

**1) Context: description of the measure and relevant context from the CID annex** [text in full from the English version]

### Reform R-4.06: 'An inclusive labour market' of Flemish Community

The reform aims at integrating people with a migrant background into the labour market and consists of (1) developing an integrated trajectory to support newcomers (migrants with a non-EU nationality) in their integration into society and in particular into the labour market and (2) strengthening the non-discrimination policy at sector level, including by enhanced monitoring and setting up of specific actions, such as trainings on how to deal with discrimination and actions specific to disadvantaged groups. The implementation of the reform shall be completed by 31 December 2023.

**2) Copy of the milestone/target wording** [text in full from the English version]

Seq.num	Measure (reform or investment)	Milestone/Target	Name	Qualitative indicators (for milestones)	Quantitative indicators (for targets)			Indicative timetable for completion		Reporting and implementation responsibility	Description of each milestone and target
					Unit of measure	Baseline	Goal	Quarter	Year		
142	C42.R-406 An inclusive labour market	Target	New integrated path for newcomers		Participants	0	2000	Q4	2023		2000 newcomers, participating to the new integrated path.

#### Verification mechanism:

Summary document duly justifying how the target (including the relevant elements of the target, as listed in the description of target and of the corresponding measure in the CID annex) was satisfactorily fulfilled. This summary document shall contain a detailed description of the new integrated pathway for newcomers, including as regards the coordination mechanisms between the partners involved.

This document shall include as an annex a spreadsheet listing the anonymised data of all 2 000 newcomers who received an integrated intake with the agencies of integration and VDAB, including:

(a) Age group, (b) Nationality of origin, (c) Gender, (d) Region in Flanders, (d) Educational level (low skilled, intermediate, high skilled), (e) Date of first registration at one of the agencies of integration, (f) Date of first registration at VDAB, (g) Labour market situation in December 2023: (1) working, (2) searching for work, (3) unsubscribed from VDAB (no information), and (h) the unique reference number ('KBI-connect number') of the newcomer in the client tracking system of the agencies of integration, which shows the registration for an integrated intake.

On the basis of a sample that may be selected by the Commission, the following documentary evidence shall be submitted for each of the newcomers selected: a screen shot of the client tracking system of the agencies of integration, showing that guidance to VDAB ('Toeleiding naar VDAB') was provided.

### 3) List of key evidence provided in FENIX

	Identifier [same as in FENIX]	Name of the evidence. For legal acts please provide the full legal reference and date of entry into force	Short description	Link to the requirements below
1		Summary document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document contains description of the new integrated intake for newcomers: This cover note contains the content and information that is requested within the verification mechanism as the “summary document”. As such, this document duly justifies how the target (including the relevant elements of the target, as listed in the description of target and of the corresponding measure in the CID annex) was satisfactorily fulfilled. This description contains a detailed description of the new integrated intake for newcomers, including as regards the coordination mechanisms between the partners involved.</li> </ul>	
2		annex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- List of the 2000 newcomers who received an integrated intake: This document shall include as an annex the following documentary evidence: a spreadsheet listing anonymised beneficiaries with identifier following information: Age group, Nationality of origin, Gender, Region in Flanders, Educational level (low skilled, intermediate, high skilled), Date of first registration at one of the agencies of integration, Date of first registration at VDAB, Labour market situation in December 2023: (1) working, (2) searching for</li> </ul>	

			work, (3) unsubscribed from VDAB (no information)	
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#### 4) Detailed justification

The overall aim is the increase of the employment rate of persons of foreign origin in function of economic and social self-reliance

The 3 integration and integration agencies and VDAB (public employment service) pursue the following strategic objectives:

- All employable persons of foreign origin are quickly and sustainably employed.
- The guidance of joint clients is optimally tailored and client-oriented.
- Employers and employer organizations are sensitized, stimulated and supported to offer maximum employment and training opportunities to persons of foreign origin.

The experiments with the integrated intake aimed to further qualitatively develop the new third pillar of the integration pathway.

From March 2022 until March 2023 the Integration and Civic Integration Agencies, the VDAB and local governments developed the integrated cooperation through 7 living labs. These were spread across the provinces, large cities and smaller municipalities, in following locations: Roeselare, Aalst-Ronse, Ghent, Mechelen, city of Antwerp, Leuven and Pelt.

- The goas was to further qualitatively develop the new third pillar of the integration programme. Specifically, there were 5 objectives:
  1. Experiment with different forms of integrated cooperation: via automatic and other data exchange, joint interviews, co-housing, case discussions ... to arrive at a definition and minimum conditions for the integrated intake.
  2. Assess whether the predetermined role delineation ensures an efficient and customer-oriented way of working.
  3. Assess whether additional (automatic) data exchange is needed to facilitate the integrated intake, including the assessment towards work.
  4. Assess the impact of the integrated cooperation on the staff capacity of the organisations involved.
  5. Capturing signals in the area of supply towards persons integrating: does the existing supply of labour market-oriented, competence-enhancing and activating measures cover the needs of persons integrating? What expansion or adjustments, if any, are required?

The agencies Integration & Civic Integration and VDAB evaluated the 7 living labs integrated intake reaching just over 2.300 people. This showed that a fully integrated and joint intake is not yet realisable due to several factors. Logistical considerations, impact on the capacity of the organisations involved and too much info for the client at once are the main challenges. Moreover, the living labs were rolled out during a period in which the agencies mainly focused on the implementation of the new regulations on civic integration and expanding the offer for Ukrainians. However, efforts can already be made today to improve data exchange (both technical and substantive) between the Agencies for Integration & Civic Integration and VDAB. The ambition remains to arrive at an integrated intake and efforts will therefore be made to solve the bottlenecks that prevent this.

The VDAB and the Agencies for Integration and Civil integration work together, each on the basis of its own decree assignments, to increase the economic and social self-reliance of shared clients.

This cooperation is perpetuated in a cooperation agreement, which includes:

- Better cooperation flow so that shared clients can take steps towards sustainable employment as soon as possible.

- Better information sharing, refined monitoring, optimisation of data sharing and better visibility of exchanged data in both organisations' client tracking systems.
- More accessible, flexible and tailor-made offerings to best match the civic integration pathway and the pathway to work. This through combined or integrated pathways where possible, linear pathways where necessary.
- A joint employer approach: an aligned language and diversity policy offer was developed to sensitise and support employers to offer more employment and training opportunities to persons of foreign origin.

VDAB's provincial/urban departments and agencies developed regional action plans that fit within the Flemish cooperation agreement.

Alongside the cooperation agreement, a Flemish agreement framework was drawn up, an operational framework in which strategic and tactical objectives are further elaborated with corresponding, measurable indicators and agreements on information exchange in function of the integrated intake.

Via the VOWI (Vlaams Overleg Werk en Inburgering, with representation of the Flemish agency, the urban agencies, VVSG and VDAB) structural cooperation is ensured by

- follow-up of the cooperation agreement at both the Flemish and regional levels;
- coordinated approach to the regional action plans;
- follow-up of thematic working groups;
- periodic monitoring and reporting of the cooperation agreement to internal policy bodies.

### **Final evaluation of the 7 living labs:**

#### **Customer Survey**

In May 2023, a survey was conducted among immigrants who signed an integration contract between April 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, and were referred to VDAB as part of a pilot project. A total of 468 customers responded, yielding a response rate of 22%. The results show that

- the majority of customers know the names of their integration coach, VDAB mediator, and OCMW social worker.
- However, almost half felt the need to repeat the same information to different organizations, highlighting a need for more efficient information exchange.
- Approximately 79% of respondents knew what steps to take to find work, and 66% found the information from various organizations consistent.

#### **Employee Survey**

In April-May 2023, an online survey was conducted among integration coaches and mediators. The results indicate diverse perspectives on how well immigrants are informed about work and VDAB registration.

- Integration coaches felt they provided sufficient information about employment, while VDAB mediators believed that customers were not adequately informed about VDAB's operations and the importance of work by the agencies. There is thus a lack of consensus on the role delineation between the two organizations.
- VDAB mediators emphasized the need for clear expectations from immigrants regarding VDAB and adequate information provision about VDAB to immigrants.
- Information exchange between counselors was generally effective, but there were still uncertainties about what exactly needed to be shared, necessitating clear agreements.

#### **Survey of Pilot Project Leaders**

The leaders of the pilot projects completed an extensive survey. These results provided insights into various tested methodologies, including (1) triad meetings, (2) consecutive meetings at the same location, (3) separate meetings at

different locations with extra information exchange, and (4) case discussions. The advantages and disadvantages of each method were analyzed.

#### **(1) Triad Meetings:**

- **What?:** Joint meetings between the customer, an integration coach, and a VDAB mediator (or social worker for immigrants with OCMW support).
- **Advantages:** Simultaneous input from the customer, integration coach, and VDAB mediator, in-depth discussion, improved communication and collaboration, joint decision-making, and staff learning about each other's operations and offerings.
- **Disadvantages:** Possible overwhelm for the customer, confusion, logistical and time challenges, interpreter requirements, and limited available working time for some immigrants.
- **Conclusion:** Triad meetings are not a standard approach for all immigrants and should occur at the right point in the integration process. They are particularly useful for immigrants with specific questions about work and sufficient motivation. Holding a triad meeting too early can be overwhelming; it is best after an initial meeting with an Integration & Immigration agency.

#### **(2) Consecutive Meetings at the Same Location:**

- **What?:** Sequential meetings between the immigrant and the integration coach followed by a meeting with the VDAB mediator, both at the same physical location.
- **Advantages:** Gradual information buildup and trust, opportunity to address specific aspects of the process, and the integration coach can accompany the immigrant to the VDAB mediator.
- **Disadvantages:** Potential information repetition, need for good planning and coordination, extra information exchange, limited preparation time for the mediator, and required concentration from the customer.
- **Conclusion:** One pilot project tested this method but discontinued it due to disadvantages for both the customer and the organization.

#### **(3) Separate Meetings at Different Locations with Extra Information Exchange:**

- **What?:** Separate intake meetings at each organization with information exchange between meetings via automatic data exchange and/or communication.
- **Advantages:** Customers do not receive too much information at once, efficient time use, expertise and specialization within each organization, confidentiality, flexibility, and good information exchange.
- **Disadvantages:** Extra time and effort for information transfer, risk of poor information transfer, information repetition, reduced joint decision-making, and decreased daily collaboration.
- **Conclusion:** Five pilot projects tested this method and had positive experiences with good information exchange.

#### **(4) Case Discussions:**

- **What?:** The customer registers with VDAB, followed by weekly joint discussions between integration coaches and mediators.
- **Advantages:** Better understanding of customers, coordinated messaging, and improved service.
- **Disadvantages:** Discussions based on customer files by staff who may not have personally met the customer, leading to potential loss of nuance. Additionally, it is time-intensive.
- **Conclusion:** One pilot project tested and adjusted this method to prioritize customers who do not physically register and who want to take steps towards work quickly.

### **Involvement of OCMWs**

OCMWs oversee the work integration process for immigrants. Involvement varies significantly locally, from no coordination to bilateral contact. Further agreements between OCMWs, VDAB, and agencies are necessary for well-coordinated intake.

### **Steps to labour market after Integrated Intake**

The goal is for immigrants to quickly take steps towards employment; some take immediate steps after registering with VDAB, including job matching, mediation actions, and competence-enhancing actions. However, a significant portion of immigrants do not yet take steps towards work due to insufficient language skills, personal choices, conditions, or lack of motivation. For them, an integration process is often the first step towards employment. The customer process should adapt to their needs, sensitization is essential, and uniform follow-up agreements are necessary.

Suggestions for improvements in the activation offer include:

- Combined or integrated work and immigration programs,
- guidance and training for immigrants in basic Dutch or another contact language,
- more flexible NT2 (Dutch as a second language) offerings,
- improvements in conditions (kindergarten, mobility,...)
- language-accessible job offers

VDAB is working on a more language-accessible offer and experimenting with the use of other languages. The importance of employer-directed actions is emphasized.

### **Data Exchange**

Good data exchange is essential for a successful integrated intake. It is important to establish what information needs to be exchanged between agencies and VDAB. Challenges include the need to obtain information from authentic sources, authorizations for exchange, and internal ICT developments. Data exchange must support the customer process and align with the needs of immigrants.

**Annex:** spreadsheet of 2300 newcomers who received an integrated intake