

**Promoting Green Skills in Flanders:
Joined-up Initiatives of Social Partners and Government
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Abstract²

Internationally, the most effective approaches to green skills development have been those with broad partnerships at different levels. Social partners in Flanders take up an important role since they not only are the main actors responsible for the actual work floor organisation and skill development at company or sectoral level, but also co-operate with government at the regional and country level. This paper highlights some good practices by focusing on the way social partners and social dialogue can contribute to developing strategies for green jobs and skills, and integrate these with other areas of workforce development.

1. Introduction

The greening of the economy will have the greatest chances of success if a clear strategy and a broad societal consensus can be created. After all, the ways in which societal challenges are identified and addressed is not the job of the government alone. Internationally, the most effective approaches for green jobs and skills appear to be characterised by wide-ranging partnerships at different levels (country, sector, company)³. Actors who play an important role here are the social partners, in other words, the employer and employee organisations.

In Belgium, the social dialogue between social partners mutually and with the government is highly institutionalised. The policy on work and training/education is developed with the input or co-operation of the social partners. The specific state structure and the distribution of powers within Belgium means that at different levels of policy, different input and consultative bodies work with different social partners. Social dialogue about the greening of the economy and green jobs therefore takes place at different levels: national or Belgian, regional (Flanders-Brussels-Wallonia), sectoral (an important level within the Belgian dialogue system) and at the company level (Works Council).

Sustainable development and greening of the economy has been on the agenda for all of the social partners in Belgium for some time now. The interest in the training aspects associated with the greening of employment has arisen somewhat more recently. Previously, the focus was more on defining and quantifying the green jobs and much less on the effects of the transition on the skills required. Currently, unions and employers have become aware that a greener economy will impose different demands in terms of training and skills. Green skills will increasingly complement the more traditional knowledge from and within the sectors. The social partners and the government are therefore increasingly taking joint or co-ordinated initiatives.

This paper outlines the way in which, in Belgium, the social partners are collaborating in the investigation of needs and the development of skills and capacities that will be required for the greening of the economy. The focus is on the regional, Flemish level because a significant part of that labour market as well as the full competency for education and training is in the hands of the Regions and Communities. In practice, most of the initiatives are situated, therefore, at the regional level as well.

2. Green jobs and skills on the Belgian national dialogue agenda

Depending on the definition of green jobs applied, from environmental industries in the narrow sense to the traditional sectors that are working to become greener, the required skills and competencies will of course differ as well. In its 2010 report on green jobs, the *Hoge raad voor Werkgelegenheid* (High Council for Employment)⁴ stated that Belgium also has a significant structural need for technical profiles combined with generic skills.

The existence of the list of shortage professions clearly indicates that there are difficulties in filling certain vacancies. Technical and scientific profiles are important for the development of many (green) sectors, but the output from the education system is too low to meet the increasing demand. This applies not only for engineers but also for the technicians needed for production, installation and maintenance.

In their recommendation to the Minister of Employment on green jobs, the national bipartite dialogue bodies (NAR and CRB)⁵ emphasised the crucial need for training and skill development. They identified multiple shortages, formulated proposals and defined those professions that will be or become important in the different phases of the transition towards a green economy. They also requested that particular attention be paid to the most vulnerable groups such as those with a low level of education.

The policy recommendations of the national social partners have to do with the initial education (a great need for researchers, getting young people interested in scientific and technological training...) as well as continuing education. The latter is eminently suitable for familiarising employees and jobseekers with new techniques and allowing them to adapt to the new qualitative changes in the employment world. Thanks to the wide range of training available through continuing education, the basic knowledge can be supplemented with new competencies which are necessary for the transition to a low carbon economy and employees in the most heavily affected sectors can more easily make the changeover to different sectors. For continuing education, the social partners have established three concrete and measurable goals:

- 1.9% of the total payroll of the companies in the private sector needs to be devoted to continuing education;
- A participation target of 50% of the employees by the year 2020;
- Set aside 0.10% of the gross salaries for continuing education of groups subject to exceptionally high risk on the labour market.

In addition, their recommendation to the policymaker is to anticipate the training needs as much as possible by performing a SWOT-analysis of all sectors in Belgium. In this way, new programmes for initial and continuing education can be adapted or developed and qualification mismatch can be reduced. This is a method that has already been developed in other countries with particular attention for green chains.

The recommendation on green jobs entails an appeal to the various actors to take up their responsibility: government, companies, employees, and citizens; each with their own responsibility. Awareness raising is a responsibility shared by all those involved, but the government must provide an appropriate framework and must introduce the various measures. The commitment of the social partners at the federal level consists of awareness raising and an advisory role, and in deployment of the sectoral training funds.

3. Green jobs and skills on the Flemish dialogue agenda

The social dialogue in Flanders takes place within the SERV (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen* or Social-Economic Council of Flanders). The SERV is a public institution that functions as a dialogue and advisory body and as a think tank for the Flemish government and the Flemish parliament. The council is where the Flemish employers' organisations and the Flemish unions regularly meet and where they have access to a secretariat and research department. The SERV makes recommendations for the social economic policy in the broadest sense and organises the bipartite dialogue between the social partners mutually. In addition, there is also the tripartite dialogue within the VESOC (the *Vlaams Economisch en Sociaal Overleg Comité* or Flemish Economic and Social Dialogue Commission) where the Flemish government and employer and employee organisations regularly gather, make agreements and establish formal accords. These accords are binding for the three parties. The VESOC is chaired by the Minister-President of the Flemish Government and the SERV provides the secretariat.

Already in 1990, the social partners set up a specific working party for Environment and Economy within the SERV. In this group, they analyse the relationship between environment and economy and formulate policy recommendations. The SERV has published numerous reports in which the issues of the greening of the economy and of skills are discussed⁶. More recently, the following initiatives have been noteworthy.

In early 2009, the **Pact 2020** was signed by the Flemish Government and the social organisations from civil society in Flanders. This Pact was prepared within the SERV and later in the VESOC, but was endorsed by all the major stakeholders' organisations in Flanders (the employer and employee organisations of the SERV, the environmental movement, minority organisations and associations for the family, the poor and for North-South solidarity). The Pact 2020 aims to achieve a transition to an economically innovative, sustainable and socially welcoming society. It contains 20 concrete goals for 2020. A number of these goals explicitly promote sustainability and green growth and the goals are monitored annually and are aligned with the *Vlaamse Hervormingsprogramma* (VHP or Flemish Reform Programme), Europa 2020 and the goals of *Vlaanderen in Actie* (ViA or Flanders in Action), the future action plan of the Flemish government⁷.

In late 2009, spurred by a sense of urgency as result of the economic and financial crisis, the Flemish social partners and government signed a ***Werkgelegenheids- en Investeringsplan*** (**WIP or Employment and Investment Plan**) within VESOC. In the WIP, the need for a transition policy was once again emphasised and measures were identified for contending with the economic crisis through both targeted initiatives in the short term and structural action to support the transition towards a future-oriented economy, including its greening. The investment section of the WIP established strategic fields of action including smart electricity networks, future proof construction, ecology-infrastructure (water, soil...) and smart logistics/mobility infrastructure. Among the points made in the employment section were that the available range of education urgently needs to be aligned with the economic transformations. After all, having access to employees with the right skills is a necessary condition for the realisation of the greening of the economy. In technical and vocational secondary education and the professional bachelor's degrees, programmes of specialisation need to be created that will channel the 'technicians for the future' into the labour market, equipped with a solid background and education in areas such as green technology, sustainable building and others. Particularly the collaboration between education and the other training actors and the business sectors must be reinforced, according to the WIP, in order to be able to more rapidly respond to the needs of the market. The actions of the WIP are monitored and evaluated in VESOC⁸.

In late 2010, the SERV issued a recommendation on its own initiative on **green transformation processes in the Flemish economy**. Companies were visited and questioned about the barriers and opportunities encountered in the implementation of the greening process. The role of government for supporting and facilitating the transformation processes was also investigated. From the cases, among other things it became apparent that the shortage of certain profiles on the labour market forces companies and sectors to find adaptive strategies: they began collaborating with schools in order to ensure a high quality supply of workers by offering (long-term) traineeships; others (also) focus on retention, social innovation, increasing the involvement of the employees and investing in the development of talent. The exploration of the field led to policy recommendations for the Flemish government but also for the business world and other social actors. With regard to the skills policy (linking education-labour market, training and guidance of job seekers, employees), the conclusion was that the acquisition of skills and the ongoing development of skills is important for the innovative capacity, the ability to absorb knowledge and the adaptability of the Flemish business world to new technological developments and standards. Shortages as a result of the lack of enough employees with appropriate skills are an obstacle to greening of the economy⁹.

In 2011 the SERV also published an extensive report on **renewable energy**. “It includes, among others, a chapter on the green jobs in the renewable energy sector and the training initiatives that exist in the sector. Another chapter focuses in detail on the consequences of the transition to a low carbon society for the economy and employment. The conclusion is that renewable energy together with other sectors and activities can play an important role in the greening of the economy and will lead to economic growth and new jobs. However, one condition is that the policy be more explicitly targeted towards achieving this. The observation was in fact that currently, many opportunities for lasting growth and job creation in the renewable energy sector are being missed because the policy is insufficiently geared towards the new technologies and activities with promising export prospects in which the Flemish production companies are specialised. Another requirement is a more intense collaboration between the energy policy and the labour market and training policy. The report points out that the introduction of renewable energy sometimes requires specific knowledge and other skills of the workers, which can lead to a mismatch between the available staff and those required. This can hinder the development of renewable energy and the renewable energy sector. To a large extent, these shortages are the same as those which apply to the processing industry, or in the renewable energy sector in other countries: technically and scientifically trained personnel with the right skills are often crucial, but that prove to be in short supply. Later in the year, a recommendation was also issued by the SERV on renewable energy, calling for an adjustment and supplementation of the existing policy¹⁰.

In 2011, at the request of the government, the SERV-partners issued a recommendation about **Rio+20**, which was dedicated to the theme of the greening of the economy. Here, they again called for structural measures in order to enable the transition towards a sustainable economy, with a strong engagement from employers and employees, certainly when it is a case of green economy and green jobs, and they want to take concrete steps. The SERV committed itself to regularly inventorying the analyses and ideas exchanged at the international level and to applying them in Flanders. On the website of the SERV there is a follow-up of the Rio+20 negotiations and in late April 2012 a joint symposium will be held with the Flemish Minister-President and the ILO in Brussels on the topic of green jobs and green skills¹¹.

Moreover, for a number of years the SERV has been working on the topic of *maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen* (MVO or **corporate social responsibility CSR**). CSR significantly contributes to the realisation of the goals of the Pact 2020 for sustainable enterprise and social cohesion. In 2007 the SERV launched a communication campaign about CSR and organised a conference. This was followed by other initiatives, including a promotional film that was shot on location at several companies and a study on CSR at 14 companies in Flanders by the *Stichting Innovatie & Arbeid* (StIA or Foundation for Innovation & Labour), a research committee within the SERV¹². A **competency team** is also active within the SERV. This team has created numerous professional competency profiles and is currently working on “Competent” (see box below).

Finally, it should be mentioned that the theme of green jobs and education is a recurrent topic in the VESOC-working parties who prepare the dialogue between the social partners and the government. The most recent **employment agreement** dates from February 2012 and focuses on those over 50 and people who find themselves on the job market without qualifications.

4. Towards more green skills in Flanders: what will happen specifically?

On the strength of the above policy recommendations and commitments, many concrete initiatives have been taken in which the social partners have played a role and help to shape or influence the practice. It may come as a surprise that the social partners in Flanders are so intensely involved in the skills policy because in many other EU countries, this falls under the powers of the government or the private sector.

It is in fact characteristic of Flanders that skills development is seen as a shared responsibility and that the dialogue between the employer, employee, the government and the trade union helps to generate solutions. This is also the case for the green jobs and necessary skills. Below, we shall show how the commitments of, for example, the Pact 2020 and the WIP are concretely translated into green skills and training, specifically in the initiatives of the sectors (via the bipartite sectoral training funds), the VDAB (the *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding* or Flemish Public Employment Service, SYNTRA (the *Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming* or the Flemish agency for entrepreneur training) and the SERV (Competent).

Initiatives of the sectors

The sectors are a very important partner in the Flemish job market policy. Among the most important instruments are the sector *convenants*. These are joint operating agreements that are concluded every two years between the sectoral training funds (under the leadership of the sectoral social partners) and the Flemish government. The objectives are a better match between education and the employment market, a sound training and skills policy within companies and greater diversity in the workplace. The sector *covenant* specifically stimulates the collaboration between sectors, VDAB, Syntra, the SERV (Competent) and education. This entails that the range of training available from the VDAB and the content of the training at the VDAB is determined in consultation with the sectors. There is also collaboration with Syntra, for example, about the supply of training profiles for the learning period (system of learning and working). The sectors also have a crucial role in drawing up the professional competency profiles in Competent (see below). The Flemish government subsidises the wages of the sector Consultants, who must realise the actions in the sector *convenants*. Within the SERV the sector consultants meet with one another and exchange practical experiences and information, critically review policy and policy proposals, etc.

Greening is not a specific theme of the sector agreements (*convenants*), but the sectors are required to indicate how they will respond to transitions, including greening, in their competency and career policy. Practical experience demonstrates that in the sectors there is increasing attention for greening and transition. This is expressed in their involvement and engagement in strategic projects (see box) and in policy choices, awareness raising campaigns and the range of training available. A few examples of sectoral training initiatives are:

- In the transport sector: training/retraining related to the ongoing development of increasingly environmentally friendly motorisation systems for trucks (from Euro 5 currently to Euro 6);
- In the electricians' sector and the temporary work sector: training of job seekers to become solar panel installers;
- In the agriculture and horticulture sector: free training programmes for green roofs, alternative weed management, biological pesticides in greenhouse nurseries, climate control, installing reed beds... ;
- In the wood sector: training in wood construction and ecological construction for employees (which in the past were too one-sidedly geared towards architects and contractors).

Transition projects

Flanders wants to apply what is known as a transitional approach in order to promptly detect the necessary long-term structural changes in the economy, and to influence and anticipate them. Generally, transition processes rely on networks of forward-thinking players from the government, business world, civil society and scientists in which policy integration is stimulated and space is created for experiment. Already quite a few sectors are actively participating. A good example is the transition process DuWoBo (***Duurzaam bouwen en wonen or sustainable building and living***) that began in 2004. In the meantime over 60 Flemish actors have come onboard. These include trade and professional organisations within the broad category of the construction sector, knowledge centres, government, environmental associations

and academics who jointly form a platform for innovation. Together they are devising an innovation project for sustainable living and building for the next 20 years. The platform aims to eradicate fragmentation of both knowledge and authority and to initiate and realize innovation by bringing actors together, providing information and investigating how construction techniques, energy, raw materials and equipment can be more sensibly deployed. The platform also strives to establish training programmes in the practical application of all of these aspects¹³. The training for contractors, architects and employees is crucial, after all. For this reason, in 2011 the VDAB launched the training centre ‘Duurzaam Bouwen’ (sustainable building) in collaboration with the construction sector, other training providers and industrial partners. In 2012 all of these programmes look set to gain momentum. The construction sector is currently bringing together expert groups to examine how the content of the professions is changing and how best to respond to this. The construction sector has also been selected as pilot project for the roundtable discussions in the context of the Nieuw Industrieel Beleid (new industrial policy), with an important role to be played here as well by the social partners in the SERV. Finally, for Belgium, the construction sector is also the partner in the European “Build up skills” project in which those skills are sought that will be necessary to achieve the 2020 goals in terms of energy efficiency in buildings¹⁴.

Similar networks and transition initiatives have also started up in Flanders in areas such as materials management (Plan C), energy (e.g. Smart Grid Platform, cleantech platform) and transport (e.g. electric vehicles, eco-driving).

VDAB

The VDAB is the public employment service in Flanders, responsible for implementing the policy on employment mediation and professional training. The social partners are part of its Board of Directors. Within the VDAB they have been assigned a spearheading role in the area of training for green jobs and jobs for the professions of the future. For the VDAB the balance between generic green skills and greener, updated technical competencies is more important for the development of a green economy than a strict focus on specialised green skills or new curricula. Moreover, the distinction between a green and a conventional profession is difficult to draw and is not always useful. The competencies from a traditional economy are just as useful in a green economy, and the shortage of engineers and holders of secondary technical degrees is an important and generalised problem judging from labour market analyses and the list of shortage professions for which jobs are difficult to fill. Green generic competencies, such as attitudes in terms of efficient energy consumption, a careful approach to the use of raw materials and an eye for sustainability, will be required in virtually all jobs of the future and must therefore be developed by all employees, among the reserve workforce (the future employees) and the employers.

In implementation of the WIP, the VDAB organised 335 training plans over the period 2010-2011. A budget of 212,915 euros was made available for green training, and of 480,000 euros for professions for the future. The training was outsourced and was geared towards “disadvantaged groups”¹⁵ and shortage professions. A few examples of this type of training: modules such as installing solar panels and solar water heaters, the training plan “insulating building shells and roofs” and “wood frame builder”. But Green skills are increasingly part of existing training programmes such as, for example for stonemasons, carpenters, auto mechanics and professional cleaners. Concretely, this means that during the training, attention is paid to the combination of the various disciplines with environmental, safety and sustainability. On the somewhat longer term (by 2011-2014) the VDAB is working on a complete strategy on the greening of the skills of employees and job seekers. This will implement the new technical skills within the existing training programmes and integrate the development of green generic skills into all of the training. The “green” VDAB strategy is based on the following major outlines:

- A spearheading role in the area of the integration of environmental and safety aspects within the development of skills among the students
- Focus on all VDAB target groups: jobseekers, students and employees,

- Integration of the development of green generic skills into training programmes
- Development of sector and profession specific green skills in the qualification-training programmes
- Green partnerships with private and/or public stakeholders
- Making green job vacancies more traceable
- Providing appropriate qualification and certification of its own training staff.

SYNTRA

SYNTRA Flanders is the *Vlaams Agentschap voor Ondernemersvorming* (Flemish Agency for Entrepreneur Training) that is responsible for providing a range of training for the self-employed and their collaborators. This training is innovative and geared towards the labour market. Here too, the social partners are represented on the Board of Directors. The SYNTRA-network is supported by 5 authorised centres which provide a wide range of training geared towards entrepreneurs, starters and young people by means of traineeship periods. Altogether they have a total of 23 campuses in Flanders and Brussels. The bulk of the skills reinforcement for the independent contractors and SMEs is done through the practical training. Essentially, this is a system of lifelong learning that is supported by the principles of alternating learning and modular plans geared towards professional and contracting skills. Green training here ranges from the traditional landscape architects and florists to specialised technical training programmes such as installing photovoltaic cells, eco-driving for drivers, insulating building shells and roofs, passive construction, energy experts, solar energy technicians, environmental coordinator, green roofs, CO₂ strategy, energy and environmental standards, etc.

Competent (SERV)

Within the SERV there is a Competency Team that is working on ‘Competent’. This is a dynamic database that includes, among other things, professional competency profiles that describe which activities are performed in professional contexts and what someone needs to know and be able to do in order to adequately carry out the activities. Experts and mandate holders from the sectoral social partners and SERV-researchers can, through digital workbenches, more rapidly draw up the professional competency profiles and standards and keep them up-to-date. Employees and job seekers can use the information in Competent to gain an initial idea of the possibilities on the job market. The VDAB uses this information to match jobseekers based on their competencies and to organise training activities. Trainers can gain inspiration for courses and modules. Standards for documenting work experience are connected to the related professional competency profile, and Competent is also the reference framework for professional qualifications which will allow new qualification requirements appearing on the job market to find their way into the Flemish qualification structure and thus into the institutions for training, education and instruction. The dynamic nature of the database allows the content to be updated rapidly with labour market information and new developments such as greening. Thus, for example, it can be quickly indicated which new activities and associated competencies have been generated as a result of the use of renewable energy sources.

5. Own initiatives of the social partners

The social partners themselves are also taking initiatives within their organisations, or in mutual consultation, in the area of green transitions.

Trade unions: jointly and separately

In 1987 the nonprofit **Arbeid & Milieu (Labour & Environment)**¹⁶ was founded, a joint operating agreement between the environmental movement (*Bond Beter Leefmilieu* or Federation of the Flemish Environmental Movement) and the three trade unions active in Flanders: ACV, ABVV and ACLVB. In Arbeid & Milieu they jointly endeavour to achieve the transition towards a socially and ecologically responsible economy and society.

The global framework is sustainable development and a liveable world for all in Flanders, now and in the future. The operation of the nonprofit is financed through various channels but mostly through public funding (via the *Vlaams Ministerie voor Leefmilieu, Natuur en Energie* - Flemish Ministry for Environment, Nature and Energy). Within Arbeid & Milieu there is the Green Jobs project that encourages the transition towards new green jobs and the greening of existing jobs. Arbeid & Milieu organises activities and training on this topic, with attention for education and support. The four modules around which they work are: Sustainable Resource Management, Sustainable Building and Living, Mobility and Energy.

Separately as well, the three Flemish trade unions **ABVV, ACV and ACLVB** and their units have ongoing projects and campaigns. Green jobs and green skills have a prominent place on their agendas: in the conference texts, in the campaigns and in the memoranda or packages of demands. Sometimes, the Flemish trade unions conduct the campaigns for sustainability and green job creation separately but frequently, they do this jointly, sometimes together with the North-South movement (Waardig Werk, climate coalition...). Examples of such campaigns and actions are: “12 engagementen in het syndicaal klimaatakkoord” (12 commitments in the syndical climate accord), “Verander mee de wereld” (help change the world), “Loop storm voor het klimaat” (join the rising tide for the climate), the carbon footprint of sustainable enterprise, the actions for green jobs, “Waardig werk tegen de crisis” (jobs with dignity against the crisis) etc. The trade unions’ internal training departments are also working to ensure that the topics of environment, economy and sustainability are understandable and feasible for the members and the militants. After all, it is not self-evident to expect employees to embrace a greener economy when in a number of sectors, they are the very people who fear that it will bring job losses. In that light, it is certainly encouraging to observe that a survey conducted in Flanders¹⁷ indicates that not only the customers but also the employees place great importance on environmentally aware enterprise. Within the trade unions, attention is always paid to involving vulnerable groups in the labour market in the green training and green jobs.

Under the impulse of the *Internationaal Vakverbond* (IVV or International Trade Union Confederation) and the *Europees Vakverbond* (EVV or European Trade Union Confederation) the Flemish trade unions are also increasingly emphasising a ‘**just transition**’ and the ‘green new deal’. They work on the basis of five just transition principles: dialogue at all levels, high-quality green jobs, investment in training and education, respect for workers’ and human rights, and social protection¹⁸. For the trade unions, therefore, the interest in Green Skills forms part of a broader vision.

UNIZO

UNIZO is the employer organisation for SMEs and self-employed. Many of the member companies are on board with the greening of the economy. In the sector of energy consultancy and audits most of the companies are clearly SMEs. But also in the traditional sectors, the UNIZO-members are being forced to adapt and subscribe to the sustainability philosophy. In this way many small contractors in the construction sector are pursuing training in order to develop green skills and to be able to offer their clients energy-efficient and environmentally friendly solutions. Within the UNIZO-organisation, there are two energy consultants available who offer first line care to SMEs and independent contractors. They also organise info sessions on energy-performance topics such as the EPB, EPC and other important energy and environmental issues. In addition, the professional federations affiliated with UNIZO such as the Bouwunie (the Flemish federation of SMEs in the construction sector) and NAV (the professional federation of architects) are also offering specific green training. Aside from energy related matters, within UNIZO considerable attention is also paid to green professions in the recycling sector.

VOKA -Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Voka is the Flemish network of enterprises, an alliance of the *Vlaams Economisch Verbond* (Flemish Economic Federation) and the 8 Chambers of Commerce. Voka also works together with 24 sectors. Within VOKA there are also energy consultants who organise interactive workshops, meetings about specific topics and provide personal assistance as required. Voka is a partner in major platforms and projects such as, for example, Cleantech and Cradle to Cradle (C2C). Smart Grids Flanders is an initiative of Voka, which brings together companies in order to roll out a smart electricity network. Voka also organises training and information sessions about how to generate green job opportunities and what the preconditions for this are. The Chambers of Commerce organise learning networks whereby larger companies are able to help coach smaller ones (the mentor formula). Topics such as renewable energy and energy efficiency are frequently addressed. Jointly with the Provinces, the chambers issue environmental charters. These are certificates for companies who make extra efforts to improve their existing environmental situation and to work toward sustainability. Within the central knowledge centre of VOKA, for many years there has been an Environmental Steering Committee (*Stuurgroep Milieu*) in which the environmental coordinators from some 25 companies and the environmental managers from the sectors meet to consult one another and thus report on the problems/challenges the companies themselves are experiencing, in the sectors and elsewhere. The Steering Committee also publishes an electronic newsletter.

Boerenbond (Farmers' Union)

The Farmers' Union is the organisation of agricultural and horticultural workers and has 190 local chapters with 16,000 members and 160 associations in which farmers and gardeners can meet each other per sector. The training centre of the Boerenbond organises training on the various sectors and the important topics for agriculture and horticulture. Although in this sector, many of the training programmes bear the label of green, there are a few that stand out in terms of sustainability: organic farming, fruit and vegetable cultivation, rational water management and sustainable use of water, *kringloopsluiten* ('cradle to cradle'), energy consumption in the agricultural and horticultural sector, solar panels and windmills, sustainable soil use, biosafety for livestock companies, etc.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

In Flanders, the greening of the economy features prominently on the agenda of policymakers and social partners. In this paper we have provided an overview of the initiatives being taken in Flanders by the social partners separately, together, and with the government in the framework of the greening of the economy and particularly in the area of green skills. Quite a few of these initiatives already seem to have been developed. On the part of the social partners, there is a clear awareness that a greening of the economy will also lead to new requirements in terms of education and skills for these jobs. On the part of the government, there is a clear awareness that it is best for them to work together with the actors in the field. That is why much of the policy in terms of work and education/training is being developed and organised with the input or in consultation with the social partners.

With an eye to the further strengthening of the policy in the area of green skills we see a number of persistent areas requiring attention.

To begin with, a more **anticipatory labour market and skills policy** is needed. That policy needs to be able to accurately monitor the current and future evolutions and to proactively take measures with which shortages in the labour market can be prevented or reduced. International studies can identify general trends at the macro and/or meso level, but are often too general to reach any conclusions at the Flemish level and/or to assess the dynamic developments in professions and skills with sufficient detail. It is also necessary at the Flemish level to gather knowledge regarding an anticipatory competency policy, in close collaboration with the sector and other stakeholders. This is where the social partners and the government have a responsibility to find the right form of synergy.

The information that the sectors and/or government need in order to be able to make forecasts will have to be provided in part by the companies. Through this collaboration and information exchange, companies and sectors will also likely gain a better insight into the challenges for the future.

Secondly, the lack of **student influx in technical training programmes** must be addressed. Promoting and upgrading these areas of specialisation, both in secondary, postsecondary and higher education, and in the professional training for employees and job seekers, is of crucial importance. In addition, specific technical training programmes should be better aligned with one another by organising them at a level that extends beyond the sectoral boundaries. Of equal importance is the integration of aspects of sustainable development and care for the environment in the existing programmes of study and training plans. Ultimately, this integration can achieve an even greater effect than the development of intrinsically new skills.

Thirdly, a **co-ordinated approach to the available range of training** is desirable. There are many organisations involved in education, each of which has its own method of working and approach. All too often, however, initiatives are developed on an *ad hoc* basis in order to, for example, respond to new needs, such as energy performance regulations or new construction techniques. Greater collaboration between sectors/companies and education and training institutions is needed in order to be able to offer the right training programmes and keep them up-to-date. The business world needs to have a long-term, structural involvement in the training plans through the integration of the relevant work experience (e.g., through traineeships – learning in the workplace).

Fourthly, at the level of the companies, more than ever, **skills development and a skills mentality** will become the mainstay of the HRM-policy (training, guidance and mediation, recruitment and selection). Training and learning will be crucial in order to be able to anticipate the changes in production processes including their becoming more sustainable and greener. For SMEs and micro-enterprises, the challenges will become even greater and there will be a need for support tailored to the needs of smaller companies.

Last but not least, there is an important **social aspect** associated with the greening of the economy and the labour market. In addition to attention for new jobs and the adaptation of existing jobs, the transformation process must devote special attention to vulnerable groups in the labour market: employees in traditional sectors who lose their jobs, older employees, the unemployed, migrants, the disabled ...

“Just transition for all” must not remain merely a slogan.

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³ James Medhurst (2010). Are All Jobs Green? European Employment Research Dialogue, 20th May 2010. European Employment Observatory.

⁴ Hoge Raad voor Werkgelegenheid (High Council for Employment), Report “Groene banen”, June 2010, 239 p.

⁵ NAR-CRB “Tweede Advies over de thematiek van de groene jobs”, Brussels, 16 March 2010, 27 p.

⁶ A few examples are: SERV (1999) Sociaal-economische analyse van de Vlaamse milieu-industrie. Brussels, 15 September 1999; SERV (2000). Sociaal-economische analyse van de Vlaamse milieu- industrie. Aanvullende regionale analyse, Brussels, 9 February 2000; P. Van Humbeeck and A. Bollen (2000). Milieu en werkgelegenheid. In De arbeidsmarkt in Vlaanderen, annual series 2000. Brussels, steunpunt Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Vorming (support point for Employment, Labour and Training); SERV (2003). Naar een industrieel beleid voor het milieu. In Sociaal-economisch rapport 2003. Ghent, Academia Press; SERV (2005). Sociaal-economische analyse van de Vlaamse hernieuwbare energietechnologiesector. In Sociaal-economisch rapport 2005. Ghent, Academia Press; SERV (2007). De Vlaamse watersector: analyse en uitdagingen. In Sociaal-economisch rapport 2007. Ghent, Academia Press. Bollen, A. P. Humbeeck and A. Lamote (2011). Energie voor een Groene Economie. Ghent, Academia Press (two volumes).

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- ⁷ See vlaandereninactie.be/actie/pact-2020/; www.vlaandereninactie.be/vlaandereninactie.be/actie/eu2020/vlaanderen-en-de-europa-2020-strategie/
- ⁸ <http://www.serv.be/serv/publicatie/werkgelegenheidsplan-en-krachtlijnen-voor-het-investeringsplan-wip>
- ⁹ SERV, *Advies over groene transitieprocessen in de Vlaamse economie op basis van een terreinverkenning*, 14 September 2011
- ¹⁰ Bollen, A., P. Van Humbeeck and A. Lamote (2011). *Energie voor een Groene Economie*. Ghent, Academia Press. SERV/Minaraad, *Advies hernieuwbare energie*, 16/17 November 2011.
- ¹¹ SERV, *Advies Rio +20 : de VN Wereldconferentie Duurzame Ontwikkeling in 2012, Rio de Janeiro*, 29 September 2011, see also <http://www.serv.be/serv/thema/2522>
- ¹² Sustenuto (2007). *Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen. Van goede indruk maken naar duurzame indruk achterlaten. Expertenrapport MVO evoluties en trends voor de toekomst*. On behalf of the SERV. Brussels, SERV; SERV/StIA (2011). *Informatiedossier Maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen "Duurzaam zaken doen duurt het langst"*. Brussels, December 2010.
- ¹³ <http://www.duwobo.be/>
- ¹⁴ <http://www.buildup.eu/>
- ¹⁵ Disadvantaged groups in Flanders are: people with an employment disability, those over 50, those with a low level of education and people of foreign origin.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.a-m.be/nl/> en www.groenejobs.be
- ¹⁷ Jobat.vlaanderen, "Groene werkgever krijgt de voorkeur", <http://www.jobat.be/nl/artikels/>
- ¹⁸ <http://www.etuc.org/a/9085>

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