



BELGIUM · BELGIË · BELGIQUE · BELGIEN

National reform Programme

2022

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1. Introduction

In this National Reform Programme (NRP), the different governments report on the most important structural reforms of the past year and what measures can be expected in the near future. The NRP complements the fiscal measures included in the Stability Programme and builds on the priorities of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

Now that we may soon, and hopefully definitively, leave behind most of the constraints caused by the coronavirus crisis, the priority for the various governments is shifting towards taking measures that will increase the potential growth of the Belgian economy, as well as the employment rate, and put public finances back on a sustainable path. However, the recent developments at Europe's external borders bring unprecedented uncertainty and result in additional and unprecedented challenges for all governments in our country. To strengthen our independence from fossil fuels in these turbulent geopolitical times, the federal government decided in March to take the necessary steps to extend the lifetime of two nuclear power plants by ten years. It is also accelerating the shift to renewable energy with additional investments in offshore wind, hydrogen, solar energy and sustainable mobility. The Flemish government also decided in March to accelerate investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy in the short term (2022 and 2023). Despite the harsh reality and the resulting short-term challenges, our governments are vigorously tackling the strategic challenges posed by the climate transition and the further digitalisation of our economy.

Over the past two years, the various governments have worked hard to neutralise the negative effects of the coronavirus crisis. From a macro-economic point of view, the approach to the crisis has been a success. The economic harm and loss of jobs was ultimately very limited. The massive use of public funds also laid the foundations for a rapid recovery of the Belgian economy. The coronavirus crisis, as in other European countries, has created a momentum for a sharp increase in public investment. The investment needs in our country are currently well defined

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and several projects of the different governments have already been rolled out or will be in the coming months.

In addition to the roll-out of the Recovery and Resistance Facility (RRF)-funded investments, the various governments took additional initiatives. In October 2021, the federal government identified additional investments of 1 billion euros in its recovery and transition plan, and recovery and transition are also being intensively pursued at the regional level.

In Flanders, the government launched its recovery plan (Vlaamse veerkracht) at the end of September 2020. With an amount of 4.3 billion euros (2.25 billion euros of which is from the RRF), this plan rests on seven pillars: (i) managing the coronavirus crisis and absorbing the consequences of Brexit, (ii) strengthening the Flemish care and welfare system, (iii) investing in people and talents, (iv) investing in infrastructure, (v) making the economy and society sustainable, (vi) digitally transforming Flanders, and (vii) making the government more efficient.

At the end of October 2021, the Walloon government approved its recovery plan, with a budget of 7.644 billion euros between now and 2024 (6.164 billion euros excluding the RRF). This is structured around six key priorities: (i) focusing on Walloon youth and talents, (ii) ensuring environmentally sustainable development, (iii) promoting economic development, (iv) supporting well-being, solidarity and social inclusion, (v) ensuring innovative and participatory governance, and (vi) supporting reconstruction and the resilience of affected areas.

The Government of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels has selected nine investment projects and two reform projects for a maximum amount of 495 million euros as part of its regional reform plan around four pillars: (i) the energy transition of buildings through infrastructure renovation, (ii) the digitalisation of the culture and media sector, (iii) the digital strategy in education with the aim of accelerating and intensifying the digital skills of teachers and pupils, and (iv) the development of knowledge and innovations related to the ecological transition through an ad hoc platform. In addition, several reforms were carried out, including the approval of a strategic plan for the renovation of the school infrastructure over ten years, for a total budget of 1 billion euros. In the field of research, support was given to the internationalisation of the actors of French-speaking Belgian research.

In Brussels, in July 2020 the government presented its recovery and redevelopment plan based on a full diagnosis of the socio-economic, territorial and environmental situation in the Brussels-Capital Region during and after the coronavirus crisis. With an amount of almost 500 million euros for urgent support measures, this plan rests on three pillars: (i) socio-economic transition and employment, (ii) welfare and health policies, and (iii) territorial development and environment.

Within the framework of its recovery and investment plan, the government of the German-speaking Community is planning reform projects in various fields

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amounting to 720 million euros in order to initiate a multi-sectoral reconstruction process as a result of the various crises it has had to face.

The current challenging macroeconomic context and the accompanying uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine call for effective and robust measures. For an open economy like Belgium's, monitoring potential macroeconomic uncertainty in the euro area and the rest of the world is essential.

The various governments will adopt appropriate policies with the necessary flexibility and taking into account the analysis of the latest economic data. These policies build on our strengths such as innovative capacity, the integration of our companies into the global value chain, the educational level of the population and the high level of productivity. But they are also committed to reforms to address our weaknesses, such as low productivity growth, insufficient labour market participation, low labour mobility and mismatches and shortages of certain job profiles, relatively high greenhouse gas emissions and infrastructure deficiencies.

The NRP is structured as follows. Chapter 2 briefly discusses the macro-economic projections for our country. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the most important reforms and investments of the different governments in the following areas: (i) budget/public debt, (ii) labour market, training and education, (iii) entrepreneurship, innovation, competition and digitalisation, (iv), energy, mobility, and sustainability and (v) social protection and inclusion. Chapter 4 gives a brief overview of the state of play on the SDGs. Chapter 5 outlines the use of Structural Funds and Chapter 6 describes the institutional process and the involvement of stakeholders in the drafting of this NRP. The annexes present the plans of the regions and communities. The Fenix and CeSaR databases were updated on 1 March 2022.

2. Macroeconomic context and effects of structural reforms¹

The Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) has prepared economic forecasts until 2027, which are in line with the Economic Budget 2022 published on 17 February. These forecasts only take into account those measures whose form was known with sufficient precision on 11 February 2022. Therefore, no account was taken of, for example, the Labour Deal announced on 15 February or the Federal Energy Agreement of 15 March. Nor was the war in Ukraine that broke out on 24 February taken into account. The FPB did, however, work out a technical variant of the possible consequences of this war on the economic outlook. This is summarised in Box 1.

The Belgian economy is expected to record real growth of 3.0 % in 2022, slowing to 1.9 % in 2023 and to an average of 1.3 % in the period 2024–2027. This will be accompanied by an increase in employment of 238,000 people over the period 2022–2027, raising the employment rate from 70.5 % in 2021 to 72.9 % in 2027. Inflation is expected to cool sharply from 5.5 % in 2022 to 1.1 % in 2023, and then gradually climb to 1.6 %.

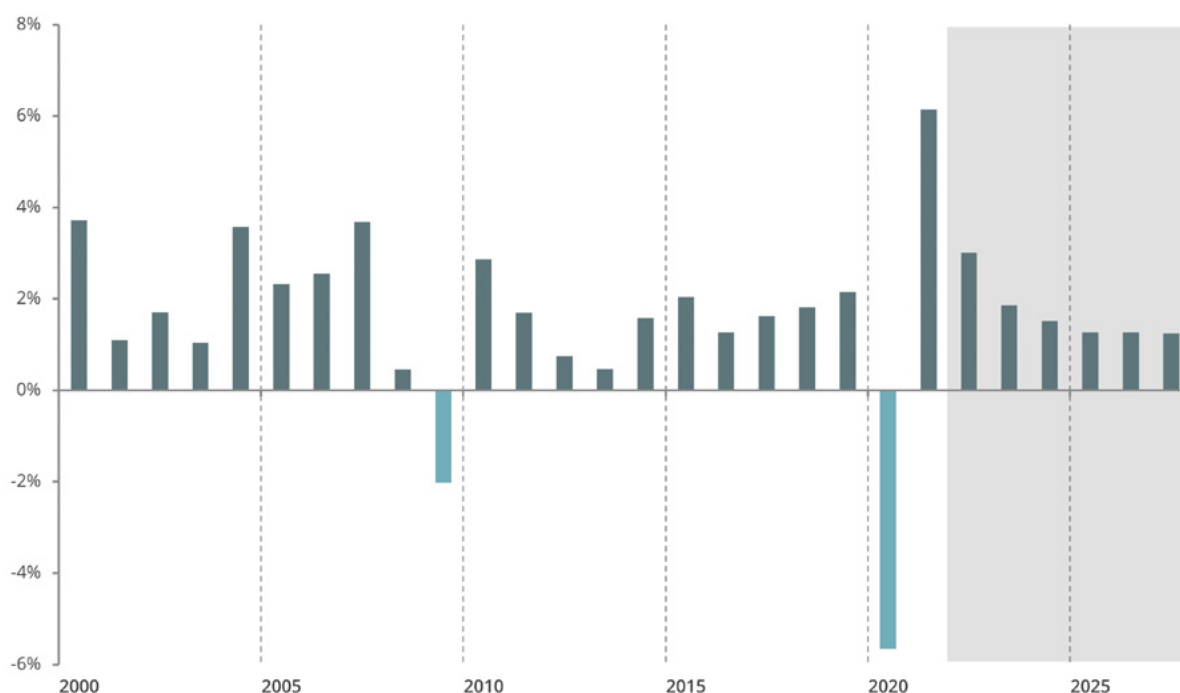
1. A gradual normalisation of economic growth.

After a contraction of 6.5 % in the year of the coronavirus outbreak, economic activity in the euro area recovered by 5.2 % in 2021. In the

¹ These perspectives are a contribution to the preparation of the new Stability Programme and the National Reform Programme. The macroeconomic parameters were approved by the Management Board of the National Accounts Institute. The Federal Planning Bureau's regional outlook 2021-2026 is available at https://www.plan.be/uploaded/documents/202107160831450.FOR_HermReg_2021_12470_N.pdf or https://www.plan.be/uploaded/documents/202107160831210.FOR_HermReg_2021_12470_F.pdf

course of 2022 and 2023, the catching-up process will be over, but robust growth of 4.0 % and 2.5 % respectively is still expected, supported by the Member States' recovery programmes. GDP growth in the euro area will reach 1.6 % in 2024 and normalise to 1.4 % in the period 2025–2027.

Fig. 1 | GDP in volume
Growth rates as a percentage



The Belgian economy grew by 6.1 % last year. The resumption was supported by almost all spending components. In 2022, GDP growth is still expected to be fairly robust at 3.0 %, with private consumption being the main driver. Growth will slow further to 1.9 % in 2023, even though investments are temporarily gaining momentum. For the period 2024–2027, GDP growth is expected to average 1.3 %, but with a slightly declining profile (from 1.5 % in 2024 to 1.2 % in 2027).

Belgian exports rebounded strongly in 2021 and should continue to benefit from further, but less pronounced, catch-up demand from trading partners in 2022 and 2023. From 2024 onwards, exports will be on a lower but stable growth path.

Private consumption recovered by 6.3 % in 2021 and is expected to continue catching up this year with a volume growth of 5.9 %. This would bring the household savings ratio back to a level (11.6 %) close to that before the coronavirus crisis, after having risen sharply to 20.2 % in 2020. In 2023 and 2024, consumption growth is expected to slow down, but at 1.9 % and 1.8 % respectively, it should still exceed its trend growth rate, driven by a strong increase in real disposable

income, especially in 2023 (2.9 %). The indexation of wages and social benefits in that year is expected to be considerably higher than inflation, which will then fall sharply. From 2025 onwards, private consumption will evolve in line with real disposable income and lose dynamism.

Corporate investment rebounded in 2021 with a 9.2 % volume growth, and it is expected to increase further in 2022 and 2023, by 1.7 % and 3.6 %, respectively. The investment is stimulated by favourable demand prospects, the recovery plans and the still favourable interest rates. These factors provide less support in the second half of the projection period, which slows down investment growth. Household investment (residential construction) also made up a lot of ground in 2021 (10.5 %) and is expected to increase further this year by 3.8 % – partly due to the reconstruction following last summer's floods. It will also increase slightly afterwards. Public investment recorded a strong volume growth of 10.5 % in 2021. During the years 2022–2024, public investment is expected to increase further, driven by the recovery plans, investments in defence and local investments in the run-up to the municipal elections. From 2025 onwards, the impact of these factors will fade away and public investment will decrease.

2. After fluctuations related to energy prices, inflation is expected to evolve to 1.6 %.

In 2022, the particularly high inflation (5.5 %) is explained not only by the increase in energy prices, but also by an increase in underlying inflation due to supply problems and price increases of some food commodities. Second-round effects also play a role, with high inflation leading to higher wages which, in turn, are passed on in consumer prices. These second-round effects should remain under control. Underlying inflation is expected to peak in the course of 2022 and then slowly decline as the problems in the supply chains gradually disappear.

In 2023 and 2024, inflation is expected to fall to 1.1 % and 1.2 %, respectively, as a decrease in energy prices is taken into account in both years. Thereafter, all price trends will normalise and inflation will gradually recover to 1.6 % by the end of the projection period.

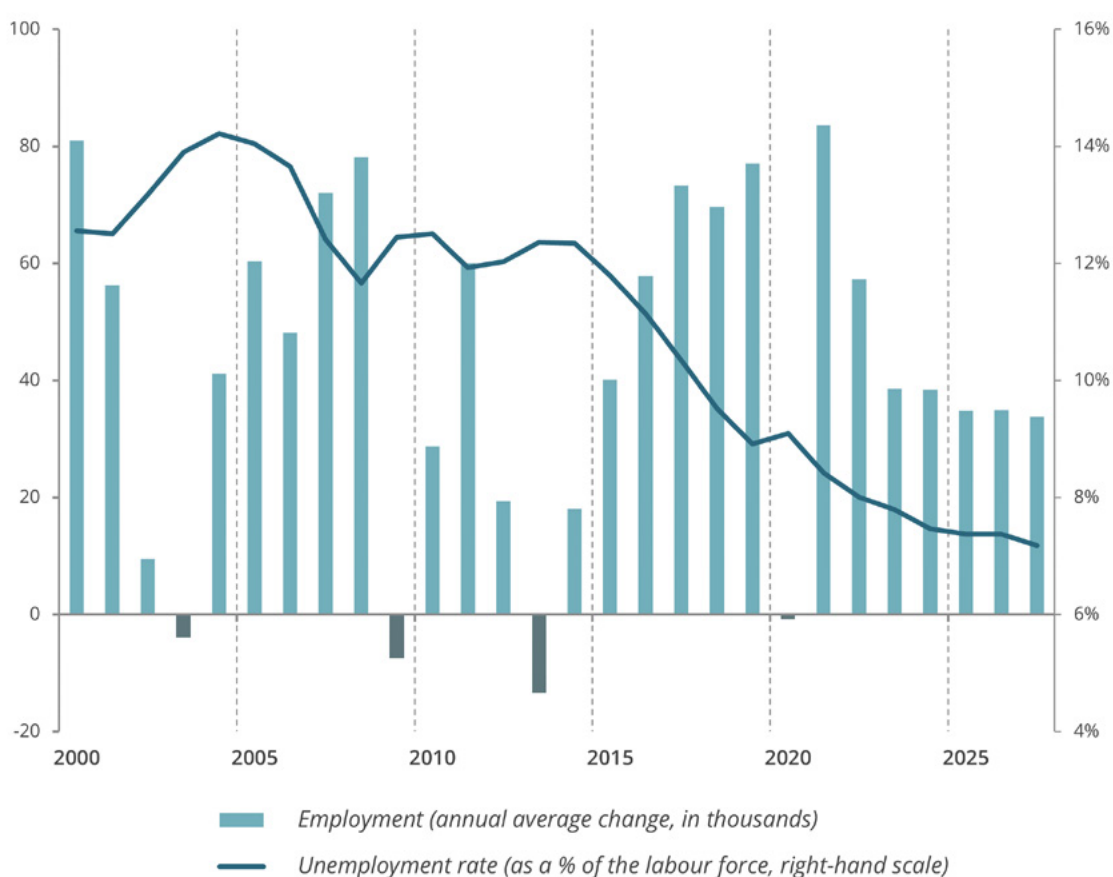
3. The labour market recovered remarkably quickly from the coronavirus shock, with the employment rate set to climb to 72.9 % by 2027.

Employment fell sharply just after the start of the coronavirus crisis but has since caught up strongly. So, employment rose exceptionally sharply in 2021 (by 84,000) and is expected to rise further this year by 57,000. The labour force is also expected

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to increase significantly this year (by 37,000), helped by the continued recovery of activity rates among younger ages. Administrative unemployment will decrease for the second year in a row in 2022 (-20,000 people) and the unemployment rate will reach 8.0 %. From a macro-economic point of view, therefore, the coronavirus period did little damage to the labour market.

Fig. 2 | Employment and unemployment rate
FPB definition



After this catching-up process, employment will end up on a lower growth path. The increase in employment is expected to be 39,000 people per year on average in the period 2023–2024. Unemployment will continue to decline (by 13,000 people per year on average), as the increase in the labour force will also slow down (to 26,000 people a year on average).

During the period 2025–2027, employment growth is expected to weaken to an average of 35,000 people per year, as the growth of activity in the market sector continues to lose momentum. Productivity growth in the market sector will be stable during that period (0.7 % per year), in line with real labour cost growth. The growth of the labour force will accelerate (to 31,000 persons per year on average)

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due to the raising of the legal retirement age to 66. Unemployment will decrease less sharply during this period (by 3,000 people per year). The unemployment rate is expected to reach 7.2 % in 2027.

Over the entire period 2022–2027, employment will increase by 238,000 people. The employment rate of people ages 20–64 (LFS definition) will climb steadily from 70.5 % in 2021 to 72.9 % in 2027.

Table 1 | Key figures for the Belgian economy
Percentages of change in volume, unless otherwise stated

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Consumption expenditures of private individuals	-8,2	6,3	5,9	1,9	1,7	1,4	1,4	1,4
Government consumption expenditures	0,2	4,2	1,3	0,6	1,1	1,4	1,4	1,3
Gross fixed capital formation	-6,2	9,6	2,6	3,5	1,7	0,4	1,1	0,8
Total national expenditure	-6,1	5,7	3,5	2,0	1,6	1,2	1,4	1,2
Exports of goods and services	-5,5	9,0	5,2	3,9	3,1	3,1	3,3	3,1
Imports of goods and services	-5,9	8,5	5,9	4,0	3,2	3,0	3,4	3,0
Net exports (contribution to GDP growth)	0,4	0,5	-0,5	-0,1	-0,1	0,1	-0,1	0,0
Gross Domestic Product	-5,7	6,1	3,0	1,9	1,5	1,3	1,3	1,2
National consumer price index	0,7	2,4	5,5	1,1	1,2	1,5	1,6	1,6
Real disposable income of individuals	0,9	0,3	1,2	2,9	1,9	1,1	1,4	1,3
Savings ratio of individuals (as a percentage of disposable income)	20,2	15,5	11,6	12,4	12,4	12,1	12,1	12,1
Domestic employment (annual average change, in thousands)	-0,8	83,7	57,3	38,6	38,5	34,9	34,9	33,8
Employment rate (20–64 years old; LFS definition)	70,0	70,5	71,2	71,6	72,1	72,4	72,6	72,9
Unemployment rate (FPB definition, as a percentage of the labour force)	9,1	8,4	8,0	7,8	7,5	7,4	7,4	7,2

Box 1 | Technical variant due to the war in Ukraine

The FPB made a technical variant with the adjustment of some international variables due to the war in Ukraine. The growth of the relevant export markets for Belgium has been adjusted downwards and the wholesale prices for energy products further increased. This variant has a purely indicative value and cannot be interpreted as an updated forecast for 2022.

The more limited growth of export markets leads to lower exports, which in turn implies that Belgian companies need to produce less to meet (foreign) demand. Consequently, companies are adjusting their production factors downwards, resulting in less investment and employment. GDP in volume terms would be more than 0.5 % lower this year than the level predicted in the base case due to a fall in all spending. Consumer price inflation gets an additional boost. The higher indexation of wages and social benefits cushions the loss of purchasing power of households to a large extent, but indexation reacts to price movements with a time lag, so that the loss of purchasing power in 2022 will still be considerable (with unchanged policies). Private consumption is falling less than the real disposable income of households, which implies that households are saving less to support their consumption. The GDP deflator (+0.46 % compared to the level of the baseline simulation) will react much less strongly to the price shock as the increase in domestic prices is partly offset by a large loss in terms of trade. GDP at current prices would therefore be slightly lower than in the baseline simulation. The labour cost per hour worked before indexation remains unchanged because the gross wages increase before indexation and the assumptions related to employer contributions have not been adjusted in this simulation. Therefore, the increase in nominal wage costs per hour worked is explained solely by the higher indexation of wages in the market sector.

The February Economic Budget only took into account measures whose form was known with sufficient precision by 11 February 2022. That remains the case in this variant. More recent measures, such as the Federal Energy Agreement of 15 March, are therefore not included. The effects of the refugee influx and negative confidence effects among entrepreneurs and consumers have also not been taken into account.

3. Addressing the key challenges for the economy, labour market and social cohesion

1. Budget and public debt (including revenues and expenditure)

1.1. General context

Like 2020, 2021 was strongly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Belgian public finances were impacted by epidemic fluctuations, health measures and budgetary measures to cope with the negative consequences of the pandemic. However, the subsequent economic recovery has been strong, albeit uneven. Public finances have played a stabilising role and monetary policy has contributed to public budget flexibility by providing historically favourable financing conditions. However, inflation and a significant rise in energy prices have disrupted the recovery. More recently, the start of Russia's offensive in Ukraine and the implementation of broad economic sanctions are likely to disrupt economic fundamentals, and thus the Belgian economy and public finances. Consequently, this is likely to have an impact on the budget, revenue, expenditure, deficit and debt. At this stage and taking into account the ongoing developments, it is too early to accurately assess the impact on Belgian public finances.

Based on the figures in the National Bank of Belgium's 2021 Report, an improvement in Belgium's public finances in 2021 can be observed. Primary expenditures fell (54 % of GDP in 2021 compared to 57.2 % in 2020), the primary

balance improved (-4.6 % of GDP in 2021 compared to -7.1 % in 2020), the interest burden dropped (1.6 % of GDP in 2021 compared to 1.9 % in 2020), as did the financing balance (-6.2 % of GDP in 2021 compared to -9.1 % in 2020) and public debt (108.6 % of GDP in 2021 compared to 112.8 % in 2020). According to the Federal Planning Bureau, this positive trend should continue in 2022. However, public debt is expected to rise again from 2023 onwards.

1.2. Budgetary measures

When the federal government took office in 2020, it opted for a dynamic fiscal policy in view of the pandemic. A fixed effort of 0.2 % of GDP per year was chosen for the period 2021–2024. At the end of this period, therefore, the fixed effort amounts to 0.8 % of GDP. In addition, for the period 2022–2024, a variable effort has been provisioned, which is dependent on the level and growth of GDP. In 2022, this variable effort will amount to 0.3 % of GDP. As part of the budget preparation for each of the following years, the government will decide on the amount of the variable effort for the year in question.

In Flanders, the Flemish government resolutely opts for the restoration of healthy public finances and the strengthening of structural growth. With 900 million euros in savings measures by 2024, the Flemish government is keeping its promise to halve the budget deficit by 2024.

The Walloon government has submitted a budget that respects the trajectory of a return to a balanced budget in 2024 for the region's ordinary budget (i.e. excluding expenditure on COVID-19, floods and recovery). Since the drafting of the initial budget for 2022, particular attention has been paid to the sustainability of Walloon debt, especially as a result of the work of the external debt commission (Commission externe de la dette). A cumulative structural effort is planned to reduce the deficit to 1 % of revenues (about 150 million euros per year).

In Brussels, the support measures taken by the government in recent months and years have had an impact on the region's financial situation. Although the roll-out of the road tax reform and the introduction of SmartMove have been delayed, the Brussels government's objective remains to return to a balanced budget by 2024, while guaranteeing a number of strategic, sustainable and growth-generating investments.

As regards the support measures in response to the coronavirus crisis, in accordance with the general opt-out clause and the Country Specific Recommendations of the Council to Belgium in 2020, the federal, regional and community governments adopted budgetary measures in 2020 and 2021 to strengthen the capacity of the health system, to contain the pandemic and to provide support to particularly affected persons and sectors. This strong policy response has cushioned the contraction in GDP and limited the increase in

government deficit and debt. The discretionary fiscal measures taken in 2020 and 2021 were largely temporary.

The measures taken are mainly: temporary unemployment (compensation for temporarily unemployed workers), bridging rights (replacement income for self-employed workers), civil protection measures (e.g. crisis centre, information, medical equipment), assistance and prevention measures (food aid, housing for the homeless, education, purchase of medicines and medical protection, masks for the civil population, etc.) other measures (testing, aid to the economy, extra cost of the public institutions concerned, measures to help the most vulnerable), advances to hospitals, tax measures, liquidity measures, suspension of payments (of taxes, social security contributions, etc.), and a guarantee scheme concluded between the federal government and financial institutions. The communities and regions have also adopted a series of measures aimed at slowing down the spread of the coronavirus and mitigating its effects on the health sector, as well as providing financial support to the citizens, sectors and/or businesses concerned.

The federal support measures amounted to 15.2 billion euros in 2020 and are decreasing gradually to EUR 0.7 billion in 2025.

As for expenditure review, the federal government launched a programme in 2020.

Table 2 | Federal support measures after the coronavirus crisis
Million EUR

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Aid amounts	15 155	9 812	2 073	1 072	832	669

On 12 February 2021, the federal Council of Ministers approved the themes and the mandate for the following three pilot projects: exemption from withholding tax, impact of large-scale remote working on the organisation and management of federal government buildings, and efficient care.

On 10 November 2021, the federal Council of Ministers decided to follow up on the measures concerning the exemption from payment of withholding tax and the imposition of uniform reporting systems, as well as to study master plans and the possibility of centralising services. With a view to the next expenditure review cycle in 2022, the Council of Ministers also decided to commission studies on the nuclear liabilities of the federal institutions, the operating costs of scientific institutions and cooperation between the institutions collecting taxes and contributions. In preparation for the next spending review cycle in 2023, preparatory studies will be conducted to assess the availability of data for the following topics: asylum and migration, effectiveness of federal support for R&D, and justice (court fees in criminal cases).

As far as pensions are concerned, the first pillar faces the challenge of rising age-related expenditure. A further increase in employment and productivity growth, and a credible fiscal path are important levers to address this. The government is looking at what reforms can be made to ensure financial and social sustainability. The introduction of a pension bonus, a key aspect of that reform, will play an important role in further raising the employment rate: it will encourage people to work beyond the retirement age, and those who make that choice will receive a substantially higher statutory pension.

As for the mini-tax shift, the government has agreed to reduce the special contribution for social security for workers earning up to 3,500 euros gross per month. The air travel tax, an increase in the tobacco excise duty and a reform of the wage tax exemption (applicable to night work, among other things) should compensate for the tax cut. Moreover, the government is also raising the upper limit of who qualifies for the work bonus.

On the investment side, from 2022 onwards, the Recovery and Resilience Facility will continue to be used to finance additional investments to support recovery. In addition, the federal government intends to pursue a strong investment policy, freeing up 1.3 billion euros for additional investments in the coming years. The Flemish government also wants to invest massively via its recovery plan (*Vlaamse veerkracht*), which provides for a total of 4.3 billion euros.

The crisis is also being used to prepare and implement reforms. The Flemish Department of Finance and Budget is working on an expenditure norm. This norm should ensure the sustainability of public finances in all circumstances, guarantee policy stability and discourage ad hoc adjustments. Working with an expenditure norm also implies starting from medium-term targets in a multiannual perspective.

Wallonia also adopted its recovery plan at the end of October 2021, with rigorous governance in place to ensure its effective implementation. A first monitoring report was prepared in December 2021. At the level of budgetary surveillance, the policy units for financial information (*Cellule d'informations financières, CIF*) and budgetary support (*Cellule d'appui au monitoring*) of the Walloon public service will be responsible for monitoring the budget years, both in terms of expenditure and revenue, as well as for preparing budgetary forecasts on the basis of which the work of the government will be carried out. As for the zero-based budget, the first three rounds of analysis have been completed and the fourth is under way. The exercise should end in spring 2022.

To avoid stifling economic recovery and to promote sustainable and inclusive growth, the Brussels-Capital Region will continue to invest in mobility, social housing, employment policy and the implementation of the climate plan. The strategic investments are clearly defined and a concrete multiannual path has been agreed (an average of 450 million euros per year for the remaining years of this parliamentary term). The budget for 2022 will be 396.7 million euros.

The analysis of Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA), carried out in 2021 with the technical assistance of the European Commission, showed that the region should strive to strengthen investment management, which should lead to better planning and prioritisation of public investments within the framework of available medium-term budgets and with predetermined criteria for project selection, including, for example, the impact on economic activity and future revenues. In response to this recommendation of the PEFA report, the region received additional technical assistance from the European Commission (through the Technical Support Instrument). This project will start next summer.

One of the CSRs addressed to Belgium concerns controlling the costs of ageing and long-term care in order to structurally balance the budget. In Flanders, these costs are evaluated within the framework of the budget and multiannual estimates. Therefore, whenever the budget is drawn up and adjusted, this expenditure is evaluated in order to achieve a structurally balanced budget, including in the medium term. This strict budgetary monitoring concerns the various components of Flemish public spending which can evolve without limitation on the basis of the ageing of the population, such as the monetary contributions based on the degree of care provided by the Flemish social protection system (Vlaamse sociale bescherming) and the mobility aids. Wallonia will cope with the expected increase in long-term care expenditure through various measures. These will contribute to the reduction of expenditure on long-term care in that they promote anticipation (health promotion – prevention), alternative measures for long-term care institutions, which will provide around 50,000 places, and the introduction of new data collections for monitoring ageing and its effects. The decree implementing the health promotion plan (Plan de promotion de la santé) until 2030 was amended in February 2022 to strengthen health promotion. The government also adopted a de-institutionalisation strategy and action plan in February 2022, which will be implemented with ESF+ support.

In terms of controlling the costs of ageing and long-term care, several measures have been taken in Brussels, notably: the recovery of beds in care homes (maisons de repos, MR / rusthuizen, RT) and nursing homes (maisons de repos et de soins, MRS / rust- en verzorgingstehuizen, RVT), i.e. beds that have been authorised but are not in use. These virtual beds represent a potential budget of about 60 million euros. Moreover, a procedure for converting MR/RT beds into MRS/RVT beds has been introduced to better meet the needs of the population in institutions. Finally, two studies have been carried out, the results of which are expected by mid-2022: a programming study on home care and care or housing structures for the elderly, and a study on the financing of MR/RT and MRS/RVT.

A new Walloon tax decree has been adopted which aims to more effectively combat practices aimed at evading and/or avoiding certain taxes. This decree introduces a general anti-abuse provision to prevent all cases of deliberate non-compliance with the intention of the Walloon legislator. The Walloon procedure also features

longer deadlines for combating fraud and a more effective and cross-cutting system of fines in tax matters. This new tax decree also contains provisions to limit abuses in the area of inheritance and registration taxes, as well as various measures in the area of motor vehicle taxes. The text was adopted in December 2021 and entered into force on 1 January 2022.

1.3. Implementation of the NRRP

The NRRP also contains a number of measures that contribute to improving the composition and efficiency of our public spending by introducing expenditure revisions (R-6). The first four milestones corresponding to these measures on the federal level, in Flanders, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region have already been reached. The integration of this measure into the budgetary process of these governments is in progress and should be achieved by the end of 2022. As far as the French Community is concerned, the conclusions of the pilot projects will be submitted to the government in September 2022, as planned in the corresponding milestone.

2. Labour market, training and education

2.1. Labour market

The various governments in this country have the shared ambition of achieving an employment rate of 80 %, and they are very much inspired by the European pillar of social rights.

Thus, in response to structural challenges in the labour market, the federal government has adopted a labour market reform that aims to improve the training and skills of workers, allow a better reconciliation of private and professional life, provide a better framework for new forms of work and contribute to raising the employment rate to 80 % by 2030.

The reform includes an individual right to training (cfr. the section on education below). Also, all employees will have the option to work full-time over 4 days per week or to work more one week and less the next.

The social partners will be more involved in achieving greater diversity in the labour market and in the problem of bottleneck professions.

In order to maintain competitiveness and employment, the federal government decided in May 2021 that wages may increase by 0.4 % in real terms for the period 2021–2022. The indexation of wages will be maintained, as always. In addition, sectors and/or companies that performed well during the coronavirus crisis could be awarded a corona premium of up to 500 euros.

In June 2021, the social partners reached an agreement on various aspects of employment policy, which was transposed into law by the federal government, including a gradual increase in minimum wages and more flexibility with regard to overtime. Other measures include the promotion of sustainable commuting, the financial encouragement of innovation by employees and the efforts of the sectors to support groups at risk on the labour market. A welfare envelope (Welvaartsenveloppe / Enveloppe bien-être) of more than 700 million euros was set aside to ensure that social benefits remain in line with wage trends.

Disabled persons belong to a vulnerable target group and deserve proper social protection. From 2022, the minimum benefit will be granted from the first day of the fourth month of incapacity for work. At the same time, the chances of people with health problems returning to work are being improved. From 2022 onwards, coordinators will be in charge of providing quick and active support to citizens who have been declared unfit for work. In combination with better monitoring, making the different parties involved more accountable and providing appropriate services in cooperation with the regions, we are introducing a 'systematic new way of working'. Adapted regulations will also be provided for self-employed people, civil servants and career processes with one's own employer.

An online calculation tool is being developed that allows people on sickness or disability benefits to estimate the impact of working on their net family income.

The regions are also making efforts to improve guidance into work. The federal and regional governments are discussing proposals that could be applied asymmetrically for an effective activation policy tailored to the regions and within the federal framework. In Wallonia, the TIM reform (Talents, Impulsion, Mobilisation) envisages the introduction of a personalised guidance and coaching programme with experts from different sectors, a better match between candidates and job offers, the creation of online 'job profiles', the screening of talents and projects for each individual and specific support for people furthest away from the labour market. In addition, the Walloon government has allocated a budget of 3.3 million euros to strengthen the guidance of jobseekers with mental health problems and to provide them with the best possible assistance, with the support of specialised actors.

Specifically for the long-term unemployed, measures have been taken in Flanders and Wallonia for better guidance of people on the path to work. In Flanders, investments are being made in better guidance (Integrale begeleiding plus, IB+) that focuses on job-seeking and 21st century skills and motivation of the jobseeker. Community services are being introduced for people who have been unemployed for more than two years, whereby long-term jobseekers perform small-scale tasks in local authorities and non-profit organisations in order to work on established generic competences and build up a work rhythm. The jobseeker receives a limited compensation for this. With calls for training support and strategic investment

3. Addressing the key challenges for the economy, labour market and social cohesion

and innovation support in sheltered workplaces, Flanders is also investing in the social economy. Wallonia is planning a reform of regional employment offices (MIRE), more extensive personalised support for jobseekers and more contact with employers. Moreover, the premium granted for the employment of a long-term jobseeker will be extended and made permanent, as will the scheme aimed at NEETs. Pilot projects to eradicate long-term unemployment (Territoires zéro chômeurs de longue durée) will be launched with the support of the ESF+.

In order to meet the structural shortage of labour, the Flemish government has launched a Flemish job bonus which targets low wages. This reform makes work in low-paid and often low-skilled jobs more attractive – a segment of the labour market in Flanders that today has a considerable number of vacancies.

In Wallonia, the reform of aid to promote employment was approved and has entered into force; in addition to consolidating employment in many non-profit sectors, it will also make it possible to create new jobs. Funds are also being made available to support the social economy and the digitalisation of the sector.

In line with the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy's objective of access to the labour market, the Brussels Region is committed to strengthening programmes to combat discrimination in recruitment and to promote diversity. The Brussels Region will also take new measures to develop a new legal framework for the introduction of a specific premium scheme to support employers in the recruitment and sustainable integration of jobseekers with disabilities. Additionally, the Brussels Region will increase its investments to reduce the skills mismatch on its labour market. This includes, in particular, a systematic assessment of jobseekers' professional, linguistic and digital skills and the development of an individualised training plan. The German-speaking Community is planning measures and reforms to improve vocational integration and opportunities on the labour market after training. The measures are mainly aimed at the integration of the long-term unemployed, people with mental or physical disabilities and the vocational guidance of young people.

In Flanders, knowledge of Dutch is essential to strengthen the position of non-native speakers or people with a language deficiency on the labour market. That is why a new action plan (Vijf voor taal) was launched. In the Brussels Region, a call for projects has been launched to promote language skills in vocational education. The projects are intended to stimulate the teaching of Dutch, French and possibly English, thus giving more candidates access to the labour market. In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, language learning is receiving special attention, especially through the DASPA (specific lessons for the reception of foreigners) and FLA (français langue d'apprentissage) systems.

Flanders and Wallonia are each making an extra effort to create childcare places with at least 2,500 and 3,143 new places, respectively, in order to safeguard the entry and retention of part of the working population (especially the female

population) in the labour market. In Brussels, a total of 2,100 new reception places will be created by 2026 on the basis of a new plan (De eerste 1000 dagen / 1000 premiers jours).

2.2. Education and training

a. Improving the performance and inclusiveness of education and training systems

The reforms to increase the quality of education will continue. The programme for the improvement of education (Pacte d'excellence dans l'enseignement) of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, which is already implemented in 1,700 schools, will be extended to the remaining 800 schools. Furthermore, another 20 schools that are among the most challenging in the school system have been placed under close surveillance, to add to the previous 20 identified.

The three communities aim to make the teaching profession more attractive. An additional budget was made available for the announced refinancing of higher education. The organisation of higher education was also clarified. Flanders continues to invest in the professionalisation of teachers (educational teams) and principals through, among other things, the programme of priority in-service training and active participation in a comparative OECD study, the Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) Study. In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the basic training of teachers has been reformed and will apply from the academic year 2023–2024. For higher education, an additional budget of 80 million euros has been made available for the 2019–2024 period. The academic track for students has also been adjusted and will be applied from the academic year 2022–2023. The inclusion of people with disabilities will also be improved. Several of the government's initiatives also aim at improving the inclusiveness of women in education and vocational and professional training. In addition, various projects and actions are aimed at better guidance of pupils and students, as well as of employees and jobseekers.

With the project for education of the future (Vision globale – Façonner l'enseignement de demain) that has been running for several years in East Belgium, the German-speaking Community wants to lay the foundation for a sustainable and equitable education system and improve the professional conditions of teachers. In March 2022, an OECD study will be published that analyses the effectiveness, efficiency and equal opportunities of the school system in the German-speaking Community. Based on this OECD study and feedback from the various stakeholders in education, a vision for an education strategy and concrete measures for its implementation will be developed in the course of 2022. The master plan should be available by 2024.

In order to prevent pupils with special needs from being referred to special education too often, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the German-speaking

Community have implemented a number of reforms. Thus, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation combines expertise and support in the application of reasonable adjustments in all mainstream schools. In German-speaking Belgium, a new government-owned institution is being set up that will bring together all know-how on supportive education so that the existing resources for increased care of pupils in mainstream schools can be used more efficiently in the future. This new school will house the current integration teachers and qualified staff. At the same time, mainstream schools will be given more say and more flexibility in the use of this specialist and support staff through cooperation contracts. For example, they will have one central contact person for the integration of pupils with special needs. Low-threshold support remains the responsibility of mainstream schools. In Flanders, the new decree on learning support (decreet leersteun en leersteunmodel) will be phased in from 1 September 2023 in order to ensure that all pupils can develop optimally with maximum learning gains. The decree will increase the quality of education and guarantees workability for schools and teachers. The focus is on strengthening mainstream, learning support and special education.

In order to detect and remedy a possible language deficiency in pre-school children in time, a language test (the KOALA test) is compulsory in Flanders for all children in the third year of pre-school as of the school year 2021–2022.

Eliminating the learning deficit caused by the coronavirus pandemic among many pupils, especially the most vulnerable, is a priority throughout Belgium. In order to eliminate the learning disadvantages, Flanders is supporting schools by providing additional support (De bijsprong). From 1 September 2021 to 30 June 2022, schools for mainstream and special primary and secondary education and centres for part-time vocational secondary education in the Flemish Community can apply for additional support in the form of teaching hours (primary education), teacher hours (mainstream secondary education) and teaching hours (special secondary education). Additional resources are allocated to pupils who meet the criteria for socio-economic status (Social-economische status, SES) support in mainstream primary education, or equal educational opportunities (Gelijke onderwijskansen, GOK) support in mainstream secondary education or part-time vocational secondary education. The Wallonia-Brussels Federation has mitigated the effects of the coronavirus crisis by strengthening social grants, revising the criteria for student funding, and providing support for doctoral students and IT grants for adult education staff. It has also simplified the criteria for awarding study grants and launched information campaigns on the support available so that more students can benefit from it. In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, periods have been allocated in primary and secondary schools to help pupils with learning or mental health problems.

b. Encourage skills development and address skills mismatches

Lifelong learning is more necessary than ever for workers to acquire the right skills for a rapidly evolving labour market. The federal government is introducing the individual right to education. Companies will have to draw up a training plan, paying particular attention to the least skilled workers.

The Flemish government continues to structurally commit to encouraging lifelong learning in order to increase training participation in Flanders, among other things with its action plan for lifelong learning (Koers zetten naar een lerend Vlaanderen). In this action plan, a partnership for lifelong learning (Partnerschap Levenslang Leren) formulates ambitions and actions to make Flanders a learning society. Work is also being done on a competency forecast model that will map out the need for competencies, the expected shortages and surpluses, and consequently the need for retraining at sector, cluster and company levels, and for the Flemish labour and training market as a whole.

Strengthening digital skills remains a key objective for all communities and regions. All governments adopted the Women in Digital inter-federal and cross-sectoral plan in 2021 with the aim of providing a coherent strategy to foster coordination and synergy among the various initiatives taken to promote women in STEM/ICT at all policy levels in our country. As part of the Walloon recovery plan, a financing package for basic training in digital skills was approved. The objective is to increase the number of training hours, to introduce a uniform teaching method throughout Wallonia, to establish a link with public employment services and to provide more stable and generous funding for the structures that provide this training. In addition, the roll-out of digital learning methods in alternate education will be strengthened. Flanders is giving adult education a boost with a strategic plan (Edusprong voor volwassenen: volwasseneneducatie versterkt). The Flemish government is allocating 60 million euros to eliminate the negative effects of the coronavirus crisis in adult education and to make structural adjustments. The main elements of the plan are strengthening digital competences, tackling unqualified outflow and enhancing labour market opportunities. The STEM Agenda 2030 aims for a higher intake in STEM courses and careers, STEM specialists and the general strengthening of STEM competences in society at large: so-called STEM literacy. In addition, with Digisprong, the government aims to make up for lost time in the digitisation of learning and teaching in compulsory education. The ambition of this plan is to strengthen the digital competences of all learners, from primary school children to adults.

The German-speaking Community is starting a radical reform of technical and vocational education. More and more young people are failing in technical secondary education or in dual education, often due to a combination of factors or personal problems. At the same time, companies and employers in the

German-speaking Community are facing a shortage of skilled workers and many apprenticeship positions remain unfilled every year.

In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, one of the priorities of the programme for the improvement of education (Pacte d'excellence dans l'enseignement) is to transform qualification education into a field of expertise and this via three priorities: reorganising the pathways of qualification education, strengthening the management of qualification education, and strengthening the education-training-work synergies. In 2021, an evaluation of the CPU (Certifications par unités) was introduced, and a start was made on reforming the management of the qualification education offer and the political dialogue between the communities and regions with a view to improving the education and vocational training systems, organised on an alternating basis in order to avoid competition between them. In addition, an agreement for the links in the book chain was adopted, aimed at the development and implementation, through consultation between the various policy levels, of strategic support for all actors in the book sector (female and male authors, bookshops, libraries, publishers, etc.), and to make books and reading a common objective.

The structural reform is aimed at bringing together dual education and technical and vocational secondary education and at finding tailor-made and effective solutions for young people, whether they follow a pure school pathway, a work-related training pathway or a mixed pathway. Young people should be able to change their learning system without negative consequences. The first reforms will be implemented between March 2022 and November 2023, and a first interim evaluation with recommendations will be available by the end of 2023.

Wallonia issued an emergency measure in May 2021 so that apprenticeships for young people in alternating vocational training could resume in hairdressing salons, restaurants and care institutions. Concretely, for a maximum period of four months, an incentive of 390 euros per month per apprentice was granted to companies whose activity was halted due to the coronavirus crisis. Specific projects are also aimed at strengthening training for business start-ups, developing training in the biotechnology sector and designing international internships to develop business skills.

Flanders continues to strongly emphasise dual learning in secondary education, a part-time education centre or a Syntra apprenticeship and a workplace with, among other things, 19 sectoral partnerships. Meanwhile, the roll-out of dual learning in higher and adult education has been started, partially through the development of pilot projects with ESF support. The regulatory framework was developed to start dual learning in adult education on 1 September 2022. For dual learning in higher education, the results of the pilot projects are awaited.

With regards to the digital and environmental transitions, identifying the current and future needs of employers is a major challenge for the Brussels Region. In

this context, the government intends, in particular within the framework of the centres for training and work (Pôles Formation Emploi / Polen Opleiding-Werk), to roll out a training offer that meets the current and future challenges of the labour market, as well as a strategy for the creation and safeguarding of training paths, qualification and vocational integration. The Brussels Region also wants to improve the offer and quality of on-the-job training programmes in companies (as part of the Go4Brussels 2030 and qualifying for work (Qualification-emploi / Kwalificering-werk) strategies). The development of individual on-the-job training programmes in companies will enable jobseekers to gain the experience and skills needed to access the jobs available on the labour market. These training courses will therefore make it possible to remedy the mismatch between skills demanded and skills offered.

2.3. Implementation of the NRRP

The NRRP plans various digitalisation measures in education. In Flanders (I-4.01), in the Brussels-Capital Region (I-4.05) and in the German-speaking Community (I-4.06), all new digital equipment and connections will be installed in schools as stipulated in the plans. The measure for personalised guidance in compulsory education (I-4.03) and the action plan against school drop-outs (R-4.03) in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation are also on schedule. In 2020, a new strategy based on the RRF projects was launched in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The aim is to make digital equipment available to all secondary school students. At the labour market level, the measures relating to digital training (I-4.11 and I-5.11), labour market inclusion (R-4.06), lifelong learning (R-5.04) and the Learning and Career Offensive (I-5.04) planned by Flanders are being rolled out. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the strategy for the retraining of jobseekers (I-4.07) should achieve its planned objectives. Under the Labour Deal of 14 February 2022, work on the learning account measure is well advanced at the federal level. Finally, the Walloon Region has already adopted its decree on the reform of support for jobseekers (R-5.05).

3. Entrepreneurship, competition, innovation and digitalisation

3.1. Entrepreneurship and competition

The federal government has decided to develop an e-commerce strategy for Belgium. It is also working on an action plan to make e-commerce more sustainable. In the first phase, an analysis of the current situation and challenges with regard to e-commerce in our country is currently being prepared by the Central Council of the Economy (CCE/CRB). On the basis of figures and data and a recommendation from the social partners, the competent ministers will take specific measures that may involve, among other things, mobility, town and

country planning, taxation, the organisation of work (in addition to what is already included in the Labour Deal), competition (especially between Belgian and foreign platforms), the price of deliveries, illegal commercial practices by certain foreign players, the modal shift, and making the last mile more sustainable.

The federal government has also taken several measures to strengthen entrepreneurship and support for companies and SMEs. Important examples are: (i) the extension of paternity leave, social benefits and the abolition of the correction coefficient for the pension calculation of the self-employed, (ii) the support of female entrepreneurship in the digital sector as part of the Women in Digital 2021–2026 strategy, (iii) the limitation of the maximum payment period between companies to 60 days, and (iv) the easing of the procedure for companies in payment difficulties. In the longer term, measures to reduce the administrative burden on companies come into play. According to a report by the Federal Planning Bureau, those for fiscal, environmental and labour regulations decreased from 3.5 % of GDP in 2000 to 1.6 % in 2016 and 1.1 % in 2020.²

In Flanders, to support the competitiveness of energy-intensive companies, the system of compensating indirect emission costs will be continued in 2022. However, companies will have to meet a number of additional conditions. For example, under certain conditions they must spend at least half of the aid amount on projects that reduce emissions, and they must conclude an energy policy agreement (Energiebeleidsovereenkomst, EBO) if they belong to the EBO target group. As a result of the coronavirus crisis, Flanders is still supporting long-term financing for companies through guarantees and the Corona subordinated loan. In addition, the welfare fund (Welvaartsfonds) became operational.

The regional strategy for economic transition (Stratégie régionale de transition économique, SRTE / Gewestelijke strategie voor economische transitie, GSET) of the Brussels-Capital Region aims to mobilise all economic actors to achieve the main objective of the Go4Brussels strategy, which is to focus regional action on businesses that operate in an environmentally and socially responsible manner in order to create a carbon-free, regenerative, circular, social, democratic and digital regional economy by 2050. In addition, as part of its recovery strategy, the Brussels government decided to develop three instruments to facilitate the financing of businesses: (i) a Boosting.brussels recovery fund (80 million euros) that aims to intervene for amounts of up to 5 million euro, (ii) the strengthening of financial instruments to improve the financing of seed and pre-seed businesses (5 million), and (iii) a financial recovery instrument for businesses with fewer than 10 full-time employees (15 million).

² Chantal Kegels, *De administratieve lasten in België voor het jaar 2020, Planning Paper 118, March 2022* or Chantal Kegels, *Les charges administratives en Belgique en 2020, Planning Paper 118, mars 2022*

The Walloon fund AMERIGO is an important risk capital instrument for companies. At the end of December 2021, AMERIGO closed its first capital round with public and private institutional investors for an amount of 161 million euros. The fund will support the companies through loans and capital interventions, in partnership with Les Investis, SOGEP, SOWALFIN and SRIW, who will also remain their partners for the analysis of the files. These instruments have also developed a resilience/strategic repositioning package to support companies in their recovery from an event such as the floods in August 2021. Furthermore, in September 2021, the government endorsed the first step towards the merger of its three economic and financial instruments. The ambition of the merged instrument is to contribute to the development of a more competitive, innovative, circular and inclusive Walloon economy and to the employment of the Walloons, through a single 'brand' adapted to the specific needs of companies throughout their life cycle.

3.2. Innovation and digitalisation

The total public credits for R&D (GBARD) in Belgium amounted to 3.3 billion euros in 2020. On average, GBARD represents about 50 % of public expenditure and investment in research and innovation-related policies; the rest comes from support for other forms of innovation aid. In Belgium, more than 80 % of total public funding for R&D and innovation (excluding tax credits) is thus managed by the regions and communities.³

Belgium has already proven to be an attractive place for pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical companies. At the beginning of this year, the federal government committed itself to making Belgium a real 'health and biotech valley' in which R&D, clinical research and production are further stimulated. Belgium will take action in several areas in the coming months to safeguard and strengthen its leadership position, including by (i) adding value to its current competitive position in terms of talent and attractiveness for companies, (ii) unlocking the potential of health data, (iii) stimulating regional and cross-border cooperation and coordination between companies, universities, hospitals and public-private partnerships, (iv) applying an 'end-to-end' approach across the value chain, from basic research to patient access, and (v) creating 'experimental spaces' of a physical, virtual or regulatory nature for the Belgian biopharmaceutical ecosystem.

In the area of digitisation, several measures are important at the federal level. In June 2021, the Digital Minds initiative was launched, both to help optimise the implementation of the recovery plan and to support the development of structuring projects. In the autumn of 2021, the FPS Economy drew up a renewed Digital Belgium 2.0 plan. This plan includes a research and innovation dimension and focuses on the key sectors of health and mobility. On the recommendation

3 Detailed figures are available in the annexes of the regions.

of the federal council of hospital facilities (Conseil fédéral des établissements hospitaliers, CFEH / Federale Raad van Ziekenhuisvoorzieningen, FRZV), a royal decree with actions to increase the cyber security of hospitals is being prepared. A sum of 20 million euros is planned for 2022 and 2023.

In Wallonia, 20 strategic investment initiatives in the five areas of strategic innovation were selected in early 2022 as part of the renewed strategy of intelligent specialisation (Stratégie de spécialisation intelligente).⁴ This strategy provides the framework for the region's research, innovation and industrial policy. The region also reformed its support for research with a view to simplification and rationalisation, and strengthened its support for research excellence in priority areas, especially in the field of health and life sciences. Under Digital Wallonia, initiatives are being taken for (i) the development of cyber security research, innovation and training, (ii) the development of artificial intelligence technologies, (iii) the digital transformation of priority sectors, especially construction, and (iv) the digital transformation of schools, local authorities and the provision of broadband to business parks. The government has also decided to strengthen its network of supercomputers. Finally, the digitisation of the public administration is being worked on in order to develop data governance; an integrated digital public service (Service public de Wallonie digital) has been created as part of this objective.

In Flanders, business R&D expenditure has more than doubled since 2010 and R&D expenditure by small businesses (up to 50 employees) has more than tripled. The innovation policy in Flanders is increasingly succeeding in reaching small(er) companies as well. Digital transformation is one of the seven spearheads of the Flemish recovery plan (Vlaamse veerkracht). It is based on three basic horizontal pillars, which form the common thread through the various digital transformation initiatives: (i) valorisation of data as a raw material, (ii) focus on the government service itself, and (iii) development of digital talents. On 18 March 2022, the Flemish government ratified the Flemish data strategy with four priority action areas. With a focused action plan (Werk aan de winkel), Flanders is also focusing on stimulating innovation in the retail sector. Merchants are helped in the digital transformation by the e-commerce action plan (Het internet: ook uw zaak). In addition to the aforementioned digital transformation, Flanders is also rolling out specific policy agendas around artificial intelligence and cyber security with its own multiannual budgets. In the framework of the recovery plan (Vlaamse veerkracht), the Flemish government is also setting up a digital utility (digital public service). As an independent player, this utility aims to increase the confidence of citizens in sharing data and make it easier for businesses to research and exchange data.

4 The five domains are: circular materials; innovations for better health; innovations for agile and safe production design; sustainable energy systems and housing; and the agri-food chains of the future and innovative environmental management.

In June 2021, the Brussels-Capital Region adopted its regional innovation plan (Plan régional pour l'innovation, PRI / Gewestelijk innovatieplan, GIP) 2021–2027, which focuses investments on six strategic innovation areas: climate resilience, resource optimisation, urban flows, health, social innovation and advanced digital technologies and services. Through the thematic focus of the PRI/GIP, R&I resources are targeted to contribute to the achievement of the region's transition goals. In addition, there is a digitalisation and economic transition project call (Digitalisering & economische transitie / Numériques & transition économique) for to support digital projects that have a positive social and environmental impact. Hub.brussels provides digital support to companies, especially those that are not very digitised, and this has been reinforced since the coronavirus crisis. Support for the digitisation of companies with high digital maturity is provided by several leading organisations, such as the Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good Institute (FARI), and there is financial support through Innoviris and Finance&invest.brussels. The obligations arising from the European Single Digital Gateway Regulation have served as a lever to speed up various initiatives: the step-by-step catalogue, the *electronic counter IRISbox*, the *Fidus platform*, the *WePulse* programme, and *Fix-My-Street*.

In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, part of the structural refinancing of higher education is earmarked for the redevelopment of research, in particular through university research, research in higher education institutions and higher art schools. As part of the ecological transition plan of the management contracts between the Ministry and ETNIC, an important axis (axis 4.2) aims to introduce electronic document management (gestion électronique des documents, GED), in particular through the dematerialisation of administrative documents.

3.3. Implementation of the NRRP

The digitisation of public administration, and in particular the implementation of the Single Digital Gateway, is an important part of the NRRP. The draft rules and terms and conditions for the implementation of various digitisation projects in the federal administration (I-2.05) will be adopted in due time. The work on the establishment of a Health Data Authority and associated e-health services (I-2.06) should be completed within the time frame of the plan. The vast majority of digitisation projects of the Flemish government have already been approved (I-2.09). Regarding the introduction of 5G (R-2.03), the implementation plan of best practices of the EU Connectivity Toolbox has been approved, as well as the law and royal decrees allocating frequency bands for 5G networks. The applications for the 5G auction have been received by the Belgian Institute for Postal Services and Telecommunications (BIPT). The auction should start on 1 June 2022. In the area of innovation, the federal call for aerospace research projects (I-5.09) will be launched in the coming weeks. The allocation of funds for research projects within the framework of strengthening R&D in Flanders (I-5.11) is also in full swing. In the Walloon Region, the activities for the construction of the technological

and training hub A6K-E6K are progressing according to the planned schedule. In the Brussels-Capital Region, a project on the development of an AI institute to address societal challenges with this technology (I-2.14) is integrated into the NRRP. Finally, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is providing large-scale support to scientific research in the field of climate and renewable energy by establishing an inter-university climate and environment research platform (Plateforme de recherche interuniversitaire climat et environnement).

4. Energy, mobility and sustainability

4.1. Energy

Through its investments and reforms, Belgium supports a socially just and inclusive transition to climate neutrality, with a particular focus on employment, consumer purchasing power and business competitiveness, as well as combating energy poverty. With an energy-price standard (energienorm / norme énergétique), the federal government introduced a reform of energy levies from January 2022. In concrete terms, the reform means that price increases due to federal levies will no longer be automatically passed on to the bill. Five federal levies were replaced by an excise duty, which allows the bill to be kept constant. On the basis of benchmarking with neighbouring countries, the impact of energy costs on the purchasing power of households and the competitiveness of Belgian companies is analysed. If necessary, the federal share of the bill can be adjusted accordingly. This is a major simplification and makes the financing of the federal energy policy more transparent. As far as the Flemish Region is concerned, an energy standard has been established by decree and an explicit commitment has been included in the Flemish coalition agreement. The Flemish additional costs on the electricity bill have already decreased this legislature. By 2022, 165 million euros of Flemish policy costs will have been removed from the electricity bill

In the field of energy, the transition to a low-carbon society has been continued in the light of the more stringent targets set at the European level. In March 2022, the Flemish government decided to free up an additional 218 million euros to increase renovation and insulation bonuses and to accelerate the roll-out of heat pumps and renewable energy. In March 2022, the federal government decided on investments for the transition amounting to 1.1 billion euros in total. The lifetime of two nuclear power plants, Doel 4 and Tihange 3 (with a combined capacity of 2 GW), should be extended by 10 years. The Capacity Remuneration Mechanism (CRM) – which aims to ensure security of supply – that was approved by the European Commission in August 2021 will be revisited in light of this extension.

In 2021, 14 projects were selected in the field of research under the Energy Transition Fund. Moreover, Belgium considers it a priority to keep its nuclear knowledge and expertise up to date with the support of its leading institutions

such as SCK CEN and IBR. The annual budget set for the next four years is 25 million euros.

In October 2021, a commitment was made to triple offshore wind capacity in the North Sea to 25 TWh through larger turbines and the connection of the new zone to the energy island. The roll-out of floating solar panels at sea will also be accelerated. In order to reduce dependence on Russian gas more quickly, the Flemish government decided in March 2022 to accelerate the development of wind and solar energy by 50 % in 2022 and 2023.

On 2 November 2021, the federal government approved the strategy on hydrogen (Stratégie hydrogène / Waterstofstrategie) to make Belgium a hub for the import and transit of green hydrogen. In particular, the roll-out of a 'hydrogen backbone' from the Belgian ports to the Belgian industrial areas and into Germany will be accelerated, and there will be close cooperation with the private sector. Wallonia has also decided on investment projects in the production and distribution capacity of Liège Airport and in the development of the chain, which includes production, transport and consumption in the economic sectors. In November 2020, Flanders published a Flemish vision on hydrogen.⁵ In it, the Flemish government described the vision and strategy for making Flanders a leader in the field of hydrogen. Here, the Flemish government resolutely focuses on sustainable innovation. Through research and innovation, it must provide the necessary support for the production and use of sustainable hydrogen technologies in the coming years. Innovation will lower the cost of those technologies so that it can play an important role in the sustainable transition away from fossil fuels. With the approval of the Flemish concept memo on carbon capture, utilisation and storage (Conceptnota CCUS) on 26 November 2021, the Flemish government also wants to accelerate the roll-out of CCUS in the region. Seven leverage actions are used, including the development of suitable CCUS infrastructure, as well as the development of the regulatory framework for the transport of CO₂. Furthermore, cooperation with pioneering CCUS countries such as Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark is being expanded.

In order to increase the production of solar energy, the federal government decided on 18 March 2022 to reduce VAT on solar panels, heat pumps and boilers to 6 % (2022–2023). In order to accelerate the energy transition, a tax reform of the sustainable investment deduction will be implemented, in parallel with proposals to activate the savings of Belgians. Wallonia has adopted a new thermal energy policy and will develop geothermal projects.

For several months, the entire European Union has been facing a sharp rise in energy prices, which has been accelerated by the war currently raging between

5 Communication to the Flemish government concerning the Flemish hydrogen vision «Europese koploper via duurzame innovatie», VR 2020 1311 MED.0357/1BIS

Russia and Ukraine. In order to support the financial capacity of households, the Belgian federal government has adopted a package of measures estimated at more than 2 billion euros until 30 September 2022: a social rate for almost 20 % of the population and an exceptional preventive reinforcement of the social fund, a temporary reduction of the VAT rate from 21 % to 6 % for residential electricity, gas and heating network contracts, a one-off cheque of 200 euros per home heated by fuel oil/propane/butane and a reform of excise duties on natural gas and electricity (programme law of 27 December 2021). The Flemish government is committed to a structural reduction of the policy costs that are passed on through energy bills. In 2022, more than 165 million euros in policy costs were removed from the electricity bill.

Measures have also been taken in the regions to support the fight against energy poverty. In Wallonia, the bonus for rational and efficient energy use for low-income households was strengthened, and the categories of beneficiaries were expanded. In the Brussels-Capital Region, significant resources are also allocated to a just transition in the fight against energy and water poverty. In the coming years, the Flemish government wants to make an extra effort to reduce energy poverty. On 10 December 2021, as part of the new energy poverty plan (Energiearmoedeplan 2025), the Flemish government approved a vision memo with concrete measures to structurally combat energy poverty in Flanders. The focus is mainly on measures that improve the energy efficiency of the homes of vulnerable households and thus lead to lower energy bills. In addition, curative actions ensure that when households do accumulate energy debts, assistance can be provided in time to prevent disconnection.

The regions are raising their ambitions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and are therefore contributing to the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). For sectors not covered by the emissions trading scheme (non-ETS sector), the Brussels-Capital Region (climate ordinance of 17 June 2021) and the Flemish Region are revising their target to -40 % by 2030 (compared to 2005). An increase was also announced in the Walloon government's agreement. On 16 September 2021, the Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation also approved its cross-cutting ecological transition plan, which aims to strengthen actions and set ambitious targets, such as carbon neutrality by 2050, a 55 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (compared to 1990) and the adoption of sustainable adaptation measures necessary for the preservation of biodiversity. One of the six priority axes of this plan concerns the energy efficiency of buildings through the renovation of building infrastructure in various sectors: school buildings, cultural buildings, sports centres and youth services. For school buildings in particular, in addition to the usual budgets (approx. 180 million euros per year) and the budgets allocated under the RRF (295 million euros), a 10-year strategic renovation plan, will be financed at a cost of 1 billion euros.

As far as the regions' measures are concerned, two sectors in particular are involved: transport (see Section 3.4.2 on mobility) and real estate. As regards the latter, the Flemish Region has announced several major reforms, such as the phasing out of fossil fuels in new buildings (obligation of hybrid heat pumps from January 2023 and ban on heating with fossil fuels from January 2026) and the obligation to renovate private houses when changing owners from January 2023 onwards, in order to reach at least energy label D within 5 years. Those who renovate their homes to label D will be able to apply for an interest-free renovation loan/energy loan of up to 20,000 euros. Those who renovate to label C or higher are entitled to a negative interest rate for 10 years. A Flemish climate fund (Klimaatfonds) will support the realisation of the non-ETS objectives through a public-private co-financing mechanism to create a leverage effect. The Brussels-Capital Region is also committed to a strategy to reduce the environmental impact of buildings (Renovatiestrategie / Stratégie rénovation, 350 million euros) with the launch of a RENOLUTION alliance to mobilise, coordinate and initiate public, private and association actors around concerted actions related to the challenges of the renovation strategy. This strategy will make it possible to achieve an average energy performance level of 100 kWh/m²/year by 2050 for all Brussels homes, i.e. an average consumption divided by 3 or 4 compared to the current situation. The region is also pursuing carbon neutrality for public buildings through the RenoClick programme. In Wallonia, several investments are aimed at supporting the renovation policy of both public and private buildings. For citizens, the Ecopack/Renopack scheme was extended by 84 million euros in 2021, giving them access to interest-free loans, while an additional effort of 89 million euros has been allocated for the period 2021–2024 for a system of simplified premiums for small-scale works of less than 3,000 euros, with an increase for low-income families. Several calls for projects also aim to improve the energy performance of public buildings: local authorities, sports infrastructures, public housing, etc. Wallonia is also investing in supporting the transition of companies to low-carbon energy through guidance and financing schemes.

Under the NECP, one component relates to the reduction of energy consumption in federal government buildings. The 2021–2024 multiannual plan for the real estate needs of the public buildings' agency (Regie der Gebouwen / Régie des bâtiments) allocates funds for optimising the occupancy of office buildings, constructing and renovating various buildings to meet current standards, replacing lighting with LEDs, and installing charging infrastructure for electric vehicles as well as solar panels.

In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the plan defines six lines of action aligned per sector and per institution, on mobility, real estate infrastructure, public procurement, behavioural changes, training and awareness, as well as one on cross-cutting measures. Young people, who are strongly committed to and aware

of climate issues, will be approached, for example, through awareness-raising campaigns or the development of environmental projects.

4.2. Mobility

In order to temporarily stop the skyrocketing prices of petroleum products, the special excise duty on petrol and diesel has been reduced by 17.5 cents per litre (including VAT). This measure entered into force on 19 March 2022 and will end on 30 September 2022. If the prices fall below 1.70 euros/litre within this period, a regular clearing system is provided for, whereby the special excise duty rate will be gradually brought back to the level it was at before the special measure was introduced. The cost of this measure is 2 million euros per day for diesel and 1.26 million euros per day for petrol.

The law of 25 November 2021 on the tax and social greening of mobility provides for several important measures. Firstly, the reform of the tax and social system for company cars allows both the greening of the car fleet and the strengthening of the attractiveness of the alternative system, the mobility allowance (Mobiliteitsbudget / Budget mobilité). The current system for combustion engine cars will be limited to zero-emission cars from 2026 onwards, notably through a gradual phasing out of the rate of deductibility of professional expenses related to the use of combustion engine cars. Other notable measures in this law are the gradual reduction until 2026 of the reimbursement amounts for professional diesel and a reduction of the administrative burden for electric vehicle charging points.

In addition to the 365 million euros earmarked for the railway sector within the framework of the NRRP, the federal government approved on 25 February 2022 investment projects of the railway companies SNCB/NMBS and Infrabel totalling 250 million euros for the years 2022 to 2024, within the framework of the Belgian recovery and transition plan. Of this amount, 180 million is specifically earmarked for investments to facilitate freight traffic. This primarily covers an innovation project for the development of a 'low-cost' signalling system, necessary maintenance and repair works on rail connections for companies connected to the railway, as well as expansion works in ports and, in some cases, new installations.

To support the modal shift of freight transport to rail, the programme law of 27 December 2021 provides for a measure to reduce infrastructure charges in favour of rail freight transport. The mechanism consists of a linear reduction of up to 1.20 euros per train kilometre actually travelled on the Belgian railway network for the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025, with an evaluation in 2023 of its impact on the competitiveness of the Belgian rail freight sector.

The modal shift from freight transport by road to transport by water is a priority for Flanders and Wallonia, and it is being achieved through major investments in the infrastructure for inland navigation. In December 2021, the Walloon Region

also approved a memo on the ambitious Seine-Scheldt cross-border navigation project (579.9 million euros in total) to request European co-financing for the first third of the investments. As part of the Flemish recovery plan (Vlamse veerkracht), the Flemish government is investing 164 million euros in various projects to promote modal shift to the waterways.

For passenger transport, the regions want to strengthen active mobility. Flanders aims to become a real cycling region, with investments in cycling infrastructure (250 million euros), sustainable mobility projects (385 million euros) and safe transport infrastructure (200 million euros). In addition, the Flemish government is making funds available for the co-financing of municipal cycling infrastructure (150 million euros). Wallonia is allocating 61.2 million euros to enable a selection of 116 municipalities to develop a policy for the development of bicycle use in daily life, as well as new drawing rights of 210 million euros for all Walloon municipalities for investments in infrastructure for active transport modes and intermodality. In addition, the increase in premiums for the purchase of bicycles for commuting and the adoption of a bicycle action plan (Plan d'action vélos) in April 2022 are intended to promote this means of transport even more. The Brussels-Capital Region attaches particular importance to improving air quality, which it mainly analyses through a citizens' survey launched in 2021 entitled *Curieuzenair*. To this end, the Brussels government has tightened the criteria for the exclusion of polluting vehicles from its low emission zone (LEZ) for 2025–2036 (ban on diesel vehicles from 2030 and on petrol vehicles from 2035), and in parallel, it has adopted a strategy of accompanying measures to decarbonise transport. Investments in cycling and pedestrian infrastructure will continue.

Finally, the three regions are investing in public transport. In the Brussels-Capital Region, more than 5 billion euros are earmarked for its 2015-2025 multiannual investment plan (Plan pluriannuel d'investissements pour les transports publics / Meerjareninvesteringsplan voor het openbaar vervoer). In Wallonia, the emphasis is on the gradual introduction of free public transport for certain groups (young people, the elderly and the disadvantaged), while ensuring that the offer is reorganised and adapted to the needs of citizens. Large-scale investments in infrastructure and rolling stock are planned. For the next 5 years (2022–2026), the Walloon public transport company Transport en Commun (TEC) wants to allocate more than 1.1 billion euros to the improvement of Walloon public transport. The Flemish government also invested in public transport in 2021, allocating a budget of 93 million euros for the electrification of the bus fleet of the Flemish public transport company De Lijn as part of its recovery plan (Vlaamse veerkracht).

In the coming years, Flanders will be greening its road infrastructure: 90 million euros will be invested in LED lighting. This innovative lighting is not only energy-efficient, but also requires less maintenance. As part of the greening of the road infrastructure and the transition to zero-emission transport, in July 2021 the Flemish government approved the new policy vision Clean Power for Transport

2030 (Op weg naar zero-emissie vervoer). In this context, the Flemish government is providing 30 million euros from the recovery funds for the accelerated roll-out of charging infrastructure. In Wallonia, a public lighting replacement programme has been running since 2019 (www.luwa.be).

4.3. Sustainability

At the federal level, the government adopted a new action plan for the circular economy at the end of 2021. This plan aims to seize the opportunities that the circular economy offers in terms of innovation, job creation and competitiveness in Belgium. The transition to a circular economy also helps in the fight against climate change, the loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation.

The regions are in the process of reforming the traceability of material and waste flows. The Flemish government's ambition is to be a forerunner in Europe in the field of the circular economy by 2030. The circular economy is one of the seven transition priorities of the fourth Flemish sustainable development strategy (Vlaamse strategie voor duurzame ontwikkeling, VSDO4). The materials information system (MATIS) is currently being developed in Flanders. In addition, Flanders is developing several action plans for the coming years, such as the policy programme on circular construction (Op weg naar circulair bouwen), the implementation plan for local materials management and the reduction of disposable packaging in the retail sector. In Wallonia, a Walloon decree of June 2021 improves the management of excavated land. Other initiatives are aimed at improving the circular and low-carbon economy: 67 million euros will be allocated to the development of platforms for industrial excellence, particularly in the construction and metallurgy sectors; 37.5 million euros will finance waste prevention projects through eco-design and recycling innovation; several sustainable materials and construction projects will be supported; the financing mechanism for circular economy companies will be strengthened; and, finally, a new independent circular economy council (Conseil de l'économie circulaire), will provide an external vision of the Circular Wallonia policy. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the roll-out of the regional programme for the circular economy (Programme régional en économie circulaire, PREC / Gewestelijk programma voor circulaire economie, GPCE) and its 111 measures made it possible to support 471 small, medium and large enterprises through coaching sessions, with 213 organisations receiving financial support in the form of grants or subsidies totalling 14 million euros. The activities carried out within this framework have resulted in raising awareness among or training of 3,200 people, including 2,000 students, during the four years of the PREC/GPCE's operation. The launch of a call for projects allowing innovators to test the feasibility of their urban mining project made it possible to close the funding gap in the circular economy innovation pathway by working at a stage upstream of the innovation chain. The elaboration of a transition strategy for the economy will make it possible to continue all these PREC/GPCE improvements from 2022 onwards.

4.4. Implementation of the NRRP

The first axis of the NRRP comprises a series of measures contributing to the transition to a low-carbon society. With regard to the development of renewable energy sources, the federal government's Backbone for H₂ & CO₂ (I-1.14) investment plan is currently being worked on and should be completed on time. In parallel, the Royal Decree for the call for projects aimed at an industrial value chain for the hydrogen economy (I-1.15) was forwarded to the Council of State. The FEED and environmental studies for the construction of an offshore energy island (I-1.21) are also expected to be completed as planned. Political discussions on the entry into force of the new gas law are currently taking place, which will delay the achievement of the relevant milestone by several months (R-1.04). The building renovation programmes of the various governments have got off to a good start, with the approval of the regulatory framework relating to the improved energy subsidy scheme of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region (R-1.02), as well as the approval of the legislation relating to renovation subsidies in Flanders (R-1.01). In the area of sustainable mobility, two railway infrastructure projects (I-3.09 and I-3.10) were launched, which will result in more accessible stations and a more efficient railway network, as agreed. The federal measures to promote more environmentally friendly travel (R-3.02, I-3.18, R-3.03) were adopted as a single package at the end of November 2021. In Flanders, the framework for the roll-out of charging stations has been established (R-3.06) and several concessions have already been awarded (I-3.19). The approval of a plan for the roll-out of this infrastructure is expected soon in the Brussels-Capital Region (R-3.05), as well as the strategy and the Walloon mapping (R-3.04).

5. Social protection and inclusion

5.1. Federal and regional measures

In 2019, the degree of risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in Belgium was 20 % and in 2020 it was 20.3 %. These figures cannot be compared to previous years due to changes in the underlying data and definition. Previously, AROPE rose between 2009 and 2012, then remained stable and fell slightly between 2015 and 2018 to finish just above the starting level for the Europe 2020 target. Severe material deprivation decreased slightly, as did the percentage of people living in a household (pretty much) without paid employment. However, the monetary poverty risk increased under the Europe 2020 strategy. Weaker groups in the labour market were harder hit by COVID-19, but overall the social impact of the pandemic seems to have been well cushioned by policy measures.

At the federal level, important measures were taken in the past year in the field of social security and social assistance. Raising the lowest benefits towards the poverty line is a key objective of the federal government. In the period 2021 to

2024, the income guarantee for the elderly, the integration allowance and the income-substituting allowance for the disabled are being increased by 2.68 % each January. These increases are in addition to the increases due to indexation and the prosperity adjustment. The minimum pensions are being raised by 2.65 % each year according to the same timetable, towards 1,500 euros net for someone who has had a full working lifetime. In the pension system for the self-employed, the correction coefficient, which is used to calculate the pension, has been abolished for career years from 2021 so that the self-employed build up a pension in the same way as employees. For most elderly people, the social benefits of the statutory pension system are the main, often the only, component of their income. Therefore, they must allow a good standard of living. Young people and the working-age population must also have the prospect of this. The pension reform will pay attention to the most vulnerable groups of the population and will strive to reduce gender inequalities as much as possible. As a result of the coronavirus crisis, an exceptional benefit has been granted at least until the end of March 2022 to the beneficiaries of social assistance: the (equivalent) living wage, the income replacement and integration allowance for persons with disabilities, and the income guarantee for the elderly. Also, at least until the end of March 2022, when calculating the integration allowance for persons with disabilities, the exemption for temporary unemployment benefit is being equated with the exemption for earned income. Additional federal funding has been provided to the public centres of social welfare (Centres publics d'action sociale, CPAS / Openbare centra voor maatschappelijk welzijn, OCMW) to support the mental health and well-being of youth and students. On 1 February 2022, the exemption threshold of the professional and replacement income when calculating the integration allowance for persons with disabilities (price of labour) was raised.

At all levels of government, plans for combating poverty and promoting social inclusion are being implemented or prepared. On 16 July 2021, the federal government adopted a 2021-2024 disability action plan (Actieplan handicap / Plan d'action handicap). The plan aims to strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities in society and includes 145 measures covering all aspects of life (dealing with the coronavirus crisis, health and social protection, work, accessibility, mobility, etc.). The federal government is also preparing an ambitious action plan to combat poverty (Plan d'action de lutte contre la pauvreté / Actieplan armoedebestrijding), focusing on four themes: prevention and early detection of poverty; protection against poverty and guarantee of a decent life; emancipation and inclusion of all in an evolving society; and coordination with the European Social Agenda. Cross-cutting points of attention are the gender dimension and cooperation with poverty organisations. The plan will include measures related to the reduction of non-take-up. The 2020-2024 Flemish action plan for combating poverty (Vlaams actieplan armoedebestrijding), approved by the Flemish government in 2020, focuses on a limited number of priority, government-wide and integrated strategic objectives on combating under-provision and child

poverty, activating and empowering people and increasing self-reliance, reducing people's risk of ending up in poverty in the event of sudden changes in their lives, and providing a high-quality, liveable and healthy environment for all. With its plan on living together (Plan samenleven), the Flemish government wants to support local administrations more efficiently and effectively, on the basis of clear objectives and well-defined actions, to make living together in diversity a success. The plan defines 7 objectives and outlines 24 actions for which local governments can be supported financially and with capacity-building during the period 2022–2024. In October 2021, the Walloon government adopted its plan to fight poverty (Plan de sortie de la pauvreté), which aims to provide every Walloon with the means to gradually move out of poverty. It aims at access to social-professional integration, housing and welfare for all. A cross-cutting section contains measures that fall under all Walloon competences. At the beginning of 2022, the government awarded a grant for the implementation of the 195 local government social cohesion plans. These aim to reduce precarity and inequalities by promoting effective access to fundamental rights for all. The Brussels-Capital Region is working on an integrated Brussels well-being and health plan: Brussels Takes Care. This plan applies to all competent entities in the Brussels territory. It reflects a territorial approach to welfare and health action, placing the CPAS/OCMWs at the centre of the roll-out of the policy to combat inequalities and poverty. The Brussels government is expected to approve this plan in 2022. It will be a compass that can be used to guide social health policy in an integrated and coherent way across the whole territory. In May 2021, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation launched a call for projects aimed at fighting poverty and reducing social inequalities. Particular attention is paid to projects aimed at preventing and/or reducing the impact of the coronavirus crisis on people living in poverty.

There are important new developments in the field of social protection policy with regard to children and single-parent families. A national child guarantee plan (Plan national de garantie pour l'enfance / Nationaal kindergarantieplan) is being prepared. This plan is part of the European Child Guarantee, which aims to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion of children in need by guaranteeing access to a set of key services in the areas of education and care, healthcare, nutrition and housing. The aim is to achieve close cooperation and exchange of good practice between the different policy levels. Within the framework of the plan, the federal minister responsible for the fight against poverty is supporting projects to combat child poverty at 10 CPAS/OCMWs between 2021 and 2023. At the end of 2021, a platform for combating child poverty was established to allow CPAS/OCMWs to exchange experiences. The Government of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels decided to strengthen the measure on free school meals and launched a new call for projects in October 2021 to offer free meals in kindergartens with children in greater difficulties for the first semester of 2022. It has also entered into a new management agreement with the Office de la naissance et de l'enfance (ONE). This new governance agreement aims to make more shelter

available in priority areas with low coverage (with attention to the situation of single-parent families, which are also largely women), but also to reduce shelter costs for low and middle-income earners. At the same time, measures are being taken to improve the quality of care: funding of the managements to transform the practices, cultural awakening aimed at the neighbourhood, and local networking by the frontline staff of the ONE. In 2021, a cross-cutting Brussels plan to support single-parent families was adopted to meet the needs of single-parent families in a coordinated and effective way, especially single women with children. The ambition is to activate as many regional levers as possible to develop innovative actions to help these families. At the federal level, the MIRIAM project, which aims to empower women in a situation of single parenthood who are entitled to an integration income, equivalent integration income or CPAS/OCMW support, is funded for the period 2022–2024. In the German-speaking Community, a restructuring of the Regionalzentrum für Kleinkinderbetreuung (RZKB) is being prepared, which should lead to the centralisation of childcare for children aged 0 to 3, the introduction of a fully-fledged statute for contracted childcare, good salary scales, legal and planning security for the RZKB and an allowance voted in parliament. In Flanders, extra investments are being made in accessible and high-quality youth infrastructure, so that more children and young people can enjoy decent meeting places in their immediate surroundings.

Various initiatives can also be mentioned in the area of housing. The Walloon government has taken several measures in the area of housing: an interest-free loan was created with which prospective tenants can put together their rental guarantee, and in the regulation for the granting of social mortgage loans, the access conditions were expanded. The Walloon government has also approved the proposal to elaborate an indicative table of rents for student residences in order to facilitate access and strengthen social inclusion. It has taken new measures to step up the fight against empty homes. In addition to building new public housing with a high environmental performance, the Walloon government has allocated more resources to the creation of shelters for specific groups and has updated the plan for permanent housing (Plan habitat permanent). With the call for projects for resilient cities (Veerkrachtige steden) in Flanders, cities can use urban regeneration projects to focus on economic revival and innovation, better quality public spaces and strengthened social relations and well-being. The inter-federal cooperation agreement on homelessness will be updated to encourage social innovation and increase the focus on Housing First projects. The federal ministers for metropolitan policy and the fight against poverty have provided funding for Housing First solutions for young people in large cities. As part of the fight against homelessness, the capacity for night shelters and counselling in housing for vulnerable groups in the Brussels-Capital Region rose from 2,607 in November 2019 to 4,446 on 1 December 2021. This general increase in reception and counselling capacity is not the result of an increased number of

emergency beds, but is related to the diversification of facilities with a view to quality.

As far as the integration of newcomers is concerned: in July 2021 the Flemish government revised the integration programme. Two pillars (pathway to work and social networking) were added to the existing pillars (social orientation and Dutch as a second language). The new integration policy emphasises increased economic and social self-reliance, thorough acquisition of the Dutch language and knowledge of Flemish society, values and norms. In the Brussels-Capital Region, several amending decrees have been issued to implement the Ordinance of the Joint Community Commission of 11 May 2017 introducing a compulsory integration path for newcomers. This compulsory procedure must be operational by 1 May 2022.

5.2. Implementation of the NRRP

In the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, social cohesion in particular is the subject of integrated measures in Axis 4. In addition to the measures in the field of education and digital inclusion already discussed above, the achievement of the first milestone of the Walloon Region's project for the construction of public utility housing and housing for vulnerable people should be mentioned in this area (I-4.12). At the federal level, there is progress in the discussions on pension reform (R-4.07).

4. Progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. Governance to achieve the SDGs

The strategies and policies for sustainable development (SD) of the communities and the regions and of the federal level are coordinated through the national strategy for sustainable development and within the interministerial conference on sustainable development. Advisory councils on sustainable development, consisting of civil society representatives, are active within each entity. Progress towards the SDGs is monitored through indicators published by the Interfederal Institute of Statistics and the Federal Planning Bureau at www.indicators.be.

At the federal level, the 1997 law on coordination of sustainable development policy aims to achieve sustainable development goals through a strategy with a five-year cycle. Of the bodies created by this law, the interdepartmental commission on sustainable development coordinates the actions of the federal government departments. In October 2021, the government adopted a new federal plan for sustainable development (Federaal plan voor duurzame ontwikkeling / Plan fédéral pour le développement durable), which focuses on interdepartmental measures and contributes to policy integration. The Federal Planning Bureau published a new report on sustainable development indicators in February 2022, which underlines that new policies will be needed to achieve all SDGs.

In November 2021, the Flemish Region approved its fourth Flemish sustainable development strategy (VSD04), with 'Vision 2050' as its long-term compass and 'Vizier 2030' as its focus. 'Vizier 2030' translates the SDGs into objectives for Flanders for 2030. Progress towards the SDGs is monitored annually using a set

4. Progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

of indicators.⁶ For the implementation of this fourth strategy, Flanders focuses on seven transition priorities (circular economy; living, learning and working in 2050; industry 4.0; living together in 2050; mobility; energy and climate; and environment for the future) and on multilevel governance. Flanders has developed strong governance with regard to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Local authorities are priority partners.

In the Walloon Region, the 2013 decree on the Walloon sustainable development strategy provides for the adoption of such a strategy by the Walloon government. The decree was amended in 2019. The SD strategies can now include thematic transitions, the first of which focuses on food (Manger demain). The third sustainable development strategy will be adopted in 2022, in cooperation with the new Walloon partnership for sustainable development, a multi-stakeholder dialogue body. In March 2020, the government adopted a second follow-up report on Wallonia's progress towards the SDGs, including recommendations.⁷ A third follow-up report will be published in 2022.

The Brussels-Capital Region defined its vision for 2040 with the adoption, in July 2018, of the regional plan for sustainable development (Plan régional de développement durable, PRDD / Gewestelijk plan voor duurzame ontwikkeling, GPDO), a strategic document that aims to achieve the SDGs in the Brussels Region. The PRDD/GPDO aims to provide an appropriate response to the challenges and concerns that Brussels faces as a metropolitan centre, including access to housing, functional and social diversity, different types of mobility or environmental issues. Other regulations also contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals through environmental and mobility measures, such as the Brussels air, climate and energy code (Code bruxellois de l'air, du climat et de la maîtrise de l'énergie, COBRACE / Brussels wetboek van lucht, klimaat en energie, BWLKE).

Since 2009, the regional development concept of the German-speaking Community (Ostbelgien leben 2025) has structured the long-term development vision in different implementation phases. The final five-year implementation phase 2019–2024 is linked to the SDGs. Through a participatory process, the German-speaking Community is working on a new long-term development strategy (Ostbelgien Leben 2040), which will address future challenges and will also be linked to the SDGs.

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels adopted an SD plan in 2010. In 2011 and 2016, two external audits on social responsibility were conducted. The management contract in preparation for the current legislature will be guided by the 17 SDGs and will herald the transition to cross-cutting and coordinated governance of the SD challenges.

6 https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/DKBUZA_Vizier2030_indicatoren_1.pdf

7 <http://developpementdurable.wallonie.be/bilan-des-progres>

2. Gaps in progress towards the SDGs

The European Commission (EC) has identified gaps in progress towards the SDGs.⁸ Moreover, of the 102 Eurostat SDG indicators, 10 have been selected as the worst performers in Belgium:

- the five indicators with the lowest ratio (or highest, depending on the direction of progress towards the target) to the EU average in the last year available (Table 3);
- the five indicators with the lowest (or highest) growth rate over the last five years, again compared to the EU average (Table 4).

Table 3 | Five worst performing indicators
last year, compared to EU average

Eurostat code	Name of the indicator
sdg_15_41	Soil cover index
sdg_06_50	Phosphate in river water
sdg_12_61	Gross value added in the environmental goods and services sector
sdg_02_60	Ammonia emissions from agriculture
sdg_12_50	Waste generation without the main mineral waste

Source | *FPB calculations based on Eurostat.*

Table 4 | Five worst performing indicators,
growth over last five years compared to EU average

Eurostat code	Name of the indicator
sdg_02_10	Obesity rate
sdg_06_30	Biochemical oxygen demand in river water
sdg_11_10	Overcrowding of dwellings
sdg_06_60	Water Withdrawal Index-plus (WEI+)
sdg_04_40	Insufficient proficiency in reading, mathematics and science: reading scores

Source | *FPB calculations based on Eurostat.*

In SDG 4 (Quality Education), several weaknesses have been identified. Firstly, «the percentage of young people who do not master basic skills, STEM and digital skills can be improved», as shown by the results of the PISA surveys (sdg_04_40). Adult participation in lifelong learning is low: this indicator (sdg_04_60) is 20 % below the EU average. Inequalities in educational outcomes have also been noted. In this

8 Analysis of Belgium's recovery and resilience plan, SWD(2021)172.

case, the distribution of the education indicators among the different population categories should be considered.

This raises questions about the digital transformation, as solid skills are needed to support it. The EC also highlights 5G and fibre connectivity (SDG 9) and the digital transformation of the justice system (SDG 16). The only SDG indicator in this area (Households with high-speed internet, *sdg_17_60*) performs better than the EU average, although it relates to a different facet of digital transformation.

Water quality (SDG 6) is also problematic. The water abstraction index-plus (*sdg_06_60*) is rising faster than the EU average. The concentrations of nitrate in groundwater (*sdg_06_40*) and phosphate in river water (*sdg_06_50*) are above the EU average. The EC points out the great pressure this situation puts on biodiversity (SDG 15). Other indicators that perform worst in Belgium contribute to this pressure, such as ammonia emissions from agriculture (*sdg_02_60*), biochemical oxygen demand in river water (*sdg_06_30*) and the soil cover index (*sdg_15_41*).

Regarding SDG 8, the EC points to the low employment rate (indicator *sdg_08_30*) and the recently rising unemployment rate (due to the coronavirus crisis). The EC also notes that «the significant proportion of young people not in employment, education or training is a cause for concern in Belgium», although this indicator (*sdg_08_20*) is below the EU average and falling faster. High public debt, with a recent increase due to the coronavirus crisis, is also a concern for the EC.

Eurostat also points to the challenge of achieving carbon neutrality. Belgium's net greenhouse gas emissions (*sdg_13_10*) are worse than the EU average, although this indicator is not one of the worst performers.

Of the SDG indicators selected by Eurostat, five others are among the worst performers as defined in this chapter. Regarding SDG 2, the obesity rate (*sdg_02_10*) in Belgium is increasing faster than in Europe. For SDG 11, the overcrowding of housing is increasing rapidly (*sdg_11_10*). For SDG 12, the indicator Gross value added in the environmental goods and services sector (*sdg_12_61*) was much lower than the EU average, while the indicator Waste generation excluding major mineral waste (*sdg_12_50*) was much higher than the EU average.

Box 2 | Synthesis of key actions contributing to the SDGs

This NRP contains many measures aimed at the most vulnerable groups in society, thus contributing in particular to the achievement of SDGs 1, 5 and 10, such as measures in the field of social security (Section 3.5), with a particular focus on disabled people, children and single-parent families. This includes measures related to the coronavirus crisis (Section 3.1), such as temporary replacement incomes, which have also supported the productive fabric (SDG 8). It also concerns education and training (SDG 4 and 8), with particular attention for pupils with special needs (Section 3.2.2) and for training for the least qualified workers as well as accompanying measures for the long-term unemployed (Section 3.2.1). Several measures (Section 3.4.1) address energy access and insulation of buildings, including for the most vulnerable categories of people (SDG 1, 7, 10, 11 and 13).

Particular attention is also paid to digitalisation. This concerns support to certain sectors such as hospitals and the retail trade (Section 3.3.2). The strengthening of digital skills is also on the education and training agenda (Section 3.2.2). This should contribute to SDGs 8 and 9. When implementing digitisation, attention should be paid to the energy consumption of the equipment to remain compatible with the energy targets of SDG 7.

The modal shift, both for goods to rail and for passengers to active modes and public transport (SDG 9, 10, 11 and 13), also receives special attention (Section 3.4.2). The same applies to the circular economy (Section 3.4.3, SDG 8, 12, 15).

5. Use of the Structural Funds

1. REACT-EU

Belgium received an additional 258.8 million euros through REACT-EU for the 2014–2020 programming period. These funds are dedicated at ESF level to the socio-economic integration of jobseekers, especially vulnerable groups affected by the crisis. For the ERDF, funds were allocated in the three regions for the digital switchover and innovation, with a particular focus on SMEs. In Brussels, the focus was on the tourism, culture and events sectors, and in Flanders on the digital transition of the culture sector. Flanders and Wallonia have also strengthened their measures on the green transition and the circular economy. Finally, Wallonia spent part of its funds on the purchase of medical equipment for health services.

2. Programming 2021- 2027

For the period 2021–2027, Belgium will receive a budget of 2,320.4 million euros in European co-financing under the Investment for Jobs and Growth objective and 182.6 million euros under the Just Transition Fund. The preparation of programming is under way in the various governments involved, with the preparation of programming documents and first calls for projects, which will take place in the first half of 2022.

As far as the ERDF is concerned, the funds will be concentrated primarily on the strategic objectives of a smarter and greener Europe, through measures supporting innovation, the development of SMEs and entrepreneurship, digital transformation, the development of the circular economy, the low-carbon transition and the reduction of pollution. Depending on the region, they will also focus on mobility, the development of training infrastructures and local development.

5. Use of the Structural Funds

For ESF+, the priorities in Wallonia and Brussels are: improving access to employment and job creation, promoting lifelong learning, social innovation, implementing the European Youth Guarantee, combating poverty, including child poverty, and social inclusion and de-institutionalisation. In Flanders, the programme adopted at the end of 2021 consists of five priorities: access to the labour market, social inclusion, lifelong learning, investing in sustainable jobs and an inclusive labour market, and social innovation.

For the territorial cooperation component, Belgium will be able to count on total co-financing of 374.3 million euros. The priorities identified for these programmes are mainly based on six strategic objectives, which cover developing and improving research and innovation capacities and the use of advanced technologies, enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, adapting to climate change, supporting renewable energy sources, sustainable mobility, enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation, and reinforcing good governance in cooperation programmes. The Interreg B programme for North-West Europe has been approved and the first call for projects will be launched at the end of March 2022.

6. Institutional process and stakeholder engagement

The elaboration of the NRP is the result of an intensive and fruitful cooperation between the federal government and the regional and community governments. These in turn have involved various actors in developing their own contribution to the NRP (Annexes 1 to 5). Also during the fact-finding mission of the European Commission on 24 and 25 February 2022, there was intense cooperation between the federal government and the regional and community governments.

At the Belgian level, good coordination between the different levels of power for the implementation of the reforms is ensured by the Consultative Committee (Overlegcomité / Comité de concertation), which provides the institutional framework necessary for this structured coordination. It is also the Consultative Committee that finally approved this NRP on 27 April. The coordination between the different levels of competence also results in cooperation agreements between the federal state and the communities and regions or among the communities and regions themselves within their respective areas of competence. Between April 2021 and April 2022, as in previous years, numerous cooperation agreements were concluded, including in the fields of public health, epidemical crisis management, mobility, sports.

Dialogue and mutual cooperation with the different sectors of our economy is a priority for the different governments. The social partners and civil society were also consulted in the drafting of this NRP and requested certain documents to be annexed to it (Annex 6).

Belgium has a strong tradition of collective bargaining and social dialogue. For example, the social partners are constantly concluding collective agreements (Conventions collectives de travail, CCT / Collectieve arbeidsovereenkomsten, CAOs) and other agreements at inter-sectoral, sectoral and company levels. They are also represented in the management committee of most social security

6. Institutional process and stakeholder engagement

institutions, as well as in the federal and regional consultative bodies. Moreover, they are informed and consulted by the authorities at all levels on all policy areas that affect them. Often, they are also asked to participate concretely in the implementation of the policies adopted by the government. The 1996 law gives the Central Council of the Economy (CCE/CRB) the permanent task of monitoring Belgium's competitiveness. According to this law, which was amended in 2017, the CCE/CRB must also prepare a report on competitiveness and employment.

This involvement of the social partners is not limited to the national level. The regions and communities also organise, each according to their own practice, consultations with the social partners in the framework of the European Semester. In addition, at the European level, the social partners are involved in the dynamics of the European Semester through the contacts and hearings organised at the Council level via the Belgian representatives in the European committees. The social interlocutors are thus closely involved in the work through their representative in the Employment Committee (EMCO) and Social Protection Committee (SPC). Meetings between the members of the CCE/CRB, the national labour council (Conseil national du travail, CNT / Nationale arbeidsraad, NAR) and the Commission's Belgian Desk also take place at key moments in the European semester.

In the context of this consultation dynamic, the social partners will, as in the past, also be consulted between the publication of the draft recommendations per Member State and the discussion of this text in the committees and bodies of the Council.

In addition, the European Commission itself is organising regular meetings with the social partners, including in the run-up to the drafting of the Country Report, and the Belgian partner organisations have always been very active in their respective umbrella organisations.

The development and implementation of policies within the framework of the European semester, particularly in the areas of employment and social policy, is generally carried out in cooperation with the social partners. This may take the form of prior recommendations on proposed policies, such as federal measures, or prior agreements between the social partners, which are then translated into regulations.

7. Annexes

Annex 1 | Walloon Region

Annex 2 | Flemish Region and Flemish Community

Annex 3 | Brussels Capital Region

Annex 4 | German-speaking Community

Annex 5 | French Community

Annex 6 | Advice of the CCE/CRB and the CNT/NAR



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**SEMESTRE EUROPÉEN
CONTRIBUTION DE LA WALLONIE AU PROGRAMME
NATIONAL DE RÉFORME BELGE 2022**

31 Mars 2022



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1. INTRODUCTION

La Wallonie est étroitement associée au processus de rédaction du PNR belge, notamment au travers de sa participation aux instances préparatoires (comité de pilotage et comité de rédaction). La présente contribution reprend les principales mesures et réformes pertinentes pour la Wallonie depuis avril 2021.

Le Gouvernement wallon a approuvé fin octobre 2021 son Plan de relance, doté d'un budget de 7,644 milliards d'euros d'ici 2024. Il prévoit un ensemble de mesures d'investissements et de réforme visant à répondre aux enjeux de relance et de reconstruction de la Wallonie, en abordant les besoins liés à la triple transition économique, sociale et environnementale. Il constitue donc le principale cadre de référence pour les mesures détaillées dans cette contribution (chapitre 2).

Ce plan rassemble les mesures (1) du Plan wallon de transition, (2) de Get up Wallonia, (3) de la Facilité pour la Reprise et la Résilience et (4) liés à la reconstruction des zones sinistrées par les inondations.

Le Plan de relance pour la Wallonie se structure comme suit :

- Miser sur la jeunesse et les talents de Wallonie (1,275 milliard €) ;
- Assurer la soutenabilité environnementale (2,428 milliards €) ;
- Amplifier le développement économique (1,196 milliard €) ;
- Soutenir le bien-être, la solidarité et l'inclusion sociale (1,883 milliard €) ;
- Garantir une gouvernance innovante et participative (124 millions €) ;
- Soutenir la reconstruction et la résilience des territoires sinistrés (738 millions €).

Ces montants sont sous réserve de la fixation définitive de l'enveloppe de la Facilité par la Commission. A ces montants viennent s'ajouter les budgets des Fonds structurels, qui sont abordés au chapitre 3.

Une gouvernance rigoureuse du Plan a été mise en place afin d'assurer sa mise en œuvre efficace. Un premier rapport de suivi a été élaboré en décembre 2021. Au niveau du suivi budgétaire, la Cellule d'Information financière (CIF) et la Cellule d'appui au monitoring auront pour mission d'assurer le suivi des exercices budgétaires, tant en dépenses qu'en recettes, ainsi que la préparation des projections budgétaires sur la base desquelles auront lieu les travaux du Gouvernement.

2. POLITIQUES ET APPROCHES CONCERNANT LES PRINCIPAUX DEVELOPPEMENTS ET DEFIS ECONOMIQUES

2.1. *Assainissement et durabilité des finances publiques*

Le Gouvernement a présenté un budget qui respecte la trajectoire de retour à l'équilibre budgétaire en 2024 pour ce qui concerne la gouvernance ordinaire de la Région (c'est-à-dire hors dépenses COVID, Inondations et Relance). Dès la confection du budget initial 2022, une attention toute particulière a été portée sur la soutenabilité de la dette wallonne, suite au travail de la Commission Externe de la Dette notamment.

La stratégie de soutenabilité de la dette sera graduelle afin d'en minimiser l'impact économique, intelligente (assurer un équilibre entre efficacité et équité des mesures) et surtout inscrite dans la durée, pour réduire la vulnérabilité aux chocs. Concrètement, un effort structurel cumulatif de réduction du déficit à 1% des recettes (environ 150 millions par an) est prévu. C'est le cas pour le budget 2022 pour lequel le solde brut à financer est de 4,134 milliards d'euros, avec une trajectoire ordinaire (c'est-à-dire hors dépenses COVID, Inondations et Relance) de 207 millions d'euros.



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Cet effort se traduirait structurellement par une stabilisation du ratio d'endettement dès 2024, avec une inflexion positive à partir de 2026.

Trajectoire ordinaire (hors dépenses COVID, Inondations et Relance)

2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
-435 millions	-400 millions	-207 millions	-274 millions	0 millions

Ces efforts budgétaires seront soutenus par l'exercice du **Budget 'Base zéro'** lancé en 2020, et qui se clôturera mi-2022. Il a été déployé en 4 vagues couvrant les différents domaines de compétences régionales. Les trois premières vagues d'analyse sont terminées, la quatrième est en cours.

Un nouveau **décret fiscal** visant à lutter plus efficacement contre des pratiques destinées à échapper et/ou à contourner certains impôts a été adopté en novembre 2021 et est entré en vigueur au 1^{er} janvier 2022.

Celui-ci instaure notamment une disposition générale anti-abus pour prévenir tous les cas dans lesquels l'intention du législateur wallon ne serait volontairement pas rencontrée.

La procédure wallonne est également dotée de délais de lutte contre la fraude allongée et d'un système d'amendes en matières fiscales plus efficace et transversal. Ce nouveau décret fiscal comporte aussi des dispositions visant à limiter les abus en matière de droits de succession et de droits d'enregistrement ainsi que diverses mesures en matière de fiscalité automobile.

Afin de faire face à l'augmentation attendue des dépenses de **soins de longue durée**, un ensemble de mesures sont mises en place, visant différents axes de travail : la promotion de la santé et la prévention qui contribuent à la réduction des dépenses, le développement et la diversification de l'offre de places alternatives aux établissements de soin de longue durée (50.000 places), et la collecte de données permettant un suivi du vieillissement et de son impact. Le décret opérationnalisant le Plan de promotion de la santé à l'horizon 2030 a été modifié en février 2022 pour renforcer la promotion de la santé. Le Gouvernement a également adopté en février 2022 une stratégie de désinstitutionnalisation et un plan d'action (« Stratégie pour des parcours de vie intégrés des personnes en perte d'autonomie »). L'AVIQ est chargée de mettre en œuvre le plan d'action et de proposer au Gouvernement une méthodologie d'évaluation pour la fin du 1^{er} semestre 2022. Il s'agit en outre d'une priorité de la nouvelle programmation FSE+. Par ailleurs, un dialogue sur l'avenir du vieillissement a été lancé en 2021, et va aborder différents enjeux du secteur avec les parties prenantes.

2.2. *Amélioration de l'efficacité des politiques actives du marché du travail et développement des compétences*

Le Gouvernement a poursuivi ses réformes visant à renforcer **l'efficacité des politiques actives d'insertion sur le marché du travail**, notamment à destination des **personnes les plus éloignées de l'emploi et des jeunes**, ainsi qu'à répondre aux situations de pénurie de main d'œuvre et à soutenir le développement des compétences.

Les orientations du futur contrat de gestion 2022-2027 du Forem validées en janvier 2022, sur base des résultats d'évaluation interne et externe, s'inscrivent dans cette perspective. Le Forem devra contribuer, avec les opérateurs économiques publics et privés ainsi que les partenaires de l'insertion professionnelle et de la formation, à relever trois principaux défis : contribuer à relever le taux d'emploi en Wallonie, notamment des chômeurs de longue durée ; fluidifier les transitions du marché du travail en contribuant à élever le niveau de compétences des demandeurs d'emploi ; et contribuer à recruter pour les secteurs en croissance et en pénurie.



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La réforme TIM du Forem – Talents, Impulsion, Mobilisation – est concrétisée par l’adoption en novembre 2021 du Décret sur l’amélioration de l’accompagnement des personnes vers l’emploi. Cette réforme, entrée en vigueur au 1^{er} janvier 2022, vise la mise en place d’un parcours d’orientation et de coaching personnalisés avec des professionnels spécialisés dans différents secteurs d’activités (construction, industrie technologique, transport et logistique, Horeca, santé, soins aux personnes...), un meilleur matching entre candidats et offres d’emplois, la création de «profils emploi» en ligne, le screening des talents et projets de chacun, un accompagnement spécifique pour les personnes les plus éloignées de l’emploi en partenariat avec des opérateurs comme les centres d’insertion socioprofessionnelle, les Missions régionales pour l’emploi ou encore des structures ayant développé une expertise dans l’approche de problématiques d’assuétude, de handicap ou de santé mentale.

Un budget de 3,3 millions d’euros a été dégagé pour renforcer le soutien des chercheurs d’emploi ayant des problématiques de santé mentale et les accompagner. Par ailleurs, afin de répondre aux difficultés d’insertion dans l’emploi des personnes au chômage de longue durée, le Gouvernement a adopté en 1^{ère} lecture en février 2022 la réforme des Missions Régionales pour l’Emploi (MIRE), qui accompagnent les personnes éloignées de l’emploi. Un budget de 2,5 millions d’euros est prévu dans le cadre du plan de relance pour concrétiser cette réforme.

Dans le même objectif, le Gouvernement a décidé d’élargir et de pérenniser la mesure Tremplin 24 mois+, initialement développée dans le cadre de la crise sanitaire et réservée à certains secteurs fortement impactés. Celle-ci est étendue, depuis le 1^{er} janvier 2022, à tous les employeurs privés, publics et associatifs¹. Celle-ci consiste en une prime mensuelle de 1.000 € pour un ETP lors de l’engagement d’un demandeur d’emploi inoccupé depuis plus de 24 mois.

Le Gouvernement va également développer des approches innovantes en matière de lutte contre le chômage de longue durée via le lancement de projets-pilotes s’inspirant du dispositif ‘Territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée’. L’objectif sera de permettre, sur une base volontaire, aux personnes sans emploi depuis plus de deux ans de retrouver un travail, un contrat à durée indéterminée. Ces projets seront lancés dans le cadre de la nouvelle programmation FSE+, avec un budget total pour la période 2022 à 2026 de 51,9 millions d’euros, et viseront les territoires des arrondissements de Charleroi, de Liège, Mons, La Louvière, Verviers et Namur, ainsi que la Province du Luxembourg.

Le projet pilote ‘Coup de Boost’ mis en œuvre depuis 2016 avec des résultats positifs² et qui vise la remobilisation et l’accompagnement de jeunes de 18 à 29 ans qui ne sont ni à l’emploi, ni en formation, ni aux études (NEETs) est quant à lui pérennisé via un budget total de 14,5 millions d’euros d’ici fin 2025 (772.000 euros en 2021).

Afin de soutenir la **participation au marché du travail**, le Gouvernement wallon propose, dans le cadre du plan de relance européen, d’augmenter le nombre (3.143 places d’accueil supplémentaires) et la qualité des places d’accueil pour la petite enfance.

Sur le volet de **l’offre d’emploi**, la réforme des Aides à la Promotion de l’Emploi (APE) a été approuvée par le Parlement en juin 2021 et est entrée en vigueur au 1^{er} janvier 2022. Celle-ci vise à pérenniser plus de 65.000 emplois et à en créer de nouveaux dans des secteurs tels que les crèches, les écoles, l’aide aux personnes âgées, les services de soins à domicile, les communes, les secteurs culturel, sportif ou environnemental. Le budget lié à ces aides, qui s’élève à plus d’un

¹ A l’exception des services publics fédéraux, régionaux et communautaires.

² Après 6 mois, près d’1 jeune sur 2 (47,5 %) est remobilisé vers le marché du travail (emploi, démarrage d’une formation qualifiante ou reprise d’études). Un an après l’accompagnement, ce taux grimpe à près de 3 jeunes sur 4 (71 % exactement).



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milliard d'euros par an, sera maintenu. De nouveaux jobs répondant à des besoins sociétaux prioritaires pourront être créés grâce à des appels à projets dans des domaines spécifiques.

Concernant la **lutte contre les pénuries de main-d'œuvre**, des mesures ont été adoptées en partenariat avec les secteurs de la construction, du bois et de l'électricité pour leur permettre de trouver des candidats à l'emploi, en particulier dans le contexte de la reconstruction des zones sinistrées par les inondations de juillet 2021. Des incitants seront proposés en 2022 tels qu'une prime pilote formation 'plan de reconstruction' de 2.000 euros nets pour chaque demandeur d'emploi ou apprenant IFAPME qui s'engage dans le secteur de la construction, ou des 'chèques permis de conduire' pour les chercheurs d'emploi ou apprenants IFAPME qui s'inscrivent dans une formation participant à la dynamique du plan de reconstruction. Les conditions financières et perspectives d'embauche pour les stagiaires et demandeurs d'emploi inscrits aux formations seront en outre renforcées. L'ouverture de nouvelles places (plus de 1.000) de formation est également prévue par le Forem et de nouvelles actions dont des « Coups de Poing pénurie » seront prochainement développées en adéquation avec les besoins des entreprises, de même que des actions de sensibilisation, et des événements de rencontre avec les entreprises en recherche d'employés, d'apprentis ou de stagiaires.

Sur le plan des **compétences**, le Gouvernement a mis l'accent sur les compétences numériques, notamment via l'adoption en septembre 2021 d'un nouveau projet de décret relatif à la formation de base au numérique. Celui-ci propose des heures de formation multipliées, une pédagogie uniformisée sur l'ensemble du territoire wallon, une articulation avec les services de l'emploi et un financement plus stable et rehaussé pour les structures qui dispensent ces formations. Il s'intègre aussi dans un programme global pour l'inclusion numérique de tous les Wallons et les Wallonnes. Un second projet de décret a pour finalité d'améliorer la qualité de la formation en alternance en renforçant les compétences numériques des apprenants et des formateurs et en faisant évoluer les pratiques pédagogiques vers un modèle basé sur le numérique et adapté aux spécificités de l'alternance.

En matière d'alternance, un autre projet vise la formation à la création d'entreprise en développant le plan d'action de l'IFAPME en matière de sensibilisation, de formation et d'accompagnement des candidats chefs d'entreprise, et ce en collaboration avec la SOWALFIN. Toujours sur le volet business, le Plan de relance wallon prévoit un budget de 2,5 M€ pour développer les stages internationaux en entreprise pour des jeunes issus de filières scientifiques, techniques, technologiques, ingénieries ainsi qu'économiques (EXPLORT+). Le contrat de gestion renouvelé du parc d'aventures scientifiques SPARKOH ! permettra également de développement de la sensibilisation aux STEM ; il promeut les actions croisées en matière de sensibilisation aux sciences et de diffusion de la culture scientifique et de contribution à la dimension sociétale.

Enfin, le projet EU Biotech school & Health Hub financé dans le cadre du plan de relance (30 millions d'euros) pour soutenir la croissance du secteur des biotechs en Wallonie a été lancé en décembre 2021. Le financement porte sur la création de l'infrastructure à Charleroi, les équipements, le développement commercial et du programme de formation.

2.3. Soutien à la compétitivité, à l'innovation et à la transition numérique

Dans une perspective de **soutien aux entreprises et indépendants impactés par les conséquences de la crise du COVID et les inondations de juillet 2021**, le Gouvernement a adopté diverses mesures de soutien. Un budget de près de 300 millions a été mobilisé pour soutenir les entreprises et les indépendants impactés par la crise du COVID. Suite aux inondations de juillet, une indemnité d'aide à la relance de 5.000 euros a été décidée à destination des commerçants sinistrés, ainsi que des budgets pour la mise à disposition de containers. Un « pack » résilience/repositionnement stratégique/plan de continuité des activités au départ de la SOGEPa, de la SOWALFIN et de la SRIW est également proposé. Ce pack comporte 4 volets cumulables



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mais également disponibles individuellement : prise en charge des frais de repositionnement stratégique (consultance) ; accompagnement des petites entreprises dans la réalisation de leur business plan sous forme d'une aide forfaitaire ; soutien à l'engagement de profils utiles à la relance ; soutien de la trésorerie et du besoin en fonds de roulement des entreprises via des prêts à taux 0%. Le Gouvernement a par ailleurs adopté un Décret d'exception visant l'élargissement du champ d'intervention du Fonds des Calamités.

Dans une perspective de **relance** plus structurelle suite à la crise COVID, le fonds AMERIGO constitue un instrument de capital-risque fort commun aux outils régionaux et aux Investis locaux qui ont souhaité y prendre part, ce afin de soutenir les (quasi-)fonds propres et la relance/croissance des entreprises wallonnes. AMERIGO a clôturé fin décembre 2021 sa première levée de fonds auprès d'investisseurs institutionnels publics et privés pour un montant de 161 millions €.

Le Gouvernement a par ailleurs validé en septembre 2021 la première étape vers la fusion en 2023 de ses trois outils économiques et financiers, la SOGEPA, la SOWALFIN et la SRIW. L'outil unique s'articulera autour d'une offre de services organisée en plateformes, combinant les volets sensibilisation, accompagnement et financement. Ses missions viseront le soutien à la croissance des entreprises dans une perspective de création d'emplois pérennes en Wallonie, de valeur ajoutée et de durabilité (ce qui passe notamment par un soutien à l'innovation, l'internationalisation, la transition et la croissance externe), le soutien des entreprises en retournement, la réponse aux défis actuels et futurs, le déploiement d'écosystèmes attractifs, l'amplification du rôle de la cellule de veille économique et stratégique,....

La stratégie de croissance mais aussi de rebond des entreprises suite à la crise, passe par une approche de chaînes de valeurs ciblée et par le renforcement de celles-ci au travers d'actions internationales. L'AWEX va renforcer ses actions en ce sens, que ce soit en termes d'analyse, d'accompagnement des entreprises, de visibilité et d'attractivité de la Wallonie ou de partenariats stratégiques à l'international. Un budget de 5,75 millions € est mobilisé pour ce projet.

Afin de soutenir spécifiquement le développement de **l'économie sociale**, plus de 22 millions sont dégagés dans le cadre du Plan de relance de la Wallonie. Celui-ci sera dédié à la création d'un incubateur d'entreprises en économie sociale, à la création de 3 hubs logistiques « circuit court alimentaire », et à l'accès renforcé de l'économie sociale aux marchés publics durables. Par ailleurs, dans le cadre de Digital Wallonia, a été lancé le programme pilote DigitalEES destiné aux entreprises wallonnes d'économie sociale qui souhaitent mettre le digital au service de leur finalité sociale.

Au niveau de la **politique de Recherche et d'Innovation et de la politique industrielle** de la Wallonie, le Gouvernement a adopté la **stratégie de spécialisation intelligente (S3) 2021-2027** de la Wallonie en mars 2021.

Cette stratégie vise à constituer des écosystèmes innovants autour de priorités stratégiques affirmées, sur base des forces distinctives wallonnes, et doit permettre d'assurer une concentration des moyens sur un nombre limité de priorités, porteuses d'une ambition forte (5 Domaines d'innovation stratégiques), et de renforcer l'efficacité des dispositifs de la politique économique et d'innovation régionale. Suite à un appel ouvert, 20 Initiatives d'innovation stratégiques ont été sélectionnées début 2022. Celles-ci bénéficieront d'un accompagnement par les cellules de coordination mises en place pour chaque DIS, et seront mises en œuvre via les différents outils de financement disponibles, des moyens seront également mobilisés via le plan de relance wallon.

Différents chantiers de réforme en cours s'intègrent dans cette approche renouvelée de la S3, reflétant ainsi la mise en œuvre concrète des principes directeurs de la S3. Parmi ceux-ci, la **réforme des aides à la recherche** intervenue en octobre 2021, qui vise à rationaliser et simplifier les dispositifs, la réforme du paysage de l'accompagnement économique et de l'innovation dans



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les PME qui vise à garantir un accompagnement de qualité des entrepreneurs wallons, l'adaptation de la Politique des Pôles et des clusters en lien avec la nouvelle S3.

En lien avec les priorités de la S3, plusieurs décisions sont intervenues pour la mise en œuvre de projets ambitieux de RDI dans le cadre du plan de relance wallon.

Dans le domaine de la santé et des sciences de la vie, l'Institut WELBIO a vu son financement renforcé à hauteur de 15 millions afin de renforcer le potentiel de recherche stratégique visant à générer les innovations de rupture qui pourront permettre le développement de projets dans ce secteur. Le Gouvernement a également souhaité favoriser l'intégration de la dynamique d'innovation au sein du personnel médical au travers de la mise en place des cellules d'innovation médicale au sein d'hôpitaux wallons.

Trois projets de recherche au sein de filières alimentaires ont également été sélectionnés pour un budget de 3,8 millions €. Ceux-ci ont pour ambition d'apporter des solutions au développement de la production des filières et pour que la production soit durable et contribue à la transition environnementale.

En outre, une mesure visant à financer la recherche collective dans les Centres de Recherche agréés avec pour objectif de maintenir une expertise de haut niveau dans des technologies porteuses qui pourront être utiles, à terme, à un grand nombre d'entreprises wallonnes, et spécifiquement des PME.

Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement a validé le lancement d'un programme d'excellence à destination des Universités, en collaboration avec les Centres de recherche agréés pertinents, visant à financer des recherches ambitieuses et fortement positionnées en amont dans des thématiques porteuses pour la Région wallonne, C'est ainsi qu'a été financé en 2021 le projet CyberExcellence (18,9 millions pour les 4 premières années) qui vise à positionner la Wallonie comme un acteur incontournable de la cybersécurité. Les acteurs wallons et bruxellois actifs dans le domaine de la cybersécurité se sont regroupés pour créer la coupole « CyberWal ». Cet institut virtuel a l'objectif de promouvoir la recherche, l'innovation, et la formation en cybersécurité, tout en assurant une coordination forte entre ces matières. Le programme Digital Wallonia 4 Cyber lancé début 2022 vise à préserver la souveraineté numérique du territoire. Des actions complémentaires seront menées selon quatre axes majeurs : Sensibilisation & Accompagnement, Recherche & Innovation, Formation et Internationalisation.

Le Gouvernement de Wallonie a également décidé de renforcer son réseau de supercalculateurs. Il s'agit notamment de renouveler l'installation Tier-2 et de financer le personnel Tier-1.

Plusieurs autres chantiers sont poursuivis dans le cadre de la **Stratégie Digital Wallonia**. Ainsi, le programme Digital Wallonia 4AI être renforcé à hauteur de 21 millions pour 2022-2024, avec pour objectif d'amplifier le développement des technologies d'intelligence artificielle dans le tissu économique wallon. Le projet d'accompagnement du secteur de la construction dans sa transformation numérique lancé en avril 2021 (Build4Wal) se concrétise par des hubs de démonstration "Construction 4.0". Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement a mobilisé un budget de 20 millions d'euros pour soutenir l'évolution numérique des PME wallonnes et assurer la relance de leurs activités au travers du numérique. Ce soutien s'effectuera via un nouveau Chèque-Entreprise.

Sur le plan des **équipements et des infrastructures**, une refonte du programme école numérique est en cours, avec un appel pilote en 2021 et le déploiement du nouveau mécanisme en 2022. L'objectif est d'optimiser les processus de candidatures et d'octroi des matériels numériques, mais également de mieux financer les établissements selon leurs besoins et priorités dans un ou plusieurs types de projets. Chaque établissement aura ainsi l'opportunité d'être soutenu au travers de deux types de projets Ecole numérique : projets de connectivité et projets d'équipement numérique. Le projet de connectivité interne des écoles démarre en 2022. Celui-ci bénéficie



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enveloppe totale de 72 millions d'euros provenant du Plan National de Relance et de Résilience et sera développé en collaboration avec la FWB.

Afin de soutenir le développement numérique des pouvoirs locaux, le Gouvernement a décidé de lancer deux appels à projets (10 millions d'euros pour 2021-2022, cofinancement à 50% par les opérateurs de téléphonie mobile et 10 millions pour 2022-2023). Ceux-ci visent l'orientation usager et la transparence administrative, la gouvernance des données, l'infrastructure informatique, les logiciels ainsi que la cybersécurité, la dématérialisation des processus de travail internes et externes, l'utilisation des logiciels libres, la connectivité du territoire et/ou de ses citoyens, le développement numérique intelligent du territoire.

Afin de mettre en place une gouvernance de et par la donnée et de progresser vers la numérisation de l'ensemble des services publics et dispositifs à destination des entreprises et des citoyens, une réforme structurelle, visant la mise en place d'un Service public de Wallonie « Digital », qui fusionne les trois structures d'e-WBS, du Département de la Technologie et des Communications (DTIC) et du Département de la Géomatique, est en cours. Le cadre organique du SPW Digital a été validé, en deuxième lecture, le 24 février 2022.

Concernant la **5G**, les recommandations du groupe d'experts concernant la révision éventuelle des normes d'émission ont été remises au Gouvernement wallon fin 2021. La révision effective du cadre réglementaire déterminant les normes d'émissions non-ionisantes est prévue pour le 3^{ème} trimestre 2022 au plus tard, si cela est jugé nécessaire et recommandé par le groupe d'experts. Par ailleurs, Le Gouvernement de Wallonie a approuvé la méthodologie, les critères et le calendrier relatifs à la mise en place des proof of concepts (PoC) 5G prévus dans le Plan de relance de Wallonie, qui permettront de tester des cas d'usage (industrie du futur, ruralité connectée, e-santé, mobilité et logistique.). Un budget de 15 millions € est prévu pour les PoC dans le Plan de relance (jusqu'en 2024).

Un budget de 15 millions € est enfin mobilisé dans le cadre du plan de relance wallon afin de déployer la fibre optique sur les 35 derniers Parcs d'Activités Economiques qui n'étaient pas couverts par le plan stratégique pour le déploiement de la fibre optique. Cela permettra d'équiper 100% des Parcs wallons à l'horizon 2024.

2.4. Transition bas carbone, biodiversité et économie circulaire

Le développement de l'économie circulaire est un levier central pour la transition vers une économie bas carbone. Dans cette perspective, la mise en œuvre de la **Stratégie Circular Wallonia s'est poursuivie**, avec plusieurs appels à projets lancés en 2021, notamment dans le cadre du PNRR. Ceux-ci visent notamment le développement de plateformes d'excellence industrielle (budget de 67 millions €), le soutien à des projets industriels concernant les matériaux et systèmes de construction (5 projets sélectionnés pour un investissement de 100 millions d'euros et la création de 200 ETP), le soutien aux démarches circulaires des organisations et les achats circulaires s'est clôturé (17 entreprises sélectionnées), le soutien à la prévention des déchets et l'innovation en matière de recyclage (budget de 37,5 millions d'euros), le soutien à la réutilisation, les chantiers et services circulaires dans la construction (8 lauréats). Un axe économie circulaire a été ajouté dans le programme 'Industrie du Futur' (budget 500.000 €) afin d'accélérer le déploiement de l'économie circulaire à travers la transition numérique.

Le Gouvernement a également décidé de renforcer le dispositif NEXT en matière de **financement des entreprises en économie circulaire**, à hauteur de 6,75 millions supplémentaires. Celui-ci offre des solutions de financement aux entreprises pour leurs projets en économie circulaire, de même que la mise à disposition d'une expertise spécialisée en économie circulaire. A mentionner également le lancement de l'appel à candidatures pour la mise sur pied du Conseil de l'économie circulaire, dont l'objectif principal est d'apporter un regard externe sur la stratégie.



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Au niveau des **réformes**, le Gouvernement a adopté en juin 2021 en troisième lecture l'avant-projet d'arrêté modifiant divers arrêtés en matière de gestion et de traçabilité des terres. Il a également adopté en juillet 2021 le projet d'arrêté instaurant une obligation de reprise des matelas usagés en 2021 ; il fixe des objectifs en termes de taux de collecte et de réutilisation/recyclage.

Le Gouvernement a poursuivi ses investissements pour soutenir le développement des **énergies renouvelables** en Wallonie, mais également renforcer l'**efficacité énergétique** des entreprises et des bâtiments. Ainsi, le Gouvernement a approuvé en avril 2021 le projet visant le déploiement d'une infrastructure de production et de distribution d'hydrogène à partir d'électricité sur le site de Liège Airport. Par ailleurs, un appel à projets pour la filière hydrogène (budget total de 25 millions) a permis de retenir 4 projets en décembre 2021. Il s'agit de promouvoir la réalisation d'applications concrètes, en situation réelle, basées sur la production, le transport et la consommation d'hydrogène vert dans un maximum de domaines économiques.

Un autre axe de travail concerne l'énergie thermique. Le Gouvernement a pris acte en mars 2021 de la nouvelle stratégie de réseaux de chaleur et de froid alimentés par des cogénérations, des énergies fatales ou des sources d'énergies renouvelables. Celle-ci identifie 28 mesures qui favorisent le recours aux énergies neutres en carbone et maximisent la valorisation de la chaleur. Dans ce cadre, le Gouvernement a adopté, en 1^{ère} lecture, en juin 2021 un arrêté portant exécution du décret du 15 octobre 2020 relatif à l'énergie thermique. Celui-ci permet de clarifier les règles applicables aux différents participants à un réseau de chaleur. Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement a approuvé en juillet 2021 un appel relatif à la géothermie de moyenne profondeur, doté d'un budget global de 7,5 millions d'€. Les projets qui seront soutenus devront pouvoir structurer une filière renouvelable à fort potentiel. Des travaux préparatoires ont été lancés en vue de projets pilotes de géothermie minière dans les bassins miniers de Mons et de Liège.

Le Gouvernement de Wallonie a approuvé en décembre 2021, en 2^{ème} lecture, les modalités d'octroi des primes à destination des clients résidentiels couvrant le coût de placement d'un compteur intelligent ainsi que de celles relatives à l'installation d'équipements de mesurage et de pilotage (« prime « domotique »).

Concernant le soutien à la **transition bas carbone des entreprises**, le dispositif WalEnergie a été lancé en décembre 2021. Il structurera son accompagnement des industries autour du financement de 5 axes stratégiques : l'amélioration des processus de production par des technologies de rupture, l'efficacité énergétique et la rénovation des bâtiments, la production d'énergie renouvelable, la mobilité durable, la logistique et la maintenance. Dans un premier temps, le dispositif travaillera avec des entreprises industrielles pilotes faisant partie des Accords de branche. Il proposera un accompagnement dans la mise en œuvre des plans d'actions dont les temps de retour sont longs (plus de 5 ans), au travers d'études complémentaires, d'un accompagnement. L'offre de financement sera constituée de prêts, garanties et de prises de participation en capital. Celui-ci sera complémentaire aux outils existants à destination des PME, notamment le dispositif EasyGreen. Celui-ci a par ailleurs été renforcé dans le cadre de REACT-EU.

La **rénovation énergétique des bâtiments** constitue une priorité du Gouvernement, et différentes mesures ont été adoptées pour l'accélérer. Le Gouvernement de Wallonie a marqué son accord pour le lancement de l'Alliance Climat-Emploi-Rénovation (ACER). Des groupes de travail thématiques seront mis en place pour poursuivre le travail participatif déjà entrepris pour la Stratégie de Rénovation énergétique à long terme du bâtiment. Un plan d'action évolutif sera établi. Des premières actions sont lancées pour la formation professionnelle, l'exemplarité des bâtiments publics et le fonctionnement des outils PEB (certificats, audits, feuille de route, estimations travaux, co-bénéfices,...). Des appels à projets de rénovations exemplaires sont aussi en préparation.



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Au niveau des logements, la programmation 2021 du dispositif ECOPACK/RENOPACK a été approuvée en juin 2021. Dotée d'un budget de 84 millions d'euros, elle doit permettre de soutenir les citoyens dans les travaux de rénovation énergétique de leur habitation, notamment via des prêts à taux zéro. Complémentairement, le Gouvernement a approuvé, en 2^{ème} lecture, le projet d'arrêté instaurant un régime d'aides pour la réalisation d'investissements économiseurs d'énergie et de rénovation d'un logement. Il s'agit d'une mesure phare du Plan de relance de la Wallonie, pour un budget total de 89 millions d'euros pour la période 2021-2024. Ce nouveau mécanisme simplifié est complémentaire au système de primes Habitations et permettra aux citoyens et aux associations de copropriétaires de bénéficier de primes pour l'isolation de toitures et pour des petits travaux de salubrité et de rénovation énergétique de moins de 3.000 euros, sans audit énergétique préalable. Les ménages à bas revenus bénéficient d'une prime majorée.

Le Gouvernement a également approuvé en décembre 2021 le projet pilote RENO+ visant à accélérer la rénovation de logements privés en Wallonie, pour un budget de 3,2 millions d'euros. Il s'agit de mener une recherche-action sur la massification de la rénovation des logements privés, sur une période de 18 mois. Le Gouvernement wallon a en outre approuvé le lancement d'un appel à projets en juillet 2021 pour la mise en œuvre de plateformes locales de rénovation énergétique. Enfin, le Gouvernement a lancé un vaste programme de rénovation des logements publics pour un montant d'investissement total de 1,2 milliards d'€. A terme, ce sont plus de 25.000 logements qui feront l'objet d'interventions visant à améliorer la salubrité et les performances énergétiques.

Au niveau du secteur public, un nouvel appel à projets a été lancé dans le cadre du programme UREBA exceptionnel, doté d'un budget global de 70 millions d'euros issu du Plan de relance wallon. Deux autres appels seront encore prévus d'ici la fin de la législature et de nouveaux bénéficiaires pourront y être ajoutés. L'accent est mis sur la rénovation en profondeur dans le but d'atteindre des niveaux d'efficacité énergétique élevés dans un objectif d'exemplarité. L'appel à projets pour la rénovation des infrastructures sportives, financé via le PRR a également été lancé en octobre 2021 (budget de près de 80 millions d'euros). Enfin, un dernier appel visant à améliorer la rénovation énergétique des bâtiments des pouvoirs locaux a été lancé en février 2022.

De manière plus générale, pour le développement d'actions visant la **transition bas carbone et le renforcement de la résilience du territoire**, le Gouvernement développe un cadre d'action avec les pouvoirs locaux. Il a ainsi adopté en avril 2021 le cadre général d'une nouvelle politique intégrée de la Ville. Une enveloppe de 240 millions y sera consacrée jusque 2024, à destination des villes wallonnes de plus de 50.000 habitants. Pour en bénéficier chaque ville concernée introduira un plan d'actions prioritaires visant les thématiques suivantes : la rénovation énergétique, le logement, la mobilité, la cohésion sociale, la réhabilitation de friches industrielles, la végétalisation, le tourisme ou encore le patrimoine. Des moyens particuliers seront concentrés sur la rénovation énergétique des quartiers prioritaires. Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement wallon a lancé en mai 2021 un appel à candidature à destination des villes et des communes, afin de les soutenir dans l'élaboration, la mise en œuvre et le suivi des Plans d'Actions pour l'Energie durable et le Climat (PAEDC) à l'horizon 2030.

En matière d'action climatique, un autre axe prioritaire porte sur la **mobilité**. En matière de fret, le Gouvernement a adopté en décembre 2021 une note visant à encadrer la partie wallonne du projet Seine-Escaut pour la période 2021 à 2027. Le coût estimé pour l'ensemble du projet est de 579,9 millions d'euros. Cette note permet à l'administration de répondre au premier appel à projet européen, qui concerne un premier tiers des investissements nécessaires.

Au niveau des transports en commun, la réduction progressive des tarifs s'est poursuivie et le Gouvernement a approuvé fin 2021 la trajectoire pluriannuelle concernant la gratuité progressive du TEC. Le tarif TEC est ainsi réduit de plus de 70% du tarif pour les 18-24 ans depuis le 1^{er} septembre 2021. Il a également décidé de ne pas indexer les tarifs TEC jusqu'en 2024 inclus. Ces deux mesures représentent un effort régional de 100 millions d'euros entre 2022 et 2024. Via l'octroi de subventions d'exploitations conséquentes, l'offre de transport croitra d'environ 10%



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sur l'ensemble de la législature. Cela s'est notamment traduit par la création du réseau Express (25 lignes à ce jour). Par ailleurs, l'Opérateur de Transport de Wallonie prévoit des investissements de plus de 1,1 milliard d'euros sur la période 2022-2027 : cela comprend l'achat massif de matériel roulant, la rénovation de dépôts, la création d'infrastructures dédiées, mais aussi des investissements dans des projets d'ampleur régionale repris dans le PNRR : le bus à haut niveau de service 'Cœur de Hainaut' vers Mons, l'extension du métro léger de Charleroi, l'extension du Tram de Liège,...

L'accent est également mis sur la mobilité douce. Dans le cadre de l'appel à projet 'Wallonie cyclable', 116 communes ont été sélectionnées, pour un subside global de 61,2 millions d'euros. En outre, un droit de tirage consacré à la mobilité active et à l'intermodalité a été acté, dont la première tranche a été libérée fin 2021 au profit des communes. Le Gouvernement a également approuvé une augmentation des primes aux citoyens wallons à l'achat d'un vélo pour les trajets domicile-travail et aux employeurs à l'achat d'un vélo de service. Enfin, la note d'orientation du Plan d'actions Vélos qui sera adopté en avril 2022 a été approuvée par le Gouvernement wallon.

En matière de **soutien à la biodiversité**, le programme opérationnel visant à planter 4.000 km de haies et/ou un million d'arbres en Wallonie a été lancé en avril 2021 (projet Yes We Plant). Il vise à lever un maximum de freins, identifiés par les acteurs de terrain, et à mobiliser des moyens humains et budgétaires importants pour booster les plantations pour les saisons suivantes, et se décline en 26 actions prioritaires à destination de différents publics. Le Gouvernement a également lancé en juillet 2021 un appel à projets pour la création de deux parcs nationaux. Ces projets bénéficieront d'une enveloppe totale de 28 millions d'euros, dans le cadre du PNRR. Enfin, le Gouvernement a approuvé en février 2022 la création de 19 nouvelles réserves naturelles et l'extension de 17 réserves naturelles existantes, soit un total de 1.016 ha.

Enfin, le Gouvernement a adopté le Plan Bio 2030 en juin 2021, visant à concrétiser l'objectif fixé dans la DPR 2019-2024 d'atteindre les 30 % de surface de production biologique en 2030, et ainsi contribuer aux objectifs du Green Deal et de la Stratégie Européenne Farm-to-Fork. Le plan comporte 32 actions regroupées selon 9 leviers d'intervention (Monitoring et planification, Réglementation, Information, Accompagnement, Aides financières, Enseignement et formation professionnelle, Promotion, Recherche, Innovation), qui visent à agir tant sur l'offre que sur la demande. Le budget nécessaire est estimé à 30 millions €. Complémentairement, afin d'organiser la distribution et de valoriser la production wallonne, le Gouvernement a décidé de développer 4 projets permettant de structurer et de développer la présence de nos produits locaux dans les différents segments de la distribution (budget de 4,3 millions €, dans le cadre du Plan de relance de la Wallonie).

2.5. Cohésion sociale et action sociale

Le Gouvernement de Wallonie a adopté en octobre 2021 son **Plan de sortie de la pauvreté**. Un budget de 482 millions d'euros est prévu jusque 2024. Celui-ci vise à offrir à chaque wallon et wallonne les moyens progressifs pour sortir de la pauvreté, via l'accès à un confort de base et un accès à l'emploi. Il s'articule donc autour de l'accès à l'insertion socioprofessionnelle, au logement et au bien-être pour tous. Il ne vise pas à gérer la pauvreté et à en atténuer les effets, mais bien à l'éliminer progressivement.

Ce plan s'articule autour de deux volets : un volet transversal qui contient des mesures qui relèvent de l'ensemble des compétences wallonnes et un volet des politiques sociales qui recense 28 actions touchant aux différentes compétences de la Wallonie, regroupées autour de 3 axes (l'accès à l'insertion socioprofessionnelle, au logement et au bien-être). Parmi les mesures reprises dans le plan, on retrouve notamment le soutien à l'accès au permis de conduire pour les personnes précarisées en formation dans les filières qui mènent à des métiers d'avenir ou en pénurie et pour les travailleuses du secteur des titres-services ; la gratuité progressive des transports en commun



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pour les jeunes jusqu'à 25 ans, pour les 65 et plus et pour les publics précarisés ; l'octroi d'une allocation de loyer aux ménages disposant de revenus précaires en attente d'un logement social depuis une certaine durée ; l'augmentation de l'offre de logements en agences immobilières sociales ; la mise en place d'une stratégie wallonne de sortie du sans-abrisme ; le renforcement des maisons médicales ; la mise à disposition de collations saines gratuites dans les écoles maternelles et primaires à indice socio-économique faible ; la création de "one-stop-shop" au niveau local pour des personnes en recherche d'emploi confrontés à des freins spécifiques entravant leur recherche.

Au niveau local, le Gouvernement a accordé début 2022 une subvention de 23 millions d'euros pour la mise en œuvre des 195 **plans de cohésion sociale** des pouvoirs locaux pour l'année 2022. Le PCS poursuit deux objectifs à savoir, réduire la précarité et les inégalités en favorisant l'accès effectif de tous aux droits fondamentaux et contribuer à la construction d'une société solidaire et coresponsable pour le bien-être de tous. Il a en outre été décidé de permettre aux communes sinistrées lors des inondations de juillet 2021 de continuer à mener des actions dérogatoires à leur plan initial, le besoin de s'impliquer dans les missions diverses d'aide aux ménages sinistrés y restant encore largement présent.

Une priorité importante du Gouvernement en matière d'inclusion sociale porte sur **l'accès au logement** ; différentes réformes ont été adoptées en la matière. Le Gouvernement a mis en place, en mai 2021, un mécanisme de prêt à taux zéro pour les candidats locataires, qui leur permettra de constituer leur garantie locative relative à un bail d'habitation, un bail étudiant, et pour les propriétaires de disposer de la garantie quels que soient les candidats. Le Gouvernement a également procédé en juillet 2021 à une modification du règlement d'octroi des crédits hypothécaires sociaux, qui en élargit les conditions d'accès et a approuvé l'octroi d'un financement de 50 millions maximum aux organismes wallons du crédit social en vue d'augmenter la production courante de 20% à l'horizon 2024. Le Gouvernement wallon a approuvé en février 2022 la proposition de créer une grille indicative des loyers du logement étudiant afin d'en faciliter l'accès et renforcer l'inclusion sociale. Une subvention de 280.000€ est destinée à financer la première étape qui consistera en une étude typologique des logements étudiants en partenariat avec les grands bailleurs.

Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement a approuvé en décembre 2021 l'appel à projets visant la construction de minimum 800 logements publics à haute performance environnementale, pour un budget de 115,7 millions (issus du PRR). Cet appel à projets vise en outre à soutenir la secteur de la construction et notamment des filières émergentes comme l'« écoconstruction » et la « préfabrication ». Le Gouvernement a en outre renforcé le financement visant la création de places d'accueil pour des publics spécifiques : les femmes victimes de violence, les personnes sans-abri et fragilisées. En parallèle, des dispositions décrétales et réglementaires sont en cours d'élaboration pour fixer un cadre légal propre aux accueils de jour destinés aux personnes en situation de précarité.

Le Gouvernement wallon a également adopté en janvier 2022 son arsenal de nouvelles mesures pour renforcer sa lutte contre le logement inoccupé. Trois nouvelles mesures sont prévues, visant à faciliter l'identification des logements inoccupés et à renforcer l'effectivité de l'action en cessation. Enfin, le Gouvernement wallon a approuvé en décembre 2021 le Plan Habitat Permanent réactualisé, ainsi que le nouveau projet de convention de partenariat portant sur la période 2022-2025. Dans ce cadre, des moyens spécifiques et conséquents seront ainsi déployés annuellement.

Afin de soutenir les ménages à revenus modestes pour **l'utilisation rationnelle et efficiente de l'énergie**, le Gouvernement de Wallonie a adopté un arrêté portant sur l'augmentation à 2.000 € du montant de la prime MEBAR et sur l'élargissement des bénéficiaires de cette prime. Le budget annuel consacré à ce programme passera d'1,7 million à un budget de près de 6 millions, dans le cadre du Plan de Relance et du Plan de lutte contre la pauvreté. Une subvention a également été



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accordée à une coalition d'organisations afin de développer un ensemble d'actions de lutte contre la précarité énergétique. A noter également que dans le cadre de la crise COVID, le dispositif octroyant le statut de client protégé conjoncturel en électricité et en gaz a été prolongé jusque fin août 2022. Il a également été ajoutée une nouvelle catégorie relative aux ménages sinistrés qui pourront, comme les personnes en chômage temporaire ou les indépendants bénéficiant de l'aide passerelle, solliciter le statut lors d'une situation de défaut de paiement.

Le **soutien à l'emploi et l'amélioration des conditions de travail** est un autre axe important de l'action du Gouvernement pour favoriser la cohésion sociale. En complément aux mesures pointées à la section 2.2, on peut relever l'adoption en mai 2021 de l'Accord-cadre du secteur non-marchand wallon 2021-2024. Celui-ci prévoit 260 millions d'euros pour engager du personnel complémentaire et augmenter les salaires des professionnels du secteur 'social et santé'. Cet accord qui concerne 62.753 ETP permettra de revaloriser le personnel et améliorer leurs conditions de travail et d'aligner les barèmes du personnel des institutions wallonnes transférées à la suite de la 6^{ème} réforme de l'État sur les barèmes fédéraux des soins de santé. Les partenaires sociaux et le Gouvernement se sont accordés sur la répartition du cadre budgétaire pluriannuel de 2021 à 2024, avec 100 millions libérés en 2021. Pour 2022, le montant global de cette enveloppe s'élève à 150 millions d'euros pour l'ensemble des secteurs.

Ensuite, le décret qui vise à encadrer davantage l'activité du secteur des titres-services et à améliorer l'emploi des travailleurs a été approuvé par le Gouvernement. Celui-ci prévoit des contrats d'une durée moyenne de minimum 19h/semaine par entreprise pour lutter contre la précarité et offrir de meilleures perspectives d'organisation du temps de travail, un minimum de 9 heures de formation par an par travailleur, une meilleure protection des travailleurs en cas de harcèlement de la part des utilisateurs, des conventions types pour définir les rôles de chacun – clients et entreprises par l'intermédiaire des travailleurs, une gestion optimisée des subsides publics. Une expérience pilote de formation gratuite pour obtenir son permis de conduire vient également de démarrer pour 186 personnes qui travaillent dans le secteur.

Enfin, le Gouvernement a pris un certain nombre de mesures spécifiques pour aider la **population touchée à faire face aux conséquences des inondations**. La Wallonie a décidé d'intervenir pour les sinistrés non assurés et est également intervenue en faveur des sinistrés assurés via un protocole de collaboration conclu avec les compagnies d'assurance. Les autres mesures prises ont porté notamment sur l'octroi d'un prêt sans intérêt de 2.500 € afin de prendre en charge les besoins de première nécessité, dans l'attente des interventions des compagnies d'assurance et du fonds des calamités, d'aides pour assurer le relogement des ménages et des locataires sociaux sinistrés, d'aides visant à couvrir les frais liés à la surconsommation électrique des sinistrés, d'aides au déménagement, d'aide alimentaire,....

3. FONDS STRUCTURELS ET D'INVESTISSEMENT EUROPEENS

Dans le cadre de la programmation 2014-2020 et suite à la pandémie du COVID, la Wallonie a bénéficié d'une enveloppe complémentaire au titre de **REACT-EU**. Dans ce cadre, au niveau du FEDER, 55 millions d'euros ont été affectés à deux priorités : la santé et la transition numérique et bas carbone des PME. Un budget de 35 millions est affecté à l'achat de matériel médical à destination des services de santé. Concernant les PME, les budgets additionnels vont permettre d'une part la mise à disposition de chèques numériques pour soutenir la transition numérique des PME et d'autre part, le renforcement du dispositif Easy Green, qui permet le soutien aux PME en matière de transition énergétique et de diminution de leurs émissions de CO2.

Dans le cadre du Programme FSE Wallonie Bruxelles un budget REACT-EU de 9 millions a été alloué à la Wallonie ; celui-ci est affecté à l'inclusion socio-professionnelle des publics fragilisés ou rendus vulnérables suite à la crise via les CPAS.



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La préparation de la **programmation 2021-2027** est en cours. Le Programme FEDER a été approuvé en 3^{ème} lecture par le Gouvernement en décembre 2021 ; Le lancement du 1^{er} appel à projets (conjoint FEDER-FSE) est prévu pour mars 2022. Le programme FEDER représente un budget total de 1,5 milliard, dont 595,6 millions de cofinancement FEDER. Concernant le **Programme FSE+**, il a été approuvé en 2^{ème} lecture en février 2022, par les trois entités (Wallonie, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles et Cocof). L'UE financera le programme pour des projets sur le territoire wallon et bruxellois à hauteur de 780 millions de cofinancement FSE+.

Les priorités du programme FEDER sont les suivantes :

1. Une Wallonie plus intelligente et plus compétitive. Y seront développées des mesures de soutien à la R&I, à la transformation numérique des PME, de soutien à l'investissement, notamment sous forme d'instruments financiers à destination des PME et de soutien à l'entrepreneuriat ;
2. Une Wallonie plus verte à zéro émission de carbone : cet axe visera le développement de l'économie circulaire, la rénovation énergétique des bâtiments, la transition bas carbone des PME ou encore la dépollution des friches industrielles ;
3. Une Wallonie plus connectée par l'amélioration de la mobilité des personnes ; cet axe visera notamment à mettre en place une mobilité durable, intelligente, intermodale et résiliente face aux facteurs climatiques, qui comprend également la promotion de la numérisation et la décarbonation du transport routier ;
4. Une Wallonie plus sociale et inclusive : cet axe visera le développement des infrastructures de formation ;
5. Une Wallonie plus proche du citoyen ; cet axe sera dédié au développement local.

Pour le programme FSE+, cinq priorités ont été définies :

1. Améliorer l'accès à l'emploi, renforcer la création de son propre emploi / activité et promouvoir l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie : actions de soutien à la création d'entreprise et au développement des compétences en lien avec les besoins du marché de l'emploi ;
2. Innovation sociale : Développer des approches innovantes en matière de lutte contre le chômage de longue durée par une approche pilote s'inspirant du dispositif « Territoires zéro chômeurs de longue durée » ;
3. Mettre en œuvre la garantie jeunesse : Développer l'accroche, la remobilisation et l'accompagnement des jeunes et des jeunes en difficultés d'apprentissage, Soutenir l'acquisition et le développement des compétences et l'accompagnement vers l'emploi, Promouvoir et proposer des formes d'enseignement plus inclusives et des innovations pédagogiques, soutien à la réussite et lutte contre le décrochage scolaire ;
4. Lutter contre la pauvreté, dont la pauvreté infantile et favoriser l'inclusion sociale : Soutenir des actions en amont à l'inscription dans un parcours global d'inclusion vers l'emploi, assurer une insertion durable dans l'emploi en soutenant l'acquisition et le développement des compétences, promouvoir et renforcer le droit à la participation des enfants en situation de pauvreté ;
5. Désinstitutionnalisation des personnes en situation de handicap et de perte d'autonomie.

Les programmes de **coopération territoriale européenne** (INTERREG) sont également en cours d'élaboration ; la Wallonie disposera d'une enveloppe de 134 millions part européenne dont 121 millions pour la coopération transfrontalière (Grande Région, Euregio Meuse Rhin et France Wallonie Flandre). Pour chacun des programmes, le Gouvernement a eu l'occasion d'en définir les priorités. Elles s'articulent principalement autour de 6 objectifs stratégiques permettant notamment de couvrir des domaines tels que le développement et l'amélioration des capacités de recherche et d'innovation ainsi que l'utilisation des technologies de pointe, le renforcement de la



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croissance durable et la compétitivité des PME et la création d'emplois dans les PME, l'adaptation au changement climatique, le soutien aux énergies renouvelables, la mobilité durable, le renforcement du rôle de la culture et du tourisme durable dans le développement économique, l'inclusion sociale et l'innovation sociale ou encore le renforcement de la gouvernance dans les programmes de coopération.

Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement a validé en première lecture en janvier 2022 le budget et les axes du Plan stratégique relatif à la nouvelle **Politique Agricole Commune (PAC)** pour la période 2023 à 2027. Un budget total de 1,862 milliard est mobilisé pour mettre en place des aides directes (= 1^{er} pilier, 1,328 milliard) et le soutien au développement rural (= 2^{ème} pilier, FEADER, 534 millions). Ce 2^{ème} pilier porte sur différents dispositifs permettant d'accompagner l'investissement dans la transformation, la formation ou l'appui technique auprès des agriculteurs, ainsi que le développement de la filière forêt-bois, d'améliorer la biodiversité et de participer à l'effort en faveur du climat, d'encourager l'innovation dans les territoires ruraux et de soutenir leur attractivité, et de favoriser la création d'activités et d'emplois en milieu rural.

Enfin, le **Programme du Fonds Asile, Migration, Intégration (AMIF) 2021-2027** a été validé par le Gouvernement en décembre 2021. Le premier appel à projets a été lancé le 14 janvier 2022. Le volet intégration du programme pour la partie francophone (Wallonie, FWB et COCOF) représente un budget total, hors assistance technique, de 38 millions d'euros dont 28,5 millions de cofinancement AMIF. Y seront développés des cours de français langue étrangère (FLE) dont l'alphabétisation, des cours de citoyenneté ainsi que des actions d'accompagnements individualisés (accès au logement, accompagnement psycho-social, accès à des services de traduction, autres) et des actions vers les jeunes (DASPA et MENA), ainsi que des actions de formation de formateurs ou de développement d'outils.

4. GOUVERNANCE POUR ATTEINDRE LES OBJECTIFS DE DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE (ODD)

La Wallonie s'est dotée le 27 juin 2013 d'un **décret relatif à la stratégie wallonne de développement durable**. Chaque stratégie wallonne de développement durable, en particulier son plan d'actions, a une durée de vie parallèle à la législature et doit faire l'objet d'un suivi bisannuel. Elle intègre toutefois une vision à long terme et intègre des objectifs à l'horizon 2030.

En vertu de ce décret, la Wallonie a adopté le 7 juillet 2016 la *deuxième Stratégie wallonne de développement durable (SWDD)*, qui s'inscrit dans la mise en œuvre des Objectifs de développement durable et contient un plan d'actions ciblé sur le changement des modes de consommation et de production, en particulier dans le domaine de l'alimentation, de l'énergie et des ressources naturelles.

Ce décret relatif à la stratégie wallonne de développement durable a été modifié le 30 avril 2019 pour d'une part y inscrire la stratégie Manger Demain (en matière d'alimentation durable) comme une des transitions thématiques nécessaires pour parvenir à un développement durable, et d'autre part pour prévoir à l'avenir la définition d'autres transitions thématiques à inscrire dans la stratégie wallonne de développement durable. Le décret s'intitule dorénavant « Décret du 27 juin 2013 relatif à la stratégie wallonne de développement durable et aux thématiques de transition en émanant ».

Dans le cadre de la transition 'Manger demain, qui s'inscrit pleinement dans la stratégie européenne 'de la ferme à la table', un Conseil wallon de l'alimentation durable (CWAD) a été institué en 2020.

La *troisième stratégie wallonne de développement durable* est en cours d'élaboration, prenant appui sur le Partenariat wallon pour le développement durable. Cet organe de dialogue multi-



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acteurs a été institué en septembre 2021 et est représentatif de bon nombre de parties prenantes wallonnes. La 3^{ème} stratégie de développement durable devrait être adoptée au 2^e trimestre 2022.

Parmi les actions de la stratégie wallonne de développement durable, la Wallonie suit les progrès de la Région vers l'atteinte des 17 ODD au moyen d'indicateurs de suivi. Deux exercices ont déjà été menés, l'un en 2017 et l'autre en 2020. Le deuxième rapport de suivi de progrès de la Wallonie vers les ODD, adopté par le Gouvernement en mars 2020^[1], était assorti de recommandations. Une recommandation phare du groupe d'experts était de déterminer des cibles chiffrées pour les ODD à l'échelle de la Wallonie. Une étude a été finalisée fin décembre 2021 pour proposer de telles cibles au Gouvernement wallon, en vue de les intégrer dans la 3^e stratégie wallonne de développement durable. Les indicateurs de suivi seront également actualisés dans le cadre de la 3^e stratégie.

[1] <http://developpementdurable.wallonie.be/bilan-des-progres>



Flanders
State of the Art

FLEMISH REFORM PROGRAMME 2022

1 APRIL 2022

1. PREFACE

The present *Flemish Reform Programme 2022* (Vlaams Hervormingsprogramma/VHP) is the eleventh that Flanders has drawn up. After the exceptional European Semester (ES) 2021, which was wholly dominated by the preparation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan/NRRP (Nationaal Plan voor Herstel en Veerkracht/NPHV), Flanders is returning to the excellent tradition of drawing up its own annual reform programme.

Since the Flemish Reform Programme (FRP) 2020, the world has changed dramatically and Flanders too had to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of just sitting back, the Government of Flanders launched the Flemish Resilience Recovery Plan¹ at the end of September 2020. Totalling €4.3 billion, this is the most ambitious investment plan ever launched by a Government of Flanders. The recovery plan is intended to help strengthen the prosperity and well-being of people in Flanders after corona. The Flemish Resilience recovery plan is based on seven key focal points: (i) managing the COVID-19 crisis and dealing with the consequences of Brexit, (ii) strengthening Flanders' care and welfare system, (iii) investing in people and talents, (iv) investing in infrastructure, (v) making the economy and society more sustainable, (vi) transforming Flanders digitally and (vii) making government more efficient. 'Flemish Resilience' was translated into 35 clusters and 180 projects. In addition to the €4.3 billion in one-off recovery funds, the Government of Flanders is also investing in other recovery measures, e.g. in care and education.

To alleviate the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, the European Union has set up at the same time a recovery fund, NextGenerationEU. This fund includes a package of grants and loans for Member States, provided by the Recovery and Resilience Facility² (RRF). Each Member State has had to submit a NRRP, justifying how it will contribute to the green and digital transitions, among other things. At the end of April 2021, Belgium submitted its NRRP to which Flanders has made a strong contribution on the basis of its Flemish Resilience recovery plan. In Flanders, 55 projects are financed with RRF funds, for a maximum amount of €2.255 billion³. The NRRP was approved on 23 June 2021 by the European Commission (EC) and on 13 July 2021 by the ECOFIN Council.

The Government of Flanders is actively monitoring and communicating the projects from the Flemish Resilience plan. A separate 'Flemish Resilience' label is used, for instance, for government decisions pertaining to the recovery plan⁴, and the implementation is being monitored extensively in a progress report in which the stakeholders are also closely involved. The results can be consulted in full transparency on the web page of Flemish Resilience⁵.

In this reform programme, Flanders provides a tailored response to the country-specific recommendations 2019, 2020 and 2021 as well as discusses its own projects within the framework of the NRRP. In addition, this reform programme presents a dashboard of the main macroeconomic statistics for the Flemish Region. Finally, this FRP addresses recent developments within the context of the ES, e.g. with a chapter on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With the measures it puts forward in this FRP 2022, the Government of Flanders shows that it will continue to invest fully in an ambitious and coherent (international) policy. The Government of Flanders is a government of investment and remains highly committed to implementing structural reforms. It is the explicit ambition of the Government of Flanders to ensure that Flanders becomes an undisputed reference in the Europe of the twenties.

¹ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/relanceplan-vlaamse-regering-vlaamse-veerkracht>

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_nl

³ The calculation of the maximum financial contribution is, pursuant to the provisions set out in the RRF, updated for each Member State by no later than 30 June 2022 by replacing the data from the EC's autumn 2020 forecast with actual data relating to the change in real GDP for 2020 and the cumulative change in real GDP for the period 2020-2021.

⁴ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht>

⁵ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht>

Flanders is setting the bar high in all areas of society. We aim, for instance, to increase the employment rate to 80% and to move up to the top 5 innovative knowledge regions in Europe.

The EC services can, as always, count on Flanders' active involvement and input within the context of the ES. Notwithstanding the excellent ES cooperation with the EC, the Government of Flanders keeps urging the EC to also receive region-specific recommendations. This final step should allow the Government of Flanders to adopt an even more tailored response to these recommendations and analyses and as such increase the support for the ES even further at the political and societal level in Flanders.

The recent developments at Europe's external borders bring much uncertainty and create additional and unprecedented challenges for Flanders. Europe has activated the Temporary Protection Directive for the refugees from Ukraine. They immediately receive temporary protection in Europe for one year, which can be extended to three years, without having to go through an asylum procedure. The Ukrainian refugees have specific rights and opportunities in terms of residence, such as immediate access to employment, social services, health care, housing and education throughout the European Union. To meet these challenges, Flanders has adopted a structured approach. A Ukraine Refugee Reception Task Force⁶ (Taskforce Opvangcrisis Oekraïne) was immediately set up, for instance, with representatives from the relevant policy areas in Flanders. This task force acts as the pivot between all policy areas in Flanders that are involved, but also between Flanders and the federal government and between Flanders and the local authorities. The Flemish public administration is taking specific measures to provide quality reception facilities for these people in cooperation with the local authorities. At the same time, we are working on concrete action plans for accompanying policies to provide the best possible support for these people for the duration of their stay, as well as to enable them to become part of our society and labour market.

Jan Jambon
Minister-President of the Government of Flanders

⁶ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaanderen-helpt-oekraïne>

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⁷ This document is the English translation of the Flemish Reform Programme (FRP) 2022. The official version of the FRP (in Dutch) was adopted by the Government of Flanders on 1 April 2022.

2. MACROECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

With the Flemish Resilience⁸ recovery plan, the Government of Flanders is investing €4.3 billion in the recovery of society after the COVID-19 crisis. The Government of Flanders is also closely monitoring the recovery via the online dashboard⁹. Fifteen indicators together give a picture of the evolution of the economic and societal situation in Flanders. This chapter discusses a number of socio-economic indicators that are relevant in the context of the ES.

2.1. Economy

Rapid recovery of economic growth

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in an unprecedented economic contraction. In July 2021, the medium-term model HERMREG (Federal Planning Bureau in cooperation with the Regions) estimated the decline of Flanders' economy in real terms at -6.1% for 2020, compared to -6.3% for Belgium. The recession was most pronounced in the sectors 'trade', 'hotels, restaurants and cafés' and 'administrative services'. The Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) reported in its medium-term forecast HERMREG for July 2021¹⁰ that economic activity in industry and construction was already picking up in the 2nd half of 2020. In July 2021, the FPB still predicted a GDP growth in real terms of 5.8% for the Flemish Region for 2021 (5.5% for Belgium). Meanwhile, in September 2021, the FPB revised upwards its growth forecast for Belgium for 2021 to 5.7% (no update for Flanders yet). For 2022, HERMREG forecasts a growth in real terms of 2.8% in the Flemish Region and 2.9% in Belgium. This would bring the GDP level in 2022 back to a level higher than before the COVID-19 crisis. According to HERMREG, real terms growth was on average 4.3% in the Flemish Region and 4.2% in Belgium over the 2020-2022 period. The EU-27 real terms growth was 4.7% on average over the 2020-2022 period (Source: AMECO).

Economic growth in real terms, Flemish Region, Belgium and EU-27 (in %)

	2020	2021	2022	Average 2020-2022
Flemish Region	-6.1	5.8	2.8	4.3
Belgium	-6.3	5.5	2.9	4.2
EU-27	-5.9	5.0	4.3	4.7

Source: Flemish Region and Belgium: HERMREG-FPB, BISA, VSA 2021, EU-27: AMECO.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is suddenly creating new economic uncertainty. The OECD expects the Ukraine crisis to lower GDP growth by 1.4% for the euro area¹¹.

A prosperous economy

The Flemish Region accounted for 57.5% of the Belgian population and 59.7% of Belgium's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021. Per capita GDP in 2021 is estimated at €38,200 purchasing power standard (PPS) by Statistics Flanders. This is 22% higher than the EU-27 average and 15% higher than the EU-15 (EU before 2004 enlargement). Due to the fact that the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) is geographically small compared to other capital areas, there is quite a lot of commuter traffic to Brussels Capital. In 2020, 8.1% of Flanders' working population worked in the Brussels-Capital Region. If GDP is corrected by allocating the labour of commuters to the region of residence, GDP per capita in the Flemish Region would be €40,800 PPS per inhabitant, which is 30% higher than in the EU-27 and 23% higher than in the EU-15. GDP per capita can be decomposed into 3 factors (source: Statistics Flanders based on AMECO and FPB).

- Labour productivity amounted to €87,500 PPS in 2021, which is 28% higher than in the EU-27 and 22% higher than in the EU-15. Since 2000, the gap with the EU-27 has narrowed (+36% in 2000), but the Flemish Region's lead over the EU-15 has grown (2000: +17%).
- The proportion of the population aged 15-64 was 63.0% in the Flemish Region in 2021. The EU-27 (64.0%) and EU-15 (63.7%) scored a bit higher. The gap has narrowed slightly compared to 2000.
- The employment rate (20-64 age group) reached 75.3% in the Flemish Region in 2021, which is less than 5 percentage points short of Flanders' 80% target. Flanders' target is higher than the EU's

⁸ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht>

⁹ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht#dashboard-vlaamse-veerkracht>

¹⁰ https://assets.vlaanderen.be/image/upload/v1646659382/hermreg-rapport-2021_miqdas.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4181d61b-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4181d61b-en>

employment rate target of 78% envisaged under the European Pillar of Social Rights. The employment rate in Flanders exceeds the Belgian average (70.6% in 2021) and is higher than that in the EU-27 (72.3% in 2020). It rose from 67.3% in 1999 to 75.5% in 2019. In 2020 (74.7%), there was a slight decrease compared to 2019, which was, however, made up for again in 2021¹².

This clearly shows that high labour productivity is the cornerstone of the wealth produced in the Flemish Region. GDP is contrasted with disposable income, which is a measure of the wealth earned by its inhabitants. The disposable income in the Flemish Region (Institute of National Accounts, INR) amounted to €23,400 per inhabitant in 2019, which was 6.3% higher than the Belgian average. In 2000, it was 4.9% higher.

Imports and exports higher than ever

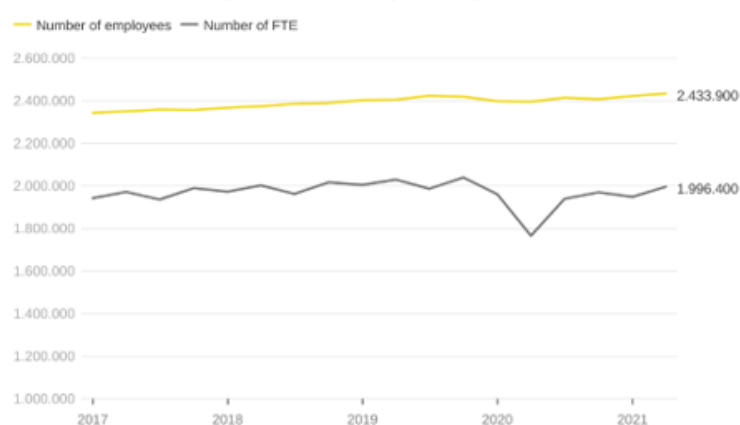
The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on international trade. Goods imports and exports fell sharply just after the outbreak of the crisis in 2020. This was followed by an increase that even surpasses the pre-crisis figures. In the third quarter of 2021, goods totalling €88.5 billion were imported, which is 29% more compared to the same quarter the year before. Goods exports from Flanders amounted to €94.6 billion in the third quarter of 2021, which is 30% higher than in the 3rd quarter of 2020 and 19% higher than in the 3rd quarter of 2019. A sharp decline was again reported in the second quarter of 2020. Exports peaked at €95.2 billion in the second quarter of 2021. In 2020, the Flemish Region accounted for 81% of Belgium's goods imports and exports¹³. It is unclear at present to what extent the tribulations caused by the Ukraine crisis will impact on our trade relations. Russia accounts for 1.2% of Flanders' exports (mainly pharmaceuticals) and 1.8% of Flanders' imports (mainly fuels and precious stones).

2.2. Work and labour market

Number of employees above pre-COVID-19 level

The COVID-19 crisis, the necessary health measures and the resulting economic contraction were of course also felt on the labour market. No sharp decline was, however, recorded in the employment of salaried employees in 2020. This is owing, inter alia, to the system of temporary unemployment, whereby the link between employee and employer is maintained, but no work or only partial work is done. In the first quarter of 2021, the employment of salaried employees in Flanders reached pre-COVID-19 level for the first time. It increased again by 15,300 employees (+0.6%), which is 3,409 (+0.14%) more than in the fourth quarter of 2019, when the impact from the COVID-19 crisis was not yet visible. In the second quarter of 2021, the employment of salaried employees in Flanders rose above pre-COVID-19 level. Compared to the first quarter, 10,786 employees were added, which is 8,476 more than before the crisis. On an annual basis, compared to the second quarter of 2020, 38,224 additional jobs were created, which is an increase of 1.6%.

Evolution in the number of employees and the volume of labour
Flanders, number of persons/FTEs, quarterly data



Note: 2021-Q2: estimate (based on rapid estimates of employment at NSSO)
Chart: DKBUZA * Source: NSSO via Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring

¹² The LFS questionnaire was revised in 2021, which is why the labour market figures of 2021 cannot simply be compared with the figures prior to 2021.

¹³ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/statistiek-vlaanderen/buitenlandse-handel/uitvoer-invoer-van-goederen>

Volume of labour is recovering

Employment in full-time equivalents (FTEs) remains below pre-crisis level (2,039,710 FTEs), but seems to be catching up. After the decrease in the first quarter and the deep dive of -9.9% in the second quarter of 2020, full-time equivalent employment rebounded strongly in the third quarter with +9.8%. In the fourth quarter of 2020, the number of full-time equivalents continued to rise. After a slight decline in the first quarter of 2021, the upward trend resumed to 1,996,400 FTEs in the second quarter of 2021.

Temporary unemployment due to COVID-19

As mentioned earlier, no sharp decline was reported in the employment of salaried employees as a result of the pandemic in 2020. During the first peak in April 2020, 691,000 employees in Flanders were temporarily unemployed for at least one day due to COVID-19. After the second peak in November 2020, the number of temporarily unemployed stabilised in the first months of 2021. In April 2021, still more than 200,000 people in Flanders were temporarily unemployed for at least one day due to COVID-19. This number continued to drop until July 2021 and then remained more or less stable around 89,000 for about four months. Although this number is still high, it is a significant decrease compared to the peak in April 2020, when 691,000 employees in Flanders were temporarily unemployed for at least one day due to COVID-19. In December 2021, the number of temporarily unemployed went up again by 10% to 97,175.

Number of jobseekers continues to fall

The unemployment rate in Flanders was 3.9% in 2021. It is lower than the Belgian average of 6.3% and the EU-27 average of 7.2% (figure 2020) (source: LFS). The number of jobseekers in Flanders continues to fall and remains much lower than before the pandemic. At the end of December 2021, Flanders had 177,522 unemployed jobseekers, which is a decrease of 15.9% compared to December 2020. In spring 2020, the number of jobseekers went up as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. From the 2nd half of 2020 the trend is downwards. The current number remains much lower than in 2019 when the number of unemployed jobseekers stood at 211,081.

Employment rate: 75.3% of 20-64 age group in work

In 2021, the employment rate¹⁴ in the 20-64 age group in the Flemish Region was 75.3% (according to the new definition), which is less than 5 percentage points short of Flanders' 80% target.

Employment rate of 20-64 age group, in total and broken down by disadvantaged groups (Flemish Region, 2010-2021, in %)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021*	EU-27 average in 2020
Employment rate (20-64)	72.1	71.8	71.5	71.9	71.9	71.9	72.0	73.0	74.6	75.5	74.7	75.3	72.3
Sub-indicators employment rate disadvantaged groups													
50-64 age group	53.1	53.6	54.6	56.5	57.5	58.1	59.1	60.8	63.5	64.8	64.7	65.7	66.7
55-64 age group	38.2	38.9	40.5	42.9	44.3	45.6	46.7	49.5	52.5	54.9	55.7	57.0	59.6
Women (20-64)	66.7	66.4	66.2	66.9	67.6	68.2	67.7	68.2	70.7	71.5	70.9	71.9	66.7
Men*** (20-64)	77.4	77.0	76.7	76.8	76.2	75.6	76.3	77.7	78.5	79.3	78.5	78.6	78.0
Born outside EU** (20-64)	53.4	53.0	51.8	54.9	53.3	53.7	53.0	56.0	61.2	61.9	59.2	-	61.9
With work-limiting disability (20-64)	33.5	38.6	38.7	40.4	42.7	43.1	41.1	43.3	45.8	45.6	46.0	-	-

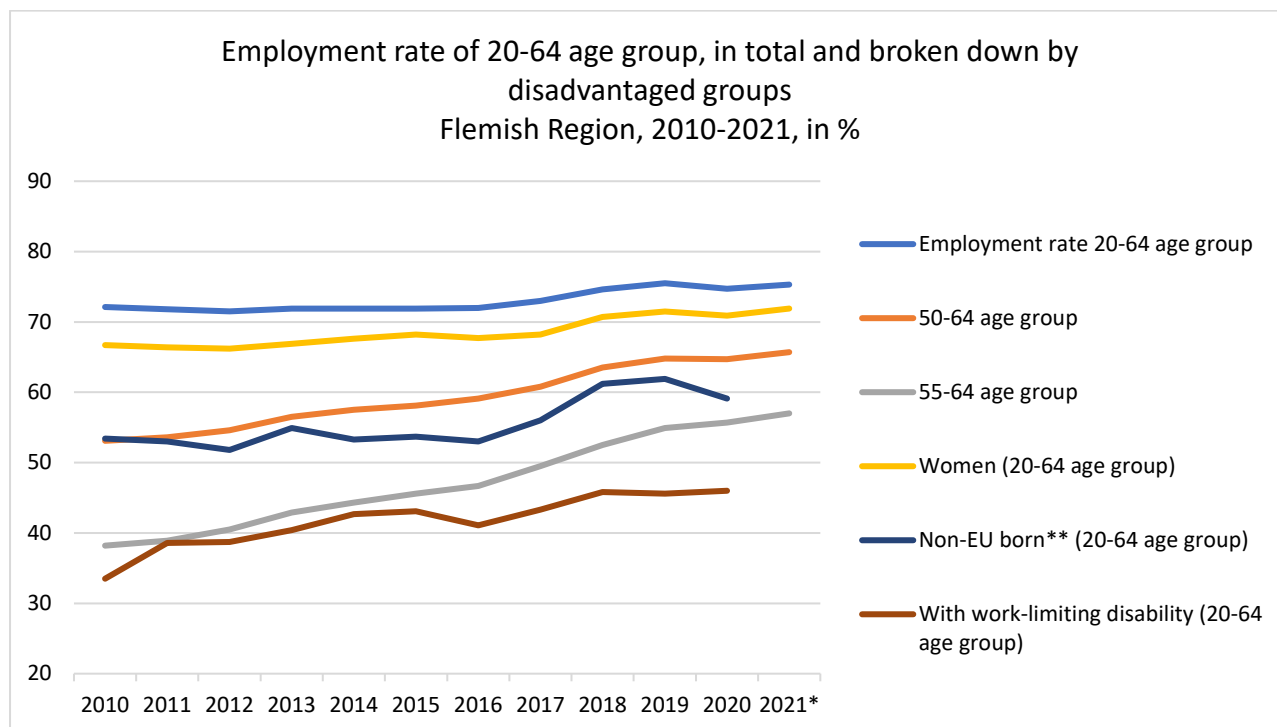
Source: LFS Statbel (Directorate General Statistics - Statistics Belgium), edited by Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring and Statistics Flanders

*Note: The data included in the chart concerns estimates based on a survey. Consequently, a margin of error must be factored in. In addition, there is a break in the time series between 2016 and 2017. * The LFS questionnaire was revised in 2021. The main change is that from 2021 onwards, those who are temporarily unemployed for more than three months will be counted as unemployed or inactive, rather than employed, depending on their answers to the questions on job search and availability. ** EU refers to EU-28 (including UK) for the years 2010-2019. For the year 2020, EU refers to EU-27¹⁵ (without UK).***: no disadvantaged group.*

¹⁴ <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/work-training/labour-market/employment-and-unemployment>

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:EU_enlargements

The employment rate fluctuated around 72% between 2010 and 2016, then increased to 75.5% in 2019. In 2020, there was a slight drop compared to 2019, which was compensated for in 2021. The employment rate among women rose more sharply than among men, yet the employment rate among men is higher than that among women in 2021. The employment rate in the 55-64 age group was lower than that of the other age groups in the period from 1999 to 2021, and yet this group experienced the sharpest increase from 23.7% in 1999 to 57.0% in 2021. The employment rate is lower among non-EU nationals and among persons with work-limiting disabilities or long-term health problems.



Source: LFS Statbel (Directorate General Statistics - Statistics Belgium), edited by Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring and Statistics Flanders

*Note: The data included in the chart concerns estimates based on a survey. Consequently, a margin of error must be factored in. In addition, there is a break in the time series between 2016 and 2017. * The LFS questionnaire was revised in 2021. The main change is that from 2021 onwards, those who are temporarily unemployed for more than three months will be counted as unemployed or inactive, rather than employed, depending on their answers to the questions on job search and availability. ** EU refers to EU-28 (including UK) for the years 2010-2019. For the year 2020, EU refers to EU-27¹⁶ (without UK).*

2.3. Education

Early school leavers (18-24 age group), highly educated (30-34 age group), NEET (15-29 age group) (Flemish Region, 2010-2021, in %)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021*	EU-27 average 2020
Early school leavers	9.6	9.6	8.7	7.5	7.0	7.2	6.8	7.2	7.3	6.2	6.7	5.3	10.1
30- to 34-year-olds with HE diploma	44.9	42.3	45.3	44.1	44.8	43.2	47.3	46.4	48.2	48.5	49.3	52.4	41.0
NEET (15-29 age group)	8.8	9.6	10.5	11.3	10.3	10.7	9.4	9.2	9.2	8.6	8.8	-	13.7

Note: The figures included in the chart are estimates based on a survey. Consequently, a margin of error must be factored in. In addition, there is a break in the time series between 2016 and 2017. The LFS questionnaire was revised in 2021. Source: LFS Statbel (Directorate General Statistics - Statistics Belgium), edited by Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring and Statistics Flanders

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:EU_enlargements

Decrease in the number of early school leavers

According to the results of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), 5.3% of 18- to 24- year-olds in Flanders were early school leavers in 2021. These young people did not obtain any secondary education qualification nor were they in education or training in the 4 weeks prior to the survey. In 2010, the share of early school leavers in the 18-24 age group was still much higher (9.6%) In 2020, the proportion of early school leavers in the Flemish Region was lower than in the European Union (10.1%).

Increase in the share of 30- to 34-year-olds with a higher education diploma

In 2021, 52.4% of 30- to 34-year-olds is highly educated (higher education diploma). The share of highly educated people has clearly risen in recent years. In the EU-27, the share of highly educated among 30- to 34-year-olds (41.0% in 2020) was significantly lower than in the Flemish Region.

Flanders is doing well in terms of NEET

NEETs (15-29 age group) are young people who are not in education, employment, or training. With a rate of 8.8% in 2020, Flanders is doing well in the EU-27 context.

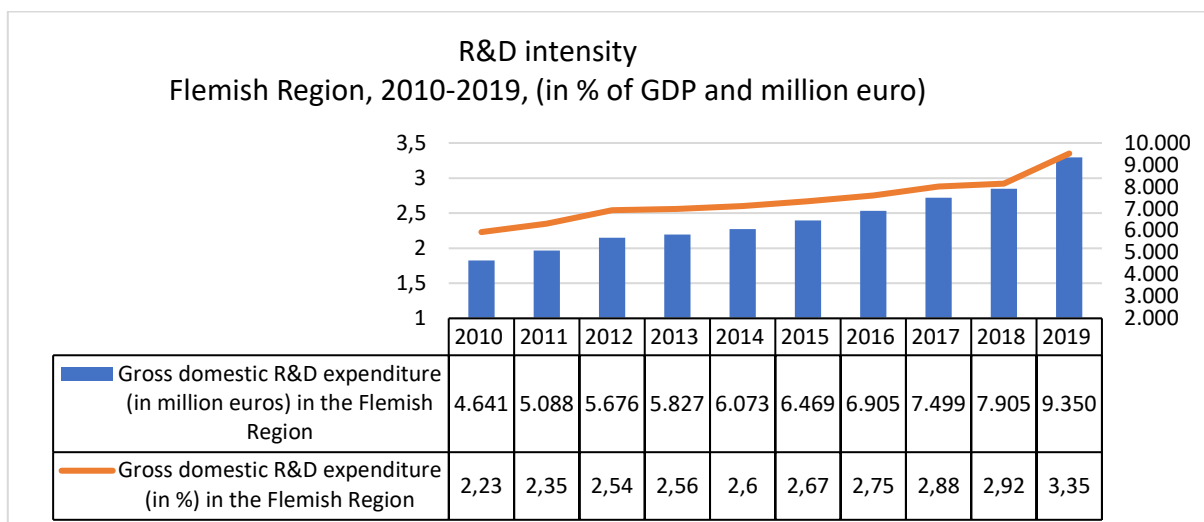
Training participation rate of 47.7% in Flanders in 2016

As part of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the European Union has put forward, in May 2021, three targets to be achieved by 2030. One of these targets is adult participation in training (25-64 age group, in the last 12 months), which should increase to 60%. On 17 December 2021, the Government of Flanders endorsed the lifelong learning action plan 'Building a learning society in Flanders' (Koers zetten naar een lerend Vlaanderen) (see also 3.2.1.3.). With this action plan Flanders subscribes to Europe's ambition to reach a training participation rate of 60% for (non-)formal learning according to the 12-month indicator. This is a yardstick for a learning society. According to the Adult Education Survey (AES), Flanders had a 47.7% participation rate in formal and non-formal learning in 2016. A new AES survey will be conducted in 2022.

2.4. R&D

R&D intensity above 3% target for the first time in 2019

Expenditure on research and development (R&D) in the Flemish Region is estimated at €9.4 billion for 2019. This amount rose year on year, with a large increase in 2019 (+18%). As a result, R&D intensity also rose to 3.35% of GDP in 2019. This means that the Flemish Region has for the first time exceeded the 3% mark. Flanders scores better than Belgium (3.2%) and the EU-27 average (2.2%).



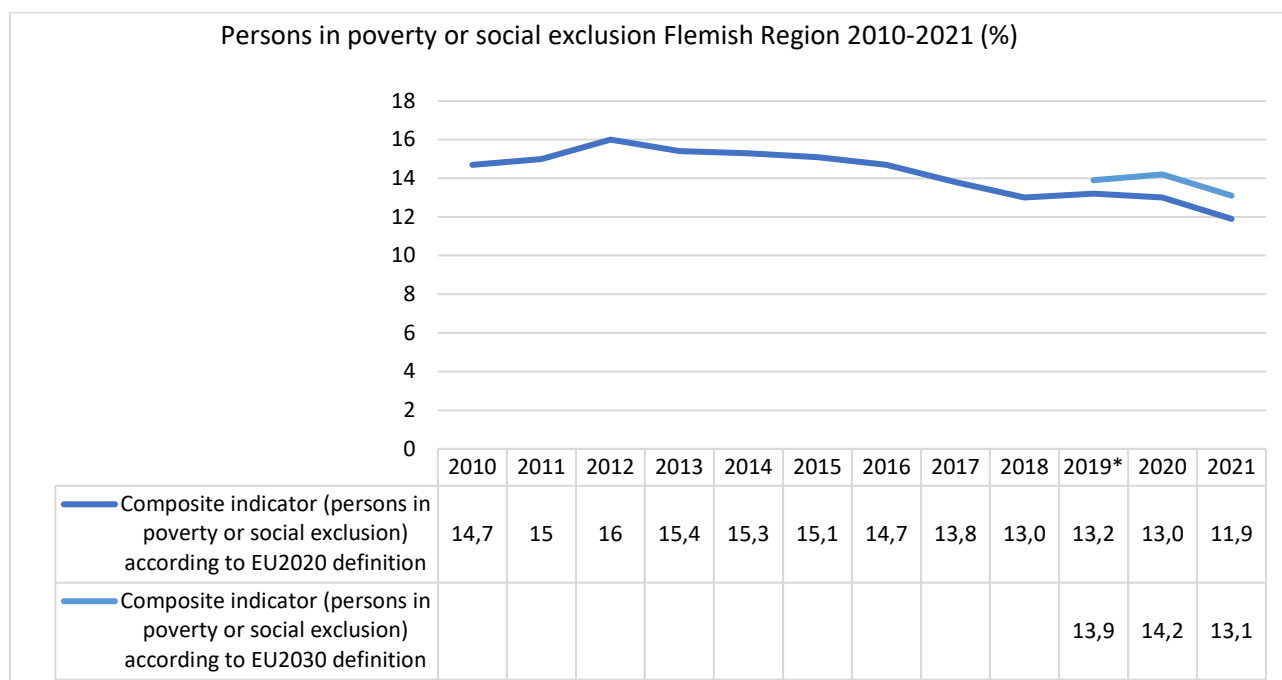
Source: ECOOM, adapted by Statistics Flanders

Flanders is an innovation-driven economy. It has a well-educated working population with a high educational attainment level (see 2.3) and it produces innovative applications. In 2020, 8.8% of the working population in the Flemish Region was employed in high-tech sectors (source: adapted by Statistics Flanders on the basis of Eurostat). This is higher than in Belgium (8.2%), but lower than in the EU-27 (9.6%) due to the high figures in a number of Eastern European countries and Germany, which have a relatively high number of people working in the high-tech industry. Patents constitute the final element in the innovation process. In 2017, the number of patents applied for in the Flemish Region was 259 per million inhabitants (source: Eurostat). Flanders scores better than the Belgian average (215).

2.5. Poverty and social exclusion

Share of people in poverty or social exclusion significantly lower in Flemish Region than in Belgium and EU-27

According to the 2021 EU-SILC survey, 13% of inhabitants of the Flemish Region lived in poverty or social exclusion (according to new EU2030 indicator). The share of people in poverty or social exclusion was significantly lower in the Flemish Region than in Belgium (19.3%) and the EU-27 (22% in 2020) in 2019¹⁷.



Note: The figures included in the chart were calculated on the basis of household incomes in the previous year. The EU-SILC survey underwent substantial changes in 2019, so caution is required when making comparisons with previous years. Under the new EU2030 strategy, the definitions of AROPE were changed. For instance, the indicator 'severe material deprivation' was extended to 'severe material and social deprivation'; and the definition of 'living in a household with very low work intensity' was changed: the age limit was raised to 64 years and a number of groups are now either included or excluded¹⁸.

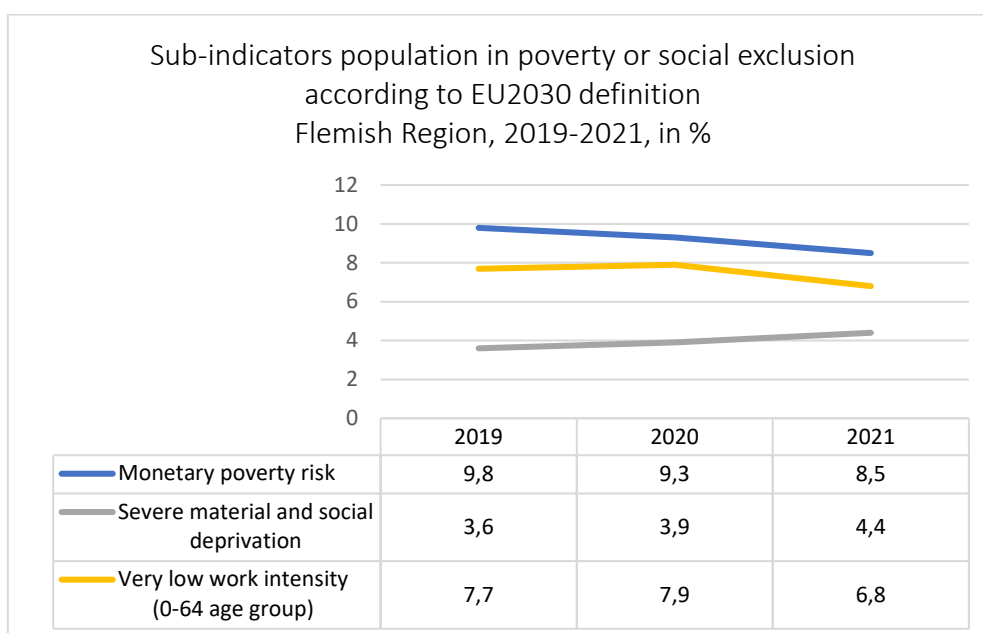
Source: EU-SILC Statbel, edited by Statistics Flanders

¹⁷ [https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/households/poverty-and-living-conditions/risk-poverty-or-social-exclusion#:~:text=Armoederisico's%20in%202021&text=Statbel%2C%20het%20Belgische%20statistiekbureau%2C%20publiceert,voo r%20monetaire%20armoede%20\(AROP\).](https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/households/poverty-and-living-conditions/risk-poverty-or-social-exclusion#:~:text=Armoederisico's%20in%202021&text=Statbel%2C%20het%20Belgische%20statistiekbureau%2C%20publiceert,voo r%20monetaire%20armoede%20(AROP).)

¹⁸ <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/households/poverty-and-livingconditions/plus>

For the three sub-indicators¹⁹:

1. In 2021, 8.5% of the population of the Flemish Region lived in a household with a household income below the Belgian poverty threshold. The *monetary poverty risk* in Flanders was significantly lower than in the other two Regions (24.9% in BCR and 17.7% in Walloon Region) and than the Belgian average (13.1%) and the EU-27 average (17% in 2020).
2. In 2021, 4.4% of inhabitants of the Flemish Region lived in a household in *severe material and social deprivation*. Flanders scores significantly better than the other two Regions (11.5% in BCR and 8.0% in Walloon Region), the Belgian average (6.3%) and the EU-27 average (7% in 2020).
3. 6.8% of the population up to the age of 64 live in a *household with very low work intensity*. The share in the Flemish Region was considerably lower than in the other two Regions (22.8% in BCR and 17% in Walloon Region) and than the average in Belgium (11.9%). The share is about the same as the EU-27 average (8% in 2020).



Note: The figures included in the chart were calculated on the basis of household incomes in the previous year. *Source:* EU-SILC Statbel, edited by Statistics Flanders

2.6. Energy and climate

Growing share of renewable energy

For renewable energy, the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan (Vlaams Energie- en Klimaatplan/VEKP) sets an indicative target of 28,512 gigawatt-hour (GWh) of renewable energy production by 2030: green electricity (12,780 GWh), green heat (9,688 GWh) and biofuels (6,044 GWh, exclusive federal competence). For energy efficiency, a target of maximum final energy consumption of 275,240 GWh by 2030 in the policy scenario (WAM) is set as a contribution to the national energy saving target (Art. 3 EED) and a contribution to the national target of 87.891 TWh (= accumulated final energy savings over 2021-2030 period) under Article 7 EED.

In the Flemish Region, final energy consumption from renewable sources amounted to 23,141 GWh in 2020. This put the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption at 8.9% in 2020. This share has increased in recent years. In 2010, it was 4.5%. This figure not only includes the domestic production of green electricity, heat and cooling, but also the use of renewable energy sources for transport purposes, such as biofuels. To meet Flanders' target under the intra-Belgian burden sharing agreement, the production of 23,141 GWh of renewable energy in Flanders for the year 2020 was supplemented by the purchase of statistics totalling 2,070 GWh.

¹⁹ <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/households/poverty-and-living-conditions/risk-poverty-or-social-exclusion#figures>

Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption (Flemish Region, 2010-2020, in GWh and %)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Final energy consumption from renewable sources (GWh)	13,304	12,711	15,281	16,319	15,762	16,716	18,369	19,152	19,776	20,101	23,141
Gross final energy consumption (GWh)	297,305	277,035	277,476	285,098	270,604	278,758	283,503	282,389	284,367	279,354	260,583
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption (%)	4.5	4.6	5.5	5.7	5.8	6.0	6.5	6.8	7.0	7.2	8.9

Source: Energy and Climate Agency of Flanders (Vlaams Energie- en Klimaatagentschap/VEKA)

Greenhouse gas reduction

Total emissions can be broken down into emissions that are regulated by the European Emissions Trading System (ETS) and the emissions that do not fall within this system (non-ETS).

In its Flemish Climate Strategy 2050 Flanders aims for an 85% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in non-ETS sectors by 2050, as compared to 2005, with the ambition to evolve towards full climate neutrality. For the ETS sectors, Flanders endorses the decisions made by Europe for these sectors in a context of a shrinking emission allocation under the EU-ETS system.

The additional package of climate measures to strengthen the VEKP raises the greenhouse gas reduction target in non-ETS sectors from 35% to 40% by 2030 (compared to 2005).

Greenhouse gas emissions broken down between ETS and non-ETS (Flemish Region, 2010-2019, in Mt CO2 eq.)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total emissions	78.5	75.2	77.9	77.3	77.1	77.4	76.1
ETS	32.7	31.6	32.6	31.7	32.0	31.9	31.9
Non-ETS	45.9	43.6	45.3	45.6	45.2	45.5	44.2

Note: These figures consider neither emissions and sinks from land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), nor NF3 emissions and CO2 emissions from domestic aviation. The reason for this is that the European burden-sharing and the burden-sharing between the Regions in our country do not take these emissions into consideration either, and these figures are intended precisely to make an assessment against the emission targets. Source: VEKP Progress Report 2021²⁰ based on figures from Flanders Environment Agency (Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij/VMM)

ETS emissions for the most part include greenhouse gas emissions in industry and the energy sector. Over 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in Flanders are covered by ETS. In the European Union, ETS greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 21% by 2020 and by 43% by 2030, compared to 2005. In the context of 'Fit for 55', the EC even proposes that ETS emissions should be lowered by 61% by 2030, compared to 2005. This ETS target applies to ETS emissions in Europe as a whole and is not broken down into Member State level. In addition, EU Member States must reduce their non-ETS emissions between 2013 and 2020 according to a linearly decreasing path with annual reduction targets. These are mainly emissions from transport, households, trade and services, agriculture and several components of the industry and energy sectors. Just under 60% of greenhouse gas emissions in Flanders are non-ETS emissions. Flanders has committed to reducing non-ETS emissions by 15.7% by 2020 in comparison with 2005.

The latest progress report (July 2021) shows that non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions in Flanders fell from 46.7 Mt CO2 eq. in 2005 to 44.2 Mt CO2 eq. in 2019. This is a decrease of 5% between 2005 and 2019 or an average annual decrease of 0.4%. In the same progress report, a preliminary assessment was also made of the realisation of Flanders' non-ETS emissions target throughout the period 2013-2020. This preliminary assessment points to a limited cumulative deficit of about 2.5 Mt CO2 eq. for the period 2013-2020. This amounts to a deficit of 0.7% of the total emission allocation of 352 Mt CO2 eq. for the period 2013-2020. This deficit will be supplemented with the flexibility mechanisms provided for. The final assessment for the period 2013-2020 will be made in a subsequent progress report on the basis of the final figures for the year 2020.

²⁰ <https://energiesparen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/VORA%20VEKP.pdf>

3. POLICY AND APPROACH FOR THE MAIN ECONOMIC, LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES

3.0. Introduction

The ES 2021 was an exceptional ES in which the preparation of the NRRP took centre stage. Flanders has made a strong contribution to the preparation of the NRRP on the basis of its Flemish Resilience recovery plan. In Flanders, 55 projects are financed with RRF funds, for a maximum amount of €2.255 billion²¹. On 13 July 2021, the European Council endorsed Belgium's NRRP. At present, the operationalisation of the NRRP is in full swing²².



Photo²³: Visit of the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen to Belgium following the positive assessment by the EC of Belgium's NRRP

The current ES 2022 is a 'transition semester', with some traditional elements coming back into play. Chapters 3.1. through 3.6. of this section address both the country-specific recommendations 2019²⁴, 2020²⁵ and 2021²⁶ and Flanders' investments and reforms within the framework of the NRRP²⁷. Moreover, the measures relating to the labour market and education (3.3.) and social cohesion (3.6.) very much tie in with the European Pillar of Social Rights²⁸. The FRP 2022 is also aligned with the 4 dimensions of competitive sustainability of the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2022²⁹, i.e. environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness, and macroeconomic stability.

Flanders again took active part in the Fact Finding Mission (FFM) on 24 and 25 February 2022 between the EC services and Belgium, which will be important in the context of the EC's draft Country Report Belgium 2022. The final Country Report and the draft CSRs are expected to be delivered on 25 May 2022, as part of the Spring Package.

²¹ The calculation of the maximum financial contribution will, pursuant to the provisions set out in the RRF, be updated for each Member State by no later than 30 June 2022 by replacing the data from the EC's autumn 2020 forecast with actual data relating to the change in real GDP for 2020 and the cumulative change in real GDP for the period 2020-2021.

²² Flanders is actively involved in the NRRP work within the framework of the Inter-federal Monitoring Committee, the Policy Monitoring Committee and the Inter-ministerial Conference on strategy recovery and investment.

²³ <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/photo/P-051384~2F00-01>

²⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC_2019_301_R_0001

²⁵ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H0826\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H0826(01)&from=EN)

²⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2021:304:FULL&from=EN>

²⁷ Flanders' investments (I) and reforms (R) in the NRRP are the following : Improved energy subsidy scheme (including investment component), Renovation of social housing (I), Renovation of public buildings (I), An industrial value chain for the hydrogen economy (I), Renewable heat networks (I), Ecological defragmentation (I), Blue Deal (I), Digitalisation of the Flemish public administration (I), Cycling infrastructure (I), Charging infrastructure (I), Greening of the bus fleet (I), Promotion of zero-emission transport (R), Emissions fraud (R), Digisprong/Digital Leap (R + I), Higher education advancement fund (R + I), An inclusive labour market (R), Digibanks (I), Learning and career offensive (R), Digital skills (I), Lifelong learning (R), Strengthening of R&D (I), Optimisation of procedures: Faster permit and appeal procedures (R), Broadening of the innovation base (R), Governance Circular Flanders (R), Recycling Hub (I), Circular building and manufacturing industry (I) Expenditure reviews - The Flemish Broad Review and expenditure benchmark of Flanders (R)

²⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en

²⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0740&qid=1644822955845&from=NL>

3.1. Budget

3.1.1. Sound public finances

Net borrowing on Flanders' budget is estimated at €3.3 billion in 2022 and is heading towards a deficit of €900 million in 2026 (see Table 1). These deficits include the construction costs pertaining to the Oosterweel link and the Flemish Resilience recovery plan.

Table 1: Financing balance of budget preparation (BO) 2022 (in thousand euros)

	BO 2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Financing balance	-3,262,505	-2,453,321	-1,747,198	-1,309,943	-877,587
Estimated GDP	297 606 750	307 500 150	317 567 920	327 214 780	337 192 980
Financing balance as % of estimated GDP	-1.10	-0.80	-0.55	-0.40	-0.26

Source: Multiannual estimate 2021-2026 for the 2022 budget preparation (begrotingsopmaak/BO) including amendments³⁰

The Government of Flanders resolutely opts for restoring sound public finances and strengthening structural growth. It is taking its responsibility and making difficult but necessary choices.

By introducing austerity measures totalling €900 million by 2024, the Government of Flanders is keeping its promise to halve the budget deficit by 2024 vis-à-vis the budget balance after implementation of the coalition agreement. A budget exercise of this magnitude is unprecedented for the Government of Flanders, especially in the middle of a term of office. For the austerity measures, the Flemish Broad Review (Vlaamse Brede Heroverweging/VBH) (see 3.1.2) was partially drawn from, which is also part of the NRRP.

Given the volatility in estimates of economic growth and inflation, we point out that changes in these key economic parameters have a significant effect on our revenues. An increase/decrease by 10 basis points in the GDP and consumer price index (CPI) respectively, results in an increase/decrease in the estimated revenue from federal transfers of €32.9 million and €35.6 million respectively.

Flanders continues to invest in the future. The Flemish Resilience recovery plan is furthering this aim. The crisis is also being used to prepare and implement reforms. The Department of Finance and Budget is working on an expenditure benchmark for Flanders. The expenditure benchmark is to ensure the sustainability of public finances in all circumstances, guarantee policy stability and discourage ad hoc adjustments. Using an expenditure benchmark also implies starting from medium-term targets in a multiannual perspective.

From the multiannual estimate 2022-2027 onwards, the expenditure benchmark will be reported at aggregated level. This will make it possible to build experience in determining benchmarks and to gain a better understanding of the expenditure dynamics of Flanders' budget in relation to revenue growth. The benchmark will each time be determined at the start of a government's term of office. The benchmark for structurally eligible public expenditure will only be determined during the budget preparation.

One of the CSRs addressed to Belgium is to contain the costs of ageing and long-term care in order to achieve a balanced structural budget. This expenditure is reviewed within the framework of Flanders' budgetary projections and the multiannual estimate. For each budget preparation and adjustment this expenditure is thus reviewed with the aim of achieving a balanced structural budget, including in the medium term. This strict budget monitoring pertains to the various components of public expenditure in Flanders that may evolve open-ended on the basis of the ageing population, such as the cash allowances based on severity of care in Flemish Social Protection and the assistive mobility devices. The role of the 60 first-line care zones is of primary importance in long-term care. These zones deliver person-centred, targeted work by integrating the health and welfare sectors. The budgets of these Care Councils (Zorghraden) take into account societal parameters. Other budget expenditure related to ageing, such as residential care for older persons and family care, comes under a regulatory framework that sets the growth target and which can therefore be enforced with regulation. In addition, the Government of

³⁰ <https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1762120>

Flanders is committed to investments in prevention, outpatient care and support of the home environment to prevent care needs from becoming more serious.

3.1.2. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: the Flemish Broad Review

The Flemish Broad Review (Vlaamse Brede Heroverweging/VBH)³¹ was the first administration-wide exercise of its kind. Its purpose was to thoroughly screen all expenditure items and, where relevant, the levels of cost recovery of Flanders' budget. This may improve the quality of public finances in terms of (management) efficiency and (policy) effectiveness. The VBH is not a one-off exercise, but should lead to a structural embedding of policy evaluations and expenditure reviews in the policy and budgetary process. It was included as a reform in the NRRP and is funded as such via the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

At the end of 2021, the Government of Flanders specified a number of themes for a spending review, such as higher education, sustainable water use and the organisation of the water landscape, housing policy instruments, and Flanders' productivity policy. For the implementation of the spending reviews, a plan of action is elaborated for each theme. The expenditure reviews must be initiated by the end of 2022 at the latest. The purpose of the expenditure reviews is to be able to take the results into account at the latest when the next government is formed. The progress of the initiated expenditure reviews is explained in the six-monthly reports under the RRF.

In recent years, the Flemish public administration has taken steps to strengthen the link between the financial cycle and the policy cycle. The Department of Finance and Budget is further streamlining and simplifying the budgetary processes. The budgetary adjustment and monitoring processes were redesigned in order to adopt a more strategic and sustainable approach to Flanders' public finances. In this way, effect is given to one of the recommendations in the Technical Report entitled 'Flanders - Integrating Spending Review in the Budgetary System' by Marco Cangiano, Riccardo Ercoli, and Johannes Hers: "*As amply proved by other countries that have successfully re-focused their budget toward a more strategic focus and on performance, the role of the budget office and budget coordinators within the MoF and line ministries will change by requiring more strategic vision and policy analysis skills in addition to more traditional roles.*"³²:

3.2. Labour market and education

3.2.1. Labour market

3.2.1.1. Introduction

Flanders' economy is recovering faster than expected (see 2.2.). But while the cyclical upturn is once again pushing up the number of vacancies, companies are having more and more difficulty in finding people to fill them. Today, the shortage and mismatch on Flanders' labour market are of a more structural and pressing nature than before and manifest themselves in acute shortages of qualified manpower in all sectors and industries. Shortages that will only increase as a result of the ageing population and the associated replacement demand. The Centre of Expertise for Labour Market Monitoring (Steunpunt Werk) calculated that each year some 75,000 people in Flanders leave the labour market, who must of course be replaced. This situation offers people opportunities to find their way (back) to the labour market or to embark on a new path. On the other hand, this situation also poses a threat, as every vacancy we fail to fill today costs us growth and prosperity, and represents a missed opportunity to help someone find a job. That is why the Government of Flanders emphasises the ambition it signed up to when it took up office to get an additional 120,000 Flemish people in work in a bid to achieve an 80% employment rate. As such, it also ties in with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

With this ambition in mind, the Flemish Minister for Work and Social Economy will, together with the Government of Flanders, focus on the broad activation of jobseekers and economically inactive people and on an ambitious learning and career policy. For Flanders to be able to pursue an effective activation policy, the Regions should be given the necessary scope within the federal framework to conduct their own customised asymmetrical policies. Within the framework of the national employment conference the

³¹ <https://fin.vlaanderen.be/de-vlaamse-brede-heroverweging-vbh/>

³² https://fin.vlaanderen.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MC-Flanders--Technical_Assistance_Mission_Report--Master-V5.pdf

Government of Flanders submitted in June 2021 a total of 29 proposals to the federal government, including criteria based on the availability of the unemployed in the labour market, training, temporarily unemployed people, etc. Several of these proposals are currently being elaborated in technical terms and should lead to concrete results as soon as possible.

3.2.1.2. More people in work

The Flemish Minister for Work and Social Economy and the Government of Flanders are strengthening the activation offer for jobseekers. In early December 2021, a new tender 'Integrated Guidance Plus' (Integrale Begeleiding/IB+) was launched for those at risk of remaining unemployed for too long. The tender provides, inter alia, for a specialised employer approach and job-hunting in line with the jobseeker's profile, and focuses on application skills, jobseeker motivation, working on 21st century skills and orientation actions. The public employment service of Flanders (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding/VDAB) is also developing a new work form 'GLOW'/groeien en leren op de werkvloer (growing and learning in the workplace) (reform). This new form will combine the strengths of the guidance forms 'temporary work experience' (traject tijdelijke werkervaring/TWE) and 'specialised training, guidance and mediation service' (gespecialiseerde opleidings-, begeleidings- en bemiddelingsdienst/GOB). This new work form is targeted at jobseekers who are in great need of support in terms of job-related self-reliance. The remit of the guidance provider is to mediate these jobseekers to paid employment. The focus is on job search and retention, and on career growth.

Short-skilled jobs account for a substantial part of the structural labour shortage in Flanders. Of the 373,543 vacancies that were reported directly to the VDAB in the past 12 months, 155,787 vacancies did not require a specific diploma or at most a diploma of the 2nd stage of secondary education. In other words, for 41.7% of the vacancies, short-skilled profiles were looked for. The job bonus is a measure intended for low wage earners, which means a large proportion of jobs with a short-skilled profile are likely to qualify. This reform makes working in low-skilled jobs more attractive, which is a segment of Flanders' labour market that currently has a considerable number of vacancies. The employment rate of short-skilled people in Flanders is much lower than the average employment rate. With this measure we are making work more rewarding, particularly for people who face more difficulties on the labour market today. This is one of the key measures towards achieving the 80% target. As mentioned earlier, companies have significant difficulties in finding personnel. If no action is taken, this will have a negative impact on businesses in Flanders and result in potential growth loss. By making work more rewarding and attractive, the Government of Flanders is thus also remedying this economic problem. The job bonus amounts to a net maximum of €600 on an annual basis for people who work full-time and earn up to €1,800 gross per month. The amount of the Flemish job bonus is then phased out towards a gross monthly salary of €2,500 for full-time work.

To increasingly activate long-term jobseekers who are entitled to unemployment benefit (jobseeker for more than 2 years) and to enhance their competencies, the community service (gemeenschapsdienst) will be introduced. The community service will be legally elaborated as a type of work experience placement. Within the competence-enhancing pathway 'community service', long-term jobseekers will carry out small-scale tasks for local authorities and not-for-profit organisations to work on set generic competencies and get into a work rhythm. Jobseekers will receive a small remuneration for this. When the community service ties in with a long-term job-seeker's pathway to employment, the jobseeker is of course obliged to accept this offer, as well as other measures, insofar as it is part of a pathway to employment.

Dutch knowledge is essential to strengthen the position of non-Dutch speakers or people with a language disadvantage on the labour market. That is why the Flemish Minister for Work and Social Economy launches the action plan 'Five for Language' (Vijf voor Taal). With this plan, VDAB wants to eliminate the language disadvantage and create more opportunities for non-Dutch speakers on the labour market.

Flanders is developing and implementing individual supported employment specifically for those who are at a great distance from the labour market, and in particular for people with a work-limiting disability. This reform within the social and mainstream economies will allow employers to hire target group

employees who yield a lower return and/or need guidance. In this way, we strengthen cohesion and interaction between the social and mainstream economies and stimulate companies to create more jobs for people with a work-limiting disability. This enables supported employment companies (maatwerkbedrijven) and social economy organisations to play a role in the guidance of target group employees in companies belonging to the mainstream economic sectors (normaal economisch circuit/NEC). New opportunities are also being created in terms of progression and the promotion of an inclusive labour market.

The Government of Flanders (2019-2024) has set itself the target of getting an additional 120,000 people into work by the end of its term of office. On 21 February 2020, the Government of Flanders and the social partners signed a joint declaration of commitment to this end. The social partners will be collaborated with to identify barriers and find solutions. These barriers pertain, inter alia, to accessible and affordable childcare, mobility and finances.

Within this framework, the priority rules in childcare and their application were evaluated in order to give actual priority to children of parents who are in work or who are following training as part of a pathway to work. The evaluation was carried out in terms of both quality and quantity and focused on the perspective of childcare providers as well as the bodies making referrals to these childcare providers. This evaluation led to recommendations that were made taking into account the feedback from the sector, namely:

- simplify the priority rules
- strengthen cooperation
- adjust the subsidy system to allow greater flexibility.

In 2022, work will be done on the practical development and implementation of these recommendations.

During the current term of office the Government of Flanders is releasing just over €27 million to create at least 2,500 new places in childcare settings that charge a means-tested fee (tier 2A). By doing so, the Government of Flanders mainly wants to create new places in the municipalities with the greatest need. A multiannual planning is used for this purpose. The earmarked budget is made available in phases throughout the current term of office, but thanks to the multiannual planning, it is clear to everyone how many places will be allocated until 2024 and to which municipality. Of the total budget, 30% is allocated to the metropolitan cities and 70% to the other municipalities on the basis of the multiannual planning. Ten per cent of the budget goes to local authorities which can demonstrate with reliable figures from their local offices that there is a greater need than what is shown in the planning. The relevant call which will be launched to the local authorities in 2022, should encourage them to work on the organisation of a local office on their territory and towards an accurate registration of needs. After all, in the long term, the idea is for additional places to be mainly allocated to a city/municipality whose local government can demonstrate the need for additional places with reliable data from the local childcare office. Since the registration of unmet needs has not yet been finalised everywhere, this will be done gradually.

3.2.1.3. Training and career

The Government of Flanders and the social partners are determined to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the labour market with a resilient and inclusive labour market. The Flemish Economic Social Consultative Committee (Vlaams economisch sociaal overlegcomité/VESOC) agreement 'All Hands on Deck' (Alle Hens Aan Dek) between the social partners and the Government of Flanders puts forward three pillars and twenty key focal points. The three pillars are (1) a training and career offensive; (2) digitalising Flanders; and (3) getting everyone (sustainably) into work. In this way, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the labour market has been, and still is being, mitigated. The COVID-19 crisis is seen as an opportunity to achieve a more structural reorientation and to realise a breakthrough in career learning.

In addition to the investments and reforms in the NRRP (see 3.2.1.4), the Government of Flanders continues to structurally promote lifelong learning in order to increase the training participation rate in Flanders. The objective is for all employees, jobseekers, temporarily unemployed people and self-employed

entrepreneurs to become more agile and employable in a rapidly evolving society with corresponding labour market needs.

The lifelong learning action plan 'Building a learning society in Flanders' (Koers zetten naar een lerend Vlaanderen) was presented to the Government of Flanders on 17 December 2021 by the Flemish Ministers for Education and Work. It seeks to provide a coherent and mobilising framework for all partners involved in creating a culture of lifelong learning in Flanders.

In this action plan, the Lifelong Learning Partnership (Partnerschap Levenslang Leren/PLL) formulates ambitions and actions to turn Flanders into a learning society. It was drawn up with 2030 as target year, but focuses primarily on the period up to the end of 2024. It contains a 'compass' with guiding objectives and underneath several 'flagships' with actions in a matrix structure. The action plan is supported by a situational analysis and aligns with the EU's ambition to achieve a 60% adult participation rate in formal and non-formal learning by 2030, which also ties in with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. The PLL is a concrete, policy-based stepping stone to realising the vision that, in 2050, everyone will live, learn and work with enthusiasm. This also includes the transition 'Living, Learning and Working in 2050' (Leven, Leren en Werken in 2050) and the transition platform of the Fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development (Vlaamse Strategie Duurzame Ontwikkeling/VSDO4) (see also 4). This transition is a joint competence of Education and Work. Under this programme, several transition experiments are currently putting these visions for the future into practice, with financial support from the European Social Fund and the Flemish public administration. It unites transition managers and provides a forum for coordination, knowledge sharing and information exchange.

Within the context of a strong training and career policy, the Government of Flanders is also investing in a skills forecast model that maps conclusively the need for competencies, the expected shortages and surpluses, and consequently the need for reskilling and upskilling at sector, cluster and company level and for Flanders' labour and training market as a whole. This information should make it possible to create training courses together with training and education providers and with employers and sectors to better match the needs of the labour market. In order to assess the consequences of the green transition on the labour market, the Government of Flanders has called in support from the EC via a Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project. The aim of this project is to arrive at a strategy and a clear implementation roadmap for green jobs and skills by mid-2023. This implementation roadmap will include a timeline, as well as the roles and responsibilities that stakeholders such as social partners, training providers and policy areas need to take on to ensure a successful green transition in the labour market.

Skills forecasts at various levels show that people with digital and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) competencies will be much needed to enable companies and their (potential) employees to deal resiliently with current and future changes such as greening and digitalisation. The Government of Flanders is therefore investing in a STEM agenda that will support transformations in a sustainable manner. The STEM Agenda 2030 focuses on increasing intake in STEM courses and careers, on STEM specialists, and on generally strengthening STEM competencies in society at large, the so-called STEM literacy.

In order to remedy structural shortages and qualitative mismatches in the labour market, focus is also placed on lateral entry to facilitate transitions between sectors. For example, actions are being taken within the framework of the 'All Hands on Deck' recovery plan and the 'Care Action Plan' (Actieplan Zorg) to increase (lateral) entry in care professions and as such alleviate the shortage of qualified labour in the sector. VDAB's 'Action Plan for Hotels, Restaurants and Cafés' (Actieplan Horeca) is intended to provide an answer to the great labour shortage in this sector. The prolonged closure of hotels, restaurants, and cafés due to COVID-19, caused many employees in this sector to leave the sector permanently at a time when this sector already faced a long list of shortage occupations.

3.2.1.4. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: an inclusive labour market, the learning and career offensive, lifelong learning (learning and career account), and digibanks

Within the framework of the NRRP, the Government of Flanders also intervenes on the demand side of the labour market and more specifically on the element of labour market discrimination. As part of this

reform, all sectors will take actions for non-discrimination and proportional participation in the labour market, such as carrying out a baseline measurement based on awareness-raising correspondence tests (35 sectors), offering training on how to deal with discrimination, launching communication campaigns on how to tackle all forms of diversity in the workplace, etc. As regards the baseline measurement, sectors will, in the course of 2021-2022, carry out a monitoring exercise that should provide more insight into labour market discrimination, in order to take more targeted action. When doing so, the sectors make an assessment of the forms of discrimination they can expect within their sector. These actions are guided and supported by a tripartite (government - social partners - experts) intersectoral guidance group.

A lot of actions from the learning and career offensive were included in the NRRP. The focus is on training participation, inter alia among the temporarily unemployed. This is done by temporarily extending the Flemish training leave (Vlaams opleidingsverlof/VOV) for joint use by employers and employees, and by systematically reinforcing e-learning. In 2021, VDAB recorded 264,492 registrations for online courses. This is a 30% increase compared to 2020. Since this school year, a temporary joint decision-making right between employees and employers has been put in place when using the Flemish training leave. Since its introduction, the number of applications for Flemish training leave has been growing. With the calls for training support and strategic investment and innovation support in supported employment companies, investments are also being made in the social economy via the NRRP. The Government and the social partners in Flanders also agreed to allow as many temporarily unemployed as possible, and in particular the intensively temporarily unemployed, to enter a training course or work placement, voluntary work or a temporary job. Our long-term objective is to reach all intensively temporarily unemployed people and have them register with VDAB.

To realise this ambition, Flanders is dependent on the federal government to create the necessary framework. This request has already been put to the federal government. VDAB makes a training offer to every intensively temporarily unemployed individual. In 2021, the purpose was to get 75% of the intensively temporarily unemployed into a training course, a work placement or voluntary work, or into a temporary job. VDAB developed an approach for this in early 2021, with the aim of approaching the temporarily unemployed with a suitable offer. The more intensive the temporary unemployment, the more intensive and personal the offer from VDAB.

Flanders has put in place several support instruments for working people who want to follow a training course. Entitlement currently depends on characteristics such as status, educational attainment level and the training course which the individual wants to follow. Pursuant to OECD recommendations, the Government of Flanders wants to move towards an individual learning and career account that puts the individual centre stage and encourages working people to take their careers into their own hands and to take part in training. This reform, included in the NRRP, starts from a personal digital portfolio with training and career incentives. We are working towards a widely accessible instrument which places specific focus on vulnerable groups such as short- and medium-skilled persons and those at risk of qualification obsolescence. The transferability of entitlement over time is also being reviewed in the context of the reform exercise.

With the establishment of digibanks (digibanken), the Government of Flanders wants to reduce the risk of digital exclusion. Vulnerable citizens can turn to the digibanks to borrow hardware, attend low-threshold training courses on specific digital skills and receive support in the use of online services. Several companies and organisations in Flanders are already working on e-inclusion. The ambition of this project is to unite these various players in local and wide-ranging partnerships such as digibanks. In the autumn of 2021, the Department of Work and Social Economy (WSE) launched 2 calls for the start-up of such digibanks. On 1 February 2022, the first 6 digibanks were launched. Another 29 digibanks are in the pipeline. Throughout 2022, these calls will be repeated several times.

3.2.2. Education

3.2.2.1. Improve the performance and inclusiveness of the education and training systems, and address skills mismatches

Increasing Dutch language knowledge and proficiency

Since the school year 2021-2022, all children in the third pre-primary class are obliged to take a language test. The idea is to allow pre-primary children to catch up on any language disadvantage during the rest of the school year. Children who start primary school with a language disadvantage often also lag behind in other areas. Now that the compulsory school age has been lowered to five years, all children are obliged to attend the third pre-primary class. This provides an opportunity to use screening to both detect and remedy language disadvantages in children in good time.

The language test, the so-called KOALA test, takes place between 10 October and 30 November. If the disadvantage is still too great at the end of pre-primary education, the class council may advise to postpone the progression to primary education. If the parents ignore this advice, a language integration pathway will be imposed on the child in the first year of primary education. This can be some sort of language immersion class, or another fully-fledged alternative.

For the language integration pathways following the language screening, schools for mainstream pre-primary and primary education receive €12 million in the school year 2021-2022, in the form of care credits (zorgpunten). These funds are allocated on the basis of the number of 4-year-old pre-primary children whose home language is not Dutch.

The Dutch language stimulation activities that were first set up during the summer holidays of 2020 at various locations in Flanders and Brussels will continue up to and including summer 2022. Grants are awarded for this purpose to the organising bodies. These language stimulation activities are intended for children and young people up to the age of 18.

In addition, from September 2022 onwards, various actions will be rolled out in the context of the Reading Offensive (Leesoffensief), which aims to enhance reading skills, and more specifically technical reading, reading comprehension and reading motivation. The actions initiated by education pay particular attention to children in the 3rd pre-primary class and the 1st year of primary education, and to pupils in technical secondary education (technisch secundair onderwijs/TSO) and vocational secondary education (beroepssecundair onderwijs/BSO).

Monitoring quality via standardised, validated and benchmarked tests (Flemish tests)

National assessments and international comparative research show that the results for specific subjects, such as mathematics, science and reading comprehension, have been worsening for several years now. From the school year 2023-2024 onwards, primary and secondary schools will therefore be taking the first Flemish tests. Flemish tests are tests which have been standardised, benchmarked and validated across networks and umbrella organisations, with the primary aim of supporting schools' internal quality assurance process and as such helping to improve educational quality. It is an instrument for monitoring learning outcomes and measuring learning gains. This knowledge, in turn, contributes to supporting the internal quality assurance process of schools, the external quality control by the inspectorate, the support provided to schools by the pedagogical support services and the monitoring of the attainment of educational objectives by pupils at system level. The tests are organised centrally, taken digitally, processed, and analysed. These tests will be limited initially to Dutch (reading comprehension, writing, grammar) and mathematics.

A pragmatic and realistic learning support decree

The Government of Flanders replaces the M-decree for pupils with special educational needs by the Learning Support Decree (decreet leersteun). This decree outlines a new model for supporting pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education, viz. the learning support model.

The Learning Support Decree and the learning support model will be phased in as of 1 September 2023. It is the Government of Flanders' ambition to make sure that all pupils can develop to their full potential with maximum learning gains. The decree raises the quality of education and guarantees workability for

schools and teachers. The focus is on strengthening mainstream education, learning support and special educational needs education.

The Government of Flanders aims for:

- strong basic care and enhanced care in mainstream education
- a sustainable learning support model with appropriate working conditions for support staff
- a fully-fledged position and increased quality for special educational needs education.

Using educational resources for their intended purpose

Extra attention is being paid to optimising the new Equal Educational Opportunities (Gelijke Onderwijskansen/GOK) cycle in special needs pre-primary and primary education and in mainstream and special needs secondary education. The Education Inspectorate will also integrate the GOK inspection into its audits. Schools must offer excellent education to every pupil and guarantee a correct and targeted use of the allocated operating and support resources.

Within the framework of the Flemish Broad Review (see 3.1.2.) the Department of Education and Training drew up a report on, inter alia, secondary education funding. The effectiveness and efficiency of resource utilisation were reviewed and numerous policy proposals were made for optimising these processes. Following on from this, a spending review will also be launched into higher education funding.

Investment in teacher professional development

Good teachers are one of the main factors in ensuring high-quality education. Therefore, with support from the EC within the framework of the SRSP, the project 'the multi-layered implementation of the teacher induction guidance reform as a leverage for continuous professional development' was started. This project will lead to evidence-based knowledge with which methodologies can be developed for schools to use to embed the induction guidance of novice teachers more structurally in their operation.

In this context, Flanders also participated actively in the international benchmark 'OECD Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) Study'³³. The study examines policies related to the professional growth of teachers throughout the entire continuum of teachers' professional learning from initial teacher education, to the first years in teaching and continuing professional learning. The findings of this report (2021) will, among other things, serve as the basis for optimising the vision and actions concerning teacher professional development with all education actors in spring 2022. The social partners committed to this in the collective bargaining agreement CAO XII.

In the meantime, the professional development of teacher (teams) and school management teams is continued via the priority in-service training programme, for which the Flemish Minister for Education establishes priority themes every two years to support policy. Via a call interested organisations are invited to translate the selected themes into a specific in-service training offer for teachers, school management teams, pedagogical support staff and teacher trainers. The Minister then makes a selection of quality projects.

For the school years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, 'reading comprehension for teacher teams in pre-primary and primary education' was selected as theme for this priority in-service training programme.

- Regular budgets for in-service training and professional development, with about €10 million being earmarked each year for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. On average, this means that an amount of €78 can be freely used per staff member/office per year. In further

³³ More background information is available on <https://www.oecd.org/education/teachers-professional-learning-study/>
<https://www.oecd.org/education/teachers-professional-learning-study/continuing-professional-learning/Flemish-community-belgium-background-report.pdf>
<https://www.oecd.org/education/teachers-professional-learning-study/continuing-professional-learning/TPL-Study-Design-and-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

discussions on the optimisation of professional development, it will be considered whether these budgets should and can be raised.

- The Government of Flanders also earmarks one-off recovery funds to offer professional development to teams within the framework of the themes 'Digital Leap' (Digisprong), 'Education Leap' (Edusprong), and 'From Vulnerable to Resilient' (Van kwetsbaar naar weerbaar) (see other sections of this text). In 2022, the resources amount to €11 million, €10 million and €6 million respectively.
- To roll out the new learning support concept referred to above, recurrent funds are also made available (€4.3 million).

In the subsequent school years focus will be placed on the professional development of school teams in language integration pathways or of teacher teams 'Mathematics/PAV' in the first stage of secondary education. An annual budget of €577,000 is set aside for this.

Bijsprong

The COVID-19 pandemic poses great challenges to education in Flanders. For many pupils, especially the most vulnerable ones, the pandemic led to greater educational disadvantage. Overcoming this disadvantage is an absolute priority. In order to realise this to the maximum extent possible, the Government of Flanders wants to offer schools extra support by allocating additional resources, the so-called Bijsprong. For this measure, €85 million is appropriated in the school year 2021-2022.

Support: Schools for mainstream and special needs pre-primary and primary and secondary education and centres for part-time vocational secondary education can apply for additional support in the form of teaching periods (pre-primary and primary education), teacher hours (mainstream secondary education) and teaching hours (special needs secondary education). The funds can be used from 1 September 2021 up to and including 30 June 2022. Pupils who meet the pupil characteristics for SES support in mainstream pre-primary and primary education or for GOK support in mainstream secondary education, and pupils in part-time vocational secondary education (deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs/DBSO) receive additional resources.

3.2.2.2 Promoting skills development

Edusprong

Adult education represents an important element in Flanders' recovery plan. With the strategic plan 'Education Leap for Adults: Adult Education Reinforced' (Edusprong voor volwassenen: volwasseneneducatie versterkt), adult education is given a boost. The Government of Flanders is earmarking €60 million to eliminate the negative effects of the health crisis on adult education. Structural challenges are being addressed as well. The key elements of the plan are (1) strengthening digital competencies, (2) tackling unqualified outflow and (3) strengthening labour market opportunities.

Edusprong wants to make adult education in Flanders a strong and well-known brand that ties in with the labour market and other training providers. This plan has been developed and will be implemented as part of a long-term vision on lifelong learning and in collaboration with the public employment service of Flanders (VDAB), Syntra, and other stakeholders.

Within the framework of Edusprong, a first call for projects was launched that divided €10 million between the adult basic education centres (centrum voor basiseducatie/cbe) and the adult education centres (centrum voor volwassenenonderwijs/cvo). The 16 July 2021 Communication to the Government of Flanders outlined the framework for the project call, offering centres the opportunity to submit a project plan for a predetermined recoupment. A jury evaluated the project plans in two stages according to the established criteria. On 26 November 2021, the subsidy order allocating the project funds was adopted by the Government of Flanders. Meanwhile, the centres concerned have started the projects. In addition to the allocation of funds to the adult basic education centres and the adult education centres via project calls, a number of Edusprong actions are also being coordinated at central level (e.g training compass, and communication campaign).

The proposed method and objectives are currently being elaborated and an initial status update has already been communicated to the centres. Edusprong ties in with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Dual learning

Via dual learning in secondary education, pupils acquire knowledge and skills in a school, a part-time education centre or a Syntra training centre as well as in the workplace. Pupils who have passed the course will receive a diploma or certificate of the course of study. Since the 2019-2020 school year, dual learning has been rolled out in the training landscape in Flanders and has been growing steadily since.

On 1 September 2021, 89 different courses are offered 596 times in Flanders in various sectors, such as 'care', 'technology', 'hotels, restaurants and cafés' and 'construction'. The most popular courses are 'verzorgende/zorgkundige' (carer), 'kinderbegeleider' (childcare worker), and 'elektrotechnicus' (electrical engineering technician). Within 19 sectoral partnerships, training providers and sector organisations are putting their weight behind dual learning, with the aim of establishing a broad and qualitative network of learning enterprises. In addition, 10 projects are running under the ESF project 'Dual Learning Impulse' (Impuls Duaal Leren).

Meanwhile, the roll-out of dual learning in higher and adult education has started. From April 2021 to June 2023, 14 ESF projects will be set up in educational institutions (10 university colleges and 4 adult education centres) to initiate dual learning living labs, create visions and develop broadening strategies. The regulatory framework has already been put in place for starting dual learning in adult education on 1 September 2022. For the introduction of dual learning in higher education, the results of the living labs are waited for.

3.2.2.3. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: 'Voorsprongfonds' and 'Digisprong'

Voorsprongfonds

In implementation of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan, the Government of Flanders approved, on 26 February 2021, the draft vision paper 'Higher Education Advancement Fund' (Voorsprongfonds hoger onderwijs) for the education strand. The Advancement Fund will make our higher education stronger, more flexible and more digital. We start from the opportunities that present themselves post COVID-19 and at the same time tackle structural challenges. We aim for innovations that give higher education a stronger labour market/societal focus, a focus on lifelong learning and a 21st century digital character. Flexibility, innovation and sustainability are paramount. To realise this ambition, we focus on three key focal points:

- Developing an education portfolio for Flanders that is future-proof and flexible: Within this key focal point we will focus on the implementation of pathways that lead to a future-proof and flexible education portfolio in all higher education institutions, the reorientation of curricula and a broad process towards a new profile for higher education in Flanders.
- Offering many more opportunities for lifelong learning within higher education: Within this key focal point, higher education institutions can develop concrete initiatives that focus on the (re)design of their educational offer to make it accessible and flexible with a view to lifelong learning. In addition, work will be done on Flanders' vision on lifelong learning in higher education.
- Focussing fully on digital forms of education: The Advancement Fund wants to support educational institutions in making new work forms within higher education more sustainable in a quality manner, whereby an ideal mix of physical education on campus and digital distance education is pursued.

On 9 July 2021, the Government of Flanders gave its approval to the 'Call for submission of a plan by university colleges and universities to obtain a project grant under the Advancement Fund' (Oproep tot het indienen van een plan, door de hogescholen en universiteiten, tot het bekomen van een projecttoelage in het kader van het Voorsprongfonds). This call was communicated to the institutions concerned. The submission deadline for the plans was 8 September 2021. In the period between 9 July and 8 September 2021, the Minister for Education put together a jury. All higher education institutions submitted a plan and projects for the Advancement Fund. As was provided for, projects that were not rated positively by the jury in the first round could be submitted again in a second round. The funds were allocated to the participating higher education institutions by the Government of Flanders Orders of 26 November 2021 and 17 December 2021. The Advancement Fund ties in with the EPSR.

Digisprong

With Digisprong (Digital Leap), the Flemish Minister for Education wants to catch up in terms of the digitalisation of learning and teaching in compulsory education. The minister's ambition is to strengthen the digital competencies of all learners, from primary school children to adults. With a strong e-inclusion policy for Flanders, particular attention is also devoted to vulnerable target groups. The measures and actions for facilitating distance learning are framed within the recovery plan and the digital inclusion objective. Efforts are being made on 5 fronts for an accelerated digitalisation policy:

- (1) digital-friendly government
- (2) ICT infrastructure
- (3) ICT vision and school policy
- (4) digital learning resources, and
- (5) ICT skills.

A strong ICT infrastructure and the development of an ICT vision and policy for schools are prerequisites for a digital acceleration. To further develop ICT skills in teachers and school teams in compulsory and adult education, existing initiatives will be strengthened and IT boot camps will be organised for teachers and ICT coordinators.

The digital transformation of education in Flanders is a complex process. In order to coordinate and support the many different actions and projects in the field of education within one single framework, a knowledge and advisory centre was also set up.

3.3. Entrepreneurship, competition, digitalisation, and innovation

3.3.1. Entrepreneurship and competition

3.3.1.1. Entrepreneurship and competition measures

In the area of economy and entrepreneurship, the past two years have been dedicated to supporting the economy and preventing healthy enterprises from going bankrupt due to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, and to supporting a successful relaunch. To this end, Flanders has developed a number of easily accessible support instruments with the aim of supporting the liquidity of affected companies. In addition, instruments were put in place to restore the solvency of companies. Long-term financing is supported with guarantees and loans subordinated as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, the Welfare Fund (Welvaartsfonds) became operational. With the Welfare Fund, Flanders wants to provide an answer to the financial challenges which companies are currently faced with. The Government of Flanders earmarks a start-up capital of €240 million for the Welfare Fund, while €260 million will be invested by private partners. At the same time, a successful appeal was made to citizens to make (quasi) capital available to SMEs via the win-win loan and the friend's share, thanks to a tax incentive.

With the action plan 'Work To Do' (Werk aan de winkel), Flanders is focusing on stimulating innovation in the retail sector. Actions are aimed at creating renewed and dynamised shop concepts and vibrant shopping streets and commercial centres. Cities and municipalities are supported in this by a 'professional team' (propfloeg), which is composed of seasoned experts and innovative thinkers who can provide input the realisation of busier commercial centres and more vibrant neighbourhoods. Traders are assisted in the digital transformation via the e-commerce action plan 'The Internet. Your Business Too' (Het Internet. Ook uw Zaak). In addition, the local retail policy is supported by the development of a Smart Retail Dashboard with relevant policy data.

Measures are also being taken for the competitiveness of energy-intensive companies. In order to eliminate the competitive disadvantage of energy-intensive companies due to indirect CO₂ costs and to prevent these companies from relocating to countries outside the European Union, Flanders will continue the compensation scheme for indirect emission costs in 2022. This measure is intended to ensure the competitiveness of energy-intensive companies. However, companies will have to meet a number of additional conditions to be able to get compensation. For example, under certain conditions they have to spend at least half of the amount of aid on emission reduction projects and they have to conclude an energy policy agreement (energiebeleidsovereenkomst/EBO), if they belong to the EBO target group. In doing so, they undertake to regularly map all potential energy saving measures and to actually implement the

profitable investments. Furthermore, they have to submit a business plan that shows how they see themselves evolving within a climate neutral Europe in 2050.

The roll-out of 5G in Flanders mainly depends on the allocation of 5G rights by the federal government. Candidates can apply until mid-February 2022. The actual auction will take place in June 2022, following which the roll-out in Flanders can be realised, as laid down in the Flemish coalition agreement. Within the Flemish public administration possibilities exist to establish a Tower Company in cooperation with a utility company. The goal is to allow telecom operators and the utility company to share infrastructure in order to save costs, and to make the roll-out more interesting and speed it up. In conclusion, it can be stated that since the deregulation of access to the profession was completed in 2018, there are no more barriers to be removed.

3.3.1.2. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: accelerated licensing and appeal procedures

The project for speeding up licensing and appeal procedures is a reform under the NRRP. This reform initiative aims to establish procedures that result in better decisions without compromising the relevant participation and environmental protection. The reforms needed to accelerate the appeal procedures and eliminate the backlog were laid down by decree. Regulatory pathways are initiated for the optimisation of the integrated environment permit (omgevingsvergunning), the amendment of the order on environment and spatial planning, and the reform of the environmental impact report. Finally, the Environment and Spatial Planning Desk (omgevingsloket) will be expanded as well. To this end, a four-track approach is taken:

- 1) the overall data structure and procedural approach in relation to 'structural decision content'
- 2) functional and procedural adjustments and extensions of the Environment and Spatial Planning Desk
- 3) adaptations and improvements to the technical architecture, and
- 4) the public desk: inspection and participation in environment and spatial planning procedures.

3.3.2. Innovation

3.3.2.1. Strong R&D figures

Innovation takes centre stage in the recovery approach. Primarily, because innovation is indispensable for keeping our businesses competitive and enhancing productivity growth, so that existing jobs are retained and new jobs are created in Flanders. Flanders exceeded the 3% R&D target for the first time in 2019. In 2019, R&D intensity was 3.35% of GDP (see 2.4.). Innovation policy succeeds more and more in reaching small(er) companies as well. Business expenditure on R&D has more than doubled in Flanders since 2010. During this period, R&D expenditure of small companies (up to 50 employees) has more than tripled. The proportion of small companies went up from around 14% in 2010 to over 21% in 2019. This catch-up movement started some three years ago. Spreading R&D over more sectors and branches of activity presents a challenge for our Region.

With growing resources for R&D, Flanders wants to advance to the top 5 innovative knowledge regions in Europe. In other areas as well, Flanders wants to reach the top of the European league table. On 13 November 2021, for example, the Government of Flanders took note of the hydrogen vision for Flanders³⁴, with which it aims to become a European frontrunner in hydrogen technology. In this vision, the Government of Flanders is fully committed to sustainable innovation. Through research and innovation, we must provide the necessary support for the production and use of sustainable hydrogen technologies in the coming years. Innovation will lower the cost of these technologies so that they can play an important role in the sustainable transition away from fossil fuels. With the approval of the Flemish Concept Paper CCUS (Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage) on 26 November 2021, the Government of Flanders also wants to accelerate the roll-out of CCUS in Flanders. To that end, seven key actions are concentrated on. Work will be done, e.g. on the development of suitable CCUS infrastructure, and a regulatory framework will be created for CO₂ transport. Furthermore, collaboration with pioneering CCUS countries such as Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark will be expanded. It is therefore no coincidence that hydrogen was a major priority for Flanders within the NRRP (see 3.3.2.2.).

³⁴ <https://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/bestanden/5fad5387b328e9000c00018b.pdf>

3.3.2.2. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: stronger R&D, focus on hydrogen economy, and a broader innovation base

Using funds from the NRRP, Flanders is giving research and development an additional boost with investments totalling €280 million. These investments are centred around the three themes of 'digitalisation', 'sustainability' and 'care' and are intended to strengthen knowledge institutes in Flanders as well as to promote research and development in companies. In 2021, a decision was already reached on a significant part of these investments and more than 100 projects were committed for a total of more than €153 million. It concerns research and development projects of companies, research infrastructure of knowledge institutes, universities and university colleges, and projects on bioeconomy. The remaining funds will be committed in 2022.

Flanders considers innovation to be the key to meeting international climate, energy and environment targets and commitments in a realistic way. This should, however, also generate economic added value for our companies and boost employment. Several additional mutually reinforcing policy initiatives were developed for this purpose in the fields of hydrogen, energy, water and circular economy. To this end, we are, among other things, rolling out a hydrogen vision and plan for research and industrial development and investing additional NRRP funds worth €125 million in the value chain for the hydrogen economy. €16 million was earmarked for investments in research in agriculture and water-saving techniques in companies. On top of that, Flanders wants to give additional impetus to the circular economy by investing an additional €25 million with specific focus on the construction and manufacturing industries.

Besides additional R&D investment, steps were also taken to increase the number of innovative companies in Flanders and to make the instruments which Flanders uses to encourage companies to innovate more easily accessible for small businesses. We also want to use the support instruments to further the economic and societal valorisation of innovation outcomes. In the Flemish coalition agreement, this challenge is described as 'extending R&D instruments to include small enterprises'. To this end, the SME growth subsidy (kmo-groeisubsidie) was reformed, a call for innovative start-up support was launched and support for R&D feasibility studies was put in place. This focus on smaller companies and a broader innovation base was also included as a reform in the NRRP under the heading 'Broadening the innovation base'.

3.3.3. Digitalisation

3.3.3.1. Digital transformation

The digital transformation is one of the seven key focal points of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan, in which the Government pursues a growth strategy that will turn Flanders into a leading data economy and society. This digital transformation is founded on three horizontal basic pillars.

1. Valorising data as raw material: In future Flanders, there will be no limits on data and on how we can use data to make better decisions. A data space for Flanders, grafted onto European initiatives, where parties can exchange industrial, commercial and government data, will act as an important lever, including for real-time data from smart IoT (Internet of Things) devices. At the same time, we guarantee citizens and businesses that they can share data in confidence, while at all times retaining control of their own data.
2. Focus on public service delivery itself: For governments as well, digitalisation is no longer a choice but a necessity. Whereas digitalisation used to be regarded as a choice to make operations more efficient, today it has become a necessary transformer. Digital transformation is not an end in itself. It is a means to make government more agile: to be able to swiftly take effective decisions in changing circumstances, to fully exploit the power of the data society in confidence, and to make public service delivery as automatic and low-touch as possible (see also 3.3.3.2). The Flemish public administration is committed to three principles: 'digital first', 'only once' and 'no wrong door'³⁵. Flanders is investing in an innovative digital transformation programme for Flemish and regional media. In healthcare we are investing in transformation projects to tailor care to each citizen's

³⁵ The 3rd Flemish Resilience report, drawn up in December 2021, shows, for example, that the 'no wrong door' principle has been further rolled out by 154 local authorities and 24 entities in the context of My Citizen Profile (Mijn Burgerprofiel).

personal needs, wishes and preferences, with health care providers being able to work together in a multidisciplinary manner.

3. The development of digital talents: This includes the digitalisation of the school and work environment, but also bespoke education in the context of lifelong learning and the learning organisation.

These three pillars run as a common thread through the various recovery initiatives for digital transformation. On 18 March 2022, the Government of Flanders ratified Flanders' data strategy with four priority action areas: providing a general framework for coordinated cooperation; focusing on data literacy and the broadening of skills; working in an ecosystem with all parties involved inside and outside government, and data quality and data use.

We are also rolling out specific policy agendas around artificial intelligence and cybersecurity with specific multiannual budgets. Strong investments are also being made in Imec and the development of the local nanoelectronics ecosystem. A new multiannual covenant was concluded with a 27% increase in the funds allocated.

3.3.3.2. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: digitalisation of the Flemish public administration

Flanders is fully committed to a *low touch* service delivery. The *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)* indicators for the key area of *digital public services* provide guidance for this. Digital services should make life easier for citizens and businesses by automating as many services as possible, e.g. automatic entitlement and payment, and proactive information. Where an automated process is not yet possible, we will accelerate a digital-first approach via an integrated desk, i.e. a one-stop shop for citizens and companies to handle their business affairs with the public service agencies. No matter which agency. With as few contact moments as possible. This is called *low touch* public service delivery. Such an accelerated digitalisation of public services is in line with the EU flagship 'Modernise' of the RRF, and also facilitates the transformation of society as a whole. The basic principle of digital service delivery is that the public services are designed from the perspective of people and companies. This requires cooperation, agreements and standardisation, as well as support for local authorities, as many service delivery processes are of an inter-administrative nature.

3.4. Sustainability, energy, and mobility

3.4.1. Sustainability

3.4.1.1. Circular economy

The Government of Flanders has expressed the ambition to be the European frontrunner in circular economy by 2030. Circular economy is one of the seven transition priorities of the Fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development (VSDO4). On 1 January 2022, the CE Center³⁶ took over the helm from the Circular Economy Policy Research Centre (Steunpunt Circulaire Economie), which is being discontinued, and has opted for a rolling research agenda with researchers working around five thematic clusters³⁷. The Materials Information System (Materialeninformatiesysteem/MATIS), for instance, is currently under development and will allow us to better trace and report waste and material streams. In addition, Flanders is developing various action plans for the coming years, such as the Circular Construction Prevention Programme (Preventieprogramma 'Circulair Bouwen'), the Local Materials Management Implementation Plan (Uitvoeringsplan voor Lokaal Materialenbeheer) and the Green Deal with the distribution sector to reduce disposable packaging. Others will be further implemented and evaluated in the year ahead, such as the Circular Construction Living Lab (Proeftuin Circulair Bouwen), the Plastics Implementation Plan (Uitvoeringsplan Kunststoffen) and the Packaging Plan 2.0 (Verpakkingenplan 2.0).

Improving spatial planning and making it more sustainable is another key priority of the Government of Flanders. Within Europe, Belgium has one of the highest population densities, a high level of economic activity and the second most dense road network. When these roads were built, habitat for plants and animals was lost, which put the survival chances of wild species under great pressure. Moreover, the

³⁶ <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/nl/blog/detail-2/ce-center-maakt-doorstart>

³⁷ <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/nl>

project 'Animals under Wheels' (Dieren onder de wielen), which has been monitoring roadkill for ten years now, has shown that some 5 million wild animals die on Flanders' roads every year.

Ecological defragmentation gives these animals more living space again and access to food and shelter, and makes it easier for them to find a suitable mate. The risk of fauna being killed or harmed in road or rail traffic collisions or as a result of drowning is decreasing as well. For 20 years now, Flanders has been committed to the ecological defragmentation of priority blackspots on regional transport infrastructure (roads and waterways). Ecological defragmentation connects wildlife habitats with defragmentation measures or safe crossings. There are different types of defragmentation measures depending on the animals present, the habitats to be connected and the obstacles. The Government of Flanders has decided in its Coalition Agreement 2019-2024 to invest in a Flemish Action Programme for Ecological Defragmentation (Vlaams actieprogramma rond ecologische ontsnippering/VAPEO). In the period 2019-2024, VAPEO will address 15 priority blackspots or work on the further underpinning of complex projects. It is not a strict list of projects, but rather a rolling programme. All known blackspots on regional roads and motorways are entered in a defragmentation database and are scored on the basis of ecological and feasibility criteria. A project that scores high can still be included in the list of blackspots to be addressed.

3.4.1.2. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: Investments and reforms in circular economy, Blue Deal and defragmentation of the landscape in Flanders

The Circular Economy component of the NRRP contributes to the development of a circular and low-carbon economy. It encompasses three projects of Flanders. The first is a reform project to renew the governance of the Flanders Circular (Vlaanderen Circulair) partnership. Meanwhile, its Steering Board has been formed. This Board meets on a regular basis. In addition, the approved text of the Roadmap is being prepared for communication to the general public. Finally, the six Working Agendas are in continuous development. Together with the seven strategic levers, these agendas will determine the main circular economy projects and reforms of the coming years. Secondly, the Recycling Hub (Recyclagehub) is an investment project that aims to support at least six recycling projects in Flanders via two subsidy calls. The first call has already been launched and was a great success. The evaluation of the applications is ongoing. The second call will be launched in May and June 2022. All subsidies will be allocated by the end of 2022 and all investments should be operational by mid-2026.

Flanders' last project is an investment in circular economy and circular construction. Its aim is to stimulate the upscaling and mainstreaming of the circular economy concept by promoting research on an industrial scale, projects with industrial companies that ensure systemic impact and support the development and implementation of circular business models and living labs, and to encourage SMEs to explore how they can make their business models and processes circular. The investment will be made via calls for innovative projects on circular construction, projects for the diffusion of knowledge on circular manufacturing and projects for the establishment of collective living labs. In addition, a subsidy scheme will be implemented for the acquisition of internal or external expertise on circularity by SMEs.

Flanders has a structurally low water availability and is therefore very sensitive to water scarcity due to drought. In addition, the organisation of our water system and the high degree of paving make Flanders vulnerable to waterlogging and flooding in the event of excessive precipitation. Finally, sustainable water use in industry, agriculture, shipping, households, etc. is crucial to avoid structural water shortages. The Blue Deal is a comprehensive and ambitious impulse programme with which the Government of Flanders wants to make the water system, water management and water use in Flanders climate-robust. To that end, the Blue Deal focuses on the two following strategic solution paths: (1) the transition to water management aimed at retention, infiltration and storage; and (2) an acceleration towards economical, sustainable and circular water use. The programme encompasses more than eighty projects and actions in total in the areas of, inter alia, investment, research and development, digitalisation, monitoring, awareness-raising, and regulation.

The Blue Deal investment agenda forms an integrated part of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan (14 projects, €343 million) and the NRRP (10 projects, €290 million). The investment projects are set up by four different policy areas of the Flemish public administration: Environment and Spatial Planning (Omgeving/OMG), Mobility and Public Works (Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken/MOW) (see also 3.4.3.2),

Agriculture and Fisheries (Landbouw en Visserij/LV), and Economy, Science and Innovation (Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie/EWI). The implementation of the Blue Deal started in 2021 and is coordinated by the Coordination Committee on Integrated Water Policy (Coördinatiecommissie Integraal Waterbeleid/CIW) and the Environment and Spatial Development Policy Area.

Within the NRRP, the project Defragmentation of the Landscape in Flanders (Ontsnippen van Vlaams Landschap) implements Part I (Roads) of the Flemish Action Programme for Ecological Defragmentation (VAPEO). Specifically, the aim is to tender six construction projects for ecoducts and a verge bridge with recovery funds by late 2022. The other VAPEO projects will be tendered with regular funds between 2021 and 2024.

3.4.2. Energy

3.4.2.1. Flemish Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 and the Flemish Climate Fund

On 9 December 2019, the Government of Flanders gave its final approval to the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 (Vlaams Energie- en Klimaatplan/VEKP), as a contribution to the National Energy and Climate Plan (Nationaal Energie- en Klimaatplan/NEKP). The VEKP sets out, inter alia, targets and ambitions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency and raising renewable energy production³⁸. It contains more than 300 concrete measures in various sectors designed to ensure that the envisaged targets are achieved. Progress is monitored annually in the VEKP Progress Report³⁹ (see also 2.6.).

On 5 November 2021, the Government of Flanders approved an additional package of climate measures⁴⁰ to strengthen the VEKP from the bottom up. The greenhouse gas emission reduction target in non-ETS sectors is raised from -35% to -40% by 2030 (compared to 2005).

The Flemish Climate Fund (Vlaams Klimaatfonds) is used in the non-ETS sectors to contribute to the achievement of the targets set out in the VEKP. The principle of co-financing is applied for financing from the Flemish Climate Fund, as is the case for many European funds. This means that greenhouse gas reduction measures cannot be financed entirely from the Flemish Climate Fund, but must also be partly financed with private or other public funds. This creates a leverage effect with the Climate Fund, and increases the Fund's impact. Co-financing from the Climate Fund is proportionally higher in case of greater public cost efficiency of the financed measure. After all, the budgetary resources for climate policy are limited, which is why they are used where they have the greatest impact.

3.4.2.2. Investments and reforms with a significant impact on the achievement of the energy and climate targets

Renovation of the building stock in Flanders (€124 million)

Funds are earmarked to support energy renovation combined with asbestos removal (€46.2 million). For the removal of asbestos in the existing building stock, an additional €40 million is appropriated to support local authorities and various sector organisations. Flemish recovery funds totalling €37.8 million are committed to make the electricity grid more future-proof by means of subsidies for battery storage, on top of the RRF funds already provided (see 3.4.2.3).

Other reforms and investments:

- Extension and expansion of the voluntary energy policy agreements (EBOs) from 1 January 2023 between the Flemish Region and participating energy-intensive companies (see 3.3.1.1).

³⁸ Flemish Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030:

(<https://energiesparen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/VR%202019%200912%20DOC.1208-3%20VEKP%2021-30%20-%20bijlageBIS.pdf>)

³⁹ VEKP Progress Report (July 2021): <https://energiesparen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/VORA%20VEKP.pdf>

⁴⁰ Vision Paper on Additional Climate Measures:

<https://energiesparen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/VR%202021%200511%20DOC.1237-1%20Visienota%20VEKP%20Bijkomende%20maatregelen.pdf>

- Introduction of a stronger regulatory framework for non-energy-intensive companies with final energy consumption <0.1 PJ/year (large company sites) and energy consumption between 0.1 and 0.02 PJ (SME sites) as of 1 January 2023.
- Phase-out of fossil fuels in new builds: From 1 January 2023, a hybrid heat pump will be required as a minimum. From 1 January 2026, fossil heating will no longer be allowed in new builds.
- Introduction of a renovation obligation for dwellings transferred in full ownership from 1 January 2023, in addition to the renovation obligation for non-residential buildings from 1 January 2022. All dwellings covered by this obligation will have to be renovated to EPC label D as a minimum within 5 years.
- Reform and extension of interest-free energy loans as accompanying policy to the renovation obligation for dwellings. The maximum amount, duration and target group of the current 0% energy loan will be extended. The interest-free renovation loan and the energy loan+ will also be available for renovations up to label D. Those who renovate up to label C or higher are entitled to a negative interest rate for 10 years.

On 14 March 2022, the Government of Flanders decided to release an additional €218 million to increase renovation and insulation subsidies and to accelerate the roll-out of renewable energy. In concrete terms, the Government of Flanders is increasing the already planned budget of €440 million to €658 million for renovation, insulation, heat pumps and renewable energy.

3.4.2.3. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: reforms and investments with a close link to the VEKP and the energy transition: improved energy subsidy scheme, social housing, heat networks, public building stock

Renovation of the building stock in Flanders (€278 million) and green heat (€44.3 million)

In line with the VEKP and the Flemish Renovation Strategy 2050, additional resources are made available to increase the renovation activity of the public, private and social building stocks. As of 1 July 2022, the energy and housing renovation subsidies will be combined into one single optimised subsidy (MijnVerbouwpremie) which will be financed with European RRF funds for an amount of €180 million. In addition, an EPC label subsidy has been introduced on 1 January 2021 (€25.35 million) and the demolition and reconstruction subsidy has been extended and increased until the end of 2022 (€17.6 million). Additional funds are also earmarked for the renovation of public buildings (€20 million).

Apart from renovation, €20.05 million has been set aside to make the electricity grid more future-proof via subsidies for battery storage and smart control. The potential for green heat, residual heat and heat networks in Flanders will be further unlocked. For this purpose, several project calls will be launched in 2021 and 2022 for project support totalling €44.3 million.

Renovation of social housing

Two investment projects are included in the NRRP for the renovation of social housing. These projects tie in with the objectives of the Housing Policy Plan which stipulates that all housing must be of good quality by 2050, and that supply and demand must be matched. With a view to achieving Flanders' ambitious climate and energy targets by 2050, efforts should also be made towards the energy renovation of social housing. Two projects from the NRRP further this purpose:

- the allocation of €30 million in subsidies from the Flemish Climate Fund to social housing companies (sociale huisvestingsmaatschappij/SHM) and the Flemish Housing Fund (Vlaams Woningfonds) to stimulate and accelerate the energy renovation of social rental housing
- the increased loan authorisation of €250 million to the Flemish Social Housing Company (Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Sociaal Wonen/VMSW), allowing SHMs to take out cheap loans to finance their construction and renovation projects. The interest expenses borne by the Flemish Region will be compensated over a four-year period with European recovery funds totalling €5 million.

Investment in the public building stock

Within the NRRP, €20 million was reserved for investments in the energy renovation of public buildings in Flanders. Increased investment in the renovation of the building stock will stimulate and accelerate the energy renovation of these buildings (including social housing) and contribute to achieving the

targets regarding energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reduction set out in the VEKP, the Energy Efficiency Directive and the long-term renovation strategy.

The projects selected for the allocation of investment grants should speed up climate efforts and help revitalise the economy. We opt for projects that help make the building stock of the Flemish public administration more sustainable. The projects are assessed specifically for the following criteria: subsidy efficiency, payback period, feasibility, and monitoring.

The projects are implemented via the Flemish Agency for Public Sector Energy Saving (Vlaams Energiebedrijf/VEB). The VEB's mission is to unburden the public sector in the path towards more sustainable and efficient energy management. To this end, it has developed activities in the field of energy supply (green electricity and natural gas), energy efficiency, and energy data. VEB acts as the central purchasing body, so that the services are sourced from the market to the maximum extent and the public entities concerned comply with public procurement law without having to organise a procurement procedure themselves. The aim is to renovate an area of 262,000 m² for energy efficiency. The project has got off to a good start and is edging closer to this target. By the end of February 2022, 72 applications had already been declared admissible. The recovery aid of €20 million will be allocated and redistributed among the selected projects by late 2022. These projects should start within one year after the funds have been allocated and be completed within three years after allocation (deadline is late 2026).

3.4.3. Mobility

3.4.3.1. Investment in sustainable transport infrastructure and modes

Within the framework of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan, the Government of Flanders is investing in sustainable transport infrastructure and modes. In the context of the recovery policy, the Mobility and Public Works Policy Area is investing heavily in cycling infrastructure (€250 million), sustainable mobility projects (€385 million) and safe transport infrastructure (€200 million). Via the Agency for Home Affairs (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur) the Government of Flanders is also making an envelope of €150 million available for co-financing of municipal cycling infrastructure. In order to finance these priorities, optimal use is made of EU funding under the RRF (see 3.4.3.2.), in addition to Flanders' own (recovery) funds.

It is the ambition of the Government of Flanders to make Flanders a prime cycling region. By creating a larger and safer cycling network, it wants to promote the bicycle as an attractive alternative to motorised transport and support an ambitious *modal shift*.

In addition, investments are being made in the modal shift to water. Investments in inland navigation infrastructure are, to the maximum extent, consistent with realising a modal shift in freight transport from road to water. To continue stimulating the steep rise of container transport by waterway, the Government of Flanders is investing €96 million via the Flemish Resilience recovery plan to improve the navigability of the Albert Canal (raising and adapting of bridges), €20 million to realise and optimise quay walls, €21 million to raise the water transport capacity of the Dender River (renovation of the lock weir complex) and €27 million to make compulsory purchases within the framework of the new sea lock in Zeebrugge.

Investments are also being made in transport infrastructure and sustainable mobility measures outside the framework of the recovery policy. In order to tackle mobility challenges efficiently, the Mobility and Public Works Policy Area draws up an annual Integrated Investment Programme (Geïntegreerd Investeringsprogramma/GIP) which gives an overall view of the investments made by each entity across the different modes of transport. On top of the cycling projects financed with recovery funds (see 3.4.3.2.), an additional €221 million was invested in cycling projects in 2021. The draft GIP 2022 reserves more than €172 million in additional funds for this purpose⁴¹. For the waterborne modes, an investment totalling €281 million was made in 2021 in addition to the recovery funds (see earlier). According to the draft GIP, over €200 million will be additionally invested in the waterways in 2022. Finally, in 2021, €224 million was invested in public transport on top of the investments in the electrification of the bus fleet of the

⁴¹The figures shown for 2022 are taken from the draft GIP 2022 and have not yet been definitively approved by the Flemish Minister for Mobility and Public Works. They can therefore still be (slightly) modified. Formal approval is expected in March 2022.

Flemish Public Transport Company - De Lijn (Vlaamse Vervoersmaatschappij/VVM – De Lijn) (see 3.4.3.2.). The draft GIP 2022 sets aside investment of at least €192 million for this purpose.

3.4.3.2. Flanders' contribution to the NRRP: Investments and reforms in sustainable transport infrastructure and modes (cycling infrastructure, charging infrastructure, greening of the bus fleet, stimulation of zero-emission transport, and emissions fraud)

Within the framework of the recovery policy, priority is given to investment in cycling infrastructure (€250 million) along regional roads. In 2021, work was undertaken to prepare or implement various cycling projects, such as the (re)construction of cycling paths, bridges, and tunnels, and bicycle parking facilities. In addition, the Government of Flanders earmarks an envelope of €150 million for the co-financing of municipal cycling infrastructure. A regulatory framework was developed for this in early 2021 which allows municipalities to submit project proposals⁴². In 2021, 41 projects were already submitted for new cycling infrastructure or for the renovation of cycling paths along municipal roads.

Both projects will result in the construction of at least 139 kilometres of new cycling paths and the upgrading of 1,351 kilometres of existing cycling infrastructure by mid-2026, as set out in the NRRP.

Another top priority in Flanders' recovery policy is the approval of a policy framework for the stimulation of zero-emission transport and the accelerated roll-out of charging infrastructure (€30 million). Electric driving is an important objective in the additional package of climate measures adopted by the Government of Flanders on 5 November 2021. After all, Flanders wants to phase out the sale of new passenger cars and vans with combustion engines from 2029 onwards. By realising 30,000 additional operational semi-public and public charge points (expressed in *charge point equivalents* (CPE)) by mid-2026, the Government of Flanders seeks to accelerate the transition to all-electric driving and further the green transition to sustainable road transport. In July 2021, the Government of Flanders approved the new policy vision *Clean Power for Transport 2030: Towards Zero-emission Transport*⁴³ (Clean Power for Transport 2030: op weg naar zero-emissie vervoer) and agreed on a legislative framework for the roll-out of charging infrastructure⁴⁴. In addition, project calls were launched in 2021 both for charging infrastructure on private property and for (ultra-) fast chargers along major transport axes, which resulted in 210 and 49 approved projects respectively. In 2022, new project calls will be launched and the first concessions for public charge points on public property will be started.

In addition, within the framework of the recovery policy, priority is given to the further greening of the bus fleet of the Flemish Public Transport Company - De Lijn. It is the Government of Flanders' aim to have the city centres served by zero-emission buses by 2025 at the latest. Via RRF funds, €93 million is appropriated for the adaptation of depots, e.g. with charging infrastructure. In 2021, orders were placed for the conversion of 280 existing hybrid buses to plug-in e-hybrid buses and for the purchase of 44 e-hybrid articulated buses, which will be realised in the course of 2022. An initial order was also placed in 2021 for 60 e-buses, which will be delivered in stages from the fourth quarter of 2022. A first order was also placed in 2021 for charging infrastructure at the depots.

Under the Blue Deal (see 3.4.1.2.), the Government of Flanders is investing €35 million in the construction of pumping stations and the renovation of lock complexes via RRF funds. In 2021, on-site works were started for 4 projects (pumping stations and lock complexes in Boezinge, inter alia). The tendering procedure for two other projects (Ooigem lock and Brussels-Charleroi Canal pumping stations) was

⁴²Government of Flanders Order (Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering/BVR) of 26 February 2021 allocating a project grant to municipalities in Flanders for investments in cycling infrastructure: https://lokaalbestuur.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/public/vlaamse_regering/20210226/vr20210226_projectsubsidie_investeringen_fietsinfrastructuur_bvr.pdf

⁴³Vision Paper of the Government of Flanders of 9 July 2021 concerning the Vision 'Clean Power for Transport 2030: Towards Zero-emission Transport': <https://beslissingenvlaamseregering.vlaanderen.be/document-view/60E72DAE364ED900080009E3>

⁴⁴Decree of 16 July 2021 on zero-emission vehicles and vehicles powered by alternative fuels (<https://beslissingenvlaamseregering.vlaanderen.be/document-view/60F07589364ED900080015FF>) and BVR of 17 December 2021 on charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (<https://beslissingenvlaamseregering.vlaanderen.be/document-view/61B86A57364ED90009001331>)

completed, so that the works can start in 2022. And the study phase was initiated for two projects (Albert Canal pumping station in Wijnegem and Briegden-Neerharen lock gates).

In addition, the Government of Flanders is working on a regulatory framework for the monitoring and enforcement of vehicle emissions in Flanders. Among other things, an NO_x test procedure is being developed as part of the periodic vehicle roadworthiness test. A first study on this procedure will be delivered in February 2022 with the aim of introducing the test procedure by the third quarter of 2023. In collaboration with the stakeholders concerned, draft policy texts will also be prepared in 2022 for extending the scope of roadside checks to include all categories of vehicles, and the necessary technical, legal and organisational initiatives will be taken for the structural implementation of a large-scale and structural roadside emission monitoring of vehicles. A progress report on the development of this regulatory framework will be drawn up in 2022.

3.5. Social cohesion

The Flemish Resilience recovery plan focuses on strengthening mental well-being and social cohesion in society.

Efforts are being made to combat poverty and to work on neighbourhood improvement with an additional injection of €32.2 million. Investment in out-of-school childcare by local authorities is being accelerated. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, many households were faced with a drop in income. To lower the financial threshold for childcare for those households, an additional specific COVID-19 rate was introduced. This measure was intended to make additional financial support available for 14,600 households. It expired in late 2021.

As from the school year 2021-2022, scope is offered to 12 pioneers who want to commit to providing a continuous line of childcare for babies and toddlers, pre-primary education and out-of-school childcare. It is being considered how connections can be made with the home environment and the neighbourhood. Special attention is paid in this context to language development and Dutch language acquisition.

Efforts are being made to improve neighbourhoods by means of neighbourhood improvement contracts in which the Flemish public administration and the local authority (and local partners) jointly undertake to tackle problems in vulnerable neighbourhoods. In addition, investments are made in neighbourhood-oriented projects at the intersection of local government - welfare - justice to prevent young people from falling or slipping back into a criminal lifestyle and to reduce (feelings of) insecurity in the neighbourhood. Particular attention is paid to vulnerable children and young people: innovative projects are set up to empower children and young people in vulnerable situations via varied, meaningful and creative leisure time activities. Outreach work is carried out by (supra-) local networks of organisations and local authorities.

The Flemish Poverty Reduction Action Plan (Vlaams Actieplan Armoedebestrijding), approved by the Government of Flanders in 2020, focuses on a limited number of priority, government-wide and integrated strategic objectives for combating under-protection and child poverty, for activating and empowering people and increasing self-reliance, for reducing the risk of ending up in poverty in the event of sudden changes in people's lives, and for providing a high-quality, liveable and healthy environment for all. The former plan furthers the realisation of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee (within the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights) in Flanders, in particular from the perspective of the child poverty reduction target.

At the end of 2020, the Government of Flanders drew up a specific action plan to prevent and combat homelessness (actieplan tot voorkoming en bestrijding van dak- en thuisloosheid) in implementation of the Flemish Poverty Reduction Action Plan. This plan contains measures for preventing evictions, expanding the Housing First methodology and improving access to the social housing market, and focusses specifically on the position of vulnerable children and young people.

In the coming years, the Government of Flanders wants to make additional efforts to reduce energy poverty. On 10 December 2021, within the framework of the new Energy Poverty Plan 2025

(Energiearmoedeplan 2025), the Government of Flanders approved a vision paper containing specific measures to structurally combat energy poverty in Flanders. The focus is mainly on measures that improve the energy efficiency of dwellings of vulnerable households and subsequently lead to lower energy bills. In addition, curative actions ensure that when households do accumulate energy debts, assistance can be provided in time to prevent disconnection. The Government of Flanders is committed to a structural reduction in the policy costs that are charged in the energy bill. In 2022, more than €165 million in policy costs were removed from the electricity bill.

Given the even greater importance of food aid in times of COVID-19, Flanders has invested an additional €2.8 million in the development of Flanders-wide social distribution platforms and their transition to circular food hubs by mid-2025. The roll-out of the Integrated Broad Reception (Geïntegreerd Breed Onthaal) from mid-2021 across Flanders to improve the detection and realisation of rights and to enhance service accessibility meant an additional investment of €7.5 million. Finally, €10 million has been earmarked to support 119 projects in Flanders and Brussels over a period of two years to turn their neighbourhoods into Caring Neighbourhoods (Zorgzame Buurten) that strengthen social cohesion, among other things.

With the Plan for Living Together⁴⁵ (Plan Samenleven), developed in 2022, the Government of Flanders wants to support local authorities more efficiently and effectively, using clear objectives and well-defined actions, to make living together in diversity a success. The Plan for Living Together defines 7 objectives and 24 actions for which local authorities can receive financial and capacity building support during the period from 2022 to 2024. The effectiveness and progress will be regularly monitored in order to show the concrete results of living together in Flanders. The Plan for Living Together is part of the updated policy plan on horizontal integration and equal opportunities.

A total of €30 million is being invested in accessible, high-quality youth infrastructure, to offer more children and young people valuable meeting places in their immediate surroundings.

With the call Resilient Cities after COVID-19 (Veerkrachtige steden na Corona), Flanders is investing €20 million for cities to step up efforts, via urban renewal projects, towards economic revival and innovation, better quality public space and stronger social relationships and greater well-being in neighbourhoods and districts, and in cities in general.

On 7 July 2021, the Government of Flanders ratified the amendment of the Integration Decree of 7 June 2013. On 16 July 2021, it adopted in principle the first draft of the implementing order. These laws revamp the civic integration programme by adding the two pillars 'Pathway to Work' and 'Social Networks' to the existing pillars 'Social Orientation' and 'Dutch as a Second Language'. The new civic integration policy puts emphasis on greater economic and social self-reliance, a thorough acquisition of the Dutch language, and knowledge of society in Flanders and its values and standards. Newcomers are invited to make an active contribution to society. At the same time, they are better prepared for our society and are provided with tools which allow them to take part as fully-fledged citizens in society in Flanders.

⁴⁵ <https://lokaalbestuur.vlaanderen.be/plan-samenleven>

4. SDGS: FOURTH FLEMISH STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

4.1. Fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development

On 26 November 2021, the Government of Flanders adopted the Fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development (Vlaamse Strategie Duurzame Ontwikkeling/VSDO4)⁴⁶. With this strategy, the Government of Flanders continues its commitment to a sustainable society with Vision 2050 (Visie 2050) as long-term compass and Focus 2030 (Vizier 2030) as focal point:

- Vision 2050. A long-term strategy for Flanders (Visie 2050. Een langtermijnstrategie voor Vlaanderen) outlines the future vision for the Flanders that we wish to have in 2050: a strong, inclusive, open, resilient and internationally connected Flanders that creates prosperity and well-being in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner and where every individual counts. Vision 2050 remains the long-term compass.
- Focus 2030 contains Flanders' objectives framework for 2030 and translates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into Flanders' own objectives. Focus 2030 gives direction to Flanders' policy with 53 objectives. All Government of Flanders ministers conduct policy that furthers the achievement of these objectives. The realisation of Focus 2030 represents an intermediate step on the road towards 2050.

Apart from monitoring the objectives in Focus 2030⁴⁷, the implementation of the VSDO4 is also focused on seven transition priorities:

1. *Circular Economy*: transition to the circular economy
2. *Living, Learning and Working in 2050*: a new story for learning and working in a world that is changing due to technological advancements; jobs are disappearing and new jobs require new skills.
3. *Industry 4.0*: is aimed at the digital transformation of industry as a lever for sustainability, competitiveness and productivity of industry.
4. *Living Together in 2050*: digital transformation of the culture sector and future care model.
5. *Mobility*: Flanders' Mobility Vision 2040 (Vlaamse mobiliteitsvisie 2040) lays the foundations for the future mobility policy
6. *Energy and Climate*: energy and climate transition in implementation of the VEKP
7. *Environment for the Future*: working on a spatial transition and addressing climate adaptation and biodiversity challenges.

Some of the transition priorities were started during the previous term of office and will therefore shift up a gear. Typical of transition processes is that they evolve along with the knowledge and experiences acquired. As a result, the original focus of the transition priorities has gradually been newly fleshed out. The transition priority 'Environment for the Future' is new. For more information on the transition priorities, please refer to the sheets⁴⁸. The governance model of VSDO4 is based on the methodologies of transition management and multi-level governance.

4.2. Strong SDG governance and cooperation with other partners and authorities

With Vision 2050 and Focus 2030 Flanders has developed strong governance with regard to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. In addition, cooperation with other partners and authorities is crucial to achieving the objectives. Local authorities are a first-line partner and the Flemish public administration allocates a project grant to the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Vlaamse Vereniging van Steden en Gemeenten/VVSG) to support projects or activities that flesh out the Flanders' sustainable development policy. CIFAL Flanders is another important partner that provides information and inspiration for and raises awareness of the UN Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and as such broadens the support base for Flanders' relevant policy. In cooperation with the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office (Departement

⁴⁶ <https://beslissingenvlaamsereregering.vlaanderen.be/document-view/61A09A14364ED90008000146>

⁴⁷ https://do.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/DKBUZA_Vizier2030_indicatoren_1.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://beslissingenvlaamsereregering.vlaanderen.be/document-view/61A09A3B364ED90008000149>

Kanselarij en Buitenlandse Zaken/DKBUZA), CIFAL organised several webinars, such as the one of 1 October 2021 on The European Recovery and the SDGs⁴⁹, for which the European Semester Officer also provided input. Now that the VSDO4 has been adopted, the Minister-President of Flanders Jan Jambon will convene the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (Interministeriële Conferentie Duurzame Ontwikkeling/IMCDO) on 5 May 2022. In this context, the opportunity will be discussed to prepare a progress report on the SDGs or a Voluntary National Review (VNR) for Belgium.

5. USE OF STRUCTURAL FUNDS

5.1. ESF Programme 2021-2027

Flanders' ESF Programme 2021-2027 was approved in principle by the Government of Flanders at the end of 2021. It was submitted to the EC early this year. The programme includes the following priorities receiving €374 million in European aid:

- Priority 1 - Access to the labour market: Flanders wants to increase the employment rate to 80%. With this priority, Flanders' ESF+ programme aims to increase the outflow to work of unemployed jobseekers, to promote the participation of economically inactive groups in the labour market and to develop an effective retention policy. The ESF+ programme sets up, inter alia, actions that intervene directly on the individual, on the relationship between supply and demand on the labour market and on the structural reinforcement of access to the labour market of the targeted groups, viz. vulnerable jobseekers and economically inactive people.
- Priority 2 - Social inclusion: With 'Social inclusion', Flanders' ESF+ programme strongly commits to strengthening the basic conditions for labour market participation and fully-fledged participation in society and focuses on the integral pathway of economically inactive groups and people in poverty, for example.
- Priority 3 - Lifelong learning: (Specific objective - Strengthening training participation and skills). Within this specific objective, Flanders' ESF+ programme supports actions that invest directly in strengthening the individual's competencies and contribute to stimulating lifelong learning, developing a real learning culture in organisations and companies and supporting sustainable careers in which learning is a constant. As such, the ESF+ programme furthers the objective of increasing training participation in Flanders.
- Priority 3 - Lifelong Learning: (Specific objective - Inclusive Education). From the ambition to improve the equality of educational outcomes and reduce the unqualified outflow of young people in education in Flanders, Flanders' ESF+ programme concentrates, with this specific objective, on actions relating to pupils' entire school career. These actions fit in with an integrated chain approach that starts in pre-primary and primary education and reaches to secondary and higher education and finally to the transition of young people to the labour market.
- Priority 4 - Investing in workable jobs and an inclusive labour market: Within this priority, Flanders' ESF+ programme works to create sustainable work and to promote the well-being of employees in organisations. Actions will be formulated that are related to making work workable, to strengthening leadership and to stimulating and supporting an inclusive labour market.
- Priority 5 - Social innovation: With this priority attention is paid to stimulating social innovation in Flanders and supporting innovative services to strengthen social inclusion, lifelong learning, workable jobs, inclusive education and access to the labour market.

5.2. ERDF Programme 2021-2027

For the period 2021-2027, Flanders will receive €505.5 million in funds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), of which €270 million is reserved for the implementation of a regional ERDF programme for Flanders and over €235 million is earmarked for the implementation of cross-border and transnational Interreg programmes with both neighbouring regions (Interreg A) and more distant partner countries (Interreg B). On top of the local and regional co-financing which is needed to trigger the use of

⁴⁹ <https://cifal-flanders.org/focus-2030-webinar-the-european-recovery-and-the-sdgs-the-case-of-flanders/>

these ERDF funds, these programmes represent an investment of over €1 billion in Flanders for the next 7 to 10 years.

The themes of the new programmes ERDF Flanders and ERDF Interreg concentrated on the EU and cohesion policy objectives of a 'smarter' and 'greener' Europe. The programmes are primarily intended to strengthen Flanders' sustainable growth and competitiveness, while at the same time seeking to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon, circular and energy efficient economy. Attention is mainly devoted to knowledge valorisation and transfer, demonstration, and the accelerated roll-out of sustainable technologies, whether in the context of Flanders or in international collaboration with other EU partner regions. Digital transition is also given a prominent place. Particularly in the Interreg context, focus is also placed on climate investments, renewable energy, the scarcity on the (cross-border) labour market(s), challenges in the care sector and sustainable tourism.

Entirely in keeping with the EU principle of additionality, the ERDF programmes cover those niches that are not yet or insufficiently covered by mainstream policies. This makes them a source of funding and a living lab for new economic and societal developments and adapted policies. Again according to the principle of additionality, they are - literally - a source of additional funding that serves as a lever for triggering the deployment of other local, regional, national, EU, etc. resources, whether at the same time or not. The European perspective is particularly evident in the Interreg component of the ERDF. Within this component, EU regions pool their ERDF resources around common objectives, for projects that deliver a win-win for Flanders and for our close and more distant neighbouring regions and partner countries. This greatly enhances international networking and cohesion between EU regions.

5.3. REACT-EU

Flanders can count on €155 million from REACT-EU. In addition to the resources provided for under the RRF, REACT-EU resources are also being used to realise the recovery plan for the labour market 'All Hands on Deck' of the Government and the social partners in Flanders. Within the learning and career offensive, REACT-EU is used to finance the job placement bonus. The aim of the job placement bonus recovery measure is to introduce a temporary increase and extension of the bonus for companies offering traineeships in difficult circumstances. To keep dual learning (see 3.2.2.2.) on track, it is important that sufficient sustainable traineeships are provided for. In order to digitally transform Flanders, the REACT-EU funds will be used to organise training courses for teleworking and training courses focused on the digitalisation and greening of Flanders' economy. Finally, the pillar 'getting everyone sustainably into work' (iedereen duurzaam aan het werk) is also supported with REACT-EU funds by extending the guidance capacity of VDAB and supporting it via outsourcing to partners and local authorities in the guidance and integration of the most vulnerable target groups in the labour market.

In addition to the labour market measures mentioned above, the REACT-EU funds under ERDF contribute to a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy. Four new calls were launched for this purpose:

- Innovative transition: Investments in the innovative ecosystem for more new and growing SMEs, with focus on the development of sustainable business models that enable the upscaling and adoption of applications or solutions by industry and end users. These projects contribute to stronger knowledge sharing on innovative applications.
- Digital transition in the cultural sector: This call is aimed at projects that can organise and implement digitalisation actions for the sector in a coordinated manner. Digital collections must be created sustainably and be made exchangeable as much as possible in conformity with the OSLO standard for cultural heritage.
- Green transition: This call focuses on facilitating the generation of green heat and the recovery of residual heat, as well as on the transport of this heat using cross-organisational heat networks.
- Circular economy: These projects support circular manufacturing places in the urban context, and packaging prevention and reuse.

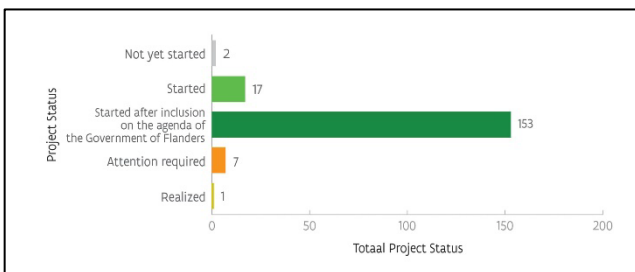
6. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

6.1. Stakeholder participation within the framework of the FRP

The Government of Flanders attaches considerable importance to enhancing public support for the ES. Within the Flemish public administration the official ES working group acts as the focal point for following progress of the activities at Flemish, federal and European level. The Board of Chairs (Voorzitterscollege) is also committed to dialogue with the EC. On 20 January 2022, the Board of Chairs had an exchange of views on the ES and the NRRP with the European Semester Officer. On 25 January 2022⁵⁰, the Committee for General Policy, Finance, Budget and Justice of the Flemish Parliament also exchanged views with the European Semester Officer. The draft FRP 2022 was discussed in the Committee for General Policy, Finance, Budget and Justice of the Flemish Parliament on 22 March 2022⁵¹. On 25 March 2022, the social partners were also involved (in the context of VESOC) in the compilation of the FRP 2022.

6.2. Stakeholder participation within the framework of the NRRP

On 30 April 2020, the Government of Flanders decided to establish an Economic Recovery Committee (Economisch Relancecomité) to develop measures for a quick and strong economic recovery. The Government of Flanders was also concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the related government measures on social life. That is why, on 16 May 2020, the Government of Flanders decided to set up a Social Recovery Committee (Maatschappelijk Relancecomité) in addition to the Economic Recovery Committee. Both committees are composed of independent experts who each play a prominent role in their fields of expertise, and of delegates of the Government of Flanders ministers. The two recovery committees each compiled their recommendations in a report⁵² that was presented on 14 July 2020. This report laid the foundations for the Flemish Resilience recovery plan that was presented at the end of September 2020. On 11 December 2020, the Government of Flanders organised, together with the Liaison agency Flanders-Europe (Vlaams Europees Verbindingsagentschap/VLEVA), a ⁵³webinar about the practical implementation of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan and the link with European funding. The aim was to bring together all the stakeholders to inform them about how the investment plan would be rolled out. All the Government of Flanders ministers explained their projects.



The implementation of the 180 projects from the Flemish Resilience recovery plan was monitored extensively three times in a progress report in 2021 (see chart with status update at the end of December 2021). In 2022, this will be done twice a year. The recovery committees, together with the climate experts panel and the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (Sociaal-Economisch Raad van Vlaanderen/SERV), issue their opinions on each

progress report. These progress reports are used for the monitoring of the recovery plan by a Management Committee (Directiecomité), consisting of one adviser per minister's office and the 11 members of the Board of Chairs. The Management Committee prepares the Task Force, which consists of the Government of Flanders ministers and the chairs of the two recovery committees, the SERV, the climate experts panel, and the Board of Chairs. The Task Force acts as consultative and supervisory body and monitors the implementation of the recovery plan.

⁵⁰ <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/parlementair-werk/commissies/commissievergaderingen/1593715>

⁵¹ <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/parlementair-werk/commissies/commissievergaderingen/1618111>

⁵² <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/rapporten-economisch-en-maatschappelijk-relancecomite>

⁵³ <https://www.vleva.eu/nl/energie-en-klimaat/events/webinar-vlaamse-veerkracht>

GLOSSARY

5G	5 th generation mobile networks	EU-28	The 28 EU Member States (including the United Kingdom)
Agenda 2030	The Global Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030	Eurostat	European Union Statistical Authority, in charge of producing statistics
AMECO	Annual macroeconomic database of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs	EU-SILC	EU statistics on Income and living conditions
BCR	Brussels-Capital Region	EWI	Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie (Economy, Science and Innovation)
BISA	Brussels Institute of Statistics and Analysis	FFM	Fact Finding Mission
Blue Deal	Plan of the Government of Flanders for the fight against water scarcity and drought	FPB	Federaal Planbureau (Federal Planning Bureau)
BO	Begrotingsopmaak (budget preparation)	FTE	Full-time equivalent
BSO	Beroepssecundair onderwijs (vocational secondary education)	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
BVR	Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering (Government of Flanders Order)	GIP	Geïntegreerd InvesteringsProgramma (Integrated Investment Programme)
CCUS	Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage	GLOW	Groeien en Leren Op de Werkvloer (Growing and Learning in the Workplace)
CE Center	Circular Economy Policy Research Centre	GOB	Gespecialiseerde opleidings-, begeleidings- en bemiddelingsdienst (specialised training, guidance and mediation service)
CIFAL	Centre of expertise on the SDGs offering training, coaching and project development	GOK	Gelijke Onderwijskansen (equal educational opportunities)
CIW	Coordination Committee on Integrated Water Policy	GWh	Gigawatt-hour
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide	HE	Higher education
CO ₂ eq.	CO ₂ equivalent	HERMREG	Belgian econometric model for drawing up regional medium-term forecasts
COA XII	Collectieve arbeidsovereenkomst (Collective bargaining agreement of 10/09/2021)	I	Investment
CPE	Charge point equivalent	IB+	Integrale Begeleiding Plus (integrated guidance plus)
CPI	Consumer Price Index	ICT	Information and communications technology
CSR	Country-specific recommendation	IMCDO	Interministeriële Conferentie Duurzame Ontwikkeling (Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development)
DBSO	Deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs (part-time vocational secondary education)	INR	Instituut voor de nationale rekeningen (Institute of National Accounts)
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index	Interreg A	Cross-border cooperation
Digisprong	Digital acceleration for education in Flanders (digital leap)	Interreg B	Transnational cooperation
EBO	Energiebeleidsovereenkomst (energy policy agreement)	IoT	Internet of Things
EC	European Commission	IT	Information technology
ECOOM	Expertisecentrum Onderzoek en Ontwikkelingsmonitoring (Centre for Research & Development Monitoring) (Flemish Science, Technology and Innovation System)	KOALA	Language test in 3 rd pre-primary class: preventing children from starting the first year of primary education with insufficient knowledge of Dutch
Edusprong	Plan for high-quality reinforced adult education in implementation of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan (educational leap)	LFS	Labour Force Survey
EED	European Energy Efficiency Directive	LULUCF	Land use, Land Use Change and Forestry
e-inclusion	From exclusion to inclusion in the digital world	LV	Landbouw en Visserij (Agriculture and Fisheries)
EPC	Energy Performance Certificate (F to A+)	MATIS	Materials Information System - OVAM data monitoring system
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights	M-decree	Decree containing measures for pupils with special educational needs
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	MoF	Ministry of Finance
ES	European Semester	MOW	Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken (Mobility and Public Works)
ESF+	European Social Fund plus	Mt	Megaton
ETS	European Emissions Trading System	NEC	Normaal Economisch Circuit (mainstream economic sectors)
EU	European Union	NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
EU-15	The 15 EU Member States as at 1 January 1995	NEKP	Nationaal Energie- en Klimaatplan (National Energy and Climate Plan)
EU-27	The current 27 EU Member States (excluding the United Kingdom)	NF ₃	Nitrogen trifluoride
		NO _x	Nitrogen oxides

NPHV	Nationaal Plan voor Herstel en Veerkracht (National Recovery and Resilience Plan/NRRP)	VDAB	Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (public employment service of Flanders)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	VEB	Vlaams Energiebedrijf (Flemish Agency for Public Sector Energy Saving)
OMG	Beleidsdomein Omgeving (Environment and Spatial Development Policy Area)	VEKA	Vlaams Energie- en Klimaatagentschap (Energy and Climate Agency of Flanders)
OSLO	Open Standards for Linked Organisations	VEKP	Vlaams Energie- en Klimaatplan 2021-2030 (Flemish Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030)
PJ	Petajoule	VESOC	Vlaams Economisch Sociaal Overlegcomité (Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee)
PLL	Partnerschap Levenslang Leren (Lifelong Learning Partnership)	VHP 2022	Vlaams Hervormingsprogramma 2022 (Flemish Reform Programme 2022/FRP 2022)
PPS	Purchasing power standard	VHP 2022	Vlaams Hervormingsprogramma 2022 (Flemish Reform Programme 2022/FRP 2022)
R	Reform	Visie 2050	Vision 2050 - A long-term strategy for Flanders
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe	Vizier	
R&D	Research and development	2030	Focus 2030 - Flanders' translation of the SDGs into objectives for Flanders
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility	VLEVA	Vlaams-Europees Verbindingsagentschap (Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal	VMM	Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij (Flanders Environment Agency)
SERV	Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (Social and Economic Council of Flanders)	VMSW	Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Sociaal Wonen (Flemish Social Housing Company)
SES	Socio-economic status	VNR	Voluntary National Review
SHM	Sociale huisvestingsmaatschappij (social housing company)	VOV	Vlaams opleidingsverlof (Flemish training leave)
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise	VSA	Vlaamse Statistische Autoriteit (Flanders Statistics Authority)
SRSP	Structural Reform Support Programme	VSDO4	Vierde Vlaamse Strategie Duurzame Ontwikkeling (Fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development)
STATBEL	Directorate-General for Statistics	VVM	Vlaamse Vervoersmaatschappij De Lijn (Flemish Public Transport Company - De Lijn)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics	VVSG	Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)
Syntra	Training centre	WAM	With Additional Measures
Tier 2A	2,500 new childcare places with means-tested fee, COVID-19 compensation subsidy		
TSI	Technical Support Instrument		
TSO	Technisch Secundair Onderwijs (technical secondary education)		
TWE	Traject tijdelijke werkervaring (temporary work experience)		
TWh	Terawatt-hour		
VAPEO	Vlaams Actieprogramma Ecologische Ontsnippering (Flemish Action Programme for Ecological Defragmentation)		
VBH	Vlaamse Brede Heroverweging (Flemish Broad Review)		

**REFORM PROGRAMME OF
THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL
REGION**

2022



Reform Programme of the Brussels-Capital Region

1. Introduction

This contribution of the Brussels-Capital Region to the Belgium 2022 National Reform Programme (NRP) presents an overview of the main regional reforms and investments, taking into account the country specific recommendations for 2019, 2020 and 2021 as well as regional priorities. Since the work under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) has been integrated into the European Semester, this document also briefly reviews progress on the implementation of the Brussels projects included in the NRRP.

The Brussels draft contribution to the NRP was submitted to Brupartners (the Economic and Social Council of the Brussels-Capital Region), which gave its opinion on 31 March 2022, for its approval by the Brussels Government on 28 April 2022. This contribution will also be presented to the Brussels Parliament.

During this legislature, the Brussels Government has committed itself to an ambitious global policy to meet the social, economic and environmental challenges currently facing the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR). It is therefore necessary to integrate the various thematic measures and strategic objectives into a coherent political vision at the level of the Region which, with the support of civil society, aims to empower all Brussels inhabitants throughout their lives, through access to housing, quality employment, accessible health care, a healthy and convivial living environment and nearby public and transport infrastructure. More broadly, the challenges imposed by the climate emergency require specific and collective responses from the political authorities. Given the environmental and public health issues we face, expectations are legitimately high. Supportive measures and radical changes, which are part of a long-term approach, are indispensable in all sectors and in every area of regional competence.

In July 2020, the Brussels government presented its [Recovery and Redeployment Plan](#) addressing the Covid-19 pandemic. With almost 500 million euros of emergency aid measures, this Plan is based on three pillars: (1) socio-economic transition and employment, (2) welfare and health policy, and (3) territorial development and the environment. It should enable a gradual and sustainable recovery of all activities in the short, medium and long term and is based on a thorough diagnosis of the socio-economic, territorial and environmental situation of the Brussels-Capital Region during and after the corona crisis.

The Brussels Region had set out its vision for 2040 during the previous legislature by adopting the [Regional Sustainable Development Plan](#) (PRDD-GPDO) in July 2018. The PRDD aims to provide an appropriate response to the major challenges facing Brussels as an urban entity. These include population growth, access to housing, economic reforms, access to the labour market, economic and social diversity, as well as various issues related to mobility and environmental issues.

The Brussels Government Policy Statement lays the foundations for the [Go4Brussels 2030 Strategy](#) and follows on from the Go4Brussels 2025 Strategy, integrating the priorities of the current Brussels government, specifically in terms of the economic, social and environmental transition. This strategy is

based on a structure comprising two strategic priorities, themselves broken down into a series of objectives:

- STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: develop a transition strategy for the Brussels economy up to 2030, which sets out the decarbonisation of all sectors and reinforces its support for the sectors of the circular and regenerative economy, social and democratic entrepreneurship and the digitalisation of the economy;
- STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: focus cross-cutting employment and training policies on the specific issue of qualifications and support employment-environment alliances: sustainable construction and renovation, sustainable food.

The [Go4Brussels 2030 Strategy](#)¹ is a partnership approach with a vision allowing the various government initiatives to converge by offering common tools for management, monitoring, consultation, communication and evaluation.

¹ [Go4brussels 2030 Strategy](#)

2. Macro-economic context and outlook

The general context for Belgium is described above in the NRP. Following the year of 2021 strongly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine is in turn causing turmoil in international markets and an unstable economic environment.

Regardless of the Brussels economy's direct or indirect exposure to the countries directly involved in the conflict, which is relatively limited, inflation and the significant rise in energy prices, as well as the implementation of broad economic sanctions, are likely to disrupt the economic foundations and, by extension, the Belgian economy and public finances as a whole. As a result, this is likely to have a budgetary impact, on revenues, expenditures, deficit and debt. At this stage and given the ongoing developments, it is still too early to assess precisely the economic and public finance impacts that this conflict will have on Brussels.

2.1. Economic and employment activity

After a strong recovery in 2021 and 2022, economic growth in the Brussels Region should return to a more moderate pace

Following the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic activity in the Brussels Region contracted sharply in 2020. As a result, Brussels GDP fell by 5.2% compared to 2019². For 2021, the latest regional projections are based on a clear recovery of Brussels GDP, with growth of 4.2%³. The recovery is expected to continue in 2022 (+3.1%), allowing economic activity to return to pre-health crisis levels.

In the coming years, Brussels GDP growth is expected to normalise, falling to an average of 1.0% per year over the 2023-2026 period³. The slowdown in medium-term growth would be due in particular to a decline in the economic stimulus provided by the various recovery plans (Belgian and foreign) after 2024.

Domestic employment in Brussels has held up relatively well over the 2020-2022 period, and net job creation is expected to rise again in the following years

The number of active workers in the Brussels Region decreased by 0.4% in 2020², a limited decrease compared to the deep economic recession. Various measures such as temporary unemployment, bridging rights and regional bonuses have indeed helped to soften the impact on employment. Benefiting from the economic recovery and continued temporary support measures, domestic employment in Brussels is expected to remain virtually stable in 2021 and 2022 (+0.2% and +0.1% respectively)³. Over the 2023-2026 period, domestic employment is expected to grow by an average of 0.5% per year. In total, this corresponds to a net creation of 15,700 additional jobs between 2023 and 2026, or an average annual increase of 3,900 jobs.

2.2. Demographics and labour market

Brussels demographics heavily impacted by COVID-19

² ICN/INR, Regional Accounts

³ The results in projections are based on the **Regional Economic Outlook 2021-2026**, published in July 2021 by the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB), the Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis (BISA), the Walloon Institute of Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS) and Statistiek Vlaanderen. These medium-term regional macroeconomic projections are consistent with the **macroeconomic framework of the national projection presented by the FPB in June 2021**. The results commented on here do not therefore include the revisions made in September 2021 and February 2022 by the FPB to the national macroeconomic context in view of the realization of the economic budget. **The effects of the war in Ukraine do not appear in these projections.**

On 1 January 2021, the Brussels Region reached 1.22 million inhabitants and has never been so populated⁴. Nevertheless, the population growth recorded in 2020 (+1,700 inhabitants, or +0.14%) was very low. The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed had important consequences on Brussels demographics.

First, it led to a sharp increase in mortality. In total, all causes combined, 11,000 people died in the Brussels Region in 2020. That is 2,000 more deaths than in 2019, which is a 23% increase. In addition, the restrictions implemented to combat the pandemic, and in particular the closure of borders for several months, greatly curbed international migration. As a result, both immigration and emigration fell by more than 20% compared to 2019.

The population of the Brussels Region is relatively younger than that of the other two Belgian regions. The proportion of people aged 65 and over is significantly lower, while the proportion of young people aged under 18 is relatively much higher. The Brussels Region also differs from the other two regions in that it has a higher share of people of working age (18-64).

Brussels employment and unemployment rates are relatively unaffected over the 2020-2022 period

In 2020 and 2021, the employment and unemployment rates in Brussels remained relatively stable compared to the pre-health crisis situation. However, the health crisis interrupted the decline seen in the number of jobseekers in the Brussels Region for 5 consecutive years from 2015 to 2019. Moreover, the relative stability of the whole masks the fact that the most vulnerable people (young people, precarious contracts, student and temporary work, in particular in the retail and hospitality sectors) were on average more seriously affected by the consequences of the health crisis. In 2021, according to Actiris data, the Brussels Region had an average of 88,780 unemployed jobseekers, with an unemployment rate of 15.5%, which is almost identical to the figures for 2020.

For 2022, the projections assume a gradual normalisation of certain aspects of the Brussels labour market: temporary employment support measures could be eliminated or become more restrictive, international migration flows would return to higher levels, and interregional commuter flows would return to a trend favourable for the Brussels Region. However, there are still significant uncertainties for 2022, such as the potential increase in the number of bankruptcies, the impact of the Omicron variant and the development of health measures. The projections at this stage predict that the employment rate (EU2020 definition) and unemployment rate would still remain virtually unchanged in 2022, with values of 61.5% and 15.5% respectively⁵.

Brussels unemployment starts to fall again in the medium term

From 2023 onwards, Brussels labour market indicators are expected to improve, largely as a result of renewed growth in domestic employment. The EU2020 employment rate is therefore projected to rise from 62.1% in 2023 to 62.8% in 2026⁴. Unemployment (Federal Planning Bureau definition) would start to fall again, although the improvement would be less marked than in the five years preceding the health crisis. On average over the 2023-2026 period, the number of jobseekers is expected to fall by 2,200

⁴ The figures in this section come entirely from the latest Demographic Barometer of the Brussels-Capital Region produced by BISA: https://ibsa.brussels/sites/default/files/publication/documents/Focus-46_FR.pdf

⁵ The results in projections are based on the **Regional Economic Outlook 2021-2026**, published in July 2021 by the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB), the Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis (BISA), the Walloon Institute of Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS) and Statistiek Vlaanderen. These medium-term regional macroeconomic projections are consistent with the **macroeconomic framework of the national projection presented by the FPB in June 2021**. The results commented on here do not therefore include the revisions made in September 2021 and February 2022 by the FPB to the national macroeconomic context in view of the realization of the economic budget. **The effects of the war in Ukraine do not appear in these projections.**

per year, or an annual decrease of 2.5%. The unemployment rate would fall from 14.5% to 13.6% between 2023 and 2026.

2.3. Precariousness and social exclusion

In 2020, 34% of the Brussels population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, while the risk of monetary poverty affected 28% of the inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region.⁶ These figures are significantly higher than in the rest of the country (13% and 9% respectively in the Flemish Region, compared to 25% and 18% in the Walloon Region)⁷. On average during 2020, 46,085 people residing in the Brussels Region received a Social Integration Income or equivalent (SII(E)) from the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW). This number of SII(E) beneficiaries increased by 5% in 2019 and 30% in 2010. In 2020, the number of SII(E) beneficiaries represented almost 6% of the Brussels population aged 18 to 64⁸. In 2021, 13% of Brussels inhabitants aged 65 or over benefited from the Income Guarantee for the Elderly (Garantie de revenus aux personnes âgées - GRAPA) to replace or supplement their pension. This proportion was 5% for Belgium as a whole⁹.

These different indicators reflect the overall situation for the Brussels-Capital Region and mask significant disparities between the Region's districts and municipalities.

3. Policies and approaches to key economic, labour market and social developments and challenges

3.1 Budget/Public debt

The support measures taken by the Brussels government in recent months and years have had an impact on the Region's financial situation. Furthermore, the deployment of the road tax reform and the introduction of **SmartMove**, which is part of the broader Go4Brussels 2030 strategy (Objective 1.7: broaden tax reform), have been delayed. Despite these developments, the Brussels government's objective remains to return to a balanced budget by 2024, except for a number of strategic investments that will bring growth and sustainability.

Due to the economic recovery, which has led to an increase in revenue and tangible savings, the 2022 budget has been brought back into balance, without increasing the tax burden on the people of Brussels. In addition, the multi-annual streamlining processes, focused on greater efficiency and rationality of public spending (including through *spending reviews*, which will be structurally embedded in the budgetary process) continue, not only in terms of public policies, but also in terms of the organisation and operation of regional public authorities.

In order to avoid harming the economic recovery and to promote sustainable and inclusive growth, the Brussels-Capital Region will also continue to invest in **mobility, social housing, employment policy and the implementation of the Climate Plan**. The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** will be used at its full potential to finance recovery.

⁶ These rates are calculated based on the income received by households in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 crisis.

⁷ The figures on the risk of poverty or social exclusion and on the risk of monetary poverty come from the results of the EU-SILC 2020 survey published by Statbel.

⁸ Figures on beneficiaries of an SII or equivalent are provided by the PPS Social Integration.

⁹ The figures on GRAPA come from the Federal Pensions Service.

When assessing budgetary objectives, the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region does not take into account certain strategic investment expenditures that have a major economic impact and support the climate transition. Strategic investments have been clearly defined and a tangible multi-annual trajectory has been agreed upon (an average of 450 million euros per year for the remaining years of this legislature). For 2022, the budget will be 396.7 million euros. Most of this budget is earmarked for the **expansion of the metro network**, the heavy electrical equipment needed to ensure the safety and performance of the metro network, the **expansion of the tram network and the electrification of the bus fleet**.

The **Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA)** analysis, carried out in 2021 with the technical assistance of the European Commission, showed that the Region must strive to strengthen the management of investments, which should lead to better planning and prioritisation of public investments within the framework of the available medium-term budgets and with pre-determined criteria for the selection of projects, including, for example, the impact on economic activity and future income. To address this recommendation of the PEFA report, the Region obtained additional technical assistance from the European Commission (via the *Technical Support Instrument*). This project will start in the summer of 2022.

The NRRP also contains expenditure reviews meant to improve the composition and efficiency of public expenditure. The first milestone for the Brussels-Capital Region has already been reached towards this goal.

With regard to **controlling the costs of ageing and long-term care**, various measures have been taken, in particular the reuse of beds *en portefeuille* in rest homes and rest and care homes, i.e. beds which have been planned and authorised but are not used. These virtual beds represent a potential budget of about 60 million euros. In addition, a procedure for the conversion of rest home beds into rest and care home beds (see chapter 3.5) has been put in place to meet the needs of the population in institutions. Finally, two studies were carried out, the results of which are expected by mid-2022: a programming study on home care and reception or accommodation structures for the elderly and a study on the financing of rest homes and rest and care homes.

Finally, a **study on the optimisation of Information Technology (IT) expenditure** within the Brussels-Capital Region was carried out and identified that there was a fairly significant potential for savings. Based on the conclusions of this study, the BCR launched a programme to support the administration's digital transition to benefit citizens and businesses. This programme is broken down into several projects. Among these, the BCR has set up a new regional IT governance that includes mechanisms designed to strengthen financial governance.

The measures and investments listed in this chapter also contribute to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 10 (reduced inequalities), Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 13 (climate action).

3.2. Labour market/training

Combating discrimination and promoting diversity

Objective 2.2 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy focuses on "ensuring access to stable and sustainable employment for all". In this context, a part of the strategy is specifically dedicated (and shared in priority with social partners) to combating discrimination in recruitment and promoting diversity.

In order to respond to the main principles and essential rights included in the **European Pillar of Social Rights** ("Equal opportunities and access to the labour market" chapter) working to develop fair and efficient labour markets and social protection systems, it is crucial that **all Brussels talents have equal access to stable and quality employment**. Combating discrimination in recruitment remains a central priority of employment policy in the wake of the health crisis and recovery policies. Although the Brussels labour market is faring better than expected, one of the lessons of the crisis is that it has had a more pronounced impact on vulnerable groups who were already facing difficulties in accessing the labour market.

With this increase in inequality in terms of access to the labour market, combating all forms of discrimination in recruitment is even more important than before. This is why the Brussels government has improved the legislation on combating discrimination, in particular in order to **strengthen the coercive nature of the anti-discrimination legislation and to improve the effectiveness of the preventive mechanisms for detecting situations of discrimination**. In this respect, the BCR has also set up a frontline service directly accessible to the Brussels' job seeker who feels discriminated against during a hiring procedure.

By the end of 2022, the Region will also have an **anti-discrimination plan** that will not only allow it to work as closely as possible with the professional sectors that experience the most discrimination, but also to improve the visibility of services offered to people who are victims of discrimination in hiring. Based on the outcome and recommendations of the legal analysis of regulations on discrimination testing, the ordinance of 16 November 2017 aimed at combating discrimination in employment in the Brussels-Capital Region is currently being revised, as well as the collaboration protocols between the Regional Employment Inspectorate, the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (Unia) and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. Finally, support for newly arrived jobseekers will be diversified.

A specific bonus scheme to support employers in the recruitment and sustainable integration of jobseekers with disabilities, alongside the redefinition of a sustainable integration pathway for jobseekers with disabilities is currently in preparation in order to facilitate their sustainable integration into the mainstream labour market.

Lastly, **support for social innovation to strengthen the inclusion of the most remote and vulnerable groups in the labour market**, for example through co-searching or mentoring, is one of the priority areas for promoting diversity in the labour market and in companies. In addition, the creation, by December 2023, of four additional "Actiris Children's Homes" sites will make it possible to support jobseekers, particularly single parents, in accessing the labour market (cf. project I-4.07 of NPRR). In addition, a total of 2,100 new childcare places will be created by 2026 on the basis of the so-called 'first thousand days' plan.

Evaluation of employment aids

Within the framework of the objective of guaranteeing access to stable and quality employment for all, the policy priority is the **inclusion of those job seekers who are furthest from the labour market** (project 2.2.2 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy in shared priority). In order to maximise the impact for these groups, the BCR has initiated in the beginning of the year an external evaluation of the performance of its activation and employment aid policies. This evaluation of the relevance and consistency of the proposed aid, its effectiveness and the satisfaction of the beneficiaries as well as the results in terms of employing the target groups, will enable the BCR to adapt and/or strengthen its system in order to maximise the capacity of public aid to get job seekers into employment, especially

those who are furthest from the labour market, people with disabilities, young jobseekers, low-skilled people and the long-term unemployed.

In order to reduce the skills mismatch, a systematic assessment of the job seeker's professional, linguistic and digital skills and the development of an individualised training plan will be put in place.

Qualification-Employment Strategy

In the Brussels-Capital Region, 60% of jobs are held by people with a higher education qualification. The qualification structure is highly polarised, with a high proportion of highly-skilled (40.8%) and low-skilled (32.2%) people and therefore a limited share of medium-skilled profiles. Faced with the digital and green transitions, identifying current needs and anticipating the future needs of employers appears to be a major challenge for the BCR.

The government therefore wants, with its social partners (in particular within the framework of shared responsibilities of Strategy 2030 and of the Job Training Centres), to develop **a training offer that responds to the current and future challenges of the labour market, as well as a strategy for initiating and securing training, qualification and integration into working life**. The ambitious objective for 2030 is to raise the level of qualifications of the people of Brussels, and in particular those for whom it is more difficult to find a job. With this in mind, in 2021, the government, in consultation with its social partners, launched the first project to develop the future regional monitoring of employment quality (project 2.2.3 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy).

With this strategy, the Brussels region also aims to improve the supply and quality of work-based training programmes in companies. These programmes will enable jobseekers to gain the experience and qualifications they require to access the jobs available on the labour market. These training courses will thus substantially contribute to remedy the mismatch between the skills required and the positions available on the market. Finally, a call for projects will be launched to promote language skills in vocational education. The projects selected will aim to stimulate the teaching of Dutch, French and English and enable more candidates to access the labour market.

Paid Educational Leave Reform

The rapid evolution of professions requires constant adaptation and continuous training. **Paid educational leave** allows workers (mainly in the private sector) to follow training programs during the day or in shifts, while keeping their salary. The health crisis has greatly accelerated the changes underway, particularly through the acceleration of the digitalisation of several areas of our society.

The main objective of the reform of the Paid Educational Leave, agreed with the social partners in the framework of the shared priorities of the 2030 Strategy, is to give every worker the opportunity to train in order to adapt to the profound changes in the professions that he or she will experience throughout his or her career, in the company, in the labour market and in the economy. The objective is also to respond to the need, in a post-health crisis context, to focus public investment on the challenge of skills and human capital.

Reform of the Brussels service voucher system

In the General Policy Declaration, the Government committed itself to making the service voucher policy permanent "within a controlled budgetary framework, by improving training and the quality of working conditions for workers in the sector, in particular by demanding reduced career conditions from the Federal Government, given the arduous nature of the work". This ambition is taken up in the Go4Brussels 2030 Strategy.

Included in objective 2.2 "*Guarantee access to stable and sustainable employment for all*", the workstream 2.2.6 of the GO4 Brussels 2030 Strategy, carried out as a shared priority with Brupartners, aims to respond to the key issues of improving the working conditions of household helpers (in particular the end of their careers for household helpers over 55 years old, support for training with the dual aim of setting up a basic training course and support for continuous training) and better control of the budgetary aspect to ensure the continuity of the system.

This work is coupled with the development of a regulatory framework for the revised scheme.

Finally, the measures referred to in chapter 3.2 also contribute to Sustainable Development Goals 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 10 (reduced inequalities). The project on the (re)qualification strategy for jobseekers should also achieve its objectives as planned (project I-4.07 of the NRRP).

3.3. Entrepreneurship/Innovation/Digitalisation

Entrepreneurship

The principles underpinning the necessary articulation of the BCR's economic and social development with the international climate commitments formulated for 2030 and 2050, formed the milestones for the second priority focus of the 2019-2024 government agreement and are central to the **Regional Strategy for Economic Transition (#shiftingeconomy)**. The *shifting economy* aims to respond to the challenges identified by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To do so, it intends to mobilise all the region's economic actors to achieve (i) the key objective of the Go4Brussels 2030 Strategy, namely the gradual but priority refocusing of regional measures (support, financing, accommodation, public orders, etc.) towards companies whose activities are in line with environmental and socially responsible approaches (objective 1.1 of the strategy), and (ii) to obtain a regional economy that is decarbonised, regenerative, circular, social, democratic, and digital by 2050. In 2021, a series of thematic working groups developed the first intermediate notes that were used to define tangible actions. The government has adopted the *shifting economy* definitively on 31 March 2022 as planned in the NRRP (project R-5.08).

As part of its **Recovery and Redeployment Plan**, the government has also decided to **develop 3 financial tools** to facilitate the financing of Brussels companies:

- a) The creation of a recovery fund (boosting.brussels), which will be financed by the Region, the Federal Holding and Investment Company (SFPI-FPIM) and institutional/private investors. This 80-million-euro recovery fund is intended to intervene for amounts of up to 5 million euros. The government has decided to invest 20 million euros in this fund;
- b) The strengthening of financial tools to improve the financing of seed and pre-seed companies via the recapitalisation of the subsidiary of finance&invest.brussels which specialises in this type of intervention. The government has decided to allocate 5 million euros to this objective.
- c) The creation of a financial recovery tool for companies with less than 10 full-time employees (FTE) (which have financial needs other than those targeted by the recovery fund). The government has decided to allocate 15 million euros to this objective.

These tools complete the recapitalisation of finance&invest.brussels, finalised in December 2020, for an amount of 131 million euros. These tools will facilitate the financing of Brussels companies.

Innovation

In order to achieve these objectives, the Region has adopted an ambitious and coherent Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) policy in the form of the **2021-2027 Regional Innovation Plan (RIP)** adopted in June 2021 as part of objective 1.3 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy ("mobilising research and innovation policy for the benefit of the climate, economic, social and solidarity transition"). This plan is designed to focus investments in key sectors for regional development in order to respond to the various economic, social and environmental challenges.

The RIP was developed through a participatory approach, based on a broad consultation of the innovation ecosystem, along with a detailed analysis of the regional socio-economic landscape. It identified six strategic innovation areas (SIAs): climate change resilience, optimal resource use, urban flows, health, social innovation, and advanced digital technologies and services.

These SIAs constitute **Brussels' smart specialisation strategy** and are consistent with the broader regional economic transition objectives and with the **European Green Deal** objectives. The RIP further strengthens the Brussels ambition to be part of European RDI initiatives working to address environmental and social challenges such as the *Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities* or the *Horizon Europe Partnerships* related to the different SIAs.

In addition to identifying key areas within the BCR and the various challenges in these areas, the RIP is working to increase the inclusion of citizens in the governance of RDI through a responsible research and innovation approach. Pursuing this goal, the **Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good Institute, FARI** was opened in 2021 (also as part of NRRP) to bring together civil society, academia, business and government. Thanks to the thematic focus of the RIP, RDI resources are targeted to contribute to the Brussels-Capital Region's transition objectives. Furthermore, a call for Digital & Economic Transition projects has been launched in 2021 to support digital projects with a positive environmental and social impact. The call will be renewed in 2022. Hub.brussels offers support for the digitalisation of companies, particularly those that are little digitalised. This support has particularly been reinforced since the covid crisis.

Lastly, the RIP intends to take practical actions to develop a fertile ecosystem that combines both innovation and the development of the circular economy. The launch of the *Gisements Urbains* programme serves as an example of this, since it aims to finance projects to recycle the materials produced and discarded by the city's actors (household, construction and industrial waste, etc.).

Digitalisation

The digital transition is an important objective of the Go4Brussels 2030 government strategy (objective 1.8). The **online sales platform mymarket.brussels** was launched in 2021. Bringing together independent businesses in Brussels, the platform responds to the government's objective of promoting local trade by supporting shopkeepers' transition towards digitalisation free of charge.

The simplification and digitalisation of administrative procedures also continues in the Brussels Region, notably as part of a partnership between easy.brussels and the BRIC. Moreover, the obligations arising from the European **Single Digital Gateway** Regulation have served as a lever to accelerate several Brussels initiatives:

- The **catalogue of procedures** offers Brussels public services users a comprehensive, structured and standardised view of the administrative formalities they wish to undertake. This catalogue contains information supplied by the regional and municipal public institutions of Brussels;

- The **IRISbox electronic counter** allows users, citizens and companies, to carry out more than 250 administrative procedures online, using secure interactive forms;
- The **Fidus platform** allows the Brussels regional and municipal public services to access data from authentic sources and personal data, in accordance with the GDPR and in application of the *Once Only* principle;
- The **WePulse program** for the digital and participative transformation of local authorities provides a common software base using an application that covers the management of finances, human resources, social files and the relationship between local authorities and their users.

Other Brussels initiatives have also been part of the Region's digital transition for the benefit of users for many years, including:

- **Fix-My-Street**, a website coupled with a mobile application that allows citizens and the administration to report incidents in the public space and to monitor their resolution;
- **MyPermit**, an electronic counter that guides the public or private applicant through the planning permit application process, step by step

Finally, several Brussels projects are also included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan:

- A **regional data exchange platform** to support the development of innovative projects by encouraging data sharing and collaboration between administrations,
- A **CRM platform**, facilitating interaction between the administrations and citizens/businesses and between administrations, allowing the development of 16 specific projects spread across regional and/or local administrations,
- 4 pilot projects conducted by the **FARI AI for the Common Good Institute** to provide support services (training, development of proof of concepts for software solutions) to for-profit, non-profit or public organisations in areas such as AI education, healthcare and employment.

The measures referred to in chapter 3.3 are also in line with Sustainable Development Goals 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

3.4. Sustainability/Energy/Mobility

Sustainability/Energy

COBRACE (the Brussels Code on Air, Climate and Energy Management) was adopted on 2 May 2013 and has been evolving ever since. The code includes many measures related to energy efficiency, renewable energy, transportation, air quality and climate. Adopted as part of objective 1.1 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy, the **Climate Order of 17 June 2021** significantly strengthens regional climate governance by incorporating new provisions:

- The **setting of targets for reduction of direct and indirect regional greenhouse gas emissions**. The Region must achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 by reducing direct regional emissions by at least 40% in 2030, 67% in 2040 and 90% in 2050 compared to 2005. The Government will be responsible for establishing the regional policy for the reduction of indirect emissions in order to achieve a trajectory comparable to that of direct emissions by 2050. The methodological framework will be proposed by Brussels Environment no later than 1 January 2023. This ambitious work is in progress;
- The formulation of **principles that guide climate policy** (see COBRACE Article 1.2.5);

- The creation of a **Committee of Climate Experts**, comprised of independent experts;
- The adoption of a **new regional air-climate-energy plan** by 30 March 2023 (then 30 September 2027 and every 5 years thereafter). The Integrated Air-Climate-Energy Plan (PACE) measures will be informed by **the 2030 Study**, which aims to identify measures that can be implemented to increase regional climate ambitions.

The Committee of Climate Experts

The main mission of the Committee of Climate Experts is to assess the adequacy of regional policies and measures with respect to climate objectives, by producing an annual report and issuing opinions at the Government's request. The composition of the Committee is such that it has expertise in the following disciplines or subjects:

- 1° climatology;
- 2° air quality and mobility;
- 3° the economy and businesses;
- 4° technologies;
- 5° social and behavioural aspects of the climate transition;
- 6° energy;
- 7° sustainable cities and regional planning;
- 8° biodiversity.

The **decree relating to the committee of climate experts**, setting out its operation, composition, etc. was adopted on 28/10/2021. The call for applications for the committee of experts was issued in December 2021 and closed on 31/01/2022. The selection of experts will take place in early 2022 and the committee should be operational by April 2022.

The Climate Steering Committee

In order to ensure a collegial approach to the development of the PACE, a Climate Steering Committee was set up in 2021, comprised of representatives of Government members. The work of this committee and the related working groups (WGs) will continue intensively into 2022.

Integrating the climate dimension into guidance notes and letters

- The Regional Policy Statement stated that, *"From the beginning of the legislature, the Government will incorporate a contribution to climate priorities in the policy briefs and guidance letters of each minister and public agency and in the objectives assigned to senior officials"*;
- In 2020, three pilot administrations were invited to participate in a support project guided by Brussels Environment: Actiris, Innoviris and Perspective;
- In 2021, ten public bodies were given more intensive support through a consortium of organisations led by Brussels Environment, for the 2022 guidance letters;
- In 2022, a stock contract will be launched to expand the support for the 2023 and subsequent guidance letters.

In addition to COBRACE, the BCR is involved in other sustainability initiatives in the region:

RENOLUTION Alliance

Adopted by the Government on 25 April 2019, the *Strategy to reduce the environmental impact of Brussels' building stock*, hereinafter referred to as the "Renolution Strategy" (350 million euros), sets a performance objective equivalent to an average EPB C for the entire residential building stock by 2050. This strategy

will result in an average energy performance level of 100kWh/m²/year for all housing in Brussels in 2050, i.e. an average consumption divided by 3 or 4 compared to the current situation. However, the tertiary sector is subject to an objective of energy neutrality by 2050. The Brussels-Capital Region is also pursuing a carbon neutral objective for public buildings through the RenoClick programme.

The RENOLUTION Alliance, launched in April 2021, is a sectoral policy based on a governance process that mobilises public, private and community actors around concerted actions related to the issues of the renovation strategy.

The Alliance is therefore the place for dialogue and collaboration to bring together all the sectors involved (construction sector, banks, solicitors, architects, tax specialists, etc.) and the different regional and community administrations around the various themes of renovation, to make the measures in each of their areas consistent with each other and **thus create a regional catalyst for energy and sustainable renovation**. The Alliance's members will work together to prepare the groups affected by the future new obligations.

The governance of the Alliance is structured around a **Steering Committee** responsible for guiding and supporting the Coordination Committee; a **Strategic Coordination Committee** (public/private) responsible for supervising the implementation of the strategy and the development of the necessary synergies between actors and actions; and an **Operational Unit** that organises and coordinates the practical implementation of actions.

Since September 2021, the Alliance has been organised into **7 thematic workshops**¹⁰ working on the issues of the strategy and **4 cross-sectoral actions**¹¹ supporting the workshops. Around one hundred organisations are involved in the Alliance's process to help implement the strategy's 34 action plans. The flagship actions launched are:

- At the end of 2021, the launch of the **Renolab** innovative call for projects, a scheme also supported by the Recovery and Resilience Plan;
- February 2022, the setting up of the technical committee, the launch of the communication campaign, the consultation on future regulation related to energy renovation.

Air quality: Low Emission Zone (LEZ)

Since 1 January 2018, the entire regional territory has been a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) which has gradually banned the circulation of the most polluting vehicles (ref. www.lez.brussels) in accordance with a schedule that has been defined until 2025. On 24 June 2021, the Government approved in first reading the draft schedule for the 2025-2036 period. This schedule sets the milestones for strengthening the LEZ access criteria based on different vehicle categories, with the objective of:

- establishing a way to stop the use of diesel cars by 2030;
- permitting only "zero-emission" vehicles by 2035 for all light duty vehicles and buses.

This measure aims to reduce air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions stemming from transportation. The proposed post-2025 LEZ schedule is based on research and on the results of a broad stakeholder consultation conducted in 2019 - 2020.

¹⁰ 1) Regulations and development of tools, 2) Urban planning and heritage, 3) Urban renewal, 4) Financing and economic aid, 5) Support for demand and supply, 6) Training and employment, 7) Economic logistics.

¹¹ 1) An innovative call for projects: RENOLAB, 2) A joint communication, 3) A technical committee, 4) The transition to a circular economy.

On 24 June 2021, the Government also took note of the [draft "Low Emission Mobility" roadmap](#), which sets out the strategy for the accompanying measures to be put in place to achieve the decarbonisation of transport in the BCR.

From July 2021 to January 2022, the draft roadmap and the draft decree that sets the 2025-2036 LEZ schedule were subject to an in-depth consultation with the relevant stakeholders (representatives from the economic sectors and specific audiences concerned, municipalities, civil society, other Belgian political entities). Based on this consultation, the schedules and roadmap are expected to be approved by the Government in April 2022.

Charging infrastructure

At the same time, based on the strategic vision for charging infrastructure adopted by the Government in 2020, the BCR is developing an operational plan for the deployment of charging infrastructure. This plan contains the objectives in terms of on-road and off-road charging infrastructures, as well as in terms of fast charging.

CurieuzenAir Project

The CurieuzenAir project¹² was launched as part of [the Brussels Clean Air Partnership](#) initiated with the support of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Foundation. This is a citizen science project that analyses the air quality in Brussels. It is organised by the University of Antwerp, the urban movement BRAL and the Université libre de Bruxelles, in close association with Bloomberg Philanthropies, Brussels Environment, De Standaard, Le Soir and BRUZZ. The measurement campaign carried out in October 2021 involved 3,000 Brussels residents who measured nitrogen dioxide concentrations using passive tubes. After analysing and interpreting the measurements, the project's results will be released in March 2022. They will help to identify areas of high pollution within the Region and promote actions to improve air quality.

Circular Economy

The implementation of the [Regional Programme for Circular Economy \(RPCE\)](#) and its 111 measures has allowed the Region to support 471 small, medium and large companies through coaching sessions. As a result, 213 organisations have been financially supported in the form of aid or subsidies for a total of 14 million euros. The activities carried out within this framework trained/raised the awareness of 3,200 people, including 2,000 students, during the four years of RPCE activities. The launch of a call for projects allowing innovators to test the feasibility of their project for the reuse of "urban deposits" has filled the funding gap in the circular economy innovation pathway, by acting further upstream in the innovation chain. The development of an economy transition strategy will allow all these improvements deriving from the RPCE to be further developed from 2022 onwards.

Mobility

The [Good Move regional mobility policy](#) supports the sustainable development of the Brussels metropolis by reconciling environmental, safety, health and quality of life challenges, as well as social, economic and budgetary issues (in line with objective 1.9 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy). It is based on strong ambitions to address these critical issues and improve the city's accessibility while maintaining its attractiveness for residents, visitors and businesses:

¹² For more information: <https://curieuzenair.brussels/en/home/>.

- A significant improvement in the living conditions and safety of the city's residents and users based on a coherent design of efficient mobility networks that help to:
 - a. calm neighbourhoods in terms of road traffic in favour of active modes of transportation and local public transportation;
 - b. strengthen the structuring of public transport lines and the development of a quality cycling and pedestrian network; and
 - c. regulate traffic flows on the main ring roads and penetration routes.

- An integrated mobility system centred on the needs of the user through the structured deployment of an integrated mobility and parking service for the movement of goods and people (including public and private transport operators) in order to:
 - a. encourage users to choose the most appropriate mode for each of their trips by avoiding the use of private cars in urban areas as much as possible (from 33% to 24% of journeys in connection with the region are made by car);
 - b. promote walking and cycling for short and medium distance trips;
 - c. facilitate the possibility for Brussels residents to no longer own their own vehicle and/or support Brussels residents in a transition to a more suitable vehicle; and
 - d. reduce the massive use of the car resulting from "commuters" and company cars; modulate travel demand in space and time by aiming for a sharp reduction in the number and length of individual motorised trips.

- Strengthened and transparent public governance through the clear affirmation of the roles of the Brussels-Capital Region, its interventions and cooperation with the other levels of government and its authority with regards to private and public mobility operators.

- A willingness to carry out a fair and equitable transition by identifying the objective needs of the Brussels actors (households, companies) and defining targeted social support measures. Thus, the Region has set a goal of reducing household spending on mobility.

In addition, the Brussels government devotes more than 5 billion euros to the **Multiannual Investment Plan for Public Transport** (2021-2031). It involves more than €5 billion in investments and covers the three modes of transport: metro (modernisation and extension of the network, rolling stock, depot, etc.), tram (extensions to the network, rolling stock, depot, etc.) and bus (redevelopment of the network, depot, etc.). The Plan is updated quarterly. It is also an integral part of the public service contract of the Brussels public transport operator, STIB-MIVB, for the 2019-2023 period adopted by the Brussels Government on 10 April 2019. The updated Investment Plan extends to 2028.

Finally, the measures in this chapter also contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals 3 (good health and well-being), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and 13 (climate action). Within the framework of the NRRP, the Brussels Region has adopted the regulatory framework for the reform of the renovation subsidies.

3.5. Inclusion and Social Cohesion

The health crisis that we have now been experiencing for almost 18 months demonstrates that the need for social cohesion has never been so great. It is undeniable that the current crisis has reinforced inequalities by further distancing already vulnerable groups from empowerment opportunities. The "post-COVID" reconstruction will require substantial public investment.

Part of the effort will consist in restoring social life and citizen's participation and in guaranteeing the proper functioning of democracy in order to combat exclusion and poverty, and ensure social inclusion.

The measures referred to in this chapter can be understood more broadly and correspond to the priorities listed in the framework of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (Chapter 3, social protection and inclusion).

Integrated social and health package

The development of the **Brussels Integrated Social and Health Plan**, called "Brussels Takes Care", began in October 2020. This plan, which is common to all the competent entities in the Brussels region, reflects a territorial approach to social action and healthcare, giving the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSW) a key role in the deployment of policies to combat inequality and poverty. The first step in making the *Brussels Takes Care Plan* a reality was to launch the consultation process for its drafting. This process took place in autumn 2020 with the non-profit sector, administrations and academic actors. A consultation process with citizens took place in parallel in December and January 2021. The Brussels government's objective is to adopt this plan in 2022. Ultimately, it will serve as a compass to guide social and health policies in an integrated and coherent manner throughout the region.

Alongside the co-creation process for the Brussels Integrated Social-Health Plan, a second project consisted of the Observatory of Health and Social Affairs identifying priority neighbourhoods in order to implement the pilot projects for **local social-health contracts**. Within the framework of these contracts, innovative ways of organising social and health services will be implemented in an integrated manner during 2022.

Combating poverty, social inequality and non-use of social rights

The COVID-19 crisis has not diverted the Brussels government from the objectives set out in its 2019-2024 Policy Statement on combating poverty and social inequality. On the contrary, it has helped to accelerate certain projects, particularly in terms of **combating the non-use of social rights**.

In June 2020, the Brussels Government granted an exceptional subsidy of 30 million euros to the 19 Brussels PCSWs to enable them to deal with the various consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the well-being and health of users in 2020 and 2021.

In this context, 4.2 million euros have also been specifically invested in **combating social under-protection and non-access to rights**. A key challenge in this regard is to ensure that all Brussels citizens affected by the crisis can benefit from their fundamental social rights and mobilise existing aid. Combating non-access to rights will continue in 2022, in particular through the granting of substantial subsidies to the PCSWs in 2022, the development of specific training for frontline workers and the provision of an inventory of the various levers available in terms of non-access to rights.

In addition, the "Standardised Social Statutes" (SSS) and "MyBenefits" projects are currently being discussed with the Crossroads Bank of Social Security. These initiatives aim to centralise and promote knowledge of all the social assistance available to citizens.

A cross-cutting Brussels plan to **support single-parent families** has been developed to "provide a coordinated and effective response to the needs of single-parent families and particularly to single

women with children. The ambition is to activate as many regional levers as possible in order to develop innovative actions to help these households."¹³

Support for dependent persons or persons losing their autonomy

In terms of improving the supply of home help, **two successive increases in the home help quota** have been enacted as part of the Recovery and Redeployment Plan (2% and 5%), in addition to the planned increase in the initial 2020 budget (1%). This capacity building to care for people losing their autonomy at home is particularly crucial during a pandemic: indeed, home help services play an essential role in keeping watch over the elderly and preventing them from moving into a nursing home too early.

Furthermore, the regulatory framework allowing the approval and subsidisation of **home care services** is being finalised, as this framework is currently non-existent. The Brussels Recovery and Redeployment Plan has also provided a budget to support these services from 2021.

In the area of mental health, calls for proposals have been launched in the context of the health crisis and the Brussels Recovery and Redeployment Plan. The selected projects, which are currently being implemented, aim to enhance the **mobility of outpatient mental health services**, create **linkage sites** to strengthen the community approach to mental health, and develop **psychiatric care for people staying at home**.

Within the framework of the **reform of the accommodation sector for the elderly**, the policy of **converting rest home beds into rest and care home beds** is an important issue and a priority. This conversion allows for a significant increase in the number of residents and a reduction in their bills, since it allows for the financing of physiotherapy sessions in particular to be included in the public funding.

A draft order amending the order of 24 April 2008 relating to reception or accommodation facilities for the elderly was also approved on second reading on 27 January 2022. The objective is twofold: to improve the match between the supply of facilities for the elderly and the needs of the elderly, pending a more far-reaching reform, and to neutralise the risk of budget overruns.

In addition, various calls for projects have been launched to support the elderly and disability sectors. In particular, a **call for projects** was launched for bi-communal organisations in November 2021 in order to subsidise projects the activities of which fall within the **health or assistance sectors**, specifically in policies related to the elderly and people with disabilities.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the Brussels Recovery and Redeployment Plan has provided substantial assistance to the COCOM-approved rest homes. A budget of 6.1 million euros has been made available to enable institutions to maintain employment in their structures and thus ensure maximum service to their residents during the epidemic.

Finally, in 2021, the COCOM took over the operational management of the **Assistance Allowance for Elderly Persons** by expanding its scope so that all persons domiciled in Brussels who may be eligible can access it, regardless of their nationality. It is granted to people aged over 65 with low incomes who have additional expenses due to reduced autonomy.

¹³ parentsolo.brussels (2021). The Brussels Single Parent Family Support Plan. Brussels. https://parentsolo.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Plan_Monoparentalite_2021.pdf

Access to housing

Access to **quality and affordable housing** is a priority for the Brussels government. In order to increase the availability of public housing, it is working on the sustainable renovation of the existing housing stock and continuing construction of 6,400 housing units provided for under the Regional Housing Plan and the 'Alliance Habitat'. An emergency plan for social housing policy has been adopted with the objective of providing a tangible solution for 15,000 households on the waiting list for social housing.

With regard to the private rental market, the government is supporting the development of the social housing agencies sector, which currently manages 6,300 housing units and is growing steadily. A rent allowance has also been developed for more than 12,000 precarious households. A policy to encourage private landlords to charge reasonable rents is being implemented (cf. the ordinance of 28 October 2021 aimed at establishing a Joint Rental Commission and to combating unfair rents). The government also intends to address the specific housing needs of certain target audiences such as victims of domestic violence. It will strengthen the secret shelters for women.

Combating homelessness

In November 2019, night shelter and supportive housing capacity for vulnerable populations was 2,607; on 1 December 2021, it was 4,446. This overall increase in reception and support capacity is not due to an increase in the number of emergency reception beds, but is related to the diversification of facilities with a view to improve quality.

The additional budget of 14.8 million euros made available in December 2019 by the Brussels government has enabled the structural reinforcement of the homeless assistance sector, by strengthening the "**housing first**" capacity, preventing the loss of housing and evictions through home guidance, improving resources for day and night actors, creating a logistics platform to facilitate the installation in housing and the stabilisation of 2 non-profit organisations under public law to assist homeless people.

In addition, as part of its Recovery and Redeployment Plan, in July 2020, the Brussels Government provided a substantial budget (2.5 million euros in 2020 and 5.75 million euros in 2021) to implement **structural rehousing solutions for homeless individuals and families temporarily accommodated in emergency facilities** linked to Covid-19. A budget of 6.6 million euros has been confirmed for 2022 and subsequent years.

Reception and referral of migrants

In November 2019, the Brussels Government approved a **strategic note** on the common vision for the **reception and referral of migrants** on its territory.

Several amending decrees (COCOM and COCOF) have been issued to implement the Common Community Commission Order of 11 May 2017 establishing a **mandatory reception pathway for newcomers**. An IT tool enabling municipalities to investigate newcomers affected by this obligation and check that newcomers comply with it is currently being developed. The mandatory pathway is scheduled to be operationalised on 1 May 2022.

In addition, a draft decree was approved in December 2021 in order to increase the number of people who can benefit from the reception pathway, thus allowing any foreigner who has decided to settle in Brussels on a long-term basis, whether or not they are qualified as a newcomer, to be able to follow the proposed reception pathway. As a consequence, the reception capacity of the Reception Office for

Newcomers (Bureaux d'accueil pour primo-arrivants - BAPA) will be increased from 5,000 to 6,000 in 2022 and the offer of language courses (alpha or French as a foreign language) corresponding to the level and needs of newcomers will be expanded. To achieve these two objectives, an amount of €1,185,000 has been obtained for 2022 and subsequent years.

Education and Childhood

The Government is mobilising regional tools in support of the education policies of the linguistic communities, with three major objectives included in the Brussels programme for education and childhood (objective 2.4 of the Go4Brussels 2030 strategy):

1. Respond to the demographic challenge: create new schools, renovate schools with a poor reputation and connect them to their neighbourhood

The regulatory framework of the "**School Contracts**" was finalised in 2021, intended for schools located in the urban regeneration zone ("zone de revitalization urbaine") (ZRU) which cater for vulnerable school populations. In 2021, the government selected 6 new School Contracts 2022-2027 (3 for 2022-2026 and 3 for 2023-2027), implemented with an annual budget of 5 million euros.

Since 2021, in the framework of the reform of the *Code Bruxellois de l'Aménagement du Territoire*, a specific procedure was put in place to optimise the submission and examination of planning permit applications for school facilities and social housing.

Finally, in order to support construction projects, support mechanisms for the management of public facilities, including school facilities, is planned.

2. Supporting young people in difficulty to stay in school and combating school segregation

In response to the health crisis and the negative effects it had on school dropouts, exceptional resources (1.8 million euros) were made available to strengthen actions in secondary schools and at local level. In addition, an overall annual budget of 8.5 million euros is devoted to combating school dropouts, through three three-year regional schemes. The means of the **School Attendance Scheme (Dispositif d'Accrochage Scolaire (DAS))**, and of the Support Scheme for schooling and citizenship support activities for children and young people (DASC)¹⁴ are concentrated in schools with pupils in difficulty, often from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The municipalities are also supported in implementing their municipal school retention plans¹⁵ (PASC). Finally, specific resources were made available for pilot projects for young people aged 15 to 21 who are actively dropping out of school (confirmed dropouts, early school leavers, young people who are not enrolled) in qualifying or alternating education.

3. Supporting the digital transition of schools

In the context of the health crisis and the hybridization of learning, the Brussels Government has committed exceptional resources (€6 million) as part of its recovery and redeployment plan and of the NRRP (project I-4.05 of the NRRP) to **strengthen the mobile digital equipment and internal connectivity of Brussels secondary schools** with a vulnerable public. This deployment plan complements the "Fiber to the School" project. Other pilot projects supported by the Region also contribute to this challenge of digitisation within schools, such as projects aimed at preventing school (cyber)harassment and supporting learning about the protection of personal data and privacy on the internet, and "job-oriented" language learning projects in qualifying education via digital tools.

¹⁴ Dispositif de soutien aux activités d'accompagnement à la scolarité et à la citoyenneté des enfants et des jeunes (DASC)

¹⁵ Plans d'Accrochage Scolaire Communaux

Social Cohesion - French Community Commission (COCOF)

The French Community Commission has also contributed to strengthening the social fabric through the following measures:

- In April 2021, an exceptional grant of nearly €100,000 was provided to enable 129 non-profit organisations to arrange tutoring activities during the summer holidays.
- In November 2021, 1.2 million euros was secured to strengthen social cohesion (expansion of citizen service and first implementations from the 2018 Decree).
- In February 2022, €2,238,000 was granted to associations working in social cohesion to enable them to carry out projects that are closer to the needs of citizens via the "Impulse" annual call for projects and the call for investment in the purchase of equipment or small infrastructure.
- Structurally, for 2022, the budget for social cohesion has increased by €1,490,000.
- Alongside the implementation of the Decree, two important projects will benefit from new or additional resources: the citizen service (€240,000) and the P3B citizen training (€153,000).

The measures referred to in this chapter are also part of a broader framework and contribute to Sustainable Development Goals 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and well-being) and 10 (reduced inequalities).

Social Cohesion - The Flemish Community Commission (VGC)

The 2021-2025 **multi-annual strategic plan of the Flemish Community Commission** (VGC - Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie) is structured around seven policy objectives with associated action plans and actions that they want to achieve during this mandate. This plan has been informed by participatory processes, including *Stadspiratie*, *De Ronde van Brussel*, advisory board meetings, etc. Citizens, civil society organisations and VGC departments were given the opportunity to submit ideas and recommendations for policy. In 2022, the necessary budgets have been linked to the multi-year plan. Social cohesion is woven into the various policy objectives of this plan, which provides the framework within which the VGC implements its policy. For a complete overview, we refer to the multi-annual plan on the following website: [Strategisch meerjarenplan 2021-2025 | Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie \(vgc.be\)](https://www.vgc.be/Strategisch-meerjarenplan-2021-2025). In the 2021-2022 policy statement, a few tangible actions were highlighted that the VGC is working on in 2021-2022.

4. SDGs: Governance in the Brussels-Capital Region

The Brussels-Capital Region has defined its vision for 2040 by adopting the **Regional Plan for Sustainable Development** (PRDD) - a strategic document consistent with others that pursue the SDGs in the Brussels Region - in July 2018. The PRDD aims to provide an appropriate response to the challenges and concerns that Brussels faces as an agglomeration, including access to housing, functional and social diversity, different types of mobility and environmental issues. Furthermore, the Brussels Government has adopted a series of regulations aiming to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through environmental and mobility measures such as: the Brussels Air, Climate and Energy Management Code (COBRACE), for example, includes numerous measures relating to energy efficiency, the development of renewable energy sources, transport, air quality and climate.

5. Use of structural funds

The ERDF and ESF structural and investment funds operational in the Brussels Region have made it possible to implement important structuring programmes in terms of the region's economic, environmental and social development, by supporting innovation but also social integration, professional reintegration and employment.

These funds are also integrated into the Brussels policies, which are designed in principle on a regional and local scale, and finance major multi-year projects carried out by public operators (regional or local), universities, associations or even Brussels' economic operators.

The **2014-2020 ERDF Programming** is not yet complete, as the Programme's funding of 59 projects and 3 financial instruments (related to innovation, support to SMEs, low-carbon economy, environment and vulnerable populations) has been extended until the end of 2023. Among the most recent projects selected in 2018, note that some were particularly mature and are therefore nearing completion.

From an operational perspective, both the ERDF Managing Authority and the beneficiaries have had to adapt to the working conditions and sometimes incorporate a significant delay in the schedule (complexity on the sites, meetings and accompanying actions impossible or strongly disrupted).

An initial evaluation of the Programme has been carried out and should help to promote a more results-oriented intervention logic for the next Programme.

The Monitoring Committee also included additional resources (6.1 million euros) in the 2014-2020 Programme as part of the **REACT-EU** Programme, which will be used to:

- increase the financing of companies (in the hospitality sector and start-ups in the health and sustainable construction sectors);
- support economic operators in the conference industry, by helping them to make the necessary investments for the "hybridisation" of the rooms, and thus to offer both "face-to-face" and remote conferences;
- develop a new regional e-ticketing tool in the tourism and culture sector in order to facilitate and streamline the offer of such sectors.

It should be noted that prior to this financing, the Programme had been adapted to provide, through CRII+, much needed flexibility to meet the specific needs of businesses in the context of the health crisis, and that several projects have reoriented their activities partly to satisfy new needs at the population or business level.

Regarding the **2021-2027 ERDF Programming**, in February 2022, the regional authorities approved a preliminary draft Programme (currently subject to a public enquiry and consultation with partners) that will support the specific objectives 1.1., 1.2., 1.3., 2.1., 2.6., 2.7., 4.3., 4.4. and 5.1. of the ERDF.

Irrespective of the increase in the total volume of the Programme (from 191 million euros in 2014-2020 to 303 million euros), we note a significant strengthening of the environmental part (which now represents 45% for strategic objective 2, or 131.83 million euros (ERDF + co-financing) compared with 50.89 million euros for 2014-2020). The energy component (which represents 30% of the Programme) will support the Region's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality, with priority given to the energy renovation of public buildings and social housing.

The Programme will also support (by up to 26.36 million euros, including co-financing) the participatory dynamics implemented (as part of urban revitalisation) by the Region in the Sustainable

Neighbourhood Contracts and Urban Renewal Contracts, by contributing to the partners' priorities in terms of facilities.

The choices for this Programme were naturally based on the principle of thematic concentration, on the investment guidelines for the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy funds for Belgium contained in Annex D of the 2019 Country Report, as well as on the regional priorities contained in the Regional Policy Declaration.

After consultation with partners and a public enquiry, the Programme will be presented to the Commission and implemented through calls for projects.

The **European Social Fund Operational Programme** for the Brussels-Capital Region for the **2014-2020 period** is structured around 3 priorities aimed at different target groups.

Regarding priority 1, targeting young people, all projects had more than 29,000 participants between 2014 and 2020. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) projects included First Job contracts, internships in the European Union and the NEETs partnership for young people furthest from the labour market.

In priority 2, access to employment for all, the partnership of the Active Job Search Workshops (ARAE) and the Actiris Guidance Active Job Search service have supported over 58,000 job seekers. During this period, the employer consultants of Select Actiris collected 170,000 job offers for Brussels job seekers. With regard to the mobility of workers in Europe, the number of one-off placements of people in employment or on internships in the EURES area amounted to more than 320.

Priority 3 targets people in vulnerable situations and includes actions promoting diversity and combating discrimination. Between 2015 and 2020, the job coaches of the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSW) supported 38,400 people. In the same period, the LINK service, which ensures professional transition at the end of a training experience and an article 60 contract, supported more than 7,000 people. The network of childcare facilities distributed across the Brussels Region has enabled more than 1,100 job-seeking parents to find a place for their child(ren).

The financial envelope committed for the programme represents a total amount of 102,904,419.94 euros, of which 55,958,693.96 euros corresponds to the support of the European Union. For the 2014-2020 period, the use corresponding to interim payment applications by the Certifying Authority (CA) to the Commission amounted 60,828,447.68 euros (62.32% of the total package). Forecasts show that after verification and certification of all expenses, a consumption of almost 100% of the budget can be achieved.

The **2021-2027 ESF+ Programme** of the Brussels-Capital Region wants to contribute to strategic objective 4 "A more social Europe".

Due to the accurate identification of the challenges of the Brussels labour market with labour market partners, social partners and those involved in civil society, based on the guidelines provided by the European Commission under the framework of the European Semester and based on the socio-economic diagnostic, the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region approved the two specific objectives of the ESF+ on 22 April 2021. In practical terms, the ESF+ programme targets two specific objectives that mainly concern improving access to employment and professional inclusion, particularly for young job seekers, the long-term unemployed and job seekers who are furthest from the labour market. The Brussels Government has decided to concentrate resources on these two key objectives rather than supporting more objectives but to a lesser extent.

The ESF+ programme is developed in a logic of complementarity with other funds and programmes and ensures synergies, particularly with the ESF+ programmes of Flanders and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, but also with the ERDF in the Brussels-Capital Region.

The total ESF+ budget for the 2021-2027 period amounts to €133,171,200, of which approximately €53,268,952 comes from ESF+ (40% co-financing rate). Adoption by the services of the European Commission is scheduled for the second quarter of 2022.

Two other ESF+ programmes are operational in the Brussels region: the Wallonia-Brussels ESF+ programme is active on the community competences of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the COCOF. On 10 February 2022, the Governments and College approved the 2021-2027 Wallonia-Brussels ESF+ Programme. This program will focus on four priorities: improving access to employment (including creating your own job) and promoting lifelong learning, social innovation, implementation of the Youth Guarantee, the fight against poverty including child poverty and social inclusion and de-institutionalisation. The Vlaanderen ESF+ programme is under discussion and has not yet been decided upon by the Flemish Government.

Within the framework of **REACT-EU** the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region granted a first instalment of 2,979,319 euros at the beginning of 2021 and a second instalment of 2,800,000 euros at the end of 2021 to the 14-20 ESF OP in order to reinforce the ARAE (44 additional Full Time Equivalent). The objective of the reinforcement is to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on employment in the BCR by increasing the number of job seekers supported and adapting the support to accommodate the CE victims.

Regierung
der Deutschsprachigen
Gemeinschaft Belgiens

Ostbelgien 

MINISTERPRÄSIDENT
OLIVER PAASCH

Annexe au Programme National de Réforme 2022

Depuis 2009, le concept de développement régional « Ostbelgien leben 2025 » constitue la base durable et à long terme des principaux projets de réforme de la Communauté germanophone ([https://ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resourcen/downloads/rek/Regionales Entwicklungskonzept Band 5 REK III.pdf](https://ostbelgienlive.be/PortalData/2/Resourcen/downloads/rek/Regionales_Entwicklungskonzept_Band_5_REK_III.pdf)). Dans un cadre global cohérent, le concept de développement régional est articulé en périodes d'implémentation de cinq ans s'étendant aux législatures respectives.

En 2020 et 2021, la Communauté germanophone est affectée par deux crises majeures : la crise sanitaire mondiale liée à la propagation du Virus COVID-19 et les inondations survenues en été 2021 ayant fortement touché certaines communes germanophones. Ainsi, les instances politiques ont été contraintes d'adapter certains projets de réforme en fonction de nouvelles nécessités immédiates dues aux crises respectives.

La Communauté germanophone en mode de gestion de crise

La gestion de la crise interfédérale du coronavirus a confié aux entités fédérées des responsabilités importantes. En tant que plus petite entité fédérée de la Belgique, la Communauté germanophone s'est activement impliquée dans la gestion nationale de crise nationale.

Elle a activé à cet effet tous les instruments pertinents de son autonomie et les instances décisionnelles ont mis en place quatre décrets de crise et adopté plusieurs paquets d'aide d'un montant total de 90 millions d'euros, qui ont d'une part couvert les besoins aigus. D'autre part, les aides conséquentes ont servi à la reconstruction durable après la crise. Il s'agit notamment de l'augmentation des dotations communales afin de minimiser les conséquences économiques pour les entreprises touristiques, les commerces, les prestataires de services et les professions de contact, de l'équipement de deux centres de vaccination à Eupen et St. Vith et de la mise à disposition de matériels de testing et de protection, la revalorisation des secteurs de la petite enfance et des soins aux personnes âgées, une majoration spéciale des allocations familiales et une garantie de subventions pour le secteur non marchand.

Dans le domaine de l'enseignement, un capital de postes supplémentaires a été créé et maintenu afin de réduire les retards d'apprentissage. Des ordinateurs portables ont été mis à disposition afin

de permettre aux élèves et apprentis dans le besoin de suivre leurs cours à distance et d'éviter l'exclusion sociale.

Dans le domaine de l'emploi, de nouvelles incitations ont été mises en place pour aider les personnes à retrouver rapidement un emploi. Les montants des subventions à l'emploi AktiF et AktiF PLUS ont été doublés pendant la période de crise.

Afin d'amortir les conséquences des inondations, la Communauté germanophone a aidé les communes et CPAS en subventionnant du personnel supplémentaire de soutien et en accordant des dotations spéciales.

Afin d'engendrer des processus de reconstruction multi-sectorielle après les crises de ces deux dernières années, la Communauté germanophone a prévu des projets de réforme dans différents domaines sur la base du concept de développement régional :

- le développement de structures d'accueil pour la petite enfance,
- l'augmentation des salaires du personnel des centres d'hébergement et de soins,
- des réformes et investissements dans les domaines du social et de la santé ainsi que la consolidation du paysage hospitalier,
- des réformes dans l'orientation professionnelle ainsi que l'introduction obligatoire de stages en entreprise,
- la promotion des projets de village et de quartier, des bénévoles et du monde associatif,
- la création d'une association phare pour le sport,
- de nouveaux accents dans les nouvelles compétences de l'aménagement du territoire, du logement et de l'énergie,
- le développement d'une vision globale dans l'enseignement,
- la mise en œuvre du concept "Du bon personnel pour de bonnes écoles",
- le développement des offres dans le domaine du plurilinguisme,
- des réformes dans le domaine de la pédagogie de soutien et de l'intégration,
- une réforme du décret Jeunesse,
- une réforme de l'administration.

Enseignement

Dans l'absolu et à long terme, la Communauté germanophone souhaite promouvoir une offre éducative de qualité et équitable. La crise COVID-19 a particulièrement souligné l'importance de développer continuellement l'offre éducative.

Les projets de réforme dans le domaine de l'enseignement sont vastes et prévoient entre autres d'améliorer les possibilités d'accès à la profession d'enseignant primaire et de mieux les adapter aux exigences professionnelles actuelles.

La Communauté germanophone mettra en place une formation pour faciliter l'accès à la profession d'enseignant primaire pour les personnes en reconversion professionnelle.

De nombreuses mesures ont déjà été prises ces dernières années dans le cadre du projet "Du bon personnel pour de bonnes écoles". Les travaux y relatifs vont être poursuivis. Il est notamment prévu de réformer l'évaluation et le recrutement, d'introduire un mentorat pour les nouveaux enseignants et les professionnels changeant d'orientation, de développer le portail des candidats et de prendre des mesures en vue de la reprise du travail après une maladie.

Les projets de réforme visant à développer la vision globale dans l'enseignement entrent dans leur prochaine phase.

Promotion des langues

En vue de promouvoir l'apprentissage de langues étrangères, la Communauté germanophone prévoit de nouvelles initiatives. Dans l'enseignement primaire, le choix des matières pouvant être enseignées dans la première langue étrangère sera élargi. Il est également prévu de créer de meilleures conditions pour renforcer le recours à des "native speakers" dans les écoles maternelles et primaires.

Pédagogie de soutien et d'intégration

La Communauté germanophone prévoit des projets de réforme dans le domaine de la pédagogie de soutien et d'intégration. Il s'agit notamment de poursuivre le développement des projets visant à soutenir tous les élèves en fonction de leurs besoins. L'orientation de base du décret sur la pédagogie de soutien et d'intégration de 2009 est maintenue.

Afin de tenir compte de besoins de soutien particuliers, de cibler davantage les ressources existantes de soutien à haut seuil dans les écoles ordinaires, de regrouper le savoir-faire en matière de pédagogie de soutien et d'intégration et afin d'organiser de manière flexible la sécurité de la planification, une nouvelle institution paragouvernementale indépendante et pluraliste sera créée. En matière de soutien à haut seuil dans les écoles ordinaires, les enseignants d'intégration et les enseignants spécialisés travailleront de manière complémentaire afin de combiner les soutiens pédagogique et thérapeutique.

Parallèlement, les écoles ordinaires auront plus de possibilités de participation et pourront bénéficier d'une plus grande flexibilité dans l'utilisation du personnel spécialisé par le biais de contrats de mise à disposition.

Éducation civique

Afin de relever le défi des fakes news et du « hate speech » pour notre société, l'Institut pour la pédagogie de la démocratie a été revalorisé afin de transmettre des compétences démocratiques à l'école, dans le cadre de l'éducation permanente et dans le monde du travail.

À l'aide de pédagogues spécialisés, l'éducation aux médias et l'utilisation critique des informations disponibles sur internet sont encouragées en plus de l'éducation civique classique.

L'éducation civique dans les écoles sera considérablement développée et les thèmes interdisciplinaires tels que l'éducation politique, l'éducation aux médias et l'orientation professionnelle davantage ancrés dans l'enseignement.

En outre, l'éducation culturelle pourra contribuer à un état d'esprit critique et nuancé. Les offres d'éducation culturelle aideront notamment les jeunes à développer des compétences telles que la créativité, l'esprit critique, la confiance en soi et la tolérance. À cet égard, des préparatifs ont déjà été entrepris en vue de réformer le cadre réglementaire des ateliers créatifs et de promouvoir les ateliers créatifs de vacances.

Pluralisme des médias

Afin de promouvoir le paysage médiatique en Communauté germanophone, une réforme sera mise en œuvre par le biais d'un décret de promotion du journalisme.

Digitalisation

L'une des principales leçons de la crise COVID-19 concerne la priorité d'investissements en matière de digitalisation.

Le développement de la fibre optique sur l'ensemble du territoire de la Communauté germanophone constitue une priorité absolue pour le lieu de vie et d'activité économique. Dans le cadre d'un projet soutenu par la Facilité pour la Reprise et la Résilience de l'Union Européenne, le déploiement de la fibre optique sera mis en œuvre dans un délai court.

Un autre projet de réforme concerne la mise en place d'un portail numérique pour les citoyens qui permettra un accès numérique sécurisé aux services de la Communauté germanophone.

En outre, la Communauté germanophone prévoit d'accélérer la numérisation dans l'enseignement.

Pendant la crise COVID-19, les élèves et apprentis dans le besoin ont déjà été équipés d'ordinateurs portables. À présent, dans le cadre d'un projet financé par la Facilité pour la Reprise et la Résilience de l'Union Européenne, 1800 enseignants vont recevoir un terminal numérique. Par la suite, tous les élèves du secondaire recevront à leur tour des terminaux.

De même, toutes les écoles secondaires seront équipées d'une connexion en fibre optique.

Afin de soutenir la numérisation dans le secteur de la jeunesse, la Communauté germanophone élabore un concept global pour la digitalisation du travail de la jeunesse.

Énergie et protection du climat

La Communauté germanophone a procédé à une réforme des primes énergétiques. Le nouveau système de primes énergétiques, soutenu par la Facilité pour la Reprise et la Résilience de l'Union Européenne, est adapté aux besoins locaux et vise à créer des incitants non bureaucratiques pour l'amélioration énergétique et la rénovation des bâtiments résidentiels, contribuant ainsi à atteindre les objectifs de la politique énergétique européenne d'ici 2050.

Marché du travail

Les projets de réforme pour l'intégration des personnes éloignées du marché du travail du projet « Un seul interlocuteur pour le recrutement » (Vermittlung aus einer Hand) sont poursuivis. La réforme vise à améliorer le travail d'accompagnement et de recrutement, à éviter les effets de porte tournante et à amener plus rapidement les personnes au travail.

Parallèlement, un processus de modernisation est lancé au sein de l'agence pour l'emploi. De nouvelles offres pour les personnes peu qualifiées sont développées en coopération entre l'agence pour l'emploi et le centre de formation ZAWM.

Afin de lutter contre la pénurie de main-d'œuvre qualifiée, il est prévu de créer des possibilités de formation alternatives et d'attirer de nouveaux groupes cibles vers la formation en alternance.

Les profils à faible qualification formelle auront la possibilité d'obtenir une attestation de qualifications afin d'augmenter leurs chances sur le marché du travail ou à obtenir un diplôme professionnel. En ce sens, le projet de réforme des qualifications partielles offrira des solutions adaptées et conformes aux besoins.

La réforme structurelle de la formation technico-professionnelle présente à son tour une réforme importante pour contrer la pénurie de main-d'œuvre qualifiée. Cette réforme permettra une plus grande coopération entre les institutions, des transitions de formation plus fluides et des stages professionnels proches des entreprises.

Accueil de la petite enfance

La Communauté germanophone reformera les structures de l'accueil de la petite enfance. Le centre régional de l'accueil de la petite enfance (RZKB) sera transformé en une institution paragon gouvernementale.

Dans le cadre de cette réforme, l'introduction d'un statut complet sera mise en œuvre. Les conditions de travail du personnel, notamment des assistantes maternelles, seront revalorisées.

Depuis le début de l'année 2021, 56 places d'accueil supplémentaires ont été créées. D'ici 2025, la Communauté germanophone prévoit de couvrir 100 % des besoins d'accueil et de devenir une région modèle en Europe en matière d'accueil de la petite enfance.

Politique de la jeunesse

Après plusieurs années de consultations, la politique de la jeunesse sera réformée afin de créer des conditions durables pour le travail de qualité avec les jeunes en milieu ouvert en Communauté germanophone.

Santé

Durant la crise COVID-19, le domaine de la santé mentale s'est révélé particulièrement important. Dans ce contexte, la Communauté germanophone intensifiera ses travaux en vue du développement et de la mise en œuvre du « concept de soins de santé mentale ». Ce projet de réforme permettra de proposer de nouvelles offres adaptées dans le domaine de la santé mentale. Dans le cadre des soins de longue durée, la Communauté germanophone prévoit une réforme visant à introduire une allocation de soins plus adaptée aux besoins du terrain et des patients.

Réforme administrative

La Communauté germanophone prévoit de réformer l'administration publique afin de la moderniser, d'augmenter l'efficacité des services publics, de réduire la bureaucratie et de rendre les structures viables et résilientes. Pour ce faire, une analyse complète a été réalisée par un auditeur externe dans le but d'examiner de manière critique les processus de travail, la communication interne et les structures organisationnelles des services. Un rapport final, axé sur la structure, la direction et la communication, le personnel et l'organisation du travail, l'IT et la numérisation a été présenté et servira de base à la poursuite de la conception de la réforme, qui sera réalisée en dialogue avec les partenaires sociaux et les services concernés.

Annex to the 2022 National Reform Programme of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles

The performance of the education system is central to the concerns of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. The FWB continues to implement the key measures in the Teaching Excellence Pact: seeking thorough reform of the education system and the management system in schools, reform of the common curriculum, continuing professional development for teachers, and removing barriers between specialist teaching and general teaching, to mention just a few such measures.

The financial consequences of Covid-19 for all sectors in the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles involved the Government taking positive action, with additional resources. An emergency fund was set up in 2020, to support the sectors most seriously affected.

So far, over 309 million euros of additional funding has been allocated. This has released substantial resources, for culture, sport, early years, teaching and educational infrastructure, media, university hospitals or scientific research. Among other things, these decisions have enabled provision of tailored support for pupils (17 million €), and expansion of digital development within education (5 million €).

Compulsory education

- **New performance targets and the implementation of a guidance framework for the education system and schools (Pillar 2 of the Pact - Governance, autonomy and empowerment)**

The FWB is pursuing implementation of the Excellence in Teaching Pact, a thorough reform process, developed collaboratively with the teaching profession, in order to improve the quality of teaching (effectiveness and equity), and to eliminate any incidence of segregation in the classroom or other performance gaps between schools. Seven improvement objectives for the education system have been inscribed in the legal framework. These performance objectives (mainly based on the PISA indicators) aim for significant improvements in knowledge and skills in pupils, for gradual reductions in repetition and drop-out rates, for reducing educational inequality among advantaged and disadvantaged pupils in terms of socio-economic levels, and for improving well-being and atmosphere in schools. This new governance framework now set up encourages contributions from all educational professionals towards the improvement objectives. Every school therefore receives guidance in adopting its own objectives, and developing a strategic plan to help improve system performance.

Reform coupled with new governance in schools is gradually involving all FWB schools: while 1700 schools are already operating their strategic plan, through a collaborative dynamic and regular self-assessments, the remaining 800 (third wave) to join the process are currently finalising their own plans, which should be ready by autumn 2022. Assessment of the strategic plans (known as objectives contracts) by the regulatory authority will take place between 3 and 6 years from finalisation.

Since 2020, twenty schools with serious difficulties have been identified every year, based on four performance indicators (results and outcomes for pupils, school climate, teaching team). They are

benefiting from a strong, three-year support and monitoring programme, aimed at reducing performance gaps.

- **Promoting the teaching profession (Pillar 2 of the Pact - Governance, autonomy and empowerment)**

The shortage of teachers has become a serious challenge to educational reform. Reducing the effects of such shortages involves re-evaluating the teaching profession, with improvements in the working context of teachers, and an ambitious review of initial and on-going training. As well as the reforms adopted since 2018, as part of the Pact (covering both increased professionalism in management, as well as in the teaching profession itself), a series of practical measures were implemented at the start of the 2020 school year. In particular, these responded to urgent needs for simplification. The main measures adopted¹ are:

- Greater stabilisation of newly-qualified teachers: if, after a period of leave lasting 4 years, allowing temporary exercise of another role in education, the person taking this leave has not returned to their original post, the job will be declared vacant.
- Optimisation of availability/reallocation mechanisms.
- Appreciation of seniority gained within various organisational bodies, within the same system, allowing greater mobility of teachers within the organisational bodies of one system.
- Simplification of the “titles and functions” order. Disciplinary and educational conditions required for access to the profession, as part of the quality education framework, are retained, but the mechanisms which burden implementation of the Order have been reduced as far as possible, while respecting the principles of the Order.
- Reduction in the number of salary scales, allowing pay to be adjusted, and administration simplified.

A second series of measures is being adopted for the start of the 2022 school year.

- **Reform of the common curriculum for pupils up to 15 years old (Pillar 1 of the Pact - Pupil Learning)**

The FWB is gradually implementing the reform of the common curriculum for pupils up to the age of 15. This reform covers, on the one hand, adaptation of all course content and strengthening of individual support, and on the other hand, extension of the common curriculum by one year (from the 2nd to the 3rd secondary). As well as improving pupil outcomes, this reform aims to end early tracking and significantly reduce repetition.

From September 2020, the first stage in the reform involved implementing the first common learning programme in all pre-primary schools, in order to ensure basic skills shared by all children. This reform has been linked to several measures intended to improve the quality of pre-primary teaching: gradual strengthening of management (from 2017 to 2020); increasing the scope of free pre-primary education (educational fees are removed, and school equipment is supplied free of charge); age of compulsory education raised from 5 to 6 years old; increased resources to support language learning; and compulsory training for 12,000 pre-primary teachers on the new programme.

¹ These measures were brought in by the decree of 17 July 2020, relating to measures to address teacher shortages.

Implementation of the common curriculum for the first and second year of primary teaching was postponed to September 2022, because of the health crisis. In order to make up for this year's delay, the reform will come into effect simultaneously in the 3rd and 4th primary year, in September 2023. The reform will then proceed steadily, to the 5th primary year in September 2024, and up to the 3rd secondary year in September 2028.

Given the health crisis, a budget of 17 million euros was given temporarily to schools to roll out customised support for pupils having serious problems in school, targeting those institutions where the socio-economic index falls within classes 1 to 10. These periods allowed support for educational teams to help in differentiation of learning content; for strengthening the acquisition of basic knowledge, of psycho-social support and where applicable, support for digital learning; and to give priority to care for children with learning difficulties.

- **Reforming the process of integration, and strengthening provision for reasonable accommodation (Pillar 4 of the Pact - Developing the inclusive school)**

Developing inclusion within ordinary schools is one of the key objectives of the Pact for Excellence in Education. It aims to reduce the provision of education in special schools for pupils with specific needs, to promote their inclusion in mainstream education, as educational indicators show an above average increase in admissions to special schools, especially for children less-advantaged in socio-economic terms.

Since September 2019, the Order relating to “reasonable accommodation” aims to make these reasonable accommodation provisions compulsory where necessary. It provides for a specific procedure which may be invoked by the parents of a child with specific needs, when the school refuses to put reasonable accommodation arrangements in place.

In June 2021, the Order creating “regional hubs” was adopted. This reform, complementary to the previous step, ensures sharing of expertise and support for schools in special education, to help mainstream schools so that they can deploy reasonable accommodation to help all pupils that require it. The reform involves setting up 48 regional hubs across all the zones of the FWB, and in all teaching networks.

- **Global plan to combat school drop-out (Pillar 4 of the Pact - Develop the inclusive school)**

The objective for the future global plan to combat school drop-out is to cut early leaving by 50%. It involves setting up three main care paths for pupils: one prevention path (detecting early signs, and harmonising and optimising individual pupil support and monitoring mechanisms); one intervention path (formalising out-of-school support methods when a pupil is absent for an extended period); and a compensation path (expanding and improving the package of compensatory measures, if there is a break with the school). The Plan also aims for a drastic improvement in coordination among those involved, to ensure monitoring and support for all pupils at risk. The procedures for implementing the reform are being finalised. Adoption of the Order is planned for the end of 2022.

- **Make qualification into a chain of excellence (Pillar 3 of the Pact - Promoting teaching qualification)**

The gradual establishment of this pillar of the Pact for Excellence in Teaching is completed through 3 priorities: reorganising the qualification pathway; strengthening qualification guidance; and strengthening the teaching-training-employment synergies. Reorganisation of the qualification pathway is being adopted by the Government, and will be presented to Parliament during summer 2022. Reform, based on the pilot experiment of unit certification, expands the system of units of learning outcomes, and introduces new regulations aimed at cutting repetition, which is especially high at the moment in this area of teaching.

Reform of the strengthened “guidance of teaching” qualification package has been closely studied in collaboration with those involved in teaching during 2021 and 2022, and will be presented to Parliament in autumn 2022. The reform is transforming the “guidance of teaching” qualification, which will in future be based on continuous assessment of the needs for skills in the labour market (through the “Teaching Training Job (EFE) Pools”), alongside the adjustment of the teaching package. The reform is also introducing efficient regulation of the options package, allowing identical options within a limited geographical radius (10km) to be closed, when these options are little used. Through this reformed decision-making framework, the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles intends to encourage deployment of a teaching qualification package that meets the socio-economic needs of the EFE Pools - and from there, of the Wallonia Region and the Brussels-capital Region. This interaction with the local and regional socio-economic realities is vital in socio-economic terms - encouraging job opportunities and reducing the skills mismatch, but it is also essential for the education system and for pupils. It contributes to the positive transformation of the route to qualified teaching, which has a negative image when it is perceived as a career path hindered by inadequate or non-existent resources.

The third reform path aims to ensure synergies among educational facilities and professional training organised as sandwich courses, and to end the competition which routinely arises between the two learning systems, whose target markets are to some extent identical. This reform path is the focus of a dialogue between the government of the FWB, responsible for education, and the Governments of the two Regions, responsible for professional training.

- **Escalation of the digital strategy**

Development of digitisation in French-speaking education is a major challenge, and an essential one for the FWB. That is why the Government has made finance available to support pupils in digitisation of learning processes, and to reduce the digital divide.

The Government has invested 25 million to escalate the path relating to equipment for its digital Strategy, especially to establish a procedure which comprises two sections:

Section 1: Building a stock representing 5% of the pupil population in educational institutions. These computers must be ready for use in school by pupils most in need (**budget 10 million euros in 2021**).

Section 2: A grant of 75€ to pupils in the 2nd and 3rd grades of secondary school in 2021-2022, then in 1st and 2nd grade of secondary school from 2022-2023 to help buy or rent a laptop computer + solidarity fund for 1 to 5% of the pupil population of schools according to their socio-economic index (**total budget 15 million euros a year from 2021**).

As regards the Digital Strategy path relating to teacher support, deployment within the “educational technology advisers” (CTP) networks was speeded up to allow the entire pool to be in place in 2021, being 42 CTP in total. These advisers support teachers in designing their teaching resources, incorporating digital tools, and also support educational teams developing the digital equipment eco-systems within schools.

Implementation of the Digital Strategy has also been speeded up, as regards digital resources and platforms. Distribution of educational resources on the “e-class” platform for teachers has also been boosted, bringing to 7000 the number of quality teaching resources available. Besides this, the FWB has provided, free of charge to schools that want it, the distance teaching and learning platform “Happi” (Hybridation des APPrentissages Interactifs - Hybridisation of Interactive Learning). This Moodle solution, adopted by over 1000 schools, is intended to be merged with the e-class platform.

- **Reform of the school year (Pillar 5 of the Pact - Quality of life)**

In March 2022, Parliament approved the Order on the reform of the school year in compulsory education, in part-time artistic education, and in social advancement education, which will take effect from the beginning of the 2022 school year. This reorganisation of the school year - a key measure in the Excellence in Education Pact - involves alternating seven-week teaching periods with two weeks’ break, to ensure a better balance between classroom time and rest time. By reducing fatigue throughout the year, these new schedules shorten summer holidays and help to reduce the effects of school drop-out observed in September, because of a too long break away from school. The new school calendar thus gives a more balanced educational setting for all pupils.

Higher Education:

- **Refinancing of higher education and research**

The Government has decided to boost the path for refinancing of higher education and scientific research. Initially planned to be 50 million by 2024, it will now be higher, with 50 million euros structural funding in 2022, 70 million in 2023, and 80 million in 2024. These additional financial resources will, among other things, help to improve student training and the quality of the courses offered, and to guarantee access for all.

For this, an extra 6 million euros has been allocated in 2021 specifically to support for success for BAC 1 students as a priority, because this provides support to the cohort especially affected by the health crisis, and facilitates their integration into higher education. The resources devoted to support for success will from now on be 89 million euros a year.

- **Reform of initial teacher training**

The FWB has approved the overall reform of initial teacher training. This reform aims to increase teachers’ skills, while adding new areas of expertise such as guidance, media education and gender diversity. The aim of this reform is to arm teachers better to deal with the increasing complexity of their profession, and given them the skills and tools needed to help every pupil succeed.

The Order sets up masters' degrees in education (co-organised among universities, higher education colleges and higher arts schools) in order to increase the quality of the training and the attraction of the profession. Reformed initial teaching training programmes pay particular attention to identifying the various needs within the classroom, including identification of learning problems experienced by the pupils, adaptation and distinguishing of the teaching stages according to pupil needs, and implementation of immediate support processes. Lengthening the teacher training process aims to prepare teachers better for their profession, thus helping to improve the French-speaking educational system.

The Government of the French Community has decided to delay implementing this Order until the school year 2023-2024. This will give more time to prepare for implementation of the new order. For assisting its implementation, two types of support are planned: (a) funding for advisers attached to higher education establishments providing initial teacher training, and (b) organisation of a support cell with the ARES (Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur), with the task of preparing and supporting the work carried out in the field by ITE advisers.

- **Expanding and simplifying criteria for study grants**

Parliament has adopted the Order for expanding and simplifying the criteria for awarding study grants. The measures contained in the text allow for an increase in the number of study bursaries awarded from the academic year 2021/2022, to make education in the French Community more accessible to students and pupils.

So, pupils entered for the years prior to higher education (7th grade in maths/science, etc.) can now hope to obtain a study grant, to encourage secondary-higher transition. Pupils in secondary education can even benefit from a grant in the event of a repetition, as this condition has been removed. Stateless pupils and students and those receiving subsidiary protection can also receive study grants, under the same terms as refugees.

In addition, in order to facilitate mobility of pupils and students within the European Union, the present limits on study bursary grants will be removed from 2022-2023.

In the school and academic year 2021/2022, the income ceiling to receive a grant is raised on a temporary basis from 150% to 300%. These fixed sums may be requested in the event of loss of job or extended unemployment, bankruptcy, sickness, death, or divorce in households which normally exceed the maximum income limit for study grants (see note to editors).

In addition, from this year 2021/2022, the provision relating to joint custody of children will be simplified to deal with situations where one of the former partners refuses to supply the documents needed for approval of the application. When the candidate's tax liability is shared, the income taken into account will from now on be that of the household of the person applying for the study grant.

Finally, in order to reduce the impact of travel costs on students receiving study grants, the fee of 50 euros for the person holding an SNCB subscription will be extended to all the public transport companies in Belgium.

These measures are based on a significant increase in budget: the study grant budget has increased from about 68 million euros in 2021, to 77.3 million euros in 2022. As a reminder, this budget was 58

million euros in 2016. The increase in resources available is thus as high between 2021 to 2022 as it was between 2016 to 2021, demonstrating the Government's commitment to overcoming student deprivation.

- **The reform of the landscape Order**

The reform of the 7 November 2013 order defining the landscape for higher education and academic organisation of studies intends to mark out more clearly the start of the higher education path, in order to combat the extension of studies and late drop-out. It also aims to overcome student deprivation.

Moreover, the Government has decided to increase resources aimed at ensuring and expanding access to higher education from any economic environment. So, the "Study grants" budget has increased by **9.2 million euros in 2022**, and additional resources are planned to improve information and communication about existing support.

- **Digital in higher education**

In addition, in order to support the development of digital in higher education, and education in social advancement, the Government has allocated 32 million euros for the RRF (Recovery and Resilience Facility) to allow the purchase of computer equipment and to support teachers in developing their digital skills.

Social inclusion

The government of Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles has adopted the “Childhood and youth plan 0-25”, a transverse plan for children and young people to the age of 25. It includes various measures in 15 areas or themes, from digital to culture, via equality of opportunity or the various levels of education, paying special attention to responses made to the Covid-19 pandemic and to climate change.

There are various measures, such as support for pupils to purchase a laptop computer (75 euros), or future investment in school buildings, linked to recovery funds obtained from the European subsidies of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

The Government of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles has approved the launch of a new call for projects (with a total of 3.8 million euros), aiming to provide free, nutritious meals in the first half of 2022, and including sustainability criteria, in nursery schools for children with greater needs. This covers 228 schools.

It has also decided to supplement the free school meals programme. From now, no less than 12,500,000 euros will be spent for healthy eating in schools.

Improving the settings for children’s care establishments (crèches, etc.) will receive “over 15 million extra from 2022”.

The Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles is also reforming the process for awarding grants for secondary and higher education.

The FWB government has concluded a new management contract with the Office de la Naissance et de l’Enfance (ONE), the public body responsible for children's policy in French-speaking Belgium. This new contract offers a multi-dimensional strategy, aimed at developing and strengthening access to present and future care settings. The plan is to increase the number of places for children in priority zones having a low coverage rate (focusing on the position of one-parent families, most of which are led by women), as well as revising the income scale for parents’ financial contribution, with the aim of reducing the cost of childcare for people on low incomes. At the same time, measures are also being taken to improve the quality of childcare: funding management to transform practice, open cultural opportunities in the district, local links woven by front-line staff from the ONE, strengthening initial training and continuous development for staff and promoting accessibility practices.

Environmental/climate change

In July 2021, Government and Parliament approved a decree organising coordination and strengthening of the FWB's actions with regard to an environmental transformation, setting the following targets:

- Carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest;
- 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990;
- Adoption of sustainable adaptation measures needed to reduce the risks of climate change for human beings and biodiversity, as far as possible.

In order to achieve these objectives, in September 2021 the Government of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles approved the strategic action plan, the transverse environmental transformation plan for the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, aimed at identifying practical measures to implement in order to achieve the objectives set. Its development is intended to be a participative operation, involving authorities, sectors and civil society through representative organisations.

In practice, 6 lines of action have been defined in the plan, around mobility, the built infrastructure, public contracts, changes in behaviour, training and awareness-raising, and one relating to transverse measures. Within these lines of action, several action options have been defined, with their objectives set according to ministerial areas of competence, and targeted by sector and organisation.

Investment in school buildings: a unifying project to ensure the climate transformation

Within the huge “School buildings estate”, and after investing over 386.7 million € in the European Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Government has decided to devote a further one billion euros over the next 10 years, to renovating school buildings.

In this way, over the coming years, school buildings should see major changes to meet the climate transformation objectives, namely carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest, 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 (as a reminder, the carbon neutrality objective is imposed on schools by 2040 in the Regions).

These climate objectives are also now enshrined within the FWB in the Order of 1 July 2021, organising coordination and strengthening of the actions of the French Community towards an environmental transformation, and via the transverse environmental transformation plan applied by this Order. Section 2 of this plan is also devoted to supporting the changes in the built infrastructure from the FWB, especially school buildings, in their environmental and energy transformation.

These buildings will need major transformations, in order to achieve the objectives linked to the climate transformation, namely carbon neutrality by 2040.



CONSEIL NATIONAL
DU TRAVAIL

CONSEIL CENTRAL DE
L'ECONOMIE

AVIS N° 2.280

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CO 1000

Séance commune des Conseils du 29 mars 2022

Contribution des Conseils au Plan national de réforme 2022

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AVIS

Contribution des Conseils au Plan national de réforme 2022

Les instances du Conseil central de l'économie et du Conseil national du travail ont souhaité apporter leur contribution conjointe pour qu'elle soit annexée au Plan national de réforme.

Concernant le dialogue avec les instances politiques, une réunion d'information organisée par la Chancellerie du Premier Ministre a eu lieu au niveau des secrétariats des deux Conseils concernant le calendrier et la procédure d'élaboration du PNR 2022 ainsi que la priorité qui est donnée au rapportage relatif au Plan de reprise et de résilience.

Concernant l'évaluation par la Commission européenne de la situation de la Belgique, une réunion conjointe CCE-CNT s'est tenue avec des experts de la Commission européenne. La discussion a porté sur la mise en œuvre du Plan de reprise et de résilience et notamment sur l'implication des interlocuteurs sociaux. La Commission s'est focalisée sur les principaux défis sur lesquels elle compte se pencher en priorité dans le cadre de la rédaction du rapport pays et de sa proposition au Conseil pour des recommandations spécifiques pour la Belgique. Les secrétariats des deux Conseils ont eu l'occasion d'intervenir pour évoquer les conclusions des avis et travaux que ce soit en réaction aux éléments mis en avant par la Commission ou à d'autres défis qu'ils jugent importants. Un échange entre tous les participants avec les représentants de la Commission a eu lieu autour des différents points abordés.

Pour le Conseil central de l'économie

Dans le document intitulé « Construire l'avenir » (Rapport Emploi-Compétitivité 2021, du 10 décembre 2021), le Conseil central de l'économie (CCE) présente ses préoccupations dans le cadre de la relance et les orientations stratégiques pour l'avenir. Le CCE encourage les gouvernements à y porter la plus grande attention lors de l'élaboration de leurs politiques publiques. Si le CCE a choisi, dans ce Rapport, de se concentrer sur ces aspects spécifiques, il n'en reste pas moins que les recommandations qu'il a formulées dans les Rapports et travaux antérieurs sont toujours valables et pertinentes. Le CCE met en avant quatre orientations stratégiques prioritaires relevant de ses compétences et sur lesquelles il mène des analyses régulières : travailler à une administration performante et efficace, en soulignant entre autres l'importance des investissements ; continuer à miser sur l'innovation et la numérisation ; œuvrer à un modèle de société en phase avec les objectifs climatiques et environnementaux ; œuvrer à un marché du travail et à une société inclusifs.

« Construire l'avenir » : le Rapport Emploi-Compétitivité 2021

La COVID-19 n'a pas seulement provoqué une grave crise sanitaire, elle a également entraîné la plus grave récession depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale, induisant même un risque d'effondrement de notre système économique et social. De vastes mesures de soutien ont par conséquent été mises en place, tant au niveau national qu'international, afin d'aider l'économie à sortir de la crise aussi indemne que possible et d'atténuer les conséquences économiques et sociales de la pandémie.

Grâce à ces mesures et aux stabilisateurs automatiques (dont la sécurité sociale et le système de chômage temporaire) et grâce à la nature particulière de la crise - qui, contrairement à la crise financière et économique de 2008, n'a pas été causée par des déséquilibres internes mais par un choc exogène - l'économie a pu se redresser assez rapidement à mesure que la situation sanitaire s'améliorait via la campagne de vaccination. Bien que les différences sectorielles restent importantes, la reprise est actuellement meilleure et plus rapide qu'escompté et, sur la base des informations actuellement disponibles, les perspectives sont également relativement optimistes.

Cependant, un certain nombre de nouveaux risques apparaissent (cf. infra). En outre, les défis structurels qui étaient déjà présents avant la crise ne se sont pas envolés. Citons à titre d'exemple les défis climatiques qui deviennent de plus en plus visibles, comme en témoignent les vagues de chaleur et les inondations qui ont frappé plusieurs pays l'été dernier. Mais des réponses politiques doivent également être apportées aux enjeux du vieillissement de la population, de la soutenabilité financière et sociale de la sécurité sociale, de la numérisation, de la mondialisation etc.

Après la gestion de crise aiguë à laquelle nous avons assisté ces derniers mois, il est temps de passer à une nouvelle phase des politiques à mettre en œuvre. Par cette déclaration, le CCE souhaite fournir quelques éléments que le Conseil estime importants lors de l'élaboration de ces politiques.

Une nouvelle relance est-elle nécessaire ? Et comment ?

Après le recul considérable de l'activité économique en 2020/au début de 2021, l'économie se redresse donc mieux et plus vite que prévu. Toutefois, cela ne change rien au fait que pour certains groupes, la crise a eu/a de graves conséquences. De manière générale, nous constatons que les groupes les plus vulnérables - les personnes peu ou moyennement qualifiées, les jeunes, les femmes et les demandeurs d'emploi - ont été plus durement touchés. De nombreux indépendants, relativement plus actifs dans les secteurs les plus touchés, ont également subi une perte de revenus importante en moyenne. En ce qui concerne les entreprises, on n'assiste pas actuellement à une cessation d'activité accrue des entreprises à faible productivité, mais Tielens et al. (2020)¹ soulignent une augmentation non négligeable du risque de liquidité et de solvabilité, bien que là aussi l'horizon se soit quelque peu éclairci entre-temps.

¹ Tielens, J., Ch. Piette et O. De Jonghe (2020), Belgian corporate sector liquidity and solvency in the COVID-19 crisis: a post-first-wave assesment, Revue économique de la BNB, décembre 2020.

Parallèlement, un certain nombre d'autres risques se manifestent. Ainsi, la reprise économique mondiale s'accompagne-t-elle d'une **hausse de l'inflation**. L'inflation observée est en grande partie due à une forte hausse des prix du gaz naturel et de l'électricité et des prix de l'énergie en général, mais les prix d'autres intrants ont également fortement augmenté et engendrent des **problèmes dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement**. On ne sait pas combien de temps ce phénomène va durer, mais on peut s'attendre à ce que l'augmentation du coût des intrants entraîne une nouvelle hausse des prix à la consommation lorsque de nouveaux contrats seront négociés avec le secteur de la distribution. En outre, l'importante stimulation de la demande induite par les plans de relance des différents niveaux de pouvoir pourrait encore renforcer ces effets dans les années à venir, non seulement via la demande accrue de matières premières, mais aussi par leur impact sur un **marché du travail déjà en pénurie** (voir point 2.4). C'est particulièrement vrai pour le secteur de la construction, où la demande de main-d'œuvre va fortement augmenter en raison des investissements prévus par les plans de relance, alors que le secteur peine depuis quelques années déjà à recruter du personnel qualifié².

Une menace plane également sur la **soutenabilité des finances publiques**. Certains défis structurels - dont le vieillissement de la population, mais aussi les investissements qui seront nécessaires à la transition écologique - pèseront lourdement sur les finances publiques au cours des prochaines décennies. Dans le même temps, ces investissements sont un pari sur l'avenir car ils sont une condition préalable nécessaire à la création de richesses futures. Un certain nombre de mesures ayant un impact structurel sur le budget ont également été prises récemment. En conséquence, à politique inchangée, le taux d'endettement affichera de nouveau une trajectoire ascendante à partir de 2023, ce qui - même avec les faibles taux d'intérêt actuels - menace la soutenabilité des finances publiques.

Compte tenu de l'amélioration de la situation économique et des risques décrits ci-dessus, il convient de faire preuve de **sélectivité dans les nouvelles initiatives de relance**. La **date de mise en œuvre** sera également importante pour éviter une surchauffe de l'économie. Cela ne signifie cependant pas qu'il n'y ait pas de points d'action politique à court terme.

² Cf. [Rapport sur l'évolution conjoncturelle dans le secteur de la construction](#)

Il est par exemple nécessaire de continuer à suivre et à soutenir les groupes vulnérables, et il faut également veiller à ce que les entreprises structurellement saines aient toujours accès à un financement approprié, mais les modalités de ce soutien seront importantes. Un principe majeur doit être de garantir une réallocation efficace des ressources. Les mesures de soutien éventuelles doivent non seulement maximiser les chances de survie des entreprises structurellement viables, mais aussi permettre d'encourager suffisamment les entreprises dont le modèle économique n'est pas viable à se restructurer ou, si cela n'est pas possible, à se retirer du marché. Dans le même temps, il convient de miser davantage sur la réallocation du capital humain, par le *res-killing* et l'*upskilling* non seulement des chômeurs, mais aussi, par exemple, des travailleurs qui risquent de perdre leur emploi et par l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie qui devrait accroître l'employabilité de tous ceux qui n'ont pas encore atteint l'âge de la retraite. De manière générale, une évaluation approfondie de l'efficacité des mesures de soutien adoptées est nécessaire afin de pouvoir en tirer des leçons pour l'avenir.

Enfin, il est important de relever les **défis à long terme qui existaient avant la crise de la COVID-19** (pensons au vieillissement de la population, à la soutenabilité financière et sociale de la sécurité sociale, au changement climatique, à la biodiversité menacée, à la raréfaction des matériaux, à la numérisation croissante...). En effet, la crise n'a pas fait disparaître ces défis et dans certains cas, comme le changement climatique, ils sont même devenus encore plus visibles. Il est donc impératif **d'agir sur cette question dans les meilleurs délais**, afin de consolider les fondements d'une économie compétitive, résiliente, inclusive et à faible émission de carbone. En particulier, en ce qui concerne la transition vers une économie neutre en carbone, les décisions d'investissement doivent être prises maintenant pour permettre à notre pays d'atteindre les objectifs européens.

S'attaquer aux défis structurels, maintenant !

Si nous voulons assurer notre prospérité et notre bien-être, il faut donc trouver rapidement une solution aux défis à long terme décrits ci-dessus. Cela nécessite, tout d'abord, une vision claire de la direction que l'économie/la société devrait prendre à l'avenir. Dans ce contexte, le CCE appelle les gouvernements concernés à s'inscrire dans une perspective de long terme dessinée par les objectifs européens du Green Deal (2050) et les Objectifs de développement durable de l'ONU (ODD) (2030), qui offrent un cadre visant à transformer en profondeur notre économie et notre société pour construire un avenir équitable, écologique et prospère. La Belgique doit s'améliorer dans les domaines dans lesquels ses progrès ne sont pas conformes à ses engagements et il convient, pour ces domaines, de réajuster les politiques en cours et de faire avancer la mise en œuvre de l'Agenda 2030. Le CCE souhaite y participer activement et demande à être consulté à ce sujet.

Pour réaliser ces objectifs (de long terme), le CCE met l'accent sur quatre orientations stratégiques prioritaires dont doit s'emparer le monde politique et qui ont déjà été mises en lumière dans ses Rapports Emploi-Compétitivité précédents : travailler à une administration performante et efficace ; continuer à miser sur l'innovation et la numérisation ; œuvrer à un modèle de société en phase avec les objectifs climatiques et environnementaux ; œuvrer à un marché du travail et à une société inclusifs. Le CCE insiste sur leur interdépendance et sur la nécessité de les relever de manière simultanée. Ces orientations sont détaillées ci-dessous.

1.1 Travailler à une administration performante et efficace

La réalisation des objectifs européens et des ODD nécessitera des investissements. Les pouvoirs publics ont un rôle important à jouer à cet égard. D'une part, par leur impact sur le **climat d'investissement qui doit inciter les entreprises à investir (durablement)**, mais aussi par leurs propres investissements. Compte tenu du sous-investissement public des dernières décennies et des besoins d'investissement dans le cadre de la transition durable, il est important qu'à l'avenir **les investissements publics soient relevés et évoluent vers 4 % du PIB d'ici 2030**. À cet égard, le Conseil souligne les points suivants.

- Le CCE réitère sa demande, adressée au gouvernement belge et à la Commission européenne, d'un **traitement favorable des investissements publics productifs dans le cadre des règles budgétaires européennes**³. Un traitement plus flexible des investissements ne supprime pas la **nécessité de mener une politique fiscale saine**. Le Conseil demande toutefois que les efforts visant à renforcer la soutenabilité financière des finances publiques et de la sécurité sociale ne se fassent pas au détriment de la soutenabilité sociale de la sécurité sociale. Comme la déclaration commune des 75 ans de la sécurité sociale l'indique : « Tout comme en 1944, les interlocuteurs sociaux souhaitent prendre leurs responsabilités afin de garantir la soutenabilité budgétaire ainsi que l'efficacité sociale de la sécurité sociale dans le futur. » En effet, la crise actuelle a une nouvelle fois souligné le rôle essentiel de celle-ci en tant que stabilisateur automatique.
- Compte tenu des contraintes budgétaires, il sera **nécessaire de hiérarchiser** les investissements. Les défis posés par les transitions numérique et écologique, ainsi que l'avancée du vieillissement de la population, sont déjà des facteurs à prendre en compte.

³ CCE et CNT (2020), Contribution du CCE et du CNT dans le cadre de la préparation du Programme national de réforme 2020 (CCE 2020-1065).

- Enfin, le Conseil demande que **tous les investissements planifiés dans le Plan pour la reprise et la résilience (PRR) soient réalisés**. Du fait de la croissance économique meilleure qu'escomptée, il est en effet possible que la Belgique voie sa part dans les moyens européens totaux se réduire⁴. Le Conseil souligne cependant une fois de plus l'importance de la **disponibilité** d'un nombre suffisant de **travailleurs** (supplémentaires) **possédant les compétences adéquates** dans la perspective de la réalisation des projets du PRR (cf. ci-dessus).

De manière générale, **l'intervention des pouvoirs publics doit être efficace et efficiente**. Les *spending reviews* doivent contribuer à cet objectif. Par ailleurs, des actions sont encore requises dans différents domaines. C'est ainsi qu'il convient d'investir dans la **modernisation et la numérisation des services publics** dans le but de rendre les administrations publiques plus efficaces au niveau tant de leurs processus internes que de leurs interactions avec les entreprises/les citoyens. Le CCE demande à être consulté, dans le cadre la mise en œuvre du PRR, au moment du déploiement des projets de numérisation des services publics fédéraux. Dans ce contexte, il est nécessaire de développer des mesures d'accompagnement suffisantes afin de faire en sorte que les personnes peu familiarisées avec le numérique soient également joignables. Une attention suffisante pour ceux qui ne maîtrisent pas bien les outils numériques doit en effet toujours occuper une place centrale en cas de modernisation et de numérisation des services publics⁵. Sur le plan de la **qualité de la réglementation**, il existe également encore une marge d'amélioration non négligeable. Il importe, dans ce cadre, de veiller à ce que la réglementation atteigne toujours le but visé tout en impliquant le moins d'obligations administratives possible pour les entreprises et les citoyens. Le Conseil a déjà formulé par le passé des lignes de force permettant d'obtenir une meilleure réglementation⁶. Enfin, le Conseil demande que la **cohérence de la réglementation soit améliorée**. En effet, la plupart des défis socio-économiques et environnementaux auxquels nous sommes confrontés réclament des actions dans divers domaines de politique, qui se situent en outre à des niveaux de pouvoir différents (autorités européennes, fédérales, régionales). Il est dès lors important que la **répartition des compétences** lors d'une éventuelle prochaine réforme de l'État **soit telle que celles-ci puissent se renforcer mutuellement** au lieu de se contrecarrer ainsi que c'est parfois le cas actuellement. Indépendamment de cet aspect, **l'amélioration de la coordination entre les différents niveaux de pouvoir est impérative**.

⁴ 30 % de l'enveloppe totale de la Facilité pour la reprise et la résilience sont octroyés en fonction de données économiques qui varient par rapport au moment de l'introduction du PRR.

⁵ Dans son avis « [Vers des services publics numériques plus efficaces et inclusifs](#) », le CCE énumère une série de mesures politiques destinées à placer la Belgique parmi les meilleurs dans le domaine de la qualité des services publics numériques, non seulement en termes d'efficacité mais aussi d'inclusivité. Plus généralement, la CCS Consommation a formulé l'avis « [Vers une politique d'inclusion numérique en Belgique](#) » comprenant 16 recommandations axées sur la réduction de la fracture numérique.

⁶ C'est ainsi que le CCE a formulé l'avis « [Pour une réglementation réalisant les objectifs de politique à un coût minimal](#) » et qu'il a, conjointement avec le CNT et les conseils économiques et sociaux régionaux, rédigé la déclaration commune intitulée « [Les partenaires sociaux plaident en faveur d'une meilleure réglementation](#) ». En outre, le 28 septembre 2021, l'avis « [L'introduction d'un agenda de la réglementation](#) » a été approuvé.

1.2 Continuer à miser sur l'innovation et la numérisation

L'innovation (au sens large) est importante. Elle est en effet la principale source de nouvelle création de valeur. Celle-ci est non seulement essentielle pour l'évolution du niveau de vie, elle définit en outre la marge de manœuvre de la politique dont un pays dispose. La soutenabilité financière des finances publiques et de la sécurité sociale est en effet influencée dans une large mesure par le niveau de la création de valeur. Mais l'innovation est aussi indispensable à la réponse à offrir aux nombreux défis sociétaux (dont en particulier le changement climatique, mais aussi les défis sanitaires, le vieillissement...). Le Conseil estime dès lors qu'il est également important que la **politique d'innovation** non seulement mise sur le **renforcement de la compétitivité** mais aussi réponde aux **grands défis sociaux, écologiques et économiques** du 21^e siècle. Les pouvoirs publics peuvent jouer le rôle important de guide en favorisant des choix pertinents par le biais d'un cadre réglementaire adapté.

Dans ce cadre, il est important de maintenir le niveau de soutien à la R&D en Belgique, mais il faut en même temps contrôler l'efficacité des mesures d'aide. À ce titre, si les régimes de dispense partielle de versement du précompte professionnel sur les salaires du personnel de R&D contribuent à générer des activités de recherche additionnelles, on trouve peu de preuves solides de l'efficacité du crédit d'impôt pour la R&D et de la déduction fiscale pour revenus des brevets. Les choix réalisés aujourd'hui en matière de R&D ayant un impact à long terme, il est d'autant plus nécessaire de s'assurer le plus vite possible que les moyens publics soient alloués de manière optimale pour stimuler la R&D. Mais la politique doit **aller au-delà de la promotion du développement de nouvelles technologies ou innovations** ; elle doit **aussi miser sur la diffusion des technologies et innovations existantes**, notamment en direction des entreprises plutôt traditionnelles.⁷

Il est un type de technologies qui constitue de plus en plus souvent la base des innovations : il s'agit des **technologies numériques**. Globalement, la Belgique obtient un bon résultat au niveau de la mise à jour des technologies numériques dans les entreprises mais, tout comme dans d'autres pays, certaines technologies avancées - par exemple les big data, les services sophistiqués de cloud computing...- sont encore relativement peu implantées et il apparaît que les grandes entreprises sont généralement plus numérisées que les PME (CE, 2021). Dans l'e-commerce, le potentiel d'augmentation de la création de valeur est encore conséquent, pour autant que l'on tienne compte des conditions écologiques connexes. Et il va de soi qu'outre les entreprises, les autres acteurs sociétaux (citoyens, pouvoirs publics) doivent eux aussi suivre le mouvement. Il est dès lors **important de mettre en place un cadre tonifiant ouvert à l'application de ces technologies numériques et, plus généralement, à l'innovation** (voir aussi la [Déclaration du G10 du 7 septembre 2020](#)).

⁷ Cf. le rapport du CCE « [R&D et valorisation de la R&D en Belgique : un premier diagnostic](#) »

Ceci requiert un **mix de politiques intégré** attentif non seulement aux investissements en R&D et innovation mais aussi aux investissements en éducation et formation, un cadre réglementaire favorable à l'innovation et conscient notamment du risque qu'encourt l'innovation du fait de la domination d'un certain nombre d'acteurs numériques mondiaux, la facilitation de l'entrepreneuriat et de sa croissance, le renforcement des liens entre les acteurs de l'innovation (également au niveau international), une infrastructure numérique adéquate...

Une organisation novatrice du travail est aussi de plus en plus considérée comme un facteur important non seulement de la diffusion des technologies mais aussi du bien-être des travailleurs⁸.

1.3 Œuvrer à un modèle de société en phase avec les objectifs climatiques et environnementaux

Les phénomènes climatiques extrêmes observés dans toutes les régions du monde sont un cri d'alarme incitant à agir d'urgence en vue de diminuer drastiquement les émissions de gaz à effet de serre. Le coût de la non-action se traduira en perte importante de bien-être et de prospérité pour la société belge.

Notre pays s'inscrit dans les objectifs du Green Deal européen qui veut transformer l'UE en une économie moderne, efficace dans l'utilisation des ressources et compétitive, garantissant la fin des émissions nettes de gaz à effet de serre d'ici à 2050, une création de bien-être avec une utilisation circulaire des ressources la plus efficace que possible, où personne n'est laissé de côté.

Des investissements conséquents et guidés par ces objectifs sont nécessaires pour y parvenir. En effet, la transition écologique que nous devons conduire va induire une obsolescence accélérée⁹ d'une part importante des équipements et du capital. Outre les investissements en capital physique, des investissements seront aussi nécessaires dans des innovations conduisant à des produits et services neutres en carbone ainsi que dans la formation aux nouveaux métiers de la transition climatique et de l'économie circulaire. La politique des pouvoirs publics se doit de remplir un rôle majeur de guidance en **encourageant de tels investissements** et, plus largement, en **stimulant des modifications comportementales de tous les acteurs socio-économiques**.

⁸ Que l'on pense par exemple aux formes organisationnelles qui accroissent l'autonomie des travailleurs, ce qui est bénéfique non seulement à la capacité novatrice des entreprises mais aussi au bien-être des travailleurs.

⁹ Pisani (2021) donne l'exemple d'une chaudière au fuel ou celui d'un camion à moteur thermique : ces équipements vont devoir être remplacés avant d'atteindre leur fin de vie.

La révision du **Plan national Énergie-Climat (PNEC)** en 2023 offre à la Belgique l'opportunité de définir des actions fortes en ligne avec ces objectifs. Grâce à une coordination interfédérale et à l'association des interlocuteurs sociaux, ce Plan révisé **devrait se doter d'un cadre clair. Il faut une vision interfédérale intégrée avec des objectifs de long terme, des objectifs intermédiaires et une trajectoire pour réaliser ces objectifs.** Les travaux actuels du CCE en matière notamment d'économie circulaire¹⁰, de mobilité¹¹ et d'efficacité énergétique des bâtiments¹² (ces derniers travaux étant menés en collaboration avec les Conseils économiques et sociaux régionaux) ambitionnent de pointer des mesures phares pour le PNEC révisé.

1.4 Œuvrer à un marché du travail et une société inclusifs

Plusieurs grands changements sociétaux suscitent des **tensions croissantes entre l'offre et la demande sur le marché du travail**. D'un point de vue quantitatif, le vieillissement de la population provoquera à terme la contraction de la part de la population en âge de travailler. Sous un angle qualitatif, les évolutions technologiques et la transition verte induisent un changement de contenu de nombreux emplois et l'obsolescence rapide des qualifications.

Les tensions croissantes sur le marché du travail sont problématiques. Elles génèrent en effet des difficultés de recrutement du personnel adéquat dans les entreprises, ce qui freine la capacité novatrice de celles-ci ainsi que l'activité économique et, partant, la croissance économique. Les investissements publics - nécessaires à la réalisation des transitions indispensables - sont de la sorte mis sous pression (voir ci-dessus). Enfin, l'inadéquation de l'offre et de la demande de travail et la faible mobilité de la main-d'œuvre représentent aussi un danger pour la cohésion sociale. Le travail reste en effet la meilleure garantie de la protection des revenus et favorise l'intégration dans la société. Il faut veiller cependant à préserver la qualité des emplois.

¹⁰ Le Conseil souscrit depuis longtemps déjà à l'importance de l'économie circulaire et a déjà formulé dans ce cadre diverses recommandations. Il a récemment émis un [Avis sur le projet de Plan d'action fédéral pour une économie circulaire](#).

¹¹ Dans ses avis récents, le Conseil propose des pistes concrètes pour favoriser l'utilisation du rail ainsi que pour accroître le développement de la multimodalité (mise en place d'un système intégré de transports publics, stratégie train-vélo, budget mobilité...). Il a émis un avis en vue des [nouveaux contrats de gestion pour la SNCB et Infrabel](#), s'est prononcé sur les [abonnements flexibles de la SNCB](#) et a proposé des pistes concrètes pour [encourager le transport ferroviaire de marchandises](#).

¹² Le Conseil central de l'économie et ses homologues régionaux (Brupartners, CESE Wallonie et SERV) ont lancé récemment un appel commun à une collaboration et à une cohérence entre niveaux de pouvoir pour accélérer la réduction des émissions de gaz à effet de serre du parc de bâtiments, et ce tout en respectant les spécificités socio-économiques et les compétences de chaque entité. Les Conseils œuvrent actuellement à un avis commun sur la thématique de la stimulation de la rénovation auprès des copropriétaires et des propriétaires-bailleurs et vont également lancer le partage de connaissances et de bonnes pratiques entre Régions pour stimuler la rénovation.

C'est pourquoi, de manière générale, le CCE met en avant l'importance de l'insertion effective du plus grand nombre possible de personnes sur le marché du travail pour augmenter sensiblement le taux d'emploi. L'accord de gouvernement prévoit de parvenir, d'ici 2030, à un taux d'emploi de 80 %. Le relèvement du taux d'emploi doit en tout état de cause s'effectuer de manière sécurisée, harmonieuse et faisable, pour assurer une création de valeur suffisante et une cohésion sociale élevée.

L'une des conditions en est l'élimination de l'inadéquation de l'offre et de la demande sur le marché du travail. Dans ce cadre, une attention particulière pour **l'insertion des groupes à risque**¹³ sur le marché du travail s'impose – que l'on pense aux personnes peu ou moyennement qualifiées, aux jeunes et aux âgés, aux personnes d'origine étrangère dont le taux d'emploi est faible en ce moment. Il faut non seulement s'intéresser aux chômeurs mais veiller aussi à la réintégration des inactifs (dont les malades de longue durée) sur le marché du travail.

En général, il est nécessaire d'accorder une grande attention à **l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie**, qui doit permettre aux individus d'accomplir au mieux leurs tâches et ce, tout au long de leur carrière, faciliter la transition professionnelle du chômage ou de l'inactivité vers l'emploi (notamment vers des secteurs et des professions émergents) et faire en sorte que les talents se perdent le moins possible en cours de route. Vu l'importance des orientations en sciences et techniques (STEM) – y compris les cycles court portés sur la pratique – pour le marché du travail, il est également requis de chercher à rendre plus attrayant le choix de ces formations.

La **mobilisation plus poussée de la réserve de travail potentielle** (chômeurs et inactifs) est également nécessaire, notamment grâce à la suppression des pièges financiers et des autres obstacles (par exemple la garde d'enfants) qui empêchent le retour sur le marché du travail. Mais d'autres facteurs sont également importants, comme des **conditions de travail attractives et adaptées** aux besoins des travailleurs en fonction du cycle de vie.

Même si l'élimination de l'inadéquation sur le marché du travail est un impératif absolu, force est de reconnaître que les transitions demandées ne seront pas simples pour tous et prendront, dans certains cas, du temps. C'est pourquoi il faut miser sur des **mesures supplémentaires** visant à accompagner et à soutenir les personnes qui risquent d'être laissées pour compte et sur une **protection sociale forte, sachant qu'elle est importante pour sécuriser les carrières professionnelles**.

¹³ Le CCE travaille actuellement sur un rapport sur l'insertion des jeunes sur le marché du travail où l'on traite des transitions professionnelles en début-milieu de carrière. Il travaille également sur un rapport sur la durée des carrières qui établit un diagnostic pour la Belgique et qui en identifie les déterminants.

Pour le Conseil national du Travail

Le Conseil national du Travail a développé de longue date un réseau associant les partenaires sociaux et les représentants de la Belgique dans différentes instances européennes (Comité de l'Emploi, Comité de protection sociale, Conseil EPSCO, Coreper...) pour réaliser un suivi régulier des politiques européennes en matière sociale et de l'emploi. Des contacts sont également organisés, conjointement avec le Conseil Central de l'Économie, avec la Commission européenne aux moments clés du semestre européen. Les réunions organisées dans ce cadre permettent aux membres du Conseil national du Travail d'être tenus informés de l'évolution des dossiers européens et de prendre position sur les questions en débat.

De manière générale, de nombreux avis et conventions collectives de travail adoptés par le Conseil national du Travail concernent directement les thématiques abordées dans le cadre du semestre européen et le PNR. Dans le cadre de leurs travaux, les partenaires sociaux privilégient une approche concrète axée sur des mesures ayant un impact direct dans la vie des entreprises et des secteurs.

Par ailleurs, le Conseil national du Travail est directement associé à la transposition en Belgique de certaines directives et intervient directement dans la mise en œuvre des accords-cadres adoptés par les partenaires sociaux au niveau européen.

La présente contribution présente de manière synthétique les principaux résultats des travaux du Conseil qui s'inscrivent dans le semestre européen.

Compétitivité – salaires – transition à temps partiel vers la fin de carrière pour des catégories définies de travailleurs âgés

Les partenaires sociaux ont adopté au plus haut niveau de concertation (Groupe des dix) le 25 juin 2021 un cadre d'accords sur différents thèmes interprofessionnels qui forment un tout indivisible. La mise en œuvre de ce cadre d'accords a été concrétisée au niveau du Conseil national du Travail, dans un premier temps, par l'adoption d'une série de conventions collectives de travail, par l'adoption d'une recommandation adressée aux secteurs et entreprises, et des engagements à poursuivre les travaux. Des engagements ont également été pris par les partenaires sociaux de mener un certain nombre de travaux. Ce cadre d'action requiert également que le gouvernement prenne d'autres mesures (lois, arrêtés royaux), y compris la prolongation d'un certain nombre de régimes en cours.

Les thèmes traités par le Conseil national du Travail dans ce cadre concernent notamment :

- **Salaire minimum**

Dans le cadre de la première étape de mise en œuvre de l'accord social, une augmentation du salaire minimum (RMMG) de 76,28 euros brut indexé est introduite à compter du 1^{er} avril 2022 par la **convention collective de travail n°43/15** du 15 juillet 2021. Le RMMG est porté à un montant unique de 1.806,16 euros avec pour effet de supprimer les conditions d'âge et d'ancienneté de la convention collective de travail n° 43 qui étaient jusque-là en vigueur. L'augmentation du RMMG est assortie d'un mécanisme visant à compenser au maximum le surcoût généré pour l'employeur par l'introduction d'une réduction très bas salaire pour les employeurs. Cette borne très bas salaire est indexée et son surcoût pour la sécurité sociale sera lui-même compensé via le financement alternatif.

Toujours concernant le salaire minimum, le Conseil national du Travail a eu l'occasion de contribuer au débat européen sur la proposition de la Commission européenne relative à des salaires minimaux adéquats dans l'Union européenne. Dans ce cadre le Conseil a fourni son analyse sur la nature conventionnelle du système belge de formation des salaires minima pour le secteur privé (**avis n° 2.197 du 5 février 2021**).

- **Pensions complémentaires**

Dans le cadre des négociations sectorielles 2021-2022, le Conseil invite, dans sa **recommandation n° 29** du 15 juillet 2021, les négociateurs au niveau des secteurs et des entreprises à associer leurs efforts afin de supprimer la différence de traitement qui repose sur la distinction entre ouvriers et employés en matière de pensions complémentaires. Les secteurs et entreprises dans lesquels se pose la problématique de l'harmonisation des pensions complémentaires sont instamment invités à y remédier.

Pour ce qui concerne la période 2023-2028, il est prévu que, afin de réaliser l'harmonisation des pensions complémentaires d'ici le 1^{er} janvier 2030 dans les secteurs et entreprises où c'est nécessaire, au moins 0,1 point de pourcentage de la marge salariale y est affecté pour chaque période d'accord interprofessionnel entre 2023 et 2028. Cette condition est prévue dans la **convention collective de travail n° 158 du 15 juillet 2021**.

- **Flexibilité**

Les travaux du Conseil sur ce point ont conduit à une augmentation des « heures relance », à savoir les heures supplémentaires volontaires additionnelles corona.

Le Conseil a également demandé dans son **avis n°2.237 du 15 juillet 2021** la prolongation du régime fiscal préférentiel des heures supplémentaires « ordinaires » et que le gouvernement prenne les mesures législatives nécessaires pour que le nombre d'heures supplémentaires bénéficiant d'un régime fiscal préférentiel soit relevé de 130 à 180 heures pour tous les secteurs, et ce, du 1^{er} juillet 2021 au 30 juin 2023 inclus.

- **Fins de carrière**

Le cadre d'accords du 25 juin 2021 prévoit le renouvellement jusqu'au 30 juin 2023 des instruments conventionnels visant à mettre en œuvre les régimes de chômage avec complément d'entreprise prévus par la réglementation fixant le chômage avec complément d'entreprise lorsque cela s'avère nécessaire. Ce volet a été mis en œuvre par huit **conventions collectives de travail du 15 juillet 2021** portant tant sur les régimes de chômage avec complément d'entreprise que les crédits-temps de fin de carrière ainsi que par **l'avis n° 2.238 du 15 juillet 2021**.

- **Prolongation des régimes en cours**

La prolongation des régimes en cours concerne : la cotisation patronale pour les efforts en faveur des groupes à risque, la dispense de l'obligation en matière de premiers emplois, le financement de l'intervention publique dans le cadre du système de déplacements entre le domicile et le lieu de travail en transports en commun, et l'amende appliquée en cas de non-proposition d'accompagnement par outplacement (accompagnement des travailleurs âgés vers un nouvel emploi).

Régulation de la crise de la Covid-19

Le Conseil national du Travail a été particulièrement actif dans **l'encadrement législatif de la crise Corona**, que ce soit au travers de ces propres instruments (convention collectives de travail) ou des avis émis sur les projets de lois et d'arrêtés royaux transmis par le Gouvernement.

On relèvera en particulier :

- la mise en place d'un régime de suspension totale de l'exécution du contrat de travail et/ou un régime de travail à temps réduit en cas de manque de travail résultant de causes économiques pour les employés en raison de la crise du coronavirus (**CCT n° 147 du 18 mars 2020**) ;
- un régime d'accès simplifié au chômage temporaire pour raisons économiques pour les employés en raison de la crise du coronavirus, qui a été prévu jusqu'au 30 juin 2023 inclus (**CCT n° 148 du 7 octobre 2020 et CCT n° 159 du 15 juillet 2021**) ;

- les absences justifiées du travail pour un test de dépistage de la Covid-19 sur la base du self assessment testing tool (**CCT n° 160 du 19 novembre 2021**) ;
- le télétravail recommandé ou obligatoire en raison de la crise du coronavirus (**CCT n° 149/2 du 7 décembre 2021**).

L'interdiction de la discrimination des travailleurs en fonction de leur statut de vaccination à la Covid-19 a fait l'objet de la **déclaration des partenaires sociaux du CNT et du CSPPT du 29 juin 2021**.

Le Conseil a également adopté les avis suivants sur le cadre réglementaire de la crise sanitaire :

- **avis n° 2.226 du 29 juin 2021** : avant-projet de loi modifiant la loi du 20 décembre 2020 portant des mesures de soutien temporaires en raison de la pandémie de la Covid-19 ;
- **avis n° 2.246 du 15 octobre 2021** : introduction d'une obligation de vaccination contre la Covid-19 pour le personnel soignant ;
- **avis n° 2.258 du 7 décembre 2021** : prolongation de différents dispositifs pris dans le domaine du droit du travail à la suite de pandémie de Covid-19 ;
- **avis n° 2.269 du 22 décembre 2021** : vaccination obligatoire des professionnels des soins de santé – avant-projet de loi.

Pour une vision exhaustive des travaux du CNT en lien avec la crise de la Covid-19 : <http://www.cnt-nar.be/Dossier-FR-covid-19.htm>.

Plan de relance et de résilience

Dans le cadre de travaux conjoints avec le Conseil central de l'Économie et le Conseil fédéral du Développement durable, le Conseil national du Travail a émis deux avis d'initiative sur le plan de relance et de résilience. Ces avis concernent, d'une part, le volet relatif aux projets d'investissement (**avis n° 2.205 du 23 mars 2021**) et, d'autre part, le volet des réformes structurelles (**avis n° 2.212 du 2 avril 2021**). Concernant les projets d'investissements, les Conseils ont, en particulier, insisté sur la nécessité d'une bonne coordination entre l'État fédéral, les entités fédérées et les autorités locales afin de maximiser les effets positifs des investissements envisagés partout dans le pays.

Développement durable

- **Plan fédéral de développement durable**

Le Conseil national du Travail a émis le **7 juin 2021**, conjointement avec le Conseil central de l'Économie et la Commission consultative spéciale « Consommation » **l'avis n° 2.221** sur le plan fédéral de développement durable (PFDD) qui détermine les mesures à prendre en vue de la réalisation, d'une part, des engagements internationaux de la Belgique – dont les objectifs de développement durable (ODD) à l'horizon 2030 – et, d'autre part, des objectifs fixés dans la stratégie à long terme (horizon 2050) du gouvernement fédéral pour un développement durable.

Dans cet avis, les Conseils ont souligné la nécessité de doter le plan d'une marche à suivre claire assortie d'actions plus concrètes. Cela implique selon eux qu'il faudrait fixer des objectifs intermédiaires à atteindre avant l'échéance du plan en vue de répondre à des engagements internationaux, et une trajectoire pour atteindre ces objectifs, ce qui devrait s'accompagner d'un monitoring de la mise en œuvre du plan.

Concernant le processus de monitoring pour la mise en œuvre des ODD, le CCE et le CNT ont émis plusieurs avis unanimes (**avis n° 2.158, 2.175 et 2.220**) dans lesquels ils proposent des indicateurs de suivi pour les ODD.

- **CCT n° 98/9 du 21 décembre 2021 sur les éco-chèques**

La CCT n° 98 a été modifiée pour permettre, à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2022, que les éco-chèques puissent être acceptés pour l'achat de produits agricoles et horticoles vendus en circuit court. Le circuit court ou « chaîne courte » consiste en la vente directe au consommateur par un agriculteur ou un horticulteur, ou par un seul intermédiaire, de ses propres produits ou d'une partie de ceux-ci ou de produits transformés/dérivés. Pour ces derniers, les matières premières utilisées doivent être issues de la production propre de l'agriculteur ou de l'environnement local. Le caractère local est en effet un aspect important du circuit court.

- **Mobilité**

Dans son avis n° **2.222** « Vers des nouveaux contrats de gestion pour la SNCB et Infrabel » du **29 juin 2021**, émis conjointement avec le Conseil central de l'Économie, le Conseil national du Travail a demandé l'adoption urgente de nouveaux contrats de gestion pour la SNCB et Infrabel afin d'assurer la qualité du transport ferroviaire – indispensable pour promouvoir l'utilisation du rail – et d'offrir aux deux entreprises la sécurité juridique essentielle aux futurs investissements ferroviaires. Les Conseils décrivent dans cet avis le cadre politique dans lequel les nouveaux contrats de gestion devraient s'inscrire à leurs yeux. Ils mettent aussi en évidence un certain nombre de points spécifiques qu'ils souhaitent voir inclus dans ces contrats.

Les deux Conseils se sont également penchés sur l'avant-projet de loi organisant le verdissement fiscal et social de la mobilité (**avis n° 2.239 du 28 septembre 2021**) en formulant des propositions concrètes visant à accroître l'utilisation du budget mobilité. Ces initiatives sont nécessaires car, bien que cet instrument soit important pour encourager les alternatives à la voiture de société dans le cadre (entre autres) des déplacements domicile travail et pour contribuer ainsi à la réalisation d'un transfert modal, il n'a que peu de succès dans la pratique. Les propositions des Conseils à cet égard présentent à la fois des avantages pour les employeurs, les travailleurs, le budget de l'État ainsi qu'en matière de mobilité.

Les deux Conseils ont enfin rendu un avis sur les « Principes de base pour la vision du rail 2040 » (**avis n° 2.259 du 21 décembre 2021**) dans lequel ils ont formulé un certain nombre de principes de base pour étayer la vision du rail 2040. Des conditions-cadres sont proposées qui devraient, à leurs yeux, être remplies pour faire de la vision un succès grâce auquel l'usage du train se trouve dynamisé et contribue ainsi à la réalisation du transfert modal que poursuivent les différents niveaux de pouvoir.

Return to work

Depuis quelques années, une plate-forme de concertation a été mise en place en matière de maintien et de reclassement des travailleurs en situation d'incapacité de travail.

Le Conseil national du Travail est en charge de la coordination des travaux de cette plate-forme qui constitue le cadre de concertation structurel, regroupant les acteurs impliqués dans le processus de retour au travail volontaire des personnes présentant un problème de santé afin de développer une approche intégrée non seulement entre institutions de la sécurité sociale concernées mais également avec le SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale et, à terme, avec d'autres institutions publiques compétentes en la matière qui souhaiteraient y participer.

C'est dans ce contexte que le Conseil a réalisé une évaluation de la réglementation en matière de réintégration au travail et a formulé des propositions concrètes en vue d'optimiser la procédure relative à la réintégration au travail des personnes déclarées inaptes à exercer le travail convenu, qui sont des alternatives à la mesure du « jobs deal », prévoyant un droit à un outplacement. Les travaux sur ce point se poursuivent de manière intensive, sur base de propositions formulées par le gouvernement suite à l'avis du Conseil du 25 septembre 2018.

Lutte contre la fraude sociale et fiscale

Le Conseil national du Travail est structurellement associé, dans le cadre d'un protocole de coopération conclu avec le Service d'information et de recherche sociales (SIRS), à la politique de lutte contre la fraude sociale et fiscale menée par le gouvernement. Dans ce contexte, il assure un suivi régulier des activités de la « European Labour Authority », et des questions que posent le Brexit ou encore la mise en place du Portail numérique unique « Travailler en Belgique ». Dans ce contexte, il a été amené à apporter, dans son **avis n° 2.227 du 29 juin 2021**, une contribution au plan stratégique du SIRS 2022-2025 et est actuellement consulté sur le plan d'action 2022.

Non-discrimination

Le Conseil a adopté la **brochure intitulée « Favoriser la diversité et l'égalité dans le recrutement »**. Cette brochure, reprise en annexe de l'**avis n° 2.163 du 28 avril 2020** qui vient l'accompagner, se veut avant tout un outil didactique pour les entreprises, les secteurs et les candidats à l'emploi. Elle s'inscrit dans le cadre légal et réglementaire applicable en Belgique en matière de non-discrimination et est adaptable à chaque type d'entreprise. Le Conseil a souhaité faire de ce guide un outil résolument pratique, qui mette en lumière les avantages qu'apporte la diversité et qui permette d'orienter, tout au long de la procédure de recrutement, les entreprises qui le souhaitent vers des pratiques de recrutement objectives fondées sur les seules compétences des candidats à l'emploi de nature à assurer une réelle égalité de traitement entre ceux-ci. Comme cela est souligné dans leur avis, les partenaires sociaux interprofessionnels témoignent, par l'adoption de ce nouvel instrument, de leur ferme volonté de continuer à œuvrer concrètement pour une participation renforcée des groupes à risque au marché du travail. Ils s'engagent également dans leur avis à promouvoir cet outil auprès de leurs membres.

Le Conseil a également adopté l'**avis n° 2.265 du 21 décembre 2021** relatif aux modifications législatives proposées en matière de **protection des témoins contre les représailles** dans le cadre de la procédure interne visant à prendre en compte la jurisprudence développée par la Cour de Justice de l'UE dans son arrêt « Hakelbracht ».

Mise en œuvre des instruments européens

- **Accès à la sécurité sociale**

Le Conseil national du Travail a émis **l'avis n° 2.216 du 5 mai 2021** sur la mise en œuvre de la Recommandation (EU) 2019/C387/01 du Conseil du 8 novembre 2019 relative à l'accès des travailleurs salariés et non-salariés à la protection sociale.

- **Accords-cadres européens**

Le Conseil est l'organe compétent pour la mise en œuvre en Belgique des accords-cadres adoptés par les partenaires sociaux européens. Dans ce cadre, il rend compte non seulement de la mise en œuvre au niveau interprofessionnel de ces accords mais réalise également un travail de centralisation des contributions des partenaires sociaux régionaux. Deux rapports de mise en œuvre ont été adoptés au cours des 12 derniers mois :

- **Le rapport n° 122 du 5 mai 2021** : Rapport annuel de mise en œuvre de l'accord-cadre européen sur la **numérisation**.
- **Le rapport n° 123 du 13 juillet 2021** : Rapport de synthèse concernant la mise en œuvre des partenaires sociaux belges de l'accord-cadre européen sur le **vieillessement actif**.

- **Détachement de travailleurs**

Suite à son avis relatif à la transposition de la directive UE 2018/957 concernant le détachement de travailleurs effectué dans le cadre d'une prestation de services (**avis n° 2.147 du 26 novembre 2019**) le Conseil a émis un avis sur la transposition de la directive relative au détachement de conducteurs dans le domaine du transport routier (**avis n° 2.255 du 30 novembre 2021**). Ce dernier avis a été émis en étroite collaboration avec les partenaires sociaux du secteur du transport et de la logistique directement concernés par la transposition de la directive.

- **Protection des lanceurs d'alerte**

Le Conseil a émis, conjointement avec le Conseil central de l'Économie, **l'avis n° 2.252 du 30 novembre 2021** sur la transposition de la directive (UE) 2019/1937 du 23 octobre 2019 sur la protection des personnes qui signalent des violations du droit de l'Union.

- **Fixation des objectifs nationaux faisant suite au plan d'action européen mettant en œuvre le socle européen des droits sociaux**

Dans son avis n° 2.263 du 21 décembre 2021, le Conseil a apporté sa contribution à la fixation d'objectifs nationaux en exécution du plan d'action européen sur le socle européen des droits sociaux. Il y exprime tout d'abord certaines préoccupations quant à l'implication des entités fédérées et des partenaires sociaux dans le processus d'élaboration des objectifs nationaux et des indicateurs de suivi. Il y aborde ensuite les questions relatives à la définition des objectifs et des indicateurs de suivi en matière d'emploi et de formation, en se basant, dans une large mesure, sur l'avis du Conseil supérieur de l'emploi et l'expertise développée par les partenaires sociaux dans le cadre du suivi des objectifs de développement durable. Il souligne ensuite la nécessité d'un lien plus clair entre les indicateurs et objectifs fixés dans le cadre des différents plans d'actions et stratégies (notamment par rapport aux ODD), formule des propositions d'indicateurs complémentaires, aborde la question des objectifs en matière de pauvreté et d'exclusion avant de se pencher enfin sur la demande des ministres de formuler des propositions d'objectifs de soutien supplémentaires.

- **Transposition de la directive (UE) 2019/1158 du 20 juin 2019 concernant l'équilibre entre la vie professionnelle et la vie privée des parents et aidants et abrogeant la directive 2010/18/UE**

Le Conseil également émis sur ce point l'avis n° 2.264 du 21 décembre 2021 dans lequel il s'est engagé, en particulier, à poursuivre à très brève échéance ses travaux en vue de la mise en œuvre du congé parental et des mesures souples de travail par la voie de CCT du Conseil national du Travail.

- **Transposition de la directive (UE) 2019/1152 du 20 juin 2019 relative à des conditions de travail transparentes et prévisibles dans l'Union européenne**

Dans son avis n° 2.272 du 25 janvier 2022, le Conseil national du Travail s'est prononcé sur les projets de loi et d'arrêté royal qui transposent les deux grands volets de cette directive, à savoir : - d'une part, la mise à jour des règles concernant les informations à fournir aux travailleurs sur leurs conditions de travail, un aspect déjà couvert par la précédente directive 91/533/CEE, que modifie à présent la directive (UE) 2019/1152 ; - et, d'autre part, l'établissement d'un ensemble de droits minimaux pour chaque travailleur dans l'Union européenne, ce qui constitue un nouvel aspect par rapport à la directive 91/533/CEE.

Par ailleurs, le Conseil s'est engagé dans ce contexte à entamer à brève échéance des négociations sur la conclusion de conventions collectives de travail concernant les thèmes « transition vers une autre forme d'emploi » et « prévisibilité minimale du travail », en tenant compte de manière équilibrée des intérêts des employeurs et des travailleurs en la matière. Il examinera également dans ce cadre la protection du travailleur contre le traitement défavorable et contre le licenciement.
