about how we care for the earth and more girls

than boys want to do something for a better world. People in their twenties are more interested in this than teenagers.

Not only does almost half of the young people want to do something for a better world, 48% actually do something to make the world a better place (34% do not, 19% say 'don't know'). The young people who say they contribute to a better world are again more girls than boys (56% vs. 40%) and more in their twenties than teenagers (55% vs. 39%).

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- Promoting cooperation with and exchanges between youth workers on different continents
- Encouraging young people to volunteer in developing countries or to work on development issues in their own country.

Main concepts

Sustainable development

The Flemish Parliament Act of 8 July 2008 concerning the sustainable development ([decreet ter bevordering van duurzame ontwikkeling](#)) adopts the following definition:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Specific attention is paid to the integration of and the synergy between the social, ecological and economic dimension and that the realisation requires a change process in which the use of resources, the purpose for investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes should be tailored to the future and current needs."

This definition is the guiding principle for everything which has to do with sustainable development in Flanders.

Sustainable development in the Flemish Youth- and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019)

The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan also mentions that sustainability is an interplay between four dimensions:

- ecological: attention should be paid to climate change
- social: attention should be paid to ALL children and young people, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable
- global: attention should be paid to children and young people in Flanders and elsewhere

- economic: aiming at green jobs, circular economy...

However in this policy plan the Flemish Government places the emphasis on the ecological component. Children and young people can make their own active contributions to a sustainable living environment. Structural measures must ensure that they are anchored. Different social actors play a role in this. The Flemish government wants to ensure that sustainable and ecological products are as attractive and accessible as non-sustainable ones. The government gives financial injections and raise awareness about this theme. Opting for sustainability is rewarded. Children and young people have the right to grow up in a healthy environment. The policy plan takes this perspective into account on several fronts. Monitoring can lead to action plans. Sustainable (re)building and living is given a boost. School is also an important environment where children and young people spend a lot of time. The pursuit of healthy indoor air is essential; a green playground can only be motivating and fun.

Youth representatives and the Flemish Youth Council

One of the aims of the Flemish Youth Council is to represent young people and youth work at national and international forums. By doing so, the Flemish Youth Council sends UN youth representatives to various (inter)national forums.

There is also a [youth representative for Europa](#) that takes part in gatherings of the members of the European Youth Forum.

Youth interest in global issues

Sustainable development and green patterns of consumption and production

The process for drawing up the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019 completed several participatory stages. In the spring of 2019, an extensive environmental analysis, the Great Priorities Debate, took place. The environmental analysis ([omgevingsanalyse](#)) provides an overview of trends, figures, research and the voice of children, youngsters and experts. During this debate, the various policy areas of the Flemish government, experts, young people and actors from civil society and from local governments discussed the major cross-policy challenges - or 'transversal' - that children and young people lay awake of, and that need to be addressed in the coming years. At the end of the debate, the priority themes that the broad field of youth and children's rights wants to see included in the next youth and children's rights policy plan (APR) were surveyed. The next government will be able to choose a maximum of five of these.

This environmental analysis reported also an overview of the themes sustainability, ecology, environment and "green living" for children and young people. The environmental analysis states that young people do not understand that themes such as environment and sustainability do not have high priority at political level. They believe that attention must be paid to waste policy, fewer cars, green energy, adapting consumption behaviour, protecting nature and making nature more accessible. An advice of the Flemish Youth Council also mentions that young people recognise the need for sustainable consumption ([advies duurzaam consumeren](#)).

The results of the survey of Youth Pact 2020 ([Eindrapport Jongerenpact 2020](#)) mention that young people are clearly very aware of the many challenges we face as a society, not least global warming. However, the many ominous reports about this do not mean that young people look at the future without confidence. Young people believe that everyone should take their responsibility and they're looking at themselves in the first place.

The results of the survey mention that more than 93% of young people themselves want to do something about global warming: more economical use of energy, recycle more or use public transport more often. But also more buying stuff together and sharing it with other people in the neighborhood. 60% of the young people in the dreamteam-survey finds that a system of borrowing or sharing goods can to ensure that we can maintain our current standard of living. A quarter of young people do not believe in this. Rather than consuming less, young people mainly want consumption to be different in the future. For

example, more than half of the young people (51.9% - dream team) say that by 2020 they will only be able to use fair trade products. and buy organic. 53.7% even hope that by then there will only be sustainable products to be found. Young people are certainly also looking to the government to raise awareness among citizens and to encourage business to have greater respect for the environment. For example, 70% of the young people in the teens-survey believe that by 2020 our energy should only come from environmentally friendly suppliers. Young people mainly mention green energy and energy efficiency, they also ask for more green areas, attention for bikers and public transport. Young people want to move around independently: public transport should be affordable, child-friendly, eco-friendly and accessible.

Children's rights

[Globelink](#) runs the project KRAS in the last two years of secondary school. In this project students debate a specific sustainable development topic. In 2013, the topic was Children's Rights. At the end of the school year, the Flemish Parliament invites the students from different schools to a big closing colloquium, where students can present their recommendations.

The recommendations of the KRAS-project on Children's Rights mention that children and young people need to be protected, especially those in vulnerable situations, such as refugee children, children in difficulties... The young people of the KRAS-project also reject child labour.

In addition, young people of the KRAS-project attach great importance to education. They believe in awareness-raising campaigns and schools play an important role in this process. In their opinion schools should raise awareness on the importance of healthy nutrition, the healthcare system and ecological awareness.

Despite the many initiatives, much remains to be done about the right to participate. The young people of the KRAS-project believe that young people should be involved in social debates and their advice should be binding.

Entrepreneurship, employment, education or volunteering opportunities with regions outside Europe

The results of the survey of Youth Pact 2020 mention that one third of young people wants to work or study abroad, particularly if it adds value to their job or their training, if it is for a good cause or if they can travel together with someone familiar.

Young people who are not going abroad are afraid to miss their family and friends. Learning another language is no threshold.

9.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Youth's contribution to global processes of policy-making, implementation and follow-up, including youth cooperation at the global level, is not exclusively a youth policy theme (or any other policy area). The Flemish Government works via both horizontal and vertical consultation and planning to stimulate youth's contribution to global processes of policymaking.

Most relevant policy domains are:

At regional (Flemish) level:

- Youth policy
- Educational policy
- Sustainable development policy

In the following we focus on the regional level and describe for each of the domains the relevant responsibilities.

Governmental authority

Flemish Government

The Flemish Government works together with other countries and regions in a bilateral context. The Flemish Government has bilateral cooperation for youth work and youth policy. The Flemish Government also participates in multilateral forums, such as the Benelux, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and UNESCO. Discussions and political decisions at European level have impact on the Flemish Youth Policy.

Furthermore, the Flemish Government funds (youth) organisations, that increase young people's competences on sustainability, through the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012.

Main public actors at community-level (Flemish Community)

Minister in charge of Youth

Minister Benjamin Dalle (Christian Democratic Party) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media.

He is the coordinating minister of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.

He has a coordinating role in topics related to youth and the world.

Since 2 October 2019 culture is an authority of the Minister-president Jan Jambon (from 2019-2024).

Department of Culture, Youth and Media

The 'Division Knowledge and Policy' – embedded in the Department of Culture, Youth and Media – ensures the administrative preparation, implementation and follow-up of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights.

The 'Division Knowledge and Policy' of the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, is responsible for the coordination of a horizontal Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (leisure, education, well-being, equality, etc.).

The Flemish international youth policy is coordinated by the Division Knowledge and Policy.

Minister in charge of sustainability

The Government of Flanders consists of 9 ministers, who are in office for a 5-year term. Minister Zuhail Demir (New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Environment, Spatial Development, Nature and Agriculture (from 2019-2024).

Department of Environment and Spatial Development

The Department of Environment and Spatial Development is the environmental administration of the government of Flanders. It is in charge of preparing, following up and evaluating the Flemish environmental policy. The Department of Environment and Spatial Development came into existence on the 1st of April 2017 and involved the bringing together of the past 'Department Environment, Nature and Energy' and 'Spatial Development Department Flanders'.

Furthermore, the department promotes policy initiatives through a specific target-group policy. It is in charge of Education for Sustainable Development and ecological engineering. It subsidises projects and it provides for the fixed and regulated subsidies to environment and nature organisations, amongst others.

Minister in charge of Education and Training

Minister Ben Weyts (New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Education (from 2019-2024).

Department of Education and Training

The Department of Education and Training together with the Minister in charge of Education and Training is responsible for the advice, evaluation and follow-up on education policy in Flanders.

The Flemish policy on education of sustainable development is defined in Flemish policy documents, such as Flemish Parliament Act of Sustainable Development and cross-curricular attainment targets in education.

Main non-public actors

Non-profit organisations working on youth and the world

Several Flemish-funded youth organisations take part in the development of policies, programmes or actions related to youth's contribution to global processes of policy-making.

Many organisations have also initiated projects about sustainable development and have developed methods, instruments and campaigns targeting young people.

The Flemish youth and children's rights policy also funds children's rights organisations. These non-profit organisations take initiatives that raise awareness of children's rights towards all people, including young people.

THE FLEMISH YOUTH COUNCIL

The Flemish Youth Council takes initiatives in this field (e.g. participating in policymaking setting up projects about sustainable development, developing methods and instruments to reach out to young people, etc.) (see chapter 5). As already argued, one of the aims of the youth council is to represent young people and youth work at national and international forums. By doing so, the Flemish Youth Council sends UN youth representatives to various (inter)national forums.

There are [UN youth representatives](#) for youth and sustainable development who can speak on the behalf of Flanders in those forums. They work around global themes such as sustainability and human rights and they represent Flemish children and young people in international UN-forums such as the third committee meeting of the General Conference, the Commission for Social Development and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

THE AMBRASSADE

The international youth representatives of the Flemish Youth Council are supported by the Ambrassade (see 5.3). It is an association recognised and subsidised by the Flemish Government and also responsible for development, support and provision of information to the youth sector.

GLOBELINK

The youth organisation [Globelink](#) runs the simulation project 'KRAS' in the last two years of secondary school. The students take on the role of a certain country or stakeholder and debate a specific sustainable development topic (e.g. power relations in 2018-2019) from that perspective. At the end of the school year, the Flemish Parliament invites the students to a big closing colloquium.

THE AANSTOKERIJ

The [Aanstokerij](#) is a non-profit youth organisation that consciously chooses game as an educational tool. For more than 40 years now, Aanstokerij has been developing, producing, facilitating and distributing educational games. The educational games inform and sensitise children, youngsters and adults about different social issues such as democracy, intercultural learning, north south problems, the environment and social skills.

JNM

[JNM](#) (Jeugdbond voor Natuur en Milieu) is a youth organisation for Nature and Environment. JNM focuses on young people between the ages of 7 and 26 who are interested in nature. It is also a youth organisation for and by young people. Fun and games form a large part of the organisation.

TUMULT vzw

[Tumult](#) is a youth organisation and encourages young people to meet each other, across borders. Tumult learns young people to deal with conflicts in a constructive manner and stimulates young people to be critical. By doing so, Tumult wants to strive towards a peaceful world together with children and young people.

The general distribution of responsibilities

The policy is prepared, implemented and monitored at the regional level (Flanders). Under coordination of the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, several departments cooperate to ensure effective contribution of youth to global policy-making processes. The Flemish government also funds several (non-public) organisations that take part in the development of policies, programmes or actions related to youth's contribution to global processes of policy-making. On the other hand the regional level collaborates with the municipalities. They are in charge of the local youth policy. Flanders supports them by means of monitoring tools, research, trainings, funding of an NGO that have the task to support local youth services, youth councils, youth policy.

Cross-sectorial cooperation

As mentioned in 1.5 Cross-sectorial approach with other ministries, youth policy is a transversal policy. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

Besides the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- The Child and Youngster Impact Report, an impact study of new legislative proposals of direct relevance to children and youth under 25 years old (JoKER)
- The appointment of contact points for youth and children's rights in all departments of the Flemish Government and the Department of Culture, Youth and Media as coordinating administration
- The Youth Progress Report: the Youth Research Platform (JOP) develops a youth monitor, whereby the JOP is asked to make up a 'state of the youth', a scientific publication that aims to track longitudinal developments and changes in the lifeworld of Flemish young people

9.3 Exchanges between young people and policy-makers on global issues

Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the domestic level

"Megaforum" of the Flemish Youth Council

Youth representatives of the Flemish Youth Council think about social themes and represent the voice of young people in policies. By doing so, the youth representatives questioned young people (online and through focus discussions) and they then started to formulate policy recommendations on European, Federal and Flemish level.

A group of young people and youth workers are brought together to think about the world we live in. A "Megaforum" is one of the many ways in which the Flemish Youth Council

participates in youth participation. It is a moment in which they bring together as many young people and youth workers as possible to discuss and debate with them about important policy themes that they as the Flemish Youth Council are working on (Education, Good in Sheet, Diversity, UN, Europe, local elections, Youth Work,...). This is seen as the ideal place for young people & youth workers with an opinion and a desire to see things differently.

The youth representatives discussed their recommendations in a number of roundtable discussions with experts and national policy makers on the event "Megaforum" of the Flemish Youth Council. The recommendations of young people are not binding.

Flemish youth representative in FRDO

The Flemish Youth Council monitors global policy developments and disseminates their opinion at the UN level. It also supports the youth representatives.

The Flemish Youth Council has youth representatives in the Federal Council for Sustainable Development ([FRDO](#)). FRDO advises the Belgian Federal Government on federal policy on sustainable development. The youth representatives represent the Flemish youth on this council. There are also representatives of NGO's, employers, employees, science and the government. Different working groups prepare opinions.

"What do you think?" project of UNICEF

Since 1999, UNICEF has launched the project "[What do you think?](#)" in Belgium. UNICEF want to make the voices of children and young people heard with this project. UNICEF questions children and young people about their rights and whether or not children and young people experience problems with their rights. UNICEF gathers their ideas, their wishes and their suggestions. Subsequently, UNICEF will make these suggestions known to the Committee on the Rights of the Childs.

In addition, the project "What do you think?" want to encourage policy makers to go ahead with children's rights. "What do you think?" is much more than just making reports: at least as important is the whole process that precedes and follows it.

This process aims to stimulate a real political and social debate at all (policy) levels on the participation of children, their experience and their situation. After all, we want to give all those who are involved in and responsible for translating the fine words of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into daily reality - policymakers at all levels of competence, the Committee's experts, lawyers, teachers, professionals from all kinds of sectors, parents, children and young people themselves - a clear picture of what is important according to the children and young people. So that they can take it into account and see how relevant it is to think about what children and young people think.

In 2016 and 2017, UNICEF Belgium continued with 'What Do You Think?' In the following two years they wanted to focus on children and young people on the run who have recently arrived in Belgium. They want to hear from themselves what their concerns are and what problems they are confronted with. And they want to look for solutions together with them, because these children are not passive victims. They are fully-fledged individuals who, at their level, want to and are able to shape society.

The publications and reports of these questionings can be found on the [website](#) of UNICEF (only in Dutch).

KRAS (Globelink)

Since 1977, the Flemish-funded organisation Globelink runs the simulation project [KRAS](#). KRAS is a discussion and role play for young people from the third grade of secondary education. KRAS works across schools. All over Flanders, young people come together in their free time to discuss global issues with their peers on the cutting edge. Discussion and one's own opinion are central in this project. Every school year, a new annual theme with a global slant is used to introduce young people to the wonderful world of democracy and debate. The theme of this year is "Climate". In this project empathy and discussion

are central and essential. From the point of view of people who have something to say, young people get the best insight into the often difficult, global themes. That is why young people put themselves in the shoes of a political party, a young person from another country, the government of a country, the press, an interest group, etc. They are also able to make their own contribution to the debate on the future of the European Union. They defend their voices with verve and experience the tensions that exist between the different parties. At the end of the school year, the Flemish Parliament invites the students to a big closing colloquium. On this colloquium, young people formulate their (non-binding) policy recommendations.

J100-top: initiative of youth organisations in Antwerp

The J100 was founded by 11 Antwerp youth organisations in order to find answers to the city's divisions together with their young people. With this project, the young people take up their position in the city. They talk about what is important to them and how they want to live together in their city.

The J100 builds bridges between the young people from the various youth work activities, but also between the youth workers and youth work organisations. Together we strengthen our neighbourhoods and our city.

In 2016, the first [J100-top](#), an initiative of youth organisations in Antwerp, was organised. These youth organisations want to bring experts, (regional) politicians and young people together to discuss social themes.

During the first J100-top, the themes media, police, work and discrimination were discussed. Young people exchanged ideas with local policymakers.

Het Burgerkabinet Jeugd 'Give more colour to youth'

In 2016 the minister of Youth organised his [Citizens Cabinet on diversity in the youth sector](#). It was prepared in a workshop with about 25 youth organisations. There was an online platform where more than 3000 youngsters posted ideas and questions, and finally there was a concluding meeting in the Flemish parliament with 134 participants from all over Flanders, with a nice diversity of ages, gender, habitation, backgrounds...that formulated a whole range of recommendations for the authorities of different levels.

Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the international level

Europinion-project of the Flemish Youth Council (Structured Dialogue)

The Structured Dialogue is a European project and process for discussions between young people and policy makers about different themes, to make sure the opinions of young people are taken into account in defining the EU's youth policies.

In Flanders, the structured dialogue is managed by the Flemish Youth Council and it is called the Europinion-project ([Gestructureerde dialoog – Europinion](#)). A group of eight young people is brought together in Europinion. The European Council provides guiding questions about a specific theme, such as youth unemployment, rights and political participation of young people. The eight young people of Europinion are looking for answers on the guiding questions by conducting research, consulting young people, policymakers and experts. Furthermore, there are a lot of actions: a kick-of weekend, a meeting with British Youth Ambassadors, a role play in the parliament, etc.

The results of the Flemish consultations and any additional input from international youth organisations are compiled into background documents. The eight Flemish young people will go to the EU Youth Conferences, where youth representatives and policy makers have the opportunity to work together and present a joint message to the EU. The EU Youth Conferences take place twice a year and are hosted by the country that holds the EU Presidency.

Flemish youth representative at the High-Level Political Forum of the UN

The Flemish Youth Council sends a Youth Representative for Sustainable Development to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. This forum is the central United Nations platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2017, a youth representative participated in the High-Level Political Forum in New York to represent the Flemish youth in global issues. The youth representative is part of the official Belgian delegation to the Forum.

Flemish youth representative on youth forum UNESCO

UNESCO is an organisation of the United Nations (UN). Its aim is "to contribute to the building of peace, the [eradication of poverty](#), [sustainable development](#) and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information".

The UNESCO Youth Forum was created in 1999 to provide young people with the opportunity to present their concerns and ideas to Member States and help shape the direction of UNESCO.

Every two years, UNESCO organises a youth forum, that precedes the general assembly of UNESCO. Young people come together at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris to discuss and debate thematic areas of concern.

The Flemish Government sends a youth representative to the youth forum.

In 2017, the 10th UNESCO Youth Forum was organised and a new way of working was thereby chosen. This new way of working involved that a group of approximately 60 young people who were already actively engaged in their communities was brought together. These young people were approached as equal partners and were asked to reflect on the question how UNESCO can improve the lives of young people around the world. The choice for such a closer collaboration with young people is related to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development – Leaving no one behind. UNESCO decided to transform the Youth Forum into a real dialogue with young people whereby young people were approached as equal partners in finding solutions for global challenges.

9.4 Raising awareness about global issues

Formal, non-formal and informal learning

Formal learning

Sustainable development is a cross-curricular attainment target (VOET), which refers to the definition of the so-called Brundtland report: "development provides in the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation".

Secondary schools are not expected to solve sustainability issues, but they have to offer opportunities for self-development to students. These opportunities enable young people to look for solutions with each other. Regarding the characteristics of sustainability issues, the cross-curricular attainment targets focus on:

- learning to think in terms of systems and to look at problems from different perspectives
- the fact that sustainability issues have local and global characteristics
- knowledge and understanding, but also the development of values and norms
- the importance of an adapted individual lifestyle if young people want to look for solutions for sustainability issues
- participation in the societal debate
- the understanding that sustainable development is a continuous learning process

Furthermore, there is the project MOS ([Milieuzorg Op School](#), Environmental Care on School) of the Flemish Department of Environment and Spatial Development. The MOS-project supports primary and secondary schools in making schools environmentally friendly and in providing a sustainable learning and living environment.

Non-formal learning

The Flemish Government will support projects and initiatives in all kinds of areas which will make sure that sustainable choices are deliberate choices. These projects must devote special attention to young people. Either because they (help) implement the project, or because it is specifically targeted at them.

The Flemish Department of Environment and Spatial Development focuses on (pilot projects regarding) Education for Sustainable Development and care for nature. A platform and working groups for 'green' education in formal and non-formal education exists, a.o. in youth work. A whole series of actions are organised, e.g. to stimulate green camps, green infrastructure, more nature to play in, playing in woods...

Educators' support

In Flanders, there are various types of educational materials on sustainable development that were developed by Flemish-funded youth organisations, such as [Globelink](#), [JNM](#) (Youth Federation for Nature and Environment), [Studio Globo](#), the Flemish Youth Support Centre, [Mediaraven](#).

Furthermore, the project MOS offers teaching materials, information and training to teachers of secondary schools. MOS belongs to a global network of schools who work towards environmental care and sustainability.

Informal learning

Youth organisations whose core activities concentrate on topics related to youth and the world

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 supports and subsidises different organisations, such as national organised youth associations, associations information and participation and associations cultural education. It also provides the funding of organisations that focus on sustainability. The Flemish Government registers which organisations indicate in their annual report to work on sustainability.

Projects

Music for Life, for example, is an annual initiative organised by the radio station Studio Brussel and the Red Cross Flanders. It is a fundraising event for which many (youth) organisations set up activities to raise money for, amongst others, developing countries.

Youth-targeted information campaigns on global issues

Thick Sweater Day

Thick Sweater Day ([Dikke truiendag](#)) is an awareness raising campaign organised by the Flemish Government.

In 2005, MOS (Milieuzorg Op School, Environmental Care at School) of the Department of Environment and Spatial Development organised the first Thick Sweater Day in response to the Kyoto Protocol. The protocol's objective was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

Since 2005, Thick Sweater Day has reminded us of the agreements made under this crucial treaty with a few simple activities: wear a warm sweater and turn down the heat, take your bike more often, eat locally grown food, reduce standby power and so on. On Thick Sweater Day Flanders massively reduced CO2 emissions as well as raised awareness of school-going children, businesses and the authorities.

National Children's Rights Day

On 20 November, it is National Children's Rights Day. There are a lot of activities to promote (the understanding) of children's rights.

In Flanders, the Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner (see 4.2.2) also presents its annual report on this day.

Campaign 'Work for Change' by YOUCA

YOUCA, Youth for Change and Action - formerly "Zuidag" - is an organisation, supported by the Flemish Government, for and by young people that encourages them to work together towards a sustainable and just society. They do this by making them aware of important social challenges and by supporting them in their commitment. In addition, we provide unique encounters with impact on cultural, business and public life.

17 October 2019 is the YOUCA Action Day, formerly "Zuidag". For the thirteenth time, more than 15,000 young people from Flanders and Brussels have committed themselves to work for a day for a company, an organisation, a government or a private individual. The wages they earn on that school day go to projects of committed young people all over the world.

No Hate Speech Movement

The No Hate Speech Movement is a campaign for online human rights and against fear for young people who want to stop discrimination and hate speech online. The campaign started in 2013 and is initiated by the Council of Europe but it is based on national campaigns run in the member states of the Council of Europe. National committees will operate their own national online Campaign platforms and online tools.

In Flanders, the No Hate Speech Movement Flanders, supported by the Division Knowledge and policy and youth organisations, calls on young people, youth workers, teachers, parents... and sensitise, train and support them to take actions against (online and offline) hate speech ([No Hate Speech Movement Vlaanderen](#)). [A No Hate Speech Platform](#) has been created to provide some tips and advise. From 2018 onwards No Hate Speech platform will be supported through the masterplan Diversity in Youth work. The department will adjudge a public procurement to an organisation that coordinates the youth work campaign against hate speech and exclusion.

GoodFood@School

[GoodFood@School](#) is an initiative of Rikolto, Fairtrade Belgium and GoodPlanet to realise – by 2021 – a healthy and sustainable nutrition policy in all Flemish schools, both in the kitchen and in the classroom. The underlying idea is that food at school can make our nutrition more environmentally responsible, fairer and healthier. Such projects are believed to be necessary if we want to feed the growing world population in a sustainable manner. The initiative involves the development of school food councils and school food labs.

Information providers

The Department of Environment and Spatial Development of the Flemish Government

The Department of Environment and Spatial Development promotes policy initiatives through a specific target-group policy.

Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 ([decreet 20 januari 2012](#)) supports and subsidises organisations (see informal learning) that focus on sustainability.

Organisations that are funded this way are e.g.

- Globelink

[Globelink](#) is a national organised youth association and sets up global and sustainable projects together with young people. Globelink aims at a sustainable, humane and fair world by developing competences among young people. These competences should enable young people to make sustainable choices.

Globelink has projects for schools, youth organisations and everyone who is enthusiastic about the climate.

The Flemish Youth Council

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on Flemish Youth Policy sets out a legislative framework for the Flemish Youth Council (Vlaamse Jeugdraad). The Flemish Youth Council is the **official advisory body** of the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people and informs children and young people.

The Ambrassade

The Youth Council is supported by the [Ambrassade](#), an association recognised and funded by the Flemish Government and also responsible for development, support and provision of information to the youth sector.

The Ambrassade offers, together with other youth information actors, a wide variety of information for children and young people.

Key initiatives

See also youth-targeted information campaigns on global issues.

The Department of Environment and Spatial Development of the Flemish Government

The Department is responsible for environmental education and provides training for teachers and lecturers. It also offers projects such as MOS and Ecocampus. These projects supports schools to make schools an environment-friendly and sustainable learning environment.

Globelink

The youth organisation Globelink disseminate information and raise the awareness of young people about global issues through different leisure time projects, such as:

- [Kras](#) for schools
- [Ecoshizzel](#) for animated playgrounds and youth camps
- [9400 Toeren](#), a project on mobility, for youth associations

The Flemish Youth Council

The UN representatives of the Flemish Youth Council launched the project and toolkit "[Flemish youth 4 global goals](#)" (only in Dutch). The toolkit explains the Global Goals for Sustainable Development to young people and youth organisations. The Flemish Youth Council believes that the Global Goals for Sustainable Development are important for young people and hopes that these goals will motivate the Flemish Government to work towards a sustainable world for young people and youth organisations. The toolkit has been updated in 2018.

The UN representatives of the Flemish Youth Council also offer a workshop on sustainability to teachers and students of upper secondary education.

Ambrassade

Youth work fights for social change. In 2015 and 2016, the Ambrassade has launched the initiative "Attention for poverty" ([Oog voor armoede](#)) to stimulate youth organisations to make a difference for children in poverty. In 2017, they introduced a guide to facilitate

the dialogue between youth workers and guiders of children, young people and families in poverty. The guide provides youth workers with good examples and tips to stimulate them to engage in a dialogue with organisations working on poverty.

The Ambrassade also coordinates [WAT WAT](#) (What What), a project commissioned by the Flemish Government. WAT WAT aims to provide young people between 11 and 24 years old with information on different topics for young people, including environment and sustainability. The goal is to tackle the fragmentation of initiatives, websites and campaigns targeted at young people.

9.5 Green volunteering, production and consumption

Green volunteering

Sustainability is an interplay between ecological, social, global and economic dimensions. In the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019) the Flemish Government places the emphasis on the ecological component.

The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019) and the Policy Plan on Environment (2014-2019) mention that children and young people can make their own active contributions to a sustainable living environment in 2019.

Flemish-funded youth organisations

The Flemish Government will support projects and initiatives in all kinds of areas which will make sure that sustainable choices are deliberate choices. These projects must devote special attention to young people. Either because they (help) implement the project, or because it is specifically targeted on them. Creating involvement and enhancing competences are key concepts.

This process involves pilot projects regarding Education for Sustainable Development ([MOS](#)-project) of the Flemish Department of Environment and Spatial Development and projects as part of Ecocampus. These projects are funded by the Flemish Government.

Furthermore, the Flemish Government supports organisations, who increase young people's competences on sustainability, through the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012. These Flemish-funded youth organisations encourage their participants to do green volunteering and organise activities on this topic. For example Globelink and JNM.

Globelink has projects for youth organisations, for instance '[Art D Eco](#)' workshops: creating art with garbage of the youth work organisations. Globelink also co-organises an annual eco-contest for playground initiatives, which receives financial support from the Flemish Government.

JNM is a youth organisation for Nature and Environment. [JNM](#) focuses on young people who are interested in nature and stimulates a sustainable and environmental friendly way of living.

The Department of Environment and Spatial Development of the Flemish Government

As mentioned above, the Department of Environment and Spatial Development and other Nature and Environment authorities focus on education for sustainable development and care for nature. A platform and working groups for green education in formal and non-formal education exists in youth work ([Milieuvorming en -educatie](#)).

Green production and consumption

In the period 2015-2019, the Flemish Government wants to help make sustainable and ecological products as attractive and accessible as their non-sustainable counterparts. In the following we describe the planned processes of the Flemish Government.

The Flemish Government wants to reduce environmental impacts by giving financial injections and raising awareness of this theme. Making the choice for sustainability is rewarded. When doing so, the Flemish Government keeps in mind that they have an exemplary role to fulfil. They pay specific attention to sustainability in their own projects and communication.

9.6 Intercontinental youth work and development cooperation

Intercontinental youth work cooperation

Bilateral cooperation between Flanders and South Africa

Since 1996, there is a cooperation on youth matters between Flanders and South Africa.

The cooperation between the Department of Culture, Youth and Media of the Flemish Government and the National Youth Development Agency ([NYDA](#)) of South Africa focuses on voluntary work of young people and civil society.

They are also working on a publication about 20 years of cooperation, which will be published in 2019.

Bilateral cooperation between Flanders and Viet Nam

In October 2018, Flanders and Viet Nam signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) in order to initiate bilateral cooperation in several fields, including youth. Both countries agreed to promote cooperation on the implementation of the [UN World Programme of Action for Youth](#). Viet Nam and Flanders will furthermore review the status of children's rights in their respective countries and focus their cooperation on promoting sustainability, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals.

Funding program global youth projects

The Flemish Government had an additional funding program for youth projects in the context of North-South cooperation. It provided opportunities for youth groups to run a project with a partner from a country on the DAC list of the OECD.

This funding program stopped in 2012, because the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights did not provide grants for international youth projects.

However, there are funding programs for international projects and youth work cooperation offered by JINT vzw.

JINT vzw

Since 1989, the Flemish Government supports the Flemish coordinating agency for international youth work, [JINT](#). The Flemish Government subsidises JINT through the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights.

JINT was established to implement the European Youth programmes within the Flemish Community, to promote international exchange and cooperation of, for and by youth and to foster the reflection on youth, youth work a youth and children's rights policy by all actors involved on the basis of international exchange and cooperation.

JINT does not only focus on projects within the EU, but promotes all international learning mobility through its websites, newsletters and publications.

In addition, JINT is the Flemish coordinating body for international youth work and the National Agency for the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme in Flanders. The youth section of Erasmus+ is called Youth in Action. It funds projects for and by young people and youth organisations. It has a separate budget and specific project possibilities.

JINT will furthermore be responsible as National Agency for the implementation and follow-up of projects under the European Solidarity Corps. [The European Solidarity Corps](#) is the new European Union initiative which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects that benefit communities and people around and beyond Europe. [Topics for projects that the European Solidarity Corps](#) could support, are e.g. citizenship and democratic participation, inclusion, environment and natural protection, education and training, creativity and culture and entrepreneurship and employment. The European Solidarity Corps includes a strong international dimension (i.e. cooperation with partner countries, through involvement of young people and organisations) under its volunteering strand.

Development cooperation activities

Several Flemish-funded organisations encourage young people to participate in development cooperation activities either in their country of residence or abroad. For example:

Go strange

In Flanders, JINT guides young people across borders under the flag [Go Strange](#). Young people with plans to travel abroad can find international exchange possibilities, such as volunteering, volunteering in development cooperation projects, studying and internships, on the website of Go Strange. Flemish organisations involve volunteers in their development cooperation projects. Sometimes, there are calls for volunteers to work in the South.

In 2015, there was a research ([cijferonderzoek](#)) on the numbers of Go Strange. 6.442 Flemish young people aged between 14 and 30 went abroad for an international experience via a Flemish organisation. 23% of these young people (1.512 young people) did international volunteer work.

JINT supports Go Strange and young people with plans to travel abroad through the Youth in Action-program of Erasmus+. It funds projects for and by young people and youth organisations. It has a separate budget and specific project possibilities.

Bouworde vzw (Building order)

[Building order](#) allows young people to approach the world differently by enabling them to volunteer in social, technical or ecological projects abroad. Bouworde strives for a world where basic rights for everyone will be respected. During a social 'building camp', volunteers will help others. During a technical camp, volunteers will help with building or renovation. An ecological camp focuses on working in and for nature.

Building order has different projects for 15-17 year olds, 18-30 year olds, groups and schools and organises active voluntarily trips. Bouworde owns 114 volunteer camps in 38 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Building order is a national organised youth association funded by the Flemish Government.

Youth service Don Bosco

Youth service Don Bosco ([Jeugddienst Don Bosco](#)) supports young people to do volunteer work and offers training initiatives and various forms of leisure activities. Youth service Don Bosco also offers youth projects, youth exchanges, training projects or individual volunteer work in Europe, Africa, Asia and South-America.

Every year, youth service Don Bosco prepares nearly five hundred young people to do voluntary youth work.

Youth service Don Bosco is a national organised youth association funded by the Flemish Government. The international secretariat of Don Bosco is financially supported by the European Union, through its 'Erasmus+ Youth in Action'-programme.

9.7 Current debates and reforms

Political youth movement

Since 2017, political youth movements are no longer subsidised through the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights. These political youth movements only can be recognised through this Flemish Parliament Act.

The Council for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media recommended, in response to the Flemish Parliament Act of 12 January 2012, to stop the subsidisation of political youth movements. In view of the current and existing party funding, separate subsidisations for political youth movements are no longer necessary.

A new concept for the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan

The Flemish Youth and Children's Policy Plan for 2019-2024 features a new concept: it focusses on maximum five cross-sectoral priority challenges for youth policy per plan. These challenges are chosen based on an extensive environmental analysis undertaken by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, with key involvement from the youth sector, youth experts and researchers, representatives from other government departments, civil society organisations, and children and youngsters. In order to guarantee strong results and change on the ground, each challenge will be tackled by a project. The projects will have their own steering groups responsible for the implementation and follow-up of the specific project actions, indicators and plans. The aim of the new concept for the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan is to promote a cross-sectoral and intergenerational approach to youth policy.

With the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2019-2024, the Flemish Government wants to offer concrete answers to the challenges children and young people are facing today. It gives a strong focus on where the government wants to go with regard to youth and children's rights. The plan focuses on all children, youth and young adults between the ages of 0 and 30. In the end, five priorities have been chosen:

1. Well-being and positive identity development.
2. Healthy and liveable neighbourhoods
3. Engagement in society through volunteerism
4. Leisure activities for all
5. Media literacy

The choice of the five priorities was made after extensive consultation with the youth sector and wider. Several participation moments were organized, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media made a broad environmental analysis and there was a round table discussion with Minister of Youth Benjamin Dalle who takes on the coordinating role of the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan. A steering committee composed of 'De Ambrassade', 'the Flemish Youth Council', 'the Knowledge Centre for Children's Rights', 'the Minorities Forum', 'Bataljong' and the administration was involved in this preparatory process.

Integrity

Furthermore, integrity is on the agenda as a result of the #MeToo movement. Youth organisations were forced to appoint a contact point for integrity. The department supports them by means of trainings.

10. YOUTH WORK

Youth work in Flanders is defined by decree as non-commercial, voluntary socio-cultural work organised in the leisure sphere for or by young people between the age of three and thirty years old and under educational guidance. It promotes the advancement of the full development of young people.

The abovementioned definition applies to formal and non-formal youth work as both types of youth work are run by organisations with non-commercial purposes. Generally speaking, there exist two sectors in Flemish youth work: universal youth work provision and targeted youth work provision. The universal youth work sector is much larger than the targeted youth work sector.

Universal youth work provision refers to those activities that do not distinguish among the target groups – they are accessible and targeted at all young people. This includes youth movements (e.g. Scouts and Chiro) and a large number of other types of youth work (e.g. playground associations, political youth associations, youth centers or clubs, youth amateur art associations, youth workshops). The youth movements are usually youth organisations (with regular activities for specific age groups) and young people themselves, above the age of 16, run the local groups. This form of youth work is generally volunteered with very limited involvement of professional youth workers.

Targeted youth work includes activities aimed at hard-to-reach groups such as young people with disabilities, young people with a migration or ethnic minority background and socially vulnerable young people. The activities are in general developed through self-organisation and volunteering, often supported by professional youth workers. Some of the initiatives organised as part of targeted youth work are referred to as “open initiatives” as they do not require regular or timely attendance and do not demand participation in prescheduled group activities.

10.1 General context

Historical developments

Youth work in Flanders has a long tradition with its origins in the 1850s with the emergence of the first Flemish youth movements (e.g. the Roman Catholic youth groups in 1850, the Socialist Young guards in 1886 and the Flemish Student Movement in 1875). These initiatives provided working-class youngsters with healthy recreation and development activities and were often led by citizens and parish priests. Also youth work activities around political topics were common and youth self-organisations were established by working class people who fought for better living conditions and opportunities.

Youth movements further emerged and developed in the beginning of the 20th century, after the First World War. The movements’ focus however shifted from countering social and material inequalities to playful outdoor activities taking place in the participants’ leisure time. Over time youth work gradually became a place to socialise, in addition to the family and the school or factory. The latter could partly be explained by the fact that the scouting initiative reached Flanders in 1910. Scouting was seen as a “new” and “innovative” outdoor recreational method for lower-class young people.

In the last decades youth work remained important in Flanders; young people have a strong need to organise themselves but also the government and society recognises the important role of youth work. Additionally, local administration started to organise youth work themselves. Flanders’ youth work history, and particularly youth movements, made its mark on the contemporary Flemish youth work resulting in a strong focus on leisure and recreation. From a historical point of view, Flanders always focused on positive youth work as an emancipatory and empowerment instrument for young people rather than an

instrument for prevention. It provides many opportunities for a more democratic and improved governance of policy implementation.

National definition or understanding of Youth Work

The Flemish Parliament defines Youth Work states that Youth work is the collective name for youth movements and playground activities in which young people take part in leisure time. The government provides a framework for the animators. Youth rooms, youth accommodations and bivouac areas also fall under this authority.

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10.2 Administration and governance of youth work

Governance

The Flemish Youth Work policy is part of the 'general' youth policy. Youth work, which is part of universal youth policy, falls under the competences of the Flemish Community and is therefore governed by the Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media, Benjamin Dalle (Christian Democratic Party, from 2019-2024) and Minister of Culture Jan Jambon (New Flemish Alliance, from 2019-2024). The Ministry is responsible for setting the legal framework, identifying sector-specific priorities and providing funding to the youth work sector.

Main public actors at community-level (Flemish Community)

Minister in charge of Youth, Media & Brussels

Minister Benjamin Dalle (Christian Democratic Party) is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media (from 2019-2024).

He is the coordinating minister of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.

He has a coordinating role in topics related to youth and the world.

Minister in charge of Culture

Since 2 October 2019 culture is an authority of the Minister-President Jan Jambon (from 2019-2024)

Minister in charge of Sport

Minister Ben Weyts is since 2 October 2019 the Flemish Minister for Sport (from 2019-2024).

Main task of the division knowledge and policy

Initiating and coordinating policy

Developing priority cross-sectoral and transversal policy themes (project work):

- culture and economy
- e-culture / digitalisation
- voluntary activity
- cultural education
- Transition 2050

Permanent coordination and monitoring of cross-policy themes:

- youth and children's rights policy
- deprivation
- level playing field
- geriatric policy
- commercial agreements

Developing and following up the archiving policy and information security policy

Guaranteeing interaction between the development of Flemish and international policy frameworks and the sectoral or broader cultural youth and media policies to be developed in-house

- data and research
- knowledge management
- legal services for the Department of Culture, Youth and Media
- building up, disseminating and sharing policy-relevant knowledge in function of policy advice and relevant (policy) projects

Local public authorities with competencies in the Youth field

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 specially meant for youth policy. The funds are integrated and increase the integration of policy making across different sectors. It also strengthened the autonomous authority of the municipalities concerning youth policy. In 2018, the person-oriented responsibilities are transferred to the local and regional level.

Main non-public actors taking part in the development of policies in the field of youth work

Youth organisations play an important role in the implementation of Flanders' youth policy. There are dozens of accredited youth organisations active at the Flemish level dedicated to youth work and young people in many different ways in a leisure time setting. Youth organisations or youth associations usually receive funding based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes.

JINT

JINT was founded in 1989 by the Flemish government, in consultation with the Flemish youth organisations. From there, JINT was given the task of stimulating and supporting the international mobility and cooperation of young people and youth organisations. JINT is structurally financed by the Ministry of the Flemish Community, Department of Culture, Youth and Media and by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture.

De Ambrassade

The Ambrassade, young business office, is:

- an expertise Centre for everything related to youth work, youth information and youth policy
- a support and networking organisation for all youth work in Flanders and Brussels the coordinator for youth information in Flanders
- the organisation of links between youth work, other policies that have an impact on children and young people (education, welfare, work, education, etc.) and policy makers
- the catalyst behind the Flemish Youth Council, the official advisory council for the Flemish Government on all areas that affect children, young people and their organisations in Flanders.

The Ambrassade carries out the following tasks:

- Practice development, practice support and the provision of information to and about the youth sector
- The provision of support to the Youth Council referred to in Article 7
- The provision of information to children and young people

VVJ (Association for Local Youth Services and Youth Coordinators)

The VVJ focuses on the triangle of Aldermen, civil servants and Youth Councils in order to implement more, better and broader local youth policy in Flanders.

As a member organisation, VVJ informs and supports Flemish cities and municipalities in the preparation and implementation of local youth policy. Based on its expertise and proximity to local youth policy, the organisation makes constructive contributions to the various authorities when making policy choices. VVJ provides an extensive package of services to youth officials, local and provincial administrations and youth councils, including training, exchange, guidance, advice and publications.

VVJ was founded in the 1970s as a collegial association of a new type of civil servants, listening to the name 'youth consultant'. Gradually, the VVJ developed into a 'mature' service platform for youth services and youth policy in Flanders. On 1 January 2014, the VVJ merged with Karuur and became the only umbrella organisation for local participation and the support of youth councils. Today VVJ can count on a team of 14 employees and has almost all (305 out of 308) Flemish municipalities as members.

ADJ (General Service for Youth Tourism)

ADJ manages two youth facilities of the Division Youth. It develops a policy paper to obtain an annual operating grant from the division knowledge and policy. The centers in question are:

- Training Centre Destelheide in Dworp focuses on management training initiatives for accredited youth associations and for consultation relation to young people and youth work
- Youth Centre Hoge Rielen in Lichtaart hosts young people and associations for camping activities and educational initiatives. It is also suitable for nature classes, reflection or training sessions and seminars
- Since 1/1/2018 on, the former provincial youth center Hanenbos is part of ADJ

The general distribution of responsibilities

There is increasing cooperation between municipalities and their youth associations. Youth work associations do not stop at the municipal border and often also reach children and young people from neighboring municipalities. In some places there is cooperation across borders and so we also find intermunicipal youth work. Youth work is a shared

responsibility of the Minister of Youth, Media, Brussels, Minister of Sport and Minister of Culture.

The Flemish government also funds several (non-public) organisations that take part in the development of policies, programmes or actions related to youth work contribution to global processes of policymaking.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

As mentioned in other chapters, youth policy is a transversal policy. It is envisaged that each ministry takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the Plan's implementation to the government.

Besides the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- Impact study of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER)
- Contact points for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration
- Youth Progress Report

In Flanders, Youth Work is a joint responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Youth, Media & Brussels, Flemish Minister of Sport and Flemish Minister of Culture.

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http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/anderever_ADJ.aspx#korteomschrijving

<http://destelheide.be>

10.3 Support to youth work

Policy legal framework

In the Flemish community, since 1 January 2013, the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a revised youth and children's rights policy as amended, came into force. This act described the basic instruments to implement youth policy and specifies the conditions for accreditation and funding of a large number of private organisations and youth-related associations operating on Flemish level (i.e. not organisations operating on a regional or a local level as these receive funding by the municipalities)

Regional or provincial youth work used to be supported by the provincial authorities. Since 2018, a province no longer has community-based powers. These powers and the associated personnel were transferred to the Flemish Community or to the municipalities and cities. Since the 1st of January 2018, the provinces no longer carry out tasks in the context of culture, youth, sport or welfare. However, there are still many provincial lending services and training centers that youth associations can make use of.

Definitions according to the Flemish Parliament Act of January 20, 2012 on a revised youth and children's rights:

- Youth work: socio-cultural work based on non-commercial purposes by or for young people of 3-30 years, during leisure time, with educational guidance and to promote the general and integral development of the young people who participate in it on a voluntarily basis.
- Youth work: any person who takes responsibility in youth work and who has verifiable experience, of makes efforts in the area of education and training in relation to youth (work).

"Youth work" or 'youth worker' is not defined or included in any other legislation or national policy document.

References:

<https://ambrassade.be/nl/basiswerk-jeugdwerk/beleid/jeugdwerkbeleid-jeugdbeleid>

<https://ambrassade.be/nl/basiswerk-jeugdwerk/landschap/plaats-van-het-je...>

Funding

Every year, the government of Flanders estimates the budget of the next year. This budget allocation is presented to the Flemish Parliament and is discussed in parliamentary committees. The Flemish Parliament has to accept the budget allocation, before the Flemish government can use the budget for expenditure. The budget allocation also contains the means for Youth Policy.

How youth policy is funded

The budget in 2015

In 2015, the Division Youth had a budget of 67.500.000 euros to achieve its objectives. Most of the money was allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy (18.877.000 euros) and the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights (32.610.000 euros). Local and regional level have their own budget, next to the subventions of the Flemish Government.

The budget in 2016

In 2016, the budget allocation to the Division Youth was 42.266.000 euros. There is a decline from the budget allocation of 2015. The budget allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy have been reduced compared to the budget allocation of 2015. The remaining budget (1.254.000) will help support youth policy in Brussels and De Rand ('the rim'). In 2016, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 32.509.000 euros and has been reduced by 21.000 euros.

The budget in 2017

In 2017, the budget allocated to the Division Youth was 42.462.000 euros. The budget allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy was still very low (1.185.000) and uniquely to support youth policy in Brussels and De Rand ('the rim'). In 2017, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 33.057.000 euros.

The budget in 2018

In 2018, the budget allocated to the Division Youth was 50.209.000 euros. The allocated budget increased because of the transfer of provincial responsibilities to the Flemish Community. This extra fund is needed to pay overcoming personnel and to subsidise those organisations that were initially subsidised by the provinces. In 2018, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 37.003.000 euros.

The budget in 2019

In 2019, the budget allocated to youth within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media was 69.550.000 euro. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 34.530.000 euro.

The budget in 2020

In 2020 the budget allocated to youth within the Departement of Culture, Youth and Media was 57.565.000. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights was 36.610.000 euro.

The budget in 2021

In 2021 the budget allocated to youth within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media was 56.256.000. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights was 36.390.000 euro.

The budget in 2022

The budget allocated to youth within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media will be 58.223.000 euro in 2022. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights will be 33.270.000 euro.

References:

<https://begrotingdigitaal.fenb.be/Klikmodel/Beleidsdomein/BeleidsdomeinDetail/H?jaarro n=0&begrotingsronde=181025>

What is funded?

Parliament acts define the instruments of youth and children's rights policy and the funding of local and provincial authorities and youth organisations. The Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy defines instances of youth work and recognizes institutions and organisations involved with young people and also children's rights policy, defining at the same time the allocation of finances within the system.

The Flemish Government may award operating grants once every four years to professionalised youth centers if they respond to the priorities of the Flemish youth and children's rights policy. This is done on the basis of the decree on supralocal youth work.

The policy priorities referred to in the decree are:

- Stimulating artistic expression
- stimulate an entrepreneurial spirit
- to promote social cohesion between the youth Centre and its surroundings

Youth centers can make an important contribution to the realisation of various objectives of the Flemish youth policy. They can play a role in the social, cultural, educational, media and integration policies for teenagers and young adults. These are places where impulses are given concerning diversity, youth culture, attention for vulnerable groups, a sense of creativity and entrepreneurship.

On 19 June 2013, the Flemish Parliament asked the Flemish Government to recognise youth centers as anchor points for young people in local communities and to see them as partners, especially in areas that are also a priority in the Flemish Youth Policy Plan: diversity, youth culture, community schools, vulnerable groups and a sense of creativity and entrepreneurship.

Youth centers that meet a number of conditions were able to receive subsidies for the implementation of:

- a supra-local project to promote artistic expression among young people
- a supra-local project to support entrepreneurship among young people.

Each project can receive a staff grant of maximum 40 000 euro and an operating grant of maximum 5 000 euro.

Parliament act supra local youth work, youth houses and targeted youth work

In October 27, the Flemish government accepted the draft 'parliament act supra local youth work, youth houses and target work'. The parliament act stipulates that from 2020, youth work that is not directed at the whole Flemish community but that does respond to Flemish government priorities will be supported. The parliament act brings together different subsidy channels and supports youth work that is focused on the realization of youth work for all young people. Thereby, attention was paid to recommendations of the Council for Culture, Youth and Media, the Flemish Youth Council, the social partners and the State Council.

The parliament Act brings together different subsidy channels and is targeted at four groups:

- Professional youth houses that are focused on the Flemish youth policy priorities
- Professional youth work with vulnerable children and young people
- Supra-local youth work with children and young people with a disability
- Inter-municipal cooperation that stimulates cooperation and networking between the local authorities and youth associations

The support of supra-local youth work with children and young people with a disability and of inter-municipal cooperation are new tasks of the Flemish government, given the new tasks assigned to the provinces.

Main aspects:

The main aspects of the parliament act are:

- A multi annual structural support for associations that anticipate the priorities of the Flemish youth policy or that develop a supra-local activity
- Project funds that provide associations opportunities to correspond to new developments
- Limiting the administrative work for initiators
- Conducting a complementary policy in respect to the local authorities

Timing

The parliament act has entered into force in different stages. For the subsidy channel 'supra local youth work with children and young people with a disability', transitional measures were foreseen in 2018 and 2019 and the funding on the basis of this parliament act has started 1 January 2020. For the subsidy channel about inter-municipal cooperation, transitional measures are foreseen and the funding on the basis this parliament act has started 1 January 2021.

Financial accountability

Youth organisations play an important role in the implementation of Flanders' youth policy. Youth organisations or youth associations usually receive funding based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes. The criteria for types of organisations funded is described in the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012:

- Nationally organized youth associations
- Associations for participation and information
- Cultural education associations

Youth organisations or youth associations receiving an operational grant on the basis of the Flemish Parliament Act of 11 January 2012 on 'conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights' need to submit a financial report and a report of an independent auditor, who's a member of the institute of auditors, to the Flemish administration every year. The date and formal requirements of the reports defined by the Flemish government.

Use of EU funds

The Flemish youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan does not (directly) use EU funds. Some youth organisations or youth associations are supported through EU funds. EU funds that have been used are:

Erasmus+:

Erasmus+ is the EU funding programme for education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It runs from 2014 till the end of 2020 with a total budget of 14.7 billion euro. Within Erasmus+ there are different sections: one for education and training, one for sport and one for youth and projects. The youth section of Erasmus+ is called Youth in Action. It funds projects for and by young people and youth organisations. It has a separate budget and specific project possibilities. In 2016, the Youth in Action-programme in Flanders has a budget of 2.445.718 euro. The Flemish government has designated JINT vzw to coordinate and to implement the youth programme in Flanders. JINT vzw is in charge of information and promoting, training, funding and assessment.

ESF 2014-2020:

The Operational Programme for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Flanders in 2014-2020 period supports initiatives that increase employment and improve social cohesion in Flanders. In the years to come, 1 billion euro will be invested. The ESF programme lays down the priorities for the expenditure of 1 billion euro. 600 million euro is financed through the Flemish budget and 400 million euro through the European budget.

The Operational Programme of the European Social Fund has a cycle of 7 years. Preparations for the 2021-2027 operational programme are ongoing.

Cooperation

As mentioned in other chapters, Youth work is a transversal policy, which is to include not only the area of 'culture, youth and media' but also other policy field such as social inclusion, employment, health and housing. It is envisaged that each department takes its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals with the Youth Policy Plan, while the minister of Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting in the Plan's implementation to the government. Youth policy is based on the group policy approach, which permeates almost every other policy sector, focusing on youth as specific group.

Besides the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, the Act on a renewed Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy envisaged three more instruments of youth policy:

- Impact study new legislation on children and youth (JoKER) – this specifies that any draft Act affecting the people under the age of 25 and submitted to the Flemish parliament has to be accompanied by a report regarding its impact on children and youth.
- Contact points for youth and children's rights and a coordinating administration – all bodies of the Flemish government have to appoint on staff member as the contact point for the youth policy. The Youth Policy Plan and responsible for estimating the impact of the policy of their institution on young people. The division Knowledge and Policy is the coordinating administration in all these matters.
- Youth Progress report – a scientific report, to be produced every five years, describing the state of the Youth in the Flemish community.

References:

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<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/-cross-sectorial-approach-other-ministries-belgium-flemish-community>

10.4 Quality and innovation in youth work

Quality assurance

There is no national quality assurance framework for youth work. However, the parliament act of 20 January 2012 on revised youth and children's rights policy plan ensures structural support for youth work organisations at community level. It sets out funding conditions for national-level (i.e. Flemish) youth organisations and requires that the organisations operate in line with the national-level priorities. In this connection, each structural subsidised youth organisations operate in line with the national-level priorities. In this connection, each structural subsidised youth organization must submit an annual progress report which entails amongst others a financial report and an activity report.

Research and evidence supporting Youth Work

The Flemish government is mapping the youth (work) policy of the local governments in the 'cijferboek' (= book with quantitative figures). The 'cijferboek' appears every three years. It's a questionnaire, which monitors the policy of local governments concerning youth. This questionnaire results in quantitative figures on the local youth policy, such as political responsibilities, youth councils, presence and support of youth work, infrastructure of youth work, youth space, information for youth and communication and cooperation with other sectors.

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed Flemish policy on youth and children's rights mentions that the Youth Monitor (JOP-monitor) is one of the instruments for a youth and children's right policy. The Youth Monitor is a scientific report with statistical data on youth gathered by the Youth Research Platform. The Youth Research Platform (JOP) is an interdisciplinary and interuniversity collaboration between Ghent University, KU Leuven and Vrije Universiteit Brussels.

The JOP periodically gathers own empirical data on the conduct, convictions and life circumstances of contemporary Flemish youth through this Youth Monitor (JOP-Monitor). Therefore, 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, such as youth work, education, work, sociodemographic information, household, political attitude, leisure participation, media (school) well-being and delinquency. The Youth Monitor appears at least every five years. The first Youth Monitor was conducted on 2005-2006. Since the administration of the first monitor in 2005, two new versions of the youth Monitor have been administrated, each also in a random sample of Flemish youth, both times between the ages of 12 and 30. In 2008, the second Youth Monitor was conducted by a mail survey and in 2013 the third version of the Youth Monitor was administered. The statistical data of these Youth Monitors can be explored through an interactive database.

Next to these general surveys, JOP city-monitors have been administered in several cities in Flanders. These surveys more specifically aim to bring more insight into the specificity of growing up and living in contemporary urban environments in Flanders. More specifically, a School Monitor was conducted in the city of Brussels in 2010. In 2012, a School Monitor was conducted in the cities of Antwerp and Ghent. In 2013, a new school survey in the cities of Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels was administered. These studies offer

a more comprehensive and more nuanced insight in the living conditions, attitudes and behavior of young people growing up in Flemish cities. Participation in youth work is one of the topics covered in these monitors.

Participative Youth Work

The Flemish Youth Council is therefore certainly involved participative youth work e.g. when, as now announced in the policy document, the Decree of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy, will be closely examined in the coming legislature, it will be in discussion with the Flemish Youth Council and youth workers delegated by the Flemish Youth Council via the Youth Work Committee.

On the other hand, the Minister himself chooses certain focuses in his policy and, for example, a project line can be written on which we then have a little less influence purely in terms of focus or subject matter, the elaboration of which and, for example, calls, can sometimes be discussed.

For more information see section 5.4 of chapter 5.

References:

http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/onderzoek_staatjeugd_cijferboek.aspx

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Smart youth work: youth work in the digital world

In a written question, on 8 February 2019, the former Minister of Culture, Youth, Media & Brussels, Sven Gatz (2014-2019), was asked how he views digital youth work. The former minister sees digital youth work as part of the broader concept of 'smart youth work'. Smart youth work is an integral part of general youth work and should not be considered as a special method or a separate movement within the youth work sector. After all, it starts from the same objectives: to create broad development opportunities for children and young people, promote their participation in society and give them room to be young. Smart youth work is about innovation and about offering new (including digital) solutions to the current and future challenges that children, young people and youth workers are confronted with. The design of smart youth work is threefold:

- (1) for children and young people: providing innovative solutions and focusing on developing and promoting their digital skills
- (2) for the youth work sector: to improve the quality, functioning and efficiency of youth work and increase knowledge about children and young people
- (3) for youth workers: develop their digital skills and improve working methods.

Top-level initiatives

At the European level there is a lot of movement around smart and digital youth work. The Council of the European Union adopted conclusions on smart youth work on 20 November 2017. With these conclusions, the Council supports the drive, capacity and competence building of youth workers to develop and implement smart youth work in their own work. There are many European countries with expertise in smart youth work, such as Finland and Estonia, where a definition of digital youth work and a set of competences for it have been developed. A definition of digital youth work, a set of competences for it, a set of recommendations for the Member States, and the exchange of legal good practices and training material were developed. There is also a European network on digital youth work in order to share expertise in this field.

The policymakers are also working with digital youth work. Policy support is provided through international and European cooperation, study visits, exchange of good practices, creating the right

environment and opportunities for the development and promotion of smart youth work, and stimulating transversal partnerships. For instance, a new cooperation agreement 2019-2022 was concluded between Flanders and the Baltic States on smart youth work. On the agenda are study visits, development and dissemination of the concept of smart youth work, international conferences, exchange of good practices, web seminars, ... The current cooperation programme between Flanders and Luxembourg 2018-2019 also pays attention to the development of a maker culture. These international and European practices offer inspiration to support and inspire Flemish youth work.

Trainings

There is more and more focus on digital forms of youth work in Flanders: camps around artificial intelligence, a robot week, a new youth association around games, coding, apps and software, digital art... The Ambrassade has taken the initiative to support youth work organizations in their search for digital possibilities. Together with Cultuurconnect, they have been organising Dig It Up! an inspiration festival that explores the horizons of digital and online tools for art and culture experiences every year. However, youth work organizations also feel the need to focus on digital youth work. Since the online world is no longer separated from the world in which young people spend their time, youth work must also be given a place in the digital world of children and young people. There is consensus in youth work on the fact that, in light of the digital innovations, a kind of catch-up is needed that enables youth work to organise itself differently, to cooperate more with other organisations that are already more educated. The Ambrassade offers them a step-by-step plan in 3 steps:

1) Investigate what digital youth work means and what possibilities it offers for their own organisation; 2) Get inspired by examples of digital youth work at different levels 3) Set up cooperation across sectors. The initiative comes from the youth sector itself.

The Ambrassade explicitly calls for experts to be on hand, to set up collaborations, to experiment and to learn.... to get inspired at Dig It Up, the inspiration day for digital innovation.

Trainings/projects/organisations

Artforum:

At Artforum, children and young people take up space to create unheard stories, to make those stories visible and to use those stories to claim a place in society. They do this by organising an interaction between young people, artists and society. In this way they stimulate an ongoing search that goes beyond the most obvious, in which expression and imagination are central. During their activities, children and young people get to work with the languages of art and culture. The supervisors are artists who work from their artistic passion and experience. The emphasis is on the creative ability of the participants and on the content they provide themselves.

Artforum chooses art for and by young people and works in the midst of today's society. They make the stories of children and young people visible, especially stories that are less often heard today. They work for all children and young people and take social themes and trends as our starting point.

Urban words (Urban woorden):

Since January 2018 Urban Words is an independent project at Artforum. Urban Words is a youth collective that specializes in new metropolitan arts such as rap and slam. Urban Words provides a range of workshops and is involved in the Leuven urban hotspot BURn. Urban Words also organises projects such as TOP theatre, 3DO Radio and Read it Loud and makes space for young creators through creation projects.

Mediaraven:

Mediaraven seizes the opportunities of digital media with children, young people and all those who work with them. With their experience and expertise they create an

experimental space to create media together and develop media skills, a wide range of training and support for those who want to work with children and young people, digital tools and media products for everyone who works with children and young people.

Mediaraven works with young people in the broadest sense of the word: from 3 to 30 years of age. They give their strength and potential a boost via digital media. They respond to different interests, backgrounds and levels of development and this translates into a wide range of activities, trainings and products. They choose to work with children and young people in all contexts: at home, at school and in leisure time. That's why they also want to be a partner for all those who work with children and young people. Mediaraven pays special attention to youth work: together with them they look for ways to use digital media to strengthen their own functioning. Mediaraven strongly believes in the power and possibilities of youth work and take up our role as partner, supporter and inspirer of the sector. They like to translate the experience they gain in the youth work context with experiment, research and daily working with young people into other contexts and sectors.

Nerdlab:

An art education organization that believes that young people are going to save the world. For this they offer creative, technical and social skills to young people. They make things with young people and share their knowledge with everyone who works with them. They also help other organizations or companies with innovative challenges.

Mooss:

Mooss, that's learning "from, about and with" the arts and heritage through active forms of work in the domains of music, theatre, dance, audiovisual and visual arts. Mooss works for children, young people and their supervisors. Mooss is a catalyst for plans around children and young people and art and heritage. They not only organise projects for, but also by young people, where they learn to develop their own initiatives in the sector and expand their network. And they like to share their expertise with other organisations through training, coaching and publications.

Cultuurconnect:

Cultuurconnect combines digital innovation in art and culture with local culture houses, governments, technology players and artistic initiatives. They support Flemish municipalities in the digital challenges of their cultural policy, with an emphasis on public libraries, cultural and community centres.

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10.5 Youth workers

Status in national legislation

There is no legal or regulatory authority for youth work as profession. The department Culture, Youth and Media stimulates and supports a rich and varied offer of non-commercial socio-cultural activities for young people, mainly through subsidies to organisations on national or regional level.

Education, training and skills recognition

Youth associations can offer a framework training programme to young people in order to obtain a certificate as an animator, chief animator or instructor in youth work. Each route consists of a theoretical part, a supervised work placement and an evaluation. Since October 2015, the framework reform paths have been radically changed and the new regulations on framework reform have been included in the decree on the renewed youth and children's rights policy. In the past, organisations had a great deal of freedom in setting up their courses, but with the new Flemish Decree on Framework Reform of 2014, the regulations were harmonised.

Certificate = course (50h) + internship (50h) + evaluation moment (4h/2h)

In the new regulations, a framework reform path consists of three main parts: Association organizes and supervises course of 50h.

1. participant does internship (50h)
2. The association organizes an evaluation moment (4h in group / 2h per individual)
3. A participant who has completed each of the three elements can obtain a certificate.

Completion of a route takes place in a maximum of 3 years

Young people are obliged to complete their entire journey within three years. From the moment they experience their first day of the course until the end of the evaluation period, three years may pass.

Follow-up obligation for the association throughout the entire process

With the new Flemish Decree, organisations are now obliged to bring the participants back into the house for a moment of reflection after their supervised internship. This means that, as an association, you are responsible to organise a course, as well as an evaluation moment for participants who have completed their internship. This also implies that the organisations keep in touch throughout the course.

Working with a generic route booklet

The renewed decree stipulates that all participants will be followed up with the same instrument throughout their framework formation trajectory. In consultation with representatives of the youth work sector, the Youth department developed a generic route booklet for this purpose. This booklet will keep track of the progress of competence development during the course, as well as during the internship and the evaluation moment.

Requirements

The following associations can set up training programmes to obtain a certificate as an animator, lead animator and instructor in youth work:

- Subsidised nationally organised youth associations
- Subsidised cultural education associations
- Subsidised associations information and participation
- Subsidised political youth movements
- Associations with a special assignment, such as De Ambrassade, VVJ, JINT, Children's Rights Knowledge Centre and the Children's Rights Coalition.

Mobility of youth workers

The main objectives

The concept of mobility of youth workers makes it possible to promote cooperation between youth workers and volunteers from different communities, to discover the diversity of youth work in the other community, to develop new methodologies and to set up networking projects to promote professional development.

This activity supports the professional development of youth workers through the implementation of activities such as transnational/international seminars, training courses, contact-promoting events, study visits, etc., or job shadowing/observation periods abroad with an organisation active in the youth field. All these activities may be coordinated and combined to meet the needs and desired impact identified by the participating organisations when organising the project. The professional development of the participating youth workers should contribute to the capacity building for high-quality youth work of their organisation and have a clear impact on the regular work with young people of the participating youth workers. The learning outcomes, including all material, innovative methods and tools, should be further disseminated within the youth field in order to contribute to quality improvements in youth work and/or to promote youth policy development and cooperation.

Examples of types of activities:

- Conferences and seminars: Youth workers from different countries meet for exchange and discussion on a specific theme linked to the priorities of Youth in Action.
- Courses/training courses: Youth workers from different countries gather knowledge, skills and methodologies to enhance the quality of their (inter)national activities.
- Partner-search seminars: in order to find suitable partners for a future Youth in Action project. Youth workers come from different countries and work with the same target group or around a central theme.
- Study visits: an international group of youth workers visit youth organisations in a given country. They work with a specific target group or around a specific theme. There is also room for discussion and reflection.
- Jobshadowing in another organisation active in youth work: A youth worker participates in another youth work organisation and gets insight in how the organisation works around a certain theme or with a specific target group.

The geographical scope of programmes/projects/initiatives

General information on the geographical scope of Erasmus+ and Youth in Action is described in chapter 2, section 2.5.

In 2019, the focus in the selection of projects will be on:

- reaching out to vulnerable young people, promoting diversity, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the common values of freedom, tolerance and respect for human rights, as well as projects promoting media literacy, developing critical thinking and initiative among young people
- Equipping youth workers with the competences and methods for their professional development, including digital youth work, necessary for communicating the common basic values of our society, in particular to young people who are difficult to reach, and for preventing violent radicalisation of young people.

Taking into account the critical context in Europe, and given that youth work, non-formal learning and volunteering can contribute to meeting the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and/or promote awareness of these issues in local communities, particular attention will also be paid in this context to supporting youth mobility projects involving or focusing on refugees/asylum seekers and migrants.

- **References:**

- <https://www.vlaanderen.be/kadervorming-en-attesten-voor-jeugdwerkers>
- <https://www.youthinaction.be/over-ons>
- <http://www.bel-j.be/bel-j/index.php/nl/organisaties/mobiliteitvanjeugdwe...>
- https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-b/three-key-actions/key-action-1/mobility-project-for-young-people-and-youth-workers_nl
- <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work>

10.6 Recognition and validation of skills acquired through youth work

Existing arrangements

General information is provided in chapter 6, section 6.4. The framework applying to non-formal and formal learning is also explicated under that section.

Skills

General information is provided in chapter 6, section 6.4. The framework applying to non-formal and formal learning is also explicated under that section.

10.7 Raising awareness about youth work

Information providers

For leaders in youth movements or animators in youth work there are a lot of informative and useful websites.

Websites on rules within youth work:

- Are you going on a walking or cycling tour with your group? Then take a look at www.veiligopstap.be for tips.
- Everything you need to know about your classrooms can be found on Jeugdlokalen.be.
- Everything you need to know to organise a party can be found on Ikorganiseer.be.

Website on games and room to play

- Do you want to play another game? On www.spelensite.be you'll find more than 2,900 forest games, ball games, circle games ...
- Goe Gespeeld! gives tips and information about space to play, the importance of movement, adventure, playing in the green, risks ...
- On Youth Maps you'll find all the other youth activities in your neighbourhood and a lot of play areas: nice places, youth accommodations, play forests ... Make your own trip between the nicest play areas in your neighbourhood.

Website on going to camp

- No inspiration to cook at camp? Find more than 450 recipes at www.kokenopkamp.be to take your camp costs to the next level.
- Are you leaving for camp? Check Opkamp.be for good campsites, regulations and papers to apply for admission.
- What to do with mobile phones at camp? On www.mediaopkamp.be you will find a lot of inspiration to work with them in a fun and responsible way!

Also interesting!

- Want to inform your members in a reliable way? Discover all the websites, leaflets and games with the WHAT WHAT label on the Pinterest page of the label!
- Is your website suddenly offline? Do you want to reach more followers on the Facebook page of your youth movement? The Mediaraven Media Helpdesk will help you!
- Drugsinbeweging.be helps your youth movement to draw up rules about alcohol and drugs.
- Are you looking for ways to brainstorm, evaluate or give back some energy to your group? Check out the Working Methods database of De Ambrassade.
- Do you want to do something for refugees? Sign up to volunteer to organize activities at an unaccompanied minor shelter. Check the website of Wereldspelers.

Formations

- Other organisations provide training to train you as an animator or leadership in a particular theme.
- For example, Tumult works on non-violence among young people.
- Pimento gives courses and workshops on relationships and sexuality in youth work.

Mediaraven gives trainings on media.

- You can read all about the route to the Attest Animator in Youth Work on www.mijnkadervorming.be

References:

<https://www.watwat.be/vrijwilligerswerk/ik-ben-leider-een-jeugdbeweging-welke-websites-moet-ik-kennen>

Key initiatives

Flanders has already taken steps, taken initiatives and started pilot projects, but especially from organisations (the Ambrassade) and youth movements themselves. The government's efforts to raise public awareness about the value of youth work are scarce.

Further information is provided in chapter 6, section 6.9.

10.8 Current debates and reforms

Social developments seem to further enlarge and deepen the existing socio-economic and socio-cultural fault lines. Year after year, the number of children and young people growing up in poverty is increasing. In terms of poverty and evolutions in the area of migration, our cities have become super diverse over the past decades. The group of 'people with disabilities' has not increased in numerical terms, but the focus has shifted from the 'people with disabilities' group to the 'people with a disability' group. For these "invisible citizens" has been enlarged.

In fact, diversity is on the rise, and the diversity present is on the rise, that is more prominent in the foreground. With regard to the youth work policy, a double problem definition is put forward. There is an under-representation of certain target groups in youth work. Research from the Youth Research Platform (JOP) shows that girls, young people with a lower level of education, and young people with a lower level of education are less represented. Among the 12 to 17-year old we see that young people from general tracks participate in youth work up to twice as much as young people from the vocational tracks.

A priority around youth work development is how youth work can deal with the growing diversity in our society. A sticking point is the overregulation which is the result of the

multitude of administrative procedures and regulations, there is little room for bottom-up initiatives and innovation in youth work.

GLOSSARY

Administration for youth policy: the administrative entity of the administrative services who are responsible for the implementation of youth policy.

Ambrassade: support centre for youth work and youth information, secretariat of the Flemish Youth Council. Supported by the Flemish Government.

Better Administrative Policy: In the frame of a programme for 'Better Administrative Policy' the Flemish public administration has been subjected to a reform in 2006 (Flemish government, s.d.). This programme was designed to make the public administration more efficient, to make Flanders a place where people enjoy working and living.

Citizen's Cabinet (Burgerkabinet): this is an initiative of Flemish Minister for Culture, Media, Youth and Brussels Sven Gatz. The goal of this initiative is to give people a voice and discuss cultural and youth policies.

Commission: A commission is a group of Flemish representatives, who are specialised in a particular subject, such as education, welfare or economy. A commission has fifteen permanent members and fifteen alternates, divided according to the strength of the political groups. Commissions prepare the decrees, check the Flemish government policy (e.g. through questions or interpellations to the Minister).

Community fund (gemeentefonds): this is a source of income for local authorities. Approximately one fifth of the income of local authorities arises from this Flemish fund. The fund is divided amongst the municipalities based on different standards. Municipalities can define the allocation of the fund and can use these financial means as they see fit. It only has to be divided between the local authority and OCMW.

Community Schools: schools who have an active cooperation with other sectors to create a rich learning and living environment for children and young people.

Cross-curricular attainment target (VOET): Attainment targets are minimum goals which the government deems necessary and attainable for pupils in a certain level of education.

Division youth: the 'Division Youth' is embedded in the Flemish department of culture. In short, the Division Youth has five main tasks: preparation, follow-up, evaluation and implementation of legislation (e.g. the Flemish Youth Policy Plan), funding support structures, youth organisations, youth projects, youth hostels and accommodation centers, as well as municipal and provincial youth (work) policy, providing material support for youth work: e.g. the lending service for camping equipment for youth associations, providing information on youth (work) policy (e.g. via website and e-zine) and representing Flanders at international forums.

EUROSTAT: statistical organisation of the EU.

EVC policy (Eerder Verworven Competenties): Early Acquired Competences policy values competences acquired elsewhere. In other words, EVC provides the opportunity to people to have their relevant experience recognised, independently of the context they acquired these competences.

Flemish Parliament Act or decree: Flemish Parliament Acts or Decrees are Flemish laws approved by the Flemish Parliament and are applicable to all persons in the Flemish Region, and to Flemish institutions in Brussels.

HBSC: Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children.

JoKER (Child and Youth effects report): it is an impact study of new legislation directly affecting the interests of children. This specifies that any draft Act affecting the people under the age of 25 and submitted to the Flemish parliament has to be accompanied by a report regarding its impact on children and youth. By decree of July 18, 2008 (decree on the conduct of a Flemish youth and children's rights policy the child impact report (KER) has been extended to a child and youth impact report (JoKER).

National Youth Associations: these are associations engaged in youth work covering the entire Flemish Community. An association can be recognised as a National Youth Association if it offers a sufficiently large range of activities: such as support for local youth associations, an own range of activities for young people, training for youth workers, products specifically for youth work – or a combination of the above. Recognised National Youth Associations receive funding for their operational costs and can apply for additional project subsidies.

Point of contact: all bodies of the Flemish government have to appoint one staff member as the contact point for the youth policy. These Contact Persons assess the impact of the regular policy activities of their departments on youth and children.

Political youth movement: is a membership association of persons up to thirty years old, which encourages young people to take up active citizenship and that sensitizes and develops young people in view of their participation in political decision-making, in the operation of a particular political party and in public debate.

Primary education: Primary education in Flanders comprises both pre-school education and primary education.

Youth: The Flemish Community formally defines 'youth' as the group of children and young people up to and including the age of 30.

Youth ambassadors: Youth ambassadors of the Flemish Youth Council are young people who think about social themes and represent the Flemish youth in the Flemish policy.

Youth and children's rights policy: the comprehensive and integrated vision and a government's resulting systemic and plan-based measures which aim to have a perceptible effect on youth, with a special focus on children's rights, as moral and legal framework.

Youth Paragraph: The youth paragraph is an effect report preceding a decision. It is a policy tool that assesses certain municipal decisions on child-friendliness.

Youth Progress Report: a scientific report, to be produced every five years, describing the state of the youth in the Flemish community.

Youth Research Platform (JOP): JOP is an interdisciplinary and interuniversity partnership of three research groups: (1) Research group Tempus Omnia Revelat (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); (2) Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy (Ghent University); (3) Youth Criminology research group (LINC, KU Leuven).

Youth sector: [youth associations](#) subsidised by the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights.

Youth work: socio-cultural work based on noncommercial purposes by or for young people of three to thirty years, during leisure time, with educational guidance and to promote the general and integral development of the young people who participate in it on a voluntarily basis.

Youth worker: any person who takes responsibility in youth work and who has verifiable experience, or makes efforts in the area of education and training in relation to youth (work).

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