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Education and Labour Market Research Services

Jurisdictional Scan

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Prepared for: The Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC)

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List of Acronyms

AEC	*Attestations d'études collégiales*
AEQES	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policies
ARES	Academy for Research and Higher Education
CE	Continuing Education
CEDEC	Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation
CEFA	*Centre d'Education et de Formation en Alternance*
CEGEP	*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*
CET	Continuing education and training
CHF	Swiss franc
CISP	*Centres d'insertion socioprofessionnelle*
CLA	collective labour agreement
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
DASPA	*Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des Primo-Arrivants*
EFZ	Federal Certificate of Competence
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EVC	*eerder verworven competenties*
FPIE	*Formation professionnelle individuelle en entreprise* / Individual In-Company Training
IBO	*Individuele beroepsopleiding* / Individual Vocational Training
IFAPME	*Institut wallon de Formation en Alternance et des Indépendants et Petites et Moyennes Entreprises*
INVOL	Integration Pre-Apprenticeship (*Integrationsvorlehre*)
NEET	neither in employment nor in education and training
NGO	non-governmental organization
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands & Flanders
OCDMO	*Organismes communautaires de développement de la main-d'œuvre*
OdA	*Organisationen der Arbeitswelt*
OKAN	*Onthaalklassen voor Anderstalige Nieuwkomers*
ORP/RAV/URC	Regional Employment Offices

PES	public employment service
PFI	*Plan Formation-Insertion* / Training-Integration Plan
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RAC	Recognition of Acquired Competencies
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation
SCB	Statistics Sweden
SFI	Swedish for Immigrants/*komvux*
SFX	Swedish for professionally trained migrants
SME	small- and medium-sized enterprise
STF	Sectoral Training Fund
SYV	Study and Vocational Guidance *Studie- och yrkesvägledning*
TA	training agency
VET	vocational education and training
VDAB	Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Service
VPET	Vocational and Professional Education and Training
VPETA	*Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act*
WIL	Work-integrated learning
YFI	Integrated Swedish Language and Vocational Training

1.0 Introduction

The Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC) contracted PRA Inc. to conduct a study examining international best practices and models related to education-to-employment pathways. The research involved a scan of practices in other countries to identify established and effective workforce development and labour market integration models. A particular focus was placed on models that demonstrate tangible impacts for Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) and other minority populations, with an emphasis on the English-speaking communities in Québec.

This report presents the results of a scan of education-to-employment pathways in Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden, as well as findings from interviews with Québec stakeholders. Findings are organized according to three agents – Educational Institutions, Employers & Industry, and Intermediaries & Community Organizations – and are distilled into a set of model ingredients which can be tested and adapted in Québec. This study is an initial phase, and more research will be required to assess applicability to the Québec context in greater detail.

1.1 Methodology

The following section outlines the approach to the research.

Research Matrix

The aim of the research was to identify best practices to strengthen Québec's education-to-employment pathways, with specific attention to English-speaking communities. The work began by defining a simple model of the pathway and building a research matrix around it to focus the key research questions and scope the jurisdictional scan. The research matrix can be found in Appendix A.

The model centres on coordination among **three agent types** within an **enabling environment** of policy, funding, regulation, culture, and monitoring:

1. **educational institutions**,
2. **employers and industry**,
3. and **intermediary organizations.**

This framing guided both strands of data collection used in the report: an international **jurisdictional scan** and Québec **stakeholder interviews.**

Jurisdiction Selection

Best practices were sought by researching other countries' practices with respect to their education-to-employment pathways. An initial set of nine countries was screened on two criteria: comparability to Québec on key system features, with emphasis that the country chosen has multilingualism as a feature, and strong labour market performance broadly measured through macro-economic indicators such as unemployment, job vacancy, earnings, underemployment, and proportion of youth not in education or training.

In collaboration with CEDEC, the list was narrowed to **Switzerland**, **Belgium**, and **Sweden**. These jurisdictions combine relevant language contexts with established education-to-work mechanisms, making them suitable comparators for extracting lessons that could translate to Québec. Each has

historically strong or comparable labour market outcomes compared to Québec, and features elements of multilingualism in their populations. The sections below introduce each country and outline these characteristics.

Data Sources

The scan began with official sources to establish structure and baselines, drawing on government websites and databases, and using the same cross-jurisdictional sources wherever possible to maintain comparability. OECD, Eurostat, World Bank, ILO, and national statistics and ministry portals were used for system descriptions and indicators. From that base, the research moved into grey literature, program evaluations, audits, and academic work to identify practices with attributable outcomes and to capture implementation specifics. Where helpful, materials in other languages were consulted.

References for the scan of each country are listed at the end of the report.

Stakeholder Interviews

To ground the external evidence in Québec's context, interviews were conducted with representatives from the three agent types in Québec: Educational Institutions (n=5); Employers & Industry (n=2); Intermediaries & Community Organizations (n=2).

Interview guides were derived from the research matrix and tailored to each group. Interviews were conducted in English or French by video or phone under informed consent and confidentiality protocols, and focused on what works, what does not, collaboration patterns, and supports for English-speaking communities. These insights are used to assess fit and feasibility and to identify where external practices could serve as practical ingredients for Québec.

Limitations and Considerations

- This scan is preliminary research intended to open up views on programs, practices, and system approaches in other countries for navigating education-to-employment pathways. While some impacts are described, further work is needed to fully evaluate these approaches and their direct applicability and potential impact to Québec, particularly for English-speaking minorities in Québec.
- Interviews with stakeholder agents provided insights into broad needs and issues, as well as what is happening in education, industry, and through intermediaries. However, the sample size is small, with less engagement with industry and intermediaries. A full jurisdictional scan of Québec's education-to-employment ecosystem would be needed to complement the practices and approaches described in this report.
- Some source materials were available only in the local language. English or French versions were used when available; in other cases, materials were in the country's local language (e.g., Swedish or German). The research team can read multiple languages beyond English and French, and no sources were included that were not able to be read.

Overall, it is recommended to treat findings as promising directions to explore. Prior to adoption, conduct targeted engagement with employers and intermediaries, assess fit for English-speaking communities in Québec, and develop Québec-specific evaluation and implementation plans.

1.2 Report Structure

The report is organized around the three "model agents" in the education-to-employment pathway: Educational Institutions, Employers & Industry, and Intermediaries & Community Organizations, plus the enabling environment.

In the first section are the findings from the **Québec stakeholder interviews**, summarizing practical issues in current pathways. This sets the foundation for examining how other countries structure their pathways and which approaches may align with Québec's needs.

In the next section are the three **jurisdictional scans for Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden**. Each country is presented agent by agent. At the end of every agent section, a brief "**Best Practices for Québec**" box highlights specific practices from that country that could translate to Québec based on the findings from the stakeholder interviews.

Best-In-Class Model

The report concludes with a **Best-in-Class Model**. Using the same three-agent frame, the country's "Best Practices for Québec" are grouped into a small set of **model ingredients** for each agent. Each ingredient aligns to themes that emerged from the interviews, indicating what Québec could explore and the originating country's examples. The model acts as a type of "menu" to explore, test, and adapt various countries' practices—not a single prescriptive blueprint.

2.0 Québec's Education-to-Employment Pathways

Stakeholder Findings Summary

Québec's pathways from education to employment are mostly decentralized: transitions hinge on the individual jobseeker and the specific employer. Large firms run their own pipelines (co-ops, internships, new grad programs), while small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face administrative constraints to fully integrate similar processes, hence access skews toward candidates who can self initiate via their own networking. For non-professional degree fields (arts, humanities, social sciences, etc.), employment outcomes for students depend more on personal networks plus institutional intermediaries (job fairs, career centers, alumni, chambers) than on centralized matching tools.

CEGEPs are unique to Québec: short internships and practicums, and three-year technical diplomas give younger students real work exposure and a parallel to university. Although it is not perceived as providing a universal "edge," since a majority passes through, it offers a distinct staging point for further pathways to employment or education. French matters in practice: employers value bilingualism (including among francophones), and confidence using French at work (interviews, writing, client contact, understanding crucial instructions on a shop floor, etc.) is a decisive factor in employment. According to stakeholders interviewed, there are many offerings for French-at-work or French language supports, but for learners who choose to attend university, arriving at university without a baseline means that closing the gap is hard.

Overall, some gaps arise where SMEs cannot host internships and co-ops, where language confidence lags, and where non-professional degree graduates must navigate a do-it-yourself labour market with a fragmented matching landscape (centralized portals are underused, private job platforms are noisy, and policy compliance steps deter some postings). This, despite hearing these degree types are valued amongst employers.

- **Pathways and the centrality of work-integrated learning (WIL).**
  Internships, co-ops, part-time roles, and short "stages" are the dominant on-ramps. In CEGEPs, early three-week placements followed by longer third-year internships (often near full-time) commonly extend into paid summer work and later employment. Universities report earlier employer recruiting and a rising tendency to convert interns rather than post standalone entry-level roles.

  Professional programs (engineering, business, health, law) benefit from more direct pipelines to employment and professional accreditations, where generalist fields (arts, humanities, social sciences) rely more on internships, personal networking, extracurriculars, and targeted career promotion (job fairs, university job boards, etc.).

- **Employer behaviour and SME constraints.**
  Internships cost the employer, and while Québec offers cost incentives for employers, for SMEs, the binding constraint is potentially more around supervision and administration bandwidth, not necessarily ability to pay. Tax credits and wage supports help, yet according to key informants, time, structure, and paperwork cause friction, especially for short or early placements that are often unpaid. Montreal's diversified economy and dense employer and employee networks create many entry points for jobseekers; Québec City's market is smaller but buoyed by government positions and SMEs, and, as such, can be less "Anglophone friendly."

Hybrid work after the global COVID-19 pandemic weakened informal learning and early career scaffolding. Institutions and employers that rebuilt rotations, mentorships, and structured onboarding report better retention. Large firms often run multi-pipeline systems (co-ops in cohorts, new grad programs, contractors-to-permanent positions), although current co-op ties with Québec institutions can be thinner than with Ontario schools for some of the larger national firms.

- **Language as a practical and policy variable.**
  For those looking for employment in Québec, functional French at work, not just classroom proficiency, matters. Required levels of French differ by role (client facing vs. internal), but according to key informants, having the confidence to interview, write, and collaborate in French is pivotal. Among English-speaking Quebecers and some newcomers, confidence in workplace French (and perceived risk of being screened out by policy requirements) can suppress applications despite other very relevant skills.

  Bill 101 makes French the language of work and requires French versions of HR documents and postings. Bill 96 expands and enforces these obligations (e.g., coverage to 25+ employees, justification for non-French language requirements, equal prominence posting rules). Together, they add compliance steps that can deter some employers from listing roles – specifically in Montreal – and can dampen Anglophone application confidence. Institutions respond with workplace French supports (courses, clinics, conversational clubs); some employers add in-house French classes and place English-speaking employees in bilingual units where feasible.

  A related obstacle is the lack of willingness of employers to implement measures to facilitate the integration of English-speaking Quebecers and newcomers until market forces push them to do so. This obstacle is more present in smaller businesses and in the smaller cities, towns, and rural parts of Québec versus Montreal.

- **Institutional supports and intermediaries.**
  Universities and CEGEPs operate job fairs, employment centers (CV and interview aids), alumni networks, and targeted workshops (including AI-aware career prep). As mentioned above, some programs, like those in technical and health, embed substantial job placements into the program for direct entry out of education. In health programs, for example, placements are formally funded and regulated. Intermediary assistance ranges from provincial tax credits and Chamber wage supports to philanthropic programs (e.g., Women in Finance; international student roadmaps).

  According to key informants, having centralized job boards alone does not solve job matching barriers. Public matching tools (e.g., legacy Emploi-Québec interfaces) were perceived as outdated by some, or not universally used, which hinders their usefulness. Indeed or LinkedIn are more common for day-to-day recruiting but require resources for filtering applications, leading employers to resort to internships, co-ops, and other pathways for hiring, particularly for the larger firms that can afford to do this.

- **Data and measurement gaps.**
  Interviews yielded little evidence on data measurement. Interviewees did indicate that, beyond professional licensure pass-through in more regulated programs, outcome tracking is patchy: low response exit surveys of graduates, anecdotal feedback, and ad-hoc LinkedIn checks are common. Non-standard internship definitions and limited longitudinal data hinder evaluation of what works and for whom.

- **Newcomers and recognition.**
  Interviews suggest that strong labour demand can speed newcomer entry into employment, but foreign credential recognition and verification of experience remain sticking points. In practice, AECs (Attestations d'études collégiales – short, job-aligned college programs) are often available in English and French and serve as a local credential bridge that employers trust while newcomers learn Québec tools and norms. RAC (Recognition of Acquired Competencies) is expanding but uneven, hence many candidates still retrain via AECs rather than get full credit for prior learning.

  Access and language remain barriers for some groups, especially Indigenous and English-speaking communities outside Montreal, because of the principle of French-first delivery, limited English offerings, and scarce culturally adapted programs which can slow recognition-to-employment transitions

- **Organismes communautaires de développement de la main-d'œuvre (OCDMO)**
  Described as a "silent success," OCDMOs are locally rooted, professional community workforce organizations across Québec serving all client groups (immigrants, youth, Indigenous peoples, women, older workers, etc.). They start from the person's needs and navigate across programs and institutions to assemble tailor-made mixes of training, placement, language, and psychosocial support. Crucially, many now follow clients into the workplace, supporting both the hire and the employer through integration and early retention.

  Because they are embedded in their local communities, OCDMOs can move quickly to build bespoke solutions (e.g., pairing a factory's skills gap with a nearby school board's training unit to start up a short course). They also help employers open non-traditional pipelines through low-risk trials (e.g., one-day "exploration" stages for persons with disabilities that lead to hires) and workplace embedded upskilling by folding French-for-work or basic skills into technical training delivered on site. The main constraint cited was funding and reporting rules that are too rigid for this person-centred, end-to-end accompaniment; lighter contracts with simple outcomes (placement-to-hire conversion, 6–12-month retention) were flagged as a way to preserve agility and impact.
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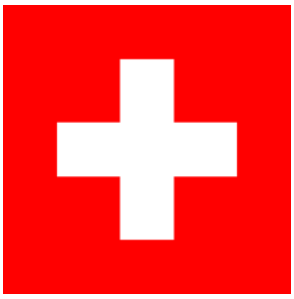
3.0 Switzerland



The Swiss Confederation (Switzerland) is a land-locked country in Central Europe bordered by Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and Liechtenstein. It is a federal republic composed of 26 cantons with strong cantonal and municipal autonomy. The population is multilingual, with four national languages: German (predominant), French (west), Italian (south, chiefly Ticino and southern Graubünden), and Romansh (parts of Graubünden). Major urban centres include Zürich, Geneva, Basel, Bern, and Lausanne, with most people living along the Swiss Plateau between Lake Geneva and Lake Constance. Switzerland is not a member of the European Union but participates in many European frameworks through bilateral agreements; the currency is the Swiss franc (CHF). Direct-democracy instruments (popular initiatives and referendums) are a routine feature of federal, cantonal, and local governance.

Switzerland Labour Statistics	
Population *(2024)*	**9,034,000**
Unemployment Rate *(2023)*	**4.0%**
Underemployment Rate *(% of part-time workers in involuntary part-time employment, 2024)*	**6.7%**
NEET *(% ages 15-29 neither in employment nor in education and training, 2024)*	**9.1%**
Job Vacancy Rate *(2024)*	**1.8%**
Average Annual Wages *(US dollars, PPP converted, 2024)*	**$87,468**
Unemployment Rate, Population: World Bank Data (WBG, n.d.) NEET, Job Vacancies, Underemployment: Eurostat (EUROSTAT, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, 2025)	

3.1 Educational Institutions Switzerland

Education System

The education system in Switzerland from childhood to adolescence is categorized into compulsory education and post-compulsory education (EDK, n.d.-d, n.d.-d):

- **Compulsory** education is broken into primary (first eight years including *kindergarten*) and lower secondary (another three years). Compulsory education is a cantonal responsibility, where each canton sets its own curricula.
- **Post-compulsory** begins for adolescents at upper secondary, and they are given the choice between: (1) Baccalaureate or upper secondary specialized schools; or (2) vocational education and training (VET) programs. After upper secondary, tertiary education includes a wide range of programs which can be completed at universities (for those typically coming from baccalaureate or specialized upper secondary schools) or professional education institutions (for those who

completed VET). The Swiss system bundles work-based learning and occupational certification before tertiary, not after.

VET as the default upper-secondary route

Upper secondary is built to link education and employment structurally. Most learners follow dual-track VET: they spend three to four days per week training under contract in a host company and one to two days in a vocational school; they also attend inter-company courses run by professional bodies that standardise practical skills across firms (Eurydice, n.d.-d).

Around two thirds of young people in a given school year pursue VET, while one third attend a baccalaureate or upper secondary specialised school, making VET the common, "default" approach for most Swiss students (Eurydice, n.d.-e).

What defines programs: VET ordinances and training plans

The backbone of this system is a set of occupation-specific, legally binding VET ordinances. For each recognized occupation, an ordinance defines: the program length, learning objectives, curriculum content, distribution of learning between company, school, language of instruction, and the national qualification exams (Eurydice, n.d.-d; SDBB, n.d.-c).

- **VET programs.** Switzerland offers VET programs for 230+ nationally recognized occupations. This spans beyond trades to include commerce/finance, ICT, lab technicians, health assistants, logistics, hospitality, design, media, and engineering technician roles – i.e., many jobs that, in Canada, often require a college diploma or even a university credential (OPET, 2011). For portability and recognition, every VET certificate carries a National Qualifications Framework (NQF VPQ) level, referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (SERI, n.d.-a)**.**
- **Training plans.** Each ordinance is paired with a detailed training plan drafted by the relevant professional organisation (OdA) and approved by the federal authority (SERI), which makes it binding nationwide. Training plans are generally based on two means of presenting professional competencies (SDBB, n.d.-b): a professional competence model which specifies the competences to be acquired; and the competence resource (CoRe) model, where competence is described by one or more "situations" and resources are taught to master each of the situations given.

Governance of VET delivery

Governance is tripartite (Eurydice, n.d.-d):

1. the **Confederation,** represented by the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI) sets the legal framework (VPET law and ordinances) and enacts VET ordinances;
2. the **cantons** implement federal law, supervise VET schools and providers, operate career information and guidance services, market apprenticeship places locally, and organise local delivery; and
3. **professional organizations (OdA)** [*Organisationen der Arbeitswelt* (OdA) in German] are sector bodies that represent the labour market in VET – comprised of employer and industry associations and other professional bodies – who define occupational content, run inter-company courses, and keep qualifications current (SDBB, n.d.-a).

When a sector needs a new or revised apprenticeship, the OdA proposes content and assessment; SERI enacts the corresponding ordinance; cantons implement and oversee provision; and companies train apprentices under contract. This formal loop is what keeps curricula and exams aligned with labour market standards (Eurydice, n.d.-c; SBFI, n.d.-b).

Federal funding from the Confederation covers 25% of VET costs (teaching in VET schools, inter-company courses, exams, etc.) paid via lump-sum subsidies to cantons, who finance the remaining 75% (Eurydice, n.d.-a).

Built-in employability via binding ordinances. Because Switzerland's upper-secondary pathway is predominantly VET, employability is already built into the curriculum by law. As described above, for every occupation, a federally enacted VET ordinance is drafted with the relevant OdA and paired with a detailed training plan that fixes the program length, learning objectives, and the national qualification procedures. These rules are binding nationwide, so vocational schools must teach to current employer standards for learners to pass national assessments. The Confederation enacts and updates ordinances, cantons implement and supervise delivery, and the OdA keeps content current; when an occupation is revised, the whole system moves with it (Eurydice, n.d.-d).

Language, curriculum harmonization, and transition supports

Switzerland's multilingual setting is built into schooling from the start. The language of instruction follows that of the region and cantons (German, French, Italian, or Romansh), and during compulsory schooling pupils also learn a second national language and English (EDK, n.d.-a). Curriculum at the compulsory level is harmonized at the level of the linguistic regions through the Intercantonal Agreement on Harmonisation of Compulsory Education (HarmoS Agreement). The French-speaking cantons have implemented the *Plan d'études romand* (PER), the 21 German-speaking and multilingual cantons the *Lehrplan 21*, and the canton of Ticino the *Piano di studio.* This keeps early education consistent across all language regions (EDK, n.d.-b).

Upper-secondary transitions. To help non-native speakers succeed at the upper-secondary transition, one-year bridge courses (*Brückenangebote*) can be taken after lower secondary to close academic or language gaps before entering VET or general programs (Eurydice, n.d.-d). Additionally, cantons offer German as a Second Language (*Deutsch als Zweitsprache* [DaZ]) so learners whose first language is not German can build the language of schooling from a young age (e.g., Canton Zurich guarantees DaZ where needed and defines minimum weekly provision) (Kanton Zürich, n.d.).

Work exchanges. In Switzerland, "exchanges" are time-limited mobility stints for VET learners or recent VET graduates where they work and/or study in another Swiss region. The aim is to build language, cultural, and job skills and to strengthen labour market mobility. *Movetia*, the Swiss national agency for the promotion of exchanges and mobility in the education system, provides funding to work in another Swiss language region, typically up to six months, with the option to add a language course, and live in the host canton during the placement (Movetia, n.d.).

Continuing education and training (CET). The majority of people living in Switzerland take part in some form of CET (EDK, n.d.-c). The CET landscape is diverse and largely market organized: private providers deliver most courses, and costs are often borne by participants (and sometimes employers). The Confederation and cantons play a subsidiary role, intervening where objectives cannot be met without regulation or support, such as promoting CET for educationally disadvantaged groups and supporting programs in integration, basic skills, and employability (EDK, n.d.-c).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 1: Swiss Practices to Explore Educational Institutions

Bridge years for language and academic gaps.
Switzerland offers one-year *Brückenangebote* after lower secondary so learners can strengthen the language of schooling and core subjects before entering VET or general programs. Québec institutions could explore short pre-admission bridges focused on French-for-work plus academic refreshers.

Work-language exchanges across regions.
Through *Movetia*, Swiss VET learners do short work and study stints in another linguistic region (often with a language course), building employability and mobility. Québec could pilot intra-province exchanges pairing placements with immersion between French and English regions.

Inter-company practical training hosted by schools.
Swiss professional bodies run standardized, school-hosted practical blocks (inter-company courses) that complement company training and reduce firm burden. Québec CEGEPs and universities could convene shared practical modules that SMEs plug into during WIL terms.

Occupation aligned, shared competency frameworks.
Swiss VET uses occupation-specific ordinances with detailed training plans co-written by sector bodies, ensuring consistent learning outcomes and assessment. Québec programs could co-publish common competency maps and WIL outcome rubrics with advisory boards to improve clarity and portability.

Targeted continuing education for integration and basic skills.
Swiss CET is broadly market led, with public support focused on educationally disadvantaged groups (integration, basic skills, employability). Québec institutions could expand modular CE (including AECs) offers that align short courses with local labour needs and language at work.

3.2 Employers & Industry Switzerland

How employers organize training (the mainstream model)

The mainstream apprenticeship arrangement is the one-company model: firms recruit and employ the apprentice and deliver productive training three to four days per week, while vocational schools and inter-company courses (üK), set by OdA, standardise theory and practical skills across companies. Training agency models (see Section 3.3) exist but are complementary, not dominant.

In-company trainers *(Berufsbildner)* deliver the ordinance mandated curriculum and assessments. Many small and mid-sized firms (SMEs) pool resources in a *Lehrbetriebsverbund* (training network and consortium): two or more complementary firms jointly train one apprentice, rotating placements while one lead company coordinates. This lets SMEs cover all the skills a national ordinance requires without carrying the full burden alone and therefore can guarantee apprentices a comprehensive education in professional practice (berufsbildung, n.d.).

Why firms use apprenticeships (the employer strategy)

Swiss employers use apprenticeships as their primary talent strategy: firms train to national standards set in ordinances, but layer firm-specific skills in-house and often retain graduates directly – reducing the search, onboarding, and mismatch risks of external hires (Aepli et al., 2024). Standardized VET education ensures broad transferable skills for labour mobility, while firms tailor more specific training to their own needs. Research estimating impacts of apprenticeship approaches in Switzerland and Germany shows that, when labour markets tighten and external hiring frictions (onboarding costs, etc.) rise, Swiss firms lean further into apprenticeship pipelines rather than relying on spot hiring (Aepli et al., 2024).

This creates a built-in market incentive as training ordinances are co-written with industry (OdArecall from above), aligning school content, inter-company courses, and exams with current workplace practice so firms get exactly the skills they ask for. Recurrent cost-benefit studies done by KOF Swiss Economic Institute and the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training find that, on average, many training firms break even or profit during training; compared to hiring fully qualified workers externally, growing talent in-house is frequently cheaper and improves retention (Gehret et al., n.d.). This helps explain the consistently high level of employer participation across many sectors, as more than three quarters of companies reported being very or somewhat satisfied with the cost and benefit ratio of their own training programs (Gehret et al., n.d.). In 2019, reported total gross costs for basic vocational training was about CHF 5 billion per year (Gehret et al., n.d.). This would be equivalent to about $6.7 billion in Canadian dollars in 2019, or $776 per capita.

Risk sharing and hiring supports (activation tools that benefit employers)

In Switzerland, Regional Employment Offices, called ORP in French (RAV in German; URC in Italian), administer a toolbox of labour market measures funded by unemployment insurance. These measures are designed to (1) restore candidates' employability and (2) share onboarding risk with employers, so firms can hire people who need a ramp-up (older workers, returners, newcomers, recent graduates, etc.) (SECO, n.d.-b). Examples of labour market measures include training courses and allowances, temporary positions, and the following:

- **Work initiation allowance**. If an employer hires a registered jobseeker who needs extra onboarding, the ORP can grant an *Allocation d'initiation au travail*: about 40% of wage costs for up to six months; for people aged 50+ (or exceptional cases) up to 12 months at 50%. Salary costs of the initiation period are covered under unemployment insurance (État de Vaud, n.d.; SECO, n.d.-b).
- **Practice companies (*entreprises d'entraînement / Übungsfirmen*).** ORP places jobseekers in simulated firms that replicate real workflows. In office roles, practice companies buy and sell in a closed market and run realistic admin, finance, accounting, and banking tasks. In craft or technical tracks, participants do fabrication, construction, and/or design work to learn new techniques. These assignments are typically six months and target people with little recent experience (e.g., new apprenticeship graduates or returners) (SECO, n.d.-b).

ORP's also provide free vacancy posting, candidate pre-screening, and advice on employer supports, useful for SMEs with thin HR capacity (SECO, n.d.-a).

Workplace upskilling for basic skills and language

Under the national initiative "*Einfach besser! … am Arbeitsplatz*," companies can co-finance on-site courses that build language of work and schooling, literacy, numeracy, and basic digital skills for employees. The federal scheme (via SERI) pays a flat CHF 15 per lesson per participant (plus up to CHF 3,000 to develop a new course). Courses are free for employees, count as working time, and typically run 20–40 lessons in small groups; some cantons also run their own funding windows (Einfach besser, n.d.).

For newcomers and refugees, the Integration Pre-Apprenticeship (*Integrationsvorlehre* [INVOL]) is a one-year pre-apprenticeship program that provides job-specific language skills to participants to prepare for basic vocational training, and familiarize themselves with the rules of the Swiss labour market. Its goal is to sustainably improve the professional integration of recognized refugees and temporarily admitted persons. The pilot launched in 2018 across 18 cantons, and it has been continued for extension to 2023/24 and including adolescents and young adults. In its first year, approximately two thirds of participants found an apprenticeship (Staatssekretariat für Migration, n.d.).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 2: Swiss Practices to Explore – Employers & Industry

SME training consortia (shared apprentices).
Switzerland's *Lehrbetriebsverbund* lets several SMEs jointly train one apprentice, rotating them so all ordinance-required skills are covered while a lead firm coordinates. Québec could attempt something similar by piloting SME training consortia through sector associations to spread supervision and administration load.

Apprenticeship pipelines as a primary hiring strategy.
Swiss employers build talent in-house to national standards (set with industry) and often retain graduates, reducing search and onboarding risk and cost. While apprenticeship pipelines exist in certain trades, such as construction trades, Québec could try something similar by encouraging, in other sectors, sector-defined competency frameworks and multi-term WIL paths that employers treat as first-line hiring.

Risk sharing wage allowances for ramp-up hires.
Regional Employment Offices offer work initiation allowances that cover a share of wages for several months when firms hire jobseekers who need onboarding. Québec could try something similar by testing time-limited wage offsets (via employment services) specifically for SMEs hiring new grads or newcomers that require onboarding.

On-site basic skills and language upskilling.
A national scheme co-finances workplace courses in language, literacy, numeracy, and basic digital skills during paid time. Québec could try something similar by co-funding short "French-at-work/basic skills" courses delivered on worksites.

Integration pre-apprenticeships for refugees and newcomers.
A one-year pre-apprenticeship (INVOL) blends job-specific language, work norms, and employer exposure; most participants progress to full apprenticeships. Québec could try something similar with pre-WIL bridges that prepare newcomers for AEC, a Diploma of Professional Studies, or sector entry.

3.3 Intermediaries & Community Organizations Switzerland

Intermediary landscape (between candidates and firms)

Outside of public employment offices, Switzerland relies on a dense mix of sector bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social enterprises, and private platforms that sit between candidates and firms. At one end, employer-side associations (the OdA) act as quasi-intermediaries, working with government co-defining occupational standards for VET, as an example. At the other, candidate-facing NGOs and market platforms prepare, assess, and place people into real workplaces, often with added language or credential support layered on.

Based on examples laid out below, all support the following roles: prepare & upskill candidates (bridges, coaching, practice firms); match & place people into companies (internships, apprenticeships, jobs); translate & validate (language, interpretation, and credential recognition support); and mobilize sectors (associations that convene employers and shape standards).

- **Credential recognition + job coaching (skilled migrants).** NGO's such as *Hilfswerk der Evangelisch-reformierten Kirchen Schweiz MosaiQ* provides case management for recognition of foreign diplomas and then brokers internships and job entries once gaps are closed, shortening time-to-employment for internationally trained professionals (HEKS, n.d.).
- **Practice company training (commercial & technical).** *Helvartis* is an example of a training network consortium that coordinates a national network of 50+ "practice firms." Jobseekers work inside simulated companies that buy/sell, invoice, bank, and export/import in a closed training market, giving them recent, verifiable Swiss experience and, importantly, chances to use foreign languages in realistic business tasks (Helvartis, n.d.).
- **Private apprenticeship matching & promotion.** *Yousty* operates Switzerland's **largest apprenticeship platform**, letting firms post apprenticeships and reach a national pool of candidates; it also runs youth/employer pulse surveys that surface mismatch issues. This complements Switzerland's public portals (such as *berufsberatung.ch*) with active marketing tools (Yousty, n.d.).
- The Swiss Service Centre for Vocational Training, Study and Career Counselling operates **berufsberatung.ch** – the official portal carrying apprenticeship listings, pathway maps, and guidance resources (available in German, French, and Italian) (Eurydice, n.d.-b; SDBB, CSFO, n.d.).
- **Umbrella coordination for youth risk.** *Check Your Chance* functions as a national umbrella of NGOs tackling youth unemployment, coordinating projects, fundraising, and business outreach so dozens of small actors do not work in silos. They operate across all language regions and have a network of professional partners and private-public partnerships. The vision is to bundle all relevant forces and coordinate efforts on youth unemployment prevention (Sugimoto & Perishable, 2020).
- **Sector associations as "OdA" (quasi-intermediaries).** OdA are not government; they convene firms, set occupational content, and often run shared training offers (e.g., inter-company courses), acting as powerful employer-side intermediaries between schools and companies. Example: *scienceindustries* coordinates VET professions for the chemical and pharma sector (scienceindustries, n.d.).

- **Training agencies function as local multi-employer intermediaries.** Switzerland has local training agencies (TAs) and training consortia that use start-up public financing to form training networks so SMEs co-train via interfirm rotations. The TA holds the contract and accreditation, recruits apprentices, designs the firm rotations, and handles quality and grievance mediation with cantonal authorities. Learners gain broader exposure by moving; firms face onboarding costs each rotation and cede selection discretion to the TAs. This approach to apprenticeships has fallen out of some favour, making up around 3% of total apprenticeship contracts in Switzerland by 2017 – mostly due to high coordination costs and firms' preferences to retain recruitment autonomy (Michelsen et al., 2021).
- **BIZ (Job Information Centres).** Cantonal career information and guidance centres offer walk-in information, short consultations, booked counselling, workshops, and tools for youth and adults. They serve as the public front door to VET and tertiary pathways and link directly to the federal portal *berufsberatung.ch* (SDBB, CSFO, n.d.). Some cantons provide dedicated apps; for instance, Ticino offers the BIZ App to help users navigate the VET ecosystem, explore occupations, and find apprenticeship positions (Cantone Ticino, n.d.).

How public purchasing makes intermediaries pivotal

As described above, Switzerland's Public Employment Service (ORP/RAV/URC) works through purchased services: cantons contract external providers for activation measures such as practice firms, training courses, work experience assignments, and wage-subsidised work initiation. This decentralised, contract driven model makes NGOs, social enterprises, and private providers core intermediaries, while ORP retains case management and oversight. It also embeds employer engagement: subsidies and trial placements share onboarding risk, and providers broker matches into real firms where intermediary organisations prepare, match, and support jobseekers and align services with local labour market demand (OECD, 2010).

State-led bricolage: How Switzerland builds intermediaries around apprenticeships. In Switzerland, the state does not replace employers or OdA; it recombines existing tools, laws, ordinances, seed grants, and coordination forums to open dual-VET training in new sectors and make collaboration feasible. In practice, SERI first (re)designs occupation ordinances so a sector can train in dual mode; it recognises and activates an OdA to co-govern content; it pilots and co-finances transitional projects (e.g., cross-firm training, bilingual tracks, exchanges) until firms adopt them; and it then codifies roles and scales what works. This "scaffolding" extends collective skill formation from traditional trades into services and higher skill domains while preserving firms' control over recruitment and training day-to-day. The effect is a thicker intermediary layer: OdA with clearer mandates, large consortia in some sectors, and private platforms that market and match, all wrapped around the one-company apprenticeship core (Graf et al., 2023). Seen this way, Switzerland's success is not a one-off reform but a series of small, state-enabled recombinations that continually lower coordination costs for employers and widen access for learners.

Best Practices for Québec

Table 3: Swiss Practices to Explore – Intermediaries & Community Organizations

Credential recognition case management.
Switzerland's NGOs (e.g., HEKS MosaiQ) guide skilled migrants end-to-end through foreign diploma recognition and then broker internships or jobs. Québec could try something similar by supporting intermediaries that pair recognition support with targeted placement.

Practice company ("simulated firm") training.
A national network of practice firms lets jobseekers work in realistic, closed market companies to rebuild experience and apply language on real tasks. Québec could try something similar by funding intermediaries to run simulation labs that generate recent, verifiable "Québec experience."

Apprenticeship matching platforms.
Private platforms like *Yousty* market apprenticeships nationally and complement official guidance portals. Québec could try something similar by enabling an intermediary-run, youth-friendly matching portal that sits alongside existing public listings.

Sector associations as employer-side intermediaries.
Swiss OdA convenes employers, co-defines occupational content, and runs shared training (e.g., inter-company courses). Québec could try something similar by empowering sector associations to coordinate standards and co-host training with schools.

Umbrella coordination for youth risk.
Check Your Chance bundles dozens of NGOs tackling youth unemployment, coordinating outreach, fundraising, and employer links. Québec could try something similar by supporting a light umbrella that aligns youth employability NGOs and shares employer access.

Publicly purchased activation services.
Regional Employment Offices contract intermediaries for practice firms, wage-subsidized trials, and work experience assignments, keeping case management public but delivery mixed. Québec could try something similar by contracting community providers to deliver work-readiness and trial-hire placements under Service Québec oversight.

3.4 Environment Switzerland

Policy Landscape and Funding Levers

As noted in Section 3.1, the *Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act* (VPETA) is the backbone of Switzerland's dual system. It sets the rules for VET and codifies shared roles among three bodies: the Confederation (via SERI) sets the framework and enacts ordinances; cantons organise provision and supervision; and world-of-work organisations (OdA) co-define occupational content and standards. On financing, the Confederation covers 25% of VET costs (teaching in VET schools, inter-company courses, exams, etc.) paid via lump-sum subsidies to cantons, who finance the remaining 75% (Eurydice, n.d.-a).

The VPETA requires each canton to maintain occupational, study, and career guidance services, including local job information centres (BIZ), that support both young people choosing a first occupation and adults planning further study or career changes (Eurydice, n.d.-b).

There is also additional targeted federal project funding available through grants. This exists under VPETA articles 54 & 55 (E2, 2025; FEDLEX, n.d.-a):

- Art. 54 – **Projects for development & quality.** Time-limited, start-up style grants that co-finance updating or creating training programs, piloting new structures, studies, and quality improvements in VET. Typical rules: co-financing from applicants (approximately a 40% minimum) and support capped to a few years.
- Art. 55 – **Specific services in the public interest.** Grants for activities that serve a public interest and would not happen without support, usually time limited (up to five years). The implementing ordinance sets the federal co-funding ceiling at up to 60% of eligible costs (up to 80% in justified cases). This also includes specific language equity items: creation of teaching materials for language minorities, and measures to improve understanding and exchange between language communities.

For example, this gives a legal basis to fund multilingual versions of occupation-specific teaching materials. Projects funded include (Eidgenössisches Departement für Wirtschaft, Bildung und Forschung WBF, 2017):

- **Multilingualism in the profession (*Mehrsprachigkeit im Beruf*).** For the micro-occupation *Musical instrument maker EFZ*, where vocational school and inter-company courses are centralised and small, a model for multilingual VET delivery was developed so learners from different language regions can be trained together. The model is meant to be transferable to any occupation that faces mixed-language classes.
- **Bilingual basic VET for international companies (*CFC bilingue*, Geneva).** To attract English-speaking firms or organisations into Swiss VET, Geneva launched a French-English commercial training track that leads to the Federal Bilingual VET Diploma in Commerce (EFZ). It targets commercial apprentices and formalises bilingual competence within the standard qualification.
- **International vocational training (Canton Zug).** Zug's project, initially in two pilot occupations (commercial clerk; IT specialist), delivers training at all three learning locations predominantly in English. It is designed both for German mother tongue youth with strong language skills and for non-native speakers with solid German, reflecting the needs of internationally oriented firms.
- **Swiss Mobility (Cantons Lucerne & Ticino).** The cantons developed and tested practical models to embed intra-Swiss exchanges in VET long-term. In the first phase, recent VET graduates can combine a three to nine-month workplace internship with a language course in another language region.
- **Visite – learners visit learners (Rotary Switzerland and Liechtenstein).** Rotary's long running exchange program received support to build the structures needed in French-speaking Switzerland after earlier focus on the German- and Italian-speaking cantons. The aim was to raise exchanges from approximately 40 to 60 per year.

The ***Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training*** sets cross-cutting principles and defines when federal financial aid applies. Job-related CET is regulated under the VPETA; other regulations cover CET within unemployment and/or disability reintegration, alongside provisions in the Code of Obligations and Labour Law (EDK, n.d.-c).

Cantons specify job-related CET in their VPET-implementing laws and regulate general (non-job-related) CET differently (e.g., a dedicated CET law or broader education/culture laws). Transregional coordination among cantons runs through the Swiss Conference on Continuing Education and Training (EDK), a specialist body within government that advances lifelong learning priorities across cantons (EDK, n.d.-c).

Culture & philosophy

Social partnership and collective governance. Switzerland treats education-to-employment as a collective project. Three longstanding governance norms shape how VET is run day-to-day: federalism (cantonal responsibility), corporatism (social partner co-decision), and consensus democracy. In practice, employer associations (OdA) co-govern occupational standards with public authorities; schools accept strong employer input because curricula and exams are standardized and portable across cantons; and firms invest because they help set those standards and can rely on nationally recognized certificates. This collective skill formation logic is repeatedly identified as the Swiss hallmark (Bürgi & Gonon, 2021; vocationaleducation.ch, n.d.).

Multilingualism and canton mobility. Multilingualism is not an add on; it is a constitutional and statutory commitment. The *Federal Languages Act* (2007) and its Ordinance (2010) oblige the Confederation to strengthen mutual understanding among language communities and support multilingual cantons (FEDLEX, n.d.-b). As shown through the various components of Switzerland's education to employment pathways described in the sections above, that multilingual ethos flows into guidance portals, teaching materials, and exchange programs that operate in German, French, and Italian (and Romansh where applicable), lowering frictions for cross-regional learning and work.

Unions and Collective Bargaining Agreements

Switzerland combines relatively modest union density with sizable collective bargaining coverage. This is because collective labour agreements (CLAs) are organised mainly at the sector level and can be extended by government to non-signatory firms in a branch, so negotiated standards reach beyond union members. As of 2018, bargaining coverage in Switzerland was around 45% compared to having just under 15% of workers belonging to a union (OECD, 2021).

What a CLA does: Sector unions and employer associations agree on the floor for wages, hours, training rights, holidays, supplements, and dispute rules. Switzerland has no universal statutory minimum wage; instead, many sectors and regions rely on CLAs to set binding minimum wages. Company-level top-ups exist, but additional enterprise bargaining on wages is relatively rare; the sector agreement is the anchor (EURES, n.d.).

When enough of a sector is already covered and certain legal conditions are met, authorities may declare a CLA generally binding. That extension mechanism pulls uncovered firms under the same rules, useful in fragmented markets with many SMEs. OECD profiling notes that Switzerland makes use of extensions in many industries, though with thresholds and some discretion. This helps explain the gap between low union density and comparatively broad coverage (OECD, 2021).

Impact of CLAs. Switzerland is something of an outlier among wealthy European countries as its labour share has not fallen and low wage inequality has not widened to the same extent as others. One research program links this to the institutional role of CLAs over time, where authorities have gradually extended agreement coverage in specific sectors. The study uses the staggered introduction of CLAs since 1998 to study causal effects on wages, employment, prices, firm behaviour, and compliance through the work of joint commissions (Swiss National Science Foundation, n.d.). In short, Switzerland's use of sectoral CLAs with the option to declare them generally binding and extend them across sectors

turns negotiated minima into de-facto sector standards, anchoring wage setting in the country and helping protect lower paid workers (Swiss National Science Foundation, n.d.).

Monitoring & evaluation

Switzerland monitors education to workforce pathways through a shared approach by the Confederation, the cantons, and occupational organisations. The system combines backward-looking outcome data with near-term market signals. National publications and official surveys track participation, progression, and graduate outcomes, while barometers and business tendency indicators provide timely information on supply, demand, and hiring intentions that support operational adjustments by cantons and occupational bodies.

- **SERI "Facts & Figures."** SERI publishes an annual "Vocational and Professional Education and Training in Switzerland, Facts and Figures" compendium. It reports structure, enrolments, funding, and system indicators and is widely used as a national reference overview (SERI, n.d.-b).
- **Graduate outcomes.** The Federal Statistical Office runs a longitudinal graduate survey (one and five years post graduation) covering higher education outcomes (employment status, job match, earnings), enabling comparisons across fields and institutions, and informing transition policy (FSO, n.d.).
- **Apprenticeship Barometer (*Lehrstellenbarometer*).** Commissioned by SERI and conducted twice a year (spring and fall), it surveys both companies and youth to measure supply (places on offer) and demand (applicants), plus expectations for the next six months. Results are used by cantons and OdA to adjust marketing and capacity. Methodological notes emphasise separate representative samples for firms and young people (SBFI, n.d.-a).
- **KOF business tendency surveys**. KOF (*Konjunkturforschungsstelle* business cycle research institute) at ETH Zurich, a public university, runs recurring business tendency surveys across major sectors and publishes a quarterly Employment Indicator that summarises firms' assessments of current staffing and their three-month hiring plans. Policymakers and analysts use these signals to track near-term labour demand (KOF, n.d., 2025).

3.5 Impacts of Swiss Vocational Education Approach

Overall, one feature that characterizes Switzerland is its reliance on dual-VET apprenticeship pathways and professional degrees running alongside the general education (university) route more common in Québec and Canada. A natural question is the trade-off between these approaches. **Hanushek, Schwerdt, Woessmann, and Zhang (2017)** test this by comparing countries that emphasise vocational training with those that emphasise general education. Using microdata from the International Adult Literacy Survey, they link individuals' education type (general vs. vocational) to employment, earnings, and participation in adult training across ages 16-65 (Hanushek et al., 2017).

Within their typology, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland are classified as "apprenticeship countries" because a large share of upper-secondary VET combines school- and work-based learning with sustained employer participation. These are distinct from the other vocational classified countries where vocational programs are mainly school-based (e.g., Belgium), and from systems with little or no separate vocational track at the secondary level, notably the United States (Hanushek et al., 2017). The U.S. serves as the clearest general-education contrast, useful as a proxy for Canada and Québec, which also lean toward general education feeding into post-secondary and on-the-job learning.

Vocational vs. General Education Pathways

Individuals with general education start with lower employment rates than those with vocational education but catch up as they age. This is a trade-off, early advantage for VET; later convergence for general education is strongest in the apprenticeship countries (Denmark, Germany, Switzerland). Earnings also trace a similar arc where vocational graduates earn more early on, reflecting fast productivity gains in occupations tightly aligned with their training, while general-education graduates overtake on earnings later in the life-cycle; the differential flattens around age 50 (Hanushek et al., 2017).

Taken together, the evidence implies apprenticeship systems excel at rapid, job-ready transitions, whereas general education systems generate adaptability that pays off later. In apprenticeship countries, the easier early labour-market entry of vocational graduates is offset by greater withdrawal at older ages (Hanushek et al., 2017). The authors interpret this as a result of potentially faster depreciation of occupation-specific skills relative to broader general skills as technologies and job structures evolve.

The paper also examines adult (career-related) education as a channel shaping these life-cycle differences. In the apprenticeship countries, **general-education workers are found to be more likely to take career-related training as they age than vocational graduates** (Hanushek et al., 2017)**.** There are two interpretations to take from this: (i) general education may lower the cost of later learning, making upskilling more attractive over time; and/or (ii) rising technological change raises the return to additional training for general-track workers (Hanushek et al., 2017). Either way, the higher adult-training participation among general-education workers at older ages helps explain their relative catch-up in employment and earnings late in their career.

The Swiss Exception

A key contribution of the paper is the **present-value comparison of lifetime earnings**. Here, Switzerland is the outlier among apprenticeship countries. Swiss vocational graduates have roughly 8% higher lifetime earnings than general-education graduates. By contrast, the present-value lifetime earnings comparison favours general education in Germany and Denmark. Thus, while all three apprenticeship countries exhibit the same life-cycle trade-off, only Switzerland converts the early VET advantage into a higher discounted lifetime payoff (Hanushek et al., 2017).

What makes Switzerland different is a combination of macro context and incentives. The authors note that, relative to the OECD average, Switzerland's GDP-per-capita growth was slower in the decades leading up to the 21st century, implying potentially **less rapid technological change** and, in turn, a smaller late-career "obsolescence" penalty for occupation-specific skills. They also highlight evidence that Swiss apprenticeships tend to be **net-beneficial to employers during training** (unlike in Germany and Denmark, where firms more often bear net costs). This results in stronger incentives to create and sustain high-quality apprenticeship positions, to align closely with occupational standards, and to retain graduates, features that reinforce early employment and earnings advantages (Hanushek et al., 2017).

4.0 Belgium

Belgium is a federal parliamentary monarchy in Western Europe bordered by France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Luxembourg, and is a member of the European Union (EU). Major urban centres include the capital, Brussels, along with Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Charleroi, and Leuven.

The state is organized around three regions, Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital, and three language communities: Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking. Dutch is predominant in the Flanders (Flemish) Region; French in Wallonia; the small German-speaking community is in eastern Wallonia; and Brussels-Capital is officially bilingual (Dutch–French) with a linguistically mixed population. Brussels hosts major European and international institutions (EU, NATO).

Belgium Labour Statistics	
Population *(2024)*	**11,876,000**
Unemployment Rate *(2023)*	**5.5%**
Underemployment Rate *(% of part-time workers in involuntary part-time employment, 2024)*	**17.7%**
NEET *(% ages 15-29 neither in employment nor in education and training, 2024)*	**9.9%**
Job Vacancy Rate *(2024)*	**4.3%**
Average Annual Wages *(US dollars, PPP converted, 2024)*	**$76,109**
Unemployment Rate, Population: World Bank Data (WBG, n.d.) NEET, Job Vacancies, Underemployment: Eurostat (EUROSTAT, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, 2025)	

4.1 Educational Institutions Belgium

Education System

Belgium's education is devolved to its language communities. The Flemish Region (Dutch-speaking) and the Walloon Region (French-speaking) each operate their own education system with distinct ministries, legislation, funding mechanisms, quality assurance arrangements, and guidance services.

Compulsory education runs from age 5 to 18; full-time attendance is required until 15, after which students can meet the obligation through approved part-time learning and work pathways. Despite separate governance, the institutional designs are closely aligned (Eurydice, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Expatica Belgium, n.d.).

Primary and secondary education covers ages 6-12 and 12-18 respectively, and offers four program types with similar purposes in both communities (Eurydice, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Expatica Belgium, n.d.):

- General (broad academic, preparing mainly for higher education);
- Technical (general + technical and theoretical subjects, with options to enter work or continue studying);
- Arts (general curriculum with active artistic practice); and
- Vocational (practice-oriented, focused on a specific occupation while still delivering general education).

Part-time or dual-VET pathways starting from age 15 or 16. In both communities, learners in vocational or technical routes can combine school with in-company training through apprenticeships under structured schemes (Eurydice, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Expatica Belgium, n.d.):

- French-speaking system. Part-time secondary via *Centres d'enseignement et de formation en alternance* (CEFA) typically includes 15 hours per week at school plus company-based training (often three days per week or ≥600 hours per year). Apprenticeships are also organized via *Institut wallon de Formation en Alternance et des Indépendants et Petites et Moyennes Entreprises* (IFAPME) in Wallonia and *Service Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises or Espace Formation* in Brussels, under apprenticeship contracts that satisfy compulsory schooling.
- Flemish system. Part-time secondary is offered in Centres for Part-time Education with 15 hours per week of classes, complemented by matched workplace learning. Apprenticeships are organized at SYNTRA training centres, typically four days in-company with one day theory under a learning agreement.

There is also a strong emphasis on learning a second language in the later years of primary education – Dutch or German for the French-speaking community, or learning French for the Dutch-speaking community (Expatica Belgium, n.d.).

Higher Education

Two pathways. After secondary school, both language communities run a binary higher education model (Eurydice, n.d.-f, n.d.-e):

- **Professional bachelor (colleges)**. A professional bachelor is a practice-oriented three-year program built around a specific occupation (examples: business, nursing, primary teaching, logistics, ICT). Curricula include mandatory work placements as part of the study plan. These degrees are delivered by colleges (*hogescholen / hautes écoles*).
    - In Flanders, colleges also run a short-cycle option called the *graduaat* (associate degree) in colleges. It sits below the bachelor, is tightly linked to work, and often ladders into a professional bachelor if graduates want to continue. In the French-speaking system, comparable professional routes are organised within *hautes écoles* and adult *promotion sociale* providers (Eurydice, n.d.-e; OECD, 2021).
- **Academic bachelor (universities)**. An academic bachelor emphasizes disciplinary theory and prepares for a master's. It is delivered by universities and aims at providing students knowledge and competencies required for autonomous scientific or artistic work in general and for a specific field of science or arts in particular.

Employability in Curriculum

In both Belgian systems, money and oversight are set up to reward and incentivize employability. Public funding increasingly follows higher education outcomes, and external quality assurance requires programs to evidence WIL, employer engagement, and graduate outcomes.

Flanders (Dutch-speaking). Public funding to institutions has a strong output component. Once a student passes beyond their first year in higher education, public funding flows to the institution for each credit the student passes and, ultimately, for the degree obtained (with weights by field and extra weight for some student groups) (OECD, 2021). This pushes colleges and universities to structure programs that carry students through to completion, which, in the professional tier, usually means built-in placements and tight employer alignment so students finish on time and job-ready (OECD, 2021).

Wallonia-Brussels Federation. In the French and Brussels Regions, student *finançabilité*, defined in the *Décret du 11 avril 2014* and detailed in the government's *Vade-mecum Financement*, links public funding to whether a student meets specified progression or credit thresholds (arts. 3 & 5). Institutions therefore have a direct incentive to support timely progression (remedial support, staged curricula, work relevant learning) so students remain "finance-able" and complete (Décret Adaptant Le Financement Des Établissements d'enseignement Supérieur à La Nouvelle Organisation Des Études, 2014).

Quality Assurance (QA). Belgium has two higher education quality systems, one per language community, but both follow the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG).

- **Flanders**. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands & Flanders (NVAO) makes the formal accreditation decision for programs based on external evaluations conducted under Flemish rules. NVAO is listed on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and is reviewed against the ESG, which signals international reliability (NVAO, n.d.-b).
- **Wallonia-Brussels**. The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AEQES) is an independent public agency that runs formative, improvement-oriented evaluations of programs (and institutions) on a multi-year cycle, publishing reports for transparency. AEQES itself does not accredit or fund; it is ESG-compliant (EQAR listed) (AEQES, 2022). System coordination across institutions is provided by ARES (the Academy for Research and Higher Education) (ARES, n.d.-c).

Because NVAO and AEQES are both on EQAR, their procedures substantially comply with ESG, giving employers and international partners confidence that Belgian degrees, though governed by two communities, are comparable and quality assured.

Language in Education

As mentioned above, Belgium runs schools by language community, so teaching is in Dutch in Flanders and French in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Flanders (Dutch-speaking). Pupils learn in Dutch, and French becomes compulsory in primary school from Grade 5 (schools may start earlier, and they can also add English or German from Grade 3 if pupils' Dutch is strong enough) (Eurydice, n.d.-c). In secondary school, some schools use Content and Language Integrated Learning) (CLIL), teaching a regular subject (e.g., history or science) in French, English or German for up to 20% of lesson time, to raise real world language proficiency while Dutch stays the main teaching language (Vlaanderen, n.d.-a).

For newly arrived pupils who do not yet speak Dutch, schools run OKAN classes (*Onthaalklassen voor Anderstalige Nieuwkomers*) as a full-time reception year focused on Dutch and integration, then support the move into regular classes (Onderwijs in Brussel, n.d.).

Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French-speaking). Pupils learn in French, and a first foreign language is compulsory from Grade 3 of primary. In Brussels and certain border communes, that first foreign language must be Dutch, with more weekly hours than elsewhere, so French-speaking pupils in Brussels get extra Dutch from primary (Eurydice, n.d.-d). The Federation also offers language immersion in primary and secondary: part of the timetable can be taught in Dutch, English, or German alongside French under a specific immersion decree. For newly arrived pupils who do not yet speak French, schools set up DASPA units (*Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des Primo-Arrivants*) as a reception or transition class (typically up to 12 months, extendable) to build French as the school language before full mainstreaming (FWB, n.d.).

Recognition of Prior Learning: Colleges and universities can formally assess skills gained outside school (workplace, non-formal learning). If a faculty panel of judges determines that certain learning outcomes are met, they can grant exemptions from courses or admission to a program, so adults finish faster and get a recognised credential sooner. Competence certificates are issued by "*eerder verworven competenties*" (EVC) for Flemish institutions, and that can be used to request course exemptions and program admissions (KU Leuven onderwijs, n.d.; mes etudes, n.d.).

Student-entrepreneur supports (within higher education): Belgium lets a student who registers as self-employed apply to a social security fund for reduced social contributions (the mandatory payments that finance healthcare, pension, etc.). On top of that, most universities and colleges recognize a student entrepreneur status (Dutch: *student-ondernemer*; French: *étudiant-entrepreneur*). Qualifying usually means that one is registered as self-employed, one has a business plan, and one can show time demands. The institution then gives flexibility (e.g., deferred exams or attendance leeway), coaching, and sometimes incubator access. This is common for those studying to acquire professional bachelor's degrees (hub.info, n.d.-b; OECD, n.d.-b; University of Louvain, n.d.).

Bridging to academic master's. The usual route to a master's is via an academic bachelor's degree. However, bridging programs let graduates of professional bachelor's degrees fill academic gaps to progress to a master's.

- Flanders (Dutch-speaking): The s*chakelprogramma* (bridging program) is a tailored set of courses that covers the missing theory and credits required for entry to a specific master's (Vlaanderen, n.d.-d).
- Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French-speaking): *Passerelles* ("bridges") serve the same purpose. An official table specifies which professional bachelor to master combinations are allowed and the number of additional credits needed for each (ARES, n.d.-a).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 4: Belgian Practices to Explore – Educational Institutions

Mandatory placements in professional programs.
In Belgium's professional bachelor (college) programs, work placements are built into the curriculum and required for completion across fields like business, ICT, logistics, nursing, and teaching. Québec could try something similar by making placement requirements more systematic across college and university professional programs to normalize WIL access.

Short-cycle laddering (associate to bachelor).
Flanders' *graduaat* (short-cycle, work-linked) programs are designed to ladder seamlessly into a professional bachelor's for those who want to continue. Québec could try something similar by tightening and publicizing step-up pathways from shorter college credentials into full diplomas or degrees with minimal credit loss.

Language immersion and newcomer reception within schooling.
Schools use subject teaching in a second language (CLIL) and full-time reception classes for newly arrived students (OKAN and DASPA) to build the language of schooling before mainstreaming. Québec could try something similar with targeted French-for-work immersion modules and short reception bridges for newcomers before WIL or program entry.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) for credits and exemptions.
Universities and colleges formally assess prior experiential learning (EVC in Flanders and RPL elsewhere) and grant course exemptions or admission based on demonstrated competencies. Québec could try something similar by scaling RAC and RPL processes that lead to concrete credits or exemptions in order for adults and newcomers to reach credentials faster.

Student entrepreneur status and supports.
Many Belgian institutions recognize student entrepreneurs, offering timetable flexibility, coaching, and incubator access alongside reduced social contribution rules nationally. Québec could try something similar by formalizing campus-level entrepreneur status with academic flexibility and light touch coaching for students running ventures.

4.2 Employers & Industry Belgium

Decentralized Toolkit

Belgium does not run a single, centralised "employer model." Instead, firms use a common toolkit recognised across the EU: **train-to-hire** periods in the company, **apprenticeships** as a pipeline from secondary dual-VET, standard **internships or traineeships**, and **on-the-job training** that's nudged by legal training rights and co-funded by sectoral training funds (STFs). The names differ by language region, but the mechanics are similar.

The employers' tools intersect with regional public employment services (VDAB, Le Forem, Actiris) and training operators (e.g., Bruxelles Formation, SYNTRA, IFAPME, CEFA). Section 4.3 profiles these intermediaries. Below is an outline of employer-side **practices and incentives** that plug into this infrastructure.

Train to hire. Employers train a candidate at their workplace for a few weeks to months under an agreed plan and then hire the person when training ends. The jobseeker must be registered with each region's respective public employment service (PES – see Section 4.3 below) that provides the framework and covers the training period arrangements.

- **Flanders – IBO (*Individuele beroepsopleiding* / Individual Vocational Training).** The firm trains the person for one to six months on the job; if the training is completed successfully, the employer must offer a fixed-term or indefinite contract (VDAB, n.d.-b).
- **Wallonia – PFI (*Plan Formation-Insertion* / Training-Integration Plan).** The employer trains a registered jobseeker 4–26 weeks (longer in specific cases) according to a jointly defined plan, then must hire for a period at least equal to the training. Private and public employers are eligible (Le Forem, n.d.-b).
- **Brussels – FPIE (*Formation professionnelle individuelle en entreprise* / Individual In-Company Training).** The company trains for four weeks to six months, then must hire for at least the same duration. This results in the jobseeker being eligible to apply for an *active.brussels* certificate, which is a financial allowance for employers who can deduct it from an employee's salary – encouraging hiring (Actiris, n.d.-b).

Apprenticeships. As mentioned above in Section 4.1, learners enrolled in secondary vocational education spend part of the week in a company under a work-study contract; the other part is at a school/training centre. Companies are typically approved or recognised firms, must designate a workplace tutor, and follow a training plan tied to the school curriculum. This gives employers a structured way to "recruit and grow" talent before signing a full employment contract. Additionally, employers are incentivized through lump sum payments (bonuses) (CEDEFOP, 2018).

- **Flanders.** Companies must be officially recognised as a learning workplace and appoint a qualified mentor to host a dual learner; the mentor has minimum age or experience requirements and must complete mentor training (Vlaanderen, n.d.-b).
- **Wallonia.** Companies must be approved by *Centre d'Education et de Formation en Alternance* (CEFA) or the Walloon Institute for Work-based Learning and Self-employed Training and Small and Medium-sized Companies (IFAPME) and designate an approved tutor. Training runs under a single *contrat d'alternance* that sets duties, hours, pay, and the shared training plan linking company tasks to centre courses. (Portail de l'Emploi et de la Formation professionnelle, n.d.-b).

Types of apprenticeship jobs. These are mostly skilled trades and service roles where learning-by-doing matters (e.g., construction, mechanics, electrical, wood, HVAC, food, retail, tourism, hair, some care and ICT support). Official catalogues show hundreds of programs mostly centred on trades and service work (EFP, n.d.; IFAPME, n.d.; Vlaanderen, n.d.-c).

Why Firms Invest

Legal right to training and continuous learning. The Act of 3 October 2022 (the Labour Deal) gives full-time employees an individual right to five paid training days per year (phased in from 2023/24) (Granato, 2022; Littler, 2024). In April 2024, the Federal Learning Account went live. It is a digital tool that records each employee's training rights and usage, so employees, employers, and inspectors can see what's due and what's been taken. It also contributes to data tracking for the country on training. This is meant to help promote continuous learning in the workplace and improve the labour force (Granato, 2022; Littler, 2024).

Sectoral Training Funds (STFs). Many sectors operate joint employer–union training funds, created by sectoral collective agreements and financed mainly by wage-bill levies or social contributions. They co-finance onboarding and upskilling (courses, certificates, short modules), lowering costs for SMEs and stabilising training supply. Belgium's STFs are not one uniform system: they range from small, volunteer-run initiatives at provincial or regional scale to large, institutionalised funds active nationally, which is why "it is difficult to give a general overview of STFs in Belgium" (Panorama, 2008). Yet within Belgium's vocational training market (public and private providers), STFs play a significant role and are often treated as a third actor alongside public and private provision (Panorama, 2008).

Reduced costs on first hires for new employers. In Belgium, employers normally pay roughly 27% of gross pay in employer social security contributions (commissioner.brussels, n.d.)**.** For new employers (no employees in the previous 12 months), the federal first hire reduction permanently lowers that bill: since Q1 2024 the reduction is capped at €3,100 per quarter and applies for an unlimited duration to the first employee. For the second and third hires, smaller time-limited reductions apply over up to 13 quarters (Business Belgium, 2025).

Multilingualism and Newcomer Workers

Cross-regional commuting makes language an operational filter. Belgium's labour market spans Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region. Commuting across regions is routine, so language is an operational constraint, not just a cultural one. In 2021, 796,000 people worked in Brussels, but only 49% lived there; 33% commuted from Flanders and 18% from Wallonia. That constant cross-regional flow makes language a practical hiring filter (OECD, 2023).

Employer demand: FR–NL bilingualism, often plus English. Brussels is officially bilingual. Alongside many federal and regional bodies that work in Dutch and/or French, a large private sector customer base also spans both language groups. Employers reflect that reality in vacancies: about two in five jobs handled by Actiris (Brussels' public employment service) explicitly require both French and Dutch (OECD, 2023). Multilingualism has gained importance with the growth of multinationals and international institutions. The return on language skills is high for jobseekers in Brussels. Those with weak or no French or Dutch are roughly 39 percentage points less likely to be in the labour force; even after adjusting for education, sex, and age, the gap remains around 22 to 29 points (OECD, 2023). Actiris' own tracking shows jobseekers with intermediate skills in the second national language have a 10.5 percentage point higher exit rate into employment than those with little or none (OECD, 2023).

Labour-force participation for immigrants is closely tied to language. Among non-EU born adults in Brussels, speaking French or Dutch at least at an intermediate level is strongly associated with being in the labour force. To address this, Brussels now requires a civic integration pathway for newly arrived non-EU residents, including language courses (French or Dutch) and labour market counselling, a structural push to build job-ready language skills (City of Brussels, n.d.). Evidence also shows that occupation-specific language training yields the highest payoffs for migrant jobseekers. Effective models include (i) vocational language courses tailored to high-need occupations, (ii) workplace-oriented language for everyday tasks and interviews, (iii) on-the-job language sessions with employers, and (iv) language embedded in job-placement programs (OECD, 2023).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 5: Belgian Practices to Explore – Employers & Industry

Train-to-hire pathways via public employment services.
Belgium's regions run employer led "train at the workplace, then hire" schemes (IBO/PFI/FPIE) where firms coach a candidate for one to six months under a plan agreed with the public employment service and then must offer a contract. Québec could try something similar by working with employment services to support short, employer-run training periods that culminate in hire commitments.

Sectoral Training Funds to co-finance upskilling.
Many Belgian sectors operate joint employer–union funds that subsidize onboarding and short, job relevant training, lowering costs for SMEs and stabilizing provision. Québec could try something similar by encouraging sector bodies to pool training levies or grants that co-fund employer upskilling tied to entry roles.

Recognized learning workplaces and trained mentors.
Firms hosting apprentices or dual learners must be officially recognized and designate a qualified, trained workplace tutor; mentor requirements are set by the sector and/or region. Québec could try something similar by defining simple recognition criteria and mentor training for employers that take interns and co-op students.

Individual training rights tracked in a learning account.
Belgium's "Labour Deal" gives employees paid training days, tracked in a national digital Learning Account visible to workers, employers, and inspectors. Québec could try something similar by piloting a portable training hours account that nudges continuous learning and creates usable data on workplace training.

First hire payroll relief for new employers.
Belgium permanently reduces social security contributions for an employer's first hire (with smaller, time-limited reductions for hires two and three). Québec could try something similar by testing targeted payroll relief for first hires in small firms that commit to structured onboarding.

Occupation-specific language training with employers.
In bilingual Brussels, evidence and services emphasize job-specific French or Dutch training delivered with or at employers to lift placement rates. Québec could try something similar by backing employer embedded French-at-work modules tailored to specific roles (e.g., client service, logistics, health support).

4.3 Intermediaries & Community Organizations Belgium

Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) are highly decentralized in Belgium. In comparison to OECD peers, individuals who enter labour market programs pass through a host of organisations. The language regions are responsible for policies bearing on territory, including employment services, while communities lead human-centred policies, such as those for training (OECD, 2023).

Public Employment Services (PES). Each region or community has its own public employment service (PES) that delivers ALMPs to jobseekers, employed individuals, and employers (OECD, 2023):

- **Flanders.** VDAB (Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Service) provides training, job placement, and career guidance, often in cooperation with the adult education centres (VDAB, n.d.-c).
- **Wallonia.** Le Forem delivers employment services, adult education and vocational programs for the French-speaking population. It supports employers with vacancy postings, pre-screening, and dedicated recruitment days (Le Forem, n.d.-c).
- **Brussels Capital Region.** Actiris is the regional employment office and the main front door for jobseekers and employers. Bruxelles Formation delivers training for the French-speaking public and VDAB Brussels does so for the Dutch-speaking public. Partners also cooperate through joint initiatives that align employment and training services (OECD, 2023).

ALMPs In Practice

Examples of core practices used by regional PES and their partners to connect jobseekers with employers include the following:

Vacancy platforms and digital matching. VDAB uses competency-based matching to connect jobseekers with vacancies. The system maintains a database of candidate profiles with documented competencies and a database of vacancies with required competencies. Employers post vacancies and specify the competencies they need. Jobseekers can view the competency requirements for target roles, identify any gaps, and plan upskilling accordingly. All services run vacancy portals and matching tools and use competency-based matching in Flanders through VDAB Competent's database, which structures vacancies and profiles around required competencies (CEDEFOP, 2023).

Brokerage for employers. Le Forem, among other services it offers, can act as a type of broker for firms who are seeking employees. Typical offers include job vacancy drafting and posting, pre-screening candidates, scheduling recruitment days, and administrative support around hiring. These functions can reduce hiring costs for firms and speed up matching for candidates (Le Forem, n.d.-c).

Local access points that bundle intermediaries. Actiris in Brussels operates two kinds of local access points.

- ***Maisons de l'Emploi.*** These are sites where Actiris works alongside municipal services and insertion partners that provide step-by-step support like basic skills, short pre-training, coaching for applications, and work experience placements. A person can register with Actiris, meet a counsellor, prepare applications, and receive a referral to training in the same place (Actiris, n.d.-c).

- ***Cité des Métiers de Bruxelles*.** This is a bilingual walk-in hub run by Actiris with Bruxelles Formation and VDAB Brussels. Visitors receive information on occupations, training routes, and recruitment events, and staff direct people to the appropriate service for counselling or a course (hub.info, n.d.-a).

PES coordination platforms. Cooperation across services is formalized through Synerjob, a non-profit platform that supports shared development and dissemination of vacancies and tools across each of the regions PES (Synerjob, n.d.). Additionally, *Pôles Formation Emploi* in Brussels bring Actiris, Bruxelles Formation, VDAB Brussels, and sector social partners together by industry. The partners plan outreach, adjust training capacity to demand, and organise placement channels that serve jobseekers, workers, and students (Actiris, n.d.-d).

Insertion centres. Across Belgium, PES work with accredited "insertion" organizations that prepare adults to move into training or a job. In Walloon and Brussels, these are called *Centres d'insertion socioprofessionnelle* (CISP), which provide short preparatory training, basic and technical skills, and psychosocial support for jobseekers who are far from employment; the region accredits these centres (155 currently approved) and oversees them (Portail de l'Emploi et de la Formation professionnelle, n.d.-a). Flanders provides the same services through VDAB.

Incentives for intermediaries

Intermediaries in Belgium operate largely on public funding. Regional governments and community authorities purchase counselling, training, and placement services to raise employment. This creates predictable demand for accredited operators and rewards partnerships that can document results (OECD, 2023).

Management contracts with targets for regional providers. VDAB, Actiris, and Bruxelles Formation work under multi-year management agreements that set objectives, indicators, and reporting for counselling, training, and placement. For example, Bruxelles Formation's 2023–2027 management contract and operational plan defines strategic objectives and requires annual execution reports. These contracts steer commissioning and signal coordination expectations to partners (Bruxelles Formation, n.d.-a).

Language Services

Belgium uses employment-linked language supports so candidates and new hires can work across language regions. These include PES funding workplace coaching in the language of work, employer vouchers for language training at the point of hire, and short job-oriented language courses with entry testing. Some examples are listed below.

On the job language coaching (Flanders). VDAB funds job & language coaching at the workplace. A coach comes into the company for a series of sessions over up to 12 months, working with the new hire and the team on Dutch-for-work so the hire sticks. It is free for eligible employers (VDAB, n.d.-d, n.d.-a).

Employer language cheques tied to recruitment (Brussels). Actiris offers "*Chèques langues – Matching*" when an employer hires an Actiris-registered jobseeker who needs upskilling in language (Actiris, n.d.-a):

- **40 hours** of **individual** language training (FR/NL/EN), or
- **60 hours** of **small group** training (3–10 people) aligned to the job.

Training is delivered by approved providers and financed under the scheme, so the employer does not carry the full cost of making the recruit job-ready linguistically.

Walloon language training vouchers for employees. Le Forem runs "*Chèque-Formation langue*" where each cheque is €30 per training hour, typically €15 paid by the region and €15 by the employer, to buy recognised provider courses (Dutch, French, English, or German). It is a simple co-payment tool firms use to raise on-the-job language skills; immersion formats can count up to 10 hours per worker per day (Le Forem, n.d.-a).

Short, intensive "language for employment" courses (Brussels). Bruxelles Formation runs intensive, job-oriented language modules with entry testing and coaching throughout (e.g., 9-week daytime courses) to build the work-specific language a role needs (customer service, office work, etc.). Employers can plug recruits into these tracks to close gaps fast (Bruxelles Formation, n.d.-b).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 6: Belgian Practices to Explore – Intermediaries & Community Organizations

Competency-based vacancy matching (public PES).
Belgium's regional employment services (e.g., VDAB) run competency-based portals that structure jobseeker profiles and vacancies around required skills and use this for matching and gap-closing advice. Québec could try something similar by having Service Québec or intermediaries focus matching more systematically on competencies rather than positions (titles) and link to targeted upskilling.

Employer brokerage as a PES service.
Le Forem and Actiris offer firms hands-on brokerage, drafting and posting vacancies, pre-screening, organizing recruitment days, and handling admin to cut hiring friction, especially for SMEs. Québec could try something similar by resourcing intermediaries to deliver turnkey recruitment support for small employers hosting WIL or entry roles. It is possible Québec's non-profit sector plays a similar role but is not systematically publicly funded as in Belgium's example.

Sector coordination platforms.
Brussels' *Pôles Formation-Emploi* convene PES, training bodies, and sector social partners to align capacity, outreach, and placement by industry. Québec could try something similar by supporting sector tables that jointly plan WIL seats, curricula, and hiring channels.

Insertion centres for job readiness.
Accredited CISP deliver short preparatory training, technical skills, and psychosocial support for those far from work, under regional oversight. Québec could try something similar by accrediting specific regional community providers to run standardized "pre-WIL or job-readiness" modules with clear referral pathways.

Employment linked language supports.
Intermediaries fund on-the-job language coaching (VDAB), employer language cheques at hire (Actiris), co-financed vouchers (Le Forem), and short job-oriented language courses (Bruxelles Formation). Québec could try something similar by enabling intermediaries to offer additional workplace French coaching options (currently at the discretion and expense of employers) and hire-linked language vouchers tied to specific roles.

4.4 Environment Belgium

Policy and Governance

Belgium is a federal state composed of communities and regions. The Constitution states that Belgium is a federal state made up of Flemish (Dutch), French, and German-speaking communities, and the Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels-Capital Regions. In Flanders (Flemish Region), the community and the region are merged into a single parliament and government. Each entity holds its own legislative and executive powers (COE, n.d.; Constitute, n.d.).

Education policy sits with the Communities. The Communities set curricula and manage schools, with a limited set of education items that remain federal such as the start and end of compulsory schooling and minimum diploma requirements. Instruction takes place in the language of the relevant Community (COR, n.d.-a).

Employment policy sits with the regions. Regional authorities implement employment policy, run the public employment services, organise re-employment programs, legislate on employment of foreign workers within their powers, and allocate budgets for labour market measures and training. Federal authorities retain unemployment insurance through the National Employment Office and regulate collective and individual labour relations (COR, n.d.-b).

Language policy in Belgium. Belgium guarantees individual freedom of language, yet public use is regulated by law. After 1830, this freedom led in practice to a near universal use of French in public life. Many civil servants and judges did not use Dutch and laws appeared only in French. Parliament shifted to a territorial approach in 1932, so the language of the area became the administrative language. The decisive step came in the 1960s with the legal fixing of the language boundary and a consolidation of language laws (DOCU Vlaamse Rand, n.d.).

In defined domains, the regional language must be used (Walloon-French, Flemish-Dutch, Brussels-Capital-French/Dutch). These domains are public administration, court cases, education in publicly established or funded institutions, and social relations in companies and the official documents that firms must use. Businesses are free to choose languages in daily interactions, but official company documents and internal communication that fall under the law must use the language of the area. The *Educational Language Act* of 1963 prescribes the teaching language for general subjects in primary and secondary education. Official and subsidised schools teach either in French or in Dutch, with secondary language courses starting in primary education (DOCU Vlaamse Rand, n.d.).

Collaboration and Outcome Monitoring

Intermediary Collaboration. Collaboration is organised at the regional and community level, with the PES described in Section 4.3 working alongside schools, colleges, employers, and other social partners. The four PES themselves (VDAB, Le Forem, Actiris, ADG) and training services cooperate through Synerjob, which exchanges vacancies and CVs, develops shared tools, and supports mobility of candidates between regions.

Quality Assurance (QA) in higher education. Belgium checks the quality and labour market relevance of recognized degree tracks in universities and colleges. External experts review learning outcomes, teaching and assessment, any work-based components, and stakeholder input (students, employers). Results are published, which makes providers adjust what and how they teach. External QA is mandatory and community specific:

- **Flanders:** Programs are accredited by NVAO (a binational Netherlands–Flanders accreditation agency). NVAO decisions underpin official recognition of degrees (NVAO, n.d.-a). VDAB, the PES in Flanders, produces *Schoolverlatersrapport* which tracks each graduating cohort for one year and reports outcomes by field of education and level. Recent editions show very low job-seeker shares one year after graduation (e.g., approx. 5% for academic bachelor's; approx. 2–3% for professional bachelor's or master's) (VDAB, n.d.-e).
- **Wallonia-Brussels Federation:** Programs are evaluated by AEQES (independent public agency). AEQES runs cyclical, enhancement-oriented reviews; system coordination across institutions is provided by ARES, who also publish statistics and dashboards on higher education outcomes (AEQES, n.d.; ARES, n.d.-b).

Unions and Collective Bargaining

Belgium has high union membership and very broad collective bargaining coverage relative to most OECD countries. The OECD's 2021 country note reports a union density of around 49 percent of employees and a bargaining coverage of around 96 percent (OECD, n.d.-a). Bargaining takes place at several levels. There is a cross-sector or national layer, sectoral joint committees, and company-level agreements that specify or deviate within the national and sectoral frameworks. Additional enterprise bargaining on wages is more common in larger firms (ETUI, n.d.; EURES, n.d.).

Three representative union confederations operate nationwide. These are the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, the General Federation of Belgian Labour, and the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions (CGSLB). The trade unions are divided into regional groups: Brussels, Wallonia and Flanders. These regions are in turn subdivided into professional centres bringing together affiliates from the same professional sector (ETUI, n.d.; EURES, n.d.).

- **What unions do.** They negotiate collective agreements at the national, sectoral, and company level. National rounds set the overall frame and are linked to the National Labour Council. Sectoral joint committees set pay scales, classifications, working time, training, and other rules. Company agreements operate within the sector and national frameworks (Eurofound, n.d.).
- **How wages are set.** Wages are set mainly through collective bargaining that is coordinated from the top. Every two years a program is set, which includes a ceiling for average wage growth known as the wage norm. Sectors then negotiate wage scales under that ceiling, and companies can add arrangements within the sector rules. Automatic indexation clauses are widespread in sector agreements (Eurofound, n.d.).

4.5 Impact of Vocational Language Training

Many language courses are designed for everyday life rather than for the workplace or labour market. OECD guidance identifies approaches that combine language learning with vocational content and work experience and finds that these approaches are more effective for later labour market inclusion than running language and vocational training as separate or sequential tracks (OECD, 2021a). The 2021 OECD synthesis sets out three reasons. First, integrating language with vocational content prevents extended absences from the labour market that general courses can create, which can reduce job search intensity. Second, formats linked to specific jobs target vocabulary, routines, safety instructions, customer interactions, and communication with supervisors that are tested during hiring and probation. Third, language coaching delivered in the workplace lowers employer uncertainty about what an employee's stated language ability level means (OECD, 2021a).

As the report notes, “learners advance more quickly and are more motivated to complete their program successfully when the curriculum builds on their career goals and allows participants to apply skills to real life situations (Roberts, 2003; Chenven, 2004; Delander et al., 2005; Friedenberg, 2014)” (OECD, 2021a). Cooperation with employers can further “increase their understanding of what the language levels actually mean and assure them that successful learners have in fact acquired the language skills required for the job (Chiswick and Miller, 2009)” (OECD, 2021a). There are also “lock in” costs for employers that occur when jobseekers spend long periods in general courses away from job search and from work experience (OECD, 2021a).

Building on this, the OECD recommends four delivery formats that align language provision with employment entry (OECD, 2021a):

1. vocational language courses for shortage occupations;
2. modules for everyday workplace and interview situations;
3. sessions delivered in the workplace with employers; and
4. language training embedded in activation and placement services.

Belgian Workplace Vocational Language Training

Recall from Section 4.2 that, in Brussels, many vacancies explicitly require both national languages and that employers often screen for French and Dutch in combination. Also recall from Section 4.3 that the regional services position language support inside recruitment and onboarding rather than only in general classrooms. Actiris activates matching language vouchers at the point of hire when language is the remaining barrier, while VDAB provides job and language coaching at the workplace during the first months of work and can pair this with train-to-hire arrangements.

At the time of writing, no public counterfactual evaluation was identified that isolates the employment impact of Belgium’s hire-linked language vouchers in Brussels or VDAB workplace language coaching relative to comparable non-participants. The research suggests that practices in Belgium are being conducted with respect to the OECD evidence that vocational language training results in better labour market inclusion.

5.0 Sweden

The Kingdom of Sweden is a constitutional monarchy located in Scandinavia in Northern Europe between Norway to the west and Finland to the east. Nearly a quarter (23.8%) of the population lives in the metropolitan area of the capital city of Stockholm (Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025a; Wikipedia, 2025).

In July of 2009, a new language law recognized Swedish as the official language of Sweden. There are five recognized minority languages: Finnish (Sweden Finns comprise 5% of the population), Meänkieli, Saami, Romani, and Yiddish. Though Arabic is not an officially recognized language minority, it is the second most spoken language in Sweden after Swedish; Arabs comprise 5.3% of the population. A majority proportion of immigrants to Sweden are refugees (SO-rummet, 2025; Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025a). Moreover, English is a significant part of the linguistic landscape, as the vast majority of Swedes speak English at a near fluent level (Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025c).

Sweden Labour Statistics	
Population *(2024)*	**10,569,000**
Unemployment Rate *(2023)*	**7.6%**
Underemployment Rate *(% of part time workers in involuntary part-time employment, 2024)*	**21.8%**
NEET *(% ages 15-29 neither in employment nor in education and training, 2024)*	**6.3%**
Job Vacancy Rate *(2024)*	**2.3%**
Average Annual Wages *(US dollars, PPP converted, 2024)*	**$60,415**
Unemployment Rate, Population: World Bank Data (WBG, n.d.) NEET, Job Vacancies, Underemployment: Eurostat (EUROSTAT, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, 2025)	

5.1 Educational Institutions – Sweden

Education System

Overall, Sweden possesses a well-developed institutional architecture for education-to-employment transitions: vocational placements, adult education (Swedish for Immigrants, "*komvux*"), active public employment services, and employer/union engagement. Incentives to create pathways from education to employment are shaped by funding responsibilities at various levels, public policy goals (integration, low NEET rates), and strong labour market organizations rather than direct performance pay in higher education. Linguistic and other minority learners benefit from statutory mother-tongue rights, SFI (Swedish for Immigrants), and coordinated municipal services (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024; OECD, 2024).

Nonetheless, outcome data indicate that employment and earnings gaps for foreign-born individuals persist and that language programs alone do not close this gap. This indicates that institutions may benefit from combining language and vocational training with targeted employer engagement and

increasing recognition of foreign credentials and anti-discrimination measures to ultimately improve outcomes (Ekonomifakta, 2025; Eurostat, 2025b; Pello-Esso et al., 2025).

Core practices and programs to transition students and graduates into the workforce

Sweden's education and training system offers multiple practice-oriented routes that facilitate education-to-employment transitions. Upper secondary vocational programs, as well as adult vocational training, commonly include workplace placements and periods of on-the-job learning that appear to mirror apprenticeships in other systems. A mix of school-based and work-based vocational provision, and subsequent placements, contribute to smoothing transitions to employment (Eurydice, n.d., 2025).

At the upper-secondary level, *gymnasieutbildning* (upper secondary education) offers both academic and vocational routes, with vocational programs explicitly designed to prepare students for specific occupations and facilitate direct labour market entry (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a, 2025c). For adults, *komvux* (municipal adult education) provides flexible opportunities to complete or supplement upper secondary studies, thus enabling learners to obtain qualifications required for employment or further education (Skolverket, 2025a, 2025b; Sveriges Akademiker & Andersson, 2017).

National employment agency process. The main employment agency, the Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), actively links jobseekers and recent graduates to vacancies and offers job-matching and career services. It also provides information for newcomers on how to find work, which complements institutional placement activity (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a, 2025b). "Subnational" actors play a role in shaping adult skills and local labour market linkage mechanisms that adult education providers use to support employability (OECD, 2025).

Career services, placement support, and public employment links. Schools and higher education institutions work alongside *Arbetsförmedlingen* and municipal adult education (*komvux,* SFI) actors to help channel graduates to job vacancies and labour market programs. Education providers and employment services coordinate within Sweden's system for matching labour supply and demand (EURES, n.d.). The official Swedish guidance and courses for SFI and other adult education pathways includes orientation towards employment and integration into the labour market (Skolverket, 2022, 2022, 2025c).

Leveraging "soft skills." Swedish institutions and public services encourage students to leverage soft skills (i.e., communication, adaptability, teamwork, time management, problem solving, etc.)[1] when applying for jobs, as these are considered transferable assets across industries (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2024). To support informed decision-making, students can access career and study guidance services (Study and Vocational Guidance *Studie- och yrkesvägledning* [SYV]) at multiple levels, including municipal adult education, which provides individualized planning for education-to-employment transitions (Allastudier.se, 2021; Skolverket, 2025b, 2025a; Studentum, 2025).

[1] Note that "leadership," often considered an essential component of soft skills in North American settings, is viewed less favourably in the more collectively minded society and workplaces in Sweden, and is therefore not often emphasized (Arbetet.se, 2024).

Data-driven monitoring and national statistics. Monitoring and tracking by Statistics Sweden (SCB) and Eurostat inform institutional planning, where government and schools use labour market statistics (including NEET and earnings data) to shape programs and to identify at-risk youth and immigrant groups for targeted interventions (Eurostat, 2025c, 2025d; Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025b). A variety of OECD country profiles and datasets also provide indicators (such as enrolment and graduate outcomes) that universities and policymakers utilize in designing employability measures (OECD, 2024).

Public-private and employer engagement. Collective bargaining coverage and employer representation in Sweden contribute to shaping workplace expectations and the availability of structured entry routes. Research on collective agreement coverage suggests that organized labour plays a role in shaping standards, and thus indirectly creating opportunities for graduates (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024). Employers cooperate in a variety of ways with municipalities and higher education institutions, including through offering placements and co-designing curricula in vocational programs (European Employment Services, 2025; Eurydice, 2025).

Gaps and challenges. Despite strong institutional supports, there remain persistent challenges in Sweden's efforts and policies aimed at converting education participation into equitable employment outcomes, particularly for foreign-born youth and graduates (Ekonomifakta, 2025; Eurostat, 2025d; Nyhetsredaktionen, n.d.; Robertson, 2025). This suggests that, while institutional programs exist, their effectiveness varies by population group and local labour market conditions (Allastudier.se, 2023; Arbetet.se, 2024; Skolverket, 2025c).

Incentives that drive employment-oriented education practices

Funding and performance signals. National funding models for education in Sweden provide block grants and program funding instead of heavy per-graduate performance pay. Performance indicators (completion rates, progression to higher education and into employment) are monitored publicly and inform institutional priorities (OECD, 2024).

Employer and multi-pronged incentives. Sweden's high level of collective agreement coverage and strong labour market organizations create incentives for aligning education with labour market needs: employers and unions collaborate on skills forecasting and on work-based learning frameworks that feed back into institutional practice (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Subnational and municipal incentives. Municipalities and regions in Sweden have both the capacity and incentives (through their funding) to develop adult education and training that directly supports local labour markets (OECD, 2025). These decentralized operations and incentive structures help adult education (*komvux*, SFI) to orient their offerings and delivery toward local employer demand.

Labour market pressures and social policy goals. Broader social policy aims, such as reducing unemployment and better integrating immigrants and newcomers, underpin political and administrative incentives for education institutions to emphasize employability levels, work placements, and language or skills training that bolster labour market entry (Ekonomifakta, 2025; European Employment Services, 2025; Eurostat, 2025d). Public employment services and municipal adult education receive mandates to prioritize labour market integration outcomes (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a; Skolverket, 2025c). However, wage and integration gaps (e.g., immigrant-native wage differentials) indicate that incentives to produce employable graduates do not automatically eliminate structural and regional labour market barriers (Ekonomifakta, 2025; Robertson, 2025).

Support for language-speaking minorities and other minority learners

Legal rights and curriculum supports. Sweden's *Language Act* and *Education Act* legislate rights for national minorities and guarantee mother-tongue instruction in compulsory school where eligible and possible,[2] while SFI is the principal adult education pathway for non-Swedish speakers seeking labour market entry (Robertson, 2025; Skolverket, 2022, 2025a, 2025b). The SFI curriculum is explicitly employment oriented across its modules, with the aim to develop workplace-level Swedish and civic and workplace orientation[3] (Skolverket, 2025c, 2025c, 2025b).

Linguistic diversity and targeting. About one third of students do not have Swedish as a mother tongue (Bulletin; SCB data confirm high diversity), which obliges schools and adult education providers to deliver substantial language support and mother-tongue instruction where demand (and capacity, see Footnote 1) exists (European Commission, 2023; Nyhetsredaktionen, n.d.; Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025b). National statistics also show that foreign-born youth and adults face higher unemployment and lower earnings, providing further justification for targeted language and integration programs (Ekonomifakta, 2025; Eurostat, 2025b, 2025d).

Comprehensive service networks. Municipal adult education (*komvux*), SFI, and *Arbetsförmedlingen* coordinate to provide language training, as well as vocational preparation and job matching for immigrants and other minorities. Additionally, guidance counselors (SYV) are mandated to provide individualized advice, which is particularly important for students from minority or immigrant backgrounds who are navigating unfamiliar education and labour market systems. These services help ensure that minority learners are not only academically supported but also directed toward realistic employment opportunities (Arbetet.se, 2024; OECD, 2024; Skolverket, 2025b).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 7: Swedish Practices to Explore – Educational Institutions

Vocational programs with built-in workplace learning.
Sweden's upper-secondary vocational routes and adult vocational training routinely include on-the-job learning and placements designed for direct labour market entry. In Québec, similar vocational models exist; the opportunity is to adopt mandatory placements for trades and practice-oriented programs. This makes job placements less ad-hoc and something every learner completes.

Municipal adult education tied to employability (*komvux*, SFI).
Adult education providers deliver flexible upskilling and SFI with curricula explicitly oriented to workplace language and local job needs. Québec could try something similar by embedding "French-for-work" and job-focused modules in continuing education tied to local demand.

Institution employment service coordination.
Schools and higher education institutions coordinate with the Public Employment Service to channel graduates to vacancies and labour market programs. Québec could try something similar by formalizing referral protocols between campus career services and provincial employment offices.

[2] Note that the legislation states that this is mandatory on the stipulation that an appropriate instructor can be procured.
[3] This curriculum also includes modules on adapting to Swedish culture, learning about Swedish laws, and other types of civic education aimed at helping integration into Swedish society.

Systematic career guidance (SYV) across levels.
Career and study guidance is mandated in schools and municipal adult education, offering individualized planning for transitions. Québec could try something similar by standardizing access to individualized career guidance across CEGEPs and adult education, with clear progression planning.

Data informed program design.
Institutions use national statistics (NEET, earnings, outcomes by group) to target supports and shape programs for at-risk youth and immigrants. Québec could try something similar by routinely integrating provincial outcomes data into program review and targeted student support.

Soft skills signaling in employability services.
Guidance services emphasize articulating transferable skills (communication, teamwork, problem-solving) in applications across sectors. While it is not clear the extent to which Québec has similar practices, stakeholder interviews indicated CEGEPs help in the development of soft skills. Therefore, standardizing the development and signaling of soft skills is a practice that would help students translate that learning into employment readiness.

5.2 Employers & Industry – Sweden

Employers in Sweden draw heavily on education–industry linkages and public services to recruit, train, and retain early career workers (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a; Skolverket, 2025c). Complementing such formal pipelines are short, employment-oriented courses and rapid entry programs that target sectors with immediate demand. Career platforms and course directories list programs designed to get learners into work within a year (e.g., IT support, healthcare assistant roles, logistics); guidance providers note that such short-cycle training is attractive to employers seeking quickly deployable staff. Employers therefore recruit from both longer vocational streams and targeted short courses depending on skill needs (Allastudier.se, 2021; Studentum, 2025).

Core practices and programs used to recruit, train, and retain early career employees

Swedish employers participate in a range of structured entry routes that connect directly with the education system. A mix of school-based and work-based vocational education exists, where employers host workplace placements and on-the-job learning that functionally resemble apprenticeships and traineeships (Eurydice, 2025). These placements are a key recruitment channel for early career entrants by giving employers extended, low-risk observation periods, and giving trainees real work experience that improves employability (Eurostat, 2025a; Eurydice, 2025).

Graduate-trainee and internship schemes. Larger firms and public-sector organizations commonly run graduate or trainee programs and take interns from upper-secondary vocational programs or higher education. Cooperation between educational institutions and employers, and employer delivery of structured early-career pathways, are routine features of the Swedish system (European Employment Services, 2025; OECD, 2025).

In-house upskilling and continuous training. Sweden's strong tradition of collective bargaining and high collective agreement coverage shapes how employer-provided training is delivered. Collective agreements and sectoral partners often set expectations for training, career progression, and upskilling (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024). Employers frequently provide on-the-job development and training, and cultivate partnerships with adult education providers (*komvux*, SFI) to maintain skills and retain staff, especially in fields where skills are scarce or where firms compete on advanced capabilities (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024; OECD, 2024).

Recruitment and retention practices. Swedish workplace recruitment and retention practices are highly systematized. *Arbetsförmedlingen* is an important conduit for early career recruitment and for matching employers with newly qualified entrants and jobseekers. Retention strategies emphasize continuous skill development, internal labour market mobility, and wage structures negotiated via collective agreements. High unionization and collective bargaining provide mechanisms for predictable pay progression and training entitlements that support retention (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a, 2025c; European Commission, 2023; Eurostat, 2025c; OECD, 2025).

Limitations and equity gaps. Despite these widespread practices, data show uneven labour market returns for some populations. Unemployment is higher and earnings are lower for foreign-born workers, and research highlights persistent gaps between immigrants and native Swedes in employment and wages, indicating that structured entry routes do not necessarily guarantee equal outcomes (Ekonomifakta, 2025; Eurostat, 2025a, 2025d; Sveriges Akademiker & Andersson, 2017).

Incentives toward employer investment in training and hiring

National priorities, including reducing youth unemployment and better integrating immigrants and newcomers, create political incentives for institutions to encourage employer hiring of early career and minority workers. Public-sector employment goals and social expectations indirectly motivate firms to engage in hiring and training practices that support transition from education to work (Eurostat, 2025d; OECD, 2025).

Labour organizations and collective agreements. As mentioned, a distinctive Swedish incentive structure is the strength of labour organizations and collective agreements. (Also see Section 5.4.) High coverage of collective agreements creates sectoral norms for training, upskilling, and workforce standards; employers face both normative and contractual incentives to invest in employee development because training and career paths are often negotiated or expected through social-partner mechanisms. This system reduces free-rider problems in training and encourages employer contributions to workforce development (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a; Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Skills shortages and wage pressures. Macroeconomic and regional labour dynamics create market incentives, such that when shortages appear for particular skills, employers invest more in recruitment and upskilling to secure talent (European Commission, 2023; European Employment Services, 2025; Eurydice, n.d.; Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025b). Employers also face costs and risks: training is an upfront investment with potential externalities if trained workers leave. SMEs may find structured trainee programs resource intensive for them, compared to the burden on larger companies. Collective agreements can also impose apparent cost burdens in the short-term, although in the longer term they stabilize expectations and reduce turnover (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Public employment programs and employer-targeted measures. While many employer incentives are institutional or normative (e.g., collective agreements, company reputation), the public employment service and municipal actors provide targeted measures that influence hiring behaviour. The national employment agency *Arbetsförmedlingen* operates labour market programs that link employers with candidates, and can include employer-targeted supports and matching services.[4] Municipalities and regions may commission or co-fund training to meet local employer demand; this is effectively an incentive for firms to hire locally-trained workers (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025b; OECD, 2025).

[4] The precise menu of subsidies or grants varies by program and locality.

Support for language-speaking minority employees and other minority workers

Workplace language supports and public services. Sweden's public and educational architecture supports language acquisition through SFI, as described above, and through municipal adult education. *Arbetsförmedlingen* provides multilingual guidance for jobseekers. Employers frequently recruit through these public channels, which supply candidates and signal basic Swedish language competence. The SFI curricular materials are explicitly oriented to support labour market integration by combining language learning with work content (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025c; Robertson, 2025; Skolverket, 2022, 2025c).

Employer engagement with immigrant recruits. Employers that hire migrants often rely on *Arbetsförmedlingen's* matching and on-the-job support and may offer in-house language coaching and mentorship to help new employees integrate (Eurydice, n.d.; OECD, 2024).

Scale of multilingualism and implications. As mentioned previously, Sweden is highly linguistically diverse, which affects the pool of early career workers and increases the importance of workplace language supports (Bulletin; SCB; Sweden.se). Since foreign-born workers have higher unemployment and lower earnings on average, as indicated above, language training must be combined with other measures – such as credential recognition and targeted recruitment – to be effective. Collective bargaining contexts can also protect workers' rights and create predictable progression routes that benefit minority workers once hired (Ekonomifakta, 2025; Eurostat, 2025a; Medlingsinstitutet, 2024; Pello-Esso et al., 2025; Robertson, 2025).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 8: Swedish Practices to Explore – Employers & Industry

Placements as primary recruitment.
Swedish employers routinely use workplace placements and traineeships from upper-secondary VET and higher education as low risk pipelines into entry roles. While Québec's CEGEPs and universities utilize co-ops and internships, the opportunity is to lean further into using them as hire ahead trials, especially for SME's and university programs where they may be less established.

Graduate-trainee programs in large firms.
Many larger Swedish companies and public bodies run structured graduate trainee schemes that rotate hires and embed mentoring. Québec could try something similar by inviting employers to (re)establish cohort-based trainee intakes linked to clear conversion paths.

Collective agreement norms for training.
Sectoral collective agreements in Sweden often set expectations for employer-provided upskilling and career progression, which stabilizes investment in early career development. Québec could try something similar by using sectoral tables across more sectors to codify basic training or mentoring standards for entry roles.

Employer links to adult education providers.
Firms commonly partner with municipal adult education (*komvux*, SFI) to source talent and co-shape short, job-focused courses for immediate needs. Québec could try something similar by having employers co-signal needs to adult and continuing-ed and recruit directly from those short programs.

Workplace language supports tied to hiring.
Employers that hire migrants in Sweden often combine recruitment with in-house language coaching, using SFI and municipal supports as a backbone. Québec could try something similar by providing

funding to more systematically incentivize employers to pair hires with “French-at-work” coaching delivered alongside public language services.

5.3 Intermediaries & Community Organizations – Sweden

Sweden’s intermediaries and community organizations function as connectors between jobseekers, education, and employers. Their practices range from job matching and skill recognition to personalized career guidance. Incentives stem from a publicly funded system prioritizing employability and lifelong learning rather than narrow performance-based contracts. Intermediaries provide inclusive supports for linguistic minorities through tailored language and advisory services, contributing to more equitable access to employment opportunities (Allastudier.se, 2021, 2023; Skolverket, 2025b; Studentum, 2025).

Sweden’s intermediary ecosystem – which comprises primarily *Arbetsförmedlingen*, municipal adult-education providers, EU or local labour market projects, and a range of community organizations – performs three interlocking functions in education-to-employment pathways: matching and placement, facilitation of skills and credential recognition, and wraparound supports (language, counselling, and mentoring supports). These intermediaries operate within a policy environment shaped by strong social partners (trade unions and employer organizations), and decentralized (municipal and regional) provision of adult skills and integration supports (Ekonomifakta, 2025; OECD, 2024, 2025).

Core practices and programs connecting jobseekers with employers

Public employment matching and casework. The backbone of employer–jobseeker matching in Sweden is *Arbetsförmedlingen*. It provides vacancy mediation, targeted matching for specific sectors, job-search coaching, and referral to training or labour market programs that combine short skills courses with placement support. *Arbetsförmedlingen* also offers multilingual guidance and targeted information for newcomers to facilitate initial labour market entry. These official job matching and placement functions are routinely used by employers seeking screened candidates, and by jobseekers who need practical support to navigate recruitment processes (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025c).

Municipal adult education and SFI integration pathways. Municipal adult education (*komvux*) and SFI are central intermediated pathways: they combine language training, basic vocational modules, and local work placements or internships designed to prepare participants for immediate labour market roles or traineeships. SFI curricula explicitly include work-oriented language learning and civic and workplace orientation, making SFI a practical bridge between formal language learning and employer-facing competence. Municipal adult-education bodies often broker workplace contacts and short upskilling courses in collaboration with local employers (OECD, 2025; Skolverket, 2022, 2025c).

Project-based intermediaries. Beyond statutory services, local NGOs, community organizations, and a plethora of smaller pilot projects run targeted programs: job-search workshops; mentoring schemes linking experienced workers with newcomers; and short, employer-driven traineeships (European Commission, 2023; European Employment Services, 2025).

Credential recognition and tailored bridging. Intermediaries commonly offer or signpost credential recognition support (advice on how to have foreign qualifications evaluated) and run sector-specific bridging courses that adapt prior qualifications to Swedish certification or workplace standards. Where sectoral skills are in short supply, local projects and *Arbetsförmedlingen* co-design rapid upskilling modules to enable quicker hiring into entry roles (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a; OECD, 2025).

Incentives that drive intermediary organizations and collaborations

Public commissioning and regional and subnational incentives. A major incentive is public commissioning: municipalities and regions fund adult skills programs and integration initiatives tailored to local labour markets, where intermediaries must demonstrate local labour market relevance to secure funding (OECD, 2025).

Partnership grants and EU funding. EU-level funding provides grants and co-financing for multi-partner projects (NGOs, municipalities, training providers) that facilitate employer engagement and cross-border recruitment. These grants incentivise collaborative consortia and encourage intermediaries to design projects that explicitly link training to hiring outcomes (e.g., traineeships, apprenticeships, or internship conversion into employment) (European Commission, 2023; European Employment Services, 2025; Eurostat, 2025c).

Social-partner norms and collective frameworks. Sweden's high collective agreement coverage and active social partners (unions and employer organizations) shape intermediary behaviour indirectly: intermediaries align programs with sectoral expectations around working conditions, training content, and progression paths to improve employer uptake of trainees and placements. Collective bargaining norms therefore act as a stabilizing incentive that encourages intermediaries to match supply with employer-approved skill profiles (European Commission, 2023; Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Operational constraints and the SME challenge. Financial and administrative burdens can make SMEs less able to absorb structured traineeships; intermediaries therefore design short, low-risk placements and subsidised schemes (brokered by *Arbetsförmedlingen* or municipal actors) to incentivise SME hiring. The balance between rigorous outcome measurement and flexibility for small partners is a recurring design trade-off in intermediary contracting (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025c; OECD, 2024).

Support for linguistic minorities and other minority jobseekers

SFI is the primary public pathway supporting non-Swedish speakers into employment, as described above. *Arbetsförmedlingen* often refers jobseekers to SFI and coordinates language learning with job-focused placements (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025b; Skolverket, 2025c, 2025b).

Legal and educational rights for mother-tongue instruction. In compulsory schooling, children with national minority languages or other home languages have rights to mother-tongue education when eligible and possible; this reduces early life language disadvantage and can support later transitions into apprenticeships or vocational tracks. Sweden's *Language Act* and education guidance underpin these rights (Robertson, 2025; Skolverket, 2022, 2025b).

Targeted programs and multilingual service provision. Intermediaries routinely provide multilingual information, use interpreters, and run targeted integration programs for newcomers and refugee groups. Municipal projects and NGOs often deliver tailored mentoring, sectoral bridging courses, and job coaching in community languages to build trust and overcome initial barriers to employer engagement (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025a; European Employment Services, 2025; Eurostat, 2025b).

Best Practices for Québec

Table 9: Swedish Practices to Explore – Intermediaries & Community Organizations

Public employment matching as the backbone.
Sweden's *Arbetsförmedlingen* centrally provides vacancy mediation, targeted matching, coaching, and multilingual guidance that employers and jobseekers routinely use. Québec could try something similar by empowering intermediaries to act as the primary matching hub with stronger employer-facing services and multilingual support.

Language plus vocational bridges run by local providers.
Municipal adult education (*komvux*) and SFI combine work-oriented language training with short vocational modules and broker local workplace placements. Québec could try something similar by funding intermediaries to deliver French-for-work tied to job-specific upskilling and nearby placements.

Intermediary-led credential recognition and sector bridging.
Intermediaries help newcomers navigate foreign credential evaluation and run short bridging courses aligned to Swedish workplace and sector standards. Québec could try something similar by resourcing intermediaries to offer credential advice plus sector-specific bridges that lead to interviews or traineeships.

NGO mentoring and targeted projects.
Community organizations run mentoring schemes, job search workshops, and employer-driven short traineeships alongside public services. Québec could try something similar by backing NGO-led mentoring and micro-traineeships that complement institutional career centers.

Regional commissioning for local labour market fit.
Municipalities fund adult skills and integration programs tailored to local demand, and intermediaries must show labour market relevance to secure support. Québec could try something similar by commissioning regional intermediaries to co-design offerings with local employers and report simple placement outcomes.

SME-friendly, low-risk placements.
Intermediaries design short, subsidized placements to reduce administrative and supervision burdens for SMEs. Québec could try something similar by enabling intermediaries to broker brief, low overhead placements that test candidates and ease SME participation.

5.4 Environment – Sweden

Sweden's policy environment relies on multiple pillars:

- statutory protections for language and education;
- decentralized commissioning of adult skills through education provision spanning upper-secondary vocational tracks and municipal adult education (*komvux),* where *komvux* is explicitly designed to be accessible for adults seeking to upskill or change careers;
- a social-partner governance model wherein career guidance systems orient learners toward labour market outcomes; and
- integration of employer expectations into training via public employment services that link learning to jobs (Allastudier.se, 2021; Eurydice, 2025; Medlingsinstitutet, 2024; OECD, 2024, 2025; Studentum, 2025).

Policy landscape, mandates, strategies and legislation

Language and minority rights statutes. As mentioned previously, Sweden's *Language Act* (2009) and related provisions give Swedish official status while also protecting the five national minority languages (Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani, Saami, and Yiddish), as well as Swedish Sign Language. These laws and education sector policies guarantee mother tongue tuition for eligible schoolchildren and require government agencies to provide certain information in these languages in addition to Swedish (Robertson, 2025; Skolverket, n.d.; Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025b).

Education and adult learning mandates (SFI, *komvux*). The national education authority (*Skolverket*) sets curricula for SFI and municipal adult education (*komvux*), explicitly orienting many of its courses to labour market needs, as described above. SFI's curriculum documents formalize the expectation that language instruction supports employability and integration, establishing an administrative bridge between education delivery and employment outcomes (Skolverket, 2025c, 2025c, 2025a, 2025b).

Public employment service mandates and active labour market policy. *Arbetsförmedlingen* plays a central, legislatively mandated role in vacancy mediation and job matching, and in the delivery of job activation measures. Its multilingual public guidance and labour market programs (including skills training) implements national employment policy priorities at the individual citizen or resident level (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025c). As mentioned in education incentives above, Sweden's decentralized delivery model for adult skills gives municipalities significant influence over how education-to-employment pathways are put into practice (OECD, 2025).

Sectoral governance and collective agreement environment. Overall, Sweden's high collective agreement coverage with strong trade unions and employer organizations constitutes a de-facto regulatory layer that shapes the workplace environment and working conditions, training expectations, and employer behaviour. This is particularly the case for the sectoral coverage of collective agreements, which creates structured entry routes, and provides the aforementioned incentives for employers to invest in training and establish predictable career progression frameworks – all of which follow high level education-to-employment policy goals (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Formal engagement and collaboration among key actors

Institutionalized cooperation. Sweden's model is highly collaborative but not highly prescriptive. Though formal avenues exist for cooperation, the practical modalities are often negotiated locally or sectorally rather than dictated by a single nationwide statute. *Arbetsförmedlingen* and *komvux* frequently act as convenors between schools, training providers, and employers to place participants into traineeships or short hiring route programs (Ekonomifakta, 2025; European Employment Services, 2025; Eurydice, 2025).

Migrant language learning supports. Sweden operates three related formats that link language learning to labour market entry. As mentioned in Section 5.1, SFI is Swedish for Immigrants and is the national adult language pathway delivered by municipalities. SFX is a Swedish language course for professionally trained migrants and adapts SFI to specific occupations through sector tracks with workplace-focused language and progression toward licensing or work. YFI is vocational education for immigrants that integrates Swedish language instruction with a specific vocational program and workplace learning in partnership with *Arbetsförmedlingen* (above). The policy logic is a staged link from foundational Swedish in SFI to occupation-specific language in SFX and to full vocational preparation and placement in YFI.

Role of social partners, including unions and other employer organizations. Collective bargaining and social-partner institutions are central to formal collaboration in Sweden. Because collective agreements are widespread, as described above, unions and employer organizations are routinely involved in establishing sectoral training expectations and workplace entry arrangements. This tripartite ecosystem (state, employers, and unions) provides formal and informal governance channels by which education providers calibrate curricula and work placement standards to employer and sector needs (Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Consensus corporatism and social-partner tradition. Sweden's historical model of labour market governance, based in collectivism and built on strong trade unions and employer organizations, highlights a cultural preference for negotiated solutions rather than top down, hierarchical regulatory imposition. This national "philosophy" favours sectorally negotiated training norms, collective agreements that embed training and skill expectations, and collaborative, incremental reform. The result is a national system wherein social partners are expected to co-produce pathways from education to work (European Commission, 2023; European Employment Services, 2025; Medlingsinstitutet, 2024).

Egalitarianism and integrationist goals. Swedish social policy traditions emphasize universal (and free) access to education, welfare support, and integration. The legal protection of minority languages, rights to mother-tongue education, multiple entryways to *komvux*, and the provision of SFI reflect a societal commitment to inclusion, which is showcased through education-to-employment instruments (i.e., instruments such as language training tied to employability, skills training). These cultural principles form the foundation to a policy approach that treats labour market inclusion as both an economic and social objective (Robertson, 2025; Skolverket, n.d., 2025a).

Monitoring, evaluation, and employer and graduate outcome measurement

National statistics and reporting infrastructure. As described under Section 5.1, Sweden's national statistical agency (SCB) and various international EU reporting channels form the backbone of monitoring labour market statistics, which are used to diagnose problems (e.g., immigrant-native employment gaps) as efficiently as possible, and subsequently to inform policy responses (Robertson, 2025; Statistikmyndigheten SCB, 2025b, 2025a).

Municipal-level performance measurement. Municipal contracts for adult education and *Arbetsförmedlingen's* activation programs typically incorporate performance indicators such as placement rates, employment retention, job moves, and course completion (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2025b; OECD, 2025).

5.5 Impact of Swedish Language & Vocational Programs for Migrants

Recall that SFI refers to Swedish for Immigrants as the baseline adult language pathway. SFX refers to Swedish for professionally trained migrants and delivers Swedish in sector tracks that align language learning to a specific occupational field. YFI refers to vocational education for immigrants with Swedish taught inside the vocational program and alongside workplace learning.

OECD case studies reported that participants' motivation and persistence resulted in improvements for both language components and vocational components when delivery was integrated rather than running them separately (OECD, 2022, 2023). SFX and YFI were also found to shorten the time to labour market entry for migrants and summarised evidence from evaluations sourced below that SFX pathways could lift labour market integration rates by roughly 20-25%, and highlighted an example of bus and lorry driver cohorts reaching about 90-95% employment soon after completion or within the first year (OECD, 2022, 2023).

Evaluation of combining language education with workplace learning (YFI)

A learning evaluation of YFI in Stockholm asked whether participation in YFI built language and vocational competence that led to sustained employment. The evaluation overall reported positive results for the migrants and a strong association between completion and entry to work, although participants' education results were noted as only adequate (Oxford Research, 2019).

Quantitative tracking and qualitative evidence from schools and employers indicated that a majority of participants secured a position by the end of the program and remained employed 12 months later. For language, it was noted that most participants progressed through SFI at its higher grade levels, with teachers reporting observable gains in oral and written communication at work. The vocational grading components, however, were concentrated around passable levels, described as "adequate" results (Oxford Research, 2019). Despite this, the evaluation noted low dropout overall once participants were past the initial introduction phase and attributed early exits partly to long introductory modules that reduced motivation; later cohorts shortened the introduction and saw lower exits (Oxford Research, 2019).

Some limitations of the findings in the evaluation should be noted. First, many participants trained for high demand occupations, which complicated attribution of outcomes solely to the YFI itself (Oxford Research, 2019). Second, the delivery model was noted as costly relative to standard adult education routes where a learner first completed SFI to the required level and only then applied to a separate vocational program in *komvux*, which raised questions for scale (Oxford Research, 2019).

Evaluation of SFX, combining vocational training with language training

An evaluation commissioned by the County Administrative Board of Stockholm followed SFX graduates using register data and comparison groups (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2017). It found overall that about 60% of participants were employed two years after completion and a further seven percent were in education, with stronger employment rates in some tracks such as bus and lorry driving and lower rates in broader academic tracks.

The analysis also showed that only a minority worked in occupations that directly matched their trained profession two years after completion (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2017). This mismatch was noted as evidence of labour frictions that included weak networks and other barriers to accessing openings in regulated or professional fields. Tracks that placed more graduates in jobs closely related to their training also recorded higher overall employment than matched comparison groups, which indicated that stronger occupational matching coincided with better employment rates (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2017).

Recommended actions included closer alignment with regional demand, stronger employer networking and transition supports, clearer incentives for conversion to employment, and added cultural competency content to support integration (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2017).

6.0 Lessons for Québec

This last section summarizes how Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden operate in their respective education-to-employment pathways across the three model agents (educational institutions, employers and industry, and intermediaries) in the environment that supports them.

This is followed by taking the *"Best Practices for Québec"* noted throughout the report for each agent type for each country and distilling it into a simple "best-in-class" model for Québec. This is presented as grouped model ingredients for each agent type, with the groupings reflecting the stakeholder interview findings that went into identifying the *"Best Practices for Québec"* sections throughout the report. This model acts as a menu of options Québec could test and adapt. As previously mentioned, this study is an initial phase, and more research will be required in order to assess applicability to and feasibility in the Québec context in more detail.

6.1 Summary – What Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden are doing

Educational Institutions

Across all three nations, WIL is not optional, or student driven; it is structural and is not occupation or sector specific. Switzerland's dual VET embeds a contractual company placement as part of the legal curriculum, reinforced by inter-company practical blocks that standardize hands-on skills across firms. Belgium's professional bachelor tracks require placements across fields (e.g., business, ICT, nursing, teaching), making work exposure a universal feature of applied higher education. Sweden similarly treats workplace learning as core: upper-secondary vocational programs and adult vocational training include structured on-the-job periods intended to feed directly into entry-level roles.

Readiness is tackled with formal bridges that ensure an appropriate level of fluency in the language of work and close academic gaps before, or alongside, WIL. Switzerland uses one-year bridge programs and short intra-country exchanges that pair placements with immersion in another language region. Belgium combines newcomer reception classes (OKAN and DASPA) with content-and-language integrated learning (CLIL), so students build subject knowledge and the language of schooling simultaneously. Sweden's *komvux* and SFI couples adult upskilling with employment-oriented Swedish, aligning language acquisition to concrete workplace tasks and local labour demand.

Standards and accountability are made visible so that institutions, learners, and employers share a clear picture of competence. Switzerland co-writes occupation frameworks with employer bodies and ties programs to national qualification procedures, giving schools a common competency map and easing firm burden through school-hosted practical blocks. Belgium's external quality assurance requires evidence of employer engagement, WIL, and graduate outcomes, nudging providers to maintain labour market relevance. Sweden leans on national statistics and mandated guidance (SYV) to steer design, while flexible ladders, recognition of prior learning that yields real credit and short-cycle credentials that stack into degrees, let adults and newcomers progress without needless repetition.

Employers & Industry

Across the three nations, employers often make use of structured, work-based routes as entry channels, not necessarily ad-hoc hiring. Swiss firms anchor recruitment in apprenticeships aligned to legally defined occupational standards and often retain graduates directly. Belgian employers can draw from dual-VET and run "train-to-hire" periods agreed with regional public employment services that end in a contract. Swedish employers recruit heavily through placements and firm-run graduate-trainee intakes, treating on-the-job learning as an extended selection and onboarding phase rather than a distinct activity.

All three environments reduce employer risk and raise training capacity with predictable supports. Switzerland adds wage-sharing allowances for ramp-up hires and allows SMEs to co-train through multi-employer consortia while inter-company courses standardize practical skills. Belgium pairs sectoral training funds and a legal right to paid training days with recognized learning workplaces and trained mentors, lowering the cost and administration of skills development. Sweden's high collective agreement coverage sets sector norms for training and progression, while the public employment service pre-screens candidates and brokers matches at scale.

Language-for-work is treated as an employer-side competency, not just a classroom goal. Swiss companies can co-finance on-site language and basic skills training during paid time; Belgium deploys employer language coaching and vouchers tied to recruitment; and Sweden links workplace hiring to SFI or municipal supports and in-house coaching. These mechanisms make client-facing French/Dutch/Swedish proficiency a solvable onboarding task rather than a precondition that screens candidates out.

Intermediaries & Community Organizations

Across the three nations, intermediaries are often the operating system that connects candidates, institutions, and employers. A public employment backbone does the heavy lifting on matching: Sweden's *Arbetsförmedlingen* and Belgium's regional PES (VDAB, Le Forem, Actiris) run vacancy mediation, targeted referrals, and casework, while Switzerland's employment offices purchase activation services from external providers. Around that core, each country layers specialized intermediaries that prepare, place, and validate credential recognition case management for internationally trained professionals; "practice companies" where jobseekers gain recent, verifiable experience in simulated but production-like settings; and sector bodies that convene employers and align content with hiring needs.

Intermediaries also reduce employer friction and standardize access for candidates. Belgium formalizes employer brokerage (draft and post vacancies, pre-screening, recruitment days) and operates one-stop walk-in hubs (*Maisons de l'Emploi; Cité des Métiers*). Coordination platforms (e.g., Synerjob; sector "*pôles*") keep tools interoperable and capacity aligned. Switzerland embeds sector associations (OdA) as employer-side intermediaries and uses public purchasing to scale services (trial placements, wage supported work initiation, inter-company practical training). Sweden's municipalities commission short, local labour market bridges through *komvux* or SFI, while NGOs deliver mentoring, micro-traineeships, and targeted projects that plug into public channels.

Language-for-work is treated as an intermediary function, not just a school outcome. Belgium ties language coaching and vouchers directly to hiring; Sweden integrates SFI and *komvux* with placement; Switzerland co-funds on-site basic skills and language courses. Funding and accountability are explicit: multi-year management contracts for PES and TAs (Belgium), municipal commissioning with simple KPIs (Sweden), and contract-based activation (Switzerland) create predictable demand and measurable job-placement and retention results.

Table Summary on Practices by Agent-Type for Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden

Agent Types	Switzerland	Belgium	Sweden
Educational Institutions	• Switzerland offers one-year *Brückenangebote* after lower secondary so learners can strengthen the language of schooling and core subjects before entering VET or general programs. • Through *Movetia*, Swiss VET learners do short work and study stints in another linguistic region (often with a language course), building employability and mobility. • Swiss professional bodies run standardized, school-hosted practical blocks (inter-company courses) that complement company training and reduce firm burden. • Swiss VET uses occupation-specific ordinances with detailed training plans co-written by sector bodies, ensuring consistent learning outcomes and assessment. • Swiss CET is broadly market led, with public support focused on educationally disadvantaged groups (integration, basic skills, employability).	• In Belgium's professional bachelor (college) programs, work placements are built into the curriculum and required for completion across fields like business, ICT, logistics, nursing, and teaching. • Flanders' *graduaat* (short-cycle, work-linked) programs are designed to ladder seamlessly into professional bachelor's for those who want to continue. • Schools use subject teaching in a second language (CLIL) and full-time reception classes for newly arrived students (OKAN and DASPA) to build the language of schooling before mainstreaming. • Universities and colleges formally assess prior experiential learning (EVC in Flanders and RPL elsewhere) and grant course exemptions or admission based on demonstrated competencies. • Many Belgian institutions recognize student entrepreneurs, offering timetable flexibility, coaching, and incubator access alongside reduced social contribution rules nationally.	• Sweden's upper-secondary vocational routes and adult vocational training routinely include on-the-job learning and placements designed for direct labour market entry. • Adult education providers deliver flexible upskilling and SFI with curricula explicitly oriented to workplace language and local job needs. • Schools and higher education institutions coordinate with the Public Employment Service to channel graduates to vacancies and labour market programs. • Career and study guidance is mandated in schools and municipal adult education, offering individualized planning for transitions. • Institutions use national statistics (NEET, earnings, outcomes by group) to target supports and shape programs for at-risk youth and immigrants. • Guidance services emphasize articulating transferable skills (communication, teamwork, problem-solving) in applications across sectors.
Employers & Industry	• Switzerland's *Lehrbetriebsverbund* lets several SMEs jointly train one apprentice, rotating them so all ordinance-required skills are covered while a lead firm coordinates. • Swiss employers build talent in-house to national standards (set with industry) and often retain graduates, reducing search and onboarding risk and cost. • Regional Employment Offices offer work initiation allowances that cover a share of wages for several months when firms hire jobseekers who need onboarding.	• Belgium's regions run employer led "train at the workplace, then hire" schemes (IBO/PFI/FPIE) where firms coach a candidate for one to six months under a plan agreed with the public employment service and then must offer a contract. • Many Belgian sectors operate joint employer–union funds that subsidize onboarding and short, job relevant training, lowering costs for SMEs and stabilizing provision. • Firms hosting apprentices or dual learners must be officially recognized and designate a qualified, trained workplace tutor; mentor requirements are set by the sector and/or region.	• Swedish employers routinely use workplace placements and traineeships from upper-secondary VET and higher education as low risk pipelines into entry roles. • Many larger Swedish companies and public bodies run structured graduate trainee schemes that rotate hires and embed mentoring. • Sectoral collective agreements in Sweden often set expectations for employer-provided upskilling and career progression, which stabilizes investment in early career development.

Agent Types	Switzerland	Belgium	Sweden
	• A national scheme co-finances workplace courses in language, literacy, numeracy, and basic digital skills during paid time. • A one-year pre-apprenticeship (INVOL) blends job-specific language, work norms, and employer exposure; most participants progress to full apprenticeships.	• Belgium's "Labour Deal" gives employees paid training days, tracked in a national digital Learning Account visible to workers, employers, and inspectors. • Belgium permanently reduces social security contributions for an employer's first hire (with smaller, time-limited reductions for hires two and three). • In bilingual Brussels, evidence and services emphasize job-specific French or Dutch training delivered with or at employers to lift placement rates.	• Firms commonly partner with municipal adult education (*komvux*, SFI) to source talent and co-shape short, job-focused courses for immediate needs. • Employers that hire migrants in Sweden often combine recruitment with in-house language coaching, using SFI and municipal supports as a backbone.
Intermediaries & Community Organizations	• Switzerland's NGOs (e.g., HEKS MosaiQ) guide skilled migrants end-to-end through foreign diploma recognition and then broker internships or jobs. • A national network of practice firms lets jobseekers work in realistic, closed market companies to rebuild experience and apply language on real tasks. • Swiss OdA convenes employers, co-defines occupational content, and runs shared training (e.g., inter-company courses). • *Check Your Chance* bundles dozens of NGOs tackling youth unemployment, coordinating outreach, fundraising, and employer links. • Regional Employment Offices contract intermediaries for practice firms, wage-subsidized trials, and work experience assignments, keeping case management public but delivery mixed.	• Belgium's regional employment services (e.g., VDAB) run competency-based portals that structure jobseeker profiles and vacancies around required skills and use this for matching and gap-closing advice. • Le Forem and Actiris offer firms hands-on brokerage, drafting and posting vacancies, pre-screening, organizing recruitment days, and handling admin, to cut hiring friction, especially for SMEs. • Brussels' *Pôles Formation-Emploi* convene PES, training bodies, and sector social partners to align capacity, outreach, and placement by industry. • Accredited CISP deliver short preparatory training, technical skills, and psychosocial support for those far from work, under regional oversight. • Intermediaries fund on-the-job language coaching (VDAB), employer language cheques at hire (Actiris), co-financed vouchers (Le Forem), and short job-oriented language courses (Bruxelles Formation).	• Sweden's Arbetsförmedlingen centrally provides vacancy mediation, targeted matching, coaching, and multilingual guidance that employers and jobseekers routinely use. • Municipal adult education (*komvux*) and SFI combine work-oriented language training with short vocational modules and broker local workplace placements. • Intermediaries help newcomers navigate foreign credential evaluation and run short bridging courses aligned to Swedish workplace and sector standards. • Community organizations run mentoring schemes, job search workshops, and employer-driven short traineeships alongside public services. • Municipalities fund adult skills and integration programs tailored to local demand, and intermediaries must show labour market relevance to secure support. • Intermediaries design short, subsidized placements to reduce administrative and supervision burdens for SMEs.

6.2 Best-In-Class Model

This table brings together the "Best Practices for Québec" identified for each country section and organizes them under themes that define a best-in-class pathway model. Model ingredients are grouped according to the three primary agents (Educational Institutions, Employers & Industry, Intermediaries & Community Organizations).

Educational Institutions	
Model Ingredient:	**Make WIL structural.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Inter-company practical training hosted by schools. **Belgium:** Mandatory placements in professional programs. **Sweden:** Vocational programs with built-in workplace learning. These practices all embed real workplace learning inside programs rather than leaving it to student initiative or making it mandatory only for certain occupations or sectors. Switzerland's **inter-company practical** training hosted by schools creates standardized, school-run practical blocks that complement in-company training; Belgium's **mandatory placements in professional programs** requires work placements across applied degrees; Sweden's **vocational programs with built-in workplace learning** puts on-the-job learning at the core of upper-secondary and adult VET. Together, they make exposure to employers routine, comparable, and assessable.
Model Ingredient:	**Build language and transition bridges (readiness and mobility).**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Bridge years for language and academic gaps; Work language exchanges across regions. **Belgium:** Language immersion and newcomer reception within schooling. **Sweden:** Municipal adult education tied to employability (*komvux*, SFI). This cluster helps learners reach the language and academic level needed for successful placements and early jobs. Switzerland's **bridge years for language and academic gaps** and **work language exchanges across regions** provide time and immersion to shore up the language of work; Belgium's **language immersion and newcomer reception within schooling** (CLIL, OKAN, DASPA) prepares newcomers before mainstreaming; Sweden's **municipal adult education tied to employability (*komvux*, SFI)** combines adult upskilling with employment-oriented language. The common idea: short, targeted ramps to make "work language" and basics job ready.
Model Ingredient:	**Publish and use shared, occupation-aligned standards and evidence.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Occupation aligned, shared competency frameworks. **Belgium:** Quality assurance that evidence employability. **Sweden:** Data informed program design. These practices align teaching and assessment with employer expectations and make outcomes visible. Switzerland's **occupation aligned, shared competency frameworks** (co-written with sectors) spell out what students must be able to do; Belgium's **quality assurance that evidence employability** requires programs to show employer engagement, WIL, and graduate results; Sweden's **data informed program design** uses national statistics to shape and adjust programs. The net effect is clearer signals to students and employers, and continuous improvement based on evidence.

Educational Institutions	
Model Ingredient:	**Recognize prior learning and create stackable progression.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Targeted continuing education for integration and basic skills. **Belgium:** Recognition of prior learning for credits and exemptions; Short-cycle laddering (associate to bachelor). **Sweden:** Municipal adult education tied to employability (*komvux*, SFI). This group shortens time-to-credential and clarifies how learners can advance. Belgium's **recognition of prior learning for credits and exemptions grants** tangible credit for demonstrated competencies, and **short-cycle laddering (associate to bachelor)** maps seamless step-ups; Sweden's **municipal adult education tied to employability (*komvux*, SFI)** provides modular, labour-facing routes adults can build on; Switzerland's **targeted continuing education for integration and basic skills** offers short, needs-based modules that connect back to work. Together, they reduce duplication and make progression paths explicit.
Model Ingredient:	**Standardize individualized guidance and connect to labour demand.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Cantonal career information and guidance services linked to national portals. **Belgium:** Quality assurance that evidence employability. **Sweden:** Systematic career guidance (SYV) across levels; Soft skills signaling in employability services. These practices ensure learners get timely, comparable guidance linked to real jobs. Sweden's **systematic career guidance (SYV) across levels** and **soft skills signaling in employability services** provide mandated, individualized planning and help students communicate transferable skills; Switzerland's **cantonal career information and guidance services** provide a consistent front door; Belgium's **quality assurance that evidences employability** keeps programs attentive to placement and outcomes. The throughline is early, data-aware advising connected to employer needs.
Model Ingredient:	**Support entrepreneurship within study.**
International Practices:	**Belgium**: Student entrepreneur status and supports. Belgium's **student entrepreneur status and supports** gives enrolled founders formal recognition, timetable flexibility, coaching, and access to incubators (with national social contribution relief for eligible students). This normalizes entrepreneurship as a legitimate work-entry pathway alongside employment and further study.

Employers & Industry	
Model Ingredient:	**Make work-based entry the default.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Apprenticeship pipelines as a primary hiring strategy. **Belgium:** Train-to-hire pathways via public employment services. **Sweden:** Placements as primary recruitment; Graduate-trainee programs in large firms. These practices turn structured, on-the-job routes into the main way employers hire early career talent. Switzerland's **apprenticeship pipelines as a primary hiring strategy** builds in-house recruits to national standards and converts them directly into jobs; Belgium's **train-to-hire pathways via public employment services** formalize short, plan-based workplace training that must end in a contract; Sweden's **placements as primary recruitment and graduate trainee programs in large firms** use extended, supervised placements and cohort intakes as low-risk selection and onboarding. Together, they shift entry hiring from ad-hoc postings to predictable pipelines with clear conversion points.
Model Ingredient:	**Expand hosting capacity and quality.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** SME training consortia (shared apprentices). **Belgium**: Recognized learning workplaces and trained mentors. Switzerland's **SME training consortia (shared apprentices)** spreads supervision and training across several firms, while Belgium's **recognized learning workplaces and trained mentors** sets simple approval criteria and tutor preparation for hosts. Combined, these mechanisms lower supervision and administration burden for SMEs and establish minimum quality for on-the-job learning. The net effect is more firms able to participate, with clearer expectations for training and assessment.
Model Ingredient:	**Share early hiring risk and fund continuous training.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Risk sharing wage allowances for ramp-up hires. **Belgium**: Sectoral Training Funds to co-fund upskilling; Individual training rights tracked in a learning account; First-hire payroll relief for new employers. **Sweden:** Collective agreement norms for training. Switzerland's **risk-sharing wage allowances for ramp-up hires** offset wages during onboarding; Belgium's **Sectoral Training Funds to co-finance upskilling, individual training rights tracked in a learning account**, and **first-hire payroll relief** for new employers channel predictable money and incentives into short, job-relevant training and initial hires. Sweden's **collective agreement norms for training** set sector expectations for ongoing upskilling and progression. Together, these tools reduce early-stage costs and risks and normalize employer investment in development.

Employers & Industry	
Model Ingredient:	**Embed language-for-work in hiring and onboarding.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** On-site basic skills and language upskilling. **Belgium:** Occupation-specific language training with employers. **Sweden:** Workplace language supports tied to hiring. Switzerland's **on-site basic skills and language upskilling** co-finances workplace classes during paid time; Belgium's **occupation-specific language training with employers** tailors French/Dutch to real tasks at point of hire; Sweden's **workplace language supports tied to hiring** links recruitment with SFI and municipal coaching. Taken together, these approaches treat client-facing language proficiency as an achievable onboarding step, widening candidate pools and improving retention without lowering job standards.
Model Ingredient:	**Link employers to short, local pipelines.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Integration pre-apprenticeships for refugees and newcomers. **Sweden:** Employer links to adult education providers. Switzerland's **Integration pre-apprenticeships for refugees and newcomers** combines job-specific language, workplace norms, and employer exposure as a bridge into apprenticeships, while Sweden's **Employer links to adult education providers** lets firms co-shape short, job-focused courses and recruit directly from them. Together, these practices create rapid, locally aligned routes into entry roles, especially for newcomers and career-changers, by pairing targeted preparation with immediate employer demand.

Intermediaries & Community Organizations	
Model Ingredient:	**Public matching backbone and local front doors.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Apprenticeship matching platforms; Publicly purchased activation services. **Belgium:** Competency-based vacancy matching (public PES); One-stop, local access points. **Sweden:** Public employment matching as the backbone. These practices make the intermediary the main connector rather than a side channel. Switzerland's **apprenticeship matching platforms** market training places at scale while **publicly purchased activation services** buy trial placements and "work initiation" supports from external providers. Belgium's **competency-based vacancy matching (public PES)** aligns profiles and vacancies by skills, and **one-stop, local access points** (*Maisons de l'Emploi; Cité des Métiers*) put counselling, referrals, and recruitment events under one roof. Sweden's **public employment matching as the backbone** provides vacancy mediation, targeted matching, and casework as a default route. Together, they create a visible front door that screens, matches, and routes people into real opportunities.

Intermediaries & Community Organizations	
Model Ingredient:	**Reduce hiring friction for SMEs and expand placements.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Practice company ("simulated firm") training. **Belgium:** Employer brokerage as a PES service. **Sweden:** SME-friendly, low-risk placements. These practices lower the supervision and administration barriers that keep small employers from taking candidates. Switzerland's **practice company ("simulated firm") training** rebuilds recent, verifiable experience so candidates arrive placement ready. Belgium's **employer brokerage as a PES** service drafts and posts vacancies, pre-screens candidates, runs recruitment days, and handles hiring paperwork. Sweden's **SME-friendly, low-risk placements** structure brief, subsidized trials that test fit with minimal overhead. As a group, they convert SME interest into actual seats and faster conversions.
Model Ingredient:	**Embed language-for-work in intermediary offers.**
International Practices:	**Belgium:** Employment linked language supports. **Sweden:** Language plus vocational bridges run by local providers. These practices treat language as part of hiring and onboarding, not only a classroom task. Belgium's **employment-linked language supports** attach coaching, cheques, and vouchers to real recruitment moments so new hires build job-specific French/Dutch on the job. Sweden's **language plus vocational bridges run by local providers** pair work-oriented Swedish with short vocational modules and nearby placements. Together they close client-facing language gaps at the point of entry and raise placement-to-hire conversion.
Model Ingredient:	**Credential recognition and sector bridges.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Credential recognition case management. **Sweden:** Intermediary-led credential recognition and sector bridging. These practices turn fragmented recognition into usable hiring routes. Switzerland's **credential recognition case management** guides internationally trained professionals through diploma evaluation and then brokers internships or jobs. Sweden's i**ntermediary-led credential recognition and sector bridging** adds short, sector-specific modules that align prior learning to local standards and lead to interviews or traineeships. Combined, they shorten time-to-eligibility and reconnect skilled newcomers to appropriate roles.
Model Ingredient:	**Sector coordination and employer-side convening.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Sector associations as employer-side intermediaries. **Belgium:** Sector coordination platforms. **Sweden:** Regional commissioning for local labour market fit. These practices align capacity and content with what employers need. Switzerland's **sector associations as employer-side intermediaries** co-define occupational content and run shared training (e.g., inter-company courses). Belgium's **sector coordination platforms** convene PES, training bodies, and social partners by industry to plan outreach, adjust capacity, and organize placement channels. Sweden's **regional commissioning for local labour market fit** funds adult skills and integration offers that reflect local demand. Together they provide consistent signals to providers and smoother pipelines into priority roles.

Intermediaries & Community Organizations	
Model Ingredient:	**Youth-focused umbrellas and targeted mentoring.**
International Practices:	**Switzerland:** Umbrella coordination for youth risk. **Belgium:** Insertion centres for job-readiness. **Sweden:** NGO mentoring and targeted projects. These practices concentrate supports on young people and those far from work. Switzerland's **umbrella coordination for youth risk** aligns dozens of NGOs on outreach, fundraising, and employer links. Belgium's **insertion centres for job-readiness** deliver short preparatory training, technical skills, and psychosocial support under regional oversight. Sweden's **NGO mentoring and targeted projects** add mentoring, workshops, and micro-traineeships that complement statutory services. Together they reduce duplication and move hard-to-place candidates into work experience pathways.

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Appendix A – Research Matrix

The first item in research matrix is the identification and screening of non-Québec jurisdictions that combine comparability with strong labour market performance. Questions Q1 and Q2 narrow the list by examining similarities and macro-outcomes to identify the comparison jurisdictions.

For each comparison jurisdiction, the research will document:

1. **Core practices and programs** implemented by each agent (Educational Institutions, Employers/Industry, Intermediaries).
2. **Incentives** such as funding, regulatory, or market mechanisms that motivate each agent to prioritise successful education-to-employment transitions.
3. **Minority-focused supports** delivered by each agent, with special attention to language-minority populations where applicable.
4. **Model environment / ecosystem**: the overarching policy landscape, mandates, collaborative structures, cultural philosophy, and monitoring/evaluation systems that link the three agents and shape overall performance.

This four-element lens will allow for consistent comparisons across jurisdictions and for the development of a best-in-class model based on these elements. See research questions Q3-Q6 below. Findings from the comparative scan feed directly into the final Québec-focused questions. Interviews with Québec stakeholder (education, employers, intermediaries) will be used to map local strengths, gaps, and fit (Q7). Those insights, combined with the external evidence from the comparative scan, will be distilled into a concise set of transferable practices (Q8). To the extent possible, best practices deemed suitable for short-term or long-term implementation will be identified.

Table 1: Research Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source
Jurisdiction Screening and Comparisons	
1. Which jurisdictions are comparable to Québec?	
1.1 To what extent are the demographics comparable to Québec? *(e.g., population, GDP per capita, socio-economic indicators, education, employment, etc.)*	• Literature Review
1.2 To what extent is there institutional comparability to Québec? *(e.g., OECD membership, Western legal–political tradition, degree of federalism or decentralisation, union coverage)*	• Literature Review
1.3 How comparable is the education-system and outcomes to Québec? *(e.g., highest education level achieved, post-secondary access, presence of dual vocational pathways split between classroom and employer paid trainings, etc.)*	• Literature Review
2. Which comparable jurisdictions show strong labour market outcomes?	
2.1 What are employment related outcomes? *(e.g., NEET[5] rates, unemployment, underemployment measured through involuntary part time work, possible estimates of long-term and/or structural unemployment if available)*	• Literature Review

[5] Youth ages 15-29 not in employment, education, or training.

Research Questions	Data Source
2.2 What are earnings related outcomes? *(e.g., median incomes by age or educational attainment if available)*	• Literature Review
2.3 To what extent do any labour market outcome gaps exist between majority and minority language groups (or other minority communities)?	• Literature Review
Education-To-Employment Models: Agents and Enabling Environment	
3. Model for Educational Institutions	
3.1 What are the core practices and programs used to transition students/graduates into the workforce? *(e.g., work-integrated learning, apprenticeships, placement services, employment-oriented curriculum)*	• Literature Review
3.2 What incentives drive employment-oriented education practices? *(e.g., performance-based, or other funding incentives, graduate employment targets, employer-funded chairs, etc.)*	• Literature Review
3.3 How are language-speaking minorities and/or other minority learners and graduates supported? *(e.g., second-language courses, student services, targeted programs, etc.)*	• Literature Review
4. Model for Employers/Industry	
4.1 What are the core practices and programs used to recruit, train, and retain early-career employees? *(e.g., structured internships, apprenticeships, graduate-trainee schemes, in-house upskilling pathways)*	• Literature Review
4.2 What incentives drive employer investment in training and hiring? *(e.g., wage subsidies, payroll tax credits, training-levy rebates, procurement preferences)*	• Literature Review
4.3 How are language-speaking minorities, or other minority workers supported or leveraged? *(e.g., workplace language coaching, wage premiums, recruitment campaigns, inclusive career-progression supports, etc.)*	• Literature Review
5. Model for Intermediary and Community Organizations	
5.1 What are the core practices and programs used to connect jobseekers with employers? *(e.g., matching and placement services, mentoring, credential-recognition bridges, job-search workshops, etc.)*	• Literature Review
5.2 What incentives drive intermediary community organizations and collaborations? *(e.g., outcome-based contracts, pay-for-performance funding, partnership grants with institutions or employers, etc.)*	• Literature Review
5.3 How are linguistic minorities or other minority jobseekers supported? *(e.g., services delivered in the minority language, targeted employment programs for minorities, etc.)*	• Literature Review
6. Model Environment/Ecosystem	
6.1 What policy landscape, mandates, strategies, or legislation govern the delivery of education-to-employment pathways and employment services? *(e.g., youth-guarantee laws, apprenticeship acts, language-rights statutes, targeted minority-employment strategies)*	• Literature Review
6.2 How, and to what extent, do the key actors (education institutions, employers/industry, and intermediary community organizations) formally engage and collaborate?	• Literature Review

Research Questions	Data Source
6.3 What cultural, historical, or philosophical principles shape the jurisdiction's approach to education-to-employment transitions?	• Literature Review
6.4 How, and to what extent, does the jurisdiction monitor and evaluate its education-to-employment ecosystem? *(e.g., graduate-outcome dashboards, employer satisfaction surveys, longitudinal learner tracking, public performance reports)*	• Literature Review
Québec Gap Analysis and Best-In-Class Model	
7. What is the state of Québec's education-employment pathways and ecosystem of actors?	
7.1 What outcomes in Québec are comparable to other jurisdictions?	• Literature Review • Stakeholder Interviews
7.2 What are the key e**nabling factors and existing strengths of Québec's education-to-employment pathways?**	• Stakeholder Interviews
7.3 What are the key i**nhibiting factors and persistent challenges of Québec's education-to-employment pathways?**	• Stakeholder Interviews
7.4 How effectively do educational institutions, employers/industry, and intermediary organisations coordinate in Québec?	• Stakeholder Interviews
8. What is the best-in-class model for the Québec context?	
8.1 What are the key transferable model elements from the comparison jurisdictions?	• Literature Review • Stakeholder Interviews
8.2 What are Québec's priority gaps to address when measured against the best-in-class model from the comparison jurisdictions?	• Literature Review • Stakeholder Interviews