

Action plan for lifelong learning

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 BELGIUM-FL

Timeline



ID number 43782

Background

Lifelong learning is a major challenge, as participation in adult education and continuing education/training remains comparatively low. According to the Labour force survey, in 2021 10.8% of the Flemish population aged 25-64 years participated in formal or non-formal learning for work or private purposes the last four weeks before the survey. This puts Flanders below the EU average. People with a high level of education participate significantly more than those with a low level of education. This difference is larger in Flanders than the EU average.

Objectives

The action plan for lifelong learning aims to transform Flanders into a lifelong learning society. This is essential to increase innovation potential and productivity and to prepare Flanders for transformations such as climate change and the ageing population. This is an initiative to promote VET and lifelong learning; it also strengthens key competences in VET.

Description

On 30 October 2020, the lifelong learning partnership was established, to stimulate participation in lifelong learning by developing a joint approach across sectors and policy areas. This partnership is composed of representatives from the Socio-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), education and training providers, the private training providers, the Lifelong Learning Committee of the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and a higher education expert from the Vlerick business school.

The lifelong learning partnership was tasked by the government of Flanders to prepare an action plan for lifelong learning. The government is represented through the Flemish Department of Education and the Department of Work. The plan *Setting course to a learning Flanders* was then presented to the government in 2021.

The action plan aims to provide a coherent and mobilising framework for all partners involved in realising a lifelong learning culture in Flanders. With these actions we aim to involve all possible stakeholders involved in lifelong learning: government, VET institutions,

sectors, companies, guidance practitioners, teachers, educators and all possible learners. Different stakeholders are linked to the 47 actions listed in the plan. This should contribute to synergy and cooperation and make the change to a real learning culture. Special attention is paid to vulnerable groups such as low-skilled employees, who participate far less in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is pivotal in a quickly changing society and labour market. It is set out with the year 2030 as the horizon but its focus is initially on the period up to 2024. The action plan aligns with the ambition of the European Union to achieve a participation rate of 60% for (non-)formal learning by 2030. This lead indicator will be supplemented by other relevant sub-indicators, that are under construction. The action plan consists of a 'compass' with orienting goals and several thematic 'flagships' initiatives with actions within a matrix structure underneath.

The Compass

The compass includes 10 goals for policy orientation with the ambition to bring Flanders to the level of top performing European countries and regions in lifelong learning (LLL):

- (a) placing the learner at the centre in relation to his/her environment(s);
- (b) developing LLL competence combined with consistent sensibilisation and mobilisation in view of a learning society,
- (c) promoting inclusive learning;
- (d) permanent quality assurance;
- (e) generating more impact by providing more transparency;
- (f) flexible and sustainable coordination;
- (g) effective cooperation;
- (h) reinforcing work-based learning and learning-based working;
- (i) developing monitoring instrument and collective knowledge;
- (j) implementing technology in and through learning.

Flagships initiatives

The flagships are ordered according to a matrix structure with axes for target groups and themes. An overarching concern is the efficient tackling of concrete obstacles for the realisation of the 47 actions listed under the respective flagships, which number 7:

- (a) knowledge agenda for LLL;
- (b) mobilisation strategy for each segment in society;
- (c) LLL incentive strategy based on individual follow-up;
- (d) holistic strategic competence framework;
- (e) enabling accompanying policies for guidance and support for LLL;
- (f) guidance and support to LLL providers;
- (g) future-proof strengthening of LLL partnerships.

2020 Design

In 2020, the partnership for lifelong learning was established and designed the Action plan for lifelong learning in collaboration with representatives of stakeholders including education, training, sectors and labour market partners.

2021 Approved/Agreed

The action plan was adopted by the Flemish Government in December 2021.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, the action plan's flagships are set into motion. Of the 47 actions, one has been realised, 27 are being implemented, nine are in the process of being launched and 10 are being prepared for launch or implementation. The partnership follows up on the implementation.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, the action plan's flagship initiatives continue to be implemented. The partnership follows up on the implementation. The annual report provides a complete overview of the developments and the progress made in 2023, such as:

- (a) the Centre for Innovative Learning Pathways organised an inspirational conference in December 2023 on the current state of lifelong learning in Flanders, within the framework of the TWIN transition;
- (b) the LLL Dashboard was published, along with research aimed at developing a roadmap for its further evolution;
- (c) continued work on the knowledge agenda included the completion of three studies in 2023: a review of lifelong learning regulations, an analysis of the lifelong learning landscape, and the LLL Dashboard. Additionally, three new research projects were initiated or continued: research on bridge figures & conversation methodologies, follow-up research on the OECD segmentation study on learning profiles, and research on informal workplace learning & the development of a learning climate assessment tool;
- (d) the launch of the lifelong learning portal website.

Furthermore, the Learning Collective project aims to support local breakthroughs regarding lifelong learning and fostering a learning culture in various organisations and enterprises.

2024 Implementation

In 2024, the Lifelong Learning Action Plan continued to build on its seven flagship initiatives, with a strong emphasis on deepening knowledge, mobilising stakeholders, and fostering a learning culture across Flanders. The year saw significant progress in strengthening the knowledge agenda, particularly through research on informal learning in the workplace. This research lays the groundwork for the future development of a conceptual tool to assess the learning climate within enterprises. Three new studies were launched to map the private training market in Flanders, to understand and stimulate learning sensitivity among citizens and to launch a research to improve the measurement of informal learning (OECD).

Efforts to mobilise citizens and organisations were intensified through initiatives such as Learning collective (*Leercollectief*), an initiative that brings together lifelong learning actors in Flanders. The Learning Collective has grown into a vibrant LinkedIn community of over 1200 members, produced a practical guide full of insights, tools, and best practices for fostering a learning culture, and generated 15 groundbreaking ideas to strengthen lifelong learning in Flanders. Furthermore, personalised use of learning incentives was further refined through optimisations of the Flemish individual learning account and Signpost (*Wegwijzer*) - a digital guide that helps citizens navigate the various Flemish training incentives available to them.

The integrated labour market projection model (*Geïntegreerd Arbeidsmarktprojectiemodel*, GAP) was advanced to identify future skill mismatches, and VDAB's competence check tool was enhanced and widely adopted. The LED database was updated and prepared for strategic expansion, and significant efforts were made to improve the interoperability of competence languages, aligning them with European frameworks to ensure consistency and accessibility.

Support and guidance for key stakeholders were also strengthened. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) benefited from targeted initiatives such as the Boost your learning culture (*Boost je leercultuur*) campaign. The concept of bridge figures was further developed into five distinct profiles, supported by a practical guide and a low-threshold conversation toolkit. Digital inclusion was promoted through the expansion of Digibancken and enhanced e-learning support for training providers.

The *Opleidingskompas* platform was expanded to include higher education offerings, and coach training for educators focused on developing digital competencies and inclusive design practices, ensuring that teaching professionals are equipped to meet evolving learner needs.

2025 Implementation

Since the start of the new legislative term in 2024, the lifelong learning partnership is no longer in effect. However, a number of policy initiatives outlined in the Action Plan have continued.

The Lifelong Learning Dashboard was further expanded with new indicators and redesigned to enhance user experience.

In 2025, the Expertise Centre for Innovative Learning Pathways (*Expertisecentrum Innovatieve Leerwegen*) organised several mobilising events on lifelong learning, including the Festival Lifelong Learning (*Levenslang Leren*), Learning Performance Day (*Dag van het Leerrendement*), and the Innovation and Learning event in October. These initiatives responded to major societal and labour market transitions and aimed to strengthen the role of learning in navigating change.

In parallel, the development of the self-assessment scan new tool Learning lens (Leerlens) - was initiated. This scan aims to help enterprises assess and improve their internal learning climate, building on prior research into informal learning. A practical guide was also developed, offering tools and good practices to help companies strengthen their learning culture.

Beyond the Expertise Centre's initiatives, the integrated labour market projection model (GAP) continued to be refined.

In the context of adult education, we have aligned funding with labour market needs, to enlarge the amount of learners choosing shortage occupations.

Bodies responsible

- Flemish Department of Education and Training
- Flemish Department of Work, Economy, Science, Innovation and Social Economy

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)
Adult learners

Education professionals

Teachers
Trainers
School leaders
Adult educators
Guidance practitioners

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies
Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning
Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET promoting equality of opportunities

VET underpinned by a culture of quality assurance

Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Action plan 'Setting course to a learning Flanders'](#)

[Lifelong learning webpage](#)

[Annual report](#)

Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/43782>