

BELGIUM

INHOUD

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INTRODUCTION

In 'part one' each partner can offer some 'facts & figures' and 'legal framework' which gives an idea about the context of the host country. The aim is not to be complete nor to compare with other countries, but to give relevant information in order to help the participants/visitors to better understand the 'best practices' presented to them during the coming meetings.

After the meeting, the host partner can be asked to complete 'part two'. Best practices can be 'tools, programs, initiatives, methodologies, instruments,...' of which it has been proven to be effective in enhancing the employability of young people and to activate them. During the meeting the presented 'best practices' can be discussed: what are the results? what are its strengths/weaknesses? Are there other opportunities? Are there new ideas/suggestions? What about the transferability to another country? Are there any recommendations to make towards policy makers?

PART I CONTEXT

FACTS & FIGURES

1. Unemployment rates of your country: national, regional, local averages

In Flanders the latest unemployment rate is measured to be 8.02%, representing 237.201 job seekers. In West-Flanders the unemployment rate is slightly lower, namely 6.57% (statistics of Arvastat, February 2015). To make it possible to compare the rates on a national, regional, provincial and local level we go back to a research of the station of support for Work and Social Economy (WSE) conducted in 2012. We have to keep in mind though that the rates have increased for some percentages by now.

WSE 2012		Inhabitants	Employable population	Unemployment rate	Amount of job seekers
National level	Belgium	7.246.910	5.000.937	11.20%	560.214
Regional level	Flanders	4.146.127	2.949.151	6,90%	204.396
	Wallonia	2.330.090	1.573.341	15.80%	297.264
	Brussels	770.693	478.445	22.50%	107.854
Provincial level	West-Flanders	745.377	537.730	5.6%	29.854
Local (city) level	Courtrai	47.678	34.130	7.80%	2.646

2. Youth unemployment rates of your country: national, regional, local averages

As regards to youth the latest unemployment rate for employable young people under the age of 25 in Flanders is measured to be 16.58% (or 45.348 young people). In West-Flanders there is a youth unemployment rate of 6.57% (statistics of Arvastat, February 2015). Once again, to make it possible to compare the rates on a national, regional, provincial and local level we go back to the research of the station of support for Work and Social Economy (WSE) conducted in 2012.

WSE 2012		Young inhabitants (age under 25)	Employable Young inhabitants	Youth unemployment rate	Amount of young job seekers
National level	Belgium	1.328.208	480.643	23.70%	113.808
Regional level	Flanders	741.048	276.414	20.09%	44.940
	Wallonia	448.939	162.155	25.70%	54.109
	Brussels	138.221	42.075	34.50%	14.760
Provincial level	West-Flanders	136.760	54.867	17.70%	7.083
Local (city) level	Courtrai	9.312	3.498	22.40%	565

3. Unemployment benefits of your country (Criteria to get them, minimum amount, duration of getting benefits,...)

In Belgium there are two systems of unemployment benefits: there are unemployment benefits 'after a job'

and unemployment benefits 'after studies'.

You can get **unemployment benefits after having lost your job** under the following conditions:

- previous to your request you must have been working a certain amount of days
- the loss of your job must have been involuntary

The rules on the exact amount of days you must have been working in a certain period previous to your request is depending on your age.

The amount of money you get is calculated considering your marital status, your former salary and your job history and is currently 503.62 euros per month at minimum. There is no fixed duration for this benefit, but the amount of money you get decreases as time passes by.

If you didn't have a job before or if you don't have enough previous job days, you may be qualified for an **unemployment benefit after studies**. Criteria to get these benefits are:

- you have gone through all levels of secondary education (having achieved the certificate is no criterion) OR you got at least a certificate of the third grade of general secondary education or a certificate of the second grade of technical/vocational/art secondary education or you got a certificate of 'second chance education' (see educational system of Belgium below) OR you succeeded in an entrance examination for higher education/you were engaging in higher education and you've been attending education for at least a period of six years before your request (regardless of the level of education)
- you're no longer at school age
- you're no longer attending education
- you've gone through a waiting time for 310 days (after finishing education)
- you've been actively seeking for a job during that waiting time
- you have not reached the age of 25 at the time of requesting the benefit (there are some exceptions on this rule)

The amount of money you get in this benefit system is calculated depending on your marital status and your age. The amount is 266.50 euros per month at minimum (for a cohabiting young person under the age of 18).

The duration of getting this benefit is limited to 3 years.

4. Social benefits of your country (if applicable)

(Criteria to get them, minimum amount, duration of getting benefits,...)

In Belgium you can get social benefits via the public centres of welfare under the following conditions:

- you have your priority residence at Belgium
- you have the Belgian nationality or your partner is a EU inhabitant or you're a political refugee or you're registered in the civil register as a foreigner
- you're 18 plus or you're married or you're pregnant or you have a child to take care for
- you cannot provide your own income
- you are willing to get a job (unless you have physical or other legal reasons not to)
- you are willing to subscribe for other possible benefits
- if you're under 25 years old you have to sign a contract of agreements (on actions to find a job or to improve your welfare)

The amount of money you get is calculated depending on your marital status and is at minimum 544.19 euros per month for a cohabiting person. If you do have other incomes, these incomes can be subtracted. There is no limit on duration.

5. Figures of early school leavers (if available)

In 2012 6.985 young people in Flanders left school without certificate. This is 10% of all Flemish school leavers in 2012 (73.385 young people). A research on job chances for school leavers showed that these unqualified young people have indeed less chances on the labour market compared to their qualified peers. 30.6% of the unqualified school leavers in 2012 had no job one year later, whereas on average 'only' 13% of all school leavers was seeking a job one year after they left school.

6. Existence of any kind of work agency, job center, ... to support 'activation of people' (= getting a job) (name + private or public + short description of their services)

Every region in Belgium has its own **public work agency** (with different local premises). In Flanders this is 'VDAB' (the Flemish Agency for Job placement and Vocational training). VDAB collects vacancies, provides job guidance and vocational training. VDAB outsources part of these activities to **private intermediary organisations**. Private intermediary organisations can also provide job guidance independent of VDAB.

In Belgium there are lots of private **temporary employment agencies** as well. These organisations get paid by employers to match jobseekers with their vacancies for temporary jobs.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

EDUCATION: POLICY TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE

- Overview of education - 'flow' of an individual (from primary school to ...)
- Minimum age of leaving school
- Specific measures taken to better match with the labor market
- ...

Below we provide an overview on the educational system in Belgium.

In Belgium compulsory education is at stake from the month September of the year the kid turns six and lasts until the 18th birthday if this day is situated before the 30th of June and until the 30th of June of the year a person gets 18 if not.

In Belgium there is not compulsory to go to school. This means that parents also can educate their kid themselves or pay a private teacher. In that case the controlling of the quality of this private education and the taking of exams is done by an independent commission.

The entrance to the first and secondary level of official education is fully subsidised. The entrance for the tertiary level of official education is subsidised as well. The maximum of entrance fees at tertiary level is now 1000 euros per year.

The educational system in Belgium may have some specific characteristics.

- For young people with specific learning disabilities and/or mental/motorial disorders there is special education in which education can be provided more at the pace of the child.

- For people who did not achieve their certificate of secondary education in their earlier years there is 'Second Chance Education', in which they get training and guidance to still attain their certificate.
- Besides the general, art, technical and art secondary education there is also the possibility of 'part-time learning': learning and working at the same time. In that system students at a minimum age of 15 attend school for 2 days and engage in an apprenticeship on the other 3 days of the week. For students who are not ready yet to fully engage in apprenticeships there are also some intermediate forms of part-time learning in which there is more guidance provided during the apprenticeship or in which the 3 working days are exchanged with courses on attitudes,... (part-time is not quite the same as dual learning, but it's pretty close. Part-time learning is a system of part-time in school, part-time in work. Dual learning is an integrated form of learning in the workplace. In recent publications of Voka, Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, dual learning is promoted as the way forward in the battle against youth unemployment, stating that in Belgium, this type of learning is not yet enough integrated).
- Finally, next to the possibility to attend higher professional education or academic education (=university) at a tertiary educational level, there are also organisations providing adult education, there are public employment training services (see the services of VDAB above), private training services,...

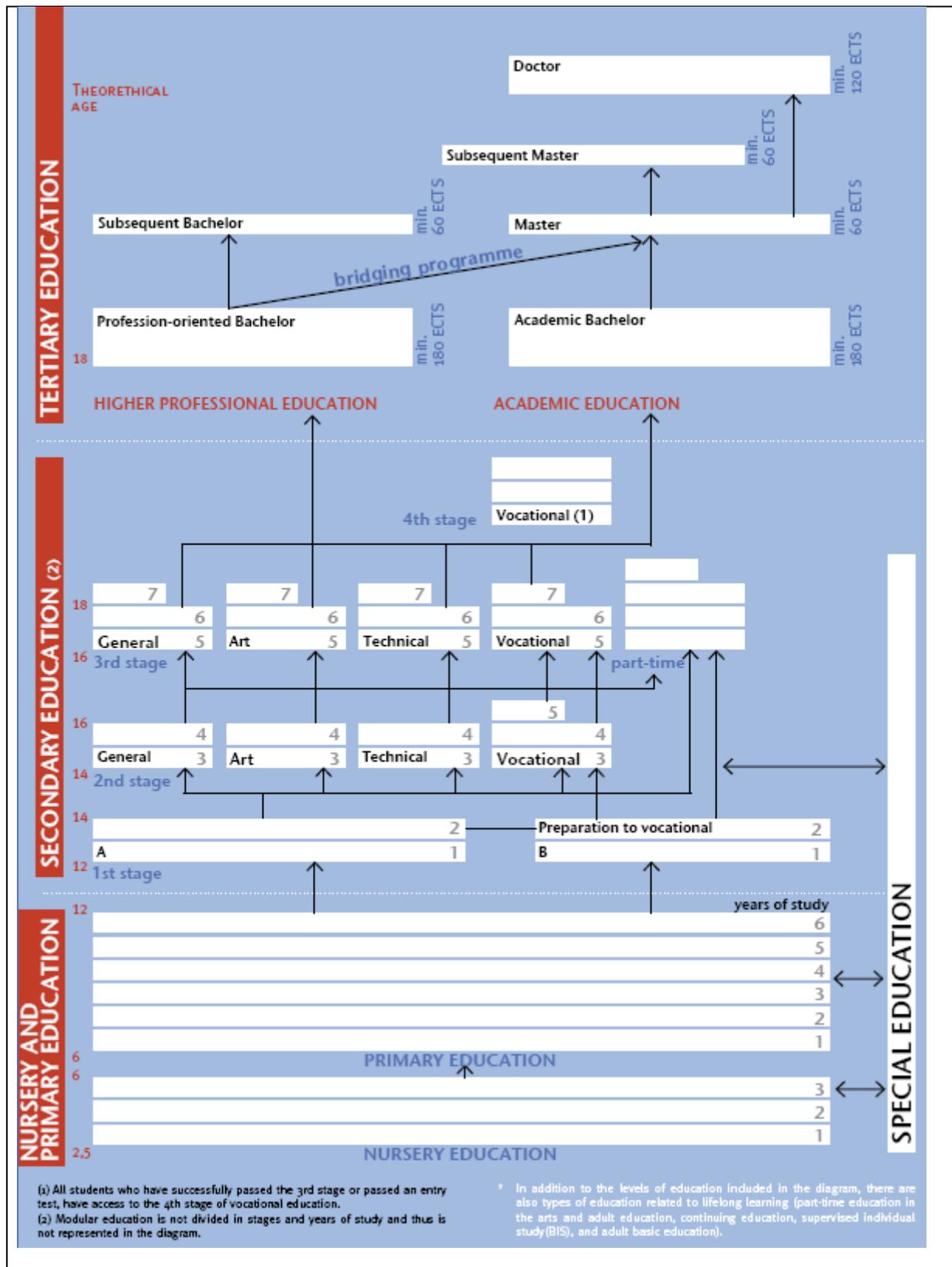
Special measures to match education better with the labour market: cooperation between education providers and VDAB:

- Do-days: One day a year, children from the last year in primary school can go to the competence centres of VDAB to taste from different technical professions.
- Campus-actions: Informing students on what to do after graduation.
- Infosessions for teachers: information for teachers on how they can prepare their students for the transition to the labour market.
- ...

On the website of VDAB there is a part especially for youngsters, with information about 'graduated, now what?', with short job movies, e-coaching, ...

Other specific measures for students:

- 72-hour-arrangement: Students from the last years of secondary education can get free (vocational) training by VDAB.
- Short modules for part-time learners: part-time students can take 10 days of training in a VDAB competence center.
- Certification trainings: special courses in education for certification based on labor market related policy principles, including: qualification in function of career prospects and employment opportunities and focused on bottleneck vacancies and fit within labor market developments



WORK: LABOR MARKET POLICY TO ENHANCE (RE)EMPLOYMENT OF YOUTH

1. Subsidies (for employers or/and employees)

In Belgium there are several arrangements to stimulate activation of (young) job seekers.

A first of these arrangements is '**activa**': A subsidy for employers who hire people who have been workless for a certain period of time. The amount of money the employer gets is depending on the age of the employee, the length of his/her previous period of being workless and his/her level of schooling. The subsidy consists of two components: One part is a reduction of taxes the employer has to pay, the other part is a contribution to the wage of the employee so that the employer pays less for the hiring of his employee.

Specifically for employees under the age of 25 the employer can count on a activa-subsidy if the employee has been workless for at least 12 months in the previous 18 months. The subsidy consists of 1000 euros of tax reduction for a period of 5 quarters and a contribution of 500 euros on the wage of the employee for a period of 16 months.

In small and medium size companies employers can also get **subsidy for the training** they provide for their employees. The money they get is depending on the training costs and can be 15.000 euros at maximum.

For jobseekers/employees there are also subsidy possibilities concerning **mobility** problems. Job seekers can get cheap train tickets (1 or 2 euros) if they have a job interview or job examination. For people who found a steady job for at least 18 hours a week there is a mobility bonus of 743 euros available if they are living at least 60 kilometres away from their job and if they have to travel more than 4 hours to get there/are more than 12 hours away from home on a working day. This bonus is given only once.

Finally, there are a variety of **grants for employees with a mental/motorial disabilities and their employers**. Next to subsidies at the level of wage, there are subsidies for employers as well to transform the working place if necessary. For people who are not able to work in a 'normal economic company', there are '**social economic companies**'. In these companies people with disabilities or context problems can work with adapted support. Nevertheless, these companies also target profitable production!

2. Specific programs (trainings, internships, job placements,...)

In Belgium specific subsidies are available for employers who provide **internships**. Employers who provide an internship for people under the age of 25, who don't have a certificate of their secondary education and who have been workless for at least 6 months can count on this subsidy. The employer pays his trainee 200 euros per month and does not have to pay taxes, whereas the trainee gets paid an extra income supplement of 26.82 euro per day. Moreover, VDAB gives the employer support to find an eligible trainee and to organise the internship.

A specific kind of subsidy for internships is the program '**IBO**', which stands for Individual Vocational Training. In this program an employer gives on-the-job training to a job seeker for a duration varying between 1 and 6 months. In that period VDAB helps to organise the training and gives support to both the employer and the job seeker. During the training period the employer doesn't have to pay a wage or pay taxes. (S)he only has to pay a small 'productivity bonus' to the trainee (who still gets his/her unemployment benefit). Nevertheless, if the IBO period is completed successfully, the employer is obligated to give the trainee a job contract.

Youth Guarantee: The Youth Guarantee is a new strategy to tackle youth unemployment and ensures that every young person under 25, whether or not registered with the employment within four months after leaving formal education, or after he or she has been unemployed gets a decent, concrete offer. This offer should come down to a job, apprenticeship, internship, or continuing training or competency enhancing supply that matches the situation and needs of each individual.

WIJ (Work Experience for Youngsters): Young people who find themselves without qualifications or work experience in the labor market, have a hard time finding a job. To assist them in finding a job or obtaining useful qualifications, the Flemish government introduced a new instrument through the Career Agreement: Work Experience for Youngsters. Flemish Employment Minister Philippe Muyters "When VDAB offers a work place, the young person is required to take it. The work experience may include a variety of measures: from education and training to short internships in different companies. We resolutely go for customization: a work experience project is an individual support plan, according to the needs of the job seeker" The project can take 12 to 18 months, depending again on specific situation of the job seeker. Because youth unemployment is particularly an urban phenomenon, especially among young people without qualifications, the Flemish government is working with the 13 Flemish 'centre cities' (also Kortrijk).

Voortraject (preliminary process) for vulnerable target groups: Objective: Setting up of pathways that lead to the target is in a stronger position to be in the labor market or to enter the labor market inducted. The job seekers who are at risk of dropping out or hard to reach through the normal channels. They are people from vulnerable groups. These are vulnerable groups that are either in training or guidance, nor at work. This vulnerability can be due to all sorts of reasons: pregnancy and maternity, long-term illness, disability, death, conscious and informed choice to stay at home, moving abroad, poverty, failure of notice by VDAB, ... Some of these individuals will finally disappear from the labour market. These job seekers should be found and be prepared for a concrete route to work. We notice that not all job seekers are achieved through regular counseling agencies like example VDAB. That's why VDAB is investing in other agencies with specific approaches that the current governmental offices can't offer.

WELFARE: SOCIAL POLICY TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL WELFARE OF YOUTH

- Rent allowances,
- Child care benefits,
- Tax reductions,
- Mobility benefits,
- ...

In Belgium social policy includes several measures to integrate disadvantaged groups in society.

For people who have difficulties to find an affordable rented house, there are specific **social house agencies**. With these agencies, people who have a low income can be considered for a house with reduced rent costs. For people with an income under certain standards there is a **social loan system** as well. Within this system people pay lower interests for their loan.

In Belgium, the sum people have to pay for **childcare** depends on their income as well. The less money you make, the less money you pay for child care.

Likewise, the amount of **taxes** you pay in Belgium is depending on your income and your properties. Again, people who have a lower income will pay less taxes.

People who get social benefits via a local service centre (OCMW) can get **support** in this centre in managing their financial, housing,... situation as well. These centres can also provide **reductions** on leisure time activities, mobility,...

BEST PRACTICES

Description/explanation of 'programs', 'tools', 'methodologies', 'Successful stories', 'initiatives public/private' ... to enhance the (re)employment or improve the employability of youngsters in the labor market

In 1-2-3 (see presentation Marjolein & Stijn during Belgian meeting)

The ESF project 'In 1-2-3' in the region of the South and the Centre of West-Flanders focusses on young unemployed people between the age of 18 and 25 who have (financial, domestic, attitudinal,...) problems that restrain them from looking for/finding a job. These people are currently not served by the standard programs guiding people to work. The project provides both individual guidance - in helping to solve individual problems - and group sessions in which several steps to (or conditions of) work are discussed and trained on. The main purpose of the project is to allow people at the end of their 'In 1-2-3 trajectory' to join the standard guiding programs to work. In addition, the project brings different aid workers within the region together and let them exchange knowhow about dealing with this vulnerable target group. In this project Mentor takes responsibility as lead partner and works together with several partner organisations: public centres for social welfare, centres for general health and a centre for integration of immigrant's.

Why is this a best practice?

- Joint efforts between the field of welfare and the field of work, organizations working together to guide the person individually and in group on a number of personal requirements
- Group aspect: modules on work in small groups of 10 persons with one confidant counselor
- Easily accessible: we start with informal interactions with the youngsters, like sharing a meal, to motivate them into the more intensive sessions on work. Even in these later sessions we try to approach the youngsters with games and a 'non-school' approach.
- At tempo and based on the interests of participant: Part of the program is co-designed by the youngsters. The length of the trajectory and the amount of individual guidance sessions is also depending on the need of the youngster.
- Learning network of youth workers and stakeholders to share and exchange good practices on working with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

Any preconditions for transferability?

- This project was funded by ESF-funding. To start up this module you need an investment of staff costs, for 2 groups of 10 youngsters we are currently employing one part-time coach and a project manager for 30% of working time. For this investment, the two groups can each have 2 sessions per week (so 4 half days a week for a total of 20 people).

IBO (see presentation Ellen Albrechts from VDAB during Belgian meeting)

IBO is a financial benefit for the employers who employ long term unemployed jobseekers (reduced taxes, only pay a 'productivity bonus' on top of the unemployment benefit of the 'new employee').

Why is this a best practice?

- Reducing risk of early drop-outs considering the investment of the training on the job.
- A chance for jobseekers/employees to find out if they like this job/employer and if it suits them.
- VDAB counselor as a neutral intermediate for jobcoaching and counselling.
- Extra support for the employer to train the new employee.
- Protection for employee against early dismissal by employer, employer is also bounded by the IBO-contract to hire the employee for at least the same duration of the IBO-contract after this has finished.

Any preconditions for transferability?

- You need governmental funding and support (cf. VDAB).
-

Bus to work (see presentation Bruno Messiaen from the City of Kortrijk during Belgian meeting)

Cooperation between employer and the City of Kortrijk and intermediate organisations that guide unemployed people. The goal is to recruit people for jobs at one certain company, put them on a bus to get them to the workplace and giving them the opportunity to work there.

Why is this a best practice?

- Focus on mobility: work on practical issues like arranging transport
- Focus on employer and the needs of his business.
- Possibility for employees to get an IBO-contract so (1) a more sustainable employment, (2) employers to get financial benefits and (3) extra coaching from a guidance counsellor.

Any preconditions for transferability?

- You need an employer to pay for or share the costs of the bus.
- Engagement of all partners and stakeholders, to coordinate this and to take into account the needs of both employer, employee and intermediate organization.

FUTURE:

IDEAS, SUGGESTIONS IN ORDER TO ACTIVATE YOUNG PEOPLE

RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS