

Flanders is  
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**Flanders**  
State of the Art

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# Preface

Dear Reader,

For centuries, Flanders has been a hub for international politics, trade and culture. It remains so today. We host both the European Union and NATO. We are the 15<sup>th</sup> largest exporter worldwide. We are home to people of 188 different nationalities. And our cultural cities are a magnet for world-class arts events.

Retaining our central place throughout the centuries is thanks in no small part to our native entrepreneurship, adaptability and ambition - tempered by our objectivity and realism. We recognise that we are dependent on the world around us for our prosperity and development. Then as now, Flanders must be international, or it is not Flanders.

However, during the Covid pandemic, Flanders was confronted with the dependence and vulnerability that comes with an open economy. The impact of the crisis will be felt for a long time to come. In response, Flanders launched the recovery plan "Flemish resilience", which will reinforce the prosperity of Flanders and the well-being of the Flemish people.

Meanwhile, international solidarity remains the foundation for our active foreign policy. We represent our interests in various ways across multiple domains, always with a keen sense of the global interests at play. Because, ultimately, what is good for the world is also good for Flanders.

Flanders agrees fully-fledged international treaties, organises diplomatic and economic services abroad, and manages its own foreign policy budget. Flanders' foreign policy takes shape through the Chancellery and Foreign Office and is implemented in cooperation with the other departments and agencies.

In this brochure you will read more about our goals and our approach to realising them. I would like to invite you to learn more about Flanders.



**Julie Bynens**  
Secretary General of Flanders Chancellery  
and Foreign Office

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According to the KOF Globalisation Index, Flanders is one of the most globalised economies in the world.



Brussels is:

- ✓ Capital of Flanders and Belgium
- ✓ Capital of the EU
- ✓ Headquarters of NATO
- ✓ 2nd-largest diplomatic hub in the world



Antwerp's P.P. Rubens is known as a baroque painter by 20 to 40% of the population in India, Japan, China, the US and Brazil.

Surface:  
**13,522 km<sup>2</sup>**

Number of inhabitants (2017)

**6.650.000**



GDP in Flanders:

**EUR 254 billion**

GDP per capita:

**EUR 38,200**

# FLANDERS IS INTERNATIONAL

## Facts & Figures



**Flanders:**

logistics centre of Western Europe



**3 ports**



**4 airports**



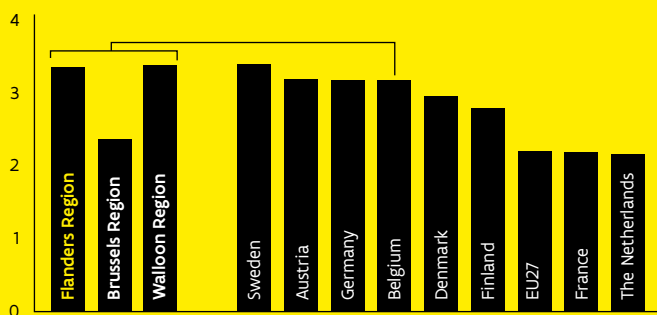
**916 km of motorway**



**1,607 km of railway**

**60%**

of the European consumer market within a radius of 500 km



Source: Statistiek Vlaanderen

In 2019, Flanders reached with 3,35% of its GDP, an R&D-intensity on a similar level as the best-performing EU-countries and considerably above the EU27-average (2,2%).

**EXPORT**  
 EUR 380,5 billion  
 (goods, 2021)

**IMPORT**  
 EUR 378,8 billion  
 (goods, 2021)

**Development cooperation**

3 partner countries in southern Africa  
 and 1 in northern Africa



**Top 5 export destinations** (2021)

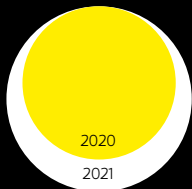
- 1 **GERMANY**  
EUR 70.4 billion
- 2 **NETHERLANDS**  
EUR 49.3 billion
- 3 **FRANCE**  
EUR 46.8 billion
- 4 **UK**  
EUR 23.8 billion
- 5 **USA**  
EUR 19.7 billion

**Top 5 investors** (2021)

- 1 **USA**  
64 projects  
(21,69%)
- 2 **UK**  
49 projects  
(16,61%)
- 3 **NETHERLANDS**  
48 projects  
(16,27%)
- 4 **FRANCE**  
24 projects  
(8,14%)
- 5 **GERMANY**  
17 projects  
(5,76%)

Foreign **investments**  
 in Flanders

2020 EUR 2.39 billion  
 2021 EUR 2.86 billion



**295**  
new projects

**6233**  
new jobs



With **3,5%**  
 job seekers,  
unemployment in Flanders  
 is among the lowest  
 in Europe (2020)



**9,5%** of Flanders' residents have  
 a foreign nationality

**Top 5**  
 international  
 migration to  
 Flanders (2021)

- 1 **NETHERLANDS**
- 2 **MOROCCO**
- 3 **TURKEY**
- 4 **ITALY**
- 5 **POLAND**



In 2022, Flanders spent more than **EUR 52 million** on development cooperation

### Main export sectors



1 Chemistry and pharma  
**EUR 105,4 billion**



2 Mineral products  
**EUR 37,9 billion**



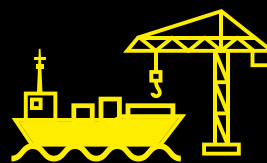
3 Machines and electrical equipment  
**EUR 37,4 billion**



4 Transport equipment  
**EUR 37,4 billion**



5 Plastic and applications  
**EUR 32 billion**



Flanders is the **15th exporter** worldwide (WTO)



Every year more than **6000 students** Erasmus+ go abroad through the programme. That is 80% more than 10 years ago

8

in

10

Flemings are positive about **EU membership** (2020)



In 2020 there were over **15 million** overnight touristic stays in Flanders



People of **188 different nationalities** live in Flanders



In total, the Government of Flanders spends more than EUR 155 million annually on **foreign policy** in all its facets



International institutions in Brussels employ approximately **49.000 people**

'**Flanders Trainee Programme**' annually sends about

**80 trainees** to multilateral organisations



# 1. Foreign policy in five dimensions

## Flanders as a diplomatic actor

Flanders engages proactively in foreign policy at multiple levels: the European level; bilateral level (in relation to individual states or federated states); and at the multilateral level.



The Errera House in Brussels, the official residence of the Government of Flanders.

### **European Union: The Fulcrum of Our Foreign Policy**

The added value of the EU for every citizen's daily life can hardly be overstated. In scores of policy areas, European decisions are the foundation on which member states and regions build. For these reasons, the EU is the fulcrum of our own foreign policy.

#### Diplomatic Ties with the EU

Flanders represents its values and interests within the EU on two tiers: through direct contacts with the EU institutions, and on behalf of Belgium. This last activity is based on an intra-Belgian framework ensuring a cohesive approach to EU positions, and representation for our region in negotiations within European institutions. This framework provides Flanders and the other federated states a large degree of direct involvement and representation, unparalleled in other Member States.

Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office is responsible for the coherence of Flemish input into European decision-making processes. As the diplomatic link between Flanders and the EU, its role is chiefly one of coordination: of the Flemish position on issues such as trade policy, the European budget, cohesion policy, European Semester, public governance and Brexit; and on the adoption of EU legislation into Flemish law.

The Delegation of Flanders operates within Belgium's Permanent Representation to the EU. Its autonomous team of more than twenty staff members (seconded from all policy areas of the Government of Flanders) negotiates daily within the European institutions.

#### Presidency of the Council of the EU

From 1 January to 30 June 2024, Belgium will hold the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This also offers opportunities to strengthen Flemish interest representation within the European Union. A focused and well thought-out programme of (informal) meetings and events will make an important contribution to this. In this process, Flanders can, on the one hand, promote its assets and expertise internationally and, on the other hand, place certain themes and



policy issues on the European agenda that are of importance to Flanders and yield clear added value for the European Union and Flanders. The EU Presidency will also strengthen the Flemish network within the EU institutions. Finally, the Government of Flanders wants to use the EU Presidency to further enhance the intra-Belgian role of the federated states within the European context.

**MORE** about the General Representation of Flanders to the EU can be found at [www.flandersineu.be](http://www.flandersineu.be)

**A Guiding Vision for the Future**

The Government of Flanders' 2016 Vision Statement on the future of the EU functions as a touchstone for the Government of Flanders services when it comes to evaluating European policy and legislative proposals.

The Vision Statement identifies 10 core interests with respect to the EU:

- Safeguarding our shared fundamental values, standards and freedoms; and championing them across the world.
- A reinforced Schengen zone, with properly-functioning external border controls.
- Providing specific support for socio-economic reforms in the Member States and federated states.
- Generating a reinvigorated investment framework that adheres to the Stability and Growth Pact.
- Fostering effective social policy, particularly addressing social dumping and fiscal shopping.
- Broadening the European Monetary Union, with the completion of the Banking Union as a priority.
- Expanding the internal market to include an energy, transport and digital union.
- Effecting a breakthrough for the most strategic trade agreements with state-of-the-art investment protection.
- Expanding the European Research Area through research programmes to catalyse the knowledge-based and low-carbon economy of tomorrow. And, this as part of an ambitious and effective sustainability policy including the whole implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement.
- A powerful foreign and security policy, especially in Europe's neighbouring regions.



5 May 2021 -Dubravka Šuica, Vice President of the European Commission and European Commissioner for Democracy and Demography is received in the Flemish Parliament on Europe Day by President Liesbeth Homans and Minister-President Jan Jambon.

**Flemish EU Diplomacy: Three Core Interests**

**Trade Policy: Creating Sustainable Opportunities for Enterprises**

The Government of Flanders is strongly committed to the Common Commercial Policy, in line with the specific interests of the Flemish economy.

The EU has exclusive competence for the Common Commercial Policy. When the European Commission participates in negotiations on multilateral trade liberalisation within the World Trade Organization and when it negotiates bilateral free trade agreements with major markets

outside the EU, it does so with a mandate determined by the Member States.

Flanders is responsible for its own export promotion and policy, and therefore also for supporting Flemish companies in their international activities (more on p. 16 ff.).

Multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements also create structural and sustainable trade liberalisation, which in turn creates more opportunities for Flemish companies on the international stage. Therefore,

Common Trade Policy is closely monitored. The specific interests of the Flemish economy are a guiding principle in this effort.



Vision for the Future of the European Union  
[bit.ly/2DrRLZ3](https://bit.ly/2DrRLZ3)

## EU budget: Investments with Added Value

The EU subsidises a wide range of projects within Flanders' areas of competence (including research, development, innovation, education, transport, cohesion, agriculture and the environment). In turn, the Government of Flanders also contributes resources to European projects and is responsible for managing them in cooperation with the European institutions (examples include cohesion policy and rural development policy).

Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office represents Flemish values and interests in the negotiations on the European (multi-annual) budget, the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument, cohesion policy and InvestEU Fund.

## A new partnership with the UK

The United Kingdom's departure from the EU poses a significant challenge for Flanders. As our fourth-largest trading partner, the UK is of particular economic importance. Brexit has consequences in many areas, from everything related to trade, fisheries, transport and research. Flanders regrets the UK's departure from the EU and acknowledges that this departure will certainly change the current relationship.

Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office and Flanders Investment & Trade will continue to provide information and monitor stakeholder needs and concerns across a variety of topics and sectors linked to Brexit. Issues are raised with decision-makers in EU and Belgian institutions.

The UK remains a neighbour with whom Flanders shares important trade, cultural and historical ties. Brexit will not change this.

30 August 2020 – Secretary-General Patricia De Clercq representing Flemish Minister for Agriculture, Hilde Crevits, during the Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers in Koblenz, Germany. © BMEL



Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers  
30 August – 1 September 2020, Koblenz



## Bilateral Dialogue with Countries and Regions

The international role played by the Government of Flanders is not limited to EU matters. The Government of Flanders maintains close ties with other national governments and federated states. Trade issues, such as cooperation between ports or research and development, are often high on the agenda when engaging with countries outside the EU. Ultimately, many of our policy goals necessitate direct consultation and/ or cooperation with those countries.

Working with neighbouring countries often involves transport connections or other issues related to logistics, infrastructure, energy or the environment. One such agreement, with the Netherlands, is for the deepening of the Scheldt river or the joint construction of a new sea lock. Another example is the treaty that Flanders concluded with France and Wallonia regarding the Lys Mitoyenne.

With countries from outside the EU, cooperation often centers on trade issues, cooperation between ports or research and development.

Flemish development cooperation is also predominantly bilateral and has taken form through discussions and negotiations with the governments of South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi and Morocco.

### Flanders News Service

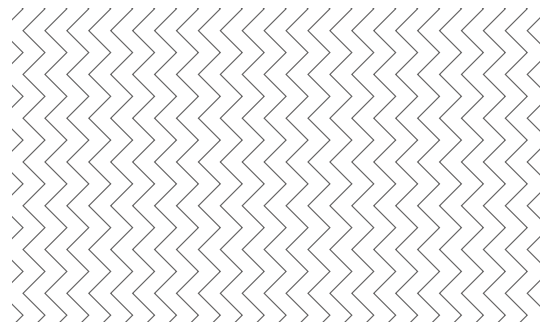
In order to give Flanders the necessary international resonance, Belga News Agency distributes daily English-language news items to foreign media, international institutions and embassies. *"Flanders is at the top of the world in terms of innovation, digitization, culture, sustainable economy, sports, technology, ports and much more. Yet our assets are not always well known abroad. This international news service can change this and strengthen the appreciation for Flanders",* says Minister-President Jan Jambon.

You can subscribe to Belga News Agency via twitter ([twitter.com/Belga\\_English](https://twitter.com/Belga_English)) and via [www.belganewsagency.eu](http://www.belganewsagency.eu)"



14 October 2019 – Minister-President Jan Jambon is received by Minister-President of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte at Catshuis in The Hague. © Belga Image

As of 2021, Flanders was party to 41 bilateral treaties and 219 Memoranda of Understanding



## Autonomous regions

Flanders maintains long-standing cooperation with autonomous regions and federated states, in and outside of Europe.



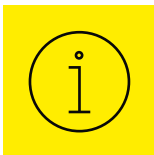
30 November 2019 – Minister-President of the Catalan Government, Quim Torra, received Minister-President Jan Jambon at the Palau de la Generalitat in Barcelona. © BELGA Nicolas Maeterlinck



12 December 2018 – neon-artwork referring to the work of Belgian artist René Magritte, on display during the signing of the cooperation programme specifically aimed at young artists and youth theatre between Flanders and Quebec.

To bolster the positive cooperation with governments, Flanders invested in a solid diplomatic network. Today there are bilateral diplomatic missions in The Hague, Berlin, London, Paris, Vienna, Warsaw, New York, Pretoria and, as of 2021, Copenhagen. More information about these can be found in the final section of this brochure.

For consultations with colleagues from other governments, the members of the present Government of Flanders have already embarked on more than 40 missions abroad. Conversely, more than 30 foreign ministers or official delegations were received by the Flemish government at political level. Some of the talks took place digitally.



### MORE

about Flanders' bilateral relations with other countries and regions is at [bit.ly/3O4uxJw](https://bit.ly/3O4uxJw)



25 November 2019 – Minister-President Jan Jambon met the Austrian Chancellor Brigitte Bierlein in Vienna during his mission to Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic.



25 - 27 September 2015 – UN Headquarters in New York, USA, during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015. (© UN Photo)



13 November 2019 – Minister-President and Flemish minister for Culture Jan Jambon at the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, France.

## Multilateral Cooperation

In addition to its cooperation with and within the EU, and its direct cooperation with countries and regions beyond the EU, Flanders also participates in many multilateral organisations.

Multilateral partnerships are particularly effective for setting specific policy targets like ensuring dignified work, children's rights and gender equality.

This involves two-way traffic between the Flemish and the international levels. Flanders influences international policy and regulations by actively participating in forums and administrative bodies.

Flanders also uses international regulations and international recommendations from the multilateral institutions to shape its own policy.

Through the establishment of cooperation agreements, in which specific financing mechanisms are provided, Flanders has become a direct partner of several UN organisations, such as Unesco, UNAIDS, FAO and ILO.

Today, Flanders can act as a direct donor, illustrated by its role as the largest subnational donor to the UN Central Emergency Relief Fund, or it can participate in specific memberships (UNWTO). In addition to this, there is active partnership with the Council of Europe, OECD and WTO.

To streamline the cooperation between the Government of Flanders and these institutions, two multilateral posts were set up within the Flemish diplomatic network: one in Geneva and one in Paris.



16 January 2020 – Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Public Governance, Civic Integration and Equal Opportunities, Bart Somers, at the OECD Ministerial and Policy Forum on Migration and Integration in Paris, France

**MEER  
AMBITIE  
DAN OOI.T.**



**DE VLAAMSE VEERKRACHT**

Een investering van  
4,3 miljard in elke Vlaming.

**DE VLAAMSE  
VEERKRACHT**

## Flemish Resilience

The Flemish Government launched the ambitious Flemish Resilience Recovery Plan. This program aims to mitigate the effects of the corona crisis, which affected Flanders considerably, bolster the return to a path of social and economic profit and bring Flanders to the top of Europe. The government invests 4.3 billion euros – of which 2.25 billion euros from the European Recovery Fund – in this recovery plan. Flemish Resilience builds on 7 spearheads that are made concrete in 180 projects. They strengthen Flanders' role as pioneer of the digital revolution and bring a more sustainable economy one step closer.

The 7 spearheads of Flemish Resilience are:

- Investment in climate and innovation, making economy and society more sustainable
- Investment in infrastructure and major mobility works
- Digital transformation in Flanders
- Stimulation of lifelong learning and digitization in education and on the labour market
- Strengthening the Flemish care and welfare system
- Out of the corona crisis and beyond Brexit
- Fewer rules and more efficiency in government

A selection of projects:

- 125 million euros for hydrogen technology: hydrogen as an important component in the Flemish climate-neutral energy transition
- 25 million euros for circular construction and the circular manufacturing industry
- 30 million euros for recycling installations: waste as a resource
- 160 million euros for strengthening the research infrastructure of the Strategic Research Centers (of which 70 million euros for IMEC's research cleanroom).

**MORE:**

[www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht](http://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht)

## Fayat scholarships

In 2022, the Government of Flanders gave green light to a new scholarship, the Fayat scholarship. This scholarship offers talented Flemish master students the opportunity to obtain an additional master's degree at an internationally renowned top institution. The Fayat students contribute to the development of an international network of exceptional students and alumni. A network from which both the students and Flanders can reap the benefits in the long term. In this way, the students strengthen the image of Flanders as an innovative top region.

**MORE:** [www.vlaanderen.be/fayatbeurzen](http://www.vlaanderen.be/fayatbeurzen)



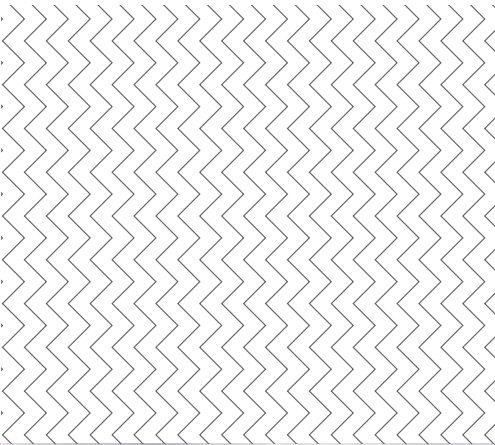
## Focus on the North

The Coalition Agreement of the Government of Flanders (2019- 2024) deliberately focused on the North of Europe for inspiration, benchmarking and international cooperation.

In September 2021, Minister-President Jambon - in the presence of the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jeppe Kofod - opened the new General Representation of Flanders in Copenhagen. The scope of action covers not only Denmark, but also Finland, Norway and Sweden.

With this initiative, the Government of Flanders wants to express its ambition to strengthen ties with ten Nordic countries. By entering into a sustainable and strong cooperation with four Scandinavian countries, but also with the Netherlands, Germany, three Baltic states and Ireland, Flanders wants to take major steps forward in many areas including employment, sustainability and innovation.

However, Flanders' ambition with the North goes beyond bilateral cooperation and also explicitly focuses on cooperation in the European decision-making process and in the economic field. Flanders Investment & Trade was therefore reinforced with an additional technology attaché for the Nordic countries.



# Trade at the Service of Employment and Prosperity

International trade is part of Flanders' DNA. Just think of Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp - cities that rose to prominence centuries ago as major trade centres in Western Europe. Today, the total value of what Flanders exports per year equals that of our region's GDP. In absolute terms, Flanders is the 15<sup>th</sup> largest exporter in the world, exporting three times as much per capita as Germany. Even so, we are always looking to further enhance our position because markets never stand still. We continuously invest in infrastructural improvement, and in developing our wide range of tools for stimulating international trade and promoting free trade agreements.





# International Trade and Foreign Investments

## Export Promotion for Our Companies

Flanders autonomously promotes export and supports Flanders-based companies that are active in and export to foreign markets. The network of Flanders Investment & Trade consists of 102 offices - 96 offices abroad, 5 provincial offices and one head office- and helps Flemish companies market their goods and services in every corner of the world. Furthermore, the network also guides foreign investors to Flanders.

## Trade Agreements and Free Trade

Competence for trade agreements and free trade is shared between Flanders and the federal government and the EU. Flanders' trade interests are represented directly by Flanders, or in a coordinated Belgian position, depending on the forum.

## Influencing EU policy

Flanders plays a proactive and positive role in the development and implementation of European trade policy. Specific areas of attention include: the interests of SMEs; further liberalisation of the trade in services; the reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade; the importance of flexible labour mobility; and the potential for trade as a tool for sustainable development.

Free trade agreements can only be approved when Flanders has the competence and with Flanders' consent.

The importance of foreign trade can scarcely be overstated. As a centrally-located region, at the heart of a prosperous and productive Western Europe, foreign trade is the main artery of Flanders' economy. Exports increased year on year reaching 380,5 billion euros in 2021, an historical record. With an increase of +27,6%, the Flemish export grew faster than the EU-average. Similarly, imports of foreign goods achieved a new record of 312.6 billion euros in 2019. Flanders' export ratio and export per capita are among the highest in the world.

Within the European Union, it is the common market that ensures the free movement of all goods and services, capital and people. The EU internal market is very important and positive for trade within and beyond Europe. 64,5% of Flanders' exports went to the European Union in 2021. The most important markets for goods are located in neighbouring countries.

The European Trade and Investment Protection Policy Working Group is responsible for the permanent monitoring of European trade policy and coordination between Flanders' policy departments. It also represents Flemish trade positions in federal, European and international contexts. Civil servants and representatives of the Ministers of the Government of Flanders come together in this working group.

Flanders' international trade policy objectives:

- **Improve market access**
- **Remove trade barriers**
- **Liberalise services and investments**
- **Open market for public procurement**
- **Safeguard intellectual property rights**
- **Include SMEs**
- **Consider the multilateral framework**
- **Protect sensitive sectors**
- **Promote sustainable development**

Flemish exports of goods outside Europe amounted to € 93.0 billion in 2021. Here again, the European Union plays an indispensable role as its European Commission Directorate-General for Trade represents all Member States in all trade agreements with third countries.

Due to the comprehensive and diagonal nature of the trade and investment policy, all entities and powers of the Government of Flanders can take part. Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office coordinates the tasks of this working group.

Via the General Representation of Flanders to the EU, a finger is also kept on the pulse of the European Commission, and European trade contacts are maintained.



Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT) is the region's specialised agency for promoting export and investment. Its mission is to support Flanders-based exporters and to attract foreign investments to Flanders.

The Trade Barriers Hotline – accessible via the FIT website – helps companies address their specific trade problems in markets outside Europe. In cooperation with the European Commission, FIT and Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office aim to resolve these trade

barriers, for instance, by discussing these issues in the Market Access Advisory Committee of the European Commission, EU Member States and European business federations.

Consequently, FIT's dedicated hotline solves problems for the companies involved, and provides strategically important information about the needs of Flanders-based companies. This information also contributes to defining the position of the Government of Flanders in trade negotiations.

## Flanders Accelerates!

To keep performing when it comes to internationalisation of the Flemish economy, FIT has developed and conducts the internationalisation strategy 'Flanders Accelerates' in cooperation with its partners, which include companies, civil society partners, knowledge institutions and government actors.

In the update of the internationalisation strategy, the focus is on:

- Maximising Flanders' economic strengths: pharma & biotech; food & beverage; engineering & technology; smart logistics; and sustainable (raw) materials & chemistry
- Promoting Flanders as a startup and scaleup region
- Investing in the European priorities of Green Deal and Digital Agenda

- Proposing improvements in rules and regulations regarding international entrepreneurship
- Assessing the challenges of digital trade

In 2021, FIT set up the 20th edition of the 'Export Lion' annual award for Flemish companies with exceptional export figures. In 2022 FIT organises the 4th edition of the Export Fair.

In 2021-2022, FIT will strengthen Flemish economic diplomacy with Science & Technology Offices in innovation hotspots worldwide. Our technology attachés (TAs) play an essential role there and focus on 3 technological domains: Digital Tech, Health Tech and Climate Tech. These are all technological themes that contribute to solutions for today's societal and socio-economic challenges. From New York, Palo Alto, Paris, London, Copenhagen, Munich, Mumbai, Singapore, Guangzhou and Tokyo.



Export Lion – Annual award of Flanders Investment & Trade for Flemish companies with exceptional export figures.

They build an extensive network abroad of tech companies, venture capitalists, knowledge and research centers, clusters, incubators, accelerators and so on. In this way, they can help Flemish tech companies even better abroad, strengthen the industrial ecosystem with foreign tech investors and better connect Flemish and foreign ecosystems.

## Partnerships

In order to give international Flanders a boost, FIT has been surrounded by a new, solid team of structural partners in 2022. The partners include sector federations and clusters, but also bilateral Chambers of Commerce, business organisations, incubators and so on. Each of them focuses on essential themes for the internationalisation of Flanders: from trade relations to peer learning to connecting with foreign innovation networks.

## Maintaining and Improving Infrastructure

Easy accessibility is the single most important requirement for trade, not least because three-quarters of export continues to be goods. As a centrally-located region with a strong trading spirit, the transport and traffic infrastructure in Flanders is traditionally very dense. In fact, Flanders has the second densest rail and road network in Europe and has four airports. The logistics sector is responsible for no less than 9% of Flanders' GDP.

Given the importance of a well-developed infrastructure for the competitive position of Flemish companies, the Government of Flanders is constantly investing in maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure. In recent years, special attention was paid to the accessibility of the Flemish ports (Antwerp, Zeebrugge, Ghent and Ostend) by conducting, among other things, dredging works, organising new locks and focusing more on faster transit times.



In one of the most densely-populated areas of the world, inland waterways offer sustainable, reliable and environmentally-friendly connections between large industrial zones and service centres. This is why upgrading the Seine-Scheldt connection has been a top priority in recent years. It is an exciting investment for Flanders, as it is for France and Wallonia, because so far, the two river basins have never been optimally connected. The project is one of the 30 priorities of the European Ten-T initiative (Trans-European transport network).

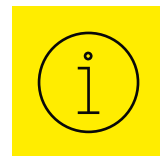
The 3RX project is another emblematic, cross-border project. For years, Flanders has been making the case for a rail connection for goods between the port of Antwerp, the Netherlands and the German Ruhr area. In this 'missing link', selected by the European Commission as a Ten-T project in 2015, the Government of Flanders cooperates through diplomatic channels with the relevant authorities in the Netherlands, Germany and North Rhine-Westphalia.



19 May 2020 - Flemish Minister for Mobility and Public Works, Lydia Peeters, pictured during a new phase in the works for the Oosterweel Connection in Antwerp. © BELGA Jasper Jacobs

Flanders also promotes its water expertise internationally, among other ways, by participating in the Mekong River Commission. This platform for regional cooperation focuses on the management of shared water resources and the sustainable development of the Mekong River region. As a development partner, Flanders will be closely involved in water diplomacy in the Southeast Asian region.

The intended collaboration also creates opportunities for Flemish business and its expertise in an area that is geostrategically gaining in importance. The technical approach of the organisation makes it possible to focus on water-related and environmental themes where Flanders shows itself to be a global player.



### CURRENT INFORMATION

on major infrastructure and mobility sites can be found on the Department of Mobility and Public Works website [bit.ly/3xNnKhS](https://bit.ly/3xNnKhS)



Shrine of St. Ursula by Hans Memling, 15<sup>th</sup> century

# Cross-border Connections through Culture, Tourism and Science

Flanders' foreign policy focuses on culture, science, education and tourism. Hardly surprisingly considering Flanders is known across the world for its ancient and contemporary culture, as well as for being an innovative knowledge area.

## Cultural Diplomacy

In Flanders' foreign policy, a special place is reserved for culture. Flanders has a rich cultural tradition. It is world famous for its fine arts - like the Flemish Primitives - and the work of leading contemporary artists and art centres. It has a solid reputation that creates opportunities for emerging Flemish artists abroad, and is also a valuable tool for strengthening Flanders' international position and image.

Involvement in major international exhibitions, festivals or publications keeps our arts in the spotlight.

Flanders has one cultural centre abroad: 'de Brakke Grond' in Amsterdam. It is founded on the belief that an inspirational environment for artists and art publics is fostered through collaboration and exchange.

Language unites Flanders and the Netherlands. With respectively 6.5 and 17 million Dutch-speaking citizens, Dutch is the eighth largest language group in Europe. The language alliance was formally ratified in 1980 with the Dutch Language Treaty.

But the connection is not limited to language alone. Flanders and the Netherlands also have close historical, cultural, political and socio-economic ties. Cooperation in the areas of culture, education, science and welfare was embedded in the Cultural Treaty Flanders-Netherlands in 1995.

Through the export of culture, Flanders positions itself as it has traditionally been known in the world: as a trading and maritime nation, as a crossroads of culture, heritage and innovation. Innovative ideas are being exported – for example to the Lithuanian city of Kaunas, the European Capital of Culture in 2022, where Designregio Kortrijk will show small and medium-sized enterprises how to integrate design thinking into their business operations. In West Flanders, the creative industries have been successfully matched with SMEs for more than ten years, resulting in forty new product and business model innovations.

Cultural diplomacy is not limited to exporting culture and ideas, however. There is also a focus on cultural diversity and recognition of the added value and effectiveness of cultural cooperation and the cross-border exchange of ideas, values and traditions. Cultural cooperation leads to mutual understanding, recognition and détente. By supporting projects that enhance intercultural dialogue, Flanders aims to protect an open and free society against the dangers that arise from polarisation, fear and division. Flanders acknowledges the power of artists and performers in transition processes towards more democracy and self-development. In other words, culture draws attention to a number of fundamental values and norms of our foreign policy.

Flanders is strongly committed to international networks and organisations focused on culture and heritage such as EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) and UN-agency UNESCO.

With the Flanders UNESCO Trustfund (FUT), Flemish support for UNESCO's heritage projects is assured and world heritage sites can count on better support. Capacity and expertise related to intangible cultural heritage like dance, rituals and music is improved, especially when it comes to southern Africa.



Brussels Philharmonic performing at Carnegie Hall, New York. © Véronique Bossaert



Rosas & TG Stan QUARTETT (© Herman Sorgeloos).

29 January 2020 – Minister for Tourism, Zuhair Demir, at the opening of the exhibition "Van Eyck. An Optical Revolution" in MSK, Ghent. © IDAgency/ Frederiek Vande Velde





Tourism directly employs 6.5% of the workforce, or 250,000 Flemings.

## Promoting Flanders as a Tourist Destination

Flanders and Brussels recorded more than 15 million tourist overnight stays in 2020. In 2019, this figure was above 33 million and we count on getting back to this level by 2025 (post-corona). Tourism directly employed 256,000 people in Flanders in 2020 (6.7% of the working population). With VISITFLANDERS, Flanders has a powerful tool to draw attention to the many assets of Flanders abroad. VISITFLANDERS uses tourism to create added value for visitors, residents, entrepreneurs and the country itself. The aim is to develop Flanders into a flourishing destination. We do this on the basis of six themes, linked to the DNA of Flanders:

- Heritage experiences: from Flemish Masters to religious heritage, from the Great War to castles and gardens
- Flanders nature: landscapes, nature reserves, hiking, rivers and coast
- Culinary Flanders: the heritage and future of our food and drink culture
- Flanders cycling country: our cycling culture in combination with our ambition to make Flanders a real cycling destination

- Everyone deserves a holiday: the right to vacation for everyone, today and tomorrow
- Conferences and events: strengthening tourist themes, the seven transition priorities and focus on events with international appeal.

In our marketing, we want to strengthen the international reputation of Flanders as a destination and encourage specific target groups to visit our region. We focus on the international visitor who consciously chooses Flanders or one of its regions, where the visitor can discover one or more of the six themes. VISITFLANDERS has a strong international network reaching the appropriate target groups all over the world and connecting them to our destination. VISITFLANDERS achieves this through thorough PR and press campaigns, a strong B2B operation in the international travel industry, and inspiring online and offline campaigns that put our destination in the spotlight under various themes. To make all of this happen, we work in a knowledge-driven way, with a good measure of data collection and analysis.

This relates to general market information such as the number of arrivals and overnight stays from the different markets, the average length of stay, market trends... as well as research into the profile of the visitor, the reputation of Flanders and macro trends. Flanders is also represented in the European institutions (Tourism Advisory Committee) and organisations such as the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and Necstour. The latter is a network of more than 30 European Regions for sustainable and competitive tourism. Within UNWTO, Flanders represents the associated members in the Executive Council and the Programme and Budget Committee of the organisation. In 2021, Flanders hosted the UNWTO World Forum for Tourism and Gastronomy and the award of 'the World 50 Best Restaurants'. Flanders also organised the World Cycling Championships, which attracted great international interest and greatly benefited our reputation as a cycling destination.

Flanders aspires to strengthen its position as a world reference for innovative technologies and as a hotbed of digital transformation.



1 October 2020 - Flemish Minister for Economy, Innovation, Work, Social Economy and Agriculture Hilde Crevits attends the presentation of the Volvo XC40 Recharge p8, at the Volvo Car plant in Gent. © BELGA Kurt Desplenter

## A knowledge region like no other

With few natural resources and a dense population, Flanders has nurtured for centuries a strong focus on education, innovation, science and knowledge. Over the past decades, the Government of Flanders has capitalized on this focus. The present coalition agreement (2019-2024), marked technological innovation as the overarching theme for the years to come.

Flanders needs to strengthen its position as a world reference for innovative technologies and as a hotbed of digital transformation continuously. This involves constant dialogue and cooperation between government, knowledge institutes, citizens and companies.

The effort will not only focus on Research & Development but will also widen the scope to areas as diverse as mobility, education, social services and healthcare. Equal attention is paid to both the roll-out of digital infrastructure and to the development of human digital skills.

Education plays a key role in this effort. Special attention goes to innovation and digital skills in higher education.

Climate and sustainability are vital benchmarks throughout this work. In its policies, Flanders puts great emphasis on digital technologies (artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, smart cities, industry 4.0...) and the transition to a sustainable economic model (circular economy, bio-economy, water-related innovation, hydrogen technology, etc.).

### **MORE:**

[www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/en](http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/en)



## IMEC, one of four Strategic Research Centres



IMEC in Leuven, a world-leading nano-electronics and nano-technology research centre. © Christoph Ennekens

Leuven's IMEC is a good example of how research and development in a niche area can become a worldwide success story, as well as a hotbed for growth locally. IMEC, a spin-off of the University of Leuven, was founded in 1984 as a research centre for nanotechnology and nanoelectronics. In a short span of time, IMEC developed into the O&O-hub for the computer chip.

Today, it forms a bridge between science and industry and brings a smart dimension to mobility, health, industries, cities, energy, education, infotainment and agrofood.

Besides IMEC there are 3 other strategic research centres in Flanders: the Flemish Institute for Bio-Technology (VIB), VITO (Cleantech) and Flanders Make (manufacturing).





## Towards a circular economy

Evolving towards a circular economy is one of the key challenges in the decades to come. This means: responding better to the needs of society with a much smaller ecological footprint. Flanders has a long and successful track-record when it comes to circular economy research and practice. The transition towards a circular economy is an opportunity for Flanders to expand its expertise in recycling, strengthening the knowhow on circular production/construction and entering the transition to a sustainable agricultural and food policy. European programmes such as Food 2030 and Horizon Europe are a valuable framework for this effort.

'Circular Flanders' is a partnership between government departments, companies, civil society and the knowledge community and acts as an incubator for change when it comes to transitioning to a circular economy.

### **MORE:**

[www.circularflanders.be](http://www.circularflanders.be)

## Development cooperation and innovation

Innovation plays a central role in Flemish development cooperation work as well. VITO and its South African counterpart CSIR started a demonstration project on battery technologies, aiming at supporting the introduction of electrical storage to accelerate the shift towards renewable energy in South Africa and offering companies and knowledge organisations the opportunity to learn and collaborate in the field.

## Flanders UNESCO Science Trust Fund

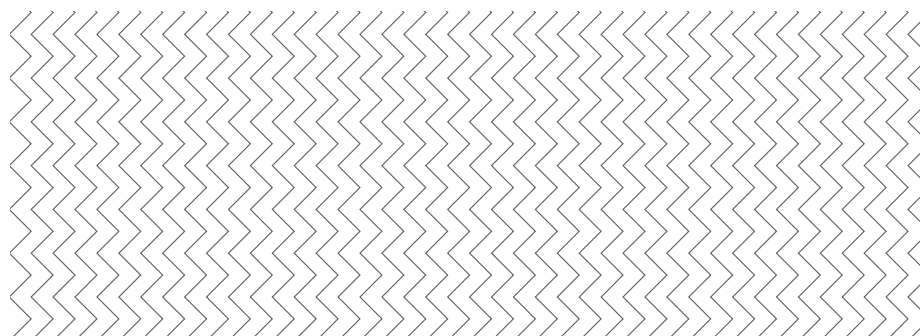
To help strengthen global scientific cooperation within UNESCO programmes, Flanders created the Flanders UNESCO Science Trust Fund (FUST). Flemish scientific expertise on oceans and water management contributes to UNESCO projects, with a recurrent focus on climate change. The Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) in Ostend is also home to UNESCO's project office for oceanographic data management, which ensures an enriching cross-pollination between Flemish and international expertise.

## Hydrogen technology

Flanders aspires to become a European leader in the field of hydrogen and published a Flemish hydrogen vision and strategy in November 2020. Hydrogen plays an important role in our energy and climate transition and it creates economic opportunities for the many Flemish companies and technology players that are active throughout the hydrogen value chain. Hydrogen will be crucial for the decarbonisation of the Flemish industry for both industrial processes and as a feedstock for sustainable chemical products, and to further decarbonise our mobility sector. Large offshore windpower farms off the Flemish coast generate green electricity, which can be used for producing green hydrogen that can be stored and used later for multiple applications with no carbon emissions.

The hydrogen community in Flanders is organised in the "Waterstof Industrie Cluster", a strong collaboration of companies, research institutes and government agencies and coordinated by WaterstofNet, the Flemish hydrogen knowledge centre. They join forces on pilot projects, studies and project consortia along the hydrogen value chain to establish a complete hydrogen ecosystem in Flanders.

**MORE:** [www.waterstofnet.eu/en](http://www.waterstofnet.eu/en)





## **Global Support for a Sustainable Transition**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations has as its main aims: putting an end to extreme poverty, protecting the earth, ensuring inclusive and peaceful societies and pursuing fair prosperity for everyone. The Government of Flanders uses all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals to guide its international operations. To this end, Flanders finances programmes in the areas of agriculture, health care, climate and green jobs in southern Africa and -as of 2022- Morocco. Embedding the international development agenda in Flanders is targeted by supporting organisations with a wider audience, such as educational and youth organisations, civil society actors, citizen initiatives, media and local governments in Flanders. Flanders has also grown into a valued partner and donor of multilateral and international organisations. An explicit thematic and geographical focus as well as an innovative approach are key aspects of Flemish participation.



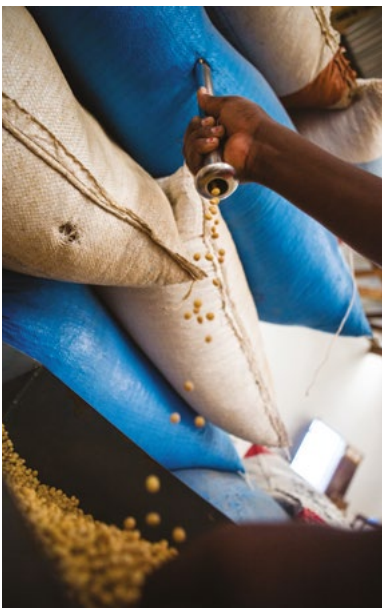
## Innovative Donor with Maximum Impact

The Flemish approach was well received in the OECD 2018 study on decentralised development cooperation. In particular, the thematic and geographical focus that Flanders consistently applies was praised. This focus enables a long-term strategy, a high level of aid predictability and the full potential for expertise building and capacity strengthening.

The new forms of cooperation in which Flanders and other donor states enter into partnerships with multilateral organisations, national ministries and parastatal institutes were also seen as a positive evolution. These multi-actor partnerships increase the long-term commitment and the effectiveness of development cooperation.

In addition, Flanders was appreciated by the local partners as a flexible donor who has the courage to focus on innovation, new technologies and experiments. Flanders is consciously committed to this role as an innovator and incubator. When a pilot project proves to be successful and larger donors become involved, Flanders looks for scale-up opportunities.

## Investment in Sustainable Agriculture and Health Care



The Farmer Warehouse Chilanga, Malawi

The partner countries of Flanders' development cooperation are Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa (reorientation) and -starting up- Morocco. For each country, a distinctly thematic focus is applied, based on a considered analysis of the greatest needs and challenges.

With respect to Malawi, the focus is on agriculture and food security. Cooperation with Mozambique revolves around the theme of health. For South Africa, and -as off 2022- Morocco, the emphasis is on adaptation to climate change, job creation and the green economy.

In fact, the latter is always relevant in situations with deprivation or poverty, for which solving immediate local challenges is key. In the upcoming years, focus in South Africa will shift to socio-economic cooperation.

For example, the Government of Flanders decided to support a project by Tradeline Corporation Limited in Malawi to promote the market access for small-scale farmers and farmers' organisations through the development of a favourable business climate.

A budget of 1.6 million euros was made available for this. In Malawi, Tradeline Corporation strives to develop a private sector driven by a flourishing and competitive agribusiness which contributes to economic growth and the creation of dignified work in the country.

Through the provision of technical assistance and financial support and the development of commercial partnerships, Tradeline Corporation is strengthening the capacity of 30 emerging marketing organisations in the focus districts of Kasungu and Mzimba. At the end of the project, the companies will be able to assume their market function independently and will have the skills, tools, network and resources to maintain a sustainable trading relationship

with the small-scale producers on the supply side, as well as the large national or regional buyers on the demand side.

A similar focus on a specific target group features in a programme supported by the Government of Flanders as regards reproductive health in Mozambique.

The cooperation between the Government of Flanders and the International Centre for Reproductive Health in Mozambique aims to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents (boys and girls aged between 10 and 18). The focus is on reducing teen pregnancies, unsafe abortions, new HIV and STI infections, as well as gender-related violence.

In addition, it attempts to change the attitude towards harmful social norms and practices in a positive way.

ICRH-Mozambique is a partner of ICRH-Global, founded at the initiative of the University of Ghent, with the support of the Government of Flanders. Funding of 1,119,810 euros has been provided for the 2018-2022 period.



25 August 2017 – Information stand of ICRH-Mozambique at the high school of Nhongonhane, Mozambique, on sexual and reproductive health.

## The Fight against Climate Change



Beyond the significant challenge it poses to humankind, climate change is a reality that threatens to increase inequality in the world. Developing countries from the South are more directly dependent on natural resources to provide for livelihoods and incomes. Therefore the human impact of climate change is at its most outspoken here.

This has prompted agreements within the UN to reserve 100 billion dollars annually for international climate finance by 2020.

From 2016 until 2020, Flanders committed 14.5 million euro annually for this objective within a framework of cooperation with southern Africa. In the upcoming years, this commitment will be continued. The distribution of these funds according to organisation, recipient country and sector can be consulted online: [www.fdfa.be/en/climate](http://www.fdfa.be/en/climate)

The aim is to enable the partner countries to adapt to the effects of climate change and to pursue a low-carbon development path.

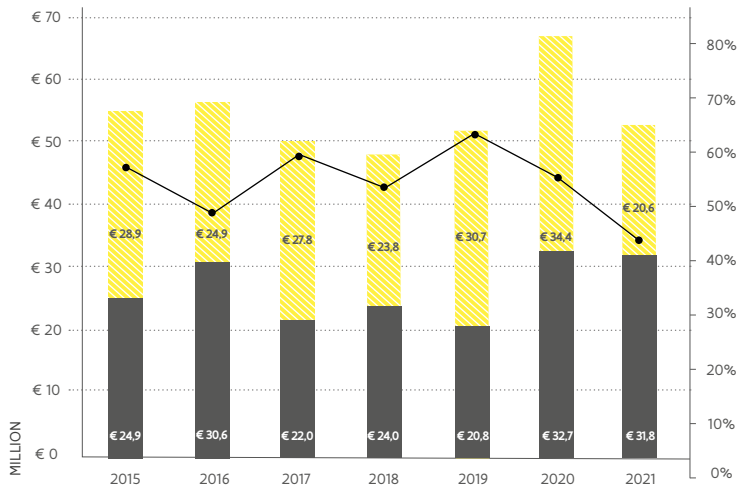
### Basic principles of **Flemish Development Cooperation**

**STIMULATE  
INNOVATION**

**ADOPT A SYSTEMATIC  
APPROACH**

**FOCUS ON  
COOPERATION**

## EVOLUTION OF TOTAL ODA: BREAKDOWN BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICY AND OTHER ODA



■ Expenditure for development cooperation

■ Other ODA

—● % development cooperation policy on total ODA (right axis)

Expenditure qualifies as ODA (Official Development Assistance), when it meets the following criteria:

**Official** - the expenditure comes strictly from government funds.

**Development** - economic and social development is the prime goal.

**Assistance** - it is aid (i.e., it is not a commercial transaction subject to market conditions).

The assistance is going to a country (or group of countries) or an international institution on the DAC list.

## Development Cooperation through Multilateral Channels

With respect to development cooperation, Flanders liaises with multilateral organisations that support and propagate the established Flemish policy priorities. For the health sector these are UNAIDS and WHO, for agriculture and climate change FAO, WFP, ICRAF and UNEP and UNDP to support

resilience programmes in relation to humanitarian aid. This operational support feeds Flemish input at the policy level of multilateral organisations, while at the same time, the international standards and recommendations from the multilateral institutions feeds into the country programmes.

## Getting the North in Motion

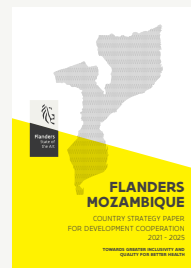
In Flanders, development cooperation promotes a fair and sustainable growth and solidarity.

This is achieved through education and media and by supporting innovative projects and volunteer initiatives.

A five-year country programme is being drawn up in cooperation with the partner countries in southern Africa. The country strategy outlines the supported sectors, the objectives and the available budget. To achieve this, Flanders works together with governments, non-governmental partners and multilateral organisations, and increasingly in mixed partnerships also.



**Country Strategy Paper  
South Africa**  
[bit.ly/2006wHC](https://bit.ly/2006wHC)




**Country Strategy Paper  
Mozambique (EN)**  
[bit.ly/3PQWJB8](https://bit.ly/3PQWJB8)



**Country Strategy Paper  
Malawi**  
[bit.ly/3MBDA3e](https://bit.ly/3MBDA3e)

# Human Rights, Peace and Security



For Flanders, human rights constitute not only a legal and ethical commitment towards its own citizens, but also a lodestar for foreign policy. A pro-active, international human rights policy indisputably contributes to Flanders' long-term interests, since respecting human rights ensures more peace, security and economic and social progress in the world. The First World War played a decisive role in the creation of this awareness.

“There is no peace without development, there is no development without peace and there is neither lasting peace nor sustainable development without respect of human rights and the rule of law.”

Former Deputy Secretary General  
of the UN Jan Eliasson



Our 'Human Rights and Flanders' (international) Policy' brochure presents 4 key human rights themes for Flanders' international policy:

- **RESPECT FOR THE PHYSICAL INTEGRITY OF EVERY PERSON**
- **RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**
- **COMBATING ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION**
- **THE RIGHT TO DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS**

Fundamental rights in developing countries is also an area of particular focus.

## Human Rights as a Touchstone and an Objective

In 2021, Flanders provided more than 700,000 euro support for human rights worldwide. This included iSANS from Belarus, which supports political opponents of the Belarussian regime. Also supported where the LGBTQI organisation Mozaika from Latvia, which organised a conference on 'human dignity' during the Pride week, and the LGBTQI organisation 'Love does not exclude' from Poland.

The LGBTQI organization Badayaa from Egypt, working on the defense of women's rights, also received support. Furthermore, we reiterate our support to the Council of Europe to combat violence against women, improve the safety of journalists and promote LGBTQI rights. Minister-President Jambon decided to grant 200,000 euros to Nadia's Initiative, to help the Yazidi population in Iraq rebuild their community after the ethnic cleansing by Islamic State.

In addition to financial support, Flanders addresses the importance of human rights in international contacts when appropriate. When Flanders takes positions in European and multilateral fora, human rights are steadily on the radar.

BELGA PHOTO NICOLAS MAETERLINCK  
Rainbow flags during the 9th edition of the Antwerp Pride, 2016





26-30 August 2019 – Flemish participation at the 5th Conference of State Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty, in Geneva, Switzerland.

## Strategic Goods Control

Flanders is without doubt a region whose history is steeped in armed conflict, so there is a natural predisposition for continuous high vigilance in respect of trade in firearms and weapon systems. Flemish legislation places a strong emphasis on ethical criteria such as

conflict management and respect for human rights. And Flanders uses these criteria as an instrument of its responsible export control policy for combatting illegal arms flows that threaten peace and stability in the world.

Control of the international trade in strategic goods is entrusted to Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office and is monitored biannually by the Flemish Parliament.

## Arms Control

In addition to analysing licence applications for trade in strategic goods, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office is internationally active in the pursuit of globally-effective arms trade control and increased transparency on the import and export of weapons.

The Department represents Flanders in various European and international forums dealing with agreements on arms trade control, exchange of information, and the

strengthening of cooperation and convergence. Examples include the EU Council Working Group on the export of conventional arms and the Conference of States that are party to the UN Arms Trade Treaty. Flanders takes a leading and proactive role in these forums. In relation to increased transparency, Flanders not only pro-actively participates, but also chairs the relevant working group under the UN Arms Trade Treaty.

Day-to-day, the Department's experts participate in assistance programmes, mainly under the auspices of the European Union, supporting other countries as they set up their own arms trade control systems. Flemish experts are active in the neighbouring countries of the EU, the Western Balkan countries, Northern Africa, and beyond.





Flanders is the leading subnational donor to the UN Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF).

23 March 2019 – Cyclone Idai made landfall near Beira city, Mozambique, on March 14, 2019. © IFRC



8 December 2017 – CERF thanks Flanders during the Annual High-level Pledging Conference 2018 in New York, USA.

## When Disaster Hits: Humanitarian Aid

With its annual budget reserves for humanitarian aid, Flanders shows solidarity with regions that are affected by natural disasters or conflicts. Flanders has made a substantial contribution to CERF, and has for some time been the leading subnational donor to this fund.

The Fund ensures that humanitarian organisations have the necessary resources for agile responses at the onset of crises.

Flanders also provides direct grants to humanitarian organisations responding to disasters or conflict.

If conditions permit, innovative technologies, such as digital cash transfers, are used to promote self-reliance of the victims, without disrupting the rebuilding of local economy.

Finally, Flanders attaches importance to supporting partner countries Malawi and Mozambique with their disaster avoidance or mitigation measures.

After the devastating passage of cyclone Idai in Malawi and Mozambique in 2019, the Government of Flanders immediately made 250,000 euros available for emergency aid. The contribution was primarily for meeting the most urgent needs but also for supporting the climate-related disaster preparedness of the region.

In response to the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the Government of Flanders provided 200,000 euro in emergency aid through the World Food Programme at the end of 2021. This support was mainly aimed at pregnant women and young children.

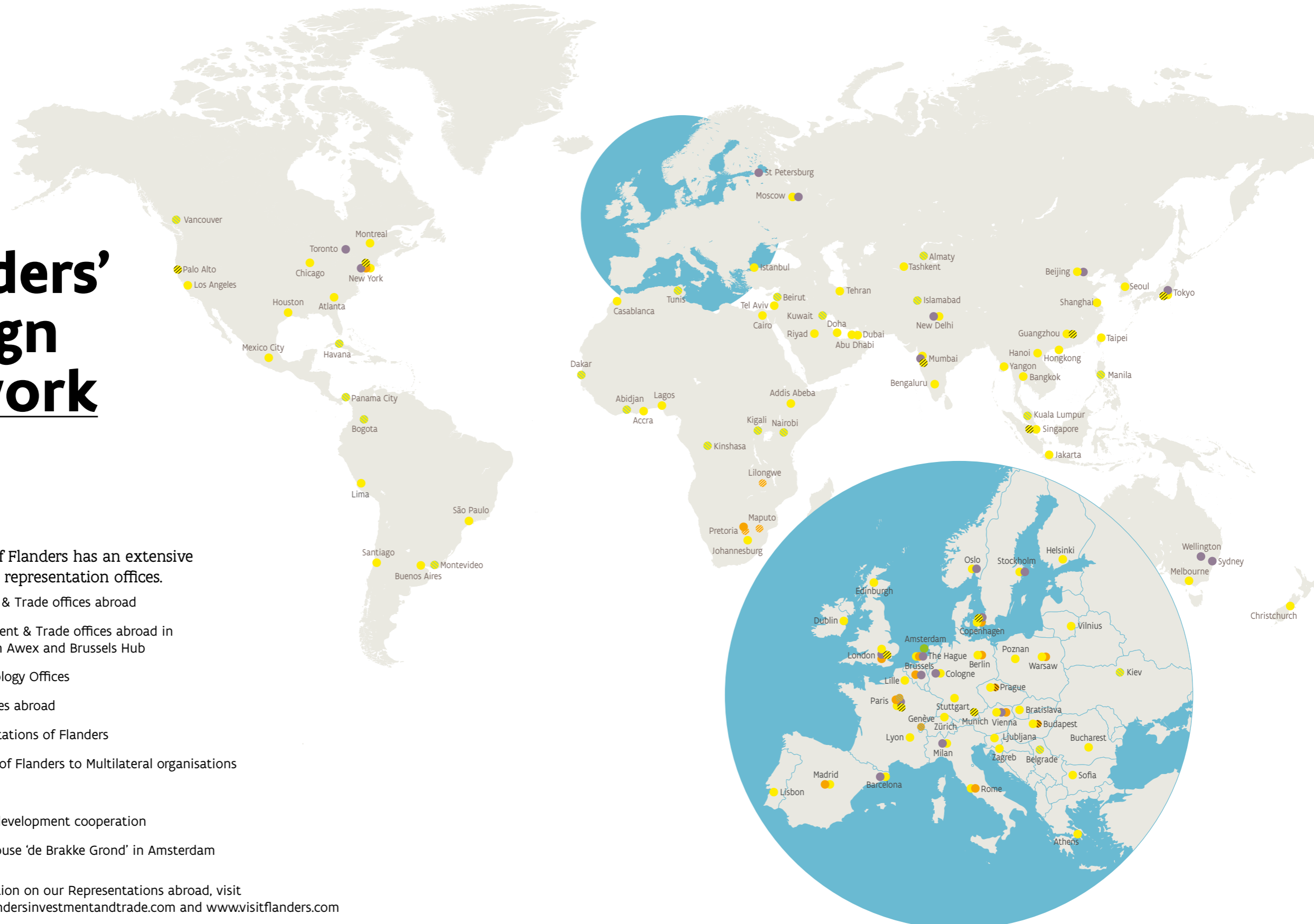


# Flanders' foreign network

The Government of Flanders has an extensive network of foreign representation offices.

- Flanders Investment & Trade offices abroad
  - Flanders Investment & Trade offices abroad in cooperation with Awex and Brussels Hub
  - ▨ Science & Technology Offices
- VISITFLANDERS offices abroad
- Diplomatic representations of Flanders
  - Representations of Flanders to Multilateral organisations
  - Country offices
  - Country offices development cooperation
- Flanders' Cultural House 'de Brakke Grond' in Amsterdam

For the latest information on our Representations abroad, visit [www.fdfa.be](http://www.fdfa.be), [www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com](http://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com) and [www.visitflanders.com](http://www.visitflanders.com)



# 2. Flanders' Foreign Policy Actors

## FLANDERS CHANCELLERY & FOREIGN OFFICE

### Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office: Shaping and Implementing policy

#### **What?**

Since its inception, the Government of Flanders has conducted a foreign policy. Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office is responsible for coordinating Flanders' international and European activities and is therefore in charge of the relations between Flanders and foreign governments, the European Union and international organisations.

This includes:

- International and European trade policy;
- Development cooperation;
- Controlling the import, export and transit of dual use products, arms and other strategic goods from Flanders;

- Establishing and implementing European regulations, and concluding and ratifying international treaties.

Furthermore, the Department functions as Chancellery for the Government of Flanders and is responsible for:

- Better regulation policy;
- Communication and reputation policy;
- Evidence informed policy by statistics, strategic analysis and policy research;
- Long-term strategic vision of Flanders.



## Why?

In a globalized world, the interests of 6,65 million Flemish need to be actively promoted. As an open society and economy, Flanders balances its commitment to the Flemish people, companies and organisations, with being a committed player in the world, including the strong influences that come with international involvement and partners.

This interrelatedness serves to underscore the crucial role played by Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office.

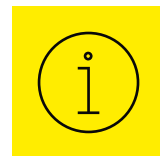
## How?

- diplomatic representation at 14 missions for strong cooperation with our international partners;
- organising more than 30 foreign missions and 30 domestic receptions per year;

- monitoring and implementing more than 230 treaties and partnerships: trade agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, EU regulations and bilateral and multilateral treaties;
- support for numerous initiatives, projects and organisations - from cultural events and international conferences to financing development projects and funds for UN agencies;
- development, implementation, coordination and evaluation of Flanders' foreign policy in all its aspects, from cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries to arms trade control.

## Where?

- The Department is centrally managed in Brussels and has about 290 staff members.
- Diplomatic representations with approximately 43 staff members across Brussels (EU), Berlin, The Hague, London, New York, Warsaw, Vienna, Pretoria, Madrid, Paris, Geneva, Rome and Copenhagen. In addition, there are also offices in Prague and Budapest. The offices in Lilongwe (Malawi) and Maputo (Mozambique) facilitate development cooperation.



For an **OVERVIEW** of all cooperation agreements, conventions and Memoranda of Understanding per country, please see: [bit.ly/2S4UP1n](https://bit.ly/2S4UP1n)



[www.fdfa.be](http://www.fdfa.be)

[www.vlaanderen.be](http://www.vlaanderen.be)

Facebook: [@FlandersDFA](https://www.facebook.com/FlandersDFA)

Twitter: [@Flanders\\_DFA](https://twitter.com/Flanders_DFA)

# FLANDERS INVESTMENT & TRADE

## Flanders Investment & Trade: The Go-To Organisation for International Business

### **What?**

In 2005, the Government of Flanders launched Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT) to support Flemish companies in their export activities, while also promoting Flanders as an ideal investment location for foreign businesses.

FIT's mission is:

- to advise and support Flanders-based companies with their export and/or international aspirations;
- to connect Flemish producers and foreign buyers;
- to provide information, advice and support for foreign companies looking to develop economic activities in Flanders.
- to promote and represent Flanders as an innovative region with an open and vibrant industrial ecosystem.

### **Why?**

Internationalisation fuels Flanders' economy. To maintain and strengthen the region's global competitiveness, internationalisation is a must for Flanders-based companies.

For a robust regional economy, Flanders also requires sustainable foreign investment inflows. Foreign companies represent significant added value in this respect. They are catalysts for productivity, job creation, knowledge building and technology links between local companies and their employees. All of this has a clear and positive impact on the competitiveness of local companies as well.



Foreign Investment Trophy 2022: Daikin Europe, CNH Industrial and Legend Biotech receive prizes from Minister-President Jan Jambon during FIT's 10<sup>th</sup> Foreign Investment Trophy 2022

## **How?**

The four service pillars of FIT are: advice, actions such as trade fair participations and group business trips, financing and market knowledge. FIT organised 128 business trips, trade fair participations and seminars in 2021 worldwide. It facilitated 2,219 B2B contacts between Flemish and foreign entrepreneurs. In addition, FIT developed 292 trade proposals and 93 market studies and 4,277 Flemish companies received export advice. 1,397 companies received a subsidy to boost their exports. FIT proactively approaches foreign investors through round tables, seminars, fairs and focused meetings.

FIT representatives in the extensive network abroad promote Flanders as an economic partner and increase the image of Flanders as a knowledge region and as a strong innovative economy. They support Flemish companies and organisations to conquer new markets even faster and more sustainably. They also make a significant contribution to attracting more foreign direct investment and indirect investment flows to Flanders. To this end, they build and maintain a strong network of local and international contacts. Together with Flemish companies, federations and specialists, FIT has been coordinating the internationalisation strategy "Vlaanderen Versnelt!" ("Flanders Accelerates!").

## **Where?**

Flanders Investment & Trade - headquartered in Brussels - is close to Flemish companies with its domestic network of five provincial offices. From 96 posts - spread over some 70 countries - 5 provincial offices and the headquarters in Brussels, FIT keeps its finger on the pulse of the most important economic markets worldwide.

[www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com](http://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com)

Facebook: [@flandersinvestmentandtrade](https://www.facebook.com/flandersinvestmentandtrade)

Twitter: [@FlandersTrade](https://twitter.com/FlandersTrade) and [@InvestFlanders](https://twitter.com/InvestFlanders)

LinkedIn: [Flanders Investment & Trade](#), [Invest in Flanders](#) and [Flanderstrade](#)

Instagram: [@InvestFlanders](https://www.instagram.com/InvestFlanders)



# VISITFLANDERS

## VISITFLANDERS: Putting Flanders in the Spotlight as Top Destination

### **What?**

VISITFLANDERS is an agency of the Government of Flanders. We support the tourism sector to further develop Flanders as a travel destination and we promote our destination abroad. Our efforts benefit the place as well as the residents, entrepreneurs and visitors.

The core tasks of VISITFLANDERS are:

- creating added value for (international) visitors, residents, residents and the place with targeted investments and support for the tourist offer in Flanders.
- actively promoting the tourist destination of Flanders in order to attract visitors and business travellers;
- making full participation in tourism possible for every Fleming;
- stimulating the further professionalization of the sector



## **Why?**

VISITFLANDERS strengthens the positive power of tourism with the aim of allowing Flanders to flourish as an innovative, inspiring and high-quality travel destination.

## **How?**

VVISITFLANDERS works closely with Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office and with stakeholders from the tourism sector:

- provinces, cities and municipalities
- tourist and non-tourist enterprises
- organizations active in the fields of tourism, mobility, heritage, culture and education.

## **Where?**

VISITFLANDERS has its head office in Brussels and an international network of foreign offices spread all over the world. In total, the agency has about 200 staff, a quarter of whom are abroad. The agency is active in some thirty international markets.



[www.toerismevlaanderen.be](http://www.toerismevlaanderen.be) and [www.visitflanders.com](http://www.visitflanders.com)

Facebook: [@toerismevla](https://www.facebook.com/toerismevla) and [@visitflanders](https://www.facebook.com/visitflanders)

Twitter: [@toerisme\\_vla](https://twitter.com/toerisme_vla) and [@visitflanders](https://twitter.com/visitflanders)

LinkedIn: [Toerisme Vlaanderen](https://www.linkedin.com/company/toerisme-vlaanderen)



## The Flemish Peace Institute: Peace and Security Monitoring

### **What?**

The Flemish Peace Institute was established in 2004 as a paraparliamentary institution at the Flemish Parliament. Although funded by the Flemish Parliament, the Flemish Peace Institute works independently and impartially. Its Board of Directors - whose members reflect parliamentary factions, civil society organisations and academia - has advisory and management responsibilities. The Institute also has a Scientific Council, comprised of international experts, that supervises and evaluates the Institute's research.

The Institute has four tasks:

- **To study-** Policy-oriented research is the main task of the Institute. The Peace Institute publishes its research in Dutch and English and issues background reports and fact sheets.
- **To advise-** The Peace Institute supports the Flemish Parliament with recommendations. The Institute formulates evidence-based advice on arms trade, foreign policy, and dealing with conflict and violence in society.

- **To inform-** The Peace Institute organises and stimulates debate by organising events, lectures, scientific conferences and policy-oriented seminars, for Flemish and international audiences. The Institute also provides thorough and impartial information to journalists and policy makers.
- **To document-** The Peace Institute manages its own collection of publications, in collaboration with the Flemish Parliament's Parliamentary Information Centre. A catalogue is available online and the collection is accessible to all.

The Institute's areas of interest include: arms trade and use; the development and production of weapons, as well as export control; radicalisation; dealing with polarisation in the classroom; urban violence; and commemorating victims of violence.



## Why?

Striving for a more peaceful society, both in our country and throughout the world, requires a thorough understanding of peace issues. Policy-oriented research has a critical role to play in this. The aim is not to prescribe decisions, but to inform public debates, to enrich conversations with knowledge and to formulate measures. The Peace Institute delivers thorough and impartial analyses with these aims in mind.

## How?

The Peace Institute conducts scientific research on peace issues. The Institute uses the results of that research to support the work of the Flemish Parliament, and the work of policy makers at other levels.

Beyond this work, Institute staff are often invited to speak at international conferences and the Institute regularly hosts events in the Flemish Parliament that bring together policy makers and researchers from across Europe. The Peace Institute produces information, documentation and also formulates recommendations based on its research. The target audience is not only policy makers, but also civil society organisations, professionals, journalists and the general public.

## Where?

The Scientific Secretariat of the Peace Institute is located at the Flemish Parliament in Brussels. The Secretariat currently has nine staff members: a director, five researchers, two part-time office managers and a communications manager.



[www.vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu](http://www.vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu)

Facebook: [@vlaamsvredesinstituut](https://www.facebook.com/vlaamsvredesinstituut)

Twitter: [@Vredesinstituut](https://twitter.com/Vredesinstituut)

LinkedIn: [flemishpeaceinstitute](https://www.linkedin.com/company/flemishpeaceinstitute)



# Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe (VLEVA): Building Bridges between Europe and Flanders

## **What?**

The Flanders-Europe Liaison Agency is a membership organisation that builds bridges between the European Union, Flemish (local) governments and civil society. VLEVA promotes more Europe in Flanders and more Flanders in Europe. It was founded in 2006 and is structurally subsidised by the Government of Flanders.

VLEVA's four key tasks are:

- **Monitoring-** VLEVA filters, analyses and processes European policy documents and initiatives into ready-to-use information for stakeholders in Flanders.
- **Bridging-** VLEVA works to create a basis for information exchange and advocacy by following and building networks within Flanders, and with European partners and institutions.
- **Supporting Lobbyists-** VLEVA does not take positions, but supports its members and governments in their lobbying activities, so that the right information reaches the right person at the right time.
- **One-stop Shop-** VLEVA is a free guide to questions about European contacts and initiatives and provides up-to-date information on European funding and jobs.



## **Why?**

Europe is increasingly our homeland, meaning that Flanders must be closely involved in European policy. Both the Government of Flanders and society-at-large play an essential role in this.

Flemish civil society organisations and local authorities can gain better access to European policy through VLEVA's information platform and network. These resources enable VLEVA members and the Flemish authorities to represent their European interests in a timely and informed manner.

## **How?**

VLEVA has over thirty members (governments, interest groups and companies) and its team of 10 staff members works closely with the General Representation of the Government of Flanders to the EU. The members and the Flemish authorities determine the content of the VLEVA's annual agenda. VLEVA's information sessions and website are open to everyone.

## **Where?**

VLEVA is located in the heart of the European district of the City of Brussels.



[www.vleva.eu](http://www.vleva.eu)

Facebook: [@vlevavzw](https://www.facebook.com/vlevavzw)

Twitter: [@VLEVA](https://twitter.com/VLEVA)

LinkedIn: [VLEVA](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vleva)

# Vlamingen in de Wereld

## Flemish People in the World: Treasuring the bond with the homeland

### **What?**

Flemish people in the World Foundation (VIW) assists Flemish emigrants and expats whether they have international aspirations, or are already abroad. With more than seventy representatives serving their local compatriots across the world, it's a global community, spearheaded by its Brussels secretariat.

While VIW is not a government agency, it has been structurally supported by the Government of Flanders since its launch, and can also call on the expertise of a number of reliable partners for its work.



## **Why?**

VIW's vision stems from the conviction that a community is also responsible for its members abroad. The administrative hurdles involved in an international move are often complicated. Whether you are an expat, emigrant, recent graduate or retiree, you can quickly and easily find the information you need for your move abroad.

## **How?**

### **Personal Service**

VIW supports Flemish people with international plans by offering information and contact resources. Various initiatives, like the VIW information day, simplify the emigration process. The VIW employees advise and refer people to the appropriate official bodies when necessary. Thanks to a well-organised online emigration guide, interested users can quickly find the information they need.

### **Global Network**

The Foundation regularly communicates with tens of thousands of expats via the website, the electronic newsletter and the VIW magazine.

## **Representative**

VIW and its board members lobby the authorities and public services for projects that improve the lives of Flemish people worldwide, and that strengthen the bond with Flanders. VIW is a recognised resource regarding the needs and aspirations of Flemish expatriates. One of VIW's current initiatives is working to ensure that there are sufficient facilities to teach the Dutch language and Flemish culture, and to expand voting rights.

## **Where?**

The Foundation is not only active in Brussels, but also worldwide. The widespread network of VIW representatives means that you can connect with Flemish people in forty-six different countries.



[www.viw.be](http://www.viw.be)

LinkedIn: [Vlamingen in de Wereld](#)

# 3. Legal Framework

## Legal Context and Background

### Juxtaposition, not Hierarchy

Flanders enjoys a considerable number of powers at the international level. The Belgian Constitution provides for a juxtaposition, rather than a hierarchy, between the federal government and the subfederal governments. The Constitutional Amendment of 1993 includes the principle of “in foro interno, in foro externo” (art. 167 Belgian Constitution). In this context, it means that all governments have control over domestic issues as well as over foreign issues.

Considering the substantial shifts in power that have been ceded to the federated states since 1993, the impact of this principle cannot be overstated.

Flanders acts internationally in all areas for which it has internal jurisdiction like economy, employment, the environment, agriculture, mobility, public works, education, culture and health policy. Flanders has the constitutional right to conclude internationally-binding treaties in these areas, and can appoint diplomatic representatives abroad.

This authority extends to the Government of Flanders. Every minister is responsible for domestic, European and for international initiatives falling within their ministerial remit. The same applies to departments and agencies. Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, for example, monitors international policy coherence and is responsible for the coordination between the various policy areas. It is also the first point of contact for foreign embassies and diplomatic representations.

## Treaty Law in Practice

Flanders concludes treaties with third countries or with international institutions. An overview of the hundreds of treaties with Flanders (with a convenient search filter per country and theme) is available on the website of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office: [www.fdfa.be/en/treaties-and-mous](http://www.fdfa.be/en/treaties-and-mous)

A few examples:

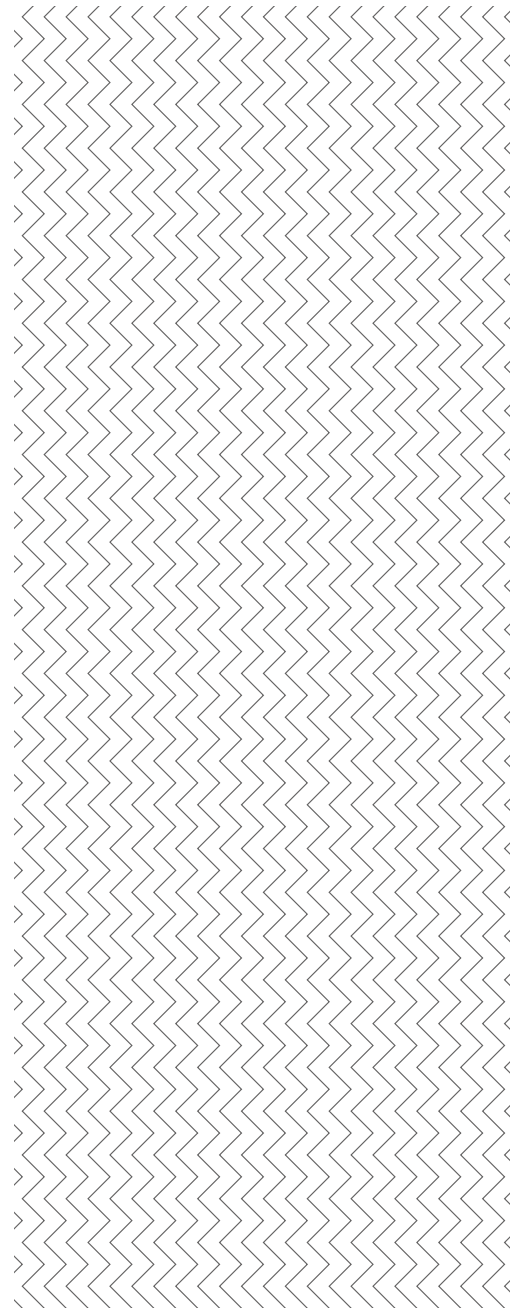
- Treaty of the Council of Europe concerning the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse;
- the Scheldt treaties;
- Agreement between the Flemish Community and the Netherlands regarding the accreditation of tertiary educational degree programmes;
- Amendment to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal;
- Treaties on cultural cooperation with third countries;
- Double taxation treaties.

Concluding treaties on matters where federated states have exclusive competence ('exclusive treaties') requires formal disclosure to the federal government. This is done by means of a letter from the Flemish Minister of Foreign Affairs to the federal minister of Foreign Affairs.

'Mixed treaties' relate to matters for which the federal government and the federated states are both partly competent. The 1994 Cooperation Agreement between the federal government, the communities and the regions sets out detailed rules for the conclusion of mixed treaties. The Inter-Ministerial Conference on Foreign Affairs (ICBB) is a forum for consultation on foreign policy between the federal level and the federated states. This body determines the mixed nature of the convention, based on advice from the Working Group on Mixed Treaties.

The conclusion of treaties involves the following steps: negotiating, signing, questioning of the advisory councils concerned and Council of State, obtaining parliamentary approval and ratifying and promulgating the treaties. Approval by the Government of Flanders is required at every step of this process. Treaties are adopted into Flemish law by means of a decree of endorsement in the Flemish Parliament. EU treaties, like the EU-Canada [CETA] Free Trade Agreement, are also discussed and approved in the Flemish Parliament.

As a party to a number of human rights treaties, Flanders regularly reports on compliance with these treaties in our domestic policy.





## Intrafederal Cooperation Agreements

Flanders also has full powers at EU level. The Maastricht Treaty, which came into force in 1992, empowered Flemish ministers to participate in the EU Council of Ministers on issues such as the environment, education, culture or fisheries. In a 1994 Cooperation Agreement, the federal state, the communities and the regions confirmed the process and authorisations for representation at the EU level. The Agreement details six categories for representation at the EU Council of Ministers: from exclusive federal representation (e.g. council configuration for justice and home affairs) to exclusive representation by the federated states (e.g. education or culture councils), with a number of gradations in between.

However, this EU Cooperation Agreement has now become outdated. It is in urgent need of amendments that reflect the significant institutional changes in Belgium and in Europe spanning the last 25 years, in particular since the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) and the sixth Belgian state reform of 2011.

In addition to the EU Cooperation Agreement, there are similar intrafederal cooperation agreements regulating accords between the federal government and the federated states. These pertain to diplomatic representatives of the federated states, representation in international organisations, the conduct of proceedings and attracting foreign investment.



### **MORE INFORMATION**

on the policy framework of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office (regulations, cooperation agreements, strategy notes, the coalition agreement and policy notes) is available at:

[www.fdfa.be/en/policy-framework](http://www.fdfa.be/en/policy-framework)



