

Lifelong learning in Flanders (Belgium)

Social research shows only a 4/10 participation in formal or non-formal forms of education, training and adult learning, most attended are software programs, foreign languages and management courses. The majority of the population indicates that they have no intention at all to attend to whatever kind of education programs, although there are increasing possibilities We will try to describe some of those possibilities in this article.

- Alphabetisation-programs are followed by 1/10 adults having problems reading or writing.
- Social Promotion: people at work, having no time during the day, but interested to follow courses and trainings: they mainly want to acquire new knowledge, (social)skills and competences linked to their work are attending courses in the evening or in weekends.
- Education/training 'at distance': people learn at home by computer: special lessons on various subjects are offered, sometimes there is a 'tutor' involved and after doing a test, one can go to the next chapter.
- System of 'learning cheques': work-seekers, unemployed people, independents or wage-paid workers can ask all kind of government agencies for 'learning cheques', offering possibilities for computer courses, language education or for getting a higher degree of qualification in the own working field. These cheques lowers the costs of the training and are mend for people with a low budget, although it isn't always this group which uses the system.
- The VDAB and the RVA, official agencies for 'labour mediation' are organising a lot of possibilities for trainings. They specialises merely in basic professional skills and attitudes. Their focus for the last 15 years lays on the so called 'professions at risk': those sectors having difficulties finding workers, such as f.i. the construction sector, transport, cleaning, hospitals, bus drivers, horeca-staff (working in hotels, restaurants and pubs), technicians ...etc
- Federations for independents are organising different trainings and seminars for their members, such as: how to start a business, sale skills, how to address difficult clients and situations, accountability, how to pay (not too many) taxes, how to use new technology, business opportunities...etc
- Within a lot of projects in the social economy sector special trainings are offered to the participants of these projects.
- The socio-cultural sector: more than 200 organisations, forming a network of 'life long learning opportunities', mainly very basic, broad and open courses in a lot of themes, such as art, philosophy, psychology, politics, diversity,...but also things as 'repairing bicycles', sewing, decoration, painting, special visits to exhibitions, walking-trips in nature, 'how to use less energy' ...etc

Socius, the support organisation of this socio-cultural sector is offering a special course on 'how to deal with the educational bearing power of people for life long learning', especially for the so called 'people with lesser chances'. This course is the result of a European Grundvig-program.

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