Youth employment measures

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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

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.