



European Employment Policy Observatory (EEPO)

Ad hoc request

Country fiches on skills governance in the Member States

Belgium

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1 Imbalances in the labour market

According to Eurostat, Belgium is characterized by an employment rate for the age group 20-64 of 67.3 % in 2014. Although there is an increase compared to 2005 (66.5 %), this level is below national (73.2 %) and European (75 %) targets. Furthermore, this national rate masks significant differences between regions. The employment rate was 71.9 % in Flanders in 2013, 62.3 % in Wallonia and only 56.8 % in Brussels. The Brussels-Capital Region also experienced a decline of its employment rate between 2009 and 2013 (-2.7 percentage points) while those in the Flemish Region (+0.4) and the Walloon Region (+0.5) experienced an increase.

According to the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB), growth is expected to increase by 1.3 % per year over the period 2015-2020. The contribution of employment to growth should be significantly lower than in the previous period (2009-2014) because of the slowdown in growth of the working age population. Employment should, however, continue to increase (+0.7 % per year), exceeding the rate it had experienced between 2009 and 2014 (+0.4 %). This increase is mainly due to the services sector (+1.3 % per year) while other sectors continue to decline - less strongly, however, than over the previous period - with -0.4 % for agriculture, 0.3 % for industry and -0.2 % for non-profit services.

According to the Cedefop forecast, demand for occupations requiring high skills continues as well as for unskilled occupations, leading to a situation of increasing polarization of the labour market. Over the period 2015-2025, the increase in employment is expected to be 9.7 % for managers, 20.3 % for technicians and associate professionals and 21.3 % for professionals but also 9.5 % in elementary occupations. In contrast, occupations requiring intermediate skills should decrease by 5.6 % for skilled agricultural and fishery workers, by 9.5 % for craft and related workers and by 14.6 % for plant machine operators and assemblers.

Education plays an important role in the acquisition of skills. According to Eurostat, 43.8 % of the population aged 30-34 had a tertiary education degree in 2014 and this level is expected to rise to 47 % in 2020 in line with the high targets set by Belgium. However, the proportion of early school leavers among the population aged 18-24 is still 9.8 % in 2014. Similarly, the number of graduates in science and technology is low (13 % of population aged 20-29 in 2012) given the significant needs in this sector. At another level, lifelong learning remains very low compared to the EU average in 2014. The rate of participation in education and training during the last four weeks was only 7.1 % for population aged 25-64 and 11.1 % for population aged 25-34.

Belgium is a federal country composed of three regions with very different labor market characteristics. Each region has its own employment agency: Actiris for the Brussels-Capital Region, the VDAB for the Flemish Region and the Forem for the Walloon Region. The three regions also have competence for education (compulsory and higher education), training and employment policies. The minimum wage level but also unemployment benefits remain federal, justifying the existence of a national employment agency (ONEm – Office national de l'emploi/RVA – Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening).

Each of the three regions of the country tries to determine how companies are experiencing difficulties to hire workers with adequate skills. To reach this goal, they sometimes identify the 'métiers en pénurie' (important labor shortage), that is occupations with a quantitative lack of candidates, and secondly the 'fonctions critiques' (critical occupations), for which there are difficulties to find candidates even if no

effective lack of skilled persons is experienced. In addition, there are two lists (French and Flemish) of studies that prepare for occupations with significant labor shortages.

In Brussels Capital Region, the Brussels Employment Observatory has established a list of 80 critical occupations in 2013 that can be grouped into 29 occupational categories from which the ten first make up 80 % of job offers corresponding to critical occupations. These ten groups may be sub-divided into three main professional families: technical occupations (computer scientists, engineers), administrative and commercial occupations (salesmen, secretaries) and occupations in the non-profit sector (teachers, assistant nurses).

In the Flemish Region, the number of critical occupations in 2015 was higher with 144 occupations classified into 64 groups. In these occupations, 43 are considered especially critical (with a shortage). They are mainly specialized technical occupations. The construction sector is no longer present while several health-related occupations (usually highly specialized) appear.

In Wallonia and without the education sector occupations, there were in 2013 38 critical occupations and among these, 19 were in labor shortage. Similarly to the Brussels Capital Region, we can mainly find technical occupations (engineers, technicians), occupations in the health sector (nurses and paramedical workers) and commercial occupations (sales representatives, real estate agents).

The ONEm French and Flemish lists of studies that prepare for an occupation for which there is a significant labor shortage are divided into three parts (technical and vocational education, professionalizing education and higher education) and apply for the academic year 2014-2015. The lists are relatively similar for the number of occupations in shortage (33 in French and 34 in Flemish) and for the type of occupations. These are mainly technical occupations (IT, engineering) and non-profit occupations (health and education). The Flemish trend has become stronger on these two types of occupations.

2 Production of labour market and skills intelligence

2.1 Forecasting capabilities

Strictly speaking, it seems that Belgium does not have a forecasting model of skill needs. The Federal Planning Bureau and the regional statistical institutes conduct employment projections per sector but these are not specifically aimed at forecasting future skill needs.

However, Belgium has developed many instruments objectifying skill needs.

The main tools are (1) the directories of professions and qualifications, and (2) the identification of the occupations 'in demand'. The main creators and users of these tools are the regional Public Employment Services (PES): Actiris for Brussels, VDAB for Flanders, Forem in Wallonia and ADG for the German-speaking Community. Therefore, these tools cover the entire national territory.

(1) The directories of occupations and qualifications

For the French-speaking side, le REM (Répertoire Emploi Métier) is based on the Operational Directory of professions and jobs ((Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois (ROME)) and on the work done by ISCO (International Nomenclature), the National Employment Office, the Forem ERASMUS program and the SFMQ (Service francophone des métiers et des qualifications). To design the REM as close as possible to the reality of the field, the REM must be validated through specific agreements with

the sectors concerned¹. On the basis of REM, the SFMQ (Service Francophone des Métiers et des qualifications) produces "Occupational profiles" and "Training profiles". The "Occupational profiles" reflect the concrete exercise of different occupations and the "training profiles" connect the appropriate training to the various "occupational profiles"².

For the Dutch-speaking side, the database 'Competent' was created by the Flemish Economic and Social Council (SERV) on the basis of ROME but adapted to the Flemish labour market. Competent's data are also used to create qualifying files. After being approved by AKOV (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming), these files are classified into one of the eight qualifications' levels defined by the Flemish Qualifications' Structure or VKS (Vlaamse qualificatiestructuur).

(2) The identification of the 'demand occupations'

The models of identification of the 'demand occupations'³ are mainly developed by the regional public employment services (PES): Actiris, VDAB, Forem and ADG. Based on various methodologies, these services identify labour shortages, but also promising occupations and jobs for the future. To identify labour shortage, the methodology used by the PES is generally based on a statistical analysis complemented by consultations with stakeholders in the field. The statistical analysis consists of screening job offers and selecting a list of occupations on the basis of certain criteria (minimum number of job offers received during the year, satisfaction rate, median time required to satisfy the offer, etc.). Then this list is subject to internal PES services and other stakeholders (employers' federations, training centers, etc.) that validate or modify it according to field reality.

Aside from identifying the current labour shortage, the PES also develop prospective research. For example, the Forem research 'Occupations of the future' is a project that consists in detecting the occupations for the future for Wallonia for the next 5 years. It doesn't only aim to adapt and improve the training programs according to the market developments but also to anticipate it. This project includes several steps. After the interview of over 300 Walloon experts, the Forem published a first prospective analysis on the different evolution factors of the sectors and their presumed effects on the development of skills (Forem 2013). Then, the Forem published a data sheet for each sector containing the main lessons learned and a list of occupations identified as "occupations for the future" for Wallonia. The term "occupations for the future" includes new occupations, occupations whose content will evolve, and / or occupations for which the number of jobs will strongly grow. Finally, among these "occupations for the future", the Forem has chosen five occupations that were studied more in depth using the Abilitic2Perform method. Abilitic2Perform is a method of anticipation of skills based on the participation of expert groups during successive workshops and tested in fifteen occupations during its development within the context of the European projects "Interreg IV". This method is inspired by studies on strategic foresight, where some tools such as structural or morphological analysis are used (Forem, 2014). This analysis also allows to identify precisely the training programs to be offered in order to help these occupations to expand.

PES are sometimes supported to execute these tasks by research centers. For example, in 2006 the Department of Applied Economics of ULB (DULBEA) conducted a study on

¹ <http://www.ufenm.be>

² <http://www.sfmq.cfwb.be>

³³ The 'demand occupations' are defined here as the group of occupations composed of the current labour shortages and the 'occupations for the future'

labour shortages upon a request from the Brussels and Walloon Ministers of Economy, Employment and Trade⁴. More recently, as part of the 'Bassins d'emploi' project (see point 3.1), the tasks of diagnosis of offered trainings and needs was given to a working group led by IBSA (Institut bruxellois de statistiques et d'analyse) and IWEPS (Institut wallon de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la statistique). The project brings together experts and technicians of the relevant administrations, economic and social councils, members of 'Bassins d'emploi' bodies and representatives of the ministerial cabinets. In Flanders we can mention the project 'Boosting skills ecosystems for greener jobs in Flanders' within the LEED program of the OECD, conducted by HIVA (Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving) in collaboration with the Flemish Authorities, the City of Ghent, the Province of Antwerp, POM West-Flanders Water and Flemish Knowledge Centre (Vlakwa). This project aims to consider to what extent the education and training offer helps to develop "green skills" which are needed in sectors such as food processing, construction, chemistry and plastics.

In addition, SPE's also develop directories of existing training programs which, compared to the skill requirements, allow to adequately identify training needs.

Finally, the "demand occupations" are sometimes compared to the labour supply, thus linking the supply and the demand for skills. For example, the VDAB provides, on its website, reports as well as a set of Excel tables, which provide, for each economic sector, an overview of the figures in the sector, job offers received, the training programs corresponding to the sector, the characteristics (degree, experience) of the people recruited and the labour reserves on the basis of occupations⁵.

All these methods of identifying demand occupations seem adequate to identify skills needs.

2.2 Transmission and use of information

The main users of instruments of objectification of skills needs described above are of course SPE's but also training centres, public authorities and citizens.

The REM (Répertoire Emploi Métiers) is, for example, used by various services of the Forem (Wallonia). As part of its service to individuals (guidance counsellors, professional accompaniment counsellors, etc.), the Forem uses REM to build a jobseeker profile based on an evaluation of skills for one or several specific occupations. This is done through several techniques including "self-positioning", the "screening" and "validation of skills." The Forem Training service and the Forem Council services realize a group of REM occupations within skills units. All modules, all training certificates and all certificates of validation and screening are referenced to the REM. Other organizations also use the REM as a reference: regional ministries, research centres, skills validation consortia, sectoral funds and training operators. Furthermore, cooperation agreements were signed between PES to more closely align the database of the different regions of the country with the aim of improving workers' mobility⁶. The "occupations profiles" and "training profiles" produced by the SFMQ (Service Francophone des métiers et des qualifications) on the basis of REM is used by all the educational and training operators.

The list of 'demand occupations' identified by the above described process is directly accessible on the SPE's websites and on that of the National Employment Office. For example, Actiris (Brussels) made a website dedicated to providing information about

⁴Mansour J.M., Plasman A. et Plasman R. (2006)

⁵ VDAB, Gegevens sectorconvenanten

⁶<http://www.ufenm.be>

the Brussels labour market and through which it is possible to search for jobs by selecting only the "critical occupations" or the "occupations in high demand."

This list of 'demand occupations' is actively used both by PES's and by training operators, public authorities and citizens.

3 Steering the education and training provision

3.1 Policies and programmes

Higher education (HE):

In Belgium, higher education is managed by the Communities but these leave freedom to the institutes and universities to define the content of programs and training given. There is no overall strategy alignment of higher education to the needs of skills required by the labor market. We can just mention the collaborations between universities and businesses through Chairs financed by companies or by policies such as poles of competitiveness or clusters.

Vocational education and training (VET):

These last years, many policies and strategies have been developed in Belgium in order to align training to job requirements.

Targeting training on labor shortages

Most of the time, the offer of training is based on the analysis related to 'demand occupations' and other identification tools mentioned above. In Flanders, VDAB recently said that among the training provided, nine out of ten lead to a job where there is a shortage⁷. In Wallonia, an additional effort has been put in recent years on the alignment of vocational training offered by regional training centres in order to meet the skills needs that would address labour shortages. Under the Marshall Plan 2.Vert which is co-financed by European funds, a specific study has been conducted to identify the causes of job shortages. In particular, the authors have compared the lists of jobs that experience labour shortage relative to formations that were proposed to jobseekers. Noting that among the courses leading to occupations in short supply, some had significant waiting lists while some others were not so requested by the participants, the authors made recommendations to correct these problems⁸.

The skills centres

Created in the 2000's, the skills centres are training centres that aims specifically to focus on the skills needed by the employers on the labour market. To this end, they are located where the companies are located or where there is a specific economic development project. Furthermore, they favour collaborations between the public and the private sector and always work in partnership with professional sectors and sectoral funds. These partnerships are reflected in a mix of funding including: regional public authorities, PES, sectoral funds managed by the social partners and European Structural Funds (FEDER and ESF). Finally, skills centres broaden the scope of the training field intervening both upstream (monitoring, information, awareness, etc.) and downstream (validation of skills, improved integration courses etc.). Currently, Brussels and Wallonia have respectively 5 and 25 skills centres, active in the sectors of construction, wood, industry, transport, hotel and catering, security and IT. These centres are overseen by a Network that ensures the overall coherence of their actions. Flanders has a similar

⁷ <http://www.standaard.be> – Het Standaard en ligne – 13/04/2015

⁸ Iweps (2014), p.15

policy with its 'kennisinstellingen' located in various knowledge clusters such as Flanders' Drive, Flanders' Food, Flanders' Bio Flanders and In Shape.

The Sectoral agreements

Sectoral agreements are specific agreements between sectors and operators of training and employment, on the one hand, education, on the other, that result in concrete projects focused on the increase of internships, immersion of alternating training, teacher training in company, training of workers in the centers of competence,... This policy is actively implementing. In February 2015, an agreement with the hairdressing sector was signed and others will soon follow with the food, wood, chemical, pharma and aesthetics sectors. The next areas that will be contacted are the green sector, the stone and retail sectors⁹.

The advanced technology centers (Brussels and Wallonia)

The advanced technology centers (CTA) are infrastructures that are installed in the secondary schools which make available advanced equipment available to students and teachers, trainers, job seekers and workers. The CTA are developed in priority for promising professional sectors in order to provide training offers even sharper than provided in technical and vocational programs and thus meet the needs of the sectors concerned (skills shortages)¹⁰. In the framework of the overhaul of qualifying education, additional resources amounting to € 5 million has been awarded in December 2014 to modernize the teaching equipment and complete the equipment of the 30 Advanced Technology Centers (CTA) of the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region. These resources will be complemented by support from the FEDER. In addition, the cooperation agreement between the Brussels-Capital Region, the COCOF and the French Community on the equipment provided and collaboration between advanced technology centers and centers of reference were approved in the second reading¹¹.

The 'Bassins « Enseignement qualifiant – Formation –Emploi » (Brussels and Walloon Régions)

In Brussels and Wallonia, the 'Bassins de l'Enseignement qualifiant Formation-Emploi', officially launched in February 2015, aim to strengthen the structure and synergies in terms of training, education and employment by developing joint projects and seeking optimal consistency between the training and education offer in relation to the identified socio-economic needs. The territory of the Walloon and Brussels Capital Regions has been divided into 10 fields and each of these will be led by a balanced team composed of representatives from education, vocational training, employment, social and professional integration and social partners. After making an inventory of all policies relating to early school leaving, additional offers of internships in companies and business investments in schools and with training providers will be discussed and planned¹².

3.2 Financial incentives

If the employment policy is a regional competence, management and financing of unemployment benefits remain under federal jurisdiction and therefore some financial incentives still remain at the Federal level, through the National Employment Office.

There are two federal measures:

⁹ PNR (2015)

¹⁰ <http://www.enseignement.be>

¹¹ NRP (2015), p.100

¹² PNR (2015), p.96

The National Employment Office (NEO) grants the exemption of unemployed from the requirement to seek employment in case of resumption of studies leading to addressing a labour shortage. This measure allows individuals to retain their rights to unemployment benefits while being exempted from some of their obligations. The people who benefit from the exemption may refuse a suggested job, should no longer be available on the job market and should not be registered as job seekers. This is designed to people who are unemployed and receiving benefits who have completed their studies for at least two years and have not obtained a higher education diploma. The list of studies leading to addressing a labour shortage is regularly updated by the National Employment Office (NEO) and is also directly accessible on its website. This measure is regionalized since July 2014¹³.

To encourage young people to acquire the best possible skills, the new federal government has tightened the conditions for the perception of unemployment benefits for young people by adding a diploma requirement. As from 1 September 2015, the young requesting the integration allowances below the age of 21, must be in possession of a higher secondary school diploma or have successfully completed a day-release training.

The European structural funds have also allowed to invest in education and lifelong learning. We can take as an example, the project calls made for 2007-2013 by the European Social Fund Agency¹⁴, which manages European aid for the development of human resources in the French part of Belgium. Many projects have received a grant by the agency and they effectively address several priority axes including employment creation and development of human capital, knowledge, know-how and research. Moreover some projects focus only on job shortage.

4 Career and vocational guidance

As mentioned above, matching skills demand and supply is a regional responsibility. The four Public Employment Offices (ACTIRIS in Brussels, ADG for the German Community, FOREM for the Walloon region and VDAB in Flanders) each elaborate a list of jobs that are hard to fill. They also develop plans in order to avoid skill shortages in terms of collaboration with the political, sectoral associations and the academic field. Along these lines, they detect regional or specific sectoral needs and try to find solutions to meet those needs. With reference to this, they develop specific educational programmes for unemployed people, provide training opportunities to employees and teachers and give support to different associations that help to orientate students.

On the side of the Walloon and Brussels region, FOREM and Actiris work in collaboration with different partners from the political, sectoral, associations and educational actors. The list published each year is mainly used by different organizations such as PMS and Siep which are Student Guidance Centres. Both organizations provide information concerning studies and professions and therefore can guide students towards job shortages of 'jobs for the future'.

Regarding to jobseekers, Actiris and Bruxelles Formation have launched the project 'Destination Métiers' in 2012. The purpose of this project is to guide and inform jobseekers towards occupation or training programs according to the jobseeker profile. In addition, a critical sector of activity or a critical type of job is highlighted twice a year.

¹³ More precisely, the Regions can now set the criteria for benefiting the exemption. The unemployment benefits system remains under federal jurisdiction.

¹⁴ www.fse.be

The equivalent of this project is the CEFo¹⁵ (Carrefour Emploi Formation Orientation) in Wallonia. It conducts individual and group sessions on jobs with a high level of demand. One other action funded by the Marshall Plan 2.vert, "Essais-métiers" also gives priority to jobs where there is a lack of demand. This is a policy approach based on practice.

In Flanders, we find the same types of aid and information (CLB, Career Coaching Centers, etc.).

Educational reforms can help to manage skill gaps in the labour market. In Flanders, there is a shortage of applied sciences, ICT or engineering graduates. In 2012, the Flemish government launched an action plan "STEM 2012-2020" to tackle the problem by increasing the number of technicians, engineers and scientists.

Furthermore, we can note that for several years each Public Employment office invests in language learning as it is a major obstacle to the geographical mobility of workers. (e.g. <http://www.wallungues.be/> and <http://www.brulingua.be/>)

Besides, there are regional campaigns to raise awareness that several sectors have job shortages but these actions are limited. We can take as an example the advertisement on Flemish public television to recruit medical orderlies (e.g. <http://www.ikgaervoor.be/>) that experience an important job shortage.

5 Stakeholders in steering education and training provisions

The supply of vocational education and training in Belgium can be divided into five parts: secondary compulsory education with technical and vocational programs, adult education, higher education with vocational bachelor program, apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training and vocational training for adults, unemployed, workers and students, organized by the public employment services.

Education depends on the education minister in each community (French, Flemish and German). Education is compulsory until the age of 15; then young people can choose a part-time education and follow a training organized by a school or a private company. After the age of 18, they can follow the entire range of trainings. As confirmed by a member of the cabinet of higher education Minister of the French Community, there is no political will to ensure that the higher education programs meet the needs of the labor market in terms of skills. Universities and higher schools are totally autonomous of political authorities to write their programs in the name of academic freedom.

Adult education – funded by the communities but carried out by many public and private stakeholders – allows the recognition of skills from formal, non-formal or informal learning for individuals to pursue a learning path that leads to qualifications corresponding to full-time education. These trainings allow workers to obtain degrees from basic education to higher vocational education. In general, the actors of adult education work closely with the public and private stakeholders of training in each region.

Apprenticeship and entrepreneurship training are carried out by SYNTRA in Flanders and in the Dutch-speaking part of Brussels, by IFAPME in Wallonia, by IAWM in the German-speaking Community and the SFPME/EFPME in the French part of Brussels. These various non-profit organizations are under the jurisdiction of the Minister responsible for training within each community.

The other actors in training are subsidized private partners, sectoral training centers and non-subsidized training centers (mainly language learning and ICT). The subsidized

¹⁵ <http://www.iweeps.be/>

partners are non-profit associations aiming mostly to improve the skills of the people furthest from the labour market. They must sign approvals with the regions or communities competent either for employment or training, as appropriate Sectoral centers are managed by labor unions and employers' organizations and have committed to invest 0.1 % of their payroll in training for at-risk groups and 1.9 % to private sector workers trainings. These partners can work with many operators (public and private) both financially and logistically. This cooperation may be informal or be settled by a collective labor agreement.

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