

YOUTH POLICY IN THE THREE COMMUNITIES OF BELGIUM





COLOFON

This publication is an initiative of the youth administrations of the three Communities of Belgium as part of the Belgian EU Presidency 2024

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This is my country

The Presidency of the European Union (EU) offers our country the opportunity to play a leading role in co-directing the agenda and fostering cooperation within the EU for a period of six months. The presidency provides an opportunity to promote cooperation and dialogue between Member states and EU institutions. By acting as an honest broker, our country aims to contribute to finding common solutions to challenges to children, youth and youth work in Europe. Youth policy in Belgium is characterised by some very specific elements that set it apart from other European Union member states. Here are some of these specific features:

Decentralised structure

Belgium is a federal state with three communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking) and three regions (Flemish, Brussels and Walloon). The Belgian Constitution allocates competences to these entities differently. Youth policy is within the competence of the Communities. Each community has autonomy and responsibility over its own youth policy. This means that youth policy is often adapted to the cultural and linguistic specificities of each community.

Bilingual Brussels

Brussels, the capital of Belgium, is bilingual (Dutch and French) and has a special status. Youth policy in Brussels must take into account this linguistic diversity and the unique challenges the city faces as an international and multicultural centre.

Cooperation between Communities

Although youth policy is decentralised, there are efforts for cooperation between communities. Consultative bodies and partnerships have been set up to address common challenges and share experiences.

Attention to cultural diversity

Belgium has a diverse population with different cultural backgrounds. Youth policy is tied to and pays attention to this diversity and tries to develop inclusive initiatives that take into account the different "identities" of young people.

A vibrant Youth Work

Youth work plays a crucial role in the youth policy of the three communities. There are numerous youth clubs, youth houses and youth organisations that organise activities and programmes to promote the development and participation of children and young people.

Youth participation

Encouraging the participation of children and young people in decision-making processes is a particularly important aspect of youth policy. There are youth councils, structures and initiatives that allow children and young people to have their voices heard and actively contribute to policy-making.

The specifics of youth policy in the three communities reflect the complex administrative structure, cultural diversity and linguistic diversity of our country. The pursuit of community cooperation and attention to local contexts are central aspects of youth policy. This presentation brochure "youth policy in Belgium's three communities" alongside Youth Wiki and the European Knowledge Centre Youth Policy will guide you through our intricate and colourful country!

WELCOME! WELKOM!

BIENVENUE! WILLKOMMEN!

Belgium in a nutshell: introduction to the state structures



BELGIUM: A FEDERAL STATE

Belgium is a federal state, consisting of 3 communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) and 3 regions (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region). There is no hierarchy between the federal level, the communities and the regions.

This division into three communities and three regions is a unique feature of Belgian federalism. Both types of entities have their exclusive competences. Their territories overlap geographically because they correspond to different combinations of Belgium's four linguistic areas (the Dutch language area, the French language area, the German language area and the French-Dutch bilingual area).



Surface

32,545 km



Population

11,697,557 (2023)



Federal capital

Brussels City



Head of state

King Filip (Belgium is a monarchy)



Federal prime minister

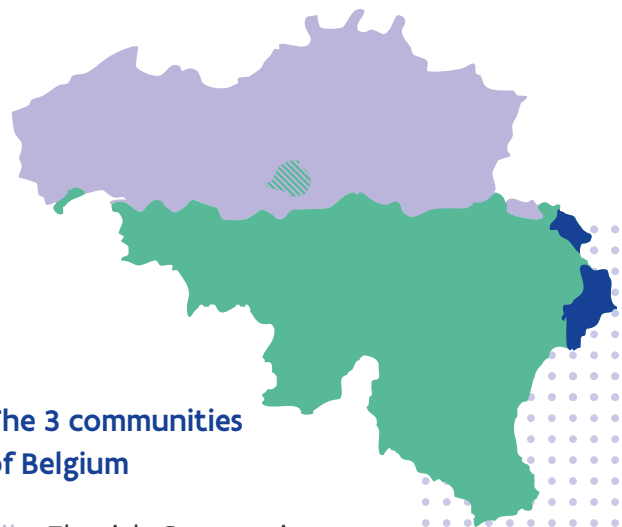
Alexander De Croo (outgoing)



Official languages

Dutch, French and German

Each entity has its specific area of responsibility. The federal state in Belgium holds the power over various critical areas, including foreign affairs, finance, justice, defence, employment and social security. Additionally, it holds 'residuary powers' to respond to emerging challenges like migration, refugees and asylum seekers.

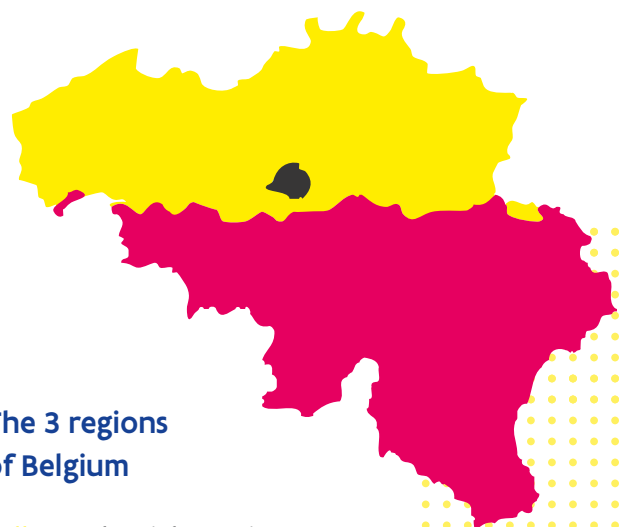


The 3 communities of Belgium

Lila: Flemish Community

Green: French Community

Blue: German-speaking Community



The 3 regions of Belgium

Yellow: Flemish Region

Red: Walloon Region

Black: Brussels-Capital Region

The powers of the region are linked to its 'territory' and include environment, agriculture, urban planning, housing...

The powers of the communities are 'person-related' matters such as education, health care, culture, **youth**...



These competences are based on the ‘foro interno, foro externo’ principle: the responsibilities can be broadly categorised as internal, governing the country’s functioning, and outward-facing, dealing with issues on an international scale. This principle also applies to the competences of the Communities, which is particularly important for youth, as it explains the special situation of Belgium and the three Communities in the European context of [the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council configuration \(EYCS\)](#) and in the context of the European programmes [Erasmus+ Youth](#), [the European Solidarity Corps](#)... where for example a centralised and unique Belgian NAU and NA is by constitution unfeasible.

The German-Speaking Community finds itself in a unique situation, disposing of a high degree of autonomy and being located at the intersection of different countries. The German-Speaking Community disposes over the same community competences as the other two Belgian communities. However, Article 139 of the Belgian constitution allows the transfer of competences by mutual agreement from the Walloon Region to the German-Speaking Community. Within this context some regional competencies were handed to the German-Speaking Community over the years, most recently Energy, housing and regional planning (2019) became part of the jurisdiction of the German-Speaking Community.

The Brussels-Capital Region is also a special case because it is a bilingual area with both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking people. That’s why the ‘person-related’ powers in the Brussels-Capital Region are divided between the Flemish and the French Community. That means that both communities have the authority and responsibility in policy domains within this region, ensuring that the linguistic and cultural needs of their respective communities are addressed.

Additionally, the Brussels-Capital Region is a distinct administrative entity with its own parliament and government. It is primarily responsible for matters of regional competence. These competences typically include issues related to local governance, urban development and other regional affairs specific to the Brussels-Capital Region. This administrative setup allows for a degree of self-governance within the Brussels-Capital Region while still accommodating the linguistic and cultural diversity present in the area.



THREE MINISTERS FOR YOUTH

The federal 'Belgian' level of government only has limited powers in youth matters (e.g. some aspects of judicial protection of minors), so there is no youth policy at the Belgian level. It is the communities that are each independently competent for youth and youth policy, so the most explicit 'youth policy instruments' can be found at community level.

The communities have a minister responsible for youth, a parliamentary commission and a number of administrative departments with 'youth' in their title and a large number of specific youth-related budget items. Given the fact that every community has its own minister for youth, this means Belgium has three.

FEDERAL COMPETENCES RELATED TO YOUTH

While youth policy is a competence of the communities, there are many federal competences that affect youth policy and young people. These include but are not limited to:

1. Citizen participation

In Belgium, all citizens of Belgian nationality have voting rights from the age of 18. There is compulsory voting for the election of members of:

- ✿ the European Parliament,
- ✿ the Federal Parliament,
- ✿ the different parliaments at regional and community levels.

THE MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

In 2021, the Flemish Government decided that for local and provincial elections there will be voluntary voting rights instead of compulsory voting. Therefore, citizens are no longer obliged to participate in elections for municipal and provincial councils in the Flemish community.

VOTING AT 16

In 2022, Belgium lowered the voting age, enabling citizens aged 16 and 17 to participate in the election of the European Parliament. This means that a new age group in Belgium can participate in the 2024 elections for the European Parliament. Lowering the voting age adds 270,000 young people to the voting pool in Belgium. This amendment to the electoral laws was introduced through the act of 1 June 2022. The ruling no. 116/2023 of 20 July 2023 of the Constitutional Court has furthermore annulled the prior registration requirement.

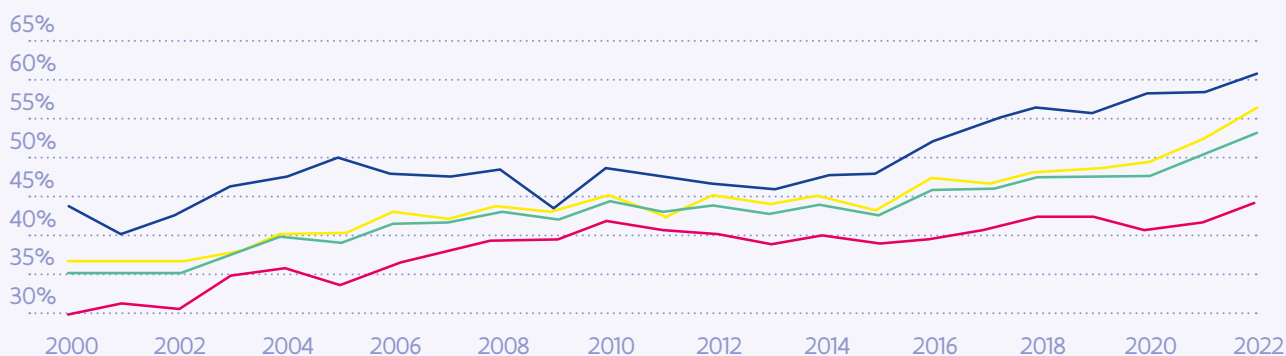


2. Compulsory education

In Belgium, education is compulsory for all children from 5 to 18 years old. This period of compulsory education is determined by the Federal Government for the whole of Belgium. However, it's important to note that compulsory *education* doesn't necessarily mean compulsory *schooling*. Parents have the option to provide home schooling for their children. From the age of 15 or 16, students also can opt for vocational education: they can combine part-time school attendance with a part-time working experience to fulfil compulsory education.

According to 2020 OECD data, in Belgium, a significant proportion of 25–34-year-olds (22.6%) hold a master's degree or an equivalent tertiary education degree, ranking fifth among the surveyed countries. Additionally, Belgium has a relatively low percentage (5.5%) of inactive NEET individuals among 15–29-year-olds, ranking 35th out of 40 surveyed countries.

SHARE OF PEOPLE AGED 30-34 WHO HAVE HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (2000-2022)



3. Majority age

Since 1 May 1990, the legal age of majority in Belgium has been fixed at 18, where previously it was 21. At the age of majority, a person is considered to be legally competent and liable.



1990

18 becomes the legal age of majority

2021

voluntary voting rights

2022

voting at 16

2024

new age group can participate



4. Unemployment benefits

Unemployment insurance is part of social security and therefore a federal competence. It mainly provides benefits to replace lost professional income. Several institutions play a role in attributing unemployment benefits, the most important one being the National Employment Office (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening – RVA, Office national de l'emploi – ONEM, Landesamt für Arbeitsbeschaffung - LFA) that organises and manages the unemployment insurance.

Young people who graduated before they turn 25 and who do not find a job within a year after graduating are also eligible for financial support.

In Belgium, the unemployment rate for young people (15-24) continues to decline, reaching 13.9% in 2023. This is nearly 3 percentage points lower than the 16.8% unemployment among 15-24-year-olds in 2022.



5. The Cultural Pact

The Cultural Pact protects associations against discrimination for ideological or philosophical reasons when it comes to infrastructure and subsidies. This is to promote democracy and increased participation in the cultural sector. The law also established a Permanent National Commission for the Cultural Pact to ensure compliance. This federal Commission is composed of 28 members, 13 Dutch-speaking and 13 French-speaking as well as 2 German-speaking. If anyone or any association believes the Cultural Pact has been violated, they can file a complaint with this commission. The commission then investigates the complaint, seeks reconciliation and, if unsuccessful, issues a reasoned opinion with possible recommendations.

THREE YOUTH COUNCILS

1. The Council of the German-speaking Youth

The [Council of the German-speaking Youth](#) (Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend, RDJ in short) was established by royal enactment on 9 June 1976. It is the independent federation of individual young people, youth workers from open and mobile youth work, youth wings of political parties, youth organisations and youth information services in the German-speaking Community.

The RDJ runs activities that enable young people in the German-speaking Community to influence decisions and measures that concern them. The youth council makes the link between youth and policy. It is a platform for young people to participate actively in youth policy design and project development, and to experience (European) democracy.

The RDJ is governed by a steering committee and a general assembly. Members should not be older than 35 when nominated. Different working groups develop projects and contribute to the overall work of the youth council. The youth council's thematic priorities for 2023-2025 include civic education, sustainability, well-being and support for local youth organisations. The working groups are connected to these thematic priorities.

The RDJ receives structural funding to implement its tasks, as defined in the decree on youth work funding. Two coordinators run the secretariat and carry out the day-to-day organisational work. The youth council can also request funding for specific projects, for instance via the Strategic Plan for Youth (see chapter 'Legal basis for youth policy in the German-speaking Community').





Since 2020, the Council of the German-speaking Youth has been delegated to organise the elementary training for voluntary youth leaders (e.g. scout leaders). It is the first step towards obtaining the 'Certificate for Volunteer Youth Leaders'.

The elementary training prepares young people in a fun and enjoyable way to take on leadership responsibilities. Volunteers who have been active youth leaders for many years share their knowledge and experience with future youth leaders.

Currently, the youth council organises two elementary training courses per year: one geared towards open youth work (spring) and another one for youth organisations, e.g. scout movements (autumn). The youth council cooperates with local youth organisations and youth workers to plan and implement the elementary training course, but it also draws on the expertise of the police or the agency for people with disabilities to provide specialised input for youth leaders. The training courses are also open to interested young people who are not involved in youth organisations or do not visit youth clubs. Each training consists of two parts: the elementary training course and a practical training course. To obtain a Certificate for Volunteer Youth Leaders, participants have to complete both training parts.

ELEMENTARY TRAINING COURSE

The elementary training course organised by the youth council is the first of two building blocks to obtain the certificate. The 40 hours of elementary training are spread over two weekends. It consists of practical exercises, theoretical modules and workshops. Participants are also trained in first-aid by a team of professional healthcare workers.



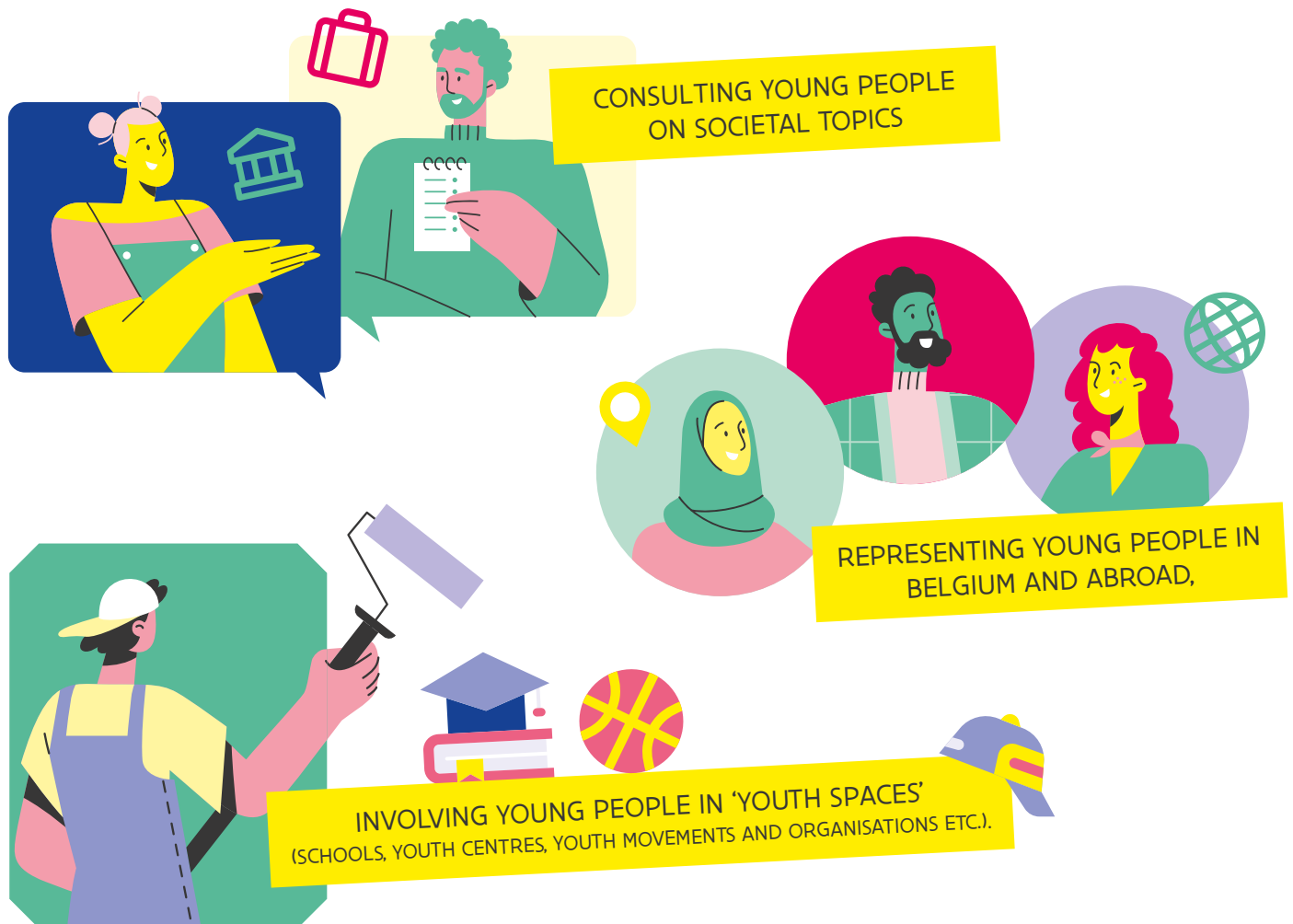
PRACTICAL TRAINING COURSE

The second part is a practical training course of 30 hours. It is carried out by the youth organisation or youth club in which the trainee is active. Depending on the youth organisation or youth club, the content varies. The trainees need to apply in their own youth club or organisation what they learned during the elementary training course.

After completing the two parts, the trainees are issued a Certificate for Volunteer Youth Leaders by the Government of the German-speaking Community confirming that they completed the elementary training course, the first-aid course and the practical training. The volunteer youth leaders can use this and other certificates in their further career.

2. The Belgian French-speaking Youth Forum

The Belgian French-speaking Youth Forum, 'Forum des Jeunes' in French, is accredited as the official advisory body representing youth (aged from 16 to 30) in the French-speaking Community. The Youth Forum channels the views of young people to decision-makers and defends the interests and rights of young people at the national and international levels. This is done in several ways:



The cross-cutting objective of the Youth Forum's activities is to train young people to be responsible, active, critical and supportive citizens (CRAC in French). In addition to its advocacy role, the Youth Forum places youth participation at the heart of its actions.



YOUTH-LED ORGANISATION

All projects of the Youth Forum are carried out by young people for young people, supported by staff members. Each project is co-organised by a team of young people. Any young person who wants to get involved in the Youth Forum can become a member under two conditions: to live in the French-speaking Community and be from 16 to 30 years old. The number of teams depends on the number of projects. One member can be involved in more than one team. Besides the teams, the Youth Forum has three governance bodies: the board, the general assembly and the Agora. These are all composed of young individuals who are actively involved in the structure.

CONSULTATIONS

One of the main missions of the Youth Forum is to publish official recommendations on issues that concern young people. Some recommendations are voiced at own initiative (Youth Forum members decide on a theme they wish to work on), while for other themes decision-makers ask the Youth Forum for an official opinion. In both cases, the methodology is the same for producing qualitative policy recommendations.

- ✿ Start-up: recruiting a team around the topic (via social media, members of the Youth Forum etc.),
- ✿ Training: training and meetings about the theme (e.g. meeting with decision-makers, experts, young people etc.) to get a global view on the topic,
- ✿ Participatory process: all Youth Forum projects are based on a participatory process, so the teams reach out to young people all over the French-speaking Community to gather their views on a specific issue, for example through:
 - online quantitative surveys,
 - qualitative surveys, events, focus groups etc.,
 - discussion sessions on a given theme.
 - For an opinion to be considered 'official', 1,000 young people have to be consulted.
- ✿ Collecting results: once the consultation phase is over, the team analyses the results,
- ✿ Drafting: drafting of the official recommendation and the advocacy points,
- ✿ Communication: producing youth-friendly communication materials to present the recommendations to young people, but also in the media (by the team members),
- ✿ Advocacy: presenting the recommendations to the relevant political authorities, organising discussions between young people and policymakers.



International mandates

The Belgian French-speaking Youth Forum plays an active role in representing young people at national and international levels, by assigning mandates to delegates:

UN MANDATES

- ✦ There are four mandates for the United Nations: for youth, sustainable development, climate and biodiversity. There are two delegates per mandate, so eight UN delegates in total. They are chosen for two years: the first year as a junior delegate, the second as a senior delegate. Each of them takes part in missions related to their mandate. The delegates' role is to represent the voice of young French-speaking Belgians on the international stage, depending on the issues addressed. In order to carry out this representation work, they implement, together with the Youth Forum, a participative process in the French-speaking Community to gather the voices of young people.

EUROPEAN YOUTH DIALOGUE MANDATES

- ✦ There are two Youth Dialogue delegates. Each Youth Dialogue cycle lasts 18 months and focuses on a different theme set by the Council of Youth Ministers. The Youth Forum and the delegates are in charge of conducting consultations and activities with young people and policymakers on the theme of the Youth Dialogue cycle. The results are then compiled, analysed and further discussed during the EU Youth Conferences, where the Youth Dialogue delegates from all EU countries are present.

EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM MANDATE

- ✦ The Youth Forum of the French Community is also a member of the European Youth Forum. One delegate has the mandate to participate in the council of members and the general assembly.

To carry out its international mission, the Youth Forum is supported by Wallonie-Bruxelles International and the European Youth Dialogue programme.

As youth is a competence of the communities, the Youth Forum works closely with its Flemish (Vlaamse Jeugdraad) and German-speaking (Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend) counterparts to ensure efficient representation of Belgian youth as a whole. In addition to this collaboration between youth councils, the Youth Forum ensures good communication and coordination with national agencies and administrations.



Meaningful participation: What does it mean to be young?

Participation is part of the Youth Forum's DNA. It shapes all its mission and actions. A society that does not listen to its young people is a society in crisis. For young people to take an active role in society and feel integrated, it is important to consider them and to give them the means to participate. We need to create inclusive participation spaces and, above all, involve them in decision-making processes. The Youth Forum's official opinion on the civic participation of young people has many concrete proposals on how to do so. Enabling young people to participate more, in optimal conditions, is the best guarantee for a renewed democracy and a better society. As part of its missions, the Youth Forum aims to work on this, in partnership with other stakeholders.

To reach out to young people and get them genuinely and meaningfully involved, the Youth Forum has launched a project entitled 'Being young' ('Être jeune' in French) in 2021. Youth Forum members and staff met more than 200 young people across the French-speaking Community for non-directive interviews. The aim was to discuss the question: 'what does it mean to be young today?' We gathered a large number of stories that reflect the realities of young people today. In addition to personal testimonials and reflections, the young people also made recommendations for a better society.



The Youth Forum collected, compiled and structured these testimonies in a 'Memorandum' of about a hundred pages. This document sheds light on how young people experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, with their mental health heavily impacted and their daily lives disrupted. It reflects their views on society, politics and citizenship, as well as their concerns about the environment and employment. The interviews revealed that young people are willing to help build a new society, provided they are invited to do so. From all these conversations, recommendations were drafted, incorporating the wishes and aspirations of young people towards the future. The recommendations were presented to policymakers.



The idea is to repeat the project 'Being young' every two years to gain a global view of the priorities and wishes of young people. In 2023, more than 1,000 young people were interviewed. The testimonials show that young people are worried about their future (studies, employment, climate crisis etc.). They are also concerned about the cost of living and housing. In addition to these reflections, the young people also suggested many improvements and changes. With this project, the Youth Forum puts the participation of young people at the heart of its work, going out to meet them where they are and giving them the opportunity to express themselves.



3. The Flemish Youth Council

The Flemish Youth Council (Vlaamse Jeugdraad in Dutch) is the official advisory body towards the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people in Flanders, Belgium. The youth council plays a crucial role in representing the voices and interests of young people and youth organisations in the Flemish Community. As described by the Flemish law on children's rights and youth policy, the establishment of the youth council is mandatory.

A youth-driven and youth-led organisation

The Flemish Youth Council consists of 16 advisers. Half of them are young representatives from 16 to 30 years old, while the other half are youth workers. These advisers are elected respectively by young people aged 12 to 30 in Flanders and by accredited youth organisations. They form the advisory board that convenes monthly to vote on policy recommendations, to discuss positions and to engage in policy work related to youth.

In addition to the advisory board, the Flemish Youth Council operates with working groups, consisting of committed and enthusiastic young people who meet monthly to set up participation initiatives and write policy recommendations on specific themes. The working groups engage in debates, brainstorming sessions, expert consultations and interaction with young people to gather their opinions and translate them into impactful recommendations towards policymakers.

Moreover, the Flemish Youth Council has two commissions: the Youth Work Commission and the Youth Information Commission. The Youth Work Commission meets monthly and represents all accredited and/or subsidised organisations under the Flemish youth and children's rights policy. It is an influential body for youth work policy and for the support towards the youth work sector. The commission meetings are open for all organisations but operate with a core group of fifteen individuals elected by name, representing the diversity of organisations.

The Youth Information Commission discusses, analyses and influences youth information legislation. It comprises 10 organisations from the youth, education, welfare and media sectors. Its key objectives include providing input on policy themes, preparing opinions for the Flemish Youth Council and initiating impactful actions such as writing open letters and press releases. The commission aims to empower young people by advocating for comprehensive and accessible information resources, ensuring that young people have access to accurate and relevant information.



Methodology: the 'In-Heart-Out' approach

To reach robust policy recommendations, the Flemish Youth Council follows the so-called 'In-Heart-Out' method. It consists of three major phases leading to clear opinions, strong lobbying efforts and impactful recommendations towards policymakers. Some of these recommendations can also be accompanied by policy actions or media visibility.



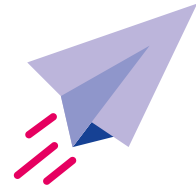
IN

gathering insights and perspectives
The process starts by gathering extensive input on the theme from various sources, including children, young people and the youth sector. We also discuss with experts and policymakers. This collaborative effort results in a wealth of data and perspectives for the youth council to proceed to the next phase.



HEART

shaping the vision
During this phase, the youth council actively works with volunteers and advisers to define a clear vision or opinion on the issue. The advisory board engages in debates and discussions to refine and shape the recommendations, ensuring a comprehensive and well-founded opinion.



OUT

amplifying the message
In this phase, the Flemish Youth Council goes the extra mile to reinforce the impact of its recommendations. It influences the political debate by engaging with policymakers and using its voice, platforms and campaigns to disseminate the message to children, young people and organisations. Whether through general information or targeted approaches, the volunteers and advisers lead the communication efforts as experts in youth advocacy.



International commitment: making a global impact

The Flemish Youth Council has three mandates to represent youth at the international level. Per mandate, a pair is selected for a term of two years of voluntary commitment. The pair works in a junior-senior system, ensuring that the experience of the predecessor is passed on to the successor. There are two European youth delegates and four UN youth delegates.

At European level, the youth representatives attend meetings of the European Youth Forum to work on youth-related European policies. The European Youth Forum is the European umbrella organisation representing national youth councils and international youth organisations from all over Europe and has over 100 members. Policy papers are voted at meetings with all members of the European Youth Forum (general assemblies) or council of members meetings that are prepared by coalitions of national youth councils. The Flemish EU youth representatives are part in the BICC coalition, gathering 13 youth councils from the Benelux, the 'islands' (UK and Ireland) and Central Europe.

The EU youth delegates also participate in activities within the European Youth Dialogue, such as consultations among peers and policy-making discussions. As part of the Youth Dialogue, European Youth Conferences are organised each semester by the member state that holds the presidency of the Council of the European Union. These conferences bring together youth representatives and youth ministerial delegates and discuss a theme related to the EU Youth Goals, chosen by the Trio Presidency.

The Flemish youth delegates to the UN participate in the United Nations Commissions for Economic and Social Development, the High-Level Political Forum, the third committee meeting of the UN General Assembly and the Climate COP meetings. They are part of the official Belgian delegation to these UN forums. Together with the French-speaking Youth Forum's UN youth representative, the Flemish youth delegates organise side events at these UN conferences and bring the voice of young people to discussions about the Sustainable Development Goals and international youth interests.

As youth lobbyists, the UN youth representatives influence decisions made by policymakers, both at the regional and international levels. To formulate their positions at international conferences, the youth representatives consult children and young people to gather their views and base their opinion on the input by the Flemish Youth Council. They actively engage in various events, seminars and activities related to international youth policy.





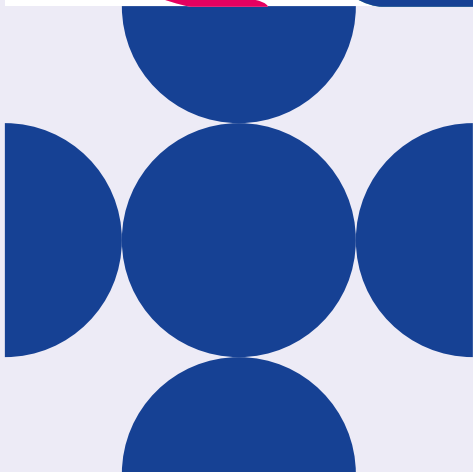
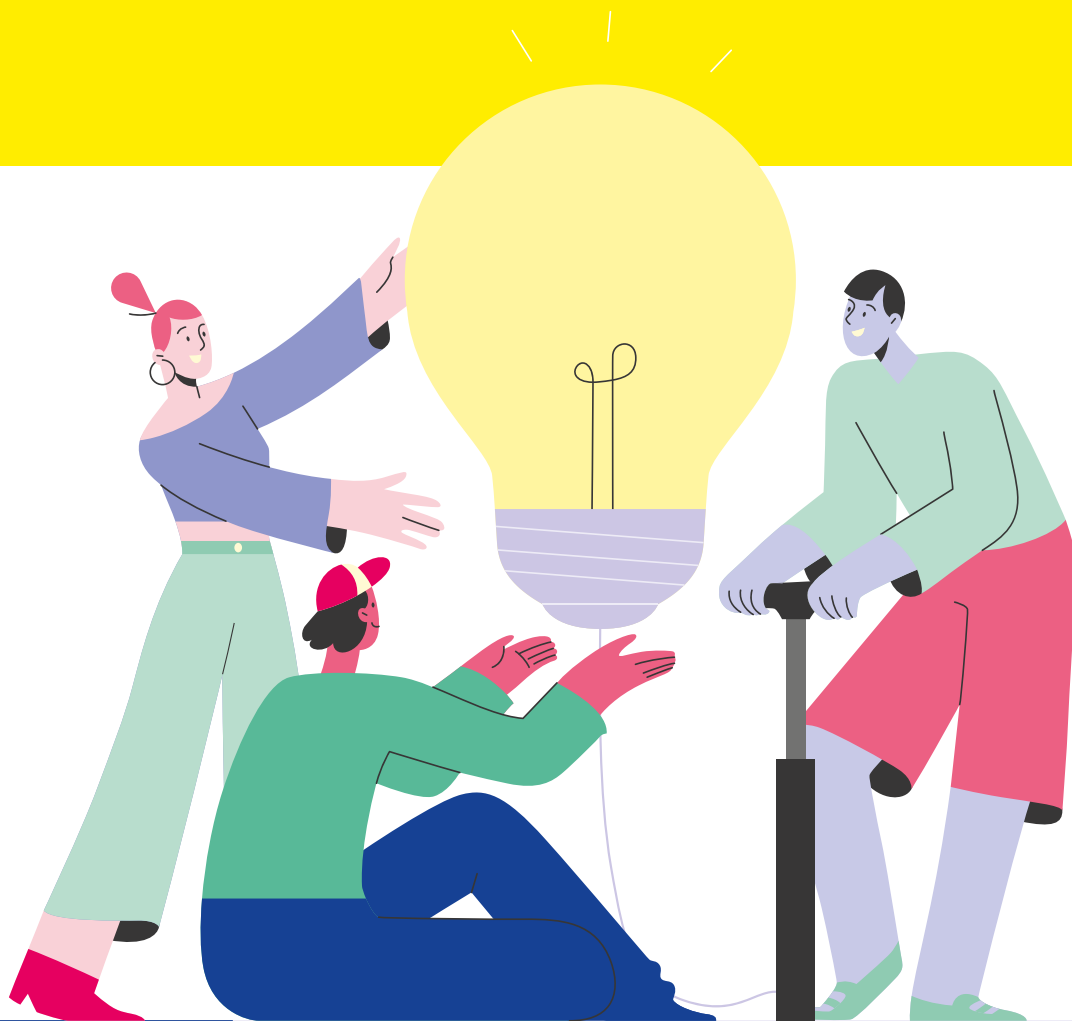
Mental health: a topic dear to us

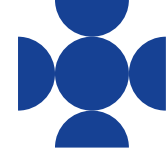
Mental health has been a prominent topic for the Flemish Youth Council for the past years. Starting in 2016, the Flemish Youth Council decided to focus on psychological well-being during the 5th EU Youth Dialogue cycle (2016) about *'enabling all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe'*. The participatory process lasted more than a year and consisted of an online survey, several focus groups and two dialogues between young people, policymakers and experts, resulting in recommendations on mental health in 2017. The subsequent advocacy work made the Flemish Government invest 15 million euro in healthcare services to address young people's mental health.

In the next two mandates of the youth council (2017-2020 and 2020-2023), psychological well-being was also chosen by young people as a priority topic. This spurred further policy work on mental health. In particular during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Flemish Youth Council advocated strongly for measures to bring relief to the mental struggles that young people were increasingly confronted with. The youth council's credibility and expertise were recognised with the appointment of the president of the Flemish Youth Council as a member of the Relance Committee that formulated recommendations to the Flemish government for post-COVID societal recovery.

This chapter provided an overview of the complex federal structure of Belgium. Next, we will focus on the distinctive youth policies and initiatives of the communities, as well as their impact on young people in Belgium. To learn more about the Belgian federal structure and youth policy within Belgium, please consult the publication of the Council of Europe ['Youth policy in Belgium - It's more complex than you think!'](#)

Youth policy in the Flemish Community





THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY: SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

0-4	331 327
5-9	363 253
10-14	384 717
15-19	360 189
20-24	370 902
25-29	401 293

The Flemish Community comprises the inhabitants of Flanders and the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region. In 2022, there were 6,698,876 inhabitants populating a surface area of 13,522 km². The Flemish youth population (under 30 years of age) amounted to 2,211,681 persons (33% of the total Flemish population).

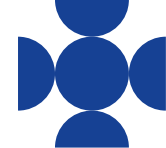
Flemish politicians decided in 1980 to merge the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region. As a result, Flanders has only one Flemish Parliament and one Flemish Government with competence both for community matters, as well as regional matters.

- ✦ The Flemish Parliament is directly elected by the Flemish population in five-yearly elections. The parliament has 124 members.
- ✦ The Flemish Government has 9 ministers. Benjamin Dalle is currently (2023) the Flemish Minister for Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels.

The tasks of the Flemish public administration are organised around 10 policy areas. Each policy area is supported by a civil service department and a number of autonomous agencies. The departments support and advise the Flemish Government on policymaking, whereas the agencies implement the policies through services to citizens, companies and organisations. These agencies operate with a large degree of autonomy as defined in their terms of reference.

One of these policy areas is 'culture, youth, sports and media'.





YOUTH POLICY: CONCEPT AND BOUNDARIES

Youth policy and related government measures are based on a planned, comprehensive and integrated vision of youth. All elements in this definition are significant.

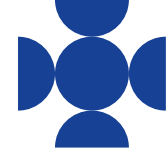
Youth policy refers to an interrelated body of elements set in a time perspective. It covers elements from every sphere of life deemed important for young people, in a coherent way. Youth policy is embedded in a society model that expresses the desirable situation for young people (as individuals and in terms of their group development), how they are expected to grow up and develop and the place they have in society.

Youth policy is implemented through explicit measures: the specific actions undertaken by the government focusing on any part of the 'youth population'. For the Flemish Community, this generally means the age group between 0 and 30 years old, although different definitions are used in specific contexts.

Youth policy is based on the assumption that it is possible to implement a group policy. This is not self-evident, because the government applies a sectoral approach in most other domains. A group policy is a different way of implementing policy: instead of focusing on one sector, the starting point is young people's lives across the board, with all their needs and requirements. That is why youth policy permeates almost every other policy sector.

A group-oriented implementation of policy creates a number of policy crossroads, where it encounters sectoral policies. Youth policy is based on an interactive, participatory style of government and a comprehensive, inclusive approach to policy. This makes youth policy a special and cross-cutting policy, with many opportunities for a more democratic and democratising policy implementation.





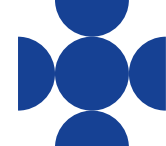
MAIN ORIENTATIONS OF POLICIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY

The Flemish decree of 20 January 2012 ‘regarding a renewed policy on youth and children’s rights’ defines youth and children’s rights policy as follows: ‘the integral and integrated vision and the systematic and planned measures based on it by the government that aim to have a noticeable effect on youth, with special attention to the rights of the child as an ethical and legal framework’.

The decree stipulates that the Flemish Government implements this categorical policy for children and young people up to and including the age of 30. The key instrument of the Flemish Government in the implementation of its youth policy is the ‘Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy Plan’. It describes the priority objectives of the Flemish Government and embeds them in a general vision on youth, youth policy and children’s rights. The 2012 decree requires the Flemish Government to submit a Flemish youth and children’s rights policy plan to the Flemish Parliament no later than 12 months after the start of the term in office. This means that the current youth and children’s rights policy plan covers the 2019-2024 legislature and the next policy plan will cover 2025-2029.



Since 2004, the Flemish Government has allocated the coordination of the children’s rights policy and responsibility for youth matters to the same minister. The current Flemish Minister for Youth is Benjamin Dalle.



This strategic policy plan for youth and children’s rights should formulate the desired social effects deemed crucial for children and young people within the policy period. The following four objectives are mentioned in the decree on youth and children’s rights and form the fundamental structure for every policy plan to be developed:

creating equal opportunities for all children and young people,

OPPORTUNITIES



SPACE TO BE THEMSELVES



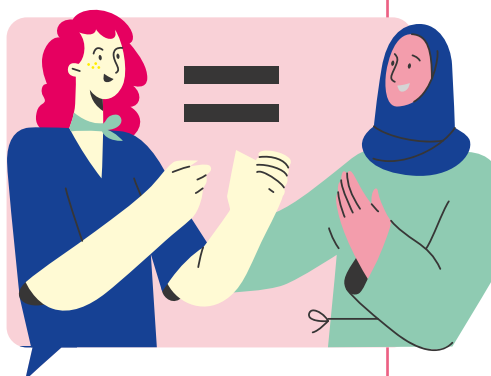
empowering young people to participate as full members of society, giving them the opportunity to help shape society, whether it is in school, at work, in their neighbourhood, in organisations, in municipalities...
This implies they should be well informed about participation possibilities.



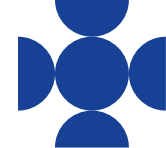
EMPOWERING

providing space for children and young people to be young.
'Space' in this context refers to three dimensions: policy space (attention given by authorities to youth), mental space (respect for young people’s personality and culture) and physical space (literally the space to be young together). Young people are part of the public space where they play, hang out, live and move around, but they also need mental space to be creative, take risks and cherish positive feelings.

EQUALITY



increasing opportunities for young people to develop their talents and competencies,



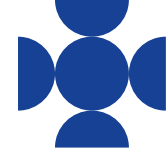
The International Convention on the Rights of the Child serves as an ethical framework for the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan. Other international policy agendas and documents such as the European Youth Goals and the EU Youth Strategy are used as inspiration for the further development of this youth policy plan.

In the youth and children's rights policy plan, the Flemish Government also describes how it responds to the final observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, formulated in their response to the report submitted by Belgium.

Various stakeholders are consulted and involved, such as the Flemish Youth Council, experts on youth affairs, youth-work organisations, as well as of local and provincial authorities and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels.

The current youth and children's rights policy plan addresses 5 priority objectives:

- 1** well-being and positive identity development,
- 2** healthy and thriving neighbourhoods,
- 3** participation in society through voluntary commitment,
- 4** leisure for all,
- 5** media literacy.



OTHER INSTRUMENTS CREATED TO IMPLEMENT THE FLEMISH POLICY ON YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ARE:

The Flemish Child and Youth Impact Report (Kind-en-jongereffectrapport, JoKER in short):

this is the first youth check introduced in Europe. Following the Child Impact Report established in 1997, its scope was extended in 2008 to include young people up to 25 years of age. JoKER is applied to the ex-ante assessment of legislation in order to gauge the consequences of it on children and young people. The process is initiated by the ministry responsible for the proposed legislation. When legislation is likely to have effects on young people (whether specified or not as a particular target group) doing a JoKER check is mandatory. The JoKER report is composed of three parts: a description of the intended effects of the draft legislation on the situation of young people, a description of the situation of young people in the absence of the proposed legislation, alternatives to the legislative proposal in the form of mitigating measures in case critical effects are identified.



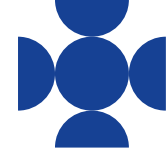
A State of the Youth report to monitor the situation of youth:

this is a scientific report concerning youth developments in Flanders. The report will appear at least every five years.

Contact points for youth and children's rights and increased coordination:

all departments and agencies of the Flemish authorities should appoint one member of staff to be the contact point for the youth and children's rights policy. They will be asked to contribute to future Flemish youth and children's rights policy plans. They will also be involved in the monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Flemish youth and children's rights policy plans. They will be responsible for estimating the impact of the policy prepared or implemented by their department or agency on children and young people and their rights.





Last but not least, **the Flemish Youth Council advises the Flemish Government or the Flemish Parliament**, at its own initiative or at request, on all areas related to children, young people and their organisations in the Flemish Community. It ensures that the voices of children, young people, youth organisations and youth advisory bodies (youth councils and pupil councils) are heard by policymakers.





THE TASKS OF THE MINISTRY: THE 'YOUTH TEAM' OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, YOUTH AND MEDIA

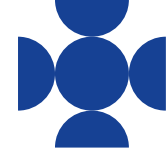
The 'youth team' within the Department of Culture, Youth and Media ensures the administrative follow-up of Flemish policy on youth and children's rights. Furthermore, the team implements youth policy as a socio-cultural matter. It stimulates and supports a rich and varied offer of non-commercial socio-cultural activities for young people, mainly through subsidies to associations and local authorities.

In short, the tasks of the youth team and the department are as follows:

-  **preparation**, follow-up, evaluation and implementation of legislation (e.g. the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan),
-  **funding** support structures, youth organisations, youth projects, youth hostels and youth accommodation,
-  **funding** for **investments** in youth work infrastructure,
-  **providing material** support for youth work,

Youth associations traditionally organise camps during the summer months. The Flemish Lending Service for Camping Equipment (Vlaamse Uitleendienst voor Kampeermateriaal) has more than 5,000 tents available for this purpose, offering a total of about 50,000 sleeping places.
-  **providing information** on youth (work) policy (e.g. via the website and an e-zine),
-  **representing Flanders** at international forums.

On the one hand, the youth team is involved in bilateral cooperation projects that Flanders established with other countries or regions in the context of cultural or partnership agreements. This cooperation mainly consists of exchange programmes. On the other hand, the youth team participates in multilateral forums that have a youth and youth work agenda, e.g. Benelux, European Union, Council of Europe and United Nations.



1. Child- and youth-related legislation in the Flemish Community

In child- and youth-related legislation in the Flemish Community several decrees or acts are the backbone of youth and youth work policy:

The decree establishing the rules for subsidising youth accommodation, hostels, support structures and the non-profit organisation General Service for Youth Tourism (2022). With this decree, the With the exception of the first mentioned decree (youth tourism, accommodation and hostels), all listed decrees will be integrated into a new comprehensive 'youth decree' from 2024. The intention is to provide a substantive legal redesign of the regulatory framework. This participatory redesign process with the youth sector started in the fall of 2021 and will be completed by the end of 2023.

The youth decree will be the core legislation concerning youth policy and youth work policy. This decree integrates and optimises the above-mentioned four former decrees. It serves as a framework to develop youth policy instruments and to support youth work organisations at the community and sub-community levels in the Flemish Community concerning youth work policy, the youth decree streamlines the procedures to apply for and grant eight types of specific subsidies. By paying attention to inclusive and exclusive activities adapted to children's and young people's needs, we ensure that a wide range of youth work is supported.

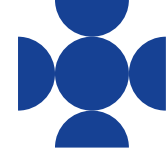
Flemish Community supports youth-friendly, accessible and affordable tourist accommodation:

- ✿ funding of the General Service for Youth Tourism,
- ✿ funding of youth accommodation and hostels,
- ✿ establishing support organisations for youth accommodations and hostels.



The decree regarding a renewed youth and children's rights policy (2012):

- ✿ youth policy in general (see above),
- ✿ recognition and funding of youth work organisations at national levels,
- ✿ recognition and funding of youth (work) organisations for information & participation,
- ✿ recognition and funding of youth (work) organisations for cultural education,
- ✿ funding of organisations with specific objectives (international youth policy and national agency for the EU youth programmes, support for the youth work sector and support for the Flemish Youth Council, concerning children's rights and supporting local youth(work) policy),
- ✿ project support for experimental youth work.



The decree regarding subsidies for supra-local youth work, youth centres and youth work for special target groups (2017):

- ✿ funding of supra-local youth centres,
- ✿ funding of youth work with socially vulnerable children and young people,
- ✿ funding of youth work with children and young people with disabilities,
- ✿ funding for structural inter-municipal cooperation.

The decree regarding the support and incentives for local youth policy (2012):

- ✿ obliges all municipalities in Flanders to establish a local youth council,
- ✿ financial support for the local youth work plan of the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels.

The decree regarding additional subsidies for employment in the cultural sector (2004):

- ✿ additional funding for employment measures

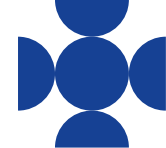
The decree regulates the access to structural funding for:

- ✓ regional youth work organisations such as youth movements, holiday camps, organisations in the field of cultural education or children's help lines,
- ✓ professional youth work organisations that work with children with disabilities and with disadvantaged children at the sub-community level,
- ✓ structural cooperation between local governments in the fields of youth policy and youth work,
- ✓ and support organisations for youth work.

The decree also regulates the funding of temporary projects:

- ✓ experimental projects,
- ✓ projects executing the Flemish youth policy plan,
- ✓ projects by youth centres at the sub-community level,
- ✓ projects by volunteer organisations that work with children with disabilities.

The structural funding offers youth work organisations long-term certainty. The temporary projects stimulate innovation.



THE BUDGET

In 2023, the budget for the youth measures is 65,662,000 euro. This is 0.1% of the total budget of the Flemish Community in 2023 (62,555,985,000 euro) or 0.4% of the budget for formal education & training (18,082,598,000 euro). **These resources are distributed as follows:**

€ 65,662,000

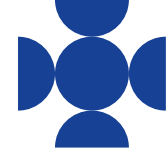
€ 35,782,000	35,782,000 euro for youth (work) organisations working at national level,
€ 9,018,488	9,018,488 euro for youth work organisations at sub-community level, inter-municipal collaborations and the Flemish Community Commission (Brussels),
€ 4,376,211	4,376,211 euro for supporting specific organisations for youth work and the Flemish Youth Council,
€ 2,714,000	2,714,000 euro for innovative and/or experimental projects.

As mentioned, youth tourism is an important part of youth policy. **The financing is as follows:**

€ 10,445,512	10,445,512 euro for youth accommodation and hostels (including the General Service for Youth Tourism),
€ 527,789	527,789 euro for supporting organisations in the field of youth tourism.

There is also a yearly budget for international youth policy. In 2023 the budget was 373,000 euro.

€ 373,000



THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS IN IMPLEMENTING YOUTH POLICY

Youth organisations play an important role in the implementation of the Flemish youth policy. Dozens of accredited youth organisations in Flanders are dedicated to youth work and young people in a leisure-time setting in many different ways.

Youth organisations or youth associations usually receive funding based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes. The Flemish Government has assigned some specific tasks to the following organisations:



[JINT](#) (coordinating body for international youth work) was established to implement the European youth programmes in the Flemish Community.



[De Ambrassade](#) is a youth support centre. It has three different tasks: (1) developing, supporting and informing (about) the youth sector, (2) supporting the Flemish Youth Council, (3) informing children and young people. De Ambrassade develops knowledge, expertise and networks to analyse and strengthen the position of children, young people and youth work in society.



[Bataljong](#) is an association for local youth services, youth coordinators, youth councils and youth aldermen. Bataljong's members are local authorities from Flanders and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region, as well as the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels. Most of the municipal authorities are members of this support organisation.



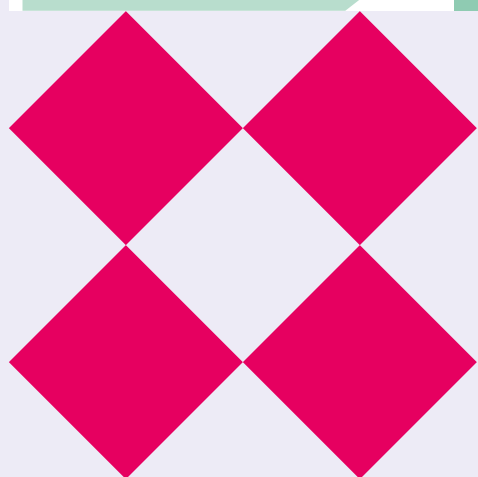
The [Knowledge Centre on Children's Rights](#) (KEKI in short) aims to increase the knowledge about children's rights at national and international levels. KEKI takes an interdisciplinary approach to children's rights based on scientific research. Due to the integration of the legislative framework regarding youth policy (see above) in 2024, the tasks regarding children's rights will broaden. The knowledge centre will in the future also (1) establish an alternative national report on children's rights based on findings of NGOs and (2) inform children and young people on children's rights.



The [General Service for Youth Tourism \(ADJ in short\)](#) manages two youth facilities of the Flemish youth administration. Both youth accommodation centres have the quality label for youth centres of the Council of Europe:

- ✦ Training centre [Destelheide](#) in Dworp focuses on training initiatives for accredited youth associations and on consultations relating to young people and youth work.
- ✦ Youth centre [Hoge Rielen](#) in Lichtaart hosts young people and associations for camping and educational initiatives. It is also suitable for nature classes, reflection or training sessions and seminars.

Youth policy in the French Community





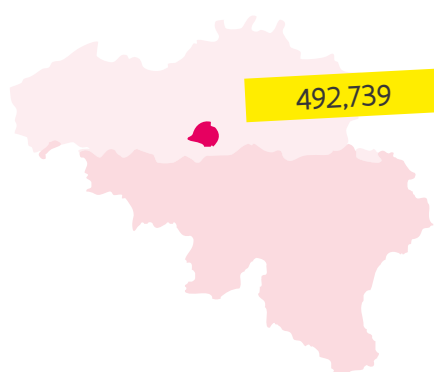
THE FRENCH COMMUNITY AT A GLANCE

The French Community of Belgium is an entity within the Belgian federal system with its own parliament and its own government.

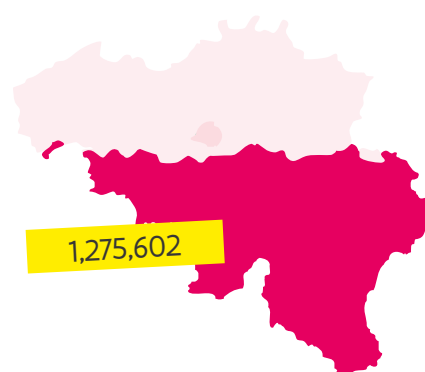
The area inhabited by the French Community coincides with the area of Wallonia (excluding the German-speaking Community) and the Brussels-Capital Region. It has 4,668,035 million inhabitants living in an area of 17,005 km³. The population density is 275 inhabitants per km³.

THE NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 30 YEARS OLD:

BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION



WALLOON REGION



The French Community manages the matters allocated to it by the constitution and the institutional reform laws. In short, these are competences related to the individual and the use of the French language such as culture, education, research and training, youth care, children, youth, infrastructures, sports, intra-Belgian co-operation and international relations.



YOUTH POLICY, A CULTURAL POLICY

Young people's cultural participation is at the heart of youth policy in the French Community. One of its aims is to foster responsible, active, critical and supportive citizenship (CRAC in French) among young people aged from 3 to 30.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN YOUTH POLICIES

The Government of the French Community is composed of five ministers: Françoise Bertieaux is responsible for youth until the next elections in 2024.

In the internal organisation of the ministry of the French Community of Belgium, youth policies are part of the General Administration for Culture. The Youth Department, the central public administration for the youth sector, is part of the General Department for Continuous Education for Adults and Young People. Therefore, youth policy is seen to empower young people and to develop the active and creative citizenship of young people.

The minister is also assisted by the Observatory for Children, Youth and Youth Care. This body is directly placed under the authority of the General Secretary of the Ministry. The observatory informs public authorities and citizens about policies that are aimed at children and young people in the French Community. It supports these policies through analysis and research and it promotes policy initiatives in line with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and for the welfare of children and young people.

The French Community has an International Youth Office (Bureau International Jeunesse, BIJ in short). BIJ manages and promotes a range of exchange programmes and works at European and transcontinental levels. Among other things, BIJ implements the Erasmus+ programme (youth) and European Solidarity Corps. The available funds to support international activities are under the responsibility of both the Minister for Youth and the Minister of International Affairs of the French Community, also called the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

There are three main types of youth structures approved by decree:

1. youth centres active at local level,
2. youth organisations with activities at community-wide level,
3. the Youth Forum representing the voice of young people aged 16 to 30 in the French Community.

Youth policy also includes homework support initiatives (écoles de devoirs) that are active at regional or community levels. These 'écoles de devoirs' at local level fall under the authority of the Minister for Children.

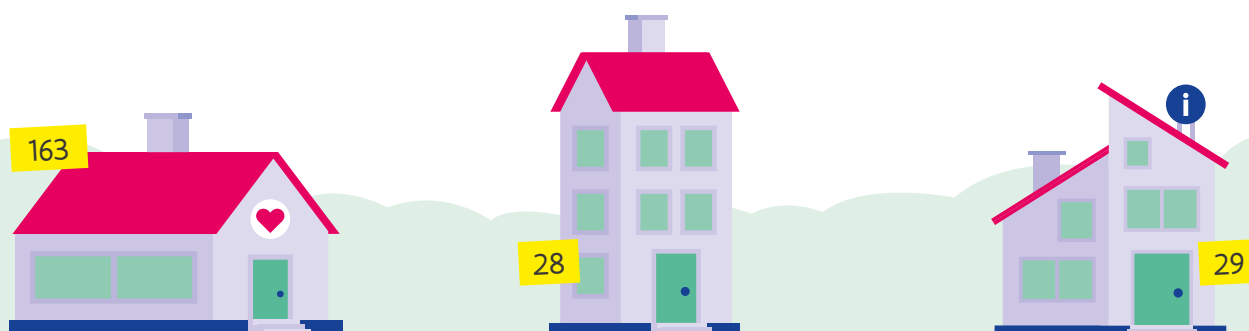


1. Youth centres

Youth centres are ruled by the decree of 20 July 2000 that defines the general mission and the specific procedures to approve and fund youth centres that are active at local level.

In 2023, there were 219 accredited youth centres spread over the entire territory of the French Community. They are accredited for a four-year term, currently until 2024. All these youth centres contribute to developing critical, active and responsible citizenship (CRAC in French), particularly among young people aged 12 to 26. They do so by raising awareness about social realities and by promoting responsible attitudes through social, economic, cultural and political participation and socio-cultural practices.

Among these 219 youth centres:



163 are accredited '**YOUTH CENTRES**' as such. They welcome young people for out-of-school and non-work-related activities. The youth centres implement activities in a democratic way, co-decided by and for young people. Hence the presence of one-third of persons aged below 26 in its decision-making bodies.

28 are accredited as '**YOUTH HOSTELS**'. They have the facilities to provide full accommodation for a minimum of 50 young people. They also organise short residential activities for individuals or groups.

29 associations are accredited as '**YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRES**'. They answer questions raised by young people and they analyse and raise awareness about the issues and conditions relevant for young people's life.



9 umbrella organisations of youth centres are also accredited by the decree on youth organisations as 'federations of youth centres'.

The decree has four special measures for specific projects:

- ✿ 'Equal opportunities' is destined for youth centres that develop specific educational methods to allow young people with fewer opportunities to participate in their projects.
- ✿ 'Cooperation for youth information' is geared towards youth information centres that invest in partnerships with associations or local public authorities to facilitate access and ownership of information by young people.
- ✿ 'Decentralisation' is granted to youth hostels and youth centres that facilitate access to their activities for young people facing geographical or socio-cultural disadvantages.
- ✿ 'Support for creation' is granted to youth hostels and youth centres that specifically focus on developing socio-artistic expression in their activities.

The grant allocated to youth centres covers the costs of activities and projects, and also a part of the staff costs. The grant depends on the category in which the association is accredited. This category is determined by the number and size of activities.





2. Youth organisations

Youth organisations are structured by the decree of 26 March 2009. This decree defines the general tasks and specific procedures to approve and subsidise associations active at community-wide level. Those organisations should develop their activities at least in three of the six areas of the French Community. Those six areas correspond to the five provinces of Wallonia plus the Brussels-Capital Region.

In 2023, 105 youth organisations, spread over the entire territory of the French Community were accredited for a four-year term. All these organisations are contributing to the development of critical, active and responsible citizenship (CRAC in French) among people between 3 and 30 years old.

Youth organisations develop a variety of actions ranging from leisure-time activities to training, media literacy, artistic creativity, social awareness, activism, discovering culture heritage, promotion of positive human relationships etc. All these activities are decided 'by and for' young people. Similar to the youth centres, youth organisations need to have two-thirds of people under 35 in their decision-making bodies.

There are currently 105 accredited youth organisations spread over six categories:

15 'THEMATIC MOVEMENTS' with volunteers, analysing social issues and raising awareness about citizens' questions.

5 'YOUTH MOVEMENTS' composed of local groups of children and young people engaged in activities, games, play and camps, supervised by volunteer youth leaders.

71 'YOUTH SERVICES' that contribute to the development of young people's sense of responsibility, through several actions such as play, socio-cultural expression, awareness, training, information, meetings, residential activities or international mobility.

9 'FEDERATIONS OF YOUTH CENTRES' and **5 'FEDERATIONS OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS'** that provide technical and educational support for their members such as training, coordination, networking, information and advocacy.

5 'YOUTH GROUPS' that develop activities mentioned in the decree on youth organisations but that still do not meet all formal accreditation conditions, such as geographical deployment.



The decree foresees eight mechanisms to trigger youth organisations to go beyond the activities approved in their work plans. These mechanisms focus on financial support for staff and quality development and can be granted on the basis of specific activities:



- ✿ ‘Decentralised youth movement’ supports youth organisations to create and coach local groups and to network with them.
- ✿ ‘Training and educational expertise’ supports youth organisations specialised in training or that develop many training activities.
- ✿ ‘Animation in schools’ supports partnerships between youth organisations and schools to develop educational and socio-cultural activities for young people as well as learning tools adapted to the needs of young people within their environment.
- ✿ ‘Political awareness and student participation’ focuses on thematic movements to support their awareness-raising actions throughout the French Community.
- ✿ ‘Combating extremist movements’ supports actions and educational tools to combat all forms of extremism.
- ✿ ‘Specific target audiences’ supports youth organisations that mainly develop activities for specific target groups, such as young people from working-class background, young people with disabilities or victims of discrimination.
- ✿ ‘Media education’ is aimed at youth organisations that develop media literacy activities with young people and that share their expertise with different partners.
- ✿ ‘Linking youth centres & youth organisations’ encourages cooperation between youth centres and local groups of youth movements.

Accredited youth organisations receive a grant that covers the costs of activities, structural expenses and a part of the staff costs. Similar to the youth centres, this grant is determined by the size and volume of activities and the number of members or local groups for each type of association.



3. The Youth Forum

The Youth Forum of the French Community (see above) ensures the participation and representation of all young people of the French Community. It is officially established by the decree of 3 May 2019.

The Youth Forum is the voice of young people aged 16 to 30 in the French Community.

It organises concrete projects that young people from different backgrounds have decided to carry out collectively.

These projects are defined during participatory days that capture the main concerns of young people. These discussions enable participants to reflect on current priorities, as well as on local, national and international issues that have an impact on young people.



The Youth Forum listens to the voices of young people and makes them heard by issuing official opinions and recommendations, by representing young people at national and international forums and by carrying out citizen-initiative projects.

In addition to its political advocacy role, the Youth Forum puts youth participation at the heart of its actions.



4. homework support initiatives (écoles de devoirs)

The sector of the 'écoles de devoirs' falls under the joint authority of the Minister for Children and the Minister for Youth. The Minister for Children is responsible for local 'écoles de devoirs' and the Minister for Youth is responsible for their regional coordination and for the Federation of Ecoles de Devoirs' at community level. The homework support initiatives or 'écoles de devoirs' are targeted to children and youngsters aged 6 to 15. They provide after-school space and activities to support school work, but they also promote social integration and carry out socio-cultural projects.

5 regional coordination bodies support the local 'écoles de devoirs'. They are spread over the whole territory of the French Community. They support the staff and coordinators of the local homework support initiatives with training and information, they develop and disseminate educational tools and help set up new local structures.

The Federation of Ecoles de Devoirs provides additional support through publications, a hotline and resources available to the whole sector. The federation also represents local 'écoles de devoirs' towards other sectors and the government.



5. Advisory bodies

In order to ensure democratic consultation and youth participation in these structures, each of the sectors above has an official advisory body:

- ✦ Advisory Committee for Youth Clubs and Youth Centres,
- ✦ Advisory Committee for Youth Organisations,
- ✦ Advisory Committee for Homework Support Initiatives (Ecoles de Devoirs) under the authority of the Minister for Children.



THE BUDGET

In 2021, the expenses for youth policy measures were 71,837,340 euro. This is 17% of the total expenses of the whole Department of Culture.

OTHERS DIMENSION OF YOUTH POLICIES

The French Community also supports several other dimensions of youth policy that are not ruled by the decrees mentioned above. Here is an overview:

TRAINING OF YOUTH LEADERS

The training of youth leaders, whether they are volunteers or paid staff, contributes to the development of critical, responsible and active citizens.

CALL FOR PROJECTS ABOUT PRIORITY THEMES





In order to respond to the needs of young people, but also to adapt our policies to the current priorities such as media literacy, women's rights, the fight against racism etc., the Youth Department organises calls for projects.

- ✿ Since 2017, a budget of 30,000 euro has been dedicated to youth projects focusing on media literacy.
- ✿ 'Youth projects' is another call for projects with an annual budget of 690,000 euro. Those projects are implemented by youth organisations, youth centres but also associations or independent groups of young people that are not officially accredited.

The projects are divided into 6 actions ranging from raising cultural awareness and/or co-existence to the dissemination of finished products or an in-depth reflection process in accredited associations. The main aim of this call for projects is to respond to the realities in youth associations and to provide the best possible support for projects that complement their regular activities.

- ✿ 'Local youth policies' supports local initiatives to implement consultation processes between local authorities, local youth workers and/or young people. 150,000 euro are allocated each year to support such projects.
- ✿ The call for 'valorisation' projects aims to support initiatives that reconnect young people to the sector, that create new links or strengthen existing links in order to build trust and encourage their participation and commitment.
- ✿ Special attention is also given to youth facilities and their equipment. A budget of 910,000 euro is earmarked for that purpose.

A last important topic is EVRAS. This is short for 'education for emotional, relational and sexual life'.





It is defined as an educational process that involves, among other things, reflections to increase young people's ability to make informed choices for a fulfilled relational, emotional and sexual life and to respect themselves and others. It guides every young person toward adulthood making sexuality understood in a wider sense, including relational, emotional, social, cultural, philosophic and ethic dimension

Various actors carry out sessions in this common EVRAS framework regardless the sector they belong to (e.g. family planning centres, teachers, youth workers etc.). To ensure the quality of these EVRAS sessions, the Youth Department, in collaboration with the Service for Equal Opportunities, implements the 'EVRAS accreditation' that is based on, among others, relevant training courses followed by the actors.

A call for projects is also organised in the youth sector to fund EVRAS projects implemented by EVRAS-accredited structures. 100,000 euro is dedicated to support these projects.

Youth policy in the German-speaking Community





The German-speaking Community is the smallest of the three Belgian communities and the smallest constituent state in Europe. It is legally recognised by article 2 of the Belgian constitution.

The German-speaking Community is situated in the east of Belgium. It is a predominantly rural area that borders Germany, Luxembourg and the French Community, and is only a stone's throw away from the Netherlands and Flanders. It covers 854 km² and consists of 9 municipalities with 79,383 inhabitants (2023).

The official language of the community, also in schools and in court, is German.

The German-speaking Community in political terms

The German-speaking Community has [a directly elected parliament](#) with 25 members and a government with four ministers who are elected by parliament. The German-speaking Community is represented in the Belgian Senate by one co-opted senator who is elected by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community. It also has one directly elected member in the European Parliament.

The German-speaking Community has its own ministry with 20 departments (youth policy is treated by the Department for Culture and Youth) and several public services related to public radio and television, employment, training, social support, business promotion, media literacy and tourism.

The German-speaking Community is not allowed to collect taxes. The budget of the community is therefore exclusively fed by the endowment of the federal state and the money transfer of the Walloon Region linked to the competencies transferred under article 139 of the constitution.



Further information on the German-Speaking Community can be found [here](#) and youth-related information can be found [here](#).



Young people in the German-speaking Community

2023 statistics showed that of a total Belgian population of 11,697,557 inhabitants, 79,383 people were living in the German-speaking Community.

To frame the specific situation of the German-speaking Community and their young people, the table below provides information about the total Belgian population, the total population of the German-speaking Community and the number of young people between 10 and 30 years old. The data also show the relevant percentages and the gender balance.

POPULATION	 MEN	 WOMEN	TOTAL
Belgium 10-30 years	1,480,612	1,437,619	2,918,231
Belgium Total	5,761,410	5,936,147	11,697,557
% 10-30	25.69%	24.82%	24.95%
Ger. Com. 10-30 years	9,514	8,949	18,463
Ger. Com. Total	39,406	39,977	79,383
% 10-30	24.14%	22.38%	23.26%

LEGAL BASIS OF YOUTH POLICY IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

Since 1 January 2012, the promotion of youth work has been governed by the decree of 6 December 2011 on the promotion of youth work (last amended by the decree of 14 December 2021) and the implementing decree of 15 March 2012 (last amended by the government decree of 25 August 2022). The decree covers main themes such as:

- ✿ the quality, provision and funding of youth work,
- ✿ elementary and further training of youth workers and voluntary youth leaders,
- ✿ the participation of young people.

The decree defines youth work in the German-speaking Community as follows:

‘Youth work mainly takes place in out-of-school settings and is based on processes of non-formal and informal learning and voluntary participation. Youth work promotes the individual, social and cultural development of young people through suitable offers, taking into account their interests and needs’ (article 2 of the decree of 6 December 2011 on the promotion of youth work).

As for the German-speaking Community, young people are at the centre of youth policy as every young person should be given the opportunity to experience self-efficacy and to acquire creative skills. To achieve this, youth work sets out to accompany young people on their way to adulthood.

Youth policy in the German-speaking Community is promoted through the following measures that are anchored in the above-mentioned decree:

- ✿ the Strategic Plan for Youth,
- ✿ the Youth Report,
- ✿ social space analyses and annual plans,
- ✿ grant applications,
- ✿ performance contracts and management contracts,
- ✿ lump-sum grants (e.g. functional grants, training grants),
- ✿ staff grants,
- ✿ grants for equipment and furnishing,
- ✿ additional grants e.g. for youth camps and special or innovative projects.



Current youth policy and its legal basis

According to the legislation of the German-speaking Community on youth work, young people are defined as being 10 to 30 years old. This is the target group of youth information providers, open and mobile youth work, youth organisations as well as the Youth Council. Some youth organisations however also have activities for children from 5 years onwards.

Subsidies and funding

Most of the available budget for youth policy support in the German-speaking Community goes to structural subsidies for youth work structures and staff costs. There are however also some project-related funding opportunities such as the Strategic Plan for Youth and funding for special or innovative projects. All funding for youth work in the German-speaking Community is regulated via the decree of 6 December 2011 on the promotion of youth work, last modified on 15 December 2022.

The decree contains the following measures:

- ❖ **Staff grants:** since 2023, the Government of the German-speaking Community covers all staff costs of youth workers who meet the decretal requirements and are approved by the government. A total of 21 full-time equivalents working in youth information, open and mobile youth work is financed this way. The seven youth organisations can, depending on their size, also employ a coordinator. The three biggest youth organisations currently employ four coordinators, but they rely mostly on voluntary commitment.
- ❖ **Lump-sum grants:** these are given to all accredited youth institutions to cover their operating and material costs. This includes the Council of the German-speaking Youth: it receives structural funding in the form of a lump-sum grant for its staff, organisational and project-related costs. The amount of the lump-sum grants for youth information and open and mobile youth work depends on the number of youngsters between 10-30 years in the respective municipality. The municipalities contribute to the grant with a 'flat rate' per inhabitant that is between 10 and 30 years old.
- ❖ **Equipment subsidies:** the government can provide grants for the purchase of equipment that is used in the youth work practice and for infrastructure.
- ❖ **Training grants:** youth workers and youth leaders receive a yearly budget to participate in education and training. Youth institutions can also apply for funding when organising training courses themselves.
- ❖ **Project-related funding:** youth camps of accredited youth organisations are granted a sum per person per day from the funds for 'specific and innovative projects'. Additionally, unique projects by accredited youth institutions can receive an additional grant (e.g. a project coordinator on intercultural youth work was funded via this grant). Also the Strategic Plan for Youth funds youth-related projects in the German-speaking Community.
- ❖ The decree also foresees structural funding for the Youth Office (Jugendbüro der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft) for its staff, operational and activity costs. This funding is regulated by a management contract between the government and the Jugendbüro.

The Strategic Plan for Youth and the Youth Report

The youth policy of the German-speaking Community has been structured since 2013 by a [Strategic Plan](#) for Youth adopted by the government and the parliament. The 5-year strategic plan captures the areas of life, interests and needs of young people at the level of the German-speaking Community. This allows the government to prioritise certain topics in a knowledge-based approach. The Strategic Plan for Youth contains an action plan with goals, measures and evaluation criteria to improve the situation of young people. To reach the goals from this action plan, the Strategic Plan for Youth funds projects that contribute to the goals. These projects can be initiated by youth institutions, municipalities, schools, other youth authorities as well as non-profit organisations.

The decree determines that funded youth and social institutions, but also individual young people have to be involved in the creation process of the Strategic Plan for Youth and the consultations that contribute to the action plan. This ensures that the needs and wishes of young people are reflected in policy development and its further evolution. Moreover, a steering group, composed of representatives from the youth sector as well as political representatives, accompanies the development process leading to the final Strategic Plan for Youth.

Currently, the third Strategic Plan for Youth runs from 2023 to 2027. It is also based on the findings of the Youth Report (see below) and covers four thematic priorities:

- ✿ civic engagement,
- ✿ digitalisation,
- ✿ emotions and self-image,
- ✿ sustainable development of East Belgium as a living space.





In preparation for each Strategic Plan for Youth and in order to implement evidence-based youth policy, the government publishes a [Youth Report](#) on the living conditions of young people in the German-speaking Community. The Youth Report is based on a study, carried out by a scientific institute. The decree prescribes that there should be at least one Youth Report and one Strategic Plan for Youth per funding period of five years. The funded youth institutions and the Youth Council of the German-speaking Community are involved in the preparation of the Youth Report. By providing current data and statistics, the Youth Report provides scientific evidence to base the Strategic Plan for Youth on and it helps setting the thematic priorities of the strategic plan and for youth policy as such.

The first Youth Report (2018) examined young people's transition between school and work. The second Youth Report (2023) analysed the well-being of young people.

The second Youth Report about the well-being of young people was published in October 2023. The topic was particularly relevant in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and covers aspects such as mental health, family affairs, leisure time... The report does not only monitor the situation of young people in this regard. It also puts forward policy recommendations in cooperation with youth and social institutions. These recommendations, together with the statistical evidence from the report, contribute to knowledge-based youth policy to improve the living conditions of young people.

The German-speaking Community is currently also examining possibilities to introduce a youth check at community level to ensure that young people's needs are considered across all policy fields.

THE YOUTH SECTOR OF THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY AND ITS MAIN ACTORS

THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR

Generally, youth work in the German-speaking Community aims to provide socio-cultural, mostly out-of-school activities for children and young people on a voluntary basis. Youth workers in various settings do so using non-formal education methods to enable children and young people to become active and confident citizens. This is achieved by fostering their skills and enhancing their knowledge, their participation in society and their autonomy.

Youth work in the German-speaking Community addresses those taking part in the activities as well as those providing these activities, such as youth workers and youth leaders.

The key actors in the field of youth work in the German-speaking Community are:

- ✿ 7 recognised [youth organisations](#) with around 4,600 members, aged 5 to 30,
- ✿ [17 youth centers/clubs](#) across the nine municipalities (three of them provide open youth work: OJA Eupen in Eupen, JuRa in Raeren and the Jugendbüro of the German-speaking Community). The Jugendbüro provides open youth work in the remaining 7 municipalities of the German-speaking Community as well as mobile youth work. Since 2023 the open and mobile youth work provided by the Jugendbüro are combined in the offer of “regional youth work”,
Regional youth work is focused on six pillars:
 - outreach and support of young people in public places and digital space
 - run youth centers and support self-organized youth spaces (promote voluntary engagement)
 - offer local and regional activities and projects
 - offering support to young people in their development (youth coaching on topics that concern young people)
 - individual case support
 - giving young people a voice, exchange with decision makers
- ✿ the [youth information](#) service at two locations,
- ✿ the youth commission responsible for the education and training of youth workers,

- ✿ [the Youth Council](#),
- ✿ [the Jugendbüro](#) plays a central role in youth work provision and expertise and at the same time acts as the national agency for the European programs in the German-Speaking-Community. It promotes national and international cooperation in the field of youth, supports the youth organizations, assists the Youth Council, administers the YouthWiki-Website of the community and collects data on young people. The funding of the Jugendbüro has been regulated by decree since 2012 and is set out in a five-year management contract between the government and the Jugendbüro.

The political framework

Within the [Parliament of the German-Speaking Community](#), youth affairs are treated by the Committee for Culture, Employment, Economic and Rural Development.

In the current Government of the German-speaking Community, the Minister for Culture and Sports, Employment and Media is also responsible for youth affairs. At the moment (2023), this is Isabelle Weykmans.

The administrative framework

At the ministry of the German-speaking Community, youth affairs are dealt with in the Department for Culture and Youth. By delegation of the minister, this department is also the national supervisory authority for the European programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in the German-speaking Community.



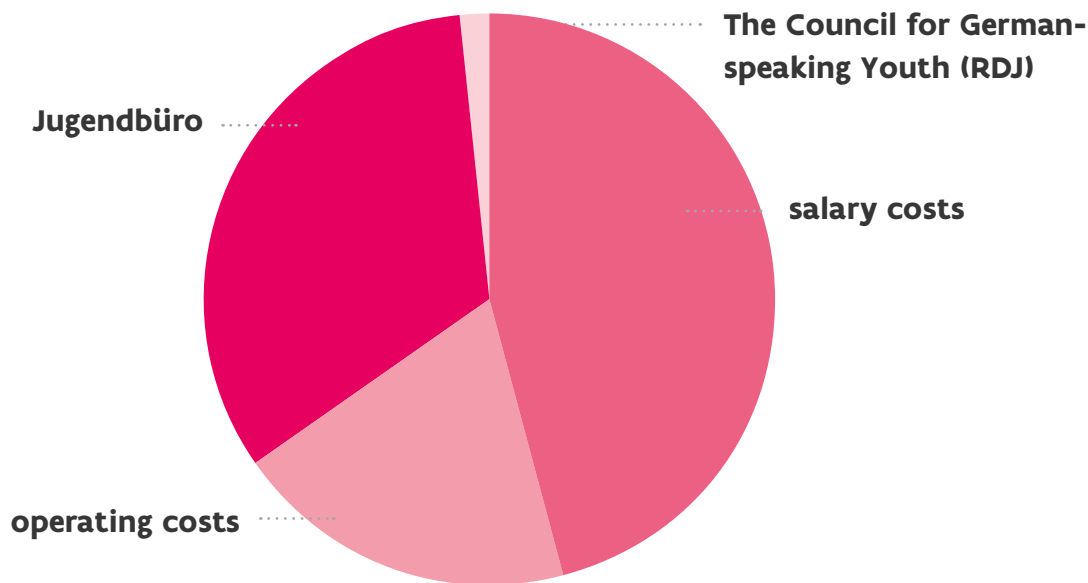


THE BUDGET FOR YOUTH POLICY MEASURES

The overall budget of the German-speaking Community in 2022 was 549,512,331 euro.

€ 2,373,953

2,373,953 euro was allocated to youth policy measures (0.43% of the overall budget). This sum was split up in the following way:



€ 1,006,474

1,006,474 euro or 42.3% of this budget was dedicated to **salary costs** of youth organisations, youth centres and youth information services (excluding funds for the Youth Council and the Jugendbüro).

€ 427,778

427,778 euro or 18% was dedicated to the **operating costs** of youth organisations, youth services and youth centres.

€ 738,377

738,377 euro of the budget was allocated to the **Jugendbüro** to execute its above-mentioned tasks, covering salary costs and operating costs linked to its own projects and for its assistance to the Youth Council. The Jugendbüro receives 31% of the total budget available for youth. Additionally, the Jugendbüro receives separate funding to conduct open and mobile youth work (as mentioned above).

€ 30,000

The Council for German-speaking Youth (RDJ) receives a grant of 30,000 euro to conduct its tasks (e.g. organising training for youth leaders, representing youth, organising projects etc.). This makes up 1.3% of the overall youth budget. The staff costs are excluded from this grant, as they are covered from the grant that goes towards the Jugendbüro.



€ 21,215

21,215 euro or 0.1% of the budget is invested in the **training and education** of youth workers and youth leaders. Additionally, the youth commission receives a similar budget to organise training courses it considers necessary.

€ 53,599

Additionally, 53,599 euro is dedicated to **special or innovative projects** (including funding for youth camps and the Strategic Plan for Youth).

€ 96,836

Infrastructural loans were financed with 96,836 euro.

Since the last publication of this brochure in 2010, the overall budget allocated to youth has almost doubled.

To get a complete picture of all youth-related expenditure within the overall budget of the German-speaking Community, we add the 2022 budgets for education and youth welfare (excluding budgets available for specific loans and expenditures):

€ 167,183,063

Education

€ 7,763,438

Youth welfare

€ 2,373,953

Youth

The budgets for youth, education and youth welfare combined account for 32% of the total budget of the German-speaking community. This is the sum that is specifically earmarked for young people.

POLITICAL PRIORITIES AND FORECAST OF A FUTURE YOUTH POLICY IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

Considering the past, including the present and preparing the future

On 6 December 2011, the Parliament of the German-speaking Community adopted the first decree on the promotion of youth work. This decree caused a true paradigm shift with the introduction of a knowledge-based, verifiable youth promotion policy and the associated Strategic Plan for Youth. Due to these numerous far-reaching innovations, the government committed itself to evaluating in a timely manner how the new funding approach affected the local youth landscape. The evaluation process started in 2017 and showed that the main principles (such as the principle of evidence-based youth work) and instruments of funding contributed to an expansion, professionalisation and increased visibility of youth work. However, new solutions needed to be found for several major challenges in youth work (e.g. shortage of skilled workers, flexible funding frameworks, digitalisation or the volatile nature of the sector and the target group).

On 14 December 2021, after numerous consultations with institutions from the youth sector, a decree amending the decree of 6 December 2011 on the promotion of youth work was adopted by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community.

The amended decree adjusted the subsidies for employed youth workers by increasing their salaries to match those in the health- and social sectors. Moreover, new job profiles in youth work were introduced and funded. This was the case for youth worker assistants who train on the job (requirement of 300 hours of training) or profiles that meet the specific needs of the youth institution. These measures aim to introduce a wider range of eligible functions in youth work, address the shortage of skilled workers and counter the high staff turnover in the sector.

The decree also simplified the provision of open youth work. Instead of 8 different providers, there are now 3 non-profit associations carrying out open youth work in all nine municipalities, among which the Jugendbüro responsible for youth work in seven out of nine municipalities.

Different grants were increased, for instance for youth camps and for education and training.

Since 2011, opportunities for youth participation have been strengthened. Participation of young people in policy development is also anchored in the decree via funding and the role of the Youth Council. Young people also have to be involved in the creation of the Strategic Plan for Youth. And there is support for youth leaders to put young people at the centre of all efforts.



International and national cooperation

It goes without saying that international and national cooperation are essential for the German-speaking Community. On the one hand, this is linked to the geographical situation of the German-speaking Community, wedged between two European regions and at the border of several language areas. On the other hand, it also has to do with the wide range of competences and the small size of the German-speaking Community.

To allow young citizens to benefit most of this autonomy, the German-speaking Community is very active in international initiatives and networks such as the Benelux cooperation, the cooperation in the framework of the Greater Region, as well as some bilateral treaties.

In this context, being part of the European programmes Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps and having its own national agency for these programmes is a precious added value for youth policy and young people in the German-speaking Community. The national agency, as well as several other youth exchange programmes, such as Quebec-Wallonie-Bruxelles (a programme of the French Community) and [Bel'J](#) (a programme of the three Belgian communities), are managed by the Jugendbüro.

The German-speaking Community benefits greatly from the cooperation on European youth policy design and has close contacts with its national partners, the partners in the Greater Region, as well as other partner countries.

In the context of European cooperation, the three Belgian communities work closely together to coordinate a single Belgian position regarding the competences of the communities. The leadership and Belgian spokesperson role in the European Council are taken in turn by the three communities. This close cooperation will be even more intense during the Belgian Presidency of the European Council in 2024.

Flanders will lead the EU presidency in the field of youth policy, while the German-speaking Community will have the role of Belgian spokesperson (the Belgian seat).

The three Belgian communities also cooperate in the field of youth policy. The German-speaking Community has cooperation agreements with the French and Flemish Communities. The communities frequently share information regarding new developments, transfer knowledge or invite each other to participate in events.

The three communities also have a common programme for youth exchanges and projects for creative and active citizenship. This programme is called "[Bel'J](#)" and was initiated in March 2009 by the three ministers for youth. It gives young people between 12 and 30 the opportunity to discover the other communities and their culture. Bel'J is managed by the Jugendbüro in the German-speaking Community.