

Belgium: Mentor2Work Programme

Type of provider

The Flemish government established **Minderhedenforum (Minorities Forum)** in 1999. It is an umbrella organisation for ethnic-cultural associations across Flanders and Brussels, providing a voice for those with an immigrant background. The Minderhedenforum makes recommendations to the Flemish government. It monitors policy developments at local, Flemish and federal levels, with a specific focus on labour market integration, workplace learning, addressing racism and discrimination, job creation, etc ...

Minorities Forum recently launched the **Mentor2Work programme**, which began in the autumn of 2017. Despite qualifications and/or relevant experience, job-seekers with an ethnic/cultural background encounter difficulties in their search for employment. They face discrimination and have difficulty with the formal administrative procedures (also linked to language barriers).

Objectives

Mentor2Work's aim is to use mentoring to **reduce the gap** between employers and potential employees with a migrant background, to validate and improve the use of a mentee's talents and competences in the labour market.

Mentor2Work matches job seekers with a **volunteer mentor** for a period of 6-8 months. This period includes the preparation of CVs, learning and gaining experience about the demands and realities of potential career paths with the help of a professional from the sector of interest.

Mentor2Work aims to:

- reduce the gap between employers and potential employees with a migrant background
- increase ethnic/cultural diversity in the labour market
- facilitate strong matches between the workplace and the competences/talents of the jobseeker

Assessment approaches

The **mentor** is a professional from the profit or non-profit sector who wants to share his professional knowledge and expertise with the **mentee** (jobseeker with immigrant background). The mentor wants to make a difference in someone's life and be of significance to society. In this way the mentor helps to counter the forces of social inequality and aims to reduce unemployment rates. The mentee may have experienced many challenges in their search for work, and the mentor gives the mentee the necessary 'push' or encouragement.

The **coach** meets with both the mentor and mentee separately for an interview to assess the mentee's sector of interest, motivation and other criteria such as competences, language, talents and interests. The coach will then link a mentee to a mentor. The coach is the contact for both sides, answers questions and supports throughout the entire process.

Assessment approaches

Training is then provided for both mentor and mentee; this is tailored to needs. It includes the following elements:

For the *mentee*

- providing knowledge about and orientation (if necessary) regarding a sector of interest
- providing job application advice and support
- highlighting talents and skills, translating them into a functional and relevant CV

For the *mentor*

- strengthening coaching skills and techniques
- providing opportunities to network with other mentors
- participating in diversity and discrimination training

The mentor and mentee meet together at least twice a month for a period of 6 months. During the **meetings**, discussions are centred on the profession they are exploring. The discussions are broad and informal, helping to build trust.

The mentor gives feedback about CVs, interviews and job applications. Expectations regarding the workplace are also discussed. The mentor encourages the mentee and instils confidence.

The mentee receives tips to find work in the sector, etc. During these meetings, the two 'partners' learn from each other and exchange experiences. It is a mutually beneficial process, for the mentee who gains confidence and knowledge and the mentor who contributes to a more inclusive society.

Description of the target group

Job seekers **over 16 years of age** with an **immigrant background** (migrants themselves or whose parents were migrants), with several years of professional experiences but lacking formal qualifications.

Have experienced challenges in finding work and would like help from a professional with experience in the sector that they have been searching in.

Potential transferability/ scalability

Opportunities for replicability exist as the programme is embedded within the Minorities Forum network, composed of diverse associations and organisations spread across Flanders and Brussels.

All professionals with good knowledge of their sector and who would like to share their professional knowledge and expertise are eligible to apply as mentors, thus providing an easy possibility for the growth of the programme. Coaches discuss possibilities for cooperation with potential mentors and interested organisations or business.

Summaries or basic elements of analysis

The Flemish government provided a **project grant** of 593,000€ to Minderhedenforum in order to launch Mentor2Work (started winter 2017 until end of 2019).

Evaluations between the coach and mentors/mentees are to be carried out at the end of the cycle. Currently over 20 mentee-mentor partnerships exist and the programme is proving to be promising, based on feedback between participants and coaches.

The programme only began at the end of 2017, therefore formal evaluations of impact are as yet unavailable.