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## THE FOUNDATION P&V IS COMBATING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT!

Since 2012, the Foundation P&V has been focusing on two current European issues: early school leaving and youth unemployment.

### European top priority: preventing a lost generation

Young people are the first victims of the wave of unemployment which has struck Europe and its major cities and most vulnerable people. In December 2013, 23.7% of young people (aged 15-24) in Europe were without work. In some countries and major cities, youth unemployment has even hit 58%. It affects all young people, but those with the fewest qualifications are hit hardest. In Europe, one young person in eight leaves secondary education without a diploma. Many fear a 'lost generation' which will see its chances for a better future diminish through a combination of school drop-outs and unemployment (cf. ILO, 2013). Keeping young people in school and helping them enter the labour market is therefore a fundamental challenge and priority for European society (cf. Europe 2020 Strategy), and therefore also for Belgium and its social actors.

### Where does Belgium stand?

Belgium sits around the European average for both issues. However, there are major differences between regions and communities.

### Major regional differences in youth unemployment

Recent comparative research between European regions shows that Flanders is doing relatively well with **youth unemployment** of 12.8%. Wallonia, and in particular the Brussels Capital Region, appear to have more problems getting their young people into work and record percentages of 27.1% and 36.4% respectively (Sourbron & Herremans, 2013). In Brussels, 62% of unemployed young people have been

out of work for longer than 6 months (compared to 55% in Wallonia and 35% in Flanders). Furthermore, at 19.5% there is an extremely low chance of entry into work for unemployed young people in Brussels (compared to 32.6% in Wallonia and 54.6% in Flanders). This means that only 1 in 5 unemployed young people in Brussels will have a job one year later (Sourbron & Herremans, 2013).

Although Flanders scores well on the above indicators, there also appears to be a number of areas that are more problematic there. For example, the gap between labour market opportunities for young people and adults is extremely large in Flanders, even larger than in the other two regions. Under-25s are 3.3 times more likely to be unemployed than over-25s (compared with 3.1 in Wallonia and 2.2 in Brussels) (Cockx, 2013). On top of this, Flanders appears to have a pronounced dual labour market for young people: highly educated school leavers appear to find a job relatively quickly, while poorly educated young people find it incredibly difficult to find work and are more likely to remain long-term unemployed. Young people without a secondary education diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed in Flanders than highly educated young people (22.9% compared to 10.5%). Although poorly educated young people are also much more often unemployed than highly educated people in Wallonia and Brussels (almost half of poorly educated young people in Brussels are unemployed), the inequality in labour market opportunities according to level of education is greatest in Flanders (Sourbron & Herremans, 2013). **Attempting to combat early school leaving and offering more guidance to poorly educated young people is therefore a priority in Flanders, just as in the other regions.**

### **Belgium is lagging behind in the fight against early school leaving**

According to the latest figures, Belgium is beginning to lag behind in terms of **early school leaving**. While Belgium could count itself among the best 10 European countries a couple of years ago, it has now fallen down to 20th place, just ahead of Bulgaria, the UK and Romania. Compared to 2009 a small rise in the number of early school leavers in Belgium can be seen (12% in 2012 compared to 11.1% in 2009), while most other European countries display a falling trend. In this case, too, there are major **differences between regions**. While in 2012, 8.7% of young people in Flanders left school without a diploma, the figure rises to 14.8% in Wallonia and 20.1% in Brussels; figures which have also been recorded in southern Europe. Young people of foreign descent are more than twice as likely to leave school without a diploma than young people who were born in Belgium. Belgium finds itself around the European average, but does considerably worse than Luxembourg and the Netherlands, for example (EU, 2013).

### **Three-year project by the Foundation P&V combating early school leaving and youth unemployment**

For the reasons outlined above, the Foundation P&V has launched an extensive programme which combines scientific research with concrete action. This programme aims to urge both policy makers and field practitioners to develop new policy measures, to give innovative and successful initiatives the chance to develop, to diffuse actions able to the fight against early school leaving and youth unemployment, and to support young people who either leave or threaten to leave education without a diploma or do not have or cannot find work.

The programme started in 2012 with an appeal to thousands of social scientists and research institutions across the whole of Europe. From the more than 40 submissions, an international panel selected 9 winning contributions which distinguished themselves through their original and informed take on the issue. These contributions were collected in the book *Early school leaving & Youth unemployment*, published by Lannoo Campus and Amsterdam University Press, and presented to the European Parliament on 7 and 8 March 2013 in the presence of European Commissioner László Andor, various ministers and important stakeholders. These debates led to a broad call for projects that work on this issue within Belgium, which was launched on 5 June 2013 (with a deadline of 5 October 2013). By 5 October 2013, we had received 245 dossiers from all over Belgium. After various evaluation rounds, a jury composed of Belgian experts (from the education, employment and poverty reduction sectors) selected **6 projects** from these dossiers to receive grants of between €10,000 and €50,000. Two projects came from Brussels, two from Flanders and two from Wallonia (see below for a description of the projects). In 2014, these projects will be closely monitored and evaluated by the Foundation P&V. The results of this monitoring and evaluation as well as the entire three-year project, along with the policy recommendations which will be derived from the project, will be presented at a major final event at the beginning of 2015.

## **Laureates of the Foundation P&V's call for projects**

Research clearly shows that early school leaving greatly increases the chance of (long-term) (youth) unemployment and poverty. Furthermore, if these young people leave school without a diploma, they more often end up in worse-paid jobs with less security. Certain groups of young people are more often affected by early school leaving and unemployment. More specifically, it is more often young people with poorly educated parents, a lower socio-economic status, an immigrant background or from certain urbanised areas. Research shows that there is often not simply one cause of early school leaving, but that it is a process of risks which gradually accumulate (from a young age). Learning difficulties, social and personal problems and (social and ethnic) inequality and discrimination also play an important role here. Guidance is therefore not just the responsibility of the school or the employment agency, but also of other actors and policy areas. A personalised approach and improved orientation, guidance and coaching for young people would seem to be important tools for combating early school leaving and finding a job (see De Groof & Elchardus, 2013; Eurofound, 2012).

The winning projects all attempt in one way or another to work on one or more of the above causes and issues. The following projects are receiving a grant from the Foundation P&V:

### **Vormingscentrum Foyer – Roma Plus (Brussels)**

A project to offer guidance to extremely vulnerable young people from an immigrant background (mostly young Romas) for getting into education and work, thereby improving their integration into the school and labour market. This project aims to improve screening and route counselling tools, further develop relationships with partners (mediation by Romastewards, consultation relating to effective follow-up routes with Leren & Werken (Learn & Work) partners, attention paid to the required language abilities in collaboration with the Dutch Language House...) but also focus on the aftercare needed and for which

there is currently no room – because even after they turn 18, these young people need support and advice to remain optimistic. All of this should lead to solutions to the obstacles that stand in the way of their success on the labour market and at school during this transitional period.

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### **Odyssee – Guidance for adolescent school drop-outs (Brussels)**

A non-profit organisation which seeks out young people who are threatening to drop out of school and helps them get back on track. In collaboration with 17 schools in Brussels, early school leavers are guided back into school by, among other things, carrying out an analysis of the reasons for dropping out and working intensively on motivation, self-respect and a personal project. Also works on prevention through group workshops for young people, as well as training for teachers and educators to help them recognise the risk factors for school drop-out, alienation and discrimination mechanisms.

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### **Werkvormm – Junior Engineering (Antwerp)**

Organises workshops outside school hours to introduce children and young people (5th and 6th year of primary education and 1st year of secondary education) to technology, allowing them to discover their potential technical talent and in this way getting them interested in technical education. This is achieved through a serious commitment from the children, parents and community. The motivation behind the project is that children or young people are seldom guided towards technical secondary education (TSO) or vocational secondary education (BSO) based on targeted selection; that someone could be technically gifted; that talent should be noticed and that the maximum opportunities for the child's development should be found in the TSO/BSO rather than the general secondary education (ASO). On the contrary, children and young people are more often than not directed towards the BSO or TSO based on their (allegedly) bad results, which considerably increases the risk of a later school drop-out.

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### **Perspectives – Digital stage technology (Flémalle)**

A project where poorly educated and/or long-term unemployed young people between 18 and 24 can receive basic training in and collaborate on a light and sound show over 9 months. This training appeals to the interests of many young people and has the advantage that many other basic skills are acquired via the realisation of an ambitious technical project (basics in mathematics, computer science, electricity, but also collaboration, organisation, etc.) which are useful when looking for work in all sectors.

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### **De Schoolbrug – From chaos to zen in the classroom (Antwerp)**

An in-school guidance route where teachers, classes and parents work together to prevent school drop-outs. The project is focused on classes with a clear issue in terms of behaviour and truancy. There are various young people in these classes who run the risk of expulsion. The unique aspect of this project is that teachers, students and parents are involved as equal partners during the preparation, implementation and aftercare. Preventive work is done within the school, and in that way the project can be distinguished from all other external time-out projects outside the school.

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### **La Teignouse AMO – Tutoring to help you grow (Comblain-Au-Pont)**

Organises and leads a tutoring system within secondary education, in which young school pupils and students learn from older, more experienced fellow pupils. A project for young people by young people, where both 'parties' are supported and reinforced in their skills (mutual 'contracts', monitoring, guidance and training, feedback and evaluation, etc.).

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