

VET system in Belgium

The tourism sector has become one of the strongest pillars of the EU of which Belgium is no exception. Belgium's VET system plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for various professions, supporting economic growth, and addressing skill shortages in the workforce. Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Belgium features compulsory education up to 18 years, with dual learning options for those aged 15 and older. Education, training, and employment are managed at the federated level by various actors, including education and training ministers, while formal certification predominates in the VET field. The country's small territory and diverse linguistic communities, along with migration flows, present unique linguistic challenges.

VET providers operate within school networks (both public and subsidized private) and share common objectives, certification, and occupation profiles, while maintaining some autonomy, which supports educational choice for learners and parents. Strategies and policies related to employment and VET are negotiated with social partners, who also help organize alternating work-education programs and continuous vocational training.

Due to varying socioeconomic realities, the regions of Flanders, Wallonia, the German-speaking Community, and the Brussels-Capital Region have distinct objectives and priorities, formalized in government strategies addressing issues like language learning and workforce skills. The 'school basin' concept in French-speaking regions and the 'Flemish partnership of dual learning' in Flanders facilitate regional responses to specific socio-economic and educational challenges.

Below is the overview of the VET system in Belgium:

1. Types of Institutions

A. Secondary Level (ISCED 3) and some programs offered:

- **Technical Secondary Education:** A school-based program offering courses in technical subjects such as computer science, applied sciences, and economics. At the end of the program, students receive both a qualification certificate and a Certificate of Upper Secondary Education (CESS), allowing them to pursue higher education.

- **Vocational Secondary Education:** Also, school-based, this program prepares students for direct entry into the workforce in various sectors (agronomy, industry, etc.). Students receive a qualification certificate after six years, with the option of an additional seventh year to obtain the CESS.
- **Apprenticeships/Dual Programs:** Available to learners aged 15 and older, these programs combine theoretical learning in schools or training centers (e.g., IFAPME, SYNTRA, ZAWM) with work experience. A qualification certificate is awarded after six years, with the option for a CESS in the seventh year.
- **VET for Special Education Needs (SEN) Learners:** Tailored programs for learners with physical or mental difficulties, offering a qualification certificate or, in some cases, a CESS.

B. Post-secondary Non-tertiary Level (ISCED 4):

This level includes advanced programs following technical and vocational secondary education, as well as a graduate program in nursing.

C. Tertiary Level (ISCED 5 and 6):

Tertiary VET includes professional bachelor's programs with a strong focus on practical experience and dual bachelor's or master's programs that split time between theoretical courses and workplace training.

2. Entry and Progression:

Students or trainees enter the VET system after completing lower secondary education. Vocational programs (ISCED 3, in BE-DE ISCED 2-3) are offered from grade 9 as school-based schemes to learners aged 14. These programs have a strong practical focus and aim at direct employment. Additionally, there are pathways for learners with special educational needs (SEN) that lead to a qualification at ISCED levels 2 and 3.

3. Pathways:

The VET system in Belgium offers various pathways, including vocational programs, technical and artistic programs, apprenticeship programs, and upper-secondary follow-up programs. These

pathways are designed to provide learners with practical skills and theoretical knowledge in sectors like agronomy, industry, construction, and economy.

4. Educational Qualifications:

- Focused on competencies for functioning in society, further studies, and professional activities.
- Can only be obtained through formal education.

Wallonia (BE-FR)

SFMQ Responsibilities:

- Develop professional profiles that reflect job realities.
- Creates training profiles to align training with job market needs. Ensures coherence between training offerings and employment services.

Qualification Development:

- Trades Profiles: Developed within a Professions Profiles Commission and validated by the Chamber of Trades.
- Training Profiles: Developed within a Training Profiles Commission and validated by the Teaching-Training Chamber. The Chamber of Trades provides matching notices to connect profession and training profiles.

German-speaking Community (BE-DE)

Qualifications Development:

- Managed by the Institute for Vocational and Educational Training in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (IAWM), in cooperation with professional sectors, companies, and associations.

Program Design:

- Programs are updated based on market needs, considering both general and professional skills.
- The pedagogical service of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community handles secondary VET schools similarly to the IAWM's role in apprenticeships.

Integration and Training Programs:

- Offered by the Employment and Vocational Training Agency (ADG), designed to align with employment market conditions.
- The ADG is certified to issue training in sectors such as cleaning, office work, and construction.

5. VET Governance by Linguistic Communities:

Flanders (Dutch-speaking, BE-FL): The Flemish Government oversees VET for learners in Flanders and Brussels. Key agencies include AGODI (education services), AHOVOKS (higher education and adult education), and VDAB (employment and vocational training).

French-speaking (BE-FR): VET governance is shared by the French Community Government, the Walloon Region, and COCOF (for Brussels). Education and training ministers are responsible for policy direction and resource allocation.

Brussels: As a bilingual region, VET in Brussels is governed by both Flemish and French authorities, with providers like VDAB and Bruxelles Formation delivering services.

German-speaking Community (BE-DE): The German-speaking Community manages its VET system and employment policies, with input from social partners. The Institute for Alternating Training (IAWM) collaborates with companies and sectors to design relevant training programs.

Each community/region defines and updates its VET qualifications based on local needs:

Flanders: VDAB manages the "Competent" database, which contains professional profiles and helps develop qualification dossiers within the Flemish Qualification Structure.

French-speaking Community: The SFMQ coordinates professional and training profiles to align education with labor market needs, involving public employment services and social partners.

German-speaking Community: The IAWM collaborates closely with companies to design qualifications, while the ADG agency provides training programs aligned with employment market demands.

Market needs in tourism sector in Belgium

The tourism industry in Belgium is a vital component of the economy, contributing significantly to employment and revenue. However, it faces specific labor market needs shaped by changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's a detailed overview of the current demands for skills and qualifications, areas of shortage, and emerging opportunities within the sector.

Current Demand for Skills and Qualifications

1. High-Demand Professions:

Key roles in the tourism sector include:

- **Hospitality Staff:** Hotel managers, receptionists, and front desk staff.
 - **Food and Beverage Services:** Chefs, waitstaff, and bartenders.
 - **Tour Guides:** Professionals with knowledge of local history and culture.
 - **Event Coordinators:** Specialists in managing conferences, weddings, and other events.
 - **Travel Agents:** Experts in travel planning and customer service.
2. **Skills in Demand:**
- **Customer Service Skills:** Essential for enhancing guest experiences and ensuring satisfaction.
 - **Language Proficiency:** Knowledge of multiple languages (especially Dutch, French, English, and German) is increasingly important to cater to diverse visitors.
 - **Digital Skills:** Proficiency in digital marketing, online booking systems, and social media management is critical as the industry shifts toward digital platforms.
 - **Technical Skills:** Familiarity with property management systems, reservation software, and other technological tools.
3. **Qualifications:**
- The set of right qualifications is usually needed especially under some specific vocational education which is often acquired through VET programs or specialized training courses. For example, chefs may need formal culinary training, while hospitality managers may require degrees in hospitality management.

Key Areas of Shortage

1. **Seasonal and Temporary Workers:**
 - The tourism sector heavily relies on seasonal staff during peak periods. However, there is often a shortage of available seasonal workers, particularly in hospitality and service roles.
2. **Skilled Professionals:**
 - There is a notable shortage of experienced professionals in management positions, such as hotel managers and event planners. Many skilled workers left the industry during the pandemic, creating gaps in leadership and expertise.
3. **Culinary Professionals:**
 - Demand for skilled chefs and culinary staff remains high, particularly in regions known for their gastronomy. Many establishments struggle to find qualified candidates who can create authentic Belgian cuisine.

Emerging Opportunities

1. **Sustainable Tourism:**

- As travelers increasingly prioritize sustainability, there is a growing demand for professionals who can implement eco-friendly practices in tourism and hospitality, including roles in sustainable travel planning and management.

2. **Digital Transformation:**

- The shift toward digitalization has created opportunities in areas such as digital marketing, online customer engagement, and e-commerce. Professionals skilled in these areas are increasingly valuable as businesses seek to enhance their online presence.

3. **Health and Safety Compliance:**

- In the wake of the pandemic, there is heightened demand for professionals who can ensure compliance with health regulations and safety protocols within the hospitality and tourism sectors.

4. **Cultural and Experiential Tourism:**

- The rising interest in cultural and experiential tourism creates opportunities for professionals who can design and manage unique cultural experiences, such as local tours, culinary experiences, and cultural events.

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