OECD Skills Studies

OECD Skills Strategy Flanders

Assessment and Recommendations

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Foreword

People's skills are at the heart of Flanders's vision for the future, which is a society where people learn for and through life, are innovative, trust one another, enjoy a high quality of life, and embrace their unique identity and culture.

As globalisation and digitalisation transform jobs, how societies function and how people interact, the impetus for getting skills right is growing. People will need higher levels of skills and a well-rounded set of skills, including cognitive, social and emotional, and job-specific skills, to flourish in life both in and out of work.

Flanders performs well compared to most OECD countries on most measures of skills development and use. The skills proficiency of Flemish adults exceeds the OECD average and skills mismatch is low. High-performance work practices that stimulate the use of skills are widely adopted by firms in Flanders. There are many good governance arrangements in place to support co-ordination and collaboration in adult learning across government departments, levels of government and with stakeholders. Financial incentives for adult learning help to reduce the burden for individuals and employers, promote cost-sharing and reduce under-investment.

However, some challenges remain. Adult learning could be strengthened, in particular for older workers, immigrants, adults in flexible forms of employment and low-skilled adults. Shortages in professional, technical and scientific occupations persist due to a low number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The use of skills at work could be further enhanced, especially as productivity growth has slowed in recent years. A comprehensive vision for adult learning that stimulates collaboration within government and with stakeholders is lacking. Existing financial support for adults who are most in need of adult learning is not sufficiently taken up by those most in need.

Recent and planned policy reforms show great promise, but more needs to be done to ensure better skills outcomes. The government and all relevant stakeholders should continue to work in partnerships that involve every level of government, education and training providers, employers, trade unions, the non-profit sector and learners.

While no single action is the answer, a clear vision and concrete steps taken together by all stakeholders can ensure that Flanders will bridge the skills gap. Citizens of all ages and backgrounds should be able to develop, activate and use their skills effectively to take up opportunities of a rapidly changing society.

After widespread engagement in Flanders and consideration of numerous international examples, the OECD has provided several recommendations in this report to help Flanders along this path.

The OECD stands ready to support Flanders as it seeks to implement better skills policies for better lives.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations and acronyms

The following are the main Flemish acronyms cited in the report. Other acronyms cited occasionally are defined where used.

AES	Adult Education Survey
AHOVOKS	*Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen*, the Flemish agency for higher education, adult education, qualifications and allowances
ALMP	Active labour market programmes
CABE	Centres for Adult Basic Education or *Centra voor Basiseducatie* (CBO) in Dutch
CAE	Centres for Adult Education or *Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs* (CVO) in Dutch
CAW	*Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk*, the Flemish centre for general social support for adults
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CELM	Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring, or Steunpunt Werk in Dutch
CLB	*Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding*, the Flemish pupil guidance centre
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EPL	Employment protection legislation
EPOS	National Agency for the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders
EU	European Union
ESF	European Social Fund
EVC	*Erkenning van Verworven Competenties*, or skills validation in English.
EVK	*Erkenning van Verworven Kwalificaties*, or qualifications validation in English
GDP	Gross domestic product

GOAL	Guidance and Orientation of Adult Learners, Erasmus+ project
GVC	Global value chain
HBO	*Hoger beroepsonderwijs*, or higher vocational education in English
HIVA	Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving, or the Research Institute for Work and Society in English
HPWP	High performance workplace practices
HR	Human resource
IBO	*Individuele Beroepsopleiding*, Flemish vocational training programme for individuals in enterprises
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JAC	*Jongeren Advies Centrum*, youth organisation of the *Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk*, the Flemish centre for general social support for adults
KMO	*Kleine en Middelgrote Ondernemingen*, or SMEs in English
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MOOC	Massive open online courses
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NT2	*Nederlands als tweede taal*, Dutch as a second language
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OKOT	*Onderwijs Kwalificerende Opleidings Trajecten*, a qualifying trajectory with a VDAB training contract
PES	Public employment service
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (Survey of Adult Skills)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
R&D	Research and development
RTC	*Regionaal Technologie Centrum*, Regional Technology Centre

SAA	Skills assessment and anticipation
SAB	*Sectorale Arbeidsbemiddeling Bouw*, a sectoral job placement programme in the construction sector
SERV	*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*, the Flemish social economic council
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SSC	Social security contributions
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
SYNTRA	*Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming*, or the Agency for Entrepreneurial Training in English
ULC	Unit labour costs
VAT	Value added tax
VDAB	*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding*, or the Flemish Public Employment Service (PES) in English
VESOC	*Vlaams Economisch Sociaal Overlegcomité*, the tripartite committee with social partners and the Flemish Government, the SERV is responsible for the secretariat
VET	Vocational education and training
VLAMT	*Vlaams Arbeidsmarktonderzoek van de Toekomst* or Flemish Labour Market Research of the Future in English
VLOR	*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*, the Flemish Education Council
VPL	Validation of prior learning
WO	*Wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, or university in English
WPS	Wage peak system
WSE	*Beleidsdomein Werk en Sociale Economie*, or the domain of work and social economy in English

Executive summary

Flanders performs well compared to most OECD countries on most measures of skills development and use. The skills proficiency of Flemish adults exceeds the OECD average. High-performance work practices that stimulate the use of skills are widely adopted by firms. There are many good governance arrangements in place to support co-ordination and collaboration in adult learning across government departments, levels of government and with stakeholders. Financial incentives for adult learning help to reduce the burden for individuals and employers, promote cost-sharing and reduce under-investment. However, important challenges remain. Ensuring the continued success of Flanders in the future will depend on the policy choices Flanders makes today.

As the labour market tightens in Flanders, skills shortages are emerging. Shortages in professional, technical and scientific occupations persist due to a low number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Shortages are also evident in skills related to health services and education and training. Addressing these shortages is becoming all the more challenging due to a shrinking working-age population.

The shrinking working-age population is reducing the contribution of labour utilisation to economic growth. As a result, productivity growth will be an even more important driver of economic growth in the future. This will put more pressure on Flanders to ensure that more youth develop high levels of skills, that adults have opportunities to upgrade and update their skills, and that adults use their skills fully and effectively in workplaces.

At the same time, technological change is transforming workplaces and reshaping the skills requirements of jobs in the process. Recent OECD research based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) finds that sizable numbers of workers in Flanders are in jobs with a high risk of automation. Some of those jobs will disappear; others will see their tasks change significantly.

Flanders must foster a culture of lifelong learning to ensure that its people develop the skills to thrive in a world characterised by change. Strong foundational skills will make people more resilient to the changing skills demand, and digital skills and other 21st century skills – including critical thinking, communication skills, adaptability and accountability – will become even more relevant for adults to succeed in both work and life.

A comprehensive vision for adult learning that stimulates collaboration within government and with stakeholders is needed. Flanders already has an ambitious long-term vision for the future as articulated through "Vision 2050: a long-term strategy for Flanders," which outlines Flanders' plan to become an "inclusive, open, resilient and internationally connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner." The Flemish Social Economic Council (SERV) and the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) representing relevant stakeholders

have also expressed their strong support and commitment for better skills outcomes in the long term.

OECD-Flanders collaboration on the OECD Skills Strategy project

The National Skills Strategy (NSS) Flanders project was launched during the high-level Skills Strategy Seminar in Brussels in January 2018 with the Flemish Minister and representatives from the Department of Work, Economy, Innovation and Sports, the Department of Education, the Social Economic Council and the European Commission.

Two workshops were held in May and September 2018 that convened a wide range of stakeholders, including unions, employers, sectoral training providers, education institutions, academics, and government representatives. Bilateral meetings with stakeholders and experts, as well as site visits, also took place. This process provided input and shaped the recommendations featured in this current report.

Improving adult skills is important for boosting growth and well-being in Flanders

The five topics identified as priorities by the OECD and the Government of Flanders are: 1) developing a learning culture; 2) reducing skills imbalances; 3) strengthening skills use in workplaces; 4) strengthening the governance of adult learning; and 5) improving the financing of adult learning.

Developing a learning culture

Fostering a learning culture and adult learning are priorities for Flanders, as identified in its Vision 2050. Participation in adult learning in Flanders is around average in comparison with other OECD countries. Certain groups that are most in need of upskilling or reskilling are falling behind, such as older workers, immigrants, those in flexible employment forms, and low-skilled adults. A strong learning culture is imperative, if Flanders wishes to ensure that all individuals are ready to upgrade their existing skills or acquire new skills to adapt to new challenges and opportunities and thrive in an increasingly complex world.

Reducing skills imbalances

Skills imbalances are costly for individuals, firms and the economy. Tight labour market conditions in Flanders have contributed to increasing shortage pressures in recent years, which are particularly acute in occupations related to professional, technical and scientific activities, information and communication technology (ICT), as well as skills related to health services and education. High shares of unfilled vacancies can be found in both high and medium-skilled occupations. Long-term unemployment remains high, and nearly half of the long-term unemployed have not obtained a secondary diploma. Reducing these skills imbalances could result in lowering hiring costs, increasing productivity, and improving the ability of firms to innovate and adopt new technologies.

Strengthening skills use in workplaces

Traditional skills policies focus on the supply side but there is increasing recognition of the need to work closer with firms to look at how skills are used in the workplace. Better skills use is associated with stronger wages and higher job satisfaction for individuals while firms benefit from increased productivity and decreased turnover. Individuals in

Flanders tend to make good use of their literacy skills, while the use of numeracy skills in the workplace falls behind the OECD average. Skills use is often associated with the prevalence of high performance workplace practices (HPWPs). While HPWPs in Flanders is above the OECD average, more can be done to encourage firms to think critically about how they organise their workplaces, better link pay to the complexity of tasks in the workplace and generally engage employees in work organisation and training.

Strengthening the governance of adult learning

Strong governance is important for the effective functioning of the adult learning system. Co-ordination within government across ministries and levels of governments as well as with stakeholders is needed. Strong governance helps to minimise policy gaps and overlaps, improve the likelihood of successful policy implantation, leverage strengths, and generate policy complementarities. The Flemish Government has made clear in their Vision 2050 strategy that a whole-of-government approach involving all relevant ministries and levels of government, as well as the engagement of social partners, will be key in making this vision a reality.

Improving the financing of adult learning

A strong system of adult learning requires adequate financing, and this may become more urgent as automation and other global trends transform the skills needed in the labour market at an increasing pace. Flanders offers many financial incentives to help share the costs of adult learning between individuals, employers and government, as well as to steer adults towards training that is relevant to the labour market. However, there are concerns that financing for adult learning is not reaching the groups who could benefit most. For example, low-educated and older adults are under-represented in applying for career guidance and training vouchers, and low-educated adults are also less likely to benefit from employer-provided training.

Chapter 1. Key insights and recommendations

This chapter applies the OECD Skills Strategy framework to examine the characteristics and performance of the Flemish skills system. The findings are the basis for identifying, in consultation with the national project team, the five priority areas for action in Flanders. This chapter introduces these priority areas, and subsequent chapters for each priority area provide an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities, as well as concrete recommendations. In addition, this chapter provides an overview of the policy context of the Flemish skills system, including descriptions of long-term policy goals and recent and new reforms related to skills and education.

Overall assessment

The current socio-economic situation in Flanders is characterised by strong performance in almost all comparative performance measures. The Flemish economy has regained strength after the crisis and currently provides a solid foundation for strong and stable growth. Economic expansion has accelerated in recent years, with year-to-year growth above 2%, and the labour market is expanding (OECD, 2018[1]). People in Flanders enjoy high standards of living, with low levels of inequality and high levels of well-being in many dimensions, such as income, work-life balance, health, education and civic engagement (OECD, 2018[2]).

However, in a constantly changing world, several developments could undermine this positive trajectory. Since the success of Flanders today is largely the result of policies and practices of the past, the continued success of Flanders will depend on the choices it makes today to address current challenges.

An example of such a challenge is the shrinking working age population (OECD, 2018[1]), which is reducing the contribution of labour utilisation to economic growth. As a result, productivity growth will be an even more important driver of economic growth in the future. This will put more pressure on the need to raise workers' output, which is already high in comparison with most OECD countries.

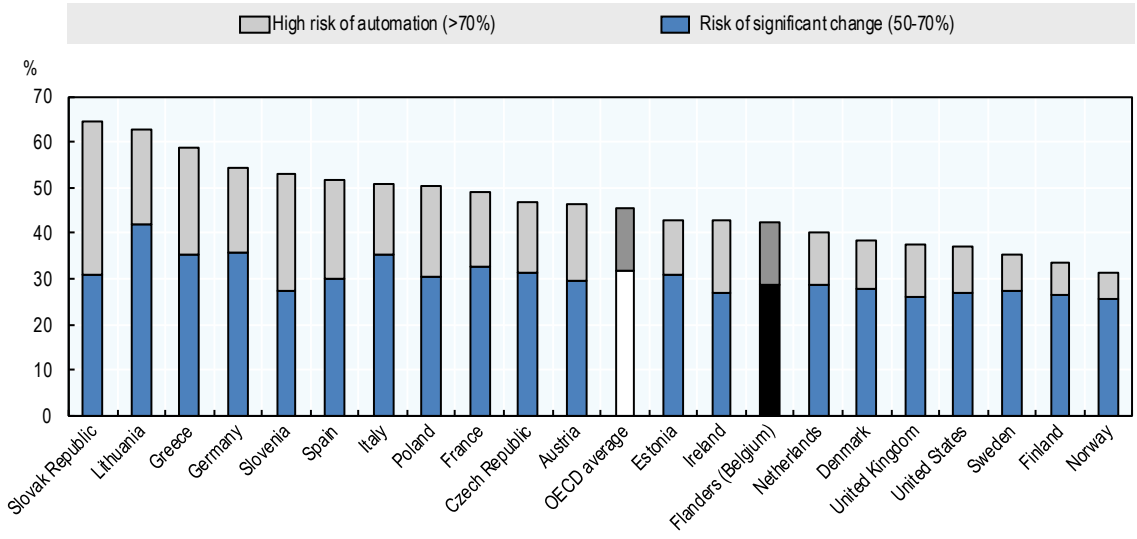
Moreover, digital innovations, such as machine learning, big data and artificial intelligence (AI), will change the nature of many jobs, reshaping how certain tasks are performed. OECD work building on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) suggests that in Flanders, about 14% of workers face a high risk of seeing their jobs automated, and another 29% face significant changes in their job tasks due to automation (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018[3]) (see Figure 1.1). However, there are still significant uncertainties about the impact that technology will have on the skills needs of jobs.

Contributing further to the uncertainties associated with technological change is the continuing expansion of international trade and global value chains. New technologies and trade liberalisation have facilitated the emergence of a more globalised world that is characterised by the expansion of supply chains and the outsourcing of certain forms of work. For Flanders, like all OECD countries, this has strongly affected the competitiveness and success of different economic sectors, as well as the supply of jobs and demand for skills in the labour market (OECD, 2017[4]; OECD, 2017[5]).

These developments, among others, demonstrate that skills are key to the capacity of countries and for people to thrive in an interconnected and rapidly changing world. People will increasingly need to upgrade their skills to perform new tasks in their existing jobs or acquire new skills for new jobs. Strong foundational skills will make people more resilient to the changing skills demand, and digital skills and other 21st century skills – including critical thinking, communication skills, adaptability and accountability – will become even more relevant for adults to succeed in both work and life.

Figure 1.1. Cross-country variation in job automatability, percentage of jobs at risk by degree of risk

High risk – more than 70% probability of automation; risk of significant change – between 50 and 70% probability



Source: Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018[3]), Automation, skills use and training, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/2e2f4eea-en.

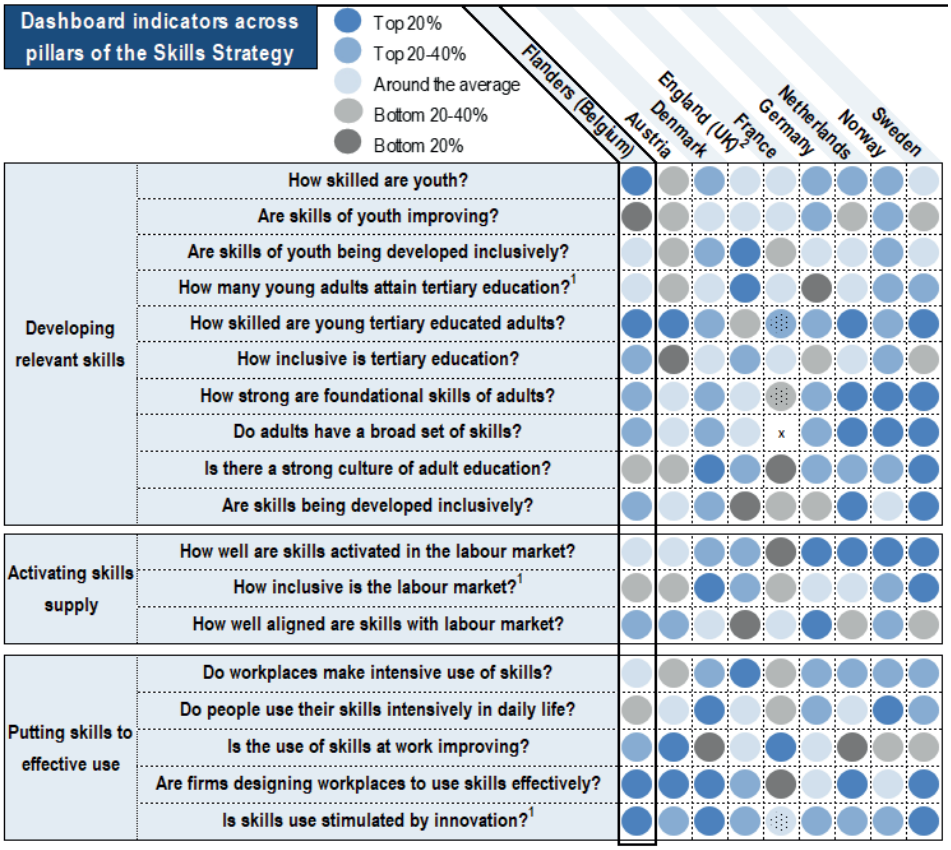
StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891186

The OECD Skills Strategy Dashboard provides an overview of the relative performance of countries across the pillars of the OECD Skills Strategy (as presented in Figure 1.2). For each pillar of the strategy there are a number of indicators – sometimes these are composite indicators made up of a number of other indicators – that provide a snapshot of each country's performance (see Annex 1.A for indicators and method). The position in the country ranking is shown by the shading of the circles, with dark grey indicating performance at the bottom of the ranking, dark blue indicating performance at the top, and other colours representing a performance between these extremes.

Compared with other European Union (EU) countries with similar socio and economic characteristics, as well as close geographic proximity, the dashboard demonstrates that Flanders performs well in most areas: youth have high skill levels, a large share of the population has attained tertiary education, and adults have strong skills compared to most OECD (PIAAC) countries. Furthermore, skills performance is more inclusive than in most OECD countries, skills supply and demand in the labour market are relatively well aligned, and an innovative economy stimulates the activation and use of skills in the workplace.

The dashboard also highlights areas where Flanders' performance could be improved: adult education could be strengthened; the skills of youth are not improving as fast as in many other countries; and despite a strong supply of skills in the system, demand in the labour market and the use of these skills at work and daily life could be enhanced.

Figure 1.2. Skills Strategy Dashboard, Flanders and selected European countries



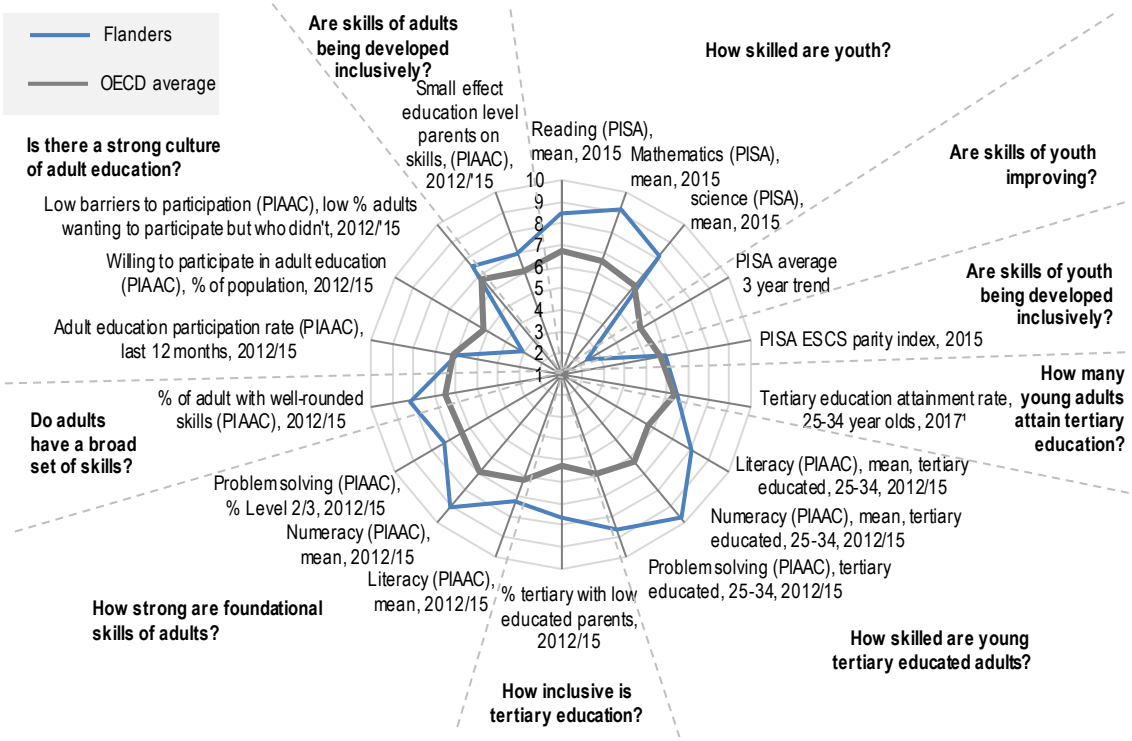
1) For one or more underlying indicators there are no data available on the level of Flanders. Belgium data have been used or a different selection has been applied (for instance, a different age group).
2) For several non-PIAAC indicators, data for England were not available and data for the United Kingdom were used.
Note: These summary indicators are calculated as a simple average of a range of underlying indicators (see Annex 1.A for indicators). All underlying indicators have been normalised in a way that implies that a higher value and being among the "top 20%" reflects better performance. Only aggregated indicators are presented for which more than half of the underlying indicators have data available. The "x" indicates insufficient or no available data, and dotted circles indicate missing data for at least one underlying indicator.

Developing relevant skills

People develop skills throughout life, from compulsory education to tertiary and adult education. The overall performance in skills development across the outcome measures of skill levels, inclusiveness and improvements is strong in Flanders compared to most OECD countries. This is shown in Figure 1.3, which shows the sub-indicators of the pillar "Developing relevant skills" from the dashboard presented above. These indicators demonstrate that skills proficiency is comparatively high for all age cohorts, but younger generations perform particularly well compared to their peers in other countries. This is reflected in the high scores of Flemish 15-year-olds in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2016[6]), where the Flemish Community scores well above OECD averages in science and reading, and is among the top-performing countries in mathematics. However, there is a downward trend in PISA performance, with average scores falling in reading, mathematics and science across the latest PISA rounds.

Figure 1.3. Key indicators for developing relevant skills

Normalised scores from 1 to 10, (1=minimum, 10=maximum) based on relative position in range of scores among countries, where a higher value reflects better performance.



1) Data on the level of Belgium, due to unavailability data for Flanders.
2) The OECD average (when using PIAAC data) is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills.
How to read this chart: The normalised scores indicate the relative performance, 1 for weakest performance and 10 for strongest performance across OECD countries. So the further away from the core of the chart, the better the performance. For example, indicator 'Willing to participate in adult education (PIAAC), % of population, 2012/15' has a low score compared to the average, indicating a share of employees willing to participate near the bottom of the ranking.
Note: See Annex 1.A for explanation of sources and methodology.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891205

Adults in Flanders are more proficient in literacy and problem solving in technology-rich environments than adults in most OECD countries (as measured by PIAAC) (OECD, 2016[7]). In terms of numeracy skills, Flanders is among the best performing countries in the OECD – only Finland and Japan have higher average scores. Furthermore, for both tertiary attainment and adult skill levels, the effect of parents' education level is relatively small, which demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Flemish skills system.

Although high proficiency in a given skill is relevant, proficiency across multiple skills domains is important for performance in the labour market. In Flanders, approximately 1 in 3 adults has strong proficiency across a broad range of skills (individuals scoring at least Level 3 in literacy and numeracy and at least Level 2 in problem solving). This is a higher share than in many OECD (PIAAC) countries, but still below that of top-performers such as Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands where approximately 40% of adults has such a combination of skills (OECD, forthcoming[8]).

Flanders has experienced a relatively sharp increase in its skills performance over time, which is reflected in the large difference between the skills proficiency of the youngest and the oldest age cohorts. Moreover, Flanders experienced a sharp increase in tertiary education attainment in recent decades: in 2014, over 41% of the workforce had a tertiary degree, compared with 32% in 2000 (OECD, 2018[1]). In addition, Flemish tertiary graduates are highly skilled compared to peers in other OECD countries, with more than 1 in 4 performing at the highest levels in literacy and numeracy, whereas the OECD (PIAAC) average is approximately 1 in 5 (OECD, 2016[7]).

A culture of lifelong learning is important for ensuring that adults keep their skills up-to-date and can adjust to changing skills needs, as well as to reduce inequities in skills performance. However, participation in adult education in Flanders is not yet on the level of other OECD countries with comparable skill levels: the participation rate in non-formal and formal education in the 12 months preceding PIAAC is only comparable with the OECD (PIAAC) average. In Flanders, 51% of adults were not involved in lifelong learning, compared with 32-42% in other high performing OECD countries, such as Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Canada (OECD, 2017[9]). Moreover, various other international surveys on adult education show similar patterns of participation, including the Labour Force Survey (LFS) (Eurostat, 2018[10]) and Adult Education Survey (AES) (Eurostat, 2018[11]), and Flemish data shows a downward trend in secondary adult education enrolment since 2014 and a small drop in basic adult education enrolment since last year (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2018[12])

A driver behind the low-participation rate is the large share of the population not willing to participate in adult education: 82% compared with 76% on average across OECD-PIAAC countries and 62% in a top-performing country such as New Zealand (OECD, 2017[9]). Together with the Netherlands, Japan and Korea, Flanders is near the bottom of the ranking in terms of workers' "readiness to learn". Overall, barriers to participation are comparatively low in Flanders, for instance, the cost of training was least cited as the main obstacle to participation out of all OECD countries. However, work, childcare and family responsibilities are relatively often cited as reasons for not participating in adult education.

Activating skills supply

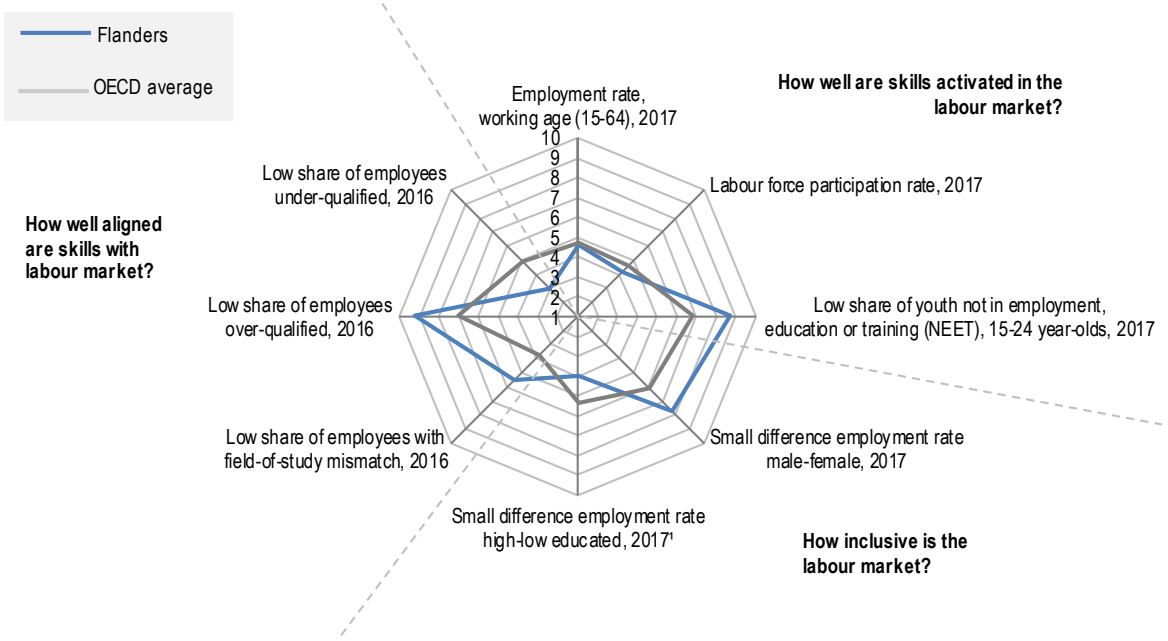
In recent years, the economy has been expanding and labour-market performance has been improving. In 2017, about two-thirds of the working age population is employed, which is comparable with the average OECD country, but below strong performing countries such as the Scandinavian countries, Germany and the Netherlands where 3 out of 4 are employed. (OECD, 2018[13]; Eurostat, 2018[14]). In addition, the share of active working age population was relatively low (see Figure 1.4): 70.6% of the adult population was active (either unemployed or employed) compared with 72.1% on average across the OECD (Eurostat, 2018[15]; OECD, 2018[13]).

There are also significant differences in employment across population groups. Older generations are lagging behind, and differences in employment rates for high and low-educated adults, as well as for foreign and non-foreign born adults, are relatively large. While some differences are smaller than in other OECD countries, they can still be substantial, for instance, differences between genders are relatively small, but the employment rate for women is still 9 percentage-points below the employment rate for men (OECD, 2018[1]).

A relatively small share, but nonetheless large number, of adults is mismatched for the needs of their jobs based on their skills, qualifications and fields of study. This could have negative implications for firms' and countries' productivity, as well as individuals' incomes, job satisfaction, health and well-being. Recent OECD research highlights that countries may make large gains in productivity by reducing skills mismatches, and even for Flanders – where labour productivity is already high – it is estimated that allocative efficiency that lowers literacy mismatch could result in a 2.6% productivity gain (Mcgowan and Andrews, 2015[16]).

Figure 1.4. Key indicators for activating skills supply

Normalised score from 1 to 10, (1=minimum, 10=maximum) based on relative position in range of scores among countries, where a higher value reflects better performance.



1) For Flanders, data is used for age group 20-64 instead of 25-64.
2) The OECD average (when using PIAAC data) is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills.
How to read this chart: The normalised scores indicate the relative performance, 1 for weakest performance and 10 for strongest performance across OECD countries. So the further away from the core of the chart, the better the performance. For example, indicator 'Low share of employees over-qualified, 2016' indicates performance near the top of the ranking for Flanders, i.e. a comparatively low share of employees with qualifications too high for their job.
Note: See Annex 1.A for explanation of sources and methodology.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891224

Furthermore, for several occupations there are currently labour shortages, despite a relatively large share of the population being inactive and a comparatively high long-term unemployment rate of 41.3% (OECD-EU average of 30.5%) (Eurostat, 2018[17]). In addition, 7.2% of 15-24 year-olds were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018[18]). There is a particular mismatch between demand and supply in technical occupations, with enrolment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies not sufficient to meet the high demand of employers in these fields for workers.

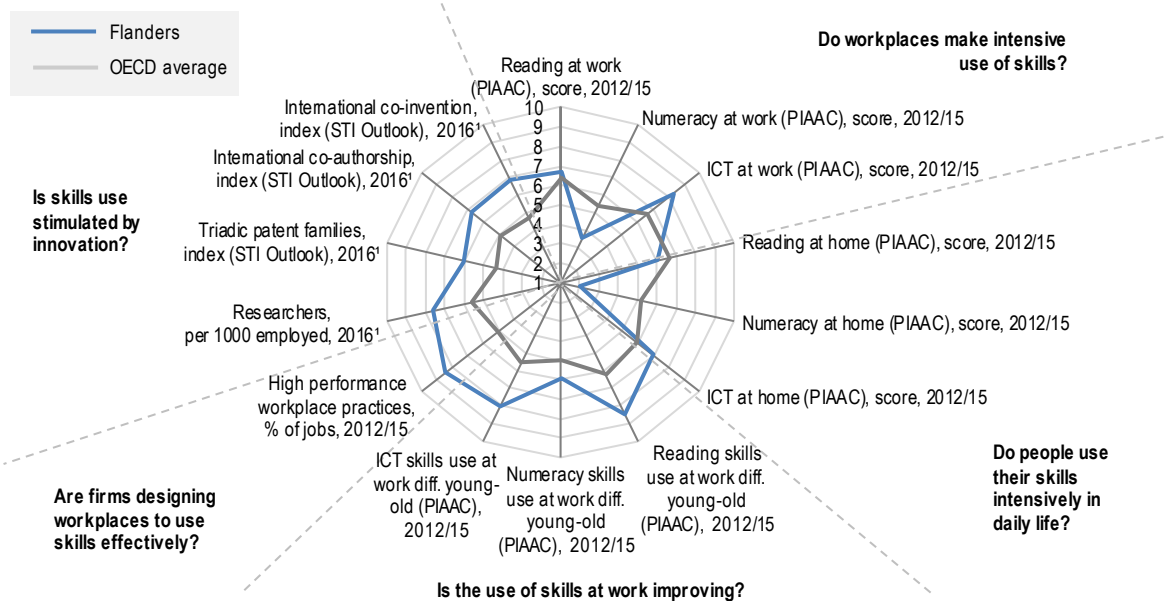
Using skills effectively

Flemish adults have high skill levels, but these skills are not always used to their full potential in the workplace, according to PIAAC (Figure 1.5). While the use of information and communication technology (ICT) skills in the workplace is more common in Flanders than in most OECD countries, and the use of skills seems to be improving (the difference in skills use between generations is large), the use of reading skills in Flanders is only average, and the use of numeracy skills ranks near the bottom of OECD countries. This large gap between skill levels and skill use suggests that some of the investment in developing skills is wasted.

The use of skills for specific tasks of workers could also be intensified in Flanders. Where self-organisation, ICT managing and communication skills are more often used on the job than in most OECD countries, the use of STEM, management and accounting skills at work is relatively weak (OECD, 2017[4]).

Figure 1.5. Key indicators for using skills effectively

Normalised score from 1 to 10, (1=minimum, 10=maximum) based on relative position in range of scores among countries, where a higher value reflects better performance.



1) Data on the level of Belgium, due to unavailability data for Flanders.
2) The OECD average (when using PIAAC data) is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills.
How to read this chart: The normalised scores indicate the relative performance, 1 for weakest performance and 10 for strongest performance across OECD countries. So the further away from the core of the chart, the better the performance. For example, indicator 'Reading skills use at work diff. young-old (PIAAC), 2012/15' indicates performance above OECD average, i.e. a comparatively large difference in the use of reading skills between younger and older generations, demonstrating relatively strong improvements in the use of these skills.
Note: See Annex 1.A for explanation of sources and methodology.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891243

The adoption of high-performance work practices is generally associated with the intensive use of skills and higher productivity. Based on data from PIAAC, Flemish firms

are already adopting these practices (both organisational and managerial) at a higher rate than their counterparts in most other OECD countries (about 37% of jobs adopted these practices, compared with 26% across the OECD (2016[19])), however, this is not being translated into improved skills use.

In addition, business investment in a range of intangible assets, such as organisational capital, computerised information, design, and research and development (R&D), is positively associated with productivity and competitiveness. Flanders has an innovative economy and society, with a large share of researchers in the workforce and above average R&D expenditure (OECD, 2018[1]). Innovation in Flanders also has a strong international dimension, with good performance in international co-authorship of research publications – as a measure of international collaboration in science – and a large share of patents developed together with foreign co-inventors (OECD, 2017[20]).

Policy context for Flanders

Flanders has a long history of developing strategic policies to address challenges and seize opportunities from societal and economic changes. As part of this tradition, the Flemish Community has already taken various steps to address many of the challenges identified in this chapter. These efforts go in the right direction and have the potential to generate the policy outcomes the country needs to strengthen adult education and training, to enhance the activation of skills in the labour market, and to more effectively use skills at work and in society. In the last decade, the Flemish Community has identified several skills and education goals (see Table 1.1 for a complete list (Flanders, 2018[21])). These long-term policy initiatives are diverse in nature with different durations, target groups and topics within the field of education and skills.

An example of such a long-term vision for the economy and society is "Vision 2050" (*Visie 2050*) (Vlaamse Regering, 2017[22]). In line with the fundamentals of the OECD Skills Strategy – albeit with a broader scope – Vision 2050 aims to deliver a strategic response to the opportunities and challenges that Flanders is facing. The vision supports policy actions by defining priorities and applying a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Launched in 2016, this strategy identifies seven crucial transitions for Flanders that underscore the importance of creating an inclusive, open, resilient, and internationally connected region, with the topic of education and skills addressed in the fourth transition towards "lifelong learning and a dynamic life course" (*Levenslang leren en de dynamische levensloopbaan*).

Related to this is the concept note Vizier 2030, which links the long-term strategy from Vision 2050 with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Vlaamse Regering, 2018[23]). It supports the implementation of SDG4 ("Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all") by defining the objectives and listing specific goals for 2030. In the context of Vision 2050 and Vizier 2030, the OECD Skills Strategy in Flanders could build on the selected transitions by developing specific recommendations, contribute to building support and a common understanding, and create momentum for policy reform.

The Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) provides input for socio-economic policy. The social partners represented in the SERV do so through advice, agreements and research. For example, the SERV produced a platform text "Flanders 2030 – An outstretched hand" (*Vlaanderen 2030 – Een uitgestoken hand)* in which the Flemish social partners formulate joint guidelines for the policy agenda of the next fifteen years in

a number of socio-economic core areas (economy, labour market, education, energy, and social policy) (SERV, 2016[24]). Recently the SERV did the same on the issue of digitization ("The transition to a digital society: the start of an integrated policy agenda" (SERV, 2018[25])).

The Flemish Community has effectively responded to specific challenges in Flanders with policy goals and actions in recent years. For instance, to address the mismatch in demand and supply for technical occupations, Flanders introduced the STEM Action Plan (*STEM-actieplan*) in 2012, which aims to stimulate young people to choose STEM education, professions and careers. In addition, to address the weak literacy and digital skills of various sub-groups in society, the Flemish government launched a third Strategic Literacy Plan for the period 2017-2024 (*Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid 2017-2024*) with several strategic goals and specific targets for 2024 (VLOR, 2017[26]).

Table 1.1. Long-term skills and education policy goals

Name	Year	Description
Vision 2050 (*Visie 2050*)	2016	Vision 2050 is a long-term strategy for Flanders identifying seven crucial transitions Flanders should make in order to become an inclusive, open, resilient and internationally connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner. One of these transitions is towards "lifelong learning and a dynamic life course".
Vizier 2030	2018	Vizier 2030 is a concept note that combines UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with Vision 2050. It is the next step in the implementation agenda of the SDGs, building on the Vision 2050 long-term strategy, and defining objectives with a list of 49 specific goals for 2030 related to SDG4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".
Strategic Literacy Plan 2017-2024 (*Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid 2017-2024*)	2017	The third Strategic Literacy Plan was introduced in 2017 and has a deadline for 2024. It has five strategic goals and specifies targets to improve the literacy skills and digital literacy skills for different sub-groups, including people leaving secondary education, job seekers and employed persons, and people in poverty.
Concept note "Together against early school leaving" (*Samen tegen schooluitval*)	2015-2019	A broad approach to reduce early school leaving and truancy and to guarantee the right to learn concretised in a plan of 52 actions at 4 levels: 1) monitoring, identification and co-ordination; 2) prevention; 3) intervention; 4) compensation.
Policy Paper Education & Training 2014–2019 (*Beleidsnota Onderwijs*)	2014	The Flemish ministers submit policy papers at the start of their five-year political term. The paper from the Flemish minister of Education and Training included visions and targets for adult education, transfer from education to the labour market, languages, digital literacy, media wisdom, learning guidance, secondary education, financing higher education, and teacher education.
STEM Action Plan (*STEM-actieplan*)	2012-2020	Joint action plan by the policy domains education and training, work and social economy and economy, and science and innovation to stimulate young people to choose STEM education, professions and careers. This involved marketing, communication campaigns, strengthening teachers and trainers, improving the process of study and career choices, and encouraging young adults to study STEM.
European 2020-strategy	2010	The aim of the European 2020-strategy is to reduce early school leaving, with a target for Flanders of 5.2% early school leavers in 2020. In 2015, the third action plan started (concept note "together against early school leaving").
Pact 2020/EU 2020	2009	Pact 2020 is a tripartite mission statement that defines a range of policy goals for 2020 in Flanders. So far, broad qualitative targets have been set ("permanent retraining of employees will be crucial"), but more concrete targets are planned.

The Flemish government recently introduced several reforms and policies in the field of skills and education, many of which are steps in the right direction to address the challenges identified in this chapter (see list in Table 1.2 (Flanders, 2018[21])). For instance, to improve the performance of adult education, Flanders has started the process of reforming the adult education sector with a recently approved financing decree for adult education that affects both Centres for Adult Education (CAE) (*Centra voor volwassenenonderwijs*) and Centres for Adult Basic Education (CABE) (*Centra voor basiseducatie*). This legislation is to be implemented in 2019 and aims to strengthen adult education and re-position it within the education landscape. In addition, CAE

responsibilities will be affected: higher vocational education (for instance informatics and orthopaedics) will be transferred from Centres for Adult Education to university colleges in 2019, making higher vocational education a fully-fledged part of higher education.

To improve the accessibility of adult education and training, a national law on "Workable work" (2017) (*Werkbaar werk*) introduced the obligation for employers to provide an average of five days of training per year, replacing a legal obligation to spend a share of the wage cost on training. Recently, the Flemish government introduced a related reform of paid educational leave to Flemish training leave (*Vlaams opleidingsverlof*), with 125 hours annual paid leave for education for every employee in the private sector. Furthermore, to enhance participation in adult education and training, a reform is expected related to education and training incentives, following agreements between the Flemish government and Flemish social partners.

Table 1.2. Recent and new reforms related to skills and education

Name	Year	Description
Financing decree for adult education (*Financieringsdecreet volwassenenonderwijs*)	2019	Approved by the Flemish Government on 16 March 2018, the new financing decree is part of an overall reform of the adult education sector that aims to reinforce the sector and position it clearly within the educational landscape. The new financing decree will provide, from 1 September 2019, a more stable and predictable financial system for institutions. This includes: 1) a "qualification bonus" for centres when participants finish a certain programme; 2) more and open ended financial means for courses in "Dutch as a second language", basic skills courses; and 3 more means for vulnerable groups, such as jobseekers or course participants with a low level of qualifications (Eurydice, 2015[27]).
Emergency ordinance on adult education and higher vocational education	2019	The Flemish Government approved this act in December 2016. It contains a reform of the programmes within adult education and introduces changes to the organisation of the sector to achieve economies of scale. From 1 September 2019, adult education centres with educational competence for more fields of study will have to reach a higher rationalisation standard in secondary adult education in order to be eligible for financing or subsidising. A new programming procedure will apply for secondary adult education which links the educational competence of an Adult Education Centre to (a) certain location(s) or site(s) (Eurydice, 2015[27]).
Decree on the elaboration of the associate degree programmes within the university colleges	2019	Adopted by the Flemish Government on 25 April 2018, this decree will transfer higher vocational education (*Graduaatsopleidingen*, HBO5), for example informatics and orthopaedics, from Centres for Adult Education to university colleges from 1 September 2019 onwards.
Decree on dual learning in secondary education	2019	Following various projects that tested the application of dual learning in Flanders between 2016 and 2018, a decree on dual learning was adopted by the Flemish Parliament on 21 March 2018. This decree on dual learning in specialised secondary education will become effective on 1 September 2019, and will allow providers of dual learning to deliver official dual education and training programs.
Reform of paid educational leave to Flemish training leave	2018	Approved by the Flemish Government on 20 July 2018, and part of the reform of the Flemish training incentives for workers, this reform will include the following main changes: 1) every employee in the private sector will have 125 hours annual paid leave for education; 2) courses are registered in a centralised database and will be more flexible in terms of time and location; 3 criteria of recognition will be determined late 2018, but will have a labour-market focus, including basic, job-specific, and general labour-market skills; 4) administrative tasks for employer will be simplified; and 5) sanctions will be introduced for absence during courses.
Reform of the system for validation of competences and integrated quality framework	2018	Implemented in June 2018, this policy on validation - among all policy domains concerned - aims to make visible and valorise the competencies people have acquired during their life, work and leisure time activities. A parliamentary act defines the common definition, referencing standard (professional qualifications of the Flemish Qualification Structure ('*Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur*, VKS'), outcomes and quality framework for the validation of competencies.
Update and optimisation of the "Competent" database	2018	Update and optimisation of "Competent", the standard and database that contains more than 500 "profession files" with information on professions, competences, work organisation and more. The update aims for a clearer and more transversal formulation of competencies, more flexibility to respond to new and changing competences in the labour market, and refinement of division into occupations.

Name	Year	Description
Reform of individual vocational training in enterprises (*Individuele Beroepsopleiding*, IBO)	2018	The individual vocational training in the enterprise is a form of training in which the trainee learns a profession in the workplace. Reform is intended for IBO allowances, administration is scheduled to be simplified and reduced, and training should start quicker with more support.
Act on Workable Work	2017	Previously, private employers were legally obliged to spend at least 1.9% of their wage cost on training for employees. This law, at the Federal Government level, changed this obligation to instead providing an average of five days of training per year.
Reform of the Flemish training incentives for workers	2017	On 11 July 2017, the Government of Flanders and social partners reached an agreement within the Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee (*Vlaams Economisch en Sociaal Overlegcomité*, VESOC) on the reform of education and training incentives for adults. Specifics of this harmonisation are still to be decided.
Parliamentary act on Flemish integration and civic integration policies	2013-2015	In the civic integration programme, newcomers receive courses in Dutch, social orientation and individual support. The parliamentary act sets the framework for these policies and regulates the provision and financing of agencies and organisations who implement these policies.

The above-mentioned reforms and long-term visions and strategies provide only a sample of the most recent initiatives directly related to improving the development, activation and use of skills. Nonetheless, they provide an indication of how actively the Flemish government has worked to address skills challenges.

Priority areas and recommendations

Based on this assessment of the overall performance of the Flemish skills system and the feedback from the Flemish government, five priority areas have been identified for the Skills Strategy in Flanders:

- Developing a learning culture
- Reducing skills imbalances
- Strengthening skills use in workplaces
- Strengthening the governance of adult learning
- Improving the financing of adult learning

These priorities and their associated recommendations are discussed at greater length in the chapters that follow. Specifically, Chapter 2 is on the topic of *developing a learning culture*, Chapter 3 on *reducing skills imbalances*, Chapter 4 on *strengthening skills use in workplaces*, Chapter 5 on *strengthening the governance of adult learning*, and Chapter 6 on *improving the financing of adult learning*.

Developing a learning culture

A strong learning culture is imperative if a country wishes to thrive in an increasingly complex world. Learning culture can be defined as the set of beliefs, values and attitudes, and resulting behaviours favourable towards learning that a group shares. While the precise skills needs of the future are unknown, a strong learning culture ensures that individuals are ready to upgrade their existing skills or acquire new skills to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. Fostering a learning culture and adult education are priorities for Flanders, as identified in its Vision 2050.

Participation in adult learning in Flanders is around average in comparison with other OECD countries. Certain groups that are most in need of upskilling or reskilling are falling behind, such as older workers, immigrants, those in flexible employment forms, and low-skilled adults.

The motivation to learn is comparatively low among Flemish adults, which highlights the importance of raising awareness and responding to their specific learning interests and

needs. Furthermore, many adults report that their educational activities are not relevant to their jobs. Time constraints due to work, competing family responsibilities and inconvenient time or place of adult education offers are other factors limiting participation in learning among adults. The higher education system in Flanders is also underdeveloped for adult learners, with only a low share of adults obtaining higher education degrees as mature students. Work-based learning in post-secondary education, which could foster a learning culture in the workplace, is still sparse. Employer support for adult learning is low, in particular in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

The following recommendations are made for developing a culture of adult learning:

1. **Raise awareness of the importance of adult learning.** The government and diverse stakeholders, such as libraries, socio-cultural organisations (e.g. sports organisations, workers organisations, organisations for youth, the elderly, women, immigrants), education providers, local authorities and companies, can all play their role in encouraging lifelong learning and continuous skills development. Making learning more attractive and creating positive learning experiences for learners are key in this cultural transition and in fostering motivation.
2. **Embed adult learning within a lifelong development approach.** The government, training institutions, non-governmental organisations, employers, sectoral training providers and other relevant stakeholders should take the whole path to development into account. Instead of incidental learning, a continuous development approach is needed. Learners should be aware of their career paths and training needs, and companies should train workers towards specific career paths. Training institutions and public employment services should incorporate a lifelong development approach into their business models. See Chapter 5 on governance, for more information.
3. **Make adult education more accessible and relevant.** The government, non-governmental organisations, employers, sectoral training providers and other relevant stakeholders should partner to co-create the curriculum, match adults to relevant adult education courses through skills validation, and expand the available learning environments of adult education courses. This would mean that those who are least likely to participate can be reached where they are and encouraged to participate. Such a partnership can distribute the cost of adult education provision and enable finding creative ways of tailoring the adult education experience to their needs.
4. **Transform adult learning providers into learning organisations.** Teacher training institutions, universities and university colleges, as well as other adult learning providers, should do more to ensure that all staff involved in adult learning are given opportunities to receive further professional development and supported to collaborate.
5. **Enlarge the accessible course offerings for adult learners in higher education**. Higher education institutions should consider creating more flexible offering of adult learning and professional development opportunities. Requirements of who can access these courses should also become more flexible and take previous work experience into account by assessment of prior learning. Courses should be tailored to the needs of adult learners and should be set up in broad collaboration with other higher education institutions and with businesses/sectors to create

advantages in both the content (multi-disciplinary knowledge) and the organisation (fewer staff and infrastructural costs/overhead).

6. **Expand work-based learning in university colleges, universities and adult education.** Education providers and employers, among other relevant stakeholders, should participate in the European Structural Fund call for tenders that seeks to support pilot projects on dual learning in higher education and adult education. Employers and education providers should also be supported by the government to widely apply a framework for high-quality workplaces which establishes quality criteria covering the curriculum, programme duration, physical resources and qualification requirements.

7. **Establish a co-operation network to identify and disseminate best practices in stimulating a learning culture in the workplace.** This could be initiated by employers, unions and sectoral training providers, with support from the government. Researchers from academia may also be able to help identify best practices through evaluations and surveys. An employee in each company could be the contact person to participate in this network, share internal practices with others, and propose and disseminate external new practices internally. Sharing identified practices could be of interest within a sector and across sectors.

Reducing skills imbalances

Skills imbalances, defined as a misalignment between the demand and supply of skills, are costly for individuals, firms and the economy. Skills shortages increase hiring costs, lower productivity, and constrain the ability of firms to innovate and adopt new technologies. Reducing skills imbalances has been identified as a priority for Flanders, with the Flemish Minister of Work signing an agreement with employer organisations to tackle labour-market shortages (*Pact tegen krapte op de arbeidsmarkt*) in January 2018.

Tight labour-market conditions in Flanders have contributed to increasing shortage pressures in recent years, which are particularly acute in occupations related to professional, technical and scientific activities, information and communication technology (ICT), as well as in skills related to health services and education and training. High shares of unfilled vacancies can be found in both high-skilled occupations (e.g. nurses, site managers, ICT analysts) and medium-skilled occupations (e.g. technicians, mechanics). Shortage pressures are also evident in skills relevant to a range of occupations, including literacy and numeracy, social skills, systems skills, complex problem solving and reasoning. Despite a tight labour market, long-term unemployment remains high, and individuals with low levels of education face high unemployment rates, making up nearly half of all long-term unemployed. Flanders has a comparatively low share of skills mismatch (in terms of qualifications, skills, and field of study), but increasing automation and the resulting changing demand for skills could worsen these imbalances going forward.

A number of factors contribute to skills imbalances in Flanders. Despite persistent shortages in STEM fields there is a low and declining supply of graduates in STEM subjects, suggesting that the education system may not be sufficiently responsive to changing skills demand. Youth and older workers are not participating in the labour market as much as in other countries, which reduces the available skills supply. While Flanders produces skills assessment and anticipation information, the lack of an economy-wide forecast exercise prevents a broader understanding of labour-market needs. Online career guidance tools are useful, but information is not sufficiently tailored

to the needs of users, and there is a need for more bridges between learning and career development support. The current system for recognising and validating skills fails to raise awareness among employers and individuals, although reforms to the system promise to address other weaknesses. Barriers to mobility (both geographic and job-to-job) restrict the allocation of labour to the regions and sectors that are most in need of workers.

The following recommendations are proposed for reducing skills imbalances:

8. **Provide individuals with a balanced portfolio of skills.** Training providers and employers should develop and promote the transversal skills that are likely to be needed across occupations in a rapidly changing economy, including literacy and numeracy, complex problem solving, and reasoning abilities. Government should continue to monitor whether its policies are having the desired effect of providing individuals with a balanced portfolio of skills that includes strong cognitive, social and emotional, as well as relevant job-specific skills. Such a balanced portfolio of skills promotes the movement of labour to occupations and sectors that most need it, and supports sustainable employment outcomes.
9. **Make the education system more responsive to changing skills demand**. The government should disseminate data on wage premia by field of study instead of just by level of study, in addition to information on labour-market outcomes more generally. This could entice more prospective students to choose fields relevant to the labour market. Employers may need to improve the compensation package offered to occupations with persistent shortages to attract more students to these fields. At the same time, government should monitor the incentives that students face to study different courses, and, if needed, offer scholarships to cover tuition and living expenses for students who study high-demand courses. Furthermore, government should ensure that education institutions face the right incentives to make course offerings responsive to changing skills demand.
10. **Support assessments of skills needs and skills forecast exercises.** The government could consider committing to a long-term collaboration agreement with other regions in Belgium to regularly carry out skills forecast exercises. This would promote a human capital agenda to make the skills system responsive to the needs of the labour market (elaborated in Chapter 5 on governance).
11. **Create bridges between learning and career development support.** Career and education guidance are currently separate services in Flanders. The career guidance and education guidance services should work closely together in order to refer clients to each other and to support each other's services. These services could also be offered in tandem in the same location to facilitate access. Some thought could be given to extending the use of the career guidance vouchers (*Loopbaancheques*) to education guidance. Existing digital platforms for guidance (e.g. Education Chooser, *Onderwijskiezer*, and the Flemish Public Employment Service's My Career, *Mijn Loopbaan)* could be better integrated to ensure that users can easily access information about both career and training trajectories. A more interactive format, where the information provided to users is based on responses to a set of questions about their skills and experience, would help to customise information to users' needs.
12. **Raise awareness about skills validation (*Erkennen Van Competenties*, EVC) among employers and potential users.** Ongoing reforms promise to simplify the existing skills validation system and improve flexibility, however, survey

evidence suggests that more efforts are needed to raise awareness about EVC processes among users and employers. Information about EVC processes should be centralised and available via a digital platform, such as a careers website, as in Denmark.

13. **Mobilise sectoral training funds to address skills shortages.** Social partners should work with the government to promote the sharing of sectoral training funds between sectors to better facilitate workers' transitions from declining to expanding sectors, and aggregate funds to address common skills challenges, such as adopting digital technologies and addressing STEM shortages.

14. **Prioritise training in skills in high demand for jobseekers, particularly those at risk of long-term unemployment.** VDAB should continue to work closely with employers and sectoral groups, as well as with adult education centres, to supply training to jobseekers in skills in high demand. The government should monitor whether the recent actions (*Pact tegen krapte op de arbeidsmarkt*) are successful at their objective to improve the matching of long-term unemployed with vacancies.

Strengthening skills use in workplaces

Many OECD countries have primarily engaged on skills issues from the supply side, focusing on the number of people completing skills qualifications. However, there is increasing recognition of the need to look more closely at how those skills are deployed within the workplace. Putting skills to better use in the workplace is important for workers and firms. In Flanders, workers who use their skills more frequently earn higher wages and have higher job satisfaction. Firms benefit from increased in productivity and reduced employee turnover and well-being.

Evidence from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills shows that individuals in Flanders tend to make good use of their literacy skills while the use of numeracy skills in the workplace falls behind the OECD average. The optimal use of numeracy skills in the workplace is important given the advanced technological changes that are occurring in the workplace and driving changes in the future of work. Workers who do not optimally use their numeracy skills could be more vulnerable to the automation of tasks in the workplace. When looking at the use of skills among firms, SMEs tends to make less use of the literacy and numeracy skills of their workers.

One way of assessing skills use in the workplace is looking at the prevalence of high-performance workplace practices (HPWPs), which tend to exist in firms that offer employee award programmes, flexible jobs, regular performance appraisals, as well as general mentoring and leadership development, and skills development programmes. In Flanders, about 36% of jobs adopt HPWPs practices, which is above the OECD average but below leading countries, such as Denmark (42%), Finland (41%), and Sweden (40%). In general, Flanders has showed large improvements in the number of companies offering general training opportunities. One particular study in Flanders shows that in 2016, 82.5% of employees indicated to have sufficient learning opportunities in the workplace.

A number of factors determine the degree of which skills are effectively deployed in the workplace. In Flanders, the level of awareness about the benefits of using skills effectively is relatively low, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Managers often lack opportunities to participate in training about how to foster high-performance work practices in the workplace. Many firms also do not offer career mobility opportunities, which can be useful in providing individuals with new work

experiences as well as opportunities to improve their general working conditions. Public employment services can be more active in working closer with employers to offer human resources management supports, while also identifying whether unfilled job vacancies are due to the poor quality of jobs on offer.

The following recommendations are made for strengthening skills use in the workplace:

15. **Raise awareness of the importance of skills use in the workplace.** The government with social partners should consider how to engage firms on skills use policies and disseminate information about good practices and innovation within firms. The goal of actions in this area would be to develop new partnerships with employers to promote high-performance workplace practices and encourage managers to think more critically about work organisation.

16. **Examine incentives to employers to re-shape their workplace and encourage more management training, especially among SMEs.** In many cases, employers can take a leadership role to develop management training plans, which encourage great employee autonomy, work organisation, as well as job rotation strategies. The chambers of commerce can be particularly important in networking firms, especially SMEs to share good management practices. In some cases, direct government funding can provide incentives for firms to re-shape their workplaces and embed better management practices within the firm. This would be especially important for firms that have not traditionally participated in workplace training programmes previously.

17. **Promote flexible career mobility opportunities (e.g. upward, sideward, and downward) within sectors and firms.** Career mobility programmes can play an important role in fostering employee engagement, increased productivity, and teamwork. The goal of this action by firm, unions and education providers would be encourage firms to experiment with career mobility programmes that allow workers to test new roles within a firm as well as to enable individuals to take on different tasks at another firm. This also includes looking at how pay and remuneration systems can be adjusted to reward greater employee autonomy in the workplace.

18. **Examine company working conditions and human resource practices to help fill job vacancies and address potential skills shortages.** While employer leadership is critical for stimulating high-performance workplace practices, employment services can play an active role in working closer with firms to develop human resources management tools. Public employment services can work alongside the chambers of commerce in Flanders to identify company's having recruitment difficulties because of the type of jobs on offer.

Strengthening the governance of adult learning

Governance refers to the processes by which responsibilities are distributed and decisions made and implemented through collaboration between national government, sub-national governments and stakeholders. Governance is particularly important for the effective functioning of the adult learning system as adult learning lies in the sphere of action of a number of bodies within the public administration and stakeholders. The policies and actions of these bodies are inherently intertwined and require co-ordination at both the vertical (across ministries) and horizontal (across levels of government) dimension and vis-a-vis the stakeholders. Strong governance helps to minimise policy gaps and overlaps,

improve the likelihood of successful policy implantation, leverage each other's strengths, and generate policy complementarities. The Flemish Government has made clear in their Vision 2050 strategy that a whole-of-government approach involving all relevant ministries and levels of government, as well as the engagement of social partners, will be key in making this vision a reality.

The governance of adult learning in Flanders is complex. While the federal government is responsible for the legal framework for certain kinds of adult learning policies, the regional and community level, which in Flanders is represented by the same government, is responsible for the majority of labour market and education policies. Several departments in the Flemish Government have some responsibility for the planning and delivery of adult learning, including: education and training, work and social economy, and finance and budget. In addition, many stakeholders, such as sectoral training providers, employers, unions and academics, have an important influence on participation and success in adult learning. It is also critical to engage adult learners themselves and place them at the centre of policy design. Governance structures are abundant in Flanders, with often strong roles for stakeholders. Examples of these structures are the Joint Policy Council, the Management Committee, the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and the Social-Economic council (SERV), as well as triple-helix partnerships in the Flemish Cluster policy.

Several factors determine the quality of governance in adult learning. A common vision that generates ownership and a commitment to work together is critical and helps generate a level of trust between institutions. Since collaboration across institutions takes time, there needs to be sufficient opportunity for regular contact and dialogue between the various parties. Financial resources are also required to support collaboration efforts. Those at the frontline of collaboration efforts would also benefit from being equipped with skills, such as managing networks, negotiations, communication, and conflict resolution. Collaboration can be strengthened through institutional mechanisms, such as co-ordinating bodies, legal instruments, shared budgets or common reporting structures. Timely, accurate and transparent information across institutions to build a common evidence base facilitates collaboration and improves decision making.

The following recommendations are made for strengthening the governance of adult learning:

19. **Establish a comprehensive and concrete vision for adult learning.** The government and stakeholders should draft the vision together and include clear goals, values and actions to be taken. Responsibilities should be allocated to all relevant stakeholders. The funding mechanisms to implement the vision would need to be determined and it would need to be specified how the expenditures would be covered and by whom. There should be agreement about performance indicator milestones. Measures should be included to track the implementation of the vision and to report progress publicly to ensure transparency and build trust. Moreover, target groups should be identified to ensure the vision leaves no one behind. A pact between the government and stakeholders could help to ensure implementation of the vision.
20. **Promote coherence and complementarity between levels of government in adult learning.** The government should ensure that policies and reforms go in the same direction to strengthen each other and create synergy effects. As this process takes time and resources, it is critical for all to agree upon the shared vision, have a clear plan of how to move forward, and have open and transparent

communication to maintain trust and commitment. The government should provide training to equip government officials with the skills needed to engage effectively with one another. There may be particular challenges when there are strong diverging opinions across ministries and levels of government. Skills are required to negotiate these differences to reach a compromise that works for all involved, and then to move forward to implementation.

21. **Support local community organisations to foster, host and co-ordinate local networks of stakeholders that work to improve adult learning**. The government could provide funding for these networks and initiatives that is linked to relevant performance indicators. Since adult learning providers are often fragmented, the government could select a single organisation that helps to co-ordinate the different initiatives.

22. **Establish a common knowledge and evidence base**. The government should closely collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to have a common knowledge and evidence base. This could inform continuous efforts of promoting lifelong learning within Vision 2050. Introducing a coherent quality assurance framework for adult learning is a step in the right direction. Further efforts will be needed to ensure that stakeholders are aware of the framework, understand how to interpret what it means and use it in practice. Moreover, the impact and effectiveness of adult learning policy measures should be assessed more systematically through monitoring and evaluation practices to continue to improve policy design and implementation. Based on their research, academics could provide feedback on the soundness of the assessments. Findings should also be made widely accessible so that stakeholders and end-users can make informed decisions.

Improving the financing of adult learning

A strong system of adult learning requires adequate financing, and this may become more urgent as automation and other global trends transform the skills needed in the labour market at an increasing pace. The Flemish government and social partners have committed to increase participation in continuing education from 7.5% of the total population in 2011 to 15% by 2020. This will require a system of adult learning that helps adults to reduce barriers (financial and otherwise) associated with participation in adult learning. These considerations are particularly relevant in light of the ongoing reform of Flemish training incentives for workers.

Available data for Flanders suggest that cost does not represent a significant barrier to accessing adult learning, whereas non-financial barriers, including time constraints due to work and family responsibilities and the course or programme not being offered at a convenient time or place, are more significant. Flanders offers many financial incentives to help share the costs of adult learning between individuals, employers and government, as well as to steer adults towards training that is relevant to the labour market. However, there are concerns that financing for adult learning is not reaching the groups who could benefit most. For example, low-educated and older adults are under-represented in applying for career guidance and training vouchers, and low-educated adults are also less likely to benefit from employer-provided training.

To some extent, the under-representation of marginalised groups in accessing financing for adult learning is due to the tendency of employers to invest less in the skills of lower-skilled workers. Furthermore, employees in small firms may be limited in their capacity to take advantage of financing for adult learning, as it can be more difficult for small

firms to plan and cover employee absences. Other relevant factors include a complex system of incentives, rules that limit the participation of some groups (e.g. those with a weak attachment to the labour market or displaced workers), and large disparities in sectoral training funds.

The following recommendations are proposed for improving the financing of adult learning:

23. **Group all existing training incentives into a single learning account.** To reduce complexity and facilitate access to training incentives, the government should over the long run group all existing training incentives for individuals (paid education leave, training vouchers, training credit, career guidance vouchers and possibly sectoral training funds) into a single learning account (in Skills Strategy workshops these were referred to as training backpacks or "*rugzak*"), similar to France's *Compte Personnel de Formation*. Key features of the learning account should include: training rights that are portable upon job loss and transferable between employers, targeted at accredited labour-market oriented courses, and more training rights allotted to low-skilled than to high-skilled workers. The learning account should be accompanied by programmes to reach out to vulnerable groups with information, advice and guidance.

24. **Expand programmes to reach out to marginalised groups with information, advice and guidance about training.** The government should consider how training incentives can help to overcome barriers to training (financial and otherwise) and how they could be better targeted both at the learners who most need the support (including the low-skilled, older workers and those in SMEs) and at the type of training that will have the most impact on the economy and employment outcomes. The government should disseminate information about available training incentives to a wide range of stakeholders, including guidance counselling services, adult education providers, VDAB, non-government organisations and the staff responsible for training (VTO) in companies.

25. **Explore options for financially supporting transitions from job to job or from one employment status to another.** To achieve this, the government should work closely with employer organisations and trade unions. As discussed in Chapter 3, on skills imbalances, sector covenants could be used to support the sharing of sectoral training funds between sectors. Alternatively, severance pay could be converted into a fund that dismissed workers could use to access a variety of re-employment services, including training, counselling and recognition of prior learning. Making VDAB training more widely available to employees at risk of displacement would also support a proactive approach to their re-employment.

26. **Ensure that training incentives support flexible modes of training delivery.** Given the importance of non-financial barriers to adult learning in Flanders, the government should ensure that training incentives support flexible modes of training delivery, including modular learning, work-based learning, distance learning, e-learning, blended learning, and massive open online courses (MOOCs). This flexibility should be reflected in the new database of eligible training courses that will be introduced in September 2019. Additional support should also be given to higher education institutions to finance education provision in formats that are flexible to the needs of adult learners.

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Annex 1.A. OECD Skills Strategy Dashboard Flanders

This annex addresses the OECD Skills Strategy Dashboard for Flanders. The objective of this dashboard is to present an overview of the performance of the skills system in OECD countries. It is the starting point for analysis in the diagnostic phase of national skills strategy projects, allowing the OECD and the national project team to identify the priority skills policy themes to be covered in greater detail in the report. Presenting the relative position of countries on key skills outcomes, the dashboard provides a general overview of the Flemish skills systems' strengths and weaknesses. This annex describes the characteristics, presents the indicators and describes the underlying methods for calculating indicators.

Characteristics

The dashboard is the result of internal consultation and analysis of core indicators used in OECD Skills Strategy projects. It presents a simple, intuitive overview of the outcomes of skills systems that is easy to interpret and which gives a quick impression of a countries' skills performance across the pillars of the OECD skills strategy ("developing relevant skills", "activating skills supply", and "putting skills to effective use"). The dashboard applies a broad definition of skills by presenting foundational skills, problem-solving skills and broadness of skill sets, and considers both economic and social outcomes. A total of 39 key outcome indicators were selected and grouped into 17 aggregated indicators (see full list in Annex Table 1.A.1).

Indicator selection

The selection of indicators followed a process whereby a long-list of the most commonly used indicators in OECD Skills Strategy reports was gradually reduced to a short-list of core indicators. This process built on the principle that the indicators describe the core outcomes of the different pillars of the skills system. In addition, these indicators express outcomes in terms of level, trend, distribution and equity. The indicators need to be comparatively easy to interpret and based on OECD sources, with data as recent as possible. Since many surveys and databases are on the country level, data were not always available for Flanders. For these indicators (as indicated in Annex Table 1.A.1), data for Belgium were used.

Method for calculation of aggregate indicators

To develop aggregate indicators that represent the relative position of countries on key outcomes of the skills system, a number of calculations were made on the collected data. To describe the relative position across countries, a score for each indicator was calculated ranging from 0 to 10, with 0 for the weakest performance and 10 for the strongest performance in the list. This resulted in an indicator that allows comparisons between different types of indicators (e.g. averaging performance of literacy scores and

educational attainment rates). The resulting scores were normalised in such a way that better performance results in a higher score. Subsequently, an unweighted average of the indicators was calculated for each of the aggregates, and these scores were then ranked. The final ranking was separated into five groups of equal size, ranging from top 20% performer to bottom 20% performer.

Annex Table 1.A.1. Pillars, aggregates and underlying indicators

Pillar and aggregates	Indicator
Developing relevant skills	
How skilled are youth?	Reading (PISA[1]), mean score, 2015
	Mathematics (PISA[1]), mean score, 2015
	Science (PISA[1]), mean score, 2015
Are skills of youth improving?	PISA[1] average 3 year trend (reading, mathematics, science) [2]
Are skills of youth being developed inclusively?	PISA[1] ESCS parity index, science performance, 2015
How many young adults attain tertiary education?	Tertiary education attainment rate, 25-34 year-olds, 2017[3]
How skilled are young tertiary educated adults?	Literacy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, tertiary educated 25-34 year-olds, 2012/15
	Numeracy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, tertiary educated 25-34 year-olds, 2012/15
	Problem solving (PIAAC[4]), % Level 2/3, tertiary educated 25-34 year-olds, 2012/15
How inclusive is tertiary education?	Share tertiary educated with both parents less than tertiary, 2012/15
How strong are foundational skills of adults?	Literacy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, 2012/15
	Numeracy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, 2012/15
	Problem solving (PIAAC[4]), % Level 2/3, 2012/15
Do adults have a broad set of skills?	Percentage of adults with a broad set of skills (PIAAC[4]) (Level 3-5 in literacy and numeracy and Level 2/3 in problem solving), 2012/15
Is there a strong culture of adult education?	Formal and/or non-formal adult education participation rate (PIAAC[4]), last 12 months, 2012/15
	Willing to participate in adult education (PIAAC[4]), percentage of population, 2012/15
	Barriers to participation (PIAAC[4]),percentage of people wanting to participate who didn't, 2012/15
Are skills of adults being developed inclusively?	High-low educated parents, adjusted literacy difference (PIAAC[4]), 2012/15
Activating skills supply	
How well are skills activated in the labour market?	Employment rate, working age, 2017
	Labour force participation rate, 2017
	Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), percentage of 15-24 year-olds, 2017
How inclusive is the labour market?	Gender (male-female), employment rate difference, 2017
	High-low educated, employment rate difference, 2017[5]
How well aligned are skills with labour market?	Share of employees with field-of-study mismatch, 2015 (Skills for Jobs database)
	Share of employees over-qualified, 2015 (Skills for Jobs database)
	Share of employees under-qualified, 2015 (Skills for Jobs database)
Putting skills to effective use	
Do workplaces make intensive use of skills?	Reading at work (PIAAC[4]), score, 2012/15
	Numeracy at work (PIAAC[4]), score, 2012/15
	Information and communication technology (ICT) at work (PIAAC[4]), score, 2012/15
Do people use their skills intensively in daily life?	Reading at home (PIAAC[4]), score, 2012/15
	Numeracy at home (PIAAC[4]), score, 2012/15
	ICT at home (PIAAC[4]), score, 2012/15
Is the use of skills at work improving?	Reading skills use at work adjusted difference young (16-25) – prime age (26-54) (PIAAC[4]), 2012/15
	Numeracy skills use at work adjusted difference young (16-25) – prime age (26-54) (PIAAC[4]), 2012/15
	ICT skills use at work adjusted difference young (16-25) – prime age (26-54) (PIAAC[4]), 2012/15

Pillar and aggregates	Indicator
Developing relevant skills	
How skilled are youth?	Reading (PISA[1]), mean score, 2015
	Mathematics (PISA[1]), mean score, 2015
	Science (PISA[1]), mean score, 2015
Are skills of youth improving?	PISA[1] average 3 year trend (reading, mathematics, science) [2]
Are skills of youth being developed inclusively?	PISA[1] ESCS parity index, science performance, 2015
How many young adults attain tertiary education?	Tertiary education attainment rate, 25-34 year-olds, 2017[3]
How skilled are young tertiary educated adults?	Literacy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, tertiary educated 25-34 year-olds, 2012/15
	Numeracy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, tertiary educated 25-34 year-olds, 2012/15
	Problem solving (PIAAC[4]), % Level 2/3, tertiary educated 25-34 year-olds, 2012/15
How inclusive is tertiary education?	Share tertiary educated with both parents less than tertiary, 2012/15
How strong are foundational skills of adults?	Literacy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, 2012/15
	Numeracy (PIAAC[4]), mean score, 2012/15
	Problem solving (PIAAC[4]), % Level 2/3, 2012/15
Do adults have a broad set of skills?	Percentage of adults with a broad set of skills (PIAAC[4]) (Level 3-5 in literacy and numeracy and Level 2/3 in problem solving), 2012/15
Is there a strong culture of adult education?	Formal and/or non-formal adult education participation rate (PIAAC[4]), last 12 months, 2012/15
	Willing to participate in adult education (PIAAC[4]), percentage of population, 2012/15
	Barriers to participation (PIAAC[4]),percentage of people wanting to participate who didn't, 2012/15
Are skills of adults being developed inclusively?	High-low educated parents, adjusted literacy difference (PIAAC[4]), 2012/15
Activating skills supply	
How well are skills activated in the labour market?	Employment rate, working age, 2017
	Labour force participation rate, 2017
Are firms designing workplaces to use skills effectively?	High-performance workplace practices, percentage of jobs, 2012/15 (PIAAC[4])
Is skills use stimulated by innovation?	Researchers, per 1 000 employed, 2016[3]
	Triadic patent families, performance index (STI[6] Outlook), 2016[3]
	International co-authorship, performance index (STI[6] Outlook), 2016[3]
	International co-invention, performance index (STI[6] Outlook), 2016[3]

1. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
2. The average trend is reported for the longest available period since PISA 2006 for science, PISA 2009 for reading, and PISA 2003 for mathematics
3. Due to unavailability of data on the level of Flanders, data for Belgium have been used
4. Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)
5. For Flanders, data are used for age group 20-64 instead of 25-64
6. Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)

Note: Indicators without a specific source between brackets are OECD indicators from OECD Data (https://data.oecd.org/home/).

Chapter 2. Developing a learning culture

The chapter presents diagnostic evidence on adult learning in Flanders, the factors that affect adult learning and specific policies and practices to foster a learning culture. Flanders can develop a learning culture by taking action in seven areas. These are: 1) raising awareness about the importance of adult learning; 2) tailoring adult education provision to the specific needs of adult learners; 3) transforming adult education providers into learning organisations; 4) making higher education more accessible for adult learners; 5) promoting work-based learning in post-secondary education; 6) promoting human resource practices that stimulate a learning culture in the workplace.

Introduction

Why developing a learning culture matters

Learning culture can be defined as the set of beliefs, values and attitudes, and resulting behaviours, favourable towards learning that a group shares (OECD, 2010[1]). A strong learning culture is imperative if a country wishes to thrive in an increasingly complex world. While the precise skills needs of the future are unknown, a strong learning culture ensures that individuals are ready to upgrade their existing skills or acquire new skills to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. For society at large there are economic (e.g. productivity, innovation, economic growth) and social benefits (e.g. well-being, social cohesion). A learning culture needs to be cultivated from an early age and reinforced during the later years. In this chapter, the focus will be on the notion of a learning culture as it relates to adults in Flanders and how much they engage in adult education.

In Flanders, participation in institutionalised adult education is around the OECD average, and low in comparison to Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany, which have the highest rates. This is despite the relatively high average skills levels of Flemish adults in most measures of cognitive skills, such as literacy, numeracy and, to a lesser extent, problem solving in technology-rich environments. Higher participation in adult education could help reduce the significant skill level differences that exist between high and low educated adults, older and younger generations, and natives and migrants (OECD, 2016[2]). It would also help mitigate the risks of skills obsolescence, which is important given that about 60% of the workforce in Flanders are potentially vulnerable to automation (Elliott, 2017[3]). Adult education could also facilitate the transition of adults from low demand to high demand occupations, such as healthcare, and support the integration of immigrants in Flanders (Vlaamse Regering, 2016[4]).

Fostering a learning culture and adult education are priorities for Flanders. In Flanders, long-term strategy Vision 2050 identifies "lifelong learning and a dynamic lifecourse" as one of the seven crucial transitions Flanders has to make in order to become an "inclusive, open, resilient and internationally connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner" by 2050 (Vlaamse Regering, 2017[5]). As mentioned in Chapter 1, adult education has also been highlighted in PACT 2020 (VESOC, 2009[6]), the VESOC agreement on the reform of education and training incentives (Vlaamse Regering and SERV, 2017[7]), the Policy Paper Education and Training by the Department of Education (Crevits, 2014[8]), and the Strategic Literacy Plan (Vlaamse Regering, 2017[9]).

Overview of chapter

This chapter analyses available data and evidence on the participation in and quality of adult education in Flanders. It then proceeds to discuss the factors that influence adult education quality and participation. Next, it explores relevant general policies and practices to raise the quality of and participation in adult education, existing specific policies and practices of adult education in Flanders, and policies and practices from other countries that could be of interest for Flanders. The chapter concludes with recommendations of how to improve adult education.

Adult learning in Flanders

Context of adult learning in Flanders

Adults can learn through formal adult education, non-formal adult education and informal adult learning opportunities. Formal adult education occurs in a structured environment and leads to a nationally recognised formal qualification. Non-formal adult education also occurs in a structured environment, but may only lead to a diploma or certificate that is recognised by a sector or professional body. Informal adult learning is unstructured and does not lead to any qualification. When referring to formal and non-formal education, the term "adult education" will be used. When referring to formal, non-formal education and informal learning, the more encompassing term "adult learning" will be used. For more information, (Box 2.1).

In Flanders, the majority of adults in formal education attend Centres for Adult Education (*Centra voor Volwassenonderwijs*, CAE). Centres for Adult Education provide education in a wide range of skills such as technical skills and languages. The courses are modular and flexible (e.g. evening courses). After completing a module, the learner receives a partial certificate, and after completing an entire programme, the learner receives a formal certificate recognised by the Flemish government. The CAEs also give adults the opportunity to obtain a secondary education degree through "second chance education" (*Tweedekansonderwijs*, TKO). CAEs also have specific teacher training programmes, which from September 2019 will be moved to the university colleges *(hogescholen)*. Centres for Adult Basic Education (*Centra voor Basiseducatie*, CABE) provide courses in basic skills (e.g. numeracy, digital skills) and Dutch as a second language.

Universities and university colleges (*hogescholen*) allow adult learners to combine work and study by providing a limited number of special tracks (*werktrajecten*) in some study fields (Box 2.5). Higher education institutions also offer advanced bachelor and advanced master's degrees and postgraduate certificates, which allow adults with work experience to continue professional education. Through a credit contract, adult learners can take up specific courses from bachelor or masters programmes without enrolling on the entire programme. Currently, adult learners can pursue post-secondary VET to obtain an associate degree (*Hoger beroepsonderwijs*, Higher Vocational Education, HBO5) in the Centres for Adult Education; however, from September 2019 HBO5 will be moved to the university colleges, which will bring more adult learners into higher education institutions.

The Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training Syntra (*Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemingsvorming Syntra Vlaanderen*, Syntra) provides apprenticeships (*leertijd*) for 15 to 25 year-olds. Apprentices usually spend four days a week in a company and one day a week in a Syntra training centre. The programme can lead to both a professional qualification and a diploma of secondary education, if the learner completes the general education component.

In terms of non-formal adult learning, the main training providers are employers. Syntra offers non-formal education, such as entrepreneurial training, sectoral training and additional specialised training. The Flemish Public Employment Services (VDAB) organises vocational training for job seekers. This training often leads to a professional qualification. VDAB also has specific programmes for target groups such as individual vocational training (*Individuele beroepsopleiding*, IBO), work experience placements, induction work placements, explorative internships and education qualifying training programmes (*Onderwijskwalificerend opleidingstraject*, OKOT). (See Chapter 6 on

financing for more details). There are also many training courses provided by employers through the financing of sectoral covenants. (See Chapter 3 on skills imbalances, for more details). Concerning liberal arts adult education, part-time art education (*Deeltijds kunstonderwijs*, DKO) allows adults to enrol in art programmes in the academies for visual arts and the academies for music, drama and dance. Socio-cultural adult education is organised by various providers: associations, movements and training institutions (adult education institutes/training plus centres and national training institutions) (Eurydice, 2015[10]).

Table 2.1. Overview of providers of adult education in Flanders

Share of participants in Adult Education Survey 2011 who reported having participated in specific formal and non-formal education programmes.

Type of adult education	Providers of adult education	
Formal	Centre for adult education / Avondschool* / OSP* / TKO	58%
	SYNTRA	20%
	University colleges	13%
	University	8%
	Secondary school	3%
	Conservatory	1%
	Centre for Basic Education	1%
	Open University	1%
Non-formal	Employer training	43%
	Private institution, where education is not the main activity	14%
	Institution for formal education (e.g. school, colleges, university, CABE)	13%
	Institutions for non-formal courses (e.g. academies, DKO, NHA)	9%
	Non-profit organisations, cultural associations, political parties, regional/local government	8%
	Non-commercial organisations where education is not the main activity (libraries, museums, ministries, VDAB, FOREM, ACTIRIS, ADG)	5%
	Individuals (e.g. private lessons)	5%
	Employer's organisations, chamber of commerce, trade unions	3%

Note: * Avondschool and OSP do not exist anymore.
Source: Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2015[11]), *Patterns in lifelong learning participation, a descriptive analysis using LFS, AES and PIAAC,* https://steunpuntssl.be/Publicaties/Publicaties_docs/ssl-2014.19-1-1-1-patterns-in-life-long-learning-participation
Note: CVO (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs*): Centres for Adult Education; Avondschool: Evening School; OSP (*Onderwijs voor sociale promotie*): social advancement education; TKO (*Tweedekansonderwijs*) - second chance education; *Hogeschool* – university college; CABE - Centre for Adult Basic Education; DKO (Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs) – part-time arts education; NHA: private provider of distance education; FOREM: public employment service for the Walloon Region; ACTIRIS: public employment service for the Brussels-Capital Region; ADG: public employment service for the German-speaking community.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891528

Box 2.1. Survey of Adults Skills (PIAAC): Measures of formal education, non-formal education and informal leaning

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) is an international survey conducted in over 40 countries and measures the key cognitive and workplace skills needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper.

Formal education: Formal education is provided in schools, colleges, universities or other educational institutions and leads to a certification that is taken up in the national educational classification.

Non-formal education: Non-formal education is defined as any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions, and cater to persons of all ages. In the context of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), non-formal education and learning refers to:

- Courses through open and distance education. This covers courses which are similar to face-to-face courses, but take place via postal correspondence or electronic media, linking instructors/teachers/tutors or students who are not together in a classroom.
- Organised sessions for on-the-job training or training by supervisors or co-workers. This type of training is characterised by planned periods of training, instruction or practical experience, using normal tools of work. It is usually organised by the employer to facilitate adaptation of (new) staff. It may include general training about the company and specific job-related instructions (safety and health hazards, working practices). It includes, for instance, organised training or instruction by management, supervisors or co-workers to help the respondent do his or her job better or to introduce him/her to new tasks. It can also take place in the presence of a tutor.
- Seminars or workshops.
- Courses or private lessons. This can refer to any course, regardless of the purpose (work or non-work).

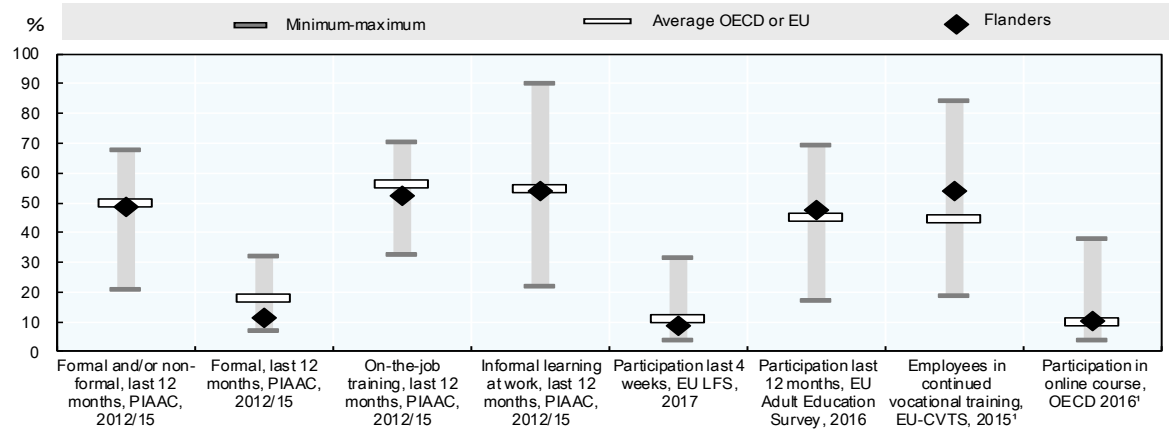
Informal learning: Informal learning relates to typically unstructured, often unintentional, learning activities that do not lead to certification. In the workplace, this is a more or less an automatic by product of the regular production process of a firm. The Survey of Adult Skills asks several questions about types of informal learning: In your own job, how often do you learn new work-related things from co-workers or supervisors? How often does your job involve learning-by-doing from the tasks you perform?

Source: OECD (2011[12]), *PIAAC Conceptual Framework of the Background Questionnaire Main Survey*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/PIAAC(2011_11)MS_BQ_ConceptualFramework_1%20Dec%202011.pdf.

Adult learning in Flanders

The level of adult learning in Flanders is around average in comparison with other countries. While Flanders has relatively high levels of skills on most measures of cognitive skills, the share of adults participating in different forms of adult learning, such as formal education[1], non-formal education[2], and informal learning, is around the OECD (PIAAC) average or EU average (OECD, 2016[2]). Similarly, participation levels are also around average in on-the-job training and online courses, but slightly above average in continued vocational training.

Figure 2.1. Adult learning levels in Flanders in comparison with other countries



Notes: 1. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). 2. Due to unavailability of data for Flanders, data for Belgium has been used.
Source: OECD (2018[13]), OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015), www.oecd.org/skills/piaac; Eurostat (2018[14]), Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by NUTS 2 regions, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_lfse_04&lang=en; Eurostat (2018[15]), Participation in education and training (last 12 months), http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_aes_100&lang=en; Eurostat (2018[16]), Participants in CVT courses by sex and size class - % of persons employed in all enterprises, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_cvt_12s&lang=en; OECD (2017[17]), OECD Digital Economy Outlook 2017, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276284-en.

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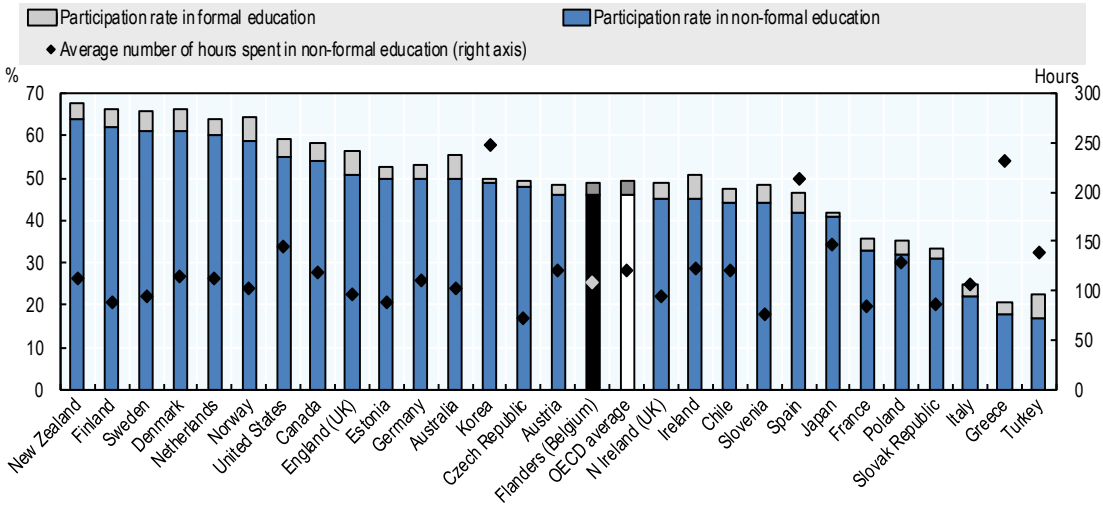
Flanders has an average participation rate in non-formal and formal education and average intensity, which refers to the average number of hours spent. This differs from countries like Spain, where the participation rate is comparable to Flanders, but the number of hours is significantly higher (OECD, 2016[2]). Other countries, such as Canada and the United States, have both higher participation rates and higher number of hours than the average. While having a higher intensity in adult education does not guarantee a better quality of adult education, it does provide adults with more time within a learning environment where acquisition of new skills can take place.

Figure 2.2. Rates and intensity of adult education

Share of adults 25-64 years old participating in education and average hours per participant in 12 months preceding the survey



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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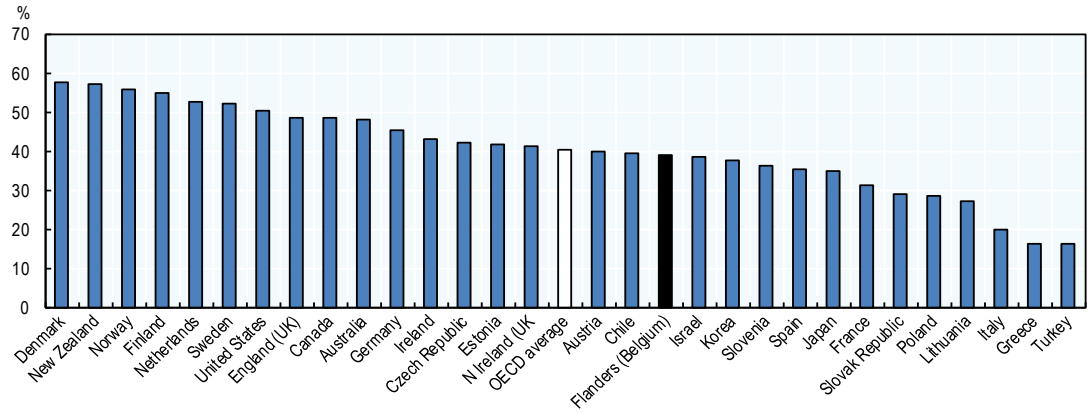
When considering job-relevant adult education the participation rate for adults in Flanders is around 39%, which is close to the OECD (PIAAC) average (41%) and falls behind leading countries such as the Netherlands (53%), Finland (55%), Norway (56%), New Zealand (57%) and Denmark (58%). There are also significant differences across socio-demographic groups.

Figure 2.3. Participation in job-related adult education

Share of 25-64 year-olds that participated in formal or non-formal adult education or training for job-related reasons in the 12 months preceding survey



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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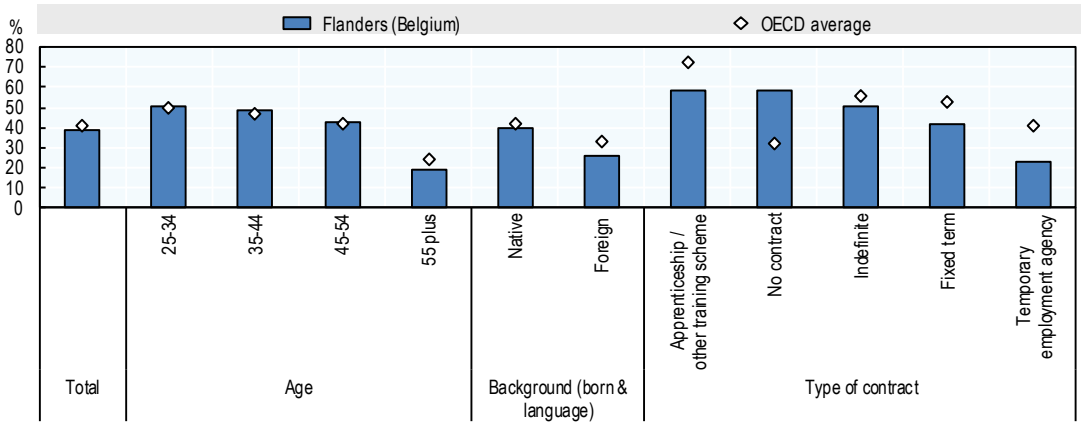
Figure 2.4. Participation in formal or non-formal education for job-related reasons by demographic group

Share of adults that participated in formal or non-formal adult education or training for job-related reasons in the 12 months preceding survey



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891319

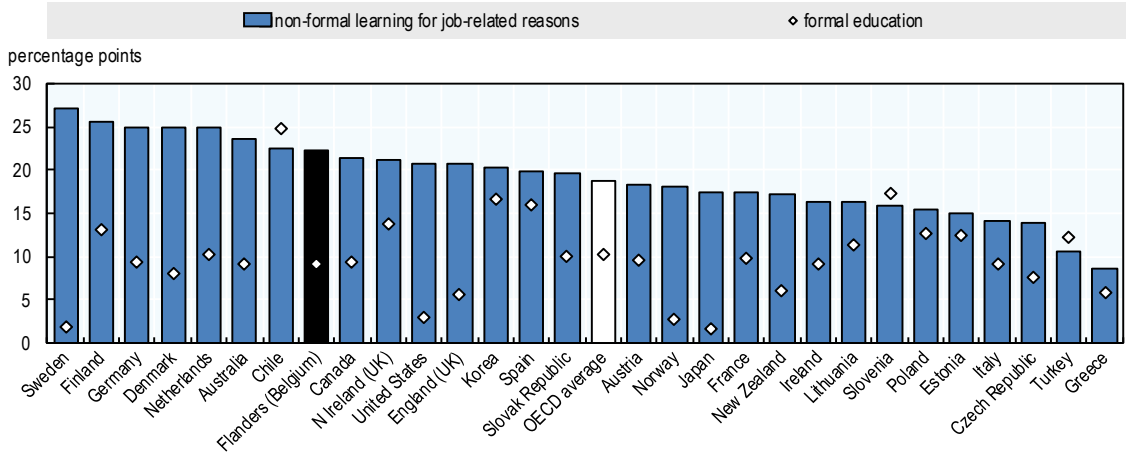
Older workers are much less likely than younger workers to participate in adult education. While for other age groups in Flanders the participation rate in job-related adult education is similar to the OECD average, those 55+ are much less likely to participate in this form of adult education than their peers in other OECD countries. From the employer's perspective, it can make sense to invest more in younger workers, since there is more time to recuperate investment than for older workers. However, with an ageing population and a significant share of older workers who may want to remain professionally active past official retirement age, a low participation rate in adult education today could limit their employability in the future. For example, some may want to remain professionally active in their field, but would need to update their skills to do so. Others may want to work in other areas, but would require new skills to do so. There could also be health and social benefits for remaining active (VLOR, 2014[18]). According to projections by the United Nations (UN), by 2030 about 30.3% of Flanders, 27.9% of Wallonia and 18.7% of the Brussels-Capital Region will be 60 or over, which is slightly higher than other high-income countries (27.2%); similar to some neighbouring countries, such as France (29.9%); and lower than other neighbouring countries, such as Germany (36.1%) and the Netherlands (32%) (United Nations, 2015[19]).

Immigrant adults in Flanders also participate less in adult education. While 39% of natives in Flanders participate in job-related formal or non-formal education (on par with the OECD average), only 25% of immigrants do, which is below the OECD average. This is of particular concern, as immigrants in Flanders are three times more likely to have very low literacy rates[3] than natives (38% vs. 13%). Female immigrants are even a more vulnerable group (SERV, 2018[20]). The demand of immigrants appears very high. For example, when immigrants do participate in non-formal education, they spend 60% more hours than native adults. This is similar to immigrants in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands (OECD, 2018[21]). This may be largely due to the Dutch as a second language

courses (*Nederlands als Tweede Taal*, NT2) that immigrants are enrolled in after arrival, which is compulsory for newcomers and ministers of official religions (Pulinx, n.d.[22]).

Adults in flexible forms of employment are less likely to participate in adult education. Around 50% of workers with indefinite contracts participate in job-related adult education, compared to only 42% of workers with a fixed term contract and 23% of those on a temporary contract with an employment agency. However, for the latter two groups participation in job-related adult education would be a particularly important investment for their career prospects and increase their chances for better quality jobs. The reduced participation may in part be due to employers being less willing to provide their temporary employees with training opportunities if there is no guarantee that they will stay long enough to allow employers to reap benefits from their investment. However, temporary employees are also not able to benefit from the many job-related adult education opportunities offered by VDAB, since they are often limited to the unemployed and not accessible to the currently employed. Stakeholders in the OECD workshops highlighted that this rigid system was not enabling current workers, such as those on temporary contracts, to proactively develop their skills for career moves.

Figure 2.5. Participation gap in formal and non-formal education for job-related reasons, high-skilled and low-skilled adults



Notes: 1. The participation gap is calculated as the participation rate in 12 months preceding the survey of highly skilled adults (literacy or numeracy at level 5 or above) minus the participation rate of low-skilled adults (literacy or numeracy below level 2), in percentage points.
2. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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The gap in participation between high and low-skilled adults in Flanders is large. Across all countries, low-skilled adults are significantly less likely than highly skilled adults to participate in adult education. This is the case for both formal and non-formal education (**Error! Reference source not found.**). There is a similar pattern with level of education: adults with higher education levels are more likely to participate in adult education than adults with lower education levels. This reflects concerns raised by many stakeholders during the diagnostic workshop in May 2018 (Flanders, 2018[23]) that if not carefully guided by policy, adult education could be reinforcing inequalities stemming from early differences in initial education and family background rather than having a compensatory

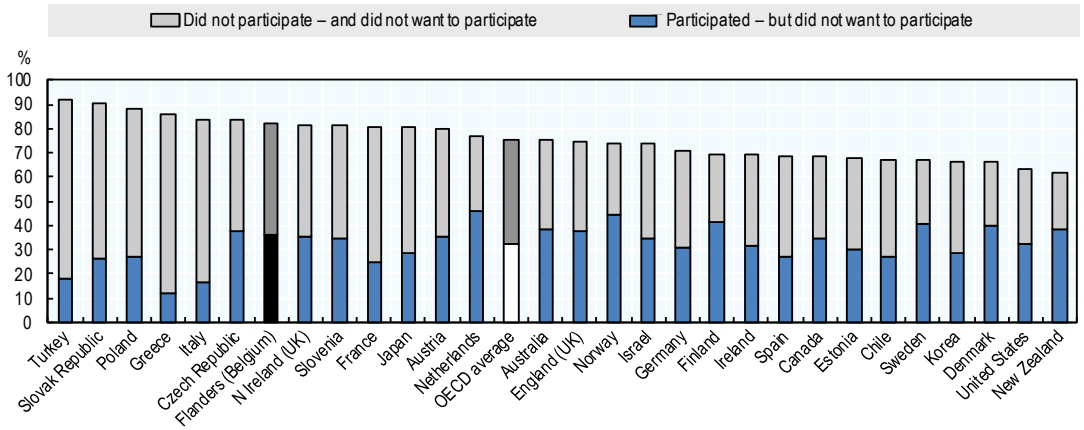
effect. A frequently mentioned term by stakeholders was the "Matthew effect"[4] (Merton, 1968[24]) to describe the phenomenon that the advantaged being able to accumulate further advantages, while the disadvantaged are left behind. This highlights the importance of increasing efforts to ensure that the low-skilled, who have the most to gain from adult education, are actually participating.

Factors affecting adult learning

Motivation level of individuals

Motivation to learn is comparatively low among Flemish adults. A significant share of adults in Flanders reported not wanting to participate in adult education. Most of these individuals also did not participate in education, while others did despite their lack of motivation. While the lack of motivation is a common barrier across countries (Pont, 2004[25]), in Flanders the share of adults reporting that they are not interested in participating in adult education is significantly higher than the OECD average and leading countries such as New Zealand, the U.S. and Denmark. This is a reason for concern since motivation is considered to be key for successful adult education engagement (Carr and Claxton, 2002[26]), even more significant than socio-economic background (White, 2012[27]). Lower skilled adults are more likely to lack motivation than higher skilled adults (Lavrijsen and Nicaise, 2015[28]). The pattern is similar when looking at the readiness to learn index, which is made up of people's responses to six questions in the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills that provide insight into people's beliefs, values and attitudes towards learning – i.e. their learning culture. This proxy-measure of a learning culture at the individual level shows that adults in Flanders rank close to the bottom in comparison with adults in other OECD countries.

Figure 2.6. Willingness to participate in formal and/or non-formal education



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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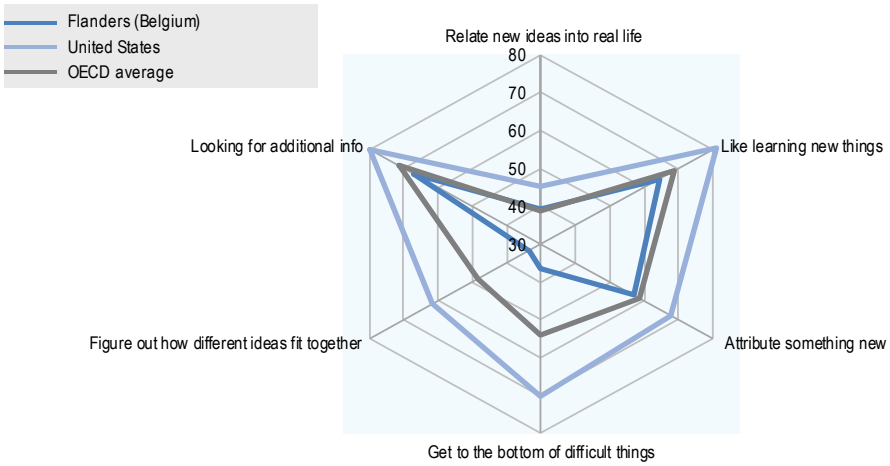
Figure 2.7. Readiness to learn

Percentage of adults who reported using a learning strategy to a (very) high extent



Notes: 1. Comparison with the United States, as they have the highest percentage of adults who indicate that they are ready to learn.
2. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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Fostering motivation for learning in the early years is critical to ensure disposition for lifelong learning as adults. The quality of teaching and the curriculum, as well as the engagement of students with different skill and motivation levels, are, among others, important factors. Once students drop out of initial education they are less likely to participate in adult education later on (VLOR, 2014[18]). The more young students can be engaged in a learning experience that fosters a positive attitude towards learning, the more likely they are to seek out and take up learning opportunities later as adults. The higher their skill levels and levels of education, the more equipped they will be to continue to learn in adulthood. This is particularly relevant for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those with low socio-economic family status, migration history and parents with low education levels. Providing these students with support early on can help them to develop a positive attitude towards learning and be equipped with the foundational skills that will enable them to continue to learn skills specific to their future needs. Later on improving work chances and career prospects as well as active participation as a citizen in society are also important factors to stimulate motivation for learning in adult life.

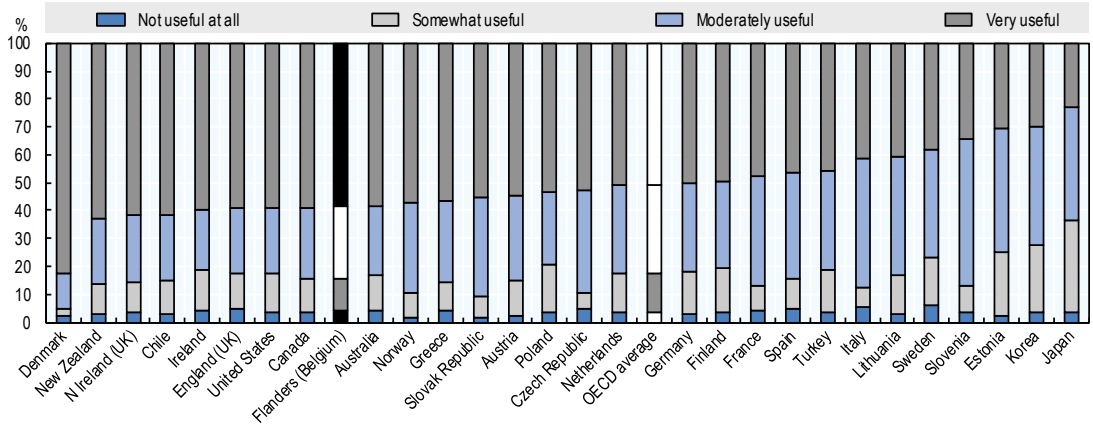
Relevance of adult education for jobs

Most adults participating in education find that it is relevant for their jobs, but there remains room for improvement. The share of people in Flanders who found formal or non-formal education useful for their job is above average, but not as high as in certain other OECD countries, such as Denmark and New Zealand. Many stakeholders participating in the OECD diagnostic workshop commented that the design and

implementation of adult learning offers should place the learner at the centre and be undertaken in collaboration with key stakeholders, such as employers and unions (Flanders, 2018[23]). Low-skilled adults in particular tend not to see the relevance of formal and non-formal adult education. This may partly explain their lower participation rates (Vansteenkiste, 2014[29]), which reinforces the Matthew effect, with more skilled adults continuously upgrading their skills, while low-skilled adults are being left behind.

Figure 2.8. Share of adults who found formal or non-formal education useful for their job

25-64 year-olds participating in formal or non-formal education for job-related reasons in the 12 months preceding the survey



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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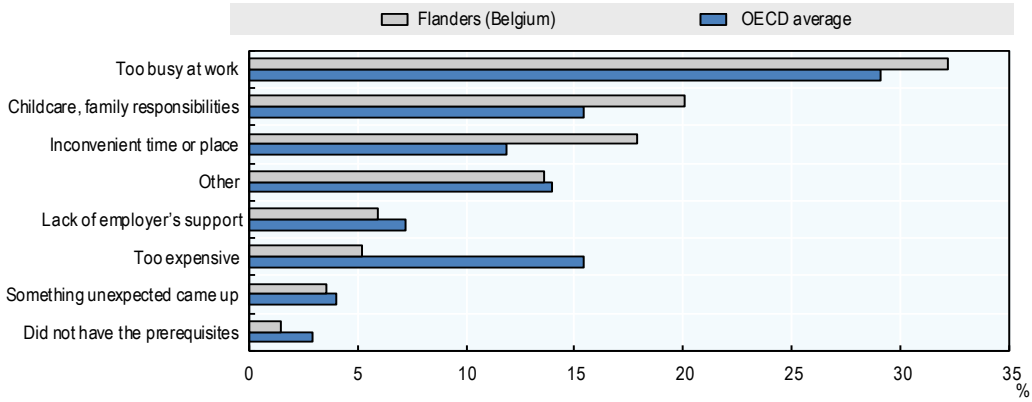
Accessibility of adult education

Time constraints due to work, competing family responsibilities and inconvenient time or place of adult education offers are the top limiting factors for Flemish adults. While these reasons are common in other OECD countries, in Flanders they appear to be more widespread. Other reasons mentioned were lack of employer support, cost, something coming up and not having the necessary requisites. While most of these obstacles are similarly common in Flanders as across other countries, there is a notable difference regarding the cost. In contrast to other OECD countries, the cost of adult education does not seem to be an obstacle to adults in Flanders. (This will be further discussed in Chapter 6 on financing).

Figure 2.9. Obstacles to participation as a share of total



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC)* (2012, 2015), www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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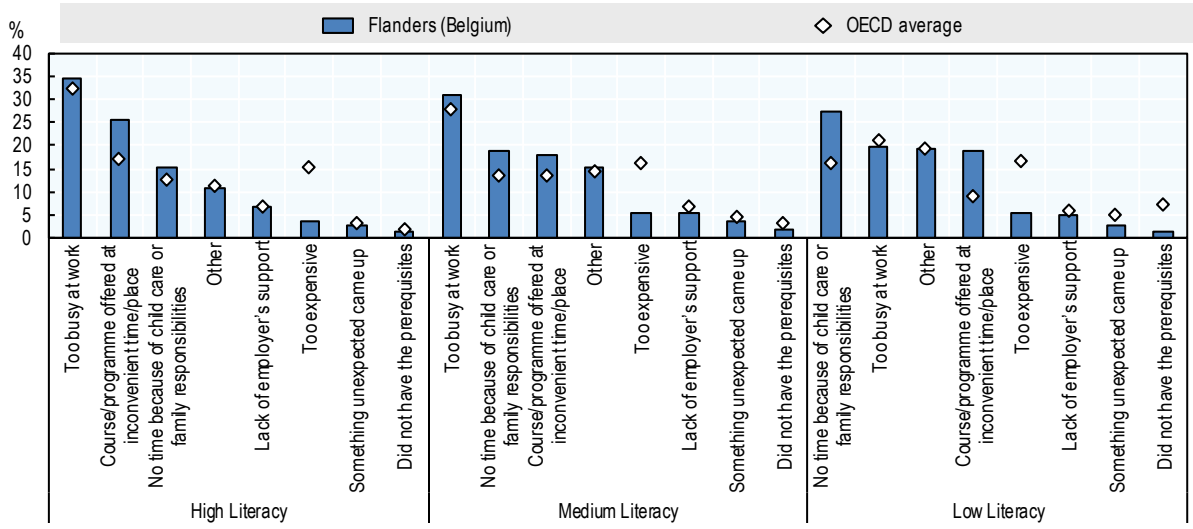
Figure 2.10. Obstacles to participation as a share of total, by skill level



Notes: 1. Some caution is required when interpreting self-reported barriers as an information source, since they may not reflect the underlying obstacle. Some barriers are ambiguous (e.g. lack of time) and could be affected by a social desirability bias (e.g. instead of reporting a motivational barrier, reporting an extrinsic barrier) (Lavrijsen and Nicaise, 2015[28]).
2. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]) *calculations based on OECD Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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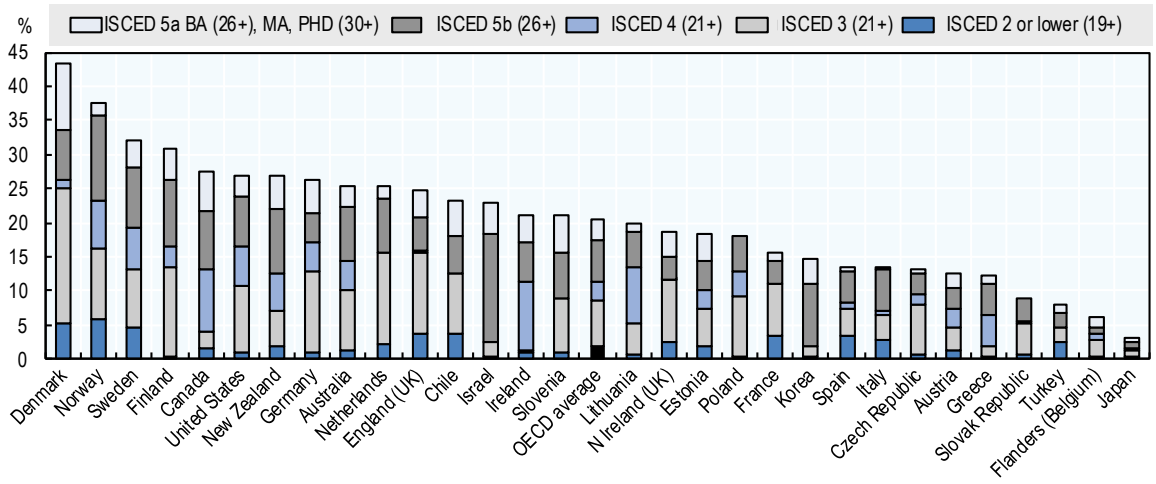
While time constraints at work applies in particular to high and medium-skilled adults, competing family responsibilities is more relevant for low-skilled adults. This may be partly due to the types of jobs high and medium-skilled adults have, which may be more time intensive. Low-skilled adults may have fewer financial resources to afford childcare while participating in adult education. This suggests that policy interventions seeking to raise adult education participation may have to focus on different obstacles, depending on which group is being targeted.

Openness of higher education for adult learners

The higher education system in Flanders is underdeveloped for adult learners. In Flanders, the share of adults who have completed a higher education degree beyond the normative age[5] is one of the lowest across OECD countries, with only Japan having a lower share. Only around 1% of Flemish adults were able to complete a typical university degree (bachelor's, master's, PhDs – ISCED 5a) at such a non-normative age. This is significantly lower than in other countries, such as Denmark (10%) and Finland (5%). This "stock measure" reflects that the higher education system has historically had a low degree of openness for Flemish adults. However, Flanders has already taken important steps to make higher education more open for adult learners. To analyse the more recent situation, the "flow measure" is used and it provides information about the incidence of participating in higher education in the previous 12 months. In this measure, Flanders falls below the OECD average, although it is not at the end of the ranking, and has only about 1% of adults participating in typical university courses (bachelor's, master's, PhDs – ISCED 5a). This is lower than in other countries such as Norway and New Zealand, where 5% and 4% of adults, respectively, have recently participated in higher education at a non-normative age. Higher education systems can play an important role in helping adults develop their skills further, which raises their labour market outcomes and productivity levels (Desjardins and Lee, 2016[30]).

Figure 2.11. Stock of qualifications attained via adult education



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]), *calculations based on Survey of Adult Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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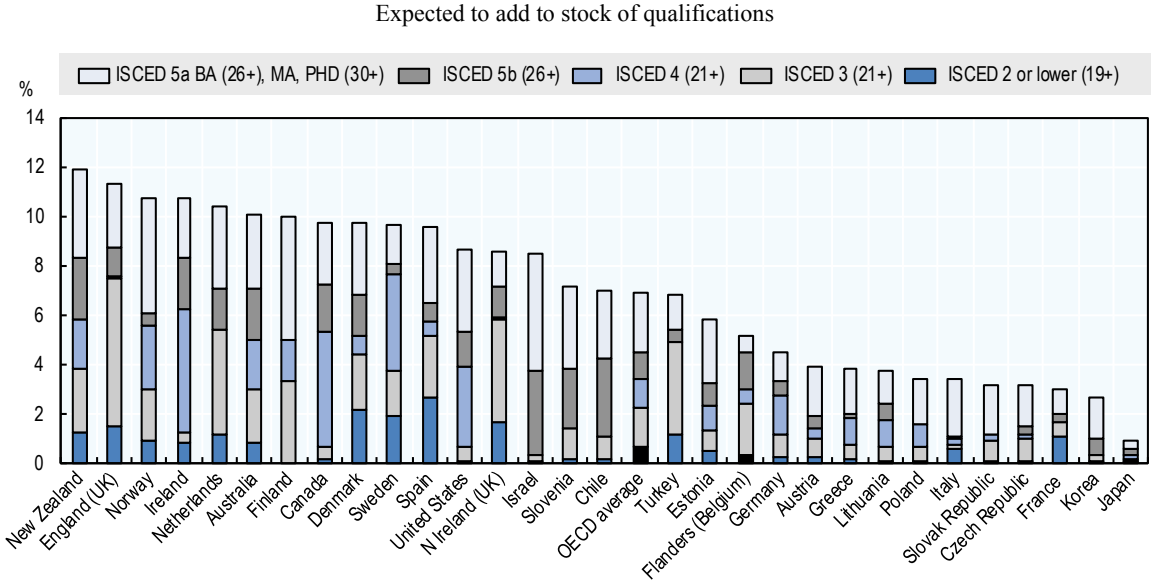
Figure 2.12. Recent adult education flow in formal provisions



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]), *calculations based on Survey of Adult Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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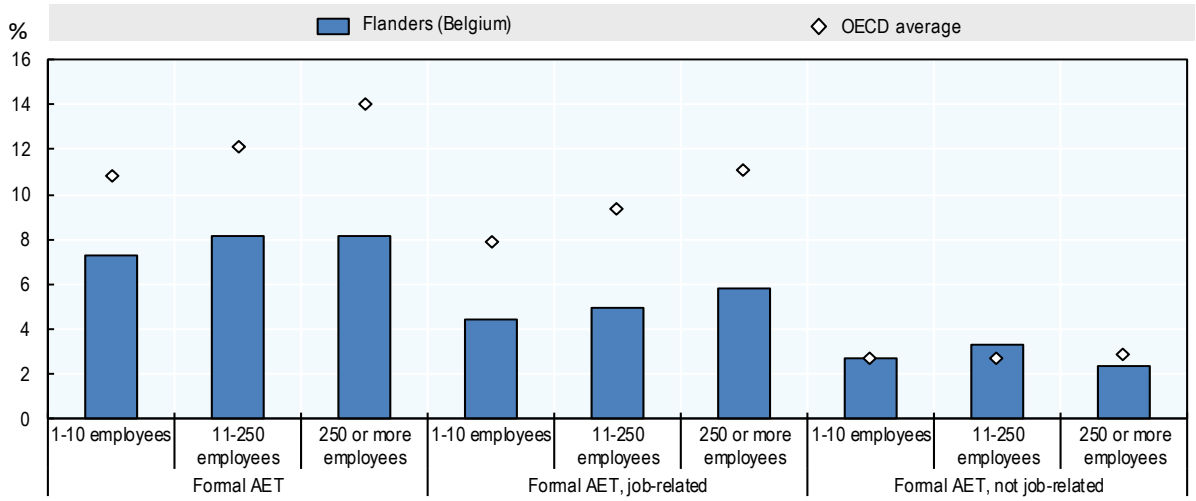
Employer support for adult education

Large firms invest more in their employees' skills development. This is the case for all forms of formal and non-formal job-related education. For purposes not related to the job, the participation rate is similar across firms regardless of size. A number of surveys (i.e. PIAAC, Adult Education Survey or Labour Force Survey) find that the smaller the firm the less likely the workers to receive job-related formal and non-formal education. This is the case across all countries. Larger firms typically have more disposable resources to invest in their staff. Small firms are also more concerned that after they invest in their workers they could be poached by larger firms, which can typically afford a more generous compensation package (OECD, 2015[31]). In Flanders, workers in larger firms are more likely to participate in job-related formal and non-formal education (Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, 2015[32]). This is concerning, as there is a large number of micro and small and medium-sized enterprises in Flanders (UNIZO, 2014[33]).

Figure 2.13. Formal education by firm size



Notes: 1. Adult Education and Training (AET)
2. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]), *calculations based on Survey of Adult Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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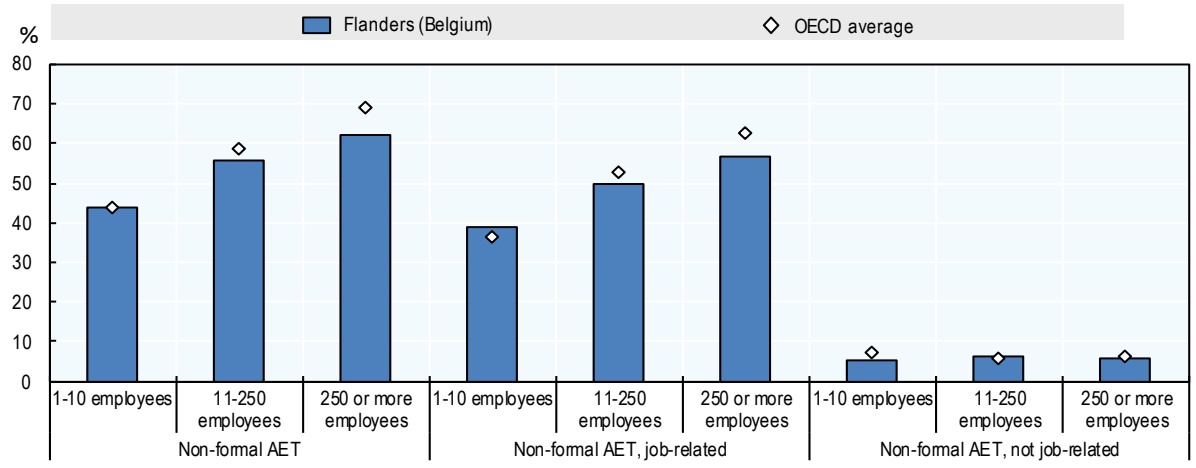
Figure 2.14. Non-formal education by firm size



Notes: 1. Adult Education and Training (AET)
2. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[13]), *calculations based on Survey of Adult Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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Policies and practices to foster a learning culture

Fostering a learning culture and raising participation in and quality of adult education is possible through relevant policies and practices, which are presented in this section. This section is based on input from the stakeholder workshops, bilateral meetings, site visits and OECD analysis of international and national data sources and literature. Stakeholder perspectives on specific recommendations are indicated where they appear.

During the two OECD Skills Strategy workshops in May and September 2018, stakeholders in the groups assigned to the topic of learning culture discussed a wide range of issues and proposed recommendations. The OECD has carefully considered each of the perspectives and recommendations and incorporated them, as much as possible, in this section. However, due to the large number of ideas, and in order to go in-depth and provide concrete and elaborated recommendations, not all could be featured here. An overview of all the ideas that Flanders may wish to consider in the future can be found in annex A. Some ideas are integrated into other chapters rather than here (e.g. sectoral covenants, bottleneck occupations and career guidance in Chapter 3; information on adult learning in Chapter 5; and incentive measures for adult learning and financing of adult learning in Chapter 6).

Raise awareness about the importance of adult learning

As described in the previous section, the motivation level of Flemish adults for adult learning is comparatively low. Motivation is considered to be the key for successful adult education engagement. Willingness to participate in learning depends on factors that are both intrinsic (e.g. the desire to learn a subject) and extrinsic (e.g. improved chances for a better job), and governments can introduce policies that strengthen these factors in order to increase the motivation to participate. To raise the motivation level of adults to participate, especially the most vulnerable, it would help to make adults more aware of the benefits of adult learning, which include higher employability and earnings (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2015[34]) and non-economic returns such as mental health (Hammond, 2004[35]), well-being (Sabates, Hammond and Fellow, 2008[36]), civic engagement (Field, 2009[37]), and personal attributes such as confidence and self-efficacy (Hammond and Feinstein, 2006[38]). Employers play a key role in providing and stimulating education and training at work, and their support for adult learning depends strongly on immediate needs and expected returns. Increased employer awareness of the importance and benefits of adult learning – including the positive effects on productivity and long-term employability – could help to increase their support for adult learning.

Initiatives to raise awareness of adult learning have been developed, implemented and discussed in various countries and institutions. For example, campaigns in the form of multimedia advertisements and "adult learning weeks" are widespread in countries such as Denmark, Finland, Portugal and Slovenia. Effective initiatives to raise awareness should intend to change attitudes, knowledge and behaviours, and can take various forms. The EU, based on a number of best practice case studies, made a list of the steps to take to improve both participation in and awareness of adult learning (European Commission, 2012[39]). This list includes, for instance, the identification of target groups and relevant tools, and the development and promotion of an adult learning campaign.

Flemish adults can easily access information and guidance on adult learning opportunities, for instance by using career guidance vouchers and visiting websites with information on second chance education and flexible higher education options such as

"www.onderwijskiezer.be", but policies to actively enhance awareness of the importance of adult learning are limited. The challenge for Flanders is to develop policies to effectively raise awareness of the target groups most in need.

The government and stakeholders should raise awareness of the importance of adult learning in a rapidly changing environment (SERV, 2018[40]). Multiple stakeholders, such as libraries, youth organisations, education providers, local authorities and companies, can all play their role in encouraging lifelong learning and continuous skills development. Making learning more attractive and creating positive learning experiences for learners are key in this cultural transition and in fostering motivation.

The government, training institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), employers, sectoral training providers, and other relevant stakeholders should embed adult learning within a lifelong development approach. This means the whole path to development should be taken into account. Instead of incidental learning, a continuous development approach is needed. Learners should be aware of their career paths and training needs and companies should train workers towards specific career paths. Training institutions and public employment services should incorporate this lifelong development approach in their business models. (See Chapter 5 on governance, for more information).

Box 2.2. Practice examples for raising awareness about adult learning

International Adult Learners' Week in Europe

International Adult Learners' Week in Europe (IntALWinE) was a Europe-wide network that linked co-ordinators of national learning festivals in 15 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). It was supported by the EU programme Grundtvig. The three-year network project, which ran from 2003-2005, was co-ordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and drew on and built up the strategic potential of learning festivals, with a view to developing a more consolidated European framework of co-operation. It also aimed to enhance the role of adult learners and use their input while developing learning processes.

United Kingdom – Premier League Reading Stars

The National Literacy Trust is an independent UK charity that works to transform lives through literacy by supporting those who struggle with literacy and the people who work with them. It conducts research on issues relating to literacy and works with teachers, literacy professionals and librarians. It provides literacy news and teaching resources to the 48 000 visitors to its website every month. The National Literacy Trust developed the Premier League Reading Stars programme, a reading motivation project that aimed to harness the power of football to encourage people to enjoy reading. It targeted hard to reach groups in society who may not have shown an interest in reading, but who do have a passion for football. Although primarily aimed at school age children, this project also engaged with and benefited parents. The project was implemented through a partnership with the UK Premier League and the participation of local libraries, which organised a series of football and reading activity based meetings for local children and their families.

Portugal – Minuto Qualifica

The introduction of the Qualifica Programme in Portugal which aims to reboot Portugal's strategy to upgrade the education and skills of adults has been supported by several information tools. One includes a large-scale television campaign, *Minuto Qualifica*, launched in July 2017. The campaign includes 100 different video clips, each one to two minutes long, describing real-life situations and the impact of adult learning. The Qualifica Programme also has a web portal (*Portal Qualifica*) that provides access to a range of information on adult learning through multiple channels, including social media.

Sources: European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) (2012[41]), Strategies for improving participation in and awareness of adult learning, https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/024feeda-773e-4249-8808-158716e4296c; OECD (2018[42]), https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-studies_23078731https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-studies_23078731

Tailor adult education provision to the specific needs of adult learners

A flexible adult education system is needed to respond to the diverse needs of a broad spectrum of adult learners with different backgrounds, as well as to the continuously evolving skill needs of the labour market. A flexible adult education system has an adaptive curriculum co-designed with various stakeholders. It matches adults to relevant adult education courses, which are provided in accessible formats (SERV, 2016[43]).

The curriculum of adult education courses should be designed, implemented and revised in co-operation with the instructors of adult education courses, employers, and adult learners themselves (Baert, 2014[44]). Through such a process the curriculum could become more "life-centred" in the sense that it will relate to real-life events and topics that directly affect the adults (e.g. job prospects, community and neighbourhood) (Vermeersch and Vandenbroucke, 2009[45]). Participants in the OECD Skills Strategy workshops emphasised the importance of focusing on the learner and including them in skills development decisions, so that the adult education content is directly relevant to their specific needs (Flanders, 2018[23]; Flanders, 2018[46]). The process of developing and obtaining approval for a revised or new curriculum needs to be shortened so that it can be relatively quickly adapted if needed. Currently, it takes at least two years for a curriculum to be designed and officially approved (VLOR, 2015[47]).

Matching adults to relevant adult education courses and granting them access can be achieved through systems of skills validation. These systems are particularly useful when linked to a qualification framework that makes formal, non-formal and informal learning visible and comparable (Baert, 2014[44]; Vermeersch and Vandenbroucke, 2009[45]). Such skills validation (*Erkenning van Verworven Competenties,* EVC) systems need to be tailor-made and available offline and online (SERV, 2015[48]). (See Chapter 3 on skills imbalances for a more in-depth discussion of this). Skills validation is particularly relevant for migrants who often lack the national credentials of the host country to certify their skills. Formally recognising existing skill sets acquired in their home countries could allow them to not repeat courses in their areas of expertise, but to focus instead on learning opportunities that increase their chances of successful integration (e.g. how to access healthcare, applying for a job) (VLOR, 2016[49]).

Providing adult education in a variety of learning environments could increase accessibility and thus raise participation. Some learning environments may be more

accessible due to their familiarity with the target group and their location. This is particularly relevant for marginalised groups who may otherwise not know how to participate or feel intimidated by formal education institutions due to past bad experiences in the formal education system. Alternative venues include libraries, museums, sports clubs, religious buildings, cafes and day care centres. Box 2.3 for Flemish and international examples. It may be useful to offer adults with competing family responsibilities simultaneous childcare services while the parent(s) participate in adult education; this is particularly relevant for low-skilled adults who reported childcare as the main barrier. Accessibility to adult education may also be increased through flexible education formats, such as e-learning (e.g. massive open online courses), blended learning and distance learning. Adults who have difficulties being physically present in adult education courses due to their work schedule or family responsibilities could join virtually from home at a time of their convenience, i.e. after work or when children are asleep or taken care of. A certain amount of familiarity with and availability of technology would be required to fully benefit from these options.

The government, NGOs, employers, sectoral training providers, and other relevant stakeholders should partner to make adult education more accessible and relevant. They could, for example, co-create the curriculum, match adults to relevant adult education courses through skills validation, and expand the available learning environments of adult education courses. This would mean that those who are least likely to participate can be reached where they are and encouraged to participate. Such a partnership can distribute the cost of adult education provision and enable finding creative ways of tailoring the adult education experience to their needs.

Box 2.3. Practice Examples for tailoring adult education provision to the specific needs of adult learners

Flanders – Dutch for mothers (formal)

Low-literate women with young children often do not participate in integration courses, as they are not designed for their needs, and because of young children that form a practical barrier. In May 2015, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) launched a project call to start a specific Dutch course for mothers with young children from third countries (non-EU countries). By organising the courses at primary schools, the practical barrier disappears and mothers have the chance to participate in a civic integration programme. The main purpose is to teach these mothers Dutch and to involve them in the education of their children. The courses address the following four aspects: 1) Dutch language lessons: 2) support in healthcare and education; 3) raising development opportunities for children; and 4) integration and strengthening of mothers. The programme depends on local initiatives. Because of the lack of any structural co-operation, the programme requires good co-operation between primary schools, the local centre for basic adult education (*centrum voor basiseducatie*) and other agencies, such as *Kind&Gezin* which is the Flemish Agency for children and families. There are no exact evaluation results from the pilot projects that have been organised so far, but after the end of the programme, the mothers were asked to describe their experience. Most of the mothers reported feeling less isolated because of the contact and shared experience with other mothers. They also reported feeling more confident to go to the library, the local market or to make use of public transportation. In many cases, the Dutch for mothers' courses also acted as a first step to other formal adult learning programmes.

England (UK) – Skills for Life

In 2001, England launched a national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among adults and English for speakers of other languages. The Skills for Life strategy was supported by a national curriculum, framework of standards and assessments, and large national campaigns on television during prime time. The target group are the unemployed, low-skilled workers, young adults and other groups at risk of exclusion. Adult learning centres and colleges provide most of the courses, but trade unions, social and cultural services, employers and sport clubs are also being encouraged to provide general numeracy and literacy training.

Sweden – Swedish Higher Vocational Education

The Swedish Higher Vocational Education (HVE) programme is post-secondary vocational education that combines theoretical and applied studies in close co-operation with employers. The programmes are oriented towards the needs of the labour market and allow adult learners to put learning into practice through work-based learning. The Swedish government established HVE in 2001 to fill a gap in the Swedish education system by providing non-university higher education programmes in specific fields where there is an explicit demand from the labour market. The Swedish National Agency for HVE is the regulatory authority of the HVE programme. Its main task is to analyse the demand for qualified workforce in the labour market, decide which HVE programmes will be offered that year, and allocate public funding to the corresponding education providers. Employers and industries are involved closely in the design of the courses and participate actively by giving lectures and participating in projects. Evaluation results are released each year, which are overall strong: seven out of ten students have a job before graduating and nine of ten students are employed or self-employed one year after graduation.

Sources: Vervaet and Geens (2016[50]) (2016). *Inburgering op maat van laaggeletterde vrouwen met jonge kinderen: draaiboe*k,www.esf-vlaanderen.be/nl/projectenkaart/gent-vzw-proeftuin-inburgering-op-maat-van-laaggeletterde-vrouwen-met-jonge-kinderen;
Centrum voor Basiseducatie Kempen ((n.d.)[51]), *Project Moeder-Taal draaiboek*,www.isom.be/documents/Draaiboek-Moeder-Taal-Geel.pdf.
Department for Education and Skills (2004[52]), *Skills for Life – the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills: Delivering the vision 2001-2004*, http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7187/7/ACF35CE_Redacted.pdf
Cedefop (2015[53]), *Sweden – attractiveness of higher vocational education programmes*, www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/sweden-attractiveness-higher-vocational-education-programmes
OECD (2013[54]), *A Skills beyond School Commentary on Sweden,* www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/ASkillsBeyondSchoolCommentaryOnSweden.pdf

Transform adult education providers into learning organisations

There are seven strategies, processes and structures that define a learning organisation in the field of education: 1) developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students; 2) creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff; 3) promoting team learning and collaboration among staff; 4) establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration; 5) establishing embedded systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning; 6) learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system; and 7) modelling and growing learning leadership (Yang, Watkins and Marsick, 2004[55]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[56]). While some of these issues will

be covered in Chapter 5 on governance, the focus in this chapter will be on supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff and promoting team learning.

Continuous learning opportunities for all adult education staff are critical for the quality of adult education provision**.** This applies in particular to those working in the non-formal adult education sector, which tends to be less regulated and less well developed in terms of recruitment, initial training, certification and professional development of staff than the formal education sector. Since most adult education occurs in non-formal settings, the majority of adult education teachers, with the exception of teachers of the Centres for Adult Education and the Centres for Adult Basic Education, are not subject to such rigour. This means that, in practice, staff quality can vary greatly, with significant implications for the quality of the adult educational experience. For example, there is a lack of initial and in-service training for adult education teachers, coaches and instructors in Flanders, which means that many may not be sufficiently prepared and supported to teach adult students (Baert, 2014[44]). Induction programmes are important to help new teaching staff settle into the adult education centre, participate in peer work with other teaching staff, and receive mentoring by more experienced and effective teaching staff. The induction programmes have been found to increase teaching staff's commitment, retention and student achievement (Cohen and Fuller, 2006[57]; Fletcher, Strong and Villar, 2008[58]). Feedback and formal appraisals can also have a positive impact on teaching staff's level of job satisfaction and feelings of self-efficacy, as well as student learning and outcomes (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1986[59]; Hattie, 2009[60]). Professional development opportunities allow teaching staff to update and learn new skills for teaching, which is particularly important given the changing skill needs. This also applies to other professionals involved in the provision of adult education, including administrators of adult education, adult education curriculum designers, those in charge of training in companies (*vorming training opleidings-verantwoordelijke*, VTO), guidance counsellors of adult learners and social workers supporting marginalised adult learners.

In Flanders, Centres for Adult Education and Centres for Adult Basic Education, which provide formal adult education, are subject to regulations and quality control by the inspectorate. All of their teaching staff are required to have specific qualifications and to participate regularly in professional development. These same regulations do not apply to other adult learning providers.

Promoting team learning and collaboration among adult education professionals is important for more effective delivery of adult education. During the journey through the adult education system, the adult learner interacts with many adult education professionals. They all play an important role in ensuring that the adult education experience is relevant and of good quality. Better adult education provision can occur when these professionals collaborate through exchanging information about the specific needs of the adult learner, discussing how to adapt the adult education curriculum to the adult learner, and providing each other with constructive feedback and insights on how to improve. Technology can support such a collaborative environment by creating platforms for professional collaboration to occur (Falk and Drayton, 2009[61]). Other ways of collaborating include regular meetings to discuss challenges and potential solutions (Senge, 2012[62]), learning how to work together (Lunenburg, 2011[63]; Watkins and Marsick, 1999[64]), and external facilitation (Senge, 2012[62]).

The Support Centre for Non-formal Adult Education (SoCius) offers training and organises meetings for staff members of socio-cultural organisations involved in adult

learning. It provides them with opportunities to interact with one another, engage in peer learning and potentially collaborate (Broek and Buiskool Zoetermeer, 2013[65]).

During the Skills Strategy workshops participants emphasised the importance of teachers working together to improve teaching quality. Some Centres for Adult Education (Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs, CAE) are already promoting peer learning among their teachers, and collaboration among teachers from different disciplines could also be fostered. Workshop participants recommended that teachers be provided with internship opportunities in industry so that they can keep up to date with continuous changes and better ensure the labour market relevance of education.

Currently, higher vocational education (HBO5) that leads to an associate degree is provided by the Centres for Adult Education (*Centra voor volwassenenonderwijs*), but from September 2019 will move to university colleges (*hogescholen*) (VLOR, 2017[66]) Some Skills Strategy workshop participants expressed their concerns that this move may mean that the offered courses will become more theoretical and less applied. This could happen if, for example, the instructors of these courses are no longer lecturers from industry but rather academic university staff (SERV, 2017[67]). Maintaining industry experts as guest lecturers after the move could help ensure that the curriculum remains closely aligned with labour market needs (Flanders, 2018[23]; Flanders, 2018[46]). Guest lecturers from industry should also receive some training to help them teach effectively and apply adequate pedagogical strategies for adult learners.

Box 2.4. Practice examples for transforming adult education providers into learning organisations

Norway

Skills Norway, in co-operation with teacher training institutions, universities and university colleges, developed a formal training model for teachers who teach basic skills to adults. It is a 30-credit programme spread over two semesters that focuses on teaching digital skills as part of basic skills. The goal is to enable adults to master the challenges of working and community life in an increasingly digitised world, as well as the qualification and certification of those who teach adults basic digital skills. Skills Norway also organises one-day seminars for professional development of adult teachers.

Germany

Community Adult Education Centres in the Stuttgart area established the Course Teachers Academy (CTA) in 1988. The CTA aims to provide a broad range of training and retraining courses for part-time and freelance staff in adult education. Besides providing access to a basic adult teaching qualification, the CTA allows teaching staff to keep their qualification continuously up to date and to receive training in a particular subject to meet any new qualification requirements. After participating in a course, teachers gain a certificate from the Academy. The Academy's target group are the 50 000-60 000 course teachers in the Stuttgart area.

Sources: Kompetanse Norge (2018[68]), *Basic skills – Kompetanse Norge*, www.kompetansenorge.no/English/Basic-skills/#ob=9145; Plato and Research voor Beleid (2008[69]), *Adult Learning Professions in Europe. A study of the current situation, trends and issues*, www.ne-mo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/MumAE/adultprofreport_en.pdf.

Teacher training institutions, universities and university colleges (*hogescholen*), as well as other adult education providers (Centres for Adult Education and others), should do more to transform themselves into learning organisations. This would mean ensuring that

all staff involved in adult education are given opportunities to receive further professional development and supported to collaborate.

Make higher education more accessible for adult learners

Higher education institutions have an underutilised potential to support adults in pursuing specific courses for current or future job needs. This may entail getting a degree or just one or few courses. Workers undertaking such courses may, as a result, be able to increase their chances for better earnings and career progressions (Blossfeld et al., 2014[70]). For immigrants whose initial degree from their home country was not officially recognised or doesn't hold the same value in the host country, getting another degree in the host country may provide them with better job prospects and facilitate social integration. Expanding higher education for adult learners is also important for higher education institutions, since demographic changes have led to the number of traditional students declining. Countering this trend with an increased intake of adult learners could help higher education institutions remain financially sustainable.

Flanders, along with Italy and Japan, has one of lowest shares of adult learners in its higher education system (Desjardins and Lee, 2016[30]). Although all higher education courses can be accessed by students regardless of their age, in practice most students are traditional students who went on to higher education after finishing secondary education at age 18. There are, nonetheless, some mature students. Universities and university colleges (*hogescholen*) account for around 13% and 8% of formal adult education, respectively (Lavrijsen and Nicaise, 2015[11]). Flemish universities and university colleges have some specific programmes that target adult learners: postgraduate certificates, short courses in continuing education, bachelor's and master's programmes for adults learners, and advanced bachelor's and master's programmes to expand knowledge in the area of the first degree (Box 2.5). Distance programmes for adult learners are available through the Dutch Open University, which is supported by Open Higher Education study centres from the Flemish universities.

In the academic year 2017-2018, in university colleges only about 24% of the students in an advanced bachelor's programme and 23% of the students in an advanced master's programme are over 30 years of age. This indicates that participation of mature adults over 30 years who have a lot of work experience is relatively small in these programmes. Instead, these programmes are mostly taken up by traditional students, after they completed their bachelor's or master's degree, as well as young professionals who have limited work experience (Vlaamse Overheid, 2018[71]).

Most adult learners in these courses tend to already have a higher education degree, which reinforces the Matthew effect. Adults participating in higher education programmes who do not have a higher education degree are a small minority, which indicates that higher education in Flanders does not yet constitute a clear first/second chance option for adult learners. Pursuing higher education studies while working is also not common in Flanders. In the academic year 2017-2018, only 5,262 students in university colleges and 1,718 students in university combined working with studying (Vlaamse Overheid, 2018[72]). The courses, which are more accessible for adult learners in terms of when they are organised (e.g. evening classes) and modality (e.g. online), tend to be focused on specific fields of study, such as teacher training and nursing, and overall in social sciences and humanities (De Lathouwer et al., 2006[73]). There are only very limited offerings in other fields, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) or subjects related to other bottleneck occupations (see Chapter 3

for more on these). This may partly be due to cost, since the limited number of students per class, as well as additional instruction times in evenings and weekends, can make this expensive (Boeren, 2011[74]).

Other countries, such as Denmark, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Singapore have much higher proportions of adult students who are 30 years and older participating in higher education. Denmark has a parallel system in higher education with a range of programmes specifically targeting adults, including masters, diploma and VVU (*videregående voksenuddannelse*) degrees (higher education degrees for adults). The Danish system in particular has increased access with skills validation processes that allow participants with relevant work experience to be admitted to diploma programmes without any other formal degree requirements.

Participants in the Skills Strategy workshops stressed the importance of making the higher education sector in Flanders more accessible for adults. They suggested that it was important to increase flexibility in the format and times of course offerings. Higher education courses could be offered in a more modular format, which presents the learning material of courses in self-contained units so that adult students can take them one at a time and more spread out. This would provide adult learners, who may not be able to complete a whole course in one attempt, the flexibility to finish the course over a longer period through taking one module at a time. This could be combined with the offer of more convenient learning times for adults, such as evenings and weekends.

In Flanders, the Second Chance Education programme (*Tweede Kansonderwijs, TKO*), part of CAE, offers early school leavers opportunities to get a secondary education degree through modular courses and during the evening (Box 2.5). Something similar could also be done at the higher education level.

When family care issues make participation in adult education difficult, complementary social policies are needed to address these issues, for example, childcare offered on or near higher education premises while the parent participates in adult education (Vermeersch and Vandenbroucke, 2009[45]).

Higher education institutions should consider enlarging the accessible course offerings for adult learners, including courses in areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) or specific bottleneck occupations (see Chapter 3 for more on these). Requirements of who can access these courses should also become more flexible and take previous work experience into account by assessment of prior learning. Courses should be tailored to adult learners needs and should be set up in broad collaboration with other higher education institutions and with businesses/sectors to create advantages in both the content (multi-disciplinary knowledge) and the organisation (fewer staff and infrastructural costs/overhead).

Box 2.5. Practice examples for making higher education more accessible for adult learners

Flanders – Adult education in higher education

Universities and university colleges (hogescholen) in Flanders offer different possibilities for adults who are unable to be regular full-time students. Students can follow all bachelor's and master's programmes provided by the universities on a part-time basis, but regular courses are spread over the week. Universities and university colleges also provide special tracks of the regular bachelor's and master's programmes for students who combine work and study (werktrajecten). These programmes combine distance learning and a flexible organisation of the programme. Courses can take place, for example, in the evenings and weekends or are grouped on one or two days in the week. The requirements and qualifications are the same as those of the regular bachelor's and master's programmes. These flexible tracks are mainly provided by the university colleges (professional bachelor's), especially for bachelor's in education (primary education and secondary education), nursing and information and communication technology (ICT). In general, Flemish universities do not provide many bachelor's and master's programmes that can be followed in the evening and/or weekends. Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) was the first university to provide flexible master's programmes for adults and now has a broad offer for students who combine work and study.

To broaden and expand the knowledge and competences acquired in an initial bachelor's or master's programme, students can follow an advanced bachelor's or master's degree programme. Students can start this type of programme immediately after the initial bachelor/master programme or after some work experience. University colleges and universities can also award postgraduate certificates after the successful completion of learning pathways with a study load of at least 20 credits. The purpose of these courses, in the context of continuing professional education, is to add further breadth or depth to the competences acquired on completion of a bachelor's or master's programme.

Adults can also follow certain parts of higher education through a credit contract, which allows adult learners to choose relevant courses without entering a whole bachelor's/master's programme. After participating successfully in the course, the student receives a proof of credit.

Flanders – Second chance education

Second chance education (*Tweedekansonderwijs, TKO*) is part of the formal adult education system and is provided by the Centres for Adult Education. It offers early school leavers the opportunity to obtain a degree of secondary education and opens the door for further education. Options include general education or a combination of professional education and additional general education. The modular structure and the possibility to follow evening courses gives adult learners the flexibility to set out their personal learning path. Each year, 10 000 adults are enrolled in second chance education and around 1 500 adult learners obtain a degree. As a financial incentive, graduates are paid back their tuition fees when obtaining a diploma. Recently, the Department for Adult Education joined the Visible Skills of Adults (VISKA) programme (part of the Erasmus+ programme) that aims to focus on the visibility of skills of vulnerable groups by the skills validation (EVC) from both formal and non-formal education.

The Danish parallel competence system

Denmark has one of the highest participation rates in adult education and training. In 2016, adult participation in both formal and non-formal education was over 50% for adults aged between 25 and 65. These high participation rates can be attributed to both the long tradition of adult learning in Denmark and the flexible system. In 1996, Denmark introduced an education system for adults that is parallel to the regular system: the adult and continuing education (ACE) system. This gives adults the chance to obtain secondary and/or higher education degrees. Secondary education includes basic and general adult education (*Grundlæggende Voksenuddannelser*, GVU, and *Almen Voksenuddannelse*, AVU) as well a higher preparatory degree (*Højere forberedelses eksamen*, HF) and labour market training (*Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser*, AMU). Higher education gives adults the possibility to obtain a master's degree or to follow modules at universities. There are also short-cycle higher education programmes (e.g. *Videregående voksenuddannelser*, VVU and *Diplom uddannelser*, diploma programmes) that make higher education more accessible for adults. The diploma programmes (corresponding to a bachelor's degree), for example, are built in modules that may be taken together or separately according to the interests of adult learners. The education emphasises the competences the participant has from any previous work experience and the qualifications needed in the profession. Through skills validation, participants can also be admitted to diploma programmes without any formal degree requirements.

Since its introduction, the ACE system has undergone numerous reforms to make it even more flexible, demand-led and adaptable to the needs of the labour market. In 2003, it shifted to a competence-based system with over 130 competence descriptions defined by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education and social partners. Recently, a tripartite agreement involving the government, unions and employer's organisations reformed the AMU programme in order to provide adults with or without existing vocational training with vocational adult and continuing education opportunities. The agreement emphasises a more flexible and digital training system, easier access to AMU programmes and financial incentives for both learners and employers.

Sources: Onderwijskiezer (2018[751]), Flexible studying in higher education, www.onderwijskiezer.be/v2/hoger/hoger_flexibel.php; Flanders (2018[76]), OECD Skills Strategy for Flanders Questionnaire; Cedefop (2012[777]), Vocational education and training in Denmark: short description, www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4112_en.pdf; Danish Adult Education Association (2011[78]), Adult Education in Denmark, https://www.daea.dk/media/335952/vux_utb_dk_eng_2011.pdf Ministry of Education Denmark (2008[79]), The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (ALE), http://asemlllhub.org/fileadmin/www.asem.au.dk/national_strategies/Denmark.pdf; *Eurofound* (2017[80]), Denmark: Social partners welcome new tripartite agreement on adult and continuing education, www.eurofound.europa.eu/printpdf/publications/article/2018/denmark-social-partners-welcome-new-tripartite-agreement-on-adult-and-continuing-education; *OECD* (2012[81]), A Skills beyond School Review of Denmark, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264173668-en; Eurostat (2018[151]), Participation in education and training (last 12 months), http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_aes_100&lang=en.

Promote work-based learning in post-secondary education

Work-based learning is learning that takes place through a combination of observing, undertaking and reflecting on work in workplaces. There are different types of work-based learning schemes. Structured work-based learning schemes (e.g. apprenticeships, dual learning) combine on-the-job and off-the-job components of equal importance and typically lead to a formal qualification. A regulatory framework determines the duration, learning outcomes, funding and compensation arrangements. There is usually a contract between the learner and the firm. Work placements (e.g. internships, work shadowing opportunities) usually complement formal education programmes, are shorter, and are less regulated (Kis, 2016[82]).

Work-based learning has a positive effect on individuals as well as companies. Workplaces are important learning environments for individuals to develop technical and general skills (OECD, 2010[83]). Work-based learning allows companies to train employees and future employees. Providing a work-based learning placement (*leerwerkplek*) for students also positively affects the learning culture of the company, since work-based learning decreases the separation between working and learning (Heene et al., 2018[84]) and introduces an environment for learning (e.g. mentoring system).

Use of work-based learning in vocational programmes is increasing, but mostly at the secondary education level. Work-based learning in VET offers on-the-job experiences that make it easier to acquire both hard skills by using modern equipment and soft skills by working with people (OECD, 2010[83]). There is still a strong emphasis on school-based over work-based learning in vocational programmes in Belgium. In Flanders, work-based learning is offered in part-time vocational secondary education (deeltijds beroeps secundair onderwijs, DBSO) and in Syntra (leertijd). In the school year 2017-2018, 6 668 agreements for work-based learning were registered on the online registration platform "www.werkplekduaal.be" (Vlaams Partnerschap Duaal Leren, 2018[85]). Flanders introduced dual learning (*duaal leren*) in a pilot project in the 7th year of vocational upper secondary education (*beroeps secundair onderwijs*, BSO), in the upper secondary vocational and technical education (beroeps en technisch secundair Onderwijs, BSO and TSO) and part-time vocational secondary education (*deeltijds beroeps secundair onderwijs*, DBSO) and in specialised secondary education (buitengewoon secundair Onderwijs BuSO). In the school year 2017-2018, 503 students participated in the pilot project "School desk in the work place" (*Schoolbank op de werkplek*) (Box 2.6) (Vlaams Partnerschap Duaal Leren, 2018[85]). However, 105 students dropped out during the year. The most popular fields of study are hair care, electrical installations, healthcare, childcare and car maintenance (De Tijd, 2018[86]). In the school year 2018-2019, more than 1 000 students started a dual learning programme. Dual learning will be introduced as an equivalent path to full-time education as of September 2019.

Work-based learning is used to train the unemployed. The Individual Vocational Training (*Individuele Beroepsopleiding*, IBO) programme is the largest work-based learning programme in Flanders (others include work-based learning at VDAB, training internships, training projects with companies, work experience internships, profession immersion internships, activation internships and short training with internships on the work floor). IBO allows employers to hire a jobseeker and, with the financial support of VDAB, train them in the workplace, typically over a period of 4-26 weeks. The wage and social security contributions of the individual are covered by VDAB, and the employer is only expected to pay a "productivity premium". In return, the employer is expected to hire the individual after the training, normally on a permanent contract. This programme

has been highly successful, with 90% of participants still working in the same company where they trained one year later.

Some types of work-based learning are common in university colleges (*hogescholen*). While mandatory periods of work placement are required in most professional bachelor's degree programmes offered by university colleges, there is no formal regulation for more structured forms of work-based learning (i.e. dual learning). However, structured work-based learning has been found to provide an important stepping-stone for participants to move from education to employment (Kis, 2010[87]). From September 2019, a new reform will move associate degrees (*HBO5-opleidingen*), which are short-cycle higher education programmes formerly provided by the Centres for Adult Education (*Centra voor volwassenonderwijs*) that offer dual learning components, to university colleges. This could be an opportunity for university colleges to expand dual learning to the professional bachelor's degree programme.

Work-based learning in universities could be expanded. In universities, most bachelor's and master's programmes do not require work-based learning at all, and some programmes (e.g. business studies) require only a short-term work placement. The exceptions are in specific study fields, with work placements ranging from several months (e.g. psychology, education) to years (e.g. medical studies) (Verhaest and Baert, 2018[88]). More work-based learning opportunities, whether work placements or dual learning, could be beneficial for university students in helping them transition from education to work.

Work-based learning in adult education is sparse. In some adult education programmes, such as associate degrees from CABEs, there is a work-based learning component. However, these associate degrees are now being transferred to university colleges. Other adult education programmes could be improved by incorporating work-based learning elements to benefit adult learners who would like better employment chances. This is particularly relevant for the employed in Flanders. While the unemployed can benefit from many work-based learning programmes, the employed do not have such opportunities. Providing them with work-based learning opportunities could enable them to proactively prepare themselves for career progression and transitions without having to wait until becoming unemployed to take the necessary steps.

Education providers and employers, among other stakeholders, should examine the possibility of expanding work-based learning in university colleges, universities and adult education. These stakeholders should participate in the European Structural Fund call for tenders that seeks to support pilot projects on dual learning in higher education and adult education (ESF Vlaanderen, 2018[89]). Employers and education providers should also be supported by the government to widely apply a framework for high-quality workplaces, which establishes quality criteria covering curriculum, programme duration, physical resources, and qualification requirements.

Box 2.6. Practice examples of promoting work-based learning in post-secondary education

Dual training: Chemical process techniques – BASF

The chemical production company BASF was one of the first companies to facilitate dual learning for students enrolled in chemical process techniques education through the project "School desk in the work place" (*Schoolbank op de werkplek*). After two years, BASF indicates that it is a win-win situation for the school, the company and the student. The schools can rely on the infrastructure and technology of the companies and the students can apply their knowledge under supervision within a realistic working environment in which they also acquire the right working attitudes regarding safety, interaction with colleagues and punctuality. The dual form of learning strengthens the content of the training and offers well-trained candidates to the company. From the first pilot project in 2016, all students (25) have found a job in the sector. Recently, the bonus for employers and students (*start-en stagebonus*) has been reformed to make it more transparent and to simplify the administrative process. There is broad support for extending dual training to other types of education programmes.

Hands-on Enterprise Architect Training (HEAT) programme

In this advanced master's degree, students combine working in an ICT strategy consulting company and the IC (inno.com) institute that offers the Master's of Science in Enterprise Architecture. The HEAT programme illustrates the great potential of dual learning as a learning method in higher education, especially in STEM related study areas.

Sources: Dekocker (2016[90]), *Ready for dual? How to encourage employers to join in dual learning*?; De Standaard (2018[91]), *Dual learning is catching on in the chemicals sector*, www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20180912_03738405; Jobat (2018[92]), *Chemicals sector reaps the benefits of dual learning,* www.jobat.be/nl/artikels/chemiesector-plukt-vruchten-van-duaal-leren/; SERV (2018[93]), Skills above: 11 inspiring practices in Flanders, www.serv.be/serv/publicatie/vaardigheden-boven-11-inspirerende-praktijken-vlaanderen; Syntra Vlaanderen (2018[94]), "*Dual learning and lifelong learning in higher education: the HEAT case"*, www.syntravlaanderen.be/duaal-leren-en-levenslang-leren-in-het-hoger-onderwijs-de-heat-case.

Promote human resource practices that stimulate a learning culture in the workplace

Promoting a learning culture in the workplace matters. While reducing the number of low-skilled adults through strong initial education is key, the workplace for many adults is the most important place for continuous learning in adulthood. Learning in the workplace ensures that employees continue to adapt to changing skill demands and remain employable (Ellinger, 2004[95]). It is important for companies to have a learning workforce so that they can quickly adapt to evolving needs, adopt new approaches and technologies and not fall behind their competition (Ellström, 2002[96]). In comparison to full-time formal adult education, learning in the workplace, both non-formal and informal, is less costly and is directly relevant for the job, as acquired skills can be immediately deployed without a time lag (Baert, De Witte and Sterck, 2000[97]; Boud and Garrick, 1999[98]).

Since the readiness to learn index indicates that the disposition to learn on one's own is relatively low in Flanders, firms could take a more proactive role in stimulating their

employees to undertake learning. They could provide the right environment through specific human resource and managerial practices that encourage employees to grow professionally and develop in their jobs (Billett, 2004[99]).

Certain human resource practices can incentivise employees to learn**.** A number of human resource practices can influence the decisions of workers to participate in learning (Clauwaert and Van Bree, 2008[100]). These include having access to training courses, internal meetings, collegial consultations, job rotation, feedback mechanisms and mandatory on-the-job learning courses (Eraut, 1994[101]; Education Development Center, 1998[102]). Researchers in Belgium identified that among these the most important condition for fostering learning in the workplace was creating opportunities for employees to receive feedback. Feedback could be received through a manager, mentor, coach, or buddy. It could take place informally in a debrief session or career consultations, as well as more formally during performance reviews and general appraisal (Kyndt, Dochy and Nijs, 2009[103]; Bednall, Sanders and Runhaar, 2013[104]). Since employees with lower education levels are less likely to participate in these practices, the firm should encourage this group of people in particular.

Participants in the Skills Strategy workshops made a number of recommendations for stimulating learning through human resource practices. One suggestion was to include participation in training in job descriptions of employees, feature learning as part of the vision and mission of the firm, and develop a strategic skills development plan for the firm. This would make it clear to the employee at the point of hiring that continuing to learn was an expectation and important value in the workplace. Another suggestion was to stimulate learning through increasing the mobility of employees within the firm. The assumption was that by allowing employees to move internally they would be able to acquire new skills (Flanders, 2018[23]; Flanders, 2018[46]).

Managers play a critical role in promoting a positive learning culture in the company (Baert, 2014[44]). Skills Strategy workshop participants mentioned that managers in companies define the company culture and determine how time is being spent. It was suggested that training should be provided to managers, with funding for such manager training coming from sector funds. The training should consist of learning how to communicate and provide feedback to their employees, conduct regular career consultation sessions, provide regular performance reviews, and publicly recognise and celebrate learning achievements. One concern raised was that it was also necessary to ensure that managers are actually able to take the time to implement these new ideas. A good example of management promoting such a learning culture in a company is Marine Harvest Pieters, based in Bruges. Managers in this firm reach out to their staff members and encourage them to participate in internal and external training (see Chapter 4 for more details). They also introduced a buddy system that allows new employees to receive support and immediate feedback.

Since Flanders has many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that may not have a strong human resource infrastructure to implement such policies, targeted support may be required. For example, government could provide or subsidise training for managers and employees in SMEs. Funding from sector covenants may also help cover the costs of such initiatives.

Flanders could consider establishing a co-operation network to identify and disseminate best practices for stimulating a learning culture in the workplace. Employers, unions and sectoral training providers, with support from the government, could establish this network. Researchers from academia may also be able to help identify these practices

through evaluations and surveys. In practice, a person in each company could be the contact person to participate in this network, to share internal practices with others, and to propose and disseminate external new practices internally. Sharing identified practices could be of interest within a sector and across sectors.

Box 2.7. Practice example of promoting human resource practices in the workplace to foster a learning culture

Skillnet is Ireland's national publicly funded agency dedicated to workforce learning. It seeks to increase companies' participation in enterprise training by operating enterprise-led learning networks in different economic sectors and regions, as well as various other services.

A specific example is CitA Skillnet, which is a learning network for private companies of all sizes in the construction sector in Ireland. The network supports architecture, engineering, construction and operations enterprises within the construction sector. Member companies work collaboratively to share best practice examples of successful approaches to learning and talent development, and to respond effectively to the specific skills needs of the sector by organising training. The network addresses both technical and non-technical (communication, teamwork, problem solving and other core skills) skills needs of members. It also organises conferences, seminars, and other informal learning and networking events.

Skillnet programmes are subject to an annual evaluation conducted by an independent agency. The objective of the evaluation is to assess the alignment of activities and outcomes of Skillnet programmes with the requirements of the National Training Fund, ensuring the best use of public funds. The evaluation process requires extensive primary research involving numerous direct consultations and surveys, complemented with detailed data from internal databases and external sources, such as the Central Statistics Office. The evaluation takes place at programme, training activity and network level to examine inputs, activities, outcomes and impacts of all Skillnet components. Some highlights of the 2016 evaluation of Skillnet were that member companies and adult learners reported high levels of satisfaction with the relevance of training, quality, contribution to learning and personal development, as well as value for money.

Sources: Skillnet Ireland (2018[105]). Skillnet Ireland About us, www.skillnetireland.ie/about/ Skillnet Ireland (2018[106]), *CiTA Skillnet*, www.skillnetireland.ie/networks/cita-skillnet/; OECD (2018[107]), *Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Slovenia: Improving the Governance of Adult Learning*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308459-en.

Summary of policy recommendations

Drawing on the evidence presented in this chapter, Flanders could consider the following recommendations to develop a learning culture:

- **Raise awareness of the importance of adult learning**. The government and diverse stakeholders, such as libraries, socio-cultural organisations (e.g. sports organisations, workers organisations, organisations for youth, the elderly, women, immigrants), education providers, local authorities and companies, can all play their role in encouraging lifelong learning and continuous skills development. Making learning more attractive and creating positive learning experiences for learners are key in this cultural transition and in fostering motivation.
- **Embed adult learning within a lifelong development approach**. The government, training institutions, non-governmental organisations, employers, sectoral training providers and other relevant stakeholders should take the whole path to development into account. Instead of incidental learning, a continuous development approach is needed. Learners should be aware of their career paths and training needs. Companies should train workers towards specific career paths. Training institutions and public employment services should incorporate this lifelong development approach in their business models. (See Chapter 5 on governance for more information on this).
- **Make adult education more accessible and relevant**. The government, non-governmental organisations, employers, sectoral training providers and other relevant stakeholders should partner to co-create the curriculum, match adults to relevant adult education courses through skills validation, and expand the available learning environments of adult education courses. This would mean that those who are least likely to participate can be reached where they are and encouraged to participate. Such a partnership can distribute the cost of adult education provision and enable finding creative ways of tailoring the adult education experience to their needs.
- **Transform adult learning providers into learning organisations**. Teacher training institutions, universities and university colleges, as well as other adult learning providers, should do more to ensure that all staff involved in adult learning are given opportunities to receive further professional development and supported to collaborate.
- **Enlarge the accessible course offerings for adult learners in higher education**. Higher education institutions should consider creating more flexible offering of adult learning and professional development opportunities. Requirements of who can access these courses should also become more flexible and take previous work experience into account by assessment of prior learning. Courses should be tailored to the needs of adult learners and should be set up in broad collaboration with other higher education institutions and with businesses/sectors to create advantages in both the content (multi-disciplinary knowledge) and the organisation (fewer staff and infrastructural costs/overhead).
- **Expand work-based learning in university colleges, universities and adult education**. Education providers and employers, among other relevant stakeholders, should participate in the European Structural Fund call for tenders

that seeks to support pilot projects on dual learning in higher education and adult. Employers and education providers should also be supported by the government to widely apply a framework for high-quality workplaces, which establishes quality criteria covering the curriculum, programme duration, physical resources and qualifications requirements.

- **Establish a co-operation network to identify and disseminate best practices in stimulating a learning culture in the workplace**. Employers, unions and sectoral training providers, with support from the government, could initiate this. Researchers from academia may also be able to help identify these practices through evaluations and surveys. In practice, a person in each company could be the contact person to participate in this network, to share internal practices with others, and to propose and disseminate external new practices internally. Sharing identified practices could be of interest within a sector and across sectors.

Notes

[1] This includes university education, vocational education and training as well as training by public training providers, such as VDAB and Syntra (Flanders, 2018[76]).

[2] This includes online courses, courses in socio-cultural associations, training courses organised by employers and sectoral organisations (Flanders, 2018[76]).

[3] Level 1 or below in the Survey of Adult Skills.

[4] The "Matthew Effect" is coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1968, which takes its name from a biblical parable in chapter 25 from the Gospel of Matthew and refers to the phenomenon of the advantaged being able to accumulate further advantages, while the disadvantaged are left behind (Merton, 1968[24]).

[5] Age in which students would have attained their highest qualification had they followed the normative path.

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Chapter 3. Reducing skills imbalances

The chapter presents diagnostic evidence on skills imbalances in Flanders, the factors that affect skills imbalances and specific policies and practices to reduce skills imbalances. Flanders can reduce skills imbalances by taking action in six areas. These are: 1) ensuring that the education system is responsive to labour market needs; 2) improving information about current and future skills needs; 3) integrating career and training guidance services; 4) making skills visible; 5) promoting labour mobility; and 6) prioritising training in skills in high demand for jobseekers.

Introduction

Why reducing skills imbalances is important

A skills imbalance is a misalignment between the demand and supply of skills in an economy, and can comprise skills shortages, skills surpluses, and skills mismatches. Skills shortages refer to a disequilibrium condition in which the demand for a specific type of skill exceeds its supply in the labour market at the prevailing market wage rate (Junankar, 2009[1]). In the opposite case, when the supply exceeds demand, skills surpluses arise. Skills mismatch describes situations when a workers' skills exceed (over-skilling) or fall short (under-skilling) of those required for the job under current market conditions (Shah and Burke, 2005[2]; OECD, 2017[3]). Mismatch can be measured along different dimensions, including skills, qualifications and field of study.

Skills imbalances are costly for individuals, firms and the economy. Skills mismatch has negative impacts for individuals, including a higher risk of unemployment, lower wages, lower job satisfaction and poorer career prospects. A study based on Flemish data found that the wages of over-educated youth are associated with a wage penalty of 5% per year of education that is not required for the job, compared to someone who is well-matched to their position (Verhaest and Omey, 2012[4])

For firms, the impact of skills mismatch is more ambiguous. Evidence from Belgium suggests that over-qualification can have a positive effect on firm productivity in certain working environments, for example: for firms in high-tech or knowledge-intensive industries, those with a higher share of high-skilled jobs and those evolving in more uncertain economic environments (Mahy et al., 2015[5]). However, evidence from other countries points to a negative impact of over-qualification on firm productivity (e.g. Tsang (1987[6])), possibly owing to high worker turnover and lower job satisfaction among employees. The effect of under-qualification on firm productivity is generally found to be negative. Field-of-study mismatch is usually only associated with a wage penalty when combined with qualification mismatch, for example, when workers must downgrade to a job with a lower educational requirement because they cannot find work in their field (Montt, 2015[7]). OECD evidence suggests that higher skills mismatch is associated with lower labour productivity through a misallocation of workers to jobs (Adalet McGowan and Andrews, 2015[8]).

Skills shortages increase hiring costs and lower productivity as vacancies remain unfilled for a longer period of time and firms substitute for less productive workers (Haskel and Martin, 1993[9]; Bennett and McGuinness, 2009[10]). Skills shortages also constrain the ability of firms to innovate and adopt new technologies, which can negatively influence their productivity.

Reducing skills imbalances has been identified as an important priority for Flanders. As part of its Vision 2050 priorities, Flanders puts an emphasis on skills and lifelong learning to ensure that "no talent remains unused in our society." In January 2018, the Flemish Minister of Work signed an agreement with employer organisations to tackle labour market shortages (*Pact tegen krapte op de arbeidsmarkt*). The agreement set concrete commitments on the part of both government and employers, such as creating more work-based learning opportunities for jobseekers and improving skill-based matching.

Overview of chapter

This chapter presents available data on skills imbalances in Flanders, followed by a discussion of the factors that affect skills imbalances. It reviews relevant policies and practices from Flanders to address skills imbalances, as well as those from other countries that could be of interest to Flanders. The chapter concludes with a set of recommendations.

Skills imbalances in Flanders

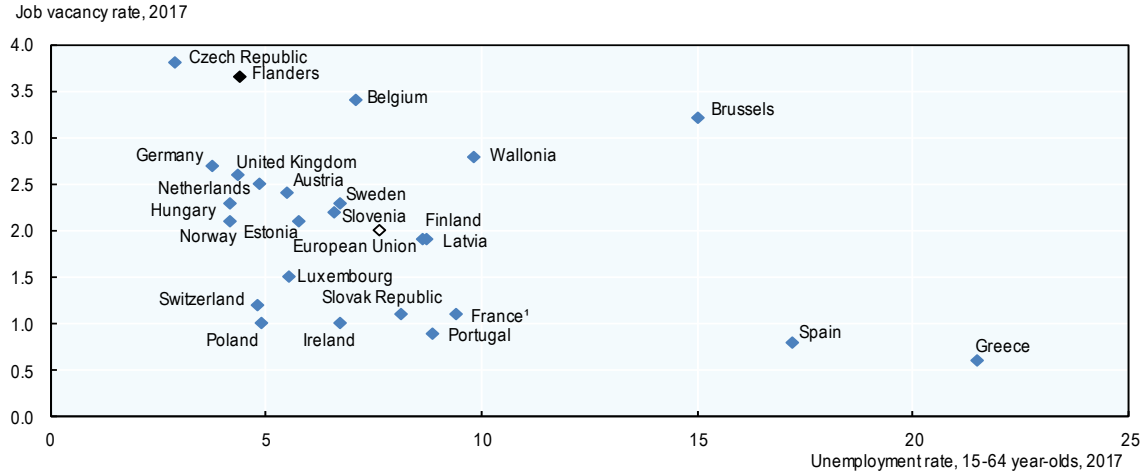
A tight labour market in Flanders is leading to shortages in specific occupations and skills, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) occupations. Shortages are also evident in nursing and care giving, as well as in occupations such as chefs, truck drivers and accountants. Furthermore, there is a gap between the qualifications of jobseekers and those of wage earners, and the incidence of long-term unemployment remains high. On the other hand, in comparison to OECD countries, relatively few workers in Flanders are mismatched to their jobs on the basis of qualification or skills.

Skills shortages in Flanders are rising, and shortage pressure is most acute in some skills and occupations

The labour market in Flanders has been tightening since 2013, with the job vacancy rate rising from 2.6% to 3.7%, and the unemployment rate falling from 5.1% to 4.4%. The unemployment rate is among the lowest in the EU and OECD, and compares with 7.2% in Belgium as a whole (Figure 3.1). The job vacancy rate is higher in Flanders than any country in the EU, apart from the Czech Republic. Such tight labour market conditions can make it more difficult for employers to fill vacancies. Results from a national forecasting study suggest that demand for labour will continue to grow by 1.0% per year in Flanders between 2016 and 2030, which is higher than the national average of 0.9% per year (Agoria, 2018[11]).

Flemish employers are having difficulty hiring in some economic activities more than others (Figure 3.2). Occupations related to professional, technical and scientific activities have persistently high job vacancy rates, as do occupations in information and communications technology (ICT), and construction.

Figure 3.1. Job vacancy rate and unemployment rate, Flanders, other Belgian regions and OECD-EU countries, 2017



Notes: 1. The job vacancy rates is the number of job vacancies divided by total labour demand (i.e. job vacancies plus occupied positions).
2. The job vacancy rate for France is only for firms with 10 employees or more.
Sources: Eurostat (2018[12]), *Job vacancy rate by NACE Rev. 2 activity - annual data (from 2001 onwards) [jvs_a_rate_r2]*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/jvs_esms.htm; Statbel (2018[13]), Job vacancy rate, https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/work-training/labour-market/job-vacancy#figures; OECD (2018[14]), *Regional Labour statistics*, www.oecd.org/governance/regional-policy/regionalstatisticsandindicators.htm

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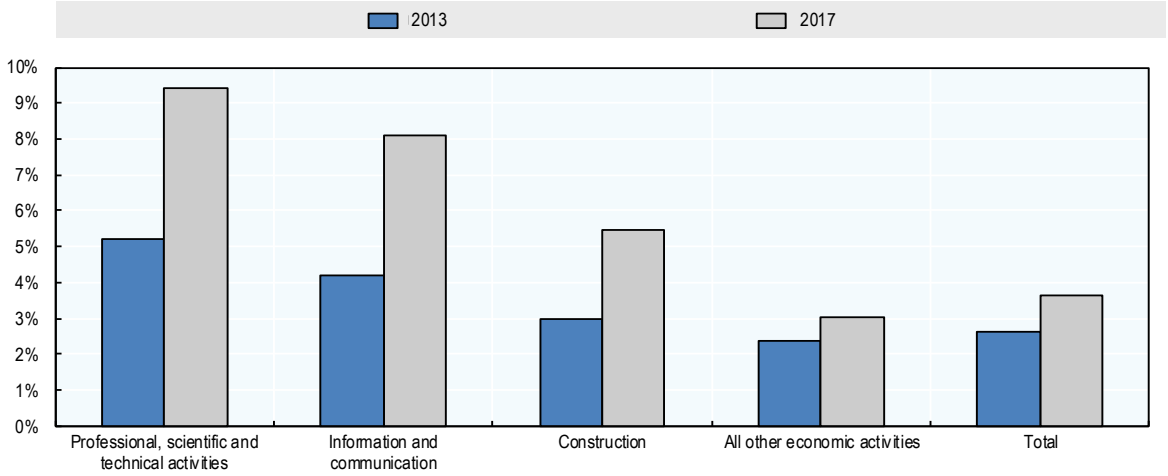
Figure 3.2. Hiring difficulties have become a more significant issue in certain economic activities

Job vacancy rate for selected economic activities and total, Flanders, 2013 and 2017.



Note: The job vacancy rate is the number of job vacancies divided by total labour demand (i.e. job vacancies plus occupied positions). Based on NACE Rev. 2 (Nomenclature générale des activités économiques dans les Communautés Européennes).
Source: Statbel (2018[13]), *Job vacancy rate*, https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/work-training/labour-market/job-vacancy#news.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891566

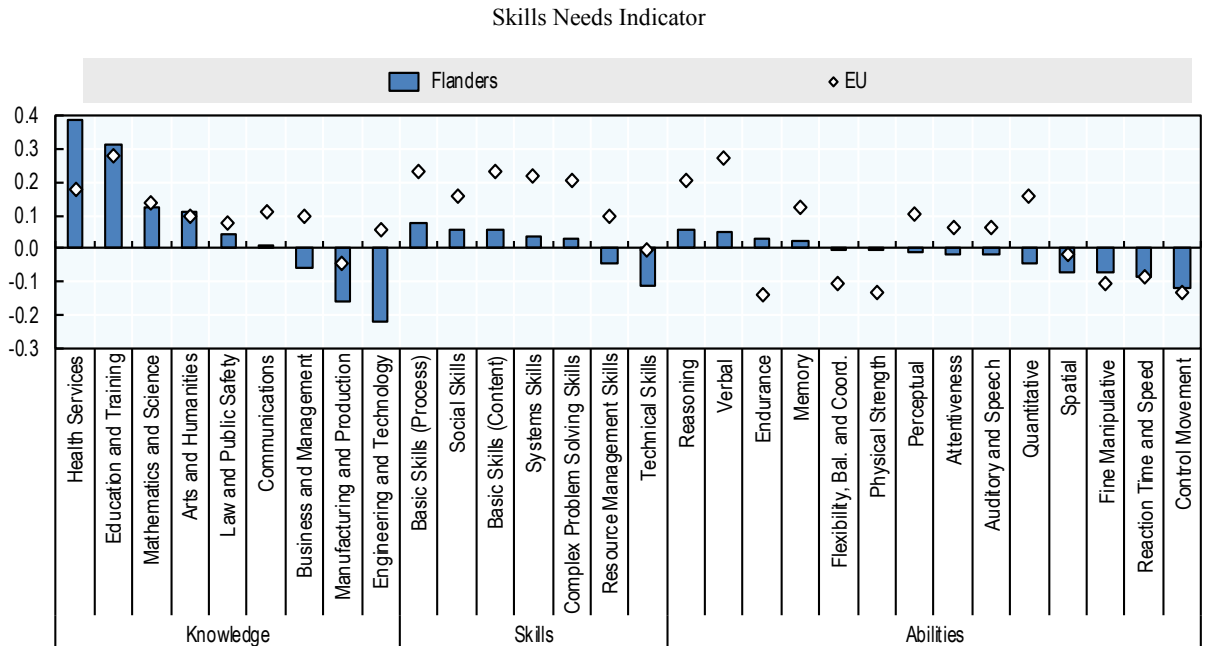
The Flemish public employment service, VDAB, produces a list of bottleneck (i.e. shortage) occupations every year by combining quantitative information, such as vacancy rates and share of vacancies filled, with qualitative information from sector organisations and VDAB experts. Over the last 10 years, VDAB has observed persistent shortages in STEM occupations; both those requiring a secondary-level vocational degree (e.g. technicians, mechanics) as well as those requiring a tertiary degree in a technical direction (e.g. engineers, and site managers). Persistent shortages have also been observed among nurses and care givers, as well as chefs, truck drivers and accountants.

Shortages can also relate to skills, rather than occupations. The OECD Skills for Jobs database is an internationally-comparable index of skills in shortage and in surplus. The indicators are constructed using a multidimensional set of quantitative signals of skills pressure, including changes in wages, employment, hours worked and under-qualification, as well as unemployment rates. After first assessing shortage pressure at the occupational level, a mapping from occupation to skill (using the O*NET classification[1]) generates a profile of shortages and surpluses for various types of knowledge, abilities and skills. Looking at the profile for Flanders (Figure 3.3), the most acute shortages are in knowledge of health services, education and training, and mathematics and sciences. These skills shortages reflect the skills required by occupations in shortage, including STEM occupations and health and personal care occupations. There are also signs of smaller shortages in more transversal skills, such as basic skills (literacy and numeracy), social skills, systems skills, complex problem solving and reasoning abilities. While the intensity of skills shortages is low in Flanders compared with other countries in the database, resolving these imbalances still represents an important challenge for Flanders as a means to support productivity and sustainable employment.

Consistent with declines in the manufacturing sector and a global decrease in the share of employment in routine-intensive occupations (OECD, 2017[3]), surpluses are evident in knowledge of manufacturing and production, control movement abilities, precision time and speed abilities and fine manipulation abilities. Surpluses are also evident in knowledge of engineering and technology and technical skills, which are caused by surpluses in trades occupations (i.e. machinery, metal and related trades, electrical and electronic trades, building and related trades). These all make heavy use of one of the sub-components of this type of knowledge, i.e. mechanical knowledge[2].

At the same time, there are shortages in several occupations that require knowledge of engineering and technology (e.g. science and engineering professionals and associate professionals, ICT professionals, ICT technicians). Former trades workers who are now unemployed or who would like to improve their employment situation could, in principle, be deployed to shortage occupations which use knowledge of engineering and technology, although they would require significant upskilling, particularly in programming, knowledge of computers and electronics, written expression, and reading comprehension.

Figure 3.3. Skills shortage and surplus, Flanders, 2016



Note: Positive values indicate shortages while negative values indicate surpluses. An indicator value of +1 represents the maximum value across countries in the database, while a value of -1 represents the lowest value.
Source: OECD (2018[15]), *Skills for Jobs database*, www.oecdskillsforjobsdatabase.org

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891585

Skills mismatch is low in Flanders

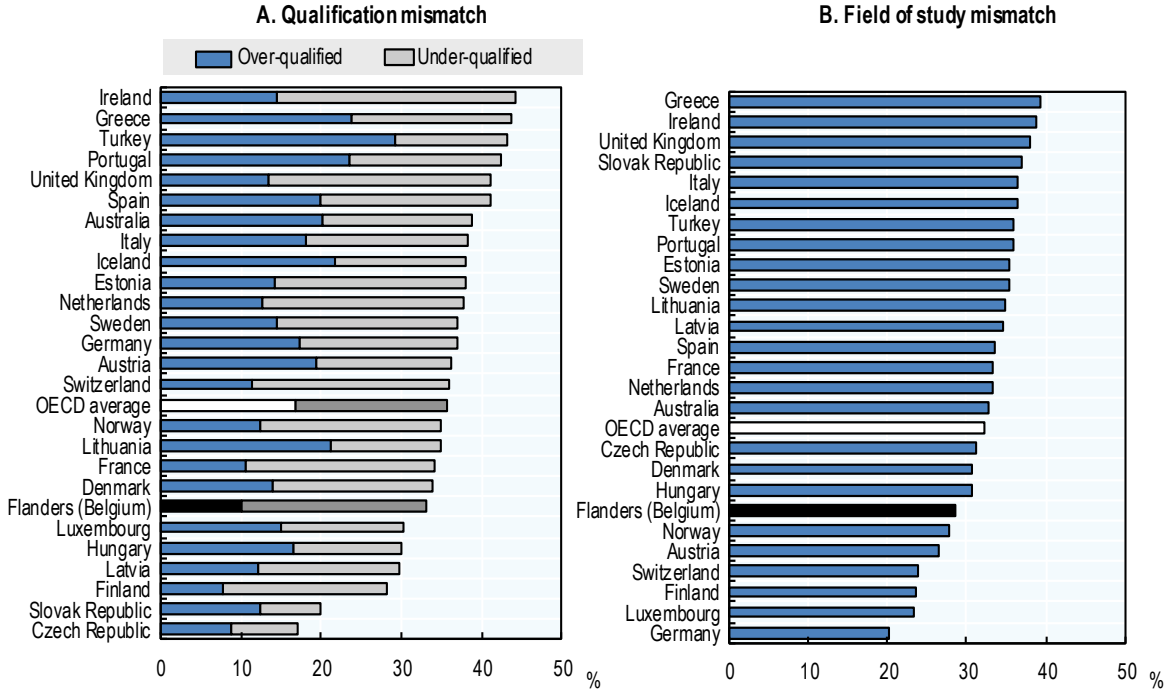
The OECD Skills for Jobs database shows that 10.2% of the Flemish workforce was over-qualified for their job in 2016, substantially lower than the OECD country average of 16.8% (Figure 3.4). Only 28.7% of workers were employed in an occupation outside their field of study, putting Flanders below the OECD average for field-of-study mismatch (32.2%) (Figure 3.4).

According to the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), only 7.8% of Flemish workers were found to have literacy skills that were higher than those required by their job in 2012, which is below the OECD (PIAAC) average of 10.1%.

A comparatively small share of workers, therefore, are mismatched in Flanders on the basis of qualification or skills. Going forward, and in the context of changing demand for skills arising due to technological change, globalisation and population ageing, Flanders should position itself to maintain this low (or even lower) level of mismatch. The OECD estimates that improving allocative efficiency by reducing skills mismatches to the lowest level of the OECD could increase economy-wide productivity gains by about 2.6% in Flanders (Adalet McGowan and Andrews, 2015[8]).

Figure 3.4. Qualification and field-of-study mismatch, Flanders and selected OECD countries

Share of mismatched workers, 2016



Note: Most recent year available for each country. Data for Flanders are for 2016. Field-of-study mismatch is calculated for all countries at the 2-digit ISCO level.
Source: OECD (2018[15]), *Skills for Jobs database*, www.oecdskillsforjobsdatabase.org

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891604

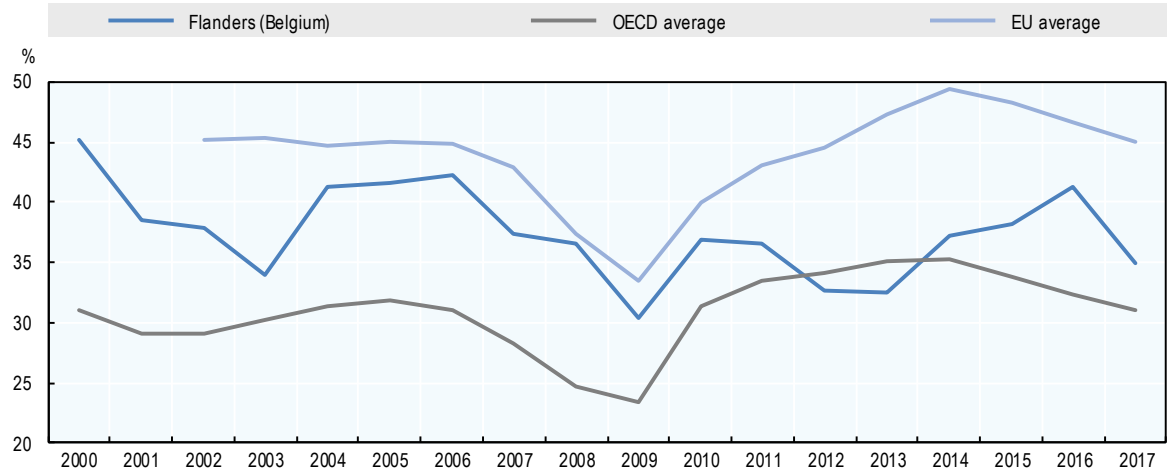
Despite a tight labour market, long-term unemployment remains high

While Flanders faces a tight labour market, the incidence of long-term unemployment remains relatively high. As shown in Figure 3.5, 35.0% of unemployed workers in Flanders were unemployed for a year or longer in 2017, which is lower than the Belgium (50.0%) and EU (45.1%) averages, but higher than the OECD average (31.0%,), and much higher than Sweden (18.5%), Denmark (22.6%) and Finland (24.2%). In 2017, nearly half of all long-term unemployed in Flanders (47%) were low-qualified (i.e. no final diploma in secondary education).

Unemployed workers may remain unemployed because their skills do not match those that employers require. A recent analysis using the Eurostat Labour Force Survey finds that 31% of unemployed individuals in Flanders are low-qualified, compared to only 15% of wage earners (Pasgang, Vansteenkiste and Sels, 2018[16]). Similarly, only 26% of the unemployed are highly-qualified (i.e. final diploma from post-secondary education), compared to 43% of wage earners. Converting these differences in education shares between wage earners and jobseekers into a mismatch index (Figure 3.6) leads to the conclusion that while the education profile of the average unemployed worker in Flanders differs from that of the average wage earner, this misalignment is low relative to other regions in Belgium and relative to the EU average, and has been declining.

Figure 3.5. Elevated incidence of long-term unemployment

Share of unemployed who have been unemployed for at least a year, 2000-2017

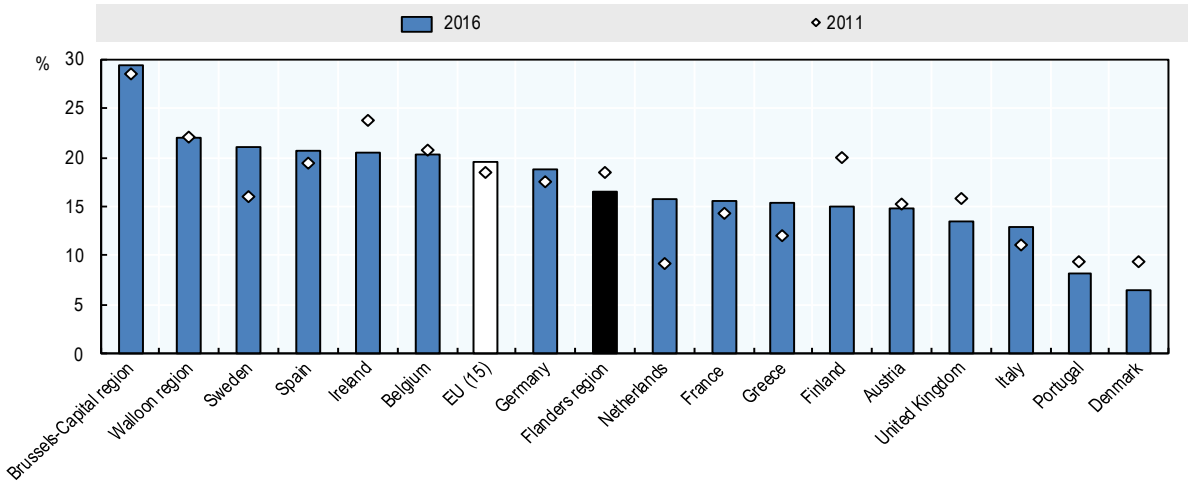


Sources: National Bank of Belgium (2018[17]), *Long-term unemployment statistics*, www.nbb.be/en/publications-and-research/employment-statistics-trends/labour-market/long-term-unemployment; OECD (2018[18]), *Long-term unemployment rate (indicator)*, https://data.oecd.org/unemp/long-term-unemployment-rate.htm

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891623

Figure 3.6. Mismatch between the education profile of wage earners and that of jobseekers, Flanders and other Belgian regions, and selected countries (2011, 2016)

Sum of absolute differences between education level shares in employed and unemployed population



Note: The education level of wage earners is compared with the education level of jobseekers. The authors distinguish between three levels of education: low-qualified (no final diploma in secondary education), middle-qualified (final diploma from secondary education) and highly-qualified (final diploma from higher education). The absolute differences in the shares per education level are summed to create an aggregate level of imbalance. A higher percentage corresponds to a higher imbalance between the education profile of wage earners and that of jobseekers.

Source: Pasgang, K., Vansteenkiste, S., & Sels, L. (2018[16]), *Is there a strong qualitative mismatch in the Flemish labour market?*, http://www.steunpuntwerk.be/node/3759.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891642

Factors driving skills imbalances

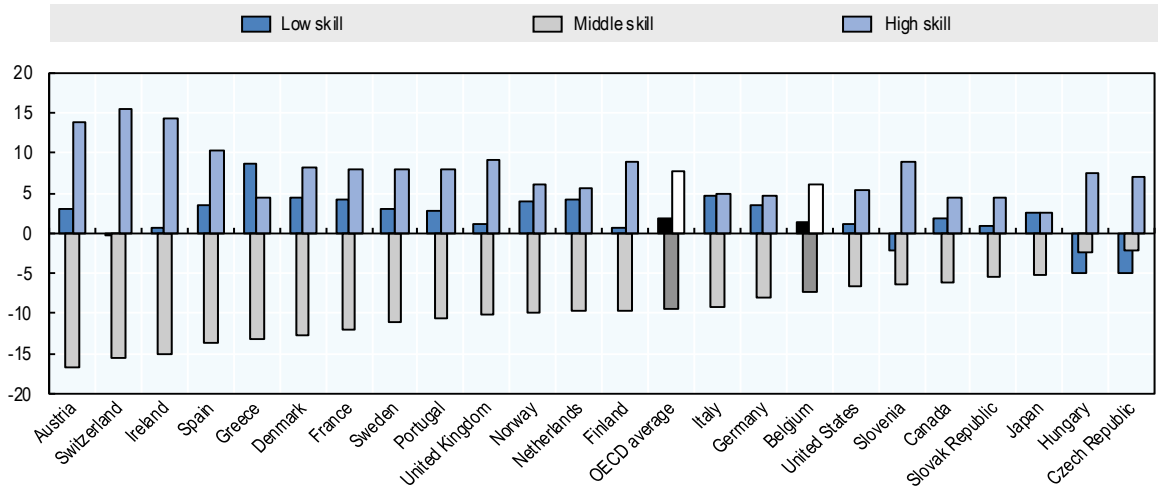
Persistent skills shortages in certain STEM and technical occupations over the last 10 years, combined with a high incidence of long-term unemployment, suggests that the match between the skills in the labour supply and employers' needs could be improved. There are a number of factors causing these skills imbalances.

Global trends such as technological change, globalisation, and population ageing have led to the emergence and expansion of some sectors and occupations while others have contracted. As a result, labour markets have become more polarised, with a rise in the share of employment in jobs at the top and bottom of the skills distribution over the last two decades. Meanwhile, the share of employment in middle-skill jobs has declined (Figure 3.7). These global trends contribute to skills imbalances, as workers who had previously been employed in middle-skill jobs requiring routine skills (e.g. manufacturing) do not necessarily have the skills needed to fulfil existing jobs, or jobs that are expected to become more important in the future.

Several papers have estimated the share of jobs likely to be automated in the coming decades. A recent OECD paper using findings from the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) takes a task-based approach to this problem by accounting for the heterogeneity of workplace tasks within occupations (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018[19]). It finds that in Belgium, about 11% of jobs are at high risk of automation, meaning that they face a 70% or higher probability of being automated. This is on par with the OECD average. An additional 25% of jobs are found to be at significant risk of change due to automation, slightly below the OECD average (30%). With a total of 36% of jobs at significant or high risk of automation, workers will be under pressure to upskill and reskill to remain employable.

Figure 3.7. Labour market polarisation, Belgium and selected OECD countries, 1995-2015

Percentage point change in share of total employment



Note: Data presented at the country level only.
Source: OECD (2017[20]), *OECD Employment Outlook 2017, Figure 3.A1.1. Job polarisation by country*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933477940.

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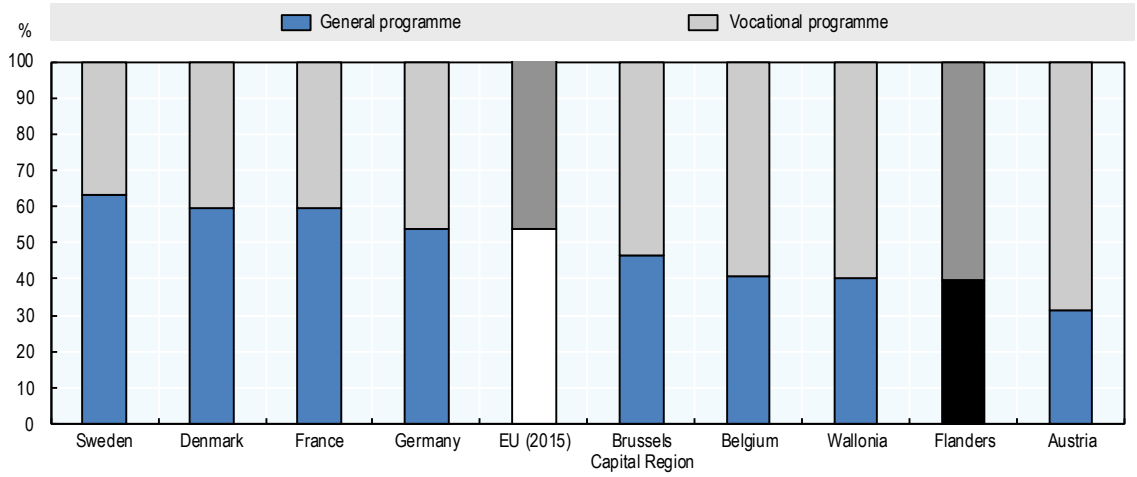
In addition to global trends, the responsiveness of the education system to changing skills demand is another factor behind skills imbalances. Shortages in STEM occupations can be linked to a low and declining supply of graduates in the natural sciences, engineering and ICT: only 17.4% of tertiary students in Belgium graduated in one of these fields in 2015, down from 22.4% in 2005, and well-below the OECD average of 23.4% (OECD, 2017[21]). Similarly, among upper secondary graduates from vocational programmes in Belgium, only 25% graduated with a degree in engineering, manufacturing and construction in 2015, compared with 34% across the OECD. The low supply of graduates in STEM fields in Belgium, despite persistent shortages in STEM occupations, could suggest that the education system is not sufficiently responsive to labour market needs. It could also reflect that students do not view investment in STEM education as an attractive option. A study from 2013 finds that STEM professionals in Belgium have the smallest wage premium among all EU countries (17% relative to 55% in Latvia, 53% in Ireland, and 48% in Poland) (Goos et al., 2013[22]), although this may have changed as shortage pressure has intensified in these fields since 2013. According to an EU report, interest in STEM careers declines with a country's level of development and its living standard (Caprile et al., 2014[23]). The report attributes the low and declining attraction to STEM jobs to a range of social, cultural, economic and education factors, including the changing attitude of society towards science and technology, and the view that training as an engineer or scientist is far from being the best track to a top management position. Rapid depreciation in the currency of STEM degrees in light of technological change may also reduce a student's motivation to study these courses.

Figure 3.8. Distribution of upper secondary student enrolment, by programme orientation

By programme orientation, Flanders and selected countries and regions, 2016



Source: Eurostat (2018[27]), *Distribution of pupils and students enrolled in general and vocational programmes by education level and NUTS2 regions*, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uoe_enra13.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891680

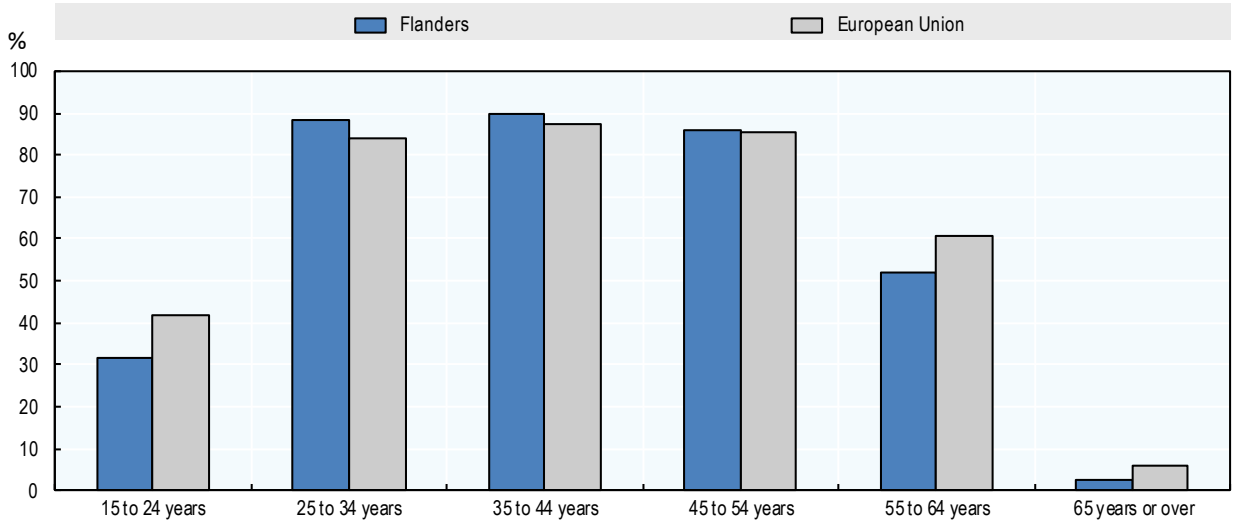
Flanders introduced the 2012-2020 STEM Action Plan to raise the supply of graduates with a STEM education. The plan involved a number of actions, including: improving the marketing and communication of STEM education, strengthening the training of teachers

and educators in STEM fields, improving the process by which career and study choices are made and attracting more girls to STEM courses and occupations. Despite these efforts, the supply of STEM graduates remains low.

There is also a limited use of work-based learning in vocational programmes for young people in Flanders. Vocational programmes that include work-based learning have been shown to improve school-to-work transitions for young people by equipping them with the skills that employers need (OECD, 2017[24]). Compared to the EU average, a high share of upper secondary students enrol in vocational programmes in Flanders (**Error! Reference source not found.**). However, vocational education and training (VET) in Belgium has a much stronger emphasis on school-based over work-based learning (OECD, 2017[25]; Musset, 2013[26]): in 2015, 94% of vocational enrolment in upper secondary education was in school-based programmes (OECD, 2017, p. 258[24]).

Activation of some groups is low, which restricts the supply of skills. Among the working-age population (15-64 years old), only 68% of Belgians were working or looking for a job in 2017, which is a relatively low activity rate compared to the EU average (73.3%) and countries with high labour force participation rates such as the Netherlands (79.8%), Iceland (88.7%) and Sweden (82.5%) Figure 3.9. As recommended in the OECD *Economic Survey of Belgium* (OECD, 2017[28]), boosting labour force participation in Belgium depends on lifting the participation and employment of certain under-represented groups, including older workers, youth, the low-skilled, and the foreign-born population. Recent reforms to the pension system to raise the eligibility age for retirement will help to reduce disincentives to work among older workers. A review of disincentives to work is beyond the scope of this report, but the Flemish government should continue to monitor activity rates among under-represented groups, and adjust policy settings to lower disincentives to work as necessary.

Figure 3.9. Labour force participation rate by age group, Flanders and EU-28, 2017



Source: Eurostat (2018[29]), *Economic activity rates by sex, age and NUTS 2 regions [lfst_r_lfp2act]*, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfst_r_lfp2actrt&lang=en.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891699

Career and training guidance services are currently separated in Flanders, and a recent evaluation found that while career guidance services are well-established, guidance for education and training is not (Vlaams Adviescomité project GOAL, 2018[30]). Effective career and training guidance over a lifetime can improve skills matching by making individuals aware of relevant labour market opportunities, assessing transferable skills, and pointing individuals towards learning opportunities which could help them to train for opportunities in promising jobs or sectors. Creating bridges between the career guidance and education guidance services would improve skills matching. These two services should work closely together in order to refer clients to each other and to support each other's services.

Weaknesses in the existing system of skills validation is another factor behind skills imbalances. Recognising and validating skills, regardless of where or how they were acquired, allows them to be put to more effective use in the labour market. The Flemish system of skills validation (EVC) is currently undergoing reforms to address weaknesses, which include: a poor link between the EVC process and qualifications and an overly complex system. In the past, the system has failed to raise awareness about EVC among employers and to secure the support of key stakeholders (SERV, 2015[31]). As a result, skills validation is not widely practiced. This may be a particular challenge for older workers, with a recent analysis forecasting that skills obsolescence of older workers will be a major social risk in Flanders in the future (Sels, Vansteenkiste and Knipprath, 2017[32]). Better skills validation would help older workers to retrain in expanding occupations and sectors without having to start new degrees from the beginning.

Labour mobility facilitates the optimal allocation of skills to the regions, occupations and sectors where they are most needed. Barriers to labour mobility may include language, housing, transportation costs, poor recognition of skills or credentials and variation in licensing requirements. Evidence suggests that there are barriers to geographic mobility in Flanders and Belgium. A body of Flemish research finds that the risk of over-qualification during a graduate's first years on the labour market is positively correlated with the regional unemployment rate. De Witte and Hindriks (2017[33]) interpret this evidence as implying that the geographic mobility of young people is constrained; otherwise, there would not be such large negative impacts from regional labour market shocks. Variation in regional unemployment rates is also symptomatic of constraints in the free movement of labour (Zimmer, 2012[34]). In 2017, the unemployment rate in the province of Antwerp in Flanders was nearly double that of the province of West Flanders (5.9% versus 3.2%). At the country level, this variation is even more extreme: the Brussels-Capital region and the Wallonia region had an unemployment rate that was more than triple and double, respectively, the unemployment rate in Flanders (14.9%, 9.7%, versus 4.4%). Such a large variation in unemployment rates between regions suggests that there may be barriers preventing workers from moving to areas where their skills would earn the highest return.

Movement from one job to another can also result in better skills matches, but such movements are modest in Flanders. Across OECD countries, the job-to-job transition probability averages 7%. This probability masks significant cross-country differences: Norway, Sweden and Germany all have transition probabilities in excess of 16% (Garda, 2016[35]). In Flanders, only 5.6% of workers move from one job to another on an annual basis, similar to Belgium (4.9%).

Policies and practices to reduce skills imbalances

This section discusses how to reduce skills imbalances through relevant policies and practices. It is based on input from the stakeholder workshops, bilateral meetings, site visits and OECD analysis of international and national data sources and literature. Stakeholder perspectives on specific recommendations are indicated where they appear.

During the two OECD Skills Strategy workshops in May and September 2018, stakeholders in the table groups assigned to the skills matching topic discussed a wide range of issues and proposed recommendations for Flanders. The OECD team has carefully considered each of the perspectives and recommendations and prioritised and elaborated those viewed as most important in this section. A comprehensive list of the proposed ideas can be found in Annex A.

Ensure the education system is responsive to changing skills demand

While the objective of education and training goes beyond preparing individuals to contribute to the labour market (see Chapter 2 on learning culture), this is an important objective. An education system that is responsive to labour market needs provides adequate incentives to institutions to offer courses in high demand, and to potential students to take those courses. It should also equip individuals with the necessary foundational skills to succeed in the labour market, now and in the future.

In vocational education, work-based learning offers real on-the-job experiences that make it easier to acquire both hard skills using modern equipment and soft skills by working with people (OECD, 2010[36]). Employer willingness to offer workplace training signals that a VET programme is relevant and has labour market value. Although there is still a strong emphasis on school-based over work-based learning in vocational programmes in Belgium, Chapter 2 on learning culture explores how Flanders is starting to expand its use of work-based learning in vocational programmes, and what more can be done.

In general education, an assessment of the financial returns to education for particular fields of study provides some indication of the incentives that potential students face to invest in those fields. In Belgium (Flanders data not available), graduates of STEM fields earn a higher wage on average relative to non-STEM graduates; however, this wage premium is low relative to other countries in the EU (Goos et al., 2013[22]). Low returns to STEM study may contribute to the low supply of STEM graduates in the labour market.

Many countries have scholarship programmes that provide incentives for students to take up certain courses (OECD, 2017[37]). The vast majority of these programmes focus on STEM courses, with the remaining targeting subjects for which there is unmet labour market demand. In Flanders, the cost of education is already low (average tuition fees for enrolment in college or university in Flanders are EUR 890 for non-scholarship students and EUR 105 for scholarship students) (Geboers, 2015[38]), leaving little scope for the government to influence study choices in this way. Loans and grants in higher education in Flanders are generally dependent on family income, and not tied to study in particular subjects.

Some governments use funding arrangements for education and training institutions to steer the mix of provision in favour of subjects that face high labour market demand. The Korean government, for example, provides special funding to the 50 universities with the best performance in terms of graduate employment rates, the proportion of teachers with industry experience and the proportion of students who took part in an internship or

fieldwork. The Higher Education Funding Council for England offers one-off capital funding to develop and modernise STEM facilities.

In Flanders, funding of higher education institutions is based on student enrolment and the cost of training. Courses that are more expensive to offer (e.g. biomedical sciences due to the cost of laboratories and equipment) are allocated more funding.

Making the education system more responsive to labour market demand is not only about boosting the supply of graduates with in demand qualifications, it also means equipping individuals with the skills needed to build careers with sustainable employment prospects. The Skills for Jobs database identifies a range of transversal skills currently in shortage in Flanders, including basic skills (numeracy and literacy), systems skills, complex problem solving, and reasoning abilities. These align with the skills that are likely to be relevant for the future labour market. The OECD (2017[39])finds that to get the most out of global value chains, for example, industries need workers with literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills, prowess in management and communication, and a readiness to keep learning. Some of these transversal skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills) are also essential for adults to be able to participate in training opportunities over the course of their careers.

Finally, experience from OECD countries has shown that involving social partners can be beneficial for assessing and anticipating skills needs (OECD, 2016[40]), as well as developing education and training curricula that match labour market needs (OECD, 2017[37]). In Flanders, it is a legal requirement that all public higher education institutions have social partner representatives on their board of directors (OECD, 2017[37]).

The OECD (2017[28]) recommends that disseminating data on wage premia by field of study, instead of just by level of study, could entice more prospective students to choose fields more relevant to the labour market. Employers may need to improve the compensation package offered to STEM professionals, and other occupations with persistent shortages, to attract more students to these fields. At the same time, government should monitor the implicit incentives that students face to study different courses, and, if needed, offer scholarships to cover the cost of living expenses for students who study in high-demand courses. Furthermore, government should ensure that education institutions face the right incentives to adjust course offerings in response to labour market demand. This may mean targeting public subsidies at particular courses, introducing elements of performance-based funding, or providing one-off capital financing to develop and modernise facilities to support the provision of education and training in high-demand areas.

Improve information about current and future skills needs

Information from skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises helps individuals, social partners and policy makers to make choices that bring skills supply and demand into alignment. Improving the match between the demand and supply of skills hinges on collecting and using high-quality and up-to-date information on skills needs. Such information can be used in a variety of policy areas, including migration, education and training and employment. Sweden, for example, has become a leader in the development and use of SAA information at the national, regional and sectoral levels (Box 3.1).

Flanders collects information about both current and future skills needs. As noted above, Flanders' public employment service, VDAB, produces a list of bottleneck occupations that can be translated into skills needs by the "Competent" database. This list of shortage

occupations provides an indication of current skills needs and is used for general information purposes, as well as to inform education and training subsidies. For instance, participation in full-time formal training programmes in shortage areas is fully subsidised for jobseekers via the Education Qualification Pathway (OKOT).

To assess future skills needs, the Department of Work and Social Economy developed a skills forecasting methodology (VLAMT, *Vlaams ArbeidsMarktonderzoek van de Toekomst*) to anticipate skills needs at the sectoral level. VLAMT was piloted in several Flemish sectors, which could receive European Social Fund co-funding for running these forecasts. The methodology is mostly qualitative and involves conducting interviews with the most innovative firms in emerging industries as these are believed to have the best grasp on the future skills needs of the sector. During interviews, participants are asked to reflect on possible 10-year business case scenarios and which skills would be needed under each scenario. The results of VLAMT are used by the Flemish government to invest in future-oriented and labour market relevant training and to improve career guidance. During workshops, some employer stakeholders noted that the results of the VLAMT exercises had proven useful in developing training plans. At the same time, stakeholders also identified a limitation with sector-specific exercises, as it is not possible to obtain a broader sense of economy-wide labour market needs.

A consulting firm commissioned by the sectoral training fund, Agoria, carried out a national forecasting study in co-operation with VDAB, FOREM (Walloon public employment service) and ACTIRIS (Brussels public employment service). The main results of the study are that by 2030, growth in demand for labour (0.9% annually) will outstrip growth in supply (0.3%), and 584 000 vacancies will not be filled across Belgium. Furthermore, 310 000 employees and jobseekers will have to be retrained in order to remain in the labour market. The strongest increase in vacancies will be in the education, services and health care sectors. Sectors with high productivity growth - such as agriculture, metal and electric sector, media and digital entertainment - face negative growth in labour demand.

A human capital agenda to make the skills system responsive to the needs of the labour market (elaborated in Chapter 5 on governance) should be based upon assessments of skills needs and skills forecast exercises. Flanders could consider committing to a long-term collaboration agreement with other regions to carry out forecast exercises on a regular basis.

Box 3.1. Skills assessment and anticipation exercises in Sweden

Skills mismatches and shortages are widespread in Sweden. To help address these skills imbalances, Sweden has become a leader in the development of skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises to collect timely and robust information on current and future skills needs at the national, regional and sectoral level. The responsible agencies, Statistics Sweden and the Swedish Public Employment Service, use surveys and forecast models, as well as constructive dialogue with stakeholders. SAA information in Sweden is used in education policy by informing prospective students through career guidance. In employment policy, the PES has made considerable investments in improving its capabilities to match the skills of jobseekers to those required by employers based on the results of SAA exercises.

Source: OECD (2016[41]), *Getting Skills Right: Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264265479-en.

Create bridges between career and training guidance support

Effective career and training guidance over a lifetime can improve skills matching by making individuals aware of relevant labour market opportunities, assessing transferable skills and pointing individuals towards learning opportunities that would help them to train for opportunities in promising jobs or sectors. Given that adult learning in Flanders is fragmented and spans policy domains and ministries, adults can benefit from objective guidance about available learning opportunities and where they might lead in terms of career or learning trajectories. Such support is particularly relevant in adult learning, where adults must take the initiative as learning is no longer compulsory.

Flanders offers subsidised career guidance services to support lifelong learning. Through VDAB, jobseekers have access to free guidance and training to help them overcome obstacles to employment. Employed and self-employed workers can also apply to VDAB for career guidance vouchers, which offer four hours of subsidised career guidance with a mandated career coaching centre of their choice. Individuals have the right to two vouchers (i.e. 8 hours in total) every six years. Consisting of conversations, exercises, checklists, etc., the career guidance service results in a personal development plan. If training is needed to reach the client's career ambitions, then the career guidance counsellor will help the client identify specific training and inform them about the availability of training vouchers to finance the training.

Since the introduction of the career guidance vouchers in 2013, career guidance is offered by both private and non-profit providers and the number of career centres has increased sevenfold: a Flemish citizen can find an average of 12 offices for career guidance within a 5km radius. Customer satisfaction rates are high (86% in 2016). However, evaluations suggest that high-skilled adults are more likely to use the career guidance vouchers than low-skilled adults (VDAB, 2017[42]).

Newcomers to Flanders can also access social orientation courses, and individual support and guidance towards Dutch language courses via locally-based integration agencies. Such agencies also have agreements with the Flemish public employment service to refer newcomers to their programmes for career guidance, job search and professional training.

However, as noted in a recent evaluation of the Guidance and Orientation of Adult Learning (GOAL) project, while career and employment guidance is well-established in Flanders, guidance for education and training is not (Vlaams Adviescomité project GOAL, 2018[30]). Pilot education guidance projects in West Flanders *(Leerwinkel*,Box 3.2*)* and Ghent *(De Stap)* have been successful in providing a neutral source of information about training opportunities, and most participants of the programme go on to enrol in some form of adult learning. While *Leerwinkel* counsellors discuss employment possibilities in their guidance sessions, this is not a primary focus. Referrals from the public employment service and immigration agencies have proven effective in attracting vulnerable groups to these services. The GOAL project evaluation recommended that education and training guidance be more structurally embedded in Flanders, which would create stability for the guidance centres and allow adults from all regions in Flanders to benefit.

More bridges between career guidance and education guidance services are needed in Flanders. This does not entail combining these services, but rather, as recommended in the GOAL project evaluation report, the career guidance and education guidance services should work closely together in order to refer clients to each other and to support each other's services. Furthermore, these services could be offered in tandem in the same location to facilitate access. Some thought could also be given to extending the use of the career guidance vouchers (*Loopbaancheques*) to education guidance.

Box 3.2. Reaching out to vulnerable groups in Flanders

Adults living in poverty face both practical and psychological barriers that prevent them from participating in adult learning: lack of awareness about adult education opportunities; lack of transport and time; and low self-esteem or shame about their low level of literacy and numeracy. The Learning Opportunities project (*Leerkansen*) tries to overcome these barriers by bringing adults living in poverty into contact with learning opportunities in an accessible way. Local Centres for Adult Basic Education (CABE) collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a focus on adults from low socio-economic backgrounds. A basic education teacher from CABE regularly visits the NGO to become familiar with the association and its members and to detect learning opportunities. Through coaching and participant observation, the teacher aims to develop a learning culture in the association by making learning functional, by adapting learning to the individual needs of the participants, and by integrating learning in the activities of the association.

Leerwinkel (which means learning shop) is one of the programmes included under the Erasmus+ Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners (GOAL) Project co-ordinated by the Flemish Government's Department of Education and Training. *Leerwinkel* was designed as a one-stop-shop where potential learners in West Flanders could go to learn which educational options and financial incentives are available to them, and to receive neutral assistance in navigating the system. Any adult can come to Leerwinkel for help, but the programme specifically targets low-educated persons, prisoners, and immigrants. Many participants come through referrals from public employment offices and immigration agencies with whom Leerwinkel has strong partnerships. The value-added of the programme is that it provides independent and neutral advice, which is tailored to the clients' needs and not connected to a particular educational institution (Schiepers et al., 2017[43]).

At the end of the GOAL project, UCL (University College London) Institute of Education performed an evaluation of the project in co-operation with local implementers. The quantitative results showed that 78% of service users had enrolled in some form of adult learning and 49% of clients who granted consent to be tracked in the department's database had enrolled in an educational programme at a Centre for Adult Education (formal education). Clients of *Leerwinkel* also reported that they discovered training opportunities they did not know existed, increased their self-confidence and received tailored advice adapted to their personal situation. There were no evaluations of the impact of training on employment outcomes.

Sources: Netwerk tegen Armoede, Federatie Centra voor Basiseducation vzw and Vocvo vzw (2015[44]), *Learning Opportunities,* http://www.netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Dossier-Leerkansen.pdf;El Yahyaoui, Hoefnagels, Reynders & Van den Buijs (2018[45]), *GOAL National Evaluation Report Flanders*, https://adultguidance.eu/images/Reports/GOAL_National_Evaluation_Report_Flanders.pdf.

It is also important that adults be able to easily access information about both employment and learning opportunities. To assist potential learners in navigating the many opportunities available for learning, the Department of Education and Training supports an education guidance website (Education Chooser—*Onderwijskiezer*) which gathers objective and detailed information about education and training options (elementary, secondary, higher education and adult learning), as well as information about bottleneck occupations. The website usefully highlights which courses teach STEM skills to encourage training in the skills needed in bottleneck STEM occupations. Users can consult career guidance tools and submit questions. The website also provides concise information about government financial incentives for training. A career guidance website, My Career *(Mijn Loopbaan)*, is operated by VDAB. It provides tips and information on how to look for a job, how to take stock of one's skills, descriptions of occupations with good labour market prospects, and how to train for these occupations via programmes offered by VDAB. Links allow users to move easily from one website to the other.

The challenge with these types of online services is tailoring the information to the specific and diverse needs of target groups. Users should ideally be able to answer some questions about their skills and experience, as well as their career aspirations, and be provided only with information that is relevant to them. In Denmark, a live chat feature on the careers website provides customised information for users (Box 3.3). In New Zealand, the careers guidance website features an interactive tool which informs users about the specific skills, courses or qualifications they are missing to work in their desired occupation (Box 3.3). Clear instructions for how to proceed with additional training are also provided. The New Zealand career guidance website provides a good example of a tool that integrates detailed information about careers and training possibilities and ensures that users only receive the information relevant for them through an interactive format.

Useful career and training guidance depends on having high-quality information about the labour market outcomes (e.g. average wage, employment rate) of training programmes. Currently, guidance websites in Flanders showcase information about the labour market prospects of bottleneck occupations, as defined by VDAB, as well as the education required to fill vacancies in those occupations. To assist prospective students, Flanders should also track the labour market outcomes of particular training programmes and disseminate this information on relevant digital platforms.

Existing digital platforms for guidance (e.g. *Onderwijskiezer*, and *Mijn Loopbaan)* could be better integrated with one another to ensure that users can easily access relevant information about both career and training trajectories. A more interactive format, similar to New Zealand's guidance website, would help to customise information to users' needs. The Flanders statistical offices and relevant partners (VDAB, Steunpunt, Department of Work and Social Economy, Syntra Vlaanderen) should also start tracking labour market outcomes of particular training programmes, and disseminate this information on digital platforms.

Box 3.3. Career guidance websites in Denmark and New Zealand

Denmark's *UddannelsesGuiden* (Education Guide, www.ug.dk) is the national information and guidance portal for adults and young learners. The sub-portal on *adult continuing education and training* provides information on educational choices for adults from different education backgrounds. It offers detailed information on: education requirements for different trades and occupations; individual education institutions; estimated duration of education and training, costs and financial support available; how to get knowledge and work experience assessed and recognised, including the preparation process for the real competence assessment (RKV), places, costs, and other practical information; and guidance and counselling services available. The sub-portal on jobs and careers provides information on the Danish labour market, trades, industries and sectors, including information on current employment opportunities, the work environment, labour legislation, local job centres, and education opportunities. The sub-portal "ask a counsellor" (*eVejledning*) offers a number of ways to get in contact with someone who can provide customised guidance to anyone who needs help regarding education and jobs. The service is available every day, including weekends. The user can choose to communicate via email, live real-time chat or telephone.

New Zealand's careers website allows users to learn about education and career pathways by searching by degree, skill and occupation. Users can input their degree and courses they have taken into a subject matcher tool to find out which occupations they are qualified for. Users can also search by occupations that interest them to learn which additional degrees and courses they would need in order to work in these occupations, and the average employment and salary of workers in that occupation.

For adults considering a career transition, the skill builder tool helps users build an inventory of their own skills based on the positions they have held in the formal and informal labour market. For instance, entering "mining engineer" as a previous occupation will automatically build a list of skills, among them: to design industrial equipment, prepare detailed work plans, and advise others on health and safety issues. Skills can be added or subtracted from the automatic list until it accurately represents a user's skillset. The tool then identifies a set of alternative occupations. Skill builder also informs users about the additional qualifications or courses needed to work in a given occupation.

Sources: Danish Ministry of Education (2018[46]), *About Education Guide*, www.ug.dk/programmes/aboutugdk; European Commission (2018[47]), *Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe: Information about courses, work-based learning and qualifications*, https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/ro/node/5788; https://www.careers.govt.nz/tools/skills-builder/.

Make skills visible

Recognising and validating skills, regardless of where or how they were acquired, allows them to be put to more effective use in the labour market. Non-formal and informal learning are important modes of skills accumulation that do not lead to a formal qualification. Non-formal learning refers to education that does not lead to a nationally-recognised diploma or certificate, but rather to a diploma or certificate recognised by a sector or professional body, or to no diploma or certificate at all. Informal learning refers to learning by doing and learning from others. By improving opportunities to use skills more effectively in the workplace, validating informal and non-formal learning reduces

skills mismatches. It also strengthens incentives to invest in training and helps to promote job-to-job transitions.

In Flanders, several departments regulate the validation of non-formal and informal learning, known as the EVC (*Erkennen Van Competenties*, skills validation), including the Departments for Work and Social Economy, Education and Training, and Culture (De Rick, 2016[48]). Validation can be used to obtain a Certificate of Experience (*Ervaringsbewijs*), which recognises skills acquired outside of formal education and is certified by a recognised provider, usually sectoral training funds or VDAB. In higher education and secondary adult education, validation can also be used to obtain admission to an education and training programme or to request exemptions from parts of the study programme. Arrangements for validation vary by sector. The current system is fragmented and lacks coherence, which led to the Flemish government in 2015 approving a concept note for an integrated validation framework (Vlaams Minister van Onderwijs and Vlaams Minister van Werk Economie Innovatie en Sport, 2015[49]). As a result, a government task force was set up to develop the integrated policy framework and to draft new legislation on validation (first draft approved by the Flemish Government in June 2018) (Vlaamse Regering, 2018[50]).

Reforms to the skills validation system will establish stronger linkages between skills certificates and the education system, and improve flexibility. Under the agreed concept note for a more integrated EVC policy, the validation of informal and non-formal learning could be used to acquire a qualification based on the Flemish Qualification Framework (VKS, *Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur*), which provides standard descriptions of the knowledge and skills an individual needs to work in a given occupation or to pursue further education (Vlaams Minister van Onderwijs and Vlaams Minister van Werk Economie Innovatie en Sport, 2015[49]). This should reduce fragmentation in the system by creating links between qualifications and the EVC system. The reforms would also introduce more flexibility by allowing partial qualifications. Under the current system, individuals who pursue an EVC process are not given validation for skills they have acquired unless they add up to a full qualification. The reformed EVC system would validate partial qualifications and clarify the skills and training needed to reach the full qualification.

The Flemish skills validation system has so far failed to raise awareness among employers and individuals and to secure the support of key stakeholders. The Socio-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) noted that companies are still not sufficiently familiar with EVC (SERV, 2015[31]). There have been positive outcomes with the Certificate of Experience, but further efforts are needed to engage employers. A 2013 survey found that 1 in 4 employers had never heard of the Certificate of Experience, and 2 in 3 did not use the system for their employees. Half of all employers considered the Certificate of Experience a useful and important tool for the development of employees, while the other half did not think that it offered sufficient added value to their organisation. This latter view was echoed by employer stakeholders during workshops. Finland and Norway provide examples of countries with well-established systems of recognition of prior learning, and have successfully built trust and support among employers and other stakeholders in the system through engaging with them throughout the process (Box 3.5).

More efforts are needed to raise awareness about skills validation procedures in Flanders. Several stakeholders thought that information about EVC procedures should be centralised in a website to make it more accessible. In Denmark, for example, information

about recognition of prior learning trajectories is clearly laid out on the national careers guidance website (Box 3.3). Public awareness campaigns that use media channels, events, existing networks or direct mail can also help to promote the benefits of skills validation. For instance, in 2016/2017, Portugal used a large-scale public awareness campaign to launch *Qualifica*, an adult learning programme that includes *Qualifica Centres* which provide guidance and recognition of prior learning support (OECD, forthcoming).

Ongoing reforms promise to simplify the existing skills validation system and improve flexibility, but more efforts are needed to raise awareness about EVC processes among individuals and employers. To raise awareness about EVC among employers and potential users, information about EVC processes should be centralised and available via a digital platform, possibly *Onderwijskiezer* or *Mijn Loopbaan*.

Flanders has made a lot of progress into recruiting employees based on skills. In 2012, SERV launched the Competent database that contains more than 500 profiles of occupations and the skills needed to perform them. Based on the French labour market reference framework (Romev3 of Pôle Emploi), Competent was developed in partnership with Pôle Emploi, SERV and Synerjob (a non-profit organisation which facilitates co-operation between the regional public employment services), with VDAB now responsible for managing the database.

The Competent database is used by VDAB to match jobseekers with vacancies based on skills requirements, in addition to the traditional qualification and work experience requirements. With the current digital matching tool, employers may enter their vacancy information, including location, qualification, experience and skills requirements. This allows them to see a list of candidates who match a minimum 80% of the requirements for the vacancy. At the same time, jobseekers who subscribe with VDAB complete an online profile, selecting the skills that they possess. Jobseekers receive a list of vacancies which correspond to at least 80% of their profile. All of this occurs without any human intervention. The Competent database is updated frequently to ensure that it is responsive to changing skills needs in the labour market. VDAB will soon launch a new version of the digital matching tool that is intended to make it even more user-friendly (Box 3.4).

There is some evidence that Flemish firms are moving to more competency-based assessments in their recruiting practices, particularly larger firms and firms that innovate the most (Notebaert, 2015[51]). One in three companies and organisations are estimated to use "competency profiles," which represents an increase compared to only 24% in 2011.

Box 3.4. Matching jobseekers to vacancies with the help of artificial intelligence

VDAB will soon launch a new digital matching tool to improve how it matches jobseekers with vacancies. Using text analytics, the tool is trained to "read" uploaded job vacancies and curriculum vitae (CVs) and to recognise patterns and extract relevant information. This produces a list of qualifications and work experience, which the tool then translates into skills requirements using the Competent database. In this way, the new tool simplifies the process of inputting skills possessed or skills required. Whereas previously an employer would need to pore through hundreds of skills to decide which were relevant for their job vacancy, now all they need to do is upload a job vacancy and the tool will make suggestions for which skills to include. The employer is free to add or delete any skills suggested by the tool.

Source: Presentation from VDAB, September 2018.

Box 3.5. Developing a strong system of recognition of prior learning in Finland and Norway

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has a long tradition in **Finland** and is embedded in legislation. Under legislation, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is understood to be a right of the individual, and an individual's skills ought to be given recognition regardless of when or where they were acquired. One of the strengths of the Finnish validation system is the strong co-operation with employers, who are involved in all aspects of validation, from designing the content of qualification requirements to individual validation procedures. Such co-operation promotes trust, with employers viewing qualifications gained through validation as equally valuable to the qualifications gained through school-based learning.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is highly recognised in the **Norwegian** economy, thanks to a national legal framework and engagement with stakeholders in the validation process. Vox, the Norwegian agency for lifelong learning (affiliated to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research), estimates that 55% of all adults completing upper secondary education (including VET) in 2008 had undergone validation of their prior learning, and 86% of these were granted exemption of at least one module. Validation in Norway is often geared towards obtaining a trade certificate, as many adults have worked in a trade for years without much schooling and with no certificate. Evaluation results indicate that validation of prior learning contributes to greater flexibility in working life and improved standing in the job market (e.g. more interesting tasks, better wages), as well as improved access to the labour market for those previously excluded.

Sources: Karttunen (2016[52]), *2016 Update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning*, https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_FI.pdf; Cedefop. European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). "European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Finland." Yang (2015[53]), *Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in UNESCO Member States*, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002326/232656e.pdf.

Promote labour mobility

Labour mobility facilitates the optimal allocation of skills to the regions, occupations and sectors where they are most needed.

Flanders has participated in initiatives to improve regional labour mobility in Belgium. In 2005, the communities and regions (Brussels-Capital region, the Flemish region, the Flemish community, the Walloon region, the French Community Commission and the German-speaking communities) signed a co-operation agreement to share hard-to-fill vacancies systematically between the various public employment services (VDAB, ACTIRIS, FOREM, and ADG) for more efficient skills matching.

In February 2018, given the high rate of unemployment in Wallonia compared with in Flanders, the two regional governments signed a strategy to promote the matching of Wallonian jobseekers with Flemish job vacancies. The strategy involves: improving the compatibility of skills matching software used by the Flemish and Wallonian public employment services; developing business-oriented Dutch language courses and modules which can be followed by French-speaking Walloons in the workplace; and building awareness among Flemish employers about the possibility of recruiting from Wallonia, e.g. through job fairs where employers and jobseekers interact with one another.

In order to promote and facilitate the inter-regional mobility of trainees in vocational training, the regional and community institutions responsible for vocational training in Belgium signed a framework agreement in 2008. Under this framework, a common procedure allows trainees to follow a vocational training course in the region of their choice, provided they comply with conditions and obtain the approval of the institution in their place of residence.

More efforts are needed to facilitate job-to-job and sector-to-sector transitions. Low job-to-job mobility is associated with weak worker reallocation and poor skills matching (OECD, 2017[28]). Housing, product and labour market policies all affect mobility rates. The design of national level sectoral training funds creates incentives to limit training investment to within individual sectors, which dampens sector-to-sector mobility and reduces the ability of workers in declining occupations and sectors to retrain for occupations and sectors with better prospects.

The OECD Adult Learning dashboard shows that across countries, workers in jobs with significant risk of automation are less likely to participate in training than adults with low risk of automation. Similarly, workers employed in surplus occupations (as defined by the OECD Skills for Jobs database) are less likely to participate in training than those in shortage occupations. Flanders is among the countries where these differences are greatest: workers in jobs with high risk of automation are 24 percentage points (p.p.) less likely to participate in training (OECD average is 19 p.p.), and workers in surplus occupations are 20 percentage points less likely to participate in training (OECD average is 9 p.p.). More efforts are needed to facilitate transitions from declining to expanding sectors and occupations.

Through sector covenants, which are collaboration agreements between sectors and the Flemish government, there have been examples of successful co-operation between sectors in the use of sectoral training funds. When the Flemish government approves a sector covenant, the sector receives regional government funding to implement the plan (see Chapter 5 for more on sector covenants). For example, as part of the 2018-19 sector covenant, the Flemish government provided funding for several industrial sectors (food, textile and metal) to collectively organise training which would be relevant to each of them (e.g. training in operations). The three sectors shared the cost of the training, allowing them to organise more courses and to ensure a wider regional distribution.

Further co-ordination in the use of sectoral training funds between sectors, either by pooling resources for specific initiatives or by taking advantage of services already financed by other sectoral training funds, would help to finance the training of workers to shift from low-demand sectors to high-demand sectors, and would yield efficiencies in responding to common challenges, such as responding to digitalisation or shortages in STEM fields. In the Netherlands, the government has encouraged stronger collaboration among sectoral training funds via sectoral plans (Box 3.6).

A balanced portfolio of skills is also needed. Given uncertainty about the precise skills needed in the future, the best risk mitigation strategy for individuals and society is to develop a balanced portfolio of skills. High levels of cognitive skills, social and emotional skills and relevant job-specific skills are needed to ensure that individuals and society are resilient and adaptable in the context of change. Such an approach supports sustainable employment for individuals and promotes movement of labour to occupations and sectors that are most in need of skilled workers.

Social partners should work with the Flemish government to promote the sharing of sectoral training funds between sectors to better facilitate workers' transitions from declining to expanding sectors, and aggregate funds to address common skills challenges, such as adopting digital technologies and addressing STEM shortages. Government should also continue to monitor whether its policies are having the desired effect of providing individuals with a balanced portfolio of skills which includes strong cognitive, social and emotional, as well as relevant job-specific skills. Making workers more adaptable and resilient promotes movement of labour to occupations and sectors that are most in need of workers.

Box 3.6. The Netherlands' sector plans

In 2013, the Dutch government introduced sector plans (*sectorplannen)* as a co-financing solution for training and guidance to help address mismatches between the demand and supply of skills. The government allocated EUR 600 million to finance the sector plans, which represents 50% of total costs: social partners pay the remaining 50% and are heavily involved in drafting the plans. Most of the resources go to training and guidance for employees who have been made redundant. Training is designed and implemented by the social partners.

There are several examples of sectors co-ordinating with one another to develop sector plans that support labour mobility. For instance, given strong growth prospects in the ICT sector, the ICT sector plans make training and guidance available to attract new employees to the sector. The cost of the training is shared by the transition fund and the future employer. Taking advantage of these opportunities, the culture sector plans offer guidance to direct unemployed workers in the sector towards available training in ICT, particularly in light of transferable skills between the two sectors (e.g. creativity).

In 2014, the transport and logistics sector saw almost 250 companies go bankrupt, putting 3 000 employees at high risk of unemployment. Through their sector plan, a transfer centre was opened which focused on providing training and guidance to at-risk employees to help them secure work in a different job within or outside the sector (e.g. public transport, security, and passenger transport).

Source: Stichting Opleidings- en Ontwikkelingsfonds Beroepsgoederenvervoer over de weg en de Verhuur van Mobiele kranen (2015[54]) *Sector plan transport and logistics 2016-2017*, https://www.soob-wegvervoer.nl/files/117/files/Sectorplan-2016-2017.pdf; Cultuur-Ondernement (2014[55]), *Sector plan Culture: Plan of Action*, http://www.sectorplancultuur.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/D.Plan-van-aanpak-3.pdf.

Prioritise training in high-demand skills for jobseekers, particularly those at risk of long-term unemployment

Promoting upskilling and retraining of long-term unemployed in skills and occupations where Flanders has shortages could help address skills imbalances while improving the employability of the long-term unemployed. Training for the unemployed in Flanders is heavily focused on work placements and VDAB offers several types of training programmes with a work placement component. The Individual Vocational Training (*Individuele Beroepsopleiding* – IBO) and the internship as a requirement of a study-based programme (*Opleidingsstage*) together account for 79% of enrolments in work-based training for jobseekers (VDAB, 2017[56]), though there are other programmes as

well[3]. The *Opleidingsstage* generally lasts 2-3 months, and forms part of a study programme, 69% of which are in care and education (VDAB, 2017[56]). IBO allows employers to hire a jobseeker and, with the financial support of VDAB, train them in the workplace typically over a period of 4-26 weeks. The wage and social security contributions of the individual are covered by VDAB, with the employer paying only a "productivity premium." In return, the employer is expected to hire the individual after the training, normally on an indefinite contract. This programme has been highly successful, with 90% of participants still working in the same company where they trained one year after the programme (VDAB, 2017[56]).

Recognising that employers may be less willing to engage long-term unemployed in this type of contract, the VDAB offers an alternative version of the IBO programme, K-IBO, to employers willing to hire workers who have been unemployed for a year or longer or those with a disability. For these workers, the maximum duration of the training is longer (52 weeks), and the employer is not expected to pay a productivity premium and the training is completely free.

As part of a recent pact made between the Flemish Minister for Work and employers (*Pact tegen krapte op de arbeidsmarkt*, January 2018), both parties agreed to four actions to improve the matching of long-term unemployed with vacancies: 1) the government will take action to speed up and improve the screening of long-term unemployed; 2) the government will work with employers to ensure that more vacancies are described in terms of skills rather than qualifications or experience; 3) employers committed to double the number of opportunities for IBO training; and 4) employers were encouraged to provide feedback to VDAB about the success of a particular match. While the outcomes of these actions have not yet been evaluated, they appear to be promising steps towards improving the matching of long-term unemployed with vacancies.

VDAB should continue to work closely with employers and sectoral groups, as well as with adult education centres, to supply training to jobseekers in skills in high demand. The government should monitor whether the recent actions (*Pact tegen krapte op de arbeidsmarkt)* are successful at their objective to improve the matching of long-term unemployed with vacancies.

Summary of recommendations

Drawing on the evidence presented in this chapter, Flanders could consider the following recommendations to reduce skills imbalances:

- **Provide individuals with a balanced portfolio of skills.** Training providers and employers should develop and promote transversal skills that are likely to be needed across occupations in a rapidly changing economy, including literacy and numeracy, complex problem solving, and reasoning abilities. Government should continue to monitor whether its policies are having the desired effect of providing individuals with a balanced portfolio of skills which includes strong cognitive, social and emotional, as well as relevant job-specific skills. This balanced portfolio of skills promotes movement of labour to occupations and sectors most need in need of workers, and supports sustainable employment outcomes.
- **Make the education system more responsive to changing skills demand**. The government should disseminate data on wage premia by field of study instead of just by level of study, in addition to information on labour market outcomes more generally. This could entice more prospective students to choose fields relevant to

the labour market. Employers may need to improve the compensation package offered to occupations with persistent shortages, to attract more students to these fields. At the same time, government should monitor the incentives that students face to study different courses, and if needed, offer scholarships to cover tuition and living expenses for students who study in high-demand courses. Furthermore, government should ensure that education institutions face the right incentives to make course offerings responsive to changing skills demand.

- **Support assessments of skills needs and skills forecast exercises.** The government could consider committing to a long-term collaboration agreement with other regions to carry out skills forecast exercises on a regular basis. This intelligence could feed a human capital agenda to make the skills system responsive to the needs of the labour market (elaborated in Chapter 5 on governance).
- **Create bridges between career and training guidance support**. The career guidance and education guidance services should work closely together in order to refer clients to each other and to support each other's services. These services could also be offered in tandem in the same location to facilitate access. Some thought could be given to extending the use of the career guidance vouchers (*Loopbaancheques*) to education guidance. Existing digital platforms for guidance (e.g. *Onderwijskiezer* and *Mijn Loopbaan)* could be better integrated with one another to ensure that users can easily access information about both career and training trajectories. A more interactive format, where the information provided to users is based on responses to a set of questions about their skills and experience would help to customise information to users' needs. The Flanders statistical offices and relevant partners should also track the labour market outcomes of training programmes and disseminate this information on relevant digital platforms.
- **Raise awareness about skills validation (*Erkennen Van Competenties* – EVC) among employers and potential users.** Ongoing reforms promise to simplify the existing skills validation system and improve flexibility; however, survey evidence suggests that more efforts are needed to raise awareness about EVC processes among users and employers. Information about EVC processes should be centralised and available via a digital platform, such as a careers website, as in Denmark.
- **Mobilise sectoral training funds to address skills shortages.** Social partners should work with the government to promote the sharing of sectoral training funds between sectors to better facilitate workers' transitions from declining to expanding sectors, and aggregate funds to address common skills challenges, such as adopting digital technologies and addressing STEM shortages.
- **Prioritise training in skills in high demand for jobseekers, particularly those at risk of long-term unemployment.** VDAB should continue to work closely with employers and sectoral groups, as well as with adult education centres, to supply training to jobseekers in skills in high demand. The government should monitor whether the recent actions (*Pact tegen krapte op de arbeidsmarkt*) are successful at their objective to improve the matching of long-term unemployed with vacancies.

Notes

[1] O*NET (Occupational Information Network) is a competency-based occupational framework sponsored by the US Department of Labour that contains detailed information about the knowledge, skills, and ability requirements of more than 800 occupations.

[2] There are four sub-components of knowledge of engineering and technology, according to the O*NET classification: computers and electronics; engineering, mechanics and technology; design; building and construction; and mechanical.

[3] Other work-based learning programmes for the unemployed include the job-advisory traineeship (*De beroepsverkennende stage*—BVS), the activation traineeship (*De activeringsstage*), the Occupational Survival Agreement (*De beroepsinlevingsovereenkomst*—BIO), and the work experience internship (*De werkervaringsstage*).

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Chapter 4. Strengthening skills use in the workplace

This chapter presents evidence on how firms in Flanders use skills within the workplace. It highlights the factors that affect skills use as well as specific policies and practices within Flanders. Flanders can improve skills use in the workplace by taking action in four areas: 1) raising awareness of the importance of skills use in the workplace; 2) reshaping workplace practices and encouraging management training, especially among SMEs; 3) promoting career mobility within sectors and firms; and 4) encouraging human resources practices through partnerships between firms and public employment services.

Introduction

OECD countries have primarily engaged with the issue of skills from the supply side by focusing on the need to improve the number of people with post-secondary, tertiary academic and vocational qualifications. However, there is an increasing recognition that policymakers should also consider the deployment of skills in the workplace. This requires that public policy makers work closely with employers to look more comprehensively at how they use the skills of their employees (OECD/ILO, 2017[1]). Skills utilisation strategies often involve a mix of policies focusing on work organisation, job design, technology adaptation, innovation, employee-employer relations, human resource development practices and business product market strategies.

Putting skills to better use in the workplace is important for workers, firms and the broader economy. OECD research shows that workers who use their skills more frequently earn higher wages even after accounting for differences in education and skills proficiency (OECD, 2016[2]). From the point of view of firms, better skills use in the workplace is typically associated with higher labour productivity. For example, the use of reading skills explains a considerable share (26%) of the variation in labour productivity across countries participating in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), after adjusting for average proficiency scores in literacy and numeracy.

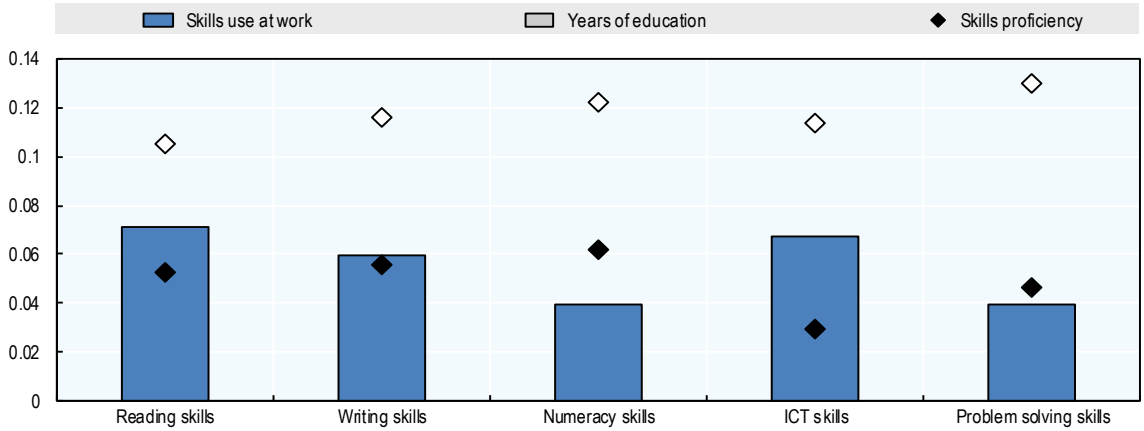
Improving use of skills in the workplace will be a key element in achieving the Vision 2050 goal of Flanders being a "region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens" (Vlaamse Regering, 2017[3]). This chapter discusses factors that affect skills use in Flanders. It provides an overview of current data pertaining to skills use and covers relevant policies and practices within Flanders. The chapter also provides international examples to highlight how OECD countries are targeting skills programmes to improve human resource and management practices. The chapter concludes with practical recommendations of how to improve skills use in Flanders.

Why strengthening skills use in the workplace matters

OECD analysis indicates that workers in Flanders who use their skills more at work tend to earn higher wages. Figure 4.1 shows the impact of skills use, education and skills proficiency on wages in Flanders. It demonstrates that better use of skills has a positive effect on wages, beyond having attained these skills. The degree to which workers in Flanders apply their reading and information and communication technology (ICT) skills at work is particularly significant in explaining higher wage returns, which is an important aspect of job quality for individual workers. The number of years of education and skills proficiency are also important factors in explaining wage variation among workers.

Figure 4.1. Wage returns to skills use, education, and skills proficiency in Flanders

Percentage change in wages associated with a standard deviation (1) increase in skills proficiency, skills use at work, and years of education (2).



1. One standard deviation corresponds to the following: 2.9 years of education; 47 points on the literacy scale; 53 points on the numeracy scale; 44 points on the problem solving in technology-rich environments scale; 1 for reading use at work; 1.2 for writing and numeracy use at work; 1.1 for ICT use at work; and 1.3 for problem solving at work.
2. Estimates from Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions with log wages as the dependent variable. Wages were converted into USD Purchasing Power Parity (PPPs) using 2012 USD PPPs for private consumption. The wage distribution was trimmed to eliminate the 1st and 99th percentiles. All values are statistically significant. The regression sample includes only employees. Other controls included in the regressions are: age, age squared, gender, whether foreign-born. Skill proficiency controls are the following: literacy for reading and writing at work, numeracy for numeracy at work and problem solving in technology-rich environments for ICT and problem solving.
Source: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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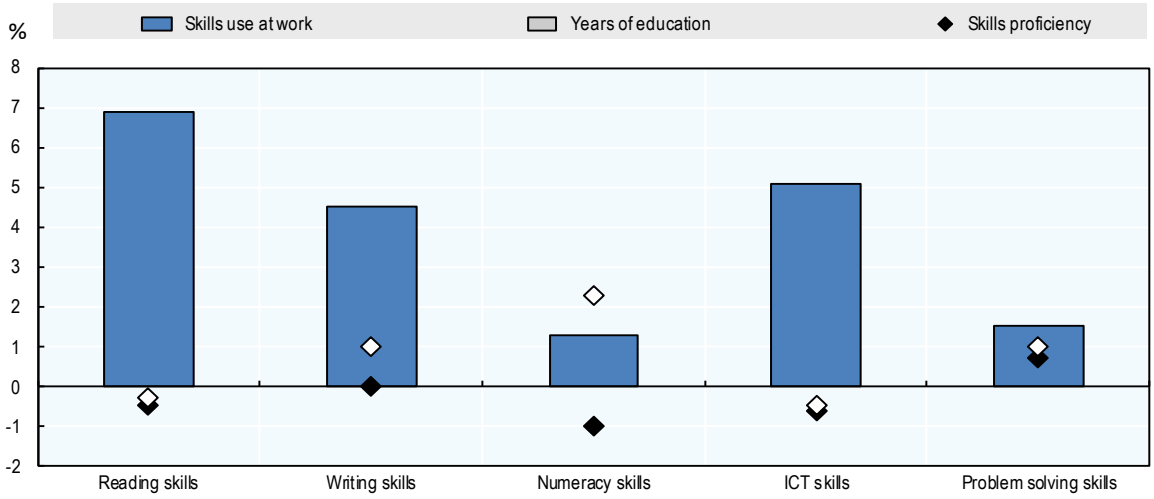
Looking at specific aspects of skills use in the workplace, higher job satisfaction is associated with the use of reading, writing, ICT, and problem-solving skills at work. Figure 4.2 shows how the relationship between skills use, years of education and skills proficiency affects job satisfaction in Flanders. In many cases, the use of these skills is more important in explaining high levels of job satisfaction than educational attainment and skills proficiency. Altogether, these findings indicate that skills use at work is an important factor contributing to improving job quality in Flanders.

Figure 4.2. How skills use, education and skills affect job satisfaction in Flanders

Percentage-point change in job satisfaction associated with a standard deviation (1) increase in skills proficiency, skills use at work and years of education (2)



1. See note 1 in Figure 4.1.
2. Marginal probability estimates from probit regressions with individuals reporting being extremely satisfied in their current job as the dependent variable. One model is estimated for each skills use variable, with years of education and the corresponding skills use and proficiency as independent variables (literacy scores for reading and writing use at work, numeracy scores for numeracy use at work and problem solving in technology-rich environment scores for ICT and problem-solving use at work). All models include controls for age, age squared, gender, foreign-born status, tenure and gross hourly wages.

Source: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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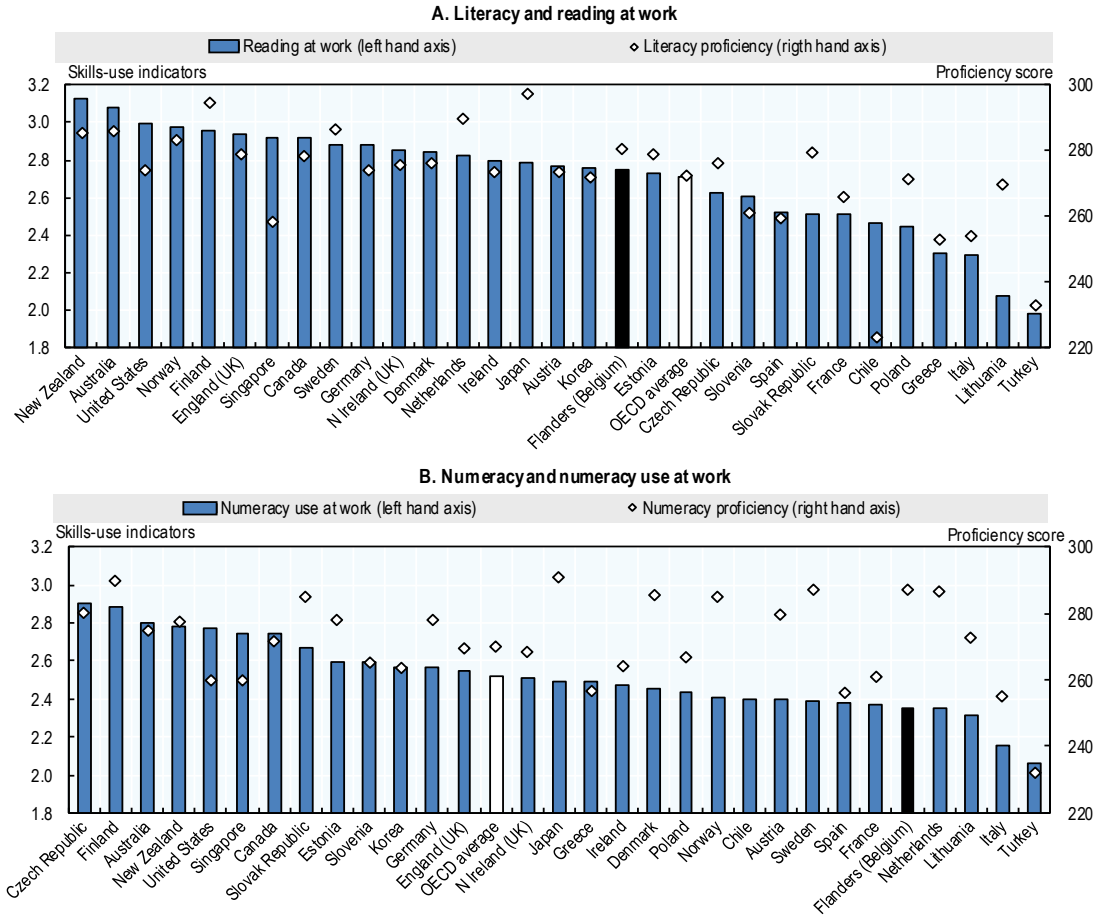
Skills use in the workplace in Flanders

Flanders tends to make good use of literacy skills but falls below the OECD average on the use of numeracy skills

Compared to other OECD countries, workers in Flanders tend to make good use of literacy skills at work; however, this is not the case for numeracy skills (Figure 4.3). On average, workers in Flanders have high literacy proficiency compared to the OECD average, and the intensity of skills use and skills proficiency is similar in relative terms. By contrast, Flemish workers use their numeracy skills less intensively than workers do in other OECD countries. The gap in numeracy proficiency and skills use among workers in Flanders is among the highest across OECD countries. This implies a potential loss in investment in developing those skills that are often a complement to the adoption of new technologies.

Figure 4.3. Skills use at work and skills proficiency of working population



Notes: For reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills, skills use indicators are scales between 1 "Never" and 5 "Every day". Problem-solving skills use refers to respondent answers to "How often are you usually confronted with more complex problems that take at least 30 minutes to find a good solution?" The set of possible answers also ranges between 1 "Never" and 5 "Every day". Proficiency scores range from 0 to 500. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

Source: OECD (2016[5]), *Skills matter: further results from the Survey of Adult Skills,* www.oecd.org/skills/skills-matter-9789264258051-en.htm.

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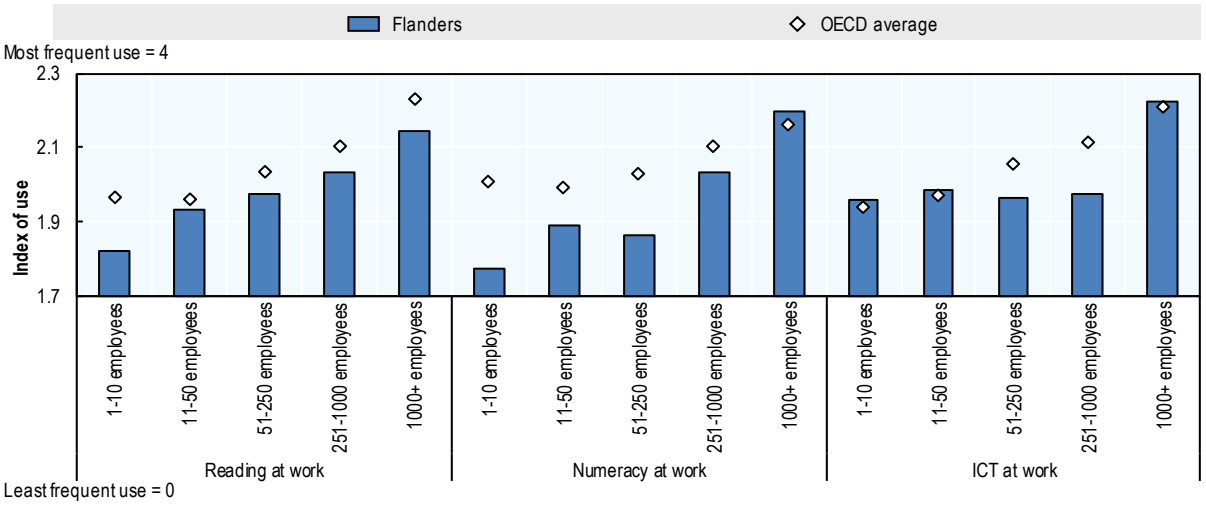
Small and medium-sized enterprises lag behind large firms in skills use

There appears to be a positive correlation between firm size and the use of information-processing skills at work in Flanders (Figure 4.4). Large firms (over 1 000 employees) in Flanders tend to make the most frequent use of workers' reading, numeracy, and ICT skills at work, which is a similar pattern to the OECD average. The use of skills in micro-firms (1 to 10 employees) is lagging behind in Flanders, especially for reading and numeracy at work. There is a stark gap between large firms and all other firms (micro, small and medium-sized) in the level of ICT skills use at work in Flanders. This is important as ICT skills are a complement to the introduction of new technology in the workplace, which helps firms to produce products and services in a more efficient manner.

Figure 4.4. Use of information-processing skills at work, by firm size



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

Source: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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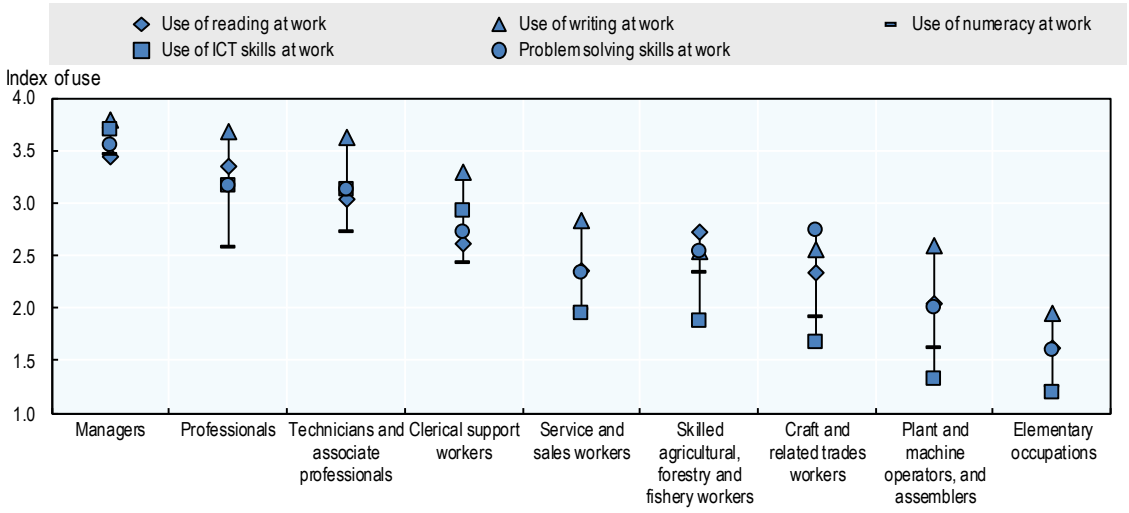
When looking at skills use within sectors, Flemish workers in low-skilled occupations tend to use their skills less than workers in occupations which typically require a higher level of education or skills. For example, skills use in Flanders tends to be low among elementary occupations and among plant and machine operators and assemblers, and higher among workers within management and professional occupations (Figure 4.5). Therefore, the use of skills in the workplace is linked to the complexity of the job. Workers with more education are more likely to apply their skills in the workplace and be less vulnerable to changes in the world of work.

Figure 4.5. Skills use at work by occupation in Flanders



Source: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

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Factors affecting skills use in the workplace

Workplaces are often seen as a "black box" for policymakers, as employer skills needs evolve quickly. Given that employers are often reluctant to engage with government on issues related to human resources and organisational management practices, targeting individual workplaces to improve the use of skills is a challenge. Various internal and external factors shape how and why skills are used in the workplace, including local economic conditions, the broader value chain and current market demand. The effective use of skills in the workplace occurs through the interplay of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including individual employers, employees, training providers, government departments, chambers of commerce, and unions (OECD/ILO, 2017[1]).

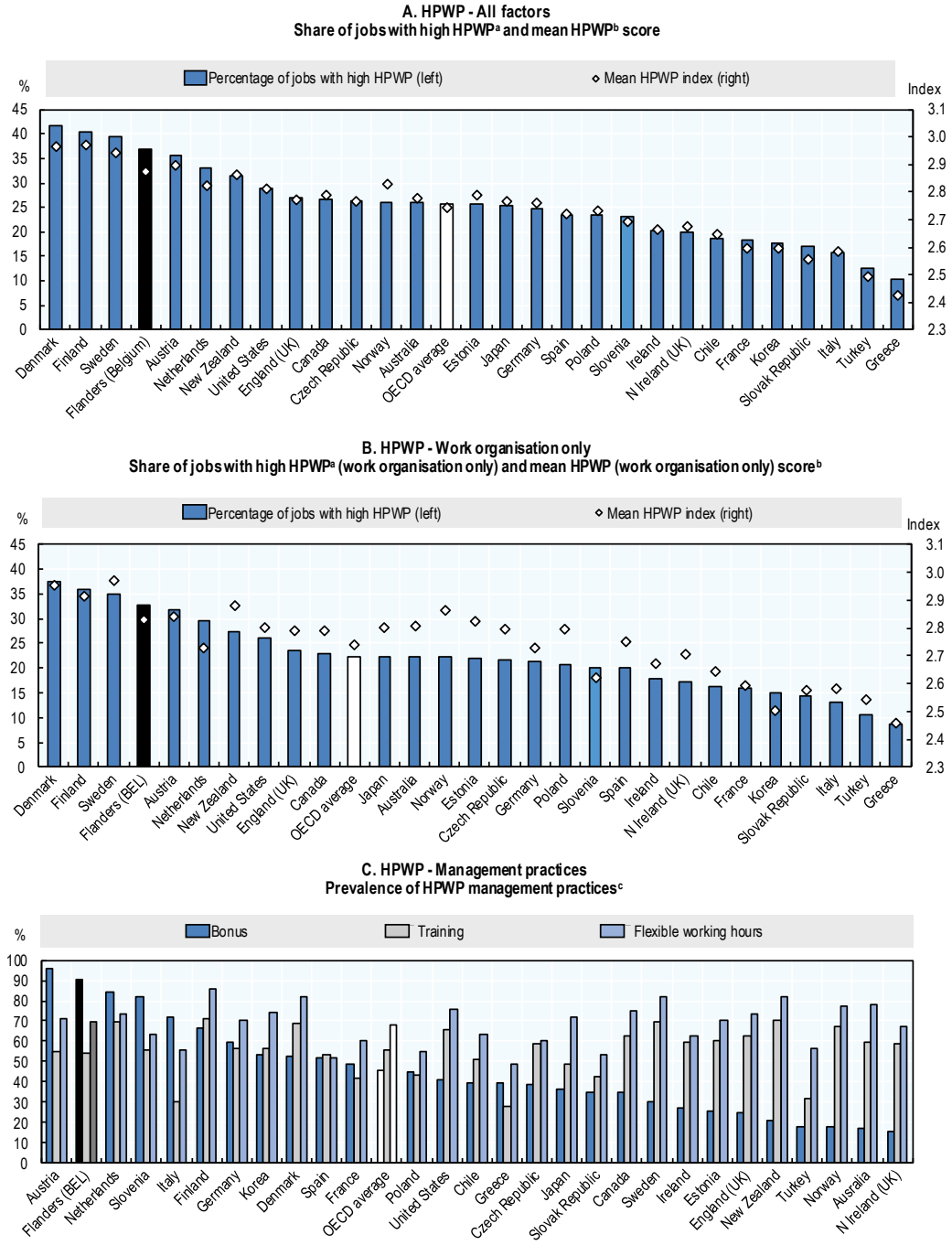
High-performance workplaces, human resources practices, and training

The organisation of work and how a job is performed can have significant implications for how skills are deployed in the workplace. Jobs that involve simple and repetitive tasks are less likely to result in strong engagement from employees, and therefore less likely to have employees fully applying their talent within the workplace. Work practices need to enhance the notions of career, participation, ownership and well-being, which are factors that make employees engaged or committed to the organisation and therefore willing to maximise the use of their skills (OECD/ILO, 2017[1]).

The higher use of skills is generally associated with high-performance work practices (HPWPs), which include employee award programmes, flexible job descriptions and working hours, regular performance appraisals, bonus pay, mentoring and leadership, and workplace training (OECD/ILO, 2017[1]; OECD, 2016[2]). For instance, workers who can choose how to sequence their tasks, plan their own activities, organise their time, and decide the speed of their own work tend to make better use of their reading, writing, numeracy, ICT and problem-solving skills at work than those who do not. When comparing Flanders to the OECD average, skills use at work is especially responsive to flexible working hours, particularly for ICT skills, followed by numeracy and problem-solving skills at work. Also the availability of training opportunities tends to be highly correlated with the frequent use of writing and ICT skills.

On average, across OECD countries, about one in four jobs apply HPWPs more than once a week. The average share of jobs adopting HPWPs is the highest in Denmark (42%), followed by Finland (41%), Sweden (40%) and Flanders (36%). The mean HPWP index of Flanders is also above the OECD average (Figure 4.6, Panel A). Flanders also performs strongly regarding the individual components of HPWPs, specifically work organisation and management practices. When considering work organisation only, about 32% of jobs in Flanders demonstrate high adoption of HPWPs, which is greater than the OECD average of 22%. There is a similar pattern for the mean HPWP index (Figure 4.6, Panel B). In terms of management practices, 90% of workers in Flanders receive bonuses, about 50% receive training, and 70% benefit from flexible working hours (Figure 4.6, Panel C). On average across OECD countries, 45% of workers receive bonuses, about 50% receive training, and 68% enjoy flexible working hours.

Figure 4.6. High-performance work practices



a. Share of workers in jobs where summary HPWP is above the top 25th percentile of the pooled distribution.
b. Average value, across jobs, of the HPWP index. The HPWP index is a sum scale of all subcomponents of HPWP (Panel A) or summing the scales of the work organisation subcomponents only (Panel B).
c. Share of workers receiving bonuses (bonus), having participated in training over the previous year (training) or enjoying flexibility in working hours (flexible working hours).
Source: OECD (2016[2]), *OECD Employment Outlook 2016*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/empl_outlook-2016-en.

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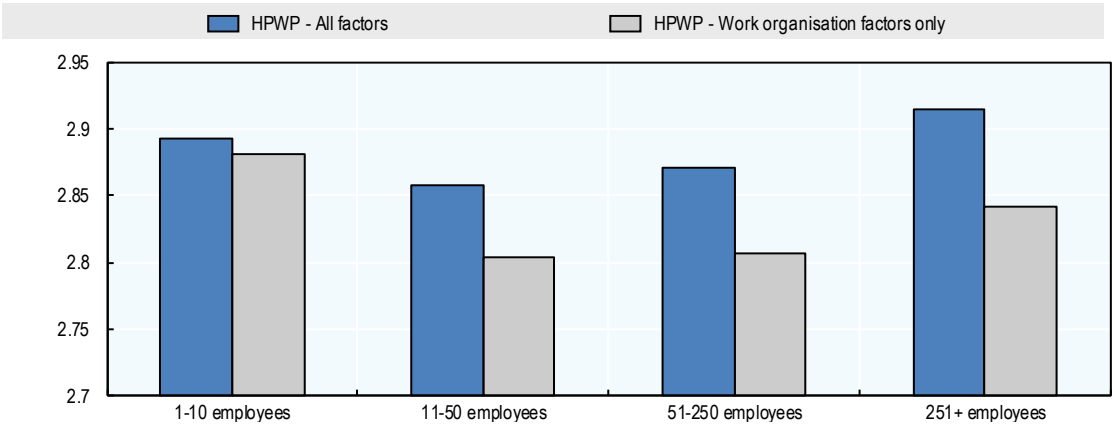
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Flanders could potentially benefit more from the increased adoption of HPWPs than micro or large-sized firms. Figure 4.7 shows the average HPWP scores by firm size and industry in Flanders, based on PIAAC data. The distribution of HPWP scores by firm size follows a U-shape, where HPWPs are most commonly implemented among large firms with more than 251 employees, followed by micro-firms (1 to 10 employees). In general, SMEs are less likely to adopt HPWP practices.

Figure 4.7. High-performance work practice by firm size in Flanders

Average HPWP scores by firm size and industry



Source: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on OECD (2017) Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015)*, www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/.

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The European Working Conditions Survey also provides insights into the adoption of HPWP. This survey provides a comprehensive overview of working conditions in Europe, enabling cross-country comparisons and long-term monitoring of activities related to skills use, including work organisation, learning and training, and employee autonomy. This survey considers workplace trends at the firm level. Some caution should be exercised when interpreting this data as it only captures Belgium and does not disaggregate to regional results for Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital. When examining issues related to skills use in the workplace, indicators reporting on management styles and employee access to training opportunities provide particularly relevant insights into Belgium's performance. These factors relate to high-performance work practices through firm and well-being performance (Box 4.1).

Results from the latest survey in 2015 show that, although generally performing in line with the European Union (EU) average, Belgium has yet to catch up with high performers in some relevant areas. For example, 57% of Belgian workers report always being involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of the department or organisation where they work (Figure 4.8). While this result is above the EU average (49%), it lags behind leading performers, such as the Netherlands (64%) and France (60%) (Eurofound, 2018[6]).

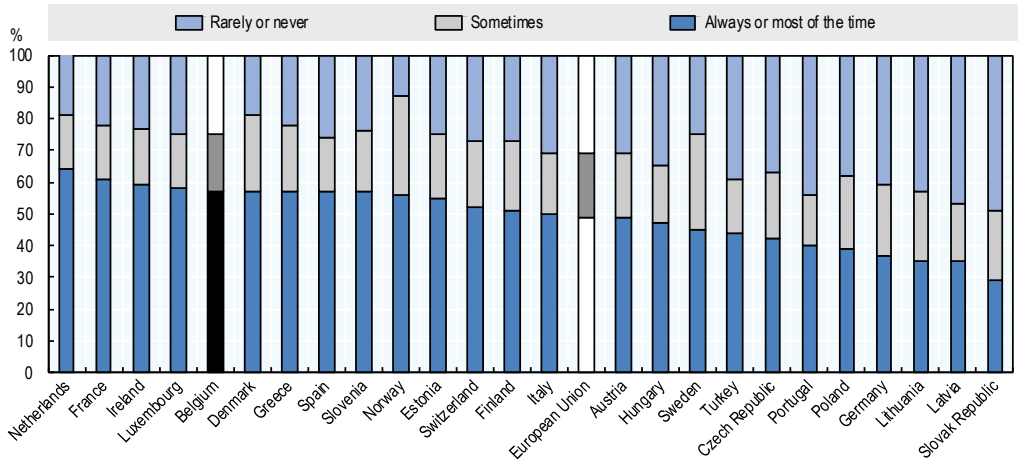
Box 4.1. The European Company Survey: five categories for human resources management practices in firms

1. ***Interactive and involving***: joint decision making on daily tasks, moderately structured internal organisation, limited investment in human resources management (HRM) but extensive practices for direct participation.
2. ***Systematic and involving***: top-down decision making on daily tasks, highly structured internal organisation, high investment in HRM, extensive practices for direct and indirect participation.
3. ***Externally oriented***: high levels of collaboration and outsourcing, top-down decision making on daily tasks, moderately structured internal organisation, moderate investment in HRM, and little direct and indirect participation.
4. ***Top-down and internally oriented***: top-down decision making on daily tasks, little collaboration and outsourcing, highly structured internal organisation, moderate investment in HRM, and moderately supported direct and indirect participation.
5. ***Passive management:*** top-down decision making on daily tasks, moderately structured internal organisation, hardly any HRM, and little direct and indirect participation.

Source: Eurofound (2018[6]), *Third European Company Survey – Overview report: Workplace practices – patterns, performance and well-being*, www.eurofound.europa.eu/nl/publications/report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/third-european-company-survey-overview-report-workplace-practices-patterns-performance-and-well.

Figure 4.8. Involvement of employees in the improvement of the work, 2015

Distribution of answers to question 'Are you involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of the department or organisation?', OECD-EU countries



Note: Due to unavailability of data for Flanders, data for Belgium has been used in this chart.
Source: Eurofound (2015[7]), *Third European Company Survey – Overview report: Workplace practices – Patterns, performance and well-being*, www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/third-european-company-survey-overview-report-workplace-practices-patterns-performance-and-well.

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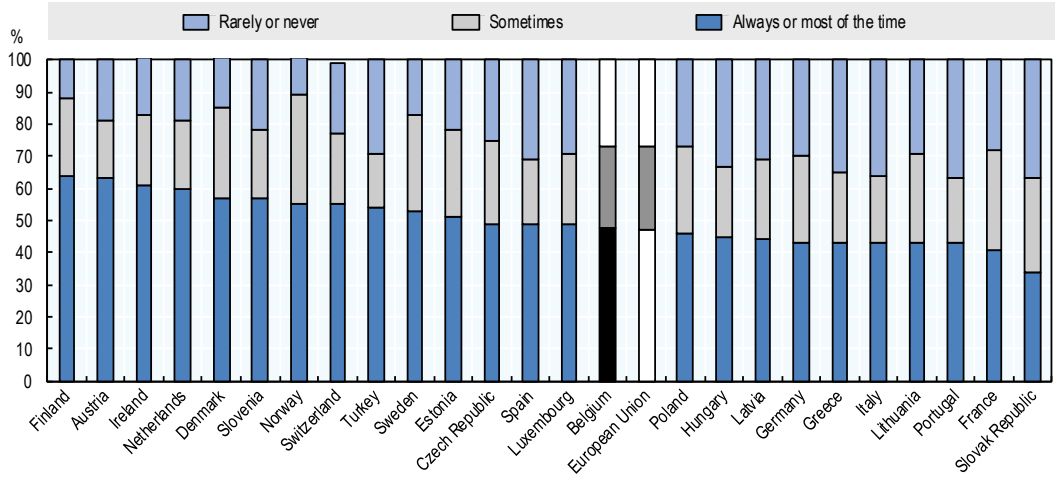
Workers in Belgium are also less likely to influence decisions that are important for their work: only 48% of workers noted that they can influence such decisions, substantially less than Finland (64%), the Netherlands (60%), Denmark (57%) and Norway (55%) (Figure 4.9) (Eurofound, 2018[6]).

Figure 4.9. Influence of employees on their work, 2015

Distribution of answers to question 'Can you influence decisions that are important for your work?' OECD-EU countries



Note: Due to unavailability of data for Flanders, data for Belgium has been used in this chart.
Source: Eurofound (2015[7]), *Third European Company Survey – Overview report: Workplace practices – Patterns, performance and well-being*, www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/third-european-company-survey-overview-report-workplace-practices-patterns-performance-and-well.

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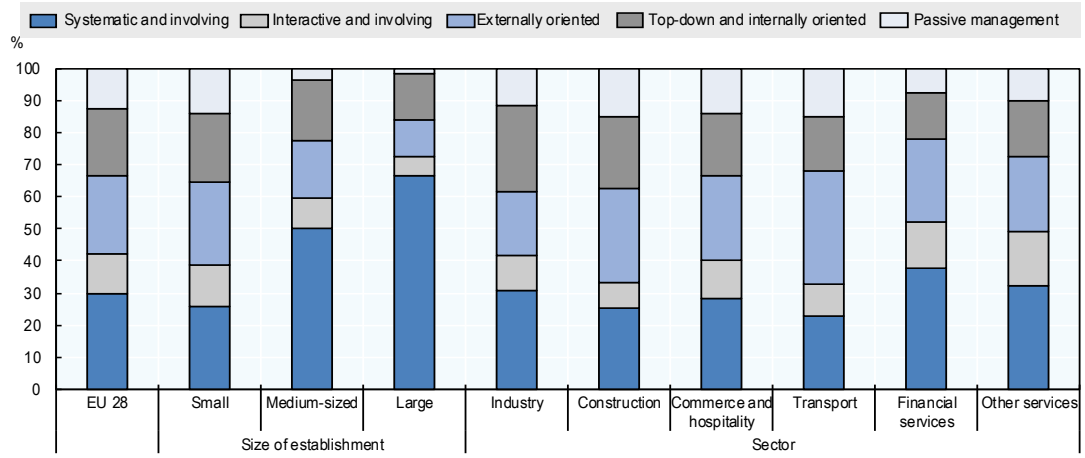
Firms with the best outcomes in terms of management practices are classified as "systematic and involving" and "interactive and involving", with the latter having the best performance in terms of workplace well-being. Looking across the EU28, these types of workplaces are more often present in large firms (defined by the survey as 250 workers or more) than SMEs (Figure 4.10) Around 55% of firms across the EU28 have these internal management characteristics and are therefore more likely to display high-performance work practices. The Belgian performance on this indicator is around the EU28 average, with about 29% of firms identified as systematic and involving, and 10% interactive and involving (Figure 4.11). Belgium trails behind leading countries, such as Sweden, Austria and Denmark, which tend to have a higher percentage of firms with these types of management practices.

The European Company Survey also considers other aspects of work organisation practices, such as collaboration and outsourcing arrangements of a firm, internal organisation and information management as well as decision making in daily tasks. Looking at these aspects, Belgium falls behind the European average when it comes to the percentage of firms that are "highly structured" within their management organisation. About 50% of Belgian firms are highly structured compared to 70% in Sweden, 65% in Austria, and about 60% in the Netherlands. Highly structured firms tend to be characterised by high levels of teamwork and enjoy greater employee well-being in the workplace.

Figure 4.10. Distribution of groups of establishments by structural characteristics, 2013

Percentage, EU countries



Source: Eurofound (2015[7]), *Third European Company Survey – Overview report: Workplace practices – Patterns, performance and well-being*, www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/third-european-company-survey-overview-report-workplace-practices-patterns-performance-and-well.

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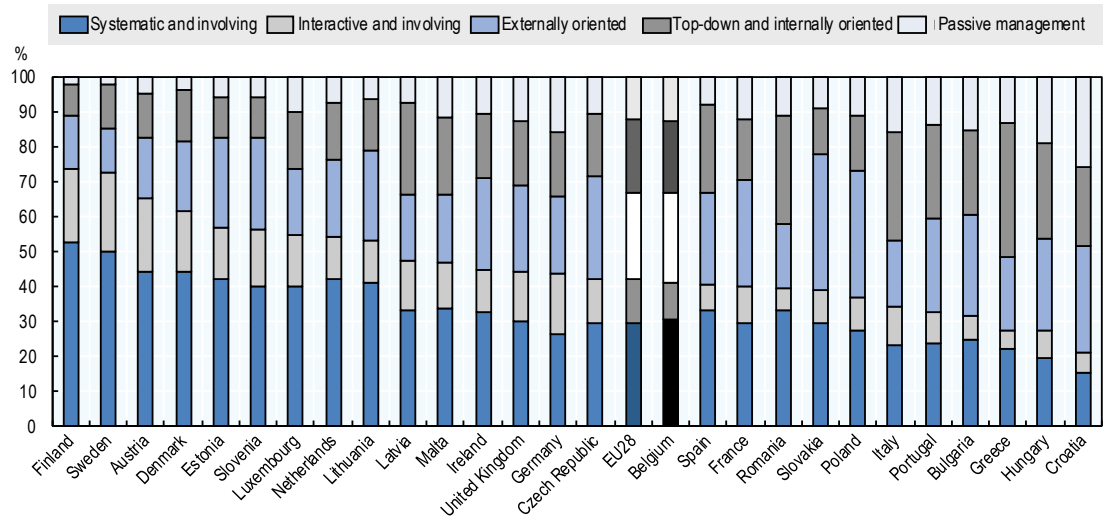
Figure 4.11. Type of establishment, by country 2013

Percentage, selected EU countries



Note: Due to unavailability of data for Flanders, data for Belgium has been used in this chart.
Source: Eurofound (2015[7]), *Third European Company Survey – Overview report: Workplace practices – Patterns, performance and well-being*, www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/third-european-company-survey-overview-report-workplace-practices-patterns-performance-and-well.

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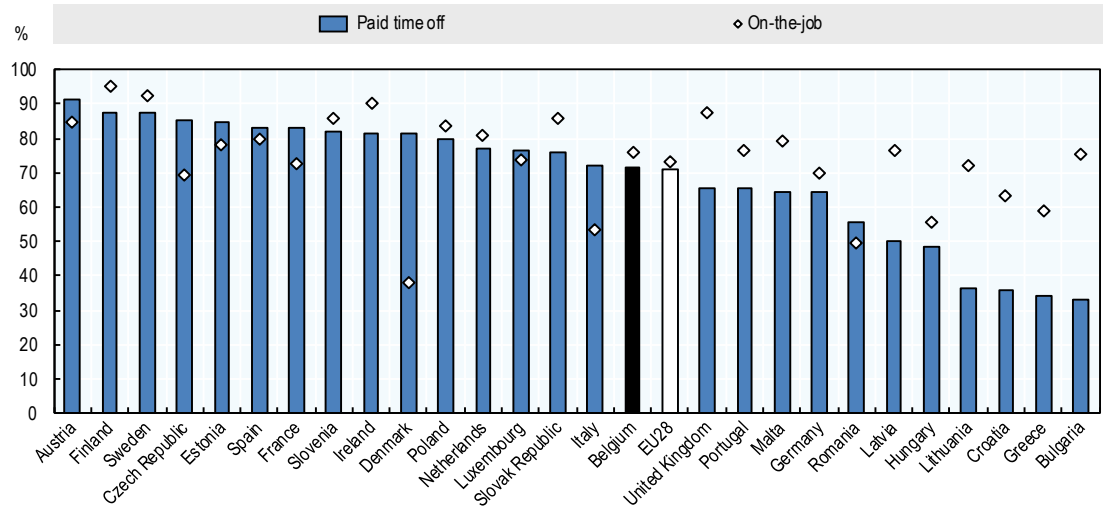
Belgium also falls around the EU average when it comes to the percentage of firms characterised as "joint establishments." About 38% of Belgium firms are considered "joint establishments," which is below leading EU countries, such as Finland (59%), Sweden (58%), and Denmark (55%). "Joint establishments" tend to provide employees more autonomy in making decisions in the workplace relative to "top-down" management structures where employees have limited influence on how they perform their job.

Lastly, Belgium also falls around the EU average in terms of the percentage of firms considered as "extensive and supported" where employees tend to be involved in joint decisions with management around organisational change. About 57% of firms in Belgium are considered "extensive and supported" which falls behind Sweden (80%), Denmark (70%), and Finland (73%).

Conflicts between management and employees often make it difficult to introduce programmes that foster better use of skills in the workplace. Skills use is also often positively influenced by reward systems that support learning and provide incentives for skills upgrading, as well as team-based activities to support mutual learning across an organisation (OECD/ILO, 2017[1]). About 70% of firms in Belgium offer paid time off to their employees for training, which is around the EU average, but falls behind leading European countries, such as Austria, Finland, and Sweden. Around 75% of firms offer on-the-job training, which is similar to the EU average.

Figure 4.12. Paid time off for training and on-the-job training, provided to at least some employees, by country (%), 2013

Percentage, selected EU countries



Note: Due to unavailability of data for Flanders, data for Belgium has been used in this chart.
Source: Eurofound (2015[7]), *Third European Company Survey – Overview report: Workplace practices – Patterns, performance and well-being*, www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2015/working-conditions-industrial-relations/third-european-company-survey-overview-report-workplace-practices-patterns-performance-and-well.

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Signs of improvement in adoption of HPWP

While the European Working Conditions Survey and European Company Survey show mixed results for Belgium, there is recent research looking more specifically at Flanders which shows large improvements in providing access to learning opportunities at work for employees. Approximately half of enterprises with more than 10 employees now provides training to at least half of their employees, compared with 40% in 2014. (Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, 2018[8]). In 2016, 82.5% of employees indicated having sufficient learning opportunities in the workplace, which is 5% higher than in 2004 (Bourdeaud'hui, Janssens and Vanderhaeghe, 2017[9]). Progress has been made for both men and women, in all age groups (excluding the oldest generations), and in most sectors and professions.

However, despite this positive trend, there are still many employees who are not positive about their learning opportunities at work – 17.5% reported that there are not enough training opportunities offered, and 6.1% reported a serious shortage of training opportunities. Moreover, there are still large differences between learning opportunities among employees. For instance, 34.5% of low-educated employees has insufficient opportunities in the workplace, compared with only 8.6% of the high-educated employees. This is problematic, since having insufficient learning opportunities is associated with less job security and less job satisfaction for the employee.

There is evidence of improvement in other aspects of HPWP as well. For example, teamwork has become more prevalent within firms – in 2018, more than 50% of surveyed employees reported being involved in teamwork in 1 in 4 enterprises with more than 10 employees, compared with less than 1 in 5 enterprises in 2011 (Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, 2018[8]). While this is a positive trend, the share of Flemish firms offering job and/or task rotation for a majority of their employees remained stable at 1 in 10 firms.

Policies and practices for better using skills in Flanders

Improving the use of skills is possible through relevant policies that engage employers on aspects related to HPWPs and skills use. This section analyses current programmes in Flanders based on input from the stakeholder workshops, bilateral meetings, site visits and OECD analysis of international and national data sources and literature.

During the two OECD Skills Strategy workshops in May and September 2018, stakeholders in the groups assigned to the topic of skills use discussed a wide range of issues and proposed recommendations. The OECD has carefully considered each of the perspectives and recommendations and incorporated them as much as possible in the following section. However, due to the large number of ideas, and in order to go in-depth and provide concrete and elaborated recommendations, not all could be featured here. An overview of all the ideas that Flanders may wish to consider in the future can be found in Annex A. Some ideas are integrated into other chapters rather than in this chapter.

Raising awareness about the importance of skills use policies, including high-performance work practices

The Flemish government's strategic outlook for the future is called Vision 2050. Vision 2050 is designed as a forward looking strategy that outlines the essential economic and social changes that will challenge government in the future, and emphasises the importance of knowledge and talent as driving forces for innovation and inclusive growth (Vlaamse Regering, 2017[3]). Vision 2050 states that no talent should remain unused in

Flemish society, and that Flanders will stimulate the development of competences and talent by responding to the demand for new skills in a changing economy and society. Improving the effective use of skills is therefore part of the long-term vision in Flanders, but more can be done to translate this vision into skills use policies, including high-performance work practices. Flanders could support this by raising awareness about the importance of these policies.

There are a limited number of organisations within Flanders with a focus on encouraging aspects of HPWPs. The best example is Flanders Synergy which helps firms evolve through workplace restructuring, workplace learning and innovation (OECD, 2015[10]). Its objective is to help organisations create more attractive (workable) jobs and to become more agile, innovative and responsive to market needs. To this end, Flanders' Synergy conducts scientific research and helps disseminate practical examples and success stories through networking, training, and new business models and tools. Some services for employers are subsidised by the Flemish government. Flanders Synergy has an advisory board that includes academic researchers and social partners, including unions, enterprises and consultants.

Another example of an organisation that contributes to a stronger knowledge base for the use of skills, is the Foundation Innovation and Labour (StIA, SERV), which carries out research commissioned by and for the Flemish social partners. The Foundation Innovation and Labour works around three thematic clusters: labour market and innovation in companies and organisations, workable work and longer careers, entrepreneurship, economy and innovation policy.

The SERV also helps to raise awareness about good work practices by actively supporting the adoption of 'workable work', including by considering it one of the targets for 2030 (SERV, 2016[11]). The concept covers topics directly or indirectly related to the intensive use of skills, including learning and motivation in the workplace, work stress, and the work-life balance of employees. The workability monitor 2016 (*Vlaamse werkbaarheidsmonitor 2016*) showed a downward trend in an aggregate 'workability indicator' (covering mental fatigue, well-being, learning opportunities, and work-life balance of employees) (Bourdeaud'hui, Janssens and Vanderhaeghe, 2017[9]). Between 2013 and 2016, the share of good quality jobs dropped, and the Action plan for workable work (*Actieplan werkbaar werk*) was introduced as a response to these results (SERV, 2017[12]). The Flemish partners, in cooperation with the Flemish government, created a plan to support employees, employers, entrepreneurs and organisations with the adoption of workable work practices. A number of concrete goals are included, including continuing to build a knowledge base, sharing information, motivating stakeholders, and stimulating action. A good example of providing information and support to employers about workable work practices is an extensive Flemish website on the topic (SERV, 2018[13]). It provides an overview of the concept of workable work, and supports employers to implement workable work practices by listing good practices, various tools and general information.

Going forward, there is a clear opportunity for the government in Flanders to engage more closely with firms to raise awareness about HPWPs. The government can play an important convening role to generate dialogue about why skills use is important and best practices within Flanders. There are also a number of influential stakeholders at the regional level, which could shape dialogue related to HPWPs and other aspects of skills use, such as the SERV and the VESOC. These regional organisations could be leveraged to examine how the government can work closer with firms on skills use policies.

Box 4.2. International examples to foster government leadership around job design and work organisation

One of the main barriers to improving the use of skills in the workplace is the low level of awareness among employers and other social partners about what can be done to stimulate better work organisation practices.

Australia: There are a number of government-led active efforts in Australia that aim to build the evidence base for why action is needed, while also sharing best practices about successful programmes. For example, the Centre for Workplace Leadership was established in 2013 and is dedicated to excellence in leadership research, improving the quality of leadership in Australian workplaces, and developing individual leaders. The centre aims to bridge the gap between research insights and leadership practices around work organisation and job design. It offers a number of customised programmes to help organisations engage employees and develop organisational leadership skills.

Finland: The Finnish National Workplace Development Programme, launched in 1995, aims to boost productivity and the quality of working life by developing and making full use of staff know-how and innovative power in Finnish workplaces. The programme was set up as a joint initiative between the Ministry of Labour and representatives of trade unions, employer confederations and entrepreneur organisations. The programme supports workplace-initiated projects, increases international exchange, and also aims to increase research on improving the quality of work.

Sources: OECD/ILO (2017[11]), *Better Use of Skills in the Workplace: Why it matters for Productivity and Local Jobs*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en; Centre For Workplace Leadership (2018[14]), *Centre For Workplace Leadership About*, https://fbe.unimelb.edu.au/cwl/about.

Encouraging employers to reshape workplace practices and offer management training

In some cases, employers can take a leadership role and work directly with their employees to look at job design within their firm or organisation. These is some positive evidence of firms taking more leadership on ensuring the firm is a place for learning. For example, research of the Foundation Innovation and Labour (ICO2020) shows that there is improvement in the adoption of strategic skills policies within firms in Flanders (Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, 2018[8]). As a policy goal for Pact2020 with broad qualitative targets, 15 criteria have been identified for strategic skills policies, varying from the use of competency profiles to career planning, teamwork and job rotation strategies. 55% of firms with 10 or more employees met more than half of these criteria selected to measure the adoption of strategic skills policies in 2018. This share is much higher than in 2014 (40.3%) and 2011 (37.6%). The proportion of companies adopting these practices has increased sharply in recent years in all sectors and both in small and large enterprises (Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, 2018[8]). However, Flanders should not be complacent with the improvements, and the Flemish Government should continue encouraging employers to adopt even more of these policies and practices.

A good example of a firm reshaping its workplace practices is *De Oever*, a youth welfare agency based in Hasselt that provides intensive and temporary support for families facing complex social problems (De Oever, 2018[15]). Since 2014, the agency has implemented a number of internal reforms to provide employees with the autonomy to manage clients'

files. The point of the reform was to reorganise internal human resources management processes to give front-line staff more discretion in how they manage their tasks when performing their job. Before the reform, middle managers spent much of their day dealing with administrative tasks; whereas after the reform, they are more focused on coaching front-line staff and sharing knowledge within the company about best practices in managing children and families with complex problems. *De Oever* worked with a local consulting firm who advised on the most appropriate training programmes to help staff define a new role focused on client care, as well as how their skills could more effectively contribute to the agency's strategic objectives. The company was also instrumental in transforming team leaders into coaches, and worked with each manager to perform a skills assessment to identify knowledge gaps. To measure the effectiveness of the reforms, *De Oever* interviewed clients about their satisfaction with their services, and preliminary outcomes show that clients became more satisfied.

To foster stronger employer leadership in stimulating HPWPs in Flanders, more needs to be done to engage chambers of commerce and industry associations. Government can play an important role in coordinating networks among employers so that they can share information on their management practices and think more critically about embedding HPWPs practices into their company culture. In some cases, direct funding support from the government can be a catalyst in driving change among employers.

Box 4.3. International examples of employer-led models to stimulate skills use in the workplace

There is evidence that managers who participate in industry or cross-industry associations are more likely to adopt high-performance work practices or employee training programmes. In this regard, sector-based strategies are often more successful in terms of grouping employers based on similar business practices and skill needs. For example, the healthcare sector is a natural target for skills utilisation policies given that it is often a sector with high turnover and lower wages.

Australia: A National Disability Insurance Scheme was introduced that requires healthcare service providers to adopt new business models and workforce management practices with the goal of moving to a more client-centred care model.

Korea: Larger firms can encourage the better use of skills through their supply chain management practices. The POSCO HRD Consortium addresses company human resources management issues by involving change management, whereby POSCO's HRD Consortium provides leadership education to managers on developing a common company vision in partnership with employees. POSCO has a large number of suppliers and outsourcing contractors that deliver goods and services for the production of steel in Korea. These companies, which are mostly SMEs, are located in the supply chain of POSCO and are not direct competitors. Through the POSCO HRD Consortium, SMEs are encouraged to increase investments in their own education and training programmes. POSCO partners with local vocational education and training providers to provide 130 courses in technology, safety, information technology, and ethics, including an E-MBA curriculum for executive members.

Singapore: More direct interventions involve funding or other types of support for employers to reshape their workplace practices or move towards higher value added production. The Singapore Enterprise Training Support (ETS) scheme seeks to make

skills development relevant to workplace performance and link skills acquisition and utilisation to retention. The scheme provides direct grants to employers, which can cover the costs of structured training programmes or develop training plans where a company has no previous history of workplace training.

Sources: OECD/ILO (2017[11]), *Better Use of Skills in the Workplace: Why it matters for Productivity and Local Jobs*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en; Erickson and Jacoby (2003[16]), *The effect of Employer Networks on Workplace Innovation and Training,* http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en 10.0.4.153/001979390305600201.

Recognising employers that create flexible career mobility opportunities

Career mobility programmes can play an important role in fostering employee engagement, motivation and better alignment of the workers' skills with job tasks. Consequently, flexible career mobility opportunities could contribute to the more effective use of skills at work, and the Flemish Government should support the adoption of these programmes.

Bringing together firms on a sectoral or regional basis can stimulate more strategic thinking about human resource practices while also creating new career mobility opportunities for individuals. These are some examples of practice in this area in Flanders. Through contracts with sectoral bodies, often sectoral training funds, the Flemish government funds sector consultants who assist the development of adult learning programmes and human resources practices with the construction, retails, and logistics sectors. The stakeholders in the sector then work towards the common goals of "increasing diversity, synchronisation of education and labour, and lifelong learning" (Inspires, 2016[17]). The covenants also enable sectors to receive funding from the Flemish government to hire sectoral consultants to assist with the implementation of these plans, on the condition that the industry supplies the Flemish government with proof of annual monitoring and evaluation (Inspires, 2016[17]). These sector covenants also provide valuable training opportunities to low-skilled employees to undertake workplace training and apply their new skills in the workplace to foster more career mobility opportunities.

Another programme within Flanders that promotes career mobility opportunities is Project 3030, which is focused on the care sector (Vlaamse Social-Profitfondsen, 2018[18]). This initiative started in 2009 as a partnership between the association of services for family care and unions to improve the quality of jobs within the family care sector. The programme was introduced to respond to unfilled vacancies within the sector, while also offering career mobility opportunities to those working in entry-level positions. Funding for the project is provided through the Social Maribel Fund. Training is also provided on a modular basis to enable entry-level staff to progress within the sector to higher level positions. It includes additional modules to enable care workers to become nursing assistants and is provided to eligible employees within the sector to give them a chance to upgrade their qualification and improve their pay and working conditions.

Employers can take a leadership role in stimulating career mobility opportunities while also better linking their remuneration systems to workplace tasks. A good example in Flanders comes from Marine Harvest Pieters, which is one of the largest companies in the food services sector operating in more than 20 countries and employing more than 13 000 people. In 2010, Marine Harvest Pieters changed its remuneration model to reward skills as well as years of experience. To determine the remuneration of each employee, tasks

are identified within each position and valued with a weight. The tasks are categorised in either complexity or strenuous labour clusters. Marine Harvest Pieters also recognises the need for lifelong learning even while employed, and has created training programmes to suit the needs and interests of employees. Marine Harvest Pieters pays for a variety of courses to help workers learn new hobbies and personal skills with the goal of helping employees move from one competency cluster to another. The courses can be followed outside of normal working hours and/or during employees' free time. The classes also promote networking between colleagues, which fosters better teamwork and collaboration.

While these are good Flemish examples, still more needs to be done in Flanders to encourage firms to undertake similar internal company reforms. Studies show for instance that in 2018, almost half of the Flemish companies and organisations use competency profiles (Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, 2018[8]), but there are large differences between different types of companies and organisations in terms of number of employees (more use in larger organisations) and sectors (more use in service and knowledge-based sectors of the economy) (Notebaert, 2015[19]). Moreover, career development planning for employees are only present in one in ten companies and organisations, and almost half of companies and organisations do not evaluate performance of employees. In general, companies and organisations that implement these types of competency and career planning practices tend to be more innovative and have higher revenue, and the Flemish Government should continue to support companies and organisations to adopt these practices. The Government could for instance play a role by recognising employers with good human resources management practices that support career mobility opportunities (Box 4.4).

Box 4.4. Recognising good employers that provide quality jobs and mobility opportunities

United States: The Hitachi Foundation's Good Companies @Work programme recognises "Pioneer Employers" that provide quality jobs and mobility opportunities to the middle-class for their lower-wage workers, while remaining competitive in their industries.

Australia: The Australian Training Awards recognise small enterprises that have achieved excellence in the provision of nationally recognised training to employees that have improved productivity and profitability.

Scotland: Employers can sign up for the Scottish Business Pledge if they pay a living wage and meet the requirements of at least two other pledge elements (and make a commitment to meeting the other requirements over the long term). These requirements include not using exploitative zero hours contracts; supporting progressive workforce engagement; investing in youth; making progress on diversity and gender balance; committing to an innovation programme; pursuing international business opportunities; and playing an active role in the community. As of April 2016, almost 250 businesses had signed up for the pledge, accounting for over 57 000 Scottish jobs.

Source: OECD/ILO (2017[11])*Better Using Skills in the Workplace: Why it Matters for Productivity and Jobs*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en.

Encouraging better human resources management practices to address labour market shortages

Both skills shortages and unfilled vacancies indicate that there is sufficient room in the labour market to improve the use of the skills. When employers report skills shortages or vacancies, it is important for policy makers to work closer with these firms to look at the type of jobs that are going unfilled. This requires public policy to move beyond the traditional approach of "firefighting" to fill skills shortages and to look more fundamentally at the design of a job within a firm. In this area, public employment services can play an important role given the close relationship they often have in working with employers to meet their human resources needs.

In Flanders, VDAB (the public employment service) offers a number of activation and employment facilitation programmes to both jobseekers and employers. Relative to other OECD countries, VDAB's employer engagement services are comprehensive, with the ability to advise companies on recruitment and human resourcing needs. An interesting initiative within VDAB is the establishment of the Competent system (Box 4.5). This example of a close relationship with employers on job vacancies demonstrates the detailed insights that VDAB has regarding company human resources practices

Box 4.5. VDAB Competent System

The objective of the Competent system is to help employers advertise vacancies that are systematically detailed and sufficiently comprehensive, and match these vacancies to jobseekers with equally comprehensive competency profiles to generate closer and more accurate matches in VDAB's systems. Through VDAB's system, employers need to register to be able to post vacancies and to collaborate with VDAB to access the jobseeker profiles. Employers who publish a vacancy also record, in detail, the competences required for the vacancy on offer. To aid this process, the system provides a list of competences generally associated with the profession, against which an employer registers the vacancy. Employers can also add other competences for a specific vacancy to create accurate job listings.

Source: European Commission (2017[20]), *Summary Report on VDAB Innovation Lab*, http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=17369&langId=en.

While some work is taking place, more effort could still be made to identify employers that need targeted human resources planning support. Given that this type of work goes beyond the traditional role of public employment services which are mostly concerned with filling job vacancies, it would be important for the VDAB performance management system to recognise and reward local offices who are working directly with employers to look at work organisation and job design practices. VDAB could work closer with the local chambers of commerce across different cities in Flanders to help firms think more critical about the design of jobs and how better management practices could help fill potential recruitment challenges and skills shortages.

Box 4.6. Employment services in Quebec, Canada work actively with employers on human resources practices

In **Quebec**, **Canada**, Employment Quebec (*Emploi-Québec*) has been focusing on working with employers on human resource management practices under the assumption that employers who have good human resource practices tend to have better operations with more stable and productive employees. In the town of Mauricie, the employment office has recently made efforts to assist employers to attract and retain workers by developing guides and human resource management support tools. The local chamber of commerce is also working alongside the employment office to increase exposure of management practices to their members and identify firms that are having recruitment difficulties potentially due to the poor quality of jobs on offer.

Source: (OECD, 2014[21]) *OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation: Employment and Skills Strategies in Canada*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264209374-en.

Summary and recommendations

Drawing on the evidence presented in this chapter, Flanders could consider the following recommendations to strengthen skills use in the workplace:

- **Raise awareness of the importance of skills use in the workplace.** The Flanders government with social partners should consider how to engage more firms on skills use policies and disseminate information about good practices and innovation within firms. The goal of actions in this area would be to develop new partnerships with employers to promote high-performance work practices and encourage managers to think more critically about work organisation.
- **Examine incentives to employers to reshape their workplace and encourage more management training, especially among SMEs**. In many cases, employers can take a leadership role to develop management training plans, which encourage greater employee autonomy, work organisation, as well as job rotation strategies. The chambers of commerce can be particularly important in networking firms, especially SMEs, to share good management practices. In some cases, direct government funding can provide incentives for firms to reshape their workplaces and embed better management practices within the firm. This would be especially important for firms that have not traditionally participated in training programmes previously.
- **Promote flexible career mobility opportunities within sectors and firms.** Career mobility programmes can play an important role in fostering employee engagement, increased productivity, and teamwork. The goal of this action by firms, unions and education providers would be to encourage firms to experiment with career mobility programmes that allow workers to test new roles within a firm as well as to enable individuals to take on different tasks at another firm. This also includes looking at how pay and remuneration systems can be adjusted to reward greater employee autonomy in the workplace.
- **Examine company working conditions and human resource practices to help fill job vacancies and address potential skills shortages**. While employer leadership is critical for stimulating high-performance work practices,

employment services can also play an active role in working closer with firms to develop human resources management tools. Public employment services can work alongside the chambers of commerce in Flanders to identify companies having recruitment difficulties because of the type of jobs on offer while also networking firms to share best practices about human resources management.

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Chapter 5. Strengthening the governance of adult learning

The chapter presents diagnostic evidence on the governance of adult learning in Flanders, the factors that affect the governance of adult learning and specific policies and practices to strengthen the governance of adult learning. Flanders can strengthen its adult learning governance by taking action in four areas. These are: 1) developing a long-term vision for adult learning; 2) promoting a whole-of-government approach to adult learning; 3) using networks to promote collaboration between government and stakeholders at the local level; 4) consolidating information sources on adult learning for greater transparency.

Introduction

Why the governance of adult learning matters

Governance refers to the processes by which responsibilities are distributed and decisions made and implemented through collaboration[1] between national government, sub-national governments and stakeholders (OECD, Forthcoming[1]). Governance is particularly important for the effective functioning of the adult learning system, which concerns a number of bodies within the public administration whose policies and actions are inherently intertwined and require co-ordination at both the vertical (across ministries) and horizontal (across levels of government) dimensions. Strong governance helps to minimise policy gaps and overlaps, improve the likelihood of successful policy implantation, leverage the strengths of all involved bodies and stakeholders, and generate policy complementarities. Without the effective governance of adult learning there is a risk of wasting collective efforts and investments, and, most importantly, not serving well the needs of all adult learners.

The governance of adult learning in Flanders is complex. While the federal government is responsible for the legal framework for certain kinds of adult learning policies, the regional and community level, which in Flanders is represented by the same government, is responsible for most labour market and education policies. Several departments in the Flemish government have some responsibility for the planning and delivery of adult learning, including: Education and Training; Work and Social Economy; Culture, Youth & Media, and Sports; and Finance and Budget. In addition to government departments and agencies, many stakeholders have an important influence on participation and success in adult learning. This includes sectoral training providers, employers, unions and academics. It is also critical to engage the adult learners themselves and place them at the centre of policy design.

The governance of adult learning is a priority for Flanders**.** The Flemish government made clear in their Vision 2050 strategy that a whole-of-government approach involving all relevant ministries and levels of government, as well as the engagement of social partners, will be key in making this vision a reality. Adult learning is part of one of the seven critical transitions featured in this document (Vlaamse Regering, 2017[2]).

Overview of chapter

This chapter presents available data and evidence on the governance of adult learning in Flanders and discusses the factors that affect the quality of governance. It explores relevant generic policies and practices to make the governance of adult learning more effective, existing specific policies and practices of governance of adult learning in Flanders, and policies and practices from other countries that could be of interest for Flanders. The chapter concludes with recommendations of how to improve the governance of adult learning.

Governance of adult learning in Flanders

This section assesses the quality of adult learning governance in Flanders and provides an overview of the roles of different levels of government. It also examines the role of key stakeholders.

There are a range of actors involved in adult learning in Flanders

Responsibilities for adult learning are dispersed across the government. Flanders is part of the Federal State of Belgium, which divides policy competences among the federal level, the regions (i.e. Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) and the communities (i.e. Dutch-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking). Provinces, cities and municipalities implement mostly federal and regional decisions. While the powers exercised by each level are exclusive to each level, there are some thematic overlaps. For example, in adult learning policy, the federal government is responsible for the legislative framework affecting adult learning, but community government oversees the implementation of adult learning policies and related issues, such as civic integration. Regional government is responsible for the implementation of active labour market policies, which constitute an important part of the adult learning system. Provinces and municipalities can also implement local initiatives that relate to local education, labour market and social welfare issues (OECD, 2015[3]).

Similar to compulsory education, adult education programmes (such as Centres for Adult Education, CAE) are organised within three educational networks. The first is at the provincial and local level, where an umbrella organisation of provincial authorities (POV, *Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen*) co-ordinates CAE in the provinces of Eastern Flanders, Antwerp and Limbourg; in parallel, an umbrella organisation of local authorities (OVSG, *Onderwijskoepel voor steden en gemeenten*) co-ordinates CAE in the cities of Antwerp, Bruges, and Ghent (Flanders, 2018[4]). The second educational network is under the Catholic Church, where CAEs are publicly financed, but privately managed. The third educational network is overseen by the "Go! Education of the Flemish Community" (*GO! onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*) body, which works independently from the Flemish Department of Education and is also publicly financed. Overlapping responsibilities makes the governance of adult learning a complex space. In addition, there are private providers of adult education, which are explained later. Given the complexity of how powers overlap and are distributed, effective governance arrangements are especially important in Flanders.

Different departments play a role in adult learning policy in Flanders. There are 11 policy domains in the Flemish government, which, with the formation of each new government, are distributed as portfolios across nine minister positions. Each policy domain has a corresponding department. Since the composition of the portfolio under each minister can change with each new government, it is custom not to refer to "ministries", but rather to the policy domains or departments. There are a number of departments responsible for providing adult learning opportunities (Table 5.1). The main ones are the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Work and Social Economy. To a lesser extent, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Department of Culture, Youth, and Media are also involved (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2008[5]). In addition, the Department of Finance and Budget can determine the budget available for adult learning.

Table 5.1. Departments and their roles in providing adult learning opportunities

Department	Adult Learning Programme
Department of Education and Training	• Adult Basic Education • Part-time artistic education (*Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs* – DKO)
Department of Work and Social Economy	• Vocational education for jobseekers and employees (Public Employment service – VDAB) • Entrepreneurial Training (Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA)
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries	• Training in agriculture
Department of Culture, Youth, and Media	• Socio-cultural adult work

Source: Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming (2008[5]), National report on the Development and State of Art of Adult Learning and Education, http://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/multimedia/uil/confintea/pdf/National_Reports/Europe%20-%20North%20America/Belgium_Flemish_Community.pdf.

Stakeholders play an important role in adult learning policy in Flanders. The government cannot provide adult learning opportunities alone. Since a significant share of adult learning takes place in the workplace, employers, unions and sectoral training providers are important partners. Private education providers also provide adult learning courses (Flanders, 2018[4]). Academics who conduct research on adult learning policies are an important voice and can generate evidence for policy design. The role these diverse stakeholders play varies, as does their degree of involvement (e.g. funding, implementation, information). It is the challenge of governance to foster collaboration among these diverse actors who have different interests.

There are two independent advisory councils (Box 5.1) that exert a strong influence on the government's approach to adult learning policy. The Flemish Education Council (VLOR, *Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*) provides the Department of Education and Training with advice on all preliminary decrees related to educational matters. VLOR has different councils for different levels of education, including one for lifelong and life-wide learning. Each council is composed of a wide range of stakeholder representatives (e.g. students, socio-cultural organisations, principals, VDAB, SYNTRA). The second advisory council is the Flanders Social and Economic Council (SERV, *Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*), which negotiates agreements, conducts research, drafts reports and provides advice to the Flemish government a wide range of policy issues, including adult learning. SERV is composed of representatives of social partners (employers, unions). While the advice of these councils is non-binding, they have considerable influence on policy decisions.

Box 5.1. Practice examples from Flanders: VLOR, VESOC and SERV

Flanders – Flemish Education Council (VLOR)

The Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*, VLOR**)** is a strategic advisory council for education and training policy of the Flemish Community that provides advice on matters of education. VLOR can also provide practical implementation support to new government educational initiatives. It also functions as a knowledge centre for education and conducts analysis on topics such as adult learning. There is a general council and a council for each of the four levels of education: primary, secondary, higher and adult learning. Additional commissions deal with specific themes, for example: vocational education and training, adult learning, special needs education, guidance, and counselling. In total, several hundred people are members of one of the councils, commissions or working groups (Flanders, 2018[4]).

Flanders – VESOC and SERV

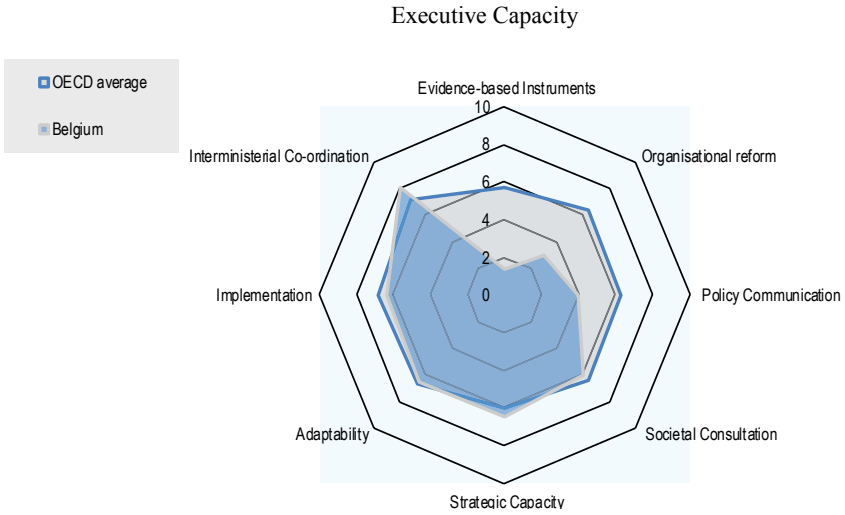
The Flemish Economic Social Consultative Committee (VESOC, *Vlaams Economisch Sociaal Overlegcomité*) and the Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV, *Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*) are consultation and advisory bodies. SERV is the advisory board for Flanders on work, economy, energy, education and other general policy issues as well as budget. In the SERV, the social partners consult, negotiate and conclude agreements with each other, e.g. the agreement and action plan on workable work. The SERV has a research department, the Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid, which carries out research about the labour market, innovation, careers, workable work at the request of the social partner. It also organises the secretariat of VESOC (high level dialogue between social partners and the Flemish government) and the VESOC Working group. It provides an ongoing forum for policy debate between social partners and the government (Flanders, 2018[4]). This can result in official agreements, like the recent agreement on the reform of training incentives (Vlaamse Regering and SERV, 2017[6]).

Sources: Flanders (2018[4]), *OECD Skills Strategy for Flanders Questionnaire*; Vlaamse Regering and SERV (2017[6]), *Agreement between the Flemish government and the Flemish social partners – Reform of training incentives for employees*, www.serv.be/serv/publicatie/vesoc-akkoord-opleiding

Indicators on governance strength paint a mixed picture

There is room for improvement in executive capacity. Executive capacity can be broken down into a number of indicators (Figure 5.1). Overall, Belgium (including Flanders) ranks higher than the OECD average in interministerial co-ordination and strategic capacity. In Flanders, this may be explained by the many different committees and councils and the strategic plans, such as Vision 2050. However, Belgium falls slightly below the OECD average in certain aspects of executive capacity, including implementation, adaptability, societal consultation and policy communication. It performs particularly poorly in organisational reform and using evidence-based instruments (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017[7]).

Figure 5.1. Sustainable governance indicators



Note: The following definitions are used:
Evidence-based instruments: government applying regulatory impact analysis; o**rganisational reform**: government monitoring own institutional arrangements and reforming them if necessary; **policy communication**: government co-ordinating policy communication to ensure statements are aligned with government strategy; **societal consultation**: government consulting with economic and social actors in the course of policy preparation; **strategic capacity**: government decision-making backed by strategic planning and the advice of scholars; **adaptability**: government co-operating with other states, while adapting to new developments at home; **implementation**: government implementing policies effectively; **interministerial co-ordination:** co-ordinating government decision-making across institutional lines
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung (2017[7]), *Sustainable Governance Indicators,* www.sgi-network.org/2017/

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891946

Interministerial co-ordination is ranked relatively highly in Belgium. Interministerial co-ordination occurs at the highest level of ministers via the weekly council of ministers, which is composed of 14 line ministers and the prime minister. In Flanders, a council of 8 line ministers and the minister-president also meet weekly. The councils debate every policy proposal and to what extent it is in line with the coalition parties' agenda. Prior to being discussed in the council of ministers, each policy proposal is discussed through formal and informal inter-cabinet meetings, where experts and senior officials of the relevant ministries discuss the main content. Co-ordination seems to work well, as long as the proposals are in line with the government agreement signed when the government forms. However, it is important to note that ministers are nominated by party presidents, after having negotiated how to divide control over the different policy domains, and not the prime minister. This means, in practice, that ministers have a strong incentive to promote their own specific party perspectives, rather than the government's, which can lead to some friction (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017[7]).

Implementation of policies in Belgium is slightly below the OECD average. This could be partly due to Belgium's complex governance system, which has a diverse party landscape and a government usually composed of a coalition of parties at the federal and regional level. The capacity to co-ordinate across levels of government is facilitated when the composition of coalitions at the federal and regional level overlaps. This is particularly relevant when approval is needed across levels of government for a policy proposal to proceed. Party discipline tends to be strong and party presidents can enforce

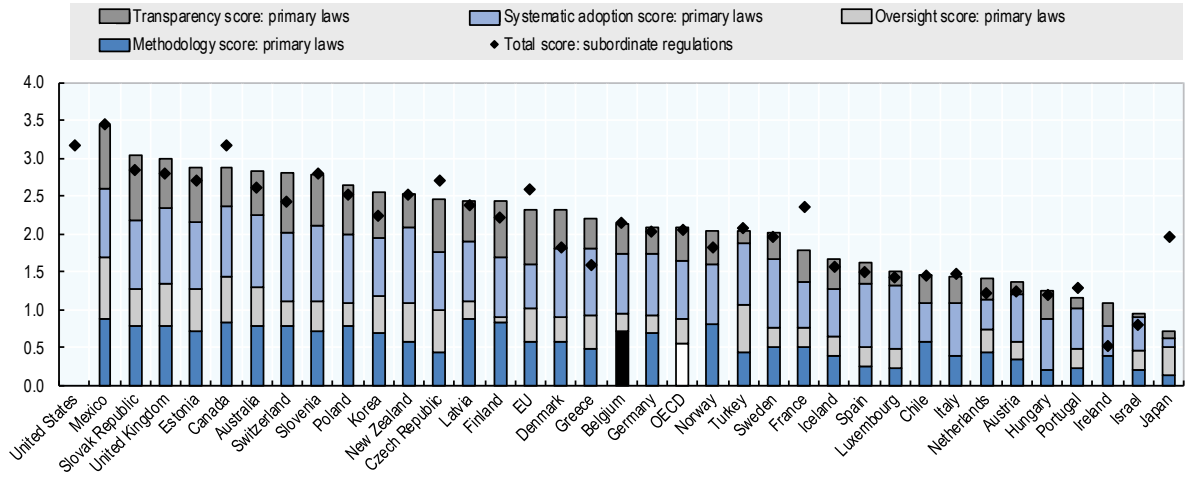
co-ordination across government levels when the same parties are in power. The federal government must have the same number of Dutch- and French-speaking ministers (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017[7]).

Regional and federal ministers meet to discuss issues that affect them both at inter-federal councils, however, these meetings happen on an ad hoc basis and are largely political. For each policy domain, regional ministries collaborate with federal agencies when there is a policy overlap. For example, jobseekers who want to study to be nurses can do so while retaining their unemployment benefits. Since these benefits are paid by a federal agency, the regional ministry would have to negotiate this with the federal ministry. However, there are some challenges. For example, the Flemish government has a labour market activation policy, *werkplekleren*, which includes individual vocational training (IBO, *individuele beroepsopleidingen*). The employer's contribution is based on the future salary of the trainee. The wages are divided into five tranches. Depending on the tranche, the employer will pay a fixed monthly amount to VDAB. KIBO (IBO for vulnerable groups in the labour market) is now completely free for the employer. IBO is calculated as the difference between the normal salary and the unemployment benefit that the trainee receives currently. If the trainee is entitled to additional compensation, VDAB will not reclaim this from the employer. Since September 2018, every trainee receives the same amount during training. The training is free for every jobseeker. The costs for travel or childcare are reimbursed by VDAB. Second principle: compensation for the training effort of the trainee. Third principle: the income of the trainee is replenished to 80% of the guaranteed average minimum monthly income.

Policy communication is relatively low in Belgium. With a broad coalition government at the federal and regional level, it can be complicated to have coherent policy communication. Citizens often face challenges in finding government information. This is partly due to the complex multilevel governance structure and challenges in aggregating information across federal, regional/community, provincial and local levels, and then making it publicly available (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017[7]).

Societal consultation in Belgium is around average. In general, there is a tradition of stakeholder engagement, with specific consultative bodies (e.g. SERV, VLOR) facilitating such processes. However, the current government has found it challenging to engage some stakeholders (e.g. trade unions) in reform efforts in unemployment, pensions and taxes (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017[7]). Stakeholder engagement in developing regulations is around the OECD average and falls behind other countries such as Great Britain, Estonia and Canada (Figure 5.2). While the methodologies of stakeholder engagement (e.g. minimum periods for consultation) and systematic adoption (e.g. engaging stakeholders in early and later stages) of stakeholder engagement are relatively widespread in Belgium, oversight (e.g. monitor and evaluation of stakeholder engagement) and transparency (e.g. reaching the widest spectrum of stakeholders) of stakeholder engagement can be improved (OECD, 2017[8]). Stakeholders during the OECD Diagnostic Workshop in May 2018 mentioned that vulnerable groups, those who are least likely to participate in adult learning, are often not sufficiently engaged in the policy design of adult learning: adult learning programmes are designed for them rather than with them. Placing the learner back at the centre of adult learning policy design emerged one of the key themes for Flanders to focus on (Flanders, 2018[9]).

Figure 5.2. Stakeholder engagement in developing regulations, 2014

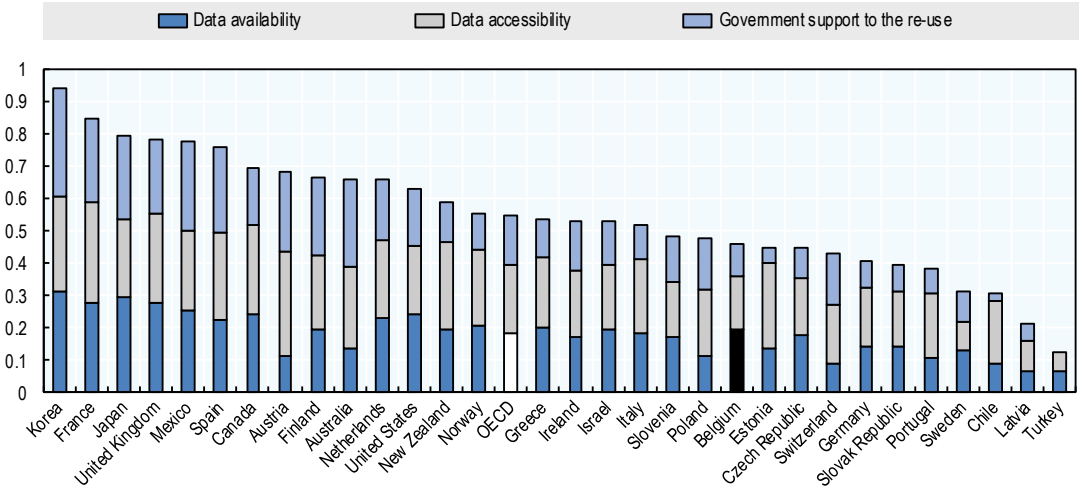


Note: **Systematic adoption:** investigates if there are formal requirements for stakeholder engagement and to what extent stakeholders are engaged in practice both in the early and in the later stages of the regulation-making process; **Methodology** looks at methods and tools used for stakeholder engagement, including minimum periods for consultations and the use of interactive websites and social media tools, and examines the existence of guidance documents for stakeholder engagement; **Transparency** looks at the extent to which the processes of stakeholder engagement are made open to the widest spectrum of stakeholders and how and if stakeholders' views and comments are taken into account; **Oversight and quality control** measures whether there are mechanisms in place to externally control the quality of stakeholder engagement practices, to monitor stakeholder engagement and whether evaluations are made publicly available.
Source: OECD (2015[10]), *Indicators of regulatory Policy and Governance (iREG),* www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/indicators-regulatory-policy-and-governance.htm.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891965

Open government data is below average. Based on the OECD Survey on Open Government Data in 2016 collecting information about current practices and procedures regarding open government data from chief information officers across OECD countries, Belgium is doing relatively well in data availability, which means that a significant amount of information is made available by default and that stakeholders are engaged for the data release (Figure 5.3). Belgium could improve in increasing the accessibility of its government data, so that the data exist in disaggregated and electronic form as well as stakeholders are engaged to ensure the quality and completeness of the data. Another area for improvement is the government support for the re-use of the data. This refers to data initiatives and partnerships (e.g. hackathons and co-creation events), data literacy programmes in government (e.g. training and information sessions for civil servants), and monitoring impact (economic and social impact of open data; open data impact on public sector government) (OECD, 2017[8]).

Figure 5.3. **Open-Useful-Reusable Government Data Index (OURdata), 2017**



Note: **Data availability:** making data openly available by default, stakeholder engagement for data release, implementation; **Data accessibility**: content of the unrestricted access to data policy, stakeholder engagement for data quality and completeness, implementation; **Government support to the re-use of data:** data initiatives and partnerships, data literacy programmes in government, monitoring impact.
Source: OECD (2017[8]), *Governance at a Glance, table 10.11,* https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2017-en

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933891984

Factors determining the quality of adult learning governance

This section presents some governance gaps that can undermine effective collaboration across levels of government, between departments and with stakeholders in Flanders.

A common vision. When priorities and perspectives on the same policy challenge vastly differ across government and stakeholders, it makes collaboration and the alignment of policy responses complicated. When a vision is drafted with all relevant parties, it creates ownership and commitment to work together towards implementing the vision. A vision should include clear goals, spell out the values, and identify the actions to be taken. It should also allocate responsibilities to all relevant stakeholders.

Level of trust between institutions. A lack of trust between institutions undermines collaboration. Trust is needed between the government and stakeholders, as well as between different stakeholders. Negative past experiences of stakeholders interacting with government, for example government unresponsiveness to stakeholder demands, can make stakeholders less willing to engage. Government may lack trust in stakeholders' feedback on policy design when they make unsustainable and unrealistic demands that primarily serve their own interests.

Time for collaboration and engagement. Collaboration across institutions takes time, whether within government, between government and stakeholders, or among stakeholders themselves. It requires regular engagement to maintain the dialogue and have a constructive feedback loop. Through this process, institutions can establish a shared narrative working together on a common goal, where every actor has a specific role to play and contributions to make.

Resources and capacity for collaboration. Additional success factors for stronger collaboration are the individuals at the frontline of collaboration efforts. The level of support they receive could impact their effectiveness. A clear mandate and back-up from leadership enable and empower collaboration efforts. Staff members should also be given the time and financial resources needed (Charbit and Michalun, 2009[11]). Efforts should be publicly recognised and adequately appreciated in performance reviews and when considering promotions. Collaboration requires skills and may thus require relevant staff to be trained in how to engage in effective collaboration. Training could include aspects such as managing networks, negotiations and conflict resolutions. There may also be the need to raise awareness about the benefits of increased collaboration, which include: higher probability of successful implementation of policies, better serving end users, minimising a waste of resources through overlaps, and filling gaps.

Institutional mechanisms for collaboration. Institutional bodies can also foster collaboration. Mechanisms employed in other countries include: incentivising horizontal and vertical collaboration within government through performance measurement that takes into consideration the amount of collaboration, and introducing co-ordinating bodies such as groups, committee, and councils. Other possible mechanisms include legal instruments, such as legislation, regulation, constitutional change, contracts, agreements, and pacts. A more radical approach would be sharing a budget for adult learning policy, or even merging the parts of government that deal with the same issue. As a backdrop to this there needs to be a long-term vision that goes beyond short-term political considerations and is shared across government.

Information sharing across institutions. An integrated information system supports collaboration across institutions to align policies and ensure coherence and complementarity. Such systems collect and disseminate information so that policy makers and stakeholders have accurate, timely and tailored information to identify where there are gaps, duplications and areas for collaboration.

Policies and practices to improve governance of adult learning

Strengthening the governance of adult learning is possible through relevant policies and practices, which are discussed here and presented in the following section. This section is based on the input from the stakeholder workshops, bilateral meetings, site visits and OECD analysis of international and national data sources and literature. Stakeholder perspectives on specific recommendations are indicated where they appear.

During the two OECD Skills Strategy workshops in May and September 2018, stakeholders in the groups assigned to the topic of the governance of adult education discussed a wide range of issues and proposed recommendations. The OECD has carefully considered each of the perspectives and recommendations and incorporated them, as much as possible in the following section. However, due to the large number of ideas and in order to go in-depth and provide concrete and elaborated recommendations not all could be featured here. An overview of all the ideas that Flanders may wish to consider in the future can be found in Annex A.

Develop a long-term vision for adult learning

A long-term vision for adult learning that is shared across government and stakeholders would strengthen policy alignment and collaboration in adult learning. Only with a shared vision can there be shared commitment and ownership. A shared vision would provide a

common language and clarity about the respective responsibilities of involved parties, and make the successful implementation of policies more likely.

The need for a horizontal strategy across policy portfolios to strengthen collaboration towards a common vision in Flanders is widely known (Baert, 2014[12]). Vision 2050 aims to be a horizontal strategy that brings together different policy domains to foster collaboration. However, even here the various policy domains are still presented separately, with each having its own vision (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018[13]). A number of long-term visions and strategies (e.g. spearhead cluster strategies, Box 5.2) exist for specific clusters, but Flanders currently lacks a comprehensive vision for adult learning.

Stakeholders in the OECD Skills Strategy workshops recommended launching a process to develop such a vision. The stakeholders who participate in such a process would need to have sufficient mandate to make commitments. All relevant sectors should participate, and the government could initiate the process by setting a date and location for stakeholders to meet and engage for this purpose. It would be important to have an independent interlocutor who could facilitate such a meeting and be the single contact point between government and stakeholders for efficient communication. There was even a suggestion of setting up a dedicated agency to fulfil this responsibility.

This vision for adult learning should be aligned with Flanders' overarching Vision 2050. While one of the seven transition areas in Vision 2050 focuses on adult learning, it should also be explicitly referred to in the other six transition areas, since adequate human resources are needed to implement these transitions. The vision for adult learning should also be consistent with Flanders' ambitious agenda to implement the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030, which features specific targets for adult learning. These targets include: adult learning for sustainable employability; training courses provided outside regular education and aimed at both lifelong and life-wide learning that offer a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes through which the mobility and social participation of learners can be promoted; three times as many adults following formally or non-formally education or training compared to 2015; recognition of competences and qualifications, regardless of where they were acquired; and all companies and organisations having a strategic policy on skills (Vlaamse Regering, 2018[14]).

If possible, Flanders' vision for adult learning should also be consistent with the vision for adult learning at the European level. For example, the Europe 2020 strategy identified the goal of 15% of adults aged 25-64 participating in adult learning (European Commission, 2018[15]).

The government and stakeholders should establish a comprehensive and concrete shared vision for adult learning. It should include clear goals, spell out the values and identify the actions to be taken, as well as allocate responsibilities to all relevant stakeholders. The funding mechanisms to implement the vision would need to be determined and specify how the expenditures would be covered and by whom. There should also be agreement about performance indicator milestones. Measures should be included to track the implementation of the vision and to report progress publicly to ensure transparency and build trust. Moreover, target groups should be identified to ensure that the vision leaves no one behind. A pact between the government and stakeholders could help to ensure implementation of the vision. This pact could be modelled on the existing pact for training in Flanders (Box 5.2). In order to spread the vision and strengthen its implementation, "champions" could be identified from among the stakeholders to promote the vision and its wide adoption.

Box 5.2. Practice examples of developing a vision for adult learning

Flanders – Spearhead clusters

Spearhead clusters are partnerships between companies, knowledge institutions and the government that develop a long-term strategy to remain competitive. The cluster plays an important role in identifying skills needs. With support from the European Social Fund they can initiate skills prognosis exercises and co-operate with innovation and education partners. Each cluster negotiates a cluster pact, which can include initiatives to increase training. There are currently six clusters that have been approved by Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO): Catalisti (chemistry), Flux50 (energy), VIL (logistics), Flanders' Food (agri-food), SIM (materials) and Blue (North Sea economic development).

Flanders – Training Pact

In July 2017, the Flemish government and Flemish social partners made a training pact (*VESOC-akkoord*) on the reform of training incentives for employees. The goal is to have an integrated training incentive policy with three instruments: Flemish educational leave, training vouchers and Flemish training credit. The training pact focuses on five building blocks:

1. From September 2019 only labour market oriented training (basic skills, job specific skills and general labour market skills) will be eligible for new training incentives. Furthermore, the new system will include new and flexible ways of learning, such as distance learning, blended learning and work-based learning.
2. The parties agreed to establish a single quality framework for the recognition of training providers.
3. The Flemish government will provide a digital easy-to-use Flemish training database for the "labour market relevant" training courses that are eligible for the training incentives.
4. There is a need for more transparency and uniformity in monitoring and evaluation. Each year, a report on the evaluation of recognised training (e.g. number of participants, labour market relevance) will be published. In order to make this possible, the training providers will need to provide the necessary information.
5. Transparency and digitalisation will be increased. The training pact wants to put an end to the current administrative complexity by digitalising the application process for training incentives.

The training pact forms the base of the decree on training incentives, proposed by the Flemish government in 2018.

Estonia – Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 is the guiding instrument for education policy in the country, including funding. It covers the formal education system (early childhood education, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, vocational schools, higher education institutions and other education institutions), as well as non-formal education (including on-the-job education and retraining) and informal learning in all its

diversity. The development of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 involved the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and Research, the Estonian Co-operation Assembly, the Estonian Education Forum, civil society organisations, and the Central Government of Estonia.

Ireland – Further Education and Training Strategy

The "Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019" (FET) sets the direction of adult learning and training for adult learners, employees and employers. The strategy establishes a comprehensive set of education and training programmes according to the needs of different adult populations. The implementation of FET is under the co-ordination of the Irish Further Education and Skills Service (SOLAS), and involves close collaboration between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, employers, and education providers, among other stakeholders in the adult learning sector.

Sources: Flanders (2018[f4]), OECD Skills Strategy for Flanders Questionnaire; Vlaamse Regering and SERV (2017[f6]), Agreement between the Flemish government and the Flemish social partners – Reform of training incentives for employees, www.serv.be/serv/publicatie/vesoc-akkoord-opleiding; Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (2018[f16]), Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, www.hm.ee/en/estonian-lifelong-learning-strategy-2020; Irish Department of Education and Skills (2014[f17]), Further Education and Training Strategy, www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf.

Promote a whole-of-government approach to adult learning

A whole-of-government approach is very relevant for adult learning policies due to their multidimensional nature. As described in this chapter, various departments and different levels of government are involved in the diverse aspects of the adult learning system, with adult learning taking place in both formal, non-formal and informal environments. This diversity can result in gaps and misalignments between objectives and policies of different actors, creating the need to abandon the traditional "silo" approach to policy making. It is essential for countries to promote co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across different entities for the design and implementation of adult learning policies. This could eventually result in complementary policies that are mutually reinforcing, meaning that they generate better outcomes when combined and co-ordinated than when implemented separately or in piece-meal fashion (Braga, Joaquim and Martins, 2006[18]; Chang, Kaltani and Loayza, 2005[19]).

The division of tasks and responsibilities in Flanders and Belgium creates a complex system where different actors are involved in the field of adult learning, including all levels of government – from federal to local – and different departments of the Flemish government. To support a whole-of-government approach, the Flemish government has introduced various governance arrangements. Good examples of such arrangements are the Joint Policy Council and Management Committee that oversee the co-ordination of policies related to qualifications, skills and spending on education and training (Box 5.3), and a recently introduced Strategy for Inter-regional Mobility, where the Flemish and Walloon Ministers of Work agreed to formalise and reinforce the matching of vacancies in Flanders with jobseekers in Wallonia in 2019 (Muyters, 2018[21]).

However, there is not yet a holistic approach for the co-ordination of adult learning policies in Flanders (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018[13]). Within the Flemish government, adult

learning is often seen as either a responsibility of the Department of Education and Training (e.g. adult learning provision) or the Department of Work and Social Economy (e.g. job-related training). Some policies (e.g. dual learning) are shared responsibilities between the two departments. However, governance arrangements fail to consistently align policy objectives across vertical levels of government. For example, in 2017, the federal government added the requirement that employers need to provide on average five training days, but this requirement did not mention or take into account various existing active labour market policies implemented by the Flemish government (for instance individual vocational training (IBO, *Individuele Beroepsopleidingen*) (VOKA, 2018[20]).

To promote a whole-of-government approach, the government should introduce arrangements to co-ordinate and clarify responsibilities of the different entities and actors. A government could put in place one co-ordinating institution that connects all relevant government actors to generate synergies between adult learning policies, as is the case with Skills Norway (Box 5.3). Co-ordination can also happen more informally, for instance through making adult learning a national priority to ensure continuous policy dialogue across different policy portfolios. Government officials with the right set of skills to ensure effective co-ordination are essential. For continued relevance, it is crucial that governance arrangements for the co-ordination of adult learning policies have tangible benefits; to achieve this, governments should continue to monitor and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of these arrangements.

The government should work towards promoting coherence and complementarity between levels of government in adult learning. Policies and reforms need to go in the same direction so that they can strengthen each other creating synergy effects. As this process takes time and resources, it is critical for all to agree upon the shared vision (as discussed previously), have a clear plan of how to move forward and have open and transparent communication to maintain trust and commitment. In addition, the government should provide training to equip government officials with the skills needed to engage effectively with one another. In particular, there may be challenges when there are strong diverging opinions across ministries and levels of government. How to negotiate those differences to reach a compromise that works for all involved, and then to move forward to implementation, requires skills.

Box 5.3. Practice examples of promoting a whole-of-government approach to adult learning

Flanders – Joint Policy Council and Management Committee

The Joint Policy Council (Beleidsraad) (including ministers) and Management Committee (Managementcomité) (not including ministers) on Education, Training and Work are two joint management committees of policy domains of Education & Training and of Work & Social Economy. They co-ordinate policies regarding qualification and development of competences, as well as spending for education and training. They also provide ministers of education and labour with advice on matters that overlap education and labour. The committee is composed of leading civil servants from the policy domain of education and training, and work and social economy. The council is composed of the committee and the relevant ministers. The council is a decision-making body.

Norway – Skills Norway

Norway has created a dedicated body for the oversight of skills and lifelong learning. Skills Norway is a national agency created by and tasked with the overall implementation of the 2017 – 2021 National Skills Strategy. It is part of the Ministry of Education and Research and has a commission from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Its role is to co-ordinate and oversee the priority areas highlighted in the National Skills Strategy, such as provision of basic skills training, upskilling for teachers and trainers, Norwegian and socio-cultural orientation for adult immigrants, and the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway. As the national lifelong learning body, Skills Norway is also responsible for international co-operation and acts as national co-ordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning, representing the sector and implementing the agenda. The National Skills Strategy includes the establishment of a Future Skills Needs Committee, and Skills Norway also serves as the secretariat for this body. The committee is composed of a broad range of ministries, as well as social partners and researchers, and has a key role in co-ordinating between different ministries and stakeholder bodies.

Portugal – upskilling of government officials

Portugal has put in place a multidimensional governance framework of policies and institutions to improve the skills of civil servants. The Directorate-General for the Qualifications of Public Servants (*Direção-Geral da Qualificação dos Trabalhadores em Funções Públicas*, INA) is responsible for establishing a new model to co-ordinate and improve professional training in the public administration. This legislation involves important governance aspects, as it creates two new bodies with consultative and co-ordinating roles to strengthen professional training in the public service. These are the General Council for Professional Training (*Conselho Geral de Formação Profissional*, CGFP) and the Commission for Co-ordinating Vocational Education and Training (*Comissão de Co-ordenação da Formação Profissional*, CCFP). The CGFP is presided over by the minister in charge of public administration and includes the heads of relevant public services and agencies. Its role is to advise government on the definition and ongoing improvement of professional training in the civil service. The CCFP has a co-ordinating role and involves the heads of services responsible for training in the public service at the national, regional and local levels.

Ireland – National Skills Council

Ireland adopted a national skills strategy as part of the Action Plan for Jobs 2015. Within this framework, the country created a National Skills Council (NSC) to oversee research, advise on the prioritisation of identified skills needs, and secure the delivery of these needs. Membership of the council is a mix of private and public representatives. Three members are appointed from an enterprise/employer background, with one chairing the council. The chief executives of the main agencies active in higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning are also members, as well as representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The chairs of the council of presidents of the universities and institute of technologies are also invited to be members of the council. The National Council has absorbed the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs and has the function of advising on skills priorities. It also has a key role in orienting education and training providers towards labour market needs at the regional level.

Sources: Flanders (2018[4]), OECD Skills Strategy for Flanders Questionnaire; Dalbak, K. (2018[21]), *Mandate of Official Norwegian Committee on Skill Needs | Kompetansebehovsutvalget*, https://kompetansebehovsutvalget.no/mandate-of-official-norwegian-committee-on-skill-needs; INA (2016[22]), Avaliação do Impacto da Formação na Administração Pública: abordagem metodológica, www.ina.pt/index.php/component/docman/doc_download/1318-documento-avaliacao-de-impacto-da-formacao?Itemid=; Ireland Ministry for Education and Skills (2016[23]), *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025*, www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf.

Use networks to support collaboration between government and stakeholders at the local level

With so many different actors across government and stakeholders engaged in adult learning, it is important to clarify different roles and responsibilities so that everyone understands what everyone else is doing. Consultative bodies, such as VLOR, SERV and the Joint Policy Council and Management Committee (Box 5.4 below) that provide advice to the government from various stakeholder perspectives seem to be going in the right direction and, therefore, there is no apparent need for additional consultative bodies. However, stakeholders in these bodies should feel that they are co-ordinating policies in the form of equal partnerships (VLOR, 2016[24]).

While these consultative bodies include representatives of the major stakeholders, it may be important to go further and include end users, as frequently raised by participants in the OECD Skills Strategy workshops. In particular, policies that seek to target the marginalised (e.g. low-skilled, long-term unemployed, immigrants) often do not involve these groups as part of the conversation. However, including them directly in policy design and implementation is important to ensure effective policies. As discussed in Chapter 2, the needs and perspectives of the target group should be at the centre when designing the curriculum, adapting the pedagogy and planning the assessment. Their feedback about the programme effectiveness should also be continuously solicited during policy implementation in order to adjust quickly where needed. In Flanders, some existing initiatives manage to achieve this, such as the Strategic Literacy Plan 2017-2024 (see Table 1.1. in Chapter 1) introduced in 2017 that involved relevant stakeholders who participated in workshops and writing sessions in order to design the plan. Input was also solicited from people with low literacy skills through a survey of participants in the

centres for adult basic education (CABE, *Centra voor Basiseducatie*). More of this type of stakeholder engagement is needed.

Adult learning takes place in the local context and local actors are often the most aware of the needs of adult learners. They should thus play an important role in implementing Flanders' long-term vision for adult learning at the local level. Involving them is critical for impact and the coherence of adult learning policies, and makes better use of the limited available resources.

Currently, collaboration at the local level occurs mostly between local agencies. For example, VDAB has "city managers" who specifically co-ordinate public employment service activities with all local partners and stakeholders in the largest cities. Some policies aimed at the long-term unemployed focus on temporary work experience to help them update their skills and reacquaint themselves with the world of work. Some of these long-term unemployed will be on unemployment benefits and registered with the public employment service; however, others will be on social assistance and registered with local agencies for social welfare, which requires collaboration between local governments and local agencies for social welfare.

In Flanders, local perspectives are represented by the Association of Flemish Cities and Communities (VVSG, *Vereniging Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten*). In educational matters, the umbrella organisations of the schools of Flemish cities and communities (OVSG, *Onderwijskoepel van steden en gemeenten*) and of the provinces (POV, *Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen*) represent those views. Collaboration in education occurs mainly through the OVSG and the POV.

There are also a number of decentralised initiatives. For example, the Regional Technological Centres (RTC) financed by the Flemish government promote collaboration and information exchange between education and the business community at the local level to support the 3rd stage of vocational and technical secondary schools. There are 5 RTCs, one in each Flemish province. RTCs facilitate agreements between schools and businesses about using infrastructure and equipment, adapting the curriculum to labour market needs and providing teacher training, among others. However, a challenge is reaching all VET schools and having them take up RTC offers. On the other hand, some VET schools rely too much on some RTC offers, which makes it difficult to replace existing actions with new and more innovative initiatives. Another initiative are the sectoral partnerships in dual learning where education providers and social partners discuss about workplaces for dual learning. There are currently 16 sectoral partnerships active in sectors ranging from the car to the food industry. Syntra participates in these sectoral partnerships and organises monthly meetings where the different aspects for dual learning are being discussed.

The government should consider supporting local community organisations to foster, host and co-ordinate local networks of stakeholders that work to improve adult learning. Government could provide funding for these networks and initiatives, with funding linked to relevant performance indicators on adult learning. Since adult learning providers are often fragmented, the government could select a single organisation that helps to co-ordinate the different initiatives. The government could pilot innovative approaches to adult learning in two or three local areas for a certain amount of time. These approaches could then be evaluated before expanding the model and embedding them in national policy plans and objectives. Such initiatives have existed before, such as EDUFORA, which ran from 1999 to March 2003 and then merged into a more permanent and centrally managed Service Information Training and Alignment (*Dienst Informatie*

Vorming en Afstemming, DIVA) structure with a similar objective (which also no longer exists). These were former consortia of adult education (2007-2015). There are currently no comparable local alternatives specifically aimed at adult learning. Since collaboration across sectors is often weak, the government could play a more active role in fostering collaboration across sectors, similar to the role it plays within a sector through the sector covenants (Box 5.4) (Baert, 2014[12]).

Box 5.4. Practice examples of supporting collaboration between government and stakeholders

Flanders - Sector covenants

Sector covenants are collaboration agreements between sectors and the Government of Flanders (e.g. Minister of Work, Minister of Education). They provide a framework that commits all social partners of a sector to targets in the fields of: 1) increasing diversity; 2) synchronisation of education and labour; and 3) lifelong learning. When the Flemish government approves sectoral covenants, the sector receives funding for the recruitment of sectoral consultants who assist social partners in the implementation of their sectoral plan. The number of sector consultants depends on the size of the sector. Sector covenants are agreements for two years. After each year, the industry provides a progress or final evaluation report to the Flemish government. The Flemish government monitors and evaluates all sector covenants annually. The covenants are negotiated between sectoral social partners and the government (e.g. Minister of Work and Social Economy; Minister of Education and Training). Other stakeholders such as VDAB, SYNTRA Flanders, VLOR and SERV are involved, but do not co-sign the agreement.

Germany

Against a background of promoting national policy priorities at the local level, The German federal government established the Learning Locally Programme (*Lern vor Ort*, LvO) in 2009. The aim of the programme was to support local governments to create sustainable network structures and develop capacities in educational monitoring, management and consulting. The programme ran from 2009 until 2014 and had a total budget of EUR 100 million, jointly financed by the federal government and the European Social Fund (ESF). In total, 75 districts and municipalities received funding, selected by a competitive process. Proposals were chosen based on how the local government would include local stakeholders and how it would implement the main goals of LvO. By adopting this competitive process for local governments, the LvO programme secured political commitment and sustainability of the structures afterwards. A structural innovation of the LvO programme was the requirement to involve philanthropic foundations, with the aim of increasing the involvement of civil society associations. As LvO was seen as a "learning programme", the structures and processes were flexible enough to allow for changes and adaptations in the management of the programme after first experiences. The programme also contained an evaluation component that constantly monitored the evolution of LvO and gave feedback to localities and the central level.

Denmark

To ensure that local needs are adequately addressed, Denmark relies on local committees affiliated with local providers of VET. These include representatives of local employers and employees appointed by the national committees, and of students, staff and managers

of institutions that provide instruction. These local committees have an active role in adjusting the curricula of programmes supplied by local providers, as well as the duty to maintain quality standards and ensure an adequate number of traineeship vacancies for students.

Sources: Flanders (2018[4]), *OECD Skills Strategy for Flanders Questionnaire*; Busemeyer and Vossiek (2015[25]), "Reforming education governance through local capacity-building: A case study of the 'learning locally' programme in Germany", http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js6bhl2mxjg-en; Andersen and Kruse (2016) (2016[26]), *Vocational education and training in Europe – Denmark*, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_DK.pdf.

Consolidate information sources on adult learning for greater transparency

When institutions responsible for adult learning do not sufficiently share information with one another, collaboration between them cannot thrive. Governments across all levels need to improve how they share information internally and with stakeholders when designing and implementing adult learning policy. Sharing information regarding objectives, capacities and needs would allow the other parties to identify common objectives and opportunities to generate synergies. This would also help to avoid policy gaps, so that no adult learner falls through the cracks.

There is a significant amount of informal exchange across departments in the Flemish government, which results in official positions and decisions in the joint management committees and policy councils. However, differing political views between responsible ministers or different stakeholders in each policy domain can be a constraint on collaboration. Some formal information sharing also exists, such as the annual school leaver report drafted by VDAB that uses information from the Department of Education and Training (VDAB, 2018[27]).

Information sharing between the government and stakeholders could be improved. There are many adult learning providers that could benefit from better information sharing, including: Agencies for Integration, Public Centres for Social Welfare (OCMWs), Centres for Adult Education, sectoral training funds, employers, professional organisations, VDAB and SYNTRA (VLOR, 2015[28]). Information shared could be about the provision of adult learning courses to allow individual institutions to clearly differentiate themselves from others. Currently, adult learning courses may appear the same, but may in fact aim for different learning outcomes, which is confusing to the individual adult learner who has to make a decision. Information about the quality of these courses within a comparable framework would allow learners to make informed decisions about which adult learning courses they would like to take. For the government, up-to-date, easily accessible and consolidated information on adult learning programmes, expenditures and outcomes would facilitate and improve adult learning policy design. In particular, information on adult learning quality through monitoring and evaluation results would allow the government to design policies to improve existing practices.

Information sharing between individual adult learning institutions could also be improved. For example, there is lack of information sharing between CABE and centres for adult education (CAE, *Centra voor volwassenonderwijs*) (VLOR, 2015[28]). Ideally, a low-literate adult who went through a CABE gaining some basic skills would be able to move to a CAE or other dual learning opportunity to continue to upgrade their skills and eventually find employment. However, this transition is still difficult and highlights the need for more collaboration and exchange of information. This is something that the government could co-ordinate and support through financial means.

Stakeholders at the Skills Strategy workshops emphasised the importance of sharing information on adult learning between institutions and end users. While a lot of work is going into crafting a vision and document like Vision 2050 for Flanders, they highlighted that not enough effort is being put into disseminating this vision with the public at large. If Flanders were to develop a long-term vision for adult learning as suggested above, it would be important to raise awareness about it through diverse communication channels to reach the different end users. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to have information available in a consolidated format on different adult learning opportunities, the quality of adult learning programmes and how to participate in them through the diverse incentive mechanisms (e.g. paid education leave). This information is currently dispersed and difficult to find. Having an online platform combined with guidance counselling for marginalised groups could help disseminate the information effectively (see Chapter 3).

Information sharing between diverse adult learning providers could be enhanced through a coherent quality assurance framework. This would also help make the programmes comparable and ensure quality across all providers. The Department of Education has created a common quality framework (*Gemeenschappelijk kwaliteitskader,* GKK) to assess the quality of training provided by institutions outside the formal education system (e.g. VDAB, SYNTRA, private organisations). A preliminary draft was approved by the Flemish government on 1 June 2018 and is based on the Flemish Qualification standards and in line with the European Qualification Framework. It is also related to the framework for the validation of acquired skills (*erkenning van verworven competenties,* EVC) to ensure that skills obtained within and outside formal education are recognised. The intention is to develop one central external supervisory body with representatives from all relevant policy domains to verify the quality of all professional qualifications. Regular quality inspection would ensure that the standards are being met and that the same curriculum is being followed for each qualification. Whether this is feasible remains to be seen.

Government should closely collaborate with all relevant stakeholders (e.g. VLOR, SERV, SYNTRA, education institutions, sectoral training providers) to establish a common knowledge and evidence base, which will inform continuous efforts to promote lifelong learning within Vision 2050. The introduction of a coherent quality assurance framework for adult learning is still work in progress, but a step in the right direction. Further efforts will be needed to ensure that stakeholders are aware of the framework, understand how to interpret what it means, and use it in practice. Moreover, the impact and effectiveness of adult learning policy measures should be assessed more systematically through monitoring and evaluation practices to continue to improve policy design and implementation (Box 5.5 provides an international example). Based on their research, academics could provide feedback on the soundness of the assessments. Findings should also be made widely accessible, so that stakeholders and end users can make informed decisions.

Box 5.5. Practice example of consolidating information sources on education

In recent years, Illinois state agencies responsible for economic and workforce development and education have come together to ensure stronger linkages between education and workforce data. Indiana and Maryland each have legislation establishing the membership and duties of governance councils for management of information systems. These bills aim to ensure that longitudinal data systems help answer policy questions that are important to stakeholders by requiring participation from stakeholders across the education and workforce spectrum.

Illinois

As part of efforts to strengthen data used to promote training in high-demand sectors and occupations, the office of the governor and seven state agencies teamed up to create the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS). This federated system matches data from multiple agencies for specific tasks, while keeping data stored in individual agency databases and leaving agencies to administer separate intake systems. Agencies with responsibility for initial and higher education, as well as for labour market outcomes, share data through the ILDS. Linked data sets can assist government and qualified third parties with performance management and reporting, research and analysis, and consumer information initiatives. The ILDS uses an identity resolution system at Northern Illinois University to match data and return information to agencies. To ensure privacy and security, ILDS aligns security protocols across agencies. ILDS also developed a standardised vetting process for external researchers to access data with agency approval.

Indiana

Indiana's cross-agency council is legislatively mandated to oversee the state's longitudinal data system, the Indiana Network of Knowledge (INK). Among those duties are: implementing a detailed data security plan; ensuring compliance with privacy laws; establishing INK's research agenda; creating policies to respond to requests from state and local agencies, the general assembly, and the public; and developing public access to aggregate INK data. The governance committee must include representatives from the Department of Education, Department of Workforce Development, the Commission for Higher Education, private colleges and universities, and the business community.

Maryland

The Maryland Senate Bill 275 established the Governing Board of the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (MLDS). The board includes members representing kindergarten to 12th grade, higher education, and labour; five members appointed by the governor, one of whom must be a data systems expert; and three at-large positions filled by a workforce development professional, a teacher, and a parent. The board's responsibilities include: providing general oversight and direction to MLDS; establishing its research agenda; approving the annual budget; ensuring adherence to relevant privacy laws; creating an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly; and setting policies for the approval of research requests from the legislature, state and local agencies, and the public. Since the bill's passage, the Governing Board has emerged as a model for transparency. It holds public quarterly meetings, with agendas and minutes available on the MLDS website.

Sources: Leventoff, Wilson and Zinn (2016[29]), *Data Policy Toolkit. Implementing the State Blueprint*, www.workforcedqc.org; Peña (2017[30]), *From Patchwork to Tapestry Collaborating to Maximize Data Utility*, www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/WDQC-Tapestry-Brief-final-web-compressed.pdf.

Summary of policy recommendations

Drawing on the evidence presented in this chapter, Flanders could consider the following recommendations to strengthen the governance of adult learning:

- **Establish a vision for adult learning that is comprehensive and concrete.** The government and stakeholders should draft the vision together and include clear goals, spell out the values and identify the actions to be taken, allocating responsibilities to all relevant stakeholders. The funding mechanisms to implement the vision would need to be determined and specify how the expenditures would be covered and by whom. There should be agreement about performance indicators milestones. Measures should be included to track the implementation of the vision and to report progress publicly to ensure transparency and build trust. Moreover, target groups should be identified to ensure the vision leaves no one behind. A pact between the government and stakeholders could help to ensure implementation of the vision. This pact could be modelled on the existing pact for training in Flanders. In order to spread the vision and strengthen its implementation, "champions" could be identified from among the stakeholders to promote the vision and its wide adoption.
- **Promote coherence and complementarity between levels of government in adult learning**. The government should ensure that policies and reforms go in the same direction that strengthen each other creating synergy effects. As this process takes time and resources, it is critical for all to agree upon the shared vision, have a clear plan of how to move forward and have an open and transparent communication to maintain trust and commitment. In addition, the government should provide training to equip government officials with the skills needed to engage effectively with one another. In particular, there may be challenges when there are strong diverging opinions across ministries and levels of government. How to negotiate those differences to reach a compromise that works for all involved and then to move forward to implementation takes skills.
- **Support local community organisations to foster, host and co-ordinate local networks of stakeholders that work to improve adult learning**. The government could provide funding for these networks and initiatives with funding linked to relevant performance indicators. Since adult learning providers are often fragmented, the government could select a single organisation that helps to co-ordinate the different initiatives.
- **Establish a common knowledge and evidence base.** The government should closely collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to have such a common knowledge and evidence base, which could inform continuous efforts of promoting lifelong learning within Vision 2050. Introducing a coherent quality assurance framework for adult learning is a step in the right direction. Further efforts will be needed to ensure that stakeholders are aware of the framework, understand how to interpret what it means and use it in practice. Moreover, the impact and effectiveness of adult learning policy measures should be assessed more systematically through monitoring and evaluation practices to continue to improve policy design and implementation. Based on their research, academics could provide feedback on the soundness of the assessments. Findings should also be made widely accessible, so that stakeholders and end users can make informed decisions.

Notes

[1] Collaboration is used in a broad sense with a wide spectrum. A low level of collaboration would refer to processes of co-ordination, while a high level of collaboration would be refer to co-operation across groups.

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Chapter 6. Improving the financing of adult learning

The chapter presents diagnostic evidence on the financing of adult learning in Flanders, the factors that affect the financing of adult learning and specific policies and practices to improve the financing of adult learning. Flanders can improve the financing of adult learning by taking action in four areas. These are: 1) reviewing financial incentives to encourage the participation of marginalised groups in training; 2) repackaging existing financial incentives to provide each learner with a "training backpack"; 3) supporting transitions from job to job and from one employment status to another; and 4) ensuring financing supports flexible modes of learning.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Introduction

Why the financing of adult learning matters

Adequate financing is needed to support a strong system of adult learning in Flanders. Currently, most countries spend less on adult learning than on other types of learning (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary education). However, in the context of technological change and increasingly globalised markets, this spending allocation may need to be adjusted to ensure adequate financing for adult learning going forward. Available data suggests that Flanders spends less on adult learning than other OECD countries. However, cost does not appear to represent a barrier to accessing adult learning, suggesting that the system is well financed overall. Flanders offers many financial incentives for adult learning which help to reduce the burden for individuals and employers, promote cost sharing and reduce under-investment.

However, there are concerns that financing is not reaching the groups who could benefit most. For example, low-educated and older adults are under-represented in applying for career guidance and training vouchers; low-educated adults are also less likely to benefit from employer-sponsored training. Furthermore, learners and firms are not always aware of available financing options as the system is complex and fragmented; this lack of transparency particularly hinders access to financing for low-educated workers and employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

As explored in Chapter 2 on learning culture, strengthening Flanders' lifelong learning programme is a key component of Vision 2050, which sets out a long-term strategy to position Flanders as an "inclusive, open, resilient and internationally-connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens" in the context of globalisation and technological change. The Flemish government and social partners have also committed to increase participation in continuing education from 7.5% of the total population (25-64 year-olds) in 2011 to 15% by 2020 (De Coen, Valsamis and Sels, 2013[1]). This will require a well-financed system of adult learning that is capable of reaching marginalised groups.

Overview of chapter

This chapter presents data and evidence to compare financial investments in adult learning in Flanders relative to other OECD countries. It also reviews the factors contributing to the under-representation of marginalised groups in accessing financing, highlights international practices that could be relevant to Flanders, and provides recommendations.

Financing adult learning in Flanders

The cost of training does not represent a significant barrier to adult learning in Flanders

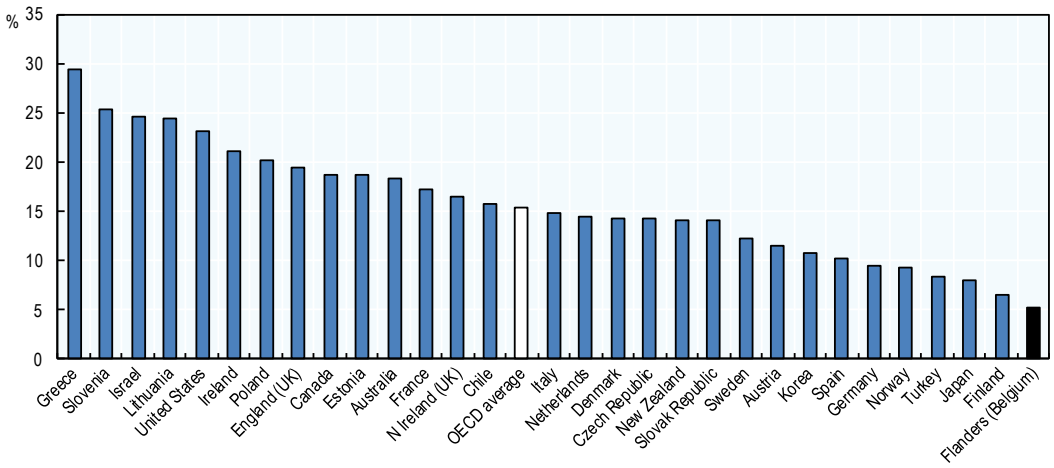
Flanders spends less than other OECD countries on adult learning. Data collection on the cost of adult learning is relatively sparse for a number of reasons: adult learning is financed by multiple actors and in different ways across countries; there are no official statistics on adult learning financing; and there is no commonly-agreed definition of "adult learning" (OECD, 2019[2]). OECD analysis based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), labour force surveys, and systems of national accounts data estimates that

Flanders spends 4.9% of gross value added (GVA) on adult learning, of which 47% is spent on formal learning, 35% on on-the-job learning and 18% on informal learning (Squicciarini, Marcolin and Horvát, 2015[3]). These estimates rely on an expenditure-based approach whereby investment in training is calculated as a function of the hours that individuals spend in training and of their salaries (i.e. the opportunity cost of training), and of the cost that private entities and/or public institutions incur to provide the training (i.e. the direct cost of training). According to these estimates, spending on adult learning is relatively low in Flanders compared with other OECD countries such as Australia (11.2%), Denmark (11.0%), Canada (9.7%), UK (9.7%) and the Netherlands (8.1%).

However, the cost of training does not represent a significant barrier to adult learning for most groups: only 5.4% of adults who wanted to participate (or to participate more) in training did not do so because it was too expensive (OECD average is 15.9%). This is the lowest share among surveyed countries (Figure 6.1). Non-financial barriers to training-notably, time constraints due to work and family obligations, and the course/programme not being offered at a convenient time or place—represent more significant barriers (OECD, 2018[4]). Low-skilled and low-qualified workers are just as likely as highly skilled and highly qualified workers to say that cost is not a barrier to adult learning. However, the unemployed are more likely to report cost as a barrier, with 16% saying that they could not afford the cost of education and training.

Training also appears to be relatively affordable from the perspective of firms: 20.9% of enterprises report high costs of continuing vocational training courses as the reason for not providing training, much lower than the EU average of 33.6% (Eurostat, 2018[5]).

Figure 6.1. Share of workers who did not participate in training because it was too expensive



Note: The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).
Source: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933892003

A number of financial incentives reduce the financial burden on individuals and employers, promote cost sharing, and reduce under-investment

Given the large private returns from adult learning, many believe that individuals and employers should bear the bulk of its cost (OECD, 2017[6]). However, public financing can be justified by the societal benefits of lifelong learning: higher economic growth, reduced spending on social and unemployment benefits, and higher tax revenues. Public financing can help to address market failures and channel funding towards the most disadvantaged groups (e.g. the low-skilled) and firms (e.g. SMEs) that face the greatest challenges in accessing adult learning opportunities (OECD, 2019[2]). For these reasons, most countries share the costs of adult learning between government, employers and individuals.

There are a range of financial incentives in place in Flanders to promote cost sharing and reduce under-investment in adult learning. These include: paid education leave, training vouchers, training credit, sectoral training funds, and grants for companies. Some of the main incentives that target individuals are summarised in Box 6.1, while Box 6.2 summarises the main incentives targeting employers. Together, these incentives reduce both the direct costs (e.g. course registration fees, transportation costs) and indirect costs (e.g. lost wages, time off from work) associated with training for individuals and employers.

Box 6.1. Financial incentives to stimulate training among employees in Flanders

Although currently under reform, the existing set of financial incentives can be summarised as follows:

Paid education leave (*Betaald Educatief Verlof*): Paid education leave entitles employees in the private sector (including part-time and contract employees who work sufficient hours per week) to up to 180 hours of paid leave per year to participate in officially-recognised training and education programmes. The number of hours depends on the type and length of the programme, with the maximum 180 hours reserved for vocational training in shortage occupations, or for obtaining a first secondary education degree. Training should be at least 32 hours/year. Under new legislation, up to 16 hours of paid education leave may be used towards skills validation processes. Employees must request permission of their employer to take the leave and agree on when to take it. During the employee's absence, the government compensates employers the wage cost to a maximum of EUR 21.30 per hour.

Training credit (*Opleidingskrediet*): In Belgium, employees can work reduced hours for up to two years and receive replacement income (max. EUR 500/month) from the government for a variety of reasons, including training. When this time is taken for training, Flemish employees are eligible for a training credit (EUR 180/month for full-time absence). Training must last at least 120 hours and only training courses recognised by the Flemish government are eligible. Extensions of the credit beyond the two year maximum are possible for training in shortage occupations, based on VDAB's list of bottleneck professions.

Training vouchers (*Opleidingscheques*): Flemish employees (including part-time and contract workers) can pay for recognised training or education programmes with training vouchers, which they purchase from the public employment service (VDAB). The Flemish government covers 50% of the cost, with a maximum subsidy of EUR 125 per

year. Employees from all sectors are eligible for the training voucher, provided that they do not yet have a tertiary degree. Training vouchers can also be used for skills validation processes.

Registration fee exemptions: Registration is free for adults who enrol in courses in Centres for Adult Basic Education (CABE) and second chance education. Registration fees are waived for some vulnerable learners (e.g. jobseekers in an approved VDAB trajectory, immigrants, prisoners) and for those without a secondary diploma who enrol in courses in Centres for Adult Education (CAE).

Career guidance vouchers *(Loopbaancheques)*: Employed and self-employed workers can apply to VDAB for career guidance vouchers, which offer 4 hours of subsidised career guidance with a mandated career coaching centre of their choice.

The various financial incentives contribute to a good mix of co-financing by employers, individuals, and government. Based on a survey of adult learning participants in Flanders, 86% had received funding from their employer for at least one (formal or non-formal) learning activity (PIAAC, OECD average is 77.2%). Flemish employers also invest a high share of their total investment money in training activities (12.4% compared to 9.7% OECD average). Available data suggest that individual contributions to adult learning in Flanders are comparable to other OECD countries: 21.5% of adult learning participants had paid to take part in non-formal learning activities, compared with the OECD average of 20.6%. Regarding government contributions, internationally-comparable data on government spending on adult learning are limited and tend to refer mainly to public spending on training in the context of active labour-market policies (ALMP) targeted at the unemployed. In Flanders, public expenditure on ALMP training programmes represents 0.16% of gross domestic product (GDP), which is on par with the OECD average (0.14%). However, public expenditure on ALMP training per participant is only 1.17% of GDP per capita, which falls below the OECD average of 2.7% (OECD, 2019[2]).

Box 6.2. Financial incentives to stimulate employer-provided training in Flanders

The **SME Wallet** *(KMO-portefeuille)* is targeted exclusively at SMEs and is designed to help them grow and become more competitive through skills investments. The SME Wallet covers 30-40% of training costs, depending on the size of the enterprise. SMEs can apply for subsidies online to receive a direct transfer. Employers determine their own training needs and there is no targeting element (OECD, 2017[6]). A recent impact assessment determined that participating firms achieved higher growth than a control group.

The **Strategic Transition Support** *(Strategische transformatiesteun)* covers 20% of employers' training costs for strategic transformation projects in the Flemish region (up to EUR 1 million per year and per firm), provided that at least three firms participate in the training.

Previously, all Belgian private employers were obliged to spend 1.9% of their wage bill on training activities for their employees. Under new "**Workable Work**" legislation, this financial obligation was replaced by an obligation to provide five days of paid training per full-time employee each year.

In Belgium, the **self-employed are eligible for tax deductions** for eligible professional expenses (*beroepskosten*), including office rent, business travel expenses, and training

expenses, provided they can show that the training is necessary to perform the job.

In Belgium, employers pay a levy on the wage bill which goes towards a **sectoral training fund**. The levy amount varies by sector, from 0.10% to as much as 0.60% of the gross wage. Sectoral groups use these funds to develop training policies for their sector.

Financial incentives have been designed with labour-market needs in mind

Financial incentives can play a role in helping governments promote more and better investments in skills to achieve a better match between the supply and demand of skills. Chapter 3 on skills imbalances considers the role of financial incentives to steer investments in initial education, and argues that the education system could be more responsive to changing skills demand.

In adult learning, many of the financial incentives in Flanders have been designed (or are being reformed) with labour-market needs in mind. For instance, employees participating in training have the right to paid education leave of up to 180 hours per year; the maximum leave (180 hours) is reserved for workers attending vocational training in shortage occupations and those studying towards their first secondary education degree. Similarly, workers who take time off from work to train or retrain can receive a subsidy, called a "training credit" (*Opleidingskrediet*) for a period of up to two years, which may only be extended if the training is in an occupation deemed to be in shortage based on the VDAB's list of bottleneck professions (OECD, 2017[6]). Since 2011, the training vouchers (*Opleidingscheques*) may also only be used if training can be shown to have a labour-market orientation. A recent review concluded that the rules for identifying "labour-market oriented" training programmes are vague, resulting in poor targeting on training that will have the most impact on the economy and employment outcomes. Under new legislation that will come into force in September 2019, a single database for labour-market relevant training will be created and paid educational leave and training vouchers will only be applicable to training opportunities identified in this database. The government will conduct an annual evaluation of labour-market relevance to update this database. Eligible courses will fall under one of three categories: basic skills (e.g. literacy, official languages, attainment of secondary education degree), job-specific skills (shortage occupations), and general labour-market skills (e.g. communication, information and communication technology (ICT), teamwork, entrepreneurship, career management and social dialogue).

Box 6.3. Flanders' Education Qualification Pathway for jobseekers (OKOT)

The Education Qualification Pathway (*Onderwijskwalificerende trajecten met VDAB-opleidingscontract*, OKOT) is a training programme for jobseekers launched by VDAB in 2011. The programme aims to increase the chances of jobseekers finding sustainable employment by training them in the skills needed to fill postings in shortage occupations. The programmes are offered by different education providers (CAE, secondary vocational schools, and higher educational institutions) and allow jobseekers to obtain a diploma (European Qualification Framework 4, 5 or 6) through different training programmes that have a duration of 1 to 3 years. Each provincial VDAB office decides the training offer based on a provincial labour-market analysis. Under the training contract, adult learners keep their unemployment benefits, provided that the training is in a field for which there is strong labour-market demand. They may also receive a relocation allowance and a childcare allowance. From the second year onwards they are encouraged to combine training with part-time work, and in subsequent years a greater focus is put on work-based learning to avoid prolonged absences from the labour market. In 2017, 4 467 jobseekers started an OKOT programme. Three months after completing the training programme, 76% of students had found work.

Source: VDAB ((n.d.)[7]), *Educational qualifying courses with VDAB Training Contract,* www.vdab.be/sites/web/files/doc/infobrochure%20OKOT-VDAB.pdf.

Much of the training financed and provided by VDAB for jobseekers has a labour-market focus. Under the Education Qualification Pathway (OKOT) programme, jobseekers in Flanders may, in some cases, continue to receive their unemployment benefit while in training, provided that the training is in a field for which there is strong labour-market demand (Box 6.3).

Financial incentives have been designed to reduce deadweight losses

Given that advantaged groups (e.g. high skilled, high income) are likely to invest in their own skills without the help of public subsidies, governments can reduce the deadweight losses of incentives programmes by targeting such schemes at those who need them most. An important trade-off in the design of financial incentives for adult learning is between simplicity (and therefore lower administration costs but possibly higher deadweight loss), on the one hand, and better targeting (which increases administrative costs and possibly reduces take-up but cuts deadweight loss) on the other (OECD, 2017[6]).

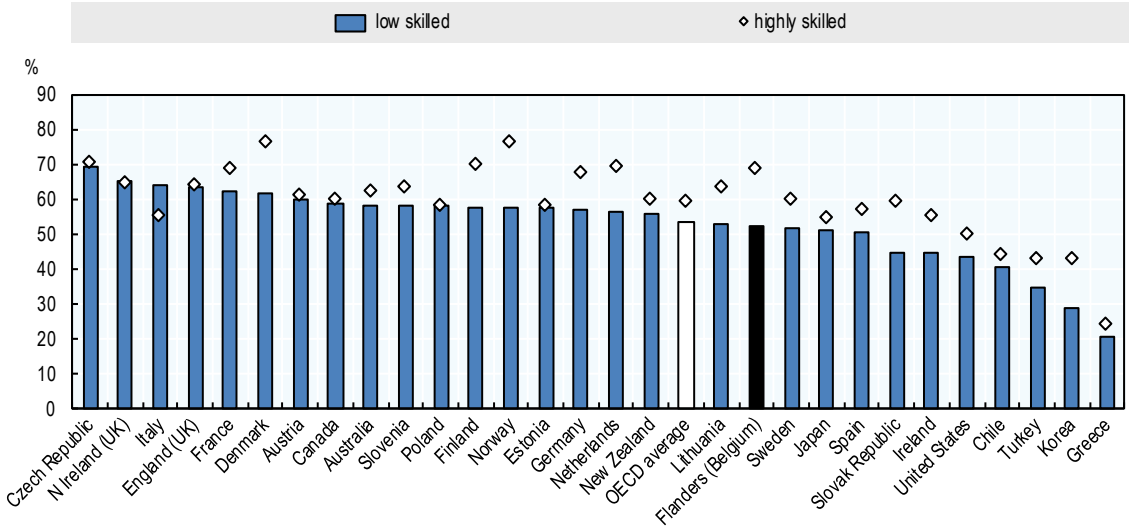
Flanders has made some attempts to target training vouchers at those who need them the most. The system was reformed in 2015 to target low and medium-skilled adults, although those with a bachelors' degree or higher could still access training vouchers if advised that training is needed after receiving career guidance. Previously, almost half of the beneficiaries were highly educated workers while middle- and low-skilled people were under-represented. Flanders also focuses financial incentives at SMEs (e.g. SME Wallet, tax deduction for the self-employed), which face particular barriers to providing training (e.g. lower economies of scale, lack of training expertise).

Marginalised groups are under-represented in accessing financing for adult learning

As is the case in most OECD countries, high-skilled workers in Flanders are more likely to receive employer financial support for education and training than low-skilled workers (Figure 6.2). In Flanders, 52% of low-skilled employees receive employer financial support for education or training, which is lower than the average for low-skilled employees across the OECD (53.3%) and much lower than for high-skilled employees in Flanders (68.4%).

Some groups are also less likely to apply for financial incentives targeted at individuals. In 2017, 24% of all training voucher users were low-skilled, compared to an average of 14% of low-skilled workers in employment in Flanders (Table 6.1). Low-skilled workers are thus no longer under-represented in accessing training vouchers since the system was reformed in 2015 to make them the target group. However, low-skilled workers continue to be under-represented in their application for career guidance vouchers: only 5% of career guidance voucher users in 2017 were low-skilled, relative to 14% in employment (Table 6.1). Older workers are also under-represented in applying to financial incentives for training. The proportion of elderly workers (55+) among training voucher users was 12.4% in 2017, below the share of 16.3% of elderly workers in total employment. During workshops, stakeholders provided anecdotal evidence that adults from other marginalised groups (e.g. those with low attachment to the labour market, migrants, adults with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed) also face difficulties accessing financing for adult learning.

Figure 6.2. Share of employees receiving employer financial support for education or training, by skill level



Notes: 1. High-skilled adults score at level 5 or above in literacy and/or numeracy, while low-skilled adults score below level 2 in literacy and/or numeracy. 2. The OECD average is based on the sample of OECD countries/regions assessed in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). *Source*: OECD (2018[4]), *OECD calculations based on Survey of Adults Skills database (PIAAC) (2012, 2015),* www.oecd.org/skills/piaac.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933892022

Table 6.1. Distribution of training and guidance vouchers

Training and guidance vouchers according to level of education, age and gender (2017)

	Career guidance vouchers		Training vouchers		Both	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Level of education						
Low	2,218	5.4	5,514	23.8	7,732	12.0
Medium	9,076	22.1	15,837	68.3	24,913	38.8
High	29,775	72.5	1,848	8.0	31,623	49.2
Total	41,069	100.0	23,199	100.0	64,268	100.0
Age group						
<20	8	0.0	96	0.4	104	0.2
20-29	7,310	17.8	5,163	22.3	12,473	19.4
30-39	16,469	40.1	6,174	26.6	22,643	35.2
40-49	12,485	30.4	5,732	24.7	18,217	28.3
50+	4,805	11.7	6,034	26.0	10,839	16.9
Total	41,077	100.0	23,199	100.0	64,276	100.0
Gender						
Females	28,173	68.6	12,450	53.7	40,623	63.2
Males	12,896	31.4	10,749	46.3	23,645	36.8
Total	41,069	100.0	23,199	100.0	64,268	100.0

Note: A low level of education is understood by VDAB to include less than an upper secondary certificate. A medium level of education includes completion of upper secondary certificate, while a high level of education includes an associate degree (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO5), a bachelors' degree or higher.
Sources: Training vouchers: VDAB; Guidance vouchers: VDAB (2017[8]), "Ga fluitend naar je werk: Monitoring van de loopbaancheque 4 jaar na lancering."

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933892041

Factors behind under-representation of marginalised groups in accessing financing for adult learning in Flanders

Several factors help to explain why marginalised groups are under-represented in the use of financial incentives for adult learning.

Employers are less likely to invest in the skills of lower-skilled workers. Employers may be reluctant to invest in adult learning for low-skilled workers because they expect this investment to generate lower returns than for high-skilled workers (Groenez, 2009[9]).

Furthermore, the system of financial incentives is complex. While there are a range of financial incentives in Flanders to support adult learning (more than in most European Union [EU] member states), this variety comes at the cost of complexity. Understanding the system can be challenging, particularly for lower-skilled workers, SMEs, and adults with barriers to accessing the relevant information, e.g. language barriers faced by migrants. Furthermore, as noted by stakeholders, a multitude of training providers make it difficult to navigate the system and find the best training offer.

The rules governing financial incentives may also limit the participation of some groups. The existing set of financial incentives do not support career transitions, either from one sector to another, or from one employment status to another. Training vouchers, paid education leave, and the training credit are only eligible to employees. This means that jobseekers and workers with a weak attachment to the labour market face barriers to accessing financing.

Furthermore, sectoral training funds create incentives to limit training investment to within a sector. As a result, workers in surplus occupations, or those at risk of automation, may not be able to access financing to transition to occupations or sectors with better labour-market prospects. As noted in Chapter 3 on skills imbalances, Flanders is among the countries where workers employed in surplus occupations have the lowest training participation relative to workers employed in shortage occupations. Similarly, workers in jobs with a high risk of automation are much less likely to train in Flanders relative to workers in jobs with a low risk of automation (OECD, 2019[2]).

Some sectors do not have well-funded or organised sectoral training funds. Information about the financing of sectoral training funds is not centralised and there is no publicly available record of the amount of funding available to each sectoral fund (Cedefop, 2008[10]). An employer's required contribution to sectoral training funds varies by sector, from 0.10% to as much as 0.60% of the gross wage (Cedefop, 2008[10]). While workers in well-funded sectors have access to opportunities to upskill and retrain within the sector (see care sector example in Box 6.4), those in less well-funded sectors lose out.

Institutional arrangements also play a role in financing adult learning. Under new legislation (Vlaams Parlement, 2018[11]), the institutional financing of CAEs and CABEs is being reformed. Previously, adult education centres had little incentive to target vulnerable groups. However, under the new decree, additional resources will be allocated to centres based on participation of vulnerable target groups, including those without a secondary education certificate, non-working jobseekers, and prisoners. The centres will also receive a "qualification bonus" when participants successfully complete the programme and obtain their certificate. The qualification bonus is intended to incentivise centres to provide tailored guidance to students to help them complete their certificate, as well as to grant students exemptions on the basis of previously acquired competences. The government expects these reforms to improve the targeting of adult learning resources at more vulnerable groups.

Box 6.4. Flanders' Project 3030 and the Maribel fund

In response to shortages in professional care occupations, Familiezorg, a family care provider delivering in-home care to over 100 000 families in Flanders, introduced Project 3030. Employees in the health-care sector who currently do not work as care professionals (e.g. cleaning staff, logistical assistants) can train to become a polyvalent care worker or nursing assistant while maintaining their salary. The training is one year full-time and results in recognised certifications in the industry. The project started in 2009 and is a joint initiative with the social partners, the Flemish Institute for Training and Education (*Vlaams Instituut voor Vorming en Opleiding*, VIVO) and VDAB. It currently trains 40 full-time employees per year on a budget of approximately EUR 1.3 million. The social Maribel fund, which is the employment fund for the family care industry and coordinated by the sectoral training fund for the care sector, covers all costs. The goal of the fund is to fill jobs in the social profit sector to cope with needs in this sector, to reduce working pressures, and to improve the quality of the service. For services related to family care, the annual budget is approximately EUR 40 million.

Sources: Vlaamse Social-Profitfondsen ((n.d.)[12]), The Social Maribel Fund 318.02 for the Family Care services of the Flemish Community, www.vspf.org/sociale-maribel-318-02; VIVO (2018[13]), Project 3030, www.vivosocialprofit.org/project-3030.

Policies and practices to address the under-representation of marginalised groups in accessing adult learning financing in Flanders

Addressing the under-representation of marginalised groups in accessing financing for adult learning is possible through relevant policies and practices. This section is based on input from the stakeholder workshops, bilateral meetings, site visits and OECD analysis of international and national data sources and literature.

During the two OECD Skills Strategy workshops in May and September 2018, stakeholders in the groups assigned to the topic of financing adult learning discussed a wide range of issues and proposed recommendations. The OECD has carefully considered each of the perspectives and recommendations and prioritised and elaborated those viewed as most important in this section. A comprehensive list of the proposed ideas can be found in Annex A.

Review financial incentives to encourage the participation of marginalised groups in training

Some groups are under-represented in accessing financing for adult learning. At least two comprehensive reviews of financial incentives for training have been carried out for Flanders (Sels, 2009[14]; De Coen, Valsamis and Sels, 2013[1]). Both of these studies conclude that employees in the Flemish labour market are already adequately supported financially for training through various channels. The reviews argue that there is no need for additional incentives as there is already a wide range of initiatives that is broader than in most other EU member states (De Coen, Valsamis and Sels, 2013[1]).

However, one challenge highlighted in these reviews is that training incentives are not successful at reaching some groups. De Coen et al. (2013[1]) find that the low-skilled and older workers are under-represented in their application for training vouchers, despite targeting that excludes highly educated adults.

An important consideration is whether Flanders' existing scheme of vouchers is best placed to target marginalised groups, or if alternative mechanisms (e.g. individual learning accounts, loans or tax incentives) could perform better. Based on a recent review of the literature on financial incentives for education and training (OECD, 2017[6]), it seems that the challenges of deadweight loss and difficulty targeting marginalised groups are not unique to vouchers, but are instead equally or even more associated with individual learning accounts, loans and tax incentives (Box 6.5). Therefore, instead of revising the current mix of financial incentives in Flanders, efforts should be aimed at improving their design and expanding outreach efforts to improve take-up, in particular by marginalised groups.

Box 6.5. Financial incentives for adult learning: targeting vulnerable groups

Subsidies (including vouchers, scholarships, grants, bursaries, allowances, training cheques) are the most direct way of providing financial incentives to individuals to invest in education and training. Most subsidies for vulnerable workers focus on the individual as the main beneficiary (rather than the employer). Access to programmes can be restricted based on characteristics such as age, skill level, presence of children, disability or minority group status.

Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) are schemes that attach training rights to individuals, rather than to jobs, to fund future education and training activities. These include accounts where time and/or savings for training are accumulated over time. ILAs are receiving renewed attention for their potential to make training rights more portable between jobs and to support career transitions. In this way they have the potential to broaden access to training rights to vulnerable groups, including those in non-standard forms of employment. France, for example, introduced personal training accounts (*Compte Personnel de Formation*) in 2015, which allow individuals to accumulate entitlement to training hours. The accrued entitlement is transferable between jobs and employment status. A serious drawback with ILAs that have a savings component is that they are more likely to be used by high-skilled rather than low-skilled individuals, owing to poor financial literacy and a lack of access to information.

Loans are seen as a cost-effective way of helping adults overcome temporary liquidity constraints. While loans are important funding tools for initial formal education, they are used less often in the context of adult learning, although some OECD countries do use loans for this purpose. For instance, in England, Advanced Learner Loans allow adults to upskill and re-skill. Repayments are due at the end of the course, but only if the trainee earns more than GBP 25 000 a year. However, it has been argued that loans are less effective than vouchers in encouraging individuals on low incomes to invest in education and training, in part because of their higher debt aversion.

Tax incentives may be designed to encourage investments by individuals in adult learning, and can come in the form of a tax allowance (i.e. deductions from taxable income) or tax credits (i.e. sums deducted from the tax due). Evaluation evidence suggests that tax incentives carry high deadweight losses, since they tend to favour groups who already have access to education and training. They can also only reach workers, leaving out vulnerable groups like the unemployed or those with low taxable income. In the Netherlands, evaluation has shown that the tax deduction (*aftrekpost scholingsuitgaven*) was used primarily by highly skilled individuals. As a result, the Netherlands is replacing tax incentives for education and training with direct subsidies.

Source: Adapted from OECD (2017[61]), *Financial Incentives for Steering Education and Training*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264272415-en.

Access to vouchers is frequently restricted based on a number of characteristics, including age, employment status, skill level, income and wealth. The reform to the Flemish training voucher system in 2015 restricted access to low- and medium-skilled workers, and resulted in better targeting of the voucher at those who most need it. As part of Canada's Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, subsidies are limited to those aged 45-64. The Netherlands is currently defining the target group for their new system of public vouchers, with a possible focus on low-skilled workers and SMEs (Box 6.6). During the Skills Strategy workshops, some Flemish participants advocated for a quota for specific groups to ensure that the incentive measures benefit those most in need.

Allowing training vouchers to be used for indirect costs of training (childcare expenses, transportation costs) by low-skilled or older workers could also help to improve their participation. Training vouchers may currently only be applied to the direct costs of training, such as registration and course materials. Extending training vouchers to indirect costs like childcare and transportation could make adult learning more compatible with family obligations for marginalised adults. VDAB already offers allowances for childcare

(*kinderopvangvergoeding)* and transportation (*verplaatsingsvergoeding*) for jobseekers who participate in training.

Box 6.6. The Netherlands' training incentives

In September 2018, the Dutch government launched a strategy to move away from tax incentives in favour of direct subsidies for financing skill investment, known as "learning accounts." Skill investments by employers are currently deductible from the corporate income tax base in the Netherlands, however from 2020 onwards this will no longer be the case, and the EUR 218 million that will become available due to the abolition of the tax incentive will be invested in public learning accounts. The Netherlands is planning to target groups that need the subsidies the most; if the subsidies were divided across all workers then each employee would receive only EUR 20 a year for training. Discussions are still underway, but the Netherlands is considering targeting the subsidies at low-skilled workers and those working in SMEs.

If individuals are unfamiliar with training and financing options, then even targeting subsidies or extending them to indirect costs of training might not help to increase the training participation of marginalised groups, unless such aid is accompanied by other interventions such as information, advice and guidance. When many training providers are involved as in Flanders, adults and employers require easy access to information about the quality of these providers and their programmes. As was discussed in Chapter 3 on reducing skill imbalances, Flanders should track the labour-market outcomes of training programmes and disseminate this information centrally.

Career guidance vouchers are available to subsidise the cost of career guidance for all workers (see Chapter 3 for more on career guidance). However, these vouchers are taken up disproportionately by high-skilled workers, despite a financial stimulus package (*stimuleringsfinanciering*) which rewards guidance counsellors if they reach a quota of 30% participants from target groups. Guidance campaigns such as the *Leerwinkel* and *Leerkansen* programmes (see Box 3.2 in Chapter 3) help to increase beneficiaries among marginalised groups by reaching out specifically to low-skilled workers and other marginalised groups and disseminating information and counselling about the training incentives available. As mentioned in Chapter 3 on skills imbalances, some thought could be given to extending the use of career guidance vouchers to education guidance, as currently there is no central financing of education guidance services and this has resulted in unequal access to these services across regions. Engaging trade unions can also be an effective way to reach out to low-skilled and older workers about training. In the United Kingdom, *Unionlearn* receives public funding to train union learning representatives within companies to promote the value of learning within the company and reach out to older and lower-skilled workers to support them in identifying their training needs and arranging training opportunities (OECD, 2017[15]).

In addition to low-skilled and older workers, employees in SMEs may also face particular barriers in accessing financing for adult learning. In Flanders, paid educational leave allows employees in the private sector to keep receiving their wages while they train for a maximum of 180 hours, and the government compensates the employer the lost wages while the employee is absent. However, during Skills Strategy workshops participants noted that SMEs may be less inclined to grant permission for paid educational leave, as it can be difficult to plan and cover absences in small firms. In some OECD countries

(Denmark (Box 6.7) Finland and Portugal), job-rotation schemes provide the employer with temporary replacement (usually an unemployed worker) for the employee during their training (OECD, 2019[2]), which reduces the burden on the employer.

The government should consider how training incentives can help to overcome barriers to training (financial and otherwise) and how they could be better targeted both at the learners who most need the support (including the low-skilled, older workers, and those working in SMEs) and at the type of training that will have the most impact on the economy and employment outcomes. The government should expand programmes to reach out to marginalised groups with information, advice and guidance about training. The government should also disseminate information about available training incentives to a wide range of stakeholders, including guidance counselling services, adult learning providers, VDAB, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the staff responsible for training within companies (VTOs).

Box 6.7. Denmark's job-rotation scheme

Job rotation, first introduced in the 1980s in Denmark, allows a firm to send its workers on training while taking on someone without a job to provide cover. At their high point there were 80 000 full-time participants in job-rotation schemes, but as unemployment levels fell during the 1990s the schemes were gradually rolled back, and today there are around 1 100 full-time participants. Under the scheme, employers receive a hiring subsidy for every hour an employee is on training and an unemployed person is employed as a substitute. The replacement person is provided by the local jobcentre. Costs are shared equally between the municipality and the national government (EUR 23.4 million in 2012). The jobseeker often receives training (a few weeks or longer) in order to fill vacant jobs. A recent Danish evaluation of the scheme focused on the effects on the unemployed: it showed that job rotation, on average, makes participants enter into regular employment two to three weeks faster than they otherwise would have, and income and employment effects are strongest for unskilled jobseekers.

Job rotation is dependent on close cooperation between a business and the job centre in order to find unemployed people with the right skills to fit as job rotation replacements.

Sources: Madsen (2015[16]), *Upskilling unemployed adults. The organisation, profiling and targeting of training provision: Denmark.,* www.nordiclabourjournal.org/i-fokus/in-focus-2013/nordic-hunt-for-solutions-to-youth-unemployment-1/article.2013-05-21.0258264149; Kora (2018[17]), *Effects of being employed as a substitute in a job-rotation project,* www.kora.dk.

Repackage existing financial incentives to provide each learner with a "training backpack"

Learners and firms are not always aware of available training incentives because the system is complex. This lack of transparency particularly hinders access to adult learning for low-educated workers and employees in SMEs. Skills Strategy workshop participants were enthusiastic about the idea of repackaging existing financial incentives to provide each learner with a "training backpack," which is essentially an individual learning account that allows individuals to accumulate training rights over their working lives. In theory, this could consolidate the three Flemish training incentives (training voucher, paid educational leave, training credit), the right to career guidance, and federal rights such as sectoral training levies.

The idea of a training backpack is not new in Belgian discussions around adult learning. For example, De Coen et al. (2013[1]) refer to a training backpack (*rugzak)* that both the employee and employer would contribute to and which would be fully portable between employers, and enjoy tax sheltering from the government.

In France, the *Compte Personnel de Formation* (Individual Training Account, CPF) offers something similar. The CPF allows workers to accumulate time credits towards future education and training investments (Box 6.8). All direct costs for eligible training are covered by social partner organisations or by the firm. A unique feature of the CPF is that training rights are preserved upon job loss and transferable between employers, thus supporting career transitions and workers in non-standard forms of employment.

To reduce complexity and facilitate access to training incentives, the government should consider over the long run grouping all existing training incentives for individuals (paid education leave, training vouchers, training credit, career guidance vouchers, and possibly sectoral training funds) into a single learning account, similar to France's *Compte Personnel de Formation*. Key features of the learning account could include: training rights that are portable upon job loss and transferable between employers, targeted at accredited labour-market oriented courses, and more training hours allotted to low-skilled than to high-skilled workers. The learning account should also be accompanied by programmes to reach out to vulnerable groups with information, advice and guidance.

Box 6.8. France's Compte Personnel de Formation

France has a long history of using time accounts to incentivise training. The current *Compte personnel de formation* (Individual Training Account – CPF) replaced the previous *Droit individual de formation* (Individual Training Right – DIF) on 1 January2015. Under the CPF, the account of each full-time worker is credited with 24 hours each year during the first five years, and with 12 hours per year during the subsequent three years, up to a maximum of 150 training hours in total (with part-time workers accumulating credits in proportion to their hours worked). These training hours, which are preserved upon job loss and transferrable between employers, can be used to acquire recognised qualifications or basic skills, or to take up a list of training courses selected by regional councils, social partners and professional associations, which often reflect foreseeable economic needs. If the training takes place during working hours, then the employee needs to obtain permission from his/her employer, who is then obliged to continue paying the full salary. All direct training costs are covered either by social partner organisations or directly by the firm if it spends at least 0.2% of its wage bill on the CPFs of its employees.

The Labour Law of August 2016 (*Loi n °2016-1088 du 8 août 2016 relative au travail*) extended the use of the CPF to the self-employed and all youth aged sixteen and over. In addition, workers without qualifications now accumulate 48 hours per year (compared to 24 hours for other workers).

Under the CPF, the number of approved training spells increased significantly, from just over 200 000 training spells in the first year, to more than 800 000 at the end of February 2017. As of October 2016, 40% of CPF training spells were taken by the unemployed, and 36% of all CPF training participants had educational attainment below the Bac level.

Reforms to the CPF were recently announced (*Loi n °2018-771 du 5 septembre 2018 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel)* which would convert the time

accounts into money accounts. Workers with a qualification would receive EUR 500 per year for training, while those without a qualification would receive EUR 800 (up to a limit of EUR 5 000 and 8 000, respectively). Individuals would also no longer be required to request permission from an employer or the public employment service to make use of the training credits.

Sources: OECD (2017[6]), *Financing Incentives for Steering Education and Training,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264272415-en; OECD (2017[18]), *Getting Skills Right: France*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264284456-en.

Support transitions from job to job and from one employment status to another

Current financial incentives in Flanders are closely tied to job and employment status, which limits their capacity to support retraining for a new job in a new sector or occupation, or for transitions from one employment status to another. Sectoral training funds in Belgium have built-in incentives to promote retraining for jobs within a sector, but do not generally support sector-to-sector job transitions. In France and the Netherlands, several initiatives were recently introduced to finance the retraining of workers to new sectors (Box 6.9).

Retraining from one employment status to another (e.g. from jobseeker to employment), could potentially involve partially converting an employees' severance pay into a fund to finance necessary retraining for a new job (e.g. Voka (2017[19]), De Standaard (2013[20]), and most recently De Morgen (2018[21])). The idea is that when a worker is fired, he or she would be offered a set of services (e.g. training, counselling) to find a new job. Lithuania offers this type of training for workers who have been given a notice of dismissal: they may benefit from up to eight months of vocational training (*Profesinis mokymas*) during which they receive an education grant of 0.6 times the monthly minimum wage (OECD, 2017[6]). Historically, this idea resonates well with employers in Flanders but less well with trade unions, who would prefer that workers receive money for training in addition to severance pay. Strong social dialogue would be needed to push this proposal forward.

The use of such a fund need not be limited to retraining and counselling, but could also be used to validate existing skills. During workshops, stakeholders raised the importance of validating an employee's skills when he or she loses a job. This could make the worker's skills more visible, and improve their chances of finding new employment, which is especially important for older workers who may have worked in an occupation for many years without ever having obtained a formal qualification. In Australia, for example, workers who are displaced due to large-scale industry-specific closures (e.g. automotive manufacturing, mining, forestry) are eligible for government assistance, including incentives to have their skills assessed. Given the success of this programme in facilitating transitions for displaced workers, it is being expanded to regions affected by structural change (OECD, 2018[22]).

The Flemish government should work closely with employer organisations and trade unions to explore options for financially supporting transitions from job to job or from one employment status to another. As discussed in Chapter 3 on skill imbalances, using sector covenants to support the sharing of sectoral training funds between sectors is one possibility, as is the retraining fund mentioned above.

Box 6.9. Using financial mechanisms to promote labour mobility

France: The Employment and Skills Development Actions programme (*Actions de Développement de l'Emploi et des Compétences*, ADEC) is an agreement between the national or regional government in France and a sector (relevant stakeholders such as employer organisations, trade unions, or regional councils) to support employers in training their employees. The programme targets sectors adversely impacted by structural economic, social and demographic change. The state offers aid to promote targeted training actions that focus on preventing the risk of skills obsolescence, support mobility and professional development, maintain and develop skills, and provide access to a recognised and transferable qualification. An ADEC agreement can also support retraining for sector-to-sector transitions. For example, an ADEC agreement was signed in the Île-de-France region with employers in the automobile sector, and involved support for retraining to other sectors or occupations.

Netherlands: Sectoral training funds in the Netherlands are a key pillar of the financing system for adult skills development. However, as concluded in the OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report for the Netherlands, the funds insufficiently support the reallocation of skilled workers across sectors. To address this issue, several initiatives were recently introduced, including transition centres, job placements, and transition funds. Transition funds facilitate mobility by providing employees with a personal budget to buy employment services. They are based on collaboration between the Dutch public employment service (UWV) and employment agencies, with transition centres as the central information broker between employers and individuals searching for a job. Most participants are currently employed, but some receive social benefits. More than half of the current participants are from the construction or care sectors.

Sources: OECD (2017[18]), *Getting skills right: France,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264284456-en; OECD (2017[6]), *Financial Incentives for Steering Education and Training,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264272415-en; van der Werff et al. (2017[23]), Interim Evaluation Sector plans, www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/rapporten/2017/12/12/tussenevaluatie-sectorplannen-2017/tussenevaluatie-sectorplannen-2017.pdf; OECD (2017[24]), *OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: Netherlands 2017*, www.oecd.org/skills/nationalskillsstrategies/OECD-Skills-Strategy-Diagnostic-Report-Netherlands.pdf.

Ensure financing supports flexible modes of learning

The importance of flexibility in modes of training delivery was discussed in Chapter 2 on learning culture. Making training opportunities available through e-learning, blended learning, modular learning, work-based learning and distance learning can make training more accessible and compatible with family and work obligations. For example, when combined with processes for the recognition of prior learning, modular learning allows workers to focus on developing the skills they currently lack through self-contained learning modules. By combining modules they may eventually gain a full (formal) qualification. This type of approach is especially useful for older workers who do not have a formal qualification and have spent much of their career in a sector or occupation with poor future prospects, as it allows them to retrain for a new occupation in less time.

The financing of adult learning should be designed to support such flexible modes of training delivery. Measures have already been taken in this direction in Flanders, for example, a previous requirement of regular student presence in class as a basis for

financing was seen to be at odds with the concept of flexible learning (e.g. distance learning), and was removed under reforms (Rekenhof, 2013[25]).

New legislation from the Department of Work and Social Economy also permits the use of paid educational leave towards up to 16 hours of skills validation. This reform supports a modular approach to adult learning: by participating in validation of prior learning, an adult clarifies which skills they are currently lacking and need to acquire. To continue in this direction, financial incentives for adult learning should ideally allow skill sets or modules to be eligible for funding, in addition to full qualifications. In France, steps are being taken to make modular learning eligible for subsidies by splitting all qualifications into "*blocs de compétences*" or partial qualifications. Adults will be able to use existing financial incentives, which are limited to short-term training, to obtain partial qualifications which accumulate towards a full qualification.

By September 2019, the new single database of eligible training will be introduced in Flanders, as announced in the proposed reform to adult learning. Paid educational leave and training vouchers will only be applicable to training opportunities identified in this database. Policy makers should ensure that flexible modes of training delivery are eligible for financial support under the new database.

As it can be costly for higher education institutions to offer courses in a flexible format (e.g. modular learning, irregular hours), the government may also need to provide financial support to higher education institutions to provide courses for adult learners in ways that are compatible with their work and family obligations.

Summary and recommendations

Drawing on the evidence presented in this chapter, Flanders could consider the following recommendations to the financing of adult learning:

- **Group all existing financial incentives for training into a single learning account**. To reduce complexity and facilitate access to training incentives, the government should over the long run group all existing training incentives for individuals (paid education leave, training vouchers, training credit, career guidance vouchers, and possibly sectoral training funds) into a single learning account (in Skills Strategy workshops these were referred to as training backpacks or "*rugzak*"), similar to France's *Compte Personnel de Formation*. Key features of the learning account should include: training rights that are portable upon job loss and transferable between employers; targeted at accredited labour-market oriented courses; and more training rights allotted to low-skilled than to high-skilled workers. The learning account should be accompanied by programmes to reach out to vulnerable groups with information, advice and guidance.
- **Expand programmes to reach out to marginalised groups with information, advice and guidance about training.** The government should consider how training incentives can help to overcome barriers to training (financial and otherwise) and how they could be better targeted both at the learners who most need the support (including low-skilled, older workers, and those in small and medium-sized enterprises) and at the type of training that will have the most impact on the economy and employment outcomes. The government should support programmes to reach out to marginalised groups with information, advice and guidance about training. The government should also disseminate information about available training incentives to a wide range of stakeholders, including guidance counselling services, adult education providers, VDAB, NGOs, and the staff responsible for training in companies (VTO).
- **Explore options for financially supporting transitions from job to job or from one employment status to another.** The government should work closely with employer organisations and trade unions on this. As discussed in Chapter 3 on skill imbalances, using sector covenants to support the sharing of sectoral training funds between sectors is one possibility. Another possibility worth exploring is converting severance pay into a fund that dismissed workers could use to access a variety of re-employment services, including training, counselling and skills validation. Making VDAB training more widely available to employees who are at risk of displacement would also support a proactive approach to re-employment.
- **Ensure that training incentives support flexible modes of training delivery.** Given the importance of non-financial barriers to adult learning in Flanders, the government should ensure that training incentives support flexible modes of training delivery, including modular learning, work-based learning, distance learning, e-learning, blended learning, and massive open online courses (MOOCs). This flexibility should be reflected in the new database of eligible training courses that will be introduced in September 2019. Additional support should also be given to higher education institutions to finance education provision in formats that are flexible to the needs of adult learners.

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Annex A. Workshop recommendations

As part of the Skills Strategy project in Flanders, the OECD and Flemish project team organised two workshops in Brussels – the diagnostic workshop on 15 May 2018 and the good Practices workshop 18 September 2018. These workshops were conducted to convene officials from ministries participating in the project team as well as other relevant public agencies and a broad cross-section of stakeholder representatives. In total, both workshops had around 75 participants.

In the two workshops, participants developed long lists with policy recommendations for each of the priority areas. In the diagnostic workshop, with input from a presentation, a briefing pack and outcomes from a pre-workshop survey, participants worked on a specific priority to develop generic and group specific recommendations. Discussions took place throughout multiple sessions in small groups that were heterogeneous and homogenous (in terms of stakeholders), and various exercises steered the conversation. In the good practice workshop, participants further refined the recommendations. Supported by presentations on good practices and different exercises in small groups, final lists with specific recommendations were developed.

The final lists of policy recommendations are comprehensive, detailed and often very concrete. They represent a broad view of government and stakeholder perspectives and demonstrate the diversity and quantity of ideas for further strengthening the Flemish skills system. As a result, these recommendations are the main input for the final recommendations presented in this report. This annex presents an overview of all the generic and specific recommendations developed by the workshop participants.

Developing a learning culture

Table A.1. Overview of policy recommendations for developing a learning culture

General recommendations	Specific recommendations and ideas for implementation
1. Make learning more attractive	**Provide a good start in learning (ED).** Review teaching methodologies and assessments in formal education to ensure they foster intrinsic motivation for learning in later life. **Support learning opportunities for teachers (ED).** Strengthen teacher induction, feedback, appraisal, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional development (e.g. industry internships). **Raise quality and relevance of adult education (ED, EM, G).** Place the adult learner at the centre when designing courses, ensure labour market relevance of courses (e.g. shorter curriculum development and approval cycle, guest lecturers from industry), provide continuous development for instructors, introduce quality assurance mechanisms, have clear and measurable targets for adult education within a long-term strategy.
2. Raise awareness among individuals and organisations about the importance of learning	**Promote a learning culture in the workplace (EM, T, S).** Include training participation as part of the job description, feature learning as part of the vision and mission of the workplace, institute internal job mobility opportunities, have a business training plan, and explore internal and external worker swapping programmes. **Empower managers to support learning (EM, S, G).** Train managers in communicating and providing feedback to their employees, conducting regular career and performance reviews; grant managers time and discretion to implement new ideas from training; consider funding source for manager training to come from sector funds. **Disseminate best practices (G, EM).** Set up a co-operation network, which could identify and disseminate best practices in adult education programmes offered by employers with a particular focus on providing this information to vulnerable industries and companies.
3. Create incentives for participation in learning	**Improve incentives to participate in adult education (G).** Instead of restricting incentive mechanisms (e.g. training leave, training vouchers and training credit) to ones that are only relevant for the labour market, consider targeting marginalised groups with specific quotas; consider having an expiration date for diplomas to ensure continuous professionalisation. **Improve financing of adult education (G).** Ensure that the many existing financial mechanisms for promoting adult education are managed effectively and well targeted; consider introducing a learning account system; ensure a stable source of financing for adult education providers (e.g. longer time reference for budget and not just annual budget cycle; financing by target group instead of by type of institution); greater transparency and autonomy for adult education centres regarding the use of finances; regularly evaluate the effective use of finances for adult education.
4. Provide tailor-made guidance and support	**Disseminate information about education opportunities (G, ED, EM).** Have one independent and neutral service provider collecting and providing transparent information about all available education programmes for secondary students and adults; have an online platform with all the information accessible; adapt the information to the specific needs of user groups. **Provide career guidance counselling (G).** Reach out to marginalised groups through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that represent these groups; provide career guidance in a low-barrier environment where there are marginalised groups; work with role models from marginalised groups who can advocate for and encourage others to engage in adult education.
5. Create accessible, flexible, and tailor-made learning pathways at every stage of life	**Improve access to adult education (G).** Provide adult education programmes in diverse learning environments where uptake is most likely. **Ensure access through mechanisms (T).** Include training in collective agreements and reinforce these agreements so that adults in all sectors and companies of all sizes have the opportunity to take up adult education. **Make higher education more accessible for adult learners (G, ED).** Encourage and support adults who want to pursue formal education in higher education (e.g. modular courses, recognition of prior learning for admission). **Improve flexibility of adult education (G, ED).** Increase flexibility to take time off for education and increase allotted time for adult education (especially in small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs); decrease or remove the minimum 32 training hour requirement to benefit from paid education leave; consider making programmes by the Flemish public employment service (‘*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, VDAB*’) targeted at those unemployed also accessible for those employed, so that those who are, for example, at risk of displacement can preventively prepare themselves for a transition instead of having to wait until they are officially unemployed. **Remove constraints of participating in adult education (G, ED, EM).** Introduce time accounts to allow employees to participate in adult education; provide access to childcare services for parents who would otherwise not be able to participate in adult education. **Facilitate tailor-made learning pathways (G, ED, EM).** Match adults to relevant adult education programmes through recognition and validation of prior learning; consider a national qualifications and credit transfer system to facilitate learning pathways.

Note: Stakeholder groups: government (G), education institutions (ED), employers (EM), sectoral training provider (S), trade unions (T), academics (A).

Reducing skills imbalances

Table A.2. Overview of policy recommendations for reducing skills imbalances

General recommendations	Specific recommendations and ideas for implementation
1. Facilitate labour mobility	**Raise awareness among employees and employers about possibility of job rotation and worker pooling (G).** **Encourage sectoral organisations to co-ordinate training opportunities to facilitate sector-to-sector movement (S).** **Continue to provide and subsidise learning and career counselling, and target lower-skilled workers through outreach (G).**
2. Make skills visible	**Work with employers and providers of recognitions of competences *('Erkenning van verworven competenties, EVC')* to simplify the EVC system (G, EM).** **Ensure that EVC certificates are linked to the education system (G).** **Introduce public investments to boost participation in EVC(G).** **Recruit employees based on skills (EM).** Train managers with a focus on skills instead of only qualifications. **Upon job loss, provide employees with a certificate of skills (EM).**
3. Develop work-based learning opportunities	**Support employers in developing quality workplaces (G).** Introduce a framework for quality internships. **Ensure that the long-term unemployed are not passed over for relevant skills training.** **Improve career guidance associated with work-based learning.** Match learners with mentors who can help them understand opportunities for advancement.
4. Improve information about current and future skill needs	**Conduct forecast studies of future skill needs which involve a range of stakeholders (A).** There is a need for sector-specific forecast studies and broader forecast studies, which capture the needs of the entire economy.

Note: Stakeholder groups: government (G), education institutions (ED), employers (EM), sectoral training provider (S), trade unions (T), academics (A).

Strengthening skills use in workplaces

Table A.3. Overview of policy recommendations for skill use in workplaces

General recommendations	Specific recommendations and ideas for implementation
1. Stimulate high-performance work practices	**Support and raise professionalisation of managers (G, ED, EM, S).** Human capital management should be added for the last year of university for all degree courses and all disciplines; support companies to make their companies more skills intensive, and support companies in introducing high-performance work practices. **Disseminate good examples (G).** Make a database of good practices to make them visible; leader appointed if all actors involved in implementation. **Foster a learning culture to prepare employees to transition to another job (G, EM).** Support employees in their career to help them better understand their interests and training needs; employ a strength-based approach instead of deficit-approach. **Promote and raise awareness about internal job mobility, make clear the benefits for the employer (G).** Consider the financial perspectives of employers, sectoral agreements and agreements between companies. Need for more pilots to promote inter-sectoral movement.
2. Unlock people's skills through raising self-awareness of one's skills	**Provide training and coaching as close as possible to the workplace (G, ED, EM).** **Support competence-based recruitment (G).** Assess how salaries can reflect levels of competency as well as seniority. **Promote intrinsic motivation (G).** Create incentives for continued learning by providing rewards for more degrees. **Make hidden competences visible through EVC (G).** Support ongoing reform. **Transition from training fund to career fund (mandatory for covenants), not just subsidy organ or intermediary (G).** **Provide a platform to make competencies transparent (G).**

Note: Stakeholder groups: government (G), education institutions (ED), employers (EM), sectoral training provider (S), trade unions (T), academics (A).

Strengthening the governance of adult education

Table A.4. Overview of policy recommendations for strengthening the governance of adult education

General recommendations	Specific recommendations and ideas for implementation
1. Develop a long-term vision for adult education	**Initiate process (G).** Set a date and location to bring stakeholders together for this process and identify a neutral interlocutor. **Have a single point of contact between government and stakeholders (G).** Consider creating an adult education agency that fulfils this responsibility. **Determine common goals, values and actions for adult education (ALL).** Create a vision similar to Flanders' overarching Vision 2050, but focusing specifically on adult education; ensure adult education aspect is featured in each of the six transitions in Vision 2050; have key performance indicators (KPIs) for specific milestones; if possible co-ordinate with the vision at the European level. **Define responsibilities of all stakeholders (ALL).** Ensure that those involved have sufficient mandate to make commitments to the vision; involve all sectors. **Determine** the sources of **funding** for all **actions (ALL).** Have clarity about the sharing of funding responsibilities. **Design a new pact with stakeholders (ALL).** Create a lifelong learning pact similar to the training pact, ensure commitment from stakeholders. **Identify "champions".** Have specific individuals promote this vision so that it is widely adopted.
2. Promote collaboration among all relevant stakeholders	**Promote collaboration with all (EM, T, S).** Foster collaboration within government (i.e. across ministries, levels of government), between government and stakeholders, and within and across sectors; discuss together how to deal with common challenges (e.g. digitalisation). **Have mechanisms that foster collaboration.** Have a financing framework that stimulates collaboration; have structural partnerships between the different adult education providers; while these mechanisms should be centralised, they should allow for enough flexibility for regional implementation. **Align quality assurance mechanisms (EM, S, G).** Ensure comparable framework, quality standards, evaluation mechanisms and language between different adult education providers. **Disseminate best practices and tools to promote a learning culture (ALL).** Set up a co-operation network that can identify and disseminate best practices in adult education programmes; promote transfer of learned experiences within and across sectors; disseminate best practice through magazines, websites and exchanges of "testimonials".
3. Improve the collection and dissemination of information	**Monitor and evaluate adult education policy measures (G, A).** Create an evidence-base for policy making in adult education; track implementation of long-term adult education vision in a transparent and open manner without sanctions. **Foster inter-disciplinary research across sectors about the skills needs of the future (G, A).** Describe scenarios of how skill needs in society and the labour market will evolve and how the skills system should respond. **Ensure application of research insights into practice (A).** **Communicate long-term vision to all.** Have coherent, comprehensive and transparent communication channels that are tailored to the diverse profiles of end users; share vision 2050 and long-term adult education vision with stakeholders. **Provide neutral information (G).** **Use digital tools to inform, orient and guide (G).**

Note: Stakeholder groups: government (G), education institutions (ED), employers (EM), sectoral training provider (S), trade unions (T), academics (A).

Improving the financing of adult education

Table A.5. Overview of policy recommendations for improving the financing of adult education

Generic recommendations	Specific recommendations and ideas for implementation
1. Review and revise financial mechanisms	**Review financial incentives to raise training participation for marginalised groups (G).** **For paid educational leave, allow a broader selection of eligible courses for lower-skilled adults.** Giving lower-skilled adults freedom to pursue courses that interest them could help them to develop a positive attitude towards learning. **Provide wage compensation for the employer, particularly regarding training for disadvantaged groups (G).** **Remove obligation for unemployed to carry out job search when they are enrolled in adult education and training (G).** This requirement may introduce barriers to participation in training for the unemployed. **Revise wage mechanisms/legislation to assess if there are any barriers to participating in training.** **Conduct research on the returns on investment in adult learning (A).**
2. Repackage existing financial incentives	**Repackage existing financial incentives to provide each learner with a "training backpack" (G)** to simplify and improve accessibility. **Commit to transforming the C4 (document for firing someone) into a skills portfolio (EM).** **Through social dialogue, the government should consider partly converting severance pay to a training fund (G, EM, T).**
3. Ensure financing supports flexible modes of training delivery	**Ensure that financing supports flexible modes of training delivery, including e-learning, blended learning, modular learning and distance learning (G).**

Note: Stakeholder groups: government (G), education institutions (ED), employers (EM), sectoral training provider (S), trade unions (T), academics (A).

Annex B. Pre-workshop surveys outcomes

In advance of both the diagnostic and good practice workshops, the OECD asked participants to complete an online survey. The reasons for these surveys were twofold: first, output of the surveys would help to steer discussions in the workshops by providing insights into the level of support for possible recommendations (in the first workshop) and a prioritisation of the generic recommendations from the first workshop (in the second workshop); second, it gave participants the opportunity to provide additional information on the various topics. This annex describes the main outcomes of these surveys.

Participants

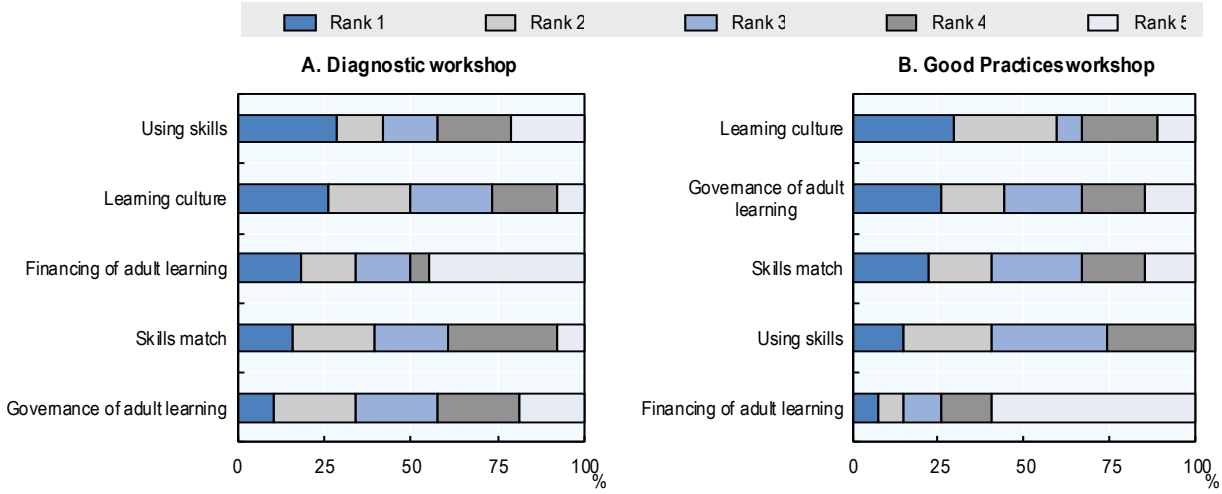
A total of 39 participants completed the survey for the diagnostic workshop, and 26 participants completed the survey for the good practice workshop. In both surveys, participants were predominantly from the government and sectoral training providers; as well as stakeholders such as employers, unions and education institutions. Advisors were unrepresented. Participants had, on average, many years of experience in the field: a large majority worked for more than 10 years in the same sector. Different age groups had relatively equal representation.

Prioritisation of priority areas

While the following ranking should not be considered an absolute measure of relevance of priorities, it does indicate the relative "popularity" of the priority areas in the two workshops. Participants were asked to rank the priorities based on how much they feel they could contribute to them, and to indicate which one they considered most important to discuss. In the first workshop, "using skills" and "learning culture" were selected most often as the highest rank, whereas in the second workshop, participants had a preference for "learning culture" and "governance" (Figure B.1). For the first workshop, a relatively large number of participants indicated that they could not contribute to the priority "finance", and in the second workshop only a small number gave it a high rank.

Figure B.1. Rank of priority areas in both workshops

Ranking based on extent they expected to contribute (diagnostic workshop) or wanted to contribute (good practice workshop), share of total respondents



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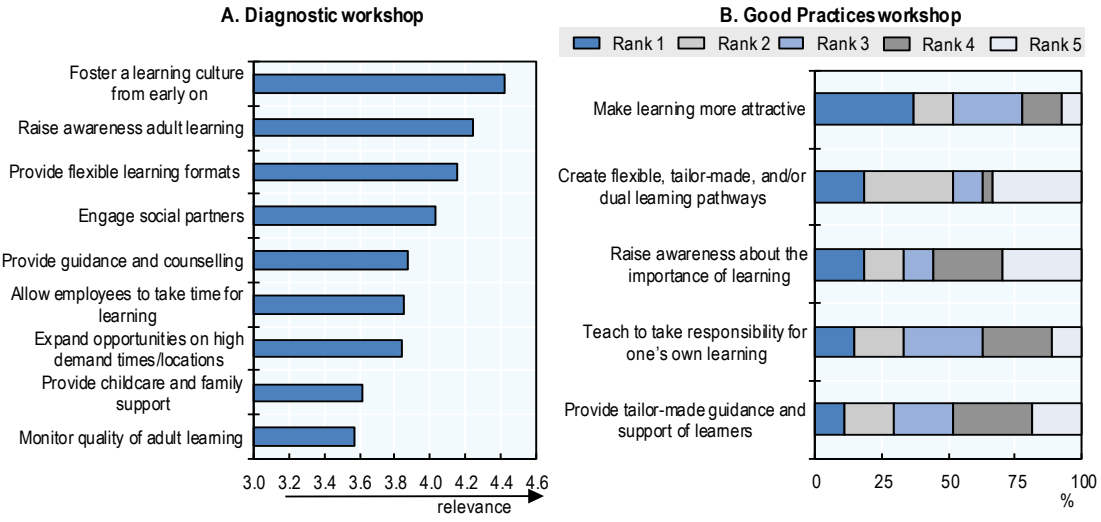
Support for recommendations

In the pre-workshop survey for the diagnostic workshop, recommendations from various other OECD Skills Strategy reports were presented and participants were asked to indicate how relevant these recommendations were for the specific challenges in Flanders, with 1 being "this is not relevant for Flanders" and 5 being "this is needed in Flanders". The intention was to display differences in positions between different stakeholders, and although some patterns were visible, the limited number of respondents made outcomes restricted for this analysis. In the pre-workshop survey for the good practice workshop, participants were asked to prioritise the generic recommendations from the first workshop. In this section, the outcomes of these questions are presented for the five priority areas.

Developing a learning culture

As shown in panel A in Figure B.2, the recommendations presented to participants in the diagnostic workshop received strong support overall – average scores for relevance in Flanders are high. The most strongly supported recommendations were to "foster a learning culture from early on in education" and "raising awareness of adult learning". These topics are also reflected in the generic recommendations developed in the diagnostic workshop and described in panel B of Figure B.2. In advance of the good practice workshop, participants gave the recommendations "make learning more attractive" the highest rank overall. The recommendation "flexible, tailor-made, and/or dual learning pathways" ended up in the higher ranks of many respondents, while support for the other three generic recommendation was more equally spread.

Figure B.2. Support for recommendations related to developing a learning culture



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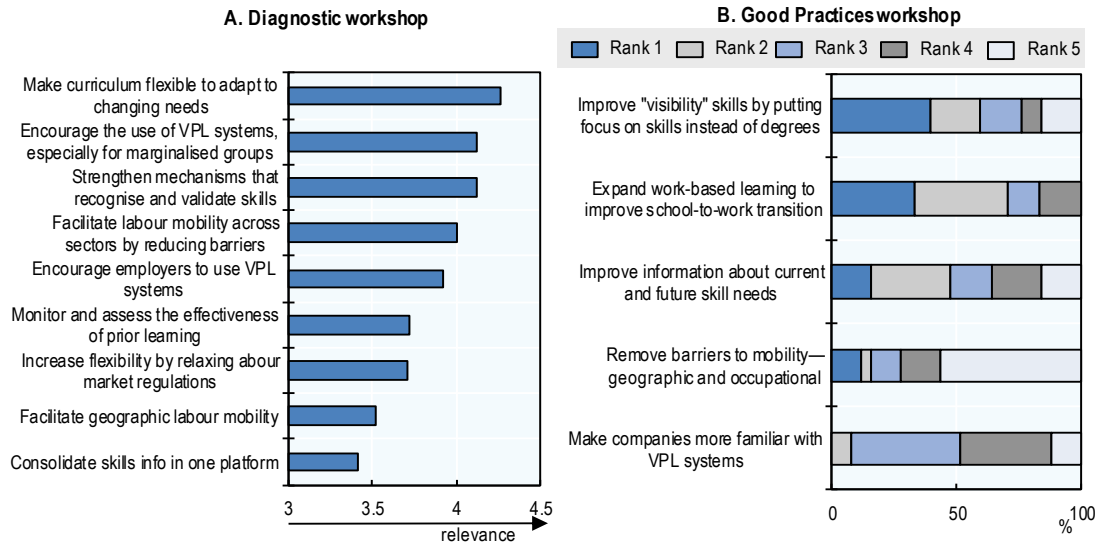
Reducing skills imbalances

For reducing skills imbalances, the overall support was strong for the recommendations shown to participants in advance of the diagnostic workshop. According to respondents, "making curriculum flexible to adapt to changing needs" was especially relevant for Flanders. For the generic recommendations that came out of the diagnostic workshop, there was more variation in outcomes by respondents. The recommendations "make companies more familiar with systems for validation of prior learning (VPL)" and "removing barriers to mobility" had a relatively low priority, while "improving the visibility of skills" and "expanding work-based learning" had a relatively high priority.

Figure B.3. Support for recommendations related to reducing skills imbalances



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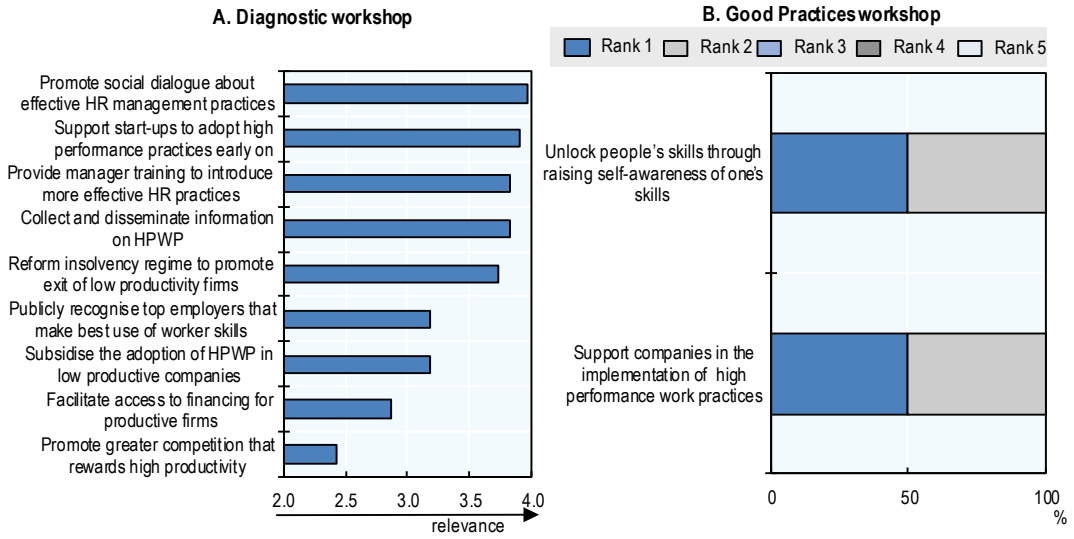
Strengthening skills use in workplaces

There was more variation in the support for different recommendations for skills use than in the other priority areas, as shown in panel A in Figure B.4 below. "Promoting greater competition to reward companies with high productivity" received little support, while other recommendations that focus on "social dialogue about human resource (HR) management practices" and "supporting high-performing work practices in start-ups" received more support. Two generic recommendations were developed in the diagnostic workshop that had the same priority.

Figure B.4. Support for recommendations related to strengthening skills use



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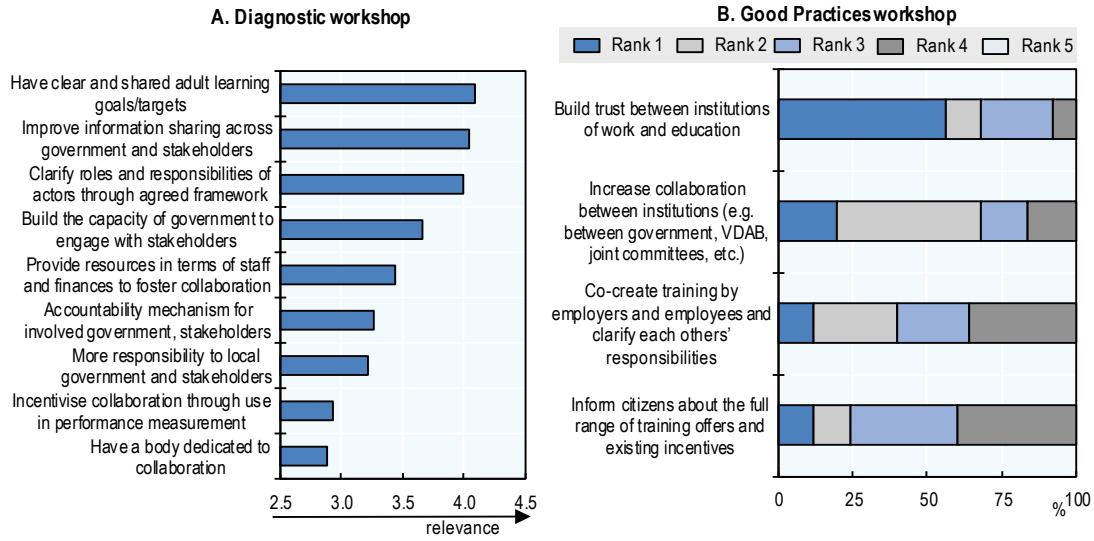
Strengthening the governance of adult education

Not all recommendations related to strengthening the governance of adult education proposed before the diagnostic workshop were relevant. For example, setting up a "body dedicated to collaboration between government and stakeholders" is relatively irrelevant for Flanders according to respondents, in contrast with strong support for "having clear and shared adult learning goals and targets". The generic recommendation with the highest priority, according to respondents, is to "build trust between institutions of work and education".

Figure B.5. Support for recommendations related to governance of adult education

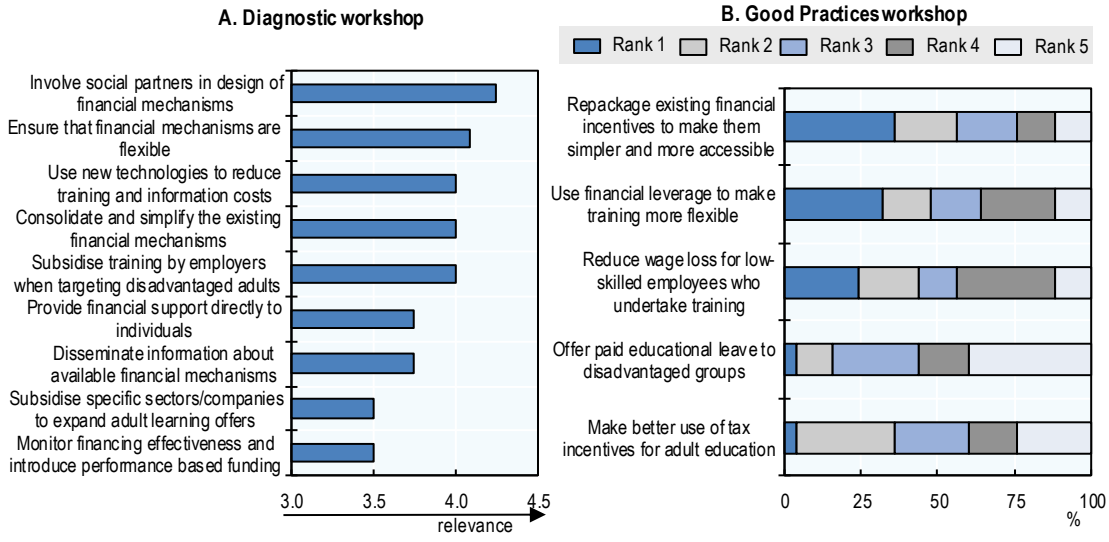


StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888933892136

Improving the financing of adult education

For financing, most recommendations proposed to participants before the diagnostic workshop were considered relevant, especially "involving social partners in the design and implementation of financial mechanisms". For the generic recommendations developed in the diagnostic workshop, the "repackaging of existing financial incentives" and "using financial leverage to make training more flexible" had the highest priority, according to respondents.

Figure B.6. Support for recommendations related to financing adult education



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Annex C. Engagement

The National Skills Strategy Diagnostic Phase involved ongoing oversight and input from an inter-ministerial team (the National Project Team) co-ordinated by the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy and composed of experts from various other departments and organisations, as outlined in the table below.

Three missions were organised between January and September 2018, including two stakeholder workshops.

The European Commission was represented at the skills strategy seminar and at both stakeholder workshops by Michael Horgan and Kasia Jurczak.

Table C.1. National Project Team

National Project Team	
Willem De Klerck	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Ann Van den Cruyce	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Ariane Rober	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Raf Boey	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
An-Katrien Sodermans	Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA Flanders
Caroline Gijselinckx	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)
Jeroen Backs	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)
Peter Van Humbeeck	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Mieke Valcke	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Sandra Hellings	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Philippe Nys	Department for Economy, Enterprise, Science and Innovation (Departement Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie)
Sven De Haeck	Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB)
Anneleen Peeters	Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB)
Sarah Van Steenkiste	Coordinator in the Centre of Expertise for Labour market Monitoring (CELM)
Reinhilde Pulinx	Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR)
Koen Stassen	Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR)
Tom Tournicourt,	Department for Economy, Enterprise, Science and Innovation (Departement Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie)

TableC.2. Participants in meetings throughout the project

1. Skills Strategy seminar – Brussels, 30 January 2018 (Launch of the project and define the scope)	
Ministerial level	
Philippe Muyters	Flemish Minister for Work, Economy, Innovation and Sport
Marion Vrijens	Adjunct-kabinetschef, werk en sociale economie, duaal leren. Cabinet of minister Crevits
Griffin De Baere	Flemish Ministry for Budget, Finance and Energy
Greet Valck	Flemish Ministry for Local and Provincial Government, Civic Integration, Housing, Equal Opportunities and Poverty Reduction, responsible for social economy
Government officials and social partners	
Charlien Van Leuffel	Policy advisor in the cabinet of minister for Work, Economy, Innovation and Sport Philippe Muyters
Dirk Vanderpoorten	Secretary general of the Flemish department for Work and Social Economy
Bruno Tindemans	Head of the Flemish agency for entrepreneurial training Syntra Vlaanderen
Koen Algoed	Secretary general of the Flemish department for Finance and Budget
Johan Hanssens	Secretary general of the Flemish department for Economy, Enterprise, Science and Innovation
Tom Bevers	Advisor-general at the Belgian Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue
Pieter Kerremans	Secretary general of the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Sarah Vansteenkiste	Coordinator in the Centre of Expertise for Labour market Monitoring (CELM)
Sven De Haeck	Head of division in VDAB
An-Katrien Sodermans	Head of division in the Flemish agency for entrepreneurial training Syntra Vlaanderen
Ann Van den Cruyce	Head of division in the Flemish department for Work and Social Economy
Jeroen Backs	Head of division in the Flemish department for Education and Training
Willem De Klerck	Head of unit in the study and research unit of the Flemish department for Work and Social Economy
Mieke Valcke,	Policy advisor in the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Caroline Gijselinckx	Policy advisor in the Flemish department for Education and Training
Philippe Nys	Department for Economy, Enterprise, Science and Innovation (Departement Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie)
Raf Boey	Policy advisor in the Flemish department for Work and Social Economy
Ariane Rober	Policy advisor in the Flemish department for Work and Social Economy
European Commission	
Kasia Jurczak	Member of commissioner Thyssen cabinet
Academics	
Sarah Vansteenkiste	Sarah Vansteenkiste

2. Diagnostic mission – Brussels/Ghent, 14-16 May 2018 (Site visits)	
Christof Vanden Eynde	Staff member in the Centre for Adult Basic Education (Centrum voor Basiseducatie) Gent-Meetjesland-Leieland
Peter Peyskens	Deputy Director of the Centre for Adult Education (Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs) Gent
Mira Vanderplancke	Leerwinkel West-Vlaanderen
Bea Van Imschoot	Policy advisor education, Provincie West-Vlaanderen

3. Good Practice Mission – 17-19 September 2018 (Site visits)	
Bart Lannoo	HR Business Partner Marine Harvest Pieters
Wouter Van Thuyne	Factory Manager Bruges Marine Harvest Pieters
Marc Cloostermans	VDAB

Table C.3. Participants in diagnostic workshop (15 May 2018) and good practices workshop (18 September 2018)

Government and central public bodies and institutions	
Jeroen Backs	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)
Leen Baisier	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Tom Bevers	Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue (FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg)
Raf Boey	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Sarah Bonte	Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances (Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen, AHOVOKS)
Linde Buysse	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Ann Coenen	Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue (FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg)
Helga Coppen	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Sven De Haeck	VDAB
Willem De Klerck	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Liesbet De Koster	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Katrien de Schrijver	STEM Platform
Mia Douterlungne	Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR)
Nathalie Druine	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)
Rita Dunon	STEM Platform
Isabel Gaisbauer	VDAB
Kim Geerts	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Caroline Gijselinckx	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)
Sandra Hellings	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Roos Herpelinck	Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR)
Evelyn Laermans	Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances (Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs, Kwalificaties en Studietoelagen, AHOVOKS)
Jules Maenhaut	Department of Finance and Budget (Departement Financiering en Begroting)
Nina Mares	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)
Isabelle Melis	Flemish Interuniversity Council (Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, VLIR)
Elisabeth Mertens	Department of Finance and Budget (Departement Financiering en Begroting)
Peter Neirynck	Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG)
Philippe Nys	Department for Economy, Enterprise, Science and Innovation (Departement Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie)
Reinhilde Pulinx	Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR)
Danielle Raspoet	Flemish Advisory Council for Innovation and Enterprise (Vlaamse Adviesraad voor Innoveren en Ondernemen, VARIO)
Ariane Rober	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
An Katrien Sodermans	Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA Flanders
Koen Stassen	Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR)
Bruno Tindemans	Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training – SYNTRA Flanders
Mieke Valcke	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
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Peter Van Humbeeck	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Charlie Van Leuffel	Cabinet Muyters
Eline Van Onacker	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Katrijn Vanderweyden	Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)
Jessie Vandeweyer	Department of Work and Social Economy (Departement Werk en Sociale Economie)
Liesbeth Vermandere	Department of Education and Training (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming)

Education institutions	
Kurt Berteloot	Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen
An Bollen	VIVO, training institute for the social profit sector
Sofie Cabus	KU LEUVEN HIVA
Willy Claes	Katholiek onderwijs vlaanderen
Ans De Vos	Antwerp Management School
Patriek Delbaere	Education for cities and municipalities (Onderwijskoepel van steden en gemeenten, OVSG)
Eddy Demeersseman	Katholiek onderwijs vlaanderen
Kris Denys	FOPEM, Federatie Onafhankelijke Methodescholen
Jeroen Doom	WOODWIZE
Mandy Ghyselinck	HoGent
Annick Haesaerts	Go! Education of the Flemish Community (GO! onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap)
Sara Jaminé	Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education (Vlaams ondersteuningscentrum voor het volwassenenonderwijs,Vocvo)
Catherine Laurijssen	Karel de Grote Hogeschool
Griet Mathieu	Provincial Education Flanders (Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaandere, POV)
Inge Van Acker	Flemish Support Centre for Adult Education (Vlaams ondersteuningscentrum voor het volwassenenonderwijs,Vocvo)
Steven Van den Eynde	Federation Centers for Basic Education (Federatie Centra voor Basiseducatie)
Greet Van Dender	Provincial Education Flanders (Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaandere, POV)
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Christof Vanden Eynde	Centrum voor Basiseducatie Leerpunt Gent-Meetjesland-Leieland
Johan Vandenbranden	Education for cities and municipalities (Onderwijskoepel van steden en gemeenten, OVSG)
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Erik Vanwoensel	Arktos
Katrien Verstraeten	Christelijke Onderwijscentrale

Sectoral training providers	
Yves Bollekens	Fund for Diamond Industry (Fonds voor de Diamantnijverheid)
Maarten Bresseleers	Social Fund Performing Arts (Sociaal Fonds Podiumkunsten)
Peter Bruggen	Boerenbond
Thomas Crauwels	Sector fund assemblers (vzw Montage)
Jan De Schepper	Cobot, Training for Textiel Industry
Henk Dejonckheere	Alimento, Sectoral organisation for the Food industry
Siegfried Desmalines	LOGOS, Training fund for International trade, transport and logistics
Geert Heylen	Social Fund for Transport and Logistics (Sociaal Fonds Transport en Logistiek)
Sophia Honggokoesoemo	Minority forum (Minderhedenforum)
Ruben Janssens	Social fund Fuel trade (Sociaal Fonds Brandstoffenhandel)
Sofie Leyten	Coiffure.org
Michel Loncke	Cobot, Training for Textiel Industry
Lieve Ruelens	Alimento, Sectoral organisation for the Food industry
Elisabeth Salaets	Social Fund Bus and Car
Pieter Tratsaert	Horeca Vorming Vlaanderen
Bart Van Hooreweghe	INOM Bedienden
Vincent Vandenameele	Training Fund for Temporary Employees (Vormingsfonds voor Uitzendkrachten)
Anne Vandenborre	Boerenbond
Justine Vandormael	Liberform, Training center for free professions
Mieke Vermeiren	Belgian Federation for the Technology Industry, Agoria
Elisah Verschraegen	Cobot, Training for Textiel Industry
Tinne Vliers	Training and Advice for Fashion and Clothing (Opleiding & Advies voor Mode en Confectie, IVOC)

Trade unions	
Sam Coomans	ACV
Goele Cornelissen	Coc
Joris Renard	Union of Self-Employed Entrepreneurs (Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers, UNIZO)
Lore Tack	General Federation of Belgian Labour (Vlaamse Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond, ABVV)
Peter van der Hallen	ACV

Employer associations and private companies	
Dominique Boyen	Co-valent
Jonas De Raeve	Flemish Network of Enterprises (Vlaams Netwerk van Ondernemingen, VOKA)
Rik De Stoop	SF 323 - vastgoed
Jan Denys	Randstad
Dirk Malfait	Association for Social Profit Enterprises (Vereniging voor Social Profit Ondernemingen, Verso)
Geert Ramaekers	Constructiv
Sonja Teughels	Flemish Network of Enterprises (Vlaams Netwerk van Ondernemingen, VOKA)

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Johan Desseyn	Mpiris bvba
Michelle Sourbron	Steunpunt Werk - KU Leuven
Sarah Vansteenkiste	Steunpunt Werk - KU Leuven

European Commission	
Michael Horgan	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion