The thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) systems provided in ‘VET in Europe’ reports. The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda. Thematic perspectives provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. They are available at:


This thematic perspective was prepared based on data/information from 2017. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of Cedefop. Thematic perspectives are co-financed by the European Union and ReferNet national partners.

ReferNet is a network of institutions across Europe representing the 28 Member States, plus Iceland and Norway. The network provides Cedefop with information and analysis on national vocational education and training (VET). ReferNet also disseminates information on European VET and Cedefop’s work to stakeholders in the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway

Guidance and outreach for inactive and unemployed

Many countries across the European Union (EU) have high levels of unemployment and of inactive adults. These phenomena are frequently associated with low levels of qualification and insufficient basic skills. They may also reflect lack of adjustment between skills demanded in the labour market and skills developed in formal education and training. In both cases up-skilling and re-skilling solutions could be explored to increase the employability of adults.

The national reports developed by ReferNet partners reflect efforts done by Member States to reach vulnerable groups affected by unemployment and inactivity and help them reengage in learning and employment. The reports refer, in particular, to measures which may include young adults not in employment, education or training (NEET) and adults undergoing long term unemployment (LTU), given their persistence in many countries and the high challenges these groups face.

The policy strategies and initiatives in focus shed light over ways to support the most vulnerable to find learning and qualifying solutions. Career guidance and counselling support to people with decaying skills, low levels of motivation and insufficient basic skills are addressed. Its instrumental role in providing information, identifying skills needs, clarifying career options and developing positive attitudes towards learning is made clear.

Whenever possible, outreach measures were described, addressing the ones who fall out of the scope of standard policies to support registered unemployed or recent education drop-outs. Many reports entertain an important discussion on the entitlement to social protection and its effectiveness in addressing the challenges of all demographic groups.

Lastly, Cedefop trusts that these reports will provide an important characterisation of current opportunities and challenges across the EU in establishing appropriate upskilling pathways for adults. Current European policy initiatives urge MS to integrate skills assessment measures with flexible learning and validation solution, where guidance services and outreach will necessarily play a key role.
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NEETs and the long-term unemployed: what approaches have been implemented in Belgium?

This article describes different approaches coexisting in Belgium to deal with NEETs (1) and the low-skilled long-term unemployed (over 12 months). We will use the standard abbreviations NEETs and LTU (long-term unemployed) in this article. Society, the economy and the labour market in Belgium are currently putting an emphasis on ever-higher qualifications. However, the percentage of people taking part in lifelong learning is very low (7.1% in 2010, 6.9% 2015) and below the European average (EU 28) which is 10.7% (2).

Many people, both NEETs and the LTU, are currently not in training, in education or employed. They also do not all have the skills needed to obtain long-term employment. In addition, current systems to activate jobseekers can lead to counter-productive outcomes and, therefore, fail to connect people with the appropriate training programmes. In fact, the activation policies (for instance the termination of rights if the Public Employment Service determines that the job search effort is insufficient) can lead some people to cut themselves off entirely from the system and place themselves out of reach of the authorities (disaffiliation). This situation has an impact on vocational education and training (VET) and forces the authorities to rethink their outreach policies and adjust their systems for these groups.

Belgium, a federal state consisting of three Regions and three Communities, offers a varied panorama of economic and individual situations. As a result, public and non-profit initiatives differ depending on whether the unemployed live in the North (Flanders), in the Centre (Brussels), in the East (German-speaking Community) or in the South (Wallonia) of the country.

In order to write the article requested, ReferNet Belgium national coordination team organised a study day on NEETs and the LTU on 20 June 2017. It brought together all of its partners and certain experts to discuss some of the initiatives taken by the various entities in order to bring figures, experiences and concrete facts to the table. We should point out, however, that the following document is not an exhaustive analysis of all measures taken or of practices in the field. The subject is indeed extremely vast and touches upon various social sectors, far beyond that of VET. Many players are involved to some degree or another in the support, orientation and re-socialisation processes upstream of

(1) Not in employment, in education nor in training
(2) Source: Eurostat
training and/or employment. We will point out some policy examples and measures taken, illustrated with practical examples.

Part 1 of the article provides Belgian and regional statistical data for the two groups in question. They are completed with more qualitative information drawn from recent works to further qualify the numbers, clarify profiles and better understand the attitudes, behaviour and expectations of the public.

Next, we provide a view of federal, regional and community policies and of some measures taken by the various Belgian institutional entities. The second part presents four initiatives put in place for persons from the two groups covered. In addition to the ‘portraits’ drawn from the statistics and qualitative studies these experiences from the field help to complete our understanding. They materialise the objectives defined by politicians (decision-makers) and provide a great deal of information in terms on assisting NEETs and the LTU. In addition to the terms activation, occupation, training and trades, words such as reconstruction, inclusion, diversity, affiliation/disaffiliation, etc. are also important to these four initiatives.

We conclude by opening a discussion about the potential for increasing the number of initiatives for supporting the members of vulnerable groups in order to help them become autonomous and managing their lives.
CHAPTER 1.

Current status

1.1. Facts and figures about NEETs

According to Eurostat data, the Belgian population between the ages of 20 and 34 included 17.2% of NEETs in 2016, a rate slightly below the average of the 28 European countries. The rate has been stable since 2012.

Graph 1. NEETs (ages 20 to 34) – European comparison (in % of the population ages 20 to 34)

There are some regional variations with respect to NEETs in Belgium, a federal state in which each Region is competent for employment matters. More than a quarter of young Brussels residents between the ages of 20 and 34 are considered to be NEETs (25.8%) whereas only 12.2% are in Flanders (below the national average of 17.2%) and 22.3% are in Wallonia.
Taking a closer look at socio-demographic characteristics, it becomes apparent that the age group between 25 and 29 has the most NEETs in Belgium while the rate diminishes between 30 and 34. There are somewhat more women than men in the group, which matches the European trend. The most striking characteristic is related to education: 42.6% of NEETs between 20 and 34 lack qualifications whereas 8.1% of them are highly qualified.
**1.2. NEETs: initial profiles**

The Eurofound study ‘Exploring the diversity of NEETs’[^3] highlighted the diversity of the profiles of NEETs 15 to 24 years old. The heterogeneity is multifaceted: some NEETs have no qualifications, others have university degrees, others are in a precarious situation and yet others are well off; six subgroups of young people have been identified. In Belgium, 30.3% of NEETs are currently inactive and between the end of their studies and their first job. The inquiry also found that 24.1% of NEETs in Belgium do not fit any of the six profile subgroups found by the study and shown in the table below. They may be ‘people who are very far from the labour market or any social life or, on the contrary, young people who are very well off materially. They may also be young people involved in unconventional projects (artistic projects not recognised by traditional education or which are not valued in the job market)’[^4].

[^3]: Mascherini (Massimiliano) - Ledermaier (Stefanie), *Exploring the diversity of NEETs*, Eurofound, 2016, 72 p.

[^4]: Mascherini (Massimiliano) - Ledermaier (Stefanie), *Op. cit.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-entrants: (will soon be in training or employed)</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term unemployed: (&lt; 1 year)</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term unemployed: (&gt; 1 year)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unavailable due to illness or disability</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unavailable due to family responsibilities</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouraged workers</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other inactive persons</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Exploring the Diversity of NEETs, Eurofound (See footnote 2)

1.3. **NEETS: qualitative work (research and studies) for a better understanding**

Given this range of profiles, several qualitative studies have been carried out in Belgium to complete the figures, better understand the outlook and paths taken by NEETs and question the suitability of the solutions provided to the phenomenon by the public authorities. We chose to present the study carried out by the non-profit organisation **Réalisation, Téléformation et Animation (RTA)** (5) commissioned by the Observatory of Childhood, Youth and Youth Assistance (OEJAJ), a service which assists policy decision-making for children and youth in the French Community of Belgium (6).

The goal of the study was to take a fresh approach and gain more in-depth knowledge of those branded as ‘NEETs’ by analysing the pathways followed by 30 young people (ages 18 to 30). These young people have varied life experiences, some of them ‘being off the normal radar’ (unemployment, public social services centres (CPAS), assistance and insertion institutions). The interviewers asked them about their living conditions, their aspirations, their interests and their relationship with institutions. They are also interested in the way the people interviewed describe their situation. Their answers revealed a mismatch between the usual perception of this group of young people and reality: they have very active lives. NEETs are usually associated with ‘inactivity’ when, in fact, they are often ‘over-active’: they are outside of normal institutional

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(5) RTA : **Réalisation, Téléformation et Animation**, www.rta.be
assistance circuits, but they manage, do not wallow in their situation, are very proactive, have family responsibilities and look for work, legal or otherwise.

By reading through the interviews, it quickly becomes apparent that the triple-negative ‘no-no-no’ associated with the term NEETs is a very poor description of the situation of these young people. It would be more appropriate to be positive about what they do, rather than describe them with a series of negatives.

RTA models people’s social life on two axes (see Annex 1), based on the theories of French sociologist Robert Castel on the concepts of exclusion and disaffiliation: integration/non-integration through work and insertion/non-insertion via social and family relationships. Each person’s position on the two axes is determined by various economic, social and individual factors. The position of each individual on these two axes can vary according the stages of his life. Each individual follows therefore his or her own specific trajectory which is in part affected by social determinants and the measures taken by the authorities.

By cross-referencing the two axes, RTA determined four types of social life, each with its own priorities. People follow a trajectory, which aligns with one of the four types at any given time. However, the two axes ‘co-produce’, that is, they impact each other and, unfortunately, the impact is negative for many of these young people: a problem on one axis will cause a problem on the other one and vice-versa. The trend in so-called ‘activation’ public policies is to put the focus on the integration axis (actively find a job at all costs, despite that fact that the job market is very poor). Many people’s priorities are quite different (for example, finding housing). This discrepancy can worsen, and in some cases, lead to disaffiliation for NEETs, the result of lack of employment and social isolation. As an example, we can highlight the case of Océane, a NEET interviewed as part of the study. She is twenty and lives on the street. She has a degree in advertising, but was denied training because the rules of the institution she depends on state that she is overqualified.

RTA and the OEJAJ concluded that the situations of young people branded as ‘NEET’s’ and the measures taken by the institutions should not be generalised, respectively standardised. It recommends individualised support for each of these youngsters via non-profit organisations, which are more in tune with their needs and concerns. The result will be support provided in a much more favourable relational environment.

A second study also commissioned by the OEJA and conducted by Odenore (The Observatory for the non-use of rights and services, Observatoire des non-
recours aux droits et services) in 2014/2015 (7) shows among other things that the breakdown of family life plays a determining role on the chaotic aspect of the pathways. Many young people have also a lack of confidence in themselves and in others. Sometimes they feel they have been wronged or even victims of social mechanisms (8).

Based on the information gathering, we can summarize that the NEET phenomenon in Belgium involves nearly one young person out of every five between the ages of 20 and 34, with significant differences by region. Half of them have a low level of qualifications, but it should be noted that that one young so-called NEET out of 10 has done post-secondary studies. The heterogeneity of profiles, behaviour, and aspirations in this group is striking. The employment activation policies implemented in Belgium do not necessarily succeed in re-integrating these groups, which have a wide range of life conditions and aspirations, into the labour market. On the contrary, real discrepancies are noticed by the study between the daily lives and concerns of NEETs - often mistakenly described as inactive - and the often non-differentiated measures proposed by the institutions. Restoring confidence in institutions, giving time and allowing individuals to re-construct themselves in a secure environment are real challenges for the measures to be implemented.

1.4. LTU facts and figures

The second target group covered by the article are the long-term unemployed (over one year) for which we use the acronym LTU. The LTU account for 4% of the active population in Belgium. This is in line with the European average, except that it has increased since 2012 (in Belgium) whereas the European average declined over the same period. Three neighbouring countries (Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) have a lower LTU rate than Belgium. The LTU rate in France is a little higher (4.5%).


(8) Forms of social exclusion and discrimination caused by the social system (such as the Education system).
Slightly more men than women are long-term unemployed and, as is the case for NEETs, it consists of groups with low qualification levels. In terms of the Regions, Brussels has the highest LTU rate (10.3% of the active population ages 15 to 64) whereas it is 2% in the Flemish Region and 5.9% in the Walloon Region. As is the case in other European countries, approximately one Belgian jobseeker out of two is a LTU.
1.5. Exclusion of the unemployed and the LTU: how can the negative effects of exclusion be reduced? A qualitative approach

One way to better understand the paths taken by the unemployed is to take a closer look at the effects of the activation policy applicable to most LTU. Employment policies have put more emphasis on individual responsibility over the past years: jobseekers are monitored and threatened with the loss of benefits if their job search behaviour does not conform to the rules established by the authorities. This can lead to negative effects and result in people in need...
disappearing off the radar. Two procedures can deny the unemployed benefits in Belgium. The first is termination of the integration allowance (FIDAI), which has been limited to three years since January 2012, and resulted in a wave of rights terminations in January 2015. The second is exclusion from unemployment benefits following negative assessments of the jobseeker’s behaviour (traditional DISPO procedure).

In order to measure the impact of the reform and understand the response of the unemployed, the Brussels Employment Observatory commissioned a qualitative research on the future of the unemployed in Brussels who are denied benefits from GIRSEF (UCL), in collaboration with the Centre for the Sociology of Organisations (CSO) at Sciences-Po in Paris (9). Using 55 in-depth research interviews with excluded persons, the study highlighted the strong feelings of resentment felt by the excluded toward the public unemployment institutions (assistance, payment organisations, etc.). The effect of exclusion is to automatically deny the unemployed person their status and income. Moreover, for the unemployed the termination of rights can hardly be reduced or recovered in the future; according to the authors of the study, it tends to worsen their situation. As an example, we can highlight the case of Jacques, 45 years old, a LTU denied benefits who was interviewed. He has a lower secondary school diploma and has training in sound and lighting. He always found work by word of mouth at concerts, events or festivals, until he suffered a long depression. He has come out of it, but never learned to promote his experience. He does not know how to use a curriculum vitae, or barely. He registered with the regional employment office and waited for years before finding a counsellor who phoned around and found part-time work for him.

The authors provided 40 recommendations in three areas: (1) Organise monitoring and support based on an understanding and acceptance of a range of different ways of defining work and searching for a job. (2) Design an employment policy that provides multiple statuses to address the heterogeneity of situations and the way they are experienced. (3) Think in terms of overall job paths, transitions and mobility to anticipate the effects of the actions carried out and take into account the consequences for individuals.

Several lessons can be drawn about the profile of the LTU by studying the results of the interviews and the conclusions reached by the researchers. In Belgium, the longer the period of unemployment (24 months and more), the more difficult it becomes to find a job, regardless of the Region. Half of the unemployed

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(9) The complete and summary reports in French and in Dutch are available at: https://uclouvain.be/fr/chercher/girsef/actualites/chomeurs-exclus.html
in Belgium are LTU (unemployed for at least 12 months). From a socio-demographic standpoint, the profile of the LTU is more male and less qualified.

The qualitative interviews helped to highlight some important data. There is misunderstanding at several levels between the LTU and the institutions. They do not apply the same standards: What is a job? How long should it last? What is a qualification? How can a jobseeker’s qualities and skills be highlighted? The standards applied by the LTU and the activation bodies (primarily PES) appear to be contradictory: for example, the job placement office requires that a cook sends a certain number of curriculum vitae and cover letters to prove that they are actively looking for a job. This happens despite the fact that the way most cooks signal their skills is not via a curriculum vita, but by showing their ability to create hearty or gourmet meals. Developing different approaches, adjusting expectations based on profiles, considering individualised alternative income searches, which demonstrate a minimum level of autonomy and proactivity could help support job search mechanisms which better take into account the heterogeneity of the LTU.
CHAPTER 2.
Non-exhaustive outline of policies and measures taken

This chapter focuses on some of the policies implemented in Flanders, the Brussels Region, Wallonia and the German-speaking Community. All these entities have competences in the fields of employment and training and, together, cover the entire country. Measures linked to education (mandatory, higher or adult) taken by the three communities will not be discussed in this chapter. The sixth government reform recently confirmed the transfer of most employment matters to the four above-mentioned federal entities. This includes the activation and monitoring of jobseekers as well as the target group policy. As the new legislation was passed recently (2016-2017), or is in the process of being passed, it is premature to analyse the new practices in depth.

In any event, with respect to public policies, the support (individual follow-up) provided to jobseekers continues to be the main measure taken by the public employment services (PES). Generally speaking, the support provided is more intense for jobseekers with poor qualifications who have been out of work for a long period of time. Following an interview with a counsellor and the creation of a project or career plan based on their profile, jobseekers can be provided with free remediation, training - in a public or partner training centre - or individual vocational training at a company (FPI/PFI/IBO).

In order to encourage the LTU to seek training, the PES (public employment services) collaborate with local organisations, which are in direct contact with this group in the field. The traditional players in the field include the public social services centres (CPAS/OCMW) which are managed at the municipal level and work with the beneficiaries of social aid throughout the country. Support for the LTU and/or their training can also be handled by non-profit organisations (ASBL/VZW). However, the type of partnership with the PES can vary from one region to the other. In Flanders, partnerships are established with third parties (non-commercial sector) following calls for projects initiated by the regional public employment service and agreed via partnership agreements. In Wallonia, the Centres d'insertion socio-professionnelle (socio-professional integration centres) (CISP) and the Maisons régionales pour l'emploi (regional employment offices) have been established for several decades and are grouped in federations. In Brussels, the players include the Missions locales pour l'emploi (local missions for employment) which carry out activities upstream of training: information,
guidance and orientation and establish projects, and the *Organismes d’insertion socio-professionnelle* (socio-professional integration organisations) (OISP) which work with groups with low or middle-level qualifications to provide initial training, basic training and qualification-based training in some sectors.

Guidance to training is one of the options offered to the LTU in all cases. This is done in collaboration with the PES, which are responsible for taking decisions regarding exemptions on the rule of availability of the person for employment, allowing job-seekers to follow education or training courses.

In addition, several measures covering employment and/or training have been adopted for jobseekers. Given that target group measures (young people under 25, LTU and older jobseekers, etc.) are now managed at the regional level, the outlines of the policy and the target groups may differ. In Wallonia, the ‘Impulsion 12 months +’ system enables the LTU hired by a company to receive a work allowance for two years, which is deducted from net salary by the employer. In Flanders, the VDAB grants a bonus to companies, which hire a LTU between the ages of 25 and 55 who has been unemployed for at least 24 months. The amount is paid in the third and twelfth months following signature of a permanent employment contract (or similar). Starting on 1 October 2017, the LTU in Brussels will receive a work allowance during the first 30 months following signature of their contract (fixed-term contract of six months minimum).

Under certain conditions, low-qualified LTU (> 12 months) can receive an allowance of one euro/hour of training completed plus reimbursement of transport expenses.

Several non-profits working in the field of NEETs receive funds from several sources (regional, municipal, federal, European, or private in some cases) and work to provide support to young people and reconnect them with society and the work world. Following the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the regions in 2014, this system has been playing an increasingly important role in the policies implemented for NEETs by the public authorities, although they are implemented differently in the Regions given their socio-economic differences.

The Youth Guarantee plan for Brussels consists of seven different parts ranging from information for jobseekers to training and education. It is part of each stage of the young person’s transition to employment. The authorities of the various sectors work together within this framework to provide young people with the following solutions within six months of their registration as jobseekers: 3 000 training places/year, 2 000 internships/year and 1 000 internships/year.

The first area covers measures related to information and guidance. A significant amount of work was done on NEET outreach systems for this purpose. In 2016, this led to a strong increase in the number of actions, beneficiaries and
requests for information. A multi-partner orientation space for young people managed by the public French-speaking training service (Bruxelles Formation) is one of the first accomplishments of the plan, following the lead of the Bruxelles-J (10) virtual advisory platform.

Drawing on experiments carried out at the municipal level, Bruxelles Formation inaugurated the ‘Form Truck’ project in 2017. Designed as a first line service, the project consists of a mobile information centre, which travels around the capital to inform, attract, guide and enrol jobseekers (particularly NEETs) to training, validation of skills or education pathways (11). It is financed by Bruxelles Formation and is made available to its partners (other VET providers or CPAS for instance) after the signature of a contract. The composition of the staff rests on the partner using the Form Truck but it is generally composed of guidance counsellors and social workers. In order to strengthen the outreach of the project, Bruxelles Formation closely works with ‘Abdel en vrai’ (12), a humourist and YouTubian popular with Brussels youth, This collaboration involves the making of promotion videos as well as his participation in some outreach activities in the field. In addition, several actions have been carried out to strengthen the call to training made by people in direct contact with the NEETs (youth offices and CPAS among others).

In Flanders, VDAB has committed to offering every young person (up to 25) personal assistance within four months of registration. All low-skilled early school leavers start vocational training or a work placement after their sixth month of registration. Among the measures taken, we can identify three best practices. The pilot project ‘Work In Progress’ (WIP) is part of the Youth Work plan and is an online portal for young, highly educated jobseekers younger than 25 where e-coaches provide guidance, e-learning, labour market information and mentoring. Online guidance is seen as an efficient way of working towards making young jobseekers self-reliant. Through a faster diagnosis and more intensive guidance, follow-up and counselling, VDAB activates young people directly after registration as short as possible in order to refer them to a maximum sustainable employment. This counselling is fully online and done by mail, by telephone or via video call. VDAB’s preventive actions (before registration) for the Youth plan

(10) http://bruxelles-j.be/

(11) In order to obtain an upper secondary education certificate through adult education pathways.

(12) For more information, visit his youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/Abdelscenedup
are: transitional trajectories and smooth transfer to VDAB of pupils coming from special secondary education and part-time vocational secondary education (dual learning programme organised by schools); campus actions in order to inform students and this via collective sessions at school or elsewhere; Promotional VDAB campaigns and other communications for young people; VDAB representation on provincial fairs for graduated pupils; workshops organised according to the ‘Train-the-Trainer’ principle for educational professionals.

‘Sectoral Networks and talent houses’ bring together educational providers and labour market players aimed at promoting smooth transitions from education to work. The networks are supported by sectoral organisations, sectoral training funds, social partners, educational providers, and regional technology centres. The aim is to develop action plans in this regard. In addition, in order to help avoiding low-skilled early school leavers via the 72-hour operation, VDAB makes its training infrastructure in the competence centres available to pupils in their final years in technical and vocational education.

A promising career begins with a well-informed choice of study and vocation. This can best take place at school, by starting with the development of the (school) career competencies of pupils, but also by informing pupils in advance about the labour market. ‘Werkinleving voor jongeren WIJ!’ (Work experience for youth) is a project in which VDAB works with specialised partners (non-profit organisations) that are in charge of monitoring and guiding very low-skilled young people towards work placements, training or employment.

Over the past years, the VDAB has also strengthened its outreach services for young people, notably through sport and social media to attract them to training and to promote their skills. Within the framework of WIJ, VDAB builds further on the sport component and this in the cooperation with its partners (Sport Vlaanderen – Iris Anticorrosion – Tech ICT). An outcome of this was also visible in 2017 in ‘Rising You’ (see 3.1). VDAB’s Apps ‘inspiration’, ‘competition’, ‘Job Mapping’, ‘Mentor’, and ‘My Coach’ are part of tools platform Lab new service for young jobseekers. A digital Starter package with an extra part for young people, the professions orientation test (with links to profession folders and movies), the competency report are other ways of strengthened VDAB outreach services for young people.

Wallonia signed the Pacte pour l’Emploi et la Formation (employment and training pact) with the social partners in June 2016. It committed to an extensive reform, which targets, among others, poorly or medium-qualified young people under 25 years old and the LTU.
The creation of an integration contract (13) for young people, combined with the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Wallonia, targets young people under 25 with no work experience who have been unemployed for more than 18 months. The Forem will be implementing a support system in collaboration with the Walloon Missions régionales pour l’emploi (MIRE) (Walloon regional missions for employment).

Life-long strengthening of career orientation via a multi-partner system is structured around three trade cities (Namur, Liege and Charleroi) and the Carrefours emploi-formation-orientation (employment training orientation offices). The concerns of all groups are addressed by raising issues related to educational and professional orientation (primary, secondary and post-secondary education, parents, teachers, jobseekers, professionals looking to change careers, vulnerable groups, etc.). The orientation consists of information, awareness-raising, job trials, an interactive approach, etc. for trades, with special focus on the employment niches identified or anticipated and the industries in demand. Dual training will also be promoted.

Other measures aim to increase internships for apprentices, to emphasize the relationship between supply and demand and to strengthen links and cooperation between the world of VET and the world of work, with the objective to double the number of places available in enterprises by 2020.

With respect to the integration of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market, the renewal in July 2016 of the framework agreement between the Forem and the Federation of CPAS (14) sets out the framework for motivation, socialisation and orientation actions with, notably, the opportunity for internships in companies and active job search activities. The framework agreement provides information about and implementation of services, cooperation on training with providers and a search for the best ways to ensure integration in the workplace.

Given the small size of the population in the German-speaking Community (DG), NEETs are not handled as a separate group. In addition to the preventive measures implemented (at school or in apprenticeships) and the support provided for the transition from school to employment, young people (under 25) considered to be far from the job market are closely followed starting in the first month after they register with the local employment services office (ADG).

(14) Centre public d’action sociale (public social services centre).
CHAPTER 3.
Innovative approaches in the field

Following the description of the current status of NEETs and the LTU in Belgium, we present four initiatives taken by four regional non-profit organisations which have, at times, developed innovative approaches to ensure that young people receive training and find jobs. In most cases, the public institutions, which are aware of how difficult it is to reach these groups, have developed partnerships and finance projects managed by these organisations which are more present in the field and in the neighbourhoods. Acting as relays between the institutions and these persons, they are better suited to identify and connect with NEETS and LTU who are suspicious towards the authorities. Networking with all concerned partners and stakeholders is therefore a very important part of a VET provider’s reaching-out effort intended to NEETS or LTU.

3.1. **Rising You in the Flemish Region and in Brussels: rising above expectations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective: Discovery and acquisition of integration skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private companies host training on their sites. They are future potential employers for the interns trained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding: VDAB - VLAIO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience: Mainly unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA) – Foreign NEETs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical programme offered by the organisation: Training in the field - follow-up and initial employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key lessons: The importance of group dynamics and of keeping groups small. It's important not to confront people with their shortcomings: they must be positive. Get the most out of partnerships with companies to obtain an employment contract for the interns once they are trained (individual professional training, IBO).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

One unemployed young person in five in Flanders is from another country. The number is higher in Brussels. Many of them left everything behind in the country they left, to have a chance at a new life. They did so by trusting their courage, flexibility, convictions and their refusal to give up. The *Rising You*
The programme was founded by the NATURE non-profit organisation and receives funding from the Flemish administration. This social economy enterprise works with young people and, in particular, with young refugees and unaccompanied foreign minors (MENAs). Although its goal is to ensure that MENAs do not become NEETs, the project has been so successful that NATURE offered to include the latter group in its activities. Indeed, mixing young Belgians with MENA’s can have a positive impact on both groups as they can combine their strengths: a mastery of languages and cultural codes for some and a strong motivation for others.

The training for young people provided by Rising You consists of two separate parts. The first is a hands-on experience at the Rising You climbing club in Brussels. After becoming familiar with indoor climbing techniques, the second part of training takes place outdoors, in the field. Given that the latter part of training takes place on site (wind turbines, pylons, masts, etc.), a partnership is established with the company that owns the installations on which the trainees will learn their trade. Companies including IRIS, Proximus and Engie are all involved in the project. Participants either are dispatched by VDAB or contact directly NATURE. Indeed, some learned about the training programme by word of mouth or by participating in the climbing club. All interested persons must attend an information session and pass the entry tests.

The social economy enterprise trains enthusiastic young people who, at the end of their training in the field, receive a certificate for completing a given
number of jobs at height. These can range from washing windows, repairing electrical poles, trimming trees to washing statues or maintaining church towers. VDAB and the staff of NATURE provide guidance. Learners are supervised by trainers, social educators and counsellors. Evaluation happens throughout the training (1/week) and assessment of skills occurs in the form of examinations to verify technical proficiency and to obtain security certificates. NATURE tries to place its young graduates with customers on fixed-term jobs or permanent contracts.

**Testimonial**

Benjamin Gerard, founder of *NATURE* and *Rising You* on his meeting with a trainee:

‘I met Niamat a few years ago. He came to Belgium when he was 13. He came alone, with no family. I won’t go into all of the dramatic details of his personal history and of his journey to reach our wonderful country. What impressed me the most was his courage and determination, to find peace and security and to start a new life. However, there was a statistically low chance that Niamat would find a good job for which he originally trained in his country. Or of finding work at all, given that two out of every three young refugees are unemployed. Our educational systems send disadvantaged young people to jobs which do not necessarily give them a sense of self-worth: they do dishes, change diapers in nursing homes, etc. Our educational approach recognises Niamat’s entrepreneurial abilities. We’re planning something different for him.’

For more information: [www.risingyou.be](http://www.risingyou.be)
3.2. Popul’Art Cité: street art and urban renewal help integrate young people (Walloon Region)

Objective: Skills acquisition by NEETs for socio-professional integration: develop interest and start training
Funding: ESF
Target audience: NEETs (18-25 years old)
Typical programme offered: Create a positive dynamic via a fun street art project - recruit via word-of-mouth and partners - foster a calling and promote training programmes - integration in neighbourhood life
Key lessons: Some aspects of the project are essential: pedagogy by project, local anchoring, removal of barriers. Training must prepare for real job opportunities. Be hands-on from the start or risk losing trainees. They have to be hooked because many quit (some are homeless, some are expelled...and there are also administrative concerns). The relationship between partners with different backgrounds is difficult in the beginning. Facilitators are needed: a social worker used to working with young people has to maintain the relationship, even afterwards, and act as a relay. Content must be relevant: No time fillers.

Popul’Art Cité is sponsored by the public social services centre (CPAS) of Charleroi. It involves young people in a street art and urban revitalisation project which are identified and contacted by the CPAS and Forem, in collaboration with partners with street and social workers that are active in the neighbourhoods. Popul’Art Cité’s goal is to provide a complete programme for NEETs with several integration partners. They learn industrial painting, graphic arts and audiovisual skills during the project via teaching and participative methods. The goal of the project is to mobilise young people and encourage them to acquire skills to then carry out a collective project in their neighbourhood (fresco, marked and painted route, etc.) Those interested in the training must attend an information session. The programme is open to everyone, although the partners try to enrol persons with artistic sensibilities. Moreover given that the project has a visible impact on the youngsters’ neighbourhoods, word of mouth is an efficient outreach mechanism. Guidance is provided by the CPAS staff in collaboration with partners.

The goal of the fun research and creation project is to build a win-win approach: The young NEETs who take part get the benefit of a dynamic, which facilitates their integration in a training programme, which will enable them to join the employment market: skills acquisition via training in computer graphics and industrial painting.
The neighbourhood and its residents also win because their living environment becomes more attractive (painting of certain areas and participation in neighbourhood renewal, etc.). The Dochérie neighbourhood was the first to benefit from this dynamic in 2015-2016. Other Charleroi neighbourhoods and other young NEETs, in particular, will also benefit from this support, which is planned to last four years.

Testimonial
Sophie Deffet, Popul’Art Cité project leader at the public social services centre of Charleroi:

‘The idea for Popul’Art Cité came from an experiment carried out during the Charleroi urban art biennial. The theme was citizen participation and urban renewal. To approach NEETs we proposed the joint construction of a collective urban art project with several local partners including youth clubs, graphical arts training centres, local players, socio-professional integration organisations, etc.

The objectives of Popul’Art Cité are to improve socio-professional integration, enable NEETs to choose a direction and facilitate training, education and employment. However, it also ensures that they become involved in local cultural and social life.

Methodology: the connecting thread is the creation and realisation of an urban art project, which is a pretext for learning skills. The partners contribute their skills to the group dynamic and to the art project.’
3.3. Exposure to trades (Brussels Region)

Objective: Arouse interest in thinking about career options by trying out several different trades. Young people experience a trade for a day.
Partners: Brussels Region, EFP dual training centre
Funding: ESF (fourth pillar of the Brussels Youth Guarantee system)
Target audience: Young drop-outs, MENAs, marginalised youth, young people becoming empowered, in transition, or retraining (15-25 years old)
Typical programme offered: Experiment with a trade for a day, supervised by a teacher specialised in the trade chosen.
Key lessons: NEETs are difficult to mobilise (less than 60% of those who register actually attend). The attendees must be a diverse group (NEETs and non-NEETs)

Paradoxically, while it generates the greatest amount of wealth in Belgium, the Brussels Region also has the highest rate of unemployed young people under the age of 30 in the country. The under-qualification of young people is the leading reason for this high rate. Regional authorities made decreasing youth unemployment one of the top priorities of the 2014-2019 legislative session.

The Brussels Region’s dual training centre (EFP) created Découvertes Métiers to help young people join the job market and effectively counter poorly thought-out career choices. The programme consists of a discovery week during which young people can try out manual trades (food, beauty, woodworking,
electricity, mechanics, etc.). They can then make an informed choice about a training programme based on tangible and reliable information as well as on their short practical experience. Découvertes Métiers is for young people 15 to 25 and NEETs are one of the three priority groups. Participants are identified and contacted mainly through non-profit organisations in contact with young people (social and street workers of CPAS, prevention services, safe houses, OISP, etc.) These reach out to the target group by disseminating information on the next sessions of Découvertes Métiers, sent regularly by the EFP. Subscription is free of choice and is done through web portal that EFP has set in place \(^{(15)}\). Word to mouth is also a very efficient way to boost participation whilst ads on the press and social media have not been so fruitful. In practice, each session lasts a full week and provides an introduction to 10 trades paired over each day (one in the morning and one in the afternoon). The sessions are held during the school holidays. A module lasts four hours maximum and is split into three parts:
(a) Welcome and introduction to the trade by a trainer with experience in the field (one half hour).
(b) Practical application (creation of an object, etc.) which also includes cleaning up the workstation and workshop (three hours).
(c) A group review period consisting of two parts: an evaluation (15 minutes) and a question and answer session (15 minutes).

While Découvertes Métiers is intended to facilitate a career choice via practical experimentation, the process also includes several more specific objectives:
(a) Provide professional support in a safe and welcoming setting to groups of 12 young people maximum.
(b) Deconstruct prejudices and provide a realistic understanding of the profession and the industry.
(c) Provide an experience under real conditions.
(d) Inform the young people about training opportunities available in the establishment itself.

Testimonial
Charlotte Belleflamme, Découvertes Métiers project manager at EFP:

\(^{(15)}\) This portal is also important in the reaching-out efforts of EFP. Besides overall information, we find testimonials of former participants and videos made during former sessions. For more information see: https://decouvertesmetiers.wordpress.com/
‘From 28 participants registered for the first session in November 2016, we increased to 41 in February 2017, then 58 in April 2017. These numbers will be revised for the new school year in September 2017 to assess the impact of the project on actual registrations for one of the training sessions offered by EFP. In terms of participants, Découvertes Métiers has brought young people from very different backgrounds together. The age group between 15 and 25 facilitates experience sharing and we can capitalise on the maturity of the older attendees who have already thought more about their choices. It isn’t easy to involve the NEET target audience. Only 60% of NEETs who register actually attend Découvertes Métiers. NEETs are often stigmatised. That’s why we decided to open the sessions to other groups at the same time (for example, young people still in school): this enables us to mix the profiles attending and avoid having a single group which is difficult to manage.’

More information: http://www.efp-bxl.be

3.4. The technical unit of Molenbeek Saint-Jean’s ‘local mission’ (Brussels Region)

Objective: Social and professional integration of the long-term unemployed (LTU).
Partners: The Molenbeek Saint-Jean municipality, Molenbeek Housing and La Molenbeekoise social housing agency. The partners are fully involved since they are also ‘customers’ for the work done by the trainees. They provide concrete and practical projects with real customer requirements.
Funding: Brussels regional government (Initiative locale de développement emploi, ILDE) (local employment development initiative)
Target audience: LTU with poor skills (unemployed 12 to 24 months)
Typical programme offered: Job training via a real, six-month employment contract renewable three times.
Key lessons: Since 2012, 60% of the workers of the two teams have found a job lasting at least three months. The programme is successful because it provides special support to this group in several areas which go beyond a specific qualifying training (work on self-confidence, language skills, psycho-social monitoring, job coaching with personal follow-up, preparation for skills validation with prior hands-on experience, etc.). The use of a renewable six-month employment contract (PTP) provides the trainees with a wage during their apprenticeship. This ensures that they are available and less preoccupied about their financial autonomy.

Brussels’ ‘local missions’ are socio-professional integration specialists (OISP), see chapter 2. These organisations provide hosting, advisory and information services for career orientation, employment and training. Molenbeek’s local mission consists of a technical unit, which is funded by the
regional government as a local employment development initiative (ILDE). It is currently working on a social and professional reintegration project for a group of 20 long-term unemployed (LTU). This vulnerable group, which is far from the employment market and low-skilled, is also often discriminated.

The technical unit initiated two, two-year programmes with the 20 jobseekers to address the revitalisation needs of the urban spaces of vulnerable neighbourhoods as well as the other building renovation and finishing needs of the community. The LTU are hired as worker/trainees on a six-month Professional Transition Programme (PTP) contract which is renewable three times (i.e. a total of 24 months). The goal of the PTP is to develop the skills of low-qualified jobseekers via a hands-on apprenticeship in a trade, training and support in the field. The objective is to increase their chances of finding permanent work. There are primarily two channels through which participants are identified and contacted. Job advertisements are transferred to the regional public employment service (Actiris) and the local missions that are in charge of forwarding them to job seekers; the technical unit contacts pre-training providers in order to identify potential applicants who have already acquired basic skills in the sector (this is especially the case for building finishing where preliminary knowledge is preferred). All applicants must pass a selection test. Proposing a work contract and a decent salary better attracts LTU who wouldn’t have the financial resources to attend a full-time training.

The approach offered by the technical unit to the 20 LTU consists of complete training in two different sectors. The first is paving (road work). This trade is fairly easy to learn, and doesn’t require much prerequisites in technical and language (French) competences. The second is building finishing (tiling, ceiling plastering, painting, etc.).
Each candidate signs an employment contract and the apprenticeship starts on real teaching work sites (which require professional finishing work). The candidates gain ‘knowledge’, ‘know-how’ and ‘social skills’. Assessments are scheduled throughout the training period (evaluations of the trainees according to training standards and teaching tools) as well as at the end of their 6 months contracts (evaluation of the behaviour and technical skills). If succeeded, the apprenticeship leads to a certificate, which is accompanied by a skills portfolio with all certifications received. Indeed, formal certifications can be obtained through external bodies for some modules; this also includes validation of skills. Participants are highly prepared for validation tests, especially the strengthening of their language and soft skills. They receive a validation certificate (titre de compétences). This mentoring pays off since almost 90% of trainees (as from 2013) have successfully passed the validation tests. In addition to technical training, the system is successful thanks to its individual psycho-social support which helps manage any potential distractions such as finding housing, excess debt, family conflicts, etc.). The technical unit also provides socio-professional integration follow-up for group members, who often suffer from low self-esteem (by creating a list of skills, providing practical assistance with CV and cover letter writing). Lastly, job coaching prepares the worker/trainees for job interviews and helps them develop positive relationships and increase their self-confidence.

Local partnerships are set up with the municipality of Molenbeek Saint-Jean, which needs road work done. La Molenbeekoise social housing agency is very
interested in the renovation work because it manages housing which must be maintained, spruced up or updated.

The workers often receive their training on community project work sites. The work they do helps families in difficulty, like the worker/trainees themselves.

**Testimonial**

Severino Pierno, Molenbeek local mission technical unit:

>'The spirit of these programmes is built on mutual respect, personal development, acknowledgement of each person’s potential, regaining self-confidence, and finding a place in society as an active and responsible citizen.

>There are several barriers to the professional integration of the LTU and the technical unit team works to provide a concrete response to each of them. Lack of education? Poor language skills? We organise three hours a week of French for each team! Poor skills? We train them and do a lot of work to perfect their skills to meet market requirements. We validate their skills and they receive a training certificate. Digital divide? No access to a computer? We help them write a CV and a cover letter and we teach them how to change and personalise the documents so that they can respond to job offers on their own.'
Conclusions

Far from giving an exhaustive scientific description of the ‘Outreach and Guidance’ services available in Belgium, the article provides an overview of the current situation in the Regions from the standpoint of figures and of the lessons to be drawn about the different groups and their paths, highlighted by two recent qualitative research papers.

With the exception of a few more or less apparent regional differences, Belgium is a little below the European average in terms of NEETs in its active population whereas the number of long-term jobseekers is comparable to the average of the 28 European countries. Recent national institutional reforms, in particular within the sector of employment policy, have resulted in the Regions reviewing their ‘target group’ policies, including those intended for NEETs and the long-term unemployed. They are gradually being implemented.

One of the main lessons learned concerns the diversity of groups and their paths, where so-called ‘activation’ policies are usually standardised. Two examples of this are: Océane, a NEET interviewed as part of the study commissioned by the OEJAJ (see 1.3.) and Jacques, 45, who was interviewed with the group of LTU denied benefits (see 1.5.) They are two cases among others who make it clear that every situation is different and that, with respect to activation policy and training, individual support, which must sometimes be long term, is often required and is much more effective.

The qualitative studies highlight ‘serial’ discrepancies between the public and institutions. For NEETs and the LTU, the job search recommended by the institutions is founded on formal mechanisms: advert + letter + CV + interaction with the recruiter. This standard works for qualified jobseekers who know how to write a CV with striking elements and make a case for themselves. In other words, who can ‘sell themselves’. On the other hand, the CV isn’t favourable to the LTU and NEETs because it contains ‘holes’, official periods of unemployment, sometimes an illness...the document merely highlights stigmatising elements.

Persons being denied unemployment benefits usually have poor skills and no longer believe in the official job hunting method which doesn’t work for them. They receive no answers - or only negative ones - and no longer believe in it. However, they know that they have found jobs in other ways, without a CV. But, the proof required by institutions to, formally prove good faith and the efforts undertaken are governed by ‘formal’ mechanisms. If the jobseeker, the NEET or the LTU doesn’t conform to them, they are sanctioned and can even be denied
unemployment benefits because their file is incomplete. They sense a breakdown, a dissonance between their experience and the demands of the institution.

The four projects presented under ‘practical cases’ in the second part of the report clearly illustrate the need to approach groups ‘differently’, to better take into account their needs and difficulties to enable them to (re)build their self-confidence and re-integrate into the mainstream.

Vocational training and the acquisition, acknowledgement and validation of skills can be very key tools for this purpose. However, to ‘attract’ NEETs and the LTU, training providers must be able to adjust their offering while providing renewed confidence and rebuilding self-esteem.

Several practices facilitate the acquisition of skills by the LTU and their later employment. They should be offered training with pay and provided with support to validate their skills. Partners should be potential providers of employment, support must be continuous and personalised and training should be modular. The three NEET case studies presented demonstrate the importance of reaching out to these young people where they are, in their environment, and of accepting the way they are before offering training, an internship or employment. Fully integrated practical experience and an introduction to jobs can help them remain motivated and stay in training. In addition, bringing NEETs out of their own environment and having them mix with other groups helps fight the stigmatisation they can experience because of their status.

These four practical approaches, sometimes still confidential, can provide inspiration and be adapted and applied much more widely. In this respect, we again emphasise the primary role of partnerships with a diverse range of players from civil society and the socio-economic and cultural worlds. We must also emphasize the close proximity between these two target groups. At any time, some LTU can become NEETs, whilst NEETS can become LTU. A comprehensive approach must be considered.
Position 1 designates individuals whose fundamental right to work is respected and who benefit from supportive social interactions or which, at a minimum, provide a legitimate social identity.

Position 2 designates individuals facing a negative economic situation who continue to receive family and social support which enable them to ‘hold on’ temporarily. Public assistance, for example in the form of replacement income, is a key element, which often prevents the deterioration of other aspects of their life.

Position 3 designates vulnerable situations, for example when the absence of social support makes the person overly exposed to unexpected events such as divorce, a sick child, etc. This situation is even more worrisome because it is at the mid-point on the integration axis.

Position 4 designates individuals who are at risk of what Castel calls disaffiliation. We would say that they are at risk of losing the rights that make us all equal.
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