

Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Belgium (FL)

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Introduction

Belgium is a federal state with two kinds of political entities alongside the federal authority: the Regions and the Communities. The Regions include the Flemish Region (Flanders), the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the Brussels-Capital Region (Brussels), while the Communities include the Flemish Community (BEFL), the German-speaking Community (BEDG) and the French Community (BEFR). Every entity has its own government in addition to the federal government. Different authorities are responsible for different domains in the field of career guidance. This has generated a rich landscape of systems, practices, methods and tools.

Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

The [policy note 2019-2024](#) of the Minister of Work and Social Economy includes the installment of a lifelong learning platform. This platform should generate more synergies between the domain of work, economy and education in terms of training and learning throughout the whole career. With this, the Flemish Government wants to maximise measures that strengthen careers and competences, regardless of status or profile. Preparations are now made to set up the platform lifelong learning at a later stage, for example through stakeholder consultation.

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for guidance in the education sector. It transfers the responsibility for the actual design and implementation, with a great level of autonomy, to the organising authorities of schools. Schools are responsible for reaching the learning targets set by the Ministry of Education and Training on (school) career guidance. In terms of content, career guidance in primary and secondary school education is now strongly linked to the '[Modernisation of secondary education](#)', which was implemented on 1st September 2019.

In July 2017, the first legislative steps were taken in the adoption of a new decree on pupil guidance. The main goal of the reform was to clearly define the roles and tasks of all actors involved (pupils, parents, schools, Pupil Guidance Centre, School Advisory Centres, welfare sector) and to optimise the organisation of pupil guidance. The new [Decree of the Flemish Government](#) of 27/4/2018 concerning pupil guidance in primary and secondary school education, and the pupil guidance centres came into effect on September 1st, 2018.

In primary and secondary school education, the [pupil guidance centres](#) (*Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding*, CLBs) offer services for pupils in compulsory education, their parents, their teachers and other school professionals. CLBs provide schools with support on demand, e.g. through information provision on the education landscape or one on one career guidance. Pupils in the [Dual learning system](#) or [Leertijd](#) system at [SYNTRA Vlaanderen](#) (the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneur Training) combine education and on the job training. They can also avail of CLB services, as can their parents, mentors and teachers. The CLB umbrellas are linked to the educational umbrellas. Regional and national CLB (education) working groups on career guidance (looking at policy implementation, new tools or working methods, external services, etc) are no exception. CLB centres cooperate with health organisations, social services (e.g. youth justice), VDAB (Flemish Public Employment) and several other specialised services.

The Flemish public employment service, VDAB, holds cooperation agreements with education umbrellas GO! Education of the Flemish Community and Catholic Education Flanders (KOV). These agreements focus on career guidance, labour market information and on cooperation at regional level. For example, VDAB contributed its expertise in conducting career conversations through professionalising employees of the Community Education (GO!) central services. Several trainers at GO!, who were trained by VDAB, went on to train and coach GO! teachers in conducting career interviews with their students. An in-service training offer was developed by GO! for teachers, student counsellors and educational career counsellors.

Guidance for pupils with specific educational needs is strongly influenced by the [M-decree](#) on special needs education, which aims to include children and young people in mainstream education. Pupil guidance centres (CLB's) have extensive expertise in (education) career guidance for pupils in mainstream and in special education. Pupils and their parents can call on the CLBs for information and advice. During 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, a new decree on guidance for pupils with specific educational needs will be prepared - including a final support model specifying the role of each stakeholder.

The Flemish institutions for higher education are responsible for student guidance and orientation, which has led to various guidance approaches and practices. During their study time, students can avail of various guidance services including educational guidance (finding the right course) and career guidance (finding 'the right job') -also for students with specific needs, such as learning disorders or a physical disability. Several colleges and universities collaborate with secondary schools to introduce young people to their way of working and available courses. Many higher education institutions work with 'role models' ('rolmodellen') - young people representing different groups in society - to encourage their peers to take the step to higher education.

The Flemish Ministry of Work and Social Economy sets out policies related to the field of work and social economy, including competences and careers. The Flemish public employment service, [VDAB](#), is a Flemish government institution operating under a management contract. VDAB connects jobseekers with employers and is committed to supporting every jobseeker in the search for a suitable job. The agency aims to be a reliable partner in HR policy and supports filling job vacancies as quickly and efficiently as possible. To meet these ends, VDAB offers job placement, training, career guidance and outplacement. [Actiris](#) provides similar services in the Brussels Capital Region, with a focus on qualitative guidance for the unemployed looking for qualitative and sustainable work.

In collaboration with a series of key partners, VDAB takes action towards specific target groups (young job seekers <25, older job seekers >55, refugees and job seekers from a migrant background, long-term unemployed (>1 year), unqualified job seekers (without a secondary school diploma), and people with a physical disability and/or special needs.

For people in employment, VDAB coordinates and quality monitors the career vouchers system, which gives adults the opportunity to receive tailored career guidance at a low cost. The Flemish PES gives out mandates to career guidance centres wanting to join the career vouchers system. It is responsible for the [mandated centres'](#) quality support and control.

The Belgian Youth Guarantee (YG) Implementation Plan was presented in 2013 and adapted in 2014. In Flanders, VDAB is responsible for the coordination of the Youth Guarantee scheme and thus the coordination of partnerships across all levels and sectors.

In the Brussels Region, responsibility lies with the Monitoring Committee of the Youth Guarantee.

VDAB works with many partners in the fields of education, youth, local and regional authorities (including cities and provinces) on the YG. Young people receiving YG can have access to personalised guidance and counselling, work-based opportunities and financial incentives

Lifelong guidance is also partly a matter for the policy domain of Culture, Youth and Media as several youth organisations provide information and guidance services, sometimes aimed at specific target groups (e.g. young people at risk of early school leaving or in a NEET situation).

The '[Specialised Mediation Team](#)' ('*Gespecialiseerd Team Bemiddeling*', GTB) offers specialised guidance and counselling for people with special needs,

as well as people with physical and/or mental health problems, who experience limitations in finding and keeping suitable employment. GTB services are necessary due to a greater need for mediation and the need for a different kind of coaching. Flanders also funds [Specialised Training, Guidance and Mediation Services](#) ('*Gespecialiseerde Opleidings-, Begeleidings- en Bemiddelingsdiensten*', GOBs), which offer work based learning for job seekers and specialised job coaching for employees. Their customers need specialised services when there is a risk on long-term unemployment as a result of severe limitations in health and functioning. Through its project '*Transitietrajecten*' (Transition pathways'), GTB offers support to pupils and students, who will most likely have significant work limitations, in their transition from education to the labour market. GTB offers them guidance and support, and works together with several partners to provide tailored guidance in the workplace.

Both GTB and GOB support employers in the recruitment and (re)integration of suitable employees.

The Flemish [Agency for Integration and Civic Integration](#) carries out the Flemish integration and civic integration policy. The Agency cooperates closely with local administrations and other relevant policy domains also in relation to guidance. Integration pathways for newcomers are coordinated and facilitated by the 'reception bureaux' (*onthaalbureaus*).

The Flemish Government encourages enterprises to improve their personnel policy through career development and diversity plans. This happens both through subsidies and technical support for companies, as well as through [sectoral agreements](#) (cooperation agreement between the Flemish Government and sectoral social partners, in which the latter commit to undertake actions to support employment policy in Flanders). The sectoral agreements support the transition from education to the labour market, the development of competences, the increase of diversity in the workplace and the reduction of discrimination. Since 2000, over 30 sectors have signed sectoral agreement.

In the Brussels Capital Region, Actiris is responsible for the implementation of the Brussels employment policies and ensuring a healthy labour market in the Brussels Capital Region. To this purpose, it has developed a variety of services for employers and job seekers, often in partnership with regional stakeholders. Services for the unemployed are similar to the VDAB services. Actiris also offers specialised support to job seekers, for example through their jobfocus centres and 'Active Search for Work Guidance' programme.

Also in the Brussels Capital Region, the multi-partner one-stop service [Beroepenpunt/Cité des Métiers](#) opened its doors to the public in 2018. It was established through a partnership between VDAB, Actiris and Bruxelles Formation and belongs to the international '*Cité des Métiers*' network, which was set up in Paris in 1993.

[Beroepenpunt/Cité des Métiers Brussels](#) is a cross-sectoral initiative, open to anyone looking for information and/or career guidance. Services are anonymous and free of charge. Its main objectives are to:

- a. provide guidance to young people, jobseekers and workers and direct users to the available resources;
- b. guide people towards vocational training;
- c. promote 'new' professions (in growth sectors and new, emerging professions) and the professions that are expected to grow in the future (through career counselling);
- d. stimulate entrepreneurship, and
- e. facilitate national and international work mobility.

[Beroepenpunt](#) contributes to institutional collaboration between the education, training and employment sector. The initiative aims to strengthen cooperation between 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. The annual report of 2018 can be found [here](#).

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Access to guidance

Based on an audit process in 2015, the system of pupil guidance in primary and secondary schools and pupil guidance centres was reformed. The [Decree of 27/4/2018](#) on pupil guidance in primary and secondary schools and pupil guidance centres came into effect on September 1st, 2018. Schools hold the final responsibility for the delivery of (education) career guidance, and can collaborate with several partners.

For career guidance support, schools can collaborate with their [pupil guidance center](#) (*Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding*, CLB). CLBs provide independent and objective (education) career guidance to pupils in compulsory education. This is a service for pupils, parents, teachers and school managements to receive information, assistance and guidance. Every school creates a policy plan or policy contract to that effect with a CLB. Pupils are always at the heart of CLB actions. All pupil guidance centres work in four different domains:

- learning and studying: reading and spelling, speech, language development, dyslexia and dyscalculia;
- the (school) career: monitoring compulsory education, study-choice guidance (e.g. working with [Onderwijskiezer](#)), information regarding education and the link to the labour market, certification for access to special education;
- preventative health care: medical check-ups, vaccinations, contagious conditions, substance abuse, nutrition and eating disorders ;
- socio-emotional development: behavioural problems, social skills, emotional problems and bullying.

In the final year of secondary school, each class can take part in one of the regional 'SID-IN' fairs, hosted by the Department of Education and Training. Ten SID-IN fairs are open to schools; only five SID-IN fairs are open to the wider public. The fairs offer young people an opportunity to discover and explore various options following secondary school. The pupil guidance centres (CLB), [Onderwijskiezer](#), higher education institutions, Euroguidance Flanders (study abroad), sectoral organisations are all represented to give advice and information. Many schools prepare the young people for their SID-IN visit and use the guide [Wat na het secundair onderwijs?](#) (What after secondary school?) in this preparation process.

In 2016, an interactive online counselling service was set up, called [CLBch@t](#). The service follows the method of solution-oriented action and it is accessible to all pupils, their parents and teachers - with an option to remain anonymous. CLBch@t staff are professionals with extensive training and experience in the (CLB) care and support system. In 2017-18, CLB Chat carried out 4.377 chats, of which the majority (12%) focused on the theme of study choice.

Institutions for higher education are responsible for student guidance and orientation, which has led to various guidance approaches and practices. During their study time, students can avail of various guidance services, such as educational guidance (choosing a course) and career guidance (finding 'the right job'). Of course, this includes the students with specific needs such as learning disorders or a physical disability. Most institutions have a study guidance and advice centre that supports students in their (study) career. Contact information can be easily accessed on the institutions' websites. If students do not complete their first year in higher education successfully, they can still consult the pupil guidance center linked to their former secondary school. Several colleges and universities collaborate with secondary schools to introduce young people to their way of working and available courses (through workshops in the schools or at the institution for higher education). Many higher education institutions work with 'role models' (*Rolmodellen*) - young people representing different groups in society - to encourage their peers to take the step to higher education.

The [Flemish public employment service](#) (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding*, VDAB) facilitates access to career guidance for the unemployed and for employees. Every citizen can visit the VDAB website or a regional VDAB office. The services for job seekers focus on providing support to identify and pursue a career path, which suits them, as well as on filling the existing gaps on the labour market. Career guidance services for employees and the self-employed are rather coaching-oriented. VDAB works with ['Mijn Loopbaan'](#) ('My Career'), an interactive, online system which documents one's career, and ['Mijn Loopbaan voor partners'](#) ('My Career for partners'), which grants partners access to someone's online career file under certain conditions.

VDAB offers a wide range of support to jobseekers, employers and employees through various channels (website, face-to-face, telephone, video-chat, e-mail, apps). This can range from career guidance and advice on how to apply for a job, to in-house or outsourced vocational training (both online and in a training centre). VDAB consultants are customer-oriented and understand the value of career guidance. One of their main roles is to promote customers' self-sufficiency.

VDAB offers services for specific target groups such as newcomers and people with special needs. It also organises activities for jobseekers who have been looking for a job for over a year (long-term unemployed) with the aim of providing more individualised and personalised support.

Since 2013, according to the [Legislation of 17/05/2013](#) and its [amendments](#) (2019), VDAB has been the director and quality controller of career guidance voucher system for employees and the self-employed (no longer the service provider). Two years following the launch of the new career voucher system, VDAB carried out an [evaluation](#) with recommendations. Based on these results, the Flemish Government adapted the decree on career guidance - including a clearer definition for career guidance and follow-up care, as well the obligation for enterprises to include their training plan in their application to become a mandated career guidance centre.

VDAB offers online information on the mandated career guidance centres, as well as an online [search engine](#) that supports the search for a career guidance centre in one's neighbourhood. Employees who have been employed for 7 years can take up career guidance through the career voucher system.

At the start of 2020, a total of 3.480 locations offer career guidance through [mandated career guidance centres](#). The centres empower employees and self-employed individuals to make informed decisions regarding their career, mainly through the development of career management skills (CMS). VDAB-recognised career centres can be public or private organisations, unions, HR professional organisations, non-profit organisations, social partners, local authorities, and others.

In various public and private sectors, employees have access to internal career guidance services, usually with a focus on harmonising individual needs with the needs and content of the respective company/organisation. Some examples: the Government of Flanders administration, Randstad Group and Atlas Copco.

VDAB has been providing services for specific target groups (such as newcomers, people with special needs, the unemployed over 50) for a long time. VDAB also organises activities for jobseekers who have been looking for a job for over a year (long-term unemployed) with the aim of providing more individual and personal support. In the Brussels Capital Region, the multi-partner one-stop service [Beroepenpunt/Cité des Métiers](#) opened its doors to the public in 2018. It was established through a partnership between VDAB, Actiris and Bruxelles Formation, and belongs to the international '[Cité des Métiers](#)' network, which was set up in Paris in 1993. [Beroepenpunt/Cité des Métiers Brussels](#) is a cross-sectoral initiative, open to anyone looking for information and/or guidance. Services are anonymous and free of charge.

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Quality assurance

The [decree on pupil guidance](#) in primary education, secondary education and the centres for pupil guidance (27/04/2018) implies that the task of career guidance in compulsory education lies with the school, the school team, the [school support services](#) (*Pedagogische Begeleidingsdiensten*, PBDs) and the [pupil guidance centres](#) (Centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding, CLB).

The education inspectorate monitors the pupil guidance quality in secondary schools, based on the [Development scales for quality area pupil guidance](#). When pupil guidance is part of an inspection/monitoring process, the inspection team will not only involve school representatives, but also a representative of the pupil guidance centre (CLB) linked to the school. The quality development of the centres for pupil guidance (CLBs) is also monitored by the education inspectorate based on a specific [quality framework for CLBs](#).

Schools should appoint at least one staff member to coordinate career guidance policy within the school team. This person can be any member of staff the school considers most suitable, usually a qualified teacher. Every school has to have a professional development plan in place to ensure that the staff are equipped enough to carry out their tasks.

The [CLB staff](#) delivering (education) career guidance usually have a degree in psychology, pedagogics or in social studies. All pupil guidance centres have to guarantee a professionalisation policy as well as an annual professional development plan for every employee. Every CLB staff member (including guidance counsellors) has to follow the [guidelines for CLB staff](#), such as adhering to the code of ethics, which includes professional confidentiality. Teachers involved in pupil guidance should treat any information they receive discretely and carefully, and they cannot share sensitive information externally. However, they are legally bound to inform their superiors of any relevant facts; they do not have the 'right to remain silent'.

Guidance services in higher education institutions are internally monitored and evaluated. The institutions have developed their own quality assurance systems, including collecting student feedback, monitoring statistics, staff evaluations, etc. The [Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation](#) (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*, NVAO) is responsible for the quality control of higher education in Flanders and encourages a quality culture within the institutions for higher education. The NVAO accredits existing and new educational programmes and assesses the quality assurance systems within the institutions (e.g. every officially recognised third level college and university receives an [institution review](#) through the NVAO). The NVAO institution reviews cover education policy and quality assurance assessment of education programmes. The NVAO [quality policy](#) can be consulted through its website.

The [Education Inspectorate](#) monitors the quality development of the [centres for adult education](#) (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs*, CVOs) and [centres for basic education](#) (Centra voor BasisEducatie, CBEs). Centre reports can be consulted online, [here](#).

Regarding career guidance for employees, every organisation/enterprise seeking a [VDAB](#) mandate to deliver career guidance through the voucher system, should have at least three years of professional experience in career guidance, career orientation or coaching, outplacement or job placement. In order to assure the quality of the VDAB-directed career guidance voucher system, VDAB assesses the candidate career guidance centre on a number of criteria. The criteria were set up in light of the new career voucher system, launched in 2013 and updated in 2017. They include:

- the centre manager should have at least three years of professional experience in career guidance, career orientation or coaching, outplacement or job placement;
- having a vision in place (articulated and applied) of how career guidance matches its policy goals, and ensure that, in the same way, the vision of subcontractors is articulated and applied in practice;
- demonstrate how the career guidance expertise will be guaranteed, as well as knowledge on approaches and methods used by personnel and subcontractors.

To qualify for a mandate, applying centres should have obtained at least one relevant quality label (e.g. Cedeo, Certo, Iso, K2).

During a six-year mandate period, VDAB monitors the career guidance quality by checking at several points in time whether a mandated centre still meets the requirements. Every career centre is regularly monitored on processes and outputs and every professional delivering career guidance within the career voucher system must adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#). Other aspects of the quality control include fraud-detection, complaint management and financial control. User satisfaction results for services provided via VDAB vouchers are also considered. The [most recent monitoring report](#) on the career voucher system covers July 2017-June 2019.

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Career management skills

In 2018, the Flemish Government approved a new [decree on the reform for secondary education](#), which has resulted in new educational goals. Learning outcomes will be formulated in terms of 16 key competences, of which number 15 is 'Initiative development, ambition, entrepreneurial spirit and career management skills'. Learning outcomes and development goals were developed and approved for the first stage of secondary school education, which came into effect in September 2019 as part of the [modernisation of secondary school education](#). The learning outcomes related to CMS include 'Understanding the difference between rational, emotional and intuitive decision making processes' and 'Managing decision making strategies including the educational choices and career' and 'Understanding your own interests and preferences, possibilities and limitations'. The required learning outcomes for the second and third stage of secondary school education will be available in the near future.

VDAB, the public employment service in Flanders, encourages the development of career management skills through tailored support with the aim of helping individuals direct their own career. VDAB career services address the five career management skills according to the theory of Marinka Kuijpers (2005):

- a. reflection on motivation;
- b. reflection on qualities;
- c. communicative career competences (including networking);
- d. career steering, self-profiling, career control (planning, initiative);
- e. work exploration (identification of opportunities).

E-coaches can support the development of CMS and provide all the necessary information, including information related to career guidance vouchers for employees. Career guidance centres with a VDAB-mandate (for working with career vouchers) support CMS teaching by:

- a. encouraging employed individuals to use their talents and capacities fully on the labour market and to strengthen their career competences to increase their opportunities;
- b. empowering participants to take their own career decisions and translate them into a personal development plan (*Persoonlijk OntwikkelingsPlan*, POP), which should lead to greater ownership of the career guidance process.

The personal development plan (POP) is a tool developed by VDAB and mandatory in the [career voucher system](#). It is used not only during career guidance sessions, but also made available through the public employment service's online tool *My career (Mijn Loopbaan)* (see section [ICT in lifelong guidance](#)). It should lead to greater ownership of the career guidance process.

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Evidence, monitoring and assessment

The [pupil guidance centres](#) (*Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding*, CLB) monitor the number of questions and guidance processes related to (school) career guidance. Every school year, results are published in a CLB report, which is put together by the CLB umbrellas and made available online (e.g. the [report of the school year 2017-2018](#)). In addition, the [CLBch@t](#) service publishes a [report every school year](#). For 2018/19, the following figures are available:

- a. total of 5.465 chats;
- b. average chat duration: 20 minutes;
- c. average age of the pupils concerned: 14.75 years. Parents and teachers also contact CLB Chat;
- d. the majority of chats were related to study choice and school career (=12 %);
- e. 87% of the visitors gave CLBch@t 3 stars or more (max. 5 stars);
- f. 50% of the visitors awarded CLBch@t 5 stars.

CLBch@t has received many positive reactions and appreciation within the CLB sector. It is providing an enthusiastic, new dynamic within the organisation. CLBch@t also scores internationally, having been presented as good practice example at conferences abroad.

In 2017, the online (study) career guidance tool *Onderwijskiezer* ('Education selector') was used by 1,5 million unique visitors. More than a million young people completed one of the online tests it provides. It is hard to know what the exact impact will be, but the enormous and steadily growing success demonstrates that this way of providing information is a success.

VDAB, the Flemish employment service, reports regularly on its work, including the current situation and the evolution of the mandated career guidance centres (qualitative and quantitative indicators, targets, evaluation results). Every career guidance centre mandated by VDAB is monitored throughout the six-year mandate period on quality and formal requirements, in relation to processes and outputs. Other aspects, which are part of the quality control, include fraud-detection, complaint management and financial control. Satisfaction measurement with services provided via VDAB mandated centres are also considered.

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ICT in lifelong guidance

In Flanders, ICT has become increasingly important in guidance. Career information is being collected, updated and disclosed online to the public. New applications, tools and methods are being developed and used. We are also moving towards a society in which career information is increasingly saved, exchanged and consulted online.

[Onderwijskiezer.be](#) ('Education selector') offers a fully integrated service linking learning opportunities, professions and labour market information. The project was initiated by two umbrella organisations of the pupil guidance centres (*VCLB and GO! CLB*), developed in cooperation with the other two umbrella organisations (*OVSG CLB and POV CLB*) and it is supported by the Flemish ministry of Education and Training. *Onderwijskiezer* informs pupils, parents, teachers and guidance counsellors on the Flemish education and training landscape. It also provides labour market information linked to education and training choices. A team of counsellors employed by the pupil guidance centres ensures that *Onderwijskiezer* is updated on a continuous basis.

Apart from independent, neutral information on education and training in Flanders and Brussels, the website offers links to guidance tools (e.g. self-assessments) and information for guidance counsellors. *Onderwijskiezer* works with external partners to provide relevant information to end users. *Partners* include the Ministry of Education and Training, VDAB, Jobat (Jobsite for job seekers and employers) and Randstad In 2017, *Onderwijskiezer* attracted just over 1,5 million unique visitors, which is higher than the total number of pupils in Flanders. *Onderwijskiezer* offers a series of self-assessments that look at interest, study attitude and motivation. Over 500,000 pupils have already filled out one or more. Some pupils fill in the self-assessments as a school task, others on their own initiative.

[CLBch@t](#) is a cross-network initiative of the pupil guidance centres (CLB). It offers an anonymous chatroom to pupils, parents and school staff during particular opening hours. Upon registration, clients are welcome to discuss various issues in terms of a private conversation with a professional counsellor. In a first step, the chat query is clarified and put into context. In a next step, information and advice are provided. One session may last up to 45 minutes. Clients can register with a 'nickname' so that anonymity is fully guaranteed. Since its launch, the online counselling service has become very popular; demand doubled after a terrorist attack in Brussels. Opening hours had to be increased. The online counselling service is jointly operated by different CLB centres, through their umbrella organisation. Whenever appropriate, clients are referred to their local CLB or the wider network. [CLBch@t](#) was officially launched on 1st February 2016. It provides simultaneous, multidisciplinary availability of CLB staff between certain hours on several weekdays. The initiative is supported by the entire CLB sector.

Columbus is the compulsory, non-binding exploration test for pupils in the third and final stage of secondary school education. During the spring of 2017, all secondary schools were offered the opportunity to take part in *Columbus* for the first time. Over 16,000 pupils registered on a digital platform, developed for this purpose. Pupils who fill out all the modules receive general feedback and tips to make a more conscious study choice. Based on the built-up experience with the tool, *Columbus* is being further refined and validated – including the feedback module. Results and impact include

- helps young people develop decision-making skills, with attention to autonomy and self-direction;
- contains a balanced composition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills;
- will not determine exactly for every pupil their likelihood of success;
- provides pupils with a future prospect on his/her future (education/training) career;
- development is continuous: in collaboration with the secondary school sector (including IVET).

Several higher education institutions offer career guidance through their website and/or own internal platform (general student platform and/or specific guidance tool). Only students or alumni can avail of these internal services.

VDAB, the Flemish PES - has the overall strategy to provide as many self-supporting instruments as possible. Individuals should take their careers into their own hands and *VDAB* provides tools to do so. *VDAB* offers the online system *Mijn Loopbaan* (My career), which allows users to make a fully personalised online portfolio. This portfolio allows them to keep track of their competences and qualifications, create their CV and upload it to an online platform used by employers. The system is connected to the job vacancy database and applies sophisticated matching techniques (e.g. based on competences) to link the client to suitable work. *Mijn Loopbaan* can also be used to search for education and training opportunities.

E-learning and online services are important in the *VDAB* model. E-coaching is provided to job seekers looking for career guidance or job application training (through telephone conversations or video chats). Through *VDAB TV* informative online videos are made available on professions, training and careers in different sectors.

Within the specific career voucher system for employees (monitored by *VDAB*) the personal development plan (used to detect gaps between the present competence profile and future desired profile, and then to create a development action plan) is made available online. Since 2016, *VDAB's search engine* allows users to locate a mandated career centre using geolocation. Several mandated career guidance centres also offer online information or services.

The *VDAB Arvastat website* is a tool that offers information on labour market evolutions, with a focus on unemployment figures for Flanders. It also offers specific information on target groups including aged 55+, people with special needs or employment disabilities, disadvantaged people, new graduates, and non-Dutch speakers.

In May 2004, the Flemish Decree on the *Social and Economic Council (Sociaal - Economische Raad van Vlaanderen, SERV)* was signed. *SERV* brings together Flemish employers organisations (*Voka, Unizo, Boerenbond, Verso*) and organisations representing employees (*ACV, ABVV, ACLVB*) for debate and advice on important socioeconomic topics. *SERV's* aim is to generate wellbeing and prosperity for every citizen in Flanders. *SERV* – in partnership with *VDAB* – established the *Competent*-professions database, based on an existing database of professions in the public and private sector (*Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois, ROME*) developed by the French public employment service *Pôle Emploi*. The translated information was adapted to the Flemish labour market (legislation, education and certificates) and completed with relevant information on the required competences. Since 2016, the 'Competent' database is embedded in the work of *VDAB* (the Flemish public employment service). The professional competence profiles are developed and updated by *Synerjob* (the partnership of our regional employment services: *VDAB, Actiris, Bruxelles-Formation, Le Forem en ADG*) and the social (sectoral) partners. Competences and professions are added or removed following monitoring of the labour market. Procedures are

followed according to guidelines for including feedback by various users and stakeholders (including education: professional qualification files). Labour market trends are followed through big data-analysis and artificial intelligence projects. Changes are subject to internal quality control, which are described in the guidelines.

The 'Competent' database is used in the development of training, qualifications and recognition processes of Previously Acquired Competences (PAC).

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Training and qualifications

The (education) career counsellors working for the CLB usually have a degree in psychology or in social studies. According to Article 62, 4° of the Decree of 27/04/2018, the pupil guidance centres have to guarantee a professionalisation policy as well as an annual tailored professional development plan for every employee (according to their individual needs). Every full-time employee is entitled to a maximum of 10 days of professional development. These days are calculated pro rata for part-time employees or temporary personnel. (Article 5. *Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de vorming van het personeel van de centra voor leerlingenbegeleiding*/Decision of the Flemish government concerning the professional development of the personnel of the centres of pupil guidance of 19/09/2003).

CLBch@t counsellors receive specialised training in online counselling, while the Belgian Federation of Psychologists provides ethical guidelines to (school) psychologists in Flanders. CLB staff providing career guidance, also take part in regional working groups (including professional supervision) and in professional development initiatives such as study days organised by their education umbrella or the Ministry of Education and Training.

Dutch is the predominant teaching/lecturing language regarding the available training opportunities for (future) lifelong guidance practitioners, which include:

- a. Professional BA applied psychology: School/Clinical Psychology ([Hogeschool Vives](#), [Thomas More](#))
- b. MA psychology: Education ([Ghent University](#))
- c. MA school psychology ([KU Leuven](#))
- d. MA psychology: clinical /lifecycle psychology ([VUB](#))
- e. Postgraduate certificate study career guidance ([PXL Hogeschool](#))
- f. Postgraduate certificate study and student guidance ([UC Leuven Limburg](#))
- g. Certificate career coach ([SYNTRA](#), Flemish Agency for Entrepreneur Training).

Managers of VDAB recognised career guidance centres should have at least 3 years of professional experience in the sector of career guidance, career orientation, career coaching, outplacement or job seeker guidance. Without this experience, they cannot obtain a mandate. They can have a background in economics, law, psychology, sociology, psycho-pedagogical studies, but need the required experience.

Every guidance centre requesting a VDAB mandate, has to submit an action plan that demonstrates how the expertise on career guidance amongst staff will be kept up to date (knowledge, skills). Staff will be able to engage in professional development through internal or external training opportunities. VDAB also organises professional development and networking events for career professionals working in VDAB mandated centres, at both regional and Flemish levels.

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Funding career guidance

Schools, institutions for higher education and adult education, as well as the pupil guidance centres receive funding through the Ministry of Education and Training. Part of this funding goes towards guidance related activities, projects and personnel costs. The Ministry of Education and Training funds and coordinates the SID-IN guidance fairs and other guidance related activities such as study days on relevant topics (e.g. the [modernisation of secondary education](#)). It also supports the development and implementation of guidance tools directly (e.g. the [Columbus](#) tool which supports the transition from secondary school education to higher education/labour market) and indirectly (e.g. [Onderwijskiezer](#): the online guidance platform coordinated by the CLB umbrellas). As the pupil guidance centres, schools, institutions for higher education and adult education also have other responsibilities apart from study/career guidance, it would require a complex exercise to determinate the amount of funding for study/career guidance.

Government incentives are intended to increase opportunities for engagement in career guidance and to offer customised methodologies and relevant tools for clients of various backgrounds. Two important actions funded through the Ministry of Work and Social Economy are the 'training cheques' system and the VDAB monitored [career voucher system](#) (see sections [Guidance for adult learners](#) and [Guidance for the employed](#)). For 2020, the [government](#) has foreseen €18,2 million towards the career voucher system. The individual contribution per voucher for an employee is €40 the government subsidises €640 for the first voucher and €470 for a second voucher.

In Flanders, European funding – such as [ESF](#), Interreg and Erasmus+ - is often used to adopt practices from other countries and to increase international collaboration. Some Erasmus+ examples (KA1, KA2, KA3) are described in the Euroguidance brochure '[Erasmus+ steunt projecten rond keuzebegeleiding](#)' (Erasmus+ supports guidance-related projects). One example is the Erasmus+ (KA3) funded project [GOAL – Guidance and orientation for adult learners](#) – which sought to develop available models of guidance and orientation for low-educated adults in six countries: Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Slovenia. Coordinated by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, it ran from February 2015 until January 2018.

Many ESF projects support the development of career guidance in Flanders. During 2014-2020, ESF projects are focusing on crucial career transitions, e.g. from education to employment, from unemployment to employment, from employment to different employment. Special attention is given to the most vulnerable groups of job seekers (20% of the funds).

Every action taken in the light of an ESF project, is registered in the online tool '[Mijn Loopbaan](#)' ('My Career'), which documents one's career (see section [ICT in lifelong guidance](#)). Together with other documents of evidence, these registrations form the basis for payment of the funds.

Two ESF project examples

Until August 2020, the Flemish [Agency for Integration and Civic Integration](#) will be running a project for 15-19 year old newcomers in Flanders and Brussels, supported by the European Funds for Asylum, Migration and Integration and the Government of Flanders. With the project '[Central guidance for newcomers](#)', the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration wants to create a good starting position for 15-19 year olds from countries outside the EU, with a special focus on non-accompanied minors. A summer course in 'Social orientation' is organised and fun group activities are offered for the young people. Participants are linked to an integration counsellor who can help them with any questions on studying, working and leisure time. The programme is designed in close collaboration with the secondary schools who offer 'Reception education' classes for non-Dutch speaking newcomers, also called 'OKAN' schools. The aim of this project is to embed this way of working in the regular services of the agency.

Project [@Level2Work](#) is an example of an ESF-funded project, which aimed to support highly qualified newcomers in finding positions that match their education level. The project involved many partners: VOKA-Kamer van Koophandel Oost-Vlaanderen, VOKA-Kamer van Koophandel West-Vlaanderen, Randstad Belgium, VDAB, Vormingsfonds voor de Uitzendkrachten vzw, UC Limburg, Huis van het Nederlands Brussel, Huis van het Nederlands West-Vlaanderen, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Universiteit Antwerpen, Hogeschool PXL, vzw Integratie en Inburgering Antwerpen, Cronos, Solentra Solidariteit & Trauma vzw, UZ Gent (Ghent University Hospital), Vives-Zuid, Obelisk, Integratie en Inburgering Gent.

Due to the specific and multi-layered organisation of education/ career guidance in Flanders and the Brussels Capital Region, it is not possible to provide the total amount of funding for this field of work.

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Career guidance for school pupils

Within the education and training policy domain, (education) career guidance is organised differently according to education level.

Schools are responsible for the provision career guidance. They have the autonomy to decide how to organise their career guidance activities. The [pupil guidance centres](#) (CLBs) provide services to pupils, parents, teachers and schools. Regarding labour market information and optimal transitions, the centres cooperate with [VDAB](#). VDAB runs awareness raising sessions within schools on the importance of qualitative registration and use of VDAB tool 'My career' ('[Mijn Loopbaan](#)' - see section [ICT in lifelong guidance](#)).

The [new decree on pupil guidance](#) in primary school, secondary school and the centres for pupil guidance (CLBs) came into effect on 1st September 2018. An important fact for schools is that pupil guidance has become a precondition for the recognition of each school. It has thus become part of the global policy on quality assurance of each school and will be evaluated by the [Education Inspectorate](#). For the implementation of the decree, extra financing for staff was offered. The new decree resulted in structural changes within the pupil guidance centres (CLB centres) and schools.

A pupil guidance centre can work across networks and support schools which belong to different educational networks (*GO! CLB, VCLB, POV CLB and OVSG CLB*). All 72 pupil guidance centres are expected to have particular attention for guidance of disadvantaged pupils, truancy and early school leaving. Since 2012, pupils and students with an indication of an employment related disability can receive specific guidance during their last school year offered by the 'Specialised mediation team' (*Gespecialiseerd Team Bemiddeling, GTB*) in the so-called *transition trajectories* (*transitietrajecten*). After leaving school, follow-up can be foreseen, for example at the workplace. Special attention is given to the career management skills of the young person.

As a result of the 2014 *government coalition agreement*, a new online guidance tool, *Columbus*, was developed by *VLUHR*, the Flemish Council of Universities and Third Level Colleges. Columbus is a new exploration tool for pupils in the last stage of secondary school education. The tool aims to strengthen their (study) choice process and it is one aspect of the (school) career guidance journey facilitated by the pupil's secondary school. Columbus integrates the strongest components of available tools in Flanders. It contains scales taken from the LASSI questionnaire, the LUCI platform, SIMON, Ready for Higher Education and the LEMO tests.

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Guidance for VET participants

The Flemish VET system includes part-time and full-time vocational study programmes (technical and profession-oriented education), certain post-secondary programmes, adult education programmes, apprenticeships programmes, and entrepreneurship-focused training. This means that a range of career guidance services apply to VET participants, depending on the age of the pupil/student/adult and the type of VET training they are participating in.

Through the *modernisation of secondary school education*, the new sets of learning outcomes and the reform of the pupil guidance system, pupils are strengthened in their (education) career competences and receive guidance in this area. Importance is placed on conscious orientation, well-considered study/training and professional choice, entrepreneurship and a better connection between education and the labour market (e.g. through the new learning pathway 'dual learning'). For pupils in vocational education, see also the section *Career guidance for school pupils*.

In 2008, Dutch-speaking Belgium adopted the *decree on Stelsel van leren en werken* (system of learning and working with the aim of reforming IVET and introducing a dual learning system). In 2018, the Flemish Parliament approved the Decree on *Dual Learning*. The Decree came into effect on 1st September 2019, which enabled dual learning providers officially to start with dual training. Each dual learner receives a mentor in the workplace and a pathway coach at school.

The pilot project '*School desk at the workplace*' ran between September 2016 and June 2019, with around 200 schools and training centres experimenting with the concept of dual learning. Universiteit Antwerpen (Antwerp University) carried out the evaluation ('*Duaal leren op proef*', 2019). The extension of the dual learning courses represented a step towards the broad implementation of the dual learning system in Flanders. The programmes are organised within technical and vocational secondary education. A dual learning path is of equal merit to a programme in full-time secondary education, allowing pupils to obtain the same qualifications. Many courses now offer complete programmes in which pupils from secondary education can learn both at school and at the workplace. In 2019-2020, over 200 locations offer this new way of learning. Each dual learner receives a mentor in the workplace and a 'pathway coach' (trajectbegeleider) at school.

The system of dual learning has strengthened technical and vocational education. The combination of 'learning at school' and 'learning at the workplace' is expected to enhance the motivation of many young people, and to lower the risk of early school leaving. In Flanders, compulsory education offers two other pathways that combine learning and working: *part-time vocational education* (*deeltijds beroepsopleiding*, DBSO) and 'Learning time' (*Leertijd*).

Het Beroepenhuis ('House of Professions) is a non-profit centre that familiarizes 10-14 years old pupils, their parents, teachers, career practitioners with the world of work. It emerged from an annual occupation fair in Ghent and was established through a partnership of several organisations. *Het Beroepenhuis* is now visited daily by pupils, teachers and parents. Those coming to the centre are involved in visits where they see an exhibition on the world of work, work in pairs to solve different tasks, and receive feedback. They are also involved in discussions on abilities, skills, talents and their relevance for various occupations. The visit includes participation in practical workshops. *Het Beroepenhuis* also runs family days.

For students in VET programmes in higher education, see section *Career guidance for higher education students*. Since 01/09/2019, higher education is responsible for the *third level vocational education* (EQF level 5) programmes, but nursing is offered at secondary schools with full-time programmes.

Guidance to VET students in adult education is offered through the *centres for adult education*. See section *Career guidance for adult learners*.

Participants in *professional training by VDAB*, can avail of VDAB guidance (see sections *guidance for unemployed adults*, *guidance for employed*. The *VDAB campus network* for VDAB trainees is a new online environment that supports VDAB trainees. Unemployed adults can choose to apply for an *educational qualifying training track* (*OKOT*) with a VDAB training contract. These tracks lead to a qualification that supports the development of competences needed for a certain 'bottleneck profession' and to the required diploma in the light of sustainable employment. Every OKOT-applicant has a career guidance session with a VDAB counsellor, who decides whether, or not, the candidate is suitable. Various qualifications can be obtained through OKOT tracks:

- a. secondary education qualification (via second chance education or seventh year vocational secondary education);
- b. secondary after secondary certificate (Se-n-Se);
- c. higher education qualification (vocational education = graduate (HBO) and professional bachelor).

Adult learners (18+) enrolled in flexible, labour market oriented professional training by *Syntra Vlaanderen*, receive guidance through their teachers and their work based trainers. Young people participating in PACT-training (dual learning training for future entrepreneurs) are supported by learning and competence coaches; those coaches give support throughout the learning pathway and facilitate an optimal match between the workplace and the learner.

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Guidance for higher education students

The Flemish institutions for higher education are responsible for student guidance and orientation, which has led to various guidance approaches and practices. Higher Education institutions offer educational guidance services as well as career services for students and alumni. Most institutions for higher education have a career office and/or provide guidance through an exchange platform or chat service. Activities can include information sessions, job fairs, one-to-one career guidance for students and graduates, alumni newsletter with job vacancies. Many colleges and universities also offer guidance to first year students, e.g. in cases of reorientation. Examples of specific practices and tools can be consulted in the brochure '[Recent developments in guidance - Belgium](#)'. For alumni, career guidance and support is often available on faculty level or for specific target groups such as postdocs.

VDAB informs students on the transition from education to the labour market (e.g. registration as job seeker, job prospects) to help prepare them for the labour market. VDAB communicates through its website and social media channels, the SID-IN guidance fairs (of which five are open to the wider public), on campus activities, graduate fairs, etc.

At the end of 2018, the [Flemish Interuniversity Council \(Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, VLIR\)](#) and VDAB signed a [partnership agreement](#) (2019-2024) aiming to cooperate on topics such as study career guidance, transition from university to the labour market, career thinking and career competences. The steering group has initiated two pilot projects: Blended Learning 'Train the Trainer' and career competence development tools for students.

Blended Learning 'Train the Trainer' wants to train education professionals in how they can support students in their career competence development. The training content is already available to a certain extent, but through the pilot project, the steering group wants to test whether blended learning is an efficient way to deliver the training to education professionals across the universities in Flanders. The steering group wants to support students in their development of career competences, but it is not feasible to address all students personally and offer them individual guidance. That is why a digital concept was selected: a tool that contains all the necessary materials or a web version of tools in which students will 'pingpong' from one tool to another.

A communication campaign will be set up to help making study career guidance and career thinking a success.

Also in higher education, new guidance practices and tools are developed through project-based work. For instance, the [Individual career development programme \(ICARD\)](#) was an international project aiming to develop the career management skills of university students by involving them in an online career programme: the European career development programme (ECDP). The programme involved several partners: University of Padova, MELIUS (International Mobility and Employment), Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Maastricht University, University of Salamanca, University of KU Leuven, Militos Consulting S.A and Queensland University of Technology.

European funding has been also used to finance entrepreneurship-oriented projects for students. Some institutions for higher education provide access to business coaching activities, start-up support programmes and online business games. '[Flemish Young Enterprises](#)' (VLAJO) runs several programmes to support and guide students in the development of their entrepreneurial competences. Programmes run in collaboration with teachers and entrepreneurs.

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Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Belgium (FL)

Guidance for adult learners

Formal adult education is the responsibility of the **adult education centres** (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs*, CVO) and **centres for basic education** (*Centra voor Basiseducatie*, CBE), who offer a variety of learner guidance and orientation services such as study support and career counselling. Adult learners with physical limitations can avail of special educational support. On request, every CVO and CBE can arrange for:

- a. a sign language interpreter and/or writing interpreter;
- b. reimbursement of copies made of class notes;
- c. converting educational materials in braille writing;
- d. enlarged copies, digital converting or large letter print.

Lifelong guidance is also offered in non-formal adult education, where several socio-cultural organisations initiate lifelong guidance projects and activities.

A **blueprint for 'Learning career guidance'** (*Leerloopbaanbegeleiding*) in Flanders was recently circulated as a result of **Project GOAL!**, a KA3 Erasmus+ project supporting policy reform.

In Flanders, adult education is fragmented, as it is the responsibility of several policy domains and ministries. It is not easy for adult learners - and particularly for low-educated adults - to find the learning pathway that suits their needs best. The 'learning shops' (*leerwinkels*) are one stop guidance shops, which adults can call into for information, advice and guidance. They aim to help increase participation of this target group - particularly low-educated adults - in education and training. These '**learning shops**' (*De Stap, Leerwinkel West-Vlaanderen, Leerwinkel Genk and Tracé Brussel*) recently established a learning network as they are aiming for structural funding. One of these learning shops is *De Stap* (The Step), a regional service that provides neutral, cross-network and cross-level information on training, study programmes and adult education, aimed at (young) adults. It offers one-to-one guidance and is easily accessible and free of charge. Every year, *De Stap* produces publications, such as the brochure *De wijze stap* [The wise step] Adult education in 15 questions, East Flanders'.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the **Flemish public employment service** developed its new '**VDAB campus network**' for VDAB trainees, offering a digital environment that supports VDAB trainees. Adult learners can also get career support through the online VDAB -coaches. Unemployed adults can decide to go for apply for an **educational qualifying training track (OKOT)** with a VDAB training contract. These tracks lead to a qualification that supports the development of competences needed for a certain 'bottleneck profession' and to the required diploma in the light of sustainable employment. Every OKOT-applicant has a career guidance session with a VDAB counsellor, who decides whether, or not, the candidate is suitable. Various qualifications can be obtained through OKOT tracks:

- a. secondary education qualification (via second chance education or seventh year vocational secondary education);
- b. secondary after secondary certificate (Se-n-Se);
- c. higher education qualification (vocational education = graduate (HBO) and professional bachelor).

Adults' learners in employment can apply for:

- a. training vouchers are available for those who wish to follow training outside working hours to strengthen their position on the labour market;
- b. career vouchers are available to pay for career guidance, given the following five conditions at the time of application:
 - i. residency in Flanders or Brussels;
 - ii. being prepared to follow guidance in Dutch, in a recognised centre for career guidance;
 - iii. full-time or part-time employee or self-employed;
 - iv. a min. of 7 years work experience (employed or self-employed);
 - v. has not received career guidance in the past six years.

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Guidance for the employed

VDAB, the Flemish public employment service, offers employed persons:

- a. career guidance with career vouchers;
- b. outplacement;
- c. online career support, e.g. e-coaching.

The **career guidance voucher system** was launched in 2013. Adults in employment (employees and self-employed adults) can apply for career vouchers. From January 1st 2020, the following conditions should be met at the time of application:

- a. residency in Flanders or Brussels;
- b. being prepared to follow guidance in Dutch, in a recognised centre for career guidance;
- c. full-time or part-time employee or self-employed;
- d. a min. of 7 years work experience (employed or self-employed);
- e. has not received career guidance in the past six years.

All employed (salaried or self-employed) individuals are entitled to two VDAB career vouchers every six years. The individual contribution per voucher for an employee is €40 (the government subsidises €640 for the first voucher and €470 for a second voucher).

Through the system, the government wants to stimulate lifelong learning, with a view to increase employability and flexibility among the working population (moving from *job security* to *career security*). The long-term goal is to keep more citizens in 'workable work' for longer.

Career guidance through the career voucher system (for employees and people in self-employment) is offered through recognised centres which are monitored by VDAB. These accredited centres are not linked to the employer(s) and it is up to the employed individual to decide when and where to engage in this type of career guidance. Overall, the process can be divided into three steps:

- a. the intake interview;
- b. the development of an action plan;
- c. the realisation of this plan.

During the intake interview, the client's competences and needs, as well as labour market realities, are discussed. Following this first step, mandated career guidance centres focus on the process of designing a Personal Development Plan (*Persoonlijk OntwikkelingsPlan*, POP) to strengthen career competences and to support the client in making career decisions. The career coach supports the employee in taking actions based on the action plan.

In this career guidance process, the development and strengthening of career competences are the central focus. This enables the client to manage his/her career more proactively and strengthen his/her position on the labour market.) It usually includes the following elements:

- a. engagement in a process that leads to career decisions and choices (looking at strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, ambitions, realistic goal setting);
- b. information about the labour market;
- c. gaining better insight into own strengths, weaknesses, talents, interests
- d. introduction to the various information channels on +careers and training or their use;
- e. a personal development plan (POP) as the output of the process.

In the 12 months following the last career guidance session, the client is entitled to 'aftercare' by his/her career guidance centre. An 'aftercare' session is max. 30 min. long and free of charge.

When being made redundant, employees sometimes have the right to participate in an outplacement programme (e.g. in case of restructuring/collective dismissal, employees over 45). In an **outplacement programme**, the client is supported in the search for a new job. It involves:

- a. administrative support;
- b. creating a personal overview;
- c. psychological guidance;
- d. support with job searching;
- e. guidance during integration in the new job.

The '**digital employees' counter**' (*medewerker digitale communicatie*) is the online service through which employees can find answers to questions about their career (via video chat, telephone or e-mail). In 2018, VDAB received 625 requests through the digital employee office. Popular questions are:

- a. How does the career guidance system work?
- b. What are my career advancement opportunities and how can career guidance support this?
- c. What are my training opportunities?

In the Brussels Capital Region, the multi-partner one-stop service *Beroepenpunt/Cité des Métiers* is open to anyone looking for information and/or career guidance – also to people in employment. Services are anonymous and free of charge. Its main objectives are to:

- a. provide guidance to young people, jobseekers and workers and direct users to the available resources;
- b. promote vocational training;
- c. promote 'new' professions (in growth sectors and new, emerging professions) and the professions that are expected to grow in the future (through career counselling);
- d. stimulate entrepreneurship and to facilitate national and international work mobility.

Companies, organisations and public service institutions can offer internal career guidance services to their employees. This allows for the support and management of in-house talent, which increases the likelihood that employees continue working for the employer. Examples: Vlaamse Overheid (Flemish public administration), Randstad Group and Atlas Copco.

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Guidance for unemployed adults

Unemployed job seekers should register with **VDAB**, the Flemish public employment service. VDAB offers career guidance for the unemployed, including services for specific target groups such as newcomers, people with special needs, and older unemployed persons. VDAB also organises activities for the long-term unemployed (jobseekers who have been looking for a job for over a year) with the aim of providing more individualised and personalised support.

VDAB mediators support unemployed job seekers through:

- a. job coaching: support throughout the search for work, the development of work-related attitudes and job application training (e.g. through work-based learning, suitable training sessions or courses).
- b. orientation: mediators support clients in their search for their strengths and for their right pathway (e.g. through competence assessment, finding 'matching' job offers)
- c. referral clients who are considering setting up their own business to those organisations offering personal guidance (Syntra, Unizo).

The emphasis is on finding suitable and sustainable employment, in a reasonable amount of time. Throughout the mediation process, an individual action plan is developed to help the client find a job. This action plan is followed up regularly to see how the client is progressing with its implementation and how he/she is progressing with job applications.

VDAB offers services for a number of specific target groups. For example, it has developed specific transition programmes for the low-skilled and long-term unemployed people. The aim of these programmes is to increase the employability of these target groups by providing access to work-based learning, work experience in a company and career guidance. In addition, several measures have been put into place to encourage employers to employ clients belonging to these target groups.

'Activation pathways' is a specific programme aimed at job seekers for whom paid work is temporarily not an option due to medical, psychological and/or social limitations. Participants can be referred by VDAB, GTB or through a care provider who considers this pathway could be of benefit to the client.

In the Brussels Capital Region, Actiris is responsible for the implementation of the Brussels employment policies and for ensuring a healthy labour market in the Brussels Capital Region. To this purpose, it has developed services for employers and job seekers. Services for the unemployed are similar to the VDAB services. Actiris also offers specialised support to job seekers, for example through their Jobfocus centres and 'Active Search for Work Guidance'.

In February 2020, 17,3% of the Flemish unemployed job seekers are known to have a 'work disability' (VDAB werkzoekendenbericht, 2020). For this group of job seekers, please see section [Guidance for special needs and disabilities](#). Just over 20% is 55 years old or older. More information on this subgroup of unemployed job seekers can be found in section [Guidance for older adults](#).

Apart from services offered through VDAB and Actiris, career guidance for unemployed adults is also offered through a variety of small to large-scale organisations (e.g. the Flemish unions, local initiatives).

In the Brussels Capital Region, the multi-partner one-stop service *Beroepenpunt/Cité des Métiers* is open to anyone looking for information and/or career guidance. Services are anonymous and free of charge and its main objectives are to:

- a. provide guidance to young people, jobseekers and workers and direct users to the available resources;
- b. promote vocational training;
- c. promote 'new' professions (in growth sectors and new, emerging professions) and the professions that are expected to grow in the future (through career counselling);
- d. stimulate entrepreneurship and to facilitate national and international work mobility.

The annual report of 2018 can be found [here](#).

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Guidance for older adults

Since 1999, the percentage of older unemployed adults (55 or older) has increased by almost 20% (further information can be found [here](#)). The longer availability of older unemployed adults on the labour market (as a consequence of changes in laws and the ageing of the population) is considered to be the most important reason for this trend.

VDAB mediators offer tailored [guidance for older unemployed job seekers](#). An overview is made of what the client needs to find (new) employment. The mediator suggests actions in line with the competences, experience, physical and mental capacities of the client. VDAB forwards suitable job descriptions to the client (e-mail or post). Employing adults of 58 or older is encouraged through reduced social security contributions.

All employees aged 45+ who have been made redundant have the right to participate in an outplacement programme. Depending on the age of the older adult, the system of unemployment with company surcharge (*Stelsel van Werkloosheid met bedrijfsToeslag*, SWT) can be applied.

For more information on career guidance for older unemployed adults, please see section [Guidance for unemployed adults](#).

For more information on older adults who experience severe limitations in (re)entering the labour market due to physical or mental limitations, see section [Guidance for special needs and disabilities](#).

For older adults in employment, please see section [Guidance for the employed](#), for further details.

For more information on career guidance for older adult learners, please see section on [Guidance for adult learners](#).

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Guidance for early leavers

The Belgian [Youth Guarantee](#) Implementation Plan was presented in 2013 and adapted in 2014, to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship, within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

Responsible for establishing and managing the Youth Guarantee scheme and coordinating partnerships across all levels and sectors in their respective region/community are:

- VDAB (the Flemish PES) for Flanders,
- the Monitoring Committee of the YG (composed of ministers of labour, training, education, economy and social inclusion), with the President of the Region as maximum responsible (data are provided by the PES Actiris) for the Brussels Region,
- Wallonia: Le Forem;
- German-speaking Community: ADG

The plan includes preventative as well as curative measures. As a result of preventative measures, young people receive more information on professions and training options, and on what they can expect upon finishing their school career. This is reached through improved cooperation between [VDAB](#), schools and pupil guidance centres. Through the preventative actions, it is hoped that early school leaving will decrease. When problems arise in the transition from education to the labour market, a curative approach is needed to integrate young people in the labour market. Many curative actions focus on the development of skills for low-educated and unqualified youth, so their chances on the labour market increase and mismatch is tackled. For this group, personalised guidance is proposed - often following successful outreach efforts (to reach NEET youth who did not register at the public employment service and guide them to training or employment).

The concept note and action plan [Samen tegen Schooluitval](#) (Together against early school leaving) was launched in 2015. The action plan can be consulted online. It uses a whole-school approach to reduce early school leaving and truancy, and to guarantee the right to learn. It is concretised in an action plan of 52 actions, situated on four levels: a) monitoring, identification and coordination, b) prevention, intervention, and compensation.

Action 10 encompasses the set-up of regional platforms on early school leaving, in which actors of work, welfare and education work together to improve services for pupils at risk of early school leaving. The provincial networks *Together against early School leaving* are involved in activities such as:

- information/study days for young people, their parents and relevant services;
- strengthening the collaboration between stakeholders from work, welfare and education for a 'warmtransfer' to sustainable employment and integration in society; -activities to inform young people better about the labour market

Action 24 comprises initiatives aiming to strengthen career management skills for pupils, by providing teachers with labour market information and information on further education and training, as well as embedding the VDAB-tool '[My Career](#)' (*Mijn Loopbaan*) in class practice (e.g. through VDAB train the trainer-sessions).

Action 49 encompasses the development of an online reflection tool for youngsters to inform them better about the possible flexible learning pathways for obtaining a diploma of secondary education. This tool can be consulted through www.onderwijskiezer.be. The Ministry of Education and Training has developed a [flyer with this information](#), which guidance counsellors can use in guidance dialogues with young people.

School leavers should be informed as early as possible of their rights and duties, available services for (education) career guidance and VDAB (Flemish public employment service) services. Through career guidance, schools, pupil guidance centres, VDAB, part-time education centres and adult education centres, aim for a 'warm transfer' from labour market-oriented training courses towards the labour market. The focus is on talent, competence development, learning and sustainable careers.

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Guidance for NEET

The integration of NEET-youth in the labour market is an important goal of the EU Youth Guarantee and the VDAB Flanders Youth Work Plan. As NEET youth often stay under the radar, exact numbers are difficult to get. However, through the linking of DISCIMUS (the database of enrolled and deregistered pupils) and the VDAB database it is easier to detect those early school leavers not engaging in education, training or work.

The public employment service, [VDAB](#), coordinates the implementation of the Youth guarantee. It has set up projects with partner organisations to reach out to young people who are not in employment education or training. Social and youth workers are reaching out and engaging with NEETs. In 2018, VDAB initiated a new (outreach) approach to reach NEETs, whereby youth consultants become active in places where young NEETs gather, such as large cities and disadvantaged areas (e.g. the former mining area in the province of Limburg). VDAB now has a renewed partnership with [De Ambrassade](#), which - as a support and network organization for the youth sector in Flanders and Brussels - cooperates with the Flemish Youth Council and various partners to reach the goals of the youth and children's rights policies. The strategy emphasizes sharing of expertise and joint communication, so that VDAB can maintain closer contact with young people.

NEET counsellors often apply the Find-Mind-Bind method throughout the coaching process. They can donate more time to the young person than 'classic' counsellors can; this allows them to look at the overall picture (not only a job, training or placement, but also issues such as childcare or mental health care). NEET counsellors also work in a rather informal setting, which makes them easily approachable for NEETs. Most NEETs (90%) are registered with VDAB, but young NEETs, who are not, will be encouraged to register and they will be supported in this process. The Flemish Region has the lowest NEET rate in Belgium (7.8% in 2018), followed by the Walloon Region (10%). In the Brussels Capital Region, 13.3% of the 15-24 year olds had a NEET status in 2018. The European average was 10.5%, and the Belgian average 9.2%.

Since the launch of the Youth Guarantee in the Brussels Capital Region:

- a. 5,643 trainees have gained a valuable first professional experience with the "First-traineeship"-programme
- b. Youth unemployment rate has decreased from 30.8% to 18.2%

With the support of the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative, Actiris (the PES for the Brussels Capital Region) has intensified efforts to tackle youth unemployment, such as the set-up of a service to match young people with employers. In addition, several measures of personalized information and individualized guidance were put into place.

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Guidance for young people at risk

Young people can be at risk in various ways: at risk of early school leaving, at risk of engaging in negative/criminal behavior, at risk of developing mental health problems etc. In the action plan 'Together against early school leaving' ('Samen tegen schooluitval'), section 4.3. refers to youth at risk. In line with the action plan, the system of 'education-health' pathways has become more flexible to keep the connection between pupils and school for a longer period and to strengthen it. Because of this flexibilisation, the role of the [pupil guidance centres](#) (CLBs) as well as of the director of tailored programmes has become even more important. When a pupil is at risk of dropping out/has dropped out, the relevant CLB will set up a 'case meeting' with the relevant local education/health actors (which is in line with the [decree on integrated youth care](#)).

A 'case meeting':

- a. addresses the options for support in the region;
- b. organizes a meeting with the young person and all stakeholders (looking at what is necessary for the young person to enter the education system again);
- c. designs a guidance pathway for the young person that enables re-integration, which is followed-up by the stakeholders.

Schools have the responsibility to create a positive school and class climate. It is assumed that actions that promote wellbeing will prevent truancy. Truancy monitoring is another important action. Through the registration of justified and unjustified school absences in school records, the school detects truancy signals. The school secretariat and the teachers have an important role here. Attendance registration and follow-up of (un)justified absence is the first step in a preventative hands-on truancy policy. Analysis of school attendance records allows for the investigation of certain trends for later interventions and the drawing up of policies that support students.

[Pupil guidance centres](#) (CLBs) can support schools (on a yearly basis) in the development of a preventative truancy policy (through relevant data analysis, creating school regulations and informing parents and teachers how to support students). This cooperation is formalised in the cooperation agreement between the school and CLB.

Schools are recommended to include clear guidelines on truancy in the school charter, and - when it occurs - to contact pupil and parents to better assess and explain the situation.

As soon as a pupil has been absent without justification for 5 half days, the school has to inform the pupil guidance centre (CLB). The school and the CLB will then discuss which actions they can and will take to help the pupil. If needed, schools can ask their CLB for support at an earlier stage. In addition, the school and the CLB can discuss problematic attendance issues more regularly, reviewing actions taken and keeping each other informed. If schools chose to start a guidance process with the CLB, a guidance file is opened. The school draws up a truancy file, which can be included in the pupil's file.

If the underlying problems go beyond the reach of the school and CLB, the CLB will cooperate with external services in health and wellbeing (through 'case meetings' - see above). If the CLB does not find a solution for a pupil's truancy, it can transfer an 'alarm file' to the Flemish Agency for Education Services (AGODI). AGODI then searches for a solution together with the school and CLB.

VDAB, the Flemish public employment service, develops preventative and remedial actions linked to the Youth guarantee, often in partnership with other stakeholders (see section [Guidance for NEETs](#)).

In primary and secondary school education, the schools and pupil guidance centres undertake a wide variety of actions to prevent mental health problems amongst their pupils. Young people with mental health problems can reach out to a teacher and/or pupil guidance centre. As a next step, they can refer the pupil to relevant services or propose actions such as a meeting with the parents and/or mental health care services.

The Ministry of Education and Training developed [guidelines](#) for prevention, intervention and management of radicalisation and polarisation within school education, higher education and adult education. The guidelines can be consulted on the Ministry's website.

Several municipalities in Flanders have developed their own network with the aim of supporting young people at risk and preventing problems from happening or escalating. Examples are the cities of Antwerp, Mechelen and Boom ('Centraal Meldpunt' 'Central Notification Point') and Mol (Begeleiding van risicjongeren: Guidance of youth at risk). In each approach, strong cooperation and networking is key.

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Guidance for special needs and disabilities

Career guidance linked to school education is the main responsibility of the schools; [pupil guidance centres](#) (CLBs) support the schools where needed.

Guidance for pupils with specific educational needs is strongly influenced by the [M-decree](#) (of 21st March 2013) on special needs education, which aims to include children and young people in mainstream education. As a result of the M-decree, more children and young people with special needs have entered mainstream education. Therefore, mainstream schools have to consider this population when drawing up their vision and action plan for (education) career guidance. Pupil guidance centres (CLB's) have extensive expertise in (education) career guidance for pupils in mainstream and special education schools. Pupils and their parents can call on these centres for information and advice (for more information on the pupil guidance system in school education, please see section [Access to guidance](#)) Parents of children and young people with disabilities can request support through the [Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities](#) (*Vlaams Agentschap voor Personen met een Handicap*, VAPH).

During 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, a new decree on guidance for pupils with specific educational needs will be prepared – including a final support model specifying the role of each stakeholder. The new decree also aims to foster inclusive mainstream education and recognises that for some pupils, special needs education remains the most suitable pathway in order to receive the best possible support.

Higher education institutions offer (education) career guidance for all their students, including students with physical and/or other limitations, such as a learning or developmental disorder. The [Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education](#) (*Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs*, SIHO) supports higher education institutions and policy makers in the development and implementation of equity and inclusion measures for inclusive higher education.

Lifelong guidance in formal adult education is the responsibility of the [adult education centres](#) (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs*, CVO) and [centres for basic education](#) (*Centra voor Basiseducatie*, CBE), who offer a variety of guidance and orientation services such as study support and career counselling. Adult learners with physical limitations can avail of special educational support, such as a sign language interpreter and/or writing interpreter and conversion of educational materials into braille writing.

In Flanders, the [one-stop guidance services](#) centralise the learning opportunities for adults, with a special focus on the needs of low-educated adult learners. Every adult can call into a 'learning shop' for information, advice and guidance. The aim is to help increase participation of this target group in education and training. In every [learning shop](#) (*De Stap, Leerwinkel West-Vlaanderen, Leerwinkel Genk and Tracé Brussel*), also adults with specific needs will be supported in their search for the right (education) career pathway for them.

The public employment service, [VDAB](#), decides whether the restriction of a person is recognised as an official 'work limitation'. VDAB develops awareness raising campaigns to inform individuals with special needs or physical limitations about career guidance opportunities. People who experience complex thresholds to paid work, caused by social factors (poverty, offenders and ex-prisoners, NEETS) and/or specific needs (mental, psychological, physical or sensory), can avail of tailored support and guidance.

If the limitation is recognised, certain measures and specialised guidance apply to the individual with specific needs. Guidance support in the workplace will be provided and other measures are possible, such as sign language interpretation, special tools, clothing, workplace adjustments and reimbursement of travel costs. Employers can claim the [Flemish Support Premium](#) (*Vlaamse Ondersteuningspremie*, VOP), which compensates for the potential negative impacts on job productivity, as well as workplace adjustment costs (for example, installing specialised toilets or elevators).

The '[Specialised Mediation Team](#)' (*Gespecialiseerd Team Bemiddeling*, GTB) offers specialised guidance for people with special needs, as well as for people with physical or mental health problems who are experiencing severe limitations in finding and sustaining suitable employment. Unemployed jobseekers with an indication of a work disability can enrol in these specialised services. As part of their career pathway, one option is to enrol in specialised training, which is provided by the '[Specialised Training and Guidance Service](#)' (GOB: *Gespecialiseerde Opleidings, Begeleidings- en Bemiddelingsdienst*). This includes a [training and placement offer](#) (*Gespecialiseerde Individuele Beroepsopleiding*, GIBO) which is specialised individual vocational training in a company and job coaching.

At the start of 2018, GTB changed its name from 'Special trajectory, guidance and determination service' to 'Special mediation team', expressing a fundamental change resulting in new key principles:

- a mediator brings all parties – jobseekers, network, job coach, employer, health care providers – together to engage in a dialogue and shared process;
- mediation starts from the jobseeker's needs and ambitions, and tries to match this with the need(s) of someone else: the job coach, personal network and the employer;
- the mediator starts from the jobseekers' dream, and both the mediator and the jobseeker are responsible for the direction of the process (the mediator offers the expertise of support services and knowledge about the labour market, the jobseeker is expert in him/herself);
- the mediator brings demand and supply on the labour market closer together. The mediator coordinates and coaches this process. Mediators work in a team, and are often a member of an intense client network.

GTB stimulates its clients to take control of their own pathway towards employment. GTB sees the client as 'the driver' and the GTB mediator as supporting the client in finding the way as his/her 'co-pilot'. Employees are expected to adapt according to the changing work conditions and job content. GTB can support them through training (by GOB), intensive job coaching in the workplace and help with 'workplace adjustments' (which enable the person with specific needs to carry out his/her work). Working with employers is extremely important to achieve sustainable employment, for example, in case of the re-integration of employees who experienced a long-term illness. GTB aims to offer them a single point of contact for information and support and contacts its clients (employer and employee) on a regular basis to prevent drop out as much as possible.

GTB supports the client in the search for paid work on the open labour market. If such work is not feasible, GTB will look for a suitable alternative such as sheltered, social workplaces or voluntary work. However, as GTB strongly believes in supported employment, the work in a sheltered environment should be temporary.

GTB has a unique partnership with VDAB. In the local 'working shops', GTB mediators and their VDAB colleagues work side by side. This way, tailored advice can be offered promptly to clients. Every year, GTB helps [over 10.000 employees](#) find a suitable job on the open labour market, in sheltered employment, employment care or voluntary work.

GTB works with many education partners. Through its project '[Transitietrajecten](#)' (Transition pathways), GTB offers support to pupils and students, who will most likely experience significant work limitations, in their transition from education to the labour market. GTB offers them guidance and support, and works together with several partners to provide guidance in the workplace.

'[Activation pathways](#)' is a specific programme aimed at job seekers for whom paid work is temporarily not an option due to medical, psychological and/or social limitations. In the programme, a mediator and care worker talk with the client to assess the type of support needed and look for the right people to provide this support. This service is free of charge. Participants can be referred by VDAB, GTB or through a care provider who considers this pathway could be of benefit to the client.

Both GTB and GOB support employers in the recruitment and (re)integration of suitable employees. As a result, diversity in the workplace and vocational training centres has increased.

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Guidance for immigrants

Primary and secondary school education in Flanders offers 'Reception Education' (*Onthaalonderwijs*) for non-Dutch speaking newcomers who do not master the Dutch language to such extent that they can in mainstream education. Through this educational offer, pupils learn the Dutch language intensively. Their teachers and/or pupil guidance counsellors work with them on their (education) careers, for example by discussing the optional pathways with them and their parent(s)/guardian(s).

Recently, a network of trauma psychologists was developed within the network of [pupil guidance centres](#) (CLB's). The aim is to support guidance professionals in their work with young newcomers who experienced trauma. Thematic study days on this topic have been organised by the Ministry for Education and Training. Several institutions for higher education in Flanders and the Brussels Capital Region run a 'tutoring project', through which students (often studying social work or teacher training) provide extra support to primary and secondary school pupils who need it. Involvement in such a project helps young migrants enhance their language skills, boost their motivation and acquire a good understanding of (study) career opportunities. Higher education institutions implementing the project collaborate with school care coordinators (who are responsible for the selection of participants). Artevelde Hogeschool and Karel de Grote Hogeschool are two third level colleges involved in a tutoring project. Career guidance of adult newcomers mainly occurs through integration programmes. Newcomers have the right to (and are sometimes obliged to) sign an [integration contract](#) (*Inburgeringscontract*), which offers them:

- a course in social orientation (on housing, legal system, culture, working, values in Flanders, Belgium) in a language understood by the newcomer;
- Dutch language classes;
- tailored guidance in the search for work, studies, and training, as well as support, with the recognition of qualifications obtained and the validation of prior learning

The [Flemish Agency for Integration and Civic Integration](#) gives career orientation for non-Dutch speaking, adult newcomers on three levels: professional, educational and social. Throughout the career guidance process, clients are supported in their search for work and/or self-employment. This is delivered in partnership with VDAB (Flanders Region) and Actiris (Brussels Capital Region). Educational guidance is offered to clients who wish to (continue) studying. Social guidance is also provided, looking at participation in sociocultural activities, voluntary work and other leisure time activities. The Flemish Agency for Integration and Civic Integration can be accessed through regional contact points.

Until August 2020, the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration will be running a project for 15-19 year old newcomers in Flanders and Brussels, supported by the European Funds for Asylum, Migration and Integration and the Government of Flanders. With the project '[Central guidance for newcomers](#)', the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration wants to create a good starting position for 15-19 year olds from countries outside the EU, with a special focus on non-accompanied minors. A summer course in 'Social orientation' is organised and fun group activities are offered for the young people. Participants are linked to an integration counsellor who can help them with any questions regarding studying, working and leisure time. The programme is designed in close collaboration with the secondary schools who offer 'Reception education' (see above). The aim of this project is to embed this way of working in the regular services of the agency.

In 2017, [VDAB](#), the public employment agency, launched its action plan '[Integration through work](#)'. The action plan is based on the recommendations by the Diversity Commission of the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), enhanced with the advice from the 'Integration at work' study by the King Baudouin Foundation, and the result of consultations with experts, national and European exchange, VDAB experiments, collaboration with external partners, mutual consultation and internal coordination. The action plan supports accelerated activation of refugees and newcomers in the labour market. Partnership agreements were made between VDAB and its 'Integration through work' partners: the Federal Agency for Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration, the Union of Flemish Cities and Towns (*Vereniging voor Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten*, VVSG) and education partners. The aim of these partnerships is to facilitate accelerated integration and to involve all partners in the action plan.

'[Project AZO!](#)' is an ESF funded project that supports newcomers who want to become an entrepreneur. The project helps them to turn their dreams into reality through information and guidance.

'[Refugee Work Flanders](#)' (*Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen*) supports refugees, asylum seekers and stakeholders working with them. The NGO offers (study) career guidance for refugees and asylum seekers – usually in partnership with other organisations. This is situated on different levels:

- support with entrance to the labour market: in partnership with VDAB, *Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen* trained 20 job coaches. These voluntary coaches help to build bridges between the unemployed refugees and potential employers. They apply an outreach approach, exploring a variety of channels of getting in touch with people who are hard to reach. Referral of refugees and newcomers to VDAB mainly happens through its partners, including the public centres for social wellbeing (*Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn* OCMW), the Flemish Agency for Integration and

- Civic Integration, shelters and 'local reception initiatives' (*lokaal opvanginitiatief*, LOI);
- support with higher education qualifications: *Vluchtelingenwerk* Vlaanderen aims to increase migrants' accessibility to post-secondary studies and to reduce the risk on drop-out. Clients are given access to information on the recognition of the degrees obtained abroad, the Flemish education system, the admission process at the university and the preparatory classes, as well as the financing sources. In order to participate in the activities, newcomers need to have basic language skills and a secondary school diploma.
 - support in finding suitable voluntary work: during 2014, voluntary work became an option for every newcomer who legally resides in Belgium. Since then, many asylum seekers have engaged in various types of voluntary work. In 2018, the University of Ghent (Faculty of Political and Social Science, Department of Sociology) published a [report on voluntary work by refugees](#), looking at activators and limitations of engaging refugees in voluntary work.

The **Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers** (*Fedasil*) is responsible for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers. It coordinates this service provision, and works with partners such as the Red Cross and the public centres for social wellbeing ('OCMW'). In June 2017, the partnership between Fedasil and VluchtelingenWerk Vlaanderen ended and the housing initiatives ran by VluchtelingenWerk Vlaanderen (in partnership with reception partners) were closed. VluchtelingenWerk Vlaanderen has set up 'Starting point' to offer immediate support to asylum seekers upon arrival in Belgium. The service is located near the application offices in Brussels, and provides asylum seekers with information on the asylum procedure. 'Starting point' also organizes activities through which asylum seekers and Belgians can get to know each other better.

The Flemish Government encourages enterprises to improve their personnel policy through career development and diversity plans. This happens through subsidies and technical support for companies as well as sectoral agreements (cooperation agreement between the Flemish Government and the Flemish sectoral social partners in different domains of the Flemish labour market policy). **Sectoral agreements** aim to support the transition from education to the labour market, the development of competences, the increase of diversity in the workplace and the reduction of discrimination. Since 2000, over 30 sectors have signed a sectoral agreement.

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Guidance for other groups

Adults who have been imprisoned have the right to education. The [Decree on adult education](#) (15th June 2007) formalized the commitment to include education in the support and service provision for detainees. Nowadays, **VOCVO**, the Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education, coordinates education in the 17 prisons in Flanders and Brussels.

In line with the [strategic plan 2015-2020 'Support and services for detainees'](#), a learning pathway system is being developed for all detainees in the Flanders and Brussels prisons. Lifelong guidance in this regard can involve educational consultants or education coordinators. VOCVO is responsible for the implementation of this strategic plan. In addition, '**Klasbak**' is a network and centre of expertise for persons and organisations supporting learning of (ex-) detainees. Klasbak is the Flemish division of the European Prison Education Association (EPEA).

Aan de Bak is VDAB's (Flemish public employment service) mediation programme for detainees. In this programme, VDAB brings its services within the walls of every Flemish and Brussels prison through detention mediators. Intensive VDAB mediation can be started if the prisoner is likely to be released within 14 months. The detainee must also have the right of residence and be able to fulfil administrative requirements. VDAB mediation in this context may include:

- informing detainees about VDAB services and VDAB vocational training outside the walls;
- mapping strengths and thresholds;
- mapping out the competences and talents;
- personal start-up service: intensive service tailored to the individual, considering the conditions imposed by the Ministry of Justice;
- setting out employment goals (sector, profile).

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