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FLEMISH YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS POLICY PLAN 2020-2024

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points for youth and children's rights within each policy area, the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group, the Flemish Children's Rights Monitoring Report, etc.

The strength of the JKP, as well as its ambition, is that, within the scope of five government-wide transversal objectives, Flanders commits itself to a limited number of concrete, feasible and achievable actions that have an impact and noticeable effect on the lives of all children, young people and young adults in Flanders.

2.2. COMPLEMENTARY TO OTHER HORIZONTAL POLICY PLANS

The JKP has been conceived as a horizontal policy plan, in line with the Communication to the Government of Flanders of 7 February 2020 on the new approach to transversal policy/horizontal objectives frameworks (VR 2020 0702 MED.0050/1)¹. The JKP has been drawn up and shall be implemented and monitored in accordance with the principles laid down therein.

The different horizontal policy plans within the Government of Flanders are intended to respect, complement and reinforce each other in order to increase the chances of success and effects of each plan. In order to avoid overlap and fragmentation of crucial themes, an explicit choice is made to capitalise on existing policy plans. The child and youth perspective and resulting specific objectives and/or actions concerning children and young people are therefore given a place within the most relevant horizontal policy plans, including the Flemish Poverty Reduction Action Plan, the Flemish Climate Plan, the Horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunities Policy Plan, the Coordinated Flemish Volunteering Policy Action Plan, the Action Plan to Combat Sexual Violence, the Action Plan for the Homeless and the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation, Extremism, Terrorism and Polarisation.

3. PROCEDURE

3.1. IMPLEMENTATION BY DECREE

The JKP was created on the basis of Article 3, §1 of the Decree of 20 January 2012 on a renewed youth and children's rights policy².

Under the current statutory regulation, the Government of Flanders approves a JKP within one year of taking up office. Consequently, the JKP must be adopted by 1 October 2020 at the latest to be subsequently submitted to the Flemish Parliament and the Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner.

¹ Hereinafter referred to as the Transversal Policy Communication.

² Hereinafter referred to as the Decree on youth and children's rights policy.

The final choice of five priorities was approved by the Government of Flanders on 13 March 2020 (see 3.2. above). With the JKP, Flanders commits itself to concrete, feasible and achievable objectives that have an impact and noticeable effect on the lives of all children, young people and young adults in Flanders. They are operationalised through a limited number of actions which are evidence of feasible financial efforts and actual ambition.

In the follow-up process the various specialised ministers were asked, in accordance with Art. 3 of the Order on youth and children's rights policy and the Transversal Policy Communication, to identify their priorities and to make a substantive contribution to a non-exhaustive overview of concrete and assessable policy measures (actions).

The global framework was submitted for reflection and discussion to a Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group XL on 9 June 2020. The meeting of this Reflection Group was organised online in five sessions, each focusing on one of the priorities. A total of 70 people took part in the discussions, including contact points for youth and children's rights policy within the various policy areas, representatives of the youth and children's rights superstructure, Flemish and national children's rights actors, researchers, representatives of local authorities and youth work. Where possible and desirable, the input given was incorporated into the JKP.

The actions delivered within each priority were arranged into an orderly overview. This constitutes the JKP, which is aimed at achieving results for all children, young people and young adults.

4. BASIC PRINCIPLES

The JKP is founded on the following basic principles which apply transversally to all objectives.

4.1. CHILD AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

Children and young people are citizens of our society and represent a specific target group in society. On 1 January 2020, 2,288,118 children and young people aged between 0 and 30 lived just in Flanders. Compared to the total population, one can roughly say that 1 in 3 are 'youth', not including Flemish children and young people residing in Brussels.⁶

The child and youth perspective presupposes a focus on the importance and needs of children and young people. That their voices are heard and appropriate action is taken. That potential and (latent) talents are recognised and stimulated. Diversity within this target group in terms of age, gender, background, origin,

⁶ <https://bestat.statbel.fgov.be/bestat/crosstable.xhtml?datasource=65ee413b-3859-4c6f-a847-09b631766fa7>; based on figures as at 1 January 2020.



In order to gain an insight into the lives of these children and young people, what occupies them, what they worry about and what they enjoy, an extensive environmental analysis⁷ was drawn up in preparation for the JKP. This JKP Environmental Analysis focuses on children and young people aged between 0 and 30 in Flanders (Flemish Region and Dutch-speaking children and young people in the Brussels-Capital Region). The analysis contains information about very diverse policy areas and areas of life and is divided into thematic chapters. It encompasses a non-exhaustive compilation of administrative data, survey data and results of qualitative research conducted in Flanders in recent years.

The JKP aims at achieving results for all children, youth and young adults. For this reason, the objectives and actions were formulated in a specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound way. The progress and impact of the JKP is monitored through the annual reporting of actions within the framework of the policy and budget explanatory notes (Dutch: beleids- en begrotingstoelichting/BBT) of each specialised minister concerned. On the basis of these reports, the mid-term review, which shall also indicate whether and where adjustments are needed, and the final evaluation of the JKP shall be drawn up (Art. 3, §3 of the Decree on youth and children’s rights policy). These reports are prepared by the administration of the coordinating Minister for Youth, viz. the Department of Culture, Youth and Media. The final delivery is preceded by a content-related discussion in the Youth and Children’s Rights Policy Reflection Group, in which the contact points for youth and children’s rights of the various policy areas involved are represented. The contact points coordinate with their competent ministers. Indicators are linked to the different priorities and, as far as possible, aligned with the indicators included in the policy and budget explanatory notes. This should contribute to underpinned and sound monitoring and evaluation.

The monitoring of the priorities is currently being set up by the Youth Research Platform (Dutch: Jeugdonderzoekplatform/JOP), whereby a cluster of general indicators is each time developed that shall allow the progress of the priorities to be monitored. This set of indicators is a mix of survey items and administrative data.

In addition, the JKP continuously interacts with all kinds of ongoing and upcoming scientific and policy-relevant research.

5. CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

While drawing up the present JKP, we were confronted with coronavirus and the urgent measures that were taken to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. The introduction and monitoring of and the compliance with the emergency measures revealed that specific groups in society were particularly affected by the precarious living situation in which they find themselves. The general mitigating measures adopted by the various authorities remedy this to some extent, but also expose other problems.

⁷ Department of Culture, Youth and Media, *Omgevingsanalyse JKP ter voorbereiding van het Vlaams jeugd- en kinderrechtenbeleidsplan 2020-2024 (JKP Environmental Analysis in Preparation for the Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024)*, Government of Flanders, Brussels, 2019, 165 p. Hereinafter referred to as the JKP Environmental Analysis http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/jeugd_kinderrechtenbeleid_doc/jkp2020-2024/Omgevingsanalyse-JKP.pdf.

The measures had a great impact on the lives of children and young people⁸. Children and young people in socially vulnerable situations often experienced specific consequences⁹, such as illnesses that were not diagnosed or monitored; no space to relax at home and/or no garden; lack of leisure and school materials; limited social network; loneliness; living together with parents with a mental/physical illness, addiction, depression, in (technical) unemployment, in (imminent) divorce, money worries, etc.; risk for integrity due to (risk of) violence, abuse, malnutrition, neglect, not being welcome at home; ongoing integral youth assistance that came to a standstill or was delayed, etc. These are generally children and young people from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds who are in a vulnerable home situation, in a youth assistance/juvenile delinquency programme or in a precarious residence situation, as well as children and young people who have problems at school or do not go to school at all, and children and young people with disabilities.

The Government of Flanders took a lot of measures to manage the crisis as much as possible, including for vulnerable households (VR 2020 1505 MED.0157/1 and VR 2020 0307 MED.0223/1BIS). Many of these measures were also aimed specifically at children and young people, such as reopening schools and allowing summer camps to take place. Within the explicit framework of the JKP priorities, the following two measures are of specific significance. First of all, financial incentives led to a strengthening of maximum accessible online youth information and to accessible and available telephone and online support for children and young people (VR 2020 1004 DOC.0334/1). In addition, a total budget of € 4.5 million was spent on leisure and on support for the provision for children and young people in vulnerable situations (Generation Resilience Action Plan) (VR 2020 3004 DOC.0419/1QUATER).

Because the resilience of these children and young people will still be vital even after the crisis, we continue our focus on socially vulnerable children and young people in the present JKP. Given the exceptional circumstances we were in during this crisis and the measures taken within this framework, the JKP is the instrument par excellence for bearing in mind the measures taken in the longer term as well. All five priorities provide starting points and common grounds for this.

⁸ See, among other things: Flemish Office of the Children’s Rights Commissioner, Children’s Rights Knowledge Centre and Children’s Rights Coalition, *Coronacrisis treft alle kinderen en jongeren? Resultaten online-enquête #jongerenovercorona* (Does coronacrisis affect all children and young people? Results of online survey #jongerenovercorona), Brussels, 2020, 70 p.; N. Van Ceulebroeck and F. Aernouts,

De impact van de coronamaatregelen op professionele jeugdwerkorganisaties, Jeugdwerkers en kinderen en jongeren in Antwerpen (The impact of coronavirus measures on professional youth work organisations, youth workers and children and youth in Antwerp), Artesis Plantijn University College Antwerp in collaboration with Antwerps Jeugdsectoroverleg, 2020, 22 p.; Department of Communication Sciences, Centre for Persuasive Communication (Ghent University), *Tieners kijken positief naar de toekomst tijdens de coronaperiode... en naar Instagram* (Teenagers look positively to the future during the coronavirus period... and to Instagram), 7 May 2020, Ghent, <https://www.ugent.be/nl/actueel/corona-tieners-sociale-media-gevoel-instagram.htm> and *Kinderen vooral bezorgd over vakantieplannen en geannuleerde feestjes* (Children mainly concerned about holiday plans and cancelled parties), Ghent, 19 May 2020, <https://www.ugent.be/nl/actueel/kinderen-bezorgd-vakantie-feest-ziek-corona-onderzoek.htm> Flemish Youth Council, *Position statement. Impact van corona op kinderen en jongeren: mentale en fysieke ruimte onder druk* (Impact of coronavirus on children and youth: mental and physical space under pressure), Brussels, 30 March 2020, 8 p.

⁹ See inter alia: Uit De Marge, *De impact van de COVID 19-maatregelen op kinderen en jongeren in maatschappelijk kwetsbare situaties. Hoe overleven kinderen en jongeren in kwetsbare posities de lockdown?* (The impact of COVID-19 measures on children and young people in socially vulnerable situations. How do children and young people in vulnerable positions survive the lockdown?), Antwerp, 2020, 40 p.; Flemish Youth Council, *Advisory opinion 2005. Mondmakers en Megafonen: onze stem gaat niet meer in lockdown* (Face masks and megaphones: our voices are no longer in lockdown), Brussels, 1 July 2020, 39 p.



6. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

With the JKP, Flanders links objectives to concrete, feasible and achievable actions that have an impact and a perceptible effect on the lives of all children, youth and young adults in Flanders.

As a government-wide and integrated strategic objective, each priority begins with an explanation of the context on the basis of the JKP Environmental Analysis and the relevant European and international instruments.

Next, the priority is divided into two tactical objectives (TO), resulting in operational objectives (OO) which contain specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound actions. These actions were proposed by the specialist ministers' offices who believed the priority concerned pertained to their competences and subsequently wanted to work on it.

The original wording of the actions proposed was adhered to whenever possible. When the actions proposed by one or more policy areas overlapped in terms of content, they were translated into a more general, comprehensive formulation.

For each action, the specialist ministers involved are indicated. If a timescale is available, this is also stated.

In line with the Transversal Policy Communication, the actions included provide a non-exhaustive overview. If the JKP is to realise its ambition, make a difference for children and youth in Flanders, and be able to respond to changes, it should be a dynamic document. Within the objectives set, new, additional or amending actions are possible.

Once the plan has been approved, the specialist ministers concerned undertake to effectively implement the actions and translate them into policy, with the appropriate budget where necessary.

The coordinating minister, i.e. the Minister for Youth, shall therefore play an active coordinating role in the implementation of the JKP in order to monitor the implementation of the actions, retain an overview, ensure the necessary coordination and provide for the necessary reviews at all times.



etc.), on focusing on adolescent health (obesity, substance abuse, particularly of cannabis, tobacco and alcohol) and on combating bullying, including in school. This overview is appended at the end of the JKP.

Promoting the mental well-being of young people is also included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (Goal 3.4). The same encouragement can also be found in the Lisboa+21 Declaration drawn up at the World Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in 2019, which sets out the commitment to the promotion of a youth-friendly enabling environment (§8). The EU Youth Strategy identifies the mental well-being of young people as a key priority, which is why this objective was enshrined in the Fifth European Youth Goal 'Mental Health and Well-being'. As regards societal and performance pressure, the second priority of the (draft) UN Youth2030 Strategy, together with §10 of the Lisboa+21 Declaration, pays particular attention to social determinants of young people's well-being. The Lisboa+21 Declaration also invites states to ensure access to youth-friendly mental health services (§10). At the Council of Europe level, Recommendation (2019)4 encourages Member States to promote the access to and quality of psychological support for young refugees (§§20, 21 and 22). This document also assigns a special role to youth work activities in providing psychological support to young refugees (§33 and 34). Furthermore, Recommendation (2016)7 states that Member States should facilitate access to young people's rights relating to necessary health-care services (§3). For example, the Recommendation suggests that States should provide age-appropriate information about health services and support for young people (point 3.7 of the Appendix to the Recommendation). Access to relevant quality counselling services and information is also set out in Recommendation (2015)3 for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Recommendation (2016)7 highlights the need to provide holistic and preventative services to support young people's emotional development and well-being (point 3.7 of the Appendix to the Recommendation). One of the EU Youth Goals focuses on ending stigmatisation and promoting the social inclusion of all young people. Young people need to be better armed against possible mental problems, inter alia by focusing on their individual strengths and skills. In addition, professionals working with young people should be provided with quality mental health first aid training (EU Youth Goals 2018). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that youth unemployment remains a major concern for the international community (§14). Therefore, the realisation of decent work is part of the vision of the SDGs (§9) and youth employment is seen as an important element in realising sustainable economic growth (§27). In order to achieve access to quality jobs that match young people's interests and talents, Goal 4.4 aims to get more young people into work by helping them to acquire the skills needed for employment. Goal 8.3 also aims to develop policies that promote the employment of young people (see also Goal 8.b.).

b. Operationalisation of the priority into concrete objectives and actions

By choosing this priority, the Government of Flanders aims to strengthen the well-being and positive identity development of children and young people. The Coalition Agreement 2019-2024 endorses several times the importance of paying attention to themes that contribute to this. Through targeted actions, this priority seeks to give children and young people, and by extension the neighbourhood and society, the necessary oxygen and resilience to cope with a multitude of challenges, such as violence, performance pressure, mental problems and diversity issues.



2. Based on a supported vision, we shall continue to work on dealing appropriately with sexual aggression through a differentiated provision focused on specific themes and tailored support. Good (inter)national practices shall be further rolled out and scaled up. In the interests of the child or the young person, it is vital that when addressing integrity issues, the protection perspective is inextricably linked to the voice, experience and expertise of children and young people themselves. At least the following elements shall be covered in this context:
 - Continuing to tackle sexual aggression across policy areas and protect integrity
 - Exchanging expertise and strengthening competencies around information sharing and participation in the event of disturbing signs, with special focus on caring referrals
 - Organising international exchanges of civil servants, experts, sector players and youth workers within the framework of cultural agreements (bilateral cooperation in the field of youth) with other countries and regions that have specific expertise in protecting the integrity of children and young people and tackling sexual aggression. We shall look at how we can implement these international examples of good practice in the Flemish youth and children's rights policy. At the same time, we shall promote our own expertise in this theme and put good practices in Flanders in the international spotlight.
 - etc.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media, Minister for Civic Integration and Equal Opportunities, Minister for Education, Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction, Minister for Sport, Minister for Culture
 Timescale: 2020 -2024

OO 1.1.2. We shall focus on tackling (cyber) bullying in a coordinated integrated manner

1. We shall stimulate the development of a platform on (cyber) bullying where everyone has easy access to reliable, evidence-based information about (cyber) bullying in particular, combined with second-line help. This platform shall be designed to offer information, raise awareness and promote scientific research to better support policy and practice, and policy advisory work. Special attention shall be paid to the intersection between (cyber) bullying and children and young people in socially vulnerable situations. This platform shall primarily be intended for children and young people, parents and mentors of children and young people. The aim is to embed it in the Flemish landscape of youth information (Awel, Grenswijs, WAT WAT, etc.) and to make it more sustainable.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
 Timescale: 2020 - 2024

2. Schools shall focus on preventing and tackling (cyber) bullying. Through the concept of a 'whole school approach' schools shall be encouraged to integrate the approach to (cyber) bullying into school policy in order to work in an integrated and sustainable way. To this end, an incident handling procedure specifically aimed at cyberbullying shall be developed, prevention strategies that have proven to be effective shall be highlighted, and easier access for schools and research findings on tackling (cyber) bullying and prevention at school shall be valorised. In this context,



2. We shall develop a learning pathway for 'Positive Living Climate' in residential settings for children and young people. It shall be implemented through a participatory pathway with children and young people in youth support. The roll-out shall be closely monitored and evaluated. Positive learning outcomes shall be disseminated to other settings for out-of-home children and young people (across policy areas).

Minister in charge: Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction
Timescale: 2021

3. We shall develop an intersectoral guideline on isolation and fixation and elaborate a reference framework on 'dealing consciously with freedom-restricting measures in broad youth support'.

Minister in charge: Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction
Timescale: 2021

4. We shall create safe and accessible meeting places where children and young people can meet and get information and support. We shall continue to build on existing good practices, but shall also consider new innovative forms of (supra)local free spaces and encourage bottom-up initiatives.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media and Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

5. By organising targeted pathways, we shall aim, through partnerships, to reach (early) school-leavers, low-skilled young people and young adults who experience difficulties in terms of (sustainable) entry into the labour market. The focus is mainly on gaining an insight into one's competencies, strengthening these competencies, increasing well-being and reducing the distance to the labour market.

At least the following projects shall contribute to this:

- ESF call 'WIJ3' is being implemented; it focuses on the guidance of low-skilled young people towards the labour market
- ESF call 'Local partnerships for young people' is under development
- Youth projects within the ESF call 'Outreach & Activation'
- STEM Action Plan (call under development): transition pathways for pupils in the second and third stages of vocational secondary education who have difficulties at school
- Activities 'Young people and entrepreneurial education/learning to do business'.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Work and Minister for Education
Timescale: 2020 - 2022

6. By providing the necessary support and tools, we shall stimulate a 'whole school approach' by encouraging schools to work towards an integrated health policy with focus on well-being and integrity ('Healthy Schools'). Recent experiences with distance learning as a result of the COVID-19 measures shall have a continued effect on future education. The private home shall increasingly complement the school as a learning environment. The learning environment at school continues

PRIORITY 2. HEALTHY AND LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS



a. Context

This priority responds to the four policy objectives, as mentioned in Article 3, §1, second sub-paragraph of the Decree on youth and children's rights policy, but very specifically to *3^o creating space for children and young people*.

The 2018 general environmental analysis for Flanders incorporated in the JKP Environmental Analysis, pointed out at the time that the persistent concentration of population and economic activity in and around urban centres is putting the liveability of these regions under pressure. We are confronted with increased traffic, health risks due to soil and air pollution, noise nuisance, etc. The countryside faces specific challenges, in particular in preserving the open space and making villages liveable.

Sustainable urban development is an important factor in improving the quality of life of children and young people. Social cohesion and personal security are indispensable in this. Children and young people have a larger action radius than ever before, but are less and less able or allowed to play freely outside and move around on their own. Children and young people indicate that they want more green space in the cities. In addition, there is insufficient space for them to play and meet. Children and young people in Flanders meet each other less often in the public space than before.¹⁰ There is a demand for space (free spaces) for culture, leisure, experimentation. There is less tolerance for children and young people who are playing or just 'hanging around'. Young people need space to be able to do what they really want to do in their leisure time and to be who they want to be. There should be places where this is allowed without them being (or feeling) targeted.

The independent mobility of children and young people is diminishing. This has an impact on their well-being, autonomy and leisure time activities: they should be able to travel independently to school or from their home to their youth association or sports club, or to formal and informal playgrounds. Until now, the space has too frequently been organised on the basis of car traffic. Therefore, children and young people want more punctual and frequent public transport and more alternative, shared forms of transport. That is why even more efforts shall be made to achieve a 'mental' and 'modal' shift towards sustainable modes of transport among young people. We want to promote the uptake of cycling and shared mobility by young people more than we are doing today.

In the pursuit of an inclusive society, neighbourhoods should be a home to all. Smart cities and socially innovative solutions play an important role in this respect. Social cohesion can be stimulated by adapting types of housing and making them life-cycle proof. Households continue to look for a house with garden.

¹⁰ See also: J. Meire, *Het grote buitenspeelonderzoek. Buiten spelen in de buurt geobserveerd (The Large-scale Research on Outdoor Play. Playing outdoors in the neighbourhood observed)*, Kind & Samenleving, Brussels, 2020, 165p. This research gave rise to a topical question in the Flemish Parliament from Tinne Rombouts to the Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media, Benjamin Dalle, about the disturbing results of 'Het grote buitenspeelonderzoek' (no. 695), 8 July 2020, <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/plenaire-vergaderingen/1411308/verslag/1413702>.

Several European and international instruments endorse the importance of paying growing attention to healthy and liveable neighbourhoods from a child and youth-friendly perspective. Children and young people ask that their voices be heard in the debate.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child safeguards several rights that underpin the relevance of this priority, including the right to life, survival and development (Article 6), the right to health (Article 23) and the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27). Creating healthy and liveable neighbourhoods where children and young people like to live and stay and can develop themselves implies recognising them as fully-fledged citizens of society with their own views (Art. 12 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

In its latest 2019 concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belgium, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child formulates a number of recommendations to improve the standard of living of children and young people, and in particular with regard to inadequate housing, homelessness and forced evictions of children. The Committee also recommends that access to landscaped green areas and open spaces for children be maintained and ensured. In addition, It emphasises the importance of the meaningful participation of children and young people in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With reference to the sustainable development goals, the Committee recommends that an assessment be conducted of the impact of air pollution on children's health, that a comprehensive national plan be developed for reducing the level of greenhouse emissions to prevent dangerous climate impact, while ensuring that the special vulnerabilities and needs of children, as well as their views, are taken into account, and that awareness-raising of environmental health and climate change among children be strengthened, with the active participation of schools. This overview is appended at the end of the JKP.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) state that sustainable urban development and management are crucial in improving the quality of life of children and young people. More specifically, community cohesion and personal security are seen as two indispensable elements in achieving sustainable urban development (§34). In conjunction with these provisions, §8 of the Lisboa+21 Declaration invites states to promote a youth-friendly enabling environment. In addition, §10 of UN Resolution 2250 (2015) urges Member States to facilitate an inclusive and enabling environment for young people in which young people play a particular role in achieving social cohesion. In order to support the well-being of children and young people, Target 9.1 of the SDGs considers it necessary to develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure. Target 11.1 also seeks to ensure access for children and young people to adequate, safe and affordable housing. Adequate housing is also required by Council of Europe Recommendation (2015)3 (see point A. iii of the Appendix). Target 11.7 of the SDGs invites States to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green spaces, in particular for children. Making leisure facilities available is also required by Council of Europe Recommendation (2015)3 (see point A. vi in the Appendix). Goal 11.2 of the SDGs encourages States to improve road safety, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, including children. Furthermore, Council of Europe Recommendation (2015)3 calls on States to invest in affordable transport services for children and young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (see point B. of the Appendix). Involving children and young people in shaping the neighbourhood is reflected in Goals 10.2 and 16.7 of the SDGs. The participation of children and young people in decision-making processes at all levels is also enshrined in the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030 (§§1 and 2.a) and in Recommendation (2015)3. More specifically, youth participation is urged in Recommendation (2016)7 (§3 and point 3.4 in the Appendix), in Recommendation (2015)3 (see §1.c and Appendix A. vi.) and in Recommendation (2019)4 (§47). The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 recognises the need



for young people to have a say in policy measures that affect their lives (see p.8) and youth participation at local level is specifically recommended in European Youth Goal 9 'Space and Participation for All'.

b. Operationalisation of the priority into concrete objectives and actions

By choosing this priority, the Government of Flanders is assuming the commitment that children and young people should be able to live and grow up in healthy and liveable neighbourhoods. The Coalition Agreement 2019-2024 outlines several actions that endorse the importance of elaborating this priority.

Through targeted actions, this priority seeks to shape the involvement of children and young people in their living environment and neighbourhood and in the environment and climate. Tackling these challenges starts locally, with a healthy environment, clean neighbourhoods, housing, the co-organisation of public space, accessibility, etc.

The Government of Flanders fleshes out this priority by recognising the role and place which children and young people occupy in the public space and its design. At the same time, it pays attention to efforts that contribute to a liveable and sustainable life. Accessibility for all children and young people and their involvement in designing the neighbourhood are cross-links between the two objectives.

TO 2.1. THE GOVERNMENT OF FLANDERS SHALL RECOGNISE THE ROLE AND PLACE WHICH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OCCUPY IN THE PUBLIC SPACE AND ITS DESIGN

The liveability of Flanders is under pressure due to population growth (rejuvenation and ageing), changing economic activities, increasing (motorised) mobility, paving, etc. Sustainable urban and rural development and management are important factors in maintaining and improving the quality of life of children and young people. It is more important than ever that the voice of children and young people be taken into consideration in the design and organisation of our public space. They approach public space from a specific perspective, as a place for them to play and meet, as an integral part of their living environment. By focusing on a multifunctional use of space, sufficient space is kept open and flexible. Creating space (free spaces) for leisure and experimentation, among other things, allows children and young people to do what they actually want to do and to be who they want to be. Experimental types of housing and a sustainable mobility policy that takes into account the significance which children and young people attach to mobility and mobility autonomy, help shape a neighbourhood that caters for the needs of children and young people.

OO 2.1.1. We shall work together with children and young people as co-creators of public space

1. Within integral design projects, we shall develop participatory pathways together with partners for the organisation and planning of public space and neighbourhoods. Efforts shall be made to remove structural barriers in order to make the design of neighbourhoods more youth-friendly from the perspective of children and young people. It is also important to create room for bottom-up involvement of children and young people. Children and young people shall be encouraged to act as co-owners in designing public space. Examples of good practice shall be publicised. When



Minister in charge: Minister for Housing
Timescale: 2020 - 2024 (with mid-term reviews in 2020 and 2022)

3. The Government of Flanders shall support local authorities in the development of their local housing policy. In this support provision, Housing Agency - Flanders shall request that the necessary attention be paid to the position of children, youth and young adults. This focus shall be placed both in the training courses that the agency organises for local authorities and in the bespoke support for each separate local authority.

Minister in charge: Minister for Housing
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

4. The needs of children and young people to make trips shall be taken into consideration when drawing up regional mobility plans in the transport regions. In addition to the regular focus on home to school transport, it should be possible for children and young people to switch easily between sustainable modes of transport, even during leisure time. It is important to take mapped youth places into consideration. Attention shall also be paid to regional roads. The mapped youth places can be included as poles of origin and destination in the supra-local functional cycling route network. The provision of information on major cycling routes for leisure trips by children and young people shall also help broaden the current home-school focus.

Minister in charge: Minister for Mobility
Timescale: 2021 - 2022

TO 2.2. THE GOVERNMENT OF FLANDERS SHALL PAY ATTENTION TO LIVEABLE AND SUSTAINABLE COEXISTENCE, WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS THE DRIVING FORCE

In order to create an inclusive, intercultural and intergenerational society, neighbourhoods should offer a home to all. A child and youth-friendly environment means that children and young people themselves can play an important role in terms of social cohesion, accessibility, liveability of the neighbourhood, etc. All this contributes to a caring society.

Raising awareness in the field of environment, health and climate starts locally, in one's personal environment. Children and young people make a visible contribution to the liveability of their own environment by focusing on a clean living environment and being able to play an active role in this, for example by acting as entrepreneurs or by tackling litter. Concrete actions with immediately visible results influence one's attitude towards life. Children and young people are involved in the future of the planet and show their contribution through shared and supported responsibility.

OO 2.2.1. We shall make networks that focus on intergenerational co-existence more sustainable

1. With local authorities as the driving force, a child-friendly local policy shall be further pursued. The label 'Child-friendly Cities and Municipalities' acts as a lever, with the '8 80 Cities' abroad serving as an example. We shall bundle together good practices from projects and living labs (play streets, living



PRIORITY 3. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH VOLUNTEERING



a. Context

This priority responds to the four policy objectives set out in Article 3, §1, second sub-paragraph, of the Decree on youth and children's rights policy and focuses specifically on 4^o *increasing the formal and informal involvement of children and young people in society.*

The JKP Environmental Analysis shows that children and young people frequently engage in volunteering in either an organised or non-organised context. Youth work and other types of voluntary engagement are very popular, but there also seem to be obstacles and challenges. The value of volunteers is still too often insufficiently acknowledged, whereas other forms of voluntary engagement remain virtually invisible. There is a demand for better protection and appropriate support and recognition of the acquired competencies, not only in the short term, but also, for example, in future life careers.

Volunteering seems to get bogged down in expectations and planning burdens. Children and young people who engage in volunteering come under increasing pressure and have to meet larger explicit expectations to help solve societal problems. Excessive regulation and planning and reporting burdens for the different authorities associated with voluntary work pose a problem. Young volunteers get discouraged and tired as a result of this.

Through this engagement, children and young people also indicate what they regard as important, what troubles them, and what they want and can have a say about. They give an insight into how they see their environment, the world and their future. These are important signals to society. The opinions of children and young people can feed into and help shape policy.

Enabling children and young people to become engaged in society ensures that they can fulfil their right to participation as citizens of society, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: the right to be heard (Art. 12), the right to freedom of expression (Art. 13), the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion under the direction of the parents/legal guardians in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child (Art. 14), the right to freedom of association (Art. 15), the right to access to information (Art. 17), and the right to rest and leisure (Art. 31). In accordance with Article 29, education is directed to the development of the child's talents and personality and the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society.

In its concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belgium (2019), the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that the participation of all children be improved, including by continuing to involve children, particularly those in vulnerable situations, in local public consultations and ensuring the impact of the opinion of children on local policy. This overview is appended at the end of the JKP.



themselves. Through international and intercultural exchange, Flanders can weigh up, refine, and propagate its policy.

OO 3.1.1. We shall recognise and optimise what works well

1. We shall review the free volunteer insurance within the Coordinated Flemish Volunteer Policy Action Plan. Certain associations, including specific youth associations, can apply for free volunteer insurance to better protect their volunteers. Because of the coronavirus crisis, this free insurance was temporarily extended to include initiatives of 'vrijwillige inzet', which in Dutch has a broader meaning than 'vrijwilligerswerk'. In this review, we shall consider the possibility of permanently opening up the insurance to voluntary engagement, in order to provide more children and young people with the necessary protection. We shall set to work with the results of the review.

Minister in charge: Minister for Culture
Timescale: 2021

2. We shall implement the recommendations from the research on the accessibility of voluntary work that are applicable in the context of volunteering among children and young people in socially vulnerable situations. The research consists of a 'mapping' of good practices and an international comparative study on the accessibility of voluntary work. The possible policy support measures and initiatives should be suitable for implementation in Flanders.

Minister in charge: Minister for Culture
Timescale: 2021

3. We shall monitor the evolution of municipal volunteering through the local leisure monitoring report. We shall update the indicators relevant to volunteers and voluntary engagement. Registrations in the leisure monitoring report by local authorities shall take place on a three-yearly basis.
Where possible, we shall establish a link with other surveys, including the JOP Monitoring Survey, the Participation Survey, the survey 'Society in Diversity' and the Municipality and City Monitoring Report.

Minister in charge: Minister for Culture
Timescale: 2022

4. Together with the sector, we shall map existing barriers and excessive regulation in youth work and other voluntary engagement by children and young people, from the local to the international level. We shall create effective solution strategies to address these barriers and this excessive regulation in a coordinated way.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2021



OO 3.1.2. We shall encourage the engagement by and the voice of children and young people by focusing on innovative forms of engagement and volunteering by children and young people

1. We shall keep our finger on the pulse and consider new forms of volunteering. We shall identify new trends and evolutions in voluntary work and voluntary engagement and discuss them with relevant stakeholders. We shall use the needs of children and young people as starting point (demand-oriented), examine the expectations of children and young people with regard to engagement and volunteering and see how we can respond to this. We shall ensure sufficient protection and support for children and young people in taking up voluntary engagement. We shall formulate recommendations in consultation with the partners on how the policy can best get started with volunteering by children and young people. Points of focus in this respect are the large barriers for submitting eligible dossiers, the language of dossiers for new initiatives and the possibility of decreasing regulations.
In this way we shall arrive at a complementary policy that offers appreciation and recognition for all forms of (in)visible engagement by children and young people.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media and Minister for Culture
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

2. Within the framework of the fourth pillar of the civic integration policy, we shall offer a bespoke 40-hour programme, e.g. in the form of a buddy project or voluntary work. We shall start up living labs that will contribute to the further roll-out of this new pillar. Within the scope of the JKP, we shall specifically consider youth and sports organisations to involve young persons integrating (aged 18-30) or young people of Belgian origin to become buddies of persons integrating.

Minister in charge: Minister for Civic Integration and Equal Opportunities
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

3. We shall support Flemish policy areas in setting up participation pathways with children and young people and embedding them in their activities. To this end, we shall work together with relevant partners from the sectors and administrations. The expertise from the youth work sector in particular shall be disseminated.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2022– 2024

4. We shall stimulate and promote international and intercultural exchanges with other countries and regions in terms of engagement and volunteering by children and young people. We shall look at how we can implement international examples of good practice in the Flemish youth and children's rights policy. At the same time, we shall promote our own relevant expertise and put examples of good practice in Flanders in the international spotlight. We shall support and disseminate the European Charter for Local Youth Work.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media



Timescale: 2022 – 2024

TO 3.2. The Government of Flanders shall recognise and improve the development of talents, qualities and competencies resulting from volunteering

In stimulating engagement and volunteering, we shall start from the talents and strengths of children and young people. We shall not lose sight of the different talents of children and young people and shall focus on them. Children and young people should be able to become engaged and develop at their own pace. We shall also recognise the competencies that children and young people develop thanks to their volunteering. We shall continue to build on what works well and focus explicitly on cross-fertilisation in order to achieve deeper and broader engagement.

Realising and showcasing talents and competencies requires appropriate methodologies and tools and shared terminology. Specific focus shall be placed on making volunteering more accessible, tailored to the needs of children and young people in socially vulnerable situations. With the necessary time and space and starting from their talents and at their own pace, they shall be strengthened in and recognised for their volunteering.

OO 3.2.1. Competencies acquired through volunteering shall be strengthened by establishing cross-links

1. We shall continue to build on young social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education. We shall focus on talents and competencies that will develop and be strengthened through youth work, volunteering and youth initiatives. We shall stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit of young people by establishing partnerships with youth work and shall make sure that youth work is structurally involved as a partner in a number of projects.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Work, Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media and Minister for Education
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

2. We shall choose to involve the youth sector in setting up a digital tool to support associations. In this way, we shall meet the request of associations to facilitate access to (public) services. In the long term, we shall ensure further administrative simplification.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Culture and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

3. We shall broaden the STEM action plan and the STEM academy by explicitly involving young people and youth organisations. We shall focus on training young people as animators of a STEM academy, while focussing specifically on socially vulnerable young people. This training can be strengthened through integration into the existing 'animator' training. In addition, we shall ensure that youth organisations are involved in the stakeholder consultation in preparation of the STEM action plan.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Work, Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media and Minister for Education
Timescale: 2020 - 2021



OO 3.2.2. We shall focus on methodologies that identify, develop and recognise talents and competencies linked to engagement

1. We shall work to raise awareness of talents and competencies and set up new methodologies for talent development and competence enhancement.
We shall investigate the need for and the suitability of tools for competence development and recognition. We shall use what children and young people need to become engaged as starting point and scrutinise the available set of tools. We shall act upon the results and the ensuing policy initiatives. We shall pay particular attention to the development of a shared language to be used across sectors when discussing the development and recognition of talents and competencies. In this way, children and young people, and in particular those in socially vulnerable situations, shall become aware of the competencies they acquire and the talents they develop thanks to their voluntary engagement. Wherever possible, we shall enter into partnerships to set up new methodologies which shall enable the development and valorisation of the talents of children and young people through volunteering. We shall focus on strengthening competencies through informal and non-formal learning and talent-oriented thinking, while allowing room for experimentation with alternative pathways for competence recognition.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2020 - 2024



PRIORITY 4. LEISURE FOR ALL



a. Context

This priority responds to the four policy objectives, as mentioned in Article 3, §1, second sub-paragraph of the Decree on youth and children's rights policy, and very specifically to *1^o creating and guaranteeing equal opportunities for all children and young people*.

Play, sports, culture, room for experimentation and informal learning or, in short, leisure in a broad sense is essential and should be equally important in the lives of all children and young people. Leisure includes more than relaxation and rest. It offers opportunities for self-development, connection and involvement with others, the neighbourhood and society.

In addition to the existing provision (and guidance towards it), children and young people also need freedom and space to shape their own leisure time, with the non-organised provision, the provision that is organised differently, self-organisations and partnerships between different actors being equally important.

The JKP Environmental Analysis shows that leisure time activities are not accessible or available to every child or young person. Some groups of children and young people experience (more) obstacles to leisure time activities. Moreover, 28 percent of children in Belgium never go on holiday.

There is a need for a wide range of leisure time activities. For certain groups of children and young people, guidance and support should be enhanced. Bespoke leisure participation which is tailored to the needs of children and young people requires (increased) cooperation between different actors. A number of concrete pathways have already been started (and completed) within the Master Plan 'Diversity in/and Youth Work 2018-2020'. Within the scope of this priority, we shall continue to work on this in the coming period.

Several European and international instruments stress the importance of leisure for all.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right to leisure, to engage in play and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

This was also underlined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its latest concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belgium (2019). The Committee remains concerned that children living in poverty and children with disabilities do not have full access to leisure. The Committee calls upon Belgium to adopt a comprehensive strategy in this regard and urges that the reasonable accommodation of places for **sport and leisure, inter alia, be ensured. Furthermore**, the Committee calls on Belgium to strengthen its efforts to guarantee the right of children, including children from disadvantaged families, children with disabilities, and refugee and migrant children, to rest and leisure and sufficient time to engage in play and recreational activities that are safe, accessible, inclusive, reachable by public transport, smoke-free and age-appropriate. In this way, the Committee gives concrete expression to the right of children to leisure, as guaranteed in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the

Child, together with the principle of non-discrimination set out in Article 2. This overview is appended at the end of the JKP.

The right to rest and leisure is not limited to 'childhood'. This right is also guaranteed for young adults and, by extension, for all by Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which encompasses the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and to periodic holidays with pay.

When looking at international policy frameworks, a number of aspects of leisure are mentioned in several documents. The Lisboa+21 Declaration invites states in §8 to promote leisure time activities among young people. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 identifies inclusion as one of the guiding principles. Acknowledging that young people are not a homogenous group, and thus have diverse needs, backgrounds, life situations and interests, the EU Youth Strategy should promote activities and policies that are inclusive for all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities and/or those whose voices may be overlooked. Leisure time should start from the living environment of children and young people, taking into account all the intersections at which children and young people find themselves.

Part 3 (§§30-50) of Recommendation (2019)4 of the Council of Europe specifically addresses the role, recognition and support that youth work can offer young refugees. Finally, Recommendation (2015)3 encourages states to improve the availability and accessibility of leisure facilities for children and young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

b. Operationalisation of the priority into concrete objectives and actions

By choosing this priority, the Government of Flanders wants children and young people to enjoy their leisure time to the fullest. This means that all children and young people have access to a high-quality leisure provision. The Government of Flanders wants to realise this with an inclusive and diverse leisure policy.

The Coalition Agreement 2019-2014 endorses the importance of leisure participation, including for children and young people.

Through targeted actions, this priority seeks to create opportunities for all children and young people to enjoy the best possible leisure experience.

The Government of Flanders fleshes out its ambition by focusing on the elaboration of a leisure policy that starts from and is tailored to the living environment of children and young people. Particular encouragement is given to solution strategies that remove barriers to an integrated leisure policy so that leisure is made possible for all.

TO 4.1. THE GOVERNMENT OF FLANDERS SHALL BE COMMITTED TO SOLUTION STRATEGIES FOR REMOVING BARRIERS TO AN INTEGRATED LEISURE POLICY



An integrated leisure policy puts the living environment of children and young people in all its diversity centre stage. We shall therefore create scope for the power of ideas and the voices of children and young people. As experts by experience and directly involved parties, children and young people can help identify barriers and formulate relevant solutions. We shall support organisations that involve children as co-creators in achieving an integrated leisure story.

A number of groups of children and young people experience (more) obstacles to leisure time activities. We shall extend what already exists by stimulating and innovative practices that focus on guidance and support. Publicising the provision in a better and more targeted way shall contribute to this.

OO 4.1.1. We shall involve children and young people as co-creators in fleshing out and designing on demand and bespoke leisure time activities

1. We shall set up a participation pathway in which, together with various stakeholders and children and young people, we shall assess support for the Film Club and identify barriers. The findings from this pathway shall be bundled together into policy recommendations.

Minister in charge: Minister for Culture

Timescale: 2020 – 2022

2. When assessing the applications within the scope of the Arts Strategic Vision Memorandum, we shall focus on the fact that the projects should involve (young) children and young people in a unique way in the artistic activities. In Flanders, several organisations offer high-quality productions and activities for children and young people. The work carried out by these organisations is important for multiple reasons. Not in the least for introducing everyone to art from the earliest possible age and for offering all children in Flanders equal opportunities for participation and development. By bringing children in contact with art at an early age, the foundations are being laid for art participation, including museums, performances, concerts, art camps, etc.

Minister in charge: Minister for Culture

Timescale: 2020 – 2024

3. We shall set up a participatory pathway with out-of-home children and young people in order to provide an appropriate response to the needs of out-of-home children and young people in terms of leisure time activities, both within and outside facilities. We shall, for instance, continue to build on topics that were not dealt with during the previous pathway 'Maak Tijd Vrij' (Make Time Available) between youth support and youth work.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media

Timescale: 2020 – 2024

OO 4.1.2. We shall facilitate inspiring practices and methodologies that focus on guidance, exchange and encounters



1. We shall promote cooperation between parties that organise extracurricular activities. This can be done through all kinds of initiatives and incentives, e.g. a project call for language stimulation activities during school holidays and out-of-school care. In this respect, we shall further flesh out the Decree on out-of-school care and activities with a focus on cooperation and roll-out across policy areas and levels. An inspiration framework shall be developed with participation from the sectors and actors concerned. Local authorities shall be supported in their function as director and coordinator and in the realisation of the policy objectives.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction and Minister for Education

Timescale: 2021 – 2024

2. We shall set up an inter-administrative dialogue and exchange of expertise on integrated leisure policy. Many local authorities are experts in developing a transversal leisure policy and provision. In Flanders we are also aware that we can learn from local practices and harmonise policies by exchanging expertise and information. Within the context of the youth and children's rights policy we shall in any case keep our finger on the pulse at local level by linking the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Reflection Group to the Local and Supra-local Youth Policy Reflection Group and/or the Network of Child and Youth Friendly Cities and Municipalities, while focussing on cross-fertilisation and taking lessons learned into consideration in Flemish policy so that we can support local authorities even better in taking up their director's role. We shall organise this dialogue at least twice during the present term of office.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media

Timescale: 2020 - 2024

3. We shall continue to build sustainable bridges between youth support, youth work and other organisers of leisure time activities. We shall facilitate cooperation between relevant actors so that they can easily find each other. Local partnerships shall be encouraged. We shall extend the expertise to target groups where the leisure provision is reportedly underused, such as young adults, young people in secure accommodation or community institutions and families with young children. The cooperation shall be based on the children's rights discourse, projects with a strong focus on regional partnerships and other action plans such as 'Generatie Veerkracht' (Generation Resilience). The partnerships shall work as much as possible within the existing scope of care and welfare.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media

Timescale: 2020 – 2024

OO 4.2.2. Within the existing provision, we shall commit to a targeted focus on reaching specific target groups



after having been adapted to the specific context. Children and young people should have the opportunity to choose between different forms of youth work in their own neighbourhood or further away, regardless of their origin and cultural or religious background.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Civic Integration and Equal Opportunities and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media

Timescale: 2020 -2024

6. Through targeted efforts, in addition to a target group-specific approach, we shall work towards more inclusive leisure time activities for children and young people with disabilities. We shall strengthen the general awareness in society of the added value of children and young people with specific care needs participating in society. At least the following actions shall contribute to this:
 - An awareness-raising campaign, developed by partners and stakeholders, to increase the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in society, extracurricular activities, leisure time initiatives, etc.
 - The promotion of strong inclusion practices and innovative projects that respond to the needs of children with disabilities and their parents, such as the 'hands-on' guidance of children towards inclusive leisure time activities.
 - Focus on accessible leisure events, such as cultural events, festivals or sports events for children and young people with disabilities by labelling them as 'accessible events'.
 - Guidance of children and young people with disabilities towards the leisure provision, tailored to the needs of these children and young people. Special attention shall also be paid to leisure time activities for school-leavers with disabilities.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction, Minister for Civic Integration and Equal Opportunities and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media

Timescale: 2020 - 2024



PRIORITY 5. MEDIA LITERACY



a. Context

This priority responds to the four policy objectives, as mentioned in Article 3, §1, second sub-paragraph of the Decree on youth and children's rights policy, and very specifically to 2° *creating and securing broad development opportunities for children and young people* and 4° *increasing the formal and informal involvement of children and young people in society*.

The JKP Environmental Analysis identifies a number of problems and challenges in the field of media literacy among children and young people, including the continuing need to build resilience, the need to develop (digital and information) media skills and the need for a wide range of opportunities to deal with all forms of online and offline media in an informed, active and creative manner. The conscious, critical, safe and informed use of media in an increasingly international and digital world requires children and young people to build up expertise in tackling problems such as fake news and sexting, to learn how to deal with privacy, and so on.

The last few years have seen a genuine digital revolution, as well as an information revolution. Since roughly the 1980s, digital interventions have increased in number and scale. Today's generation of children and young people are the first to have grown up in this digital world. Increasingly, children and young people are active participants and creators of information (offline and online), which allows them to develop to the full. They are referred to as digital natives. Children and young people are very connected and use a wide variety of technologies, which they start using at an increasingly earlier age.

Yet there are also challenges. Growing up in a digital age is not sufficient to deal with online and offline media efficiently, effectively and with the required (technical) expertise. Button knowledge does not automatically involve digital skills. Moreover, the information skills of children and young people do not automatically evolve with their digital skills. In recent years, the online world has evolved more and more into the most dominant source of information and news for children and young people. These online sources are diverse: professional journalism, official government websites, information shared by political parties, by influencers or by young people themselves. The information landscape has become very complex and requires specific skills for verifying the accuracy and reliability of certain information.

Young people identify a number of negative phenomena in the online world, including unreliable information, polarising dialogues, sensationalism, hate speech, extreme views and general negativity. A survey conducted within the framework of the EU Youth Dialogue also shows that young people are concerned about manipulation through social media or the deliberate spreading of inaccurate information in order to influence people. Experts also point to the danger of a filter bubble and echo chamber on social media. These phenomena mean that children and young people only get to see opinions and messages that mesh with their own interests and attitudes. In other words, they are cut off from other opinions and get a distorted view of reality, while their own views are echoed and critical thinking is curtailed.



Sufficient and effective access to hardware and Internet access is not generally guaranteed. The digital divide is a reality. As a result, these children and young people have too few opportunities to develop digital skills. Socially vulnerable children and young people are particularly at risk.

Media has an important influence on (the perception of) children and young people. For example, images that emphasise positive characteristics or events can strengthen the image of children and young people in society. On the other hand, images that mainly focus on negative elements can have detrimental consequences. In this way the media contributes to the perception of and among children and young people. Children and young people want to have a voice in the media, they want to see themselves represented in the media, in all their diversity. Children and young people also point to the need for skills to communicate in a respectful, tolerant and non-violent way, both online and offline.

Several European and international policy frameworks address more thoroughly the interaction between media and children and young people. Following the rise of digital media and the growing importance of media literacy, specific tools are also being developed on this topic.

The right of access to appropriate information and the role performed by the media therein is enshrined in Article 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. States Parties are encouraged to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit, to take into account a diversity of cultural, national and international sources, to promote children's books, to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous and to provide protection from information and material injurious to the child's well-being. The UN Children's Rights Committee is drafting a General Comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

In its latest concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belgium (2019) the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child formulated recommendations to adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy addressing all forms of discrimination and to strengthen efforts to combat radicalisation of children and hate speech, including with regard to children in vulnerable situations. Specific measures to combat bullying, including cyberbullying, are recommended. This overview is appended at the end of the JKP.

The Council of Europe issued Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment (Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7).

One of the EU Youth Goals is 'Information & Constructive Dialogue'. The aim is to provide reliable information for young Europeans and to support their ability to evaluate information critically. This shall allow them to become critical and responsible users of media. When looking at European frameworks, §7 of the the Lisboa+21 Declaration invites states to address digital barriers that limit young people's participation and representation, while at the same time supporting their ability to be critical and responsible users and producers of Information (§15). Also, according to §15, young people's access to reliable information should be ensured together with the skills to deal actively and creatively with online and offline media. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 identifies fake news as one of the greatest challenges facing the European Union. Furthermore, the strategy indicates that policies should be built in recognition of the changes in society brought about by digital communication affecting democratic and civic participation. EU Youth Goal 4 'Information & Constructive Dialogue' is also relevant in its entirety to this priority. Furthermore, the promotion of critical thinking is endorsed by European Youth Goal 8. According to Recommendation (2019)4, youth work and other forms of non-formal education/learning should help and support young refugees in their digital literacy (§32 i.).



attainment targets in the various stages of education. To enable all pupils to achieve these attainment targets, specific guidelines shall be developed, focusing on initiatives at school to reduce the digital divide within the school infrastructure. The focus shall be on disadvantaged children and young people and children and young people with disabilities.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Education, Minister for Work and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

2. The content of the MediaCoach training shall be adapted to include relevant topics based on the themes of the present action plan. Access shall be extended to a broader target group, including the staff and leaders of cultural organisations working with children and young people and youth workers to support digital youth work. Attention shall be paid to good and adapted communication.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Culture, Minister for Education and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2021 - 2024

3. We shall promote reading by engaging in language stimulation activities. Reading more and with increased motivation leads to better reading skills, and greater literacy and understanding of written sources. Additional efforts shall be made for vulnerable children and young people and we shall focus on accessibility and critical information skills. Libraries can take up a more pivotal role in terms of providing access to digital infrastructure and the Internet as well as in terms of developing the content of information skills and media literacy, either with or without partners from youth work or sociocultural work. Initiatives such as 'Lezen op school' (Reading at school) shall be stimulated.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Culture and Minister for Education
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

4. We want to make children and young people more media literate through the different channels that already reach them and are used by them today. We shall work to strengthen their competencies in the field of information. Through the project 'Nieuws in de Klas' (News in the Classroom), for example, greater focus shall be placed on dealing with news and (dis)information in addition to the topical value. A pathway around fact checking, debating and participation shall be provided which is tailored to the different age groups.

Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

5. In accordance with the attainment targets, we shall improve the digital competencies of children and young people. In this context, special attention and support should be given to specific vulnerable groups. The world in which children and young people live is closely interwoven with the Internet. That is why specific vulnerable groups such as children and young people with disabilities, or in facilities or a vulnerable home situation should not be forgotten. Their use of social media and digital technology and the importance thereof should not be underestimated either. The



TO 5.2. THE GOVERNMENT OF FLANDERS SHALL BE COMMITTED TO A MORE INCLUSIVE MEDIA LITERACY POLICY THROUGH RESILIENCE BUILDING

Media literacy interacts with online resilience of children and young people. Children and young people inevitably face online risks. In many cases they are able to deal with these risks adequately. They use certain strategies to avoid risks, and adopt a problem-solving approach when things go wrong. Children and young people need to be confirmed in these competencies, but they also need to be supported in building resilience., whenever necessary. The Government of Flanders is therefore committed to combating disturbing evolutions and practices that affect the integrity of children and young people. With targeted measures and the involvement of experts, we shall fill gaps where possible and strengthen existing measures that currently fall short. We shall combat negative mechanisms, but at the same time focus on resilience by building and deepening the knowledge of children and young people about their rights and opportunities in the digital environment. With this knowledge, children and young people can find their way in an increasingly international and digital world in a healthy, safe, informed and participatory manner.

OO 5.2.1. We shall challenge online mechanisms that affect the physical, mental and/or sexual integrity of children and young people

1. We shall set up targeted actions with a view to preventing, avoiding and combating cyberbullying. More specifically, the possibilities and design of education and training of support workers in cyberbullying shall be examined on the basis of the results of practice-based scientific research on the socio-emotional development of children and young people with intellectual disabilities. Within education, the whole-school approach shall also be stimulated in the context of cyberbullying. Schools shall be encouraged to integrate the approach to cyberbullying into school policy for purposes of integration and sustainability. This shall be done by developing an incident handling procedure specifically aimed at cyberbullying, by better supporting schools and by making prevention strategies that have proven their effectiveness more accessible. In consultation with the organisations involved, we shall also examine whether existing initiatives can be better adapted to online risks, such as cyberbullying. We shall valorise research findings on combating (cyber)bullying and prevention at school.

Ministers in charge: Minister for Education and Minister for Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction, and Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2020 - 2024

2. The online world offers many opportunities to define your own image and identity. Children and young people maintain or expand their social network. Encounters and new friendships and relationships increasingly take place by digital means. Together with experts, we shall commit ourselves to strengthening the online integrity of children and young people. As part of an integrity policy focused on prevention and response, tools and methodologies shall be developed for healthy use of media, focusing on topics such as digital balance, media education, online relationships and sexuality and mapping forms of online sexism



Minister in charge: Minister for Brussels, Youth and Media
Timescale: 2021 - 2023



7.2. LIST OF SOURCES

7.2.1. European and international instruments

European Union

[European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#)

Council of Europe

[Resolution CM/Res\(2020\)2 of 22 January 2020 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)4 of 24 April 2019 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)7 of 4 July 2018 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2017\)4 of 31 May 2017 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)7 of 28 September 2016 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on research on young people's access to rights](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)3 of 21 January 2015 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](#)

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 of 4 July 2018 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment

Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of 28 March 2012 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18

United Nations

[United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.](#)

Adopted by Belgium and published in the [Belgian Official Gazette of 17 January 1992](#).

[Concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belgium \(CRC/C/BEL/CO/5-6\)](#)

the child, the right to life, survival and development, and the right to be heard. With regard to the best interests of the child, the Strategy for the Rights of the Child refers in a footnote to the Decision taken by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at its meeting on 15 April 2015 on the Conclusions of the Conference on the 'Best Interests of the Child' (Brussels, 9-10 December 2014), organised by Belgium, viz. the Flemish and French Communities and the FPS Justice.

The strategy identifies the following challenges:

1. Poverty, inequality and exclusion
2. Violence
3. A justice system made for adults
4. Challenges for families and parents
5. Racism, hate speech and radicalisation
6. Growing up in a digital world
7. Migration

Priority areas for the strategy are:

1. Equal opportunities for all children
2. Participation of all children
3. A life free from violence for all children
4. Child-friendly justice for all children
5. Rights of the child in the digital environment

The Council of Europe wants to deliver the strategy by:

1. Making the standards work for children
2. Involving all relevant stakeholders
3. Communicating children's rights
4. Evaluating performance.

Eurobarometer 2017, 2018

The Eurobarometer survey is carried out every year on behalf of the European Parliament. It inquires after the opinions and priorities of European citizens. It consists of approximately 1,000 face-to-face interviews per country.

EU-SILC survey 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) is the reference source for comparable statistics on income distribution and social inclusion in the European Union. EU-SILC was launched in 2003 based on an agreement between Eurostat and six Member States (Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria) and Norway. The survey was formally launched in 15 countries in 2004 and extended in 2005 to cover all the countries of the then EU-25, as well as Norway and Switzerland. EU-SILC is a multifunctional instrument that focuses mainly on income. The survey collects detailed data on income components, especially on the incomes of individuals, although a few household income components are included as well. In addition, information is collected on social exclusion, housing conditions, labour, education and health.

EU Youth Goals 2018

At the EU Youth Conference in Sofia from 16 to 19 April 2018, the results of the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue on Youth were discussed. More than 48,000 young people across Europe participated and spoke of what they believed to be important in their lives through surveys. With this information, youth



representatives and policymakers from 44 countries (including Belgium) together defined the eleven youth goals for the new EU Youth Strategy in Sofia. These goals were sent to the Council of Ministers and served as a recommendation to the European Commission.

EU Youth Strategy

European Commission Communication 2018. Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027.

[European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#)

European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the protection of children in migration

(COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL - The protection of children in migration, Brussels, 12.4.2017, COM(2017) 211 final)

While EU and Member State legislation provides a sound framework for protection, national systems are under pressure due to the recent arrival of many migrants. Their arrival has revealed shortcomings and flaws. For this reason the Commission is today launching measures to ensure that all migrant children are better protected throughout the process. Children should be swiftly identified upon arrival, treated in a child-friendly manner and given full access to healthcare and education. Professionals should be available to assist the children when their status is being determined. Education and healthcare also need to be made more accessible to children in order to provide them with sustainable long-term prospects. Protecting children is a key priority of the European Agenda on Migration. The Commission shall continue to support Member States' efforts in this area through training, guidance, operational support and funding.

Federal Planning Bureau

Demographic Outlook 2018-2070 - Population and households. (2019) Consulted through https://statbel.fgov.be/sites/default/files/files/documents/bevolking/5.8%20Bevolkingsvooruitzichten/bestanden/2018/FOR_POP1870_11813_N.pdf

JOP Monitoring Surveys III 2013 and IV 2019

The Youth Research Platform (JOP) is a policy-oriented research centre. It is an interdisciplinary and inter-university partnership between three research groups in Flanders: Tempus Omnia Revelat (VUB), the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy (Ghent University) and the Research Line Youth Criminology (KU Leuven). One of the core tasks of the JOP is to monitor the living environment of young people in Flanders. This is done on the basis of a written postal survey (JOP Monitoring Survey) and a written survey in schools in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent (JOP Schools Monitoring Survey) which is periodically conducted among a representative sample of young people in Flanders and Brussels. The JOP Postal Monitoring Survey is now in its fourth edition. In 2018, data was collected from 1,411 14 to 25-year-olds. For this edition, the postal monitoring survey was extended to include a younger age group. The JOP Child Monitoring Survey reached 1,226 10- to 13-year-olds. Also in 2018, the JOP School Monitoring Survey 2 was conducted among young people in the first, second and third stages of secondary education. A total of 6,039 young people from the metropolitan cities and 2,400 young people from Flanders were surveyed.



