

## Chapter 3

# Local Job Creation Dashboard findings in Flanders, Belgium

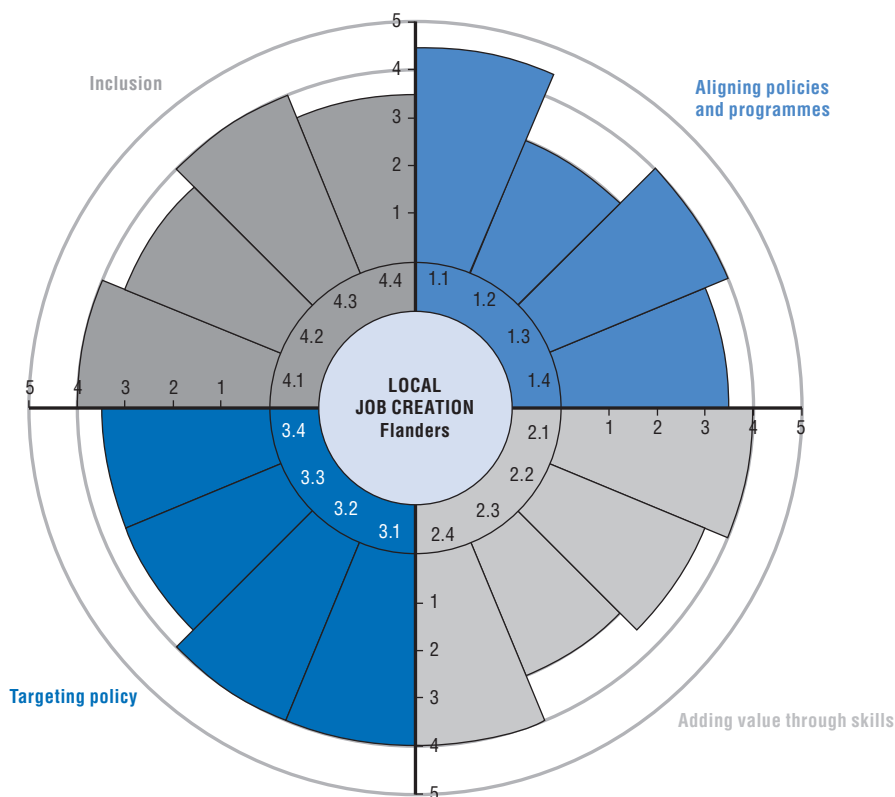
*This chapter highlights findings from the Local Job Creation Dashboard in Flanders. The findings are discussed through the four thematic areas of the OECD review: 1) better aligning policies and programmes to local employment development; 2) adding value through skills; 3) targeting policy to local employment sectors and investing in quality jobs; and 4) being inclusive.*

### Results from the dashboard

This section of the report presents the key findings from the in-depth fieldwork undertaken in Flanders. In this chapter, each of the four priority areas of the OECD review on local job creation policies are discussed sequentially, accompanied by an explanation of the results.

The full results of the Local Job Creation Dashboard across Flanders are presented in Figure 3.1 below. The dashboard enables national and local policy makers to gain a stronger overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of employment and skills policies, while better prioritising future actions. The values in the dashboard were obtained through a standard OECD methodology which collects a range of quantitative and qualitative information and assigns a value between 1 (low) and 5 (high) based on LEED research and best practices in other OECD countries. The same methodology has been applied to all OECD countries participating in the OECD reviews on local job creation.

Figure 3.1. **Local Job Creation Dashboard – Flanders**

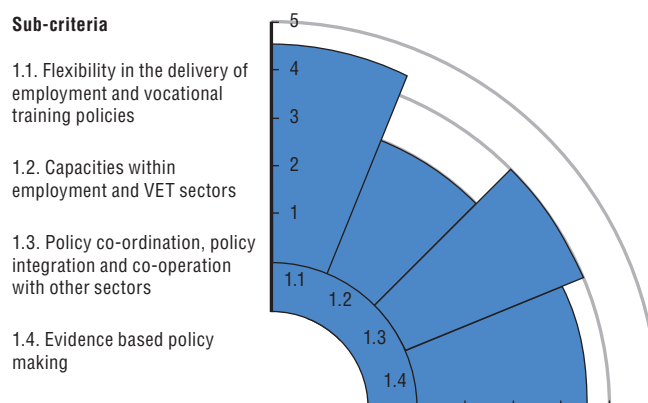


## Theme 1: Better aligning policy and programmes to local economic development

### **Flexibility in the delivery of employment and vocational training policies**

The OECD defines flexibility as “the possibility to adjust policy at its various design, implementation and delivery stages to make it better adapted to local contexts, actions carried out by other organisations, strategies being pursued, and challenges and opportunities faced” (Froy and Giguère, 2009). Flexibility deals with the latitude that exists in the management of the employment and training system, rather than the flexibility in the labour market itself. The achievement of local flexibility does not necessarily mean that governments need to politically decentralise (Froy and Giguère, 2009). Governments just need to give sufficient latitude when allocating responsibilities in the fields of designing policies and programmes, managing budgets, setting performance targets, deciding on eligibility and outsourcing services.

Figure 3.2. **Local Job Creation Dashboard: Better aligning policies and programmes to local economic development**



A previous study was conducted in Flanders by the OECD on the accountability and flexibility within the employment system (see Bogaerts et al., 2011). With regard to local employment agencies, the study found that there was still room for further flexibility at the local level with the possibility for local projects and other local initiatives to be strengthened and for collaboration to be organised more strategically. The study noted that collaboration at many different governance levels had been supported, but it made the labour market policy planning process very complicated.

Finally, this previous OECD review concluded that the capacities at the local level could be raised but that this required local employment offices to gain sufficient responsibility as well as a degree of control over policy implementation. Since this study, several changes have been made by VDAB to make the employment services more flexible, enabling local offices to take a more strategic leadership role in designing and implementing policies.

### **Flexibility within employment services offered by VDAB**

VDAB has an agreement (*beheersovereenkomst*) with the Flemish Government that defines 5 strategic objectives: 1) to activate all job seekers and other non-active citizens by using an individual approach, aiming at sustainable integration into the labour market; 2) to provide

career guidance for every working citizen; 3) to support employers to hire well qualified employees; 4) to provide procedures that recognise and develop competences; and 5) to create partnerships.

Flexibility in the delivery of services is a key feature of the organisational structure of VDAB. Recently, more autonomy has been given to the provincial level. Local employment service offices are directed by provincial management in order to be more flexible and targeted to the local labour market. The provincial board of directors (*provinciale directie comité*) takes decisions autonomously by developing a provincial plan within the overall framework of the Flemish business plan which contains a number of strategic objectives. Within each province, local employment offices also have a certain degree of autonomy through flexible budgets (e.g. 15% of the budget line), which enable them to develop programmes and policies in partnership with other stakeholders. During interviews undertaken for this study, it was acknowledged that the flexibility of public employment services will be even more necessary in the future to ensure employment programmes and policies can be adjusted to local labour market conditions.

#### ***Performance management within employment programmes***

Performance agreements between VDAB and the Flemish government contain strategic and operational objectives. For each objective, indicators are chosen and monitored to manage performance. If possible, a target is chosen that might be adjusted over the years - when progression is made and the target is reached, a new target is chosen. These targets are part of the provincial business plans that are formulated annually. Both business plans use input from sectoral business plans. Local employment offices are free to choose targets for their own local projects that have been launched with the flexible funding available to them. Monitoring is done at different levels: the Flemish level, the provincial level, and the regional level. Performance objectives include

- Inputs and procedures: number of people reached by the competence centres, number of contracts signed for Individual Vocational Training, and the number of guidance processes (preventive or remedial) started for job seekers.
- Satisfaction: satisfaction of job seekers, clients of the one-stop shops, as well as employers.
- Socio-economic outcomes, such as transition to employment after the guidance process.

All general information about VDAB and employment services is publicly available but performance management reports concerning individual local employment offices are not shared publicly. However, as there are several agreements with local partners, local offices have to report about activities and results to these stakeholders involved. The local employment offices of VDAB also have to report about performance to the regional consultation bodies.

#### ***Outsourcing arrangements***

VDAB often makes use of the services of commercial and non-commercial organisations with regard to guidance and training. Tenders are published by the central services of VDAB, but regional tenders are also common. The conditions in these regional tenders are usually strict. The provincial board of directors decides whether services should be outsourced or not and to whom based on the outcome of the tendering process. Outsourcing officers are appointed and during the last few years, the budget for outsourcing has been steadily increased.

### ***Flexibility in local training provision***

There is a high level of flexibility within the vocational education and training system in Flanders as a result of the autonomy granted to individual organisations. With regard to training programmes, the Flemish government defines goals or basic competences to be reached, which are derived from recognised frameworks (e.g. a vocational profile recognised by the Flemish government or by sectoral bodies). Training providers have to develop their programmes in line with these competences however, they can decide which pedagogical approaches or didactical methods will be used. New training programmes have to be approved by the Flemish government. A procedure for approvals has been established and the Flemish Educational Council (VLOR) gives advice to the Flemish government about new programmes.

The training centres of VDAB and Syntra have a high degree of flexibility and can easily respond to the needs of local actors. Local actors are regularly consulted, and requests from local actors for special training programmes are often taken into account. New training programmes can be provided in a timely manner and the curriculum can be designed locally. Both VDAB and Syntra plan provision on the basis of an analysis of the local economic context and rely on consultation with local stakeholders.

### ***Capacities within employment and VET sectors***

VDAB's staffing resources are under pressure due to budget cuts by the Flemish government. Since 2012, VDAB has had to cut 325 staff, representing 6.5% of total employees, adding further pressure on existing staff. During the local interviews undertaken for this study, it was highlighted that staffing resources are perceived to be adequate for implementing the current workload although there is a perceived risk of compromising the quality of the services because of the increased tasks being taken on by existing employment services staff.

VDAB has its own training centre where each employee is offered five days of training every year. Team leaders make training plans and conferences are organised where current topics are discussed and presented. During team meetings, employees are invited to participate in discussions. Overall, the skill levels of staff are perceived to be sufficient for implementing the organisational objectives effectively.

In order to support the design of interventions at the local level, the central services of VDAB provide guidance, tools and instruments to local offices. These central services include:

- follow up on European labour market policy events and research reports where information is shared with local stakeholders;
- the implementation of European instruments such as EURES, EUROPASS; promoting the use of effective tools and instruments, such as e-portfolios;
- collecting, processing and distributing labour market information as well as information about services provided by different actors;
- forecasting needs for services (training, support and guidance, and brokering);
- managing relationships with other labour market actors, target groups, and sectors;
- process management about large-scale tendering; and
- capacity building activities around monitoring, evaluation, and quality assurance.

### **Policy co-ordination, policy integration and co-operation with other sectors**

Since the restructuring of VDAB which provided more autonomy to the provinces, collaborative action has increased through local partnership agreements. In general, these agreements state the general aims and most often describe the division of tasks between the partners and where collaboration will be undertaken. An advantage of this type of formal agreement is that they make it possible to react within a short period of time to changes in the local labour market, often using innovative projects or measures.

Within the area of employment policy, local joint strategies are developed in collaboration which often includes an official formal agreement between stakeholders. VDAB has established formal agreements on collaboration with the provinces (see Box 3.1 for an example from Limburg); various cities/municipalities and OCMWs which deliver social welfare services; one-stop shops (*werkwinkels*); and not-for profit organisations or social enterprises.

#### **Box 3.1. Local collaboration agreement between VDAB and the province of Limburg**

VDAB and the province are important actors with regard to labour market policy. VDAB is “director” of the labour market providing guidance and training, matching job seekers and employers. The province is responsible for sub-regional socio-economic policy anticipating new sectoral developments, developing and promoting the region, as well as stimulating entrepreneurship.

In 2013, a formal agreement was established to develop and implement integrated policies to reduce unemployment in the province of Limburg, to reduce mismatch between supply and demand, to make the labour market more flexible (in line with new economic developments) and to realise the growth potential in the social economy.

Responsibilities are assigned to each partner in accordance with each partner’s expertise, tasks are distributed and services are designed to be complementary. Data will be exchanged between organisations and trends will be monitored. Special attention will be paid to trans-boundary collaboration. The province will take action to engage municipalities and social partners, using the RESOC Limburg consultation body.

While many formal agreements have been made, there are also informal networks and exchanges. For example, the City of Antwerp has an informal network recently established to assist high skilled migrants, which includes VDAB, the City of Antwerp, a reception service for newcomers (*onthaalbureau*), and a centre for the integration of cultural minorities. Informal working groups were established and thematic consultations were undertaken to identify issues and potential actions to improve their labour market outcomes.

In terms of joined-up strategies for job creation, a good example of collaboration at the local level is the Strategic Action Plan for Limburg (*SALK – Strategisch Actieplan Limburg in’t Kwadraat*) which involves VDAB, provincial and local governments, employers, social economy enterprises, universities and high-tech scientific research institutes, the Provincial Development Agency, and the Flemish government. This plan was created following recent economic setbacks in the region due to the imminent closure of Ford Genk. In July 2013, the Flemish government released the Action Plan for Limburg, which contains actions that will contribute to local job creation as well as innovative and

sustainable entrepreneurship. The objective is the long-term recovery of the region through projects at the regional and local level.

The motivation for the plan was the closure of Ford Genk (announced in 2012 and to be executed by the end of 2014). 6 000 jobs will be lost directly through the closure and an additional 4 000 jobs will be indirectly lost. The Flemish government immediately decided to establish a Task Force consisting of the various local partners to prepare for the reconversion of the region. A group of experts mapped the consequences of the closure and presented policy measures to be taken to develop new activities in the region and to create the pre-conditions for recovery.

Several joint projects are being established to develop skills within the region, including skills development activities for job seekers in collaboration with VDAB and the centres for adult education. Special training programmes for groups at risk and people who are temporarily unemployed are being introduced as well as an increase in apprenticeship training (especially in the care sector). Other projects include increased support for entrepreneurship, developing more robust information on job vacancies and career guidance, as well as preparing people for interviews. A number of infrastructure projects will also be launched including the reconversion of the Ford site, the acceleration of public-private partnerships on certain construction projects (e.g. bridges, railways and tram lines, business parks, as well as renovations of social housing projects).

#### ***Joined-up delivery of employment services through local one-stop shops (werkwinkels)***

Joined up delivery of employment services is facilitated by local one-stop shops (*werkwinkels*). One-stop shops are established to provide integrated and comprehensive services on work and employment, for job seekers as well as employers. They are non-profit organisations that have been developed into a network, which takes into account the nature and qualities of each actor involved, in order to add value to the customers.

Partners involved include VDAB, OCMW (public welfare centres), labour counselling, the local employment agency (PWA), the national service for employment, specialised guidance centres and other local actors, such as the municipality. Each partner provides part of the financial means necessary to run the one-stop shop and to deliver services to job seekers and employers.

These one-stop shops contribute to better labour market performance by enhancing each jobseeker's ability to self-manage his or her career and to provide individual coaching for those who need it. In 2009, there were 288 one-stop shops (*werkwinkels*) in 273 Flemish cities and municipalities. Due to rationalisation and efficiency processes, many have been forced to close during the last couple of years.

#### ***Collaboration with the private sector***

VDAB offers several services directly to employers who require direct communication and strong engagement. There are contacts with private sector representative bodies and with large employers in order to develop the provision of training as well as other employment services.

Some schools work closely together with businesses in order to provide work experience to their students. Some technical and vocational schools have formal forms of collaboration with sectoral training funds (e.g. with regard to the construction sector). Regional Technological Centres represent an important area-based partnership at the local level between employers and public employment services – see Box 3.3.

**Box 3.2. Regional Technological Centres (*Regionale Technologische Centra*)**

Regional Technological Centres (RTC) create synergies between education and business to facilitate transitions from school to work, and to enhance the quality of technical and vocational education. Every five years, an agreement is made between these centres and the Flemish government based upon a strategic action plan, which include labour market information on the position of youth in the labour market.

The RTC covering the province of Antwerp makes high tech infrastructure and training accessible for all schools in the province. It promotes innovative techniques and methods and stimulates apprenticeships and work-based learning. The target audience is students in the third grade of full-time and part-time secondary education including those with special needs. The RTC is also involved in delivering some projects with one of the Antwerp Talent Houses (*Talentedfabriek*) and with VDAB.

RTC Limburg is providing innovative training as well as information about apprenticeships and work-based learning for students in schools in the Limburg region. This RTC targets students in the third grade of technical and vocational education (TSO and BSO) and their teachers. Besides the educational providers, this partnership includes industrial federations, sectoral training funds, employers, representatives of consultation platforms, representatives of higher education providers, VDAB and Syntra.

***Collaboration between government departments***

At the Flemish level, each policy department develops its own strategy taking into account developments in other policy domains or levels, or looking for synergies where possible. For example, the Department of Work and Social Economy works closely together with SERR and RESOC to develop integrated employment and socio-economic development policies. There is also regular inter-departmental collaboration between the Department of Work and Social Economy and between the Department of Education and Training, as well as with the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family on economic and innovation policies.

***Collaboration in the area of adult education***

Joint strategies are also developed in the area of adult education, bringing together the providers of adult education within the educational system. With regard to adult education, Flanders is divided in 13 regions. In each region, a partnership is established between centres for adult education and centres for basic education to form a consortium.

For example, VOL-ANT is active in the City of Antwerp and 10 surrounding municipalities operating 14 centres for adult education and 1 centre for basic education. In Limburg, there are two consortia – one in the northern part of Limburg (consisting of 24 cities and municipalities, bringing together 11 centres for adult education and 1 centre for basic education), and one in the south (covering 20 cities and municipalities, bringing together 12 centres for adult education and 1 centre for basic education). A reform of the consortia is planned, including a restructuring of their overall organisation. It is possible that only 6 consortia will remain for the whole of the Flemish Community, representing educational providers.

***Evidence based policy making***

Employment policies and strategies are based on an analysis of available data. An important data source is the unemployment register of VDAB, which consists of individual



records. Anyone registered with the unemployment system is recorded from the day of entry. In this database, it is possible to monitor whether an individual is unemployed. However, VDAB does not necessarily know whether someone who leaves the unemployment register went to employment or to some other situation, such as inactivity or old-age-pension.

With DIMONA-data, this problem can partly be solved. DIMONA requires that whenever a Belgian employer engages a new employee, they are legally obliged to immediately inform the social security agency in order to reduce informality. By combining information from VDAB with DIMONA, it is possible to know outcomes of job seekers. From 2007, DIMONA information has been added to the database of VDAB and updated on a monthly basis. Other data are gathered and synthesised to inform local programmes and strategies such as demographics, participation in training and education, as well as unqualified school leavers. New policies and programmes often reference results from different evaluations, which are generally funded by the Flemish government, sectoral bodies, provinces and cities.

In terms of evaluation, a caveat has to be made, in the sense that while VDAB has information about gross outflow results, it generally does not use a counterfactual design, meaning that they have limited information about net-effectiveness (e.g. the actual result for a given participant, compared to what the results would have been, if the participant would not have participated). Data on labour market outcomes from participation in employment and training programmes as well as student transitions could be improved. In particular, there is no data collected concerning individuals who participate in centres for adult education.

In Antwerp, the city produces comprehensive reports which compile quantitative and qualitative information about specific labour market sectors. These reports include data for the City of Antwerp as well as the surroundings areas. Indicators include characteristics of the student population, characteristics of jobseekers, number of employers, professions and vacancies, as well as education and training opportunities. If possible, trends are analysed to detect evolutions within sectors. The results of a survey of employers with regard to the need for generic and sector-specific competences are also included. This also includes an overview of policies at the European, federal, Flemish and regional level.

Labour market forecasting is not well developed in Flanders: forecasts often do not go beyond a time frame of three years, but awareness of the importance of forecasting is growing. The Flemish ESF Agency has launched two calls for detecting future skill and training needs targeting sectoral training funds and stimulating partnerships between sectors. Information about expected changes in recruitment needs is pursued by making optimal use of existing data. In depth sector studies are undertaken to reveal expected changes in jobs with the ultimate aim of increasing the transparency of the Flemish labour market, in order to focus investments in training and education programmes to labour market demands. The information obtained is often used for career guidance and the targeted activation of job seekers.

### ***Data within travel to work areas***

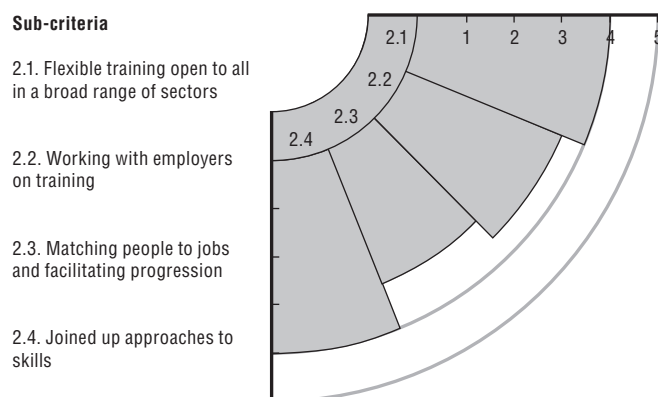
There is some fit between administrative boundaries and the local travel to work area. The fit is better for some sub-regions, such as neighbourhoods within Brussels. With regard to the city of Antwerp, the travel to work area is far bigger than the administrative area. The travel to work area is also not only situated within the province of Antwerp, but extends to the province of East-Flanders.

## Theme 2: Adding value through skills

### **Flexible training open to all in a broad range of sectors**

At local level, a wide range of training courses are available at different skills levels. As most of the education and training programmes are subsidised by the government, they are affordable to the majority of the residents. If course sizes are not sufficient, waiting lists are created before introducing a course, which usually does not take longer than six months. In general, there is a high level of institutional autonomy which leads to interesting and innovative training programmes.

Figure 3.3. **Local job creation dashboard: Adding value through skills**



Previous OECD research has highlighted that the adult education system in Flanders is particularly strong with good geographical coverage and centres playing an important role as second chance providers offering basic skills programmes (Musset, 2013). VDAB and Syntra also offer a wide variety of training programmes tailored to the needs of individuals and employers, adapted to existing skill levels.

In Flanders, the qualifications framework developed in 2009 aims to make the system more coherent, by making qualifications more transparent and comparable across training providers, including centres for adult education, university colleges, and VDAB competence centres (Musset, 2013). Professional qualifications are in the process of being defined in terms of job competences. The COMPETENT system is developed and maintained by SERV linking with the Flemish Qualifications Framework, and in collaboration with experts from social partners, sectors and other stakeholders. Previous OECD research has noted that with the use of the eight levels of the Flemish Qualifications Framework and the description of jobs in terms of competences, it will become clearer which programmes lead to the same qualification level and to the same job (Musset, 2013).

All unemployed people have the option to participate in subsidised training provided by VDAB in a range of sectors, including construction, wood, electricity, ICT, health care, and commerce. People who are temporarily unemployed can also benefit from subsidised training recognised by VDAB. Job seekers participating in a recognised training programme are entitled to free training (e.g. no tuition), transportation allowances, as well as subsidised child care. Employed workers also have access to training, as well as subsidised options in the adult education system. Depending on the programme, eligibility criteria with regard to skills levels might be applied in order to avoid people participating in courses in which

they are not qualified. All training providers provide an after-hours training option. Higher professional education (e.g. the level between secondary education and bachelor level) tends to be less flexible for learners because courses start at certain periods twice during the year.

Most vocational training covers generic skills, but also takes into account the specific skill needs and level of the individual (e.g. communication with co-workers or clients, and even networking). There are initiatives that are developed in collaboration between VDAB and providers within the educational system (e.g. secondary education, adult education and higher education) targeting job seekers.

For example, In Limburg, a one-year full-time training programme for industrial design has been developed by VDAB in partnership with Kunstschool Genk which is school for secondary and post-secondary education. The aim of the training is to: 1) develop vocational skills in the field of industrial design, 2) give students work-based experience through apprenticeship opportunities with employers, and 3) to develop entrepreneurship skills. The training leads to a certificate in Industrial Design and a certificate of Management. Employers are involved in the training programme, as well as VOKA – the local Chamber of Commerce. This post-secondary programme targets job seekers older than 22 years or who have left the educational system for at least two years, and who are able to participate in training in Dutch at the level of higher secondary education. No fees have to be paid. However, it should be noted that this type of collaboration with the educational system is not always evident and depends on local level relationships.

### **Working with employers on training**

Employers who report that their demand for skilled workers is not met often point to the lack of adequate work attitudes and generic skills, and less to the lack of vocational skills. If they mention the lack of vocational skills, it is often in reference to skills not being up-to-date because trainees do not always work with the latest equipment and technology.

As SMEs are an important driver of growth within Flanders, training programmes specifically target these types of employers. SMEs may be granted up to 40 000 EUR per year in subsidies for, among other things, training, strategic advice and coaching. The amount that may be allocated to training within the overall subsidy is topped up at 2 500 EUR. Assistance is provided by VDAB, but also by sectoral training funds where specialised consultants are assigned to provide this type of assistance and support.

Comprehensive actions are taken to ensure that training meets the needs of local employers. Training is planned in consultation with employers and sector associations. The content of training is adapted to the job and competence profiles of each sector. If there are changes in employer demand, VDAB is able to modify courses to reflect the needs of industry. Employers are often involved in the development of training courses and there is close co-operation with providers, who have to prove that there is a demand for the training programmes they are going to deliver. Training is customised to the needs of local employers but the perceived value of certification by employers varies among programmes – something which is trying to be addressed through the Flemish qualifications framework.

### **Apprenticeships and work-based training opportunities**

The development of more workplace training opportunities is an urgent issue within Flanders and efforts are being made to enhance the number of trainees in the workplace.

### Box 3.3. Sectoral Networks and Talent Houses (Sectorale netwerken and Talentenhuisen)

In Antwerp, several sectoral networks have been established bringing together educational providers and labour market actors aimed at promoting smooth transitions from education to work. These sectoral networks are governed by the City of Antwerp and VDAB, who have signed a formal collaboration agreement. These agreements not only assign responsibility and divide tasks among the partners, but also include goals and targets to be reached.

A project manager is assigned to each sectoral network and experts are engaged. The financial means are provided by the City and by VDAB, and additional means are acquired through the European Social Fund. The networks are supported by sectoral organisations, sectoral training funds, social partners, educational providers, and regional technological centres. Each network establishes collaboration between stakeholders through a sectoral commission, a core group and thematic working groups. The aim is to develop action plans (for the short and long term), starting from a thorough analysis of the local educational system and the labour market.

A sectoral network can be converted to a Talent House when a sector is willing to invest in a partnership which requires a strong sectoral organisation; when the development of competences can be an answer to the recruitment problems (e.g. a Talent House is not the right answer when recruitment problems are to be attributed to the lack of job quality; and when the sector is of economic importance to the region. Four sectoral networks have been converted to Talent Houses: 1) Construction (Talentenwerf); 2) Industry (Talentenfabriek); 3) Harbour – Logistics (Talentenstroom); and 4) Education (Onderwijstalent).

Work-based learning is systematically used in VDAB programmes, however within programmes in centres for adult education, there is no formal requirement for work-based learning (Musset, 2013).

A number of initiatives have been recently launched to encourage greater workplace training. For example the regional technological centre in Antwerp collaborates with EANDIS (an energy distribution company) to provide individuals an opportunity to learn about the electricity and gas network. Teachers and trainers who would like to make use of this training centre follow a “train the trainer” model in order to provide the workplace training themselves, supported by EANDIS professionals.

In Limburg, Arcus Plus is a competence, expertise and innovation centre in the city of Maaseik, which provides up-to-date technological training to make teachers more competent with regard to didactical approaches. There is strong collaboration between schools and employers in this centre. Training provided is tailored to the needs of companies, and companies can use the equipment for their own employees after-school hours. Participants operating the centre include a secondary school, a centre for adult education and Syntra.

### **Matching people to jobs to quality jobs**

Career planning for students is provided by centres for pupil guidance and financed by the Flemish government. One of their tasks is to support individuals with regard to their school careers. Specific initiatives are also available, such as the Job Market (*Jobmarkt*) organised in the city of Maaseik. Every year, a job market is held to bring together local companies and students. Approximately 600 students and 40 companies attended the job

market in 2013. This type of initiative is quite common in other cities within the region of Flanders. Another project is the HorizonTaal, which is available in Limburg and Antwerp. It includes initiatives to support youth in secondary education to make informed career choices. Sectoral and regional development bodies contribute to this initiative, and the information available to students is based on local labour market sectors (e.g. logistics, and life sciences in the City of Antwerp).

The city of Antwerp has a career planning service to support schools, teachers and individuals (youth and adults). One of the instruments is *Studiewijzer* which is a website that provides information about study options for pupils and students in secondary and higher education, and also for adults in adult education. Universities offer careers advice geared to local industries through career fairs, but this is often limited to specific sectors.

Job Shops (*Werkwinkels*) provide information about the local labour market (e.g. which occupations and sectors are doing well) and about the associated education and training opportunities. Out-placement services are aimed at people who find themselves in a crisis situation of short-term dismissal. They are assisted in reflecting on their career and receive information about potential labour market opportunities to find a new job.

Every employed person (including the self-employed) is entitled to subsidised career planning support and may choose among several providers. This support is not only informational and practical, but focuses on career management including extensive reflection and motivation. This service is easily accessible and in the case of Limburg, employees facing job loss are being provided with extensive career planning advice and support to assist them in their next work transition following the closure of the Ford factory.

Job profiles are produced for several sectors at the Flemish and national level. 559 job profiles (*competent-fiches*) are available and kept up-to-date. The profiles are developed by the SERV in collaboration with the individual sectors. These profiles are publicly available in an electronic database. Training programmes offered by VDAB and vocational education institutions are adapted to these profiles. Many job profiles are adapted to the regional level. In Limburg, the Provincial Development Agency (*provinciale ontwikkelingsmaatschappij*) is in the process of commissioning a research project aimed at profiling the jobs in the logistics sector, and more specifically the jobs with hard-to-fill vacancies. For each of these jobs, required competences will be determined and articulated in the associated job profile.

### **Activation and job-matching**

All unemployed people receive assistance from VDAB. Unemployed individuals who are deemed to have significant barriers are invited first for an individual consultation with local VDAB offices. Those individuals who require less intensive support can make use of on-line instruments, such as a database with vacancies. The idea is that many newly unemployed individuals will be able to find a job without intensive support. Therefore devoting a lot of attention to all new entrants is not considered to be cost-effective. This is also the case for training subsidised by VDAB. Many unemployed individuals are referred to training quite quickly, such as low-skilled youth, whereas others can make use of web-based training (languages, online ICT courses) during the first months of unemployment, where no instructor is involved in the training.

For job-matching, VDAB has a large database with vacancies which includes temporary and more permanent jobs. Matches between the vacancies and job seekers are made based on the competences, qualifications and the experience of the individual job seeker. This

information can be consulted on-line and also in several public places (e.g. large shopping malls and public libraries). In addition, one of the main functions of the *Jobkanaal* project is to facilitate matching between vulnerable target groups and vacancies.

Locally, there are strategies and concrete actions to better match skills supply and demand, where sectors or employers are experiencing difficulties accessing skilled people. In Antwerp, the Educational Council (*Onderwijsraad Antwerpen*) have chosen to develop strategies to match skills supply and demand on a sectoral and regional level by discussing how schools and employers can work together. Actions are established with regard to situated competence-based learning and guidance.

Procedures for the validation of skills gained informally at work or in the education or training system have been introduced in Flanders. Procedures are established for more than 50 professions, in a broad range of sectors (commerce, construction, food industry, health care, the clothing industry, and life sciences). Assessments are standardised making use of job and competence profiles and assessment centres are designated for each profession.

### **Joined up approaches to skills**

Economic development stakeholders consider the need to retain and attract talent and this is done in different ways. The provincial development agency of Limburg has commissioned research projects with regard to the labour market in the Euregio Maas-Rijn. A SWOT analysis is being carried out to determine the reasons for brain drain to other regions, the number of pupils, students and adults with relevant education and skills, as well as the number of job seekers with relevant job aspirations and qualifications.

Joined up local approaches to skills are common and the focus is on co-ordination using formal agreements across several different policy sectors. These agreements are supported by the Department of Work and Social Economy. Collaboration with local key actors is essential, and it is expected that local approaches will create value because local governments can create synergies between different policy domains.

Since 2007, a local education policy (*Lokaal flankerend onderwijsbeleid*) supports actions by the local government in the area of education. Cities develop a policy plan and their projects are eligible for subsidies from the Flemish government. It gives cities the opportunity to develop policy actions geared at the local situation and experiment with new innovative policies.

Antwerp, Genk and Hasselt have developed local educational plans and received subsidies for several projects. For example, in Antwerp, the “learning and work” project provided work experience to young people under the age of 25 who are still in education. Partners in the project included seven centres for learning and working, Syntra, centres for pupil guidance, schools (TISO, TIVO), a representative body of entrepreneurs (UNIZO), the Chamber of Commerce, RESOC, VDAB, and several not for profit organisations targeting groups at-risk.

Since 2011, Excellent Centres (*Excellente centra*) are a type of collaboration between sectors and key actors with regard to labour market policy, education and training. A sectoral approach is used, starting with an analysis of employment and skill needs with the aim of reducing the number of hard-to-fill vacancies.

#### Box 3.4. The City of Antwerp – Work and Economy Department

The Work and Economy department is working on Antwerp's socioeconomic planning and development, mainly focusing on attracting new investors, facilitating start-ups and stimulating competitiveness for growth and employment. Through several projects and initiatives, the department is dedicated to creating a diverse and strong economic environment where efficiency and profitability go hand in hand with sustainability and social responsibility. The Agency consists of various teams:

1. The Business Strategy and Innovation team focuses on economic strategy making the City of Antwerp as business-friendly as possible. The teams support the development of city projects with an economic focus such as the industrial site of Blue Gate Antwerp, incubator BlueChem, and Start-up City.
2. The Investment desk offers customised advice and support to investors and market players who wish to invest in the city. Location guidance is provided where a location manager helps entrepreneurs in their search for a location that matches their needs. The team also actively promotes the re-development of empty business and commercial premises. Licensing guidance (guidance for the licenses needed by entrepreneurs and directing to the appropriate city department is another key service).
3. The Retail and Hotels, Restaurants and Catering team reinforces the city's shopping and hospitality areas by supporting and advising how to start a business in hospitality, investing in the street view of commercial centres, and developing and supporting city projects with retail or hospitality focus
4. The Business Desk is the contact point for new and established businesses, as well as for the self-employed. The Business Desk provides information on permits issued by the City of Antwerp as well as the application of a renovation subsidy for commercial properties.
5. The Business Promotion team focuses on promoting Antwerp as a city "open for business" in business press and publishing and through conferences and networking events
6. The Work and Social Economy team offers customised services for filling vacancies and demand-oriented training. It co-ordinates the sectoral networks (hospitality, care) and the Talent houses as well as the development of actions to tackle youth employment.

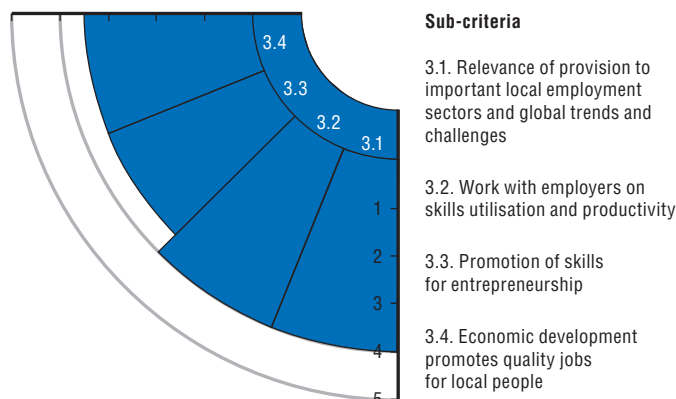
The initiatives and projects are developed in collaboration with the VDAB, organisations for social welfare, other city departments (education, youth), representatives of economic sectors, other labour market actors and education-training providers.

### Theme 3: Targeting policy to local employment sectors and investing in quality jobs

#### **Relevance of provision to important local employment sectors and global trends and challenges**

In Flanders it is common practice that employment programmes and initiatives are geared to important local employment sectors, especially in cities and in regions confronted with specific difficulties. The sectoral approach through the Talent Houses in Antwerp (as described in Box 3.3) are a good example as are the priorities defined in the Strategic Action Plan in Limburg (described earlier on pg. 23). In Limburg, important local employment sectors are logistics, life sciences, business services and ICT, construction and the care economy, clean technology, food (fruit), and tourism.

Figure 3.4. **Local job creation dashboard – Targeting policy to local employment sectors and investing in quality jobs**



It is common practice to gear the provision of training programmes to developments in the labour market. New adult training and VET courses are for instance geared to new types of employment especially in the care sector and green employment. A recent example was the development of training courses on solar energy. The rise in employment in this sector was due to specific governmental measures such as subsidies for households to install solar energy systems.

*Talentenwerf* is a Talent House in the field of construction which brings together VDAB, the City of Antwerp, the Educational Council of Antwerp, education and training providers, and the sectoral training fund of FVB-Constructiv. Other partners include the labour unions and sectoral federations. This network is also supported by the Flemish government with the aim to match people to jobs that will be generated by the large construction and infrastructure works in the City of Antwerp. An important feature of this Talent House is that the services are provided by a team of experts, using the expertise and tools of VDAB targeted to employers, educational providers, students and their parents as well as job seekers, which facilitates the development and co-ordination of actions.

In 2013, almost 900 individuals came to *Talentenwerf*. Four out of five were interested in participating in training courses; one out of five was looking for a job in the construction sector. Job seekers are presented to employers, who were then invited to get in touch with the job seekers directly. The *Talentenwerf* team looks for “hidden” vacancies, which are vacancies that are not advertised by employers. In the near future, the support for job seekers will be intensified and the aim is to reach more employers. Over the past five years, one out of four job seekers who came to *Talentenwerf* found a job and is still working in the construction sector.

To support the transition to a low-carbon economy it is necessary to invest in appropriate skills, knowledge and competences. The OECD is also conducting a complementary study in Flanders which will examine the specific skills needed to support economic growth that is green and inclusive. It examines how efforts by public policies, education and training systems and the private sector can be accelerated to support progress towards green growth in different industrial sectors, and to ease the transition to greener jobs. A mixture of transversal and specific skills are needed by different industry clusters, and the project will investigate how flexible and responsive the education and labour market system is to developing those skills that are needed to meet business objectives, both now and in the future.



### **Work with employers on skills utilisation and productivity**

Employers who want to improve introduce strategies for their staff's development and employability skills can receive financial support from the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy as well as from dedicated 'diversity consultants' through diversity and career plans. In 2012, 890 business and organisations submitted such a diversity and career plan.

Several programmes and services are available, with regard to skills utilisation and work organisation. The toolbox called "sustainable employment" developed by the Foundation Innovation and Labour (*Stichting Innovatie en Arbeid*) collects examples of initiatives in the field of sustainable employment, combining skills utilisation and work organisation and disseminates tools to be used to create sustainable employment. The tools as well as a description of several good practices are publicly available. Both VKW and VOKA (the local chambers of commerce) publish information emphasising the importance of continuously improving work organisation, inviting key note speakers to discuss this topic during events and organising workshops about the importance of the issue.

With regard to work organisation, Flanders Synergy (which operates under a public-private co-operation structure) became an important actor providing support to enterprises to innovate their work organisation. The aim is to create adaptive organisations, and meaningful and sustainable jobs. Services for employers are subsidised by the Flemish government. Flanders Synergy has an advisory board, which includes academic researchers, social partners including unions, enterprises and consultants.

Job coaching is a service provided by VDAB. An employer who has hired persons belonging to an at-risk group (e.g. migrants, older workers, disabled people, low-skilled people, ex-prisoners) can ask to be supported by a job coach. Job coaches help the new employee to develop motivation, adequate attitudes and behaviour. The aim is to ensure sustainable employment and this service is provided to employers for free.

Another good example is *Jobkanaal* which was initiated by VOKA, UNIZO, VERSO and VKW (all employer organisations) and is supported by the Flemish government. Partners are VDAB, SLN (Support for local networks, the umbrella organisation of several non-profit providers of social programmes), VVSG (Flemish Cities and Municipalities, the umbrella organization of Flemish cities and municipalities) and GTB (specialised guidance centres for persons with a handicap). *Jobkanaal* consists of advisors, who facilitate the recruitment of vulnerable groups, and provide HR-policy advice taking into account labour market developments.

In 2010, The Platform Care Limburg was introduced and supported by the province. The aim was to develop common policy for the care sector, to co-ordinate actions and to build up expertise. Innovation in work organisation is a core theme of the platform. Examples are the restructuring of labour processes and opportunities for flexible work organisation. One of the innovations is to create full-time jobs, combining part-time jobs across organisations with the expected outcome of increased labour productivity.

### **Involvement of education and training institutes in local applied research**

Universities and research centres are often asked to undertake applied research of relevance to the local economy. The research deals with many topics, such skills forecasting, employment indicators, project development, and evaluation. Research projects are commissioned by sectors, by the cities or regions themselves, or by the Flemish government. Research projects can also be undertaken to support local firms.

### Box 3.5. Practice labs for innovative work organisation

In Limburg, “Practice labs for innovative work organisation” have been set up to work with businesses, as part of a broader programme developed due to concerns about demographic change and an ageing workforce (50plusdatwerkt). The ACV union has played a key role in establishing and implementing the initiative.

The practice labs have been set up in the construction, logistics, healthcare, social economy, social service/care and agricultural sectors. Separate labs were established for each sector but in practice, labs can work with mixed groups, and can support both large and small firms. Eight workshops have taken place in 2013/14, each involving 6-8 companies. A consultant was hired to work on the workshops. They function as a learning network where companies share experience. Managers are encouraged to consider where they can effect change to make sure that workers have more involvement in the way that the firm operates. Each lab covers seven themes, each of which is a different area where the manager can have an influence. One theme, for example, has been exploring new ways that firms can expand their market base to improve the quality of their organisation (in terms of efficiency, flexibility, quality, innovation, sustainability) while also improving job quality.

Supervisors play the role of coach and act as a sounding board for participants who have questions, both within and outside of the lab sessions. Participants receive assignments to translate theory into practice when they return to the workplace. The construction sector has now started to run their own independent workshops. Unions report that the workshops have improved their relationships with local employers.

Furthermore, academic researchers are often asked to participate in projects through membership of an expert group or the board of organisations contributing to the development of the local economy.

### **Promotion of skills for entrepreneurship**

There are public employment programmes provided by VDAB that encourage entrepreneurship in Syntra and Starterslabo. Job seekers are screened based on their business ideas and if approved, they are assisted in starting their own business. Support is provided to develop a business plan and participants are provided with relevant mentorship and entrepreneurship education opportunities.

A vocational training programme (in secondary education as well as in adult education) can be complemented with a management course. This course is often optional, but sometimes it is an essential part of the programme. Adults who are not in the education or training system can participate in these courses. Within the dual system, the training provided by Syntra Flanders is geared towards entrepreneurship skills.

Entrepreneurship skills are part of specific university programmes mainly related to economics, engineering and applied sciences, sometimes as part of the core curriculum, sometimes as an option. However, awareness is raised for entrepreneurship skills in other domains (health sciences, educational sciences, food and agriculture).

A specific barrier to the development of entrepreneurship is that in Flanders “entrepreneurship” often has a negative connotation. Very often, “entrepreneurship” is also interpreted in a limited way (e.g. starting your own business while it can also refer to utilising entrepreneurship skills while working for a company or a not for profit organisation) or in a negative way (e.g. after failure of a business).

Antwerp created “enterprise centres” (*bedrijvencentra*) which assist start-ups and young entrepreneurs in developing sustainable businesses. Within these centres, several companies within similar sectors are located in the same place (e.g. design and creative professions, construction, high tech). “We are chemistry” is a project organised in collaboration with the sectoral federation and the municipal body for Harbour Antwerp (*Gemeentelijk Havenbedrijf Antwerpen*). The aim is to motivate students to choose a career in the life sciences sector.

### **Economic development promotes quality jobs for local people**

Flanders Investment and Trade plays an active role supporting home-based companies doing business abroad and foreign companies looking to invest or expand operations within Flanders. Strategies promoting quality jobs for local people often include active marketing of the local labour force to potential inward investors. An important role is played by the Provincial Development Agency (*Provinciale Ontwikkelingsmaatschappij*) and by cities.

When POM Limburg promotes the region, it provides information with regard to human capital, referring to the demographic composition of the labour force, the qualification levels, language skills as well as the opportunities provided by the presence of educational and training institutions. The collaboration between universities and enterprises is often promoted and sometimes, financial support for new employers (e.g. in the form of loans at low rates) is provided to attract them to the region.

In Antwerp, the city emphasises the presence of a high skilled and multilingual labour force and refers to the presence of universities and institutes for higher education. Specific competences are mentioned such as creativity and information about the domains covered by education providers is also available.

The quality and quantity of jobs offered by local inward investors is taken into consideration in the planning process. New enterprises for instance have to comply with certain rules before receiving permits, and often a dialogue is started with new enterprises in order to create commitment with regard to the local labour force. An important feature of Limburg’s inward investment strategy is that efforts are made to attract enterprises that create jobs for blue-collar workers as well. Limburg wants to attract large enterprises but also wants to be attractive to smaller enterprises, in order to diminish dependency from a small number of very large employers.

New local construction and development activities are considered to be opportunities for education and employment. A good and recent example can be found in Limburg where the Strategic Action Plan Limburg (SALK) (as described earlier on pg. 23) emphasises the importance of new local construction and development activities to provide new employment opportunities to the population such as the development of tourism (recreation and infrastructure); exploitation of former mines (Be-mine, Terhills, Thor-park); the development of a fashion incubator; and construction of social housing.

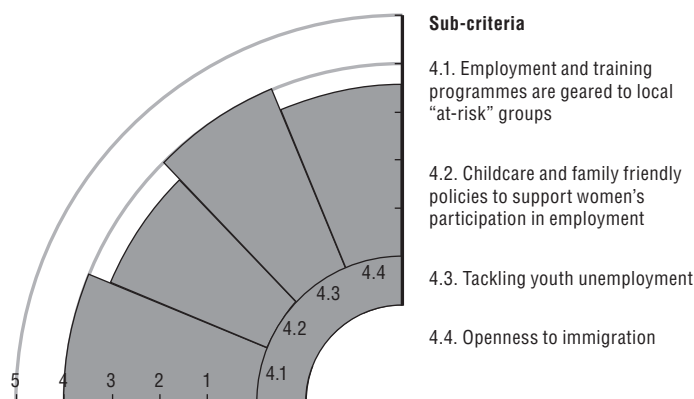
Antwerp is not confronted with job destruction. Rather, huge public construction works (traffic works aimed at improving mobility in the Antwerp region) planned to be executed between 2016-22 and will also create new jobs. In public procurement, tenderers are often asked to fulfil specific requirements (e.g. to make use of the workforce in the social economy), but the possibilities for procurement to source quality jobs is limited due to legal restrictions.

## Theme 4: Being inclusive

### **Employment and training programmes are geared to local “at risk” groups**

In general, employment programmes specifically target certain at-risk groups but some groups are under-represented in the participation of many services. The take-up of services is monitored in a limited way. The Flemish social partners diversity commission (*Commissie Diversiteit*) has asked for an evaluation of the effectiveness of some employment measures in order to enhance monitoring quality and introduce a systematic process for monitoring outcomes across regions.

Figure 3.5. **Local Job Creation Dashboard – Being inclusive**



Training programmes recognised by VDAB (for instance, within adult education institutions) charge reduced fees to job seekers in order to make them more accessible (training at VDAB’s competence centres remain free for jobseekers). There are a range of language training programmes that are available in order to make VET and adult training more accessible for those individuals who do not speak Dutch or have low literacy levels. There is a VET offer for specific groups at risk including prisoners (training and guidance provided by VDAB); and people with disabilities (transport allowances paid by VDAB). Literacy training is provided on demand in collaboration with organisations targeting groups at risk, such as migrant women and OCMW clients. One of the tasks of VDAB is to create jobs/job placements for people not ready to enter formal employment. Disabled people receive special guidance and there are specific measures including subsidies to make it easier for employers to hire them.

### **Outreach activities**

VET and adult training institutions participate in outreach activities, and some training programmes are delivered directly in disadvantaged communities. Youth organisations are most often situated in disadvantaged communities and work closely with the neighbourhood and community. Other adult training institutions do not really target groups at risk, and are as such not consistently participating in area-based approaches. However, this does not mean they do not pay attention to the needs of disadvantaged students. Often, special support is available to these students. Social economy projects providing training or work experience are also very often situated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. VDAB Antwerp has set up several outreach pilots for unemployed people who are not in contact with the employment service, especially unemployed youth and ethnic minorities.

### Box 3.6. Werkhaven and the “key carriers”-project

Werkhaven Antwerp is a non-profit association, more specifically a social economy company and a “daughter” of the city of Antwerp, called an “EVA” (externally autonomous agency). There are about 320 people working for the organisation. It targets persons unemployed for more than one year, have a low level of education and more than 85% of them have a foreign origin.

The “key carriers” project is an innovative activity, which above all brings together the target group workers and the citizens. Individuals and organisations can ask the city department “Living Together” for a meeting room in a public building for work or personal functions. The department suggests a meeting room and the user can count on a key carrier of Werkhaven in order to open and close the room. Under this programme, a school for example, does not need to keep staff working in order to open and close the college gym for a sports association. Besides opening and closing, the key carriers have an important role in logistical support and social control. They help by organising the room, setting up chairs, making coffee and keep an eye on the way the rooms are left for the next day or group.

Taking into account all these tasks, the key carriers have a big responsibility and need to have a specific profile. Presently, there are more than 50 rooms managed under this programme, which have all their own access modalities and properties. Key carriers must be flexible, customer friendly and independent. Many older workers participate in the programme, which reflects the situation in Flanders where older workers have less possibilities to participate in the regular labour market.

### **Informal and illegal employment**

Most measures against informal and illegal employment are related to control and sanctioning. However, since 2003 there is a system of service vouchers (*dienstencheques*) available throughout Flanders that is also helping people out of informal and illegal employment. The aim of the system was to create new jobs by subsidising household tasks (individual households pay a reduced fee, while government bridges the difference between that fee and the employee’s gross wage). The system is very successful in reaching workers and households, and evaluations have demonstrated that it is effective in fostering employment.

### **Childcare and family friendly policies to support women’s participation in employment**

Most families can access affordable and subsidised child care, but the demand is not fully met. There is subsidised pre-school child care available throughout Flanders with prices from EUR 1.50-27.30/day depending on the income of the family, the amount of hours the child is in formal care and the number of other children within the family. VDAB provides child care subsidies to cover the costs for children of unemployed persons who follow approved training courses. Local initiatives are taken to make childcare accessible for disadvantaged groups. The City of Antwerp for instance has created and financed special places for child care that are available short-term for parents who were unemployed but have recently found a job.

In 2012, there were 38.7 formal preschool child care places per 100 children between the ages of 0-2 years. This conceals important provincial differences comparing Antwerp and Limburg (33.2 and 32.2 places respectively per child between 0-2 years) to the other

provinces (East-Flanders: 41.3, West-Flanders: 44.8, Flemish-Brabant: 41.2). The yearly report of “Kind en Gezin” of 2012 notes that 63 709 preschool formal child care places with a fee that is dependent on the family income and 26 017 places for which the fee is not dependent on family income. Therefore, most but not all of the preschool child care places (71.0%) are thus determined based on family income.

In April 2012, the Flemish Government adopted a decree which among others incorporates the explicit goal of having 50 child care places per 100 children younger than three years by 2016, and child care should be available to any family that has a need by 2020. One study conducted on this issue suggests that increasing the number of formal pre-school child care places would still lead to an increase in total labour supply as families switch to formal child care although some households would also reduce working hours (Vanleenhove, 2013).

### **Early years education**

Affordable early years education is broadly available. In the Flemish region, a rule has been put into place stating that in order for a child to enter elementary education, he or she should have participated in kindergarten (“early childhood education”) for at least 220 days. The government wants to increase participation in early childhood education. One survey found that 89.6% of the children in between the age of 2.5-3 years attend preschool at least part time (Hedebouw and Peetermans, 2009). This is in line with the figures of the Starting Strong II study which cites 90% for participation at the age of 2.5 years (OECD, 2006). Participation is free, including use of all items necessary to attain the developmental goals that are put forward by the government.

Schemes are in place to target increased participation in early years education among disadvantaged groups. Most of the places in formal preschool child care are dependent on the family income, making prices less of a threshold for participation. Hedebouw and Peetermans (2009) suggest that although the use of preschool childcare has increased over the years since 2002 in families with a mother of foreign origin, it does not significantly increase for disadvantaged families.

*Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family) places an emphasis on measures to increase child care use in families with a mother of foreign origin and in poor and disadvantaged families. Several pilot projects have been set-up (for example projects aimed at increasing inclusive child care through so called Centres for Child Care [*Centra voor Kinderopvang*]). Neighbourhood based child care facilities are being developed that work together with other local actors to reach less privileged families. However, for now, only 0.2 places in such care facilities are available for every 100 children between the ages of 0-2 years.

### **Care for the elderly**

When it comes to the presence of affordable and subsidised care for the elderly, a distinction has to be made between care at home and residential care. Care at home is provided by not for profit organisations. All care provided by recognised services is subsidised, but elderly have to pay a small share (e.g. 5.44 EUR/hour or 6 EUR/hour for different types of domestic help) (Pacolet, De Coninck & De Wispelaere, 2013). There are no waiting lists with care being provided almost immediately upon request. Residential care is very diverse and provided by welfare services (OCMW), private not for profit organisations and commercial providers.

### ***Family friendly policies***

Data for Flanders show that 27.7% of the working population has made use of working time reduction options such as part time work or career breaks. Worker oriented flexibility, such as working from home or a four-day full time schedule are opted for by 18.1% of the working population, men and women equally. It is, however, offered to 41.8% of workers. Family friendly policies are not universally accepted or promoted by employers' organisations.

A traditional norm of a full time working week with over time work prevails so that a reduction of working time implies sacrificing career opportunities. Trade unions offer checklists for family friendly policies at the workplace, primarily directed to workers. An important family representation group (*Gezinsbond*) set up a charter on family friendly policies for companies. These initiatives are not widely adopted by employers, except for organisations in the public sector, such as local governments and health care institutions, and organisations with large networks, such as banks and insurance companies.

In sector or national level discussions, the bottlenecks seems to be the lack of legal control by trade unions over flexibility measures, and the limited margin of flexibility of employers in reorganising work, referring to the nature of the work and examples of women, as a rule, who managed to make careers either through sacrificing family life or successfully combining duties in work and private life.

### ***Tackling youth unemployment***

School dropouts and NEETs are a big source of concern for the government and all organisations involved in employment, education and training. An important new initiative is the Action Plan for Early School Leaving (*Actieplan Voortijdig Schoolverlaten*). The plan was developed at the Flemish level with specific tasks and initiatives to be carried out locally. A data warehouse will be constructed in order to provide localities with detailed information concerning the number of early school leavers. Schools and their educational umbrella organisations, Syntra, VDAB, and other organisations will be assigned tasks to process the information.

Since many years, policies and programmes have been developed to support NEETS, especially in bigger cities. The identification of these young people and active outreach are important parts of these strategies. In Antwerp, a central helpdesk for youth at risk was established in 2003. This helpdesk has the objective of reducing the number of school drop-outs. A system for early detection of problems has been developed and youth at risk are guided by several organisations in close collaboration with schools. Schools, centres for pupil guidance, welfare services, and police can report young people living in a very disadvantaged situation including domestic violence, showing risky behaviour as well as having behavioural problems. More than 7 000 youth have been registered in the last 10 years.

The professionals working for the Central Helpdesk develop tools to reduce and prevent school drop-outs. They also are responsible for monitoring and profiling youth as well as evaluating the interventions. The team is developing evidence-based policy measures and protocols.

In Limburg, a network called Right to Learn was established in 2013 to provide services for youth with truancy or other school problems, at risk of early school leaving. Educational providers and centres for pupil guidance, supported by many other partners (e.g. welfare and special care services) are collaborating to guarantee the right to learn for these individuals. Empowerment and social integration are core objectives, and parents will be actively

involved whenever possible. If necessary, alternatives for school (at least during a short period) will be available. Presently evidence is being analysed, an inventory of good practices is made and a networking model is being developed. The possibility of creating a central register is being examined and the network is planned to be fully functional in 2015.

A new initiative in Flanders is the work experience for youth programme (*Werkinleving voor jongeren – WIJ!*), which subsidise projects targeted to 13 Flemish cities, including in the City of Antwerp and Limburg regions. A call was launched and proposals were submitted by organisations working in these cities – see Box 3.7.

#### Box 3.7. **Work experience for youth (*Werkinleving voor jongeren WIJ!*)**

**Target group:** unqualified young people (under 25 years) who are not employed, who are very difficult to integrate in the labour market (but who do not suffer from specific problems making specialised guidance necessary) and who are not supported yet. Allocation of the young people towards WIJ is guaranteed by the VDAB.

**Scope:** In Antwerp, more than 1 700 young people will be supported in a two year period. In Genk and Hasselt, approximately 200 young people will be supported. For the whole of Limburg, over 310 young people will be supported with the aim to lead young people to employment or to make them more skilled.

**Services available:** Individual vocational training (*Individuele beroepsopleiding, IBO*), apprenticeship through the federal apprenticeship system (*Federale instapstages*), vocational training provided by the PES (*Competentieversterking bij VDAB*), training “work experience for young people” (*Werkinleving voor jongeren*) and language training. Other services are job hunting and brokering, and the certification of competences. Individual guidance as well as group programmes are available. Employers do not pay for the apprenticeship, but they are expected to give apprentices the opportunity to reach the learning aims, to designate a mentor and to contribute to the evaluation of the apprentice.

**Development support:** for specific target groups it includes training with regard to vocational competences, but special attention is paid to generic competences and attitudes.

**Organisations involved:** private organisations, providers of supported employment, non-profit training and guidance organisations targeting groups at risk. The organisation providing the guidance is obliged to collaborate with the local government.

### **Openness to immigration**

Recognition of educational qualifications acquired abroad is a service provided by NARIC. This service is free for many people (e.g. job seekers receiving guidance from VDAB), although some categories have to pay for the service. Skills obtained outside the academic educational system can be recognised.

Within the educational system, procedures for the recognition of acquired competences are developed. These procedures are accessible to all so migrants can also ask for the recognition of their skills, in order to gain access to the educational system, or in order to be able to choose the short track in education. Support for going through the procedures is available, but the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad is not always considered to be efficient.

Language training is widely available in education and training centres, as well as in the workplace. Language training is available in a wide range of subsidised services suited



for all skills levels. In order to determine skill levels, immigrants are screened. Language training in the workplace is also available targeted to specific occupations in a broad range of sectors. An example of language training in the workplace provided by VDAB is NODW (*Nederlands op de werkvloer* – Dutch at the workplace). This type of course is promoted by several sectoral bodies. However, specific problems still have to be tackled when it comes to providing this type of training. For example, it is difficult to combine vocational education and training with language training.

General actions are in place aimed at raising awareness about labour market discrimination. There is a Flemish action plan to combat employment related discrimination (*Actieplan Bestrijding Arbeidsgerelateerde Discriminatie*, ABAD), which combines a prevention and sanctioning approach. The plan will be evaluated annually and several professionals are assigned the task to tackle discrimination in the labour market (e.g. diversity consultants within unions and consultants within the sectoral training funds).

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