

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



COUNTRY SHEET ON YOUTH POLICY IN FLANDERS (BELGIUM)

Last updated: 27 April 2020

By Lieve Bradt & Ruwayda Said Salem

Disclaimer: The content of this document, commissioned by the EU-CoE youth partnership, is the sole responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of either of the partner institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe).

Contents

- 1. Context of national youth policy 3
 - 1.1 Context of national youth policy 3
 - 1.2. Principles of national youth policy 5
- 2. Statistics on young people 7
- 3. Actors and structures 7
 - 3.1. Public authorities 8
 - 3.1.1. National public authorities with competencies in the youth field 8
 - 3.1.2. Regional and/or local public authorities with competencies in the youth field 11
 - 3.2. Youth welfare services (comprising public and/or non public actors) 11
 - 3.3. Non-public actors/structures and youth services with competencies in the youth field 12
 - 3.3.1 Youth Councils 12
 - 3.3.2 Youth NGOs 13
 - 3.4 National network(s) for knowledge on youth linking all actors in the field (policy makers, researchers, young people and their organisations, NGOs)? 14
- 4. Legislation 15
- 5. National Policy Programmes and Action Plans on Youth 17
- 6. Budget / Public expenditure allocated to youth 18
- 7. European dimension of youth policy 19
 - 7.1. Council of Europe youth sector strategy and programmes 19
 - 7.2. European Union youth strategy and programmes 19
- 8. Further sources of information on youth policy 20
- 9. References 21

1. Context of national youth policy

1.1 Context of national youth policy?

Based on the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (2015-2019) (Department for Culture, Youth, Sports and Media, s.d.), we illustrate the main topics that Flanders wants to address. The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan outlines all the concerns regarding children and young people and their rights which the Flemish Ministers will pay attention to in their policies in the coming years. In the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan the Government of Flanders also describes how it puts into practice the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The current Youth Policy Plan is valid for the period 2015-2019 and includes 12 strategic goals and 34 operational goals. The encompassing themes are (1) poverty; (2) sustainability; (3) being young; (4) mobility; (5) education 1; (6) education 2; (7) participation; (8) space; (9) well-being; (10) housing; (11) employment; (12) cultural education.

Although some specific intentions are mentioned with regard to young people in poverty, young people of immigrant origin, young people in special youth care and other disadvantaged groups, the overall focus is on equalising the opportunities of *all youngsters* in Flanders.

In preparation for the Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan, an environmental analysis is drawn up each time. This document is a non-exhaustive compilation of recent figures and research on children and young people in Flanders. It contains administrative data, but also survey data and results of qualitative research that has been carried out in Flanders in recent years.

On Friday 26 April 2019, approximately 150 young people, youth workers, children's rights actors, middle-level actors, researchers, local and Flemish civil servants and policy makers came to the Big Priority Debate in the Herman Teirlinck building in Brussels. They debated the major challenges facing children and young people and ranked them among the thirteen targets for the new Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan 2020-2024. After a day of listening to motivating stories, exchanging arguments for or against the different goals, thinking about doom scenarios, speed dating and lobbying, the following five goals were considered to be the most important ones:

1. Reducing the poverty of children and young people
2. Strengthening mental wellbeing and positive identity development
3. Working towards sustainable and safe neighbourhoods
4. Giving children and young people a voice in the future of the planet
5. Ensuring that children

5 priority objectives for the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan Flemish Government

The definitive choice of the five priorities was made in February 2020, after an extensive consultation. For example, various moments of participation were organised, a broad environmental analysis was made by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media and there was a round table discussion with Minister Benjamin Dalle. A steering group composed of the Ambrassade, the Flemish Youth Council, the Children's Rights Knowledge Centre, the Minority Forum, Battalion and the administration was involved in the process.

1. Well-being and positive identity development

Children and young people need to feel good about themselves, wherever they are. More and more young people are struggling with pressure. In addition, suicide is one of the main causes of death among young people. Violence at school, stress, performance pressure, questions about diversity and gender... it causes more and more young people to have a hard time. A study by De Ambrassade shows that 38% of the surveyed young people between 14 and 25 years old do not feel good about themselves. The Flemish government wants to give children and young people the necessary resilience to deal with these challenges.

2. Healthy and liveable neighborhoods

The Flemish government wants to focus on healthy and liveable neighbourhoods for children and young people. Young people are very involved in the climate challenges and the future of the planet. These challenges start locally: every child and young person has the right to grow up in a healthy environment. In addition, our children and young people have to grow up in good and healthy neighbourhoods: with quality housing, sufficient 'hanging space', access to relaxation, accessibility, ... It is important that the voice of children and young people are included in the design and layout of our public spaces.

3. Engagement in society through voluntary action

The Flemish government wants to ensure that children and young people can actively contribute to society. The government wants to encourage them to volunteer. Children and young people must be given time and space to get involved in society. The strength of the voice of children and young people play an important role. This voluntary commitment must be recognised and appreciated.

4. Leisure activities for all

The Flemish government wants all children and young people to enjoy their leisure time to the fullest. To this end, an integrated leisure time policy is being pursued. This means that all children and young people must have access to a quality leisure offer. There are still too many obstacles. Children in reception centres, children with disabilities or children in poverty: for example, a quarter of the socio-economically disadvantaged young people have never been a member of a sports club. The Flemish government wants to address this with an inclusive and diverse leisure policy.

5. Media wisdom

The Flemish government wants to strengthen children and young people as critical thinking and media wise citizens. Children and young people need to build resilience, develop (digital) skills and have a wide range of opportunities to be informed, active and creative with all forms of online and offline media. They must be familiar with terms such as fake-news, sexting, privacy, ... in order to find their way in a safe and informed way in an increasingly international and digital world.

References:

- Vlaams jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleidsplan 2015-2019 / The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019 [Link]
- Youth policy in the three communities in Belgium, 2015
http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/vjkb_beleidsplan_jkp2020_2024.aspx

1.2. Principles of national youth policy?

The federal 'Belgian' level of government has limited competence in youth matters (e.g. some aspects of judicial youth protection), but there is no youth policy at the Belgian level. Person-related matters, such as education, health care, culture and youth are entitled to the Communities. Therefore, the most explicit youth policy and youth policy instruments can be found at this level.

In the Flemish community, on 1 January 2013, the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy entered into force and replaced the initial decree of 18 July 2008.

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 sectorial 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, their needs and requirements. That is why youth policy permeates almost every other sector. Thus, youth policy can be seen as a broad, cross-sectoral approach to young people - partly young, partly all young people - including children.

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 defines the policy for youth and children's rights as follows: *'the comprehensive and integrated vision and a government's resulting systemic and plan-based measures which aim to have a perceptible effect on youth, with a special focus on children's rights, as moral and legal framework'*.

The act serves two major purposes:

1. It describes the basic instruments to implement youth policy. More specifically, five key instruments are mentioned:
 - Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan

- Impact assessment of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER)
- Contact points for the policy on youth and children's rights in all departments and agencies of the Flemish Authorities and increased coordination
- A coordinating administration
- A 'Youth Progress Report' to monitor the situation of youth

Furthermore, the act also defines that the Flemish Government provides for the establishment of a Youth Council. Every month, twenty-four individual youngsters and representative of youth organisations gather for the General Assembly. During this meeting, they discuss policy developments relevant to youth and approve advices. With regard to its advisory task, the Flemish Youth Council can give advice at its own discretion or at the request of the Government of Flanders or the Flemish Parliament. As stipulated by law, the Government of Flanders shall request advice when making legislation implementing the Flemish Youth Policy Plan. The Flemish Youth Council shall approve its advices at the General Assembly with a two-third majority of the attendees. Importantly, the Government of Flanders shall explain its decision on the policy advices relating to its competences to the Flemish Youth Council. The Flemish Youth Council can also give policy advices in case its members find it necessary in view of the interests of young people.

2. It specifies the conditions for accreditation and funding of a large number of private organisations and youth-related associations operating at a Flemish level (i.e. not organisations operating at a regional or a local level as these receive funding by the municipalities, or by other parliament acts i.e. the Parliament Act on 'the support and stimulation of the municipal youth policy and the determination of provincial youth policy):

- Nationally organised youth associations
- Associations for participation and information
- Cultural education associations
- Political youth movements

The Flemish Parliament Act provides the coordination of youth policy as implemented in the different policy domains in Flanders. In an effort to mainstream youth policy, the policy plan is linked to other Ministries (and requires action from them) such as employment, education, welfare, urbanisation and mobility. The act addresses the youth population as a whole.

References:

- › Youth Policy in the three Communities in Belgium (2015)
- › Working with young people: The value of youth work in the EU, 2013. Youth policy in Belgium <https://rm.coe.int/16807023f1>
- › <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work>
- › National report: First cooperation cycle of the EU Youth strategy 2010-2012 [Link?]

- › http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_VJKB/BVR_decreet_vernieuwdJKRB_def_goedkeuring_VR.pdf
- › The Flemish Parliament Acts are published in Dutch (original language) and French translation in the Belgian Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees: www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/doc/rech_f.htm
- › The Division Youth of the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults provides an English version of the Flemish Parliament Acts on demand.
- › <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/regelgeving/Vlaamsjeugdbeleid.aspx>

2. Statistics on young people

Mention the number of all young people from the ages of 15 and 29 who live in the country

Number and percentage of young people (15-29) in global population:

Young people (15-29) in global population	
Number	Percentage
1 126 586	17,1%

Number and percentage of young people (15-29) by gender in global population:

Young people (15-29) by gender in global population	Number	Percentage
Young women	553 773	8,40%
Young men	572 810	8,69%
Total	1 126 586	17,10%

Number and percentage of young people (15-29) with a different nationality:

Young people (15-29) with different nationality	Number	% of global population	% of young population (15-29)
Young women	64 936	0,99%	5,76%
Young men	64 988	0,99%	5,77%
Total	129 924	1,97%	11,53%

References:

- › <https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/bevolking/structuur-van-de-bevolking>

3. Actors and structures

3.1. Public authorities

3.1.1. National public authorities with competencies in the youth field

National Public authorities

- FLEMISH GOVERNMENT

The Government of Flanders is responsible for implementing the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy plan. Some of its most important tasks regarding youth work and youth policy are:

1. The preparation, execution and evaluation of policy, and following legislation
2. and the regulation and financing of youth work.

The government develops youth policy documents which present the overall vision for youth and children's rights policy. An essential characteristic of Flemish youth policy is the implementation through explicit measures such as acts or decrees. These decrees define the instruments of youth and children's rights policy and the funding of local and provincial authorities and youth organisations.

For the policy period 2015 through 2019 it is the first fully integrated youth and children's rights policy plan. After two years (in 2017), interim reports with regard to the implementation of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan are issued. This allows for midterm adjustments to be made. The interim report 2015-2016 is available at http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/jeugd_kinderrechtenbeleid_doc/jkp/tussentijds-rapport-2015-2016_JKP2015-2019.pdf. At the end of the Government's term of office (before the elections in 2019) a final report will be drawn up.

- MINISTRY IN CHARGE OF YOUTH

The Government of Flanders consists of 9 ministers, who are in office for a 5-year term. Minister Benjamin Dalle (Christen Democratic Party) is since 2 October 2019 the new Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth and Media (from 2019 until 2024).

The policy domain Culture, is since 2 October 2019, a responsibility of the Minister-president Jan Jambon (The New Flemish Alliance) (from 2019 until 2024).

Since 2004, the Flemish Government has allocated the 'coordination of the children's rights policy' and responsibility for 'youth' to the same minister.

- DEPARTMENT CULTURE, YOUTH AND MEDIA

Until January 2018, the 'Division Youth' – embedded in the department of culture, youth and media – ensured the administrative follow-up of the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights. Furthermore, the division implemented youth policy as a socio-cultural matter. It stimulated and supported a rich and varied offer of non-commercial socio-cultural activities for young people, mainly through subsidising organisations and local authorities.

In short, the Division Youth had five main tasks:

1. Preparation, follow-up, evaluation and implementation of legislation (e.g. the Flemish Youth Policy Plan)
2. Funding support structures, youth organisations, youth projects, youth hostels and accommodation centers, as well as municipal and provincial youth (work) policy
3. Providing material support for youth work: e.g. the lending service for camping equipment for youth associations
4. Providing information on youth (work) policy (e.g. via website and e-zine)
5. Representing Flanders at international forums

In 2018, the department Culture, Youth and Media was totally restructured to respond optimally to the needs of its stakeholders and target groups. Therefore, more knowledge development was needed on the one hand and a more integrated approach to policy preparation and implementation on the other hand. Today, the department counts three divisions (each containing different teams) and two clusters.

- The division 'Knowledge and policy' is responsible for developing knowledge and expertise to support policy and practice. A lot of attention thereby goes to cross-sectional and international links.
 - The team 'Knowledge development' is responsible for scientific research, data processing and – analysis, legal services and the archive.
 - The team 'Transversal and international' is responsible for the integrated coordination of the culture-, youth- and media policy with specific attention for transversal and international aspects, amongst others the youth and children's rights policy.
- The division 'Maintaining and managing' is responsible for protecting, maintaining and managing cultural goods, infrastructure and institutions and for preparing, implementing, following up and evaluating the media-, game- and film policy.
 - The team 'Cultural goods' is responsible for the policy concerning the protection of cultural goods, locking intangible cultural heritage, managing the Collection Flemish Community, coordination of European Year Cultural heritage and heritage consultancy.
 - The team 'Infrastructure and institutions' is responsible for the policy concerning large and own cultural and youth institutions (following up contractual agreements), policy and management of infrastructure, policy concerning art in the public space and guiding external services.
 - The team 'Media and film' is responsible for the policy concerning media (frequency plans radios, written press and regional broadcasters, following up

the VRT, Media knowledge centre,) game policy, policy concerning film (coproduction-agreements, film classification, ...), Tax Shelter film and performing arts.

- The division 'Subsidising and recognising' is responsible for recognising, subsidising, advising and evaluating the actors of the diverse decrees within the Flemish policy. The division has four teams. Three teams monitor the policymaking process sector by sector and one team is concerned with implementing the integral file management.
 - The team 'Social-cultural work and youth work' is responsible for the policy for social-cultural work for adults, amateur arts, circus decree, the Flemish sign language and the youth work policy.
 - The team 'Arts and cultural heritage' is responsible for the Arts decree, the Cultural heritage decree, the Flemish Audiovisual fund and the Flemish fund for Letters.
 - The team 'Transversal and (supra)local is responsible for future supralocal decrees Youth- and cultural work, the transition regulation 2018-2019, the Participation decree, the youth residential centres, the former DAC-project, the National lottery, the local cultural policy, the local youth policy, partner projects, GESCO, the lending right, the supralocal libraries policy, youth work for all.
 - The Team 'Files management' is responsible for the support service in the context of files management for subsidies and recognitions.

Next to these three divisions there is the cluster communication and intern organisation (responsible for personnel policy and IT support).

Other national public bodies who are directly involved in youth policies

- OTHER MINISTRIES

All the departments and the internal and external independent agencies of the Flemish Authority who were designated for this purpose by the Flemish Government have to appoint an official as the point of contact with regards to policy on the rights of youth and children. The role of these points of contact for the said policy is as follows:

1. To contribute to the creation of future Flemish youth policy plans
2. To provide monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Flemish Youth Policy Plan
3. To estimate the impact on children and young people and their rights of the policy prepared or implemented by their department or agency

- OFFICES

A Parliament Commission in charge of youth issues – The Commission for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media – is in the area of youth responsible for:

1. Youth policy and film classification
2. Continuous education and cultural development
3. Leisure activities, with the exception of tourism
4. Coordination of children's rights policy

3.1.2. Regional and/or local public authorities with competencies in the youth field

5 provinces and 308 local authorities fall within the administrative supervision of the Flemish Region. Since the Flemish Parliament Act on local and provincial youth (work) policy came into force in 1993, steps were taken towards a decentralised and complementary youth policy.

Most local authorities nowadays have youth services or at least one officer who is responsible for youth matters.

References:

- Vlaams jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleidsplan 2015-2019 / The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019 [Link]
- Vlaamse Overheid, 2012; Decreet houdende een vernieuwd jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleid [Link]
- Youth policy in Belgium, 2013 [Link]
- Country Sheet on youth policy in Flanders, 2016 [Link]
- <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/commissies/393772>

3.2. Youth welfare services (comprising public and/or non-public actors)

Within the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family, the Flemish Agency for Youth Welfare provides guidance to young people.

The Youth Welfare Agency helps youth living in difficult conditions. Together with all the partners in the special youth care sector, The Youth Welfare Agency wishes to give every young person in Flanders the opportunity to grow in our society. The agency coordinates prevention policy and provides assistance to minors – boys and girls – through committees for special youth care, social services for legal assistance and arbitration committees. "Youth Welfare ensures the coordination of partnerships and networks focusing on education support and, in this way, enhances the development of a provision that prevents problematic living conditions.

Furthermore, the Youth Welfare Agency also provides substantial support to various partners in the private sector that play a role in the counselling of young people with problems. Young people who have committed a crime or who live in a problematic educational situation are placed in the agency's open or closed community institutions. Childcare workers and educational workers provide educational and therapeutic counselling.

Numerous consultants take part in the committees and in social services in all Flemish regions and in Brussels. Together with a number of partners they ensure qualitative prevention and assistance in families to offer development opportunities to children and youth living in difficult conditions: to this end, support and advice are not only offered to the youth, but also to their environment. The Youth Welfare Agency recognizes and subsidizes private services or institutions that provide counselling to young people or where young people can stay temporarily. The agency encourages and also subsidizes innovative youth care projects.

The key tasks of the Youth Welfare Agency are:

1. prevention and assistance;
2. recognition and funding of youth assistance facilities;
3. an educational, pedagogical and therapeutic provision;
4. counsellors in special youth care;
5. community institutions.

3.3. Non-public actors/structures and youth services with competencies in the youth field

3.3.1 Youth Councils

The Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on Flemish Youth Policy sets out a legislative framework for the Flemish Youth Council ('Vlaamse Jeugdraad').

The Flemish Youth Council, an advisory body of the Government of Flanders, gives policy advices on all youth-related issues. It has been established under Flemish legislation. Every month, twenty- four individual youngsters and representatives of youth organizations gather for the General Assembly. During this meeting, they discuss policy developments relevant to youth and approve proposals. According to the law, the Flemish Youth Council shall be elected every three years. Following an online voting procedure, a new youth council has been elected at the end of last year.

The Youth Council shall be composed of at least 16 and at most 24 members, at least one third of whom shall be younger than 25 at the start of the mandate. Maximum two thirds of the members shall be of the same gender.

With regard to its advisory task, the Flemish Youth Council can give advice at its own discretion or at the request of the Government of Flanders or the Flemish Parliament. As stipulated by law, the government of Flanders shall request advice when making legislation implementing the Flemish Youth Policy Plan. The Flemish Youth Council shall approve its advices at the General Assembly with a two-third majority of the attendees. Importantly, the Government of Flanders shall explain its decision on the policy proposals relating to its competences to the Flemish Youth Council.

The Flemish Youth Council is supported in its work by the Youth Work Commission. It is a monthly meeting place for youth work organisations of Flanders. The meeting can be attended by youth workers from any organisation funded by the Flemish Parliament Act of 2012 on Flemish youth and children's rights policy. This Commission carries out important work in support of the youth council. It follows-up on youth work policies and prepares policy proposals, in which the interests of youth work organizations are reflected, for the General Assembly of the Flemish Youth Council.

At the Council of Europe level, the Flemish Youth Council has been actively engaged for many years. This because of the relevance of these European decisions for youngsters and youth work in Flanders. The Flemish Youth Council has been participating through the decision-making structures of

the co-management system of the Council of Europe. Its representatives have sat with officials to agree on priorities of youngsters and the youth sector. Furthermore, the Flemish Youth Council is also member of the European Youth Forum working on Council of Europe youth matters. The Youth Council is supported by the “Ambrassade”, an association recognised and funded by the Flemish Government and also responsible for development, support and provision of information to the youth sector. The Youth Council and the Ambrassade provides support services for all 106 licensed youth organizations in Flanders.

Local youth councils

In the Flemish Parliament Act of 6 July 2012 on supporting and promoting local youth policy and youth work policy it is stated that a local youth council should be established and recognised in order to be eligible for subsidisation and in view of the organisation of the consultation and the participation of children and young people in the preparation and implementation of youth policy.

3.3.2 Youth NGOs

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

Youth organisations or youth associations usually receive funding based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes.

The legislator has assigned some specific tasks to the following organisations:

- **JINT** (coordinating body for international youth work) was established to implement the European Youth programmes within the Flemish Community, to promote international exchange and co- operation of, for and by youth and to foster the reflection on youth, youth work a youth and children’s rights policy by all actors involved on the basis of international exchange and cooperation.
- **De Ambrassade** (Youth Support structure) carries out following tasks:
 - Practice development, practice support and the provision of information to and about the youth sector
 - The provision of support to the Youth Council referred to in Article 7
 - The provision of information to children and young people
- **VVJ** (Association for Local Youth Services and Youth Coordinators) is an organisation, whose members are local authorities from the Dutch language area of Belgium and the bilingual Brussels Capital Region, the Flemish provincial authorities as well as the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels. Most of the municipal authorities are members of this support organisation. The association is granted in view of practice development, practice support and the provision of information to and about municipal and provincial youth policy. Virtually all Flemish municipalities (305 of 308) are members of the VVJ.
- **Knowledge Centre on Children's Rights** aims to increase knowledge of children's rights at national and international level. The Knowledge Centre on Children's Rights takes an interdisciplinary approach to children's rights based on scientific research.

- The children's Right Coalition is an umbrella organisation of non-governmental organisations for the preparation, editing and distribution of a report on the way in which Flanders puts children's rights into practice.
- ADJ (General Service for Youth Tourism) manages two youth facilities of the Division Youth. It develops a policy paper to obtain an annual operating grant from the Division. The centres in question are:
 - Training Centre Destelheide in Dworp focuses on management training initiatives for accredited youth associations and for consultation relating to young people and youth work: www.destelheide.be.
 - Youth Centre Hoge Rielen in Lichtaart hosts young people and associations for camping activities and educational initiatives. It is also suitable for nature classes, reflection or training sessions and seminars: www.hogerielen.be

Other non-profit organisations

In addition, the Flemish authorities accredit and fund some 90 nationally organised youth organisations and organisations dealing with youth information, participation and associations for cultural education.

An overview can be found on the following website: www.jeugdbeleid.be

References:

- www.jint.be
- www.ambrassade.be
- www.vvj.be
- www.keki.be

3.4 National network(s) for knowledge on youth linking all actors in the field (policy makers, researchers, young people and their organisations, NGOs)?

Before 2003 systematic and coordinated efforts were made in youth research in Flanders, thus showing overlaps and gaps in this broad area. Policy makers as well as practitioners and researchers experienced this as an obstacle. In order to overcome these obstacles, the Youth Research Platform (JOP) was created in Spring 2003 at the initiative of the Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Culture, Youth and the Civil Service. The JOP has performed policy-oriented research activities since then.

JOP is an interdisciplinary and interuniversity partnership of three research groups:

- Research group Tempus Omnia Revelat (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) - Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy (Ghent University) - Youth Criminology research group (LINC, KU Leuven)

JOP focuses on two main directions. The first direction aims at the building and expansion of knowledge through drawing up an inventory of existing youth research in both a national and international context. The second direction includes the continuation of a 'description of youth' by periodically gathering empirical data through the Youth Monitor (JOP-monitor). Both 'lines of activity' are to be consolidated and validated in an international context.

All information on publications of the Youth Research Platform can be found on:

- <http://www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/nl/publicaties>"
<http://www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/nl/publicaties>
- <http://databank.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/>).

References

- <http://www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/nl/databank-jeugdonderzoek>
- <http://databank.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/>).

Furthermore, the Parliament Act of 2012 on Flemish youth and children's rights policy also recognizes a 'Knowledge Centre for Children's Rights' (KeKi). The main objective of this Knowledge Centre is to increase the (scientific) knowledge on children's rights on the national and international level.

All information on publications of KeKi can be found on:

- www.keki.be

4. Legislation

National legislation on youth

There is no general law that covers all aspects of children's and young people's lives in Belgium. Also, there are no articles in the constitution that refer to youth explicitly.

Regional and local legislation on youth

In the Flemish community, on 1 January 2013, the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy entered into force and replaced the initial decree of 18 July 2008. This new decree replaces the decree of 18 July 2008, which, after a thorough evaluation, had shown that a number of amendments were necessary. The aim of the new decree is to facilitate a renewed youth and children's rights policy. It refers to 'renewal' because the decree does not make a tabula rasa with the previous decree of 2008. The previous decree has already brought about a major innovation in several areas. The evaluation of this decree showed that a number of provisions needed to be refined and that a number of gaps had to be filled. However, the foundations of the integrated youth and children's rights policy remain intact. The Minister of Youth and a number of Flemish Members of Parliament want to turn the Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan into a more action-oriented plan. The aim is to come up with an action or project plan, in which a limited number of complex, cross-policy themes per government period would be developed in an action-oriented/project-based way. An annual budget is then set aside for this purpose.

The most notable changes include:

1. Continue and strengthen the integration of youth and children's rights policies
2. Strengthen youth organisations through the unification of the status of nationally organised associations, information and participation associations and cultural education organisations on the basis of a number of objective parameters. As a result, these associations have a guaranteed fallback position.
3. A separate arrangement for political youth associations
4. A restructuring within the registered subsidised organisations whereby:
 - Support Centre Youth, Flemish Youth Council and VIP youth proceed to a merger
 - the Youth Council retains its role as a permanent megaphone for children and young people and for the youth sector
 - Jint as a centre of expertise in the field of international mobility and the internationalisation of youth policy is maintained
 - expertise in the field of children's rights is developed within the Keki
 - VVJ works as an interface between Flemish youth policy and local youth policy.

A recent Parliament Act on 'the support and stimulation of the municipal youth policy and the determination of provincial youth policy' of 6 July 2012 came partially into force in October 2012 and replaced the former Parliament Act of 2003 in its entirety by the end of 2013. The most notable change is the integration of the former youth policy plans in an all-encompassing and long-term municipal policy plan for the entire legislation (in accordance with a new Parliament Act on the alleviation of regulations concerning local policy planning and reporting (Planlastendecreet)).

The Flemish Government agreed on 25 June 2010 on the decision on the policy and management cycle ('Beleids- en beheerscyclus' or 'BBC') of the municipalities, the provinces and the public centres for social welfare. It contains a set of rules for the multiannual plan, budget, accounting and the financial statements of the local authorities and provinces. The BBC decision entered into force on 1 January 2014.

Youth organisations play an important role in the implementation of Flanders' youth policy. Youth organisations or youth associations usually receive funding based on specific funding regulations or grant schemes. The criteria for types of organisations funded is described in the legislation.

Youth organisations or youth associations receiving an operational grant on the basis of the Flemish Parliament Act of 20 January 2012 on 'conducting a renewed policy on youth and children's rights' need to submit every year a financial report and a report of an independent auditor, who's a member of the Institute of auditors, to the Flemish administration. The date and formal requirements of the reports will be defined by the Flemish government.

5. National Policy Programmes and Action Plans on Youth

Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan

On the basis of the decree of 20 January 2012 containing a renewed youth and children's rights policy, the Flemish government strives for an integrated Flemish youth and children's rights policy. This integrated approach makes it possible to grasp all areas that affect the lives of children and young people up to the age of thirty. Children's rights serve as an ethical and legal framework. To this end, the Flemish government makes use of various instruments.

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 presents, for each policy period and within an overall vision on youth and the youth and children's rights policy, the priority objectives of the Government of Flanders and defines the performance indicators. The act requires the Flemish Government to submit the plan to the Flemish Parliament no later than one year after the start of the term of office.

This strategic youth policy plan should formulate the desired social effects deemed crucial for children and young people.

- To create and guarantee equal opportunities for all children and young people;
- To create and guarantee broad development opportunities for children and young people;
- To create space for children and young people;
- To increase the formal and informal participation of children and young people in society.

In the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan the Government of Flanders shall also describe how it puts into practice the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Other instruments

Other instruments created in order to implement the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights, are:

1. Impact study of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER): any draft Act submitted to the Flemish Parliament has to be accompanied by a report regarding its impact on children and youth, whenever the proposal directly affects people under the age of 25.
2. Contact points for youth and children's rights and an increased coordination: all Departments and Agencies of the Flemish Authorities should appoint one member of staff to be the contact point for the policy on youth and children's rights. They will be asked to contribute to future Flemish Youth 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 Policy Plan. They will be responsible to estimate the impact of the policy prepared or implemented by their department or agency on children and young people and their rights. The Division Youth is the coordinating administration.
3. A 'Youth Progress Report' to monitor the situation of youth: this is a scientific report on the social environment of youth, which also points out longitudinal developments in Flanders. The report will appear at least every five years.

4. Research, monitoring, data collection are the basis for a knowledge based policy and a better insight of children and young people. Next to the youth progress report, also other research is executed.

The act also defines that the Flemish Government provides for the establishment of a Youth Council.

References:

- <http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/vjkb.aspx>
- <https://ambrassade.be/nl/basiswerk-jeugdwerk/beleid/basisinstrumenten-voor-jeugdbeleid>

6. Budget / Public expenditure allocated to youth

Every year, the government of Flanders estimate the budget for the next year. This budget allocation will be presented to the Flemish Parliament and will be discussed in parliamentary committees. The Flemish Parliament has to accept the budget allocation, before the Flemish government can use the budget for expenditure. This budget allocation also contains the means for Youth policy.

The budget in 2015

In 2015, the Division Youth had a budget of 67.500.000 euros to achieve its objectives. Most of the money was allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy (18.877.000 euros) and the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights (32.610.000 euros). Local and regional level have their own budget, next to the subventions of the Flemish Government.

The budget in 2016

In 2016, the budget allocation of the Division Youth was 42.266.000 euros. There is a decline from the budget allocation of 2015. The budget allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy have been reduced compared to the budget allocation of 2015. The remaining budget (1.254.000) will help support youth policy in Brussels and De Rand ('the rim'). In 2016, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 32.509.000 euros and has been reduced by 21.000 euros.

The budget in 2017

In 2017, the budget allocated to the Division Youth was 42.462.000 euros. The budget allocated to the Act on local and provincial youth policy was still very low (1.185.000) and uniquely to support youth policy in Brussels and De Rand ('the rim'). In 2017, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 33.057.000 euros.

The budget in 2018

In 2018, the budget allocated to the Division Youth was 50.209.000 euros. The allocated budget increased because of the transfer of provincial responsibilities to the Flemish Community. This extra fund is needed to pay overcoming personnel and to subsidise those organisations that were initially

subsidised by the provinces. In 2018, the budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 37.003.000 euros.

The budget in 2019

In 2019, the budget allocated to youth within the Division Youth of the Department of Culture, Youth and Media was 69.550.000 euro. The budget allocated to the Act on the Flemish policy on youth and children's rights is 34.530.000 euro.

References:

- <https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/vlaamse-overheid/werking-van-de-vlaamse-overheid/de-vlaamse-begroting-cijfers-2018#187606>
- http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/begroting_uitgaven.aspx

7. European dimension of youth policy

7.1. Council of Europe youth sector strategy and programmes

Council of Europe

With the European Youth Centres and the European Youth Fund, the youth sector has important tools to achieve its goals. The structure of the youth sector is unique in its kind thanks to co-management. Representatives of governments and youth organizations are jointly represented in the decision-making bodies. The Flemish Government gives a yearly contribution to the European Youth Foundation. The representative of the Flemish Government is active in the CDEJ and in different expert groups. The Flemish Government supports 'Perspectives on youth: European Partnership Series'. This series aims to function as an information, discussion, reflection and dialogue forum on European developments in the field of youth policy, youth research and youth work. The Flemish Government supports the further exploration and development of the series 'history on youth work and youth policy in Europe'

References:

- <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/the-history-of-youth-work-volume-7>.

7.2. European Union youth strategy and programmes

7.2.1 Implementation of the Erasmus+/Youth in Action programme

- Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU funding programme for education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It runs from 2014 till the end of 2020 with a total budget of 14.7 billion euro. Within Erasmus+ there are different sections: one for education and training, one for sport and one for youth projects. The youth section of Erasmus+ is called Youth in Action. It funds projects for and by young people and youth organisations. It has a separate budget and specific project possibilities. In 2016, the Youth in Action-programme in Flanders has a budget of 2.445.718 euros. In 2018 there was a budget of 2.875.748 euros.

The Flemish government has designated Jint vzw to coordinate and to implement the youth programme in Flanders. Jint vzw is in charge of information and promoting, training, funding and assessment.

- ESF 2014-2020

The Operational Programme for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Flanders in the 2014-2020 period supports initiatives that increase employment and improve social cohesion in Flanders. In the years to come, 1 billion euros will be invested. The ESF programme lays down the priorities for the expenditure of 1 billion euro. 600 million euros is financed through the Flemish budget and 400 million euros through the European budget. The Flemish labour minister, Philippe Muyters, states: 'We have made up a balanced investment programme, which enjoys the support from the European Commission. The programme places the right focus on creating the best opportunities for people in their search for a job, with specific attention for youngsters and the most disadvantaged people.'

7.2.2 Follow up of the EU Youth Strategy (2010 – 2018) on the national level

The Flemish Youth Policy Plan has a European perspective. It was closely connected to the endeavours of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council and to the 'European Youth Strategy 2010-2018'. After extensive consultations with young people and a series of youth policy stakeholders in the EU member states, eight priority themes were put forward. These themes provided an important framework for the development of the Youth Policy Plan. The Flemish Government will use its international cultural cooperation agreements to collect expertise and exchange approaches on these topics.

The Division Knowledge and policy is represented in the National Working Group of the Structured Dialogue.

The Division Knowledge and policy foresees representation in most of the expert groups and peer-learning exercises set up in the framework of the EU Youth Strategy.

8. Further sources of information on youth policy

C'est plus compliqué que ça. A review of youth policy in Belgium by the International review team of the Council of Europe.

www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/internationalesamenwerking_doc/CoE_policy-reviewEN.pdf

National youth report of the Flemish Community of Belgium: First cooperation cycle of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2012.

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/documents/national_youth_reports_2012/belgium__flemish_community.pdf

Youth policy in the three communities of Belgium 2015

[<http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/publicaties/detail/youth-policy-in-the-three-communities-of-belgium>]

The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019.

[http://www.jkp.vlaanderen/assets/downloads/JKP_summary_digital_version.pdf]

9. References

Legal documents

Decree 20 January 2012 containing a Renewed Youth and Children's Rights Policy, Official Gazette 7 March 2012.

Decree of 20 April 2012 on the organisation of childcare for babies and toddlers, BS 15 June 2012.

Decree of 12 July 2013 on Integral Youth Assistance, Official Gazette 13 September 2013.

Policy memorandum Youth 2014-2019 submitted by Mr. Sven Gatz, Flemish Minister of Culture, Media, Youth, and Brussels.

Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2015-2019. Retrieved from http://www.jkp.vlaanderen/assets/downloads/JKP_summary_digital_version.pdf

Data and statistics

Interactive database Youth monitor (JOP). Retrieved from <http://databank.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/>

Studies, reports and academic publications

Vandekinderen, C. and Roose, R., 2016. *Social innovation - empowering the young (society) for the common good: Belgian report on the socio-economic political context*. SociEtY.

Van der Eecken, A., Kemper, R. and Bradt, L., 2016. *Country sheet on youth policy in Flanders (Belgium)*. Youth Partnership.

