

Committee on the Application of Standards

Date: 13 May 2026

If they so wish, Governments appearing on the preliminary list of individual cases have the opportunity to supply on a purely voluntary basis, written information before 18 May 2026.

► Information on the application of ratified Conventions supplied by governments on the preliminary list of individual cases

Belgium (ratification: 1969)

Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122)

Translation provided by the Government

The Government has provided the following written information.

Belgium wishes to provide updated, detailed and technically substantiated information concerning the application of the Convention in order to respond to the observations of the Committee of Experts. This text supplements the report submitted by Belgium in 2024. It aims to highlight the substantial developments that have taken place since then, both at federal level and at the level of the federated entities, demonstrating concrete, consistent and measurable progress in addressing the concerns expressed. These developments reflect a dynamic of active and ongoing reform, fully in line with the objectives and requirements of the Convention.

Introduction

Belgium remains fully committed to the implementation of the Convention, which constitutes a normative frame of reference for all its employment policies, based on the promotion of productive, freely chosen and quality employment, accessible to all without discrimination. The authorities consider that increasing the employment rate must go hand in hand with the quality, stability and sustainability of career paths, as well as with securing transitions in the labour market, particularly for people in vulnerable situations.

Employment policy forms part of an integrated European framework, structured by the European Employment Strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Semester. The target of an 80 per cent employment rate by 2030, to which Belgium has committed, and which aims to achieve the full employment referred to in the Convention, cannot justify a purely quantitative approach or a weakening of job quality, working conditions or social protection.

The multilevel governance of employment policy in Belgium, based on a division of powers between the federal state and the federated entities and on strong, institutionalized social dialogue, allows policies to be adapted to regional and sectoral realities while pursuing common objectives at the national level.

Context

The observations made by the Committee of Experts are based on the 2024 report, drawn up against the backdrop of the end of the federal and regional legislative terms, marked by policies in transition and several reforms then in the pipeline. Since then, new governments have taken office at federal and regional levels and have adopted government agreements that place employment, training, the activation of vulnerable groups and the quality of work at the heart of their cross-cutting priorities.

Subsequently, labour market indicators have continued to show an overall positive trend. The employment rate is at its highest level since the ratification of the Convention and continues to rise, including for historically under-represented groups such as women and people born outside the European Union. The unemployment rate has reached a historic low. Although productivity growth has been insufficient in recent times, Belgium's productivity level remains one of the highest in the world.

These results confirm the course being pursued. However, they are accompanied by persistent structural labour shortages and skills mismatches in several key economic sectors. These challenges were identified as priorities as soon as the new governments were formed and are being addressed through coordinated, targeted and strengthened responses.

Matching supply and demand

Coordination between the federated entities has been strengthened since 2024 through cooperation agreements designed to ensure greater policy coherence. Interregional mobility is a key driver of this enhanced coordination. Regional public employment services are stepping up their exchange of information on job vacancies and the profiles sought, developing common matching tools and carrying out joint initiatives to reduce regional imbalances between labour supply and demand. This cooperation contributes directly to tackling labour shortages, while respecting workers' freedom of choice and the diversity of regional labour markets.

This dynamic also extends to the reintegration of people unable to work. Since 2024, federal and regional schemes have been better coordinated to promote a gradual and sustainable return to work, based on an individualized assessment of capabilities and a multidisciplinary approach. These schemes aim to balance activation and protection, prevent permanent withdrawal from the labour market and ensure employment that is freely chosen and compatible with the health status of those concerned.

With regard to labour shortages and skills mismatches, new and more precise tools have been developed. In Wallonia, a survey conducted in 2025 among a large sample of businesses made it possible to identify labour needs for 2026 and to refine the identification of occupations facing shortages. The results of this survey inform career guidance policies, the provision of skills training and support for jobseekers. In Flanders, the development of an integrated labour market forecasting model, expected in 2026, aims to improve the anticipation of future skills needs by combining quantitative data and sectoral expertise. In Brussels, the identification of shortages and occupations in high demand is more closely

integrated into the design of support and training pathways to enhance the sustainability of labour market integration.

Active policies

Active labour market policies have been strengthened since 2024, both in terms of methodology and targeting. In Wallonia, the reform of Forem aims to ensure that concrete action is offered more systematically shortly after registration, with the intensity of support tailored to the level of distance from employment. The focus is on continuous pathways, geared towards occupations facing shortages, and on the effective integration of groups requiring intensive support. In the Brussels-Capital Region, an action plan adopted in September 2025, combined with the overhaul of the Actiris support system implemented in March 2026, marks a substantial development. These measures aim to speed up the initial intake process, improve the quality of follow-up and concentrate resources on the most vulnerable groups (those facing the greatest barriers to employment). In Flanders, the Vlaanderen Werkt and Vlaanderen Leert strategies have been consolidated to strengthen targeted activation, lifelong learning and access to occupations experiencing labour shortages, with a particular focus on those with lower employment rates. In the German-speaking Community, continuous and unified support for all jobseekers has been in place since the reorganization of employment services, supported by specific measures promoting recruitment and job retention for disadvantaged target groups.

Particular attention continues to be paid to vulnerable groups. Since 2024, policies for people from countries outside the European Union have been adapted to better address the practical barriers encountered when integrating into the labour market, particularly regarding language and the recognition of skills. In Wallonia, the possibility of extending professional integration pathways to up to 52 weeks for new arrivals represents a significant development. In Brussels, the extension of the One-Stop Shop for new arrivals until 2027 ensures the continuity of integration pathways offering coordinated, multilingual socio-professional support (combining language learning, training and access to employment). In Flanders, investment is being channelled into the integration of migrant workers as well, notably through “International Houses”, which serve as accessible contact points for migrant workers and their partners. In addition, measures are being put in place to facilitate the civic integration of migrant workers, with a particular focus on language learning.

With regard to people with disabilities, the federal and regional authorities have undertaken structural reforms aimed at removing barriers to employment. Since 2024, measures have been strengthened regarding the combination of earned income and benefits, access to self-employment status, and support for entry into the open labour market. These developments aim to promote sustainable and self-chosen career paths, in which sheltered employment serves as a stepping stone rather than an end in itself. A new federal disability action plan for the 2025–29 legislative term has also been approved. It aims to remove the barriers faced by people with disabilities in leading fully independent lives, and to prevent new barriers from arising as unintended side effects of proposed policy measures.

Employment policies systematically incorporate the gender dimension. Employment services are strengthening non-gendered guidance and support for access to technical and future-oriented professions. The assessment of the impact of the law aimed at tackling the gender pay gap took place against a backdrop, from 2021 onwards, of European discussions regarding a future directive on pay transparency, which influenced the timetable and priorities of the analysis work.

Flexi-jobs

Belgium attaches central importance to the quality of employment, in accordance with the spirit of the Convention. The authorities are fully aware that certain recent developments in labour market regulation are the subject of debate and concerns expressed by trade unions, particularly with regard to the stability of career paths and the conditions under which certain forms of employment are carried out. These concerns are taken into consideration within the framework of the institutionalized social dialogue, which remains a fundamental pillar of employment policy governance in Belgium.

Measures likely to have an impact on this quality, such as those arising from the Jobsdeal, are subject to ongoing evaluation.

As regards flexi-jobs, these are only available to pensioners and people who are already in employment representing at least four fifths of a full-time position. A flexi-job is therefore never a main job, and exists primarily to help (small) businesses meet temporary additional demand. So far, there is no indication that flexi-jobs are replacing other jobs.

Training

In the field of lifelong learning, structural changes have taken place since 2024. The Federal Learning Account was abolished in 2026 due to its administrative complexity. The federal authorities and federated entities are now working to establish a simplified and interoperable Individual Learning Account (ILA), based on the “only once” principle, which will centralize training pathways.

Since 2024, the individual right to training amounts to five days per year for full-time workers in companies with more than 20 full-time employees. A reform is being prepared, in consultation with the social partners, to simplify the scheme while maintaining exemptions for small businesses, in order to avoid barriers to entrepreneurship, and for certain specific categories of workers.

The social partners play a central role in the implementation of training policies, particularly through sector-specific schemes. The federated entities complement this framework with their own instruments, ensuring effective access to lifelong learning, including for workers in small businesses and vulnerable groups, and strengthening the alignment between skills and labour market needs.

Improving the performance and equity of education and training systems, while strengthening their alignment with the labour market, particularly in ICT and STEM, remains a key priority for the federated entities. Furthermore, strengthening the teaching profession, through more flexible and attractive career paths and high-quality training, is a central objective.

Target groups

Policies for young people and older workers have recently been adjusted as well. For young people, particularly NEETs, the schemes prioritize access to sustainable, quality employment, through a combination of personalized support, work experience and training. Certain ineffective schemes have been discontinued following evaluations, while targeted measures have been strengthened or adapted, such as training-oriented work placements, supervised first work experiences, mentoring schemes and intensive support towards employment, in coordination with regional public employment services. With regard to older workers, employment support has been refocused to reduce windfall effects and enhance the

effectiveness of return-to-work schemes, with a view to sustainable careers. The reforms undertaken aim, in particular, to better target incentives for jobseekers furthest from the labour market, to strengthen personalized support, to combat age discrimination and to promote continued employment or a sustainable return to work, notably through support for social economy schemes complementing existing federal schemes.

Conclusion

In the light of all these factors, Belgium considers that the application of the Convention is characterized by a good-faith, active and evolving approach, in accordance with the principles of this Convention. Belgium remains fully prepared to continue the dialogue with the Committee of Experts within the regular and ongoing framework of the supervisory mechanism, in a spirit of cooperation and progressive improvement.