



spotlight on VET BELGIUM

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). Despite multiple authorities responsible for education and training, and diverging education and training systems, there is political consensus. This, as defined in the 2014 national reform programme, aims to reduce early leaving from education and training, increase lifelong learning participation, increase access to and value of qualifications, and reduce inequalities within each region. At all levels, vocational education and training (VET) policies involve social partners in a tradition of social dialogue.

VET systems cover compulsory and higher education, adult education programmes, programmes alternating work and learning, and vocational training organised by public services for job-seekers, employees and entrepreneurs. The three communities for education and the three regions for vocational training and employment are in charge of these systems.

- Compulsory education covers learners aged 6 to 18. VET pathways exist for those aged 14 and over: these take the form of technical or vocational secondary education programmes. Lower technical programmes prepare students for high-level technical education which awards a higher secondary education diploma and a VET qualification. Vocational secondary education programmes focus on preparing learners for labour market entry. These programmes lead to a qualification (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 services. In programmes organised by schools, learners follow general and technical courses at school two days a week. The other three days they learn through work in a company. Public training services offer apprenticeships and entrepreneurial training programmes.

The providers are:

- Syntra Vlaanderen (Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming) in BEFL;
- 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;
- IAWM (Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen) in BEDG.

In these programmes, learners acquire general and occupational knowledge and practical skills at the training services for one to one-and-a-half days and are trained the rest of the week in a company. This enables learners to become skilled workers and self-employed professionals. Learners over 18 have access to entrepreneurship programmes.

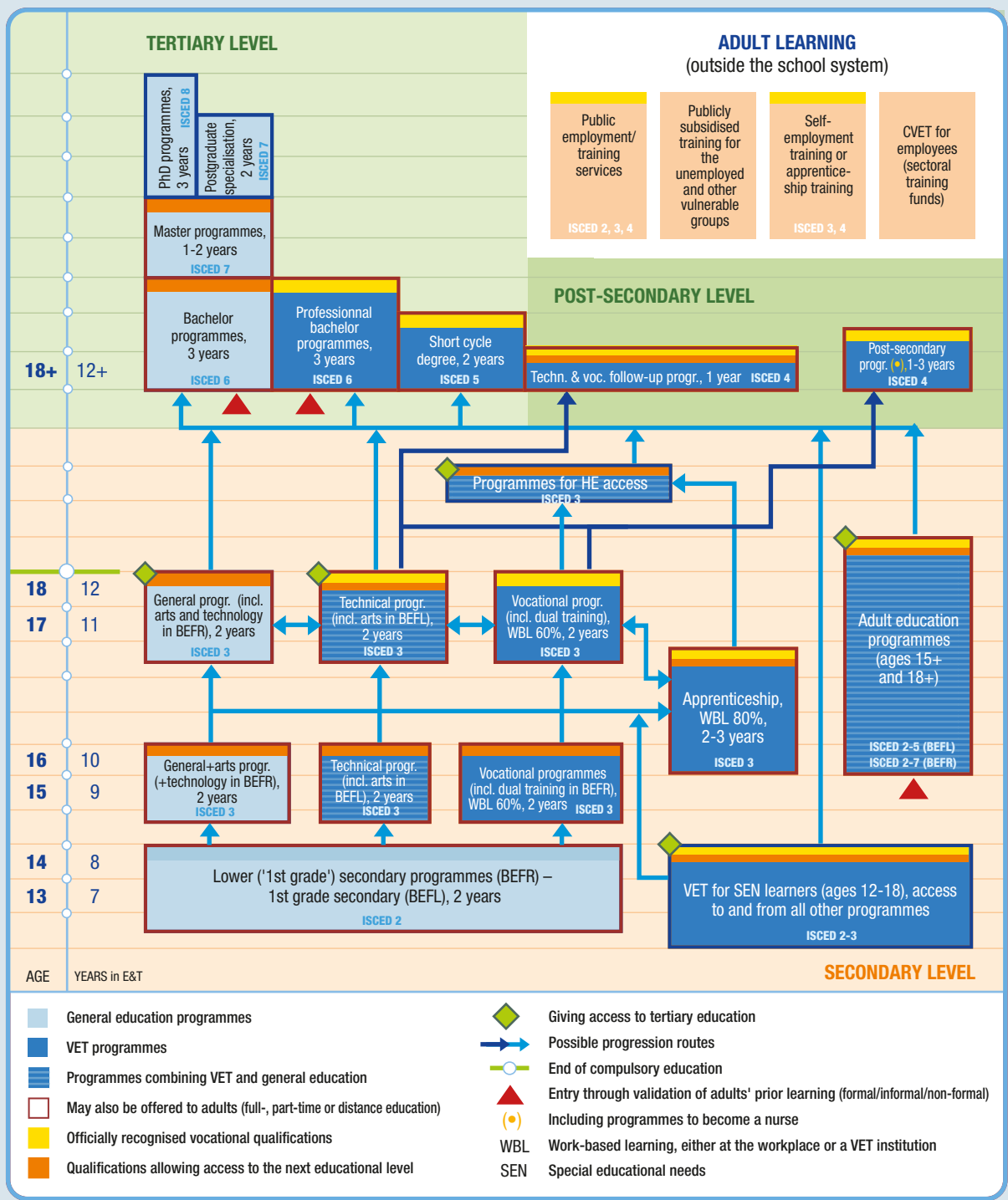
- Adults over 18 have a wide range of programmes to choose from, offered by the education system and by public and private VET providers. A higher secondary education diploma is necessary to continue in higher professional, technical or academic education. People who have failed to obtain this diploma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

Vocational training offered by public employment and training services leads to partial or full qualifications, or relates to specific subject areas, such as language learning. It is offered by:

- VDAB (Vlaamse dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding) in Flanders and Brussels;
- FOREM (Office Wallon de l'emploi et de la formation) in Wallonia;
- Bruxelles Formation (Institut Bruxellois de la formation professionnelle) in Brussels;
- ADG (Arbeitsamt der DG) in BEDG.

Training is organised by their own services or in cooperation with public or private VET providers.

VET in Belgium's education and training systems



NB: ISCED-P 2011, only one digit is used, as this is a simplified chart representing VET in the three regions.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Belgium.

Distinctive features of VET

A major influence on how VET is organised in Belgium comes from the institutional structure, with its regions and language communities and their political responsibilities. Distinctive features of the VET system are:

- VET providers in the education system are part of school networks (public and subsidised private education). They pursue common objectives (defined by minimum attainment targets) and use common occupation profiles and VET standards, but enjoy some autonomy. This results in, and promotes, freedom of education choice for learners and their parents;
- strategy, policies and all measures involving employment and VET are negotiated with social partners, leading to formal interprofessional agreements. Social partners are directly involved in organising 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 the Brussels-capital region have different objectives and priorities. These are formalised in government strategies and plans which deal with, for example, language learning, new technologies, sustainable employment, training for young people or matching workforce skills to labour market needs.

Skills and competence validation mechanisms help promote mobility in VET, along with common occupation profiles and VET standards applied by all VET providers. The first mechanism allows individuals to have non-formal and informal skills and competences that have been acquired during their career validated and recognised. Both ensure permeability of VET systems, allowing for flexibility in choosing career and training pathways.

Challenges and policy responses

- While the education level of the population has rapidly increased in the past two decades, early leaving from education and training remains a challenge (affecting 11% of learners nationally, and 20% in Brussels in 2013). To address early leaving, the links between education, labour market and vocational training are constantly being strengthened.
- The three different languages of the country and migration flows require knowledge of the language of instruction; this remains a key challenge in all regions, along with ensuring better integration of new arrivals. In Brussels, jobseekers are offered language job vouchers to improve their language skills and employment chances.
- Participation in lifelong learning is still low in Belgium. Efforts are made to expand the offer of adult education, literacy, language learning and ICT programmes. Policies also aim at increasing synergy between the world of work and that of education. Companies are obliged to allocate 1.9% of wage costs to support lifelong learning programmes. Employees have the right to paid education leave up to 120 hours per year and this option is becoming more popular. The employer cannot refuse and receives partial reimbursement of wage costs.
- Increased mobility of the working population is a shared priority in all regions. Interregional agreements support geographic mobility of individuals, increased fluency in national languages and complementarity of public employment services.
- Youth unemployment is a major concern for Belgian authorities. While there is a long tradition of dual learning in BEDG, this trend is being promoted in other regions and communities as one measure to avoid inactivity among young people.



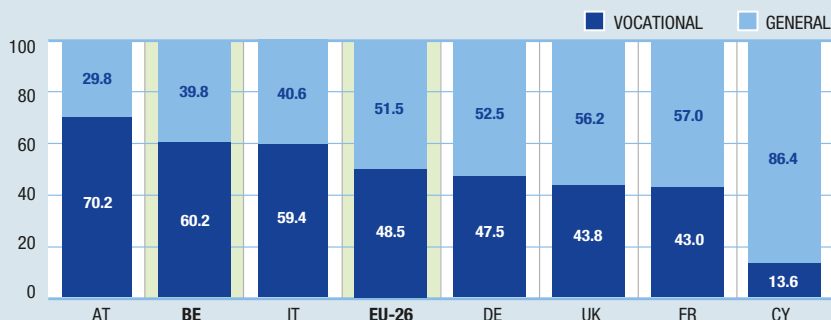
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Education and training in figures

Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes

% of all students in upper secondary education, 2013

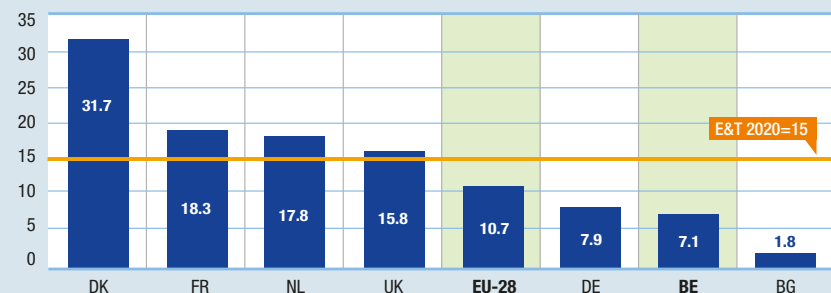


NB: 48.5% is the provisional weighted EU average for 2013 based on available country data (26 countries).

Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 22.7.2015.

Lifelong learning

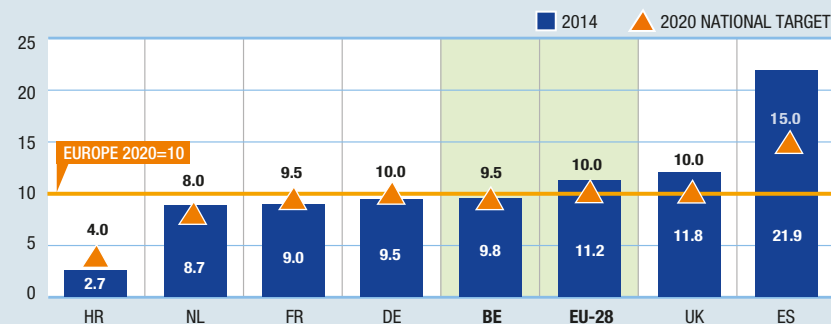
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2014



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 22.7.2015.

Early leavers from education and training

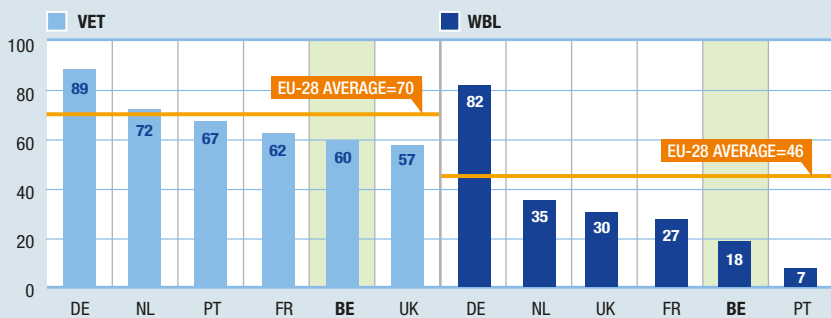
% of early leavers from education and training, 2014



NB: Break in time series in all countries; low reliability in HR; definition for national target differs in DE, NL and ES.

Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 22.7.2015.

Share of employees (aged 24-65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification, and whose highest level of education involved some learning in a workplace (% , 2014)



NB: VET: respondents of the survey described their highest qualification as vocational;

WBL: studies involved some learning at a workplace (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, other forms of work-based learning).

Source: Cedefop European skills and jobs survey, 2014.



Further information

- Cedefop ReferNet Belgium (2015). *VET in Europe: country report Belgium*. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/2014_CR_BE.pdf
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www.refernet.be	ReferNet Belgium national website
www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be (BEFL) www.enseignement.be (BEFR) www.bildungsserver.be (BEDG)	Ministries of education
www.leforem.be www.ifapme.be	<i>In Wallonia (BEFR)</i> Public employment and vocational service Public service for apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training
www.actiris.be www.bruxellesformation.be www.vdab.be	<i>In the Brussels capital-region (BEFR/FL)</i> Public employment service Vocational training service for French-speaking or for Flemish-speaking learners
www.cocof.be/sfpme www.syntravlaanderen.be	Public service for apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training for French-speaking or Flemish-speaking learners
www.vdab.be www.syntravlaanderen.be	<i>In Flanders (BEFL)</i> Public employment and vocational service Public service for apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training
www.adg.be www.iawm.be	<i>In the German-speaking community (BEDG)</i> Public employment and vocational service Public service for apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Belgium.



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