

# Volt

**Volt Belgium  
Mapping of policies**

**Volt Belgium 2022**

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***The following document is a constantly evolving work that outlines the policies proposed by Volt BE.***

***It respects, and goes hand-in-hand with, the mapping of policies written by Volt Europa. This is not a political programme.***

***The following policies have all been approved by members of Volt Belgium and are thus to be considered official policies.***

***Future policies or programmes will build on- or be based on this document.***

***For any questions or feedback, do not hesitate to send an email to Volt Belgium's policy co-leads at [policy@voltbelgium.org](mailto:policy@voltbelgium.org)***

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*Belgium is a country with unparalleled opportunity and potential. It is at the crossroads of an ambitious political project, the largest single economic market, and some of the world's most skilled talent. Yet that potential is strapped by outdated structures and approaches. As Volt we want to shock the system back to life, ensuring that Belgian institutions and policies become assertively citizen-centric. As Volt Belgium, we pursue a dynamic shift focusing on Belgian citizens, placing citizens first and creating genuine dialogue, to address the real issues of affecting people, and inspire creative solutions through active participation.*

*Belgium is de facto the heart of Europe, connecting Member States, and fostering solidarity through a grand European narrative. Yet today, we find a conflicted Europe, burdened with outdated structures and approaches, that has so far tethered the project. We set out to create a systemic shock, at all levels: the European, National, Regional and Local levels.*

*The Belgian state should work for its citizens and their ambitions and support their ability to create a better future. We want to empower citizens, and ensure that they have all the necessary skills, tools and resources to make the best use of their potential. Underpinning these citizen-centric efforts is the imperative need to make the Belgian state structure as a whole more reactive, innovative, and efficient whilst simultaneously improving the Belgian, European and global environment.*

*At a European level, Volt has proposed strengthening the Union on the basis of 5+1 challenges to ensure lasting reforms benefiting citizens. In Belgium, we also want to put forward 5+1 challenges to achieve the greatest coherence across governance levels.*

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## Pillar 1 - CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT

### **“Permanent and active citizen participation”**

Today, politicians go from one mandate to the next, often lacking long term vision, which has led to increased tensions and alienation between citizens and the political institutions. Democratic participation shouldn't stop after elections. Volt believes that the Belgian state and its institutions must empower its citizens and ensure that its policies are citizen-centric while enabling citizens to make their voices heard. We are champions of digital citizen platforms using technology to embed deliberative democracy, shape and execute public policies whilst combatting the declining trust in our institutions. We encourage deliberative democracy (e.g. citizen assemblies) and are open to explore all fora of democracy that stimulate citizen participation. We encourage participatory budgeting, especially at the local level.

Belgium is particularly lacking in levels of citizen participation compared to other established democracies. Marked as a “flawed democracy” and occupying only the 31<sup>st</sup> place globally and the fifth to last place in Western Europe, Belgian democracy is not in an excellent condition. Indeed, trust in government is low (only 39%)<sup>1</sup>.

**We want to rebuild that trust by creating the channels for citizens to engage with their public administration and their representatives not only to hold them accountable, but also to rebuild their trust in political and administrative institutions.**

In Volt, we believe in the culture of participation. Participation increases citizens' trust in politics and bridges the gap between citizens and politics. Promoting a more active involvement of all citizens is a key element of the society we want to build, where nobody is left behind and where all parties are truly represented and able to make their voices heard. In line with this key strategic priority, we will empower citizens to be able to communicate and cooperate with their administrations for the common good and to play an active role in the policy making process.

To ensure maximum impact on public interest decisions, we want citizen participation to be institutionalised and to enter politics with a strong legislative support that is built on

<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer Spring 2018 fact sheet Belgium

real citizens' needs. In doing this, we will take advantage of the most innovative tools and technologies to promote inclusiveness to generate innovative ideas.

Volt's threefold approach for citizen empowerment will be based on:

- **Institutionalising participation** – To enable citizens participation, appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks should be put in place. These should be designed according to the different federal, regional and local competences to ensure that the right participatory mechanisms are at work. We want these frameworks to be established at the local and regional level and to provide the right instruments and channels of communication to reinforce the collaboration between administrations and citizens. These would include the setting up of public debates, where citizens can express their opinion on sensitive topics, or through building up local initiatives. To do so, we will build on the lessons learned by similar initiatives, such as the Ostbelgien Model or the Participation law of the Italian region Tuscany. We propose that the regulatory framework could provide compulsory instruments of participation based on the best practices of the "citizens assemblies" or the "debat public", in well defined cases.
- **Digital citizen platforms** – We want citizens to be able to communicate with their governments, at all levels, in an effective and transparent way. Digital platforms are an effective solution to encourage communication with administrations and direct citizens' involvement, especially when decisions have a tangible impact on citizens' lives, such as in city planning. Volt wants to create an extensive online suggestion platform where citizens can clearly launch their proposals and questions, both at federal and regional level. In this way, citizens will be able to actively contribute to government decisions.
- **Establish participatory budgets at a communal level** – Another instrument to encourage citizens' participation in the policy making process is to offer them the possibility to have a say on how communal taxes are spent. Participatory budgets would allow citizens to allocate small amounts of their tax contributions to projects of public interest that they support based on transparent and democratically expressed preferences<sup>2</sup>.
- **Volt wants to reinforce citizenship education** – While citizen education has started to be implemented across Belgium, we need to further strengthen citizens by shaping them into critical persons already at school. This should include critical thinking, knowledge about political processes and institutions and about fundamental values of our society such as human rights, tolerance, democracy and peace. As a result of the growing digitisation of our world and the impact digital platforms have on our understanding and knowledge, we need to strengthen media and digital literacy to allow citizens to distinguish between what is trustworthy and what is fake. Citizenship education should also be provided in a framework of lifelong learning and should thus be a component at all teaching levels.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.regione.toscana.it/-/legge-sulla-partecipazione>

## Pillar 2 - Smart State

### A. General: “A transparent, efficient smart state serving citizens first”

We cannot afford to have a digital society supported by an analogue public administration. Achieving solutions to the challenges we face requires a more digitally enabled Smart State. By investing in digital infrastructures that facilitate innovation, speed up integration and interoperability of smart state tools across the EU, we seek to further enable public services that empower people, are tailored to their needs and expectations, and protect us all. Those infrastructures are developed in a secure way (respecting Confidentiality, Integrity, Availability). By improving the roll-out of digital approaches, we seek to improve the effectiveness of our services, transparency around decision-making and implementation, and direct participation of citizens in shaping the services that they use. We are champions of effective, proactive and responsive authorities that focus on their citizens rather than navigating red tape.

At the core of our vision is the ambition to build a smart state in Belgium and promote a more accountable and transparent European Union. Belgian and European citizens should have access to better quality public goods and services. Currently, Belgian authorities are unable to effectively deliver due to a complex bureaucracy and outdated administrative procedures. This has resulted in an inefficient and non-transparent administration that no longer corresponds to the needs or expectations of citizens. It is necessary to continue the ongoing efforts to improve efficiency of government services by adapting to the digital age.

Administrative responsibilities often remain unclear to citizens. They are not sure who to engage with and when they do, more often than not, the response is that this particular public service is not responsible for their request. This needs to change, if we want citizens to believe in our institutions again.

**We want to build government authorities that are more efficient and easier for citizens to engage with and thereby make the administrations' work relevant for Belgian citizens. Volt will introduce e-government systems at all levels in Belgium, reforming Belgian government institutions, promoting investment in public services and establishing citizen assemblies to take part and discuss political decisions. In addition we want to improve the evaluation systems of public institutions such that public officials are evaluated based on their performance.**

Concretely, our goals are:

- **E-Governance** – By learning from other European nations like Estonia, Sweden and Denmark, we aim to build a system that allows for direct interaction with public officials as well as modernising the operation within public administration. We aim for one single portal for all levels (municipality, province, region, community and national), where the system itself would take care of the correct routing. Of course this will be supported by training government employees in the effective use of these new technologies so as to ensure maximum benefit for citizens.
- **Smart Glass State** – To further empower citizens and make public administration and Parliament transparent, we want to make government expenses more transparent and more accessible for citizens. It is not only about more information, but rather about better information. More concretely, we want to make the expenses of public administration and investments that are taking place on behalf of citizens traceable and provide an overview of how they are being used. Furthermore, Volt will set up an online platform to illustrate how MPs voted urging them to explain why they voted for or against or abstained.
- **Establish a government and parliamentary transparency register for interest representation** – following the example set by the European Commission and the Irish Parliament, Volt will push to set up a Lobbying Transparency Register for companies to illustrate who they are, how much they invest in lobbying activities as well as which associations they are a member of. We will make it mandatory for interest representatives to register and to declare with whom they have met from the level of Head of Unit upwards.
- **State Reform** – In order to improve the state's efficiency, we suggest merging the communities and the regions into four new entities: Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and East-Belgium. Brussels and East-Belgium will also be independent on provincial level. The linguistic commissions in Brussels (Cocof, Cocom and Vcom) would be merged into a regional ministry of linguistic and community affairs. A pragmatic look towards the regional and national responsibilities is also required such as reducing an outdated state structure like the provinces.
- **Build better, more responsive Ministries** – We are facing various new, cross-sectoral challenges in an increasingly complex and connected world. Our response needs to address these through our government structures in order to best tackle cross-sectoral issues in a comprehensive way forward. Subjects such as foreign trade, environment, climate, health and education would immensely benefit from a more concerted approach and more federal coordination. Polluted air or water will not stop at regional or national borders. All Belgians should have access to the same quality of healthcare and education. To ensure this, it is only possible if the competences are federal.
- **Build modern, relevant Ministries** – Global issues such as climate change and digitisation need to be allocated across all aspects of government including local, regional and federal. As is the case already in many Member States a digital and environmental communication channel needs to be established as a first step to better coordinate. Important local and regional concerns such as culture and heritage-related matters may benefit from staying regionalised.
- **Talent and Reputation** – There is a clear need to improve the way that public administration is evaluated and that it is held responsible for its actions and the

way it is operating. While we are not calling for a privatisation of the public sector, there should be ways and means to evaluate the performance of employees while also setting out clear performance objectives and incentives to grow.

- **Discrimination against women** - Gender equality is a fundamental human right that must be implemented in our society. In the current state of our societies, women are still being treated unfairly, face more barriers than their male counterparts, fall victim to specific forms of violence and are discriminated against in their private, public and professional lives. An example of this is the fact that women are severely discriminated against in the workplace: they often have lower salaries, are underrepresented in manager positions and have to deal with harassment and intimidation in the workplace. Volt will push for changing this and put men, women and everyone else on equal footing.
- **No discrimination based on ethnicity, origin, skin color or sexual preference** - Current legal instruments at national, European and international level do not offer enough protection to persons dealing with prejudice, unequal treatment and social exclusion. Minorities continue to face discriminatory treatment, including in the areas of education, employment, social services, law enforcement interaction, etc. Discrimination based on ethnicity and colour remains one of the most dominant forms of inequality, and minorities remain the most disadvantaged and persecuted persons in society. In addition, discrimination against travellers throughout Europe is particularly problematic. The following measures can be used:
  - Promotion and review of legislation addressing persistent discrimination against certain groups. We need to review relevant pieces of national and European legislation to amend it so that it is adequate for the 21st century.
  - Strengthening the law enforcement system to end police violence, harassment, and discriminatory profiling.
  - Similarly, along with other minorities – including women and the LGBTQ+ community, individuals are often discriminated against in courts owing to biased practices within the justice system. As part of this fight, we urge to ban treatments where therapists try to cure homosexual behaviour. No scientific research is known to show that these methods are capable of changing sexual orientation. There is also no empirical or scientific evidence that homosexuality or bisexuality is a disorder. Apart from the fact that this is not scientifically substantiated, this is also in conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

## B. Healthcare: “Good health and a resilient healthcare system for healthy citizens”

Government decisions should be based on scientific and data-driven approaches. We are proponents of smart healthcare and the utilization of data-driven approaches, innovation, smart devices and scientific knowledge. We prioritize the reduction of avoidable social, environmental and lifestyle related burdens on our health. The economic losses resulting from pollution-related (air pollution, road traffic, industry, wood burning, etc.) and lifestyle-related (smoking, obesity, unhealthy food, etc.) health burdens in Belgium are gigantic. Around 15% and 40% of the disease burden (disease, hospitalisations and deaths) is explained by environmental (involuntary exposure!) and lifestyle-related factors. A strong contributor to health inequalities being poverty and limited access to education. Those health inequalities should be mitigated by improving living conditions.

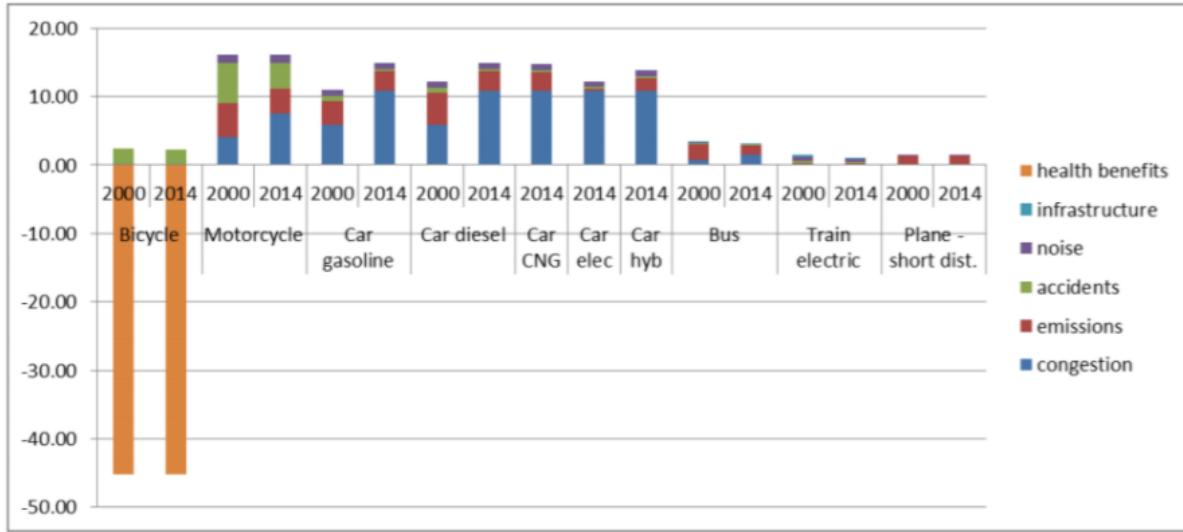
### B1. National Obesity Plan

Obesity is one of the most significant health risks in Belgium and Europe and is growing at an astonishing speed. Obesity (BMI >30) increased from around a 10% prevalence in 1997 to a 16% prevalence in 2018 (5) while overweight (BMI 25-30) rose from around 40% in 1997 to 49% in 2018 (5). Obesity negatively affects our health through various mechanisms and causes elevated disease burdens in terms of cardiovascular disorders, musculoskeletal disorders and diabetes (6).

Our national obesity plan aims to reduce the disease burden from obesity in Belgium by:

- **Mobility policies focused on active and multimodal transport:** mobility policies that are car-oriented often result in higher rates of obesity (7,8), while policies focussed on walking, cycling and multimodal transport (e.g. bike + train) tend to lower obesity rates in the population. Mobility policies can contribute to health gains by reducing obesity prevalence. In this regard, the government should also fund a **bike voucher for all citizens:** each citizen over 12 years old should receive, once every 3 years, a cheque of €75 that they can use to either give their existing bike an upgrade or to buy a new bike. The enormous health gains (figure 1) resulting from increased cycling justify this subsidy.

Figure 7: Marginal external costs of passenger transport (Flanders, 2000 and 2014), euro per 100 passenger km. Source: TML



- **Food labels:** improving the current work with food labels, such as the Nutri-Score.
- **Nudging food choices through varying tax levels:** the VAT (%) would increase from 6% to 12% or 21% for food that is either very unhealthy or has considerable negative impacts on the climate, such as beef, high-sugar drinks, drinks with a high percentage of alcohol, fast food and fried food in general.

As a compensation for the increased VAT on selected products, the VAT on other food products would be reduced from 6% to 0%. This would be the case for fruits, vegetables and chicken to encourage consumption of varied, tasty and nutritious meals at low prices, with a tax rate of 0%.

The CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions and Kcal per 100 g of food intake (as a proxy for weight gain, with specific criteria such as sugar and fat content specifically considered) can be used as criteria to determine if a food falls in the 0%, 6%, 12% or 21% VAT category.

- **Obligation to mention allergens on all foods, including restaurant menus:** food allergies are very prevalent in the population (around 5% of all people have at least one food allergy) and can be severe. Common allergens are nuts, peanuts, milk, shellfish and so on. These allergens should be mentioned on restaurant menus. This considerably increases comfort for allergic people and enables them to make healthy food choices, as they otherwise may be hesitant to try new, healthier or eco-friendly options such as vegan food, which may contain potential allergens. For example, nuts and peanuts, to which a considerable number of people are severely allergic, are often one of the core elements of a vegan diet. Food should be open and inclusive to everyone and, therefore, it is essential to transparently name allergens for all foods.
- **Government supported application to reduce obesity:** the government should either develop or otherwise enable and support private actors to develop an

application that is free to use for all citizens through which people can easily calculate the health impact and the ecological impact of their food choices.

## B2. Reduce the burden of hospitalisations and deaths from environmental pollution

Environmental pollution has a considerable impact on well-being and health with 13% of deaths in Europe attributable to environmental factors and environmental pollution (EEA report No 21/2019). Belgium is around the European average, with 13% of deaths in Belgium attributable to environmental factors and environmental pollution (EEA report No 21/2019). Evidence-based policies targeting the reduction of environmental stressors can considerably reduce sickness, hospitalisations and deaths (e.g. 5–10% of myocardial infarctions are caused by air pollution, >10% of type 2 diabetes cases are estimated to be caused by exposure to air-pollution and 20% of asthma cases are caused by traffic-related air pollution). This includes air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution and exposure to chemicals but also other environmental stresses such as a lack of availability of green space for city residents, the lack of safe cycling infrastructure and living close to a busy road with lots of traffic.

We propose a combative plan to reduce the health impacts of involuntary environmental pollution with:

- A primary focus on traffic-related air pollution (PM 2.5, NO<sub>2</sub>, black carbon, ultrafine particles, benzene, etc.), industry (PM 2.5) and residential warming by wood stoves (PM 2.5).
  - **Mobility is the most important sector causing a health burden within the broader environmental health burden.** Specific measures can include considerable additional investment in railways: more railway tracks, more trains, increased frequency and capacity of existing trains (including longer service hours), overall improving rail transport possibilities in urban, suburban and rural areas, including support for expansion of international rail travel, considerable increase cycling infrastructure investments, promote bicycle-sharing programs and car-sharing programs, ban advertisement on cars (similar to smoking) phase-out fossil fuel cars and Use improved mobility policy as a tool for improved urban planning and space allocation focussing on more green and recreational areas for people.

Those measures are elaborated upon in the mobility section of our policies.

- **Residential warming:** as for traffic, we want a **low-emission zone for wood stoves across Belgium**, with the phasing out of open wood stoves and other forms of the most polluting wood stoves that cause particulate pollution contributing to health burdens. There are

few guidelines available. The EPA 2020 Guidelines oblige all wood burning products to emit <2.5 g/hr of particulate matter. We would forbid all wood stoves with higher particulate matter emissions, as this would result in consistent and sustainable health benefits for all people. In contrast to traffic-related pollution, which has a major local component, a significant fraction of coarse particulate matter spreads over hundreds of kilometres and we would urge the EU and our neighbouring countries to implement similar measures. In Belgium, wood stoves are the responsibility of the regions, and we propose to implement the same measures described here in all regions.

- **Industry:** promote **sustainable and healthy entrepreneurship**. This will feature amongst other incentives in our **corporate tax reform proposal** (for this, see the section economic renaissance).

Those measures can all structurally reduce the pressure on our hospital system and decrease hospitalisations and death structurally while improving people's life.

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## B.3. An evidence-based smart drugs policy for the 21st century

**Volt Belgium proposes a new, pragmatic approach to deal with drugs. We should move away from receipts of the past that have not worked and strive for a balanced approach, acknowledging that the war on drugs has failed, recognizing that drugs can have harmful effects, accepting that individuals can have a certain degree of freedom in the use of substances as long as this freedom does not hinder fellow people's freedom and acknowledging the potential therapeutic effect of some drugs like weed under certain conditions.**

**We propose to:**

- **Medicinal Cannabis: Fully legalize the use of cannabis for medical needs**

Cannabis can have some specific benefits as medical treatment under certain conditions: it may have analgesic and anti-inflammatory effects, potentially of use in some diseases such as multiple sclerosis or pain management. Benefits and risks should be assessed and determined in the same way as for other medicines available on the market and as long as the risks are acceptable, doctors should have the freedom to prescribe medicines based on cannabis for medical conditions for which there is evidence in scientific literature that it may be beneficial for disease evolution. As for other medicines available on the market, doctors can have the freedom to prescribe the substance off-label in cases where deemed necessary and appropriate.

- **Legalize and regulate the sales and uses of cannabis for non-medical purposes**

We want to regulate the sales of the soft-drug weed/cannabis. Under this regulation, products based on marihuana (cannabis) can be sold in certain designated stores under control of the government. The government here guarantees that all the drugs sold in certified stores should meet the highest quality requirements, and be safe to use for the end-user. As for tobacco and alcohol, there will be taxes and excise duties levied on those cannabis-based products. Those products can only be sold and bought in those specific certified stores. Those cannabis stores that will be allowed in Belgium can be compared with the current system of selling alcohol in some Scandinavian countries like Norway and Sweden, where alcohol exceeding a certain percentage can only be bought in specific alcohol stores. For clarity, we propose to enact this model on the sales of cannabis only, not on the sales of alcohol and cigarettes who remain available everywhere where they are available today.

- **Work towards the decriminalization of hard drugs**

Portugal's progressive legislation and attitude towards drug addiction has shown that the current predominant model of a "war on drugs" has not and will not work. Volt intends to emulate Portugal's model and decriminalize all drug possession under a certain threshold. This will free up police resources to follow up on large scale drug smuggling and buyer victimization. It will enable European and Belgian societies to treat addiction as a medical and not a criminal problem.

- **Educate people, increased awareness campaigns and addiction programs**

At the same time, people should be aware of the numerous detrimental effects of drugs. Drugs like cannabis or cocaine do pose some risks on our health, such as increased cardiovascular risks. With the excise and taxes money raised from the sales of cannabis, the government will sharply increase awareness campaigns regarding the negative effects of all kinds of drugs and substances. In addition, there will be specifically more money dedicated to addiction programs to help people with an addiction to a certain substance to look for help in an appropriate and fast manner. People with an addiction should be helped profoundly and as soon as possible, maximally reducing any waiting times and waiting rows for those addiction programs. .

## C. Education: “Smart education to unlock a better future for us all”

Education is the foundation of a thriving (modern) society. We want people to be prepared to participate in an evolving European Union and world. Quality-learning is directly related to the formation of citizens. We want to empower and engage Belgians with emotional, financial and digital literacy. This makes them ‘citizens’ in the true meaning of the word, ready for the future. A key factor for social mobility and thus the reduction of inequalities is education. That’s why we think it is crucial to invest in. We aim for sustainable lifelong learning. This requires a healthy environment for all in both body and mind. Learning should be joyful and interesting to be able to keep students and staff motivated, while at the same time excelling in education rankings. Affordable and accessible education should be a basic right. Strengthening learning-communities will foster tomorrow’s leaders, entrepreneurs and workers.

**Education is the basis of a working democracy.** Having informed citizens able to engage in fructuous debates and develop a strong form of critical thinking is key to properly evaluate and elect its representatives at the local, national, and EU level.

### C1. EU Education

With more competencies being transferred to the European Union level and as a Pan-European party, we believe pupils and adults should know how the EU works, its history and their rights as EU citizens. However, EU education is highly fragmented. and recent EUrobarometer surveys showed a considerable willingness of Belgian citizens to learn more about the EU while the surveys also uncovered current knowledge on the EU is at a low level.

By learning more about the EU, we believe students will develop a critical and fully-informed understanding of the potential strengths and weaknesses of the EU, have a better understanding of the political system they live in and be empowered to actively participate and shape EU-level politics positively.

We Propose to:

- **Integrate EU Education** into the national curriculum as a learning goal for schools and adult education, such as teaching on what the EU entails (nature, history, development, etc...), what are the values and principles of the EU, what are the competences of the EU, how does democracy work in the EU, and some positive

and negatives aspects of the current integration process discussing possible solutions.

- **Integrate EU Citizenship Education** into the national curriculum as a learning goal for schools and adult education by teaching about citizens rights and obligations under EU law and how citizens can participate in European-level politics.

## C2. Curriculum reform

### C.2.1. Desinformation, media literacy, fake news and critical thinking

With democracies around the world threatened by the seemingly unstoppable onslaught of false information, conspiracy theories and bot, schools should be at the forefront of this fight by teaching about these issues starting at primary level.

The problem is, anyone can publish almost anything. It's not easy to strike the right balance between freedom of expression and citizens' right to accurate information. Jurisdictions around the world (USA, EU etc.) try to get to grips of the issues by e.g. regulating social and media platforms more stringently. However, there is only so much governments can do in terms of regulation and antitrust control that would not infringe on free speech or other rights of platforms and media companies. Even where this is achieved, consumers often don't understand their rights and how they could better control the nature and quality of information they receive.

Therefore, education is the best and most effective way to fight the spread of misinformation.

We Propose to:

- Teach children from a young age about **perils of disinformation and fake news** and how to properly analyse media content through **critical thinking**. Media literacy and critical thinking should be at the core of what is taught, across all subjects.
- Highlight the importance of quality sources when looking for information. Common evaluation criteria include: purpose and intended audience, **authority and credibility, accuracy and reliability, currency and timeliness**, and objectivity or bias.
- Explain older children and students how **social media algorithms** work, what is being done at EU level and elsewhere in the world and how they can influence behaviour.
- **Train teachers, civil servants, journalists, and librarians** so they can introduce information literacy programmes in schools and community centers so children and adults can start thinking about the reliability of the information they encounter.

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The goal is to form active, responsible citizens and voters. Thinking critically, fact checking, interpreting and evaluating all the information they receive, wherever it appears, is crucial.

## C 2.2.. Digital literacy

Volt believes that the world's future economic champions will be countries that master the digital transition and enable their businesses to quickly become digital proponents in a competitive environment. ICT in education improves engagement and knowledge retention; when ICT is integrated into lessons, students become more engaged in their work. This is because technology provides different opportunities to make learning **more fun and enjoyable**.

Moreover, given digitalization's role in the current transformation of advanced economies, ICT knowledge offers the promise of new business and **employment opportunities** along with higher productivity gains for said economies.

Today, basic ICT skills are **essential in almost all professional fields** and areas of activity and daily life. ICT specialist workers are in very high demand across a wide range of economic sectors. The professional field is growing twice as quickly as the economy as a whole, and there is already an acute and increasing shortfall in specialist staff.

We Propose to:

- **Teach students and adults more than just the basics of ICT** (Information and Communications Technology), so besides being able to operate a computer with an internet connection and utilize the most common software programs used in modern professional environments around Belgium and the world (Excel, Outlook, etc.), they also have some decent understanding and practice of programming, AI (Artificial Intelligence), Cloud computing, fintechs, and other new technologies.
- Inform students and adults about **common online scams, personal cybersecurity, and social media literacy**, its benefits and dangers (fake news is covered in section A.3.).
- Give students the **fundamentals on how to create tech startups** (also covered in section B.3.).
- **Make sure that schools and community centers are digitally equipped, connected**, and that classes are taught by knowledgeable teachers. This can be achieved through public-private partnerships to promote the use of ICT by encouraging private funding for hardware and software.

## C 2.3. Financial literacy

**Promoting financial literacy** is critical because it equips students and citizens with the knowledge and skills they need to manage money effectively in different settings throughout their lives. Without it, financial decisions and the actions ones take—or don't take—lack a solid foundation for success to have a **more prosperous life**.

Financial knowledge has important implications for the behavior of individuals and the quality of life but also for societies as a whole. Basic economic awareness is increasingly necessary for the conscious exercise of **economic citizenship** since often citizens are called upon to express an opinion on complex economic reforms.

We Propose to:

- **Have a national strategy to promote financial literacy** and its implementation to ensure that everyone has basic financial knowledge - whether acquired at the school or community centers - which is useful for making choices that are appropriate to their economic situation and consistent with their preferences. The Strategy does not intend to transform individuals into "experts" but to ensure that individuals have the basic tools necessary to orient themselves in today's complex economic world and make informed choices.
- **Partner with FSMA** (Belgian Financial Services and Markets Authority) to use its **Wikifin** program to encourage the introduction of financial education into the classroom and also its "**train the trainer**" program to qualify teachers to administer financial education classes.

## C2.4.. Entrepreneurship

Volt believes in empowered savvy citizens so they can be able to make the most of their talent and potential. To do so, we believe that learning about entrepreneurship is essential since it is not just about teaching the hard skills such as finance, management, marketing, and public speaking to create a business; it is about providing students with an **entrepreneurial mentality** that can serve them regardless of their career path. This is real-world learning that can set students up for long-term success both professionally as well as personally.

Additionally, established companies seek to **hire employees with an entrepreneurial mindset** to drive innovation, relevancy, and bring a competitive advantage to them. Not to mention that small companies and startups play a very important role in job creation.

We Propose to:

- Teach the basics of entrepreneurship to high school students, including subjects such as finance, marketing, and starting a business and "selling" it to potential investors. Beyond this, helping students develop a **startup mindset** where trying and failing is acceptable as well as having a proactive, flexible, go-getter positive attitude in their studies, career, and life.
- Help students develop innovative and proactive ways of thinking that are effective on **problem-solving as well as problem-prevention**, self-management, and working with people.
- Have **partnerships with the private sector** to train current teachers and civil servants to teach such classes in schools and in community centers throughout

Belgium and implement "**startup week**" where innovators can pitch their ideas to potential investors.

### C. 2.5. Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. EQ is essential for the well-functioning of the psychological and physical systems of individuals which determine the level of personal and professional success. The EU education system is highly fragmented when it comes to the EQ. For instance, in Belgium, the educational system lacks a well-defined EQ curriculum and practices which can be applied in all the regions (i.e., Flanders, Wallonia, & Brussels).

Volt proposes the creation of an effective bridge between EQ theory and mechanisms through which EQ can be implemented in schools from the early years. Volt has the goal to build up strategies that are secured, vigilant and resilient for future generations by creating a balance between the jobs and skills for tomorrow, as well as between the tech and humanistic spheres. Volt believes that the proposed policy will be effective in creating a balance between mind-body-soul relations which determines how successful individuals are in life.

Volt will concretely implement this by integrating EQ into the national curriculum for Belgian schools from primary and secondary school to high school to university cycles (just a follow up of the basis of EQ, they should achieve this by this stage).

We aim to achieve this by including following stakeholders in our action plan:

- Primary & Secondary schools
- Universities
- Local & National authorities
- EQ specialists (i.e., psychologists)

By doing this Volt aims that pupils and students will develop their abilities to understand, interpret and respond to the internal and external stimuli which trigger various emotions and feelings. Moreover, Volt wants to use EQ strategies to help students succeed academically and prevent bullying, while also having a better balance between physical and mental health. This is essential for ensuring a safe society, and the primary way to start doing this is by teaching EQ from younger ages and supporting long-term beneficial development for future generations and Europe as a whole.

### C. 2.6. Comprehensive first aid

The teaching of **first aid** and **mental health suicide prevention** techniques in schools and community centers is highly fragmented or not present in most cases. However, cardiovascular diseases and suicide are some of the main causes of death in Belgium.

Thus, giving the basic training on crisis response to adolescents in school and adults in community centers can empower them to make a positive difference in the life of family members, friends, or someone they know.

We Propose to:

- Train adolescents and adults practical **life-saving first aid techniques**, such as the use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), management of bleeding, and choking treatment, to prepare them to potentially save lives during a medical emergency.
- Introduce and train adolescents and adults to QRP so they can recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to **question, persuade, and refer** someone they know to help.
- Collaborate with the **Red Cross**, other non-profits, and **hospitals** to apply such training in schools and community centers.

## C. 3. Improving the education system for teachers and students

### C. 3.1. Improving the education system for teachers and students

Education should be a force for fostering social mobility and inclusion – in Belgium this is currently not the case.

In Flanders 8.000 children leave school annually without qualification. This is almost 12% of students, with the percentage rising to 22% in Antwerp. In the past 10 years there has barely been any improvement in these figures, despite the government's intention to halve the number of school leavers between 2009 and 2019. Those leaving school come overwhelmingly from poor families, especially where the parents are low-skilled and/or have a migration background. The OECD, in their PISA reports, have for years pointed out that Belgium has one of the highest levels of education inequality of all OECD countries. By the time they are 15, children from the poorest 25% of families lag 3 years behind their rich peers from the top 25%. Students that must repeat one or two school years are at particular risk of dropping out.

As a society we invest €90.000 per child, just for primary and secondary education. Young people that dropout of school without a qualification are on average unemployed for 60% of their working life. At a cost of €30.000 per year (in benefits, social housing, subsidies etc), this adds up to more than 700.000 per person over the next 40 years. The cost of secondary education is on average €9.300 per student per school year. Reducing the number of school dropouts will benefit the students, society and businesses who are having trouble finding qualified staff.

#### We propose:

1. **No school bills for families living in poverty.** While bills are capped for pre-school (€45) and primary education (€90), there is no cap in secondary schools, where students pay on average €1300 per year for books, projects, materials, extracurricular activities etc.

**2. Free tutoring for children** whose families live on a minimum wage or on benefits . Children who fall behind in learning are at risk of dropping out completely. With a cost of €9.300 per secondary school pupil per year, it makes sense to invest in additional tutoring for children that need it. Private paid tutoring is increasing the already considerable inequality in Belgian education.

**3. Collaboration between schools and organizations** that work with families in poverty to identify and fix obstacles to success in school. For example social housing organizations, OCMW, after-school clubs. Children drop out of school for various reasons, many of which have to do with their home situation. There are several organizations involved in helping those in poverty (more than 50 in Antwerp alone) but not all people in need find the necessary help.

**4. Encouraging teachers to apply for jobs in schools in lower income neighborhoods by offering a bonus.** This has been done successfully in Amsterdam, where teachers receive a bonus + an 8% increase in salary if they choose a school with a high number of students that need extra help. The Belgium amount is up to discussion.

Note:

<https://www.mo.be/analyse/onderwijs-wist-sociale-verschillen-niet-uit>

<https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/15-miljoen-euro-voor-amsterdamse-scholen-om-corona-achterstand-weg-te-werken~bd9006f41/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fduckduckgo.com%2E>

### C. 3.2. Improve teachers working conditions

Teachers have increasing workload and competing demands. Too much administrative paperwork, rapidly changing guidelines, and less freedom to teach. Parents expect teachers to nurture, be therapists, social workers and so much more. Meanwhile the average class size is increasing, teacher's shortages are becoming more alarming, and the profession of teaching is losing the recognition it rightfully deserves. Volt believes it is high time to break this cycle.

We Propose to:

- **Trust the teachers:** Teachers should teach, deploying their creativity and expertise. Teachers should be given clear and concise guidelines on the final learning goals, while enjoying the freedom to reach those goals as they see fit. To ensure teachers can actually teach, we reduce the administrative burden as a key priority.
- **Support the teachers:** There is a shortage of teachers across the country, and especially in Brussels. Classrooms are growing, reducing teachers' capacity to adequately provide each student with the attention they deserve. Volt proposes a hard cap on maximum class size, adapted to each school type. Moreover, we will develop the school's role as an anchor point in its community, tapping into a whole

community of potential volunteers standing ready to help. Finally, we want to make a career in education possible and exciting for professionals in other sectors, at any point of their career. Switching to a teacher's job should be made easier and more attractive, fully recognizing previous professional experience.

- **Value the teachers:** Less young graduates start their careers as teachers, and many of them do not stick around for lack of opportunity and recognition. Teaching should be valued and appreciated. To do so, Volt will invest in better training of teachers. Student-teachers should be able to start teaching part-time while being compensated. Master's degrees for elementary school teaching should be developed and encouraged. Finally, Volt wants to make the teacher's population more diverse. The overwhelming majority of teachers in primary and secondary education are white women. By encouraging a more diverse and balanced teacher workforce, more aspiring teachers from all backgrounds will identify with the profession and pursue a career in teaching.

## C. 4. More international oriented education - EU/global citizens

### C. 4.1. Intra-community exchange for Belgian teachers and high-school students

Many Belgians have little to no idea of what their fellow citizens from across the language border are up to. Besides (some) language classes in school, they encounter very few opportunities to speak the other Belgian languages in their daily lives. This contributes to a division of the country, a lack of comprehension, and, ultimately, unnecessary tensions in a country that is already too small to be divided.

The EU's Erasmus system provides university students with fantastic opportunities to grow as a person, make friendships, develop language skills and expand their horizons. On a greater scale, it reinforces European unity and cohesion. In much the same vein, Belgian students and teachers would greatly benefit from educational exchanges between communities. It is one way to strengthen links between the North and the South, with positive impacts for the individuals involved and society at large.

#### We Propose to:

- Set up a Belgian 'Erasmus' system for high school students aged between 16 and 18. During the fifth or sixth year of high school, students would go to a school of the other major language community for a duration of at least four weeks. More than just switching schools, students would be encouraged to attend local activities outside of school hours. Students of the German-speaking community would also be included.

- Encourage a similar exchange scheme for teachers, albeit for a longer duration. Teachers would go to teach in a school of another community for a few months, and experience what teaching is like 'on the other side'.
- Encourage this system through 'school pairings', where a school in one community would be paired to a school in another. This would ease the administrative and infrastructural burden of the scheme.

## C. 5. Excelling in education

### C. 5.1. Centralized exam to measure school performance

#### Increasing standards in Belgian education

Belgium used to rank at the top for excellence in math, science, and reading. The benchmark is the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) that is carried out every three years. In reading, mathematics and science Belgium used to lead the European rankings, but has now dropped out of the top 10. The difference between the highest and lowest performing pupils has also increased and is among the highest in the OECD. Flanders scores better than Wallonia, but as a whole standards are falling and inequality is increasing.

It is not a question of spending. Belgium spends more than almost any other OECD country on education, as a percentage of GDP. We spend twice as much per student as Estonia, a country that is second on the PISA ranking after Singapore.

In nearly all other OECD countries there is some type of standard central exam for secondary school students. In Belgium there are 'eindtermen' – standards that must be met, but exams and grading are done exclusively by the schools. This makes it difficult for students that want to apply to foreign universities, as there is no benchmark to assess them and grades from different schools cannot easily be compared.

#### We propose standard tests for secondary schools:

- a. The fractured nature of education in Belgium makes it hard to compare schools and student performance. A standard exam for at least mathematics and language would force schools to maintain a minimum standard in these subjects, while still leaving enough room for a teacher's personal input and student's interests in other subjects.
- b. A standard exam would help clever disadvantaged students. A diploma from some inner-city schools is now considered to be worth less than a diploma from an 'elite' school.
- c. 'Teach to test' can be a positive outcome if the exams test essential skills and knowledge.

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- d. Use the "Centrale Examencommissie" to administer the exams throughout Belgium to avoid extra burden to teachers and schools.
  - e. The exams could start by being applied at the end of primary and secondary school and then extend to every single school year as necessary.

Concerns; tutoring for high grades on the tests may lead to more inequality.

<https://www.tijd.be/politiek-economie/belgie/vlaanderen/vanaf-de-jaren-90-begon-het-al-fout-te-lopen-in-ons-onderwijs/10311279.html>

[https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2017/08/31/\\_ons-onderwijs-heeft-nood-aan-centrale-exams/](https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2017/08/31/_ons-onderwijs-heeft-nood-aan-centrale-exams/)

<https://www.voka.be/nieuws/onderwijs-groot-budget-dalende-kwaliteit>

## Pillar 3 - SOCIAL EQUALITY

### **“Together towards social inclusivity for all”**

We are the party of systemic inclusion. We aim for a society where no-one is left behind and where socio-economic inequalities are reduced. For us, politics should enable everyone to have a decent quality of life. We are defenders of human rights and do not tolerate any discrimination based on gender, race/origin and sexual orientation. We want to expand those rights and don't tolerate any rollback of those acquired universal rights. We seek to advocate and advance social policy and achieve this by genuinely listening to and empowering those who are disadvantaged by recognizing injustice better, connecting better with disadvantaged groups and developing solutions to empower the disadvantaged to be their own agents of change.

## Pillar 4 - ECONOMIC RENAISSANCE

### A. "An economy loved by entrepreneurs, employees and our planet"

The economic champions of the world will be the countries that master the digital and ecological transition. Companies and their employees are important stakeholders in achieving those goals and a better future. We will foster an entrepreneurial culture that celebrates entrepreneurship. We want Belgium to enable its businesses to quickly become digital frontrunners, and to embrace the ecological transition. We will promote entrepreneurship and innovation through investment whilst cutting the red tape that has prevented these businesses from emerging in Belgium. We support substantial investment in the improvement of digital, green and hard infrastructure to enable inclusive and sustainable economic growth that works for all people. Citizens are the beating heart of our economy. We want a sustainable, resilient economy. Therefore, we propose the development of an industrial policy at the European Union (EU) level that is prepared to deal with unexpected situations from financial crises to pandemics. We support the EU building a diversified economy with strategic autonomy while still being embedded in the global economy. As Volt, we stand for a level playing field in Europe's internal competition. We strongly oppose tax evasion and will close loopholes in the regulations to sharply curtail the extreme tax avoidance by corporations and individuals through European harmonization of fiscal policy and effective multilateralism.

We want to overhaul the Belgian economy, make it more inclusive and build stronger links between Wallonia and Flanders. The Belgian economy is marked by several structural features, which requires reform, and has recently suffered from lower than expected growth, a drop in unit labour productivity and low levels of investments. However, such reforms will only be successful within a strong European economy and a fully integrated Single Market. This needs to be addressed and to do so we will:

- Build the right environment to grow truly Belgian, European and global champions

- Bring Belgian employment law into the 21st century by taking into account the new ways of working as well as the new realities of mother- and fatherhood
- Invest into technology infrastructures to provide the business environment with high speed internet
- Implement distributed ledger technology where most impactful
- Update schooling as well as university curriculums to ensure future Belgians are better adapted to today's economy
- Strengthen entrepreneurship education and support innovators
- Get rid of rules that hamper innovation and entrepreneurial ambitions
- Implement digital education throughout our education system
- Establish an environment, where all citizens living in Belgium benefit from the investments in future technologies including economic migrants, refugees, older and younger generations and regions where economic growth has been blocked due to a lack of investment
- Implement rules for a sustainable financial sector that supports the growth of an inclusive and green/circular Belgian economy and
- Speed up efforts to promote sustainable economic growth while targeting the long-term ambitions of our society

We believe that these ambitions will support Belgian companies to be global champions with the competitive edge of being sustainable and best responding to customer, worker and investor needs. Concretely our goals are:

- **Volt wants a strong and inclusive Belgian economy** – pursuing equality throughout the entirety of society, and seek a cultural revolution against conventional sex and gender norms; attitudes that are often enhanced from infancy. Volt seeks to plug the gaps in social and biological education taught at schools, to promote a more understanding, accepting, and inclusive society, to break the cycle.
- **Parent equality in private and professional life** – Belgium is still relatively traditional in the way it is treating new parents. Mothers get up to 3-4 months, while fathers get no more than 10 days. Leaving the decision to the couple of how they want to organize parental leave would make allow families to decide for themselves rather than having the state tell Belgian families what to do. We therefore propose to allow equal paid maternity and paternity leave for a longer period up to 12 months and introduce family working time after parental leave to allow both parents to return to part-time work, with possible compensation for lower income during specific life stages (e.g. during early childhood, as provided for in the German Parental Leave Act).
- **Adapt the Belgian employment law for the 21st century** – greater emphasis needs to be put on the new challenges that the new economy is posing. It is no longer 9 to 5, instead there are new ways of working and being more flexible in your own work as long as you deliver. While rules for work flexibility exist, we want to help change the culture of work more and allow Belgian employees to take full advantage of their flexibility. Volt will reduce the costs of employing people in Belgium and refocus skills training towards the sectors that need them the most whilst ensuring that we are fully integrating new talented arrivals.

- **Invest in digital infrastructure** – to equip Belgium with a 21st century workforce, Volt will push for expanding high-speed internet across the country into rural and urban areas. Faster and greater access to internet is a proven factor in increasing economic growth, fostering innovation and connecting business and people economically.
- **Support technologies that are shaping the future of work** – Volt will support innovative companies across all of Belgium. Given the tremendous impact artificial intelligence and distributed ledger technology (DLT) will have on the future of our societies and economies, Volt will use dedicated EU funding schemes, amongst others, to support innovation in established companies as well as in young start-ups to develop ethical artificial intelligence and smart DLT.
- **Teach digital** – Volt will ensure that digital education is a core to the curriculum throughout our education system. In conjunction with the investments in digital infrastructure and innovation, Volt will set out to equip future Belgian generations with the skills and tools needed to succeed when AI and DLT will revolutionise the way we work. Current, and future generations need to be equipped with new skills that are not replaceable by AI or machines. Innovations have always resulted in new opportunities, Volt will make sure that Belgian citizens are able to benefit the most from these are not left behind.
- **Strengthen the economic cooperation between Belgian regions** – To promote a strong Belgian society and economy, it is essential to overcome the language barriers between citizens. We believe that language lessons in Dutch, German, French and English should start at an earlier age to help bridge cultural gaps and provide for more exchanges between regions and also foster more inclusiveness.
- **Work towards greater inclusion of migrants and refugees**, who can become, if welcomed adequately and in a structured way, a core part of our society and economy. Providing language and vocational training, apprenticeships and traineeships for incoming refugees, as well as fostering an active dialogue between communities, would help improve economic, cultural and social integration.
- **Tackle social exclusion, regenerate communities, and put in place an ambitious programme of public and private investment in economically disadvantaged areas** – this is most needed in less economically strong areas such as parts of Brussels (Anderlecht, Molenbeek, Schaerbeek, St. Josse) and in post-industrial area of Wallonia.
- **Educate** – One of the most important aims of education is to transform young people into citizens. Volt stands for a revival of democracy, and for this, targeted education is essential. Philosophical attainment targets are indispensable for the following reasons:
  - a. Especially the art of arguing and piercing through false reasonings must be given a clear place in the general formation of future generations. Especially in a time of 'fake news' and more citizen participation in policy making is of great importance.
  - b. Studies also indicate that philosophising has a positive impact on both the intellectual and emotional capacities of students.

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- c. Western philosophy is a part of our cultural heritage that must not be lost. In addition, insight into philosophies originating on other continents can promote insight into other cultures and tolerance.

## 1. Tax reform: Labour Tax

To face the challenges of the future, and put citizens central in society and the economy, we want a **tax shift from taxes on labor to taxes on pollution, health burdens and extreme wealth**. Lowering the taxes on labor enables citizens to strive and proceed in a future society. It provides maximum freedom to people to spend money on what they prefer, however in the other tax domains they are nudged to spend money in ways not harmful for our planet or fellow citizens' health.

We are achieving this by **increasing the tax-free-minimum**, the amount of income on which no taxes at all should be paid. Currently, this amount is € 9050 on an annual basis, we propose to considerably increase this amount to at least € 12.000, which would correspond to a tax-free monthly income of € 1000. This tax cut would be financed through the introduction of a capital gain tax and an increase of taxes on pollution and health burdens. Increasing the tax-free minimum income ensures that in absolute terms all wages increase, and in relative terms the lower and middle-income wages have the highest percentage increase.

Further, currently the tax free minimum is increased in the case of **having children**. And it is relatively more increased if you have more than one child (your 2nd child delivers you a larger increase in tax-free income than your 1st child and so on...). We want to harmonize this system, and give the same increase in tax-free income for each child equally. Currently, the additional tax free amount is € 1650 for the first child, € 2590 for the 2nd child, € 5260 for the third child, ... . We propose to harmonize this system and give an increase in tax-free income of around € 2500 for each child or slightly higher. The purpose of this latter change is having a **budget-neutral operation**, keeping child subsidies at a constant level.

## 2. Tax reform: Corporate Tax

### A taxation system that rewards value added to the society and the environment

The importance of maintaining a fair society and protecting the environment is growing as the world faces immense challenges linked to human activity and economic development. Current corporate tax rates tend to indiscriminately apply to profit without factoring in corporations' contribution to the society and the environment before generating their profits. Volt believes in a smart taxation system that rewards corporations based on their total contribution.

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The current CIT in Belgium is 25% with only an exception made for SMEs which attract a lower tax rate of 20%. Volt proposes using sliding scales between 15% and 35% based on contribution to: **employment, protection of the environment, health and education** and profit margins. Each economic sector and industry will have their own specificities and therefore their own sliding scale reflecting the characteristics of their sector. A dedicated governmental office would be set up to define standard metrics, if possible internationally recognised, and calibrate them per economic sector. Adapted metrics per sector would maintain a level playing across the economy avoiding thereby favouring one key sector against another.

**Creation of employment:** corporations that employ a larger number of people or generate employment in economically disadvantaged regions will see a reduction in their tax rate commensurate with the average ratio between payroll and turnover times the number of employees. The objective of this metric is to reward a high remuneration of labour both in terms of salaries but also number of employees per unit of revenue.

**Contribution to education and new technologies:** corporations that invest in education and new technologies, for instance through their research and development programmes, will see a reduction in their tax rate commensurate with the ratio between their investment and their turnover. This could be typically achieved in partnership with schools and universities. The objective would be to measure the contribution per unit of revenue.

**Protection of the environment:** corporations can improve the environment by reducing the environmental impact of their economic activity and by contributing to initiatives aiming at protecting the environment. A reduction in tax rate will be granted for companies that minimise their level of pollution, employ service providers meeting high ESG standards and require their shareholders to meet high ESG standards. The ratio between shareholder equity and turnover multiplied by an ESG grade will give a metric of the level of quality investment per unit of revenue. Furthermore investments aiming at improving the environmental impact will be tax deductible.

### Volt wants to promote sustainable entrepreneurship.

For new companies turning a profit for the first time, Volt proposes to apply the lowest corporate income tax rates of 15% for two years. For such new companies also achieving the highest contribution rates in the sliding scale no income tax will be due for the first four years of positive profit if the return on equity remains below 5%.

### 3. Tax reform: Property Tax

According to experts, property taxes are the most efficient kinds of taxes. They distort behavior less for first-time homeowners, and are more growth friendly than taxes on income, employment, or even consumption. Additionally, they are one of the easiest taxes to be collected since they give little room for tax evasion and extreme tax avoidance schemes if the real estate values are well-assessed.

At the same time, there has been considerable price increases in the housing market of developed countries, both for ownership as for rental. This increase has been significantly larger than average salary growth, keeping middle-class families struggling to pay one of the most essential living costs after food.

Among many reasons for this housing price growth is price speculation and ownership concentration by big financial and property market companies. This ownership concentration makes renting houses overpriced and artificially drives up the price in the housing market.

We propose to:

- Incentivize the **reduction of some of the regional and municipal property taxes** for first-time home owners to foster popular home ownership.
- **Compensate** this revenue reduction with an **increase in property taxes for third homes** (and subsequent ones) to disincentivize home ownership concentration and speculation that increases housing and rent prices for the average citizen.
- Increase in property **taxes for overseas entities** that/who do not have residency in Belgium to **avoid the formation of real estate asset bubbles** due to high liquidity in foreign financial markets.
- **Stimulate Smart Living through the property tax.** The reformed property tax should incentivize reduced concretisation of earth's surface and allow future houses to be built in a way good for the planet. Not everyone has to live in an apartment but we explore ways to stimulate pleasant and efficient living (e.g. shared gardens, co-housing, ...)

### 4. Tax reform: Capital gain tax

Together with climate change, rising inequality will arguably be the major challenge to our societies in the coming decades. The nefarious effects of high inequality have been pointed out by many researchers. In Volt we consider excessive inequality to be undesirable, even though total equality is not something that Volt pursues.

One of the major drivers of accelerating inequality is the divergence in the rate of growth of income earned through work versus income generated by rents acquired through the ownership of capital. If we want to tackle inequality, we will have to find a better balance between the two. The government's strongest tool to intervene is taxation.

Therefore, we as Volt strive to implement a capital gains tax for individuals, which currently does not exist in Belgium. A capital gain is the appreciation in value of an asset between the moment an asset is obtained and the sale of that asset. Volt's aim is not necessarily to increase the government's budget, but to ensure fairness in the burden of taxation. Trying to escape the capital gains tax must be considered as defrauding the government similar to the reasoning behind undeclared labour. It is up to the government to close the legal backdoors through which taxation can be escaped.

We may well face a future of slow to non-existent growth, and need economic/fiscal policies adapted to that. In the old system, for inequality to be reduced we needed economic growth – assuming that wages rise at a similar pace to the economy – higher than the increase of rents from capital investments. An unlikely future prospect, as this is a historical anomaly of the decades following WWII. Therefore, it is paramount that capital gains are integrated into the tax base.

Volt's ultimate goal is to go a step further and to implement a system of personal taxation that does not discriminate between labour or capital, but combines all sources of income and progressively taxes these as one. A capital gains tax would be a first step to achieve this objective.

The main purpose of Volt is to use the income from the capital gain tax to decrease taxes on labour. This will encourage effort and work. Therefore, possibly spurring innovation, increasing employment.

#### Requirements for the tax

- It should be progressive: essential for fairness; people generally accept taxes when they feel they're fair and everybody contributes.
- It must be uniformly applied to all gains from capital: all capital gains – without regard to their specific source – should be added together. This total should be taxed.
- Losses on specific investments may be deducted from the total sum of a person's capital gains in a given fiscal year, but the losses in years with a negative total income from capital cannot be deducted from capital gains taxes in future years. (In

the same way that a person who has not worked for a time cannot deduct his hypothetical loss of income during that time from his wage taxes when he/she has found a job. We all share the negative consequences of economic downturns, but the people owning capital should not disproportionately profit when the economy gets going again)

- Risk taking should not be discouraged by taxation, to achieve this we require a flexible and easily accessible system of bankruptcy which will be set up by the government. This swift bankruptcy system will be made possible through fair capital taxation when gains on capital are generated.
- To encourage individuals to invest in start-up companies, an exemption on capital gains taxation on the capital invested in the first X amount of years of a new enterprise can be allowed.
- We do not want to hit people's retirement savings. But the progressiveness of the capital gains tax plays a role here, as well as exemption of taxation in certain strictly regulated cases, capped at a certain amount (eg. money invested in pension funds, or a primary residence).
- When an asset on which the capital gain is not realised is inherited, the beneficiary will be liable to pay a capital gains tax upon the sale of that asset which will be calculated from the moment that asset was obtained by the bequeather.
- The government must set up a system that is capable of assessing an individual's capital so it can be taxed at a fair rate.

More background information about the capital gain tax can be found in [THIS DOCUMENT](#)

## Pillar 5 - GLOBAL BALANCE

### A.General: "Towards a more fair, equitable and ecological world"

The future of humanity is in a critical state. From climate change to migration, from health to digital transformation, the challenges

we face are immense. We need European solutions for most of those challenges. Belgium's contribution should be state-of-the art in regard to data-driven solutions and science-based investments and guide the EU towards a more equitable future. The transition to a sustainable economy and society is essential and is also a tool to reduce inequalities; we must take urgent and radical steps to reduce our carbon footprint and safeguard the future of our ecosystem for the generations to come. From mobility to air quality, from energy to waste management, from agriculture to food security, these challenges are societal and require each and every one of us to contribute. As champions of the circular economy, we will deploy a partnership model to ensure that all stakeholders work in collaboration to achieve lasting change to save our environment, our planet and our health.

## A1. Smart and Sustainable mobility

Annually, millions of euros are lost by traffic congestion in Belgium. About 50,000 people are wounded due to a traffic incident<sup>3</sup>. In conjunction with the negative impact of air pollution (see below) the driving of cars across cities and motorways is exacerbating the Belgian healthcare system with costs continuing to remain high for the Belgian state, which it is not able invest into education, digital infrastructure or public infrastructure.

Car-concentrated infrastructure requires a lot of space, reducing the space available for people, recreational green areas whilst at the same time increasing the percentage of concrete surface creating urban heat islands, in particular in cities like Brussels<sup>4</sup>.

Our Belgian state will rethink its mobility plan. It has to shift its transport infrastructure towards non-car means of transport in order to improve air quality and reduce the negative effects and ensure that Belgium is in the future a healthier society. It also enables increased livability of cities and suburbs with more space for people by creating more recreational areas. As a result of sharply reduced costs for congestion, spatial occupation and healthcare, those measures will generate more economic growth.

To achieve this, Volt suggests policies and projects that build on supporting citizens rather than punishing them. We want to bring positive changes such as more affordable public transport, more and cheap or free bike sharing systems, more and safer cycling infrastructures including more cycling highways, subsidising of car sharing systems and sufficient availability of electric chargers. We will not introduce new or additional taxes on people who do not have another choice than use a car. Instead we focus on providing

<sup>3</sup> <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/mobility/traffic/road-accidents>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150420\\_01639850](http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150420_01639850)

alternatives to people as possible in order to achieve the Paris COP21 climate goals, to improve Belgium's WHO air pollution targets and increase economic growth. Volt proposes to:

- **Significantly increase the budget for public transport** – increased investments in new train connections are needed to enable more people to leave their cars at home. Trains should also be made more affordable<sup>5</sup>. We aim both for the extension of urban and suburban networks, as well as new connections in rural areas that are often disconnected from the railway transport network<sup>6</sup>. International train travel should also be made more affordable. Belgium should take the initiative to push for less expensive high-speed connections and work together with its European partners to expand high-speed international train connections.
- **A new vision for cars** – we will get rid of bad inherited systems annually subsidising company cars with billions of euros. Instead, we want to invest in systems of the future, by enabling and promoting more electric car sharing systems<sup>7</sup>. We also aim for sufficient availability of electric car charging stations to make its use more user-friendly for people who buy an electric car.
- **Significantly increase investments in cycling infrastructure** – increased and sufficient investments in bicycle infrastructures are needed to get a higher percentage of people on the bike and to increase traffic safety for people riding a bike. We propose a connected network of cycling highways across Belgium<sup>8</sup>. We will make these highways more secure by introducing separate lines for usual bikes and electric bikes to reduce conflicts or dangerous traffic situations between manual bikers and fast-bikers. We also aim for an increased and better network of bike sharing systems across Belgium that are cheap and easy to use<sup>9</sup>.
- **Use improved mobility policy as a tool for improved urban planning and space allocation** – currently, an overwhelming part of space in cities is occupied by cars, both for driving and parking. Sufficient public transportation, bike sharing systems and (electric) car sharing systems will free up space in cities and suburbs. This will allow for urban redevelopment and rehabilitation of city centres and suburbs<sup>10</sup> with more attention for social (including increased social contacts) and environmental aspects, including more space for people and green areas. The latter can also facilitate the reduction of urban heat islands.
- **Low Emission Zones.** We propose to expand the Brussels emissions zone system to the whole of Belgium to remove the most polluting cars from the streets everywhere. In our proposal, all cars with Euronorm 0, I, II, III and IV would be prohibited from 2025 onwards. From 2030 onwards, Euronorm V would be forbidden. In addition, from 2030, no fossil fuel cars or hybrid cars would be permitted to be sold, bought or registered in Belgium. From 2035, it would be

<sup>5</sup> Also national prices of train tickets in Belgium - currently most of the time higher compared to the fuel cost of a car with even one passenger - should be lowered. The cost for doing this is reasonably low (the yearly ticket revenue of the NMBS is only € 797 million per year, which is for example far less than the annual subsidies for company cars).

<sup>6</sup> Lalivé, R. et al., Does Supporting Passenger Railways Reduce Road Traffic Externalities? (2012) available at: [http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/newsroom/reports/2012/Passenger\\_Railways\\_Subsidy.pdf](http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/newsroom/reports/2012/Passenger_Railways_Subsidy.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Studies indicate each shared car can replace 5 to 15 private cars and can reduce the share of car transportation.

<https://www.transportenvironment.org/sites/te/files/publications/Does-sharing-cars-really-reduce-car-use-June%202017.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Buekers, J., et al., Health impact model for modal shift from car use to cycling or walking in Flanders: application to two bicycle highways. Journal of Transport & Health (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2015.08.003>

<sup>9</sup> Studies have shown that more people on bikes (and e-bikes) create a net economic gain for society (benefits-costs), in contrast to people driving cars what is - despite tax benefits - a net cost for society.

<sup>10</sup> Transport Environment, Does sharing cars really reduce car use?, (2017) available at: <https://www.transportenvironment.org/sites/te/files/publications/Does-sharing-cars-really-reduce-car-use-June%202017.pdf>

forbidden to drive fossil fuel cars or hybrid cars on the streets; only fully electric cars would be allowed from 2035 onwards. This would both improve people's health and bring us closer to climate neutrality; however, in addition to a shift to electric cars, an overall reduction of car use is still needed to reduce all health burdens.

## A2. An energy transition without taboos - nuclear energy policy

### Vision and purpose

The purpose of this policy is for **Volt Belgium to have a clear standpoint** on the topic of **Nuclear Energy** within the Belgium context in line with the European Mapping of Policies.

Volt Belgium firmly believes that **Nuclear Energy answers 5** of the main components of the Global Balance Challenge of Volt Europa.

1. It is a **safe, reliable, stable** and **readily available** source of Energy
2. It **guarantees Energy independence** (of Belgium and of the EU) from any geopolitical or weather situation. The fuel<sup>11</sup> can easily be accumulated and stored into **strategic reserves** for decades (e.g. *the French Nuclear industry has enough Uranium reserves for 30 years<sup>12</sup> of continuous operation<sup>13</sup> of all its Nuclear Power Plants, with 3 to 5 years<sup>14</sup> of operations directly on its soil, on top of the fuel already in operating reactors*).
3. When talking about **Long Term Operations** (LTO)<sup>15</sup> of Nuclear Power Plants (like it is the case in Belgium today<sup>16</sup>), it is in line with the principle of circular economy. The current plants can easily operate for another 20 to 40 years, meaning that **less waste** would be generated, **less raw materials** would be required (steel, concrete, etc.) and it would have the **smallest footprint** than any other source of energy.
4. It also ensures an affordable and stable cost structure for electricity generation, certainly for already operational power plants, as the economics of those are known, with very little uncertainties (you don't have a vast and complex construction project to undergo, like you do in the case of new build projects).
5. It **does not produce any CO2 emissions** nor **any other harmful emissions** that many alternative dispatchable Energy sources produce (as those are mainly fossil fuels). CO2 is only emitted by the construction of new plants (mostly from the chemical reactions to make concrete) as well as in the mining operations of uranium<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.orano.group/fr/decodage/tout-savoir-sur-l-uranium>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sfen.org/rqn/point-projet-astrid-recherches-multi-recyclage-poursuivent/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/amendements/2230/AN/896.asp>

<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.orano.group/fr/decodage/nucleaire-un-atout-pour-l-independance-energetique-de-la-france>

<sup>15</sup>Detailed information and reports of the LTO of Doel 1&2 and Tihange 1:

<https://afcn.fgov.be/fr/dossiers/centrales-nucleaires-en-belgique/exploitation-long-terme-lto-des-centrales-nucleaires>

<sup>16</sup> Position of the Federal Nuclear Control Agency on the LTO of Doel 4 and Tiange 3:

<https://afcn.fgov.be/fr/dossiers/centrales-nucleaires-en-belgique/exploitation-long-terme-lto-des-centrales-nucleaires-0>

## Policy proposal for the Belgian 2024 Electoral Program

Volt Belgium would **repeal** the law of the **31st of January 2003** (and not amend it).

Volt would make a new legislative proposal to have a clear framework for the Nuclear Power industry. This new law could be entitled "*Nuclear Energy for a Sustainable Future*".

The details of this new legislation shall be developed further with all Volt Belgium members in the lead up to the 2024 parliamentary elections and would of course be discussed in a Parliamentary Commission if it is elected in the Belgian Parliament in 2024.

Volt Belgium's core policy vision are based and can be summarised in the following points:

1. Allow the **operation of existing nuclear power plants** for as long as it is technically feasible whilst always adhering to the highest levels of **nuclear safety**.
2. **Create a legislative environment** where private operator would be **interested to build** and operate potential **new nuclear power plants**;
3. Develop and promote the **recycling of spent nuclear fuel** in order to **reduce** the amount of radioactive **waste** as well as reduce the amount of **fresh** (natural) **uranium** needed for energy generation;
4. Nuclear energy generation should contribute more to the Belgian federal budget in order to **promote R&D on new energy projects**. The **special nuclear tax** levied since 2013 should be reinforced and used for Research and Development in new Energy Projects.
5. **Commit on a long term strategy** for long lived radioactive waste at a European level. This will ensure to have the best sites for deep geological repository, but also to have a strategy for the reuse and recycling of what is now considered waste but could be used as fuel in the future.

Volt's policy wants to put nuclear and the technological developments around nuclear energy, plant safety, radioactive waste treatments & recycling, and the arrival of fusion at the heart of its vision and political strategy.

Belgium was also the pioneer of spent fuel recycling processes in the past. These were banned in the context of the Nuclear phase-out, and most of these industries and processes were sold to French multinationals under the impulse of the National Government.

Volt wants to reactivate the industrial sector of nuclear spent fuel recycling. This will allow a reduction of the need for natural Uranium, and create even more jobs in the national nuclear industry. It also further reduces the impact on the environment.

## Legislative Proposals

Volt Belgium proposes the following main Articles to ensure safe and reliable Nuclear Energy in Belgium:

## Article 1 - Nuclear Energy to be a key part of Belgium's Electricity mix

Nuclear Energy is a key part of Belgium's electricity mix, and should remain as such together with variable renewable energies (solar and wind). Demand response strategies as well as efficient storage systems (such as Coo), home and community batteries, V2G (Vehicle-to-Grid), just to state a few, and all other promising solutions for grid load balancing should be supported in order to allow the integration of these variable energies into the electricity mix.

## Article 2 - Repeal the law of 2003 and enable a safe environment for Nuclear Operators

To enable this, the exploitation of Nuclear Reactors needs to be allowed without any sunset clause. This goes without saying that constant and independent supervision of the Federal Agency for Nuclear Control, in order to ensure the highest level of safety and adhere to the strictest international standard, needs to be guaranteed. Operating Permits will need to be updated and revised every 10 years under the supervision of this independent Agency.

In order to fulfil this intention, Volt would initiate a vote in parliament to repeal the law of 31 January 2003 and replace it with a specific law outlining the conditions for the industrial use of Nuclear Energy for electricity generation as well as green/pink Hydrogen.

## Article 3 - Ensure economic viability of Nuclear Energy without putting the burden on public finances

Negotiate with the current operator to ensure security of supply of the nation, whilst looking for alternative concessionaires in order to take over the industrial exploitation of the Nuclear Power Plants if the current operator isn't industrially interested to pursue a purpose in Nuclear Energy.

## Article 4 - Create a new legal framework for Nuclear Energy

This new law would allow the construction of new nuclear fission reactors according to the government's strategic plans for energy generation (in the same way that tenders are setup for Off-Shore wind farms).

The framework would foster an investment friendly environment for novel ideas in energy generation and management. Volt wants to ensure that all energy production technology gets a fair chance, whilst ensuring its sustainability and limited environmental impact (whether that is on climate change, biodiversity or human health).

## Article 5 – Using Nuclear as the source of financing for new energy sources

Nuclear should also not hinder the development of additional or alternative solutions. Therefore, the existing "*rente nucléaire*"/*"nucleaire rente"* tax will be exclusively used towards the development of new energy solutions, including fusion, the optimisation and

development and implementation of existing solutions, as well as the development of novel non-nuclear based solutions (R&D).

For more **background information and considerations** for this policy, you can have a look at [The Appendix Document to this Policy Proposal](#)

### A.3. Catapult Belgium towards a Circular Economy

Government authorities, citizens and businesses have to join forces to fully seize the growth and development opportunities in the transition to a circular economy. Our goal is a state that pursues green growth solutions and innovative ideas to create a better environment for its citizens and business while creating jobs and improve every citizens' life quality.

Important efforts have been undertaken in Belgium to implement its circular economy, yet the country has fallen short in comparison to its performance in 2015. The main reason is the low implementation of eco-innovation, the lack of participatory approaches to innovate with and for citizens and the limited support for the development of an enabling business environment.

Volt proposes to empower citizens, businesses, academia and knowledge centers to innovate together fostering a sense of policy ownership that can lead to more sustainable and lasting change. Volt will also create a waste reduction roadmap gathering all stakeholders of the waste sector.

- **Partnership for the circular economy** – the public sector should act as facilitator favoring the exchange of ideas and initiatives to pursue the transition to circular economy. It should set up a platform involving the main actors and encourage the implementation of participatory projects to test different ways for the public sector to catalyse the transition to a circular economy.
- **Waste reduction roadmap** – waste sector actors should convey around a common roadmap for developing the sector towards a circular economy and a circular resource market. The scope of the roadmap is to define an innovative approach of "production- consumption-waste": from the design phase to the products' end of life, making it possible to reduce inputs, reuse and recycle secondary or wasted material at any stage. Furthermore the synergy between waste actors will further develop a circular and integrated resource market.
- **Spurring eco-innovation** – further research is needed to rethink products and develop new ones together with creative business models<sup>17</sup>. Together with its regions and its communities Belgium should launch an international science hub for knowledge and talent to meet, thrive and flourish.
- **Rethinking food systems** – a complete circular economy is not only about material and products but also about food. Our current dietary habits are contributing to the unreasonable waste of resources and ecological problems, as one third of purchased food is lost in supply chain every year and the production of our food requires the largest consumption of natural resources as fresh water<sup>18</sup>. Volt

<sup>17</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/indicators/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/indicators/index_en)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/7/2/1429>

propose to define a common food strategy with a focus on a circular economy approach to halve its food waste by 2030, by boosting food donation, reduce packaging (especially plastic packaging), facilitate the consumption of ugly fruit and vegetables<sup>19</sup>.

The mentioned actions will also lead to the ban plastics, reduce water and soil consumption as well as decrease environmental pollution<sup>20</sup>.

#### A4. An air quality plan that saves lives

Belgium performs poorly in terms of air quality compared to other EU countries. According to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), Belgium has one of the worst air quality in Europe and continuously exceeds emissions limits<sup>21</sup>.

Volt proposes an ambitious plan to tackle air pollution. Volt will contribute to initiatives for reducing the air pollution and by 2020 will set an ambitious plan for lowering target values complying with the National Emission Ceiling (NEC) Directive. We also support initiatives such as sensor networks for air quality and projects such as Curieuzezen where citizens can be highly involved in providing valuable data to public measurement efforts to ensure that efforts are made to reduce air pollution:

- **Better implementation of regulation** – it is necessary to understand current legislative gaps, and to set clear legislative and non-legislative measure in coordination between state, regions and cities for all major pollutants.
- **Deploy digital and technological solution to facilitate the monitoring and control of emission, enforce regulation and measures, pursue polluters** – to fully exploit the potential of technological development, Belgium should increase the collaboration with knowledge centers to better understand and model the impact of major pollutants on human health.
- **New regulations to reduce major pollutants** – to get back down to the limits that are proposed by the WHO, additional regulation and greater ambition is needed. This includes reglementations on transportation, residential warming with wood stoves and agriculture and industry.
- **Improved finance for air quality research and monitoring** – investing is crucial for Belgium to improve its air quality. Investment should be mobilised for infrastructures. (e.g. that government institutes are able to buy monitoring instruments such as instruments for real-time monitoring of particulate matter composition and instruments to improve the collection of real-time traffic emission data to improve air pollution models).

<sup>19</sup> Sustainability, Cutting Food Waste through Cooperation along the Food Supply Chain, available at: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Save Food: Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, available at <http://www.fao.org/save-food/resources/keyfindings/en/>

<sup>20</sup> OECD, Managing water sustainably is key to the future of food and, last accessed 19.03.2019, available at: agriculture <http://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/water-and-agriculture/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.irceline.be/news/environmental-performance-index-epi-does-belgium-have-europes-worst-air-quality>

## B. "Local Pillar: Citizen Centered Urban Spaces"

As the world recovers from COVID-19, we want to accelerate the transformation of urban spaces into inclusive and sustainable places where citizens' wellbeing is prioritized. Empty offices will be transformed into green spaces for recreation, social housing through incentives for sustainable entrepreneurship. We will further improve city health by significantly reducing traffic and pollution, setting norms on industry and, where feasible, transforming roads into green spaces and pedestrian and cycling zones.

Citizens are demanding a change: students and pupils are asking for a better environmental future, bike riders for a more sustainable mobility able to increase traffic safety and improve air quality while reducing traffic congestions, households to cut energy costs, citizens for a more healthier and liveable country. Shift to a low-carbon and circular economy, foster investment in renewable energies, move to a smart and efficient mobility and transform our approach to production, consumption and waste, is not only possible, but necessary and achievable.

Our current economic model is outdated and based on the unsustainable use of finite resources (environmental as well as human) - create value and then waste. Together with an individual-oriented vision on mobility (promotion of private cars, insufficient investments in public transport), this wasteful model has presented severe limitations and has had adverse ramifications on our environment.

At the same time, air pollution<sup>22</sup> in Belgium is leading to more than 11,000 premature deaths in Belgium as a result of cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory health deficits and other significant health problems<sup>23</sup>.

Our proposed changes do not occur in isolation, but rather in a broader joint European effort to build a sustainable Europe. Volt proposes positive measures with a significant impact such as more investments in sustainable mobility and circular economy, that can foster a new green deal.

### B1. 15-minute Cities

This is a general evidence-based framework to implement 15-minutes cities across Belgium. It allows for local flexibility and puts citizen participation at the heart of urban transformation.

#### General idea & principles

<sup>22</sup> Of which car & truck transport is one of the major causes - on car-free sundays air pollutant concentrations of nitrogen dioxide , black carbon and ultrafine particulate matter are >50% lower compared to an average Sunday (The Lancet Commission on pollution and health 2017)

<sup>23</sup> The European Environment Agency (EEA) in its report concerning air quality in Europe, reveals that in 2015, in Belgium, 11,200 people died prematurely due to the effects of air pollution. Moreover, in 2018 Belgium has been referred to the Court of Justice, because it has been failing to respect the agreed air quality limit values and for failing to take appropriate measures to keep exceedance periods as short as possible.

During the last decades, vicious cycles of road expansions and new parking spots to accommodate car traffic rather than expanding investments into modes that are efficient users of road space, such as public transit, walking and cycling, converted streets into unhealthy pass throughs. We can convert streets from places where people move through to healthy places where people enjoy being, enjoy living, enjoy working and can easily reach essential functions within a walkable distance.

### **What does a 15-minute city have?**

Walkable and bikeable neighborhoods need to be the norm, not the exception. They need to be **accessible financially, not just physically**. To make these places vastly more common, the simple yet powerful 15-minute city concept needs to occupy a central role in our urban discussions. It is the urban planning equivalent of **human-centered design**: start by looking at where an individual lives and where they need to get to, and figure out how to retool our neighborhoods and cities to get the kind of “hyper proximity” and ease of access that makes urban living great. Also **public transportation should be accessible and affordable for all**: while the 15-minute city provides all essential services nearby, people should still be able to travel, visit friends and discover places.

The 15-minute city requires minimal travel among housing, offices, restaurants, parks, hospitals, public transport hubs and cultural venues. Each neighborhood should fulfil **six social functions: Living, Working, Supplying, Caring, Learning, Enjoying**

Carlos Moreno's 15-minute city framework highlights four key characteristics:

- **Proximity:** Things must be close.
- **Diversity:** Land uses must be mixed to provide a wide variety of urban amenities nearby.
- **Density:** There must be enough people to support a diversity of businesses in a compact land area.
- **Ubiquity:** These neighborhoods must be so common that they are available and affordable to anyone who wants to live in one.

### **Benefits of the 15-minute city**

The 15-minutes city is a proposition that can increase our wellbeing in multiple ways: some of the most important advantages are:

- Benefits environment and health through **limiting greenhouse gas emissions** and **health-damaging air pollution by cars** (e.g. less asthma, less myocardial infarctions, less brain damage, improved mental health through reduction of air pollution).
- Reduces the **occupation of valuable public space by car lanes and car parkings** that instead can be used for **urban green and public meeting places**.
- It **stimulates active and multimodal transport**, resulting in health gains through increased **physical activity (reduced obesity)**.

- It makes **cities more enjoyable** as people tend to have **more social interactions** and **local connections** in streets with lower amounts of car-traffic
- It makes **housing more affordable**: inequality can be reduced between neighborhoods because they will have necessary functionalities nearby.
- It enables **individual freedom** and wellbeing while it also focuses on **local communities** and participation

## How do we get there?

The following elements are critical:

- **Broad public engagement and buy-in:** Diverse communities must be involved in developing and implementing 15-minute city programs. Legendary urbanist Jane Jacobs said it well in The Death and Life of Great American Cities: "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."
- **Detailed measurement and analysis:** We must define and quantify who has access to what and where. It is a big data exercise that must be informed by an equally important community engagement exercise that identifies what should be measured. The question "what is important to access?" needs to be answered by city residents, not by planners. Local residents are often more aware of the current problems and possible fixes than planners from outside the city. And measurement must be continuous, so that a city can measure improvements in proximity and access over time and hold leaders accountable for making that progress.
- **Engaging all types of actors:** all relevant stakeholders should be part of the process, from urban planners to government agencies, to neighborhood leaders, nonprofits, entrepreneurs, investors, business organizations, action groups and academia.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** The most successful efforts will make maximum use of free or inexpensive strategies such as flexible zoning requirements and creative reuse of existing street space. It's important to work **with** market forces where possible, and **stimulate local innovative start-ups and entrepreneurship** rather than fighting **against** them, while always recognizing that market forces will provide too little of many of the things that make cities great.

## Sources

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## B2. Monthly Car-free sundays in cities with > 50,000 inhabitants

- **Volt proposes to implement a monthly car-free Sunday in all Belgian cities with a population of > 50 000 inhabitants.** The main purpose of the car-free Sundays is to promote healthy, livable cities and demonstrate how living in a city with a lower degree of car-dependency could be. It is also the purpose to use the car-free cities as a tool to create awareness regarding the considerable environmental and health burdens associated with motorized road transport. Traffic-related air pollution causes a large burden of disease, hospitalization and death while for example, traffic-related air pollution such as Nitrogen Dioxide, Black Carbon and Ultrafine Particles, can be 50-80% lower on car-free sundays in cities compared to average sundays. And in addition, moving away from car dependency has important public health and environmental benefits, not just from lower air pollution but also from increased physical activity and less space occupation by cars. Pedestrians and cyclists can enjoy the city more than ever, traveling on roads that are otherwise dangerous and difficult to cross. On a car-free Sunday, large parts of cities can be transformed from places where people only want to pass through to places people actually love being. In addition, on car-free Sundays can strongly boost the local economy by joyful activities and evenements that can be organized in large parts of cities that are normally occupied by cars. Further, on car-free Sundays, all public transport should be available for free in those cities.

## Pillar +1 - STATE REFORM

**“A stronger and smarter Belgium for all citizens”**

Belgian governance today is challenged by a fragmented

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democracy and inefficient political structure. A pragmatic approach towards the regional and national responsibilities is required to best serve and bring regions and federal entities together. As a Pan-European Belgian party we will, while respecting the communities, strengthen the federal government of Belgium. We aim to deconflict competences and to increase cooperation and harmonization between communities, regions and the federal government. We strive for all levels of government to be more efficient in organisation and administration and bring it closer to the citizens. We envision innovative means of citizen participation in policy-making, especially at the local level, in addition to the representative system.

## 1. A European Defence

Volt Belgium strongly supports the European-level vision for the future of European Security and Defence and agrees with the three building blocks on which it is based:

1. Democratic decision-making. Matters of European security and defence on all levels must be decided as part of a democratic and parliamentary process and security forces must be under civilian command.
2. A fully integrated defence force, under a European Ministry of Defence that allow the EU to respond autonomously to conventional and nonconventional threats to its territory and population.
3. Create a common security culture and ensure that security forces across Europe defend the same enlightened values of democracy, justice, multilateralism, freedom and equality; wherever they have to operate.

At the Belgian level, Volt Belgium encourages continued and increased cooperation with all EU Allies in general and the BENELUX partners specifically. The unification of the BENELUX airspace, the Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation and continued bi- and tri-national military deployment around the globe all count as examples of best practice. However, Belgian Defence must keep its eye on the future as well. The Scorpion Program allow for intense cooperation with France, as does the procurement of the F-35's with Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway. Finally, other hiatus must be filled with new ideas and new types of cooperation. International cooperation is required in order to offer our soldiers proper CBRN-protection and medical care in operations.

There is only one way forward in order to guarantee a real and proper European security, the European way forward.

## 2. Making animal rights a constitutional right

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Volt demands the welfare and dignity of animals to be included in the Belgian constitution. Animals are sensitive creatures that should have their rights to be defended. Because public opinion has evolved demanding the rights of animals to be adequately defended, it is therefore high time that our Constitution evolves. Other countries, including our European neighbours such as Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland already have animal protection embedded in their constitutions.

The Belgian Constitution is based on a series of divergent and fundamental principles, such as the right to the protection of a healthy environment. Animal protection definitely belongs to that list. It has since been scientifically proven that animals (certainly the species with which we surround ourselves and which we use) have a consciousness. We therefore focus on the species that are known to be in pain and suffering experienced (i.e. at least all vertebrates, cephalopods and certain other molluscs).

This constitutional change will encourage governments to introduce increasingly better laws and policies to protect animals. This gives animals a fundamental basis that legally justifies the adoption of concrete measures. Moreover, this will give the Courts of Appeal, and in particular the Constitutional Court, legitimate reasons for judging the merits of a new law for the protection of animals. Animals and their welfare will count much more and gain in value and importance for their own good. This will make our society more just. Caring for the most vulnerable anchors in the Constitution is proof of social civilization. It is an important step towards the recognition of legal personality for animals.