

IDSS COUNTRY STUDY

BELGIUM

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Section I: Summary

1. Key features of the ‘Proeftuinen’ reform

This country report is about experiments that took place in Flanders in 2009 (phase 1) and 2012-2013 (phase 2). These experiments were called ‘proeftuinen’ (experimental gardens) and are referred to in this text as ‘test-beds’ or ‘experiments’. These experiments as such are no policy reform, but they have contributed to policy changes in a later stage. Moreover, they have led to improved practices in the cooperation between employment services and social services at local and regional level, to enhance the (re)integration in the labour market of those groups far removed from the labour market.

The first phase of the test beds was conceptualised in 2008 in cooperation between the Vereniging voor Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (VVSG – Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)¹, the Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (VDAB – Flemish Public Employment Service (PES))² and the Minister of Employment at the time. It was at the start of the monetary crisis; a period of a tight labour market. The period before the start of the experiments was characterised by a large population growth in Belgium (the largest since 1965) with a peak in 2010, with a similar pattern in Flanders in the same period³. The Flemish economy flourished in the period of 2003-2007⁴, with an annual increase in GDP per capita of 3 to 5%.

The global financial crisis in 2007-2008 also hit Belgium with major shocks on the labour market. The number of people registered at the Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening (RVA - National Employment Office (NEO))⁵ rose to a record peak in 2010 (1.313.481 in Belgium and 702.825 in Flanders).

In parallel, the European Employment Strategy⁶ played an important role in the promotion and implementation of an active labour market policy, by fostering the employability of unemployed and

¹ The VVSG is the umbrella organisation of all Flemish municipalities, ‘Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn’ (OCMW – Public Centres for Social Welfare or PCSW), police districts and municipal associations.

² In this report, PES is used to refer to the Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling.

³ FOD Economie, K.M.O. Middenstand en Energie (2009), *Statistisch overzicht van België. Kerncijfers 2008*, Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie; Federaal Planbureau, (2014), *Economische analyses en vooruitzichten*, Perscommuniqué 18 maart 2014

⁴ Herremans, W., et al, (2007), *Tendrapport Vlaamse arbeidsmarkt 2007*, Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie, Leuven; <http://regionalestatistieken.vlaanderen.be/statistiek-economie-innovatie>

⁵ The National Employment Office is the public social security institution that manages the system of unemployment insurance and some employment measures. The NEO operates at federal level. As a result of the third state reform in 1989, job placement became a competence of the Belgian regions, while vocational training became a competence of the communities. In the same year, the Flemish PES was established.

inactive citizens through an active accompaniment in their search for a job. In July 2004, in Belgium a plan for the support and follow-up of unemployed (*Plan voor de Begeleiding en de Opvolging van werklozen*) was launched by the Federal Minister of Employment and Pensions (Frank Vandenbroucke). The plan aiming for a better follow-up and support of the unemployed in finding a job, was based on an improved coordination between the NEO and the regional PES. At the time, regional PES was responsible for the support and accompaniment of unemployed through a series of activation measures.

This shift towards a more active follow-up approach demanded a more intensive cooperation between the NEO and the regional employment services, as the NEO was meant to decide on possible sanctions based on information transferred by the PES (Royal Decree of 4 July 2004 on the modification of the unemployment regulation for unemployed people who have to look actively for a job)⁷. The fact that exclusion from unemployment benefits could increase the pressure on Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (OCMW- Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW)) (the main actor in the implementation of the Law on Right to Social Integration, of which the right to a subsistence allowance is one element), was, amongst others, demonstrated in a study of the Belfius bank of 2014^{8 9}.

In a similar move towards a more active policy, the system of income support was transformed into the right to social integration (Law on Right to Social Integration of 26 May 2002 – *RMI wet*)¹⁰.

In 2009, when the new plan (launched in 2004) was at cruising speed, 2,5% of the unemployed on full benefit under the age of 50 received a ‘warning’ on a monthly basis, as part of the closer follow-up of unemployed. A study showed that in 2009, 81% of the budget for activation was spent on the training and wages of facilitators specially trained to communicate with the unemployed about the sanctions. This in turn represents only 0.2% of the total amount of unemployment benefits at that time¹¹.

While the number of recipients of unemployment benefits decreased between 2004 and 2008 by 23%¹², for experts this is mainly due to the improvement of the economic situation. The follow-up of unemployed people certainly contributed to this decrease. At the same time, since the follow-up

⁶ The European employment strategy (EES) dates back to 1997, when the EU Member States undertook to establish a set of common objectives and targets for employment policy. Its main aim is the creation of more and better jobs throughout the EU: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=101&langId=en>, consulted on 19.04.2017.

⁷ According to Cockx, B. (2011), in reality this was mainly a transfer of data from PES to NEO.

⁸ See: <https://www.vdab.be/rechtenenplichten/sanctie> for an overview of these measures.

⁹ Belfius, (2014), Lokale financiën. OCMWs en politiezones, Brussel.

¹⁰ Bogaerts, K., et al, (2010), *Activering bij werkloosheid en recht op maatschappelijke integratie*, Onderzoek in opdracht van de FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, Universiteit Antwerpen

¹¹ Cockx, B., et al, (2011), Evaluatie van de activering van het zoekgedrag naar werk, SUI-VICHO; synthesis of the study: Sneller aan het werk dankzij activering, in: *Régards Economiques*, February 2011 – No85

¹² Bron: Statistisch Jaarboek van de RVA
http://www.onem.be/frames/frameset.aspx?Path=D_stat/&Items=2&Language=NL

procedure stretches over a lengthy period, its influence on the macro-economic evolution of unemployment will only be visible after some time¹³.

The experiments also have to be interpreted in the context of the State Reforms in Belgium. In the light of the Fifth State Reform of 2002 more competencies were transferred to the Regions (the local authority and provincial law, foreign trade, agriculture, development cooperation) but important policy areas were still the remit of the federal level, like activation policy. Employment policy and social policy were then already part of the competencies of the Flemish Region, while social security remained under the responsibility of the Federal Government. In the Flemish Decree on Local Social Policy (2004), a stronger and coordinating role of the local government is foreseen. As a result, municipalities and PCSW had to develop from 2005 onwards a common local social policy plan, comprising a vision on local social policy as well as a multi-annual planning, a division of tasks and a description of the way citizens and local actors can participate in the development and implementation of the local social policy¹⁴.

To understand how the system works, it is important to know that the Federal Parliament is responsible for the legal framework related to minimum income support, while the municipality is the main level responsible for the implementation. It is the task of every PCSW in each municipality to ensure the right to social integration of individuals without sufficient means of existence and who fulfil the legal conditions related to each of the policy instruments in place: The aim is to achieve maximal integration and participation in society through employment, the development of an individualised project for social integration and/or minimum income support.

In 2007, the Chief Executive of the Flemish PES presented his vision of a more holistic approach of the support offered to unemployed in his blog, in which he included the recipients of subsistence allowance (*leefloon gerechtigden*), a target group for which, at the time, no comprehensive approach was in place¹⁵ and which is dependent on the PCSW¹⁶. This blog-article is considered¹⁷ as the first manifestation of the willingness to start the 'experimental gardens'. During the interviews, it became clear that it was the combination of the publishing of the blog-article and the reaction it triggered within the VVSG that started the debates on the experiments.

The logic behind the experiments was to increase cooperation between PES and PCSW to further stimulate and improve the integration of clients of the PSWC and (high) risk clients of the PES into the labour market or other employment initiatives. The experiments started from the idea that clients of both PES and PCSW have to benefit from a qualitative support and a coherent trajectory of intake, screening and support for professional (and social) integration.

¹³ Cockx, B., et al, (2011), Evaluatie van de activering van het zoekgedrag naar werk, SUI-VICHO; synthesis of the study: Sneller aan het werk dankzij activering, in: *Régards Economiques*, February 2011 – No85

¹⁴ Vanreppelen, J., (2014), *Lokaal Sociaal Beleid in de meerjarenplanning: Missen lokale besturen het lokaal sociaal beleidsplan?* The legal framework changed in 2012 with an adaptation of this Flemish Decree on Local Social Policy. Since then, the local social policy is integrated into the multiannual plan of the municipality and/or the PCSW; there is no separate plan anymore.

¹⁵ <https://www.vdab.be/communicatie/weblog/jun07.pdf>

¹⁶ The Public Centre for Social Welfare are in some publications in English referred to as local Centre for Public Assistance (CPAS).

¹⁷ Struyven, L., & Vanhoren, I. (red.), et al, (2009), *Proeftuin VDAB – OCMW Eindrapport*, HIVA – KULeuven

With the introduction of the Job Centres (in 2000)¹⁸, the cooperation between the PES and other actors, such as the PCSW, had already taken a new dimension. However, the integration of the service provision between PES and PCSW within the Job Centres proved to be a challenge. When the Job Centres were established, they were set up differently in different areas. While the PCSW were considered to be an important ‘partner’ in the implementation of the Job Centres, in reality PCSW were involved in about 50% of the Job Centres¹⁹.

One of the conclusions of the process evaluation of the Job Centres (2007) was that the cooperation between PES and PCSW needed a new impulse. To activate as many clients as possible depending on each organisation, cooperation was considered to be an important instrument, especially in view of the structural shortages on the labour market and of vacancies hard to fill at that time²⁰.

Historically, the PCSW and PES have a different mission and do not target the same groups. For the PES, the main target group are the non-employed job seekers (domain of social security), while for the PCSW the main target group are people who, after screening, are identified as ‘falling out of the labour market’. Policy changes in the fields of employment and social welfare in the context of activation policies have somewhat blurred the boundaries between the action domains of both organisations even though, for most PCSW, activation was not a new domain of work. Already since the 70s, PCSW could make use of Art 60 and Art 61²¹ of the PCSW regulatory framework to employ their target group. Yet, throughout the years, the integration into the regular labour market has become an important domain of work of PCSW, and numerous PCSW have their own service (department) dedicated to coaching clients towards (re)integration into the labour market. Similarly, PES was already tasked to (re)integrate recipients of subsistence allowances into the labour market, which depended on labour market ready clients to be registered on their listings. The registration of clients of PCSW to the PES depended on the initiative and stance of the PCSW to stimulate this (the diversified approach of PCSW in relation to registration of their clients to PES was confirmed during

¹⁸ Per area, the key regional and local service providers active in the domain of labour market and employment are brought together under the same roof (Job Centres as one-stop-shops). At the start in 2000, 141 Job Centres were planned. The purpose was to cluster the services and products of various public and non-profit organisations working on employment and labour market to target different groups: unemployed, employees and employers.

¹⁹ Van Hemel, L., en L. Struyven, (2007), *Naar één loket voor werk. Evaluatie van de ruimtelijke spreiding, het gebruik en het partnerschap van de werkwinkel*. Deelrapport 2., HIVA – onderzoek in het kader van VIONA

²⁰ <http://www.werk.be/cijfers-en-onderzoek/rapporten/procesevaluatie-van-de-werkwinkels-evaluatie-van-de-netwerkbenadering-en-de-ruimtelijke-spreiding-van-de-werkwinkels-en> On this website the different related reports are available. For a summary: Struyven, L., (et al), (2007), *Naar één loket voor werk. Synthese en aanbevelingen over de ruimtelijke spreiding en het partnerschap van de werkwinkel*, HIVA, KULeuven

²¹ Article 60 § 7 is a form of social service in which the PCSW provides a job to someone who has dropped out of the labour market, with the aim of reintroducing him/her into the social security system and in the labour market. The PCSW is always the legal employer.

In the event of an employment under Article 61, the PCSW works with an employer to realize its employment task. In the special case that the PCSW cooperates with a private employer for the employment of its entitled clients, it receives from the federal government an allowance for the employment and possible training of the employed person.

the interviews)²². These blurred boundaries had raised the question how parallel and overlapping interventions can be avoided without losing sight of the specificities of both target groups.

The experiments ran between 2009 and 2013, with a gap between 2010 and 2012. The first phase of the test beds was conceptualised in 2008 in a cooperation between VVSG, PES and the Minister of Employment of the time. The improved cooperation and coordination between PES and PCSW for the first phase of the test beds (January – September 2009) was primarily aiming at:

A strengthened management role (*regiefunctie*) of the PES on the labour market and

An enhanced management role (*regiefunctie*) of the PCSW in social welfare policy, along its crucial role as actor in the employment policy.²³

Various actors were involved in the experiments:

- VVSG: coordinating the experiments on behalf of the PCSW offices involved. VVSG was also involved in the steering group.
- PES Flanders: coordinating the experiments on behalf of the employment services. PES Flanders was involved in the steering group.
- Federal Services for Social Inclusion: involved in the steering group.
- Local PES services: where the experiments were implemented. Some of them participated in the steering group.
- PCSW offices: where the experiments were implemented. Some of them participated in the steering group.
- HIVA – KU Leuven: in charge of the design and implementation of the evaluation of the experiments; participated in the steering group.
- CC Consult: responsible for the process guidance of the experiments in phase 1; participated in the steering group.

In 2009, 11 experiments were set up in 11 cities/regions in Flanders²⁴. The test-beds were selected amongst the PCSW members of the Management Board PCSW of the VVSG. PCSWs could volunteer to be part of the experimental gardens. In the selection process, the diversity of the local settings was considered, as well as the socio-economic contexts, the existing cooperation between PCSW and PES, as well as the involvement of the PCSW in the Job Centres. However, in 2010, the results of the experiments were thin enough to be described as 'embryonic', which meant that a thorough evaluation could not be carried out²⁵.

²² Franssen, A, (2014), OCMW's en gewestelijke diensten voor arbeidsbemiddeling: een spanningsvolle samenwerking bij de begeleiding van jongeren, In: *Armoede in België. Jaarboek 2014*, edited by Pannecoucke, I., et al, pp 295-320, Academia Press, Gent

²³ Van Mellaert, L., J., Kuppens & L., Struyven, (2013), Samenwerking op (de) proef. Procevaluatie van fase 2 van de proeftuinen voor samenwerking tussen de VDAB en de OCMW's in Vlaanderen, VIONA-project, HIVA – KU Leuven. Vlaams Interuniversitair Onderzoeksnetwork Arbeidsmarktrapportering (VIONA) is the Flemish Inter-university research network on labour market reporting, that was set up in 1994 by the Flemish government and the Flemish social partners, to strengthen strategic labour market research in Flanders.

²⁴ Flanders counts 308 municipalities; Belgium 589.

²⁵ VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009), *Proeftuin OCMW – VDAB. Eindrapport*

In the second phase (January 2012 – December 2012 with an extension of a few months in the beginning of 2013), five test-beds out of the 11 volunteered to deepen the results of phase 1. The choice was made to focus on less experiments but to enter more in-depth in the monitoring and analysis. The pause between phase 1 and phase 2 is explained by interviewees by the following factors:

The 6th State Reform (December 2011), which transferred the responsibility for activation policies from the federal to the regional level.

The financial crises, which resulted in difficulty to find a new budget.

Despite a cooperation between PES and PCSW in the framework of the Job Centres introduced in 2000, activating the more challenging clients and (re)integrating them in the labour market continued to be problematic. It was pointed out in the interviews that political will and a support on the ground are important to make things work. While there was already a framework for cooperation through the Job Centres, this framework was not sufficiently nourished by those involved.

The following problems were already identified at the beginning of the experiments (based on the interviews):

- PES services and PCSW services did not really know each other.
- Both organisations had their own set of activation instruments, but they did not really know each other's approach, nor did they take advantage of the eventual complementarity of the tools. In the interviews, it was stated that there was a strong global resistance to 'transferring' instruments from one organisation to the other (PES and PCSW).
- The 'warm transfer' of dossiers (which goes beyond the pure transfer of data/information and implies discussing the support needed by a client) between PCSW and PES did not work well.

A steering committee was set up for the follow-up of the experiments in phase 1. This group included a representative of the central PES services, a representative of the Federal Services on Social Integration, a representative of the VVSG, HIVA, CC Consult, 4 representatives of the PCSW and 4 representatives of the local PES.

The Minister of Employment allocated a budget of 210.000 € to the first phase of the experimental gardens. However, this was not for the implementation as such, but rather for the evaluation and process support of the experiments. The experiments were implemented without financial support for the local partners. Predictably enough, the absence of a dedicated budget, but also the hasty start of the experiments, provided little guarantee for structural and sustainable changes (impact). The second phase was financed through the VIONA programme with a similar budget. During phase 2, the budget was spent on process evaluation and instrument development.

The experiments were not intended to make any changes to the autonomy of the institutions involved, but to induce changes in the way that they cooperate. During the experiments, it became clear to both organisations, PES and PCSW, that it was not a question of transferring assignments/tasks or competencies, but rather of creating a framework for closer cooperation. In the experiments framework agreements, however, no mention is made of the implications for the staff involved in both organisations (required competencies), etc.

Various interviewees confirmed that the experiments contributed to policy changes later on, but that the experiments as such cannot be considered as a policy reform. The experiments were one of the components leading to an increased cooperation between PES and PCSW and an improved practice e.g. in relation to exchange of data and delivering of a more comprehensive support to unemployed. Yet, some interviewees found it difficult to say something about the impact of the experiments on the actual target groups (there was no specific monitoring of the clients involved after the experiments). For others, it is clear that the target group benefits from a more integrated screening and support system, whereby both dimensions (work/employment and social welfare issues) are considered.

Based on the interviews, one of the results that can be identified is that the experiments clarified the idea of ‘revolving doors’ clients. At the end of an Art 60 employment, the person is transferred to the PES services. These services are not always equipped to provide the necessary follow-up, which may lead to the client's unemployment benefit being suspended, which in turn sends the person back to the PCSW. This mechanism was known and was even one of the reasons to start the test beds, but the test beds allowed to clarify it further.

Another result has been the (introduction and/or) implementation of the concept of ‘warm transfer’ in the course of the experiments, which spells out that the referral of a client from one organisation to the other necessitates a consultation between the actors involved²⁶. ‘Warm transfer’ goes beyond the pure transfer of data/information and implies discussing the support needed by a client.

2. Driving forces, success and failure factors of the ‘Proeftuinen’ reform

The Minister of Employment at the time (Frank Vandenbroucke) was truly supportive of the initiative, taken up by both the PES and VVSG. He was very much in favour of the active welfare state. In 1999, the (federal) Verhofstadt I government (1999-2003) (in which Frank Vandenbroucke was Minister of Social Affairs and Pensions) set itself the task of turning Belgium into what it called an ‘active welfare state’. The aim was to combine ‘new risk’ and preventative policies, notably through activation, while also emphasizing the need to maintain adequate social benefits to cater for traditional social risks. Activation became a key instrument for the (federal) Verhofstadt II government (2003-2007) (in which Frank Vandenbroucke was Minister of Employment and Pensions)²⁷.

An important hurdle to overcome (during the experiments) was the definition of the target group for the experiments. While researching useful and relevant criteria, it seemed that a specific group of clients of the PES services, i.e. those with a medical, mental, psychological and/or psychiatric problem was partly overlapping in terms of their characteristics with the population of subsistence

²⁶ There is no consensus amongst the interviewees of the local PES and PCSW whether this concept existed already before the experiments but that it was only implemented during the experiments, or that it was introduced as part of the experiments.

²⁷ Vandenbroucke, F., (2012), *The Active Welfare State revisited*, CSB Working Paper No12/9, University of Antwerp, Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy; see also for more background on the activation policy of F. Vandenbroucke in: Vilrocx, J. & J. De Schampheleire, (2000), Belgian social policy inspired by new active welfare state approach, published in *Eironline*: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/articles/social-policies-quality-of-life/belgian-social-policy-inspired-by-new-active-welfare-state-approach>

allowance recipients of the PCSW. However, the follow-up and support to that group was/is delivered from a different viewpoint. It was explained in the interviews that the support provided by the PES is based on a labour market perspective, while the PCSW support starts from a more social-welfare, but also rights-based perspective. The description of the first phase of the test-beds concluded²⁸ that the cooperation was mainly based on a transfer of PCSW clients to PES services, and not so much the other way around.

In the cooperation between PES and PCSW, already foreseen in the framework of the Job Centres, issues related to confidentiality of data on clients were noted. Organisations working with PES services (like e.g. organisations delivering training and/or coaching) in the context of reintegration of job seekers into the labour market had only a limited access to the client dossiers.

Once the client was included in the experiment, alignment was necessary between the two organisations (PES and PCSW). That process was not straightforward. At the start of a client's trajectory, counsellors were not necessarily fully aware nor informed about the support already provided by the other organisation. In some test-beds, the counsellors of the PCSW tried to find out which of the clients were also supported by the PES, after which they informed the PES counsellors about the support that they offered (or were planning to offer). To gather information, PCSW counsellors depended on the information given by the client and to some extent by the online client database of the PES. At that time, full access to the PES database was not possible and the level of detail of the information entered in the database varied (especially information about social welfare issues). Furthermore, PCSW counsellors stated in the interviews that often information given by their clients in relation to mental and social wellbeing is sensitive, hence their reluctance to fully register it in the system. In the PES services as well, counsellors did not always know that their client received support from PCSW, they also depended on the information given by the client. When a client was recipient of a subsistence allowance, they often assumed that he/she received other support from the PCSW as well.

The follow-up of the clients was another challenge in the experiments. Information provided by other organisations about changes or the support provided was in most cases registered in the client's dossier but was not always noticed by the PCSW counsellor consulting the dossier. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the PCSW counsellor did not have full access to all data in the online dossier. When a client was referred to the other organisation (from PES to PCSW or reverse), the responsibility of the dossier remained with the organisation where the client was registered in the first place, unless decided differently between the organisations.

An important source of information for the follow-up of trajectories within the experiments were meetings between the organisations about the clients in question (*'cliëntoverleg'*). However, these meetings or spaces for consultation did not systematically take place in all experiments and were limited in some (e.g. in Leuven). In the Leuven PES, the communication with the local PCSW is fluid and spontaneous when needed. In Mortsel, these meetings were more structured and were even part of a cooperation agreement between the PES and PCSW. These bilateral meetings (in some cases also involving the client) were considered to be a big step forward in the cooperation. The experiments lifted personal contacts between professionals of the PES and PCSW to a higher more structural level, amongst others through these meetings.

²⁸ VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009), *Proeftuin OCMW – VDAB. Eindrapport*

The evaluation finding that the solutions to improve cooperation were mainly supported at the operational level²⁹ (counsellors and their supervisors), was confirmed in the interviews. Still, to come to a more integrated approach, more involvement and support of higher levels is needed (within the organisations, but also of policy levels) and between the policy domains (employment and social welfare) in Flanders (regional, provincial and local). During the field work, an example was found where this actually happened, hence the sustainability and further development of the cooperation after the experiments.

One of the factors that has interfered with the implementation of the experiments was that there was no overall agreement on what an activation policy should be (e.g. interpretation of the concept of 'labour market readiness as the basis for a PCSW client to register to PES services), nor was there a broader policy framework or support policy (e.g. representatives of the Cabinet of the Minister of Employment did not attend the meetings of the steering committee).

Lastly, existing structural factors have hindered cooperation. Each of the institutions involved has only the competency to sanction its 'own' group of clients. Moreover, the activation instruments of both organisations were funded by different governance levels (PES by the Flemish regional level; PCSW by the Federal level), each with its own requirements in terms of administration, conditions, registration, etc.

3. Good practices and dissemination possibilities in an EU context

Based on the interviews, the joint intake and screening of the public employment services (PES) and the social services (PCSW) results in benefits for the client, in the sense that a more integrated approach of his/her support becomes possible and this from the start of the trajectory. This joint intake is not per definition a duo-intake whereby a counsellor from the employment services and a counsellor from the social services sit together, but this can be done through joint meetings on a regular basis, with or without the client. The instrument that is used for screening is in this context important to ensure that the necessary information is gathered, that all counsellors ask the same questions and use the same approach, but at the same time, it is necessary to make sure that the instrument is not too cumbersome. While before but also during the experiments, each organisation had its own screening instrument/approach, the cooperation through the experiments resulted in discussions about common instruments, e.g. the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, introduced in PES and PCSW cooperations in 2016. Furthermore, the joint meetings whereby specific client cases were discussed during the experiments, but also in the period after (at least in some of the PCSW-PES cooperations) was considered to be very useful and complementary to the usage of screening instruments.

During the field work at local level, two instruments were referred to as relevant and useful in a more comprehensive approach:

- The instrument for professional and social activation, developed by PCSW in Antwerp, which is used as a registration tool, whereby information is gathered in relation to the activation approach and '*drempels*' (hurdles) that can interfere with the activation process (medical,

²⁹ VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009), *Proeftuin OCMW – VDAB. Eindrapport*

psychological, housing, family, social factors, communication skills and 'other' such as mobility, resilience.

- The socio-professional balance, also developed by PCSW³⁰ provides a framework and a number of tools for designing an effective trajectory by meeting the specific needs of the individual in relation to the socio-professional integration. The main objective is to take into account the client's situation, abilities, skills, expectations and needs.
- These instruments were not developed as part of the experiments but were used during the experiments.

³⁰ This instrument was developed in the period 2003-2005 by a working group in which PCSW of the three Belgian regions participated (Flemish Region, Walloon Region and Brussels-Capital Region).

Section II: Detailed description of the reform episode

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1. Setting the scene

1.1. The broad socio-economic and political context

Belgium is characterised by cultural pluralism. Different languages and different cultural and socio-economic tissues have led to the reforms of the State. Following four State Reforms (between 1970 and 1993), Belgium has evolved into a federal state. The start of the experiments as described in this country study is set against the backdrop of the Belgian Fifth State Reform (2001), which transferred further competences to the level of the Regions and Communities (agriculture, maritime fisheries, international trade, municipality and Province laws, etc.) and modified how the institutions of the Brussels Region operate.

The start of the initiative (2009 for phase 1 and 2012-2013 for phase 2) coincided with a period of large population growth in Belgium, in fact the largest since 1965. This robust growth started in 2005 and continued until 2011, with a peak in 2010 (the population growth rate in 2010 was 1,48% for Belgium, while it was -0,04% for EU28). Belgium had the highest growth rate after Cyprus and Luxembourg³¹. A similar trend can be identified in Flanders in the same period³².

The Flemish economy flourished in the period of 2003-2007³³, with an annual increase in GDP per capita of 4 to 5% (see figure 1 in annex A.6.). The economic boost in the 2003-2007 period suggested that the employment rate would continue to grow, but the figures show that the employment rate almost stabilised from 2008 onwards. In terms of employment, the economic lift seems to have mainly benefitted women in the period 2003 to 2007 (both at the level of the Belgium and Flanders) (see figures 2a and 2b in annex A.6.).

The global financial crisis in the period preceding the reform also hit Belgium with major shocks on the labour market. The number of people registered at the National Employment Office (NEO) (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening – RVA)³⁴ rose to a record high in 2010 (1.313.481 in Belgium and 702.825 in Flanders) (see table 1 in annex A.6.).

The European Employment Strategy³⁵ played an important role in the promotion and implementation of an active labour market policy, by fostering the employability of unemployed and inactive citizens through an active accompaniment in their search for a job. These European impulses have influenced policies in various European countries in relation to activation and support of

³¹ Eurostat figure : Population change – demographic balance : http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_gind&lang=en

³² FOD Economie, K.M.O. Middenstand en Energie (2009), *Statistisch overzicht van België. Kerncijfers 2008*, Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie; Federaal Planbureau, (2014), *Economische analyses en vooruitzichten*, Perscommuniqué 18 maart 2014

³³ Herremans, W., et al, (2007), *Tendrapport Vlaamse arbeidsmarkt 2007*, Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie, Leuven; <http://regionalestatistieken.vlaanderen.be/statistiek-economie-innovatie>

³⁴ The National Employment Office is the public social security institution that manages the system of unemployment insurance and some employment measures. The NEO operates at federal level. As a result of the Third State Reform in 1989, job placement became a competence of the Belgian regions, while vocational training became a competence of the Belgian communities. In the same year, the Flemish PES was established.

³⁵ The European employment strategy (EES) dates back to 1997, when the EU Member States undertook to establish a set of common objectives and targets for employment policy. Its main aim is the creation of more and better jobs throughout the EU: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=101&langId=en>, consulted on 19.04.2017.

unemployed and inactive people. The instruments in use evolved from a passive benefits policy to a policy of active support and follow-up. This was also visible in the Belgian policy landscape³⁶.

The composition of the Flemish Government shifted in the periods 2004-2009 and 2009-2014, with a fierce decrease of the number of seats allocated to the Flemish nationalistic extreme right-wing party (*Vlaams Belang*) and an increase of the number of seats of the Flemish nationalistic conservative right wing party (N-VA) (see figures 3a and 3b in annex A.6).

1.2. The activation and poverty alleviation agenda and other relevant political issues

European impulses have inspired Belgium, just like other Member States to implement a number of policy changes related to the activation and accompaniment of unemployed people. The European activation élan resulted on 30 April 2004 in a cooperation agreement between the Federal State, the Regions and the Communities in relation to the active accompaniment and follow-up of unemployed people.

In July 2004, a plan for the support and follow-up of the unemployed (*Plan voor de Begeleiding en de Opvolging van werklozen*) was launched by the Federal Minister of Employment and Pensions (Frank Vandembroucke). This plan aiming for a better follow-up and support of the unemployed in finding a job, was based on an improved coordination between the NEO and the regional Public Employment Services (PES) (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (VDAB) in Flanders*). The NEO was at that time responsible for the follow-up of the unemployed, evaluating periodically their efforts in their search for a job. If these efforts were negatively assessed, sanctions could be imposed. The regional PES was responsible for the support and accompaniment of unemployed people through a series of activation measures.

The controversiality of the plan (the trade unions were of the opinion that the Minister opened ‘a hunt on the unemployed’ in a period with too few job vacancies, especially in the Walloon and Brussels regions)³⁷, did not prevent its implementation. The NEO reported in 2009 that since the gradual implementation of the plan (gradual implementation by age group), the unemployment has decreased (see also table 1 in annex A.6.), but that the crisis had slowed down this positive trend. In the same year, the NEO announced an increase in violations of the rules, which does not necessarily signify an increase in fraud, but rather an improved control mechanism³⁸.

As a result of this plan, important reforms have been implemented in the Belgian unemployment benefit system while at the same time, a procedure for the activation of job seekers (*zoekgedrag naar werk*) has been gradually introduced. Through this new activation procedure (part of the comprehensive approach introduced in 2004), unemployed people who cannot demonstrate that they have made sufficient efforts to find work run the risk to see their unemployment benefit (temporarily) reduced or suspended³⁹. In parallel to this follow-up by the NEO, regional employment

³⁶ Bogaerts, K., Marx, I., Vandelannoote, D., and N., Van Mechelen, (2010), *Activering bij werkloosheid en recht op maatschappelijke integratie*, Onderzoek in opdracht van de FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, Universiteit Antwerpen

³⁷ Cockx, B., M., Dejemepe, B. Van der Linden, (2007), *Le Plan d'Accompagnement et de Suivi des chômeurs favorise-t-il l'insertion en emploi ?* In: *Regards économiques* no 49: http://www.regards-economiques.be/index.php?option=com_reco&view=article&cid=58

³⁸ RVA, (2009), *Jaarverslag 2009*, RVA, Brussel

³⁹ Cockx, B., et al, (2011), *Evaluation de l'activation du comportement de recherche d'emploi*, projet finance par la Politique scientifique fédérale dans le cadre du programme ‘Société et Avenir’, Academia Press, Gent

services (PES) provide support and accompaniment to the unemployed (on benefit or not) to increase their prospects to find a job.

The 2004 plan integrated the ‘right to accompaniment’ for unemployed people (i.e. the right to receive support from PES services in their job search, such as training, coaching), but with this right came also a sharpened control of the compliance with the duties related to the awarding of unemployment benefits.

In short, the reform on the accompaniment and follow-up of the unemployed set up in 2004 combines encouragements to find work by reinforcing access to the active support provided by the PES with the threat of sanctions if the efforts to find work by those on unemployment benefits are assessed as insufficient (NEO level).

This shift towards a more active follow-up approach demanded a more intensive cooperation between the NEO and the regional employment services, as the NEO decided on possible sanctions based on information transferred by the PES (Royal Decree of 4 July 2004 on the modification of the unemployment regulation for unemployed people who have to look actively for a job)⁴⁰. In the Flemish coalition agreement 2004-2009 it was stipulated that all unemployed people would be contacted and urged within six months to follow a customised and mandatory individual trajectory⁴¹.

In a similar move towards a more active policy, the system of income support was transformed into the right to social integration (Law on Right to Social Integration of 26 May 2002 – *RMI wet*)⁴². With this reform, the PCSW have a framework striving for maximal integration and participation in society. Three instruments are put forward to achieve integration: employment, the subsistence allowance and the individualised approach for integration. These instruments can be used separately or in a combined form and attuned to the needs of the individual client. Via the individualised approach, the PCSW have the possibility to monitor clients in their professional and/or social activation process.

The activation policy of unemployed people on benefit was shaped in Flanders through the concept of ‘*sluitende aanpak*’ (**comprehensive approach**) introduced in the period 2003-2004 by the Flemish PES, specifying that every unemployed person has the right to a suitable job and to support (free of charge), aiming at sustainable employment, including access to free vocational training. This approach was based on the model earlier implemented, i.e. the model of ‘*trajectbegeleiding*’, process guidance introduced by the Flemish PES in 1998 for the accompaniment of unemployed people towards their integration into the labour market. The more recent comprehensive approach entails a multi-tiered accompaniment model where the accompaniment (such as counselling sessions) intensifies with the duration of unemployment or the further the job seeker is from the labour market.

The accompaniment model can be further differentiated between two of its strands, clearly inspired by European guidelines: a preventive and a curative approach. The aim of the preventive operation is to integrate every unemployed person into the trajectory of accompaniment before 6 months (in the case of < 25 years of age) or 12 months (in the case of > 25 years of age) of unemployment. In the curative stream, the focus is on accompaniment of long term unemployed people who have been

⁴⁰ According to Cockx, B. (2011), in reality this was mainly a transfer of data from PES to NEO.

⁴¹ Leroy, F., & De Haeck, S. (2008). Van sluitende aanpak naar sluitend maatpak, In: *Over Werk*. Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt WSE, 18 (3-4), pp 25-35. Leuven: Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie/ Uitgeverij Acco.

⁴² Bogaerts, K., et al, (2010), *Activering bij werkloosheid en recht op maatschappelijke integratie*, Onderzoek in opdracht van de FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, Universiteit Antwerpen

directed by the NEO into the procedure for activation of job seeking and who have not yet been accompanied by the PES.

Since 2010, 'individual accompaniment' or '*sluitend maatpak*' (**tailor made measures**) is implemented by the Flemish PES for all unemployed people. This individual support aims at detecting early in the process, individual issues (areas requiring specific attention) and finding tailor-made solutions. Before the '*sluitend maatpak*' (tailor made measures), a well determined mix of instruments was offered and used for different target groups but not per se adjusted to the needs of individual clients within that target group. E.g. a highly skilled unemployed person of > 25 year, received after 9 months of unemployment a more intensive support, while for a low skilled unemployed person this support started already after 6 months. In the new approach, the needs of the individual are far more important in the determination of the support that he/she receives. Within the '*sluitend maatpak*' approach, specific attention is paid to specific groups, like youngsters and migrants.

In the system now in place, the obligation of seeking work is controlled by the NEO whilst the obligation of accepting a job offer is controlled by the regional PES, who transfer any refusal of an "acceptable" proposal to the NEO who then decides on possible sanctions.

An evaluation of the activation policies covering the period of 2004 to 2009⁴³ and focusing on the age group 25 to 30 years old concludes that the reformed approach enhances the return to work in all Belgian regions but especially in Flanders, underlining that a control system of job seekers is clearly more efficient when job offers are available, which is more the case in Flanders than in Wallonia or Brussels. If people go back to work more quickly (and this accelerated return to the labour market concerns more men than women), they also tend to accept jobs of poorer quality (slight reduction in salaries and instable positions). The activation policy also stimulates the participation in training, which could lead to a longer term positive impact on employment.

In 2009, when the new plan was at cruising speed, 2,5% of the unemployed on full benefit under the age of 50 received a 'warning' on a monthly basis, as part of the closer follow-up of unemployed. A study showed that in 2009, 81% of the budget for activation was spent on the training and wages of facilitators specially trained to communicate with the unemployed about the sanctions. This in turn represents only 0.2% of the total amount of unemployment benefits at that time⁴⁴.

While the number of recipients of unemployment benefits decreased between 2004 and 2008 by 23%⁴⁵, for experts this is mainly due to the improvement of the economic situation. The follow-up of unemployed people certainly contributed to this decrease. At the same time, since the follow-up procedure stretches over a lengthy period, its influence on the macro-economic evolution of unemployment will only be visible after some time⁴⁶.

However, the activation policy can be viewed as a fair compensation of the Belgian provision for **unlimited duration of employment benefit**, as it enhances the individual responsibility of the unemployed on benefit, who can appear unaware of the costs of his/her benefits to the community

⁴³ Cockx, B., et al, (2011), *Evaluation de l'activation du comportement de recherche d'emploi*, Série Société et Avenir, Belspo, Academia Press

⁴⁴ Cockx, B., et al, (2011), Evaluatie van de activering van het zoekgedrag naar werk, SUI-VICHO; synthesis of the study: Sneller aan het werk dankzij activering, in: *Régards Economiques*, February 2011 – No85

⁴⁵ Statistisch Jaarboek van de RVA
http://www.onem.be/frames/frameset.aspx?Path=D_stat/&Items=2&Language=NL

⁴⁶ Cockx, B., et al, (2011), Evaluatie van de activering van het zoekgedrag naar werk, SUI-VICHO; synthesis of the study: Sneller aan het werk dankzij activering, in: *Régards Economiques*, February 2011 – No85

and forgetful to the advantages that his/her employment can bring to the collectivity in the form of taxes.

In 2007, the Chief Executive of the Flemish PES presented his vision of a more holistic approach for the unemployed in his blog, including the target group of subsistence allowance recipients (*leefloon gerechtigden*), a target group for which, at the time, no comprehensive approach was in place⁴⁷ and which is dependent on the PCSW. This blog-article is considered⁴⁸ as the first manifestation of the willingness to start the test beds. During the interviews, it became clear that it was the combination of the publishing of the blog-article and the reaction it triggered within the VVSG that started the debates on the experiments.

One year later (in 2008), the Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving (HIVA - Research Institute for Work and Society)⁴⁹ published a study on the development of an integral concept of labour market integration for (the most) vulnerable groups, which included a strengthened cooperation between the PES and the PCSW.

In Flanders, there are various types of measures for professional and social activation⁵⁰:

- For the group of unemployed and people living on a subsistence allowance, e.g.: **Article 60 § 7** (Law on PCSW of 1976): targeting people with a subsistence allowance who have left the labour market or who have dropped out of the labour market. Besides integration into the labour market, this measure aims also at reintegration into the system of social security. This employment cannot last longer than the period required to fill the conditions to get back into the social security system. In most cases, the PCSW acts as employer.
- **Article 61** (Law on PCSW of 1976): people on subsistence allowance are employed for a period of maximum 12 months in a private company. The employer receives in return a monthly accompaniment and training premium.
- **Social activation measures** (Law on PCSW of 1976): those groups that are too distant from the labour market have a right to receive accompaniment for participation in society, other than through the labour market. This social activation policy aims for social, cultural and political emancipation via the participation in 'useful' social activities like voluntary work. This is part of the mission of the PCSWs.
- **Tenders of the PES services**: outsourcing of services through the procurement of services via tenders. The first tender was introduced in 2005 as an experiment. Since then, various tenders have been outsourced, amongst others in the area of intensive guidance and support of vulnerable groups (very distant from the labour market). Profit, non-profit and public organisations can compete for these tenders.

The diversity of activation measures is often seen as complex for the actors involved (social workers, trajectory coaches, employers and the target groups themselves)⁵¹.

⁴⁷ <https://www.vdab.be/communicatie/weblog/jun07.pdf>

⁴⁸ Struyven, L., & Vanhoren, I. (red), et al, (2009), *Proeftuin VDAB – OCMW Eindrapport*, HIVA – KULeuven

⁴⁹ HIVA: Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving (B)

⁵⁰ <https://www.mi-is.be/nl/professionele-en-sociale-activering>

⁵¹ Bogaerts, K., et al, (2010), *Activering bij werkloosheid en recht op maatschappelijke integratie*, Onderzoek in opdracht van de FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, Universiteit Antwerpen; Debast, N., et al, (2008), *5 jaar RMI-wet: evaluatie van 5 jaar Wet betreffende het Recht op Maatschappelijke Integratie*, Cahiers OCMW Visies, Brugge: Vanden Broele, cited in Bogaerts, et al (2010).

As the poverty alleviation policies are concerned, the Flemish Action Plan on Poverty Eradication 2005-2009 (*Vlaams Actieplan Armoedebestrijding 2005-2009*), also underlines the importance of participation in society (amongst others in the labour market) was stressed. The plan was based on three principles:

- **Participation:** understood as participation in all aspects of society “*non-participation in one domain, (like the labour market) can result in limiting or destroying chances for participation in other domains of life (like leisure)*”. In relation to participation in the labour market, in 2006 the consultation of the Flemish Network of Associations Giving Voice to the Poor (*Vlaams Netwerk van Verenigingen waar Armen het woord nemen*) within the Socio-Economic Council of Flanders (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen – SERV*) started. Focus of this formal consultation is on various aspects of the labour market policy, e.g. life-long learning and the implementation of actions of the Flemish Action Plan on Poverty Eradication.
- **Prevention:** prevention of poverty and social exclusion are in the plan explained to be the basis of poverty policies in Flanders, whereby reference is made to the fundamental social rights. The starting point is that poverty is not an individual problem; people experiencing poverty are not solely responsible for their situation. The causes of indebtedness, for example are often multiple, with excessive spending merely being one of them. A structural approach has to look into the process of production and reproduction of poverty in order to eradicate or at least control it. This prevention approach was to be found in various domains covered by the Flemish Action Plan, e.g. education, youth and child care, and reference is made to the comprehensive approach in the implementation of labour market policy.
- **Inclusive policy:** it is argued that poverty is a complex problem and eradicating poverty requires mobilisation of all policy areas. However, this horizontal and cross-cutting policy approach remains an important challenge. Yet, in the Action Plan a plea is made to focus on this inclusive policy approach and to avoid scattered and isolated initiatives.

Through the participation principle, an explicit link was made with the activation policy

In the coalition agreement 2004-2009 of the Flemish Government⁵², ‘giving confidence, taking responsibility’ was the central theme. Key words in this agreement were ‘more work’, ‘more (health) care’, ‘less rules’, ‘improved service delivery’, ‘education’, ‘participation’, ‘equal opportunities’ and ‘diversity’⁵³. A top priority was economic growth to maintain the high level of prosperity and welfare in society. More and improved entrepreneurship and more employment were thus considered as policy priorities. The early termination of this government in 2007 led to a new government with various rearrangements amongst Minister posts in the period 2007-2009. A new government was formed in 2009 with a new coalition agreement⁵⁴, entitled ‘A resolute Flanders in decisive times. For an innovative, sustainable and warm society’ (*Een daadkrachtig Vlaanderen in beslissende tijden*).

⁵² A government composed of 3 Ministers from the Flemish Christian-Democratic Party (*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams – CD&V*), 1 Minister from the New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie – N-VA*), 1 Minister from the Spirit (social liberal) Party, 3 Ministers of the Flemish Liberal Party (*Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten – Open Vld*) and 2 Ministers of the Flemish Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij Anders – sp.a*).

⁵³ Vlaamse Regering, (2004), *De Vlaamse Regering 2004-2009. Vertrouwen geven, verantwoordelijkheid nemen*

⁵⁴ The Christian Democrats became the largest party with 4 Ministers in the Government (CD&V), 3 Ministers of the Flemish Socialist Party (sp.a) and 2 Ministers of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA).

Voor een vernieuwende, duurzame en warme samenleving)⁵⁵. One of the key elements is a pro-active labour market policy: the (societal) costs of unemployment and re-integration into the labour market are higher than the efforts needed to keep people in jobs. The aim is to make people and companies more resilient. Therefore, it is argued, a sustainable employment and investment plan are necessary.

The 2008 financial crisis inevitably hit Flanders about one year later: the impact on the economy, the labour market, public finances and on citizens was of paramount importance. Policy makers were concentrating on regaining trust. Decreasing employment, decreasing job supply (number of job vacancies received by the PES), increasing unemployment including temporary unemployment rates were reported in 2009⁵⁶.

1.3. A brief overview of the institutional setting at the starting point of the reform

Belgium is a federal, parliamentary, constitutional monarchy where the King is the Head of state and the Prime Minister is the head of government in a multi-party system. As a result of the various State Reforms, the pyramid of the Unitarian state, was replaced by a more complex three-level structure. The top level is composed of the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions, all three of which are equal from the legal viewpoint. They are on an equal footing but have powers and responsibilities for different fields. The federation is made up of cultural/political Communities and territorial regions. The provinces are located on the next level. The provinces are supervised by all the higher government authorities (in the context of the federal, community or regional powers). The cities and municipalities (communes) are to be found at the lowest level, the closest level to the citizens. As the provinces, they are under the supervision of the higher authorities. Depending on the powers exercised, they are supervised by the Federal State, the Community or the Region. In general, they are financed and audited by the Regions⁵⁷.

The Federal authorities have competences which are not explicitly devolved to the Communities and Regions (known as residual powers) and a number of specifically designated powers (among others monetary policy, justice, social security, domestic policy, etc.).

Regions (the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region) have powers in fields that are connected with their region or territory in the widest meaning of the term: economy, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, energy, transport (except Belgian Railways), the environment, town and country planning, nature conservation, credit, foreign trade, supervision of the provinces, communes and intercommunal utility companies⁵⁸.

The Communities have powers for culture (theatre, libraries, audiovisual media, etc.), education, the use of languages and matters relating to the individual which concern on the one hand health policy (curative and preventive medicine) and on the other hand assistance to individuals (protection of youth, social welfare, aid to families, immigrant assistance services, etc.). The Flemish Community exercises its powers in the Flemish provinces and in Brussels, the French Community in the Walloon provinces, with the exception of the German-speaking communes, and in Brussels, the German-

⁵⁵ Vlaamse Regering, (2009), *De Vlaamse Regering 2009-2014. Een daadkrachtig Vlaanderen in beslissende tijden. Voor een vernieuwende, duurzame en warme samenleving*

⁵⁶ SERV, (2009), *Impact van de financiële en economische crisis op Vlaanderen en België. Analyse huidige situatie. Impact van de crisis. Analyse van de herstelplannen*, Brussel

⁵⁷ https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/federale_staat/structure (consulted on 14.04.2017)

⁵⁸ https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/regions (consulted on 14.04.2017)

speaking Community in the communes of the province of Liège forming the German speaking Community⁵⁹.

Trade unions are organised along politico-denominational lines, following the pillarisation in Belgian society. The three major trade unions are confederations, each adhering to a political trend, namely Christian (Catholic) democrats, socialist and liberal. Each confederation cuts across industry boundaries, having members working in many different sectors. Belgium is known for its system of social dialogue. This is an institutional system of negotiations at various levels between the social partners, resulting in the conclusion of sector-wide collective agreements. Joint committees have been established to negotiate the collective agreements in every activity sector. In all matters related to working conditions and social security, the social partners are playing a substantive role. Most of the working conditions measures are settled in Collective labour agreements and the social partners are involved in decisions and in the management of the social security⁶⁰.

In the light of the Fifth State Reform of 2001 more competencies were transferred to the Regions (the local authority and provincial law, foreign trade, agriculture, development cooperation). Employment policy and social policy were then already part of the competencies of the Flemish Region, while social security remained under the responsibility of the Federal Government. In the Flemish Decree on Local Social Policy (2004), a stronger and coordinating role of the local government is foreseen. As a result, municipalities and PCSW had to develop from 2005 onwards a common local social policy plan, comprising a vision on local social policy as well as a multi-annual planning, a division of tasks and a description of the way citizens and local actors can participate in the development and implementation of the local social policy⁶¹.

In relation to minimum income support, two governance levels are relevant: the Federal Parliament is responsible for the legal framework, while the municipalities are important for implementation. It is the task of every PCSW in each municipality to ensure the right to social integration of individuals without sufficient means of existence and who fulfil the legal conditions related to each of the policy instruments in place: The aim is to achieve maximal integration and participation in society through employment, the development of an individualised project for social integration and/or minimum income support.

1.4.A brief overview of the benefit system at the starting point of the reform

The '**leefloon**' (**subsistence allowance**) is the most substantial means-tested benefit in place in Belgium⁶². Entitlement depends on the income of the benefit unit (the nuclear family). The minimum guaranteed income was renamed in 2002 as the social assistance benefit or subsistence allowance. Income from other first degree family members living under the same roof and pooling income sources is taken into account for the means-test.

⁵⁹ https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/communities (consulted on 14.04.2017)

⁶⁰ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/national-contributions/belgium/belgium-flexicurity-and-industrial-relations> (consulted on 14.04.2017)

⁶¹ Vanreppelen, J., (2014), *Lokaal Sociaal Beleid in de meerjarenplanning: Missen lokale besturen het lokaal sociaal beleidsplan?* The legal framework changed in 2012 with an adaptation of this Flemish Decree on Local Social Policy. Since then, the local social policy is integrated into the multiannual plan of the municipality and/or the PCSW; there is no separate plan anymore.

⁶² There are other means-tested social benefits in Belgium e.g. benefits **located in the pension system** and in the **care** system, which are out of the scope of this study. See: Ghailani, D., and R., Peña-Casas, (2016), *Unemployment and pensions protection in Europe: The Changing Role of Social Partners. Belgium*, Research paper Observatoire Social Européen, No.27/April 2016, Brussels.

The actual income⁶³ is assessed at the moment of application for social assistance at the local PCSW. Some income sources like child benefits are not included in the means-test. The PCSW are obliged to revise the means-test on an annual basis. However, it is in the discretionary power of the local social services to do the assessment on a more frequent basis⁶⁴.

To be eligible for social assistance benefit, the applicant:

- Needs to live in Belgium (actual place of residence).
- Needs to have reached the age of majority (legal age of 18 years) (or considered as such, e.g. having one or more dependent children).
- Does not have basic means of existence, cannot claim basic means of existence or is not able to acquire these. He or she needs to exercise his/her rights to allowances he/she is entitled to (unemployment allowance, alimony, etc.).
- Needs to be willing to work, unless this is hindered by reasons of health or equity (*billijkheid*) (family responsibilities).
- Needs to have the Belgian nationality or the nationality of a EU Member State or needs to have another (foreign) nationality but being registered in the public registry, or being stateless, or a recognised refugee.

The subsistence allowance needs to be considered as the last resort. It is accompanied by an individualised project for social integration comprising a social and a professional strand, in so far that the applicant is able to work (see for figures on the number of recipients of subsistence allowances, figure 4 in annex A.6.).

The amount of the benefit (see figure 5 in annex A.6.) is determined by law and is related to the category in which the applicant fits:

- Category 1: the applicant lives with one or more persons with whom he/she runs a household. The amount is calculated per cohabiting person.
- Category 2: the applicant lives alone.
- Category 3: the applicant has a dependent family with at least one minor unmarried child. If in this case the applicant cohabits with a partner, the amount of the benefit is for both partners together (the partner is taken into account in the calculation of the amount granted).

There is no specific limit in time to receiving the social assistance benefit, although the situation is assessed annually. A specific approach for youngsters between 18 and 25 years of age is foreseen: PCSW have the obligation to offer individual accompaniment to this group towards socio-professional integration and employment.

The **social financial support** equivalent to the subsistence allowance benefit is a financial support that the PCSW awards the applicant if he/she does not have the right to a subsistence allowance (if he/she does not fulfil the requirements). E.g. before an applicant for the refugee status is officially recognised as a refugee, his/her stay in Belgium is legal. The PCSW will award the applicant social support which is equivalent to the amount and categories of social assistance benefits. The awarding criteria for this support are much the same as those for the social assistance benefit, except for the criteria related to nationality or registration in the public population registry.

⁶³ All types of income are considered, except for a list of revenues such as study grants, remuneration for foster parents, alimony for children detailed in a law.

⁶⁴ Hufkens, T., et al, (2016), *EUROMOD Country Report Belgium (BE) 2012-2015*, EUROMOD version G3.0.

The number of recipients of unemployment benefits is characterised by fluctuations in the period before and after the experiments (see figure 6 in annex A.6.). Between 2005 and 2015 the number of persons excluded from unemployment benefits has increased⁶⁵. In this context, research has pointed to the problem of the interconnection between the unemployment and social assistance benefit systems, whereby measures in one inevitably affect the other⁶⁶ (see figure 7 in annex A.6.). Exclusion from unemployment benefits can increase the pressure on PCSW, which is also demonstrated in a study of the Belfius bank of 2014^{67 68}. The increase in the number of ‘exemptions’ from unemployment benefits is in the research explained by the expansion of the activation plan for the unemployed, introduced in 2004. This plan comprises a closer follow-up of unemployed people and a more stringent sanctions policy⁶⁹ as a result of which unemployed people might be excluded from receiving unemployment benefits.

The number of recipients of subsistence allowances increased in the period 2008-2010 (42.376 in 2008 in Flanders to 47.616 in 2010 in Flanders)⁷⁰.

1.5. The main agents involved in managing the benefit system and providing employment and social services

National Employment Office: the NEO is one of the Belgian Public Institutions of Social Security (*Openbare Instelling van Sociale Zekerheid*) in charge the system of unemployment insurance and some employment policies. The headquarters are located in Brussels, and 30 front offices are spread over the Belgian territory. The tasks of the headquarters are mainly related to horizontal issues like communication, logistics, HRM, personnel administration, etc. Since 2016, the 30 offices are grouped into 16 unemployment bureaus (7 in Flanders, 1 in Brussels and 8 in Wallonia). These bureaus have various tasks, e.g. the determination of the amount of the unemployment benefits, awarding the unemployment benefits, verification of the benefits paid by the paying agents (see below in this paragraph), awarding the right to a career break, enforcement of the unemployment benefit system. The tasks of the (14) smaller offices are reduced to informing citizens.

The Belgian social security is mainly funded through contributions of employers and employees, the State providing a minor contribution.

The NEO counted in December 2015 a total of 3.742 employees and 570.902 clients⁷¹ (see figure 8 in annex A.6.). The decline in the personnel of the NEO is due to imposed budgetary restrictions and a freezing recruitment since 2014.

⁶⁵ RVA, (2016), *De RVA in 2015. Volume 2: indicatoren van de arbeidsmarkt en evolutie van de uitkeringen*, Brussel. Cincinnato, S., en I., Nicaise, (2009), *België - Bestaansminimumregelingen: overzicht en beoordeling. Een onderzoek naar nationale beleidsmaatregelen*, Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion, on behalf of the EC DG EMPL

⁶⁶ Belfius, (2014), *Lokale financiën. OCMWs en politiezones*, Brussel.

⁶⁷ See: <https://www.vdab.be/rechtenenplichten/sanctie> for an overview of these measures.

⁶⁸ Belfius, (2014), *Lokale financiën. OCMWs en politiezones*, Brussel.

⁶⁹ Cincinnato, S., en I., Nicaise, (2009), *België - Bestaansminimumregelingen: overzicht en beoordeling. Een onderzoek naar nationale beleidsmaatregelen*, Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion, on behalf of the EC DG EMPL

⁷⁰ Source : <https://www.mi-is.be/nl/studies-publicaties-statistieken/leefloon-ii>

⁷¹ RVA, (2016), *De RVA in 2015. Volume 2: indicatoren van de arbeidsmarkt en evolutie van de uitkeringen*, Brussel

Since 2012, the evolution in the number of unemployed people (see figure 9 in annex A.6.) has been influenced by regulatory changes that became visible in the figures from 2013 onwards, e.g. the increase from 58 to 60 years of age for unemployed people to be exempted of subscribing as unemployed and limitations in relation to the right to ‘integration allowance’ (e.g. for unemployed youngsters – since 2015 qualification requirements have been introduced when young unemployed request an ‘integration allowance’ before the age of 21).

The NEO works closely together with the organisations paying the unemployment benefits. There are four **paying agents**: three trade-unions (liberal, Christian and socialist trade unions) and the National Fund for Unemployment benefits (*Hulpkas voor Werkloosheidsuitkeringen*). These agencies inform the unemployed about their rights and responsibilities and provide the necessary documents to apply for unemployment benefit.

Flemish PES: the Flemish PES (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding – VDAB*) is a regional governmental service bringing together labour market mediation with accompaniment and support to unemployed people towards their (re)integration into the labour market. The Flemish PES was launched in 1989 as a result of the third State Reform. The PES concentrates its activities on:

- Delivering information to unemployed people about job vacancies.
- Collecting relevant statistics to enable its advisory role to the government.
- Organising and delivering training sessions to help unemployed people to find a job.
- Organising and delivering vocational training to unemployed people.
- Stimulating continuing training for employees.

The Flemish PES is an external independent agency (*extern verzelfstandigd agentschap – EVA*) accountable to the Flemish government, by which it is funded. The strategic objectives, how these will be achieved and with which means are written down in a management contract that is renewed every five years.

In 2014, the Flemish PES employed 4.681 people (1.369 men and 3.312 women). In 2015, the influx of unemployed job seekers in Flanders was 372.400 and the outflow 373.110.⁷² At central level, Flemish PES is mainly financed by the Flemish government (linked to the management agreement and associated targets). Other sources of income are European subsidies, or partner contributions within one-stop shops (e.g. employer contributions within the on-the-job vocational training programme)⁷³.

PCSW: the PCSWs implement social policies at the local (municipality) level. They were established in 1976. The fact that in Belgium these PCSWs exist as a separate governance structure has its historical reasons⁷⁴. In most countries, similar services are part of the local government. In the current Flemish coalition agreement, it is stipulated that “*A lean, transparent and decisive government stimulates the prosperity and the wellbeing of its citizens. This holds true for the Flemish Government, the local*

⁷² VDAB, (2015), *Samen sterk voor werk. Jaarverslag 2014 Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beoepsopleiding*, Brussel

⁷³ Bogaerts, K., et al, (2011), *Building flexibility and accountability into local employment services*, University of Antwerp, Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy, Research Group on Public Administration and Management, Country report for Belgium – OECD Local Economic and Employment Development

⁷⁴ The PCSW were preceded by the Public Poverty Commissions (C.O.O. = *Commissies van Openbare Onderstand*), by law voted in 1925. Through this law, the local care for the poor was modernised by the installation of one service for poor relief per municipality. In 1976, the Public Poverty Commissions were transferred into the PCSW.

*governmental levels and the cross-governmental relations*⁷⁵. In this context, the integration of the PCSWs into the local governments is identified as an aim to be achieved by 2019.

The PCSW belongs to the competency of the local government but has a distinct governance structure. They are governed by a Council for social support whose members are elected at the municipality level by the municipality council. The aim of the PCSW is to enable every citizen to live a life that responds to human dignity (Art. 1 of the PCSW law). The services delivered are related to material, social or and/or psychological support. Some PCSW also run service flats, hospitals, care/nursing homes. The PCSW receive financial means from various sources: the federal government (for the payment of social assistance benefits), from the Communities (*Gemeenschappen*) through the Flemish Municipal Fund and the Flemish Urban Fund, own means resulting from the exploitation of e.g. nursing homes and hospitals. Financial means from municipalities might be used to make up shortfalls.

In the second quarter of 2014, the PCSW employed 52.167 people (full-time and part-time) of which 9.034 men and 43.133 women⁷⁶. In 2015, 175.273 people received at least during one month a subsistence allowance; in the same year 23.334 persons received an equivalent to the subsistence allowance⁷⁷.

1.6. Brief description of the institutional status quo before the reform

⁷⁵ Regeerakkoord Vlaamse Regering 2014-2019, Vertrouwen, verbinden, vooruitgaan

⁷⁶ Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur, (2016), *Vlaamse profielschets, juni 2016*, Lokaal Bestuur Vlaanderen

⁷⁷ POD Maatschappelijke Integratie, (2015), *Jaarverslag 2015. De maatschappij van morgen ontdekken*,

Table A: Brief description of the institutional status quo before the reform

	provision type 1 (or client group)	provision type 2 (or client group)	provision type 3 (or client group)
Name of provision (benefit or service)	<p>Unemployment benefits.</p> <p>Youngsters between 18-25 years, after having finished studies and under certain conditions are entitled to activation or integration benefits (<i>inschakelingsuitkering</i>) for a maximum period of 36 months.</p>	<p>Subsistence allowance (<i>leefloon</i>)</p> <p>The equivalent to subsistence allowance benefit is the financial support for persons not entitled to the subsistence allowance, but who are in a (comparable) emergency.</p>	<p>Employment under Article 60 §7.</p> <p>Employment under Article 61.</p>
Main purpose of the benefit/service	<p>Unemployment benefits are awarded to compensate the loss of income from employment.</p>	<p>The main purpose of the subsistence allowance is to guarantee a minimum income to all citizens.</p>	<p>Employment under Article 60 §7: the PCSW offers a job to a person who has left the labour market or who has dropped out of the labour market. Besides integration into the labour market, this measure aims also a reintegration into the system of social security. This employment cannot last longer than the period required to get things on track again in relation to social security. In most cases, the PCSW acts as employer. The PCSW receives a subsidy of the federal government for the duration of the employment and benefits as employer of the exemption of the employer contribution.</p>

			<p>Employment under Article 61: the PCSW cooperates with an (private sector) employer for the realisation of its employment assignment⁷⁸. The PCSW receives a premium from the federal government for the accompaniment and eventual training of the person under Article 61.</p>
<p>Main access criteria (insured, means-tested, other criteria, e.g. age, family status, etc.)</p>	<p>Employed persons are insured against the risks of unemployment.</p> <p>To be entitled to unemployment benefits you need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Be out of work and out of pay due to circumstances beyond your control. – Have worked for a number of days in paid employment in determined period (reference period) preceding the application for unemployment benefits. The number of days and the length of the reference period vary according to the age of the applicant. <p>The NEO determines the gross daily amount of the unemployment</p>	<p>Means-tested.</p> <p>To be entitled to subsistence allowance benefits you need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Have the actual place of residence in Belgium. – Have the Belgian nationality or the nationality of a EU Member State or needs to have another (foreign) nationality but being registered in the public registry or being stateless or a recognised refugee. – Have reached the age of majority (or considered as such, e.g. having one or more dependent children). – Have insufficient income and being not in a position to claim any income, and not being able 	<p>The employee needs to fulfil the following conditions in order to be eligible for an Article 60 employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Being entitled to a social assistance benefit or to financial social support (= equivalent social assistance benefit). – Being registered in the population register or the foreigners register.

⁷⁸ The PCSW has amongst others an assignment to get their clients into employment. I refer to this as ‘its employment assignment’.

	<p>benefit based on the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Family situation (cohabitants with dependents; people living alone; cohabitants without dependents). – Last earnings. – Professional record. 	<p>to acquire income by personal efforts or other means.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Be willing to work, unless this is not possible for reasons of health or equity (<i>billijkheid</i>). – Have used the right to other possible social benefits (e.g. unemployment, pension). <p>The PCSW investigates whether the applicant is eligible for the social assistance benefit. It is a means-tested benefit and the amount is related to the family situation: cohabitants with dependents; people living alone; cohabitants without dependents.</p> <p>The equivalent to the subsistence allowance benefit is based on two conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To have the actual place of residence in Belgium. – To be in an emergency situation, i.e. not being able to find housing, to buy food, to buy clothes, to have access to bathing, or to have access to health care. 	
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<p>Target group and its size in proportion to total non-working active age population</p>	<p>Number of unemployed job seekers in Flanders (January 2017): NEO: 174.740 unemployed job seekers that receive unemployment benefits. NEO: 257.106 unemployed people receiving some kind of unemployment benefit, incl. those not seeking a job (e.g. elderly unemployed).</p> <p>Flemish PES: 222.255 unemployed job seekers, incl. those not necessarily receiving unemployment benefits. Unemployment rate according to Flemish PES = 7,3%.</p>	<p>Number of recipients of social assistance benefits in Flanders (2015): 50.280.</p>	<p>Article 60: Number of people employed under Article 60 in 2014: 10.344.</p> <p>Article 61: not found</p>
<p>Who is the main actor that determines the client journey?</p>	<p>PES</p>	<p>PCSW</p>	<p>PCSW</p>
<p>Who evaluates claims for this benefit / decides on who can participate in this service (if the service is open to all, please indicate that)?</p>	<p>NEO.</p>	<p>PCSW</p>	<p>PCSW</p>
<p>Who enforces the activation (job search, accepting job offer, etc.) requirements (if these exist)?</p>	<p>PES</p>	<p>PCSW</p>	<p>PCSW</p>
<p>Who decides on sanctions (in case of non-compliance)?</p>	<p>Flemish PES. NEO on the basis of information transferred by Flemish</p>	<p>PCSW</p>	<p>PCSW</p>

	PES		
Who pays the benefit / delivers the service?	There are four paying agents : three trade-union related agents (liberal, Christian and socialist trade unions) and the National Fund for Unemployment benefits (<i>Hulpkas voor Werkloosheidsuitkeringen</i>). These agencies inform the unemployed about rights and responsibilities and provides the necessary documents to apply for an unemployment benefit.	PCSW	PCSW
Who provides the funding behind (e.g. local government using their own revenues or local gov. using a per capita subsidy from the central budget)	Federal level government.	Income sources of the PCSW are: revenues accruing from own operation, subsidies from the Flemish and Federal governments, contribution of the municipality, Municipality Fund ⁷⁹ , and some minor other revenue sources.	Income sources of the PCSW are: revenues accruing from own operation, subsidies from the Flemish and Federal governments, contribution of the municipality, Municipality Fund ⁸⁰ , and some minor other revenue sources.

⁷⁹ Reallocation of tax income by the Federal or Regional authority to local authorities (municipalities and PCSW).

⁸⁰ Reallocation of tax income by the Federal or Regional authority to local authorities (municipalities and PCSW).

The logic behind the experiments was to increase cooperation between PES and PCSW to further stimulate and improve the integration of clients of the PSWC and (high) risk clients of the PES into the labour market or other employment initiatives. The experiments started from the idea that clients of both PES and PCSW have to benefit from a qualitative support and a coherent trajectory of intake, screening and support for professional (and social) integration.

Both PES and PCSW have their own expertise and according to the problem/situation, the coordination of the support and follow-up of some clients is best allocated to PES or PCSW services. For a number of clients, the trajectory will be composed of a combination of modules of PES and PCSW (besides modules of other active in this field of employment and social welfare⁸¹).

Historically, the PCSW and PES have a different mission and do not target the same groups. For the PES, the main target group are the non-employed job seekers (domain of social security), while for the PCSW the main target group are people who, after screening, are identified as ‘falling out of the labour market’. Policy changes in the fields of employment and social welfare in the context of activation policies have somewhat blurred the boundaries between the action domains of both organisations even though, for most PCSW, activation was not a new domain of work. Already since the 70s, PCSW could make use of Art 60⁸² and Art 61 of the PCSW regulatory framework to employ their target group. Yet, throughout the years, the integration into the regular labour market has become an important domain of work of the PCSW, and numerous PCSW have their own service (department) dedicated to coaching clients towards (re)integration into the labour market. Similarly, PES was already tasked to (re)integrate recipients of subsistence allowances into the labour market, which depended on labour market ready clients to be registered on their listings. The registration of clients of PCSW to the PES depended on the initiative and stance of the PCSW to stimulate this (the diversified approach of PCSW in relation to registration of their clients to PES was confirmed during the interviews)⁸³.

⁸¹ Answer from P. Muyters, Flemish Minister of Finance, Budgeting, Employment, spatial policy and sports to L. Peeters Member of Flemish Parliament, Question No271 – 15.01.2013

⁸² Article 60 § 7 is a form of social service in which the PCSW provides a job to someone who has dropped out of the labour market, with the aim of reintroducing him/her into the social security system and in the labour market. The PCSW is always the legal employer.

In the event of an employment under Article 61, the PCSW works with an employer to realize its employment task. In the special case that the PCSW cooperates with a private employer for the employment of its entitled clients, it receives from the federal government an allowance for the employment and possible training of the employed person.

⁸³ Franssen, A, (2014), OCMW's en gewestelijke diensten voor arbeidsbemiddeling: een spanningsvolle samenwerking bij de begeleiding van jongeren, In: *Armoede in België. Jaarboek 2014*, edited by Pannecoucke, I., et al, pp 295-320, Academia Press, Gent

2. Details of the reform episode (initiative)

2.1. Brief description of the initiative

The first phase of the test beds was conceptualised in 2008 in a cooperation between VVSG, PES and the Minister of Employment of the time. This was at the start of the monetary crisis; a period of tightness of the labour market. Cooperation between PCSW and PES to activate as much as possible labour reserves was an important incentive to start such an initiative as the test-beds. The improved cooperation and coordination between PES and PCSW for the first phase of the test beds (January – September 2009) was primarily aiming at:

- A strengthened management role (*regiefunctie*) of the PES on the labour market and
- An enhanced management role (*regiefunctie*) of the PCSW in social welfare policy, along its crucial role as actor in the employment policy.⁸⁴

Despite a cooperation between PES and PCSW in the framework of the Job Centres introduced in 2000, activating the more challenging clients and (re)integrating them in the labour market continued to be problematic. It was pointed out in the interviews that political will and a support on the ground are important to make things work. While there was already a framework for cooperation through the Job Centres, this framework was not nourished by those involved.

Furthermore, the cooperation between both institutions in the Job Centres did not always function very well. Not in all regions, PCSW participated to the same extent in the Job Centres⁸⁵ and the participation varied in intensity and remit (administrative, remote or closer cooperation whereby representatives of both institutions were located in the same physical place).

While the focus of the PES is on 'work', PCSW start from a more holistic approach of well-being, whereby work is one leverage out of poverty, for integration and participation in society. Many PCSW have their own service (department) to coach their clients for their (re)integration into the labour market. This could lead to two distinct parallel streams of accompaniment, when providing support for reintegration in the labour market is the core mission of PES services. Hence the question of how parallel procedures can be avoided without specific target groups losing specific attention.

The following problems were still identified at the beginning of the experiments (based on the interviews):

- PES services and PCSW services did not really know each other.
- Both organisations had their own set of activation instruments, but they did not really know each other's approach, nor did they take advantage of the eventual complementarity of the tools. In the interviews, it was stated that there was a strong global resistance to 'transferring' instruments from one organisation to the other (PES and PCSW).
- The 'warm transfer' of dossiers (which goes beyond the pure transfer of data/information and implies discussing the support needed by a client) between PCSW and PES did not work well.

⁸⁴ Van Mellaert, L., J., Kuppens & L., Struyven, (2013), *Samenwerking op (de) proef. Procesevaluatie van fase 2 van de proeftuinen voor samenwerking tussen de VDAB en de OCMW's in Vlaanderen*, VIONA-project, HIVA – KU Leuven. VIONA is the Flemish Inter-university research network on labour market reporting, that was set up in 1994. Twice a year a call is launched for project proposals in relation to labour market issues.

⁸⁵ The Job Centres are regionally organised; PCSW from different municipalities can participate in the same Job Centre, depending on their location.

The period of nine months of the first phase of the experiments proved to be too short, considering the challenges faced by the stakeholders involved. This was partly due to a hasty start resulting from the political appetite for concrete results in this domain. In October 2009, concluding meetings were organised in the various experimental settings to prepare the next phase of the projects. However, the concrete results were rather limited, described as being in an ‘embryonic phase’⁸⁶. A thorough evaluation was therefore not possible.

2.2. The rationale behind the initiative

The mechanisms put in place to achieve the objective to further stimulate and improve the integration of clients of the PSWC and (high) risk clients of the PES into the labour market or other employment initiatives, were two phases of test-beds:

- The first phase (January – September 2009): 11 experiments were set up in 11 cities/regions in Flanders. These test-beds were identified amongst the PCSW members of the Management Board PCSW of the VVSG. PCSW could volunteer to be part of the experimental gardens. In the process of selecting PCSW, the diversity of local settings was taken into account, as well as socio-economic contexts, existing cooperation between PCSW and PES, as well as the position of the PCSW in the Job Centres.
- The second phase (January 2012 – December 2012): 5 test-beds out of the 11 volunteered to further deepen the results of phase 1.

The history of cooperation between the PES and PCSW at the start of the first phase was different in the various locations.

A steering committee was set up for the follow-up of the experiments. This group included a representative of the central PES services, a representative of the Federal Services on Social Integration, a representative of the VVSG, HIVA, CC Consult, 4 representatives of the PCSW and 4 representatives of the local PES. This steering committee was only in place for phase 1. Furthermore, during phase 1 an external consultant implemented process coaching, mainly operationalised through regular meetings and focus groups. In phase 2, HIVA conducted a process evaluation whereby funds were used of VIONA (labour market research programme installed in Flanders since 1994). This programme has its own steering committee, through which various actors were informed about the implementation of the experimental gardens.

The Minister of Employment allocated a budget of 210.000 € to the first phase of the experimental gardens. However, this was not for the implementation as such, but rather for the evaluation and process support of the experiments. The experiments were implemented without financial support for the local partners. The lack of a dedicated budget, but also the hasty start of the experiments, forecasted to provide little guarantee for structural and sustainable changes (impact). This was already described in the process description of the first phase⁸⁷ and was confirmed in the interviews.

Furthermore, during the interviews it was explained that no precise boundaries of the experiments were formulated in the first place. The report of the first phase⁸⁸ mentioned the over-ambitious goals

⁸⁶ VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009), *Proeftuin OCMW – VDAB. Eindrapport*

⁸⁷ VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009), *Proeftuin OCMW – VDAB. Eindrapport*

⁸⁸ Ibidem

of the experiments within the set timeframe but also the fact that based on a ‘menu’⁸⁹ or list, the test-beds could choose which theme they wanted to tackle. This led to unclarity whether the different themes of the ‘menu’ had to be tackled amongst the various test-beds or whether each of the test-beds had fully free choice. While the PES is centrally organised, the various PCSW involved in the test-beds could follow their own course and are in this way more flexible. The different levels of coordination of PES and PCSW are in the interviews mentioned as one of the factors hindering not only the smooth implementation of the test-beds, but also overall a more strengthened cooperation between PES and PCSW.

Another challenge was the definition of the target group of the experiments. In searching useful and relevant criteria, it seemed that a specific group of clients of the PES services, i.e. those with a medical, mental, psychic and/or psychiatric problem was partly overlapping in terms of characteristics with the population of subsistence allowance recipients of the PCSW.

The follow-up and support of this group though, is delivered from a different viewpoint. It was explained in the interviews that the PES support is based on a labour market perspective, while the PCSW support starts from a more social-welfare, but also rights-based perspective. The description of the first phase of the test-beds concluded that the cooperation was mainly based on transfer of PCSW clients to PES services, and not so much the other way around.

The author of this country report identified furthermore a mismatch between the level of evaluation and the level of process guidance of the experiments. While the process guidance was in the first place focused on the individual level of clients, with less attention for the policy and management levels⁹⁰, the evaluation was more focused on the cooperation between the organisations and less on the impact on the clients (does improved cooperation and coordination help the client in a better way?). This was also because the impact on clients could only be identified on the longer term, while this was not planned as part of the evaluation (this was also not possible in the given time frame of the evaluation). No resources were available anymore to do a proper follow-up of clients or the experimental gardens.

2.3. Detailed description of the NEW system

The two phases of experiments are not labelled as ‘policy reform’; rather it could be concluded that they contributed to policy reforms in the domain of activation and more specifically the cooperation between PCSW and PES in this domain. They were one step in the process of looking for a better solution to activate the most vulnerable groups on the labour market, both the clients of the PCSW and the (high) risk clients of the PES. Improving the cooperation between PES and PCSW was a vehicle for this.

⁸⁹ Containing the following themes: forms of cooperation, various roles, transfer to the labour market, flexibilization of employment measures, suspension policy and transmission, criteria trajectory initiation, testing tools and forms of service provision, legal position of the client, initiatives towards employers, technical resources, relevant concepts and development of participative methods.

⁹⁰ See also VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009)

Table B: Brief description of the institutional status quo after the reform

	provision type 1 (or client group)	provision type 2 (or client group)	
Name of provision (benefit or service)	<p>Unemployment benefits.</p> <p>Youngsters between 18-25 years, after having finished studies and under certain conditions are entitled to activation or integration benefits (<i>inschakelingsuitkering</i>) for a maximum period of 36 months.</p>	<p>Subsistence allowance (<i>leefloon</i>)</p> <p>The equivalent to subsistence allowance benefit is the financial support for persons not entitled to the subsistence allowance, but who are in a (comparable) emergency.</p>	<p>Employment under Article 60 §7.</p> <p>Employment under Article 61.</p>
Main access criteria (insured, means-tested, other criteria, e.g. age, family status, etc.)	<p>Employed persons are insured against the risks of unemployment.</p> <p>(same criteria as before the experiments)</p>	<p>Means-tested.</p> <p>(same criteria as before the experiments)</p>	<p>(same criteria as before the experiments).</p>
Target group	<p>(same as before experiments)</p>	<p>(same as before experiments)</p>	<p>(same as before experiments)</p>
Who is the main actor that determines the client journey?	<p>PES</p> <p>However, during interviews with local PCSW/PES it was explained that as a result of the experiments, after the intake it is decided who will deliver the needed support to the client.</p>	<p>PCSW</p> <p>However, during interviews with local PCSW/PES it was explained that as a result of the experiments, after the intake it is decided who will deliver the needed support to the client.</p>	<p>PCSW</p> <p>Art. 60 becomes part of the Temporary Work Experience programme. A client of PCSW is eligible for TWE when there is a lack of work experience, lack of generic competencies, he/she is not able to enter the regular labour market but he/she has sufficient learning</p>

			potential.
Who evaluates claims for this benefit / decides on who can participate in this service?	NEO	PSCW	PCSW
Who enforces the activation (job search, accepting job offer, etc.) requirements?	PES	PCSW	PCSW
Who decides on sanctions (in case of non-compliance)?	PES (since 2015)	PCSW	PCSW
Who pays the benefit / delivers the service?	(same as before experiments)	(same as before experiments)	From 2017 onwards, PCSW have to pay social security contributions on the wages paid to people employed under Art 60.
Who provides the funding behind (e.g. local government using their own revenues or local gov. using a per capita subsidy from the central budget)	(same as before experiments)	(same as before experiments)	(same as before experiments)
Notes			

2.4. Context of the initiative: where did the idea come from?

Already in 2001, a study of Eurofound on the integrated approaches to active welfare and employment policies pointed to the tensions between the central and regional levels in Belgium. “Policy delivery institutions in the areas of social security (federal labour agency) and labour market policy (PES) are centrally guided institutions, while the policy delivery institutions for social assistance are covered by the municipalities”⁹¹. In this study, an improved cooperation between PCSW, PES and other relevant actors (such as municipalities and NGOs) was proposed for a better distribution of tasks and synergies and this for the benefit of PCSW clients and job seekers. “OCWM clients and job seekers would also benefit from a more integrated basic service, so that they are not sent ‘from pillar to post’”⁹².

With the introduction of the Job Centres (in 2000)⁹³, the cooperation between the PES and other actors, like the PCSW, took a new dimension. However, the reality seems to be different: the integration of the service provision between PES and PCSW seemed to be a challenge. When the Job Centres were established, they were set up differently in different areas. While the PCSW were considered to be an important ‘partner’ in the implementation of the Job Centres, in reality PCSW were involved in about 50% of the Job Centres⁹⁴. The participation of the PCSW in the Job Centres seems to depend on various factors, e.g. the size of the municipality^{95,96}.

One of the conclusions of the process evaluation of the Job Centres is that the cooperation between PES and PCSW needed new impulse. Especially in the light of on the one hand the structural shortages on the labour market at that time (report was published in 2007) and the problem of hard-to-fulfil vacancies on the other hand⁹⁷. To activate as many clients as possible of both organisations, cooperation was seen as an important instrument to achieve this.

While the experimental gardens were considered as an ‘experiment’, the Job Centres were embedded in a more structural framework.

In 2007, the Chief Executive of the Flemish PES presented his vision of an integrated approach for the unemployed in his blog⁹⁸. Specific attention was paid to the target group of subsistence allowance recipients (*leefloon gerechtigden*), a target group for which, at the time, no comprehensive approach

⁹¹ Eurofound, (2001), *Integrated approaches to active welfare and employment policies: summary. Belgium*, Eurofound, Dublin, p3

⁹² Ibidem, p4

⁹³ Per area, the key regional and local service providers active in the domain of labour market and employment are brought together under the same roof. At the start in 2000, 141 Job Centres were planned. The purpose was to cluster the services and products of various public and non-profit organisations working on employment and labour market to target groups: unemployed, employees and employers.

⁹⁴ Van Hemel, L., en L. Struyven, (2007), *Naar één loket voor werk. Evaluatie van de ruimtelijke spreiding, het gebruik en het partnerschap van de werkwinkel. Deelrapport 2.*, HIVA – onderzoek in het kader van VIONA

⁹⁵ In large cities PCSW do not or to a very limited degree participate in the Job Centres, while in smaller municipalities, the participation of PCSW in Job Centres can be up to 90% (see study of Struyven, L., & Vanhoren, I., (red.), et al, (2009)).

⁹⁶ Struyven, L., & Vanhoren, I. (red.), et al, (2009), *Proeftuin VDAB – OCMW Eindrapport*, HIVA - KULeuven

⁹⁷ <http://www.werk.be/cijfers-en-onderzoek/rapporten/procesevaluatie-van-de-werkwinkels-evaluatie-van-de-netwerkbenadering-en-de-ruimtelijke-spreiding-van-de-werkwinkels-en> On this website the different related reports are available. For a summary: Struyven, L., (et al), (2007), *Naar één loket voor werk. Synthese en aanbevelingen over de ruimtelijke spreiding en het partnership van de werkwinkel*, HIVA, KULeuven

⁹⁸ <https://www.vdab.be/communicatie/weblog/jun07.pdf>

was in place. Taking care of this group was (and is) part of the responsibility of the PCSW. This blog-article and the reaction to it by the VVSG is seen⁹⁹ as the first manifestation of the willingness to start the experiments. Instead of competing each other (how could provide the best service for this target group), the proposed approach was rather one of cooperation for a much better solution.

One year later (in 2008), the Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA)¹⁰⁰ published a study on the development of an integral concept of labour market integration for (the most) vulnerable groups, which included a strengthened cooperation between the PES and PCSW¹⁰¹. In September 2009, the Minister of Employment made a plea for a closer cooperation between PES and PCSW for the guidance and follow-up of the most vulnerable groups¹⁰². In 2010, the Centre for Social Policy Herman Deleeck¹⁰³ published a study on unemployment and the right to social integration. Also in this study, a plea is made for a strengthened cooperation between PES, PCSW and other relevant actors in activation measures.

In 2008, consultation took place between the VVSG and the PES and internal documents were produced. The Cabinet of the Minister of Employment was contacted. The Minister of Employment at the time was very much in favour of a closer follow-up and strengthened support of vulnerable groups to (re)integrate them into the labour market (see his plan introduced in 2004) and therefore supported this initiative. The initial team of VVSG and PES was expanded with HIVA (for scientific support of the experiments) and CC Consult for the process guidance at the level of the test beds.

2.5. The political decision phase: the actors

Please fill in the matrix below with the main stakeholders potentially affecting or affected by the reform, specifying

- their degree of influence / power over the passing and successful implementation of the reform (low / medium / high) – if relevant, please indicate the level of government as well, and
- their interest in the new system being implemented (low / medium / high).

power \ interest	low	medium	high
low			
medium	Job coaches at PES services and social workers at PCSW.		Ministry of Employment
high	Job coaches at PES services and social	Local PES	PES

⁹⁹ Struyven, L., & Vanhoren, I. (red.), et al, (2009), *Proeftuin VDAB – OCMW Eindrapport*, HIVA – KULeuven

¹⁰⁰ HIVA: Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving (B)

¹⁰¹ Steenssens, K., et al, (2008), *W²: Werk- en Welzijnstrajecten op maat. Een totaalconcept.*, Een onderzoek in opdracht van de Vlaamse Minister van Werk, Onderwijs en Vorming, in het kader van het VIONA-onderzoeksprogramma, HIVA - KULeuven

¹⁰² "OCMW moet nauwer samenwerken met VDAB" (Frank Vandenbroucke) in Het Laatste Nieuws, 10.03.2009

¹⁰³ Bogaerts, K., et al, (2010), *Activering bij werkloosheid en recht op maatschappelijke integratie*. Onderzoek in opdracht van de FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, Universiteit Antwerpen

	<p>workers and PCSW.</p> <p>Vulnerable client groups of PES at recipients of subsistence allowances (or equivalent) and people employed under Article 60/61 of PCSW.</p>	<p>Federal Services of Social Integration</p> <p>VVSG (<i>experiment operationalisation</i>)</p>	<p>VVSG (<i>experiment development</i>)</p> <p>PCSW</p>
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Job coaches at PES and counsellors at PCSW showed a varying degree of interest in the experiments, certainly at the beginning. This was amongst others due to a lack of knowledge of the other institution and a lack of insight of the issues at hand. During the experiments, parallel streams of support were made explicit, which was not always apparent before to all professionals involved both in the PES and PCSW. The power they have in the experiments was rather low. This was, according to the interviewees, mainly because of the characteristics of the organisations involved (hierarchical decision making structures). The process guidance in phase 1 planned a more bottom-up approach in which the professionals involved could express ways to improve the activation and in this context the cooperation between both organisations. However, these suggestions needed support from higher levels, which was not always the case.

The vulnerable client groups both at PCSW and PES have a high interest in results of the experiments, but a low influence.

The influence (power) of the local PES was medium considering their level of operation. However, during the interviews the view was that the cooperation agreements between PES and PCSW, some of which resulting from the experiments, are a good way to make the collaboration more concrete.

Part of the mission of the Federal Services of Social Integration is to defend the right to social integration, which is operationalised and implemented by the PCSW. Therefore, their interest in the experiments was high: they felt it was necessary to offer optimal support to the clients of the PCSW. At the same time, they were not a key player in the debate on activation in the context of the experiments.

This was different for the VVSG and for the central PES. Together with the PCSW, their interest was high (they started the discussions), as well as their influence. However, the level of influence of the VVSG and the PES was different. While the PES is centrally organised, thereby 'steering' all the local PES offices, the VVSG has no actual authority over the PCSW (PCSW have their autonomy in their relationship with the VVSG). The VVSG was highly influential in the development of the experiments, but not so much in their operationalisation (therefore also mentioned in medium power).

The Ministry of Employment who supported the initiative initially, was not very visible anymore in the further implementation process.

2.6. The political phase: the actions

For the institutional context, see paragraph 1.3.

In the 2005-2008 National Reform Programme, two main drives for the employment policy which combine flexibility and security were suggested: the coaching plan for the unemployed and the active management of company restructuring. For this study, especially the first is interesting. This support system for the unemployed includes the follow-up of those seeking employment to verify the effectiveness of how they go about their search and to direct them to the appropriate services. It also provides for sanctions in cases where the job-seekers do not participate¹⁰⁴.

The Minister of Employment at the time (Frank Vandenbroucke) was truly supportive to the initiative, taken in duo by PES and VVSG. He was very much in favour of the active welfare state. In 1999, the (federal) Verhofstadt I government (1999-2003) (in which Frank Vandenbroucke was Minister of Social Affairs and Pensions) set itself the task of turning Belgium into what it called an 'active welfare state'. The aim was to combine 'new risk' and preventative policies, notably through activation, while also emphasizing the need to maintain adequate social benefits to cater for traditional social risks. activation became a key objective to the (federal) Verhofstadt II government (2003-2007) (in which Frank Vandenbroucke was Minister of Employment and Pensions)¹⁰⁵.

The experimental gardens did not have to cope with any opponents; there were actually no other actors involved than those setting up the test beds. Other actors were not into play. Furthermore, no alternative routes were discussed, e.g. setting up real experiments with control groups (regions with and regions without experimental gardens) and compare both afterwards. This was according to interviewees related to the fact that in phase 1 test-beds could choose from a menu, meaning that each test-bed had its own characteristics related to their set-up. Comparison would have been very difficult.

There was no explicit involvement of the EU level in the set up and implementation of the experiments, other than the inevitable influence of European development in Flanders, through e.g. the country specific recommendations (in 2011 on a further reform of the active labour market policy¹⁰⁶) and the move in various parts of Europe to put more emphasis on the local level in relation to labour market and social issues.

2.7. The designing phase: the actors

The initiative was taken in cooperation between PES and VVSG. They contacted the Ministry of Employment at the time and negotiated a budget. Taking into account the existing concept of Job Centres and the respective governance and management functions of the PES and PCSW for labour

¹⁰⁴ ibidem

¹⁰⁵ Vandenbroucke, F., (2012), *The Active Welfare State revisited*, CSB Working Paper No12/9, University of Antwerp, Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy; see also for more background on the activation policy of F. Vandenbroucke in: Vilrocx, J. & J. De Schamphelre, (2000), *Belgian social policy inspired by new active welfare state approach*, published in Eironline: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/articles/social-policies-quality-of-life/belgian-social-policy-inspired-by-new-active-welfare-state-approach>

¹⁰⁶ Council Recommendation of 12 July 2011 on the National Reform Programme 2011 of Belgium and delivering a Council Opinion on the updated Stability Programme of Belgium, 2011-2014 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:209:0001:0004:EN:PDF>

market policy and social welfare policy, the overall goal of the experimental gardens can be formulated as:

- To come to successful trajectories for the clients, in which social welfare and work are linked together, through innovative forms of local cooperation, at policy level, as well at the levels of institutions and clients.

The report of the first phase was written by a consortium of organisations and people involved in phase 1: VVSG, PES, CC Consult for the process guidance and HIVA and KULeuven (University of Leuven) for the scientific follow-up. The report explains that the core group of the experiments, consisting of the five actors mentioned organised a monthly evaluation and that operational agreements were formalised 'to enable a good evaluation'.

In the framework of the content-wise support of the experiments, two focus groups were organised with the local partners of each of the test-beds. The objective was to get a clear picture of:

- The local view of PCSW and PES on the integrated service delivery, and governance/coordination of the labour market and of social welfare.
- Agreements for cooperation at the level of clients and at the level of institutions.
- Viewpoints, priorities and recommendations in relation to the themes of the menu or list (see paragraph 2.2.).

In total 26 people participated in these focus groups.

Furthermore, two reflection days were organised by the PES and VVSG for the PCSW and local PES involved in the experiments. The aim was to discuss the modes of cooperation and to exchange ideas on the further development of this cooperation. It is not clear how many people (coordinators, management level representatives) participated in these two days.

During the interviews with the local actors, regular meetings were mentioned between all the local partners involved in the experiments.

The second phase was the object of a process evaluation, implemented by HIVA - KULeuven. Each of the experiments was approached as a separate case. Semi-structured interviews were used (between October and November 2012 – i.e. during the implementation of the experiments). Per case/experiments, interviews were organised with at least one counsellor of the PES and one of the PCSW. Also, the supervisors of these respondents were invited for an interview. In some cases, these supervisors were counsellors themselves and were contact point of the experiments within their organisations. In total 18 interviews were held at the five locations of the experiments. The evaluators also participated in a meeting with clients and had complementary contacts with the counsellors by telephone and mail. Furthermore, monitoring data were gathered by counsellors during phase 2 of the experiments. For this purpose, a data gathering tool was designed by HIVA (profile of clients and trajectory followed) and implemented.

Various actors were involved in the experiments:

- VVSG: coordinating the experiments on behalf of the PCSW involved. VVSG was also involved in the steering group.
- PES Flanders: coordinating the experiments on behalf of the employment services. PES Flanders was involved in the steering group.
- Federal Services for Social Inclusion: involved in the steering group.

- Local PES services: where the experiments were implemented. Some of them participated in the steering group.
- PCSW: where the experiments were implemented. Some of them participated in the steering group.
- HIVA – KULeuven: design and implementation of the evaluation of the experiments; participated in the steering group.
- CC Consult: process guidance of the experiments in phase 1; participated in the steering group.

In the cooperation between PES and PCSW, already in the framework of the Job Centres, there have been issues of confidentiality and use of data on clients. Organisations working with PES services in the context of reintegration of job seekers into the labour market had only limited access to the client dossiers. In interviews with local PCSW, it was mentioned that within the Job Centres, the PCSW counsellors had to go to the PES services to consult the database with vacancies. At a later stage the PES services created an online vacancies database with open access. A further step was reached when the personnel of the PCSW were provided with limited access to the online dossiers of clients of the PES (under the condition of the client giving his/her permission). This access was only possible through one computer per PCSW service. In the evaluation report of phase 2 (and confirmed in the interviews done for this study), it is mentioned that the information in the client PES dossier was only available to a limited extent available to partners of the PES. Counsellors of the PCSW had to go via the *Kruispuntbank Sociale Zekerheid*¹⁰⁷.

Since 2013 every PCSW has full access rights to the PES client dossier and of all unemployed within its area of competence (if the job seeker does not file an objection). The PCSW enters the important steps in the trajectory towards work in the PES client dossier. Before the social workers of PCSW have access to the PES client dossier, they need to follow a training and need to be certified.

The exchange of data between PES services and its partners was already an ongoing process whereby the experimental gardens were one step. It is not only because of the experiments that things changed.

2.8. The designing phase: the decisions

When the experiments were designed, the target group envisaged was composed of the recipients of a subsistence allowance or equivalent, as well as those employed under Art. 60 (all clients of PCSW) and vulnerable (long term) job seekers (clients of the PES). However, as part of the focus groups in phase 1, a discussion was held on the demarcation of the dossiers for cooperation between PES and PCSW in the context of the experiments. This was not a straightforward task. Criteria were discussed and based on this, client lists of PES and PCSW were scanned to identify the potential target group for this cooperation. However, no formal framework with criteria was defined during the first phase. As a result, the cooperation in the experiments has been mainly focused on the transfer of PCSW clients to PES services (and not so much from PES to PCSW). In the five experiments of the second phase, intentions were expressed to work with specific target groups (see following table).

¹⁰⁷ Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS), a Federal organisation that has set up an electronic network between about 2000 institutions active in the field of social security.

	Dendermonde	Leuven	Mortsel	Tielt	Kortrijk-Waregem ¹⁰⁸
Target groups of the experiments	<p><u>Referral of PES to PSWC:</u> no target group identified.</p> <p><u>Referral of PSWC to PES:</u> recipients of 'subsistence allowance' that are 'ready for the labour market' (ready to take steps towards work or vocational training).</p>	<p><u>Referral of PES to PSWC:</u> PES clients for whom the PSWC can play a role (e.g. issues of financial indebtedness).</p> <p><u>Referral of PSWC to PES:</u> recipients of 'subsistence allowance' that are self-sufficient and ready for the labour market (e.g. those employed for the last months under article 60).</p>	<p><u>Referral of PES to PSWC:</u> Recipients of unemployment benefit that have a problem in relation to 'welfare'¹⁰⁹ that interferes with their labour market integration.</p> <p><u>Referral of PSWC to PES:</u> recipients of 'subsistence allowance' that are ready for the labour market, as well as those employed under article 60.</p>	<p><u>Referral of PES to PSWC:</u> Recipients of unemployment benefit that have a problem in relation to 'welfare' that interferes with their labour market integration. Focus is on clients whose benefits are suspended and homelessness clients.</p> <p><u>Referral of PSWC to PES:</u> Recipients of 'subsistence allowance' that are ready for the labour market with the focus on those employed for the last months under article 60.</p>	<p><u>Referral of PES to PSWC:</u> Youngsters (18-25 years) with a problem in relation to welfare that are eligible for individual action plan for social integration via the PSWC and who are registered with the PES.</p> <p><u>Referral of PSWC to PES:</u> Youngsters (18-25 years) with a problem in relation to welfare that are eligible for the individual action plan for social integration via the PSWC and who are registered with the PES.</p>

¹⁰⁸ Kortrijk and Waregem were two separate experimental gardens in the first phase, however for the second phase a regional cooperation was chosen. This regional cooperation covers 12 municipalities in the region. For the calculation of the average unemployment rate in the period 2002-2015, only the unemployment rates of Kortrijk and Waregem are included.

¹⁰⁹ These are unemployed people facing issues in relation to housing, finance, addictions, etc.

In total 63 clients were registered to be part of the experiments because they matched the intended profile, however finally only 39 clients were taken-up in the experiments, 30 of them transferred from PCSW to PES. The clients can be divided into the following groups¹¹⁰:

- The ‘strong’ recipients of subsistence allowances (and equivalent) who would benefit from a guidance or training by PES.
- A limited number of referrals in the framework of obligatory subscription at PES (without verifying whether these clients meet the criterion of labour market readiness).
- Clients in the last months in their employment under Art 60.
- Group of people having finished their employment under Art 60. These clients are entitled to unemployment benefits and are thus not clients of the PCSW anymore. Some PCSW still do the follow-up of these people until they can start a coaching at PES.
- Referral to the Tender Activation Care – an initiative offering support to the target group of long-term unemployed with problems that are not labour-market related (e.g. mental health issues). In this initiative, some places were reserved for recipients of the subsistence allowance.

The target group for cooperation was very broadly defined by PES, i.e. unemployed job seekers, including some recipients of a subsistence allowance. In total, cooperation was sought for nine unemployed job seekers (two recipients of a subsistence allowance and six unemployment benefit recipients), e.g. people with debts or people with a very limited knowledge of the Dutch language. There were no clients of the PES whose unemployment benefits were suspended who were put forward for the experiments, even though this group was defined as a possible target group for the test beds.

The reasons why the decision was taken to include a client in the test-beds were the following:

- At the level of the status of the client: i.e. where the client is first registered, e.g. a client of the PES whose unemployment benefits had been suspended, but is transferred again to the PES by the PCSW because they estimate that he/she is ready for the regular labour market, if necessary with parallel support from the PCSW.
- At the level of the client: being ready for the labour market.
- An identified need for support in the case of transfer from PES to PCSW (e.g. in case of debt counselling).
- An identified training need for clients of PCSW transferred to PES.
- At the level of the organisation: e.g. when the other organisation can provide a better support for the client.

The cooperation between PES and PCSW was shaped for each of the phases of trajectory of the client. The following themes for cooperation were identified at the beginning of the experiments:

- Common intake (criteria)
- Criteria for the referral of clients
- Collaboration in support provided to client
- Communication procedures and information flow
- Common training agenda.

¹¹⁰ Van Mellaert, L., Kuppens, J., & L., Struyven, (2013), *Samenwerking op (de) proef: Procesevaluatie van fase 2 van de proeftuinen voor samenwerking tussen de VDAB en de OCMW's in Vlaanderen*, Research summary – VIONA-project

In each of the solutions proposed in the different test beds, both institutions played a specific role. The cooperation can take various forms¹¹¹:

- Sharing the same physical space (which was done in some of the Job Centres). Phase 2 showed no changes in this as a result of the experiments.
- Virtual cooperation (e.g. file sharing and exchange of data on clients).
- Cooperation through e.g. consultation on clients, development of a common instrument, agreements and procedures about communication between both institutions, common intake (e.g. in Leuven – one social worker from PCSW and one counsellor from PES carried out the intake of clients together in the experiment).

The client's journey depends on the starting point (PCSW or PES) and how the experiment is shaped in that specific region where the client and the services are located¹¹². In case of a separate intake, there are differences in approach: a more 'holistic and intuitive' intake and screening by PCSW counsellors and a more employment-oriented approach in view of brokerage/mediation and fulfilling administrative requirements by PES counsellors. These different approaches are logical, based on the missions of both institutions, but they have hindered cooperation in the context of the experiments. In phase 2 of the test-beds an intake carried out by agents of both institutions was proposed as a possible approach. This was undertaken in three test-beds, but in one of them (Leuven), this was already the practice before the launch of the test-beds. Nevertheless, before this duo-intake, a preselection must have taken place to identify the clients eligible for the 'common' approach. This preselection is carried out by the organisation first contacted by the client. In test-beds without a duo-intake, it was down to one of the organisations to decide which client was eligible for the experiment. In some cases, there was communication with the counsellor/social worker of the other organisation. After the client was included in the experiment, he/she was referred to the other institution (PES or PCSW, depending on where the client came first) and a second intake was completed.

While at the beginning of the experiments, the criteria on the basis of which clients would be selected for the experiments were discussed with the counsellors, at the end of the experiments, it was clear that these criteria were not fully operationalised during the process. It was mainly the counsellor who 'felt' that the client fulfilled the criteria (e.g. labour market readiness). For many counsellors in different experiments the selection process during the second phase was problematic. This was explained by the logic used to start from the status of the client to determine the support necessary (long-term unemployed, recipient of subsistence allowance) and not from the needs of the client.

Once the client was included in the experiment, alignment was necessary between the organisations. This was also a demanding process. At the start of a trajectory, counsellors were not fully aware/informed about the support already provided by the other organisation. In some test-beds the counsellors of the PCSW tried to find out which of the clients were also supported by the PES, after which they informed PES counsellors about the support that they offered or were planning to offer. To gather information, PCSW counsellors depended on the information given by the client and to some extent by the online client database of the PES. However, at that time, full access was not possible and the extent of detail of the information entered in the database varied (especially information about social welfare issues). Furthermore, PCSW counsellors stated in the interviews

¹¹¹ *Afsprakenkader Proeftuin. Deel III: De menukaart:*
<https://www.yumpu.com/nl/document/view/20411370/afsprakenkader-proeftuin-deel-iii-de-menukaart-werkwinkel>

¹¹² Van Mellaert, L., Kuppens, J., & L., Struyven, (2013), *ibidem*

that often the information given by their clients in relation to mental and social wellbeing is sensitive and that they prefer not to register it fully in the system. In the PES as well, counsellors did not always know that their client receives support from PCSW as they also depend on the information given by the client. When a client is recipient of a subsistence allowance, they supposed that he/she receives support from the PCSW.

During the interviews at local level, it was expressed that the experiments were certainly an eye-opener: they brought to light parallel systems developed to support clients in their search for a job.

The follow-up of the client was another challenge in the experiments. Information from other organisations (like organisations delivering training and/or coaching) about the support provided are in most cases registered in the client's dossier (especially when this information is provided through the PES), but is not always noticed by the counsellor consulting the dossier. Furthermore, as already mentioned, PCSW counsellors did not have full access to all data in the online dossier.

An important source of information for the follow-up of trajectories within the experiments were meetings between the organisations about the clients in question. But these meetings or spaces for consultation did not happen in all experiments and were limited in some (e.g. in Leuven). In Leuven, the communication between PES and PCSW is rather mutual and spontaneous when required. In Mortsel, these meetings were more structural and were even part of a cooperation agreement between PES and PCSW. These common meetings were considered to be a big step forward in the cooperation. The experiments lifted the personal contacts between professionals of the PES and PCSW to a higher level and made it more structural, amongst others through these meetings.

Also, the intensity of follow-up is different at PES and PCSW. In general, the intensity of follow-up and frequency of contacts with the clients is higher at PCSW compared to PES. The need of the client for a more intense follow-up can for PCSW services be a reason for not (yet) referring their client to PES, as expressed during the interviews.

At the start of the experiments, a registration- and follow-up instrument was developed in view of the support of the cooperation between both organisations. The instrument enabled the concretisation of the cooperation by enrolling the clients in the experiments and enabling the follow-up. This instrument was developed by HIVA in cooperation with both organisations. Based on the evaluation it could be concluded that the counsellors are not in favour of yet another registration (counsellors of the PCSW faced already a double registration: into their own system and into the PES system). While the counsellors did not have problems with the content of the new instruments, they did not like this extra burden. The added value of the newly developed instrument was not always apparent for the actors involved. Furthermore, practice showed that the filling in of the data did not take place in a systematic way, as the tool was often seen as not fit for purpose (according to the interviewees in local PES and PCSW extra information asked for was not used, technical problems in filling out and cumbersome). Yet, in some experiments, instead of using the instrument, meetings or spaces for communication on clients were set up between both organisations and in some cases also involving the client. The instrument was solely used in the context of the experiments and not in the broader cooperation between PES and PCSW.

The structural exchange of information on clients (e.g. in Mortsel) that was organised in some test-beds seemed to be an important instrument. The presence of the PCSW in the Job Centres was a stimulating factor in organising this exchange of information. However, in Mortsel and Leuven the PCSW were not present in the Job Centres, but in Mortsel a cooperation agreement was signed. Practice showed that the communication on clients and follow-up functioned well in case of good personal contacts between counsellors of both organisations. At the time of the interviews it was

mentioned that it was for PCSW counsellors not always clear who exactly they could refer their clients to in the PES (this is to some extent still the situation in some cases).

The experiments were not intended to make any changes to the autonomy of the institutions involved, but to induce changes in the way that PES and PCSW cooperate. During the experiments, it became clear for the organisations involved that it was not about transferring assignments/tasks or competencies, but rather to create a framework for closer cooperation. In the framework agreements of the experiments, no mention is made of the implications for the staff involved in both organisations (required competencies, etc.). Changes in competencies of the staff is not part of the menu or list (see paragraph 2.2.) that was used to define the theme(s) on which each of the experiments wanted to concentrate. However, there was a training for those PCSW workers who were supposed to use the online client database of the PES (*'Mijn Loopbaan'*). To be able to work with this online database, staff needed to have completed a particular training. This was not only obligatory in the context of the experiments, but in general when PCSW staff needed to work with the PES online database.

Furthermore, counsellors of both PES and PCSW needed to be aware of the more holistic approach to their clients and needed to be able to translate this in their screening and support approach. During the interviews, examples were given of workshops organised to get to know each other's tools and approaches.

There were no particular (financial) incentives for cooperation between the PES and PCSW. The budget allocated to both phases of the experiments were spent on evaluation and process guidance.

Based on the interviews with the local test-beds, we can conclude that in the framework of the experiments meetings and consultation moments were organised at different levels: meetings between the personnel of the PCSW and PES, meetings between management (*regisseurs*) and meetings between the experiment coordinators of both institutions.

Interviewees are not aware of formal indicators agreed at the beginning of the test-beds to monitor progress, other than the monitoring tool designed by HIVA at the level of the individual clients.

No other actors (e.g. EU level actors, other countries), were actively involved in the design phase of the experiments, then those mentioned earlier in this country report. However, during the interviews the influence was mentioned of material published by the OECD in this period indicating the importance of local labour market policy development (as a source of inspiration)¹¹³.

The sanctions that were applied in the context of the experiments for clients not complying with the set agreements, were the same as before the experiments (so each organisation used its sanctioning mechanisms, depending on who delivered the support to the client).

2.9. Who implemented the initiative?

See also paragraph 1.5.

VVSG (1993): The VVSG is a not-for-profit organisation, representing municipalities, PCSW, police zones and municipal associations in Flanders. Their income is generated through membership fees

¹¹³ While in the interviews no specific reference was given, this could be material published in the context of the OECD LEED programme (Local Economic and Employment Development): <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/leed-publications.htm>

(45%), subsidies (33%) and own income (22%)¹¹⁴. The total income in 2015 was 18.363.374€, with 149 staff members (61% women and 39% men). Part of their members are 308 PCSW and 308 municipalities in Flanders. Their mission is to provide support and services to their members (information, advice, training), to voice the needs and concerns of their members and to stimulate networking amongst the members.

Each **PCSW** is organised around a political and administrative apparatus. The political bodies within the PCSW are the council for social welfare (or PCSW council), one or more committees, the president of the council for social welfare, the vice-president(s) and the bureau (not obligatory) to whom the council can delegate competencies. The number of council members is determined by the number of inhabitants of the municipality. The total income in 2014 for the PCSW in Flanders was 3.740.460.998€¹¹⁵. The number of personnel in the same year was 52.167 (83% women and 17% men).

PES Flanders (1989): The PES Flanders is an independent external Agency of the Flemish Government (*Extern Verzelfstandigd Agentschap*) under public law. The total budget of the PES Flanders in 2014 was 666.869.000€ (including budget for cooperation with partners)¹¹⁶. In the same year, there were 4.681 staff members (including all contractual forms and statutes) of which 71% women and 29% men¹¹⁷.

2.10. Implementation process

There was no formal evaluation done of phase 1, except for the description of the processes that took place. The time gap between phase 1 and phase 2 is explained by interviewees by the following factors:

- There was more clarity about the 6th State Reform in 2011 and the implications of this for activation policies (transferred from Federal to regional level).
- It was the period of the financial crises which resulted in budgetary issues to find new budget

Though, for many interviewees it was too long ago to give a complete analysis.

The interviews also confirm that the experiments did not lead to any policy changes as such but that they contributed to policy changes in a later stage. The experiments were one of the elements leading to an increased cooperation between PES and PCSW. Other elements having contributed and still contributing to this have been the Job Centres, the evaluation of these Job Centres, and now the Temporary Work Experience initiative (*Tijdelijke Werkervaring*)¹¹⁸. The experiments have to be considered as one of the possible roads that have been followed to increase and improve cooperation between PES and PCSW.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.vvsg.be/overvvsg/Pages/VVSGkort.aspx> (consulted on 18.04.2017) and VVSG, (2016), *Jaarbericht 2015*, VVSG, Brussel - figures of 01.01.2016.

¹¹⁵ The volume of the budget per PCSW has a direct relation with the volume and nature of services offered and the extent to which these services are used. PCSW with e.g. residential care facilities have by definition a higher level of costs. The income and expenditure of PCSW is also depending on the size of the municipality. The expenditure varies in Flanders per PCSW between 334€ per inhabitant to 780€ per inhabitant, with an average of 565€ for Flanders.

¹¹⁶ <http://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1124810> (consulted on 18.04.2017)

¹¹⁷ VDAB, (2015), *Samen sterk voor werk. Jaarverslag 2014*, VDAB, Brussel

¹¹⁸ <http://www.flanders.be/en/nbwa-news-message-document/document/09013557801a893c>, consulted on 30.04.2017

Most interviewees are of the opinion that the cooperation between PES and PCSW has become smoother, but it is not clear for all what the role of the experiments has been in this change. Furthermore, for various interviewees it is difficult to say something about the impact of the experiments on the actual target groups (there was no further monitoring of the clients involved after the experiments). Both organisations increased their recognition of the added value and complementarity of the other, mutual respect has grown throughout the years. Cooperation became in some cases (Leuven and Antwerpen/Mortsel) more formalised, while it has always been ‘a thing between people’. It was explained that e.g. in Leuven since the ending of the experiments, there are no formal meetings anymore between both services; mutual consultation takes place on the basis of individual cases.

Some interviewees state that through the experiments cooperation improved in those cases with a history of cooperation. In the settings without previous cooperation, it is less clear what is left from the experiments. During the field work at local level, the use of a common screening instrument was explained, i.e. the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (an international standard, recognised by the WHO and adapted by the PES to the Flemish context). The aim is that the PCSW provide support and give advice to the PES in screening unemployed with an occupational impairment or unemployed in a multi-problem situation. It is the PES counsellor who decides on the support and does the follow-up of the client. This instrument was introduced in 2016 for a selection PCSW.

Based on the interviews, one of the results of the experiments has been that they have clarified the idea of ‘revolving doors’ clients. At the end of the employment in an Article 60 the person is transferred to the PES services. These services are not always equipped to do a suitable follow-up and the unemployment benefit of the client is suspended, which is the reason to go back to the PCSW. This mechanism was known, but became clearer through the test beds and was at the same time also a reason to start the test beds.

Furthermore, the concept of ‘warm transfer’ has been introduced during the period of the experiments, which goes beyond the pure transfer of data/information and implies discussing the support needed by a client.

The evaluation finding that the solutions to improve cooperation that were implemented in the context of the experiments, were mainly supported at the operational level (counsellors and their supervisors), was confirmed in the interviews. To come to a more integrated approach, more involvement and support of higher levels is needed (within the organisations, but also of policy levels) and between the policy domains (employment and social welfare) in Flanders (regional, provincial and local).

Another interesting factor is the decline of the Job Centres. Of the 140 Job Centres originally set up, there are about 90 left. Closing some of the Job Centres took place in the same period as the experimental gardens. Furthermore, in the remaining Job Centres, there is less involvement of the PCSW, which has to do with the regional coverage of the Job Centres and the local remit of the PCSW.

During the interviews, the emphasised (some stated ‘forced’) cooperation between PES and PCSW was questioned. For the PCSW, the PES is one of the partners amongst many. When cooperation is discussed, it should be approached in a broader sense. It is rather about finding the most suitable approach/support and in function of this, looking for the most suitable partners/actors.

2.11. Costs of the initiative

The resources allocated to the experiments was 250.000€ for phase 1 funded by the Ministry of Employment at the time. This budget was not for the actual implementation of the experiments at local level but for the evaluation and process guidance delivered during the experiments by HIVA and CC Consult. For phase 2, the same budget of 250.000€ was allocated from VIONA funds to fund the evaluation and guidance of the experiments. Again, no resources were allocated for the implementation of the test-beds. VIONA is the Flemish Inter-university research network on labour market reporting, that was set up in 1994. Under VIONA, regularly calls are launched for project proposals in relation to labour market issues.

2.12. Monitoring

During phase 1, the experiments were accompanied by an external consultant, but no formal evaluation was carried out. During the second phase a process evaluation was implemented. The focus of this evaluation is on the development of the process of implementation and not so much on the results. It was too early right at the end of the experiments to say something about their impact on the integration into the labour market. Some of the clients just started their trajectory; others had not yet started at the time of the evaluation. On the basis of the interviews and literature, it is not clear whether the process evaluation was guided by indicators to measure progress, other than the variables in the monitoring instrument developed by HIVA for phase 2. The themes on which the experiments worked in the second phase were chosen by the evaluator (HIVA) to structure the findings.

The total number of clients involved in the experiments (39 clients¹¹⁹) is too small to make a sound analysis on the necessary scale. Yet, the evaluators acknowledge that while the experiments result in some lessons learned in relation to the cooperation, the findings cannot simply be generalised. The experiments in phase 2 were evaluated and these experiments all participated in the first phase. Furthermore, the profile of the participating PCSW is not representative as such (e.g. all of them had an employment unit, which is not the case for all PCSW, especially not the smaller ones).

2.13. Impact assessment and impacts

See previous paragraph.

2.14. Any important follow-up measures?

No formal follow-up of the experiments took place. However, strengthening the cooperation between PES and PCSW remained on the policy agenda. Witnesses of this are e.g. the common screening instruments (mentioned above), and the current Temporary Employment Experience framework (2017). The target group of this initiative are unemployed and recipients of a subsistence allowance, as well as those employed under Art 60 by the PCSW, who do not easily find a job due to insufficient (recent) work experience and a negative work attitude. The aim of the trajectory to be put in place is to build the capacity of this target group (competencies and work experience) in a real work environment to reduce their distance to the regular labour market and to stimulate their integration into the regular economic circuit. Since the target group is composed of clients of PCSW and PES cooperation is necessary. In this context, agreements have been made between both organisations.

¹¹⁹ Phase 1 and phase 2 covered in total 39 clients. The implementation at the level of individual clients in phase 1 was rather limited, as at that stage it was not fully clear yet what the actual target group would be for the proeftuinen in each of the settings of the experiments.

2.15. Any other detail that seemed important but wasn't mentioned so far?

Nothing to add.

3. Assessment and conclusions

3.1. What external factors helped/hindered the launch of the initiative and its successful implementation?

The experiments were launched based on the recognition that the activation of vulnerable groups towards the labour market could be improved and that a strengthened cooperation between PES and PCSW was a vehicle for this. The Minister of Employment at the time was very much in favour of an active welfare state with activation as one of its instruments. His thinking was that people were not encouraged to be active and that this should be changed.

The Plan for the guidance and follow-up of the unemployed (2004) was an important milestone in the activation policy in Flanders. It provided a framework to do more than follow-up and sanctioning in case of non-compliance.

The political will to support the experiments was present at the start (but faded during phase 2) while the Flemish PES services and the umbrella organisation of the PCSW as main partners, were requesting parties. Overall, the context was favourable to turn the experiments into a success, which eventually could lead to policy reforms. The intention was that if the expertise of PES and PCSW could be brought together and linked to each other, this would benefit the clients of the PES and some clients of PCSW, i.e. those groups very distant from the labour market.

3.2. Lessons for the country

One of the factors that have interfered with the implementation of the experiments was that there was no overall agreement on what activation policy should be, nor was there a broader policy framework or policy support (e.g. representatives of the Cabinet of the Minister of Employment did not turn up during meetings of the steering committee).

Also, existing structural factors have hindered cooperation. Each of the institutions involved has only the competency to sanction its 'own' group of clients. Moreover, the activation instruments of both organisations are funded by different governance levels (PES by Flemish level; PCSW by Federal level); each with their own requirements in terms of administration, conditions, registration, etc.

While changes happen through people, individual people willing to change things are not sufficient vectors for sustainable reforms. Support at various levels of governance at policy level, but also at operational level is needed to make it happen. An expression of this support are resources to be allocated (e.g. in the case of the experiments, no resources allocated to the local level) and clear involvement in the initiative (e.g. in the case of the experiments, no regular involvement through of the policy level in the steering committee of phase 1, despite the sincere support of the Minister at the beginning).

3.3. Lessons for Europe

What is transferable is the comprehensive/holistic approach to support unemployed job seekers with a large distance to the labour market, regardless their status (minimum income benefits or unemployment benefits) in their trajectory. The experiments show that a close cooperation between social services and employment services is necessary in view of an effective and sustainable approach. Besides this cooperation, other conditions need to be fulfilled to come to results, i.e. support coming from different levels in the organisation (management and operational) as well as from different policy levels (legislative framework, level of development and level of implementation); access to information on clients for those involved, tools that are sensitive to the

client in all his/her facets, meetings between the social and employment services about specific cases and capacity development of counsellors involved.

3.4. Main strengths and weaknesses

The authors of this study support the overall evaluation findings, though the question why the evaluation of the second phase did not include the perspective of the client remains unclear (*did he/she benefit from being included in the test-beds?*).

The experiments cannot be identified/defined as policy changes as such, but they have contributed to policy changes in a later stage. The process of activation of vulnerable groups and groups with a large distance from the labour market, where an improved cooperation between PES and PCSW was an instrument, started before the experiments and continued after. What became clear in the interviews was that while in the domain of activation PES and PCSW are key actors, there is a whole panoply of other actors also playing a role. Based on the specific client/situation a comprehensive approach is necessary and a set of defined actors have a contribution to make.

The experiments have contributed to a better coordination in the domain of activation, especially in those geographical areas where there was already a sound (basis for) cooperation between PES and PCSW before the experiments. Part of this improved coordination is a better exchange of information between both services and an enhanced access to client data.

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Please provide full bibliographic detail for all work referred to in your study, using Chicago referencing style.

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Section III: Annexes

A.3. Overview of the existing literature

Two studies have been undertaken in relation to the experimental gardens (test-beds):

- A description of phase 1 of the experiment (2009): this study was undertaken by a consortium of VDAB, VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KULeuven and KULeuven¹²⁰. This report describes the process of the experiments in phase 1 as well as the results.
- An evaluation of phase 2 of the experiment in 2012, with an evaluation report published in 2013. This evaluation was carried out by HIVA-KULeuven as a VIONA research project¹²¹.

A description of phase 1 of the experiment (2009): this study was undertaken by a consortium of VDAB, VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KULeuven and KULeuven

The report of this first phase gives an overview of the process in each of the settings of the test-beds. Furthermore, it describes the overall approach to the external process guidance and the content related support by amongst others a steering committee. The results are described at the level of each of the test-beds, as well as in an overall analysis, though no quantitative data are provided.

The conclusions identify the mutual acquaintance of the services offered by PES and PSWC, an increased consultation and dialogue about clients and an increased coordination and dialogue about the transfer of people of the Article 60 /7 target group from the PSWC to the PES as the most significant contributions at this stage.

The data have been gathered through the meetings of the steering committee, two focus groups and two 'reflection and development days'. The focus groups were organised with the local partners of the experiments (PES and PCSW). The purpose of the 'reflection and development days' was to offer a platform to those involved in the experiments to intensify cooperation through the exchange of experiences at that point in time.

¹²⁰ VDAB (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling*) = PES, VVSG (*Vereniging van Vlaamse Gemeenten en Steden*) = Association of Flemish Municipalities and Cities, CC Consult = an external consultancy organisation, HIVA (*Onderzoeksinstituut voor Arbeid en Samenleving*) = Research Institute for Work and Society linked to the University of Leuven (B). VVSG, CC Consult, HIVA-KU Leuven & KHLeuven, (2009), *Proeftuin OCMW – VDAB. Eindrapport*

¹²¹ Van Mellaert, L., et al, (2013), *Samenwerking op (de) proef. Procesevaluatie van fase 2 van de proeftuinen voor samenwerking tussen de VDAB en de OCMW's in Vlaanderen*, HIVA – KU Leuven. VIONA is the Flemish Inter-university research network on labour market reporting, that was set up in 1994. Twice a year a call is launched for project proposals in relation to labour market issues.

An evaluation of phase 2 of the experiment in 2012, with an evaluation report published in 2013. This evaluation was carried out by HIVA-KULeuven as a VIONA research project¹²².

The second phase of the testbeds started in January 2012 and finished in December 2012. The evaluation results of this second phase, in which 5 experiments were implemented (5 out of the 11 of the first phase), were published in 2013.

This evaluation study was done by HIVA (the labour market research institute linked to the University of Leuven in Flanders/Belgium), also involved in the evaluation of the first phase. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- The identification and definition of the target groups eligible for this cooperation.
- The collaboration process and the progress made in this.
- Improving the understanding of the role of the different partners in the collaboration.
- The definition of the conditions for collaboration, internally (PES and PSWC) and externally (regional and national levels).

The objectives of the evaluation of phase 2 make it clear that the assessment is at the level of the ‘cooperation’ between both organisations. As explained in its report, the evaluation is focused on the micro (operational) level and the meso level (inter-organisational).

Data about the individuals taking part in the experiment are limited to profiling (who are the participants) and to the numbers referred from PES to PSWC and vice versa). There is little about the experiment results as such. For example, the question of the effect or impact of a potentially improved cooperation between both organisations on the individual clients is not part of the evaluation. Furthermore, the number of individuals that have finally participated in the second phase is limited, i.e. 39 clients spread over the five geographical settings.

For data gathering purposes, each of the test-beds was set up as a case-study. Per test-beds semi-structured interviews were organised with at least one counsellor from each of the organisations involved (PES and PCSW). Furthermore, monitoring data were gathered throughout phase 2 of the experiments on the basis of an instrument designed for this purpose.

¹²² Van Mellaert, L., et al, (2013), Samenwerking op (de) proef. Procesevaluatie van fase 2 van de proeftuinen voor samenwerking tussen de VDAB en de OCMW's in Vlaanderen, HIVA – KU Leuven. VIONA is the Flemish Inter-university research network on labour market reporting, that was set up in 1994. Twice a year a call is launched for project proposals in relation to labour market issues.

The experiments themselves have in phase 2 a focus on the following five themes, whereby the targeted change is not exactly at the level of the client, therefore it would be hard to find evaluation results at client's level:

- Common intake (criteria).
- Criteria for the allocation of clients.
- The implementation of concrete trajectories.
- Communication procedures and information provision.
- Common training agenda.

Findings are structured around the target groups of the experiments as well as the cooperation between both organisations. Furthermore, conclusions and recommendations are presented.

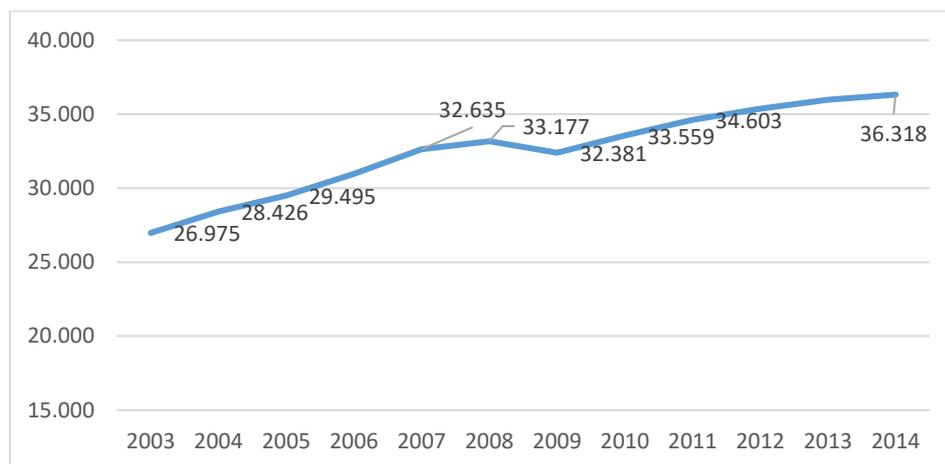
The only two reports about the experiments, are those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

A.4. Additional information on tools, good practices

None.

A.5. Background information on the reform episode

Figure 1: GDP per capita in the Flemish region (2003 – 2014)



Source: <http://regionalestatistieken.vlaanderen.be/statistiek-economie-innovatie> - GDP per capita in the Flemish Region.

Figure 2a: Employment rate of population 15-64 years – Flanders (2003 – 2009)

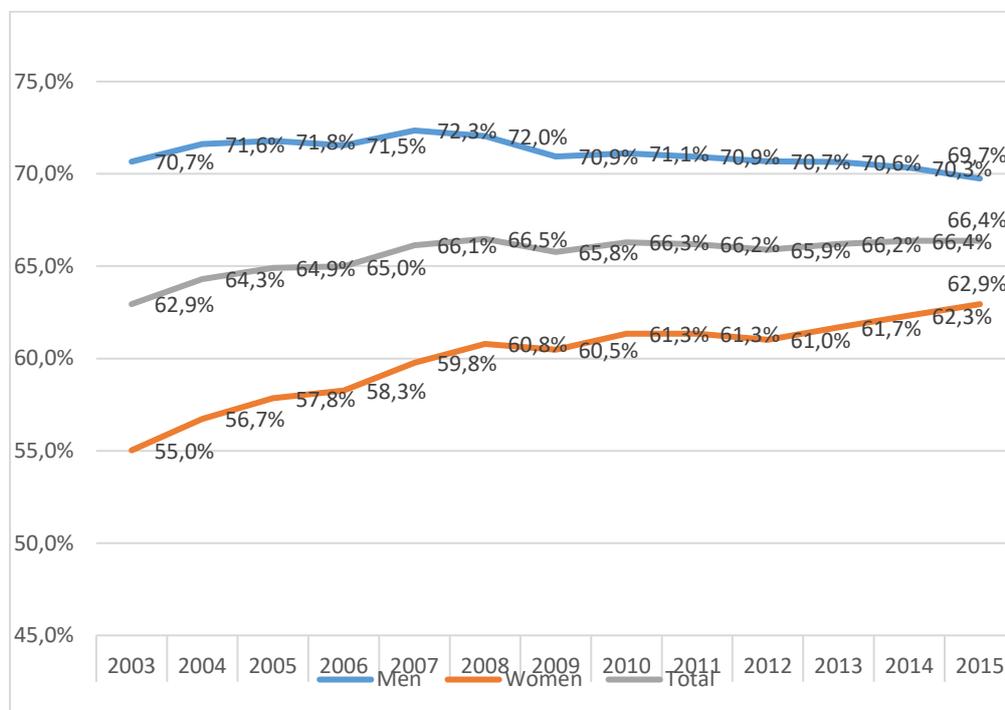
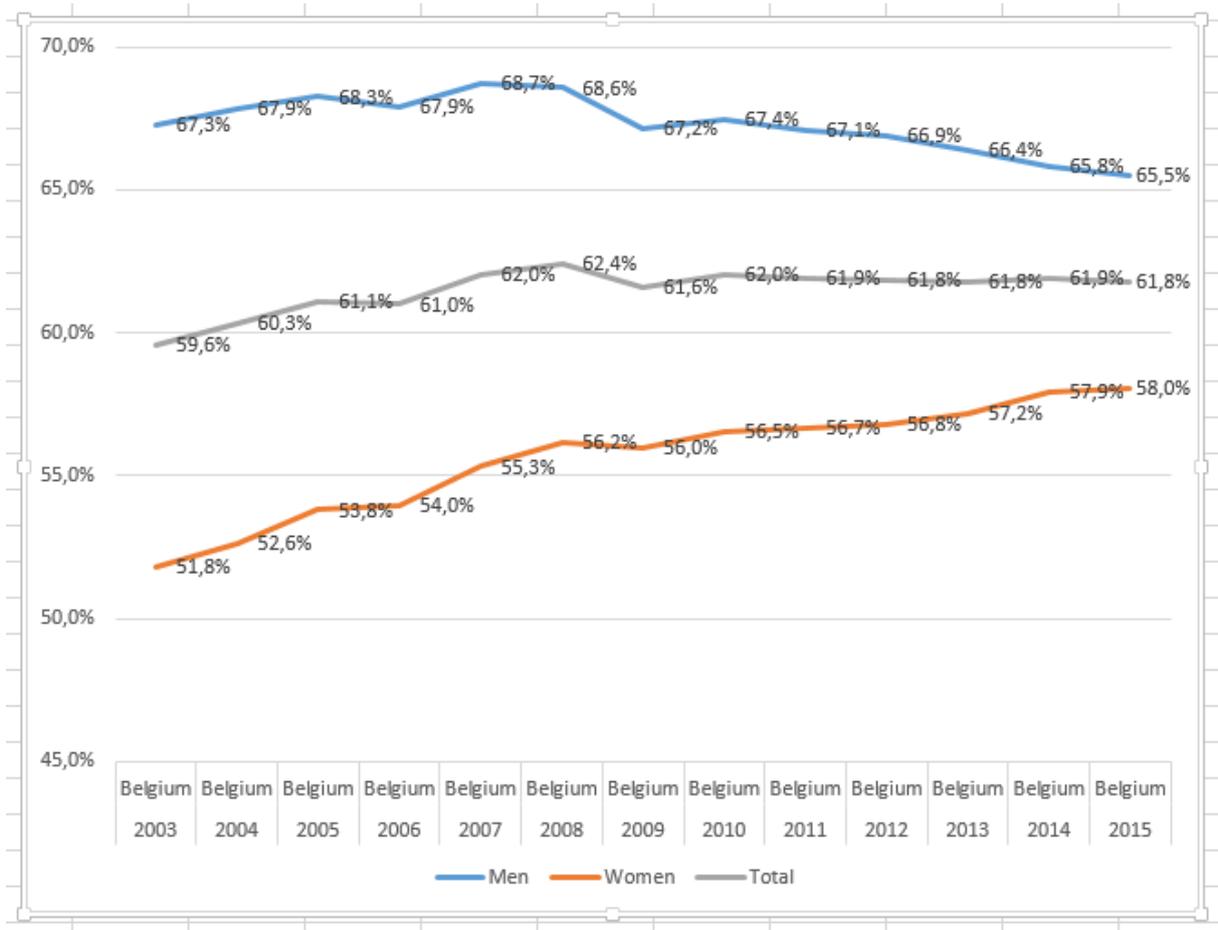


Figure 2b: Employment rate of population 15-64 years – Belgium (2003 – 2009)



Source:

http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/modules/publications/statistiques/arbeidsmarkt_levensomstandigheden/belgische_arbeidsmarkt_1983-2015.jsp - Employment rate – 15-64 years – Labour Force Survey

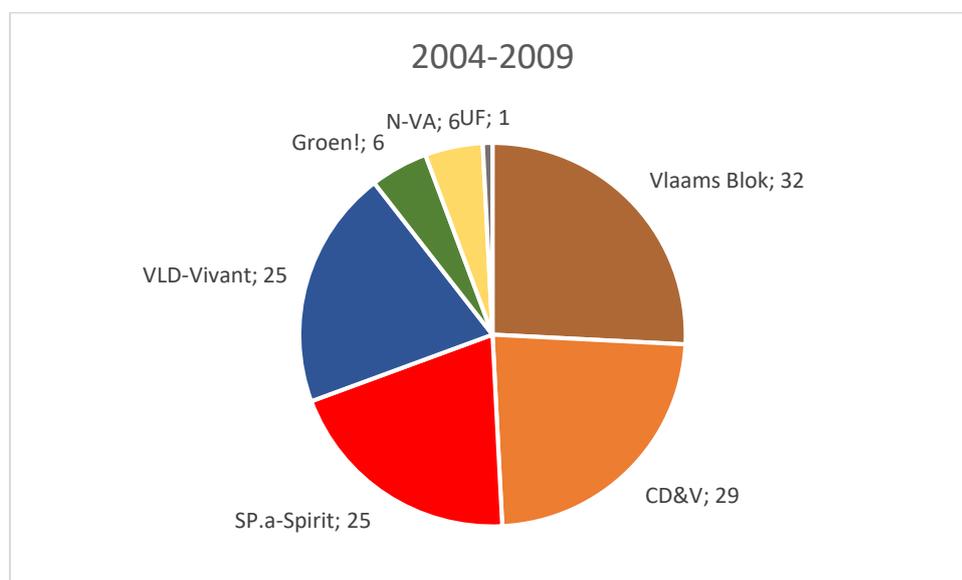
Table 1: Number of people registered at NEO (2001-2017) – annual averages physical units

Year	Physical units (annual averages) in Belgium	Physical units (annual averages) in Flanders
2001	997.766	537.449
2002	1.077.467	584.042
2003	1.155.407	625.800
2004	1.177.830	626.577
2005	1.210.686	641.067
2006	1.210.247	634.282
2007	1.193.634	617.005
2008	1.193.877	619.147
2009	1.313.481	702.825
2010	1.311.835	692.978

2011	1.292.207	674.193
2012	1.282.415	676.982
2013	1.269.930	678.686
2014	1.226.054	658.859
2015	1.159.472	638.758
2016	1.095.852	607.321
2017	1.134.808	623.822

Source : http://app.rva.be/D_stat/Statistieken/Stat_i/Default.aspx?Language=NL

Figure 3a: Composition of the Flemish Parliament (2004-2009)



Source

http://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/docs/varia/stats/legislatuurverslag_vlaamsparlement_2004-2009.pdf

CD&V: *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* (Christian Democratic party)

SP.a: *Socialistische Partij Anders* (socialist party)

Spirit: (Flemish social-liberal party. Common roots with N-VA, i.e. *Volksunie* a Flemish nationalist party (1954-2001)).

N-VA: *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (conservative nationalist party, i.e. *Volksunie*).

VLD: *Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* (Flemish Liberal party) lateron Open VLD.

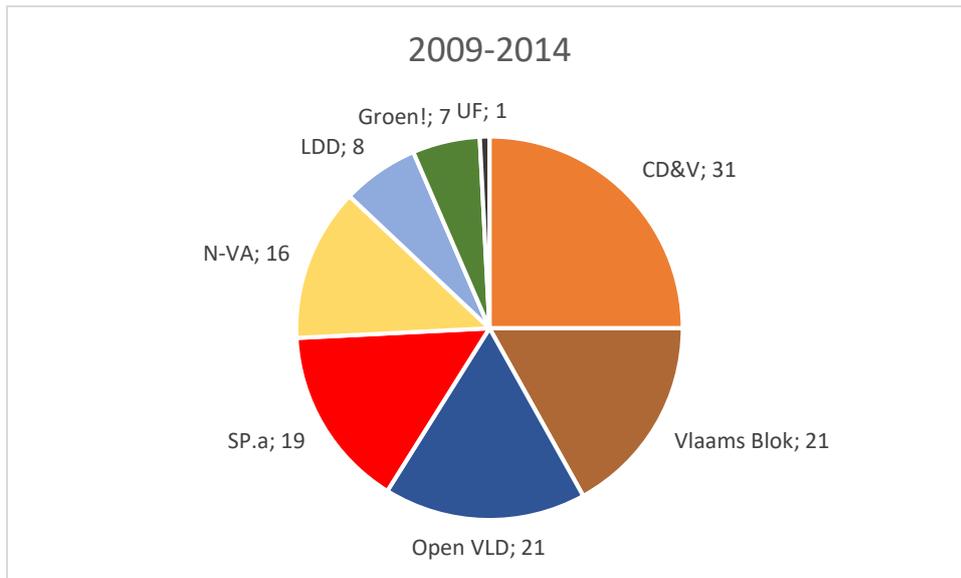
Vivant: (Belgian liberal party, currently mainly active in the German speaking part, created in 1997).

LDD: *Libertair, Direct, Democratisch* (populist-libertarian party, created in 2007).

Groen!: (ecologist party)

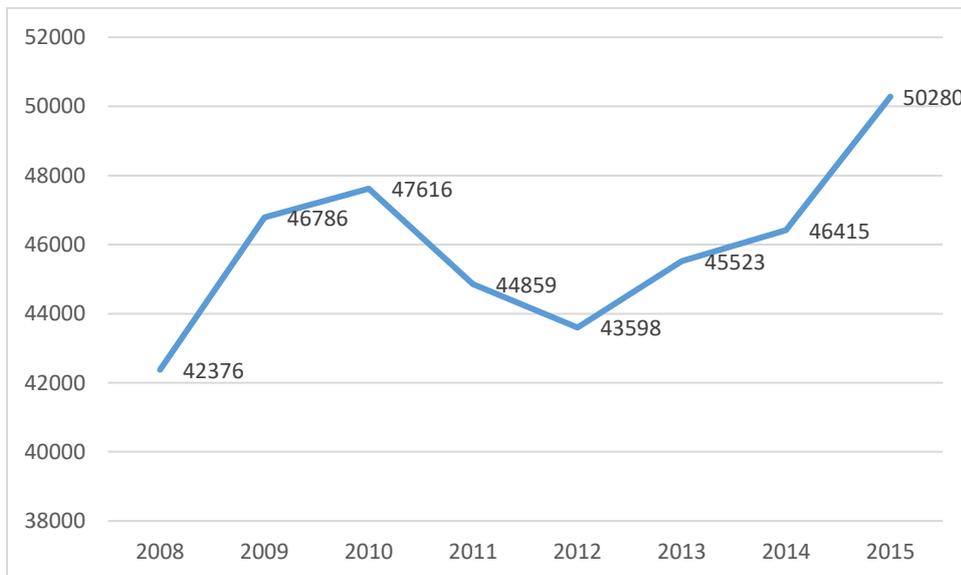
UF: *Union des Francophones* (French nationalist party only active if Flemish Brabant).

Figure 3b: Composition of the Flemish Parliament (2009-2014)



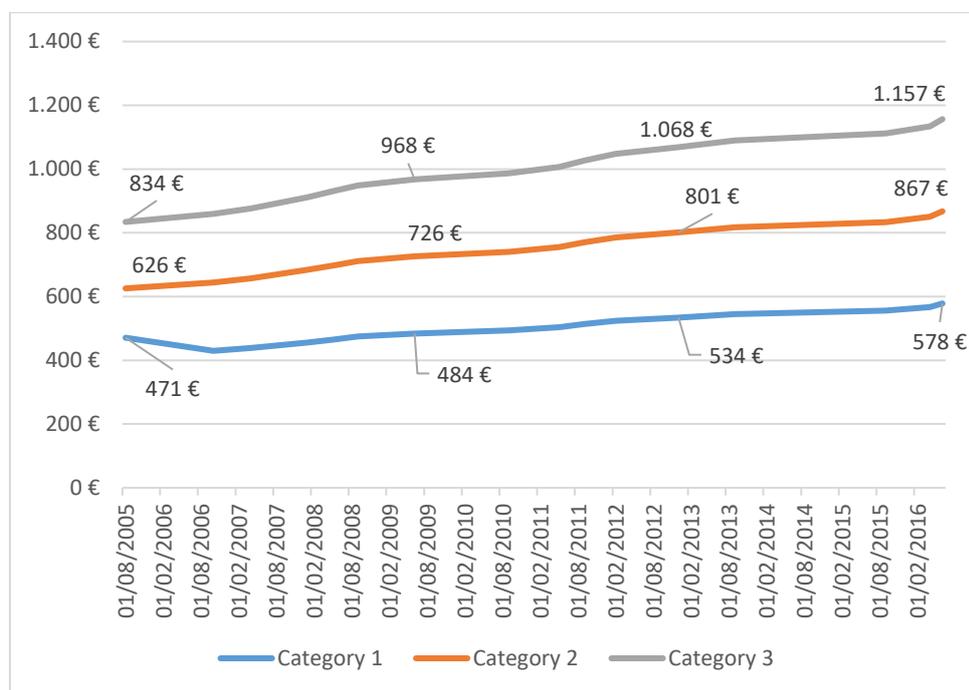
Source : http://verkiezingen2009.belgium.be/nl/vla/seat/seat_VLR00000.html

Figure 4: The number of recipients of subsistence allowances (2008-2015) in Flanders



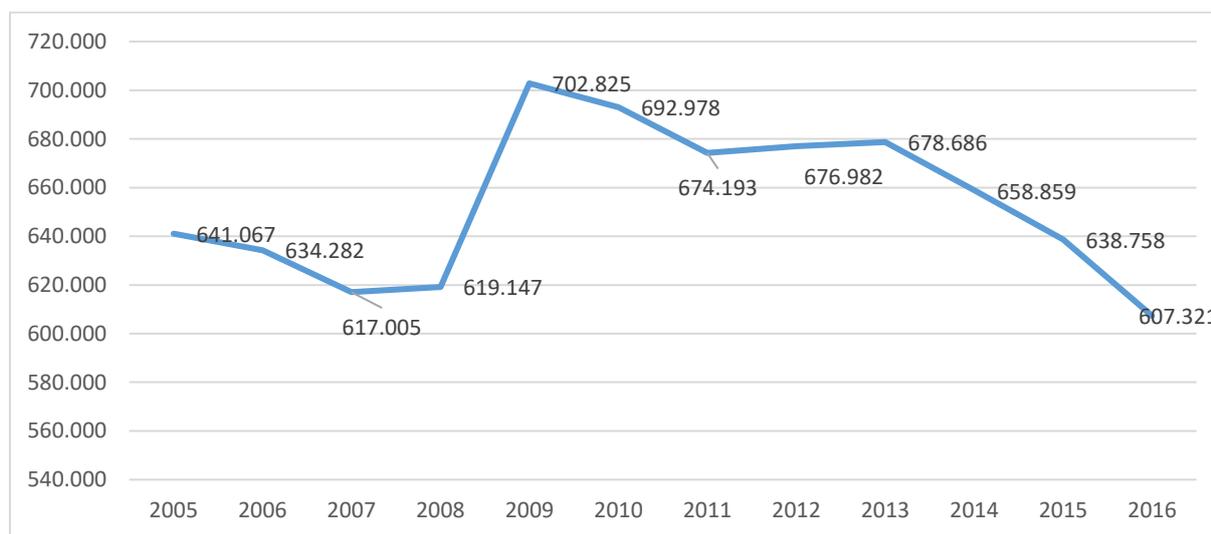
Source: <https://www.mi-is.be/nl/studies-publicaties-statistieken/leefloon-II>

Figure 5: Monthly amount of social assistance benefits according to the three categories (2005 – 2016)



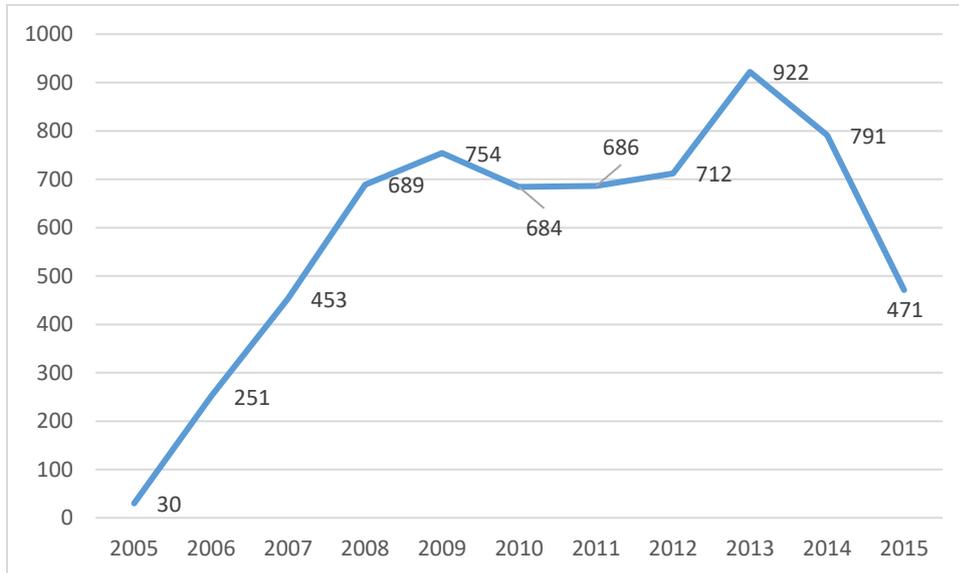
Source : http://www.armoedebestrijding.be/cijfers_leefloon.htm

Figure 6: Number of recipients of unemployment benefits (2005-2016) in Flanders



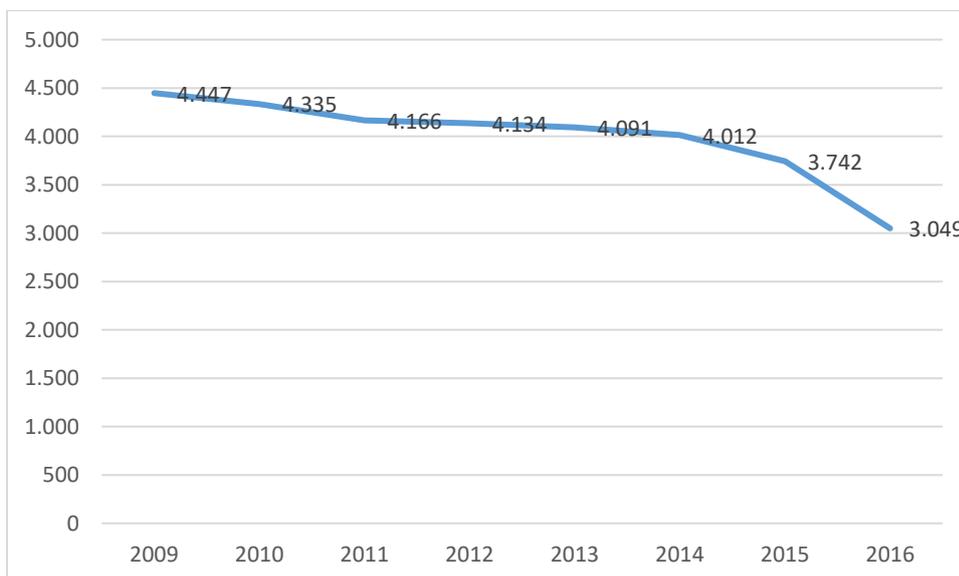
Source : http://app.rva.be/D_stat/Statistieken/Stat_i/Default.aspx?Language=NL

Figure 7: Absolute figures on exclusion from unemployment benefits (2005-2015) in Flanders



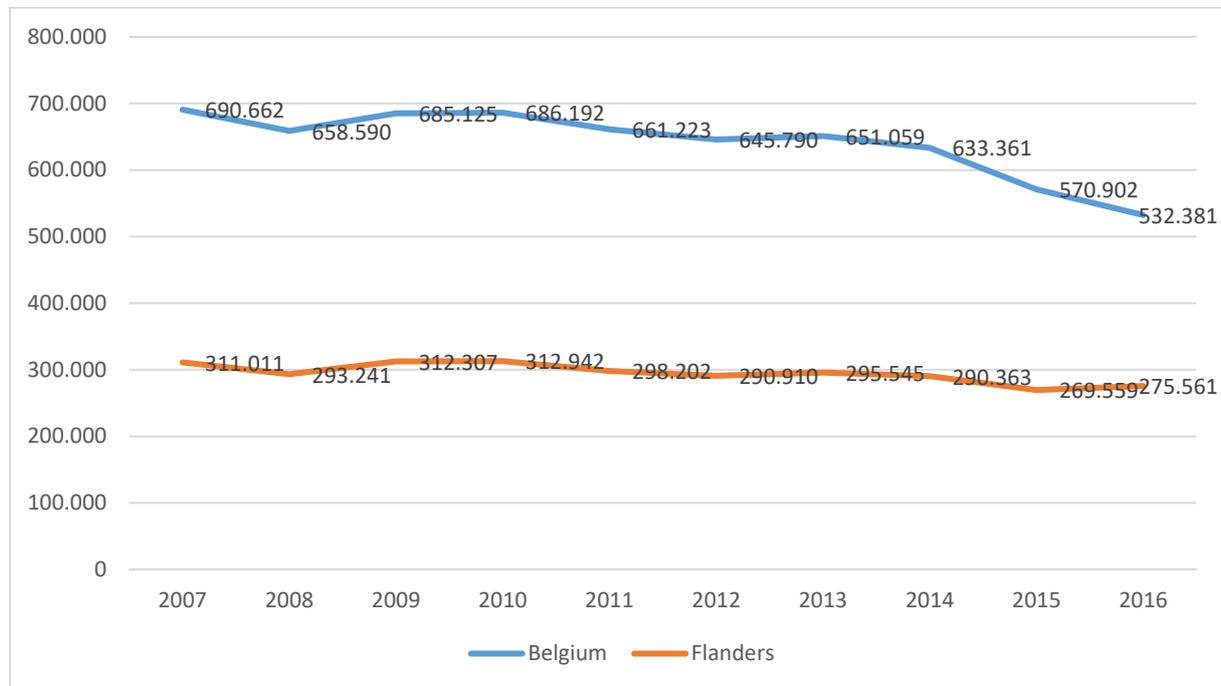
Source: RVA, (2016)

Figure 8: The number of fulltime equivalents in the workforce of the NEO (2009-2015)



Source : RVA (2016), *De RVA in 2016. Volume 1: Activiteitenverslag*, Brussel

Figure 9: The number of fully unemployed persons, including job-seekers and inactive persons not looking for a job (2007-2015) in Belgium



Source : RVA (2016), *De RVA in 2016. Volume 2: Indicatoren van de arbeidsmarkt en evolutie van de uitkeringen*, Brussel

Table 2: Timeline: Activation policies in Belgium and Flanders - milestones

1976	Law on PCSW - gives amongst others the possibility to employ recipients of the minimum income through Art 60 and Art 61.
1987	Introduction of the Local Employment Agencies (Plaatselijke Werkgelegenheidsagentschappen), amongst others to activate long-term unemployed to (re)integrate them into the regular labour market.
1993	The Federal Government approves the programme for a society based on solidarity.
1998	Model of trajectory guidance was launched by Flemish PES as method for the accompaniment of unemployed towards the labour market. Aim is to offer the most suitable services and accompaniment. The model is based on a staggered approach: the longer the duration of unemployment, or the greater the distance to the labour market, the more intensive is the accompaniment.
1999	The Belgian Government under the lead of G. Verhofstadt set itself the task of turning Belgium into an ' active welfare state ', combining 'new risks' and preventive policies through activation, while also emphasizing the need to maintain adequate social benefits.
2000	Launch of Job Centres (Flanders).
2002	Introduction of the Law on the Right to Social Integration (Recht op Maatschappelijke Integratie). This Law was introduced to avoid social assistance to become a way of life (combination of (re)integration into the labour market,

	individualized approach and a living wage). Introduction of the GPMI – individualised trajectory for integration.
2003	Introduction of the Sluitende aanpak in Flanders: a preventive approach and curative approach.
2004	Plan for guidance and follow-up of unemployed (Federal level).
2005	First tendering by Flemish PES, intended as experiment. The Flemish PES ‘buys’ services on the market; the implementation of the accompaniment is transferred to other public and private organisations.
2008	Research HIVA into W²: employment and social welfare trajectories (Flanders).
2009	First phase of experimental gardens.
2010	Introduction of het Sluitend maatpak in Flanders (focus is unemployed > 50 years). The approach is based on more individual guidance combined with an earlier detection of problems in order to intervene quicker and more effectively. Specific attention is paid to specific groups like youngsters and migrants.
2011	Approval of concept nota W²: employment and social welfare trajectories by Flemish Government.
2012	Second phase of experimental gardens.
2016	Flemish Government approves the concept Decree on Temporary Work Experience initiatives.
2017	Start of implementation of Temporary Work Experience initiatives in Flanders.

Federal level in yellow; Flemish level in blue; experiments in green