European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

EN

Vocational education and training in Belgium

Short description

CEDEFOP

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The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States.

Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

Belgium holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2024. Its priorities are to strengthen the European Union and make progress in several strategic areas, such as climate change, economic growth and social cohesion. Its education and training focus will be on evidence-informed education, mobility, lifelong learning and digital education.

Vocational education and training (VET) is pivotal to the European Union's vision for a dynamic, competitive, and socially inclusive Europe. In a rapidly evolving global landscape, the importance of VET goes beyond mere skills acquisition. It is a catalyst for individual empowerment, economic prosperity, and regional competitiveness. The European Union's dedication to a knowledge-based and innovative society acknowledges the crucial role of a well-functioning VET system in bridging the gap between education and the labour market.

Belgium is a federal State composed of three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels) and three Communities (Flemish, French-speaking, and German-speaking) and offers citizens access to three distinct VET systems: that of the Flemish Community, the French-speaking part and of the German-speaking Community. Brussels is a unique case as it hosts both the French-speaking and Flemish ones. Despite diverse authorities overseeing education, training, and employment, and the presence of distinct VET systems, there exists political consensus on specific issues, such as on the compulsory age of education. VET policies at all levels engage social partners through a tradition of social dialogue. The complexity of managing divergent regional and linguistic identities is a unique facet that influences VET positively but also challenges it, for example by limiting interregional learner and teacher mobility.

The Belgian VET system, while robust, faces several challenges that warrant attention and strategic solutions. High skill mismatch and shortages in the labour market coexist with elevated youth unemployment rates. Additionally, VET programmes which are designed to boost employability, are not an attractive choice in all Communities. While the German-speaking Community has a popular tradition of dual learning, negative perceptions persist in the other regions. Current reforms are directed at improving the quality of VET and so aiming to increase its overall attractiveness.

This concise description provides valuable insights into the distinctive features, challenges, and successes of the Belgian VET system. Understanding VET within its national context facilitates policy learning, fosters connections between diverse national VET systems, and promotes mobility for both learners and teachers. This publication may serve as an informative resource for researchers, policy-makers, VET providers, and readers both within and beyond Europe. It is part of a series by Cedefop for EU countries holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union ([1]). May this report inspire dialogue, collaboration, and innovation in the realm of VET, contributing to the shared vision of a skilled and resilient Europe.

Jürgen Siebel
Executive Director

Loukas Zahilas
Head of Department for VET and qualifications

([1]) In addition to this short description, the flyer *Spotlight on VET* (Cedefop, 2024) and an animated video, presenting the national VET system, are published for each country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

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Contents

Foreword 5
Acknowledgements 7
Belgium 11
1. External factors influencing VET 12
   1.1. Demographics 13
   1.2. Economy and labour-market indicators 15
      1.2.1. Economic structure 6
      1.2.2. Employment and unemployment 17
      1.2.3. Professional regulations 20
   1.3. Education attainment 21
   1.4. Employment policies influencing VET 24
2. VET provision 26
   2.1. Education and training system overview 30
   2.2. Government-regulated VET 32
      2.2.1. Upper secondary VET 32
      2.2.2. Post-secondary VET 39
      2.2.3. Higher VET 41
      2.2.4. Adult education 42
   2.3. Other training forms 44
   2.4. VET governance 45
   2.5. Financing VET 48
   2.6. VET teachers and trainers 49
      2.6.1. Initial teacher training 50
      2.6.2. Trainers in work-based settings 53
      2.6.3. Continuing professional development of teachers and trainers 54
3. Shaping VET qualifications 56
   3.1. Anticipating skill needs 57
   3.2. Designing qualifications 59
   3.3. Recognition of prior learning 61
   3.4. Quality assurance 65
4. Promoting VET participation 68
   4.1. Incentives for learners 69
   4.2. Incentives for training companies 73

4.3. Guidance and counselling 76
4.4. Challenges and development opportunities 80
4.4.1. Coexistence of three official languages 80
4.4.2. Addressing labour-market shortages and skill mismatches 81
4.4.3. Strengthening relevance and participation in lifelong earning 82
4.4.4. Increasing attractiveness of dual learning 82
4.4.5. Digital transformation 84
Acronyms 85
References 90
Further sources of information 94
Legislation 94
Websites and databases 95

Figures and tables

Figures

1. Population forecast by age group and old-age-dependency ratio 15
2. Real GDP growth rate to the previous year (percentage points)..... 16
3. Unemployment rate (aged 15-24 and 25-64) by education attainment level in 2012-22 19
4. Employment rate of VET graduates (20 to 34-years-old, ISCED levels 3 and 4) 20
5. Population (aged 25 to 64) by highest education level attained in 2022 .. 21
6. Early leavers from education and training in 2013-22 23
7. Participation in lifelong learning in 2011-22 24
8. VET in the Belgium (BE-FL) education and training system in 2023/24 .. 27
9. VET in the Belgium (BE-FR) education and training system in 2023/24 .. 28
10. VET in the Belgium (BE-DE) education and training system in 2023/24 .. 29
11. Share of initial VET learners from total learners at upper-secondary level (ISCED level 3), 2021 33

Tables

1. Number of international immigration and emigration and international migration balance in Belgium 2017-22 14
2. Number of births, deaths and natural balance in Belgium 2017-22 14

Belgium

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Area	**30 688 km² ([2])**
Capital	**Brussels**
System of government	**Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy. The King is the Head of State, and the Prime Minister is the Head of Government in a multi-party system. Decision-making powers are divided between three levels of government: the Federal Government, three language-based Communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking), and three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels-Capital). ([3])**
Population (1.1.2023)	**11 697 557 ([4])**
Real GDP per capita (2022)	**EUR 36 860 ([5])**
Legislative power	**Federal Parliament ([6])**

([2]) Belgium.be [accessed 10.7.2023].
([3]) European Union (country profile: Belgium) [accessed 10.7.2023].
([4]) Statbel [accessed 10.7.2023].
([5]) Eurostat, SDG_08_10 [accessed 10.7.2023].
([6]) Belgium.be [accessed 10.7.2023].

CHAPTER 1.

External factors influencing VET

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1.1. Demographics

Belgium had a population of 11 697 557 (8th largest in EU-27) in the beginning of 2023 and covers an area of 30 688 km^2 (5th smallest in EU-27). Situated in the heart of Europe (bordering Germany, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), Belgium has three regions: the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region ([7]). On 1 January 2023, the population of the Flemish Region was the highest at 6 774 807 people, followed by the Walloon Region with 3 681 575 and then by the Brussels-Capital, where 1 241 175 people lived. The German-speaking Community, which lies in Wallonia, had 79 383 inhabitants ([8]).

On 1 January 2022, Belgium had an average population density of 377 inhabitants per km²; this varied greatly from 25 in Daverdisse to 23 234 in the Saint-Josse-ten-Noode municipality of Brussels. The Brussels-Capital Region had 7 528 inhabitants/km² ([9]) and experienced strong population growth in recent years, mainly due to a strong positive international migration balance.

In 2022, the population increased by 0.98%, due to a positive migration balance (Table 1) which offset the negative natural balance of the difference between number of births and deaths (Table 2). In this specific year, 233 629 people immigrated to Belgium, partly due to the war in Ukraine; this was much higher than in previous years. This high immigration compensated the emigration of 117 085 inhabitants (Table 1) and led to a positive international migration balance (+ 116 544) ([10]). The natural balance was -2 787 people in 2022; this is a quite high negative rate for Belgium, due to significant excess mortality in the summer with exceptionally hot weather and strong flu viruses. A negative natural balance is exceptional in Belgium and recently only occurred in 2020, when the death rate was very high due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

([7]) Statbel. *Focus on the labour market.*
([8]) Statbel. *Structure of the population.*
([9]) Statbel. *Population density.*
([10]) Statbel. *Structure of the population.*

Table 1. **Number of international immigration and emigration and international migration balance in Belgium 2017-22**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
International immigration	163 918	166 894	174 591	144 169	165 634	233 629
International emigration	119 382	116 714	119 560	102 413	107 416	117 085
International migration balance	44 536	50 180	55 031	55 031	58 118	116 544

Source: Statbel. Population movement [accessed 10.7.2023].

Table 2. **Number of births, deaths and natural balance in Belgium 2017-22**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Births	119 102	117 800	117 103	113 739	117 914	113 593
Deaths	109 629	110 645	108 745	126 850	112 291	116 380
Natural balance	9 473	7 155	8 358	-13 111	5 623	-2 787

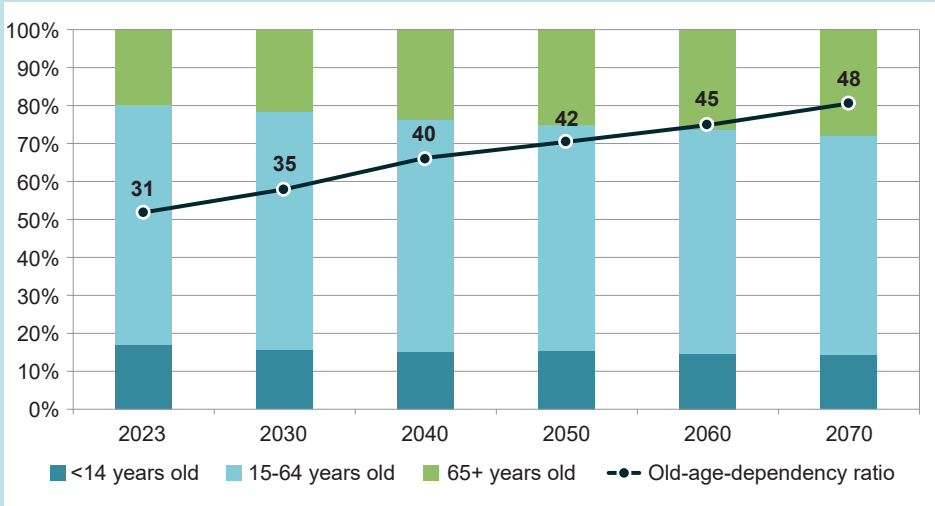
Source: Statbel. Population movement [accessed 10.7.2023].

In 2023, 65.5% of the population were Belgians with Belgian background, 21% Belgians with a foreign background ([11]) and 13.4% were non-Belgian ([12]). Since 2009, the number of foreign nationals living in Belgium has increased by over 500 000. In 2023, a total of over 1.57 million people (approximately 13%) living in Belgium had foreign nationality ([13]). Most migrants originate from EU-27 Member State countries: France (170 324), the Netherlands (159 319), Italy (155 696) and Romania (105 358) ([14]).

Belgium's population is ageing; at the beginning of 2023 the old-age-dependency rate was 31 but is expected to increase to 48 by 2070 (Figure 1). In 2023, 16.5% of the population were below the age of 14, 63.8% at the working age of 15 to 64-years-old and 19.7% were 65+. By 2070, the population aged 65+ will increase to 28%.

([11]) Belgians with a foreign background includes inhabitants whose first nationality is not Belgian and those whose first nationality is Belgian but with at least one parent with a foreign first registered nationality.
([12]) Statbel. *Origin*.
([13]) Statista. *Population of Belgium, from 2009 to 2023, by origin*.
([14]) Statista. *Foreign population of Belgium in 2020, by origin*.

Figure 1. **Population forecast by age group and old-age-dependency ratio**



Source: Eurostat, tps00001 and proj_23ndbi [extracted 12.6.2023].

1.2. Economy and labour-market indicators

Belgian gross domestic product has been steadily growing since 2010, though in 2020, it fell dramatically by -5.36 percentage points as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). In 2021, the Belgian economy recovered again, to 6.29 percentage points, the highest growth rate since 2012. This was followed in 2022 by growth of 3.25 percentage points ([15]).

The country recovery from the pandemic was slightly faster than the EU-27 average, though the crisis had a disproportionate effect on the young, low-skilled and immigrant workers, leading to an uneven recovery. The war in Ukraine has increased risks to trade and supply chains and consequently lowered business and consumer confidence.

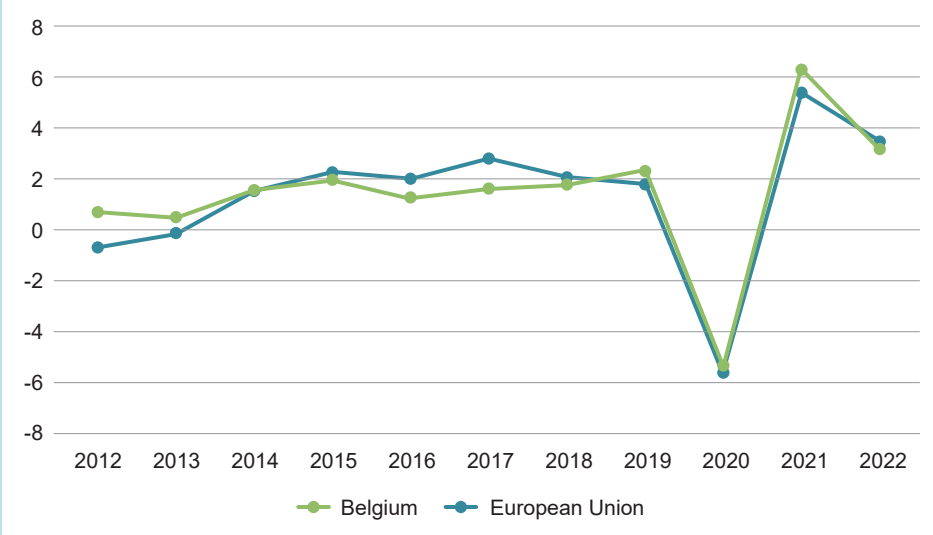
The inflation rate increased from 3.2% in 2021 to 10.3% in 2022 (European Commission, 2023a). In line with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economic survey of Belgium, it is increasingly important that the country is now carrying out reforms to boost labour market participation,

([15]) Worldometer. *Belgium GDP*.

productivity growth and business dynamism, as well as to ensure strong and sustainable public finances ([16]).

In the first quarter of 2023, the average job vacancy rate ([17]) was high (4.68%), especially for small enterprises (6.43%) ([18]), indicating the necessity for pertinent policy measures (Section 4.4.2).

Figure 2. **Real GDP growth rate to the previous year (percentage points)**



Source: Eurostat, tec00115 [extracted 12.7.2023].

1.2.1. Economic structure

Belgium has a service-oriented economic structure and in 2021 the GDP share of the tertiary sector (service sector) was 68.8%. The share in the secondary sector (manufacture) was 19.6% and the share in the primary economic sector (raw material) was only at 0.7% ([19]).

([16]) OECD. *Belgium must continue reforms to sustain recovery and future growth.*

([17]) A job vacancy defines a paid post, which is newly created, unoccupied, or about to become vacant and for which the employer:
(a) is taking active steps and is prepared to take further steps to find a suitable candidate from outside the enterprise concerned;
(b) intends to fill either immediately or within a specific period.
More information: Eurostat. *Job vacancy rate.*

([18]) Statbel. *Job vacancy: increase in the number of job vacancies.*

([19]) Statista. *Distribution of gross domestic product across economic sectors from 2012 to 2022.*

In February 2023, Belgium had a negative trade balance of EUR 677 million, spending EUR 32.5 billion more on importing goods than exporting (EUR 31.9 billion). Since February 2022, both imports and exports have fallen by 1.03% and 1.86% accordingly.

Top exports were pharmaceutical products, mineral fuels, mineral oils and products, cars, tractors, trucks, parts and accessories, precious stones, pearls and metals, and machinery, mechanical appliances and their parts. The top import products match the export products (apart from precious stones, pearls and metals), but also include electrical machinery and electronics. The exports went mostly to France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States; the imports came from, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United States ([20]).

Belgium ranks 16th of the EU-27 in the 2022 report on the Digital economy and society index (DESI). Considering its starting point, the country's relative growth in digital is among the lowest in the EU (European Commission, 2022a). However, the country is leading in the number of enterprises using internal electronic information sharing, at 53% against 36% on EU average (European Commission, 2022a). The labour market of the Brussels-Capital Region has a high and increasing demand for digital skills. The share of online job vacancies requiring advanced ICT skills (for example analysis, coding, data management, or programming) increased from a monthly average of 25% in 2018 to 31% in 2022, faster than in other Belgian cities and OECD metropolitan areas. Various measures were launched in response to this increasing need for digital skills (Section 1.4; Section 4.4.5).

The Brussels-Capital Region has one of the highest shares of green jobs compared to other OECD regions. In 2021, 26% of all jobs in the region were classified as green, up from 19% in 2011. Also, in the Flemish and the Walloon region the share of green jobs was at 21% in 2021 ([21]). The offer for jobs is expected to increase in the service sector, circular economy and construction sector. However, in other professional fields, the number of jobs is expected to fall, including in manufacturing and extractive industries, logistic and transport, and agriculture forestry and fishery.

1.2.2. Employment and unemployment

The political responsibility for employment is shared between the Federal Government, the regions and the German-speaking Community. The Federal Government creates a framework that promotes optimal development of

([20]) OEC. *Belgium*.
([21]) OECD (2023). *The future of work and skills policies in the Brussels-Capital Region*.

employment and ensures that all citizens have equal opportunities and rights. Regions and the Community are responsible for providing everyone with optimal conditions to access, and participate in, the labour market.

Most employees are working in the service sector (tertiary sector), including commerce, transport, hospitality (main areas), as well as public administration, education and business services. The most common occupations in Belgium are therefore office workers, shop assistants, home help, maintenance staff in offices, hotels and other businesses, as well as teachers. Many people commute to work from other regions, mainly from Flanders and Wallonia to the Brussels-Capital Region, where there are more jobs than workers. Some residents commute abroad to one of the neighbouring countries ([22]). By the end of 2022, Belgium had 230 536 private small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with less than 250 employees. Of these, 191 849 were micro-enterprises with less than 10 workers (83.2%). More than half of all SMEs (57.4%) were in the Flemish Region ([23]).

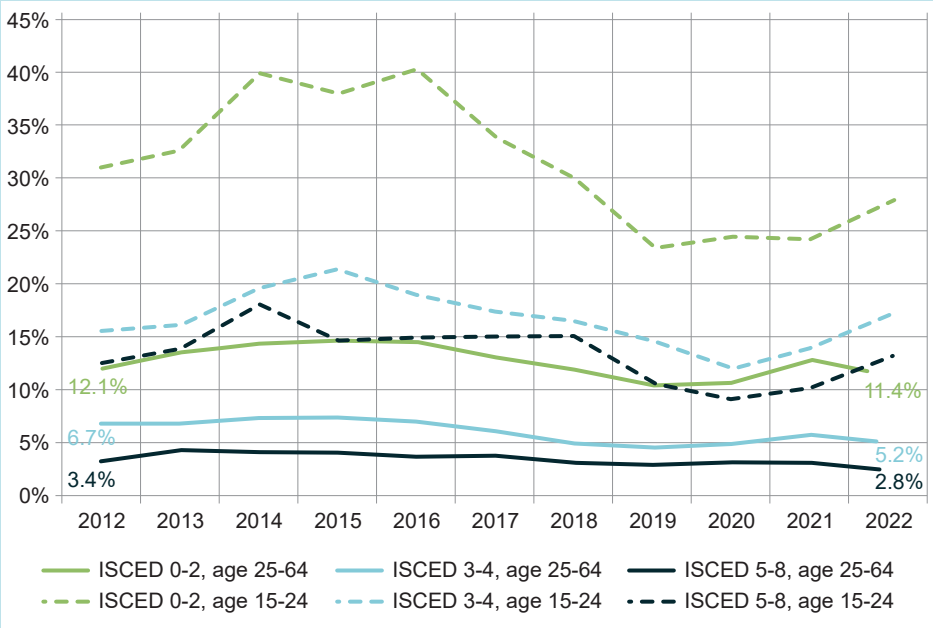
In 2022, around 293 000 people (5.6%) were unemployed in Belgium, one of the lowest rates in the last 10 years, with differences among the regions. The lowest unemployment rate was in the Flemish Region at 3.9%, while the Brussels-Capital Region faced 12.5% the highest unemployment rate among the regions. Employment in Brussels is characterised by high educational attainment requirements, with a significant proportion of the jobs filled by commuters. This situation contributes to the paradox in Brussels of high unemployment rates alongside an abundance of available jobs, surpassing the available workforce ([24]). Belgium also has a high level of inactivity of older workers and disadvantaged groups, such as people with low education attainment, migrant background and disabilities, offering a considerable challenge for the country (European Commission, 2023a) (Section 4.4.2).

As shown in Figure 3, the unemployment rate varies by education attainment level. For the age groups of 15 to 24 and 25 to 64, the risk of unemployment is lower the higher their education level is. For example, only 2.8% of 25- to 64-year-olds with international standard classification of education (ISCED) level 5-8 qualifications were unemployed in 2022. This figure almost doubles (5.2%) for those with qualifications at ISCED levels 3-4, including most vocational education and training (VET) graduates. The highest risk of unemployment is for people without a lower secondary qualification (ISCED level 0-2). For individuals

([22]) EURES. *Labour market information: Belgium.*
([23]) More information in French: Economie. *L'emploi dans le PME.*
([24]) Statista. *Rate of unemployment in Belgium from 2008 to 2022, by region.*
Eurostat. *lfsa_urgaed.*

aged 15 to 24, unemployment rates are generally higher across all attainment levels. Youth unemployment remains a concern for Belgian authorities. While there was a significant improvement of youth unemployment since 2013, the COVID-19 crisis reversed this trend. In 2022, it was above pre-pandemic levels and nearly three times higher than the overall unemployment rate. Dual education is promoted as a strategy to reduce youth inactivity (Section 4.4.4).

Figure 3. **Unemployment rate (aged 15-24 and 25-64) by education attainment level in 2012-22**

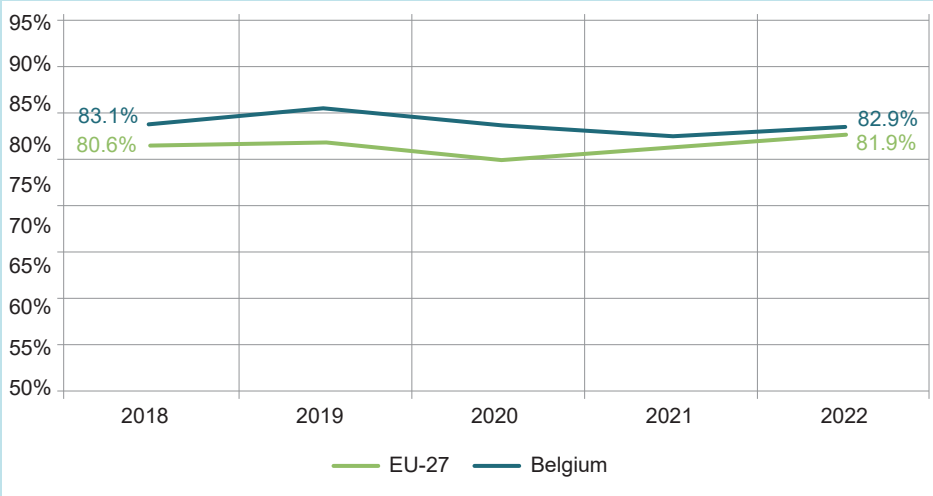


NB: Data based on ISCED 2011; breaks in time series.
ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education.
ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.
ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education.
Source: Eurostat, lfsa_urgaed [extracted 12.6.2023].

In the second quarter of 2023, 71.4% of people aged 20 to 64 were employed: for women the figure was with 67.7%, lower than for men 75.2% ([25]). The employment rate of VET graduates aged 20 to 34 with a qualification at ISCED levels 3 and 4 (Figure 4) was 82.9% in 2022, slightly above the EU average of 81.9%.

([25]) Statbel. *Employment and unemployment*.

Figure 4. **Employment rate of VET graduates (20 to 34-years-old, ISCED levels 3 and 4)**



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011; breaks in time series.
ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.
Source: Eurostat, edat_lfse_24 [extracted 12.6.2023].

1.2.3. Professional regulations

Certain professions in Belgium are regulated, meaning that only people who fulfil specific conditions can practise them. For example, at federal level, translator and interpreter and pharmacist professions are regulated. The regulation of professions can differ by region, such as the boat driver and hairdresser professions, which are considered as regulated professions only in Wallonia ([26]).

The category of liberal professions includes some service-providing intellectual occupations, which fall under a special regulation. This concerns, for example, real estate broker, accountant and tax specialists or psychologists. Other free and intellectual occupations fall under the authority of the Justice Federal Public Service (*Service Public Fédéral Justice*) or national health (for example chiefly legal, medical and paramedical professions).

For carrying out an itinerant trading activity or a fairground activity, a permit is needed from a business one-stop shop (OSS). Entrepreneurs (for example in construction) must meet a number of conditions concerning technical ability, financial capacity and professional integrity to be registered; this is a quality

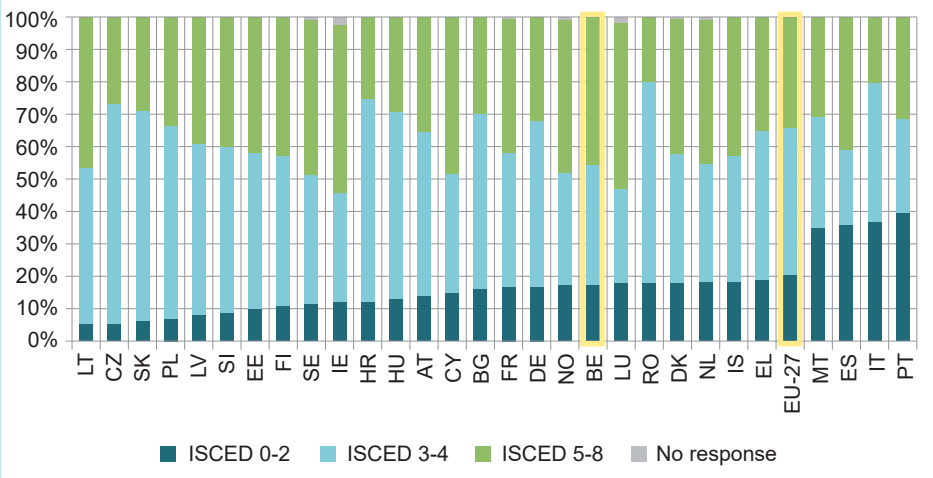
([26]) List of regulated professions.

label, offering the necessary guarantees that the company has the proper skills to execute the specific works ([27]).

1.3. Education attainment

In 2022, 17.6% of the Belgian population aged 25 to 64 had a low-level or no qualification (ISCED 0-2), which was below the EU-27 average (20.5%) (Figure 5). People with medium-level qualifications (ISCED 3-4), which includes most VET graduates, accounted for only 36.7%, which was almost 9 percentage points lower than the EU-27 average (45.2%). The share of those having completed a qualification at ISCED levels 5-8 was the highest (45.8%) and more than 11 percentage points higher than the EU-27 average (34.2%).

Figure 5. **Population (aged 25 to 64) by highest education level attained in 2022**



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011.
Low reliability for "no response" in Czechia and Latvia.
ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education.
ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.
ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education.
Source: Eurostat, lfsa_pgaed [extracted 12.6.2023].

([27]) Belgium.be. *Regulated occupations*.

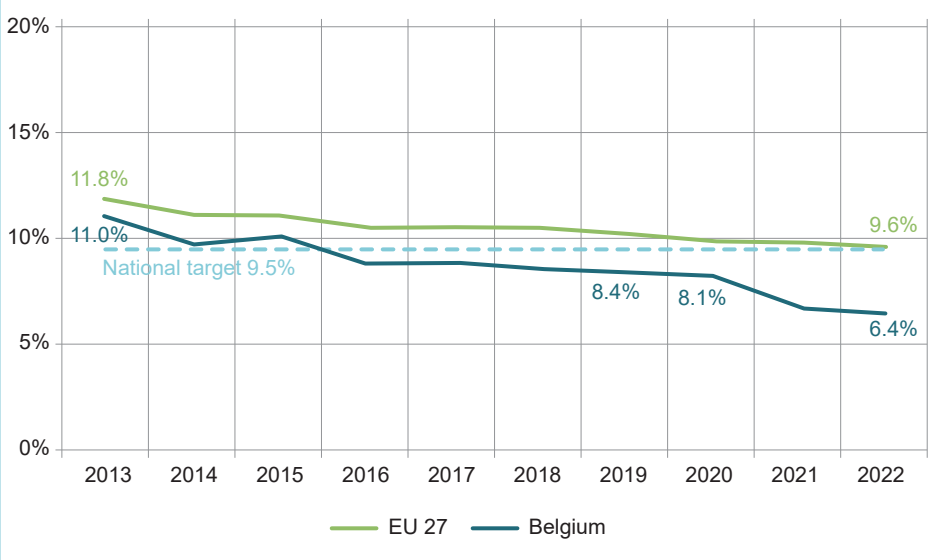
By 2016, Belgium had already reached its national target for reducing early leavers from education and training (28) to under 9.5% (Figure 6). This share decreased from 11% in 2013 to 6.4% in 2022 and surpassed (was lower than) the EU-27 average. However, learners who were born in another EU country than Belgium had, at 10.8%, a much higher rate of leaving education and training early than those of Belgian origin (5.8%, 2021 data). People born outside the EU faced even higher risk of leaving education and training early (14.9%) (European Commission, 2022b).

Several measures are taken by the regions to support early leavers. For example, in Brussels, about EUR 7.35 million were spent on more than 440 projects focusing on reducing the number of early leavers in 2019-21 (Brussels' initiative to tackle early school leaving). In 2016, the Flemish Government adopted the action plan Together against school leaving, to combat early school leaving. The Institute for apprenticeship and entrepreneurial training in small and medium-sized enterprises in Wallonia (IFAPME, *Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises*) is also taking measures to reduce the number of early leavers from alternance training, by introducing innovative teaching methods, digital tools and relevant partnerships ([29]).

([28]) Early leavers are defined as individuals aged 18-24 who have completed at most a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training during the 4 weeks preceding the labour force survey (LFS) (Eurostat. *Early leavers from education and training).*

([29]) More information in French: IFAPME. *Se préparer à la formation et à l'Alternance.*

Figure 6. **Early leavers from education and training in 2013-22**



NB: Share of the population aged 18 to 24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training.

Source: Eurostat, edat_lfse_14 [extracted 12.6.2023] and European Commission [accessed 12.6.2023].

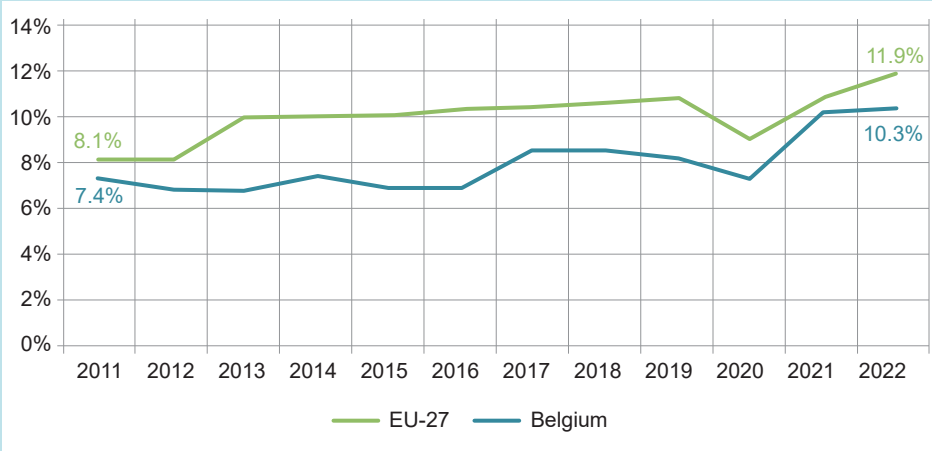
The participation rate in adult learning is increasing. The share of people aged 25 to 64 who took part in education and training in the last 4 weeks before the survey, increased from 7.4% in 2011 to 10.3% in 2022, which however was still below the EU-27 level of 11.9% (Figure 7). The fall in the participation rate to 7.4% in 2020, can be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people worked from home and had reduced their contacts and outside activities. During recent years, Belgium's participation rate has been always below the EU average.

According to the EU labour force survey (EU-LFS), which examines the annual participation rate in lifelong learning, 21.5% of 25- to 64-year-olds participated in education and training in 2022. The results indicate hardly any difference between gender but there are clear differences by education level: only 8.1% of those holding at most a primary education diploma participated in education and training, compared to 16% of those with an upper secondary education diploma. The highest participation rate in lifelong learning was for those holding a higher education diploma (32.6%) ([30]). However, in line with the

([30]) Statbel. *Lifelong learning*.

action plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Union set the target to 60% for 2030, showing that there is still a need to improve participation.

Figure 7. **Participation in lifelong learning in 2011-22**



NB: Share of adult population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training; break in series 2021.

Source: Eurostat, trng_lfse_01 [extracted 12.6.2023].

1.4. Employment policies influencing VET

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an economic recession and had an impact on societies. In 2020, the EU set up the NextGeneration EU programme, to counter these effects, and provide funds to its Member States through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), aiming to support countries to emerge stronger and more resilient from the crisis.

In June 2021, Belgium received EUR 5.9 billion through the Belgian national recovery and resilience plan (NRRP), to support the country until 2026 in the implementation of relevant reforms and investment measures; this will have a major influence on VET policies in the coming years. This plan foresees 27% of its funds for supporting the digital transition, including measures for the provision of digital skill training. The strongest emphasis was put on measures that will accelerate the country's green transition, with 50% of the funding to be used to finance the support of climate goals. High importance was put on the acquisition of skills relevant to the current and future labour market needs, combatting the

lack of qualified workforce, and stimulating labour market participation through lifelong learning. Specific focus was put on improving digital, technical and language skills of vulnerable groups, jobseekers and young people, aiming to improve their social inclusion and facilitate their labour market access (European Commission, 2021). In response to the NRRP, regions introduced their own plans.

The Wallonia recovery plan, adopted in October 2021, comprises more than 300 projects and programmes, structured around six strategic priorities, including investing in youth and Walloon talent, ensuring environmental sustainability, boosting economic development, supporting well-being, solidarity and social inclusion (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023a).

The Flanders recovery plan was based on seven pillars, among which investment focused on the digital and green transition. Furthermore, investment was foreseen to strengthen Flanders' human capital by increasing the quality education, lifelong learning and activation policies for both the inactive and the unemployed.

CHAPTER 2.

VET provision

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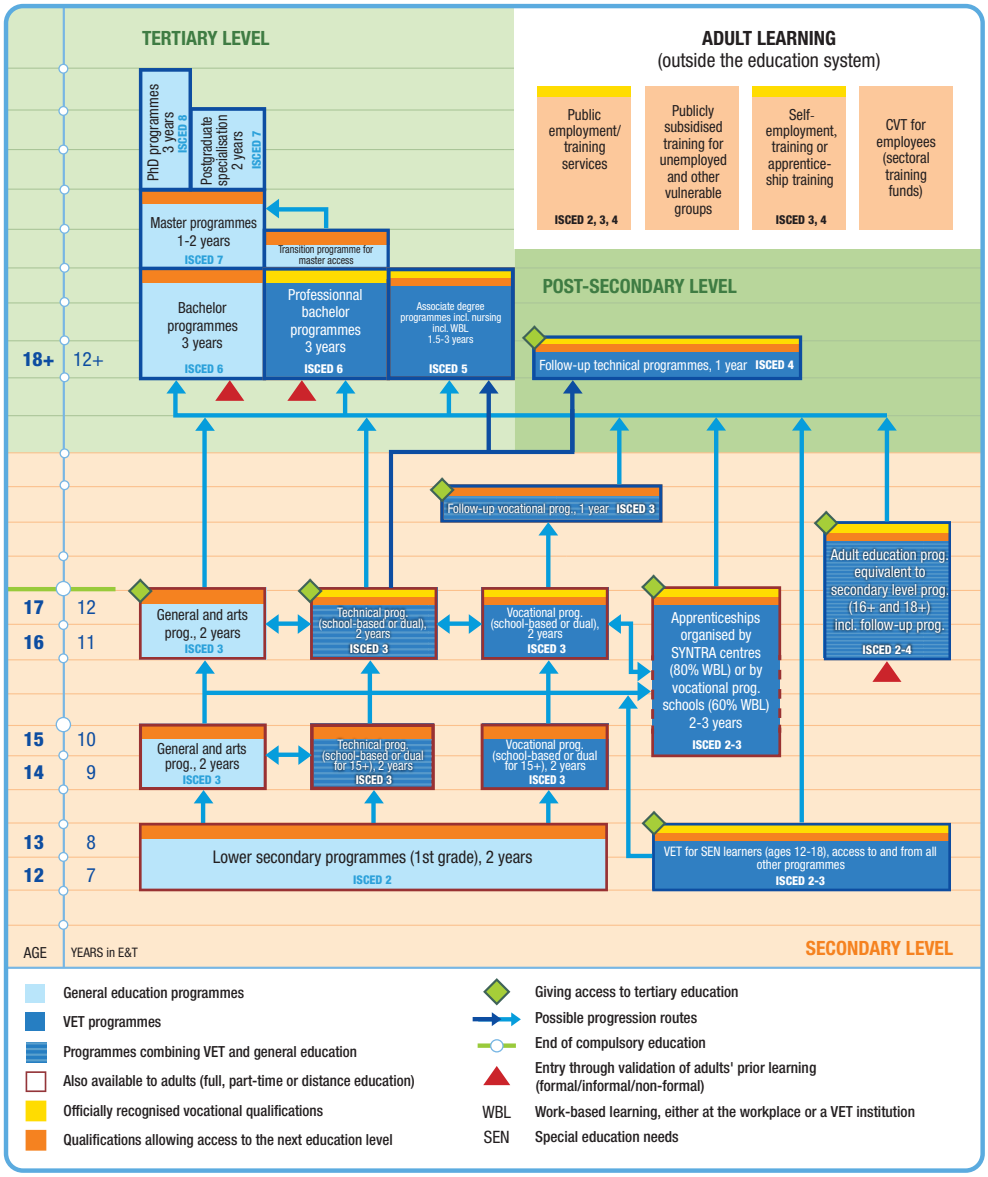
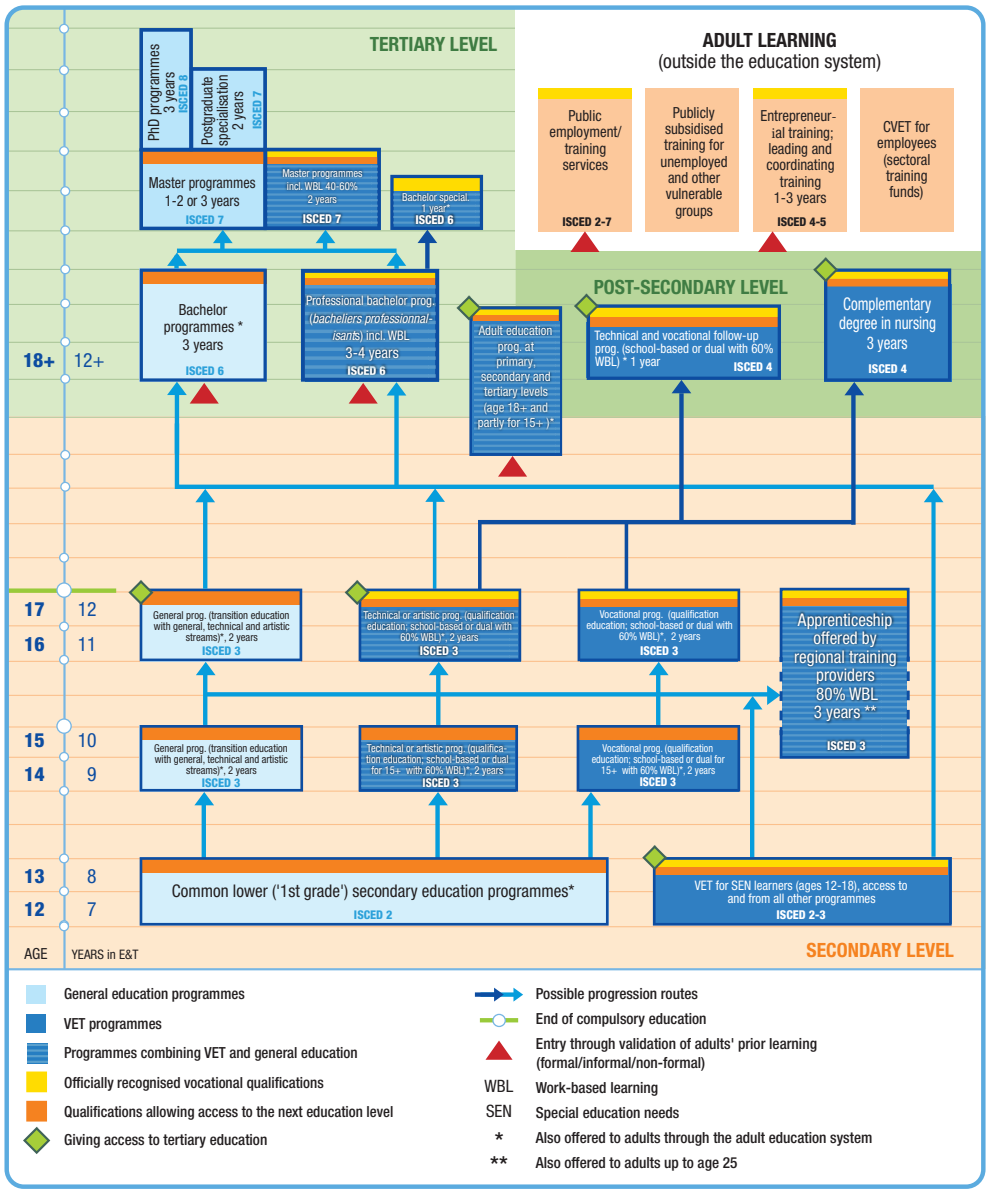
Figure 8. **VET in the Belgium (BE-FL) education and training system in 2023/24**



NB: ISCED-P 2011. Assignment of programmes to ISCED classification is under revision, so only the first digit in ISCED coding is displayed. EQF levels on qualifications are being discussed.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Belgium, 2023.

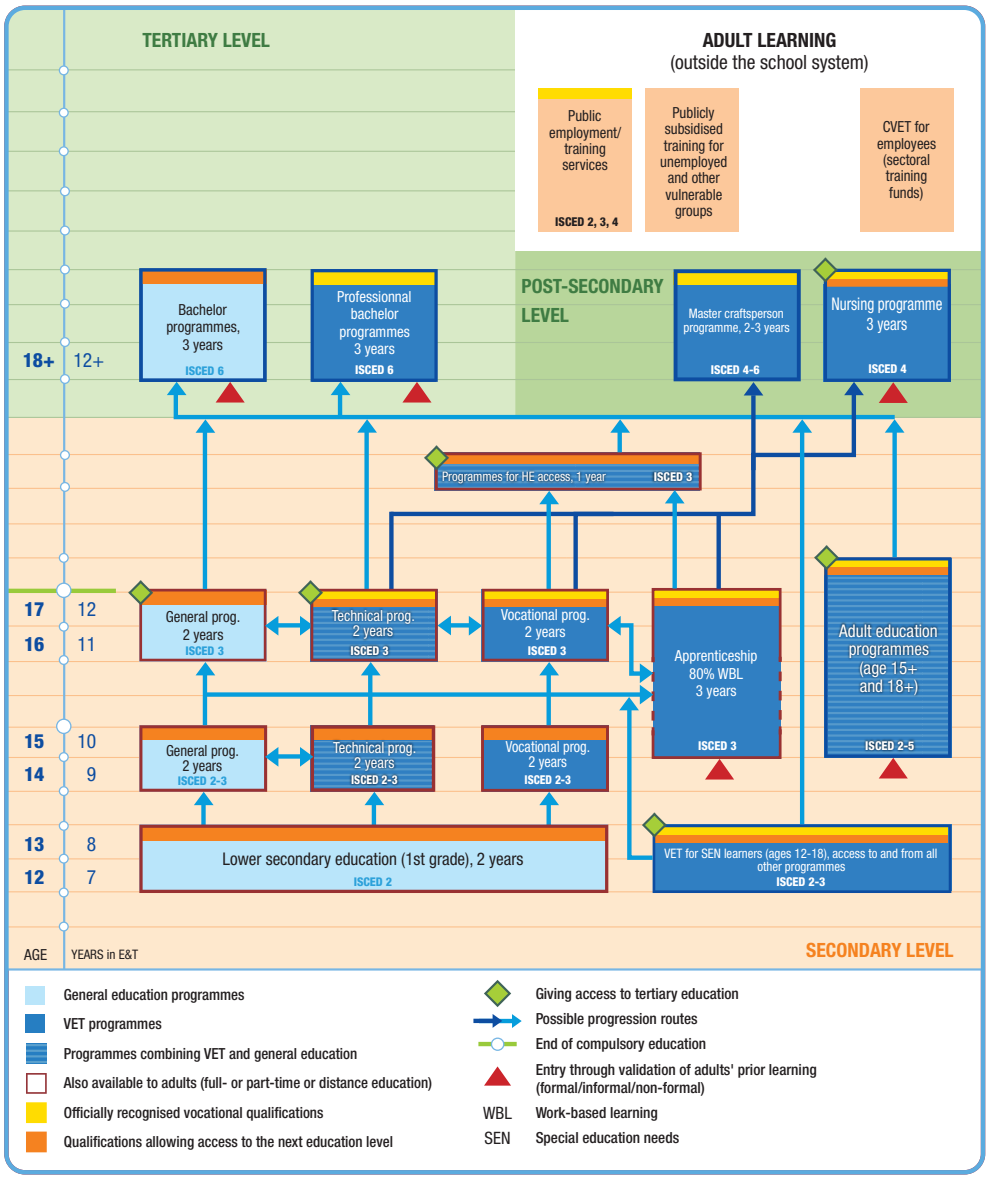
Figure 9. VET in the Belgium (BE-FR) education and training system in 2023/24



NB: ISCED-P 2011. Assignment of programmes to ISCED classification is under revision, so only the first digit in ISCED coding is displayed. EQF levels on qualifications are being discussed.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Belgium, 2023.

Figure 10. **VET in the Belgium (BE-DE) education and training system in 2023/24**



NB: ISCED-P 2011 and EQF referencing has not yet been done. ISCED-2011 one digit code used in the chart is estimated by the Ministry of Education of the German-speaking Community.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Belgium, 2023.

2.1. Education and training system overview

Historically, one common education and training system existed in Belgium. This changed in the 1970s with the first State reforms, which resulted in the transfer of competences from the federal level to the Regions and Communities. At the time, the federated entities gradually introduced discordant policies, causing the education systems to become differentiated (different programmes, organisation of these programmes, ISCED levels, qualifications, designations) (Allinckx; Karno and Monico, 2019).

Nowadays, citizens in Belgium can access three different education systems: Flemish (BE-FL), French-speaking (BE-FR) and German-speaking (BE-DE) (Figures 8, 9, 10). Brussels, as a bilingual region, is a specific case as both BE-FR and BE-FL education systems coexist. Each Community is responsible for taking decisions on education, including policy and its implementation. Despite multiple authorities being responsible for education, training and employment, there is a political consensus on specific issues at national level, such as defining the age for compulsory education. Compulsory education starts in all three Communities at age five and aims to stimulate the cognitive, motor, and affective development of children.

Primary education (ISCED 1) starts in the year the child reaches the age of six. It lasts 6 years and there is a strong emphasis on learning a second language: French, Dutch, German or English.

In the first 2 years of secondary education (ISCED 2-3), learners can follow 2-year lower secondary education programmes (grades 7-8), which focus on general education. Starting from age 14, grade 9, learners can access VET programmes and choose between general, artistic, technical (Section 2.2.1.1) and vocational (Section 2.2.1.2) upper secondary programmes. They are divided into two stages, each lasting 2 years. At grade 9, technical, artistic, and vocational programmes are offered as full-time school-based programmes and from grade 10 onwards they are also offered in the form of dual learning programmes combining company and school-based learning (nationally referred to as part-time education). At age 15, grade 10, learners can also access the apprenticeship programme (ISCED 3), which lasts 2 to 3 years and offers alternating training between a training centre or a school and a company (Section 2.2.1.3).

After grade 10, learners can switch among the programmes offered: general, technical, artistic, vocational and apprenticeship. At the end of these secondary VET programmes, graduates receive a vocational and general qualification; those who have followed the technical programmes or the apprenticeship

programme in BE-FL, also have the right to access tertiary programmes. Those who do not gain such access rights have the option to do so by following a 1-year programme in BE-DE and BE-FL.

At post-secondary level, 1-year follow-up specialisation programmes (ISCED 4) are offered in BE-FL and BE-FR, giving learners the possibility to gain an additional vocational qualification and also access to tertiary education (Section 2.2.2.1). Graduates of technical and vocational programmes can continue with the 1.5- to 2-year associated degree programmes (BE-FL) and a 3- to 3.5-year nursing programmes (ISCED 4-5; Section 2.2.2.3), providing an additional vocational qualification and access to tertiary education. Upper secondary VET graduates, including those who have graduated from the apprenticeship programme, can gain further vocational qualifications over the 2- to 3-year master craftsperson programmes offered in BE-DE (ISCED 4-6; Section 2.2.2.2.).

At higher education level, 2-year short-cycle graduate programmes (ISCED 5) are available in BE-FL (Section 2.2.3.1). In all three Communities 3- to 4-year general and professional bachelor programmes (ISCED 6) are available (Section 2.2.3.2); these include an internship in a company and provide either a general and/or a vocational qualification depending on the Community ([31]). In BE-DE and BE-FL, graduates from professional bachelor programmes need to follow an additional 1-year general programme to be able to continue with the 1- to 3-year master programmes offered in BE-FL and BE-FR at ISCED level 7 (Section 2.2.3.4). At higher general education level, the 2-year post-graduate specialisation programmes (ISCED 7) and 3-year PhD programmes (ISCED 8) are offered in BE-FL and BE-FR.

Each education system offers VET programmes for learners with special educational needs (SEN). Depending on the Community, the programme offer varies from ISCED level 1 to 7.

Formal adult education offers the opportunity to gain formal qualifications at various levels. Adults can also access a variety of programmes outside the formal school system, some leading to a recognised qualification.

In Belgium, home schooling is legally accepted and includes also education provided at compulsory level. The Belgian Constitution (Article 24) offers parents free choice concerning the education of their children, with each Community and Region providing further relevant regulations on home schooling ([32]).

([31]) More information in French: Mesètudes.be. *Le bachelier professionnalisant [The bachelor degree holder].*

([32]) HSLDA. *Belgium: legal status and resources on home schooling in Belgium.*

Each Community is also in charge of implementing its own qualifications framework and referencing it to the European qualifications framework (EQF). All Belgian qualifications frameworks consist of eight levels and are outcome-based. In BE-FL, the Flemish qualifications framework (*Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur*, FQF) is operational and linked to the EQF. The FQF and EQF levels are indicated on all certifications except for certificates of elementary education at FQF level 1 (Cedefop, 2023a). BE-FR has introduced its national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (*cadre francophone des certifications pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie,* CFC), which is also linked to EQF levels and is currently at the activation stage. CFC/EQF levels are indicated on diploma supplements of education qualification levels 5 to 8 (Cedefop, 2023b). In BE-DE, the national qualifications framework (*Qualifikationsrahmen der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft,* QDG) reflects mostly the frameworks of the Flemish and French Communities but is not yet linked to the EQF levels nor indicated on certificates and diplomas (Cedefop, 2023c).

2.2. Government-regulated VET

Citizens in Belgium can access three different VET systems: Flemish (BE-FL), French-speaking (BE-FR) and German-speaking (BE-DE) (Figures 8, 9, 10). The three education systems have many similarities and VET programmes are offered in all systems at upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level. In recent decades, efforts have been made to modernise and improve the VET system in response to the evolving needs of the globalised economy. Belgium has sought to strengthen the connection between education and the labour market, making VET more responsive to industry demands. Initiatives have been implemented to improve the quality of vocational education, increase collaboration between schools and businesses, and provide individuals with a smoother transition from education to employment.

2.2.1. Upper secondary VET

Learners who have completed the 2-year general lower secondary education programme (indicated as 1st stage in the education charts), can choose in the year when they reach age 14 between general education (nationally referred to as transition education) and the VET stream (nationally referred to as qualification education) ([33]). The following 4-year upper secondary VET programmes are available:

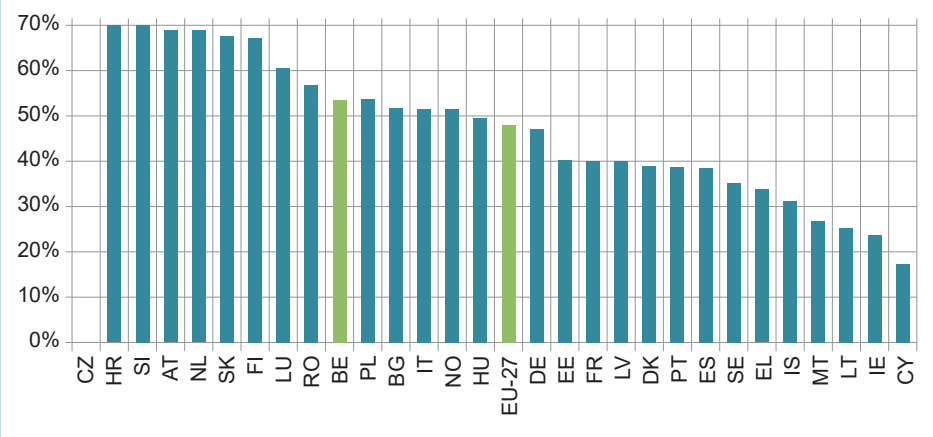
([33]) The basic options that may be organised in secondary programmes in BE-FR are defined in the 1993 Decree of the Government of the French Community.

(a) technical or artistic programmes (Section 2.2.1.1);
(b) vocational programmes (Section 2.2.1.2).

At the age of 15, learners have the possibility to access the 3-year apprenticeship programme (Section 2.2.1.3). When entering grade 11, learners may change their chosen pathway and continue to follow one of the other upper secondary programmes, also including general education programmes. The upper secondary VET system is currently undergoing some important changes (Section 4.4.4). Until these reforms are fully implemented, the current 'old' system is still presented here.

In 2021, the share of initial VET learners from all upper secondary learners was 53.8%, which is 5.5 percentage points higher than the EU-27 average (Figure 11). However, this share fell in recent years, having been 57.8% in 2017 ([34]). Less than half of recent graduates (49% in 2022) participated in work-based learning during their VET, compared to 60.8% in the EU. In 2022, 79.6% of recent VET graduates were employed, which was slightly higher than the EU average of 76.7% (European Commission, 2023b).

Figure 11. **Share of initial VET learners from total learners at upper-secondary level (ISCED level 3), 2021**



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011.

Source: Eurostat, educ_uoe_enrs04 [extracted 13.6.2023].

([34]) Eurostat. Pupils enrolled in upper secondary education by programme orientation, sex, type of institution and intensity of participation [extracted 13.6.2023].

2.2.1.1. *Technical and artistic programmes*

Technical programmes (ISCED 2-3) are offered at grade 9 to learners aged 14, who have successfully completed lower secondary education. They include mainly general and technical theoretical subjects, such as computer science, applied sciences, economics. These programmes last 4 years and are split into two blocks of 2 years each. They are offered in the first year as school-based programmes (nationally referred to as full-time education) and from grade 10 onwards they are also offered in form of a dual scheme (nationally referred to as part-time education), taking part in schools and training companies.

The teaching part of part-time technical secondary education takes place in the following schools:

- in BE-FL, it takes place in part-time vocational secondary education (*deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs,* DBSO), in Syntra Duual and in alternance education and training centres (*centre voor deeltijds beroeponderwijs,* CDO):
- in BE-FR it takes place in centres for dual education and training (*centres d' education et de formation en alternance,* CEFA) ([35]).

Graduates of the technical programmes receive a vocational certificate, nationally referred to as qualification certificate (*certificate de qualification*), which qualifies them to enter the labour market directly, such as in photography, electromechanics, electrical engineering or construction techniques. They also receive a certificate of upper secondary general education, called *certificat d'enseignement secondaire supérieur* (CESS) in BE-FR and *diploma secundair onderwijs* in BE-FL, providing them access to higher education.

Artistic secondary education programmes are organised in the same way as technical programmes, but instead of technical subjects they include a practical artistic part, where learners will actively practice art (painting, making music, photography, etc.). While this pathway belongs in BE-FR to the vocational education (nationally referred to as qualification education), in BE-FL it is considered a general secondary education programme (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming) ([36]).

The dual scheme of the technical and artistic programmes is otherwise organised in a similar way as apprenticeships (for example concerning

([35]) More information in French:
Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. *L'enseignement en alternance* [Dual education].
Wallonie. *Se former dans un centre d'éducation et de formation en alternance: CEFA* [Training in a work-study education and training centre: CEFA].

([36]) More information in Dutch: Onderwijskiezer. *SO: 2e graad Kunstsecundair onderwijs (KSO)* [2nd grade art secondary education].

renumeration, working contract) with a few differences, as detailed in Section 2.2.1.3.

2.2.1.2. *Vocational programmes*

Vocational programmes (ISCED 3, in BE-DE ISCED 2-3) are offered from grade 9 as school-based schemes to learners aged 14, who have successfully completed lower secondary education. They have a strong practical focus and aim at direct employment. These programmes last 4 years, are split into two blocks of 2 years each, and are offered in various sectors like agronomy, industry, construction and economy. They are offered in the first year as school-based programmes and from grade 10 onwards they are also offered in form of a dual scheme, taking part in schools and training companies. The teaching part of the part-time vocational secondary education takes place in the following schools ([37]):

(a) in BE-FL in part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO) and in Syntra Duual;
(b) in BE-FR, in centres for dual education and training (CEFA) (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

Graduates receive a vocational certificate, nationally referred to as qualification certificate (certificate of qualification), which qualifies them to enter the labour market directly and work, for example, as an electrician/industrial installer, nursing assistant or sales assistant.

They also have the option to continue education and to gain access right to tertiary education by completing a 1-year 'Follow-up programme' (Section 2.2.1.4; Section 2.2.2.1). In the BE-FR system this is only possible for graduates who have followed their dual programme in line with 'Article 49' in the CEFA ([38]).

The dual scheme of the vocational programmes is otherwise organised in the similar way as apprenticeships (for example concerning renumeration, working contract) with a few differences as detailed in Section 2.2.1.3.

([37]) More information in French:
Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. *L'enseignement en alternance* [Dual education].
Wallonie. *Se former dans un centre d'éducation et de formation en alternance: CEFA*. [Training in a work-study education and training centre: CEFA].

([38]) Article No 49 stipulates that this training allows learners to follow general courses and achieve the same skills as full-time teaching, while developing the practical side in the company. The diplomas obtained are equivalent to those of the full year (for example obtaining the CESS at the end of a seventh successful year), and allow return after 1 year or continuing in higher education.

2.2.1.3. *Apprenticeship*

Apprenticeships (ISCED 2-3) are offered to learners starting from age 15 (at grade 10) if they have followed at least 2 years of upper secondary education. The apprenticeship programme takes place in the training company (3 to 4 days per week) and in the training centre ([39]) (1 to 2 days), where learners undertake general, theoretical, technical and practical courses. The programme lasts 3 years in BE-DE and BE-FR and 2 to 3 years in BE-FL; it is based on a jointly agreed training plan between the learner, the training company, and the training centre. At the end of each academic year, examinations on general and theoretical vocational subjects and a practical test take place before a jury of professionals. Training centres have extensive autonomy in defining their evaluation practices and many continuously evaluate the vocational skills of their learners throughout the academic year.

Apprentices sign a training contract with their training company (work-study/alternating, *contrat d'alternance*), which is drawn up under the supervision of the training provider and states the rights and duties of all parties involved. Apprentices receive remuneration, its amount and the conditions attached varying by Community and sector, though it is common that renumeration increases over the training ([40]). In BE-DE, for example, renumeration starts in the first semester at EUR 350 and increases steadily each semester up to EUR 700, which is paid in the last semester of the third training year (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023a) ([41]). Learners in BE-FR who have not yet found a training company can start an apprenticeship programme at IFAPME as so-called candidates for work-study training (*candidats à l'alternance*). They are supported in their further search for a training company or their reorientation if there is a shortage of training enterprises in the chosen sector (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2022).

At the end of their apprenticeship, graduates receive an apprenticeship certificate, which qualifies them to enter the labour market directly. In BE-DE they can also continue education at post-secondary level, by following the master craftsperson programmes (Section 2.2.2.2) or the nursing programme (Section 2.2.2.3). In the BE-FL education system, graduates also receive the diploma of secondary education, providing them direct access to higher education (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming). In BE-FR, they can directly enter entrepreneurial training, which is offered outside formal education, or they can obtain the CESS over adult education and have then access to tertiary education ([42]).

([39]) At school if it is apprenticeship is part of the technical or vocational programme.
([40]) More information in French: IFAPME. *Training pour les jeunes: l'alternance dès 15 ans* [Training for young people: work-study programmes from the age of 15].
([41]) *Cedefop European database on apprenticeship.*
([42]) More information in French: *Comparison of dual training offered by CEFA and EFP.*

The training centres stay in close contact with the business world, by working together with sector and professional representatives. In each education system and in the Brussels region, different training providers are in place:

(a) Dutch speaking providers:
    (i) Syntra Duaal;
(b) French-speaking providers:
    (i) the Walloon institute for dual training and self-employment in small and medium-sized enterprises (*Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises*, IFAPME);
    (ii) the training service for small and medium-sized enterprises (*service de la formation des petites et moyennes entreprise*, SFPME) which governs the non-profit training centre for SMEs in Brussels (*Espace Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises,* EFP);
(c) German-speaking providers:
    (i) the Institute for vocational and educational training in small and medium-sized enterprises (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen*, IAWM). IAWM manages the training centres for education and training of small and medium-sized enterprises (*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes,* ZAWM) in Eupen and Saint Vith.

In the BE-DE system, the apprenticeship programme is very popular. Since 2016, apprentices also have the option to take part in a programme which offers them the possibility to acquire an apprenticeship certificate from Belgium as well as from Germany. For this, they need to complete the apprenticeship in one country and then pass an additional exam in the other. These double certifications exist so far for the following five professions: hairdresser, carpenter, car mechanic, retail trader and forwarding merchant. Each year, around 10 to 20 young people pass this additional exam (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023e). In March 2022 a collaborative agreement was signed between the training centres IFAPME (BE-FR) and IAWM (BE-DE) to improve synergies between them and promote the interregional mobility of their learners (European Commission, 2022b).

The main differences between the dual schemes offered in vocational, technical and artistic programmes and the apprenticeship programme are:

(a) the qualification gained at the end (vocational qualification versus apprenticeship qualification);
(b) the institution where the theoretical part takes place (schools versus training

centres) ([43]);

(c) the different progression possibilities for respective graduates in BE-FR, where apprentices cannot take the follow-up programmes to gain access to tertiary education, nor can they access the nursing programme offered at post-secondary level;

(d) the governance body differs in BE-FR: the French Community Ministry is in charge of schools, the Walloon Ministry is responsible for the training centre.

2.2.1.4. *Upper secondary follow-up programmes (BE-DE, BE-FL)*

Follow-up programmes (1-year) at upper secondary level (ISCED 3) combine general education with a vocational focus and are offered in the BE-DE and BE-FL education system. These programmes are accessible to graduates of the vocational programme (Section 2.2.1.2) as well as of those of the apprenticeship programme in BE-DE (Section 2.2.1.3), who did not gain access to higher education. Graduates of these follow-up programmes receive the certificate of upper secondary general education, providing them access to tertiary education ([44]) (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

2.2.1.5. *VET programmes for SEN learners*

VET programmes for learners with special educational needs (SEN) lead to a qualification at ISCED level 2 and 3. They are accessible to learners aged 12-21, if they have received a formal report stating their need for special education. These programmes are offered as school-based or as dual learning. Depending on their capabilities, learners can achieve different qualifications. If they are following an individually adapted curriculum, learners obtain a certificate of acquired competences. SEN learners who follow the common curricula of upper secondary programmes can obtain the same certificates as the learners following the mainstream upper secondary programmes. Exceptionally, they can also receive the certificate of upper secondary general education, providing access to tertiary education. SEN learners who have completed their VET programme can enter the labour market or continue their studies at upper secondary or tertiary level. These programmes are offered by schools for special educational needs for the school-based programmes; the CEFA offers the alternating training programmes in BE-FR (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

([43]) More information in French: *CEFA et l'IFAPME - quelles sont les différences?* [What are the differences between CEFA and IFAPME?].

([44]) More information in Dutch: Onderwijskiezer. *SO: 3e graad 7e specialisatiejaren BSO* [SO: 3rd degree 7th year of specialisation BSO].

2.2.2. Post-secondary VET

Learners who want to follow a programme at post-secondary level need to be at least 18 years old and have completed the 6th year of the general, vocational, technical or artistic programmes or the apprenticeship programme. At this level, the follow-up specialisation programmes are offered in BE-FL and BE-FR, as well as the master programme in BE-DE: the nursing programme is offered in all education systems.

2.2.2.1. *Post-secondary follow-up programmes (BE-FL, BE-FR)*

At post-secondary level, follow-up programmes (nationally also referred to as seventh qualifying years) are offered in BE-FR and in BE-FL. In BE-FR technical and vocational follow-up programmes are accessible to graduates from technical, artistic and vocational programmes, while in BE-FL they are accessible only to graduates of the technical programmes. Overall, these follow-up programmes are highly professionally oriented and provide learners an opportunity to deepen their knowledge and skills in their vocational and/or technical field. In BE-FR these programmes include school-based learning (technical and practical lessons) as well as about 60% work-based learning in a company, which is normally split into 2 days at school and 3 days at work. In BE-FL, the amount of work-based learning in these programmes varies among the different professional directions but is, on average, higher than in the general follow-up programmes offered at upper secondary level (Section 2.2.1.4). Learners also continue with their general education in both systems and graduates from the vocational programmes (applies to BE-FR system only) can gain access rights to tertiary education.

Upon completion, graduates receive a vocational qualification allowing them to access the labour market and work, for example, as a computer systems administrator, network administrator, agricultural adviser, or as clinical biology laboratories pharmacy assistant (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming). The basic options of the seventh qualifying years in BE-FR are defined in the 2003 Decree of the Government of the French Community establishing the repertoire of the 7th years of advanced training and specialisation.

2.2.2.2. *Master craftsperson programme (BE-DE)*

The master craftsperson programme is offered in BE-DE only. It lasts 2 to 3 years and leads to a vocational qualification at ISCED level 4-6. The courses normally take place in the evenings or/and on Saturdays, alongside the in-company training.

Access to the master craftsperson programmes is reserved for:

(a) graduates from the apprenticeship programme, who are holders of the journeyman's certificate in the same or in a related profession;
(b) learners who have passed the 6th year of secondary vocational, technical or artistic education in the same or in a related profession;
(c) learners who are already an independent manager of a craft, trade or service company;
(d) learners who have a specific project to set up or take over a business and submit an application to one of the two ZAWM training centres.

The examination comprises three parts, which need to be completed to receive the master craftsperson certificate:

(a) operational management;
(b) specialist knowledge (theory);
(c) practical examination.

Master craftsperson programmes are aimed at direct access to the labour market; graduates can work as managers in companies and take responsibility for employees and trainees. It is a secure basis for a possible self-employment ([45]).

2.2.2.3. *Nursing programmes (BE-DE, BE-FR)*

In BE-DE and BE-FR, the nursing programmes last 3.5 years and are placed at post-secondary level at ISCED level 4 ([46]). These programmes can be accessed by graduates from the general, technical, artistic and vocational programmes. The programmes contain theoretical lessons and a practical part which can be around 50% of the programme and take place at schools or directly in a hospital. Theoretical and practical examinations are organised throughout the programmes. This qualification permits graduates to enter the labour market and grants access to the regulated profession, for example as nurse responsible for general care. Graduates can also use the qualification to access tertiary education (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming) ([47]).

([45]) More information in German: ZAWM. *Der Meisterbrief - Ihr Weg nach oben!* [The master craftsman's certificate – your way to the top!].
([46]) In BE-FL this programme is placed at tertiary level, see Section 2.2.3.1.
([47]) More information in French: SIEP Bruxelles. *Devenir infirmier: quelle formation choisir?* [Becoming a nurse: which training should you choose?].

2.2.3. Higher VET

Higher VET is accessible to learners aged over 18 who have gained the right to access tertiary education, after completing a respective programme. The higher VET programmes differ by education system, apart from the professional bachelor programme, which is offered in all three education systems.

2.2.3.1. *Associated degree programmes including nursing (BE-FL)*

Associated degree programmes last between 1.5 and 3 years and are offered at ISCED level 5 in BE-FL. Programmes are accessible to learners holding the certificate of upper secondary education or an equivalent. Learners under age 18 without this certificate have the possibility to take an admission test to access the programme. Compared to the professional bachelor programmes, these programmes focus on workplace learning (learning and applying competence in real work situations) and are less theoretical. The practical training is done in training companies and takes about one third of the time of the programme. These programmes are offered in university colleges (Hogescholen) and are aimed at direct access to the labour market, where graduates are qualified for professions in fields such as architecture or biotechnology (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming). The associated degree programme in nursing lasts 3 years. Learners are following school-based learning in schools for full-time secondary education and pursue an internship, for example in a hospital. Graduates receive a degree in nursing (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming) ([48]).

2.2.3.2. *Professional bachelor programme (BE-DE, BE-FL, BE-FR)*

Professional bachelor programmes (in BE-FR referred to as professional-oriented bachelor programmes, bacheliers professionnalisants) are offered in all three education systems. They last 3 years in BE-DE and BE-FL and 3 to 4 years in BE-FR ([49]), and lead to a qualification at ISCED level 6. These programmes feature school-based learning at university colleges, combined with a traineeship in a company offering practical experience in a work environment. The length of the traineeship depends on the chosen professional field of the programme and can be up to 60% of the programme. For example, for the medical laboratory technologist in BE-FR, learners need to do three clinical traineeships of 140 hours each, plus one traineeship linked to the final-year dissertation of 280

([48]) More information in French: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. *Brevet d'infirmière hospitalier* [Hospital nurse's certificate].

([49]) More information in French: Mesetudes.be. *Le bachelier professionnalisant* [The bachelor degree holder].

hours ([50]). Graduates of the professional bachelor programme can directly enter the labour market, for example in agrotechnology, digital arts and entertainment, hotel management, international journalism, or music management. Otherwise, they have also the possibility to continue their studies by following a general master programme, which is offered in BE-FR and BE-FL. However, in BE-FL, graduates of professional bachelor programmes need first to follow a 1-year bridging programme (Section 2.2.3.3) granting access to the general master programmes (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

2.2.3.3. *Bachelor specialisation programme (BE-FR)*

The bachelor specialisation programme lasts 1 year and is offered at ISCED level 6 in the BE-FR education system. The programme is offered by university colleges and includes a traineeship in a company. It is accessible to graduates from a professional bachelor programme only and provides students the possibility to undertake more intensive specialisation in their study field. Graduates can enter the labour market or continue their studies at master level (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

2.2.3.4. *Master programme (BE-FR)*

Master programmes which include work-based learning (WBL) are offered in BE-FR. They last 2 years and lead to a qualification at ISCED level 7. Learners must hold a bachelor degree to be eligible to access these programmes. In the dual programmes, about 40 to 60% of the programme is focused on work-based learning taking place in training companies, while the general part of the studies takes place in universities and university colleges (*Hautes Ecoles*). Graduates are qualified to enter the labour market directly, or to continue general education, by following a PhD programme or a postgraduate specialisation programme (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

2.2.4. Adult education

Formal adult education includes programmes at ISCED level 2-4 in BE-FL and ISCED level 2-5 in BE-DE; in BE-FR it covers programmes offered at ISCED level 1-7. Any learner, who is no longer subject to compulsory education (aged 18+) is admitted unconditionally to adult education and training. In some cases, learners who are younger (starting from age 15 in BE-DE and BE-FR and from age 16 in BE-FL) may also access specific adult education courses.

([50]) More information in French: *Bachelier (3 ans) technologue de laboratoire médical (TLM)* [Bachelor (3 years) medical laboratory technologist].

A distinction is made between adult education and adult training. Adult education, nationally referred to as education for social advancement, is under the responsibility of Communities and comprises all programmes of adult basic education, secondary adult education and higher vocational education. Adult training is under the responsibility of the regions (except for Brussels, where vocational training is managed by the French Community Commission COCOF) and is a broader term, which, alongside formal, includes informal and non-formal learning for adults (Section 2.3).

Adult education is offered in a flexible format and can be offered as blended learning, an online course or as face-to-face instruction. It can be followed outside the full-time commitment during daytime hours with adapted hours, allowing adults who are working also to follow classes. It is characterised by modularisation, so a subject is subdivided into certifiable modules which add up to a full qualification. Learners can often choose the point in time they want to follow the single modules as well the duration, so they can spread several modules, adding up to a full qualification, over a school year, or over several school years. Depending on the Community and Region, there are many variations inside the adult education and training system concerning access modalities, the sector and programme availabilities, the costs and the duration of the training ([51]).

Formal education is offered by schools for adult education and contributes towards the individual's personal development. This includes updating of qualifications in line with the changing demands for labour market skills, as well as the possibility for learners to acquire skills, which they failed to obtain during their initial education (in Belgium also referred to as social advancement education) ([52]). On 25 May 2022 the decree enabling dual learning in adult education was adopted by the Flemish Government. Starting from September 2022, adult education centres (CVO) can offer dual tracks (50% of work-based learning) leading to a professional qualification (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023f; Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023g).

In 2020, the Lifelong Learning Partnership was established as part of the Flemish coalition agreement, tasked with making Flanders a learning society. In 2021, the partnership drew up the lifelong learning action plan Setting course for a learning Flanders, aiming to achieve a training participation rate for (non-)formal learning of 60% by 2030. The partnership is responsible for the implementation and follow-up of this action plan ([53]).

([51]) Eurydice. *Belgium - Flemish Community: adult education and training.*

([52]) More information in French: Fédération Wallonia-Bruxelles. *L'enseignement de promotion sociale* [Social advancement education]; in Dutch: Onderwijs. *Volwassenenonderwijs* [Adult education].

([53]) Flanders. *Het Partnerschap Levenslang Leren* [The Lifelong Learning Partnership].

2.3. Other training forms

In addition to formal adult education, adult training is also offered outside the formal system ([54]). It targets employees as well as the unemployed and vulnerable groups, to strengthen their skills and adapt them to changing labour-market needs.

In line with the inter-professional agreements signed by social partners from the private sector, each sectoral joint committee needs to sign a collective agreement which guarantees full-time employees 5 days of training per year ([55]). The law provides for the organisation of training, either at sectoral or at company level, through the creation of an individual training account. In addition, each company needs to allocate training funds for its own employees. In this respect, Belgium scores particularly high in the share of enterprises which offer ICT training to their employees (33% compared to 20% EU-average, 2nd in the EU) (European Commission, 2022a).

In the main sectors of the economy, social partners have put in place sectoral training funds to stimulate and support continuous training. These funds are managed jointly by the social partners who cooperate closely with public training services and with education via sectoral covenants, including accredited training, programmes alternating between work and training, and adult education. Each company can access various services provided by these funds. Depending on their position in the training infrastructure in the sector, these funds vary in terms of their legal powers and responsibilities, organisational structure, financial management, primary political objectives and role.

Various providers, such as public education and training providers, training centres, regions, communities or non-profit associations may collaborate at a logistical and financial level. Cooperation may be informal or governed by agreements established by framework conventions, also known as sector covenants. For example, training centres offer multiple programmes in entrepreneurial, leading and coordinating training (such as the project *Je monte ma boite*), which can also lead to relevant certificates at ISCED level 3 to 5.

The training centres of the public employment services and public vocational training bodies (Section 2.4) offer a variety of programmes to employees, but

([54]) Non-formal learning defines the acquisition of knowledge, know-how, information, values, skills and competences in the framework of planned activities – in terms of learning objectives, time or resources – where some form of learning support is present (for example student-teacher/trainer relationships). They may be validated and lead to certification (Source: Cedefop. *Terminology of European education and training policy*).

([55]) More information in French: Service Public Fédéral. *Investir dans al formation* [Investing in training].

also to vulnerable groups, the unemployed and jobseekers. They include skill training, individual training in enterprises, refresher training, internships and measures for social and occupational integration, and can lead to a qualification at ISCED level 2 up to 7.

Diverse other organisations provide publicly subsidised training or courses to unemployed and other vulnerable groups. They collaborate with the Ministry of Education and/or the employment services. Examples are the creative studios that provide courses in cultural or creative crafts, the department for persons with disabilities that organises training especially to people with disabilities, and OIKOS, an organisation that provides training for people facing social or economic difficulties (Allinckx; Karno and Monico, 2019).

2.4. VET governance

The governance of VET in Belgium is complex. The regions and the Communities have the main responsibilities and competences in managing VET, while social partners are involved at all levels. Training providers and public employment services have responsibilities in specific fields. At federal level, decisions are still taken concerning the duration of compulsory education, the minimum conditions for the award of the education diploma, and on teacher pensions. In the following the governance of VET is further described in the three language Communities and in Brussels.

Flemish Community (BE-FL)

In the Flemish Community, the Flemish Government governs VET for Dutch-speaking learners, including those living in Brussels. The following ministries are responsible for VET:

(a) the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for the formal education system, including initial secondary VET. The Department of Education and Training within this ministry cooperates with several agencies to implement relevant policies, such as with the agency for educational services (*Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten,* AGODI) and the agency for higher education, adult education, qualifications and study grants (*Agentschap voor hoger onderwijs, volwassenenonderwijs, kwalificaties & studietoelagen,* AHOVOKS);

(b) the Ministry of Work and Social Economy is responsible for socioeconomic policy in VET, entrepreneurship, innovation and scientific research, as well as for jobseekers, workers and the self-employed. The government agency

Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship (*Vlaams Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen*, VLAIO) is responsible for entrepreneurial training.

Several advisory bodies participate in relevant policy debates:

(a) the Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*, VLOR) provides advice and practical implementation support to new government education initiatives;
(b) the Flemish Economic Social Consultative Committee (*Vlaams Economisch Sociaal Overlegcomité*, VESOC) is a forum for policy debates between the government and social partners, where official agreements can be reached;
(c) the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) is the advisory body on work, economy, energy and (vocational) education and training;
(d) the Flemish Partnership for dual learning is the advisory body on workplace-related matters of dual learning; it is composed of social partners and stakeholders from education.

Some bodies have responsibilities in specific fields. The Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (SYNTRA) centres for entrepreneurial training, and the Flemish Agency for Employment and Vocational Training (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding,* VDAB) for employment and for continuing vocational training for Flanders and the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels.

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

In the French-speaking part of Belgium, the responsibility for vocational education and vocational training is divided. The following three main bodies are responsible for the governance of VET; for each of these bodies the education ministry and/or the training ministry is/are in charge of the allocation of public resources, policy and legislation for VET:

(a) the French Community Government for vocational education in Brussels and Wallonia;
(b) the Walloon Region Government for vocational training in Wallonia;
(c) the French Community Commission COCOF for French vocational training offered in Brussels.

The four training providers have also certain responsibilities in specific fields:

(a) IFAPME, concerning apprenticeship for Wallonia and training for SMEs for the French Community;

(b) SFPME, concerning continuing training for SMEs for the French-speaking inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region;
(c) *Bruxelles Formation*, concerning continuing vocational training;
(d) *Le Forem*, the Walloon Office for Vocational Training and Placement, concerning employment and continuing vocational training of the French-speaking part of Wallonia.

Brussels-Capital Region

Brussels-Capital Region is a specific case due to its bilingual status. VET governance in Brussels involves several parties:
(a) the French Community Government, responsible for French-speaking vocational education;
(b) the French Community Commission COCOF, responsible for French-speaking apprenticeships and entrepreneurship training and the governance of the training service SFPME/EFP;
(c) *Bruxelles Formation*, responsible for French-speaking vocational training;
(d) the Flemish Government, responsible for formal Dutch-speaking education, Syntra for dual learning and the Flemish Agency for Employment and Vocational Training (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding*, VDAB) for (continuing) vocational training.

The Brussels public employment service *Actiris* is the responsible body for implementing regional employment policy in Brussels. It cooperates with a network of partners to carry out its missions as effectively as possible for jobseekers and employers.

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

The German-speaking Community is responsible for the governance of employment and of the education and training system, including VET. Two ministers are in charge:
(a) the education minister;
(b) the employment minister.

However, due to the small size of the Community, the ministers rely on partnerships and are interdependent for financial, personal and strategic resources. The following bodies also have responsibilities in specific fields:
(a) the public employment service of the German-speaking Community (*Arbeitsamt der Deutschen Gemeinschaft*, ADG) concerning employment

and VET;

(b) IAWM, concerning apprenticeship and continuing training for SMEs (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

2.5. Financing VET

The financing of VET involves various stakeholders responsible for the financing of different bodies and levels. These differ between the language Communities.

Flemish Community (BE-FL)

In BE-FL, the funding of the different bodies involved in VET is as follows:

(a) VDAB receives their main subsidies from the Flemish Government, European Union and from invoicing to employers who use their training offer;

(b) SYNTRA receives their main subsidies from the Flemish Government; in addition they receive money from European and Flemish contributions for specific projects. The SYNTRA training centres receive a subsidy for the operating of apprenticeships and certified programmes and an extra subsidy if they deploy innovative or flexible programmes. The SYNTRA centres need to supplement their subsidies out of their own resources, which they mainly gain from trainee registration fees;

(c) the centres for adult education (CAEs) and the centres for adult basic education (CABEs) receive their subsidies from the government, depending on the quantity of teaching provided, which is expressed in teaching hours. They receive allowances per learner per teaching hour;

(d) the Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education (VOCVO) receives an annual subsidy budget to cover the costs for operation, investments and personnel.

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

In BE-FR, the funding of the different bodies involved in VET is as follows:

(a) *Le Forem* receives subsidies from the Walloon Region's budget, the European Social Fund (ESF), and the European Regional Development Fund. In addition, it receives financial contributions from stakeholders, such as companies' contributions to training costs, or contributions of the Federal Public Service for Employment, Work and Social Dialogue;

(b) *Bruxelles Formation* is mostly financed by the French Community Commission (almost 70%). The training operator also receives additional subsidies mainly from the ESF (and other European financing schemes),

the Federal State (under the terms of cooperation agreements) and regional actors (regional government and Actiris);

(c) 41 socio-occupational integration operators and nine local socio-professional integration missions are financed by the French Community Commission and the ESF. They also receive financial support from the Brussels public employment service *Actiris* for the counselling and job search components of its work and are jointly financed by ESF;

(d) IFAPME receives subsidies from the Walloon Region, ESF and the European regional development fund (ERDF), to cover the running costs, training activities and the centres' property-related expenses;

(e) SFPME/EFP (the training service for SMEs in Brussels) receives subsidises from the French Community Commission and the ESF. Supplements come from the tuition fees;

(f) adult education (social advancement education) receives funds from the French Community. Training sections and units are approved for subsidies by decision of the area responsible for social advancement education, on the advice of the inspection service;

(g) schools, CEFAs, *Hautes Écoles* and universities of the French Community, receive funds from the French Community based on the number of learners and their attendance, as well as the level at which the courses are given (lower secondary, upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary education or higher level).

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

In BE-DE, the funding of the different bodies involved in VET is as follows:

(a) VET centres are funded by the German-speaking Community according to the number of learners and the duration of the training. The education system also receives funding from the Province of Luxembourg, especially for education for SEN learners;

(b) IAWM and the ADG receive funds for their apprenticeship offer mostly from the Government of the German-speaking Community (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

2.6. VET teachers and trainers

Teachers and trainers are the key for the provision of quality education and training and so also important for economic growth. In all Communities, trainers

are generally working professionals in the relevant field/sector who fulfilled additional criteria to enter their training profession. The training of trainers differs among the Regions and the training of teachers differs between the Communities. However, what is common for all three Communities is that they face a growing shortage of teachers, and the available teachers often do not have the required qualifications (European Commission, 2023b) ([56]). Each Community takes its own measures and approaches to tackle these challenges.

2.6.1. Initial teacher training

Flemish Community

In the Flemish Community, becoming a teacher means following the associate degree programme, the bachelor programme or the master programme. Each programme provides the rights to teach at a certain level of education and in certain subjects. Regardless of the qualification level, all teachers need to acquire a set of basic competences and attitudes. They are defined in the Decree of the Flemish Government concerning the basic competences of teachers adopted in 2018, which serves as a reference framework for all teacher education programmes (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023h).

The education associate degree programme for secondary education lasts 1.5 years and is offered by university colleges at tertiary level at ISCED level 5. The programme is available to those who intend to teach in the first or second stage of secondary education, in the third stage of vocational secondary education or in adult education. The programme is accessible to holders of an upper secondary education certificate, who have at least 5 years of relevant professional experience in the VET subject to be taught or at least 3 years of relevant professional experience in the VET subject to be taught plus a study certificate in the field of the teaching subject.

The bachelor teacher programme lasts 3 years and is offered by university colleges at ISCED level 6. Graduates of the bachelor programme for secondary education can teach general subjects to learners in the first and second stages of secondary education, the third stage of vocational secondary education and adult education. A secondary education certificate is required to access the bachelor teacher programme. Learners enrolling in this programme need to take part in a non-binding test; although the test is compulsory, admission to the programme is not linked to the results. The test is meant to assist in identifying remediation needs. For all bachelor programmes in education (pre-primary,

([56]) More information: De Witte and Iterbeke, 2022.

primary and secondary), the knowledge of Dutch is tested. For the bachelor programme in teaching of primary education, French and mathematics are added. As of 2023/24, remediation is compulsory in case of low-test results. The remediation consists of an online remedial course that a student can take both before the start of the programme and after the start during the academic year.

The shortened study programme of the bachelor programme for secondary education lasts 1 year and focuses solely on teaching. It targets those who already hold a bachelor degree and wish to become a teacher in the first and second stages of secondary education or adult education in subjects related to the field of their bachelor diploma.

The master programme for secondary education lasts 1.5 to 2 years and is offered by universities at master level (ISCED 7). Graduates from this programme can teach general subjects to pupils in the second and third stages of (vocational) secondary education and adult education. Depending on subject specialisation during their teacher training, some graduates can also teach in part-time arts education or VET subjects. An academic bachelor degree is required to access this programme.

Those who already hold a master degree and wish to become a teacher in the second and third stage of secondary education or adult education in subjects related to their master diploma, can enter a shortened study programme of the master programme for secondary education. This shortened programme lasts 1 year and focuses solely on teaching (ReferNet Belgium Coordination Team, 2022; Cedefop, & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

In the French Community, learners who want to become a teacher in upper secondary education have the following options:

(a) the master degree with a didactic purpose, accessible for subjects in the upper secondary school curriculum; corresponding to 2 years of study and 120 ECTS (European credit transfer and accumulation system), including 30 specific ECTS of pedagogical training;

(b) the aggregation for teaching in upper secondary education (*agrégation de l' enseignement secondaire supérieur*, AESS), corresponding to a training programme of 30 ECTS following a master degree, qualifying for the subjects, which the forthcoming graduate teacher will teach, such as mathematics, French, science (ReferNet Belgium Coordination Team, 2022) ([57]).

([57]) More information in French: ULB. *Agrégation de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur (AESS) et Masters à finalité didactique* [Aggregation for teaching in upper secondary education (AESS) and master degrees for didactive purposes].

Learners who have professional experience in a trade and would like to teach in technical and practical vocational lessons in technical and vocational upper secondary education, can obtain the teaching proficiency certificate (*certificat d' aptitude pédagogique*, CAP). This certificate can be obtained via:

(a) higher education offered by social advancement education institutions;
(b) the CAP jury of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, by taking several exams, without any training provision ([58]).

Due to the shortage of teachers, institutions in BE-FR are also allowed to recruit people with no qualifications without having to seek authorisation from the administration as in the past. For technical and vocational practice programmes, professionals can access teaching positions based on relevant experience alone, comprising experience in a trade or profession relating to the teaching position (ReferNet Belgium Coordination Team, 2022).

Initial teacher training in the French Community is under reform, aiming to increase the attractiveness of the profession. In December 2021, the Decree reforming initial teacher training was adopted (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023c), coming into force in the academic year 2023/24 ([59]). This reform extended the curriculum for primary and lower secondary school teachers from 3 to 4 years, including a mandatory part at university and increased duration of internships. The reform foresees, from 2025 onwards, division of studies for teaching into five sections according to the level of education: two access routes will be provided for those who wish to teach in upper secondary education, section 4 and section 5 ([60]), the latter replacing the AESS in 2025 ([61]).

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

In the BE-DE Community there are no institutions which offer initial training programmes for initial VET (IVET) teachers. All learners who want to become teachers in IVET are admitted based on qualifications obtained in the other Communities of the country (ReferNet Belgium Coordination Team, 2022).

([58]) More information in French: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. *Le certificat d'aptitudes pédagigiques (CAP)* [The certificate of pedagogical skills].
([59]) More information in French: *Décret définissant la formation initiale des enseignants* [Decree regarding initial teacher training].
([60]) More information in French: *Master en enseignement section 2* [Master of teaching section 2]; La Libre. *Tout comprendre à la réforme de la formation initiale des enseignants* [Everything you need to know about the reform of pre-service teacher education].
([61]) Mesetudes.be. *Quelles études pour devenir prof?* [What studies to become a teacher?].

The 2021 Decree in education (*Dekret über Maßnahmen im Unterrichtswesen* 2021) introduced a measure aiming to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and to combat the teacher shortage in the longer term: as from school year 2021/22, teachers in the German-speaking Community of Belgium can receive a permanent employment contract directly from the beginning of their employment, if they have the required title, meet major language criteria, and have a contract for the whole school year. Before, teachers only received a permanent contract after having worked for at least 720 days in the same position and school. This decree applies also to existing teachers (Eurydice, 2021). BE-DE plans to reform its initial teacher training as part of the *Gesamtvision* reform by 2040 (European Commission, 2023b).

2.6.2. Trainers in work-based settings

In contrast to teachers, there are no specific initial training programmes for trainers, who can work in the following two settings:

(a) training centres, which provide dual training in various professional fields;
(b) training companies, which provide the workplace learning part for learners following dual training programmes, such as apprenticeship.

The four public training organisations VLAIO, IFAPME, IAWM and EFP/SFPME, have developed their own recruitment and training policies for trainers, closely linked to the expertise required by the relevant industries and professions (ReferNet Belgium Coordination Team, 2022). For example, in June 2023, the IAWM adopted the Government Decree on the pedagogical training of the Institute for Education and Training in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises for managers and trainers.

In BE-FR, company-trainers need to have either a bachelor or master degree and also several years of relevant professional experience in their training field. Alternatively, individuals can become trainers if they have graduated from an upper secondary education programme and have professional experience in their position, or have 10 to 12 years of professional experience in the related profession. In all cases, trainers must also have completed an initial teacher training programme (Section 2.6.1) (Allinckx; Karno and Monico, 2019). Since 2019, trainers in workplaces are obliged to follow a mentor training programme to strengthen the quality of the new dual training system.

In BE-DE, trainers are qualified through their professional experience; if they also hold a teacher qualification, their salary is higher.

2.6.3. Continuing professional development of teachers and trainers

Continuing professional training (CPD) of teachers is mandatory and varies among the Communities. The following approaches for implementing CPD for teachers and trainers apply:

Flemish Community (BE-FL)

In BE-FL, schools have a high degree of autonomy in developing their CPD policy and receive an annual training budget from the Flemish Community, which is spent according to their yearly training plan. Schools can also be supported by their pedagogical counselling services and can participate in CPD projects initiated by the Government. The teachers themselves and their schools are responsible for taking the initiative for CPD. There are no formal requirements for individual teachers regarding the content, form or frequency of CPD activities (Flemish Department of education and training, 2021).

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

In BE-FR, teachers need to undertake 3 days per school year. This number of days can be capitalised and distributed over 6 consecutive school years. In 2012, FormaForm was created through a partnership between Forem, IFAPME and *Bruxelles Formation*. Its mission is to help professionals in training guidance and social professional integration and to train the trainers from these partner institutions. The CDP for members of the school educational team and of the multidisciplinary team of the psycho-medico-social centres (PMS centres) is organised:

(a) in inter-networks, for all the organising authorities, under the responsibility of the Institute for Continuing Professional Training (*Institut Interréseaux de la Formation Professionnelle Continue*, IFPC);
(b) at the level of each network, under the responsibility of Wallonia-Brussels Education and each Federation of organising authorities;
(c) skill centres (*centres de competences*) offer vocational training also to teachers, which is adapted to the ongoing changing labour market needs.

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

In the BE-DE, the *Autonome Hochschschule Ostbelgien* organises continuing training for primary and secondary education teachers, including for certain VET teachers and trainers. The education ministry defines a pedagogical training plan from which teachers can choose their courses. They also can participate in training courses offered by their own or other providers. Teachers need to

have the agreement of their head teacher, to take part in continuous training (ReferNet Belgium Coordination Team, 2022). Teachers of secondary school-based VET must undergo regular CPD, as stated in the 1998 Decree. There are no formal requirements in place which foresee specific CPD for trainers; this is therefore the responsibility of the employer (Flemish Department of education and training, 2021).

CHAPTER 3.

Shaping VET qualifications

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3.1. Anticipating skill needs

Skills anticipation in Belgium can be described as collaborative and fragmented. It is collaborative in the sense that many stakeholders are involved, including the three language Communities and the three Regions, which have the strategic and operational responsibility for training and job-matching services. It is fragmented, as the involvement of different stakeholders is reflected in multi-layered skills anticipation activities with little coordination at national level. However, this fragmented approach also has an advantage as stakeholders can focus on regional challenges. Even though skills anticipation activities are implemented mainly at regional level, they are funded at the federal level through the national employment office (*office national de l'emploi*, ONEM). The outputs of the various skills anticipation activities are mainly used by policy-makers at regional and local levels, and with education and training providers, learners, jobseekers, as well as workers who are looking for upskilling and reskilling. The structure of skills anticipation involves several stakeholders at the different levels.

At international level

The international employment observatory (*Interregionale Arbeitsmarkt Beobachtungsstelle – Oberservatoire interrégional due marché de l'emploi*, IBA-OIE), brings together Belgian actors involved in skills anticipation with those from its neighbouring countries France, Germany and Luxembourg. The IBA-OIE collects comparable and interpretable information on the labour market in the sub-regions and thus provides the basis for structural and labour market policy decisions in the Greater Region.

At federal level

Anticipating skill needs at federal level is done by:

(a) the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB), which is a Belgian independent public agency and the leading authority at federal level. It conducts prospective studies and projections on economic (including labour-market), social and environmental policy issues on its own initiative or at the request of parliament, social partners or public authorities;

(b) the national employment office (ONEM), which provides statistics and conducts studies on the employment situation of the country;

(c) other public institutions, such as the higher council of work (*Conseil supérieur de l'emploi*) or the national social security office (*Office National de Sécurité Sociale*, ONSS), which conduct research on employment-related subjects.

At regional level

Anticipating skill needs at regional level is done by:

(a) the regional public employment services (VDAB, *Forem*, Actiris, and ADG), which are doing skills anticipation and at the same time are users of skills anticipation results. In Flanders, a team from VDAB is in charge of the web-based database Competent, the main tool for defining professional profiles. This tool is used in the anticipation of skill needs. The employment service publishes annually a report on employment-market developments, which includes information on inadequacies between supply and demand in jobs, and on which certified qualifications are available. *Le Forem* is responsible for detecting future labour needs through its labour-market observation, analysing and forecasting service. The Walloon Institute publishes analyses of labour-market needs and the annual list of jobs in shortage. The public employment service of the German-speaking Community (ADG) collects, analyses and distributes information concerning local labour market supply and demand;

(b) regional authorities, which provide socioeconomic data and undertake prospective analysis on the specificities of the employment market and its requirements. The main organisations in this field are:
   (i) *Statistiek Vlaanderen* (Flanders);
   (ii) the Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (*Institut wallon de l' Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique,* IWEPS);
   (iii) *Forem* via the mission of employment market watch, analysis and forecasting (*Veille, Analyse et Prospective du Marché de l'Emploi,* AMEF);
   (iv) Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis (*Institut Bruxellois de Statistique et d'Analyse*, IBSA); and
   (v) the statistical office of the German-speaking Community (*Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens*);

(c) skill centres (*Centres de compétence*) in Wallonia, which aim to match training with labour-market needs at an operational level. These provide training and monitor labour-market trends, and provide guidance and information on job opportunities;

(d) view.brussels, which is part of *Actiris* and extends the work of the Brussels Observatory for Employment and Training. This monitors, analyses and evaluates the labour market and transitions, as well as analysing current and future employment and training needs (Cedefop, 2022). It is also responsible for creating new methods of competence and needs anticipation in Brussels, on which it collaborates with the *Bruxelles Formation*.

There is further cooperation among different bodies. For example, since 2017 the VDAB and the Flemish Ministry of Education have used a common monitoring profile, which contains five indicators: labour-market position (working/seeking job/inactive), work experience, work regime, sector of employment and remuneration. The Flemish Ministry of Education provides schools with data on IVET graduate transition to the labour market. VDAB delivers information on labour-market participation of IVET graduates at the level of their field of study, to support the study choice of forthcoming IVET learners (Cedefop, 2022).

3.2. Designing qualifications

The Government of each Community sets out the framework within which the education institutions organise their programmes. The framework for the provision of formal education is defined in different acts or circulars per education level (secondary education, adult education and higher education). Next to this, each Community/Region develops its own approach of defining or reviewing skills and qualifications in VET in line with regional/local needs. Formal education is referenced to the national qualification framework in each Community (Section 2.1).

Flemish Community (BE-FL)

BE-FL distinguishes between professional and educational qualifications in the design.

(a) Professional qualifications are a completed set of competences, assigned to the FQF, with which a person can practice a profession. A professional qualification can be acquired through education and other training providers or through a procedure for the recognition of prior learning (*erkennen van verworven competenties*, EVC). A professional qualification is established from a professional qualification file. The competent database, managed by VDAB, forms the primary reference framework for this. The database contains occupational competence profiles that describe what an individual needs to be able to do and know to perform a certain profession. In cooperation with users and partners, the content of an occupational profile is always adapted to labour-market needs. As the competent service of the Government of Flanders, AHOVOKS coordinates the preparation of professional qualification files and organises their validation and grading.

(b) Educational qualifications are sets of competences allowing general

functioning in society, further studies and/or professional activities. These qualifications can only be acquired through education. Educational qualifications at ISCED levels 1 to 4 consist of learning outcomes and/or recognised professional qualifications or partial qualifications. AHOVOKS develops proposals for educational qualifications on its own initiative or at the request of interested parties. For educational qualifications at levels 5 to 8, the higher education institutions define, in a process coordinated by the Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad*, VLIR) and Flemish Council of University Colleges (*Vlaamse Hogescholenraad,* VLHORA), the domain-specific learning outcomes (DSLOs) for each study programme. The DSLOs need to be validated by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*, NVAO), which then provides AHOVOKS with the recognised qualifications and the domain-specific learning outcomes they incorporate.

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

In BE-FR, the French-speaking Service for Professions and Qualifications (*Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications*, SFMQ) ([62]) is an important body for the design of qualifications and brings together representative of the Governments of Wallonia, the French Community (Wallonia-Brussels Federation) and the College of the French Community Commission of Brussels. It is responsible:

(a) for setting up profession profiles reflecting the reality of the job. The Skills validation consortium is consulted during this process and, at the final stage, they are then also validated by the Chamber of Trades;
(b) for setting up training profiles based on the needs of the respective profession which are consistent with the labour-market needs. Education and training providers are consulted during this process and at the final stage they are then also validated by the Teaching-Training Chamber;
(c) to participate in the positioning of certification within the CFC (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, forthcoming).

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

In the German-speaking Community, IAWM is responsible for designing qualifications for the apprenticeship programme. While updating training programmes and developing new ones, the institute considers labour-market

([62])

needs and therefore cooperates closely with companies, professional sectors and associations.

In the design of qualifications for VET schools, the pedagogical service department of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for the updating of existing programmes and the development of new ones for secondary VET schools. Integration and training programmes offered by ADG are designed in line with the employment situation. Social partners, members of management committees, and the employment service are all involved in the decision-making. The ADG is certified to issue training programmes in the cleaning, office, and construction sector (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2022).

3.3. Recognition of prior learning

In Belgium, the Federal Law of 30 December 2001 has recognised the individual right for workers to have access to skills assessment. In the following years, two cooperation agreements on validation were signed by different stakeholders (2003 and 2019), which further define how to implement this law. The law applies for the whole Belgium, but each Community has its own approaches and involves stakeholders for the implementation of the validation system of non-formal and informal learning (Antonie, forthcoming).

In 2012, the Council of the European Union called on Member States to establish a recognition system to make existing competences visible. The main aim of validating non-formal and informal learning is to improve prospects on the labour market for those without a diploma and to shorten the duration of training paths. This means the number of unqualified jobseekers can be reduced and companies have more potential for finding skilled workers.

Flemish Community (BE-FL)

The current validation systems and arrangements in Flanders are defined by the 2019 Decree on recognition of acquired competences and the Decree on common quality assurance framework. The latter prescribes the terms for certifying professional qualifications by regulating the conditions for quality control at the level of the provider and of the training (or validation) pathway (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023i). The decrees support building coherent and transparent validation practices and procedures. Key features are to strengthen the cooperation between the different stakeholders, to link the validation processes to the structure of the FQF, and to communicate all relevant information to the stakeholders and the general public via a dedicated website.

In Flanders, the term EVC (*erkennen van verworven competenties*) stands for recognition of acquired competences and refers to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Alongside the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, it also includes what individuals have learned in a formal setting but which was not recognised with a formal (partial) qualification. EVC is used to get admission to an education and training programme, or/and to request exemptions from certain parts of a programme and/or to obtain a (professional) qualification. It is regulated by the Departments for Education and Training, Work and Social Economy as well as Culture, Youth, Media and Sports. EVC is thus supported by the Flemish Government, but implementation differs across the sectors; there are many procedures in place to validate non-formal and informal learning, which are independently developed by each policy domain.

Obtaining a secondary education qualification (BE-FL)

Those applicants who passed the age of compulsory education and wish to obtain the diploma or certificate of secondary education (including IVET), have the option to take part in an exam in the presence of the Exam Committee (there are no limitations on the age of the applicant). These kinds of exam are organised throughout the year. The regulations for the validation practices in secondary education were updated in 2021 ([63]), but with minor changes compared to recent years.

Obtaining a higher education qualification (BE-FL)

Validation of prior learning in higher education is defined by the Codex Higher Education (2013). At higher education level, the process of recognising non-formal and informal learning is a decentralised system in which each association in higher education defines its own procedure and rules. The validation can lead to a proof of acquired competences (*bewijs van bekwaamheid*), which then can lead to credit certificates and/or proof of qualification, as well as to the appropriate exemptions/shortening of the study duration. It is noted, however, that the recognition of competences does not automatically lead to exemptions and is at the discretion of the faculty or department. There is no guarantee that one association will accept the outcomes of validation awarded by another association. The procedure refers to the level descriptors included in Article No II.141 of the Codex on Higher Education (2013) and the learning outcomes laid down by the higher education institutions. The procedure often starts from a

([63]) More information in German: Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens. *Examenreglement [Exam regulations].*

portfolio and typically includes other elements, such as assessments, structured interviews and behavioural observation.

Anyone who has not obtained a secondary education diploma but wants to access higher education programmes, has the option to take part in special entrance examination (*toelatingsonderzoek*) to get access for bachelor programmes or to do an entrance test (*toelatingsproef*) to access graduate programmes. The outcome of these validation procedures is a kind of recognition, confirming that the individual who did not finish secondary programme nevertheless has the potential to succeed in higher education programmes. All relevant associations agreed to use the same standardised test with regard to the entrance examination for the bachelor and graduate programmes. Candidates can apply just once per academic year. The validation process is free of charge (Kimps, forthcoming).

Adult education (BE-FL)

Since the decrees of 2019, there are two types of EVC implementation in adult education. The Flemish Decree of 15 June 2007 relating to (formal) adult education defines exemptions linked to the modular organisation of education programmes. All programmes/modules in the adult education centres are developed using course profiles approved by the Flemish Government. The centres for adult education evaluate each module and define the procedures for exemption, which can be granted based on credits for prior learning and/or by evaluating the competences of the individual. There are also EVC procedures in place for adult education which lead to professional qualifications. The centres for adult education can act as a validation body if they fulfil certain conditions, such as accepting regular quality control and using the instruments which are developed in line with validation standards (De Rick, 2019).

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

In BE-FR, the legal basis for validation is defined in several decrees, laws, and cooperation agreements. Validation of skills is implemented in line with the revised Cooperation Agreement (2019), via the Skills Validation Consortium (*Consortium de Validation des Compétences*, CVDC) and approved validation centres. CVDC grants skill credentials to non-formal and informal learning, especially at the request of the three governments (the French Community, Walloon Region and COCOF). They are recognised by public services for employment and adult education schools and can be used to increase an individual's qualifications on the job market. They are also recognised by the vocational training providers

where they are members of this consortium. In adult education, the 2018 Decree promotes a unified approach concerning the admission, exemption and certification of formal, non-formal and informal prior learning.

In BE-FR, the validation system of non-formal and informal learning distinguishes between validation of competences (*validation des compétences*, VDC) and valorisation of experience (*valorisation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE).

Validation of competences for non-higher education aims at recognising professional knowledge and know-how acquired outside of the typical training channels. A network of training providers organises testing sessions, in which, for example, they ask the candidates to demonstrate their skills in a given occupation in a situation which is typical for this specific occupation. When the candidates carry this out successfully, they receive a *titre de competence* (skills certificate), which they can use to either access the labour market and/or further training in adult learning or vocational training. The Skills Validation Consortium and accredited validation centres carry out the validation. The centres are the Walloon Office for Vocational Training and Placement (*Le Forem*), Social Advancement Education/Adult Education (EPS), IFAPME and SFPME. Their responsibility is to verify the level of knowledge, skills and professional aptitudes to obtain the title of competence recognised by the associated partners.

Valorisation of experience defines the process of evaluating and recognising knowledge and skills acquired through professional and/or personal experience and/or training. Individuals who undergo VAE can receive a certificate of achievement (*attestation de réussite valorisation*), which can provide them access to further education or exemptions to shorten training pathways. VAE is done in adult education, universities, university colleges and arts colleges; the process is free of charge. Most universities and university colleges communicate a certain date by which candidates need to start the process by submitting their folder documenting the candidate's background (Antoine, forthcoming).

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

In 2017, the steering group developed a validation concept for the German-speaking Community; from this, the ESF project Shaping future paths was elaborated and has been running from 2018 to 2021. The objective of this project is to support citizens in shaping their career paths, including the option of validation and recognition of their vocational competences.

Since 2021, the competence recognition procedure in East Belgium has been called KomAn. The abbreviation stands for recognition of competence, but also for arrive at work. In East Belgium, KomAn primarily targets three groups:

(a) people without a formal professional qualification, who once they become unemployed have difficulties reintegrating into the labour market;
(b) those with foreign diplomas not recognised in Belgium;
(c) returnees and career changers.

Validation procedures are available for individuals who have gained competences through non-formal and/or informal learning in one of the around 40 occupations for which an apprenticeship programme is offered. These have the option to take part in the practical final examination of apprenticeship and to have their practical vocational skills certified at ZAWM. The IAWM is the supervisory authority which develops, in cooperation with the ZAWM, the relevant procedures. Individuals, who are unable to prove their skills and competences through a recognised qualification, can participate in this practical exam, if they:
(a) wish to work or reside in Belgium;
(b) are at least 25 years of age;
(c) have relevant professional experience which is not recognised as a professional qualification in BE-DE;
(d) understand and speak German (level A2 of the common European framework of reference for languages) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023j).

3.4. Quality assurance

Each language Community takes care of the quality assurance of its education system, with the involvement of different stakeholders and with respect of various regulations.

Flemish Community (BE-FL)
The Decree on quality in education of 8 May 2009 states that secondary schools are responsible for their own quality assurance and therefore are also in charge of deciding how to conduct the self-evaluation of the quality of their school. As well as these internal reviews at provider level, external reviews can also be carried out through the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate works on behalf of the Flemish Government and is responsible for overseeing the quality of education providers at various levels, including secondary and part-time arts education as well as secondary adult education ([64]). Pedagogical support services assist schools in strengthening internal quality assurance and their ability to implement

([64]) Eurydice. *Quality assurance*.

policies. Providers of initial and continuous VET are responsible for monitoring their own quality systematically and so also have some freedom in choosing their procedure for it.

In 2019, the Flemish Government approved the Decree on common principles for quality assurance in training (and validation) pathways, offered outside the formal education system but leading to a professional qualification which is formally linked to the FQF. The decree prescribes the terms for certifying professional qualifications by regulating the conditions for quality control at the provider level and that of the training and validation pathway. The quality assurance focuses on the following five areas:

(a) learning objectives;
(b) design of the learning process;
(c) learner guidance;
(d) learning process evaluation;
(e) internal quality assurance processes.

The quality of training and validation pathways outside the formal system is verified at least once every 6 years; the relevant quality assurance framework is the basis. It was developed by the Education Inspectorate and the Flemish Social Inspectorate and is aligned with the quality assurance framework used in formal education. Several vocational training programmes have already been recognised. The Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances (AHOVOKS) is involved in the preparation of the relevant legislation and plays a role in the implementation (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2022; Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023i).

French-speaking part (BE-FR)

In BE-FR, there is no common approach to quality assurance; inspection for schools, ISO for training providers, and other systems coexist. VET providers have the responsibility to assure the quality of their programmes through self-assessment. *Le Forem*, *Bruxelles Formation* and the IFAPME have ISO 9001 certification in place. In 2022, a partnership agreement was signed to set up a national reference point (NRP) for VET, which is located at the Belgian Erasmus-Plus Agency (AEF-Europe), within the Ministry of the French Community. The objective of the NRP is to develop a culture of quality assurance in the education system, including initial and continuing VET (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023u). All learning environments are included, such as school-based provision and work-

based learning (including apprenticeship schemes) and all learning types (digital, face-to-face or blended), delivered by both public and private providers.

The quality approach in adult education is especially found at the level of teacher training, where teachers regularly update their pedagogical and professional expertise to the benefit of improving knowledge and the transmission of skills ([65]).

In higher education, the Agency for the Evaluation of the Quality of Higher Education (*Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Ènseignment Supérieur,* AEQES) is responsible for planning procedures for evaluating the quality of higher education in the French Community.

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

The external evaluation agency, which is located at the *Autonome Hochschule*, is in charge of external evaluation for VET schools and VET competence centres. VET schools also apply to ISO-compatible quality management systems (ISO 9001, ISO 14001) (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2022). In line with the Decree of 31 August 1998, schools are obliged to carry out an internal evaluation every 3 years. The external evaluation team offers support in this process ([66]).

([65]) EPS. *La démarche qualité dans l'Enseignement de promotion sociale [The quality approach in social advancement education].*

([66]) More information in German: Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien. *Externe Evaluation [External evaluation].*

CHAPTER 4.

Promoting VET participation

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4.1. Incentives for learners

Incentives for learners to participate in VET are offered at the national, community and regional levels. The main incentives at national level are:

(a) each private sector employee has the right to receive accredited training and to take time off while continuing to be paid ([67]); they need to plan this together with their employer. Depending on the type of training, the employee can receive a leave of absence from work for a certain number of hours per school year. Employees in Brussels and the German-speaking Community can take up to 180 hours in specific cases, such as for training linked to bottleneck occupations and employees in Flanders can take up to 125 hours of paid educational leave. Employers are reimbursed for the costs of paid education leave, in the form of a lump sum ([68]);

(b) jobseekers receive free training and at the same time continue to receive unemployment benefits. In certain cases, a training allowance, reimbursement of travel and childcare costs are also paid during the training period;

(c) jobseekers have also the possibility to follow a vocational training programme, including practical training in a company. They sign a tripartite agreement with the company and the training provider, which includes a job contract for the length of the training. During the length of the training, the employment office pays the trainee an allowance, a productivity bonus and reimbursement for travel expenses;

(d) all apprentices receive renumeration paid by their training company during the time of their apprenticeship, which increases per training year and differs depending on which professional field the training is done (Section 2.2.1.3).

In addition to these incentives, which are offered nationwide, regional authorities and language Communities offer further incentives to their learners.

Brussels

In Brussels, learners and jobseekers are offered various incentives, many aiming to improve their language or digital skills and/or try to facilitate their transition to the labour market:

(a) training vouchers (*chèques formation)* are available to employed or self-

([67]) More information in French: Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue. *Congé-éducation payé [Paid education leave].*

([68]) More information in German: The education portal of the German-speaking Community of Belgium. *Der bezahlte Bildungsurlaub [Paid education leave].*

employed people during the first 6 months of their new career path. The public employment service *Actiris* will pay half the cost of the training relevant to the professional function, up to a maximum of EUR 2 250. The remainder is paid by the employer or the main self-employed person;

(b) language vouchers (professional project) target those who are registered at *Actiris* and are either unemployed jobseekers or on unpaid notice. These language courses are free of charge and focus on everything that can be useful to facilitate the job search of the user, such as writing a curriculum vitae or cover letter, or preparing for a job interview. Classes focusing on the language skills needed for a specific profession are also provided. The vouchers grant participation in up to 120 group language courses, each lasting 50 minutes;

(c) matching language vouchers target unemployed jobseekers registered at *Actiris*, as well as people who have been recruited by an employer or those who are about to become self-employed. These vouchers are free of charge and offer either one-to-one lessons (40 hours), or group lessons with other employees of 3 to 10 people (60 hours). The training offered focuses on the profession and the necessary languages skills it demands;

(d) the Dutch-language professional project *(projet professionnel néerlandophone*) supports jobseekers through a partnership between *Actiris* and VDAB. This project offers free-of-charge vocational training or practice-oriented training while learning useful vocabulary in six sectors: wood and construction, transport and logistics, industry, services for people in business, business support, retail and IT, as well as in care and teaching. The training is tailored to the job market and the skills of the jobseekers. The VDAB also supports jobseekers during the training and for up to 1 year after the start of the integration project. Childcare support and transport costs are also reimbursed;

(e) ICT vouchers *(chèques TIC)* are training vouchers for jobseekers to improve their digital skills. Beneficiaries can participate in training, free of charge (financed by *Actiris*), up to an amount of EUR 2 240, with training providers recognised by *Actiris*;

(f) young bonus in dual training *(prime jeune en alternance)* offers work-study bonuses for young learners (15-18), who carry out practical training in companies (for example dual vocational training programmes) for at least 4 months. This bonus is awarded as part of their work-study programme (CEFA/CDO or SFPME). The amount of this premium varies between EUR 500 and EUR 750;

(g) in the framework of the precariousness action plan for better access to training in Brussels, implemented by *Bruxelles Formation* since 2019, the training allowance paid to trainees following vocational training (particularly young unemployed people) was increased from EUR 1 to EUR 2 per training hour. The plan also includes the lending of computer equipment for unequipped learners, as well as the strengthening of the psychosocial support for learners within *Bruxelles Formation* (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023k).

Flanders

In Flanders, various incentives are offered to promote participation in VET:

(a) bonus for learners (*leerlingpremie alternerende opleiding*) who are following an apprenticeship programme or work-based learning during at least 4 months. The bonus (EUR 500) is awarded once per school year, up to a maximum of three times;

(b) training vouchers for employees working in Brussels or the Flemish Region with a maximum qualification of a secondary education diploma. The vouchers can be used for labour-market or career-oriented training. High-skilled employees are entitled to training vouchers only after following career guidance. The total for vouchers issued per person is maximum EUR 250 and is payable up to 50% by the employer and 50% by the Flemish authority. Low-skilled employees are reimbursed the full amount for certain training;

(c) Flemish training credit (*Vlaams opleidingskrediet*) is for employees working in the private and/or social profit sector who take part in training and therefore need to interrupt their careers. They can receive a supplementary benefit paid by the Flemish Government, in addition to the benefit paid by the national employment office;

(d) jobseekers who follow a training course recognised by the VDAB receive a refund of their registration fees and also for the expenses for their learning material. Moreover, jobseekers are also entitled to additional premiums (travel allowance, childcare allowance). Long-time jobseekers who follow a recognised training for a bottleneck occupation receive a specific premium (September 2023 to October 2024, temporary measure);

(e) special employment support measures are offered to people with a health problem or disability. The measures target jobseekers, employees, students who follow training, do an internship or following a dual learning programme. They include free support from an interpreter for the deaf or hard of hearing,

reimbursement of transport costs to work and for working tools and clothing ([69]).

Wallonia

In Wallonia various incentives are offered, targeting learners, jobseekers, older people, as well as those who want to start their own business or follow training in a shortage occupation, where not enough national qualified skilled labour exists, to cover the national labour market demand:

(a) jobseekers who are living in Wallonia and are registered at *Le Forem* to take part in vocational training pathways, are offered reimbursement of transport and childcare costs and all-risk insurance cover. They also receive EUR 2 per training hour;

(b) learners who have completed their dual training contract at the IFAPME of CEFA, receive a bonus of EUR 750;

(c) any person above the age of 45 who loses his/her job in the private sector and does not receive any outplacement support from his former employer, has the right to take part in outplacement activities for a fee up to EUR 1 500. Those services and guidance measures are offered by professional outplacement offices and aim to support the jobseeker in finding a new job;

(d) jobseekers who complete 140 hours of training in a shortage occupation, which is listed by the public employment service, are granted EUR 350. They also receive support to prepare for the job interview, held at the end of the training. If the training is within the building sector, they are granted an amount of EUR 2 200;

(e) jobseekers may obtain a passport driving grant to finance courses and exams to obtain their driving licence (EUR 2 600 worth);

(f) jobseekers receive a language grant to improve their language skills and so aid their transition to the labour market. This grant was increased with the language plan for 2022-24 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023v);

(g) learners who are following higher VET programmes receive a minimum monthly allowance from the training company as defined in 2020 legislation. The monthly allowance for students following a bachelor programme is EUR 550, and for students following a master degree programme it is EUR 766 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023l);

(h) people who want to start their own business can receive up to EUR 12 500, paid in four instalments, over a period of 2 years through the Airbag programme. This grant is also paid to people who have already been self-

([69]) More information in Dutch: VDAB. *Tewerkstellingsondersteunende maatregelen voor wie een gezondheidsprobleem heeft [Employment support measures for those who have a health problem].*

employed in a supplementary activity for at least 3 years, or who have undergone specific training with IFAPME.

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

The following incentives to learners are offered in the German-speaking Community:

(a) the renumeration which apprentices receive was increased in 2022. Since then, apprentices receive in the first semester of their apprenticeship EUR 350, which increases over the semesters and reaches EUR 700 in the final semester (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023d);

(b) young people can undertake a company familiarisation placement allowing them to gain a better understanding of the world of work and acquire professional experience. Learners receive a small allowance next to the reimbursement of their travel expenses from their employer ([70]);

(c) the BRAWO project offers financial support to promote the professional development of learners who follow labour-market relevant training or continuing education. It reimburses one third of the training expenses up to a maximum amount of EUR 1 000 per year. This financial support is given to private employers and employees, self-employed, freelancers and jobseekers.

4.2. Incentives for training companies

The incentives for enterprises to provide work-based training are offered by the regional authorities and by the German-speaking Community.

Brussels

Various incentives for training companies are offered in Brussels:

(a) training bonus for external training (*prime formation*): depending on the size of the company and the sector of activity, companies can receive financial aid when they are following external training to improve their competitiveness through training in management and knowledge of business. The financial aid covers from 40% to 70% of the costs, with a maximum per calendar year of EUR 10 000 for micro- and small businesses and EUR 15 000 for medium-sized companies; there is a maximum of five subsidised training courses per calendar year;

([70]) More information in German: ADGB. *Infoblatt für Arbeitssuchende: Das Arbeitsplatzerprobungspraktikum [Information sheet for jobseekers: the job trial internship].*

(b) work training bonus (*incitant à la formation*): employers can benefit from a training incentive of up to EUR 5 000 for the training of their employees. The employee must meet certain conditions (for example, be under 30) and be employed on a full-time permanent contract;
(c) tutor premium (*prime tuteur*): companies who are offering a training place for young people (15 to 25 years of age) following a dual training programme can receive this premium. The training in the company must last at least 6 months and a tutor, who can supervise up to four learners, is designated to transmit his skills. The amount of the premium is EUR 1 750 per tutor per year who looks after a minimum of one and a maximum of four apprentices at the same time.

Flanders

Various incentives for training companies are offered in Flanders:
(a) bonus qualifying work-based learning for Flemish companies (*premie kwalificerend werkplekleren voor ondernemingen*); this is a bonus which is given to companies for the mentoring of learners in apprenticeship programmes or in nursing training, if they follow at least 4-month work-based learning. The bonus is awarded once per school year, up to a maximum of three times per learner (EUR 600 if apprentices receive no remuneration, EUR 1 000 if the apprentices receive remuneration);
(b) exemption from registration fee in adult education; those who meet certain conditions are fully or partially exempt from registration fees for all adult education courses. This applies, for example, to people who are unemployed, are in parental leave, have a low income if they meet certain conditions;
(c) SME e-wallet; this is a measure whereby entrepreneurs and those practising liberal professions receive financial aid when purchasing services that improve the quality of their enterprise. These services include training courses and advisory services such as creating a communication plan for your business. Small enterprises receive 30% support, medium-sized enterprises 20%. Each year a maximum of EUR 7 500 can be paid.

Wallonia

Various incentives for training companies are offered in Wallonia:
(a) training vouchers are given to companies, supporting them financially in offering training to their workers in one of the approved training centres. For 1 hour of training they receive EUR 30. There are also two other training vouchers, which focus on a specific field:

(i) language training voucher, with a focus on language learning;
(ii) eco-climate training voucher, with a focus on environmental issues;

(b) adaptation credit (*crédit-adaptation*) is financial support for companies in Wallonia (non-profit associations are excluded), which offer specific training to at least three of their employees, with the aim of keeping their skills up to date. The companies receive an hourly flat rate per worker, which varies from EUR 6 to EUR 10; SMEs receive the highest rate;
(c) employers receive EUR 750 for each apprentice who is trained within their company. The training must be based on a contract of a minimum duration of 9 months, include an officially approved tutor and the young person needs to succeed in his/her training year;
(d) self-employed workers, who decide to train a young person for the first time receive a bonus of EUR 750 (one-time payment), to cover administrative expenses;
(e) shortage punch support is provided as soon as a company indicate that they are searching for at least eight workers in the same job. They need to submit a request to the public employment service, which then offers them a tailor-made programme. The selection of candidates is done jointly, with at least 80% of the successfully trained jobseekers guaranteed employment. These tailor-made training courses are organised by the public employment service and its skill centres in collaboration with sectoral and business federations. The training takes place within the company, allowing future recruits to be immediately operational. Companies do not need to cover any cost of the training;
(f) training-integration scheme (*plan formation-insertion*) provides employers the possibility to hire people with skill deficits and train them mainly on the job. The scheme consists of an in-company training period of 4 to 26 weeks, followed by a work contract within the same company of an equivalent duration. The scheme targets mainly jobseekers with low or no qualifications (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2022).

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, the following incentives are offered to training companies:

(a) training allowance: companies can receive allowances for each employee who takes part in training; they need to respect a maximum of training time and training fund per employee. SMEs receive EUR 9 per hour of training per employee and large companies EUR 6. The total amount of support

cannot exceed a total of EUR 15 000 per year for SMEs and EUR 20 000 per year for larger companies;

(b) employers who provide a vocational training place to people with a disability receive financial and non-financial support through the Agency for self-determined life. Such employers receive professional consultancy and a monthly contribution to the payment of the social security contributions for the tutor, who assists those young people during the training within their company (Cedefop & Bruxelles Formation, 2022).

4.3. Guidance and counselling

In 2018, the *Cité des métiers* (ReferNet Belgium and Cedefop, 2018) opened in Brussels. This is one of the biggest counselling and guidance centres in Europe, open to French- and Dutch-speaking stakeholders. It is a multi-partner and bilingual initiative, which is designed to improve access to all types of lifelong learning, including VET. Both *Cité des métiers*, and the guidance centre *Carrefour* were established through a partnership between *Actiris*, VDAB and *Bruxelles Formation* ([71]). Currently, four *Cité des métiers* centres (in Brussels, Charleroi, Namur and Liège) and nine *Carrefour* centres are providing guidance for education and career free of charge (Cedefop & ReferNet Belgium, 2018) ([72]). Their main objectives are to strengthen cooperation among organisations active in education, training, employment and career guidance, gathering the information provided by these organisations at a single point of contact where people of all ages can find it in an easily accessible format. They also enable institutional collaboration between education (compulsory, post-secondary and adult education), vocational training, and employment sectors to offer counselling and guidance services.

Besides this commonly used guidance centre, guidance and counselling is offered in the Communities under the responsibilities of the education ministries of the Flemish- and French-speaking Community.

Flemish Community (BE-FL)

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training has overall responsibility for guidance in the education sector in BE-FL. The Decree of the Flemish

([71]) More information in French: Wallonie. *Me faire aider par un(e) Carrefour ou Cité des métiers [Get help from a Carrefour or Cité des métiers].*

([72]) More information in French: Forem. *Carrefour et Cité des métiers* [Carrefour and Cité des métiers].

Government of 27/4/2018 concerning pupil guidance in primary and secondary school education, defines the roles and tasks of all players in the guidance landscape. The schools are the main players and have a high level of autonomy in the actual design and implementation of guidance for primary and secondary learners.

Each school is responsible for developing its own policy on pupil guidance and holds the final responsibility in this matter. This policy addresses four areas of counselling:

(a) education career (questions concerning the choice of studies, fields of study, certificates and diplomas, etc.);
(b) learning and studying (problems with reading, writing, calculating, learning, etc.);
(c) psychological and social functioning (feelings of depression, stress, fear of failure, bullying, transgressive behaviour, difficult situations at home, etc.);
(d) preventive healthcare (health problems, vaccinations, growth disorders, drug use, obesity, etc.).

Each Dutch-speaking school in Flanders and in Brussels appoints a pupil counsellor and cooperates with a pupil guidance centre (*centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding*, CLB). The CLBs provide guidance services to pupils in compulsory education, in mainstream and in special education, as well as to learners following a dual programme provided at Syntra centres. The guidance is not only provided to the learners but also to their parents, teachers and other school professionals. CLB centres cooperate with VDAB, health organisations, social services (for example youth justice), as well as with several other specialised services.

For higher education students, the relevant Flemish institutions are responsible for providing guidance and orientation. There are a variety of guidance approaches and practices in place and students can receive educational guidance (finding the right course) as well as career guidance (finding the right job). This service is also provided to students with specific needs, such as learning disorders or a physical disability.

Jobseekers receive support from the Flemish public employment service VDAB in their search for a suitable job and receive offers in form of job placement, training, career guidance and outplacement. *Actiris* offers similar services in the Brussels-Capital Region, proving qualitative guidance for the unemployed. VDAB takes actions on providing relevant guidance for specific target groups, such as for jobseekers who are older (over 55), have a migrant background, are

low-qualified (without a secondary school diploma) or for learners with special needs.

Learners with special needs, as well as with physical and/or mental health problems, who experience limitations in finding and keeping suitable employment, receive guidance and counselling from the specialised mediation team (*Gespecialiseerd Team Bemiddeling*, GTB) as well as from the specialised training, guidance and mediation services (*gespecialiseerde opleidings-, begeleidings- en bemiddelingsdiensten*, GOB).

Foreign learners who recently arrived in Belgium, receive educational and career guidance and counselling from the Flemish Agency for Integration and Civic Integration offers (Cedefop, 2020a).

In 2021, the Lifelong learning partnership (Section 2.2.4) drew up the lifelong learning action plan *Setting course for a learning Flanders*, which includes measures to improve the guidance and counselling offer. These measures encompass initiatives like focusing on inclusive learning, developing digital tools and gateways, introducing coaching tools for learning organisations, and providing more and better career guidance through incentives and education and training partners. The aim is to ensure that individuals, groups, and organisations have improved access to learning opportunities and receive the necessary support and advice for lifelong learning.

French-speaking part of Belgium (BE-FR)

The French Community has the overall responsibility for guidance in the education sector in BE-FR. It transfers the responsibility for design and implementation, with a great level of autonomy, to the organising authorities of the schools themselves. In nursery, primary and secondary education, as well as partly also in higher education, the education providers are responsible for learner guidance. Psychological, medical and social centres (centres psycho-médico-sociaux, CPMS) offer free-of-charge guidance services to learners and their parents, starting from nursery education until the end of the secondary education. These are independent support services linked with schools and regulated by the Ministry of Education. The centres consist of multidisciplinary teams, composed of psychologists, social workers and nurses, who work as a team. There are several other centres which offer guidance to young people in Wallonia and Brussels region, such as the youth info centres, information and documentation centres, Action Services in an Open Environment (AMO), as well as information and guidance services belonging to universities and high schools.

The pact for teaching excellence (*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*), which started in 2015 aims to reform the education system by making it more efficient and equal. It also includes the improvement of the guidance services in schools and emphasises the need for collaboration between all stakeholders (compulsory education, higher education, regional guidance services). In September 2023, the platform *Mon orientation* was launched, providing guidance to learners of secondary, higher and adult education. Financial support was given to higher education institutions, helping their development of a guidance tool for young people wishing to enrol in higher education, as well as supporting the professionalisation of those involved in guidance, including teachers. One example is the Ada tool, which is an online guidance tool and targets upper secondary learners (aged over 16) and students in the course of graduate studies; it aims to identify the areas and families of professional activity they are interested in and then to find the higher education programmes linked to these professions.

The Ministries of Employment and Training (one for the Wallonia Region, one for Brussels-Capital Region) are responsible for career guidance. The Governments of Wallonia, the Wallonia Brussels Federation (French Community) and COCOF adopted in December 2020 a memorandum presenting the terms of implementation of the lifelong guidance system, based on strategic recommendations formulated by a group of experts. The objectives pursued by the four governments concerning lifelong guidance are mainly to improve visibility of the guidance among citizens and to ensure a guidance service with a common basis for the entire French-speaking Belgian territory. Some measures in this respect are already in place, such as the *Cité des métiers* mentioned above or the coordination pools (*Bassin enseignement/formation/emploi* (EFE)), aiming to reinforce synergies between education, vocational education, employment and social partners and contribute to strengthening synergies between guidance actors. Brussels and Wallonia have 10 such pools. The Walloon Region, the French Community and the Brussels-Capital Region have set up a cooperation scheme (*orientation tout au long de la vie,* OTLAV) aimed at developing lifelong career guidance ([73]).

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

Guidance in BE-DE is provided by the ADG, which cooperates with different stakeholders. Many guidance and counselling activities are focused on the apprenticeship programme.

([73]) More information: Cedefop, 2021a.

Every year a 1-day event is organised, promoting the apprenticeship programme to pupils and their parents, with a specific focus on the professional field where apprentices are lacking (for example in 2019 chemistry). Besides, since 2018 a fair for apprenticeship professions has also taken place every year, during which companies who are looking for apprentices present themselves to young people interested in beginning an apprenticeship (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023m).

ADG and IAWM cooperate closely to transfer jobseekers into apprentices through a regular exchange of information on apprenticeships. ADG advisors have access to weekly updated information on available apprenticeships, which facilitates more targeted guidance to the jobseekers to access this training programme (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023n).

ZAWM implemented the *Berufliche Integration durch Begleitung in der dualen Ausbildung* (BIDA) project (2016-20), which runs now regularly and provides guidance and counselling to apprentices who are at risk of dropping out of training, or have already dropped out, with the aim of getting them back into the dual VET system. Depending on the individual's needs, the support measures include (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023o):

(a) analysis of strengths, interests and motivation;
(b) coaching in a new career or education path;
(c) preparation of an individual support and guidance plan.

4.4. Challenges and development opportunities

Despite the different socioeconomic and education contexts within Belgium, the VET systems face many similar challenges. In the national implementation plan of the French (Belgium French-speaking Community, 2022) and the Flemish Community (Belgium Flemish Government, 2022), the strengthening of the dual learning system is one of the priorities.

4.4.1. Coexistence of three official languages

The coexistence of three official languages remains a key challenge in all Regions, also having an impact on interregional mobility. Knowledge of the language of instruction is an important matter within VET, especially for better integration of newcomers. In response to this need, in Brussels for instance, jobseekers are offered language job vouchers to improve their language skills and employment chances. In Wallonia, *Le Forem* offers financial aid for learning German, English and Dutch. Interested candidates can apply to *Le Forem* to

spend a year or a semester abroad during the school year immediately following their upper secondary school diploma. Jobseekers can learn a language (DE, EN, NL) in intensive modules or immersion or even at distance.

4.4.2. Addressing labour-market shortages and skill mismatches

The levels of labour-market shortages and skill mismatches have increased; at the end of 2022 the vacancy rate reached 4.5%, which is one of the highest in the EU. There are increasing shortages of labour force in low- and high-skilled occupations, with the biggest shortages faced in healthcare, ICT, professional, technical and scientific jobs, and catering. In addition, the lack of relevant skills for the green transition creates bottlenecks in the transition of the economy. In 2022, labour shortages were reported for 103 occupations that require specific green skills or knowledge, such as for civil engineers (European Commission, 2023a).

In response to the digital transition, Flanders adopted in 2021 the STEM agenda 2030 (SERV, 2021), to attract more learners to choose education and training in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In 2022 the Green skills roadmap Flanders was developed, providing a report on the green skills and jobs needs in BE-FL.

The Walloon Region signed an agreement with business sectors in 2018. This details three strong measures implemented by *Le Forem*:

(a) the shortages punch (*coup de poing pénuries*), to act quickly and specifically on the particularly serious shortages encountered by small and large companies (Section 4.2);
(b) an optimised insertion training plan (PFI) system, responding better to the real needs of companies and based on simpler administrative procedures;
(c) the introduction of a financial incentive paid to learners following a training in shortage trades (Section 4.1) (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023p).

However, there is still a need to strengthen the battle against labour-market shortages and skill mismatches. Relevant activation policies need to be taken, especially in of integrating disadvantaged groups into the education and labour-market system, increasing interregional mobility, increasing relevance and participation in lifelong learning, and strengthening the teaching profession (European Commission, 2023c).

4.4.3. Strengthening relevance and participation in lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is a challenge in Belgium, as participation rates in adult education and training are relatively low. To address the skill mismatch and meet the changing demands of the labour market, it is important to increase the participation of adults in reskilling and upskilling programmes. In 2021, the participation rate of adults aged 25 to 64 in training was slightly below the EU average at 10.2%. However, low-skilled individuals, who could benefit the most from lifelong learning, were underrepresented at 4%. Additionally, according to the EU labour force survey, only 21.5% of individuals aged 25 to 64 participated in education and training in 2022. The European Union has set a target of 60% participation by 2030.

Regions and Communities have set up responding plans, aiming to further strengthen adult education. The Flanders recovery plan (Section 1.4) aims to strengthen lifelong learning and the action plan Setting the sail for a learning Flanders (adopted end of 2021), aims to transform Flanders into a learning society by focusing on synergies and collaboration in the field of lifelong learning (Vlaanderen, 2021). Since 2023 also an individual learning account is available in Flanders to stimulate lifelong learning. The Wallonia recovery plan (Section 1.4) aims to reorganise and simplify the lifelong learning landscape and invest in improving the training infrastructure. In May 2022, the charter Lifelong guidance, which defines the overarching principles of cooperation, was signed by various stakeholders involved in lifelong learning in Wallonia and Brussels. With the Go4Brussels strategy 2030, the Brussels government and social partners cooperate to improve the quality and labour-market relevance of the lifelong learning offer. In Flanders, all providers have access to financial incentives for offering training courses in shortage professions (European Commission, 2022b). Special attention is paid to vulnerable groups, such as the low-educated and older workers who generally participate far less in lifelong learning.

The relevance of the adult training offer is crucial. The Belgian recovery and resilience plan, as well as the regional ESF+ programmes, focus on adult learning, with particular attention to skills required for the digital and green transition and the integration of disadvantaged groups (European Commission, 2023a).

4.4.4. Increasing attractiveness of dual learning

Belgium has a relatively low number of upper secondary learners following dual learning. In BE-DE dual learning has a long tradition and is popular (Cedefop

& Bruxelles Formation, 2022), but there is still a negative perception of it in the other regions among learners and their parents.

In comparison to the EU average, the share of the population with a negative perception of vocational secondary education is much higher at 42.5% against 23.5%. Increasing the attractiveness of VET remains a challenge and asks for innovation to respond to the changing skill needs of the labour market. In this respect, the green and digital transition of the economy and industry become increasingly important and need to be considered by renewing and constantly revising VET pathways. There is still a need for improvement, as also shown the data from public employment services in BE-FR showing that only 3 out of the 10 most popular upper secondary VET programmes prepare learners for occupations which face labour shortages (European Commission, 2022c). The Regions and Communities have already taken some measures in this respect, aiming to make dual learning an attractive and successful choice for learners.

One major strand of the Walloon recovery plan (2021) focuses on reforming the dual learning system and on transforming it to an excellent and attractive learning pathway. In April 2022, IFAPME launched some measures to increase cooperation, with companies offering apprenticeships.

In the French Community, the qualifying education pathway (parcours d'enseignement qualifiant, PEQ), a modular system for learners in grade 10 to 12, is gradually being introduced in the upper secondary education and training system since the school year 2022/23, with full implementation foreseen until 2026 (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023b) ([74]). Since 2022, dual learning is also offered in adult education (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023q).

In BE-FL, a new dual learning system is in the process of being introduced, to be completed by the school year 2025/26 (Section 2.2.1.3). It was approved in April 2022 by the Decree on the legislative framework for the full-scale implementation of dual learning. It replaces the current system of learning and working, which faces many challenges and is often a negative choice for pupils tired of school. The decree foresees several amendments for the dual learning system, such as a new structure of secondary education and obligatory mentor training (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023g) ([75]). This allows secondary learners aged 15 and older to combine their studies with training at a company, and has led to an increase in the number of VET learners (European Commission, 2022c). It replaces the current system of learning and working (part-time vocational education, Syntra, etc.), which faces many challenges and is often a negative choice for pupils who are school-tired (but not always learning-tired). Many of the learners who choose this option are in vulnerable situations, which means they

([74]) Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. *Qu'est-ce le PEQ? What is the PEQ?*
([75]) More information in Dutch: Vlaanderen. *Van leren en werken naar duaal leren [From learning and working to dual learning].*

need a tailored approach and may not always succeed in combining learning and working (Cedefop, 2021; European Commission, 2022b).

4.4.5. Digital transformation

The need for digital transformation in terms of training provision and labour markets was underlined by the coronavirus crisis. Due to lack of equipment and of adequate competences in distance learning, among both teachers and learners, the provision of such learning faced some difficulties. The Communities introduced several measures to tackle these challenges, as well as to respond in general to the digital transition.

The Belgian national recovery and resilience plan focuses on digital infrastructure and equipment, digital education and skills at all levels of education including VET (European Commission, 2023a). In BE-DE, laptops were given to teachers and secondary learners through a leasing concept, which included maintenance, service, and guarantee (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023r). In BE-FR, the responsible providers developed new courses to help teachers to adapt to online teaching. Support was also provided through the provision of the learning platforms Ma Classe, Diffusion and Happi, as well as through a series of webinars, pedagogical tutorials and the e-classe education platform for teachers. In Flanders, support for teachers was provided via *KlasCement*, a portal providing teaching materials and learning resources. Pedagogical guidance services also supported education institutions to help them implement new techniques and to ensure the quality of education provision. The Government of Flanders developed with *Digisprong* an overall plan to tackle all aspects of digitisation in education, including digital infrastructure, specific teacher training (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023s). In 2022, the Flemish Government adopted a decree regulating structural distance learning in secondary education. These changes are expected to have a long-term impact on teaching methods. From a wider perspective, initiatives such as GO4Brussels 2030 and Digital Wallonia (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023t) are aiming to build towards the future of work.

Acronyms

Actiris	Brussels public employment service
ADG	*Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* [public employment service of the German-speaking Community]
AEQES	*Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Ènseignment Supérieur* [Agency for the Evaluation of the Quality of Higher Education]
AESS	*agrégation de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur* [aggregation for teaching in upper secondary education]
AGODI	*Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten* [agency for educational services]
AHOVOKS	*Agentschap voor hoger onderwijs, volwassenenonderwijs, kwalificaties & studietoelagen* [agency for higher education, adult education, qualifications and study grants]
AMEF	*Veille, Analyse et Prospective du Marché de l'Emploi* [Employment Market Watch, Analysis and Forecasting]
BE-DE	VET system of the German-speaking Community
BE-FL	VET system of the Flemish Community
BE-FR	VET system of the French-speaking part of Belgium
BIDA	*Berufliche Integration durch Begleitung in der dualen Ausbildung* [vocational integration through support in dual training]
CABE	centre for adult basic education
CAE	centre for adult education
CAP	*certificat d'aptitude pédagogique* [teaching proficiency certificate]
CDO	*center voor deeltijds beroepsonderwijs* [alternating training centre]
CEFA	*centre d'enseignement et formation en alternance* [centre for education and training in alternation]
CESS	*certificat d'enseignement secondaire supérieur* [certificate of upper secondary education]

CFC	*cadre francophone des certifications pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie* [Francophone framework for lifelong learning]
CLB	*centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding* [pupil guidance centre]
COCOF	*Commission Communautaire Française* [French Community Commission]
CPD	continuing professional development
CPMS	*centres psycho-médico-sociaux* [psychological, medical and social centres]
CVDC	*Consortium de Validation des Compétences* [Skills Validation Consortium]
CVO	centres for adult education
DBSO	*deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs* [part-time vocational secondary education]
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
DSLOs	domain-specific learning outcomes
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EFP	*Espace Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises* [training centre in Brussels for SMEs]
EPS	Social Advancement Education/Adult Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
ERDF	European regional development fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EU-LFS	EU labour force survey
EUR	Euro
EVC	*erkennen van verworven competenties* [recognition of acquired competences]
FPB	Federal Planning Bureau

FQF	*Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur* [Flemish qualifications framework]
GDP	gross domestic product
GOB	*Gespecialiseerde opleidings-, begeleidings- en bemiddelingsdiensten* [specialised training, guidance and mediation services]
GTB	*Gespecialiseerd Team Bemiddeling* [Specialised Mediation Team]
HSLDA	Home School Legal Defence Association
IBA-OIE	*Interregionale Arbeitsmarkt Beobachtungsstelle – Oberservatoire interrégional due marché de l'emploi* [international employment observatory]
IBSA	*Institut Bruxellois de Statistique et d'Analyse* [Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis]
IAWM	*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen* [Institute for vocational and educational training in small and medium sized companies]
ICT	information and communications technology
IFAPME	*Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et des petites et moyennes entreprises* [Walloon institute for apprenticeship and entrepreneurial training in small and medium-sized enterprises]
IFPC	*Institut Interréseaux de la Formation Professionnelle Continue* [Institute for Continuing Professional Training]
ISCED	international standard classification of education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
IWEPS	*Institut wallon de l' Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique* (Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics)
Le Forem	*Office wallon de la Formation professionnelle et de l'Emploi* [Walloon Office for Vocational Training and Placement]
LFS	labour force survey
NQF	national qualifications framework
NRP	national reference point

NRRP	national recovery and resilience plan
NVAO	*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie* [Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders]
OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONEM	*Office national de l'emploi* [national employment office]
ONSS	*Office national de sécurité sociale* [National Social Security Office]
OSS	one-stop shop
OTLAV	*orientation tout au long de la vie* [lifelong guidance]
PEQ	*parcours d'enseignement qualifiant* [qualifying education pathway]
PMS centre	psycho-medico-social centre
QDG	*Qualifikationsrahmen der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* [national qualifications framework of the German-speaking Community]
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SFMQ	*Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications* [French-speaking Service for Professions and Qualifications]
SFPME	*Service de la Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises* [training service for small and medium-sized enterprises]
SEN	special educational needs
SERV	*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen* [Social and Economic Council of Flanders]
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
Statbel	Belgian statistical office
STEM	science, technology, engineering, mathematics
SYNTRA	The Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training
VAE	*valorisation des acquis de l'expérience* (valorisation of experience)

VDAB	*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding* (Flemish Agency for Employment and Vocational Training)
VDC	*validation des compétences* (validation of competences)
VESOC	*Vlaams Economisch Sociaal Overlegcomité* [Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee]
VET	vocational education and training
VLAIO	*Vlaams Agenschap Innoveren en Ondernemen* [Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship]
VLHORA	*Vlaamse Hogescholenraad* [Flemish Council of University Colleges]
VLIR	*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad* [Flemish Interuniversity Council]
VLOR	*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad* [Flemish Education Council]
VOCVO	Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education
WBL	work-based learning
ZAWM	*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstand* [centre for education and training of small and medium-sized enterprises]

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Vocational education and training in Belgium

Short description

This short description places understanding of vocational education and training (VET) in Belgium within its socioeconomic context. It presents key characteristics, system developments, and challenges. Despite the country's three language-distinct VET systems, and two coexisting in Brussels, with multiple authorities overseeing education, training, and employment, there is political consensus on specific issues. Social partners are actively involved in VET policies at all levels.

In all systems, learners can pursue technical or vocational upper secondary VET programmes in school-based or alternating forms, including apprenticeship. Various VET programmes are offered at post-secondary and tertiary levels.

The coexistence of three official languages poses a significant challenge in all regions, impacting interregional mobility. Current challenges include skill mismatch and skill shortages. While dual learning is popular in the German-speaking Community, there is a negative perception in other regions. Improving the attractiveness of dual VET is high on the policy agenda.

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