Youth employment measures

Vocational integration period

The Vocational integration period enables young people to seek work after their apprenticeship or degree.

During their vocational integration period they can pursue paid activity.

Youth Guarantee

In April 2013 a recommendation of the European Council on the introduction of the so-called “Youth Guarantee” was passed. The aim of the Youth Guarantee is that all young people under 25 years of age – whether registered at the job centre or not – will receive a concrete and high quality offer within four months of the end of their training or after they have become unemployed. This offer – of a job, a training place, an internship or further training – should be tailored to the personal situation and needs of the person.

In the German-speaking Community the job centre has been charged with the coordination of implementing the Youth Guarantee. The roll-out plan for the DG was drawn up at the end of 2013 in close cooperation between the cabinet of the employment minister and the job centre. Also the
participating partner organisations (IAWM, Department for People with Disabilities, various departments in the ministry as well as a range of other organisations/institutions in the areas of youth, teaching and social partners) have been integrated into the development of the plan.

After the EU Commission analysed the Belgian action plans and made a range of recommendations for improving the plans, in March 2014 the adjusted action plans were submitted. Alongside actions and projects that are to directly promote the training and employment of young people (integration concept of the job centre, entry placements, JuGa project of the department for young people with disabilities, module teaching for apprentices with learning difficulties, the creation of the Kaleido service etc.), the EU also attaches great importance to structural reforms. In this area for the DG e.g. the introduction of skills validation or the reinforcement of the synergies between professional/technical education and training in SMEs was defined as a project.

**Flexicurity measures focusing on young people**

The organisation of the labour market in Belgium is a federal matter. The same federal legislation applies to the Flanders, but also to the French and German-speaking Communities. 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. In 2006, the Federal Government set up a system of financial rewards to prevent the drop-out of these part-time students (through start premiums) and to encourage companies to employ them (via internship premiums). Other measures protect minors from heavy job demands. For young people between 18 and 25 years old, specific legislation makes their entry into labour market easier: certain employers are obliged to hire a number of young people and labour costs are reduced when hiring young starters with fewer qualifications/opportunities. Belgium also has a youth vacation law. The number of vacation days in Belgium is determined by the time you have worked the year before. Because young people often start work when the calendar year is almost over, this would mean they would have almost no vacation days in the year after that. The youth vacation law allows young people to have extra vacation in return for a small income reduction. Within the Belgian framework, the German-speaking Community also pursues a particular labour market policy that aims to inform and ‘activate’ people.

Young people receive counselling and guidance services adapted to their individual situation. (e.g. individual job training in enterprises, Schnupperwochen, ...) Moreover, the German-speaking Community via its autonomous arrangement with regard to education, (vocational) training and employment within the Belgian framework, strongly supports and refines the “dual-system”, which comprises education at a training centre and working as an apprenticeship in smaller or bigger enterprises at the same time.

Additionally, the German-speaking Community tends to enhance permeability of curricula, so that pupils from different schooling and vocational training systems can get access to higher education.

**REK I: Facilitating the transitions into the labour market**

It is extremely important to enable young people to make a seamless transition from school into work as this life phase is as sensitive as it is decisive. The project includes measures to actively support young people both in the preparation for the choice of profession and also in their entry into the world of work. Children must already be prepared at their level for the world of work at primary school. Company visits and practical phases in everyday school life play an important role in this. Schools and pupils are thus sensitised to the needs of the world of work. Up to now only selectively organised by school, company visits and company contacts must be systematised in future.

Transitions also concern the transition from unemployment into employment. Here care must be
taken that the job-seekers “close to the labour market” are placed in jobs again as quickly as possible as spending a long time unemployed reduces the changes of reintegration. For this, effective job placement is needed. The findings and recommendations for action gained from an external organisational analysis of the job centre of the DG are implemented within the budgetary possibilities.

The cooperation between private and public job placement is optimised in favour of job-seekers by for example linking together information about job vacancies. The same applies to the collaboration with the public welfare centres as well as the Department for People with Disabilities of the DG [1]. A smooth transition between the system must be ensured.

For acquiring employability by further education and training the qualification opportunities must be expanded. Here cooperation with the various sector funds should be consolidated with the support of the local social partners.

In addition the reform of the so-called national support plan for the unemployed will decisively shape the future activities of the job centre of the DG. This reform is being developed in cooperation with other entities of the country.

**Reconciliation of private and working life for young people**

**REK I: Adaptation of the labour market to the changing demographic structure of the working population**

In its first Regional development concept, the government of the German-speaking Community [2] (REK) launched a specific project to improve the “Adaptation of the labour market to the demographical structure of the labour force”.

Demographic change is one of the most significant societal challenges of the future. In the next fifteen years the age profile of the workers will change noticeably and new customer needs will arise. It is important to face demographic change now to also in future be competitive and able to act. The planned measures concern businesses, workers and job-seekers equally. Also newcomers and migrants will play an important role in this connection.

Particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises regard should be paid to the age pyramid of employees. One the one hand the renewal of the members of staff who are just about to retire is dependent on this. On the other hand the transfer of professional experience from older workers to younger ones can thus be organised.

The transformation of the labour market requires the adaptation of the job offers both for job-seekers and for employers. For older job-seekers adapted qualifications must be offered. In addition the funding criteria for job creation schemes must be adapted to need. Specific groups of job-seekers, such as women returners, should be specifically supported. Also adapted job offers must be developed for newcomers and migrants. For the employers, after an awareness-raising and consultation phase, corresponding further training offers can likewise be created.

**Family-friendly companies**

Career and family can be significantly better combined if the employers offer their staff family-friendly working conditions. Not only the employees benefit from the family-friendly focus of a business or an organisation. Also for the company appropriate measures are worthwhile as a good balance of work and family increases the motivation and performance of the employees, reduces absences from work and strengthens company loyalty. In addition a family-friendly staff policy is an important showcase and decisive competitive factor to gain new qualified employees. Family-friendly policy at work is
essentially concentrated on two target groups or areas which are of great importance to all: staff with children and employees with relatives requiring care. In close dialogue with interested companies, the German-speaking Community would like to raise awareness for more family-friendly measures in the world of work and create the necessary framework conditions to give this important subject more attention and recognition. Guiding principle: family-friendly measures are to contribute to shaping the location of the German-speaking Community to be more attractive and worth living in for local and foreign workers.

**Childminders**

In Belgium and the German-speaking Community, there exists the system of day nannies/childminders. In the German-speaking Community, childminders take care of children from 0-12, when parents are working. A person who wants to work as a childminder in the German-speaking Community has two options for being allowed to do so. Either she joins the regional centre for toddler care (RZKB) or she works as an independent childminder and agrees to apply for that job at KALEIDO-DG (which will be responsible for guiding and supervision). Childminder jobs are partially subsidised and parents also pay their share of the fee to the childminder. This gives the childminder a proper income. One objective of the government of the German-speaking Community is to meet 100% of the demand for childcare. In the German-speaking Community there are several options for childcare. To reach the "100%-objective", there is a need for optimisation and further development of the childcare system in the German-speaking Community. In relation to that there also is a need for additional childminders. So public information on the profile of a childminder will be improved.

**Funding of existing schemes/initiatives**

In 2016, 27,927,000 euros have been earmarked in the budget of the German-speaking Community for the area of employment and solidarity economy.

For exercising its tasks the job centre has incurred expenditure of 5,590,329 euros in 2015.

By 2019 a sum of around 27.7 million euros has been agreed to implement and coordinate the 24 future and 3 horizontal projects of REK II. This money will be invested in the future of the DG. The REK ("Ostbelgien leben 2025" ["East Belgium Life 2025"]) contains long-term visions that are intended to shape life in the DG sustainably, innovatively and inclusively for the population.

For costs not covered there are options to obtain third-party funds. So in many projects for example attempts will be made to obtain European funding or to participate in programmes of the Walloon region. Finding sources of finance is an integral part of the project work in the REK.

The costs arising from the overall management of the REK, the global coordination and communication of the concept as well as associated scopes of functions amount to just under EUR 380,000. Apart from in the period between 2010 and 2014 the European Social Fund (ESF) does not share in co-financing these costs.

**Quality assurance**

**REK I** [2]: **Further development of the employment policy instruments**

Never before has employment policy been faced with such great challenges as today. It must in future achieve more with the same funds. It is clear that this is not the sole task of the social partners. There is only one way: The instruments must be more efficient. A self-critical look and reforms are needed. What tools must be honed? What tools should be replaced by contemporary equipment?
For this for example a forceful employment service is needed that in times of a liberalised labour market does not shy away from cooperation with the private actors.

The further development of the employment policy instruments demands as much decisiveness as careful consideration. So that this balancing act succeeds, cooperation with professional institutes and the conciliation of the social partners is indispensable. The developments of the economy also have far-reaching consequences for the labour market requiring new working methods. The demands on the employment service have changed and its organisation must therefore be reconsidered. A renewed alliance for work and employment (GABB IV) between the DG government and the economic and social council may show profitable stimuli for employment and further training. Existing instruments for observing and analysing the labour market can be further harmonised and coordinated. At the current time it cannot yet be foreseen how the institutional landscape of Belgium will develop. What is sure however is that it will change and this change will have wide-ranging consequences for the future arrangement of employment policy.