

Belgium

Belgium (Flanders) – A Work First Perspective

*Mentor Vsz



A Work First Perspective

- 1. Now we have Explored & Compared used local & national educational VET- programs (used by the partners) focused on (long term) unemployed young adults we have to outline the possibilities to adapt them to a Work first /workplacement approach in the country of the partners (to be formalized with certificates)...**

As in many European countries, Belgium has a broad program of educational VET-programs (see country report). In Flanders, all activities for unemployed jobseekers are coordinated by VDAB, the Flemish Employment Agency. The last few years, they are focusing on (long-term) unemployed youngsters (see 5 key points in guideline) as in the last few years they are becoming a more important target group, as youth unemployment is still high.

The Work First placement approach in Flanders is particularly implemented with the focus on gaining experience on the labour market and not necessarily with going abroad to do so, as the focus is more on disadvantaged groups of youngsters with a big distance to the labour market, and with severe personal circumstances, making it difficult for them to leave home for six to eight weeks.

The last few years, VDAB has used popular media and TV-programs to promote different work placement schemes to youngsters. Some recent examples are:

- TV-program: Brecht zkt werk (Brecht searches a job)
 - <http://www.een.be/programmas/tags/list/iedereen-beroemd/brecht-zkt-werk>
- Website: Ervaring werkt (Experience works)
 - <http://www.ervaringwerkt.be/>
 - <http://www.vdab.be/nieuws/pers/2015/vdab-vrt-voka-unizo-en-adecco-zetten-groots-op-eerste-werkervaring>

The Belgian social security system induces that young school-leavers automatically register as jobseekers to the appropriate regional Public Employment Service (VDAB in Flanders, Actiris in Brussels-Capital Region, Forem in Wallonia, ADG in the German speaking Community) to be eligible (precondition) to social allowances at local level (Municipality) or to inclusion/unemployment benefits at national level. Therefore, although some young people completely escape from PES data systems and registers, the rate is relatively low in Belgium, although there are regional variations. As detailed in the following Implementation Plans, it is considered that a large number of NEETS are registered within a system or register and is therefore the focus of PES.

Regarding young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training and who would not be registered as jobseekers, regional authorities and Public Employment Services need to develop and implement adapted and tailor-made actions, in cooperation with other authorities and inclusion operators and structures. Implementing a partnership approach, this targeted population need to be identified, reached out to, and re-engaged back into education, training, apprenticeship or into work applying personalised inclusion pathways, allowing personal background and specific social and familial situation to be taken into consideration.

Source: <http://www.conseildela jeunesse.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Belgian-Youth-Guarantee-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

2. Now we have Explored this please write down the consequences and steps necessary to start a Work First model with VET-programs that operates within the framework of the local, national social system and laws of each partner country (your own country)

Youth unemployment and inactivity is a major concern for Belgian authorities who welcome the European Youth Guarantee with genuine interest. From January 1st, 2014, the different regional authorities will launch the implementation of the Recommendation by introducing new measures that will ensure to every young person under 25 a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

For many years and particularly since the beginning of the economic, social and financial crisis, Belgian authorities have engaged in structural changes to provide higher quality training and to facilitate the integration of the youth workforce into the labour market, with a dedicated focus on the less qualified population and the youth who left school without qualifications. The Regions worked notably in strengthening the relationships between education policies, training and employment. The objectives are to ensure a better matching between skills and labour market needs alongside with an early intervention giving the opportunity to young people to get in touch with the environment of enterprises (development of apprenticeship education and training, strengthening of vocational training, promotion of technical and scientific skills ...).

The federal government supports the Youth Guarantee mainly through the unemployment benefit system. The specific system for school-leavers who become job-seekers, the integration allowance, is a strong encouragement for this group to register themselves with the regional PES. The federal monitoring within this system and within the broader unemployment benefit system contributes to ensuring their active job search. Moreover, the federal measures to reduce labour costs for young workers (mainly the low skilled) encourage their hiring by employers. Additional federal measures for long-term young unemployed facilitate the work of the regional PESs for this target groups, allowing them to focus on the youth guarantee beneficiaries.

Most recently, on the basis of a Federal initiative launched in 2013 – creating 10.000 workplace integration traineeships for young school leavers with at most a secondary school certificate, regional authorities have adopted the required legislation for the implementation of adapted and tailored-made “Transition traineeships” schemes at regional level.

VDAB has decided to not create a new plan, but to optimize and strengthen the existing Youth Employment Plan so VDAB can offer every youngster (100%) either a job or personal counselling

within 4 months after registration. VDAB will also set up projects with partner organisations to reach youngsters which are neither in training nor being coached.

The added value of this strengthened approach is:

- a better tie-up between education and labour market (school leavers plan – co-operation between the ministry of work and the ministry of education)
- a better information exchange between the several organisations/agencies/associations/services/ ... who works with youngsters
- projects with partner organisations in major cities to ‘find’ youngsters which are never register as jobseekers, and lead them towards the VDAB services
- workplace learning (IBO, internships, apprenticeships, instap, ...) becomes a standard module of the trajectory of unqualified youngsters – co-operation with sectors to create forms of workplace learning.
- specific tools for high-skilled jobseekers: e-counselling, website, chat, apps for searching jobs...
- further developing an acquired skill recognition program (EVC) which gives jobseekers the opportunity to prove to an employer they are properly skilled for the job (in collaboration with several partners and the ministry of education). Jobseekers will attain a certificate after certain tests and vocational training.
- Stakeholder management: VDAB wants to involve and to get to know the specific needs of youngsters so we can customize our services. VDAB will work more and more in partnering with organisations that have a strong link with young people and good experience in working with them, the counsellors and instructors find the chance to build upon this expertise to adjust their working methods to the needs of youngsters. To stimulate direct participation VDAB organise digital Youth Panels in collaboration with the Flemish Youth Counsel. These panels function as a barometer: what do youngsters find important in the world of work and what service do they want VDAB to offer them?
- greater involvement of subregional and local administrations: cooperation between VDAB, social networks, talent houses (talentenhuisen), (vocational) schools and CPA's.

Source: <http://www.conseildela jeunesse.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Belgian-Youth-Guarantee-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

See also Annex: Belgian Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan