



# **Study for the Evaluation of ESF Support to Youth Employment**

Annex 5: Case Study – Belgium  
(Contract VC/2018/0715)

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
ADG	Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (Employment Office for the German-Speaking Community)
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
CPAS	Centre public d'action sociale - Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (OCMW) (Public Centre for Social Welfare)
CRIE-JRC	Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation (Joint Research Centre)
CSR	Country-specific recommendations
DG EMPL	Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
EC	European Commission
EQ	Evaluation question
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IP	Investment Priority
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LMP	Labour market policy
MA	Managing Authority
NEET	Person not in employment, education or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Priority Axis
PES	Public employment service
pp	Percentage points
TO	Thematic Objective
VDAB	Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (Regional PES in Flanders)
WIJ!	Work experience for young persons
YE	Youth Employment
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative
YG	Youth Guarantee

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# 1 Background and Context

## 1.1 Labour market context

In 2018, less than one in ten (9.2%) young people aged 15 to 24 in Belgium were not in employment, education or training (NEET). This represents an improvement since the beginning of the programming period in 2014 (12.0%) and is slightly below the rate observed at the EU level (10.5%, see Table 1). The proportion of active young people of the same age that were unemployed stood at 15.8%, practically the same as that observed across the EU (15.2%), and down from 23.2% in 2014. There were also positive developments for those aged 25 to 29 for whom the NEET rate dropped from 17.9% to 17.0% and the unemployment rate from 11.9% to 7.8%. Both rates are below those seen at the EU level (17.1% and 9.2% respectively). Since 2014, there has been a noticeable decrease in the rate of early school leavers<sup>1</sup> from 9.8% to 8.6%. It is now 2 pp lower than at EU level (10.6%). The labour market situation of women seems to be better than that of men for the younger age group aged 15 to 24 (lower NEET and unemployment rates), but this is not the case for women aged 25 to 29 for which NEET rates are considerably higher than that of men (20.2% vs. 13.8%). Early school leaving rates are lower for women than men for both 2014 and 2018.

The Operational Programmes (OPs) covered by the case study (Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles and Operational Programme Flanders 2014-2020) cover all three NUTS1 regions in the country (even though for employment matters, Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles does not cover Brussels region). The capital region and all regions in Flanders were more developed while all regions in the Walloon region but Brabant Wallon (more developed) were transitional. There are important variations by region, with the Flemish region having significantly lower NEET, unemployment and early school leaving rates for young people than the capital and the Walloon region in both 2014 and 2018, though the gap has narrowed. Between 2014 and 2018, unemployment and NEET rates decreased in all regions, with the Walloon region experiencing the largest improvement. The rate of early school leaving remained practically unchanged in the Flemish region but dropped significantly in the capital and Walloon region (-3.7 pp and -3 pp respectively).

*Table 1. Key figures on the labour market situation of young people, Belgium, 2014 and 2018*

		NEET rate (% pop.)		Unemployment rate (% of active pop.)		Early school leaving rate (18- 24)	
		2014	2018	2014	2018	2014	2018
<b>EU-28</b>							
15-24		12.5	10.5	22.2	15.2	11.2	10.6
25-29		20.4	17.1	13.6	9.2		
<b>National level</b>							
Total	15-24	12.0	9.2	23.2	15.8	9.8	8.6
	25-29	17.9	17.0	11.9	7.8		
Men	15-24	12.6	9.4	24.0	16.2	11.8	10.6
	25-29	16.5	13.8	23.6	7.7		
Women	15-24	11.5	8.9	22.3	15.3	7.7	6.5
	25-29	19.3	20.2	10.1	7.9		
<b>Regional level (15-24)</b>							
Région de Bruxelles-Capitale		15.8	13.3	39.5	30.6	14.4	10.7
Vlaams Gewest		9.8	7.8	16.1	10.9	7.0	7.3
Région wallonne		14.7	10.0	32.1	22.5	12.9	9.9

<sup>1</sup> The early school leaving rate refers to the proportion of people aged 18-24 who have attained at most lower secondary education and who are not currently (within the last four weeks) participating in any further education or training: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/edat1\\_esms.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/edat1_esms.htm)

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS, yth\_empl\_150, edat\_lfse\_22, yth\_empl\_110, edat\_lfse\_16), data extracted on 26.06.19.

## 1.2 National ALMP targeting young people

In Belgium, the provision of public services related to employment and vocational training is a competence associated with different linguistic communities and regions:

- Brussels region: Actiris is responsible for the Public Employment Service (PES) while Bruxelles Formation provides vocational training for Francophones;
- Flanders & Dutch-speaking Community: Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB); Syntra
- Wallonie & French-speaking Community: Le Forem; CEFA, IFAPME
- German-speaking Community: Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (ADG).

The regional PES and their federation (Synerjob), a non-profit organisation created in July 2007, and respective ministries are the main actors responsible for youth employment measures including establishing and managing the Youth Guarantee scheme and coordinating partnerships across all levels and sectors in their respective region.

During the programming period, young people residing in Belgium could benefit from 69 active labour market policy (ALMP) measures funded only by national funds but were identified as a specific target group of twelve measures providing traineeships, apprenticeships, employment incentives to employers for hiring young people and direct job creation<sup>2</sup>.

Training measures included incentives for bachelor and master holders to acquire language skills, basic and vocational training for low-skilled young people and other disadvantaged groups (long-term unemployed, disabled or ex-prisoners), traineeships, and apprenticeships for low skilled young people. Employment incentives included four different interventions offering financial support to businesses for hiring low-skilled young people. Two of these were implemented in the Walloon region (by Le Forem), one of which also targeted long-term unemployed, while one was implemented in the Brussels region (by Actiris), targeting young people who were unemployed for at least six months or had limited working experience. The last one is implemented at the federal level and identifies as targets (besides low-skilled youth in general) low-skilled third-country nationals and people with disabilities. Direct job creation measures involved the creation of jobs for young people in the organisations of the federal state, regions, communities, provinces and communes as well as in the Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS/OCMW) and non-profit organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on information from the LMP database:  
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1143&intPageId=3227&langId=en>

## 2 The ESF/YEI in Belgium

### 2.1 Role of the ESF/YEI

Table 2. Distribution of expenditure on young people (<25) participating in active labour market measures by source of funding and type of intervention (million and %), Belgium, 2014-17

Type of intervention	Distribution of expenditure			
	Nationally funded interventions		ESF (co)funded interventions	
	Million	%	Million	%
Institutional training	264.4	23.7%	0.0	0.0%
Traineeships	32.7	2.9%	0.0	0.0%
Apprenticeships	32.1	2.9%	0.0	0.0%
Not specified training	16.1	1.4%	0.0	0.0%
Employment incentives	356.4	32.0%	0.0	0.0%
Sheltered/supported employment	325.9	29.2%	0.0	0.0%
Direct job creation	87.6	7.9%	0.0	0.0%
Start-up incentives	0.1	0.0%	0.7	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 115.1</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: LMP database, data extracted on 03.07.19.

Notes: Data cover interventions in LMP categories 2-7 only. Expenditure on young people is estimated for each intervention as total expenditure times the proportion of young people (<25) amongst total participants (using the observation of average annual stock where available and otherwise entrants by age). Interventions with missing data on either expenditure or participants are excluded from the analysis. For Belgium, information was available for 84.1% of expenditure. The source of funding for each intervention is based on responses to item 12 of the LMP questionnaire.

#### 2.1.1 CSRs addressed by the ESF

Table 3. Prevalence of recommendations linked to Investment Priority 8.ii Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people

Country	Country Specific Recommendation
Belgium	Increased labour market access for disadvantaged groups, such as young people (2014).

## 2.2 Programme architecture and monitoring system

### 2.2.1 Programme architecture

In the 2014-2020 programming period, three regional/community Operational Programmes implement specific actions to promote the integration of young people into the labour market: Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles (ESF+YEI), Operational Programme Flanders (ESF only) and Operational Programme Brussels-Capital Region (ESF+YEI). A total of EUR 322 million is allocated to youth employment in Belgium. The focus of this case-study is on the first two Operational Programmes.

In the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, youth employment is addressed under Priority Axis 4 (with two strands: one for the ESF and one for the YEI).

In the Operational Programme Flanders, the activities proposed by the Department of Education for youth employment are covered under Priority Axis 1 (under Investment Priority 8.ii). In addition, an important measure ('Work experience for young persons' – WIJ!) focusing exclusively on disadvantaged young people and promoting their employability is financed under Priority Axis 3 (Investment Priority 9.i social inclusion). According to the latest available data, expenditure declared for WIJ! (for projects that ran until May 2018) amounted to about EUR 4 million (with 5 250 participants) while for Investment Priority 8.ii ('Begeleiding naar tewerkstelling - IBAL/ABO') it is much

lower with EUR 1.4 million (and almost 8 000 participants). This reflects the fact that the Operational Programme Flanders' primary focus is on disadvantaged young people and the authorities therefore chose to finance the related activities under Investment Priority 9.i.

Table 4. Programme architecture

OP	Action-level		Main Actions/Interventions
	PAx	ESF/YEI	
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	PA4	ESF	The aim of measure 4.1 financed by the ESF is to propose to young people aged under 25 an individualised action plan in order to support their sustainable integration into the labour market through vocational training, alternate training, or training at the workplace.
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	PA4	YEI	The aim of measure 4.2 financed by the YEI is to increase the number of young NEETs who are active. It proposes in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalised guidance a counselling</li> <li>• First work experience</li> <li>• Actions to fight against early school leaving (second chance school)</li> <li>• Assessment and validation of skills.</li> </ul> At the start of the programming period, YEI projects covered the Brussels-Capital region, and the provinces of Liège and Hainaut. The second YEI strand (2017-2020) focuses on the Brussels-Capital region and the provinces of Hainaut, Namur and Luxembourg.
OP Flanders	PA1 and PA3	ESF	Curative actions (under PA1 - IP8ii) support youth employment and mainly focus on guidance and orientation services to support young people towards employment as well as dual learning. Flanders also considers that 'Werkinleving voor Jongeren' (Work experience for young persons - WIJ!), though financed under IP9i (under PA3), fully supports youth employability as it focuses on young people and aims to provide them with guidance to enter into the labour market.

Table 5. Main actors in youth employment activities in Belgium – preliminary data

YEI Managing Authorities		YG Implementing Authority		PES
Name	Type	Name	Type	
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles: Ministre Président du Gouvernement Wallon	Independent body	Synerjob	PES	VDAB (Flanders); Forem (Wallonia); Actiris (Brussels-Capital Region); Bruxelles-Formation
OP Brussels-Capital Region: Actiris	PES			
OP Flanders: ESF Agency Flanders	Ministry of Labour/ Social Policy			

Sources: Task 1/SFC2014, ESF website, other documents

## 2.2.2 Operational Programme monitoring system

For Operational Programme Flanders, ESF Vlaanderen receives on a monthly basis microdata from the PES that are sent to the final beneficiaries who then have to fill/correct the data. 'Mijn loopbaan – MLP' is a system developed by the regional PES where the career path of a working person or a jobseeker is recorded. If the person participates to an ESF project, it must be registered there. These registrations form the basis for the payment of subsidies, together with other supporting documents. For the Werkinleving voor Jongeren project (WIJ!), monitoring is jointly managed with the

regional PES. ESF Vlaanderen is also providing thematic analysis in this context, acting as a platform so that each stakeholder can learn from each other.

For Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, data is collected once a year (around mid-March). Beneficiaries are asked to complete an Excel file ('Fichier stagiaires') with data on each participant, which is then uploaded in the monitoring system. Follow-up data is also collected through surveys of participants (the first survey was carried out in 2018 and provided results for participants who left the ESF/YEI project in 2015).

## 2.3 Intervention logic

Figure 1. Logic of intervention for youth employment measures in the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles

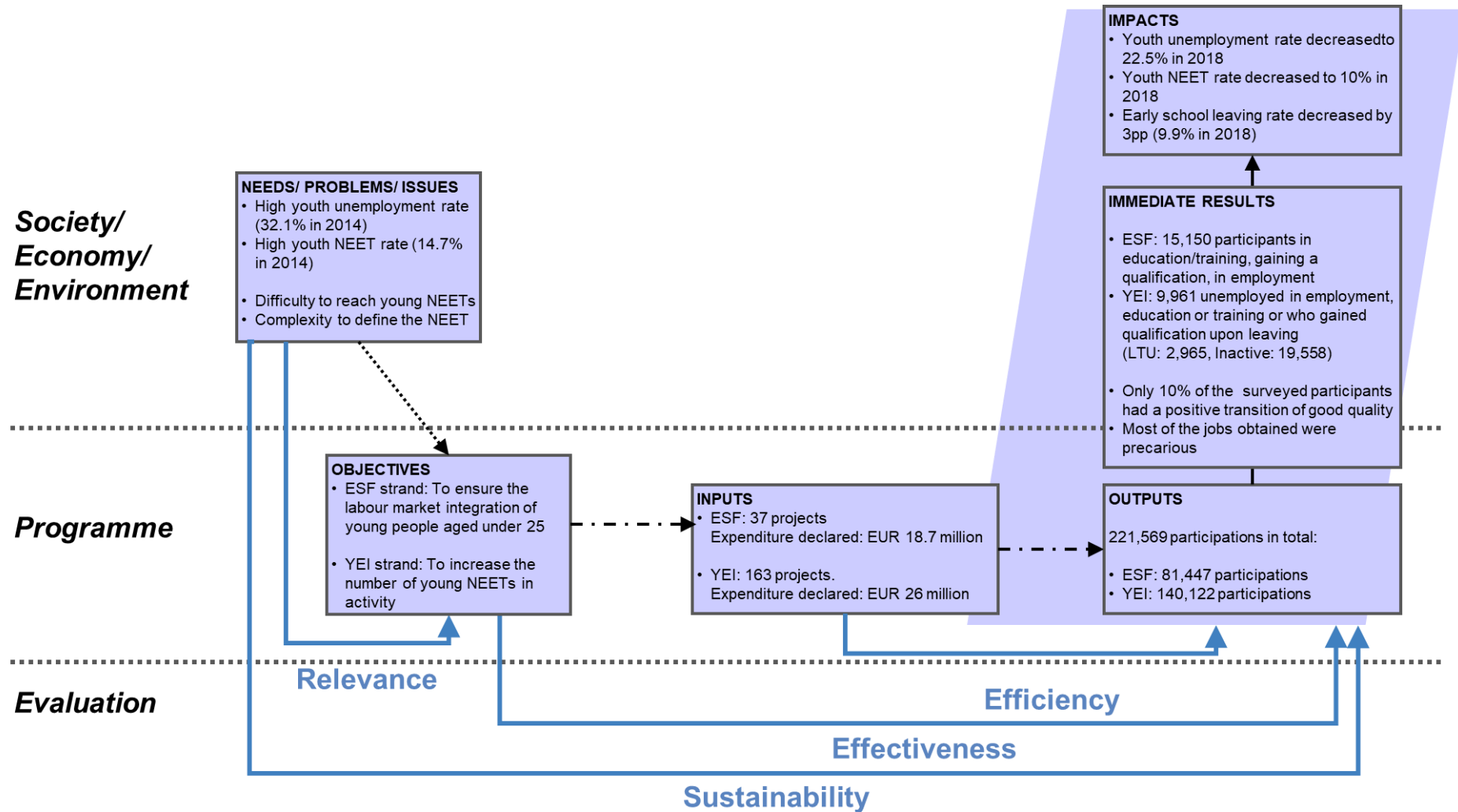
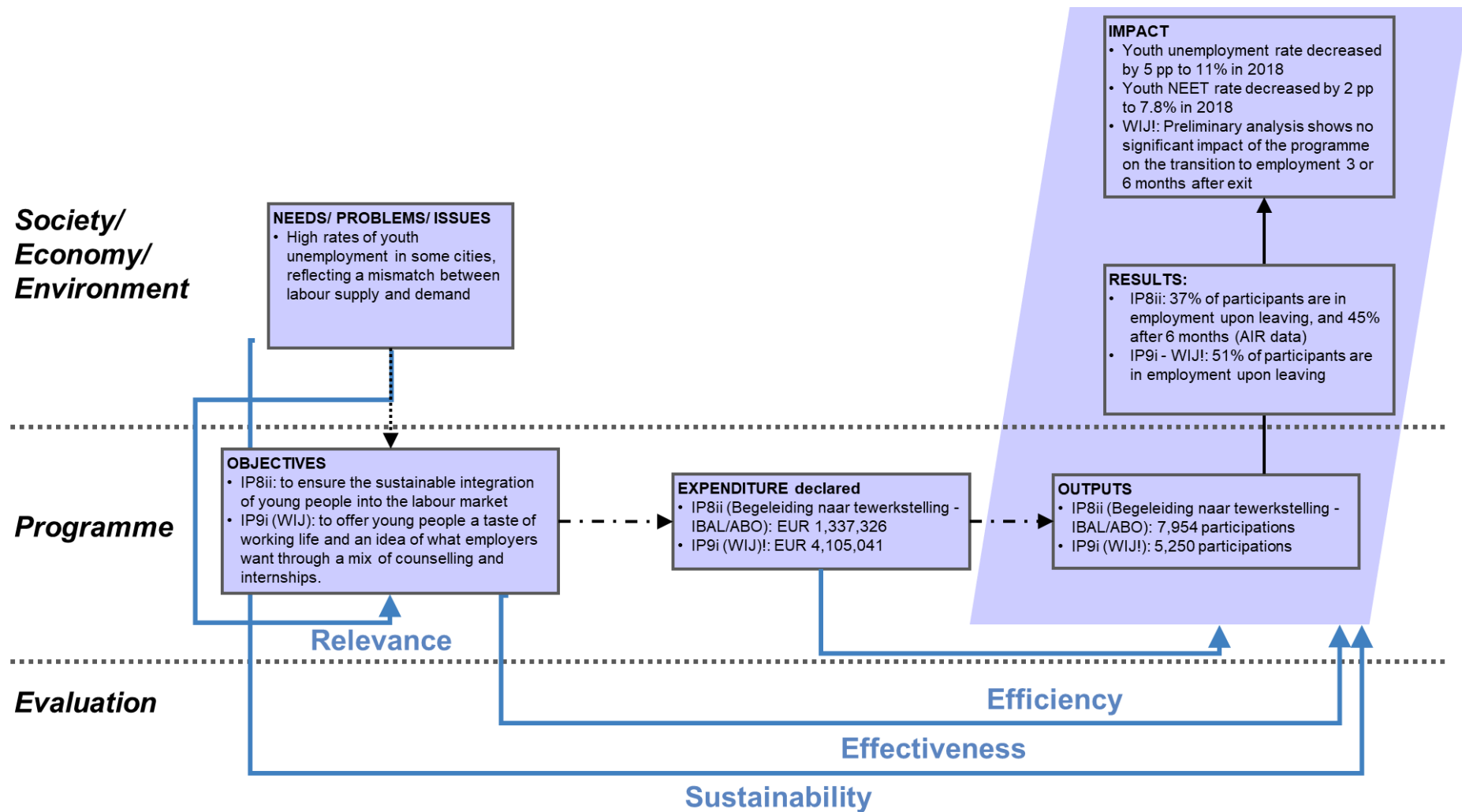


Figure 2. Logic of intervention for youth employment measures in the Operational Programme Flanders



### 3 Scale of ESF/YEI investment

Table 6. Allocations to youth employment - ESF + YEI (including Operational Programme amendments) until 2018

OP	ESF <sup>3</sup>		YEI <sup>4</sup>		Total		Share of total funding allocated to IP8ii of TO8 in %
	EU amount	Total	EU amount	Total	EU amount	Total	
	in million EUR						
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	33.6	67.3	108.4	162.6	142.0	229.8	74%
OP Vlaanderen	24.4	58.8	-	-	24.4	58.8	11%
Grand total	58.0	126.1	108.4	162.6	166.4	288.7	34%

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 7. Changes to youth employment allocations in the Operational Programme since start programming

OP	ESF <sup>5</sup>		YEI <sup>6</sup>		Total	
	EU amount in Mio. EUR	Total in Mio. EUR	EU amount in Mio. EUR	Total in Mio. EUR	EU amount in Mio. EUR	Total in Mio. EUR
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	0.2	0.3	35.3	52.9	35.4	53.2
OP Vlaanderen	0	0	-	-	0	0

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 8. Overview of the financial progress - ESF/YEI

OP / IP8ii	Allocated budget to YE in Mio. EUR	Eligible costs reported in Mio. EUR	Project selection rate IP8ii (%) 2018	Project selection rate TO8 (%) 2018	Expenditure declared in Mio. EUR	Expenditure declared IP8ii (%) 2018	Expenditure declared TO8 (%) 2018
<b>ESF</b>							
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	67.3	69.9	104%	104%	18.7	28%	23%
OP Vlaanderen	58.8	34.3	58%	78%	9.9	17%	29%
<b>YEI</b>							
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	162.6	182.3	112%	104%	26.0	16%	23%

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

#### 3.1.1 Financial progress

OP / IP8ii	Project selection rate (%)				% expenditure declared			
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>ESF – IP8ii</b>								
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	94%	99%	99%	104%	0%	0%	0%	28%
OP Vlaanderen	0%	35%	35%	58%	0%	0%	7%	17%
<b>YEI – IP8ii</b>								

<sup>3</sup> Excludes ESF allocations to YEI

<sup>4</sup> Includes ESF allocations to YEI

<sup>5</sup> Excludes ESF allocations to YEI

<sup>6</sup> Includes ESF allocations to YEI



OP / IP8ii	Project selection rate (%)				% expenditure declared			
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2015	2016	2017	2018
OP Wallonie- Bruxelles	150%	67%	66%	112%	0%	9%	12%	16%
<b>ESF EU28 IP8ii</b>				77%				36%
<b>YEI EU28 IP8ii</b>				98%				49%

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Notes: The project selection rate is calculated by dividing the cost of selected operations by the total funding of the Operational Programme.

The rate of expenditure declared is calculated by dividing the expenditure declared by beneficiaries to the Managing Authorities by the total funding of the Operational Programme.

## 4 Effectiveness

EQ 1 – How effective is the YEI, and other ESF-funded youth employment operations, in achieving their objectives?

### 4.1 Data based on the AIR 2018

This sub-section provides basic data from the AIR 2018 relevant to effectiveness.

#### 4.1.1 Outputs

Table 9. Number of participations under Investment Priority 8.ii (ESF and YEI)

OP / IP8ii	ESF <sup>7</sup>			YEI <sup>8</sup>			Total number of participations	Share of total number of IP8ii participations of TO8 in %
	Total number of participations	Share of women in %	Share of participations <25 years in %	Total number of participations	Share of women in %	Share of participations <25 years in %		
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	81 447	35%	100%	140 122	40%	100%	221 569	91%
OP Vlaanderen	7 308	36%	100%	-	-	-	7 308	6%
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>88 755</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>140 122</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>228 877</b>	<b>62%</b>

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

##### 4.1.1.1 Type of interventions

In the Operational Programme Flanders, the supported measures in relation to youth employment mostly deal with guidance and orientation services whereas in the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles (both for ESF and YEI), mainly integrated actions (mainly covering guidance, education and training and work based learning) are proposed.

##### 4.1.2 Results

Table 10. Overview results – Investment Priority 8.ii – Annex II common indicators YEI (1)

	Unemployed participants			Long-term unemployed participants		
	who completed the YEI-supported intervention	who received an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving	in education / training, gain a qualification, or in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	who completed the YEI-supported intervention	who received an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving	in education / training, gain a qualification, or are in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	42 726	5 423	9 961	27 424	1 294	2 965
OP Vlaanderen	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>42 726</b>	<b>5 423</b>	<b>9 961</b>	<b>27 424</b>	<b>1 294</b>	<b>2 965</b>

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

<sup>7</sup> Excludes ESF allocations to YEI

<sup>8</sup> Includes ESF allocations to YEI

Table 11. Overview results – measured by Annex II common indicators YEI (2)

	Inactive participants			All participants, six months after leaving		
	who completed the YEI-supported intervention	who received an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving	in education / training, gain a qualification, or are in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	in continued education, training leading to a qualification, apprenticeship or a traineeship	in employment	in self-employment
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	9 952	3 149	19 558	0	0	0
OP Vlaanderen	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>9 952</b>	<b>3 149</b>	<b>19 558</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

#### 4.1.3 Target achievement

Table 12. Overview of number of indicators with targets under Investment Priority 8.ii

	Total number of indicators	Number of indicators with a target
Output indicators – ESF	854	100
Output indicators – YEI	18	2
Total output	872	102
Result indicators – ESF	366	61
Result indicators – YEI	21	12
Total result	387	73

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 13. Average achievement rate of targets under Investment Priority 8.ii – by Operational Programme

	Average achievement rate under IP8.ii (%)				Benchmark in (%)	
	ESF		YEI		TO8 Achievement rate	EU28 IP8ii
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Total
Participations						
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	527%	81%	245%	98%	335%	67%
OP Vlaanderen	40%	66%	-	-	115%	67%
Results						
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	49%	46%	230%	156%	139%	59%
OP Vlaanderen	102%	38%	-	-	145%	59%
Empty fields mean that no targets have been defined by OP in that MS for youth employment						

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

## 4.2 Answers to the Evaluation Questions

### 4.2.1 EQ 1.1 – To what extent have the financial implementation and the achievement of the expected outputs progressed according to the targets set in the programmes? What were the main factors involved (delays in implementation, ESF absorption...)?

In terms of **financial implementation**, in the **Operational Programme Flanders**, both the project selection rate (58%) and the expenditure declared (17%) at the end of 2018 were relatively low compared to the other regions and to the EU averages (with respectively 77% and 36%). This is mainly due to the fact that the first calls were launched at the beginning of 2015 and that the projects only started in September 2015. The first final payment requests were received at the end of 2017, and the first controls were conducted in 2018. Activities carried out in the first half of 2015 were financed with the 2007-2013 budget.

On the other hand, in the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, the targets are largely exceeded in terms of certified amounts (i.e. total eligible expenditure incurred by the beneficiaries paid by December 2018 and certified to the Commission) under the ESF strand: 129% of the target was achieved in more developed regions and 262% in transition regions. However, under the YEI strand, only 29% of the 2018 target was achieved at the end of 2018 in terms of certified amounts. Various factors can explain this:

- The YEI was financed in two separate batches: YEI 1 which started in 2015, and YEI 2 which began in 2017 to cover the additional dotation from the EU.
- The beneficiaries received the final decision on the approval of their projects relatively late.
- The eligibility criteria for the NEETs were not clear enough and difficult to apply. The Managing Authority initially applied the '80/20 rule' allowing 20% of the participants not to fully comply with the eligibility criteria but financing the related expenditure. Following the YEI audit carried out in 2016, this rule was not accepted anymore and some expenditure had to be de-certified, leading to the discontinuation of many projects (in total, 15 YEI projects were abandoned over a total of 27 for the whole Operational Programme).

The **outputs** progressed according to the targets set in the programming phase in both the **Operational Programme Flanders** and the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles. According to the data reported in the latest AIR, in the Operational Programme Flanders, there were 7 308 participations reported for Investment Priority 8.ii under Priority Axis 1 ('Curative strand') against a 2023 target of 11 000 (i.e. a 66% achievement ratio). And in the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, under the ESF strand, there were 14 226 unemployed participants (against a 2023 target of 900), while under the YEI strand, more than 125 000 young NEETs participated in the programmes (against a 2023 target of 32 000). This said, it is recognised that because the NEETs were a group very much unknown at the time of the programming, the Managing Authorities were very careful with the target setting.

In terms of results, the target has already been exceeded in the **Operational Programme Flanders** (the 2018 AIR reports that 46% of participants were in employment, education or training at the end of the action against a target of 15% in 2023). In the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, while the target should be reached for YEI (9 961 unemployed in education/training, gaining a qualification, or in employment upon leaving in end-2018 against a 2023 target of 12 300), for the ESF strand it may not be the case (2 582 inactive in employment upon leaving at the end of 2018 against a 2023 target of 13 520).

#### **4.2.2 EQ 1.2 – How and to what extent does YEI contribute to the achievement of the general objective of sustainable integration (also after the end of the operation) of young people into the labour market and to the specific objectives under ESF? How did it contribute to addressing the problems faced by NEETs?**

According to the latest available data for the **Operational Programme Flanders**, for the Investment Priority 8.ii project called 'Begeleiding naar tewerkstelling - IBAL/ABO' (which is still ongoing), 39% of participants were in employment immediately after the measure, and the corresponding share for WIJ! was 51%. In addition, the 2018 AIR reports the following results for Investment Priority 8.ii:

- 843 participants in education/training upon leaving (11,5%)
- 2 786 participants gained a qualification upon leaving (38%)
- 3 289 were in employment 6 months after leaving (45%).

CRIE-JRC is currently carrying out an evaluation of WIJ! to assess its impact on the employability of young jobseekers, and in particular the added value of the programme compared to the other PES interventions. The analysis focused on individuals who started the programme between June 2015 and June 2016 and who completed it (2 913 individuals). The preliminary results (using matching approaches to compare WIJ! participants with individuals with very similar characteristics who did not participate in PES activities but not in WIJ!) show no statistically significant effect of the measure on the probability of being employed 3 or 6 months after exit. In addition, the control group is more likely than WIJ! participants to be in education 3, 6, or 9 months after the start of the programme. These suggest that WIJ! does not have an added value compared to the other PES activities, but also reflect the fact that employment is not the primary objective for the WIJ! target groups which are particularly vulnerable, and that the positive soft outcomes of the programme should not be ignored. Further work is currently ongoing to optimize the matching strategy and obtain additional information on participants and the control group (with a longer post-intervention period).

In the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, no counterfactual analysis has been undertaken yet, but a detailed survey was carried out in 2018 to assess the situation of participants who left an ESF/YEI programme in 2015 (T), i.e. about 3 years after their exit (T+42 months). 2015 is considered the implementation year of the Operational Programme (2014 being, for most operators, a transition year). The focus was on Thematic Objective 8 (Investment Priority 8.ii 'Sustainable employment of young people'), Thematic Objective 9 and Thematic Objective 10. For YEI, 48% of participants were in employment immediately upon leaving the measure. The proportion increases with time, with 65% after 6 months and 74% after 42 months. This is particularly true in transition regions, where the rate of transition to employment almost doubled between 2015 and 2018 (in 2015, 47% were in employment upon exit, and 80% at the time of the survey).

In addition, the report analysing the results of this survey developed an indicator on the outcome of the transition, by comparing the situation of the participants immediately after the exit and 42 months after the exit and by allocating weights to each situation (0 for job seeking, 1 for positive outcome excluding employment, 2 for employment excluding permanent contract and 3 for permanent contract and self-employed). The results show that for almost half of participants the transition was considered as positive (and this is higher than what is observed in the other priority axes). Less than a third of participants did not have an employment opportunity since their exit while 40% had several opportunities and could choose between these. The outcome was positive (defined as being in employment, in education or training, in voluntary work or trips abroad) for 62% of the participants upon exit, 77% after 6 months, 79% after one year and 81% after 42 months (in 2018). In addition, 14% of the participants never worked over the whole period examined. More than a third of

participants experienced at least one short unemployment period (of less than a year) and 17% longer unemployment periods while 54% of participants never experienced unemployment over the period.

#### **4.2.3 EQ 1.3 – To what extent were the target groups reached by the operations, including disadvantaged persons, those from marginalised communities and those leaving education without qualifications? To what extent was gender balance<sup>9</sup> achieved?**

In the **Operational Programme Flanders**, according to the available data, for the Investment Priority 8.ii project called 'Begeleiding naar tewerkstelling - IBAL/ABO', participants up to now were all inactive, 65% were men, 94% were low educated. WIJ! participants very much share the same characteristics: 60% of participants are men, 80% have a low educational attainment level, and 82% are Belgian citizens (cf. evaluation of WIJ! by CRIE).

According to the 2018 AIR, in the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, Priority Axis 4 'Vocational integration of young people' (Investment Priority 8.ii) concerned 210 484 participants up to the end of 2018, and 38% of these were women. 54% were unemployed and 46% were inactive. The target group is largely low-skilled: 32% did not go beyond primary school and only 5% have a tertiary education diploma. YEI participants accounted for 63% of the total participants (131 937 since 2014), and has substantially increased recently (+37% in 2018 compared to the previous year). The Survey on the situation of the participants who left the programme in 2015 concluded that the access to actions co-financed by the ESF/YEI is not equal in particular in terms of sex, age, education level, duration of inactivity and type of region. 62% of participants who left an action financed under Priority Axis 4 in 2015 were men (while men only account for 52% of unoccupied jobseekers in the Wallonie-Bruxelles Federation in 2015), 92% were aged under 25 (18%), 41% were graduated from the higher secondary education (30%), 84% were in a transition region (64%) and 78% were inactive for less than a year (41%). If only the characteristics of the YEI participants when they entered the ESF programme are looked at, the survey showed that three quarters of the participants were still living with their parents, 83% have at most an upper secondary school diploma, 57.5% left school for less than a year before starting the programme, six participants out of ten were unoccupied for less than a year, 86% were Belgian citizens and 7% were disabled.

#### **4.2.4 EQ 1.4 – What was the quality and timeliness of the offers received by the participants?**

Detailed information on the quality of the offers received by the participants are only available for Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles (for **Operational Programme Flanders**, it was only highlighted that the jobs proposed must last at least 3 months).

In the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, according to the 2015 survey of participants, 25% of participants surveyed reported that the ESF/YEI action matched their expectations. A small majority indicated that it contributed to their vocational integration. Within Priority Axis 4, less than one participant out of five received a follow-up after leaving the ESF action, but 55% of them reported that it helped them in their career path. 90% of the participants were relatively or very

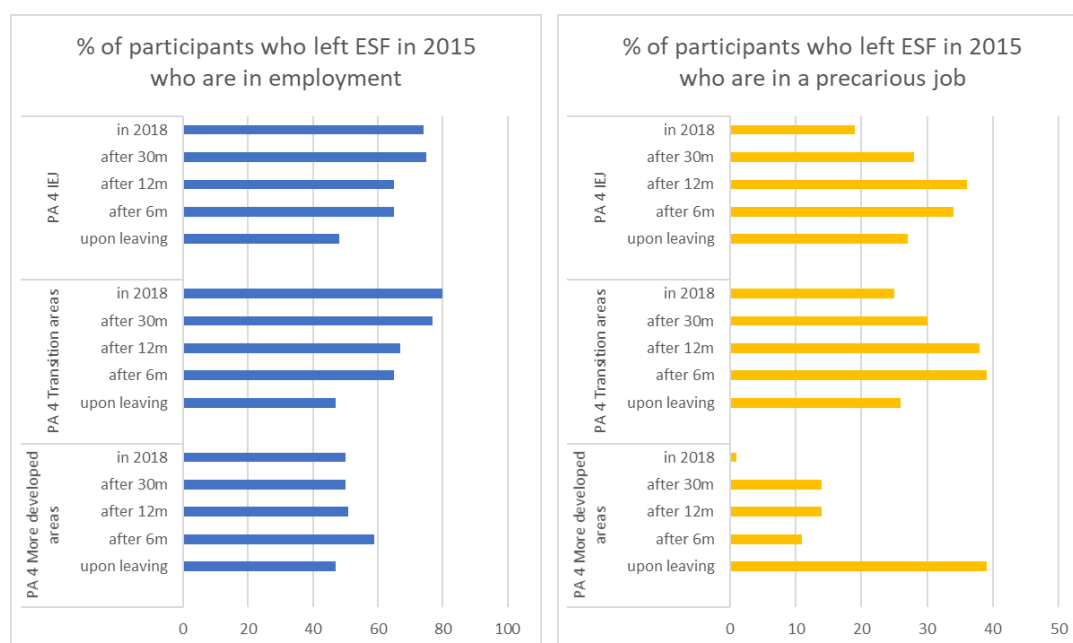
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<sup>9</sup> The study was finalised in summer 2019 but has not been published yet ("Sondage sur le devenir des stagiaires ayant terminé en 2015 une action de formation ou d'insertion cofinancée par le FSE en Belgique francophone : Interprétation des données récoltées", SONECOM, June 2019). Similar studies will be replicated for those who left in 2016 and in 2018.

Under gender balance, we understand not only parity (50/50) but evidence of the extent to which the different needs of men and women in accessing labour market are taken into account in the programmes. Please distinguish between specific interventions for women and gender mainstreaming. Please also mention, if possible, which political goal is being pursued in relation to gender (glass ceiling, horizontal segregation, integration of migrant women with a migration background, etc.).

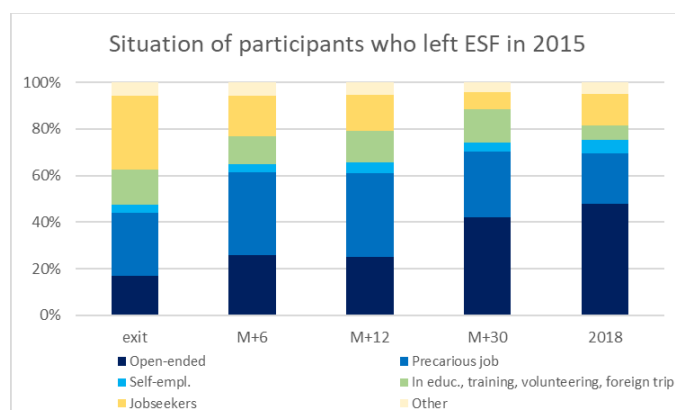
optimistic about their future career. Most of the jobs obtained by the participants were precarious jobs (i.e. fixed ended contracts, temporary agency work, contracts under 'Titres services', etc.). Between 21% (in 2018) and 36% (one year after the exit and 30 months after) of the surveyed participants had a precarious job. Nonetheless almost half of participants were working with an open-ended contract after 42 months, i.e. three years and a half after their exit.

Figure 3. Proportion of participants who found a job after leaving an ESF/YEI supported action in 2015 – Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles



Source: Survey of the situation of participants who left ESF in 2015

Figure 4. Situation of participants after leaving an ESF/YEI supported action in 2015 – Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles



Source: Survey of the situation of participants who left ESF in 2015

At the time of the survey, about half of the participants were still working in the first job they obtained after their exit. 57% of the surveyed participants reported that their first job had a link with the ESF/YEI action. For the majority of the participants (84%), the income of the household allowed to balance the household budget.

In addition, the report analysing the results of the survey developed two indicators on the subjective and objective quality of the transition. It found that the subjective quality of the transition (calculated using the variables relating to the chosen or unchosen nature of the programme, the match between the programme and the trainee's expectations, the perceived benefits of the programme and the acquisition of

new skills) was good in most cases (88%). However, the objective quality of the transition (calculated using the variables relating to the support during (or after) the transition and on the quality of the resources of the public programme (work placement, training duration, qualification) was average in most cases (59%).

By linking the result in terms of the evolution of the status of participants between T (month of exit) and T+42 months (i.e. the outcome of the transition as explained under EQ1.2 above) and the result of the (subjective and objective) indicators on the quality of the transition, it is found that within Priority Axis 4, only 10% of the participants had a positive transition of good quality, and for about a third of these the transition was neutral (or negative and of average/low quality) (See Figure 5 below).

Figure 5. Quality of the transition in priority axis 4



Source: Survey of the situation of participants who left ESF in 2015. The post-training employment path indicator takes into account the situation of the participant (on permanent contract, temporary employment or jobseekers etc.) during the whole period examined, from exit until the time of the survey. Within Priority Axis 4, about 17% of the participants had a permanent contract during the whole period and for 14%, the integration path was low (an example is as follows: the participant is jobseeker upon exit (s/he gets zero points) and still after six months (zero points), s/he is then on voluntary work after twelve months (one point) and after 30 months (one point) and is working with a fixed-ended contract after 42 months (two points); the sum of the points obtained is between one and five).

#### 4.2.5 EQ1.5 – Which types of interventions were the most effective and most sustainable, for which groups and in which contexts (e.g. more developed, less developed and transition regions; urban and rural areas etcetera)?

According to the Survey on the situation of the participants who left the programme in 2015 in the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, the employment rate immediately after leaving the ESF action (47%) was similar in transition regions



(Wallonie excluding Brabant Wallon) and in more developed regions (Brussels and Brabant Wallon). But the difference increases with time: the rate being higher in transition regions with six percentage points (pp) difference after six months, 16 after twelve months, 27 after 30 months and 30 percentage points after 42 months (80% of participants being in work in transition regions against only 50% in more developed regions). This could be explained by the heterogeneity of the regions in terms of the target group and in terms of the economic situation of the region.

In addition, the report analysing the results of this survey on the outcome of the transition – by comparing the situation of the participants immediately after the exit and 42 months after the exit and by allocating weights to each situation – shows that the share of participants for whom the transition was considered as positive was higher in more developed regions (53%) than in transition regions (48%).

The objective quality of the transition (calculated using the variables relating to the support during or after the transition and on the quality of the resources of the public programme (work placement, training duration, qualification) was slightly better in transition regions than in more developed regions.

By linking the result in terms of the evolution of the status of participants between T (month of exit) and T+42 and the result of the indicators on the quality of the transition, it is found that within Priority Axis 4, over 53% of the participants had a positive transition of good/average quality in more developed regions against about 45% in transition regions.

#### **4.2.6 EQ 1.6 – What main factors (geographical, socioeconomic, organizational...) had a bigger impact in the effectiveness of ESF and YEI operations in the field of youth employment, by type of operation?**

In both Operational Programmes, strong partnership and individualised support to young people adapted to their personal needs were reported as the key factors.

In the **Operational Programme Flanders**, it is indeed considered that the main factors that had an impact on the effectiveness of ESF/YEI operations are the close partnership with the various stakeholders along with the tailor-made approach and the flexibility in what is proposed for the integration of young people. Young people who are far from the labour market do not register with the PES. Thus, in order to reach them it is crucial to set up a partnership with NGOs, local authorities and civil society. In addition, given the heterogeneity of the NEETs, organising individual and personalised guidance sessions is considered as essential while the number of collective sessions is limited ('one size fits all' approach does not work).

The views are similar in the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, which also highlighted the difficulty to reach young NEETs (there was not enough knowledge on this target group at the beginning of the programming period). NEETs are a particularly complex group which triggered changes in the way beneficiaries work and reach their target groups: procedures have to be less formal, support has to be individualised and there has to be a close relationship between the young people and the counsellor. At the peer review on how to better reach and identify the young NEETs (which was organised by the Managing Authority in December 2017), the complexity of the situations and the diversity of the needs (for instance in terms of employability, housing, health etc.) were recognised along with the lack of knowledge of what other beneficiaries are doing on the same territory. And it was reported that better networking, cooperation and partnership was needed to better address this situation. The set-up of a listing identifying the organisations, institutions and associations working with the NEETs was encouraged.

And it was recommended (also by the peer review) to set common objectives, to work together on the field and to designate reference persons – this allows beneficiaries to consider themselves as partners rather than competitors. It emerged that the means

of contacting young people go beyond the simple transmission of information and rely on relational activities, and the creation of a strong link. Traditional outreach activities through advertisements, social networking, flyers barely had an effect. What worked was to contact the young people with activities that are related to their situation, their motivation and their interests. The necessity of having an informal approach (e.g. in public spaces such as at school, in a sport club, in a market, at a football match, at a music festival, or in a youth house) to reach the NEETs was underlined. In this regard, the work of street educators is crucial. Informal arrangements require flexibility, iteration, creativity and risk taking, exchange of information and trust. In addition, the approach promoting experimentations but allowing failures ('the right to be wrong') was encouraged in order to strengthen self-confidence and self-respect. It is important to help young people to know what they want but also what they do not want. This is essential to maintain the young people in the project and to motivate them. A 2017 report on the NEETs in the Liège region corroborates these findings by insisting on the need to be flexible and to avoid a rigid framework, and on the importance of networking and cooperation across the various actors. It also indicates that the group dynamic increases the motivation of young people, that the support and the follow-up of the participants needs to be regular.

#### **4.2.7 EQ 1.7 – To what extent YEI and ESF contributed to structural changes in national education systems, vocational training systems, public employment systems or youth policies?**

In the **Operational Programme Flanders**, it is recognised that basic training for young people is not enough, and an holistic approach (supported by strong partnerships) is more successful. In addition, it was underlined that the pilot dual learning projects funded by ESF are now being translated into regular policy.

In the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, it is recognised that the introduction of the NEETs as a target group urged the beneficiaries to work differently, to adopt a new approach and to have new beneficiaries on board who can better reach the young people far from the labour market (such as youth associations, mediators, street educators, etc.). YEI is very much linked to the Youth Guarantee, which is now extended to all young people contacting the PES (Actiris and Forem). It obliged public authorities to take an interest in this target group. Thanks to the YEI, NEETs are to become a cross-cutting issue in the national/regional public policy.

## 5 Efficiency

EQ 2 – How efficient has the YEI, and other youth-employment operations funded by the ESF, been in the achievement of their objectives?

### 5.1 Data based on the AIR 2018

This sub-section provides basic data from the AIR 2018 relevant to efficiency.

Table 14. Eligible expenditure declared to EC per participation

OP	ESF			YEI		
	Total participation 8ii	Expenditure declared 8ii in EUR	Overall unit cost 8ii in EUR	Total participation	Expenditure declared in EUR	Overall unit cost in EUR
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	81 447	18 658 260	229	140 122	26 009 638	186
OP Vlaanderen	7 308	9 895 347	1 354	-	-	-
EU-28 – IP8ii average			3 591			3 096

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 15. Eligible expenditure declared to EC per immediate result achieved

OP	ESF			YEI		
	Total results 8ii	Expenditure declared 8ii in EUR	Overall unit cost 8ii in EUR	Total results	Expenditure declared in EUR	Overall unit cost in EUR
OP Wallonie-Bruxelles	15 458	18 658 260	1 207	31 073	26 009 638	600
OP Vlaanderen	13 660	9 895 347	724	-	-	-
EU-28 – IP8ii			13 666			1 483

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 16. Average unit costs in Operational Programme Flanders based on available data up to end-August 2018, by type of action

Type of action	Investment priority	Name of the project	Expenditure declared / certified in EUR	Number of participants	Number in employment	Cost per participation in EUR	Cost per employed participants in EUR
Guidance towards employment	8.ii	Begeleiding naar tewerkstelling - IBAL/ABO*	1 337 326	7 954	3 116	168	429
	9.i	Werkinleving voor Jongeren - WIJ!**	4 105 041	5 250	2 673	782	1 536

\* Preliminary data, ongoing project

\*\* Antwerpen, Ieper, Randstad, Leuven, Vokans, Skillbuilders, Agilitas (projects ended in May 2018)

Source: Own calculations based on data provided by the Managing Authority

Table 17. Average unit costs in Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles based on available data up to end-August 2018, by type of action

	Type of action	Expenditure declared/certified in EUR	Number of participants	Number in employment	Cost per participant in EUR	Cost per employed participants in EUR
ESF 8ii	Total ESF*	10 799 572	68 713	1 193	157	9 052
	A.Work based learning, first job experience	6 748 427	25 888	17	261	396 966
	B.Education and training	1 808 551	2 041	4	886	452 138
	C.Guidance and support for young people	1 673 325	11 393	996	147	1 680
	Integrated actions (A+B+C and A+C)	569 269	29 391	176	19	3 234
YEI 8ii	Total YEI**	23 979 119	124 623	5 722	192	4 191
	A.Work based learning, first job experience	322 577	2 121	46	152	7 013
	B.Education and training	7 756 522	11 018	254	704	30 537
	C.Guidance and support for young people	2 613 679	43 766	5 229	60	500
	G.Support for institutional capacity	1 070 262	1 606	10	666	107 026
	Integrated actions (A+B, A+C, B+C, A+B+C)	12 216 079	66 112	183	185	66 755

Data only refer to projects with reported declared/certified expenditure.

\* All ESF projects except one are still ongoing.

\*\* ¼ of the YEI projects are still ongoing.

Source: Own calculations based on data provided by the Managing Authority

## 5.2 Answers to the Evaluation Questions

In the **Operational Programme Flanders**, it is recognised that the ESF entails a lot of administrative burden, but that the Simplified Cost Option helped to reduce it. ESF Vlaanderen is now developing an application that will help the final beneficiaries with the registration process (with a direct link to the PES database).

In the **Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles**, the administrative burden linked to the reporting to the European Commission was raised (in particular the limited number of characters in SFC2014, and the manual encoding of data related to the indicators). However, it is reported that as the projects have been gathered in a portfolio of projects, it helped the qualitative monitoring with the various beneficiaries. It was also stressed that traditional communication tools do not work with the NEETs. What is useful to increase the visibility of YEI and ESF-funded youth employment actions is to go into the field, to work with youth associations and street educators. Many communication activities were carried out in particular on YEI, including photo exhibitions of the participants in Brussels, Liège and Charleroi. In addition, a specific website ([www.enmieux.be](http://www.enmieux.be)), a YouTube channel, a Facebook page and a newsletter report on the various supported projects, including YEI projects.

## **6 Relevance**

EQ 3 – How relevant is the YEI, and the other ESF-funded youth employment operations?

In the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, beneficiaries reported that working with groups only composed of young people was not easy; and the young people themselves find that it is more interesting to be mixed with older people and that it would help them to go further. In addition, the definition of the NEETs is considered too restrictive (see the comment under EQ 1.1. above in relation to the scrapping of the '80/20 rule').

## **7 Coherence**

EQ 4 – How coherent are YEI and the other ESF-funded youth employment operations among themselves and with other actions in the same field?

In the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, it is recognised that complementarity between YEI and the Youth Guarantee was not easy. But it is expected that for the next programming period, more links will be established between the different policies, and more coherence will be achieved at the level of the actions.

## **8 EU Added value**

EQ 5 – What is the EU added value of the YEI and other ESF-funded youth employment operations?

In the Operational Programme Flanders, it is recognised that the ESF-funded youth employment programmes have an added value for the whole ESF, not specifically for the young people. ESF is considered to have helped reinforcing the Flemish labour market and employment policy. The regional PES provides several services to young unemployed, but WIJ! is unique in offering a more individualised support and guidance to especially vulnerable young people, reflecting the volume effect of the WIJ!. Even if according to the preliminary data, WIJ! is not found to have a significant impact on the employment of participants after 3 or 6 months, it needs to be highlighted that employment is not the primary objective for the WIJ! target groups which are particularly vulnerable, and that the positive soft outcomes of the programme should not be underestimated.

## **9 Sustainability**

EQ 6 – How sustainable are YEI and the other ESF-funded youth employment operations?

In the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, it is clear at the level of the Managing Authority that there is a need to continue ESF/YEI in the next programming period. Various beneficiaries made large efforts to reach the target groups, there is a real need for such actions, and the first results show that the support is effective. The authorities are in favour of extending eligibility in terms of age up to 29 years so that the group is more mixed (operators often report difficulties in working with very young people) and of having less strict eligibility criteria.



## 10 Conclusions

Financial implementation was low in the Operational Programme Flanders (mainly due to the late start of the projects) and in the YEI strand of Operational Programme the Wallonie-Bruxelles (again because of the late approval of projects but also due to changes in the application of eligibility criteria). On the other hand, outputs progressed according to the targets in both Operational Programmes. In terms of results, the target has already been exceeded in the Operational Programme Flanders while in the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, the target should be reached for YEI, but not for the ESF strand.

In the Operational Programme Flanders, all participants were reported as inactive while in the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles the majority are unemployed. But both Operational Programmes share the same characteristics as far as gender and education level are concerned, as in both, the majority of participants are men and are low educated.

In both Operational Programmes, strong partnership and individualised support adapted to the needs of young people were reported as key factors for the effectiveness of ESF and YEI youth employment operations.

In terms of effectiveness, according to the latest data available, in the Operational Programme Flanders, 45% of participants benefitting from 8.ii actions were in employment after 6 months. The corresponding share in the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles was 65% for participants who left YEI in 2015 (and even higher after 3 years – 75%). In addition, for the WIJ! programme in the Operational Programme Flanders, just over half of participants were in employment after exit. The preliminary results of a counterfactual impact analysis show no statistically significant effect of the programme on the probability of being employed 3 or 6 months after exit, but the effectiveness of the programme cannot be limited to the employment outcomes as the target groups are particularly far from the labour market.

In the Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles, most of the jobs obtained by the participants were precarious jobs. In most cases, the subjective quality of the transition was reported as good, but the objective quality of the transition as average. By linking the outcome in terms of the evolution of the status of participants between the exit of the measure (T, i.e. month of exit) and T+42 months and the indicators on the (subjective and objective) quality of the transition, it is found that only 10% of the participants had a positive transition of good quality.

## 11 Good Practices

<p><b>Title:</b> 'Sac Ados' (Operational Programme Wallonie-Bruxelles)</p> <p><b>Lead organisation:</b> AMO Mic-Ados (non-profit making association)</p> <p><b>Geographical coverage:</b> Eight areas in the North of the Luxembourg province of Belgium</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Schools, public social action centres (CPAS), social youth services, social accommodation agencies, residential services, social mediators, Public Employment Services</p> <p><b>Implementation period:</b> 2015-2020</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> EUR 150 120 (ESF+YEI amounts)</p> <p><b>Target groups:</b> Young people aged 15-22 who are not in education or training and who are vulnerable</p> <p><b>Type of intervention:</b> Guidance and support to individuals, First job experience, Education and training</p>
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>The project offers disadvantaged young NEETs the opportunity to bounce back and to (re)integrate school or a vocational training. The ESF/YEI finance various activities carried out by the beneficiary in addition to individual guidance and counselling (before, during and after the project). Three collective sessions (of 3 months) per year are organised: two of these focus on workshops to improve self-confidence and self-esteem and develop personal skills (such as autonomy, living in a group, expressing oneself) and short participative actions are also proposed (of about four days) where young people can give back to the community and discover or improve specific techniques in various sectors (such as in the field of construction, or in the 'green sector'). The last session (organised each year in October-December) is more dedicated to short trainings (of minimum two weeks) in several enterprises (such as a in flower shop or a fitness centre) to discover the labour market. In 2018, assistance was provided to 50 young people, but the number is growing each year (in particular the number of homeless young people). There are no official statistics on the situation of the young people after leaving the project, but it seems that most of them go back to school or attend a vocational training.</p>
<p><b>Lessons learnt</b></p> <p>The needs and requests of the target group are at the core of the project; partnerships are created based on these. Flexibility and pro-activity of the support (and in particular the 'trial and error approach') are recognised as keys for the success of the project. The variety of activities proposed (including entertainment activities to renew ties, and to promote group cohesion and solidarity) is also perceived as an essential element. In terms of outreach approach, the project becomes more and more popular; the word-of-mouth advertising seems to work pretty well, but young people are also referred by the various partners (such as schools or social youth services). It was however indicated that the age criteria are too restrictive, vulnerability does not start at the age of 16, it already begins earlier. Indeed, it is reported that many young people aged 13 or 14 already claim for assistance and cannot be concretely helped.</p>
<p><b>Title:</b> 'Work experience for young persons ('Werkinleving voor Jongeren' - WIJ!) (Operational Programme Flanders)</p> <p><b>Lead organisation:</b> ESF Flanders. The WIJ! programme is implemented by various beneficiaries, but Skill BuilderS (SBS) is the most important one (totalling 56% of all WIJ! participants for the seven projects that officially ended in May 2018).</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Public employment services (VDAB), Sport Vlaanderen, schools, social youth services, street workers.</p> <p><b>Implementation period:</b> The WIJ! programme is implemented since 2014 and is financed under IP9i. The project is now in its third phase (WIJ!3, which is planned to end in 2020).</p> <p><b>Geographical coverage:</b> The programme covers the whole Flanders (under WIJ!3, the SBS is currently active in three areas: Ghent, Antwerp and Waas en Dender).</p> <p><b>Funding:</b> National funds (60%) and ESF (40%). Over EUR 5 million has been declared up to now for all WIJ! projects (and about half of this amount concerns SBS).</p> <p><b>Target group:</b> Young people aged 18-25 years (when entering the intervention) who left secondary school without qualifications.</p> <p><b>Type of intervention:</b> Mainly guidance and support to individuals (but placement and follow-up in trainings and internships are also proposed).</p>
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>The objective of WIJ! is to provide young unqualified people with experience during 18 months to get the flavour of what working is, and to facilitate their entry on the labour</p>

market. While WIJ!1 and WIJ!2 put the emphasis on finding a job, training or internship for young people, WIJ!3 now primarily focuses on the preparation of the young people for the labour market. The idea is that it is essential to help the target group to address the barriers faced to the labour market. The programme therefore consists of intensive tailored guidance, the strengthening of soft skills, labour market orientation and coaching, but in addition, competence strengthening activities are also planned (such as participation in trainings and internships), though it seems that the large majority of participants only benefit from the intensive guidance trajectory. WIJ!3 puts a special emphasis on sport activities because it is seen as a tool to increase the employability of young people. It indeed helps them to acquire similar competences to those needed at the workplace such as complying with rules, punctuality, taking responsibilities, perseverance, self-empowerment and team work or to develop specific skills (for instance learning how to climb can help them to work at height). Young people who participate in internships or who succeeded in finding a job benefit from a follow-up support for about 3 months. Previously, the beneficiaries were paid according to their performance: they received a maximum of EUR 600 per completed action plan and EUR 2 000 per successful guidance trajectory (completion of all prescribed activities, in work for at least 3 months, or in qualifying training). Under WIJ!3, they are now paid based on the time spent for each young participant, which is considered as an improvement as more time can be dedicated to address the multiple problems faced by the young people. Up to now, a total of 7,813 participants were reported (about 60% of these are men, 82% have an education level below ISCED 3, and 82% are Belgian citizens). For the projects which already ended, about half of the participants were in employment after they left the programme.

**Lessons learnt**

VDAB, the regional PES in Flanders offers various services to unemployed youth, but the WIJ! programme is very much individualised and puts the focus on addressing the barriers faced by the target group and on tailored labour market guidance and orientation. Outreach activities carried out under WIJ!2 (with active presence in schools, youth houses, youth events, Pokémon hot spots etc.) contributed to raise awareness about the programme and to develop an intense and rich network of partners which is crucial to identify and reach young NEETs. Under WIJ!3, the focus is much less on outreach activities as the young people are referred to directly by the VDAB, and the current number of participants is satisfactory.

## **12 Information sources**

### **12.1 Persons interviewed**

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[www.esf.vlaanderen.be](http://www.esf.vlaanderen.be)

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Valérie-Anne Adam

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<https://www.micados.be/sac-ados>

Els Verstraeten

SBS Skillbuilders

<https://www.esf-agentschap.be/nl/inspiratiebron/themas/jongeren-en-werk/wij-3/wij-3>

[https://europa.eu/investeu/projects/youth-project-boosts-employment-flanders\\_en](https://europa.eu/investeu/projects/youth-project-boosts-employment-flanders_en)

### **12.2 References**

Sondage sur le devenir des stagiaires ayant terminé en 2015 une action de formation ou d'insertion financée par le FSE en Belgique francophone: Interprétation des données récoltées, Rapport final, Juin 2019 (Sonecom)

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Peer review sur l'identification et l'accrochage des jeunes et leur maintien dans le dispositif d'insertion et de formation, Synthèse, 1 décembre 2017, Agence Fonds Social Européen

Active labour market policies in Flanders – Evaluation of the ESF 'Work experience for young persons' programme, CRIE-JRC (not published yet)

### 13 Annexes

Table 18. Total common outputs for participations ESF/YEI under Investment Priority 8.ii, cumulative until 2018, by Operational Programme and indicator

Description Common Output indicator	OP Wallonie-Bruxelles						OP Flanders			Total		
	ESF			YEI			ESF					
	Total	%	% of women	Total	%	% of women	Total	%	% of women	Total	%	% of women
<b>Employment status</b>												
<b>CO01</b> Unemployed	19 440	24%	46%	61 421	44%	46%	0	0%		80 861	35%	46%
<b>CO02</b> of which Long-term unemployed	9 009	11%	46%	32 198	23%	46%	0	0%		41 207	18%	46%
<b>CO03</b> Inactive	61 993	76%	31%	78 701	56%	35%	7 308	100%	36%	148 002	65%	33%
<b>CO04</b> of which not in education or training	55 614	68%	31%	75 456	54%	35%	10	0%	10%	131 080	57%	33%
<b>CO05</b> Employed, including self-employed	14	0%	36%		0%		0	0%		14	0%	36%
<b>Total CO1+CO3+CO5</b>	81 447	100%	35%	140 122	100%	40%	7 308	100%	36%	228 877	100%	38%
<b>Age</b>												
<b>CO06</b> Below 25 years of age	81 443	100%	35%	140 122	100%	40%	7 307	100%	36%	228 872	100%	38%
<b>CO06a</b> Between 25-54 years of age	4	0%	75%	0	0%		1	0%	0%	5	0	75%
<b>CO07</b> Above 54 years of age	0	0%			0%		0	0%		0	0	0
<b>CO08</b> Above 54 years of age who are unemployed, or inactive	0	0%			0%		0	0%		0	0	0
<b>Education level</b>												
<b>CO09</b> With primary or lower secondary education (ISCED 1/2)	25 867	32%	34%	38 080	27%	38%	6 907	95%	35%	70 854	51%	37%
<b>CO10</b> With upper secondary or post-secondary Education (ISCED 3/4)	23 270	29%	40%	47 881	34%	44%	401	5%	44%	71 552	23%	43%
<b>CO11</b> With tertiary education (ISCED 5 to	3 041	4%	65%	5 960	4%	66%	0	0%		9 001	3%	66%

Description Common Output indicator	OP Wallonie-Bruxelles						OP Flanders			Total		
	ESF			YEI			ESF					
	Total	%	% of women	Total	%	% of women	Total	%	% of women	Total	%	% of women
8)												
<b>CO11a</b> Other / unknown ISCED	29 269	36%	28%	48 201	34%	33%	0	0%		77 470	23%	31%
<b>Other background characteristics</b>												
<b>CO12</b> Participants who live in jobless households		0%			0%			0%		0	0	0
<b>CO13</b> Participants who live in jobless households with dependent children		0%			0%			0%		0	0	0
<b>CO14</b> Participants who live in a single adult household with dependent children		0%			0%			0%		0	0	0
<b>CO14a</b> Other households	81 447	100%	35%	140 122	100%	40%	7 308	100%	36%	228 877	100%	38%
<b>CO15</b> Migrants, participants with a foreign background, minorities	1 973	2%	41%	10 504	7%	28%	1 451	20%	38%	13 928	10%	30%
<b>CO16</b> Participants with disabilities	2 221	3%	42%	546	0%	44%	258	4%	34%	3 025	2%	43%
<b>CO17</b> Other disadvantaged	6 364	8%	39%	13 622	10%	35%	1 409	19%	39%	21 395		36%
<b>CO18</b> Homeless or affected by housing exclusion	0	0%		0	0%		0	0%		0	0	0
<b>CO19</b> From rural areas	238	0%	45%	0	0%		626	9%	34%	864	0	45%

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 19. Common Result Indicators Investment Priority 8.ii, ESF/YEI, by Operational Programme

OP / Fund / Indicator	OP Wallonie-Bruxelles			OP Flanders			Total ESF	Total YEI	Total
	ESF	YEI	Total	ESF	YEI	Total			
CR01 inactive participants engaged in job searching upon leaving	308	1 599	1 907	7 308	-	7 308	7 616	1 599	9 215
CR02 participants in education/training upon leaving	2 416	16 084	18 500	843	-	843	3 259	16 084	19 343
CR03 participants gaining a qualification upon leaving	10 152	7 110	17 262	2 786	-	2 786	12 938	7 110	20 048
CR04 participants in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	2 582	6 280	8 862	2 723	-	2 723	5 305	6 280	11 585
CR05 disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education/ training, gaining a qualification, or in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	1 609	4 959	6 568	3 499	-	3 499	5 108	4 959	10 067
Share of total in %	10%	16%	14%	26%	-	26%	18%	16%	17%
Total number of immediate results	15 458	31 073	46 531	13 660	-	13 660	29 118	31 073	60 191

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

Table 20. Common Result Indicators Investment Priority 8.ii, ESF/YEI, by Operational Programme (2)

OP / Fund / Indicator	OP Wallonie-Bruxelles			OP Flanders			Total ESF	Total YEI	Total
	ESF	YEI	Total	ESF	YEI	Total			
CR06 participants in employment, including self-employment, 6 months after leaving	0	0	0	3 289	-	3 289	3 289	-	3 289
CR07 participants with an improved labour market situation 6 months after leaving	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	-	0
CR08 participants above 54 years of age in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	-	0
CR09 disadvantaged participants in employment, including self-employment, 6 months after leaving	0	0	0	1 630	-	1 630	1 630	-	1 630
Total number of long-term results	0	0	0	4 919	-	4 919	4 919	-	4 919

Source: SFC2014, based on AIR 2018, data extracted on 06.09.19

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