

PURE Regional Briefing Paper (RBP)

FLANDERS, BELGIUM

Part 1

1. Clarify what is meant by the region in this project e.g. historical and cultural, long-term administrative and legal, or specially created for a particular development purpose. Comment on the advantages and difficulties of the nature and understanding of the region involved. [One general benefit from the PURE project should be to gain a better understanding of what kind of region is effective for what purposes.]

Flanders is a federated entity of the federal state of Belgium. It is the umbrella term for the Flemish Region (the northern half of Belgium) and the Flemish Community (the inhabitants of the Flemish Region and the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels). Both are governed by the Flemish Parliament and Flemish Government. Town and country planning, housing, road infrastructure, culture, education and tourism are exclusively regional competences. Flanders has no natural resources, industry is exclusively focused on processing. In addition to chemicals, construction, food and drink are particularly important in this region. Many people are employed in the metal sector and car making. Market positions have been maintained in textiles, including carpet manufacturers and manufacturers of weaving machines. It also has a large service sector. Agriculture accounts for only a small proportion of GDP. Culture and Tourism are very important.

Websites:

- General portal for Belgium:
<http://www.belgium.be>
- for Flanders:
<http://www.flanders.be>
- tourist information:
<http://www.visitflanders.com>

Advantages and Difficulties

Political difficulties:

- Because of historical and cultural reasons being a federated entity of the Belgian state, the Flemish region has since the creation of the federal state always been looking to get more regional competences, e.g. social security, now being a federal matter.
- The situation of Brussels and the so called facilitated communities.
- The electoral constituency BHV remains a political burden.
- The right wing parties are supported by almost 30% of the electorate.
- Necessity of a state reform but no solution to be found.

Economical difficulties:

- The financial and economical crisis is affecting banks (Fortis, Dexia, KBC) and more and more the business sector.
- The metal sector, car factories and textile industry announce unemployment to rise.
- Unemployment: September 2008 still a decrease of 4,5% but in February 2009 there was an increase of 15,3% affecting low skilled youngsters far most.
- A lot of SME's do not receive loans any more from the banks: many of them are going bankrupt: September 2008 up to 11,2%, February 2009: more then 22%.
- Car selling was + 5,3% in September 2008, nowadays there is a decrease of 17%.
- Brussels stock-exchange went down – 56,5 % up till now.

2. Set out briefly the key characteristics of the region in terms of geography, economy, demography, social structure, trends and changes, as these affect PURE and the development agenda.

See www.flanders.be: Bordered by the North Sea in the west, Flanders is the northern part of Belgium, nestled between the Netherlands and France. Some of Europe's leading cities – London, Paris, Rotterdam, Cologne, Amsterdam, Bonn, Luxemburg – are all situated within a radius of 300 km of Brussels, the capital of Flanders. Belgium shares a land border with the Netherlands in the north, Germany and Luxemburg in the east, France in the south and a sea border with the UK to the west.

Flanders has 308 municipalities and is divided into 5 provinces. Each municipality and each province has its own executive body and directly-elected council. Municipal and provincial elections are held every six years. Every citizen is obliged to vote. Flanders has full sovereignty over the municipalities and provinces. A governor heads each provincial administration. These are the five provinces:

- Antwerp, with capital Antwerp with 455.148 inhabitants
- East Flanders, capital Ghent, population: 229.344
- West Flanders, capital Bruges, population: 117.025
- Flemish Brabant, capital Leuven, population: 89.777
- Limburg, capital Hasselt, population 69.127

The Key characteristics of Flanders can be found in the yearly publication VRIND, Vlaamse Regionale Indicatoren – Flanders's regional indicators – and in the plans recently set out by the Flemish government under the title "VIA, Vlaanderen in Actie" – Flanders in Action - both are published on the internet:

- <http://www4.vlaanderen.be/dar/svr/publicaties/vrind/vrind2008>
- <http://www.vlaandereninactie.be/nlapps/docs>

Population: 6.16 million people live in Flanders today. The population density is the highest in the EU: 452 inhabitants / sq km. Immigrants and non-Belgian residents: 354,370 or 5,75% of the Flemish population. Structure of the population in %:

- Youngsters (0-19y.) : 22,2 %
- Active population: (20-64 y): 60 %
- Elderly (65 +) : 17,8 %

Households: There are over 2.526.000 households.

Size: The Flemish region covers 13.521 sq. kms / the Flemish Community (= + Brussels) 13.684 sq.km. With 65.000 km roads Flanders has the most dense network of roads within Europe: 4,8 km road per square km.

Employment: 64.9 % of the active population is working: 71,8 % of men and 57,8 % of women.

Unemployment: Approximately 8% of economically active residents are unemployed in Flanders: 6,5 % men and 9,4%women. Nowadays, due to the financial and economical crisis unemployment is growing fast, first of all among young and low schooled.

Businesses: There are nearly 490.097 VAT registered businesses in Flanders. Export in millions:

- EURO: 168.786,5 / Import in million EURO: 170.896,6
- BNP per capita: 28.200 EUR per capita

The ageing of Europe, also known as the greying of Europe, is a social phenomenon also in Flanders, characterized by a decrease in fertility, an increase in mortality, and a higher life expectancy. The population of Europe as a percentage of the world population is rapidly decreasing and is expected to decline over the next forty years. The "greying" of Europe specifically refers to the increase in the percentage of Europe's elderly population relative to its workforce.

3. Identify and draw together a reference list of the main data sources available on the socio-economic, environmental, etc. condition of the region, and recent trends.

Condition of the Flemish region:

According to Belgian authorities, studies are revealing congestion problem on roads in the Flemish Region as well as growing health problems linked to high concentrations of fine particulate matter and CO₂ in the atmosphere. The area around the port of Antwerp, a prime economic hub, is particularly affected by congestion. Studies also highlighted the lack of available rail-road infrastructure in Flanders.

Data sources are available via <http://aps.vlaanderen.be>

Specific higher education data are provided on:

<http://aps.vlaanderen.be/sgml/largereeksen/1025htm>

A new student data bank has been set up, which will gather all relevant statistics concerning higher education. Number of students in 2006-2007:

At the 5 universities: in total 60.866

M: 27.324

F: 33.542

At the 22 university colleges: in total 105.825 students

M: 47.653

F: 58.162

Information about the organization of the HEI's within the Bologna process can be found in English on <http://www.studyinlanders.be>

Levels of schooling attained (in %) by Flanders' population:

Lower secondary education: 32,7 %

Secondary education diploma: 36.8 %

University College (ba and ma): 17.9 %

University (ba, ma, phd): 12,6 %

Flanders' Lisbon strategy aims at attaining by 2020 50% getting a ba / ma or phd.

Percentage of the population between 25-64, involved in life long learning:

Men: 8.9 %

Women: 9.4 %

Total: 9.1 %

The Lisbon strategy aims at 15% by 2010. In this respect Flanders still has a lot to do.

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Source: www.statbel.fgov.be/indicators/home: this website provides all kinds of indicators concerning Belgium and Flanders.

Already 10 years of experience with regional analysis, policy development and regional impact is available for smaller regions and cities. They are organized in the so called RESOCs or "Regionaal Sociaaleconomisch Overlegcomité". These committees bring together the social partners of SERR and the representatives of the local authorities, i.e. cities and provinces. E.g. www.resocantwerpen.be

4. Summarise any existing efforts to monitor and benchmark progress against purposes and targets. Please comment on any interest in and pressure for the measurement of quality and outcomes, including value for money auditing, that you are aware of in the region. [It is hoped that the project will assist an understanding of what kinds of indicators and quantitative measures of regional development and the contribution of HEIs to this work and are useful.]

"Flanders in Action" recently set up by the Flemish government is providing recent information and shows on its website benchmarks concerning the fields in which progress should be made in the coming years. This action plan is a consequence of the Lisbon strategy worked out by the European Commission and the EU.

The benchmarks, comparing the situation in Flanders with the other EU-regions, see <http://via.vlaanderen.be/nlapps/docs/default.asp?fid=188> are set up in following domains:

- Economy
- Innovation
- Labour market
- Demography

To see these "benchmarks" click on "Vlaanderen vergeleken":

The Flemish 2005-2008 Reform Programme, following the EU-Lisbon strategy

Although it is the Member States' responsibility to draw up reform programmes, the Flemish Government was of the opinion that Flanders should also draw up its own reform programme. In doing so, it upheld a tradition. Indeed, since 2000, the Flemish Government has been closely monitoring the European Employment Strategy as well as the Lisbon Process (among other things by drawing up annual action plans and progress reports). The Flemish 2005-2008 reform programme "[Vlaams Hervormingsprogramma 2005-2008 \(in Dutch\)](#) "Lisbon Strategy: growth and jobs" was definitively adopted by the Flemish Government on 7 October 2005. In this reform programme, both macro-economic and micro-economic measures as well as measures designed to raise employment rates occupy a central position.

2006 Progress report

The European Council of March 2006 called on the Member States to report in autumn 2006 on the measures taken to implement their national reform programmes. As a result, Flanders also drew up a 2006 Progress Report ([Voortgangsrapport 2006 \(in Dutch\)](#)) Furthermore, the European Council placed a strong emphasis on specific areas for priority action (investing more in knowledge and innovation, unblocking business potential, stepping up employment opportunities for priority categories) and on the necessity to create an Energy Policy for Europe.



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2007 Progress report

As in 2006, Flanders also drew up a progress report in 2007 that describes both the measures taken by Flanders to implement its reform programme and the measures taken as a result of the Spring European Councils of March 2006 and March 2007.

2008 Flemish Lisbon Report

The 2008 Flemish Lisbon Report indicates the measures taken by the Flemish government to implement the 2005-2008 Flemish Reform Programme as well as gives a preview of the 2008-2010 period. An adjusted 2008-2010 Flemish Reform Programme is drawn up which has been fully updated for the new Lisbon cycle.

- [2007 Progress Report \(in English\)](#).
- [2008 Flemish Lisbon Report \(In English\)](#)

External links: Flemish government:

Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs
Policy Area Work and Social Economy
Liaisons Agency Flanders Europe

Since the funding together with the Netherlands of the NVAO, the Dutch – Flemish Accreditation Organisation, every HEI in Flanders is urged by law to implement an internal quality assurance system and to be ready to obtain accreditation for its programmes.

Accreditation concerns programmes that already award (nationally) recognised degrees. These programmes are included in the official register of the relevant country (i.e. the CROHO in the Netherlands or the Higher Education Register in Flanders). Accreditation relates to the assessment of the quality of the programme and focuses on learning outcomes.

The accreditation procedure consists of three consecutive steps: the self evaluation, the external assessment and the accreditation. See www.nvao.net/accreditation

The second step in the accreditation procedure is the external assessment. The quality assessment agency convenes an assessment panel that will be responsible for the external assessment of the programme. The composition of the assessment panel should be in line with NVAO requirements.

The assessment panel assesses the quality of the self-evaluation (including the methodology used to realise it) and whether the programme fulfils the criteria of the assessment framework. The panel follows the assessment framework, which contains all the standards, and the assessment rules as laid down in the accreditation framework. The external assessment focuses on learning outcomes.

The panel writes down their (objective) findings, (subjective) considerations and conclusions in their assessment report. The report is sent to the institution and published by the quality assessment agency.

The third step in the accreditation framework is accreditation itself. The institution submits an application for accreditation of a programme to NVAO by sending in the assessment report. NVAO uses the evaluation criteria in the accreditation framework to evaluate the assessment report, the overall conclusions expressed in it, the panel composition and the methodology used. This means that NVAO verifies whether the programme offers generic quality.

Subsequently, NVAO takes an accreditation decision and lays down its findings in an accreditation report. Finally, the panel's assessment report and NVAO's accreditation report (including the accreditation decision) are published by NVAO.

The accreditation decision is either positive or negative. There is no conditional accreditation and NVAO doesn't rank programmes. A positive accreditation decision has a fixed period of validity: eight years. In case of a negative decision there is a possibility to get a temporary recognition during a recovery period.

Only accredited programmes can award recognised degrees (diplomas) and receive public funding. Only students enrolled in accredited programmes can receive student support (e.g. grants).

It is hoped that the PURE-project will assist an understanding of what kinds of indicators and quantitative measures of regional development should also be taken in account in order to benchmark the accredited programmes in an international context.

5. *List the main existing forms of collaboration between HEIs and the region. You may need to consider the region as a single administrative entity, but also note and include more localized and specialized significant HEI partnerships with other stakeholders - public, private, and NGO or third sector.*

Collaboration of HEI's with regions and cities exists, but is not always structurally embedded. Mostly the cooperation is based on projects lasting for some years. Good examples in this respect are the so called Interreg-projects in which universities and university colleges often are involved. See <http://www.uhasselt.be/interreg>

Most Flemish HEI's organizing teacher training programs work together with city-initiatives in small projects targeting on widening access to higher education for youngsters out of disadvantaged groups e.g. migrants. A lot has been done in these projects to create intercultural dialogue.

Colleges of industrial engineering often work together with regional business and SME's. In the further development of eco-systems and regenerating energy / solar energy, there are a lot of good examples.

Gent University developed the research programme "Towards an integrated hub & spoke vision and strategy of Mediterranean Sea-Ports cities". With the scope of developing port-related services and coherent urban shapes the interaction port-city and city-port was investigated and innovation strategies for case-studies in the Mediterranean area were compared to some North Europe case studies, such as Gent, Ostend, Dublin, Bremen etc.

The North Sea Interreg programma IVb provides means for project "European Regions for Innovative Productivity" (ERIP). This project with a budget of more than 3 million euro runs from 2008 till 2011. Target is the intensive coaching of SME's out of 6 regions in order to improve their productivity and flexibility based on the methods of Lean Manufacturing en Agile Manufacturing. Ghent University is involved in it.

The Interreg III programme Lingu@tic is a language programme (Dutch and French) involving secondary education, adult training, hogescholen and universities. See www.kuleuven-kortrijk.be/linguatic/algemeen/sources/10JAN2005.PPT

The industrial liaison program of the university college Howest campus PIH in Kortrijk is called Howest Technology Upgrade. See: www.tukortrijk.be. The industrial engineering program of



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this university college has set up networking contacts with SME's in the province of West-Flanders and is often asked to do applied research for them.

The research institute iMOB of the Hasselt University works on strategic basic research financed by IWT.

Since 2004 the university also organises KIZOK, the knowledge institute for entrepreneurship and SME. It runs nowadays the Interreg project called "Strategic innovation within the Euregio" 'Onder impuls van het rectoraat en de voorzitter van de Onderzoeksraad, Paul Janssen, is er in het

A project working on robotics for revalidation of MS-patients has led to the renovation of revalidation processes. It is coordinated by PHL, the University College of the Limburg Province, with three partners being the UHasselt, the University of Maastricht and the Centre for MS-patients Overpelt.

The university of Gent, Howest university college and the Centre for Mobility and physical planning works on [Interreg IVB Noordzee Regio](#)

With means out of Interreg III the Lessius Hogeschool Antwerpen in cooperation with KULeuven, Fontys Eindhoven (NI), Hogeschool Zuyd Heerlen (NI) and the Dutch and Flemish associations of logopedists has worked out standards for logopedists. See www.lessius-ho.be/logopedie Industrial Research Funding (IOF) was in May 2004 initiated by the Flemish government, meant to provide means for research targeting on a better provision of knowledge towards industry and society. Not only the universities but since 2007 also the university colleges can be integrated. Targets are explicitly named economic or societal applications within industry but also in the not-for-profit sector.

Collaboration with NGO's in the sector of working for development countries in the South. Organization of cultural happenings, speeches, concerts sponsored by industry and community and meant for a broader public. Some HEI's repeat this in a structural way and reach a broader public?

"Paardenpark Kempen": setting up of Hypotherapie in collaboration with the university of Antwerp and the university college of KHK-Geel.

6. *If there are any examples of good practice in HEI-regional engagement that you think of special interest, perhaps for inclusion later in a PURE Good Practice Manual, please make a note of them to call to the attention of the CDG.*

ALUMNI – industrial engineering:

The Flemish Chamber of Engineers (VIK Vlaamse Ingenieurskamer) is a non-profit organisation with about 19.000 members, set up half a century ago by and for industrial engineers. The Chamber aims to highlight the status of the industrial engineering profession and the value of engineering to society as a whole. The world of technology is developing more rapidly than ever before. Accordingly, ongoing education is one of the most important missions of Flemish Chamber of Engineers'. One of its departments acts as a permanent watchdog for the level and quality of training. By means of publications, pay surveys, and career counselling, industrial engineers are kept up to date with all developments affecting the profession. In order to encourage technological renewal, the VIK awards a number of prizes for innovative theses and has initiated a number of important events that attract leaders from the worlds of business and politics. Via a number of working groups, e.g. the Engineers Without Borders or EYE, the VIK



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maintains links with international associations. The VIK unifies the industrial engineers of Flanders and looks out and forward to the world of tomorrow. The VIK Young Engineers (younger than 35) are organised in ten regional groups, doing seminars on personal development, visits to companies and having a lot of fun on several events!

Part 2

1. What are:

1.1 The main problems and challenges

cfr. supra

1.2 The main development aspirations that are shared by stakeholders in the region?

Please consider the full spectrum of civil, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors, including issues of sustainability, where these apply.

In particular, what impact is the current global financial and economic crisis – and the global environmental crisis (global warming etc) - having on your thinking and long-term planning as a region and different stakeholders? What has really altered (or is changing) in your policy planning since one year ago?

The ultimate target is to rank Flanders by 2020 within the 5 best performing regions! An agreement to reach the targets has been signed by all stakeholders, but the HEI's were not considered as a stakeholder although they have a very important role to play. The agreement consist of "20 targets to lead Flanders to the top". These targets are centred within five central themes:

- More prosperity and more welfare
- A competitive and lasting (duurzame) economy
- More people working, in good jobs and on average in longer lasting careers
- High quality of life
- good and efficient management
- See <http://via.vlaanderen.be>

The current economic crisis will reach its climax only after the summer of 2009 predicts Karl Van Eetvelt, the head of the small business association Unizo. The latest economic barometer put out by Unizo is sombre. Every three months Unizo polls companies about their expectations and confidence in the economy. The SMEs are very pessimistic. Confidence in the economy is the lowest it has been since 1995. As for expectations he says, "I have never known our business leaders to be so pessimistic about the future of their company."

40 percent of those polled think their financial situation will get worse. 10 percent are having trouble with their credit at the bank. Only 13 percent of the companies think they will be able to hire more people in the future.

Especially hard-hit are the industrial and wholesale sectors and sectors that depend on export. The SMEs that are active primarily in the Belgian internal market, such as the clothing and shoe stores, are not faring too poorly. Companies in the construction sector say that they are still booked up.

"Until January I heard a lot of business people saying: it's OK, it's not too bad. But in February this changed. All of a sudden many companies saw their turnover fall by 20-30 percent. Further, many business people do not expect the crisis to end soon," says Van Eetvelt.

He expects the biggest blows after the summer and doesn't expect an economic pickup until into 2010. In the meantime, the government must make sure that the banks are giving the companies enough credit.

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Unizo is in favour of setting up a kind of crisis coach system to give companies advice on how to do business in times of crisis such as these.

Knowledge centres as the HEI's are, could/should play a role in this. They also should be ready to retrain staff and workers.

Within the VIA-plan Pact 2020 of the Flemish government the environment plays a very crucial role. Research and regional engagement of the HEI's should be involved.

2. *What are the main changes that are looked for in taking part in PURE:*

2.1 *For the region as a whole, and for particular communities and interests within it?*

More and better contacts with Flanders' labour market should be the target for all HEI's. Social-economically speaking Flanders has set up a 2020-plan, called "Flanders in Action" with as a target to belong by 2020 to the five best achieving European regions. Innovation and entrepreneurship are the keywords in the plan. The regional contribution as part of the mission of the HEI's should be more stressed in that plan.

2.2 *Within and on the part of higher education institutions i.e. sought by the HEIs themselves, and looked for by other stakeholders from HEIs?*

Widening participation by making the institutions better accessible to lower-class students, sons and daughters out of migration, also to the so called newcomers.

To define the learning outcomes of each HEI-programme better through more and better regionally contacts with the employers of profit and non-profit sector and the municipality.

2.3 *In terms of how regional and local government are managed?*

There are no changes up till now. More openness and regular meetings are necessary.

2.4 *In terms of the role and policies of central government?*

Central government will have to invest more in HEI's that are creative and innovative and really contribute to the region.

3. *What key issues do you wish to discuss with the CDG when it visits your region?*

- **New technologies – eco –region and environmental technologies**
- **SME development – knowledge transfer**
- **Local community engagement, and engagement with other governance structures**
- **Creative and cultural industries and the possible contribution of the HEI's.**