



Vocational education and training

Policy briefs 2023

BELGIUM

French-speaking part



This VET policy brief was produced by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Department for VET [vocational education and training] and Qualifications under the supervision of [Loukas Zahilas](#), Head of Department.

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This report is part of Cedefop's monitoring of vocational education and training policies and systems. It is based on detailed information on VET policy implementation submitted by Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET (ReferNet) and other sources. For additional information please visit Cedefop's [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#).

Please cite this publication as:

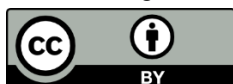
Cedefop (2024). *Vocational education and training policy briefs 2023 – Belgium (French speaking part)*. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of vocational education and training policies.

<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/915607>

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024



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PDF ISBN 978-92-896-3735-0 doi: [10.2801/915607](https://doi.org/10.2801/915607) TI-02-24-437-EN-N

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1. Introduction

This VET policy brief produced by Cedefop presents a snapshot of vocational education and training (VET) policy developments for the French speaking part of Belgium, between 2020 and the beginning of 2023. It presents the context and the challenges the country faces, a selection of the latest VET-related statistics, as well as the national priorities until 2030 identified in Wallonia's national implementation plan. This policy brief provides information from Cedefop monitoring and analysis on the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on VET](#) and [Osnabrück Declaration](#). It offers stakeholders a regular source of information on VET policy developments that could be used for future policy making.

2. National VET context and challenges

2.1 National VET context

Belgium is a federal State comprising three Regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels) and three Communities (Flemish, French, and German-speaking). Citizens can access three different Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems: Flemish (BE-FL), French-speaking (BE-FR) and German-speaking (BE-DE). Brussels is a specific case, as both BE-FR and BE-FL systems coexist. Compulsory education covers learners aged 5 to 18, unlike most European countries where compulsory schooling ends at age 16. VET is offered at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels (Cedefop, 2021).

Despite the involvement of multiple authorities in VET, there is political consensus in the decision-making process and VET policies involve social partners in a tradition of social dialogue. In the VET system of the French-speaking part of Belgium, the Ministry of the French Community regulates formal education in collaboration with school boards. The Walloon and Brussels Regions are in charge of vocational training and employment, and four regional public training services regulate vocational training provision. This sharing of competences requires close and regular intergovernmental cooperation with formal and non-formal agreements, to ensure the consistency of the system. At all levels, VET policies involve social partners.

Upper secondary education in the BE-FR VET system spans 4 years, offering two main branches: general education and VET. The VET branch includes technical or artistic qualification programmes, leading to an upper secondary diploma and direct access to tertiary education, and vocational qualification programmes focused on practical skills for immediate employment. Additionally, post-secondary vocational follow-up programmes, lasting 1 year, provide specialisation opportunities and tertiary education access. Both upper and post-secondary programmes can be delivered as school-based or dual programmes, with the latter involving a mix of classroom learning and on-the-job training.

The BE-FR VET system also includes apprenticeship programmes for individuals aged 15 to 25, managed by regional dual training services like IFAPME in Wallonia and SFPME

in Brussels. Upon certification, apprentices can pursue further training in entrepreneurship or leadership, or enter the labour market. In addition to the apprenticeship path, professional and dual bachelor graduates from the VET system can either join the workforce or continue to master degree programmes.

The adult education system in the BE-FR VET system offers formal education programmes at all levels, mirroring qualifications in the regular system and providing specific qualifications unique to this pathway. These programmes are modular and flexible, catering to various adult learning needs and serving as a primary mechanism for reskilling, upskilling, and second-chance education. Regional public services organise vocational training for diverse groups, including the unemployed and employees, leading to various qualifications. This system emphasises validation of prior learning across different sectors, improving opportunities for jobseekers, workers, and learners in adult and higher education.

2.2 Challenges

The French-speaking part of Belgium has faced several challenges in 2022, including strengthening citizens' digital skills, acknowledging and recognising prior learning, and improving professional certifications. Wallonia is also facing challenges in strengthening workplace learning, improving lifelong guidance, and promoting quality assurance in vocational training.

Low access to relevant technology and the internet is a notable challenge, affecting at least 20% of low-income households in Wallonia. Nearly a quarter of people aged between 16 and 74 are not familiar with the digital environment (Belgium, French-speaking community, 2022). This challenge, combined with qualifications polarisation, is observed especially in Brussels, highlighting the importance of upskilling. In Belgium, and particularly in Brussels, a significant skills divide is observed between very qualified individuals and those with low level of education. Quality assurance in vocational qualifications is a lasting challenge and is only amplified with the emergence of new qualifications relevant to the green and digital transition.

3. National VET policy priorities

The national implementation plan in VET for the French-speaking part of Belgium was published in 2022 in response to the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) and the [Osnabrück Declaration](#). It identified the following priorities.

- a) Strengthening the digital skills of all citizens.
- b) Improving professional certification through recognition of prior learning.
- c) Strengthening workplace learning.
- d) Improving lifelong guidance.
- e) Promoting quality assurance in vocational training (Belgium, 2022).

4. Main policy developments 2020-23

4.1 Strengthen citizens' digital skills ensuring accessibility

Wallonia and Brussels are looking for ways to address the digital skills divide, which grew during the pandemic. On 12 February 2021, the Brussels' Government approved the [Plan for digital appropriation 2021-24](#), and its implementation started later that year in four areas, 17 projects and 66 actions. The overall objective of the plan is to make Brussels a smart city, increasing citizens' access to digital skills.

The implementation of the [Start digital project](#) began in 2020; the project was initially set up for a period of 2 years (2020-2021) and was extended until the end of 2022 due to the COVID-19 crisis. A main objective of the project was the adaptation of digital-related training offered by providers of adult education in the French-speaking part of Belgium. The project broadly targets learners and jobseekers over 25 years of age with limited digital competences, especially those with little education, the unemployed and NEETs.

At the same time, [capacity building initiatives for VET providers](#) and their pedagogical teams are taking place within the framework of the European Commission's support for the development of an adapted training offer. A total of 13 stakeholders are working together in a project funded by the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme of the EU, to implement a training strategy for basic digital skills for jobseekers and adult learners with little schooling. Pedagogical teams have been assisted to adapt the format, content, methods and digital tools used to better accommodate the training needs of their learners.

In 2020, digital training initiatives were set up and started to run regularly. As of 2022, Bruxelles Formation continue to update its offer in digital training through partnerships, and training centres such as MolenGeek and BeCode continue their expansion and offer of innovative training courses in the digital sector for [citizens of Brussels](#). In response to a shortage of digital professionals, Sogeti, a technology consulting company, has initiated a specialised training programme in collaboration with the DigitalCity centre in Brussels. Recognising the increasing digitalisation of activities and the demand for digital skills, Sogeti partnered with Bruxelles Formation and Actiris to launch a 35-day Junior Digital Test Engineer (DTE) training programme (ReferNet Belgium; Cedefop, 2023).

The collaboration involved joint development of the curriculum, selection of participants, and expertise contributions from Sogeti and Bruxelles Formation. The programme covered key DTE skills, including Agile/Scrum methods and testing fundamentals taught by Sogeti experts, while Bruxelles Formation addressed cross-disciplinary IT skills. The successful first round resulted in 11 trainees securing permanent contracts with Sogeti. The second round, commenced in November, includes language courses to help meet the needs of the Belgian labour market. The company is committed to recruiting at least 80% of the trainees into an individual in-company training programme; participants receive International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB) certification upon completion. The initiative highlights a fruitful public-private collaboration to address the digital skills gap in Brussels.

Following the pandemic outbreak in 2020, the Government further strengthened the implementation of the [Digital strategy for education in the French Community](#) and accelerated the provision of digital equipment, ensuring that each upper-secondary learner in vocational training institutes would have access to a device. A second component was included in the same initiative in 2021 and concerned the provision of flat-rate compensation to parents of secondary school learners to purchase digital equipment; this was in addition to solidarity mechanisms, with both aspects ensuring equal access for disadvantaged groups. At the same time, the deployment of advisors specialised in digital learning was speeded-up and a law reforming continuing vocational training for teachers was introduced.

4.2 Professional certification through recognition of prior learning

A [new modular vocational educational pathway \(PEQ\)](#) was designed in 2021; it was approved in July 2022 and will be implemented gradually until 2026. The training process is organised in learning units which are validated progressively. This system was already available for some programmes and will now become the norm for all vocational education. It is becoming gradually more popular among learners, and is inclusive, as it is accessible to every learner regardless of their chosen educational path. Modular programmes aim at improving vocational education in terms of reducing dropout levels which further leads to low qualifications, lack of integration in the labour market and, eventually, unemployment.

4.3 Strengthening workplace learning

The Brussels Government and the French Community Commission set as a goal to coordinate employment and vocational training in the context of Go4Brussels 2025 strategy and the 2020 Training Plan. [Between 2020 and 2022, several training and employment centres](#) were set up and developed by public-private partnerships to provide training programmes in ICT, transport and logistics, and construction.

In 2020, the [government in Wallonia adopted an action plan](#) to boost vocational training focusing on the skills needed by companies. The plan coordinated the expertise of the participating training providers in creating training courses adapted to current demands. It includes six distinct operational axes focussing on the digital and green transition; the link between companies, training institutions and learners; the creation of new training courses linked to STEM; collaboration with third party providers and the exploitation of their networks and skill centres; and strengthening the visibility of lifelong training offer.

Following severe flooding in the Walloon Region in July 2021, the Walloon Government adjusted the budget for the recovery plan, allocating above EUR 737 million to support rebuilding. The construction sector, constituting nearly 13% of jobs in Wallonia, faces a labour shortage intensified by the floods, with around 10 000 vacancies estimated by the Confédération Construction Wallonne (CCW) as of 2022. To address this, the government implemented measures such as creating 1 000+ training positions, offering a maximum bonus of EUR 2 000 for relevant training, and introducing a construction driving passport

(ReferNet Belgium; Cedefop, 2022I). The Walloon Institute for dual training and self-employment (IFAPME) collaborated with CCW to implement initiatives including free tuition, increased monthly wages for learners, modularised certification of training programmes, and enhanced mentor support. A promotional campaign, 'I'm building my future,' has helped raise awareness, particularly among young people and women, emphasising the sector's dynamism, innovation, and adaptability to technological challenges. These measures aim to rehabilitate the sector's image and showcase its potential for sustainable development, while offering promising employment prospects, in line with a study revealing high employment rates among IFAPME-trained learners in the construction sector.

4.4 Provide lifelong guidance to learners

Choosing the right career path is a challenge for many learners; it becomes a greater challenge without [professional orientation support and guidance](#) when the right training programme and cycle of studies need to be chosen. In December 2020, four governments (Wallonia, the French Community, Brussels Region, and the French Community Commission) adopted a memorandum setting out the terms and conditions for the implementation of the lifelong guidance system (OTLAV). One of the objectives foreseen by the system of lifelong guidance was for the system to be known to all citizens in need of support. It also aimed at ensuring a centralised service for guidance throughout French-speaking Belgium as well as the design and implementation of a [Cités des métiers](#) ⁽¹⁾ action plan.

In May 2022, the French-speaking Ministers signed the [Charter for Lifelong Guidance system](#), articulated by the three Walloon Cités des Métiers and twelve Carrefours des Métiers, bringing together stakeholders from guidance, training, integration to the labour market and employment to form a multi-partner system.

The new system is supported by all governmental authorities is aimed at formalising lifelong guidance by including it in all relevant legal and regulatory texts. These texts came in the form of decrees and cooperation agreements throughout the territory. They allowed not only the establishment of a lifelong guidance system, but also its missions, governance, and exchange of information. As of 2021, orientation and guidance measures were in place and operating.

4.5 VET quality assurance for skills match and transparency

Following the 2020 Council Recommendation, steps were taken to promote a culture of quality assurance in national systems for IVET and CVET equally. For the first time, a [National Quality Assurance Reference Point \(NRP\)](#) was established in the French-speaking part. In May 2022, FORMAFORM – a partnership scheme set up by vocational

(1) The 3 Cités des Métiers in Wallonia, alongside the 12 Carrefours des Métiers, is a multi-partner system bringing together stakeholders in guidance, training, integration to the labour market and employment. Since 2014, the Cités des Métiers started to bring together qualified staff and documentation to help people build their professional career while providing lifelong guidance.

training actors Le Forem, Bruxelles Formation and IFAPME – changed its structure and emerged as a public service. In this context, in addition to providing mobility and training opportunities for learners, it undertook defining the quality assurance audit authority for Wallonia and Brussels.

5. Statistical information in relation to EU targets

Belgium's efforts to reduce the rate of early school leavers and NEETs are paying off. In 2022 the rate of early leavers from education and training dropped to 6.4% and has reduced by half in the last 10 years from 12% in 2012; it is 3.2 percentage points below the EU average and the 9% EU target for 2030. The 9.2% NEET rate for 15 to 29-year-olds is very close to the EU target of 9% by 2030 and has reduced from 14.4% in 2012.

Continued efforts are needed to increase the percentage of adults (25 to 64-year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months. Latest available data in 2022 indicate this at 34.9%, slightly better than the EU average but below the EU target of 50% by 2030.

In 2022, the total percentage of recent IVET graduates aged 20-34 with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training was 49%, below the EU target of 60% set for 2025.

The overall employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) in 2022 was 79.6%, on track to meet the 82% target set by Council Recommendation for 2025. More indicators and their progress compared to the EU targets are presented in the below table.

Table 1. **European vocational education and training policy dashboard: Belgium**

Type of indicator (¹)	Indicator	Last available year	BE	EU-27	Policy Document	EU target (year)
VET for developing a lifelong learning culture						
Progress	Adults (25 to 64-year-olds) with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%) *	2022	34.9	39.5	Skills Agenda Council Resolution on EEA ESPR Action Plan	50% (2025) 47% (2025) 60% (2030)
Progress	Low-qualified adults with a learning experience in the last 12 months (%)	2022	12.5	18.4	Skills Agenda	30% (2025)
Progress	Unemployed adults with a learning experience in the last 4 weeks (%)	2022	13.2	13.2	Skills Agenda	20% (2025)
Context	Employment rate for 20 to 64-year-olds (%)	2022	71.9	74.6	ESPR Action Plan	78% (2030)
Context	Early leavers from education and training (%)	2022	6.4	9.6	Council Resolution on EEA	<9% (2030)
Context	NEET rate for 15–29-year-olds (%)	2022	9.2	11.7	ESPR Action Plan	9% (2030)
VET for Resilience, transitions, sustainability, and excellence						
Progress	Adults (16 to 74-year-olds) with at least basic digital skills (%)	2021	54.2	53.9	Skills Agenda	70% (2025)

					ESPR Action Plan	80% (2030)
Progress	Employment rate for recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) (%)	2022	79.6	79.7	Council Rec on VET	82% (2025)
Progress	Recent IVET graduates (20 to 34-year-olds) with a work-based learning experience as part of their vocational education and training (%)	2022	49	60.1	Council Rec on VET Council Resolution on EEA	60% (2025)
Context	25 to 34-year-olds with tertiary attainment (%)	2022	51.4	42	Council Resolution on EEA	45% (2025)
Context	Gender employment gap (%)	2022	7.6	10.7	ESPR Action Plan	To be halved (2030)
Context	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1000s)	2022	2 144	95 284	ESPR Action Plan	15 million reduction (2030)
Context	Employed ICT specialists (1000s)	2022	277.5	9 370.2 ^e	2030 Digital Compass	20 million, with convergence between men and women (2030)
VET for the European Education Area						
Progress	Learners in IVET who benefitted from learning mobility abroad (%) **	2021	0.4	2.1 ^{dV}	Council Rec on VET Skills Agenda	8% (2025)
Context	Average number of foreign languages learned in IVET	2021	1.1	1.2		

Available flags: d - definition differs, e- estimated, V - Cedefop estimate. Special value - not available

* Eurostat data (Adult education survey, special calculation excluding guided on-the-job training)

** Provisional estimates affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Cedefop. [European VET policy dashboard](#)

6. Conclusion

The priorities defined for the French-speaking part of Belgium are addressed through initiatives, programmes and action plans that were either recently designed and implemented, or rely on the reform of existing, reformed organisations. The priorities are in line with EU priorities and largely similar to those set by the Flemish-speaking community ⁽²⁾.

Several measures are in place to boost learners' digital skills, but many measures also target citizens' upskilling overall. In Brussels where a noticeable polarisation in terms of qualifications is observed, the Plan for digital appropriation was approved, aiming at making the capital a truly smart city in terms of skills, as well as in its infrastructure through the multiple projects currently implemented. The government in the French Community has equipped schools throughout the territory with digital devices for all learners.

⁽²⁾ The German-speaking community of Belgium did not present a national implementation plan for VET.

Elevating training initiatives and improving certification levels emerges as a critical priority, strategically tackling the pressing issue of secondary school learners prematurely discontinuing their studies, resulting in a current shortage of skilled labour, and posing a long-term threat. Recognising the rapid evolution of society and the economy amid swift digital and green transitions, a comprehensive approach is imperative. Wallonia actively collaborates with stakeholders such as companies and training providers to craft competitive and inclusively accessible programmes. The modular vocational pathway, conceptualised in 2021, strives to empower every learner, irrespective of their educational trajectory, facilitating seamless enrolment and aiding those on the brink of completing their studies in transitioning toward internships and eventual workforce integration.

The provision of lifelong guidance as a major priority was addressed through the adoption of a new memorandum. A portal and a communications plan were launched in the French-speaking part for interested parties, as well as the implementation of an action plan. Lifelong guidance is supported by being included in legal and regulatory texts that foresee agreements in the entire territory. It is additionally financially supported in the context of the ESF+ programme, and dissemination activities during major annual events in Belgium.

A national reference point for VET has been established to promote quality assurance for both IVET and CVET.

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