

## VET in Belgium (BE-DE)



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. Despite multiple authorities being responsible for education, training and employment, as well as diverging VET systems, there is political consensus on specific issues. At all levels, VET policies involve social partners in a tradition of social dialogue.

In the BE-DE system, the German-speaking Community is in charge of education, training, and employment. Compulsory education covers learners aged 5 to 18. VET is offered at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels.

Formal upper secondary education can be accessed from age 14; it lasts four years and is offered in two branches (nationally referred to as full-time secondary education): general education and VET. The latter comprises:

- technical school-based programmes that lead to an upper secondary education diploma and a VET qualification;
- vocational school-based programmes that are more practice-based and focus on preparing learners for labour market entry. These lead to a VET qualification only, but graduates can follow a one-year upper secondary programme (nationally referred to as seventh year) providing an upper secondary education diploma and access to tertiary education.

Learners can switch from one pathway to the other or even continue with general education or apprenticeship.

Graduates of these upper secondary education programmes can follow a three-year nursing programme at post-secondary level.

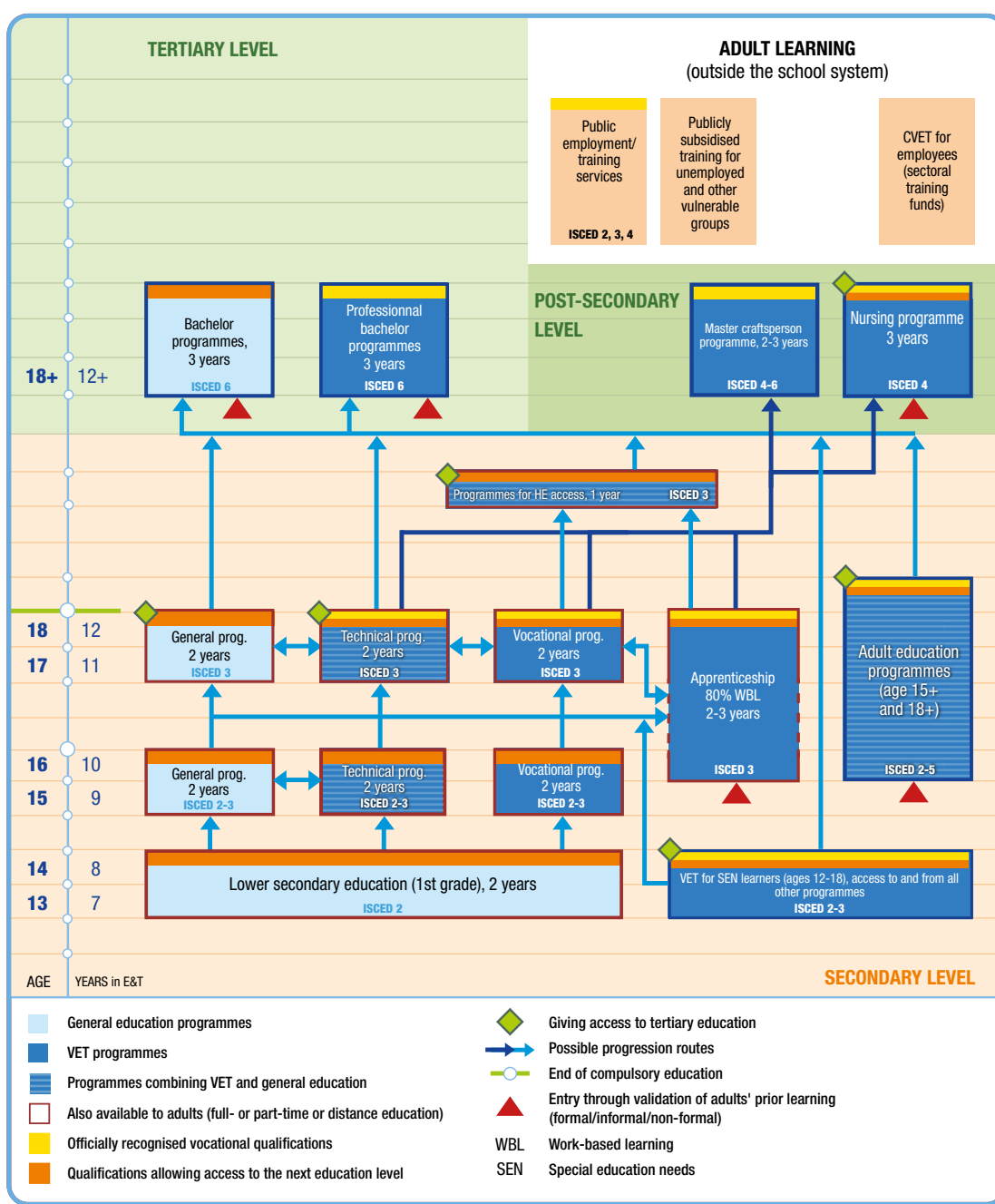
Besides these formal VET programmes, the regional training provider IAWM (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen*) offers two- to three-year apprenticeship programmes to learners from age 15 onwards to become a skilled worker. These programmes incorporate one day per week of general, occupational, and practical courses at school and four days of work-based learning in a company, based on a contract. Apprenticeship programmes are very popular, socially highly recognised, and supported by many stakeholders.

Graduates with a certain level of professional experience can follow a two- to three-year master craftsperson programme at post-secondary level, which qualifies them to become self-employed professionals and train apprentices themselves.

Adult education is partially accessible from age 15 (individual modules/courses) and fully from age 18. Course participants may obtain a recognised diploma, qualification or certificate from primary to tertiary level. Adult learners can choose among a wide range of programmes at secondary level, which can lead up to an upper secondary education diploma. Adult programmes are offered by the formal education system and by public and private VET providers.

At tertiary level, graduates with an upper secondary education diploma can access three-year professional bachelor programmes, offered in various professional fields such as primary school teacher or accountant. Due to the small size of the German-speaking Community, professional master programmes are not offered. However, students can obtain a master degree in a nearby university in another Community (e.g. Université de Liège), the Netherlands (e.g. Maastricht University) or Germany (e.g. RWTH Aachen).

The public employment and training service ADG (*Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*) offers vocational training, allowing learners to gain partial or full qualifications, or to be trained in specific subject areas such as language learning. Such training mainly targets jobseekers and employees and is sometimes provided in cooperation with public or private VET providers.



NB: ISCED-P 2011 and EQF referencing has not yet been done. ISCED-2011 one digit code used in the chart is estimated by the Ministry of Education of the German-speaking Community.  
 Source: Cedefop 2020, adapted from *Spotlight on VET - 2018 compilation*.

## VET in Belgium (BE-FL)



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). In the Brussels Region both BE-FR and BE-FL systems coexist. Despite multiple authorities being responsible for education, training and employment, as well as diverging VET systems, there is political consensus on specific issues. At all levels, VET policies involve social partners in a tradition of social dialogue. The Flemish Government is in charge of education and training and employment in Flanders.

Compulsory education covers learners aged 5 to 18. VET starts at age 14 as school-based programmes (nationally referred to as full-time education) and from age 15 onwards it is also offered in the form of dual learning programmes combining company and school-based learning (referred to as part-time education). These are organised by schools and based on a contract with the company involved. VET programmes last four years and comprise:

- technical programmes, which combine technical-theoretical classes and practical lessons. They lead to an upper secondary education diploma including a VET qualification such as hospitality;
- vocational programmes that are more practice-based and aim at direct employment. After successful completion of an additional year (follow-up vocational programme), an upper secondary education diploma is awarded.

Another apprenticeship scheme is organised by the regional training providers. In these apprenticeship programmes, learners follow general and technical courses at school or at a training centre (one or two days per week).

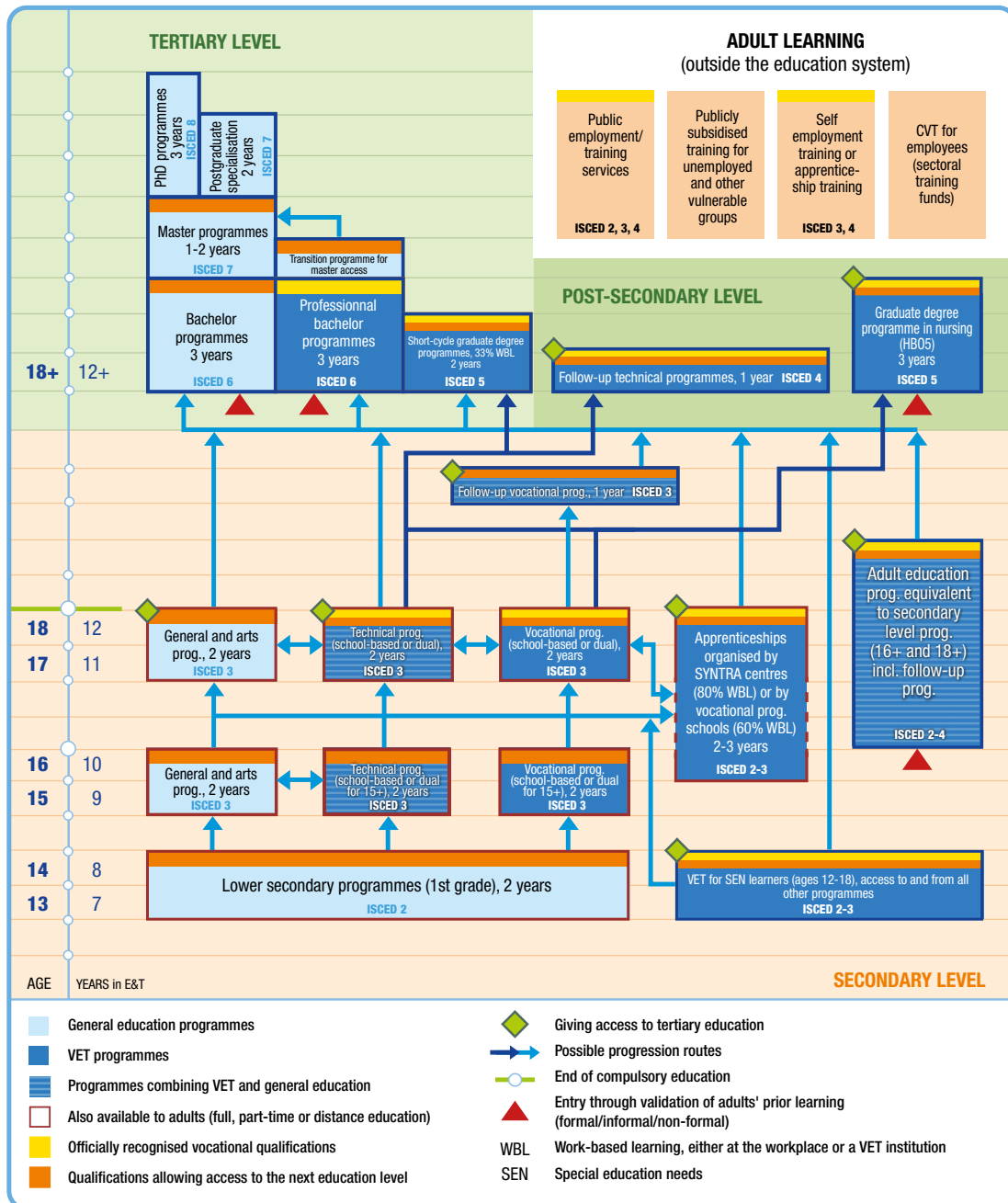
The other days (three or four), are for work-based learning in a company. Graduates receive a vocational qualification and an upper secondary education diploma. These programmes are also accessible to young adults up to age 25.

Adults over 18 can choose among a wide range of programmes offered by the formal adult education system and by public and private VET providers, including entrepreneurial training programmes.

At post-secondary level, one-year specialisation programmes are offered as follow-up technical programmes, as well as a three-year nursing (HBO5) graduate programme.

An upper secondary education diploma is necessary to enter tertiary education. People who have failed to get this diploma can obtain it via formal adult education programmes later. An exception is the two-year short-cycle programmes (two years, 33% WBL) which can be accessed by VET programme

graduates. Professional bachelor programmes (three years) are another profession-oriented programme offered in Flanders; graduates can progress to a master degree after following a one-year transition programme. Higher education is accessible to adults either by full-time pathways, part-time pathways or distance learning. Public services organise vocational training for jobseekers, employees and entrepreneurs. This leads to partial or full professional qualifications, or relates to specific subject areas, such as language learning. It is offered by SYNTRA (for entrepreneurs) and by the Flemish public employment service VDAB, which also organises some training in co-operation with public or private VET providers.



NB: ISCED-P 2011. Assignment of programmes to ISCED classification is under revision, so only the first digit in ISCED coding is displayed. EQF levels on qualifications are being discussed.  
 Source: Cedefop 2020, adapted from *Spotlight on VET - 2018 compilation*.

## VET in Belgium (BE-FR)



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). In the Brussels Region, due to its bilingual status, both BE-FR and BE-FL systems coexist.

In the BE-FR VET system, 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 provisions. 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.

Compulsory education in Belgium covers learners aged 5 to 18. VET starts at the age of 14 as school-based (nationally referred to as full-time education) and from age 15 alternance VET schemes are offered (nationally referred to as part-time programmes).

Upper secondary education lasts four years and is offered in two branches; general education (nationally referred to as transition education) and VET (nationally called qualification education). The latter comprises:

- technical or artistic qualification programmes that lead to upper secondary education diploma and a VET qualification such as electronics and automation technician; graduates have direct access to tertiary education;
- vocational qualification programmes are more practice-based and aim at direct employment. They lead to a VET qualification such as electrician/industrial installer.

At post-secondary level, one-year technical follow-up programmes (called seventh year) provide access to tertiary education and/or a specialisation.

All the above upper and post-secondary programmes can be delivered as school-based or dual programmes. Dual programmes offer alternance between two days learning at school and three days in a company based on a contract.

Besides these formal VET programmes (offered by schools) regional dual training services organise apprenticeship programmes for learners aged 15 to 25. These programmes follow the alternation scheme of one day in the training centre and four days in a company based on a contract. These regional training services are:

- IFAPME (*Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises*) in Wallonia;
- SFPME (*Service formation pour les petites et moyennes entreprises*) in Brussels.

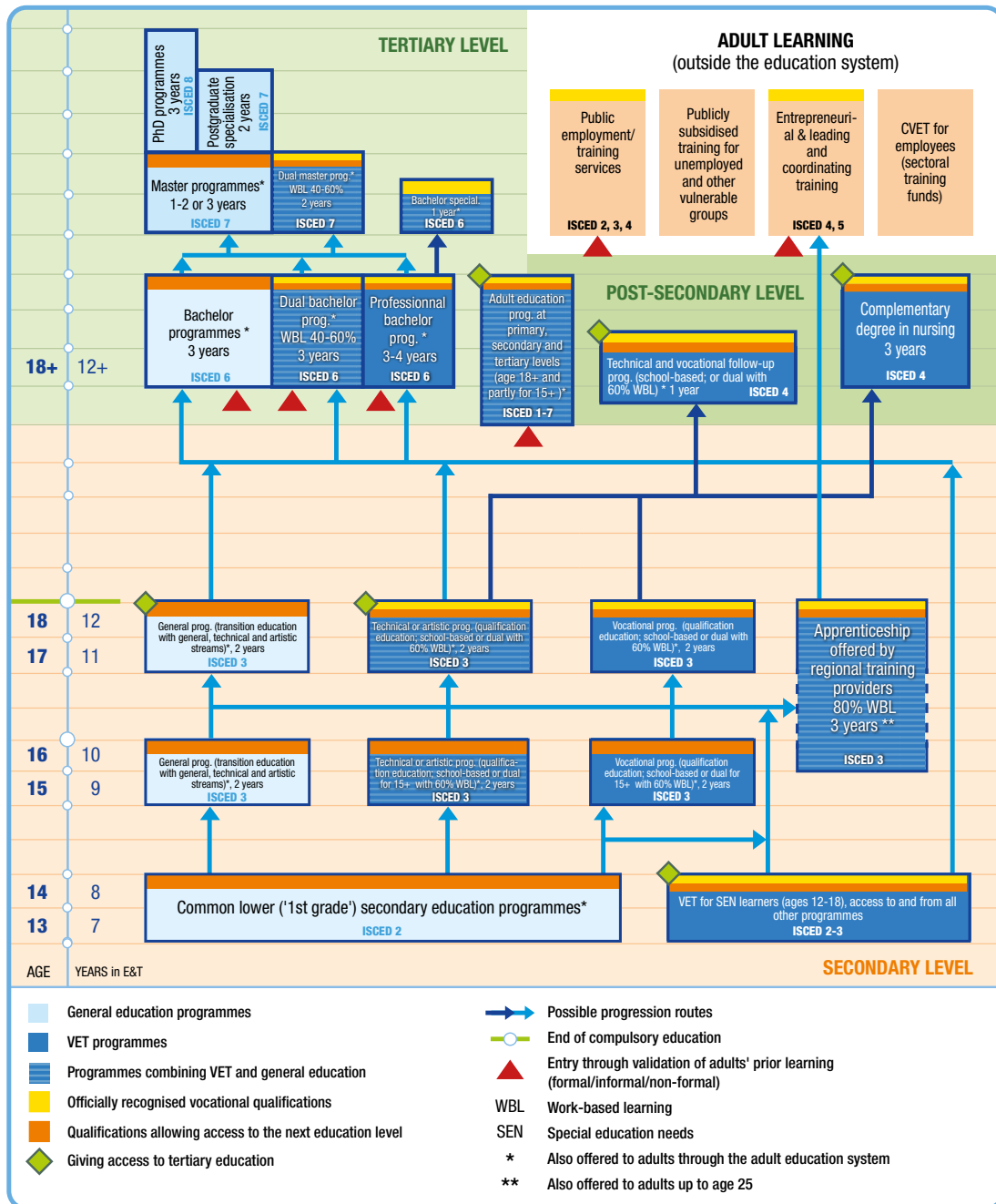
Certified apprentices can progress to entrepreneurial or to leading and coordinating training programmes, offered by these public services to adults from age 18 onwards.

An upper secondary education diploma is necessary to enter tertiary education. Professional and dual bachelor graduates can enter the labour market or progress to master degrees. Professional bachelors are school-based, include an end-of-studies internship, and can be followed by a one-year bachelor specialisation programme. Dual programmes are similar to professional bachelor or academic masters but include an alternation scheme (two to three days in a company) with the signing of a tripartite contract.

The adult education system offers formal education programmes at all levels and includes the same qualifications as in the 'regular' system. It also offers specific qualifications which are only available in this system. Programmes follow a modular approach and courses offer a flexible time schedule. The adult education system is accessible to all adults, irrespective of initial educational career, and so is the main reskilling, upskilling and second-chance mechanism of the formal education system. Regional public employment and/or vocational training services organise vocational training for the unemployed and employees. This leads to partial or full qualifications, or relates to specific subject areas, such as language learning. The public services are:

- FOREM (*Office Wallon de l'emploi et de la formation*) in Wallonia;
- Bruxelles Formation, in Brussels.

Training is organised by their own services or in cooperation with public or private VET providers. Validation of adults' prior learning (formal/ informal/non-formal) is well developed in BE-FR and offered to jobseekers and workers, as well as to adult and higher education learners.



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 Source: Cedefop 2020, adapted from *Spotlight on VET - 2018 compilation*.



## VET in Belgium <sup>(1)</sup>

### Distinctive features

Belgium compulsory schooling duration is long. From 2020/21, children are required to attend school from the age of five until 18, unlike most European countries where compulsory schooling ends at age 16. This makes the duration of compulsory education and training in Belgium among the highest in Europe. Reducing the age for starting obligatory schooling is based on findings that participation in pre-primary education is a strong protector against early school leaving.

Another distinctive feature is the high number of actors in the VET system. This is split between the three Regions (Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia) and the three Communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking), which overlap but do not coincide. Added to this, the school system is also split into multiple networks (public and subsidised private education), each of which is required to pursue common objectives, including common certification, common occupational profiles and VET standards, while benefiting from a certain autonomy in their own organisation.

The plurality of political actors can lead to divergent political priorities and strategies in the country. Policies are formalised in several government strategies and plans drawn up in each Region, dealing with, for example, language learning, new technologies, sustainable employment, training for young people or matching workforce skills to labour market needs. Though examples of strong cooperation exist within the individual Communities, collaboration between the Communities themselves mostly takes place through informal talks. On selected topics (for example, the coronavirus crisis has led to further collaboration in education) or when consensus is needed (such as positions to take at EU level), communication is carried out in a more coordinated way. There are, however, also some common points of reference for the country. The 2020 National reform programme sets a common goal to improve the performance and inclusiveness of the country's education and training systems, and better tackle skills mismatches.

The concept of 'school basin' is also a distinctive element, created and developed in BE-FR. There are 10 basins corresponding to 10 geographic areas, which face specific socioeconomic and education challenges. Though VET is, by nature, decentralised in Belgium, this is perhaps more so in the French Community compared with Flanders: the Flemish Region and Community are represented by the same parliament and government – and hence the same administration – whereas these bodies are split between the Regions and the Community in BE-FR, leading to a stronger need for collaboration on the ground. This collaboration can be observed in several agreements, such as that on the validation of competences, renewed in March 2019, the OFFA, which coordinates dual learning, and FormaForm, which brings together organisations responsible for vocational training. The BE-DE Community is different still, with some regional competences linked to employment.

The high number of different political actors involved in the VET system sometimes makes cooperation between partners challenging. Agreements regarding the validation of competences are split between Communities, and more coordination is needed to ensure competences are recognised nationwide. Different legislative frameworks due to policy choices can cause complications for pupils, students, or employers who are seeking interregional educational mobility.

Learners leaving the education system without a certificate/diploma of secondary education have the possibility to enter adult education. This is a parallel, modularised formal education system that allows adults to obtain academic and professional qualifications at primary and secondary levels in all Communities, including – apart from BE-FL – at tertiary level. The system is central to lifelong learning because it recognises skills acquired from formal, non-formal or informal learning in pursuing a learning path leading to qualifications corresponding to those provided through full-time education.

Another distinctive feature is the strategic importance of social partners. Strategy, policies and all measures involving employment and VET are negotiated with social partners, leading to formal sectoral agreements. Social partners are directly involved in organising programmes of alternating work and education, and continuous vocational training through framework agreements.

### Main challenges and policy responses

Despite the different socioeconomic and education contexts within Belgium, the VET systems face many similar challenges.

The coexistence of three official languages in Belgium remains a key challenge in all Regions, also having an impact on interregional mobility. Knowledge of the language of instruction is an important matter within VET, especially for better integration of newcomers. In response to this need, in Brussels for instance, jobseekers are offered language job vouchers to improve their language skills and employment chances.

Lifelong learning is also a major challenge, as participation in adult education and continuing education/training remains comparatively low in Belgium. Currently, low participation (especially in Wallonia at 6.6% in 2019) and low involvement of companies in training results in a lack of qualified work force among the already employed people to respond to the evolution of needs. This is particularly the case in relation to ICT skills and jobs, which results in companies being underprepared for tackling the digitalisation of the workplace. Efforts are also made to expand the offer of adult education, literacy and language learning. Policies aim at increasing synergy between the worlds of work and education. For example, until 2017 com-

<sup>(1)</sup> This part is based on information collected by Fondazione Brodolini under Cedefop's service contract No 2020/0140

panies were obliged to allocate 1.9% of wage costs to support lifelong learning programmes; a new inter-professional agreement signed by social partners from the private sector has since then established the rule that each employee has the right to five days of training per year. Some measures have also been implemented to increase or maintain the number of employees aged 45+ in companies. Improving the provision of, and access to, lifelong learning is high on the political agenda.

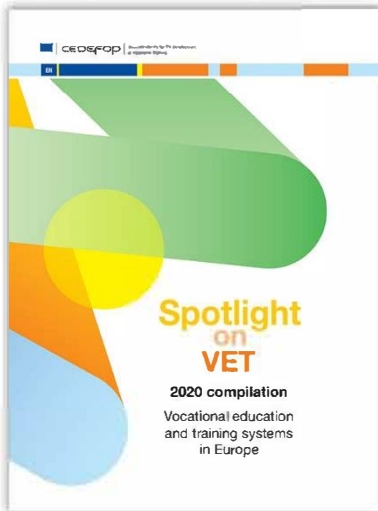
The need for digital transformation in terms of training provision and labour markets was underlined by the coronavirus crisis. Due to lack of equipment and of adequate competences in distance learning (among both teachers and students) the provision of distance learning faced some difficulties. The Communities introduced several measures to tackle these challenges. In BE-FR, FormaForm and the Institute for in-service training (IFC) developed new courses to help teachers adapt to online teaching. In Flanders, support for teachers was provided via Klasse (a magazine for teachers of the Flemish education ministry) and KlasCement (an education portal of the Flemish education ministry where teaching materials and learning resources are shared by teachers and students following teacher training). These changes are expected to have a long-term impact on teaching methods. From a wider perspective, initiatives such as GO4Brussels 2030 and Digital Wallonia are aiming to build towards the future of work.

Youth unemployment remains a major concern for Belgian authorities, a challenge which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis, as the so-called 'Covid generation' is being severely affected by the lack of internships and higher dropout rates due to distance learning. Dual education is often promoted in the Regions and Communities as a measure to reduce inactivity among young people, but mainly as a learning path that makes alternate learning possible for more young people, with the goal of improving their qualifications. There is already a long tradition of dual learning in the German-speaking Community, which is now being expanded to higher education. In BE-FL, in 2019, a new system of dual learning was implemented, allowing secondary learners aged 15 and older to combine their studies with training at a company. Different tools and campaigns have been developed to promote this new method of work-based learning, which will be extended into higher and adult education in the future. The range of training opportunities and the number of students involved is increasing every year. It will replace the two current apprenticeship schemes and encompass selected professional fields, which are covered in technical and vocational upper secondary education programmes. In BE-FR, the French-language Office for Dual Training (*Office francophone pour la formation en alternance* – OFFA) was created to coordinate and promote dual training. Dual education was also made possible in higher education; it has been available in both bachelor and master programmes since 2016.

Giving renewed value to VET is considered a shared challenge, and the three Communities are aiming to improve the

performance of their education systems. In the Flemish Community these reforms include improvements to the school curriculum, a thorough review of teacher training, language measures and language integration pathways, as well as preventing early school leaving. At the same time, the government in Flanders continues to work on the reform and update of the education curriculum. In the French Community, the decree relating to steering the system sets seven objectives for improving outcomes, student progress and the equity of the system, and encourages all schools to set individual objectives and action plans to contribute to these overarching objectives. The provisions relating to the reinforcement of nursery education, the language of learning and individual support for pupils in difficulty, which came into force in September 2019, also aim to increase pupil performance and reduce failure. From the perspective of greater equity in the system, the reform removes early selection mechanisms and the relegation of the most socioeconomically fragile students. In the German-speaking Community, a range of projects are planned, such as the promotion of lifelong language awareness, multilingualism, citizenship education, media education, integration of people with special needs and with a migrant background, technical and vocational training, support for teachers, and the design of modern learning environments.





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