

# Pilot project Mediation vouchers

in cooperation with

Flemish Service for Employment  
and Vocational Training (VDAB)

Research report

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## Introduction

In March 2021, the pilot project Mediation Vouchers started in the province of Antwerp. Eleven partner organisations participated in a concession agreement to guide jobseekers in their search for work using vouchers.

The vouchers were awarded to jobseekers eligible for the so-called 'Tender intensive guidance and job mediation' (TIBB4). TIBB4 is aimed at the target group of jobseekers who need a personalised and intensive approach in order to find work in the normal economic circuit. Possible reasons for a personalised and intensive approach are:

- lack of active application behaviour: no motivation, not having the right application skills poor knowledge of the labour market, insufficient or unrealistic job targets,...
- deficient work attitudes, such as dealing with authority, adapting to schedule changes, dealing with criticism, discipline to be on time every day, being respectful of material and colleagues,...
- presence of impeding framework conditions in terms of mobility, work-life balance, time management, own resource management, housekeeping, personal administration...

Jobseekers need personalised and intensive guidance but have:

- a job orientation,
- no need for vocational skills enhancement or language training to find employment in a job that fits their job orientation,
- no identified non-labour market-related problems which, in the opinion of the VDAB mediator, are so serious as to make the execution of the assignment impossible, because employability in the normal economic circuit is not realistic within 9 months,
- have not been caught by a financial unemployment trap,
- sufficient language skills to practice their chosen profession and know enough the legal working language (Dutch, French may be for residents of a facility municipality) to be mediated.<sup>1</sup>

The existing TIBB4 project (Tender intensive guidance and job placement) with the parcels region of Antwerp, Turnhout and Mechelen continued to operate in parallel with the existing parcel holders. Jobseekers in the province of Antwerp were randomly assigned to voucher guidance or to the existing TIBB4 guidance. This research report presents the main insights gained from interviews with partner organisations on the one hand and VDAB staff and mediators on the other. Surveys were also conducted with jobseekers to gauge their experiences with the voucher selection process. Jobseekers starting actual counselling in TIBB4 and in the voucher system were questioned about their

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<sup>1</sup>See Project sheet Tender intensive guidance and mediation to work (TIBB4): <https://extranet.vdab.be/system/files/media/bestanden/2021-04/Projectfiche%20TIBB4.pdf>

satisfaction with the TIBB4 and voucher guidance obtained. In addition to the data from the surveys, VDAB data was used to capture the possible effects of the voucher system on employment. The results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses and findings are presented in the following sections of the report.

First, the numbers of voucher assignments and the distribution of referrals to partner organisations are discussed. Second, the choice process that voucher holders went through is highlighted, including a focus on those voucher holders who ultimately did not choose a partner or who did not initiate counselling. Third, the experiences of partner organisations are discussed using interview results. Fourth, in addition to the partner organisations, the VDAB mediators are important stakeholders and their experiences with vouchers are also reported using questionnaires and panel discussions. Fifth, the focus is on jobseekers. We discuss the results of an initial and anonymous survey of jobseekers around their experiences with the choice process in the voucher system. Finally, we address the effects of the voucher system on employment outcomes. Based on VDAB data, the employment outcomes of voucher holders and TIBB4 participants are compared. In the final section on the effects on jobseekers, we discuss the satisfaction of voucher holders and TIBB4 participants with the counselling towards employment received. The satisfaction survey is based on a survey of jobseekers who went through a full counselling programme with a partner organisation either in TIBB4 or in the voucher system.



# 1. Voucher assignments and referrals

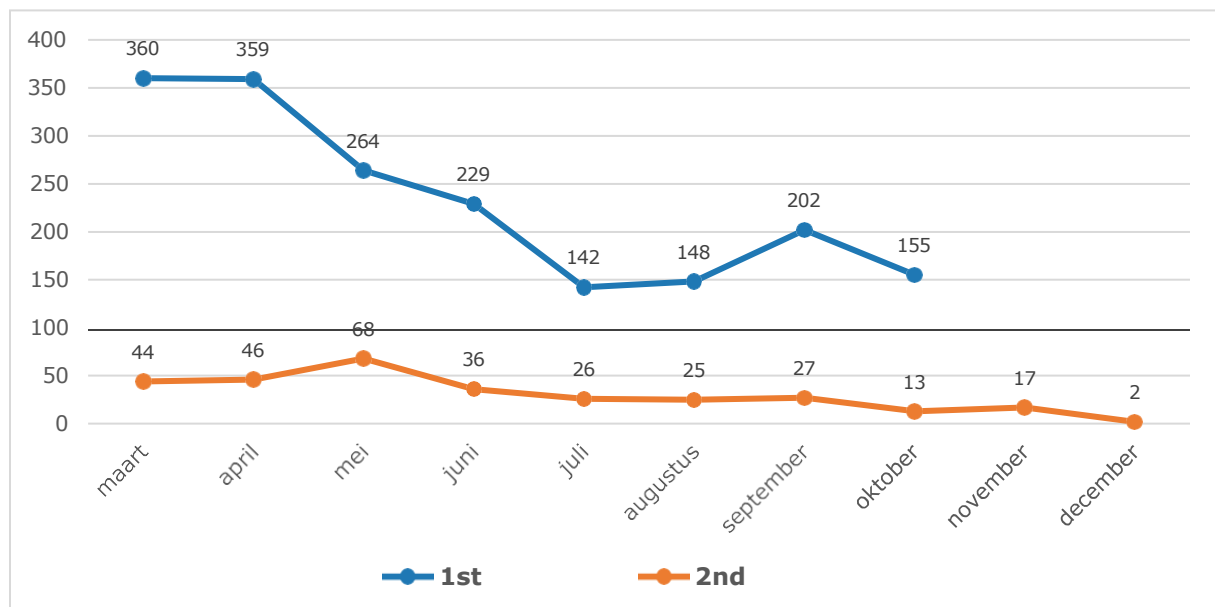
## The voucher assignments

In the period March 2021 - October 2021, a total of **1,859 voucher holders** were instructed to choose their own partner organisation for intensive job coaching. **304 jobseekers** (16%) received this assignment a **2<sup>nd</sup>** time, and this because they failed to choose a partner organisation in time.

### 1.1. Monthly voucher orders

The figure below (blue curve) shows that especially in the first months of the experiment, the largest numbers of vouchers were distributed. From April onwards, we see a **decline** with a low of 142 first orders in July 2021. After the summer months, the number of vouchers distributed increases slightly again. The trend in the number of **2<sup>nd</sup>** orders (orange curve) is expected to follow the evolution of **1<sup>st</sup>** orders issued.

Figure 1: Number of 1st and 2nd assignments by month



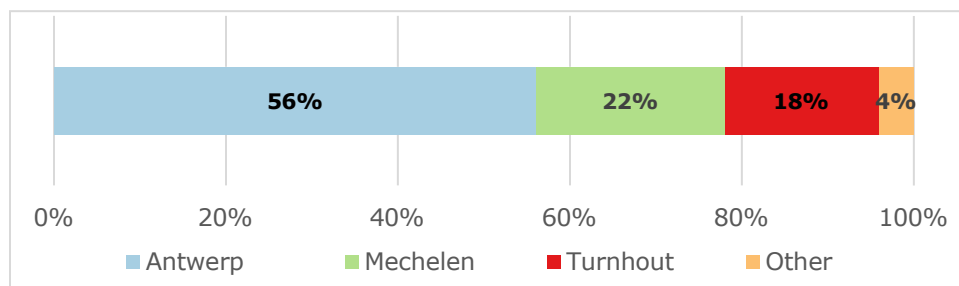
Note: As this analysis only considers jobseekers who received their first assignment in the period March 2021 - October 2021, the figures of the number of 2<sup>de</sup> assignments for the months of November and December are an underestimate. Indeed, jobseekers who receive a voucher in November or December 2021 may also receive a 2<sup>de</sup> assignment in these months.

### 1.2. Voucher orders by region

The vouchers were distributed to jobseekers across the entire province of Antwerp. The province area covers three different TIBB4 parcels (i.e. Antwerp, Mechelen and Turnhout). The graph below shows that most voucher holders (96%) are domiciled in the province of Antwerp, some voucher holders live outside the province but are looking for work in the province of Antwerp. About 56% of the 1,859 voucher holders live in the Antwerp region (city),

22% have his/her main residence in and around Mechelen and 18% live in the Turnhout region. Just under 4% live outside the province of Antwerp, as indicated earlier.

Figure 2: Residence of voucher holder



The vast majority of the vouchers were thus distributed in the Antwerp region; the Mechelen and Turnhout regions together covered fewer vouchers than the Antwerp region. The distribution of vouchers was not predetermined at the start of the project but resulted from the numbers of jobseekers (with the appropriate profile) who presented themselves in the three regions. Partner organisations with limited or no activity in the region with the most vouchers (i.e. the city of Antwerp) may be at a disadvantage because they are limited to a region with relatively few vouchers (e.g. the Turnhout region) but with a similar number of competing partner organisations.

### The voucher leads

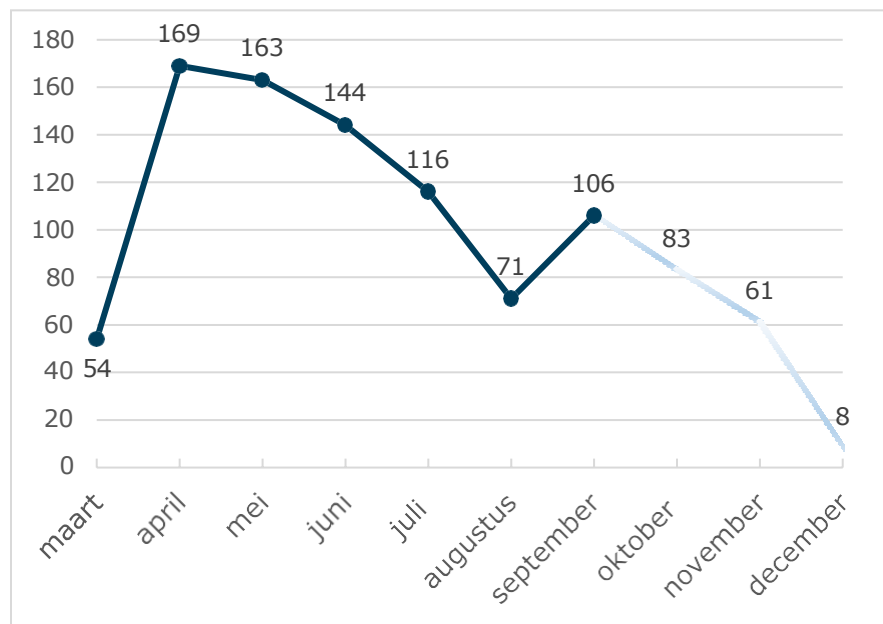
Of all 1,859 voucher holders, **975 jobseekers** were ultimately referred to the partner organisation of their choice. In what follows we discuss the evolution of the number of referrals and the distribution of referrals between the participating partner organisations.

## 1.3. Monthly evolution of voucher lines

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The graph below shows that most of the referrals took place in the **first months** of the pilot project. This is not surprising, as most vouchers were also distributed in spring 2021. The evolution in number of referrals therefore follows the same trend as the evolution of the number of 1<sup>st</sup> assignments, but always 1 month behind. The highest number of voucher assignments was in April, the lowest in August. The average number of days between a jobseeker's last assignment and the start of their voucher process is 29 days. This means it takes a jobseeker on average about a month to choose a partner after his/her last assignment. As a result, the trend in the numbers of monthly voucher assignments follows the trend in the numbers of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> assignments with a one-month lag. The lowest number of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> assignments during July translated into the lowest number of voucher introductions a month later, in August.

Figure 3: Voucher leads by month



Note: As the analysis in this chapter only takes into account jobseekers who received their first assignment in the period March 2021-October 2021, the figures of the number of referrals for the months October, November and December are an underestimate. Jobseekers who receive a voucher in October, November or December 2021 will, in fact, also be referred during these months, increasing the referral figures for the October-December 2021 period.

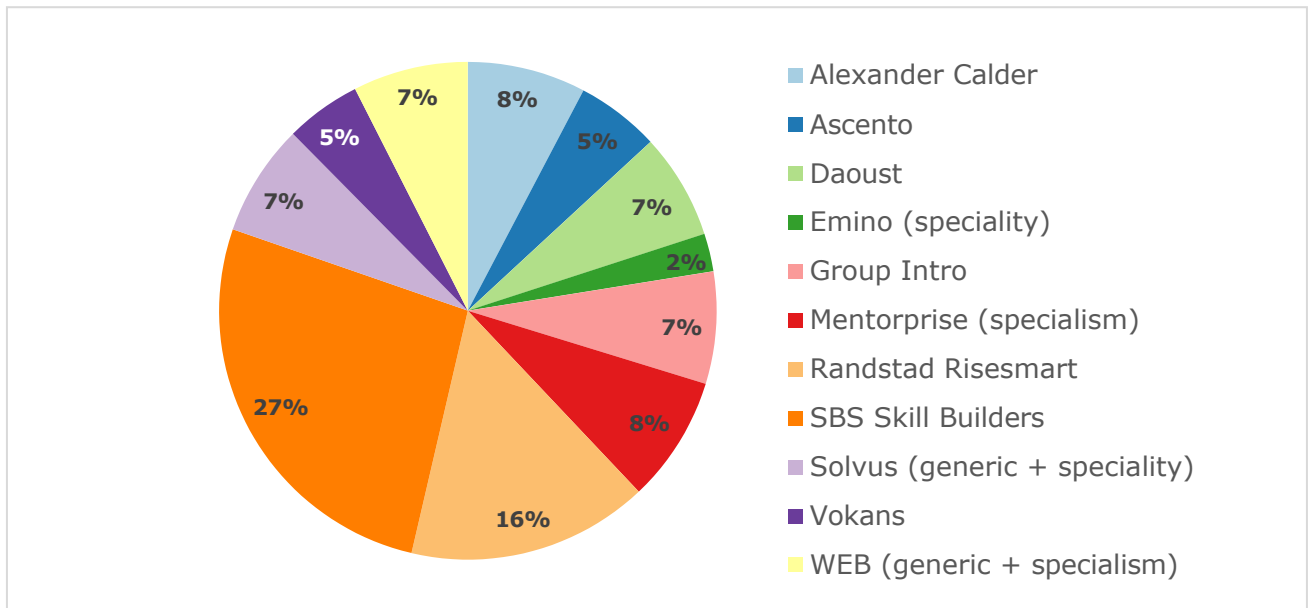
Voucher leads experience a marked decline during the summer months. The numbers recover in September but then decline again during October to December.

#### 1.4. Voucher leads by partner

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The diagram below shows the distribution of vouchers between the different partner organisations for the period March 2021 - October 2021.

Figure 4: Voucher leads by partner



SBS Skillbuilders acquires the largest number of vouchers with a 27% share. SBS Skillbuilders is the existing plot holder for the City of Antwerp plot in TIBB4. As an existing plot holder, this partner therefore already has a plot in the Antwerp region, the region where the largest number of vouchers were also distributed. This partner also provided the largest number of sites (17), not only in the Antwerp region, but in the entire province.

Randstad Risesmart has the second largest share with 16% of the vouchers. Randstad Risesmart is also an existing plot holder for the Turnhout region in TIBB4. So this partner organisation also had an existing operation and presence in at least one existing TIBB4 region that is part of the voucher area. This partner provided 10 sites, 2 of which were in the Antwerp region.

The market share of the remaining partners is between 5 and 8% of vouchers. Specialist partner Emino (presumption of labour disability) is an exception with a 2% share of vouchers. The low percentage for Emino is due to the specific target group of this partner but also to the limited number of vouchers this partner organisation wished to accompany. Emino exceeded their committed target and had to increase the number of assisted voucher holders to meet the demand.

Partner organisation Solvus, the existing TIBB4 plot holder in Mechelen, attracted 7% of the vouchers with a combined generic and specialist offer.

'New' generic partners in the province of Antwerp (but not necessarily in intensive counselling), such as Alexander Calder, Daoust, Group Intro, achieved 7 and 8% market share. Partners Vokans and Ascento both achieved 5% market share. For the partner Ascento, it can also be noted that, compared to other partners, this partner refused the most voucher holders and also mainly provided digital counselling.

The charts below show each region's market share by partner and each partner's market share by region, respectively.

Figure 5: Region distribution of vouchers by mediation partner

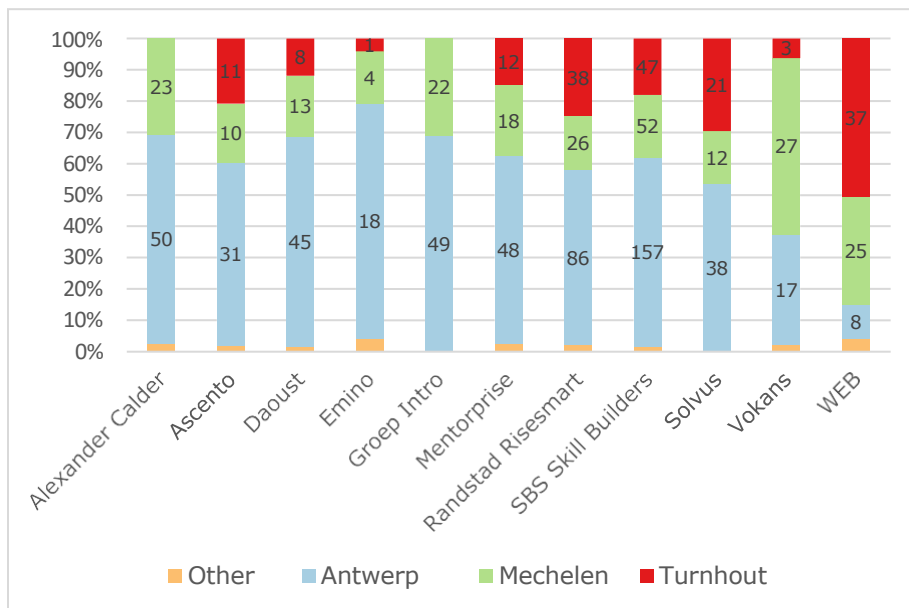
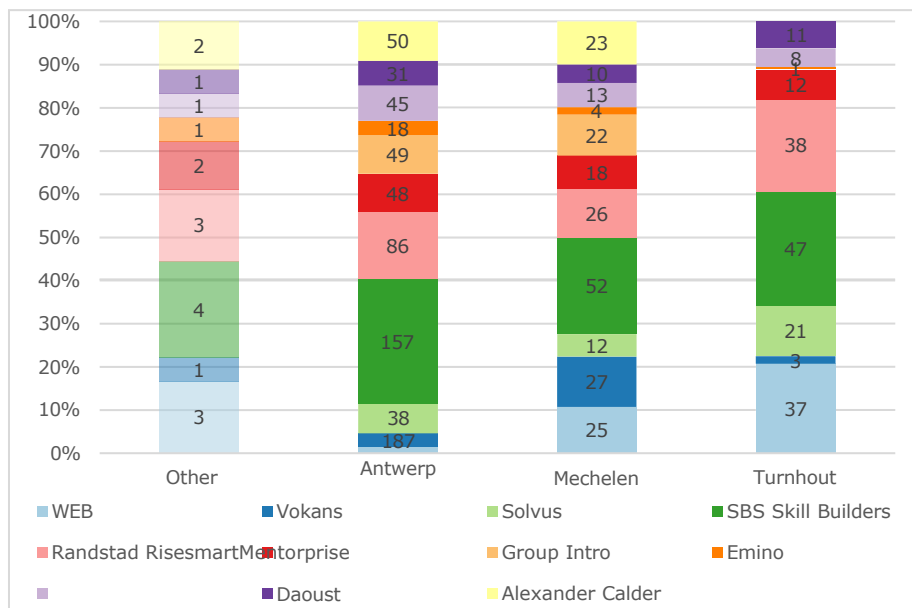


Figure 6: Partner distribution vouchers by region



Almost all partners acquire more than 50% of their vouchers in the Antwerp region. There are two exceptions to this. Vokans attracts a majority of their vouchers in the Mechelen region. WEB concentrates counselling activities in the Turnhout and Mechelen regions. Group Intro and Alexander Calder both do not acquire any vouchers in the Turnhout region.

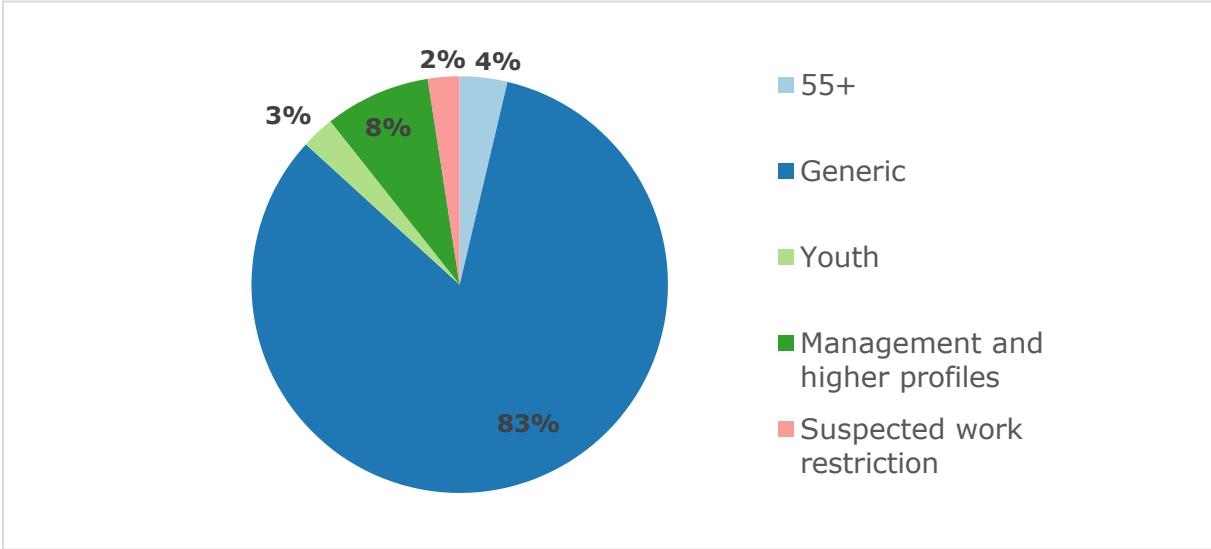
The distribution of vouchers in the regions indicates that SBS Skillbuilders, not only in the Antwerp region (where they are TIBB4 plot holder) but in every region achieves the highest market share. In the Antwerp region, Randstad Risesmart acquires 2<sup>nd</sup> place with a 16% market share. The 6 other partners achieve market shares between 6 and 9% in the Antwerp region.

In the Mechelen region, SBS Skillbuilders acquires 23% of the vouchers, Vokans 12%, WEB and Randstad Risesmart both achieve 11%, and Group Intro and Alexander Calder both acquire 10% of the vouchers.

In the Turnhout region, SBS Skillbuilders again has the largest market share, with 26% of vouchers. Randstad Risesmart and WEB follow in shared 2<sup>nd</sup> place with both 21% of vouchers. Solvus takes 4<sup>th</sup> place in terms of market share in the Turnhout region with 12%.

Besides the distribution of vouchers by partner and by region, we also look at the distribution between the generic and specialist offerings.

Figure 7: Voucher leads generic vs specialised offerings

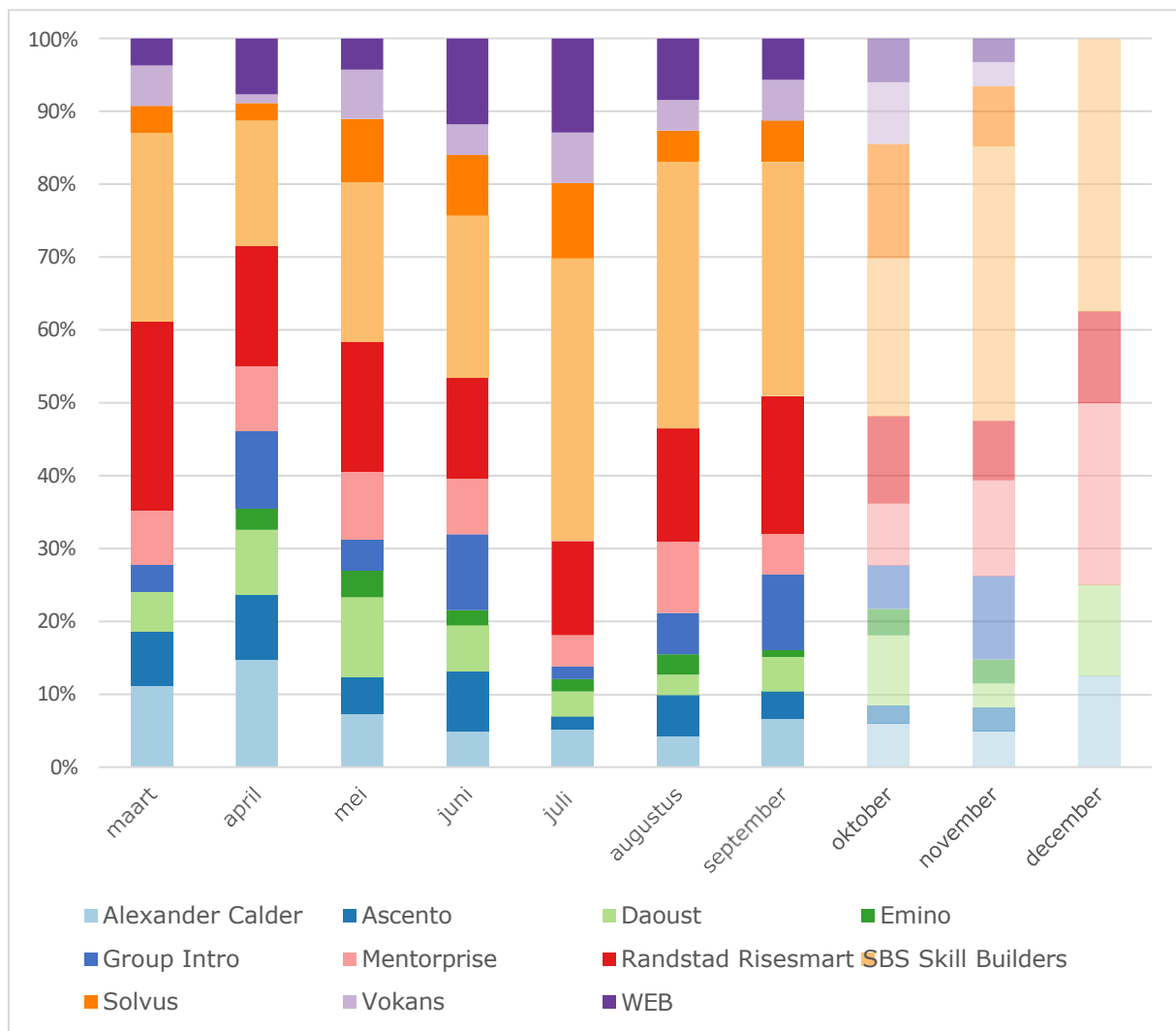


The figure above shows that the vast majority of voucher holders (83%) chose a generic offer. 8% chose a specialist offer focused on highly skilled, management and expert profiles offered by Mentorprise. The other specialisms offered, namely, Emino (*presumption of labour disability*), WEB (*young people*) and Solvus (*55+*) covered 2%, 3% and 4% of the vouchers respectively. With 8% market share, the specialised offer for highly educated people achieves an almost equal share as the three other specialised offers combined (9%). It should be noted that specialist partners Emino and WEB limit their activities regionally (cf. Emino only Antwerp region, WEB only regions of Turnhout & Mechelen). Also, partner Emino only wanted to accompany a limited number of vouchers.

### 1.5. Voucher leads per partner per month

It was cited earlier that during the months of April, May and June 2021, the highest number of voucher referrals took place, after which the number of referrals decreased overall. The chart below shows that in the months with higher number of referrals (April, May, June), the distribution between referrals per partner is more proportional/even than in the months with lower numbers (March, July, August, September).

Figure 8: Voucher leads by mediation partner per month



In the periods with lower numbers of vouchers available (March, July, August, September), the two partners with the largest market share jointly acquire 52% of vouchers monthly. In the period with higher numbers of vouchers (April, May, June), the combined market share of the two largest partners ranges between 34%-40% monthly. Limited volumes of vouchers available in the market thus seem to coincide with higher market share for the largest partners. At higher volumes of available vouchers, there seems to be more dispersion of vouchers across partners.

The order in which partners with logos appear on the VDAB website is also a point of interest. A partner appearing first on the VDAB website may have an advantage in attracting voucher holders. The partners appeared in alphabetical order during the period March 2021-May 2021, making the partner organisation Alexander Calder the first logo to appear. In June 2021, the order was changed and reversed, with partner organisation WEB appearing first in line and Alexander Calder placed last in line. In the month of June, WEB's market share went from 4% to 12%. WEB had an average market share of 5.3% during the first three months (March, April, May). After the order change from last to first place, the average market share rises to 11% in the next three months

(June, July, August). Alexander Calder's monthly average market share went from 11% in the period when they appeared first in list to 5% in the period when they appeared last.

The appearance order is not necessarily the only explanation for the changes in numbers for certain partners (e.g. fluctuations in available vouchers in a region, or availability during holiday and summer periods) but it seems important to try to rule out mere order effects. After the summer period, the appearance order was changed again.

## 1.6. Conclusion

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The presence of 11 partners instead of a single voucher holder (cf. TIBB4) enriches the offer. 9 partner organisations compete for vouchers in the generic offer, in addition there are 4 partners offering a specialism.

The Antwerp region was the region where most vouchers were distributed (56%), the share of the Mechelen (22%) and Turnhout (18%) regions was considerably smaller. Partners who concentrated on the regions with smaller numbers of available vouchers (e.g. WEB, Vokans and Solvus) were therefore fishing in a proverbial smaller pond. With the exception of WEB and Vokans, all other partners realised at least half of their result in the Antwerp region.

All three existing plot holders managed to acquire vouchers outside their existing TIBB4 region in other regions. SBS Skillbuilders succeeded best, acquiring the largest number of vouchers in each of the three regions (total 27% of vouchers). Randstad Risesmart attracted 16% of the vouchers. The generic partner organisations that emerged as 'new' partners all realised a market share between 5%-8%.

The appearance order of the partner organisations on the VDAB website is a point for attention. Efforts should be made to avoid any possible influence on job seekers through sequence effects as much as possible. Frequent changes in the appearance position of the partner logos and/or a more circular representation may be useful to reduce possible sequence effects.

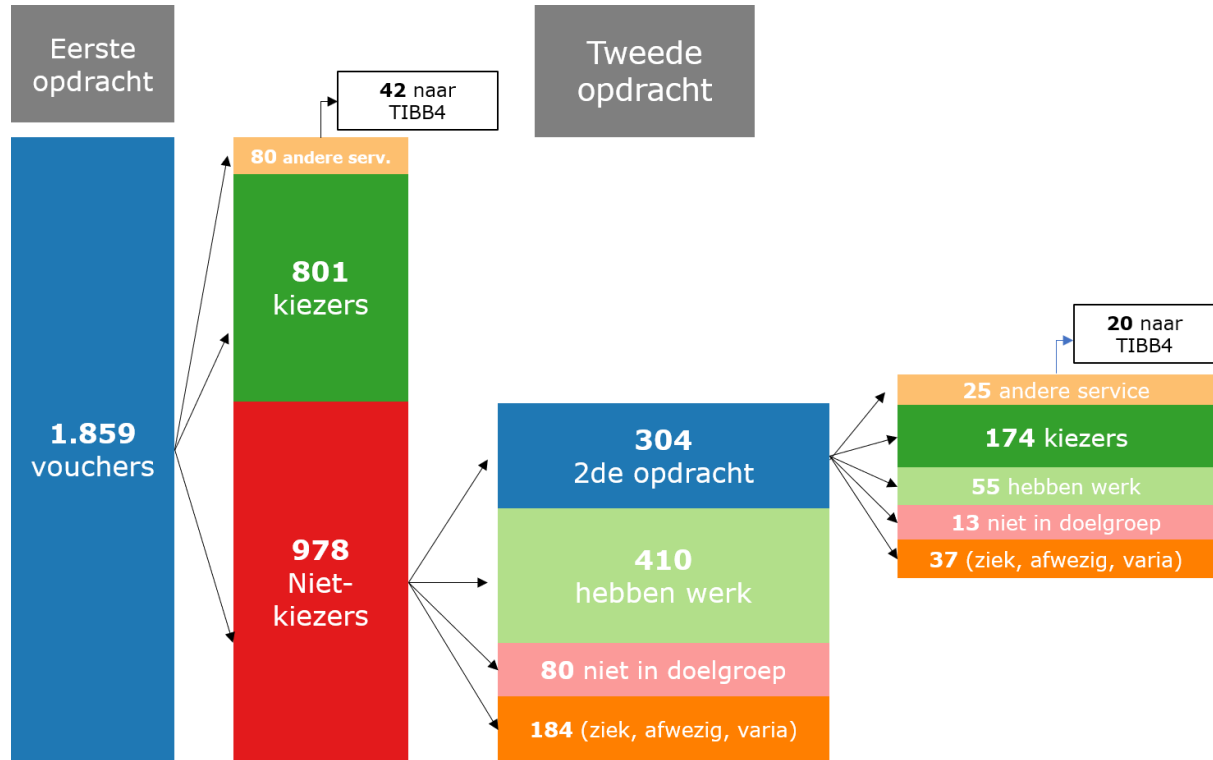
The decline in the number of vouchers available during and after the summer 2021 period seems to give rise to more concentration of vouchers among the two partners with the largest market share. At lower volumes of available vouchers, the market share of the two largest partners always rises above 50%. Therefore, to preserve diversity on the supply side, it seems important to distribute larger numbers of vouchers in a more continuous manner and to do so across all regions involved. Lower numbers of vouchers combined with a concentration of vouchers in e.g. the Antwerp region is pushing the volume of vouchers at some partners and in some regions below a critical limit. Continued low numbers of vouchers puts pressure on profitability for partners and leads to a decline in commitment and investment in the voucher project, possibly resulting in partners exiting the market.



## 2 . The choice process of voucher holders

The choice trajectory of the 1,859 voucher holders is shown in the schematic below.

Figure 9: Choice pathway voucher holders



1,859 voucher holders received an assignment (the so-called '1<sup>st</sup> assignment') from a VDAB mediator to select a mediation partner from the 11 available partner organisations within a period of two weeks. This period was followed by an interview with the VDAB mediator in which the jobseeker had to make his choice of partner organisation known. If the jobseeker failed to make a choice, the VDAB mediator gave a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment to still choose a partner organisation within a new period of two weeks. If the jobseeker also failed to choose a partner after a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment, the jobseeker should in principle be directed to the TIBB4 project.

After the 1<sup>st</sup> assignment, **43%** of jobseekers **chose** a partner organisation, or **801 jobseekers**. The remaining group of 1,058 voucher holders (57%) failed to make a choice following the 1<sup>st</sup> assignment. In principle, this group should have been commissioned for the second time to select a placement partner. However, we see that 80 voucher holders were directly directed to another service (without receiving the 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment), including 42 jobseekers who were directly directed to TIBB4.

Of the remaining **978 non-voters**, only **304 voucher holders (16%)** received a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment. Ultimately, out of this group of voucher holders with a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment, **174 jobseekers chose** a partner organisation. After receiving the 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment, 25

jobseekers who were directed to another service, including 20 voucher holders who were directed to TIBB4.

## 2.1. Groups of voucher holders according to choice pathway

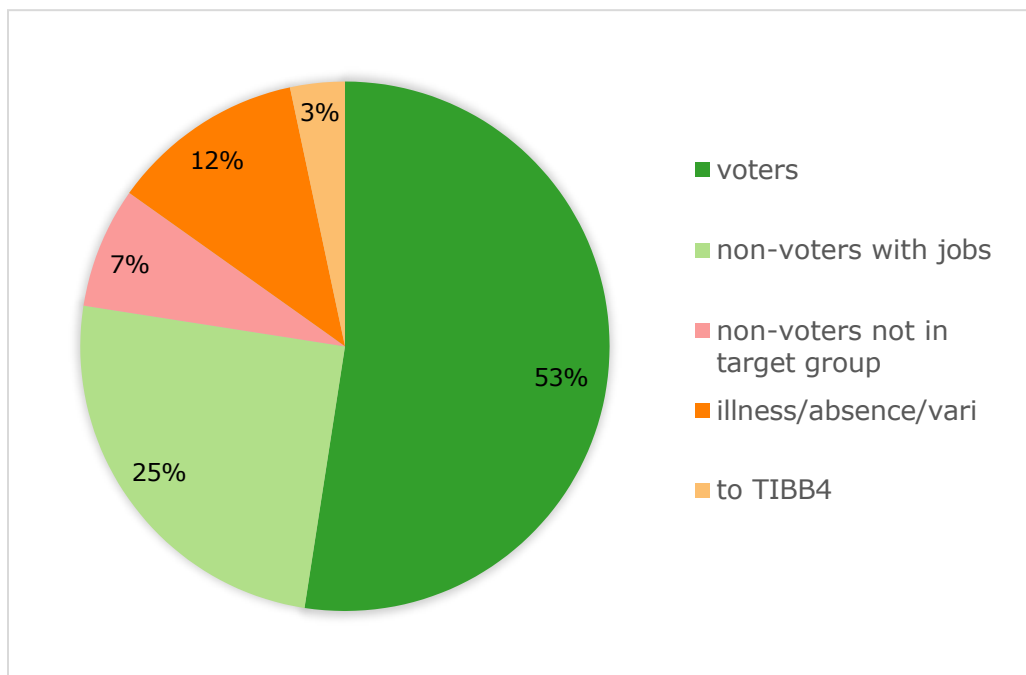
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Based on the course of the assignments and whether or not a partner organisation was chosen, we can distinguish a few groups of voucher holders:

- Group 1: Voters after a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment
- Group 2: Non-voters with **employment** or job prospects
- Group 3: Non-voters unlikely to **be in the target group**
- Group 4: Non-voters due to **illness, absence** or other reason (**varia**)
- Group 5: Non-voters directed to **TIBB4**

In the figure below, we divide the population of 1,859 voucher holders into the five different groups.

Figure 10: Groups of voucher holders



### Group 1: Voters after 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment (975 voucher holders)

Overall, **53%** of voucher holders succeed in choosing a partner organisation for guidance to work. 801 voucher holders or 43% make the choice already after a 1<sup>st</sup> assignment. 174 or 10% of voucher holders need more time and make a choice following a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment. So 47% of voucher holders fail to make that choice, but there is partly a positive explanation for this. Indeed, a significant group of non-voucher holders do not make a choice because they have job prospects, this group is discussed further below.

### **Group 2: Non-voters in employment and or with job prospects (465 voucher holders).**

A significant proportion of voucher holders who do not make a choice do so because of the fact that they find employment or have employment prospects. For the sake of employment, they do not continue the choice process and these voucher holders do not receive a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment to choose a partner organisation.

The group of voucher holders with work are registered as 'passive' (with the catw78 code) in the VDAB data files or the reason for non-selection was determined from a file review. There are 410 voucher holders who did not receive a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment and who also enter employment. In the group of voucher holders who did receive a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment, there are another 55 voucher holders who do not make a choice because of employment. Together, non-voters with employment or job prospects amount to **25%** of voucher holders.

### **Group 3: Non-voters unlikely to be in the target group (137 voucher holders)**

In addition to those jobseekers who do not make a choice because of employment, there are also voucher holders for whom non-choice does not necessarily have a positive explanation. There are 137 **(7%) voucher** holders who cannot make a choice and this is because in all likelihood they **do not** belong **to the target group** for intensive counselling. First, there are 38 voucher holders who are directly directed to other service (and not to TIBB4) after 1<sup>st</sup> assignment. We can assume that the direct referral to another service occurred because the voucher holder did not have the appropriate profile for intensive counselling towards employment. Secondly, file research of non-voucher holders without a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment shows that there is a prospect of referral to another service (cf. IBO, TWE, GTB) or that the VDAB mediator notes that there is a training need on the part of the jobseeker so that the voucher for intensive mediation is no longer applicable. Third, in the group of voucher holders who did receive a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment, there are still 13 voucher holders who are characterised by the VDAB mediator as not belonging to the target group.

The various counselling pathways offered by the VDAB are probably not all mutually exclusive, so a voucher holder could potentially qualify for multiple counselling pathways. The fact that a voucher holder is directed to another service is therefore not always a conclusive indication that the jobseeker does not have the appropriate profile for intensive voucher guidance. However, the presence of significant language deficits, or of an educational need, or of a direct route to IBO or TWE is an important indication that the initial assessment of the jobseeker's profile was not entirely accurate.

### **Group 4: Non-voters due to illness, absence or other reason (varia) (221 voucher holders)**

In addition to the groups who make a choice (group 1), who find work (group 2) and who do not belong to the target group and/or are directed to another service (group 3), there is a residual group of voucher holders who do not make a choice due to illness, absence and a diverse range of reasons (cfr. transmission, pregnant, departure abroad, resumption of studies, etc.).

There are 184 voucher holders who do not get a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment citing illness, absence or a varia reason. There are a further 37 jobseekers in 2<sup>nd</sup> assignments who, because of the

higher reasons (sick, absent, varia) do not make a choice. Together, non-voters in the category of sickness, absence and varia cover **12%** of voucher holders.

#### **Group 5: Non-voters directed to TIBB4 (62 voucher holders)**

There 42 jobseekers who were directed directly to TIBB4 after a 1<sup>st</sup> assignment. These voucher holders initially failed to make a choice and should have received a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment. However, we see that they were sent directly to TIBB4 without receiving a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment. These jobseekers were directed to TIBB4 and thus the direct referral was not due to a non-fitting profile where the jobseeker did not belong to the target group. If the jobseeker did not belong to the target group, the jobseeker would have been directed to a service other than TIBB4.

Besides the group of 'abnormal' referrals to TIBB4 at a 1<sup>st</sup> assignment, there were another 20 jobseekers who failed to make a choice after a 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment and were referred to TIBB4. The last group of 20 voucher holders followed the 'normal' process whereby there was a move to TIBB4 after two assignments without a choice. The group of transferred voucher holders to TIBB4 consists of 62 jobseekers or **3%** of the total voucher population.

## **2.2. Comparison voters vs non-voters**

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The groups of non-voters were subdivided according to reasons for not voting (cfr. finding work, not belonging to target group, sick, absent, varia) based on the data in the VDAB data files and the reasons given in individual files (if VDAB data files did not provide clarity, an individual file survey was carried out).

The group of voters was also compared with the group of non-voters on the basis of age, gender, work restriction, migration background, language deficiency Dutch, education level and sector.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics employment (voters and non-voters)

Variable	Intervention group: voters (N = 432)		Intervention group: non-voters (N = 474)		Differences between non-voters (3) and voters (1)	Intervention group: non-voters with reasons other than work found (N = 162)		Differences between non-voters with reasons other than work found (6) and voters (1)
	(1) Average.	(2) Std.dev.	(3) Average.	(4) Std.dev.	(5) Difference average	(6) Average.	(7) Std.dev.	(8) Difference average
Work	0.55	0.50	0.66	0.47				
Plot								
Antwerp	0.54	0.50	0.57	0.50		0.60	0.49	
Mechelen	0.26	0.44	0.20	0.40		0.23	0.43	
Turnhout	0.18	0.38	0.19	0.39		0.14	0.35	
Other	0.03	0.16	0.04	0.19		0.02	0.16	
Cohort								
Cohort 1	0.04	0.21	0.28	0.45		0.27	0.45	
Cohort 2	0.27	0.45	0.30	0.46		0.30	0.46	
Cohort 3	0.33	0.47	0.23	0.42		0.20	0.40	
Cohort 4	0.35	0.48	0.19	0.39		0.23	0.42	
Age								
Age <25	0.15	0.35	0.24	0.43	0.09***	0.22	0.42	0.07**
Age 25-34	0.31	0.46	0.29	0.45	-0.02	0.31	0.47	0.00
Age 35-44	0.22	0.42	0.22	0.41	0.00	0.20	0.40	-0.02
Age 45-54	0.17	0.38	0.13	0.34	-0.04	0.11	0.32	-0.06*
Age >54	0.15	0.35	0.12	0.33	-0.03	0.15	0.36	0.00
Man	0.49	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.04	0.54	0.50	0.05
Employment restriction	0.04	0.19	0.04	0.19	0.00	0.04	0.19	0.00
Migration background	0.32	0.47	0.33	0.47	0.01	0.36	0.48	0.04
Language deficiency Dutch	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.14	0.01	0.02	0.16	0.01
Education								
Training to 1° degree	0.07	0.26	0.11	0.31	0.04	0.10	0.30	0.03
Training to 2° degree	0.19	0.39	0.22	0.41	0.03	0.28	0.45	0.09**
Training to 3° degree	0.46	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.03	0.45	0.50	-0.01
Higher education training	0.28	0.45	0.19	0.39	-0.09***	0.17	0.38	-0.11***
Sector								
Sector: Construction and wood	0.05	0.22	0.08	0.27	0.03	0.07	0.26	0.02
Sector: Busin. Support, retail/ICT	0.45	0.50	0.39	0.49	-0.06*	0.36	0.48	-0.09*
Sector: Services	0.16	0.36	0.15	0.36	-0.01	0.19	0.39	0.03
Sector: Industry	0.16	0.36	0.15	0.36	-0.01	0.14	0.34	-0.02
Sector: Transport and logistics	0.06	0.24	0.11	0.31	0.05**	0.10	0.31	0.04*
Sector: Care and education	0.11	0.31	0.10	0.30	-0.01	0.10	0.30	-0.01
Sector: other	0.02	0.13	0.03	0.16	0.01	0.04	0.19	0.02

From the comparison of averages between the group of voters (column 1) and the group of non-voters (who did not find work - column 6), we see only limited differences between the two groups (see comparison in column 8). For most variables, the group of voters is similar to the group of non-voters (for a reason other than finding work). Only, a non-voter without work is 7% points more likely to be younger than 25 and 6% points less likely to be between 45- and 54-years-old (10% s.n.) than a voter. Conversely, the probability of being in the voter group is 11%-points higher for voucher holders with a higher education degree. There are no significant differences between voters and non-voters in terms of migration background or Dutch language disadvantage. We do see that non-voters (without work) are 4%-points more likely to be from the Transport and Logistics sector than a voter.

The differences between voters and non-voters (column 5) are rather limited and relate to age (<25 years) and education. For example, non-voters are 9% points more likely to be under 25 years of age than a voter, and a non-voter is 9% points less likely to belong to the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade secondary education category, than a voter. Multilingual voucher holders and/or voucher holders with a migrant background are not significantly more likely to be in the group of non-voters.

## 2.3. Conclusion

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One striking fact is that only just over half of the voucher holders (53%) ended up choosing a partner organisation. The non-voucher holders do so not necessarily out of inability to make a choice, but in all likelihood because 25% of them have job prospects or have found work. Thus, for about three quarters (78%) of voucher holders, the choice process can be said to be 'positive' t.e. they choose a partner at their own discretion or find work before the start of their counselling programme.

The remaining 22% of voucher holders do not arrive at a choice and for them the choice process may have been more problematic. There are the voucher holders who disappear from the voucher process due to illness or absence, or for a range of very different reasons (varia) (12%). Then there are those who start other trajectories or end up not belonging to the target group according to the VDAB mediator, together making up 10% of the voucher holders. It can therefore be said that a group of at least 10% of voucher holders definitely have a hard time making a choice. The group is probably larger than 10% because voucher holders who drop out of the pathway because of absence or because of work may also have struggled with the choice process.

The population of non-voters (excluding those who found work) does not have a unified profile. Contrary to what was indicated in interviews with partner organisations and with VDAB mediators, non-Dutch speakers and/or people with a migration background do not appear to be significantly more present in the group of non-voters. However, we do see that young people <25 years of age and those with a short education up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of secondary education are overrepresented in the group of non-voters and there is also a greater presence of highly educated people among the voters.

Compared to the TIBB4 pathways, the referral with vouchers is much less direct. Various actors (VDAB mediator and partner organisations) must take steps and especially the job-seeking voucher holder must proactively gather information, make contacts, make choices and feed back to the VDAB mediator. It can be assumed that vouchers have an activating effect in the sense that jobseekers should proactively look for a partner organisation, which also encourages them to consider and possibly take up work opportunities. TIBB4 guidance requires fewer intermediate steps, the jobseeker does not have to make a choice and direct allocation takes place. With TIBB4 there is possibly a *'lock-in'* effect because the jobseeker does not need to take any actions in the period between the contact with the VDAB mediator and the start of effective guidance with the assigned partner organisation (duration approximately 1 month). The jobseeker 'waits' until he/she can start the effective counselling in TIBB4, the voucher holder/ jobseeker has to take actions to start his/her counselling and enters into the conversation about career and employment with the partners.

After the allocation of the voucher, 47% of the jobseekers disappear from the voucher process. Consequently, for these voucher holders who do not start counselling, no effort and result fees should be paid either. Given the direct counselling process in TIBB4 and the limited dropout rate in TIBB4, it is likely that a significant proportion of the voucher holders/ jobseekers would have started TIBB4 counselling with cost implications.

## 3. Partner organisations' experiences

### 3.1. Interviews

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Mediation vouchers were awarded to jobseekers from March 2021. To gain insight into the experiences and actions of the 11 participating partner organisations, two rounds of interviews were organised.

The interviews were prepared by the 11 partners using a preliminary questionnaire. Each partner's responses and reactions to further questions were discussed during an interview of about one hour. The first round of semi-structured interviews was held with all partners during the period April - May 2021 as the voucher project had been running for more than one month for the partners by then and thus the first experiences could be discussed.

A second round of interviews with all 11 partners was organised during the period November - December 2021. By then, the voucher project had been running for about nine months, all voucher holders to be surveyed had started and the partners could look back on more extensive experiences with vouchers and voucher holders. We discuss partners' responses and reactions from the two rounds of interviews by topic covered.

### 3.2. Motivation for participation

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Partners were asked what the reasons, motivation and expectations were behind their participation in the voucher project, including submitting an offer with compliance with concession requirements.

#### ***Drawing lessons on partner profiling, customer perception and customer centricity.***

Almost all partners (9/11) indicated that the voucher project provided an opportunity for partner organisations to **learn lessons** and gain experiences on:

- a new service delivery model where the relationship between the partner organisation and the customer is more direct;
- a service model that starts from the customer's needs and is more customer-oriented;
- the profile of the partner organisation and customers' perceptions of the partner.

The existing partners of the TIBB4 plots in the province of Antwerp, which should attract voucher holders in addition to TIBB4 clients, indicated that they approached the voucher project positively and as a learning experience.

Partners not involved in existing TIBB4 projects, and in that sense 'new', considered the voucher project as an interesting new opportunity to participate in a counselling project around target groups they have expertise around. Partners with experience in TIBB4 within and outside the province of Antwerp, expressed a desire to be ready for a possible wider roll-out of the voucher approach throughout Flanders within the foreseeable future.



### ***Vouchers offers interesting opportunity for 'new' generic and specialist partners***

New partners with a 'generic' offer gave the following specific reasons for their participation in addition to the general reasons mentioned above:

- To (further) develop the partnership with the VDAB or to rejoin a VDAB project within the partner's area of expertise;
- because the concession approach gave them the opportunity to assist a share of jobseekers alongside other partners; the traditional tendering approach organised in lots leads to 'winner-takes-all' results where one partner acquires the entire lot. Two 'new' partners indicated that outsourcing parcels to one partner sometimes gave the impression that the VDAB is *de facto* working with a few preferred partners. Organising vouchers under the form of a concession offers more opportunities for the 'new' partners to participate, gain experience and grow alongside existing partners.

Partners with 'specialist' offerings cited the following specific reasons for their participation in the voucher project:

- For 3 specialist partners (out of 4), the voucher project was a way to still be able to offer specialised counselling for a specific target group (e.g. young people, over-55s or people with suspected work limitations) as part of a 'generic' project with a broad and diverse group of clients. Partners were given the opportunity to make their specialism available and provide targeted counselling to specific target groups within the broader population of jobseekers.
- Three specialist partners stated that it was not possible for them to compete in generic and large tenders and this due to scale, regional or organisational constraints and ambitions. The concession approach did now offer them the chance to secure a (more limited) place in the market and provide guidance to their specific target group. Providing guidance to large groups, with generic profiles and with a large territorial spread is not among the possibilities and/or wishes of specialist partners. The voucher concession approach now did offer the possibility to offer specialisms in a broad and generic guidance project and to be available for specific target groups.

### ***Endorse the assumption that freedom of choice promotes motivation among jobseekers***

Nine of the 11 partners indicated that one of the reasons for their participation in the voucher project was to endorse the underlying assumption of the project, namely, that choice promotes jobseekers' motivation. The partners indicated that they believed that freedom of choice for jobseekers can fuel the jobseeker's sense of control and autonomy. Putting the initiative in the hands of jobseekers works

motivating and potentially activating jobseekers. Nine partners indicated their belief in the benefits of choice as a reason for participation, two partners were neutral regarding the perceived benefits of voucher choice and did not see this as a reason for participation.

### 3.3. Job seekers and choice

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#### ***Are jobseekers satisfied that they can choose a partner?***

Almost all partners indicated during the interviews that most jobseekers are satisfied that they are given the opportunity to choose their own partner for their job counselling. For example, partners described jobseekers' responses as follows:

*"It gives the job seeker a sense of being in control"*

*"The jobseekers like being in control themselves, they choose a partner of their own choosing and therefore become more 'coachable' and we experience less resistance"*

*"By letting them make their own choice, jobseekers have felt serious be taken and that leads to more 'commitment' during the counselling process"*

Partners state that their impression is that the majority of jobseekers are satisfied with the voucher and the choice option. According to the partners, there is however a, albeit smaller, group of jobseekers who are less positive to negative about the voucher choice and the steps associated with it, namely, looking up information about the partners, contacting partners, making partner choice and communicating to the VDAB. According to partners, these are:

- jobseekers who perceive the voucher choice as an obligation and see the intensive counselling as an imposed requirement, necessary to keep the VDAB happy
- jobseekers with low self-reliance who struggle to contact different partners
- jobseekers suffering from 'choice stress', they feel that there are few clear differences in the generic partners' offerings, making them hesitate and hard to choose.

Despite a group of jobseekers who, according to the partners, are less positive about the option, the experience of the partners is that the majority of jobseekers appreciate the freedom of choice. Those who appreciate choice less perceive the process mainly as an obligation imposed by the VDAB.

Three partners emphatically state that the way in which voucher participation is put forward and presented by the VDAB mediator is very important for satisfaction with the option. If the voucher is presented as a useful opportunity and if the jobseeker is given a clear explanation of the steps to be taken, this also significantly increases satisfaction, according to three partners.

#### ***Do jobseekers inform themselves and compare partners?***

All partners have had introductory meetings with jobseekers and these contacts show, according to almost all partners, that a large number of jobseekers actually gather information about the partners' offers and also compare partners effectively. Partners state that:

- most jobseekers consulted the VDAB website with partner information;
- most jobseekers state that they have looked at the partner's website.

Two generic partners asked jobseekers who contacted them whether the jobseeker compared the offer with that of other partners. According to these two partners, half of the jobseekers compared multiple partners to arrive at a choice. One specialist partner, when contacted, asked the jobseeker the same question about whether they compared partners. This specialist partner estimated that about  $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of jobseekers actually compared partners. The lower number of jobseekers comparing with the specialist partner may be the logical consequence of the fact that a specific specialism is only offered by one partner and thus the possibility of comparison is rather limited.

Job seekers at several partners reported that the information on the websites of the generic partners is similar and, based on the website info, it is difficult to identify and compare differences in approach and content. With the specialist partners, the distinction from other and generalist partners is more pronounced and clear for obvious reasons.

All partners clearly state that the introductory interviews with jobseekers, rather than the website information, are the main source for information provision and for the final choice of jobseekers.

### ***What do partners believe is decisive for jobseekers to choose?***

The elements that determine the choice of jobseeker, according to most partners, are:

- the customer-friendliness of the partner: the quick availability for an introductory interview, the attention paid to the jobseeker during the introductory interview and the proverbial 'click' or affinity between the jobseeker and the offer/coach that results from the introductory interview.
- the content offer: being able to offer tailored guidance to the individual jobseeker.
- proximity of partner locations: most partners state that in addition to digital guidance, proximity to physical locations of the partner organisation are important.

One generic partner and one specialist partner indicated that they mainly provide guidance to jobseekers in a digital way. These partners communicate this to the jobseekers and therefore, for these partners, proximity to the locations is not a decisive factor in their choice of jobseekers.

Partners also gave other reasons why jobseekers choose them, for example, "already had a positive experience with the partner organisation", or "network of contacts with employers and employment agencies", but partners gave proximity, content and customer-friendliness as the most common reasons.

Almost all partners have the impression that jobseekers make an initial selection of partners based on the (VDAB and/or partner) website information. The choice made on the basis of the website information is partly dictated by the specialism and proximity of the partners. After being contacted by the jobseeker via phone, e-mail or contact form, a smooth record of an introductory meeting is important. The jobseeker's final choice is then largely determined by the information provided during the introductory meeting and the affinity that may or may not develop between jobseekers and welcome person or coach.

### ***Are there any jobseekers who find it hard to choose?***

Indeed, according to the partners, there are jobseekers who find it difficult to make a choice. The partners see very diverse reasons why some jobseekers struggle with the choice process. The partners do state that there is no single profile of the jobseeker with choice difficulties. Different reasons are cited by partners, such as:

- persons with higher vulnerability (e.g. psychological problems);
- Persons with financial (poverty) and/or housing (homeless) problems;
- low self-reliant persons;
- some non-digitals;
- some non-native speakers;
- individuals with choice stress or 'eternal doubters'.

Although a lack of digital proficiency was cited by partners as one of the reasons why some jobseekers found it difficult to choose, partners underlined that the choice problem did not present itself for all digitally literate people. A lack of digital proficiency can pose problems for information provision, contact and any subsequent counselling. Partners argued that solutions were available for the non-digitally proficient (paper 'flyers', telephone contact, on-site appointments, explaining VDAB website, etc.). Partners also noted that non-native speakers with limited knowledge of Dutch quite often chose the partner based on one contact and this without having considered other partners. Despite the challenges around non-native speakers and digital proficiency, several partners underlined that:

- no single profile on those with choice difficulties could be discerned, the reasons for choice difficulties are diverse;
- not all non-native speakers and digital natives have choice problems;
- solutions and alternatives (flyers, on-site appointment, etc.) are available for the non-native speakers and digibits.

Several partners were convinced that the challenges for digibytes and non-native speakers were not a reason to exclude these groups from the voucher choice. For example, one partner stated:

*"It would be a wrong conclusion to say that vouchers only work for higher profiles. We have to watch out for 'pigeonholing' and we have just seen that vouchers can work for non-native speakers and short-skilled people. These people do need an extra push and support, for instance with the digital aspect. Very important is also the front end, how the VDAB informs these people."*

Short-skilled, non-native speakers, people from migrant backgrounds or those with limited digital skills also benefit from the choice of vouchers, according to the partners. Any difficulties in choosing a guidance partner can be remedied with some additional initial support by the VDAB mediator and by the partner organisation.

### 3.4. What changes did the partners implement?

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In the voucher system, there are no guarantees about the number of jobseekers starting up with a partner and partners themselves have to convince voucher holders to start a counselling programme with them. The new and more competitive situation may encourage partners to make changes that make the partner more interesting to voucher holders.

During the interviews, partners were questioned around the changes they were implementing for the voucher project. The insights from the interviews were further supplemented by a review of the partners' websites and information documents

#### ***Do partners foresee more locations for counselling?***

The table below shows the partners with generic and/or specialist offerings with the number of planned locations:

*Table 2: Description locations mediation partners*

Partner	Locations	Comment
Ascento (generic)	10	Existing sites, guidance mainly digital. Use locations in case of exception or non-compliance with agreements.
Alexander Calder (generic)	4	Existing sites
Daoust (generic)	3	Existing sites
Group Intro (generic)	3	Existing sites (2) and 1 new site
Randstad Risesmart (generic)	10	Existing sites
SBS Skillbuilders (generic)	17	Existing sites and 10 additional sites were provided
Solvus (generic & 55+)	4	Existing sites (3) and 1 new site
Vokans (generic)	2	Existing sites

WEB (generic & youth)	6	Existing locations, guide preferably in Mechelen region-Kempen (not Antwerp city)
Emino (employment restriction)	1	Existing location (guiding job seekers in the city Antwerp, not in Mechelen and Kempen)
Mentorprise (highly educated)	3	Guidance mainly digital. Use locations at exception or non-compliance agreements.

The partner SBS Skillbuilders has made 17 locations available to voucher holders and about 10 of these locations are additional rental locations. This partner, by its own admission, has explicitly targeted additional locations because it estimated that proximity to the partner could be a decisive factor in the choice of voucher holders.

The partner Randstad Risesmart also responds to proximity with ten locations spread across the province. The locations offered are part of the partner organisation's already existing location network and, in this sense, are not an additional extension of locations for voucher holders.

The partner Ascento also offers 10 sites but states that the counselling process is mainly digital and thus there is little or no use of the sites. The locations offered, but little used for vouchers, are already part of the network of already existing business locations and in this sense do not represent an expansion or additional investment in locations.

The other generic partners work with between 2-6 sites, with only two partners indicating that they provided an additional site specifically for voucher holders.

Three partners stated during the interviews (WEB, Emino, Vokans) that they (initially) wished to develop their activities around vouchers locally and in the pilot phase of the voucher project did not have the immediate ambition to serve the entire province of Antwerp.

Several partners (e.g. Ascento, Mentorprise, Alexander Calder) with various locations across the province of Antwerp stated that, despite the availability of several locations, counselling is often done digitally, making the location play a less important role in the counselling process.

Based on the location data and the interviews, it can be said that one partner (SBS Skillbuilders) and to a lesser extent a second partner (Randstad Risesmart) relied on the availability of multiple locations to attract voucher holders. The other partners provided some additional locations to achieve some geographical spread within the province of Antwerp (with the exception of Emino).

A limiting factor for expanding to multiple locations is that the accompanying coaches must also be available at those locations. The presence of coaches in multiple locations and the need to maintain continuity in coaching poses significant logistical challenges. The partner with 17 locations highlighted that with low and declining numbers of voucher holders, the logistical challenge of having coaches available across all locations for a limited number of voucher holders became very significant.

### ***Other changes made? Websites***

All partners are listed with locations on an online VDAB overview page (<https://www.vdab.be/bemiddelingsvoucher>). All partners also have a web page on the VDAB website on which they can briefly introduce themselves with contact details.

All partners further created a dedicated web page on their own company websites with information on the guidance they offer to voucher holders.

The information offered on the VDAB and on its own partner website typically consists of:

- a brief presentation of the partner;
- A brief description of the general approach to the counselling process;
- contact information to set up an introductory meeting.

Contact information at all partners is a combination of:

- telephone number; 3 partners offer toll-free 0800 number;
- e-mail address;
- a contact form.

In addition to the above options, one partner also offers the option of contacting them at the partner's offices. One partner provides the option to directly record an introductory meeting with a coach via a booking tool on the webpage.

Two partners personalise their websites with a presentation of the coaches. Two partners offer an explanatory video recording.

Upon reviewing and comparing the partner websites, the following stand out:

- the websites are mainly aimed at getting jobseekers to make contact (extended contact info) and acquire more information during an introductory interview;
- the information on the websites is rather concise and limited to general principles and approaches;
- information on the actual content of the counselling programme is rarely made concrete;
- the differences in offer, approach and content of generic partners are not easy to deduce from the information provided on the website

Some partners also indicated during the interviews that the differences between generic partners based on the website information provided are not very pronounced and that the introductory interviews are the essential element for providing information to jobseekers.

### ***Welcome and introductory talks***

All partners see the development of reception, planning and organisation of introductory interviews as the main change in work processes.

Voucher holders contact partners in various ways (see above), directly by phone or through emails and contact forms. The availability of reception and/or follow-up of applications from voucher holders requires additional administrative capacity. In some partners, coaches follow up on applications, others provided additional administrative support.

Besides following up on applications and scheduling appointments, there are the actual introductory interviews with voucher holders who present themselves to the partner. Partners indicate that these interviews take around 30 minutes to 1 hour each time.

Although the introductory talks have significant organisational and time implications for partners, most partners are positive about them. Among the reasons why partners find the introductory talks useful are the following:

- the interviews provide an opportunity to get to know the population of jobseekers, their needs and support requests better;
- the interviews provide partners with insights on how and which jobseekers they reach, how the partners are perceived and whether there are any areas of concern in communication and approach;
- the interviews allow partners, on the one hand, to identify profiles that are not suitable for intensive counselling at an early stage; on the other hand, the introductory interview is a good basis to start working with the jobseeker quickly and efficiently if they choose the partner.

Three partners noted that the notification, welcome, and introductions process involves a significant investment of time and resources. Partners find the introductory interviews useful but also noted that there is no specific remuneration against the over welcoming and introductory efforts. Three partners argued that introductory interviews may have an activating function and thus a social benefit. It was therefore suggested that compensation for introductory interviews should be considered, for example, in cases where the jobseeker finds work after an introductory interview and before the start of counselling, or to compensate partners for introductory interviews with jobseekers who do not meet the specialist (e.g. no work restriction, not highly skilled), or general profile but still have orientation effects.

***Did the partners change the content of the voucher programmes, develop a different offer?***

The partners who were already active within TIBB4 both in the province of Antwerp and in other provinces all state that the content on offer for voucher holders is identical to their TIBB4 -offer. Thus, the voucher project did not prompt the existing partners to create a new



formulate offerings or make substantive changes. Conversely, the existing TIBB4 offer was also not changed under the impetus of the introduction of the voucher system.

The partners not participating in TIBB4 all stated that they composed their offer on the basis of already existing counselling and projects (e.g. outplacement, TIBB non-native speakers, career guidance, etc.). Thus, even these 'new' partners did not make any substantive changes to their offerings but used existing approaches and techniques.

One partner stated that the numbers of jobseekers within the voucher project were too limited to legitimise further development, renewal of offerings or further development of specialisms from a business perspective.

Different partners did point out that the voucher project saw a shift from on-site contacts to digital interaction. Certain learning activities were now offered digitally instead of on-site but this trend was previously Covid-related, and had also taken place before TIBB4, and so is not a change that can be attributed purely to the vouchers.

Virtually all partners state that the guidance offer for vouchers is not new in terms of content and is largely based on an already existing guidance approach of the partner organisation. However, partners do stress that there are differences in the approach and implementation of the voucher trajectories. Almost all partners underline the importance given to customisation. More than other guidance programmes, the voucher guidance starts from the wishes and needs of the jobseekers. In function of the needs, the voucher system realises more personalised routes in which possible steps are accelerated and/or skipped and other steps/needs receive more attention. In voucher counselling, there are still few standard pathways according to partner organisations. Several partners report that in voucher counselling, the focus is faster and more explicitly on finding work and that there is more room for coaches to shape a counselling pathway with the jobseeker at their own discretion.

In summary, it can be concluded that vouchers did not lead to changes or developments in the content of the partners' offerings, but that the partners shaped the existing offerings in a more personalised way together with the jobseeker in a pathway. The proverbial "menu" did not change but the choice of dishes happened more in function of the needs/wishes of the jobseekers.

### 3.5. Do partners refuse job seekers?

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A possible consequence of the introduction of vouchers linked to a result fee is that partner organisations will engage in '*cream skimming*' or so-called 'skimming'. Skimming implies that partners mainly try to attract voucher holders whom they suspect can be relatively easily led to work, in order to maximise the result fees. Conversely, voucher holders with a greater distance to the labour market or jobseekers whom the partners suspect will be more difficult to employ may be shunned or even rejected. Skimming allows the jobseekers, who are most in need of support and guidance, in the

left out in the proverbial cold for the benefit of those jobseekers who do manage to smoothly find their way to work.

The VDAB works with a dual financial incentive for both the existing TIBB4 approach and the voucher system. On the one hand, there is a fixed effort allowance per assisted jobseeker and, on the other, a result allowance when the assisted jobseeker is employed. So the result fee is not the only financial incentive for the partners. The possibility of skimming is mitigated by the effort allowance but the presence of the result allowance can still be an incentive for skimming.

Under the voucher project, partners were given the option to refuse a jobseeker with a voucher. In the existing TIBB4 approach, it was in principle not possible to refuse a jobseeker. Jobseekers who fit the TIBB4 profile and were referred by a VDAB mediator could not be refused or 'skimmed off' by the TIBB4 partner (parcel holder). In the voucher system, partners can indeed refuse jobseekers, resulting in a possibility of skimming.

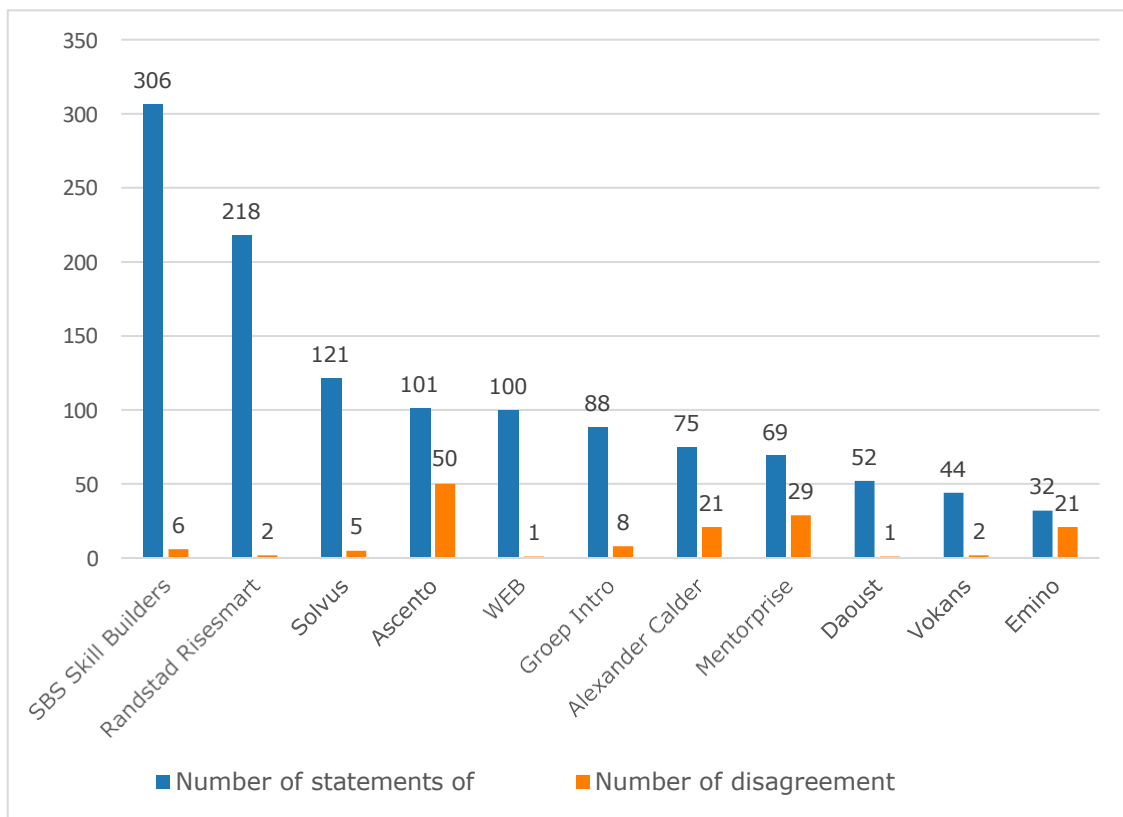
To form a picture about possible skimming within the voucher project, all participating partners were asked to record each application from a voucher holder and indicate whether or not the partner agreed to provide counselling to the jobseekers. If the partner did not agree, they were asked to specify the reason for the refusal.

Between March 2021 and October 2022, all partner organisations together recorded 1,206 statements of agreement and 146 non-agreements<sup>2</sup>. The figure below shows the distribution of agreement and non-agreement statements by partner.

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<sup>2</sup> The number of agreements and non-agreements does not correspond to the total number of vouchers distributed during the period under review and this is because: (1) not all voucher holders signed up with a partner, (2) voucher holders signed up with different partners, (3) partners were not yet able to comment on all signed up voucher holders because the introductory interview had not yet taken place.

Figure 11: Number of (non-)agreements per partner (March 2021- October 2021)



The above figures show that the partners with the most applications, SBS Skillbuilders and Randstad Risesmart, very rarely refuse jobseekers. A review of the reasons given for refusal often reveals that the jobseeker did not belong to the target group and/or had insufficient command of the Dutch language.

We get the same picture from the other partners with a generic offer (i.e. Solvus, WEB, Group Intro, Daoust and Vokans). Low numbers of refusals and with the few refusals the motivation is often that the voucher holder did not belong to the (voucher) target group because, for instance, the person was employed in the meantime or wanted to follow a training course. The refusals among these generic partners based on profiles that did not meet the requirements for intensive counselling would also lead to legitimate refusals within the TIBB4.

For two generic partners, refusals are higher. Alexander Calder refused 21 jobseekers or 22% of applications during the survey period. A review of the reasons given shows that more than half of refusals related to absence or unavailability of the jobseekers. Alexander Calder meticulously recorded every application and if the jobseeker repeatedly proved unreachable for an introductory interview, the partner proceeded to non-agreement. Most other partners decided to refuse only after an introductory interview and did not systematically record the jobseeker's unavailability. Thus, even in the case of the generic partner Alexander Calder, the refusals concern reasons that would also apply in TIBB4.

The generic partner Ascento had the highest absolute number with 50 refusals, refusing 33% of jobseekers (after an introductory interview). The reason cited in 90% of refusals was described as "*approach and offer is less in line with client needs*". The partner Ascento participated in both interview rounds (see above) and was questioned regarding the refusals. The partner stated that the offer for voucher holders is mainly digital. Locations are provided but the partner has a stated preference for the interaction between coach and jobseeker to be mainly digital. This choice of digital counselling is partly driven by scheduling considerations, efficiency, and availability of coaches. Voucher holders with a preference for on-site counselling were advised by the partner to seek other partners and figured with a non-agreement. In about 10% of refusals, the partner expressed doubts about the job seeker's attitude and motivation and cited this as grounds for the non-agreement. The last cited reason concerning motivation/attitude can be seen as a form of 'skimming', whereby the partner refuses apparently 'more difficult' profiles and thus wants to concentrate on jobseekers with better attitudes/motivation. The refusals related to the digital offer seem to be based more on the partner's counselling approach than on the jobseeker's chances on the labour market and can therefore be considered less a form of skimming.

Two specialist partners also have higher refusal rates. Mentorprise and Emino have refusal rates of 29% and 40% respectively. Review of the motivations for the refusals indicates that almost all refusals are due to a profile of the job seeker that does not match the partner's specialism. For example, the voucher holder does not have an employment disability (Emino) or is short-skilled (Mentorprise). For the specialist partners Emino and WEB, the location of mentoring was also sometimes cited as a reason because these partners also focus on specific regions (e.g. Antwerp region or Turnhout region). For the high-skilled specialism, location was never cited as a reason for refusal (cf. digital offer).

In conclusion, there was very limited skimming in the voucher system. The potential skimming was concentrated with one partner and then only to a limited extent as the refusals with that partner were mainly motivated by the digital nature of the counselling programme. Most generic partners rarely refused voucher holders and the scarce non-agreements mainly resulted from an unsuitability of the jobseeker for voucher counselling rather than because of selective and skimming partners. Specialist partners refused proportionally more jobseekers but this is a direct and logical consequence of the partner's focus on a specific target group. Specific target groups that possibly *in se* posed greater challenges to partners in guiding the jobseeker to work.

### 3.6. Mediation partners' experiences with assisted voucher holders

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Nine of the 11 partners state that the coaches' guidance of voucher holders is perceived positively because of the following reasons:

- voucher holders grasp the guidance with less resistance because they can get started with a partner they chose themselves;
- voucher holders often have clearer support needs and these can be addressed by the coaches through a personalised approach.

One existing plot holder noted that there was less need for 'sanctioning' mediation pathways among voucher holders compared to TIBB4. However, this partner's perception cannot be confirmed by the figures of effective transmissions in TIBB4 and voucher holders.<sup>3</sup>

Several partners noted that the voucher holders who reached them after summer 2021 were more often atypical jobseekers with more support and guidance needs. The shift in profiles was explained by partners by the high demand for workers in the labour market, which meant that especially more difficult profiles entered the intensive (voucher) counselling.

Nine of the 11 partners explicitly stated that after seven to nine months of experience with the voucher system, they perceived the approach as positive.

One partner endorsed the positive experience with voucher holders but pointed out a possible catalytic effect of vouchers. Self-reliant jobseekers are extra motivated and activated by vouchers, for them vouchers offer clear benefits. Non-self-reliant individuals may struggle to choose partners and for them the voucher may be inhibiting. Once counselling is initiated, there is an impression that the inhibiting effects disappear.

### 3.7. Key concerns according to partners?

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'New' partner organisations pointed to the significant administrative burdens involved in cooperating with the VDAB. The 'real time' registration of counselling activities, the various audits and checks (VDAB, ESF), making documents ESF compliant, internal VDAB training courses to be followed, etc. were cited as unforeseen and 'creeping' costs that require attention and energy that cannot be spent on core activities. Partners did note that the interaction with VDAB project successors can be time-intensive but was also perceived as constructive and useful. Partners already active in TIBB4 or in other VDAB projects did not perceive a higher administrative burden as a result of the voucher project.

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<sup>3</sup>For the period March 2021 to April 2022, there were 41 transmissions or 2.2% in TIBB4 and for vouchers 32 transmissions or 2.6%.

Almost all partners refer to two main concerns around the too limited numbers of vouchers on the one hand and the need for more data and information on the distributed vouchers on the other.

The partners are positive about the use of vouchers but regret the decrease in the total number of available vouchers since July 2021. The partners point to the cost of keeping coaches, locations, appointment times for introductory interviews available while the overall volume of vouchers continued to decline and consequently the number of jobseekers starting up. Without sustained and substantial volumes, the voucher project is not sufficiently profitable for most partners. The flexible management associated with vouchers is only sustainable if enough vouchers are made available by the VDAB.

The partner organisations further highlight the need for more information and data on the vouchers awarded. The partner organisations want more and updated information on: the number of vouchers per location and region, the number of voucher holders who are still effectively looking for a partner organisation, the number of vouchers that disappear or are not used, etc.

Vouchers require more flexibility from partners and involve more uncertainty. To learn the necessary lessons and adjust operations to a new voucher market, partners need to have more and updated data. Most partners stated that during the pilot project they were partly 'steering blind' or had the wrong impression that large volumes of vouchers were still available, while many vouchers ended up not being used by jobseekers (cfr. about half of the voucher holders do not start counselling).

## 4. The experiences of VDAB mediators

The VDAB mediators (hereafter "mediator(s)") play an important role in the process that jobseekers go through in choosing a mediation partner who will support the jobseeker in his or her job search. The mediator informs the jobseeker about his or her role and tasks in the process and the fact that he or she should choose a mediation partner.

To capture the experiences of this target group - which has close contact with both jobseekers and placement partners - several surveys were launched over the course of the experiment. Specifically, interviews were conducted with a group of mediators in April 2021 and January 2022. In addition, two online surveys were launched in which mediators could participate. The first online survey took place during May-June 2021 and the second during January-February 2022.

This chapter discusses the main results, with a particular focus on the following elements regarding the 'Mediation Vouchers' project:

- Experiences of mediators;
- Cooperation with mediation partners;
- Job seekers' experiences and reaction;
- Ability of jobseekers to choose a placement partner;
- Determinants determining the choice of mediation partner;
- Added value of 'Mediation Vouchers' project.

### 4.1. Survey - first round

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About a month after the start of the Mediation Vouchers project, a focus group with mediators and team leaders was organised on 12/04/2021. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss and share experiences, concerns, ambiguities and *best practices*. During the sounding board group, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the mediators and team leaders present. The interview had a dual purpose:

- 1) Mapping of initial experiences of mediators and team leaders regarding the Mediation Vouchers project;
- 2) Provide the basis for an online survey of all intermediaries involved.

The first online survey was launched on 21/05/2021 and ran until 01/06/2021. The aim was to survey mediators' initial experiences with the newly launched Mediation Vouchers project. A total of 24 mediators participated in this survey.

In what follows, the results of both the interview and the survey are discussed together.

#### 4.1.1. Experiences of mediators

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A key finding from this initial survey is the intensity and workload of the project for mediators. Quite a few mediators indicate that they consider the project to be particularly time-consuming

experienced compared to e.g. TIBB4. For example, they indicate that it can easily take four weeks before jobseekers can effectively start working with a mediation partner. Indeed, if a jobseeker fails to have a placement partner selected at the first follow-up interview with the mediator, the mediator should schedule a second follow-up interview with the jobseeker within the two weeks following the first follow-up interview. If a jobseeker is not present during one of these follow-up interviews, guiding a jobseeker takes even more time for the mediator.

The mediators could also formulate proposals to overcome any bottlenecks. Some proposals to make this process more efficient are:

- (Digital and/or pre-recorded) info sessions introducing the various mediation partners, their offerings, their working methods, etc;
- Making the mediation partners themselves responsible for scheduling the intake interview with jobseekers;
- Using a uniform mode/tool by which mediators refer jobseekers to mediation partners.

Some mediators also indicate that they find the two-week period between the first contact with the job seeker and the first follow-up interview too short. This is because it is not always possible for the mediator to schedule a (physical) appointment within these two weeks because of already busy schedules. In addition, mediators also indicate that this period is too short for some jobseekers to select a suitable mediation partner.

One mediator indicates that the obligation to have the first contact with the jobseeker by phone is perceived as a 'waste of time'. Indeed, the mediator indicates that, based on the telephone conversation, it is not always clear to jobseekers what is expected of them. For instance, they often do not realise that they are obliged to choose a mediation partner.

Other mediators indicate that they find the requirement for follow-up interviews to be *face-to-face* problematic. It makes it more difficult for mediators to schedule an appointment within the two-week period. Moreover, there are also many jobseekers who can be followed up via a digital follow-up interview. The possibility of digital follow-up interviews would both make it easier for mediators to schedule appointments and save time for the jobseekers involved.

However, it should also be noted that several mediators indicate that not all jobseekers benefit from a digital approach. Some jobseekers within the project can be considered 'digibeten', people who do not or insufficiently have certain digital skills. These jobseekers experience many difficulties because many parts of the project are (largely) digital. For instance, it is not always easy for jobseekers to compare the various mediation partners and their offers because this information is mainly only available online. Of course, it should also be noted that many mediation partners do have a *face-to-face* offering to this group of jobseekers.



### 4.1.2. Cooperation with mediation partners

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Mediators indicated that contact with mediation partners was difficult, especially at the start of the project. For example, jobseekers ended up with people who were not aware of the project or were not contacted by a mediation partner after leaving their contact details. Mediators do indicate that in the meantime (i.e. at the time this survey was conducted) these problems no longer occur.

Several mediators indicate that the lack of a uniform *way/tool* for referring jobseekers to a mediation partner leads to confusion. A possible solution suggested by one mediator is to make the mediation partners themselves responsible for referring and scheduling jobseekers who choose them. Some mediators also indicated that the number of places/moments available to schedule an intake interview at mediation partners is limited, which means that a jobseeker still cannot always choose the mediation partner of his preference.

Finally, it is also indicated that the information posted by different mediation partners on their websites is very similar. This makes it difficult for jobseekers to detect differences in practices between mediation partners and thus choose the mediation partner that best suits their needs.

### 4.1.3. Job seekers' experiences and reaction

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Overall, mediators indicate that jobseekers see it as positive that they can choose their own mediation partner for support in their job search. Mediators indicate that the ability to self-select reduces any resistance on the part of jobseekers to participate in counselling programmes. The jobseekers are seen as more motivated and they report feeling that they are taken into account and that they themselves are at the wheel of their guidance path.

Several mediators, on the other hand, indicate that jobseekers' reactions are rather mixed, with some jobseekers even showing little or no enthusiasm. These jobseekers may be less or not enthusiastic because they are required to follow a counselling pathway, and thus not necessarily because of the mandate given to them to choose their own mediation partner.

Some mediators do indicate that there are jobseekers who expect a certain amount of support from mediators when choosing a mediation partner. This is e.g. about providing (additional) information about the different mediation partners and their offerings.

There do not seem to be clear differences in the profiles of jobseekers who are or are not enthusiastic. Some mediators indicate that e.g. short-skilled are less enthusiastic than high-skilled or that non-native speakers (who can speak enough Dutch for the project) are less enthusiastic to participate. Again, the low enthusiasm may rather be due to the compulsory nature of following a guidance programme, and possibly not to having to choose the

a mediation partner. However, other mediators indicated that they did not experience any difference between profiles.

#### 4.1.4. Ability of jobseekers to choose a mediation partner

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While jobseekers generally respond enthusiastically that they can choose for themselves, mediators also indicate that jobseekers' ability to choose a mediation partner is rather mixed. About as many mediators indicate that jobseekers are able to choose, as the number of mediators who indicate that jobseekers cannot choose or have a lot of difficulty in doing so.

Several mediators indicate that only a limited proportion of jobseekers manage to select a mediation partner at the first attempt. It would mainly be the self-reliant jobseekers who (can) select a mediation partner after receiving their 1<sup>st</sup> assignment. Several mediators indicate that a lot of jobseekers are unclear about what is specifically expected of them or that jobseekers do not even know that they have to choose a mediation partner (themselves).

The survey revealed that mediators perceive that certain profiles of jobseekers find it difficult or impossible to choose a mediation partner. The following profiles emerged here:

- Short-skilled;
- Digibits;
- Non-native speakers;
- People with (welfare) problems (and therefore do not have the energy and/or time to find a mediation partner).

Mediators have the impression that the short-skilled profiles and the digital-savvy often contact only one mediation partner for information. The nearest and/or first available mediation partner is then regularly chosen. These profiles seem to be less able or less inclined to compare and choose in a reasoned manner. Particularly the digital-savvy struggle to make a choice. For these profiles, it is difficult to look up information about the different mediation partners (which is mainly only available online) and contact them.

#### 4.1.5. Determinants determining the choice of mediation partner

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According to the mediators, the location of a placement partner is by far the most important determinant of job seekers' choice. However, one mediator indicates that this is mainly the case for short-skilled people.

In addition, according to mediators, there are also quite a few jobseekers who contact only 1 mediation partner. According to the mediators, these jobseekers often seem to be rightly

arrive at the mediation partner Alexander Calder. It is suspected that the order in which the mediation partners are presented on the VDAB website could be a possible explanation. Based on this input and to avoid possible *order bias*, this order on the website was changed several times by VDAB.

Finally, the mediation partner that the jobseeker was able to contact first is also often chosen, i.e. where the jobseeker has had direct contact with an employee of the mediation partner. It is mainly the highly skilled profiles that seem to be more targeted in their search for a placement partner that suits them best.

The other choice determinants of jobseekers are according to intermediaries:

- The recognisability of the mediation partner;
- Offering physical *face-to-face* counselling;
- Offering individual counselling (as opposed to group counselling);
- Experiencing a pleasant and clear welcome on first contact;
- Previous experience with a mediation partner (i.e. jobseekers choose a mediation partner they have already worked with during a previous counselling process).

#### 4.1.6. Added value of the Mediation Vouchers project

Finally, mediators were also asked whether they think the Mediation Vouchers project adds value. Several mediators indicated that the expansion of supply and freedom of choice for jobseekers were the main plus points of the project.

Mediators indicate that the project provides a wider range of mediation partners compared to the TIBB4 project. This, according to mediators, allows for more customisation. The more extensive offer also means that more specialised mediation partners are available, something that offers significant added value, especially for the highly skilled profiles. Because jobseekers can now choose for themselves, they also seem to react more enthusiastically and be less resistant to following a guidance path.

Some mediators indicate that the added value for the project is currently unclear, partly because the project is still in its early stages.

## 4.2. Survey - second round

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At the start of 2022, a second round of surveys was organised to capture the experience of mediators. To this end, a second online survey was sent out to the 50 mediators with the most experience with the Mediation Vouchers project (i.e. the mediators with the most referrals). The survey ran from 06/01/2022 to 14/01/2022. Thirty mediators participated in this online survey. Following this online survey, a roundtable discussion was held with mediators and team leaders present at a focus group on 18/01/2022 to discuss the results of the online survey in more detail. In what follows, the main results of both the online survey and the roundtable discussion are discussed.

The survey of mediators mainly revealed two problems related to the Mediation Vouchers project. The first problem relates to the workload of mediators. According to the mediators, the workload in this project is higher than in the TIBB4 project. The survey also revealed some possible reasons, as well as suggestions to possibly address this.

A second problem relates to the jobseekers' choice process. The survey shows that there are certain profiles of jobseekers who generally have more difficulty in choosing a placement partner. Specifically, these are digibletes, non-native speakers and 'vulnerable'<sup>4</sup> profiles. During the roundtable discussion, it also emerged that there is another group of jobseekers (i.e. unmotivated jobseekers), for whom it is difficult to find a mediation partner. These jobseekers show more resistance to follow counselling and do not make enough efforts to select a mediation partner.

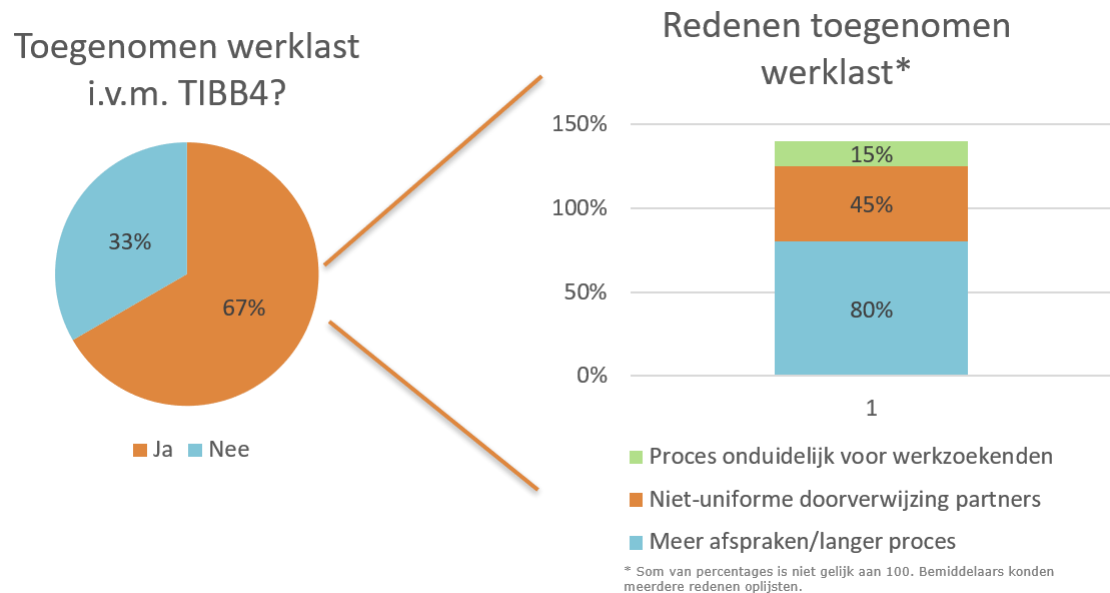
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<sup>4</sup> 'Vulnerable' profiles refer to those jobseekers who the mediators consider to be low self-reliance, short-skilled, insecure (e.g. not daring to call), having difficulty with self-reflection, etc.

### 4.2.1. Workload mediators

As already cited, the survey reveals that a large majority of respondents indicated that the workload in the 'Mediation with vouchers' project is higher than in the TIBB4 project.

Figure 12: Workload experienced by mediators



According to the mediators, the main explanations for this increase lie mainly in the fact that more appointments need to be scheduled with a jobseeker. In addition, reference was also made to the lack of a uniform way/method of referring jobseekers to mediation partners.

Those mediators who had indicated they experienced an increase in workload could also suggest solutions. Some of the suggested solutions were:

- Using a uniform way for mediators to refer jobseekers to mediation partners.

Because different mediation partners have different methods of referral, mediators regularly have to look up which method to follow for a specific partner, what to indicate, etc. A uniform method of referral for all partners would reduce the workload.

- The possibility of appointments taking place digitally (including the ability to digitally sign an appointment sheet).

The possibility of e.g. signing an appointment sheet digitally could be a great added value to help reduce the workload of mediators, and not only within the Mediation Vouchers project. Indeed, this would allow a lot of appointments to be handled digitally. However, there is the risk that a jobseeker is not present at a digital appointment and that a physical appointment still needs to be scheduled.

- Flexible terms in which agreements can be fixed.

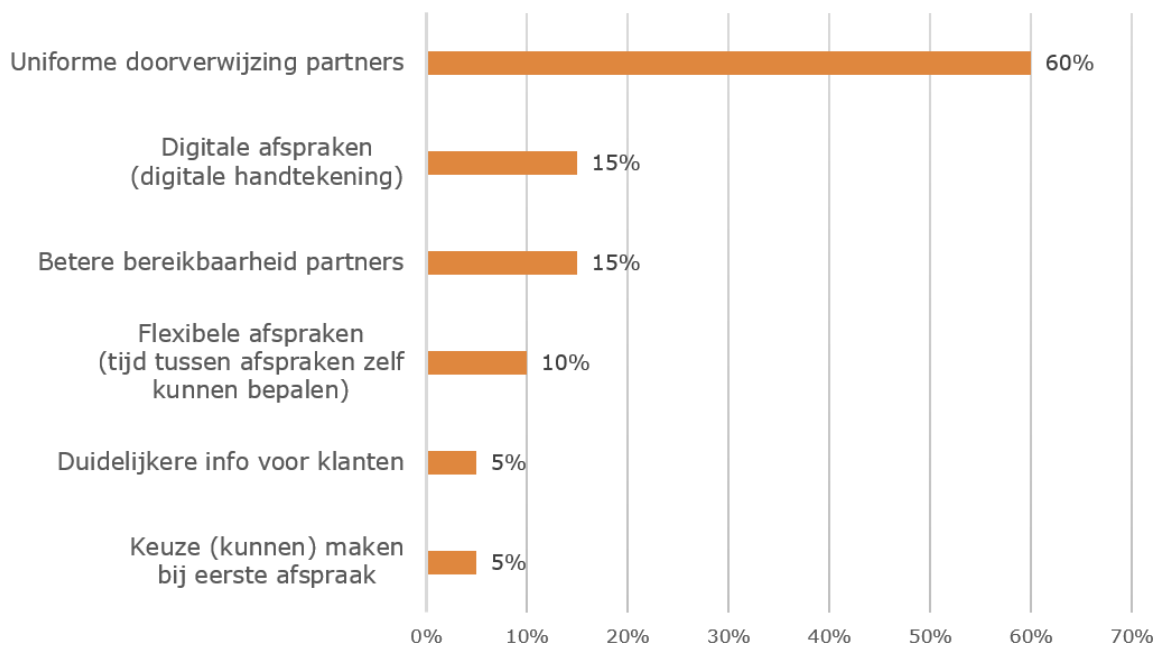
The flexible deadlines mainly refer to the maximum period of 2 weeks following, for example, the issuing of the 1<sup>st</sup> assignment to select a mediation partner. During this period, an appointment should be scheduled with the jobseeker. This deadline was set so that jobseekers have sufficient time to choose a mediation partner (compare partners, contact them, go for an introductory meeting, etc.).

This 2-week period is sometimes perceived as too short, both from the mediator's perspective and from the jobseeker's perspective. For mediators, this period is too short to schedule appointments due to busy schedules. For jobseekers, it is not always possible to schedule an introductory meeting with (several) mediation partners within this timeframe. This is because mediation partners are sometimes difficult to reach or have no availability to schedule an introductory interview. Enabling mediators to be more flexible in scheduling appointments could help avoid unnecessary appointments for a second assignment.

- The reformulation of assignments in MLB.

A rather general observation, so not specific to Mediation Vouchers, relates to the wording of assignments for the job seeker in MLB. This includes a particularly large amount of information and is not always formulated in a clear or simple manner. This makes it more difficult for a jobseeker to know what is expected of him.

Figure 13: Proposed solutions workload\*

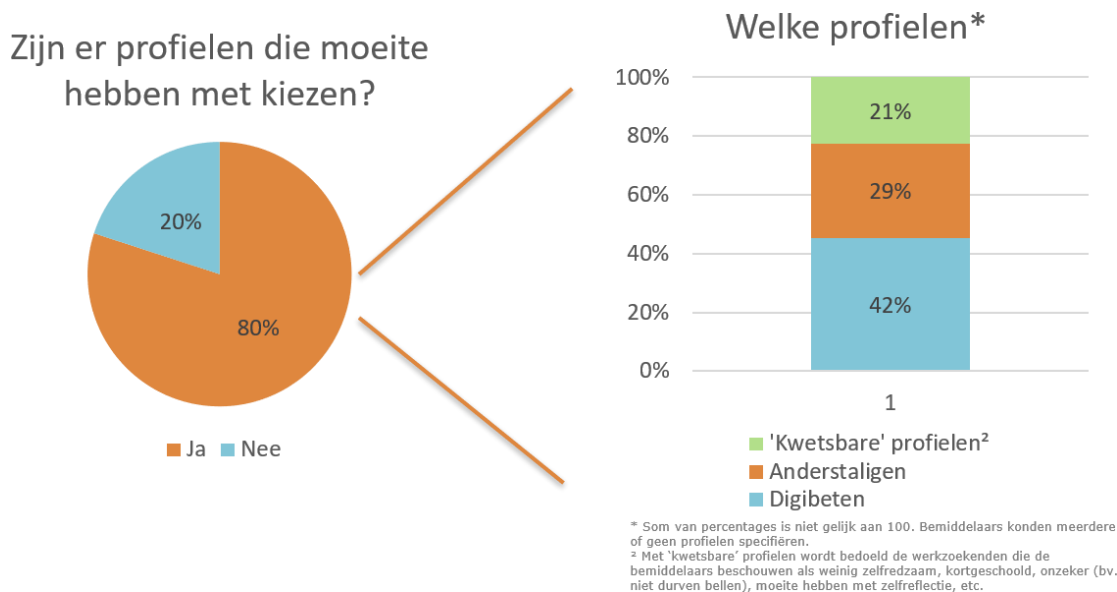


\* Som van percentages is niet gelijk aan 100. Bemiddelaars konden meerdere voorstellen oplijsten.

## 4.2.2. Ability of jobseekers to choose a mediation partner

The second issue discussed during the sounding board group relates to whether or not jobseekers manage to choose a mediation partner, whether there are profiles of jobseekers who generally have more difficulty doing so and, in relevant cases, how these profiles could possibly be supported. The online survey revealed that such profiles indeed seem to exist. Specifically, these would be digital illiterates, non-native speakers and 'vulnerable' profiles.

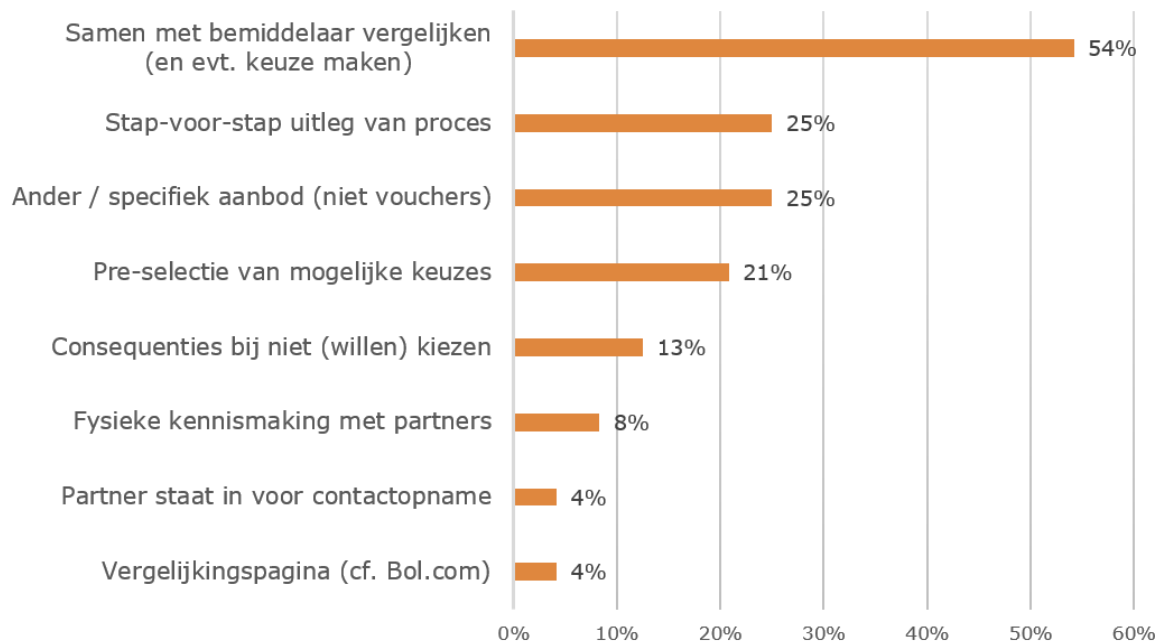
Figure 14: Ability of jobseekers to choose



Mediators were also asked how these profiles could possibly be supported. Some of the solutions suggested were:

- Mediator and jobseeker together compare mediation partners;
- Mediator makes a pre-selection of mediation partners from which jobseeker can choose;
- Improve information flow from placement partners to jobseekers;
- Expanding the contact options of mediation partners.

Figure 15: How these profiles support\*



\* Som van percentages is niet gelijk aan 100. Bemiddelaars konden meerdere voorstellen oplijsten.

Some of the proposed solutions relate to guiding the jobseeker more actively in the selection process. Specifically, a mediator would go through the offer together with the jobseeker and e.g. show the jobseeker what information to look out for, where to find certain information, etc. The second proposal, a pre-selection of intermediary partners, leans in this direction. In this proposal, based on the jobseeker's profile, the mediator would make a selection of the mediation partners that might suit the jobseeker. This requires the jobseeker to compare only those mediation partners that would suit him. Among other things, both proposals can ensure that a jobseeker does not needlessly contact a mediation partner that does not suit him, for example. For example, because a mediation partner only focuses on a specific target group.

To support the choice process for, among others, the group of digibits, one suggestion is to improve the information flow to this target group. This by, for example, making information on all partners available on paper, so that digibits can also compare different options. It should be noted that mediation partners have the freedom to choose how best to approach jobseekers, including the possibility of distributing e.g. paper leaflets. In addition, the comment was made that all profiles of jobseekers would benefit if mediation partners provided more information on the forms of work, modules, workshops, digital and physical offerings, forms of work, etc. offered by them. This would make it easier for jobseekers to notice the differences between mediation partners and consequently make a choice.

During the roundtable discussion, it also emerged that, in addition to the aforementioned profiles (digitally literate, non-native speakers and 'vulnerable' profiles), unmotivated jobseekers are another group where it is difficult to be directed to a mediation partner. These



jobseekers show more resistance to follow counselling and make too little effort to select a mediation partner. Some mediators indicate that the above groups of jobseekers might be better served by a project other than the Mediation Vouchers. This way, e.g. unmotivated jobseekers could be referred directly by a mediator to a mediation partner.

Several mediators indicated that they would like to have the option of directing jobseekers to a mediation partner. This when the jobseeker does not make a choice himself. This direct referral could take place after a non-executed 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment or possibly even without giving a 1<sup>st</sup> assignment (e.g. when the mediator experiences a lot of resistance from the jobseeker). In this way, jobseekers with insufficient motivation for Mediation Vouchers could be referred directly to a mediation partner by the mediator. This could possibly be done through a rotating system of mediation partners.

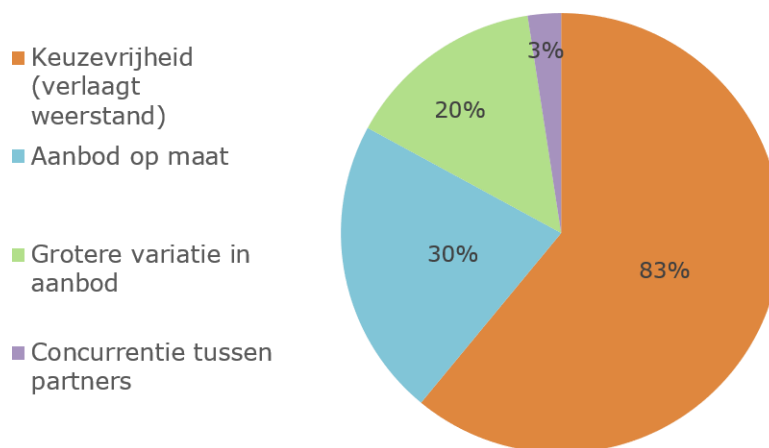
### 4.2.3. Evaluation of the project

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Finally, both in the online survey and during the roundtable discussion, mediators were asked to evaluate the project.

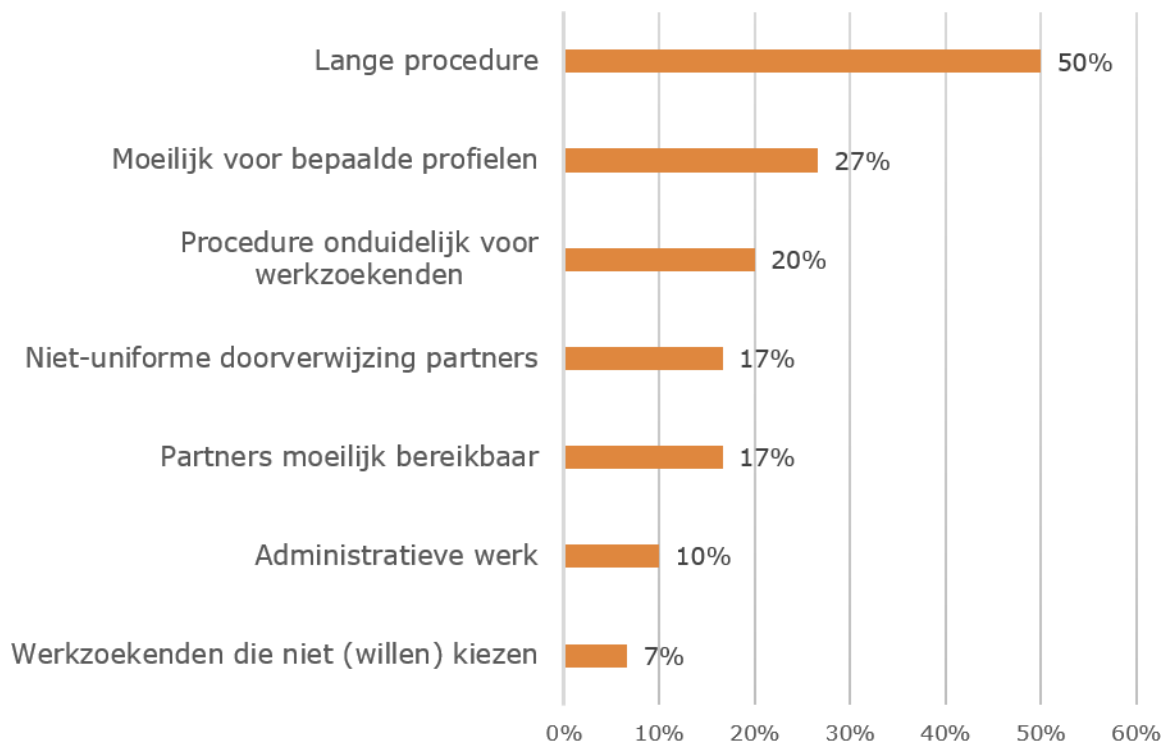
The main positives cited by intermediaries are the freedom of choice for jobseekers, the possibility of receiving a tailor-made offer and, correspondingly, the greater variety of offers.

Figure 16: Positives



According to mediators, the main negative point is the long procedure that has to be gone through before a jobseeker can start with the mediation partner. In addition, mediators also cite that the project is difficult for certain profiles of jobseekers and consequently that the project may be less suitable for these jobseekers.

Figure 17: Negative points



\* Som van percentages is niet gelijk aan 100. Bemiddelaars konden meerdere elementen oplijsten.

The roundtable discussion during the sounding board concluded by asking whether the project could be considered a success overall. Some mediators indicated that the project definitely adds value and offers more opportunities to better support certain profiles of jobseekers. Other mediators indicated that the project has added value, but that they would like to see it mainly as an addition to the existing guidance offer (e.g. TIBB4). The mediation vouchers would be an additional option available to mediators. Mediators would thus be able to allocate jobseekers, who they believe are best suited for this project, to the mediation vouchers. However, it should also be noted here that not every mediator is in favour of this 'split' method of working.

## 4.3. Conclusion

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### Experiences of mediators

The mediators indicate that they experience a **higher workload** in the Mediation Vouchers project with regard to guiding jobseekers compared to TIBB4. The main reasons pointed to are:

- The fact that **more agreements are** required between a mediator and a job seeker before the job seeker can start a counselling and placement process (compared to TIBB4);
- **Lack of a uniform way** for mediators to **refer** jobseekers to a placement partner;

- **Lack of clarity among jobseekers** about what is expected of them. As a result, a mediator sometimes has to schedule multiple appointments with a job seeker.

### **Job seekers' experiences and reaction**

**Overall**, mediators indicate that jobseekers see it as **positive** that they can choose their own mediation partner for support in their job search. Mediators indicate that the ability to self-select **reduces** any **resistance** on the part of jobseekers to participate in counselling programmes. The jobseekers are seen as **more motivated** and they report feeling that **they** are taken into account and that they **themselves** are at the wheel of their counselling path.

### **Ability of job seekers to choose a placement partner**

While jobseekers generally respond positively to being allowed to choose for themselves, mediators also indicate that jobseekers' ability to choose a mediation partner is rather mixed.

Several mediators indicate that only a limited proportion of jobseekers manage to select a mediation partner at the first attempt. It would mainly be the **self-reliant jobseekers** who **(can) select** a mediation partner after receiving their first assignment. The mediators find that **certain profiles** of jobseekers have **more difficulty** in choosing a mediation partner. The following profiles emerge here:

- Digibits;
- Non-native speakers;
- Vulnerable profiles (jobseekers whom mediators consider to have low self-efficacy, short-skilled, insecure, have difficulty with self-reflection, etc.);
- People with (welfare) problems (and therefore do not have the energy and/or time to find a mediation partner).

### **Determinants determining choice of mediation partner**

By far the **most important determinant** of jobseekers' choice, according to intermediaries, is the **locations of a placement partner**. The other choice determinants of job seekers, according to intermediaries, are:

- The recognisability of the mediation partner;
- Offering physical (*face-to-face*) counselling;
- Offering individual counselling (as opposed to group counselling);
- Experiencing a pleasant and clear welcome on first contact;
- Previous experience with a mediation partner (i.e. jobseekers choose a mediation partner they have already worked with during a previous counselling process).

In addition, mediators experience that jobseekers often **choose the mediation partner** who was **able to contact** the jobseeker **first**. Mediators indicate that

mainly the **high-skilled profiles** seem to look for the mediation partner that suits them best.

### **Added value of Mediation Vouchers**

Mediators indicate that the Mediation Vouchers project can offer a lot of added value. According to mediators, the main positives of Mediation Vouchers are:

- **Freedom of choice** for the job seeker (which reduces any resistance);
- Opportunity to receive a **tailor-made offer**;
- **Greater variety** in the range of mediation partners (both in depth and breadth).

The main **negative point**, according to mediators, is the **longer procedure** compared to TIBB4. In addition, mediators also cite that the project is difficult for certain profiles of jobseekers and consequently that the project may be less suitable for these jobseekers.

## 5. Jobseekers' experiences of the choice process

The jobseekers included in the Mediation Vouchers project were instructed by VDAB to look for a mediation partner to guide them in their job search for nine months. To do so, jobseekers with a voucher have to choose from among 11 guidance partners appointed by the VDAB in a concession scheme. The voucher project provides jobseekers with a choice, in contrast to the usual TIBB4 organisation in which the jobseeker, without a choice, is assigned to a fixed partner organisation (so-called parcel holder) that provides jobseekers with guidance in a certain region.

To identify jobseekers' initial experiences with mediation vouchers, a survey was distributed during the period 18/03/2021 to 01/10/2021. The questionnaire was distributed with the help of VDAB mediators. Two weeks after a jobseeker was instructed to choose a mediation partner, the jobseeker should communicate his choice to the VDAB mediator during a follow-up interview. If a jobseeker had not selected a mediation partner at that time, he was again instructed to choose a mediation partner. After two weeks, the jobseeker had to communicate his choice during a second follow-up interview with the VDAB mediator.

At the end of a follow-up interview, the VDAB mediator delivered the questionnaire to the jobseeker. This questionnaire could either be completed digitally or via a paper questionnaire. Two questionnaires were prepared and distributed. One questionnaire was intended for jobseekers who had chosen a mediation partner and the other questionnaire was for jobseekers who had not (yet) chosen a mediation partner.

This chapter discusses the main results of this survey, with a particular focus on:

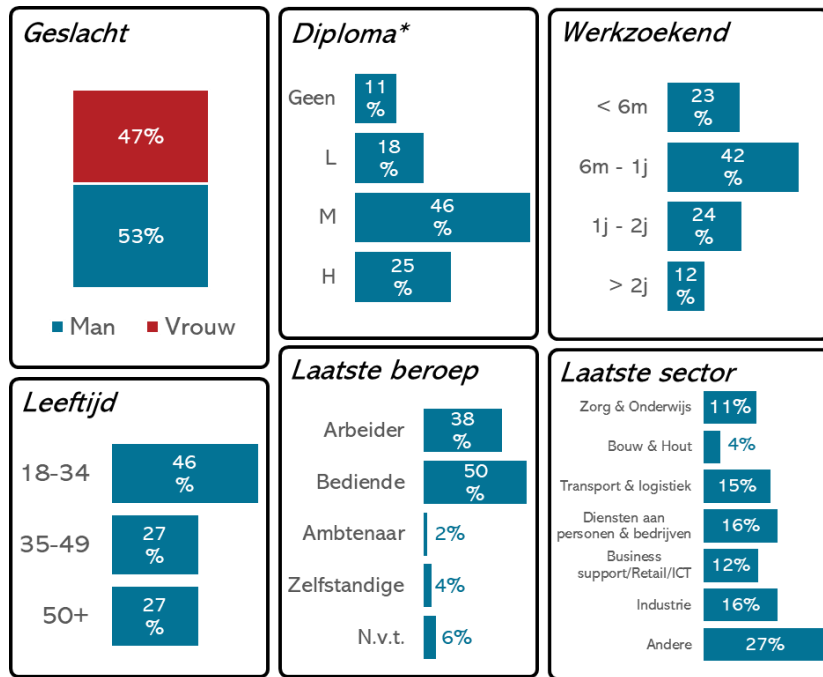
- Job seekers' satisfaction;
- Experiences related to the choice process;
- The determinants of job seekers' choice;
- The possible barriers preventing jobseekers from making (or being able to make) a choice.

### 5.1. Sample composition

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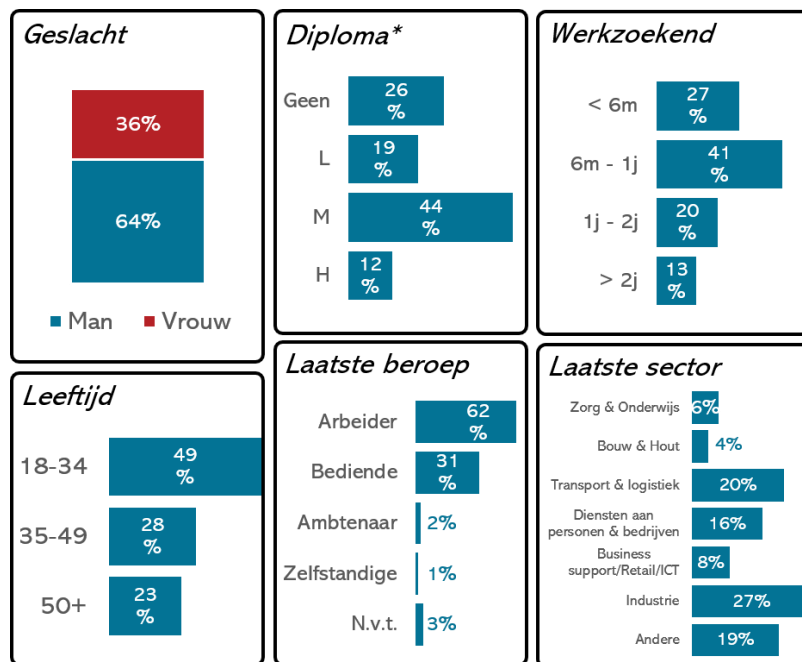
A total of 503 jobseekers participated in the survey. Of these, 417 jobseekers indicated that they selected a mediation partner (hereafter "voters"), while the remaining 86 jobseekers indicated that they did not select a mediation partner (hereafter "non-voters"). The profile of both voters and non-voters is shown in the figures below.

Figure 18: Sample description of voters



\* L = Lower secondary education, M = Upper secondary education, H = Higher or university education

Figure 19: Sample description non-voters



\* L = Lower secondary education, M = Upper secondary education, H = Higher or university education

## 5.2. Results

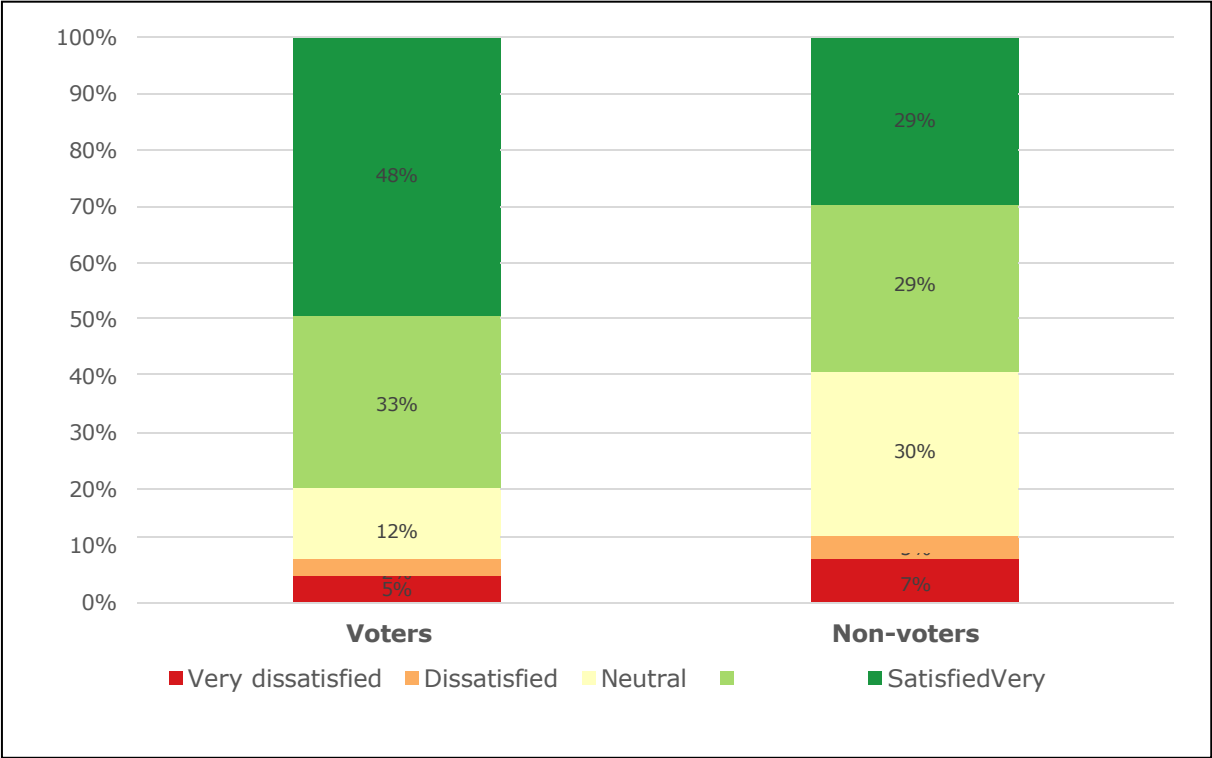
### 5.2.1. Satisfaction with optionality

Voters were asked to what extent they are satisfied with having been allowed to choose their own mediation partner. Non-voters were asked to what extent they were satisfied with having been given the opportunity to choose their own mediation partner.

More than eight in ten (81%) of voters say they are (very) satisfied that they were able to choose their own mediation partner. In addition, 7% indicate that they are (very) dissatisfied with having had to make their own choice. The average voter satisfaction score is 4.2 out of 5.

Despite the fact that non-voters - at the time of the survey - have not chosen a mediation partner, here a majority (58%) of jobseekers indicate that they are (very) satisfied with the opportunity to choose their own mediation partner. The average satisfaction score of non-voters is 3.7 out of 5.

Figure 20: Satisfaction with choice, voters versus non-voters



\* Q: Voters: To what extent are you satisfied that you were able to choose your own counselling-to-work service provider? Please give a score from 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'very dissatisfied' and 5 represents 'very satisfied'. (N= 417)

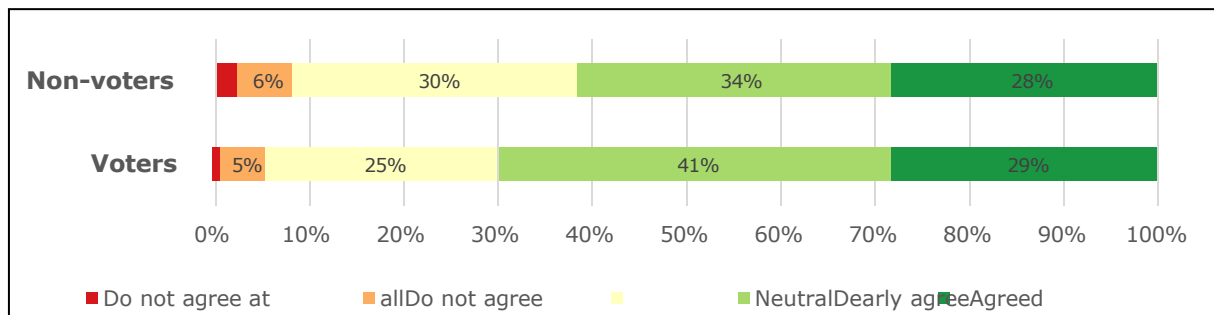
Q: Non-voters: To what extent are you satisfied that you had the opportunity to find your own partner organisation? Please give a score from 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'very dissatisfied' and 5 represents 'very satisfied'. (N= 86)

## 5.2.2. Experiences on the selection process

### 1. Ability to assess own support needs

Choosing an appropriate placement partner requires a jobseeker to be able to assess his own support needs. The better a job seeker knows in which areas he needs support to look for work, the better he is able to select the most suitable mediation partner. The majority of both voters and non-voters, 70% and 62% respectively, indicate that it is clear to them what they need support for in their job search. Less than one in 10 (6% of voters and 8% of non-voters) indicate that they believe it is not clear to them in which areas they need support.

Figure 21: Ability to assess own support needs



Q: Voters: It is clear what I still need support for in my job search. (N= 417)

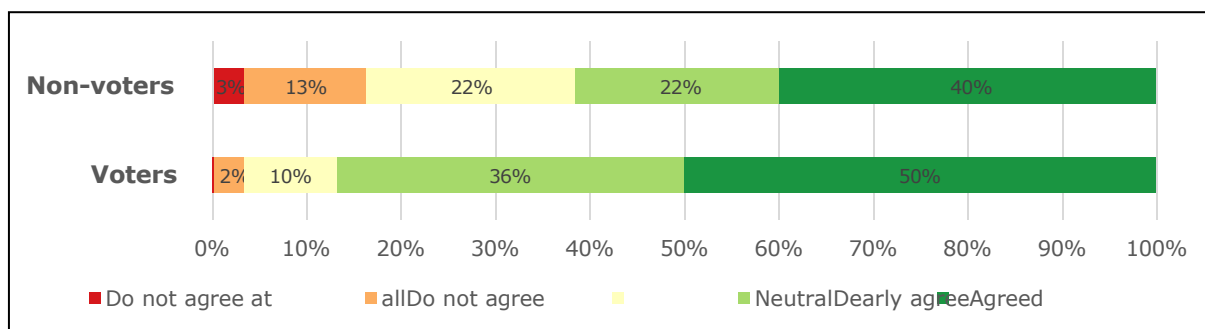
Q: Non-voters: It is clear what I still need support for in my job search. (N= 86)

### 2. Clarity of the choice process to be followed

The results of the survey show that there are differences between voters and non-voters in the extent to which they find it clear what steps they should go through to choose a mediation partner. Almost nine in 10 (86%) of voters indicated that they thought it was clear what steps they had to go through. This contrasts with non-voters, where only 66% say they found it clear. It is notable here that almost a fifth (16%) of non-voters indicate that they did not find this clear.



Figure 22: Clarity of steps to follow



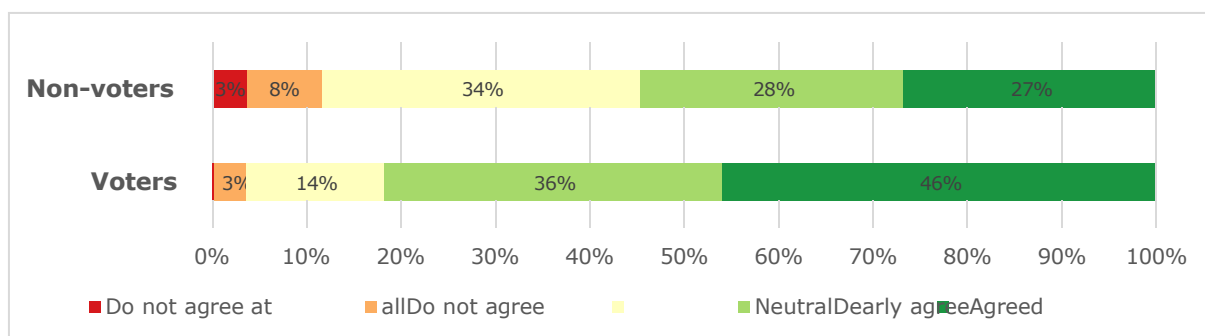
Q: Voters: It was clear to me what steps to take to choose a partner organisation. (N= 417)

Q: Non-voters: It was clear to me what steps to take to choose a partner organisation. (N= 86)

### 3. Clarity and completeness of information from mediation partners

Mediation partners can present their offer to jobseekers in various ways in order to convince them to choose them. For this purpose, the mediation partners can, among other things, use the dedicated webpage on the VDAB website, their own websites and during introductory talks. Respondents were asked to what extent they consider the information offered by the mediation partners to be sufficiently clear and complete. Here, too, we see differences between voters and non-voters. For instance, more than eight in ten (82%) of voters indicated that they consider the information to be sufficiently clear and complete. This contrasts with non-voters, where only 54% of respondents say they consider the information to be sufficiently clear and complete. A third (34%) of non-voters respond neutrally.

Figure 23: Clarity and completeness of information from mediation partners



Q: Voters: The information offered to me by partner organisations was sufficiently clear and complete (N= 417).

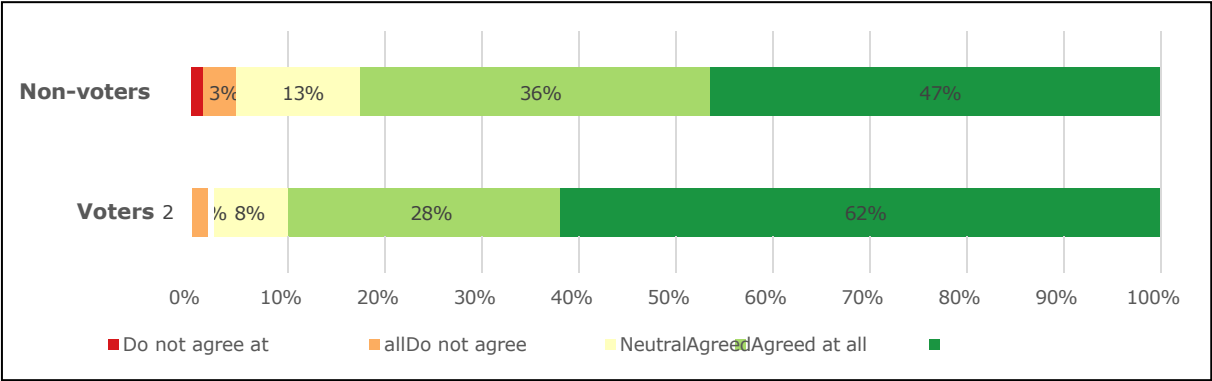
Q: Non-voters: The information offered to me by partner organisations was sufficiently clear and complete (N= 86).

### 4. Time to choose a mediation partner

Jobseekers with a mediation voucher are given two weeks before they have to communicate their choice of mediation partner to the VDAB mediator during a follow-up interview. Among both voters and non-voters, a particularly large majority (90% respectively

and 83%) indicated that this two-week period was sufficient to choose a suitable mediation partner.

Figure 24: Sufficient time to choose a mediation partner



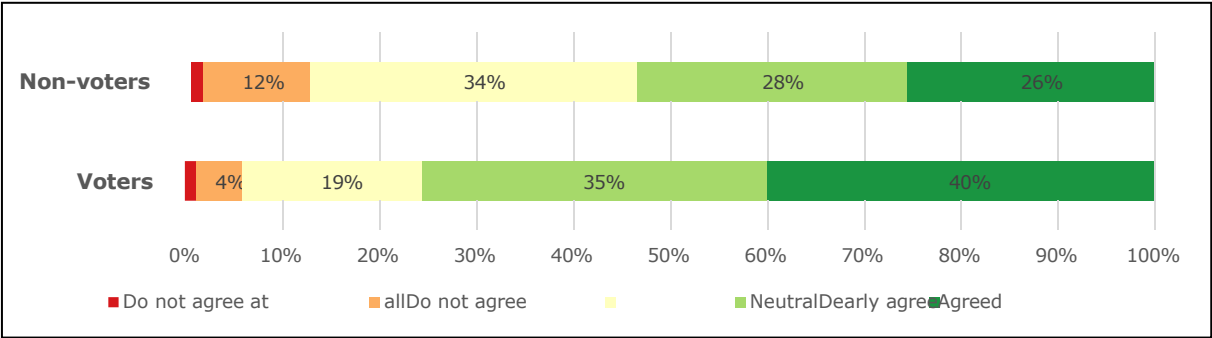
Q: Voters: I had enough time to choose a suitable partner organisation. (N= 417)

Q: Non-voters: I had enough time to choose a suitable partner organisation. (N= 86)

**5. Ability to compare mediation partners**

An important part of Mediation Vouchers is the jobseeker's comparison of different mediation partners. Indeed, this way, the jobseeker can choose the mediation partner that best suits his needs. Therefore, respondents were asked if they are able to make the comparison. Among voters, three quarters (75%) respond that they are able to make the comparison. Among non-voters, this is the case for only 54%.

Figure 25: Ability to compare mediation partners



Q: Voters: I managed to compare different partner organisations. (N= 417)

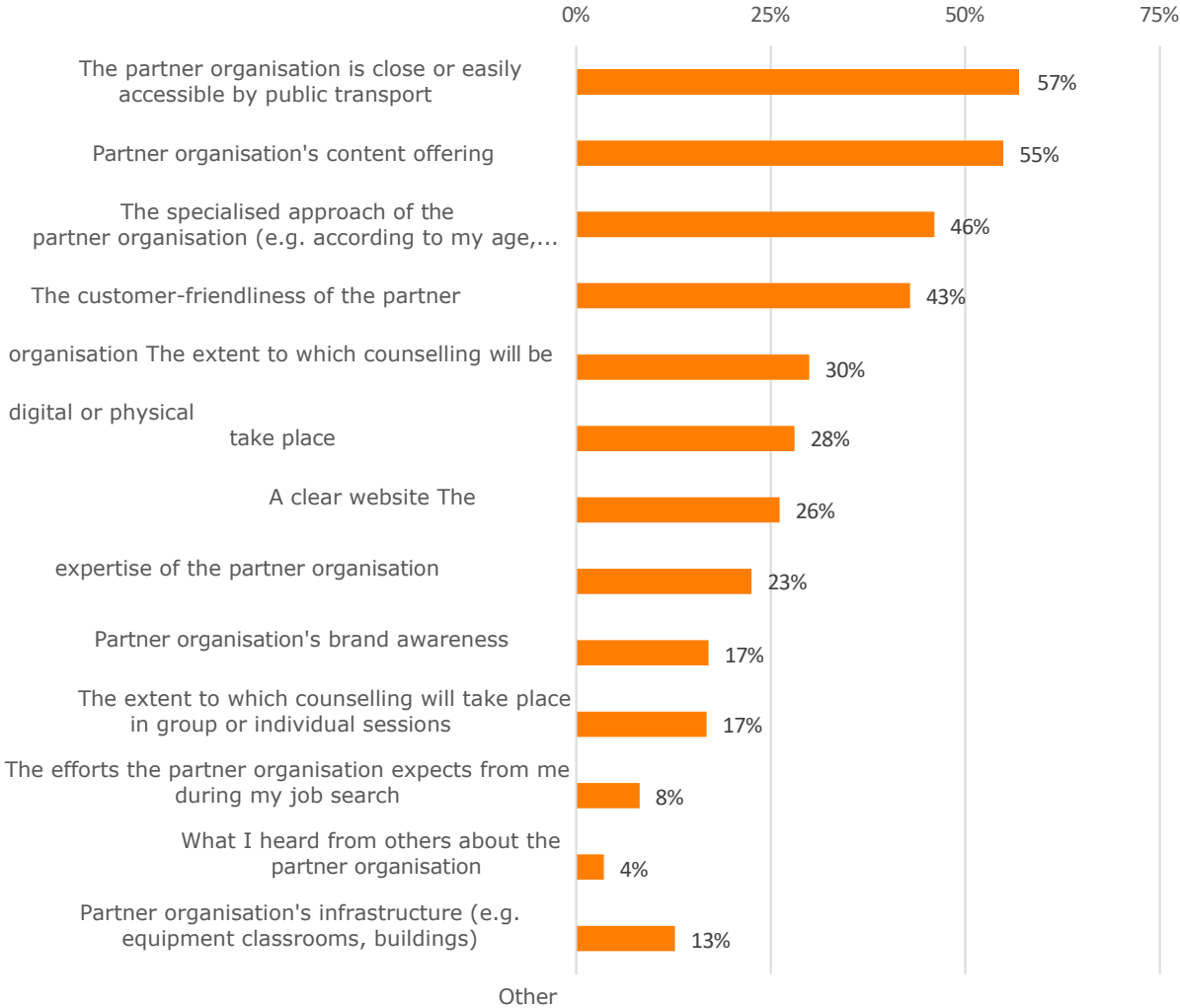
Q: Non-voters: I managed to compare different partner organisations (N= 86)

**5.2.3. Choice determinants**

Finally, voters were asked which elements they took into account when making their choice. The most important determinants emerging from the results were the proximity/accessibility of a mediation partner (57%), the content on offer (55%), a specialised approach (46%) and customer-friendliness (43%). The least important

determinants are the infrastructure of the mediation partner (4%) and what they have heard from others about a mediation partner (8%).

Figure 26: Reasons for choosing a mediation partner

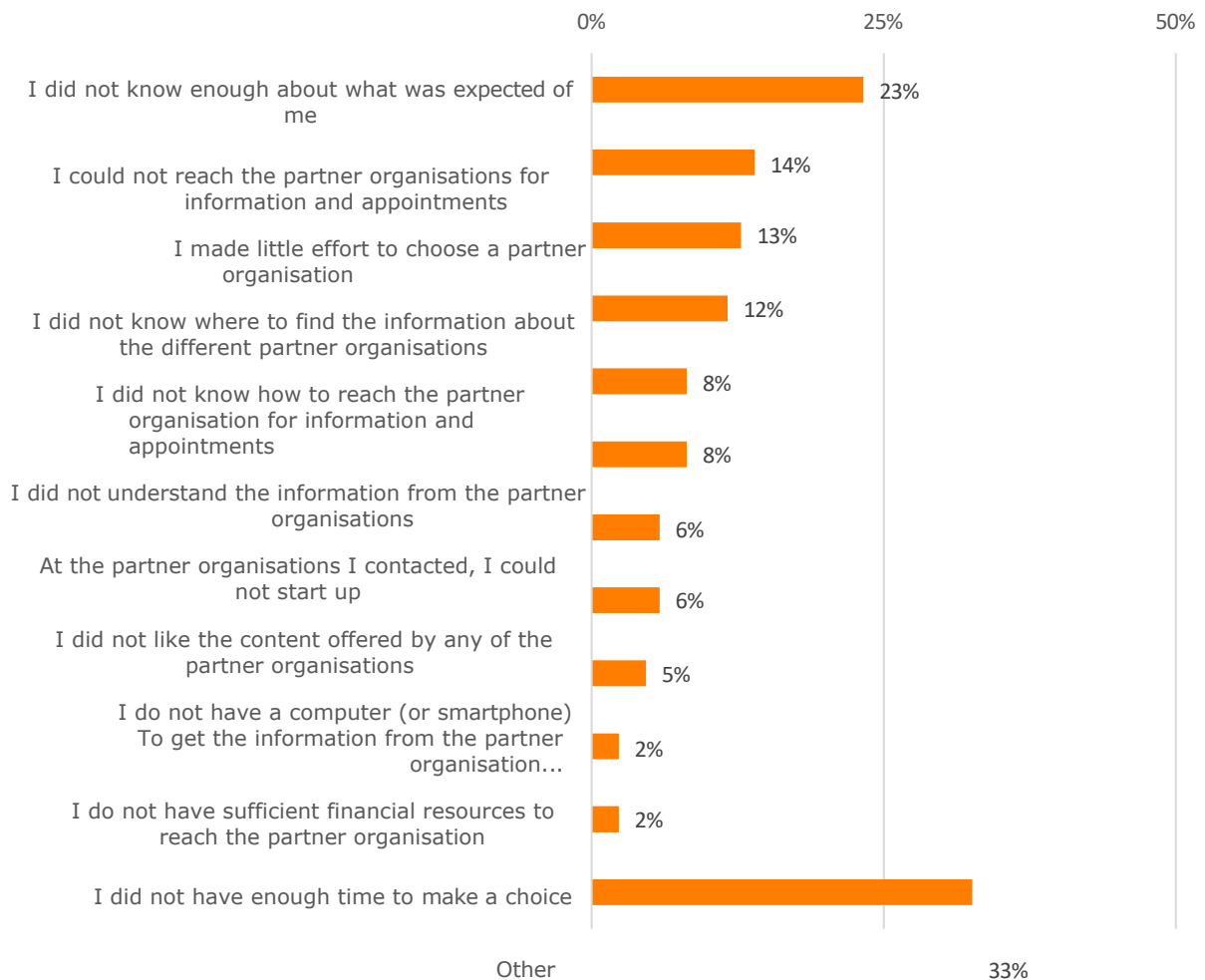


Q: Which of the following elements did you consider when choosing a partner organisation for guidance to work? Please tick all that apply. (N=417)

## 5.2.4. Reasons for not choosing

The group of non-voters was asked the main reasons why they did not or could not make a choice. The main reason given by quite a few non-voters is that they were not sufficiently informed about what was expected of them (23%). Other main reasons include not being able to reach a mediation partner for information and appointments (14%), making little effort to choose (13%) and not knowing where information is available about the different mediation partners (12%).

Figure 27: Reasons for not choosing a mediation partner



Q: What are the main reasons you could not choose a service provider? Please tick all that apply to you. (N = 86)

## 5.3. Conclusion

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### Job seeker satisfaction

Both voters and non-voters indicate that they are satisfied that they were allowed to choose their own mediation partner (or in the case of non-voters, were given the opportunity to choose their own).

- Of voters, **81%** said they were **(very)** satisfied that they had been allowed to choose for themselves.
- Despite the fact that non-voters did not choose a mediation partner, the majority (**58%**) indicated that they were **(very) satisfied** with the opportunity to choose for themselves.
- The fact that the majority of non-voters respond with satisfaction may mean that non-voters have more difficulty (and consequently may need more support) in choosing a mediation partner. Thus, this group of jobseekers is not necessarily opposed to the concept of Mediation Vouchers.

### Experiences on the selection process

- The **majority** of jobseekers (70% of voters and 62% of non-voters, respectively) indicate that it is **clear** to them **in which areas they need support** in their job search.
- The **majority** of voters (86%) and non-voters (66%) feel it is **clear what steps to take** to select a mediation partner.
- A large group of voters (82%) believe that the **information** made available by the **mediation partner** about their **offer** is **sufficiently clear and complete**. For non-voters, this is only true for a narrow majority of 54%.
- For both voters and non-voters, a particularly **large majority** (90% and 83% respectively) responded that they felt they had **sufficient time to choose** a suitable **mediation partner**.
- Finally, three quarters of voters (75%) indicated that they managed to compare the different mediation partners. For non-voters, this is true for only 54% of respondents.

The above results may show in which areas non-voters need support to choose a mediation partner. Thus, it is noticeable that non-voters generally do know in which areas they need support and that they have enough time to make a choice. In contrast, the results show that a much smaller group of non-voters (relative to voters) feel that it is clear what steps they need to take and that the information offered by mediation partners is sufficiently clear and complete.

### Choice determinants

- The main choice determinants of voters are the proximity/accessibility of a mediation partner (57%), the content on offer (55%), a specialised approach (46%) and customer-friendliness (43%) of the mediation partner.

- The non-voters mainly indicated that they were not sufficiently informed about what was expected of them (23%), that they could not reach the mediation partner for information and appointments (14%), that they made little effort to choose (13%) and that they did not know where to find information about the mediation partners (12%) as reasons why they did not choose.

## 6. Employment and jobseeker satisfaction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the impact of a voucher guidance programme on jobseekers' employment and satisfaction. To summarise the impact on employment and satisfaction, data were collected across Flanders (provinces of Antwerp, Limburg, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant, West Flanders) both before (pre-measurement: September 2020 to January 2021) and after (post-measurement: March 2021 to June 2021) the introduction of the voucher guidance programme in the province of Antwerp. The data from both pre- and post-measurement of the provinces of Limburg, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant and West Flanders will be used in this chapter to assess whether there is room for improvement in terms of employment and satisfaction. Using the data from the post-measurement of the province of Antwerp, the impact of the roll-out of a voucher guidance programme on employment and satisfaction will then be examined.

### 6.1. Room for improvement

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Before examining the impact of a voucher guidance programme on jobseekers' employment and satisfaction, it is important to first ask whether there is room for improvement. In other words, it is therefore important to examine how well individuals who do not receive a voucher score on employment and satisfaction. To this end, as mentioned above, the employment and satisfaction data of the provinces of Limburg, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant and West Flanders were used. These provinces were chosen because jobseekers residing here did not receive a voucher during both the pre- and post-measurement and thus remained part of the TIBB4 population. Table 3 and Table 4 show the mean values for employment and the various satisfaction indicators (satisfaction counselling: 11 indicators, satisfaction location and infrastructure: 4 indicators) per region and for the four provinces combined. Column (1) of Table 3 shows that on average 65% of the TIBB4 population finds employment before the end of the counselling programme. Thus, there may still be room for improvement here. Also regarding satisfaction with counselling (Table 3 column (2)-(12)) and satisfaction with location and infrastructure (Table 4 column (1)-(4)), there is still room for improvement. It appears, for instance, that only satisfaction with the coach's accessibility is given an average score higher than four (satisfied). All other satisfaction indicators have a score between three and four corresponding to satisfaction between "neither dissatisfied nor satisfied" and "satisfied". Having shown that improvement is possible, the remainder of this chapter will explore whether this can be achieved using a voucher coaching programme.

Table 3: Average employment and satisfaction guidance by region (based on pre- and post-measurement)

	(1) Work (n = 3300)	(2) Satisfaction: general (n = 501)	(3) Satisfaction: quality support (n = 501)	(4) Satisfaction: amount of support (n = 501)	(5) Satisfaction: useful for finding job (n = 501)
Bruges-Ostend-Westhoek	.61	3.65	3.78	3.68	3.48
Ghent & Rand	.70	3.62	3.71	3.63	3.45
Kortrijk-Roeselare	.70	3.85	3.92	3.97	3.78
Leuven	.61	3.58	3.77	3.63	3.53
Province of Limburg	.58	3.78	3.94	3.91	3.74
Vilvoorde	.66	3.29	3.20	3.29	3.11
ZOVL & Waas and Dender	.68	3.71	3.70	3.74	3.72
<b>Flanders (except province of Antwerp)</b>	<b>.65</b>	<b>3.66</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>3.57</b>
	(6) Satisfaction: support needed (n = 501)	(7) Satisfaction: recommended support (n = 501)	(8) Satisfaction: Coach good job (n = 501)	(9) Satisfaction: Sufficient time spent (n = 501)	(10) Satisfaction: Sufficient feedback (n = 501)
Bruges-Ostend-Westhoek	3.55	3.57	3.98	3.95	3.89
Ghent & Rand	3.54	3.51	3.83	3.93	3.76
Kortrijk-Roeselare	3.67	3.67	4.13	4.05	4.05
Leuven	3.45	3.63	3.87	3.89	3.77
Province of Limburg	3.82	3.83	4.20	4.03	3.99
Vilvoorde	3.07	3.22	3.44	3.42	3.20
ZOVL & Waas and Dender	3.61	3.58	3.96	3.94	3.89
<b>Flanders (except province of Antwerp)</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.59</b>	<b>3.94</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>3.82</b>



	(11) Satisfaction: Questions answered (n = 501)	(12) Satisfaction: useful counselling activities (n = 501)
Bruges-Ostend-Westhoek	3.94	3.66
Ghent & Rand	3.83	3.52
Kortrijk-Roeselare	4.03	3.70
Leuven	3.90	3.44
Province of Limburg	4.03	3.77
Vilvoorde	3.44	2.98
ZOVL & Waas and Dender	3.74	3.64
<b>Flanders (except province of Antwerp)</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>3.56</b>

Table 4: Average site and infrastructure satisfaction by region (based on pre- and post-measurement)

	(1) Satisfaction: Location accessible (n = 360)	(2) Satisfaction: Coach reachable (n = 501)	(3) Satisfaction: Good infrastructure (n = 308)	(4) Satisfaction: good digital infrastructure (n = 446)
Bruges-Ostend-Westhoek	4.26	4.32	3.91	3.93
Ghent & Rand	3.75	4.00	3.39	3.66
Kortrijk-Roeselare	4.20	4.25	3.71	4.06
Leuven	4.00	4.13	3.64	3.73
Province of Limburg	3.93	4.32	3.78	3.89
Vilvoorde	3.21	3.69	3.24	3.32
ZOVL & Waas and Dender	3.93	4.14	3.74	3.85
<b>Flanders (except province of Antwerp)</b>	<b>3.94</b>	<b>4.14</b>	<b>3.68</b>	<b>3.79</b>

## 6.2. Impact voucher guidance programme

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Now that it appears that there is an opportunity for improvement, the remainder of this chapter will explore whether the roll-out of a voucher guidance programme could contribute to this. As already indicated, data from the follow-up measurement of the province of Antwerp will be used for this purpose. First we will focus on the impact of voucher guidance on employment, then on the impact of voucher guidance on satisfaction. In both parts, first the characteristics of the sample will be described in detail and then a regression analysis will be performed.

### 6.2.1. Impact on employment

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#### Characteristics sample

The full sample for which a guidance pathway was initiated in the province of Antwerp (four plots: Antwerp, Mechelen, Turnhout, <sup>Andere</sup><sup>5</sup>) during the post-measurement (four cohorts: March, April, May, June) consists of 1,638 jobseekers. This guidance pathway is either the current job placement system TIBB4 (Tender intensive mediation and guidance to work) or the new voucher system. In TIBB4, a jobseeker has no say in the choice of a partner organisation as a jobseeker is allocated on the basis of domicile. TIBB4 constitutes the control group and 732 jobseekers were allocated to it. In the new voucher system, jobseekers do get the chance to choose a partner organisation themselves. A jobseeker receives a voucher with which he or she can contact a number of partner organisations, compare their offers and finally make a choice. The voucher system constitutes the intervention group and is offered to 906 jobseekers. Both a TIBB4 and a voucher system counselling programme last a minimum of six and a maximum of nine months. As the data collection ran until April 2022, there are thus five cohorts (March, April, May, June, July) available who fully completed their counselling pathway. Because of the limited size of the July 2021 cohort (147 observations), this cohort was excluded from the analysis.

Table 5 gives the definitions of the variables used in the analyses.

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<sup>5</sup>The "Other" plot consists of jobseekers (voucher holders only) who fall within a plot other than Antwerp, Mechelen or Turnhout.

Table 5: Definitions variables employment

Variable	Definition
Work	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker found work during counselling period
Voucher allocated	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was allocated a voucher
Voucher used	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was allocated a voucher, and chose a partner
Age	
Age <25	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was under 25 years old in 2021
Age 25-34	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was between 25 and 34 years old in 2021
Age 35-44	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was between 35 and 44 years old in 2021
Age 45-54	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was between 45 and 54 years old in 2021
Age >54	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker was older than 54 in 2021
Man	Dummy = 1 if job seeker is male
Employment restriction	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has work restriction
Migration background	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has migration background
Language deficiency Dutch	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has language gap
Education	
Training to 1 <sup>e</sup> degree	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has at most primary education diploma or 1 <sup>e</sup> secondary education degree
Training to 2 <sup>e</sup> degree	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has at most diploma 2 <sup>e</sup> grade secondary education
Training to 3 <sup>e</sup> degree	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has at most diploma 3 <sup>e</sup> grade secondary education
Higher education training	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker has higher education degree
Sector	
Sector: Construction and wood	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker seeks work in "construction and wood" sector
Sector: Busin. Support, retail/ICT	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker seeks work in "business support, retail and ICT" sector
Sector: Services	Dummy = 1 if job seeker seeks work in "Services" sector
Sector: Industry	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker seeks work in sector "Industry"
Sector: Transport and logistics	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker seeks work in "Transport and logistics" sector
Sector: Care and education	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker seeks work in "Care and education" sector
Sector: other	Dummy = 1 if jobseeker seeks work in sector "NT2", "Service line", or "Other"
Plot	
Antwerp	Dummy = 1 if job seeker falls within plot of Antwerp
Mechelen	Dummy = 1 if job seeker falls within plot of Mechelen
Turnhout	Dummy = 1 if job seeker falls within Turnhout plot
Other	Dummy = 1 if job seeker falls within a parcel other than Antwerp, Mechelen or Turnhout
Cohort	
Cohort 1	Dummy = 1 as job seeker guidance starts in March 2021
Cohort 2	Dummy = 1 as job seeker guidance starts in April 2021
Cohort 3	Dummy = 1 as job seeker guidance starts in May 2021
Cohort 4	Dummy = 1 as job seeker guidance starts in June 2021

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for these variables, both for the full sample (columns (1) and (2)) and for the control group (columns (3) and (4)) and the intervention group (columns (5) and (6)) separately. As shown in the table, 55% of the sample was assigned to the voucher counselling programme and the voucher was actually used by 25% of the jobseekers in the sample. In the end, 58% of the entire sample found employment, while for the intervention and control groups separately, this was 61% and 55% respectively. Thus, at first glance, it seems that the voucher system increases the probability of finding work. Furthermore, it appears that the largest share of the sample (58%) is from the Antwerp plot, followed by Mechelen (22%), Turnhout (18%) and others (2%). When cohorts are considered, it appears that the largest proportion of jobseekers were assigned to a counselling programme in March 2021 (29%), followed by April 2021 (27%), May 2021 (23%) and June (21%).

Table 6 also includes the socio-demographic characteristics of both the full sample and the intervention and control groups separately. Column (7) shows the differences between the intervention and control groups. If randomisation was done correctly, the differences between the two groups should be negligible. To check whether the intervention and control groups are comparable, we additionally used an OLS estimation<sup>6</sup> for each socio-demographic characteristic to check whether the difference between these groups is also statistically significant (see column (8)). In the intervention group, a job seeker is 4%-points more likely than in the control group to be younger than 25 years (10% significance level (s.n.)). In addition, the probability is 3%-points lower that the jobseeker has at most an educational level of primary education or first secondary education in the intervention group (10% s.n.). Finally, it appears that jobseekers in the intervention group are more likely to seek employment in the business support, retail and ICT sector (10% points, 1% s.n.) and the manufacturing sector (3% points, 10% s.n.) and less likely in the other sector (17% points, 1% s.n.). For the other socio-demographic characteristics, there is no significant difference between the intervention and control groups. That is, the difference found is attributable to chance. The results show that the randomisation was not completely successful (indeed, review shows that the random assignment based on the national register numbers was not always done correctly), but the differences are mainly limited to the sectors. For this reason, it is therefore important that we always control for these sectors in our regression models

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<sup>6</sup> Plot and cohort were controlled for.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics employment

Variable	Full sample (N = 1,638)		Control group (#voucher) (N = 732)		Intervention group (=voucher) (N = 906)		Differences between intervention (5) and control group (3)	
	(1) Average.	(2) Std.dev.	(3) Average.	(4) Std.dev.	(5) Average.	(6) Std.dev.	(7) Difference average	(8) OLS estimate
Voucher allocated	0.55	0.50						
Voucher used	0.25	0.44						
Work	0.58	0.49	0.55	0.50	0.61	0.49		
Plot								
Antwerp	0.58	0.49	0.62	0.49	0.55	0.50	0.07	
Mechelen	0.22	0.41	0.20	0.40	0.23	0.42	-0.03	
Turnhout	0.18	0.38	0.18	0.38	0.18	0.39	0.00	
Other	0.02	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.18	-0.03	
Cohort								
Cohort 1	0.29	0.45	0.44	0.50	0.17	0.37	0.27	
Cohort 2	0.27	0.44	0.25	0.44	0.28	0.45	-0.03	
Cohort 3	0.23	0.42	0.17	0.38	0.28	0.45	-0.11	
Cohort 4	0.21	0.41	0.13	0.34	0.27	0.44	-0.14	
Age								
Age <25	0.18	0.38	0.16	0.36	0.20	0.40	-0.04	0.04*
Age 25-34	0.31	0.46	0.32	0.47	0.30	0.46	0.02	-0.02
Age 35-44	0.23	0.42	0.24	0.43	0.22	0.41	0.02	-0.02
Age 45-54	0.15	0.36	0.15	0.36	0.15	0.36	0.00	0.01
Age >54	0.13	0.34	0.13	0.34	0.13	0.34	0.00	-0.01
Man	0.51	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.50	-0.01	0.01
Employment restriction	0.04	0.20	0.05	0.21	0.04	0.19	0.01	-0.01
Migration background	0.35	0.48	0.38	0.48	0.33	0.47	0.05	-0.03
Language deficiency Dutch	0.02	0.13	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.13	-0.01	0.01
Education								
Training to 1 <sup>e</sup> degree	0.11	0.31	0.12	0.33	0.09	0.29	0.03	-0.03*
Training to 2 <sup>e</sup> degree	0.21	0.41	0.22	0.41	0.21	0.40	0.01	-0.01
Training to 3 <sup>e</sup> degree	0.46	0.50	0.45	0.50	0.47	0.50	-0.02	0.02
Higher education training	0.22	0.42	0.21	0.41	0.23	0.42	-0.02	0.02
Sector								
Sector: Construction and wood	0.06	0.24	0.06	0.24	0.07	0.25	-0.01	0.01
Sector: Busin. Support, retail/ICT	0.37	0.48	0.31	0.46	0.42	0.49	-0.11	0.1***
Sector: Services	0.16	0.36	0.17	0.37	0.15	0.36	0.02	-0.02
Sector: Industry	0.14	0.34	0.12	0.32	0.15	0.36	-0.03	0.03*
Sector: Transport and logistics	0.08	0.28	0.08	0.28	0.08	0.28	0.00	0.01
Sector: Care and education	0.09	0.29	0.08	0.27	0.10	0.30	-0.02	0.02
Sector: other	0.09	0.29	0.18	0.38	0.02	0.14	0.16	-0.17***

When the intervention group is further dissected, it appears that of the 906 jobseekers assigned to the voucher system, 432 jobseekers actually chose a partner organisation (hereafter we refer to 'voters'). The remaining 474 jobseekers did not do so for various reasons (hereafter we refer to 'non-voters'). 312 jobseekers did not choose a partner simply because they found work after the first assignment. The descriptive statistics of voters, non-voters and non-voters with reasons other than work are shown in Table 7, which shows that 55% of voters and 66% of non-voters eventually found work. It further shows that the largest share of job seekers for all three groups is from the Antwerp plot, followed by Mechelen, Turnhout and others. When cohorts are considered, it appears that only a limited number of voters were assigned to a counselling pathway in March 2021 (4%). In fact, the majority were assigned in June 2021 (35%), followed by May 2021 (33%) and April 2021 (27%). A different order is observed among the full group of non-voters and those with reasons other than work found. Among these groups, most job seekers are assigned in April 2021 (30% and 30%, respectively) and March 2021 (28% and 27%, respectively). For the entire group of non-voters, May 2021 (23%) and June 2021 (19%) follow next. For non-voters with reasons other than work, first comes June 2021 (23%) and then May 2021 (20%).

To check whether voters are similar to non-voters, a t-test was conducted for each socio-demographic characteristic to check whether the difference in mean between the groups is significant. The results of this are shown in column (5) of Table 7. A significant difference is found for one category of age, one category of education and two sectors. For instance, non-voters are 9% points more likely than voters to be younger than 25 (1% s.n.). In addition, the probability of having a higher education degree is 9%-points lower for non-voters. Finally, it appears that non-voters look for work less in the business support, retail and ICT sector (6%-points, 10% s.n.) and more often in the transport and logistics sector (5%-points, 5% s.n.). No significant difference was found for the other (categories of) socio-demographic characteristics.

However, non-voters also included 312 jobseekers who did not choose a partner simply because they found work or had job prospects after the first assignment. To increase the uptake of vouchers, it is especially important to know why the *other* non-voters (i.e. those who did not choose a partner despite not yet having found work) did not choose a partner. A comparison between voters and non-voters with reasons other than work found therefore seems more relevant to ascertain where voters and non-voters differ from each other than a comparison with the entire group of non-voters as was carried out above. Again, a t-test was performed for each socio-demographic characteristic. The results are shown in column (8) of Table 7, which shows that a significant difference is observed for two categories of age, two categories of education and two categories of sector. Namely, a non-voter without work is 7%-points more likely to be younger than 25 (5% s.n.) and 6%-points less likely to be between 45- and 54-years-old (10% s.n.) than a voter. Furthermore, a non-voter is 9%-points more likely to have obtained at most a second-grade secondary school diploma (5% s.n.) and 11%-points less likely to have a higher education diploma (1% s.n.). Finally, non-voters without work are less likely to seek work in the business support, retail and ICT sector (9% points, 10% s.n.) and more likely to seek work in the transport and logistics sector (4% points, 10% s.n.).

Thus, to increase the *take-up* of vouchers, it is best to focus on young people (<25-years-old), and jobseekers looking for work in the transport and logistics sector. Regarding education level, the results seem to point rather in the direction that especially the low-skilled choose less (jobseekers with a higher education diploma are more often voters, jobseekers with only a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade secondary education diploma are more often non-voters). Individuals with limited digital skills were also cited by concerned VDAB staff and partner organisation as a group requiring additional support. However, no data are available on the digital skills of voucher holders so it cannot be verified whether nonvoters are also more often non-digital literate.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics employment (voters and non-voters)

Variable	Intervention group: voters (N = 432)		Intervention group: non-voters (N = 474)		Differences between non-voters (3) and voters (1) (5)	Intervention group: non-voters with reasons other than work found (N = 162)		Differences between non-voters with reasons other than work found (6) and voters (1) (8)
	(1) Average.	(2) Std.dev.	(3) Average.	(4) Std.dev.		(6) Average.	(7) Std.dev.	
Work	0.55	0.50	0.66	0.47				
Plot								
Antwerp	0.54	0.50	0.57	0.50		0.60	0.49	
Mechelen	0.26	0.44	0.20	0.40		0.23	0.43	
Turnhout	0.18	0.38	0.19	0.39		0.14	0.35	
Other	0.03	0.16	0.04	0.19		0.02	0.16	
Cohort								
Cohort 1	0.04	0.21	0.28	0.45		0.27	0.45	
Cohort 2	0.27	0.45	0.30	0.46		0.30	0.46	
Cohort 3	0.33	0.47	0.23	0.42		0.20	0.40	
Cohort 4	0.35	0.48	0.19	0.39		0.23	0.42	
Age								
Age <25	0.15	0.35	0.24	0.43	0.09***	0.22	0.42	0.07**
Age 25-34	0.31	0.46	0.29	0.45	-0.02	0.31	0.47	0.00
Age 35-44	0.22	0.42	0.22	0.41	0.00	0.20	0.40	-0.02
Age 45-54	0.17	0.38	0.13	0.34	-0.04	0.11	0.32	-0.06*
Age >54	0.15	0.35	0.12	0.33	-0.03	0.15	0.36	0.00
Man	0.49	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.04	0.54	0.50	0.05
Employment restriction	0.04	0.19	0.04	0.19	0.00	0.04	0.19	0.00
Migration background	0.32	0.47	0.33	0.47	0.01	0.36	0.48	0.04
Language deficiency Dutch	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.14	0.01	0.02	0.16	0.01
Education								
Training to 1 <sup>e</sup> degree	0.07	0.26	0.11	0.31	0.04	0.10	0.30	0.03
Training to 2 <sup>e</sup> degree	0.19	0.39	0.22	0.41	0.03	0.28	0.45	0.09**
Training to 3 <sup>e</sup> degree	0.46	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.03	0.45	0.50	-0.01
Higher education training	0.28	0.45	0.19	0.39	-0.09***	0.17	0.38	-0.11***
Sector								
Sector: Construction and wood	0.05	0.22	0.08	0.27	0.03	0.07	0.26	0.02
Sector: Busin. Support, retail/ICT	0.45	0.50	0.39	0.49	-0.06*	0.36	0.48	-0.09*
Sector: Services	0.16	0.36	0.15	0.36	-0.01	0.19	0.39	0.03
Sector: Industry	0.16	0.36	0.15	0.36	-0.01	0.14	0.34	-0.02
Sector: Transport and logistics	0.06	0.24	0.11	0.31	0.05**	0.10	0.31	0.04*
Sector: Care and education	0.11	0.31	0.10	0.30	-0.01	0.10	0.30	-0.01
Sector: other	0.02	0.13	0.03	0.16	0.01	0.04	0.19	0.02



## Regression analyses

Based on the sample of 1,638 jobseekers discussed above, the causal effect of a voucher counselling programme on employment was examined. The averages as described above (i.e. jobseekers assigned to the voucher system are 6 percentage points more likely to find employment (61% versus 55%)), may possibly be biased by differences in the intervention and control groups due to imperfect randomisation (see column (8) of Table 4 for differences in some characteristics) and by the fact that not everyone assigned the voucher actually uses it (see Table 5). The regression results are presented in

Table 8. For completeness, we report all coefficients (so also for the control variables), but relevant here are the results for the variables 'Voucher allocated' and 'Voucher used'.

Column (1) shows that *allocating vouchers* increases the probability of finding work by 6%-points. This effect is significant at a 5% significance level. However, the description of the sample showed *non-compliance* as only less than half of the jobseekers assigned to a voucher counselling programme actually chose a partner organisation (432 out of 906). Thus, only this group was effectively exposed to the 'treatment' or intervention, which may cause an underestimation of the effect of voucher counselling when working with "voucher allocated" (since not everyone who gets the chance to do so actually uses the voucher, and therefore misses out on the positive effect on finding work). The effect of voucher allocation on finding work is also called the *Intention To Treat (ITT) effect* and, in the case of non-compliance, does not correspond to the effect of using a voucher on finding work.

For this reason, the second approach was to examine the effect of actually using vouchers on employment. Since the use of vouchers is no longer random due to the presence of non-compliance and therefore running an OLS regression would lead to biased results, an *Instrumental Variable (IV) approach* was used. This approach uses an additional variable that is correlated with the outcome (in our case employment) through its causal effect on the treatment (in our case the use of vouchers). This variable is called the instrument and in this study is the allocation of vouchers.

To perform an *IV approach*, the instrument must meet three conditions. First, it must have a causal effect on treatment (*relevance condition*). This is the case in this study since assignment to a voucher affects the likelihood of a jobseeker using it. Indeed, only jobseekers assigned to a voucher can use it. Second, the instrument should not have a direct impact on the outcome (in our case employment) (*exclusion restriction*). It can be assumed that this was also met in the study. Finally, the *exogeneity assumption* must be met. This is the case when the instrument is randomly assigned to the units. Since allocation to voucher in this study was random on the basis of national register number, this is also met. From the above, it is clear that using the *IV approach* was thus justified.

To estimate the effect of voucher use on employment without bias, a *Two Stage Least Square (2SLS)* estimation was used. This is an estimation method that uses two steps. In the first step, voucher allocation is used as an IV to estimate the probability of using vouchers. In the second step, the estimated probability of using vouchers is used to estimate the effect on employment. It is important to note that a 2SLS estimate should be interpreted differently from an OLS estimate. For instance, an OLS estimate describes the average difference in employment between those using a voucher and those not using a voucher (*Average Treatment Effect (ATE)*), while an IV estimate describes the effect of using a voucher only for the population whose choice of treatment is affected by the instrument (*Local Average Treatment Effect (LATE)*). Thus, the

meant jobseekers who only use a voucher when they are allocated to it. This group is also called the *compliers*.

The results of the 2SLS estimation are presented in column (2) of Table 8, which shows that using vouchers (and thus choosing a partner organisation oneself) increases the probability of the *compliers finding employment* by as much as 15% points (5% s.n.). Thus, the effect of actually using a voucher is greater than the effect of voucher allocation. This implies that the effect of vouchers can increase significantly if VDAB can ensure that more assigned jobseekers actually use the voucher (or by rolling out the voucher system everywhere). Note that the 15%-point effect is a very nice result: in the sample, the average probability of finding work is 58%. So an intervention effect of 15% points means that the voucher system increases finding work by almost 26%.

Table 8: Regression results employment

	(1)	(2)
Voucher allocated	0.06** (0.03)	
Voucher used		0.15** (0.07)
Age <25	0.13*** (0.05)	0.15*** (0.05)
Age 25-34	0.14*** (0.04)	0.14*** (0.04)
Age 35-44	0.15*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.04)
Age 45-54	0.11** (0.05)	0.11** (0.05)
Man	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
Employment restriction	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)
Migration background	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)
Language gap	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.10)
Training to 1st degree	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)
Training 2nd grade	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.04)
Training 3rd grade	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)
Sector: Construction and wood	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)
Sector: Busin.Support,Retail/ICT	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
Sector: Services	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)
Sector: Industry	0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)
Sector: Transport and logistics	-0.00 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)
Sector: Care and education	0.05 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)
Antwerp	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.09)
Mechelen	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.10)
Turnhout	0.04 (0.09)	0.02 (0.10)
Cohort 1	0.06 (0.04)	0.09** (0.04)
Cohort 2	0.09** (0.04)	0.11*** (0.04)
Cohort 3	0.06* (0.04)	0.07* (0.04)
N	1,638	1,638

## 6.2.2. Job seeker satisfaction

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### Characteristics sample

The satisfaction sample is a subset of the employment sample as it includes only those jobseekers from the employment sample who completed the satisfaction questionnaire. The full satisfaction sample consists of 268 jobseekers. Of these, 133 jobseekers were assigned to a voucher counselling programme and 135 to a TIBB4 counselling programme. In the end, 129 jobseekers actually followed a voucher guidance pathway.

Table 9 shows the definitions of the different variables from the satisfaction questionnaire.

Table 9: Variables satisfaction definitions

Variable	Thesis
Guidance satisfaction	
Support (general)	How satisfied are you with the partner organisation's support in your job search? (very dissatisfied, satisfied, neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, satisfied, very satisfied)
Quality support	I am satisfied with the quality of support I received (not at all agree, not agree, neither agree, nor disagree, agree, agree, agree completely).
Amount of support	I am satisfied with the amount of support I received (do not agree at all, do not agree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree completely).
Useful for finding job	I can use what I have learned to find a job (totally disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree, totally agree).
Support needed	I got the support I needed (not at all agree, not agree, neither agree, nor not agree, agree, agree completely).
Recommended support	I would recommend the partner organisation's support to others (not at all agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, totally agree).
Coach good job	My coach did a good job (not at all agree, not agree, neither agree, nor disagree, agree, totally agree).
Sufficient time spent	Sufficient time was allotted for me (not at all agree, not agree, neither agree, nor not agree, agree, agree completely).
Sufficient feedback	I received sufficient feedback (not at all agree, not agree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree, agree completely).
Questions answered	The questions I had were answered (not agreed at all, not agreed, neither agreed nor not agreed, agreed, agreed, agreed completely).
Useful guidance activities	I was offered several useful counselling activities (not agree at all, not agree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree, agree completely).
Satisfaction with accessibility and infrastructure	
Location accessible	The partner organisation's office was easily physically accessible (not at all agree, not agree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, not at all, Not applicable, support was mainly digital)
Coach reachable	I could easily reach my coach (e.g. via phone, e- mail, etc.) (totally disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree, agree completely).
Good infrastructure	I am satisfied with the infrastructure (e.g. office spaces, classrooms, available laptops, etc.) of the partner organisation (do not agree at all, do not agree, neither agree nor disagree agree, agree, agree completely, Not applicable, support was mainly digital).
Good digital infrastructure	I am satisfied with the digital infrastructure (e.g. website, online training platform, online modules, etc.) of the partner organisation (Not at all agreed, Not agreed, Neither agreed, Neither agreed, Agreed, Completely agreed, Not applicable, the support was not digital).
Type of training	
1-to-1 training	How frequently was 1-on-1 training used (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).
Group training	How frequently was group training used (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).
Online training	How frequently online training was used (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).
On-site training	How frequently on-site training was used (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).

Table 10 shows the descriptive statistics for the satisfaction variables. It is noticeable that the variables "location accessible", "good infrastructure" and "good digital infrastructure" are not available for the entire sample. The explanation for this is the response option "not applicable" for these variables. For the satisfaction variables concerning satisfaction guidance and satisfaction accessibility and infrastructure, the score on the likert scale is looked at, but dummy variables are also considered. The score on the likert scale is a minimum of one and a maximum of five, where one represents not at all agreed/very dissatisfied and five represents completely agreed/very satisfied. The mean of 3.77 for overall satisfaction counselling thus implies that jobseekers on average gave a score of 3.77 on the likert scale. This is closest to a score of four which represents "satisfied". The dummy variables have a value of zero when a score of three or less was given by the job seeker on the likert scale and a score of one when a score higher than three was given on the likert scale. Thus, the mean of 0.71 for overall satisfaction guidance is interpreted as: 71% of respondents gave a score of higher than three to overall satisfaction. For the occurrence of different types of training, only the likert scale is considered. Here, the value one represents never and the value five represents very often.

*Table 10: Descriptive statistics satisfaction*

Variable	Likert			Dummies		
	N	Average.	Std.Dev.	N	Average.	Std.Dev.
Guidance satisfaction						
General	268	3.77	1.11	268	0.71	0.45
Quality support	268	3.85	1.00	268	0.76	0.43
Amount of support	268	3.79	1.01	268	0.72	0.45
Useful for finding job	268	3.75	1.06	268	0.71	0.45
Support needed	268	3.74	1.11	268	0.72	0.45
Recommended support	268	3.73	1.15	268	0.72	0.45
Coach good job	268	4.07	0.96	268	0.79	0.41
Sufficient time spent	268	4.04	0.92	268	0.82	0.38
Sufficient feedback	268	3.96	1.03	268	0.78	0.41
Questions answered	268	4.03	0.93	268	0.81	0.39
Useful guidance activities	268	3.66	1.06	268	0.65	0.48
Satisfaction with accessibility and infrastructure						
Location accessible	180	3.88	1.08	180	0.73	0.45
Coach reachable	268	4.25	0.82	268	0.88	0.32
Good infrastructure	156	3.81	1.02	156	0.71	0.46
Good digital infrastructure	245	3.98	0.98	245	0.77	0.42
Type of training						
1-to-1 training	268	3.00	1.23			
Group training	268	2.44	1.21			
Online training	268	2.88	1.22			
On-site training	268	2.07	1.22			



## Regression analyses

Based on the satisfaction sample of 268 jobseekers, the effect of a voucher counselling programme on different components of jobseeker satisfaction was examined. The results are presented in

Table 11 to Table 15. It is important to note here that, as with the regressions on employment, we also control for age, gender, employment restriction, migration background, language disadvantage, education level, sector, plot and cohort. Since, again, part of the jobseekers in the intervention group ultimately do not use the voucher (non-voters), we look at the effect of the actual use of the voucher (and not the allocation to the voucher system per se) and, as in the regressions on employment, we use an *Instrumental Variable (IV) approach* (See "6.2 Regression analyses" for more info on this method).

Table 11 (likert) and Table 12 (dummy variables) present the results concerning satisfaction with counselling. From

Table 11 reveals a positive and significant effect of following a voucher counselling programme on the amount of support (5% s.n.), the usefulness of the support for finding a job (10% s.n.), recommending the support to others (10% s.n.), the work of the coach (1% s.n.), spending enough time with the job seeker (5% s.n.) and giving enough feedback to the job seeker (10% s.n.). Since we are looking at the scores on the likert scale here, these effects should be interpreted as follows: following a voucher guidance programme, increases satisfaction with the amount of support received by

0.31 points on the likert scale. Positive effects of a voucher counselling programme are also found for overall satisfaction, quality of support, getting the necessary support, answering questions and usefulness of counselling activities, but they are not significant. That is, they are due to chance. Table 12 shows a positive and significant effect of following a voucher counselling programme on the amount of support (5% s.n.), recommending the support to others (5% s.n.), the work of the coach (5% s.n.) and spending enough time with the jobseeker (1% s.n.). Thus, the significance of the positive effect on the usefulness of the support for finding a job and giving enough feedback to the job seeker disappears when working with dummy variables instead of the score on the likert scale. Again, the effect of the other variables remains positive but not significant. Since Table 12 works with dummy variables, the results should be interpreted in the following way: following a voucher counselling programme, increases the probability of a jobseeker giving a score of more than three to satisfaction with the amount of support on the likert scale by 16%-points.

Table 11: Regression results satisfaction counselling (likert)

	(1) General	(2) Quality support	(3) Amount of support	(4) Useful for finding job	(5) Support needed	(6) Recommend ed support
Voucher used	0.11 (0.17)	0.20 (0.14)	0.31** (0.15)	0.26* (0.15)	0.16 (0.16)	0.30* (0.16)
N	268	268	268	268	268	268
	(7) Coach good job	(8) Sufficient time spent	(9) Sufficient feedback	(10) Questions answered	(11) Useful guidance activities	
Voucher used	0.36*** (0.14)	0.28** (0.13)	0.28* (0.14)	0.11 (0.12)	0.13 (0.14)	
N	268	268	268	268	268	

Table 12: Regression results satisfaction guidance (dummy variables)

	(1) General	(2) Quality support	(3) Amount of support	(4) Useful for finding job	(5) Support needed	(6) Recommended support
Voucher used	0.06 (0.07)	0.08 (0.06)	0.16** (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.14** (0.07)
N	268	268	268	268	268	268
	(7) Coach good job	(8) Sufficient time spent	(9) Sufficient feedback	(10) Questions answered	(11) Useful guidance activities	
Voucher used	0.12** (0.06)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.09 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)	0.09 (0.07)	
N	268	268	268	268	268	

Results regarding satisfaction with accessibility and infrastructure are shown in Table 13 (likert) and

Table 14 (dummy variables). Table 13 shows a positive effect of a voucher counselling programme on each variable, although the effects are significant only for coach accessibility (1% s.n.) and digital infrastructure (10% s.n.). Following a voucher guidance programme increases satisfaction with coach accessibility and digital infrastructure quality on the likert scale by 0.40 and 0.24 points, respectively. In

Table 14, only the positive effect of following a voucher counselling programme on coach accessibility is significant (1% s.n.). Following a voucher guidance programme, increases the probability of a jobseeker giving a score of more than three to coach accessibility on the likert scale by 14%-points.

*Table 13: Regression results satisfaction with accessibility and infrastructure (likert)*

	(1) Location accessible	(2) Coach reachable	(3) Good infrastructure	(4) Good digital infrastructure
Voucher used	0.09 (0.17)	0.40*** (0.12)	0.11 (0.16)	0.24* (0.13)
N	180	268	156	245

Table 14: Regression results satisfaction with accessibility and infrastructure (dummy variables)

	(1) Location accessible	(2) Coach reachable	(3) Good infrastructure	(4) Good digital infrastructure
Voucher used	0.00 (0.07)	0.14*** (0.05)	0.08 (0.08)	0.08 (0.06)
N	180	268	156	245

Finally, the results regarding the type of training received by jobseekers are shown in Table 15. As shown in column (2), a negative and significant effect is observed on the frequency of group training. Thus, jobseekers who attended a voucher training programme receive group training less frequently. This could indicate that the partner organisation in the voucher counselling pathway wants to work more tailored to the jobseeker, for which group training is less suitable. Possibly this is one of the reasons why participants in the voucher system are more satisfied with the counselling in many areas. Regarding the use of other type of training (1-on-1, online, on-site), no significant differences can be seen between the jobseekers who did and did not use the voucher system.

Table 15: Regression results type of training

	(1) 1-to-1 training	(2) Group training	(3) Online training	(4) On-site training
Voucher used	0.07 (0.17)	-0.35** (0.17)	-0.10 (0.17)	-0.02 (0.18)
N	268	268	268	268

### 6.3. Conclusion

When looking at the employment and satisfaction of the TIBB4 population (excluding the province of Antwerp), it was found that there was still a lot of room for improvement. The data from the province of Antwerp showed that this improvement could be achieved by rolling out a voucher guidance pathway. Indeed, the introduction of the voucher guidance pathway has a positive impact on both employment and satisfaction. For instance, allocation of a voucher increases the probability of finding employment by 6% points. In addition, when this voucher is actually used by the jobseeker, this probability increases even by 15% points. To increase the effect of the vouchers, it is therefore important that the VDAB ensures that as many jobseekers as possible who are allocated a voucher actually use it. The analysis of the difference between voters and non-voters shows that the VDAB should focus particularly on young people, the low-skilled and jobseekers looking for work in the transport and logistics sector. Regarding satisfaction, respondents who followed a voucher guidance programme score significantly better on the amount of support, the usefulness of the support for finding a job, recommending the support to others, the work of the coach, the time spent with them, receiving sufficient feedback, the accessibility of the coach and the quality of the digital infrastructure. In addition, respondents who followed a voucher guidance programme were significantly more likely to give a score of more than three out of five to the amount of support, recommending the support to others, the work of the coach, the time spent on them and the coach's accessibility. Finally, it appears that jobseekers who received a



followed voucher guidance programmes were significantly less frequent users of group training. This supports the VDAB's intention to be more tailored to the jobseeker.

It should be noted that this study has some limitations. For instance, random assignment based on the national register numbers was not always done correctly. As a result, the intervention and control groups were not entirely comparable for certain socio-demographic characteristics, so it was important to control for this in our regression models. In addition, the analyses did not take into account the jobseekers who were admitted to TIBB4 but did not start counselling since the control group consists of jobseekers who actually started their counselling programme between 1 March 2021 and 30 June 2021. Nevertheless, this latter limitation will not be a major problem. Thus, it turns out that only 50 jobseekers who had a first appointment with the VDAB mediator between 1 March 2021 and 30 June 2021 and were directed to TIBB4 did not attend the partner's intake interview and thus did not start the counselling. As 544 jobseekers had a first interview with the VDAB mediator between 1 March 2021 and 30 June 2021 and were guided to TIBB4, this corresponds to a dropout rate of about 9%. This dropout rate is thus much lower than for the voucher holders where about half ultimately did not start counselling (this high dropout rate among the voucher holders is taken into account in the analyses).

## 7. General conclusions

The introduction and effects of mediation vouchers were discussed with a focus on the course of the voucher assignments (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> assignments) and on the distribution of vouchers between the different partner organisations. The experiences with vouchers of the partner organisations and the VDAB mediators were highlighted through interviews, questionnaires and panel discussions. The jobseekers' perspective was captured in a survey on the initial selection process and a survey on the satisfaction of jobseekers who received voucher or TIBB4 guidance. We briefly present the main insights.

The introduction of the voucher system provided a wider (10 'generic' partners) and a more diverse (4 'specialist' partners) offer. A TIBB4 plot with a single plot holder (whether or not consisting of a consortium) obviously offers less variety and choice.

Half of the voucher holders (53%) actually use the voucher and start counselling with a partner. There is a significant group of voucher holders who do not start a counselling programme with a partner because they move out to work (25%). In addition, there is a remaining group of non-electing voucher holders (22%). For the remaining group of non-voters, further efforts can be made to increase the percentage of voucher holders who choose and effectively start counselling.

There is a group of at least 10% of voucher holders who find it difficult to choose between partners. These people are directed to TIBB4, to another service or are described by the VDAB mediator as not belonging to the target group. The group of non-voters does not have an unambiguous profile, although we do see more young people <25 and people with a short education in this group. In contrast to the impression of VDAB mediators and partners, non-native speakers and people with an immigrant background are not significantly more present in the group of non-voters. Limited digital literacy was cited as a possible stumbling block to choice, but no information is available on this characteristic per jobseeker. Partner organisations did note that provided additional support, even the non-digitally proficient could reach choice and voucher assistance.

Partner organisations are positive about the voucher system because it motivates jobseekers, allows them to offer more tailor-made services and they gain more knowledge about jobseekers and their own operation. Specialist partners and new partners appreciate the opportunity to play a role in the market alongside existing generic plot holders.

For partners, the main drawbacks of the voucher system were the combination of fixed costs for reception and introductory interviews and the uncertain inflow of voucher holders. The partners felt that the total numbers of vouchers available in the market were too low, making the profitability of the project among several partners problematic. The partners further felt that they have insufficient data and information on the distributed vouchers in the market. They would like more and finer-grained information on voucher volumes in order to flexibly adjust their business operations accordingly

For the positive effects, the VDAB intermediaries refer to the freedom of choice offered which lowers resistances among job seekers, to partners who are more committed to customisation rather than to

standard routes and towards a more varied partner offer. VDAB mediators see the main disadvantages as an increased workload and the longer duration of the guidance process.

Guidance using vouchers has management implications. The presence of several partners who can provide guidance to jobseekers makes the VDAB less dependent on a single partner organisation within a parcel and offers immediate alternatives in case of sub-standard services. On the other hand, where efforts around quality control are limited to one parcel holder in TIBB4, the voucher concession with 11 partner organisations also entails a multiplicity of quality control activities. It should also be noted that, in the voucher system, there were 47% voucher holders who do not start counselling and for whom, therefore, no fees have to be paid out to partner organisations. In the traditional TIBB4 organisation, the probability of actual guidance (with effort allowance) is significantly higher. Also, with vouchers there are no guarantees around minimum numbers of trained jobseekers, which avoids costs that can occur with TIBB4.

A survey of jobseekers at the start of their voucher processes indicated that voucher holders were satisfied that choice was offered to them. A majority of non-voucher holders also expressed satisfaction with the choice, information provided, time available and steps to be taken. Job seekers indicated the proximity/accessibility of the partner, the content approach and the customer-friendliness of the partner as the main determinants for choosing a partner organisation.

The employment results of the voucher system are positive. The allocation of a voucher increases the probability of employment by 6 percentage points. It should be noted here that 25% of voucher holders find employment or have job prospects before the counselling process with the partner organisation is effectively started. The search for a suitable partner organisation has an activating effect and also encourages a direct job search. Compared to vouchers, in the classical TIBB4 approach, there is more of a so-called 'lock-in' effect as jobseekers in direct referral 'wait' for the start of their counselling programme resulting in a smaller drop-out rate (9%).

Among those jobseekers who received a voucher and then actually followed a voucher guidance programme, we see an increased probability of employment of 15 percentage points. Effective voucher counselling therefore leads to better employment outcomes and could be an additional reason for efforts to encourage the group of non-choosing voucher holders (22% see above) to choose and start a counselling programme.

The satisfaction survey of TIBB4 and voucher holders on counselling programmes carried out also points to positive effects. Jobseekers who received voucher counselling are more satisfied with the amount of support received, with the quality of the coach, with the coach's accessibility and more satisfied with the time allocated for the jobseeker. Voucher holders are also more willing than TIBB4 respondents to recommend the counselling to others.

The voucher system thus offers important advantages (freedom of choice, satisfaction, employment) but there are also drawbacks and concerns that can undermine the success of the system (including long

start-up procedure, limited partner information, small volumes, insufficient explanation to jobseekers, non-electing voucher holders).