



spotlight on VET

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VET in Belgium

Belgium is a federal State comprising three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) and three communities (Flemish community – BEFL, French community – BEFR, and German-speaking community – BEDG) (1). Despite multiple authorities responsible for education and training and diverging education and training systems, there is a political coherence which, as defined in the 2014 national reform programme, aims to reduce early leaving from education and training, increase rates of participation in lifelong training, as well as increase and value qualifications, and reduce inequalities within each region. At all levels, vocational and educational training (VET) policies closely involve social partners in a tradition of social dialogue.

VET systems cover compulsory education, higher education, adult education programmes, programmes alternating work and learning, and vocational training organised by public authorities for job-seekers, employees and entrepreneurs. The three communities for education and regions for vocational training and employment organise these systems.

- Compulsory education covers pupils and students aged 6 to 18 years. VET pathways exist for pupils aged 14 and over. These take the form of technical or vocational secondary education programmes. Technical secondary education programmes prepare students for accredited training and/or high-level technical education with award of a higher secondary education diploma. Vocational secondary education programmes focus on practice to prepare learners for labour market entry. Both types of programmes lead to a qualification certificate (after the sixth year) or a higher secondary education diploma following successful completion of a seventh year in the vocational track.
- Learners aged 15 or over can also opt for part-time programmes, alternating work and learning, organised either by schools or by public training centres. The first type of work-based learning is organised by centres (schools) for part-time education. In these programmes, learners follow general and technical courses at school two days

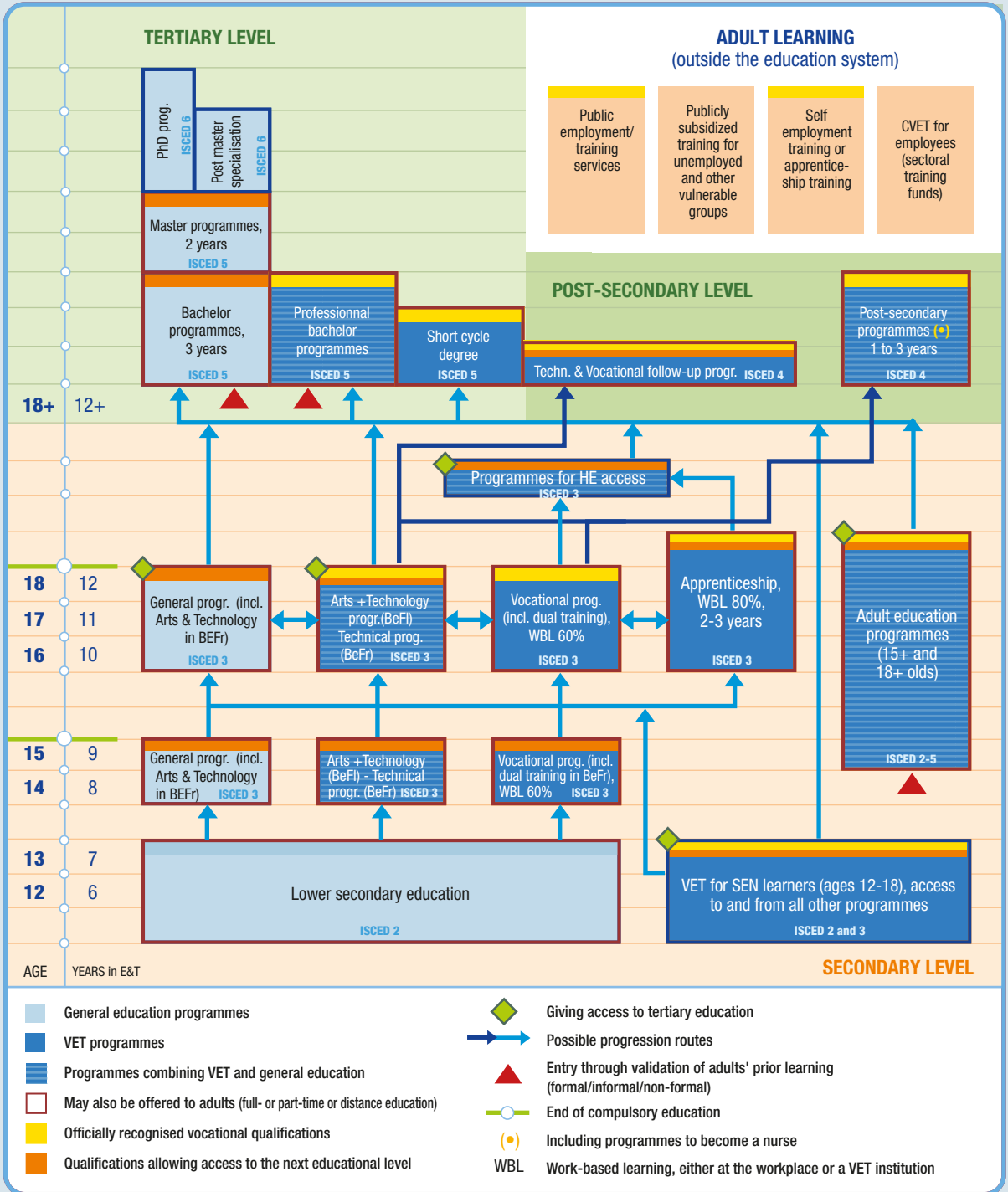
a week and work in a company the three other days. The second type of work-based learning concerns apprenticeships and entrepreneurial training programmes managed by Syntra Vlaanderen (Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming) in BEFL, the IFAPME (Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises) in Wallonia; the SFPME (Service formation pour les petites et moyennes entreprises) in Brussels and the IAWM (Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen) in BEDG. In these programmes, learners acquire general and occupation-related knowledge and practical skills at the training centre for one to one-and-a-half days and the rest of the week training in a company. The system is oriented towards becoming skilled workers and preparing for self-employed professions. Over 18 years-old, learners have access to entrepreneurship programmes.

- From 18 years onwards, individuals have a wide range of programmes to choose from, offered by the education system and by public or private VET providers. To continue in higher professional, technical or academic education, it is, however, necessary to hold a higher secondary education diploma. People who have failed to obtain this diploma can follow adult education programmes which lead to secondary education qualifications, and in some cases also to higher professional qualifications, (mostly bachelor level in BEFR or associate degree in BEFL).

Vocational training offered by public authorities leads to partial or full qualifications, or relates to specific subject areas, such as language learning. It is offered by the VDAB (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en beroepsopleiding) in Flanders and Brussels, the FOREM (Office wallon de l'emploi et de la formation) in Wallonia, Bruxelles Formation (Institut bruxellois de la formation professionnelle) in Brussels and the ADG (Arbeitsamt der DG) in BEDG. Training is organised by their own services or in cooperation with public or private VET centres, subsidised or not.

(1) In the text the three communities will be referred to by these acronyms.

VET in Belgium's education and training systems



NB: ISCED 1997 was used on the chart. Conversion to ISCED 2011 is ongoing.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Belgium.

Distinctive features of VET

Due to the institutional structure involving regions and language communities and the political responsibilities incumbent upon each entity, vocational education and training policy developed by the Belgian authorities is based on the following:

- the educational system, compulsory up to 18 years of age, is made up of a system of school networks (public, private, confessional and non-confessional) pursuing a common general objective (defined by minimal attainment targets) with common occupational profiles and common VET standards, while enjoying a certain autonomy. This results in freedom of education offer and promotes free educational choice for parents, students and trainees;
- strategy, policies and all measures involving employment and VET are negotiated with the social partners, outcomes are formalised in interprofessional agreements. The social partners are directly involved in organisation of programmes alternating work and training and continuous vocational training through framework agreements;
- different socioeconomic realities in the regions mean that Flanders, Wallonia, the BEDG and Brussels-capital region have different objectives and priorities. These are then formalised in government declarations which deal with, for example, language learning, new technologies, sustainable employment, training for young people or matching the workforce to needs of the labour market.

To promote mobility within VET systems, skills and competence validation mechanisms have been implemented, as well as common occupational profiles and common VET standards followed by all VET providers. The first mechanism allows individuals to have non-formal and informal skills and competences acquired during their career validated and recognised. Both, therefore, ensure permeability of VET systems, allowing for flexibility in choosing career and training pathways.

Challenges and policy responses

- While participation in education in Belgium has increased in the past two decades, early leaving from education and training remains important as this concerns 11% of pupils nationally, and up to 18 % in Brussels. To address it, the ties between education, the labour market and vocational training are constantly being strengthened.
- Due to the three different instruction languages as well as migration flows, which give Belgium a status of 'host country', knowing the language in which programmes are offered remains a key challenge in all regions, notably Brussels, to ensure better integration of new arrivals.
- Participation in lifelong learning remains low in Belgium. Efforts have been made to expand adult education, literacy, language learning and new technologies programmes. The policies additionally aim at increasing synergy between the world of work and that of education, in addition to increased involvement of companies in reaching their obligation to devote 1.9% of the wage cost to support lifelong learning programmes.
- Increased mobility of the working population is a shared priority in all regions. Interregional agreements support geographical mobility of individuals, increased fluency in national languages and interoperator complementarity.
- Following the BEDG example, boosting training programmes alternating work and learning has become a priority in all regions and communities. Expanding work-based learning requires more promotion of this learning pathway and adapting it to increase its use in higher education (professional bachelor and master degrees).



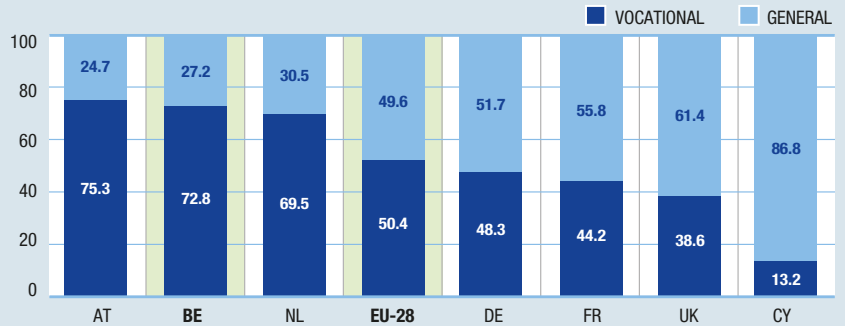
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Education and training in figures

Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

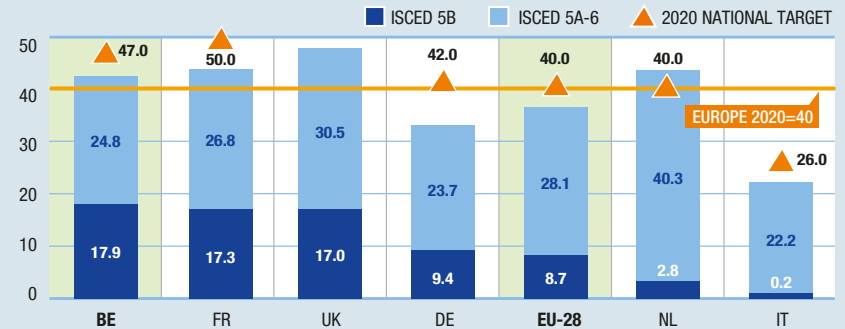
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2012



Source: Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 30.5.2014.

Tertiary education by type

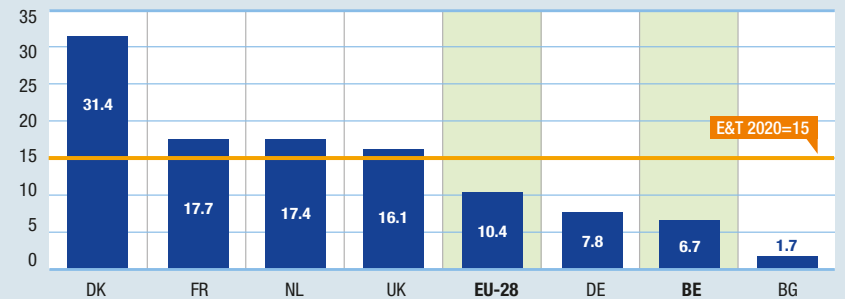
% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2013



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

Lifelong learning

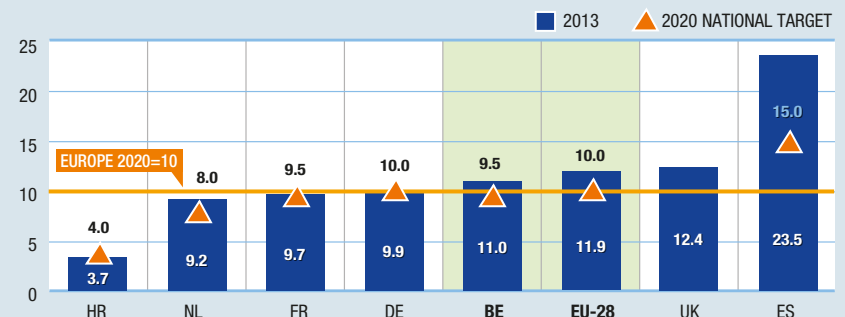
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2013



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

Early leavers from education and training

% of early leavers from education and training, 2013



Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

Further information

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www.refernet.be	Refernet Belgium national website
www.ond.vlaanderen.be (BEFL) www.enseignement.be (BEFR) www.bildungsserver.be (BEDG)	Ministries of Education
www.leforem.be www.ifapme.be	<i>In BEFR /Wallonia</i> Public employment and vocational service Agency offering apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training
www.actiris.be www.bruxellesformation.be www.vdab.be	<i>In the Brussels Capital-Region</i> Public employment service Vocational training service for French-speaking or for Flemish-speaking learners
www.efp-bxl.be www.syntrabrussel.be	Agencies offering apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training for French-speaking or Flemish-speaking learners
www.vdab.be www.syntravlaanderen.be	<i>In Flanders</i> Public employment and vocational service Agencies offering apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training
www.adg.be www.iawm.be	<i>In the German-speaking Community</i> Public employment and vocational service Agencies offering apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Belgium.



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