



Flanders
State of the Art

Making strides together

VLAIO's ambitions from now until 2031

Courage and ambition form the common thread running through VLAIO's ambitions towards 2031. Over the coming years, VLAIO aims to take on a leading role by connecting entrepreneurship and innovation even more closely.

The objective is to make strides together, and we do so by building

1. a shared culture in which courage and ambition are the norm;
2. a more cohesive ecosystem in which the various partners and value chains reinforce one another; and
3. excellent tailored services and infrastructure that promote local anchoring and economic development.

Additional focus is placed on knowledge valorisation, reaching SMEs and international thinking and networking.

The central challenge is: How can we make the economy more receptive to renewal while simultaneously increasing our competitiveness and productivity? And how do we translate this internally within VLAIO, within Flanders and towards Europe?

Our strategy is based on a survey of our clients and responds to the challenges (such as financing) and opportunities (such as market introduction of innovations) that strongly emerged from it. It aligns with

the recommendations from Mario Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness and with research on high-performing ecosystems by Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt, the recent Nobel Prize laureates in economics. Draghi argues that Europe suffers from fragmented capital, risk aversion and insufficient knowledge dissemination. Mokyr and his co-laureates emphasise that innovation only thrives in a culture that tolerates failure, rewards experimentation and spreads knowledge widely.

With this strategy, VLAIO aims to help build a Flanders that dares to innovate and that collaborates more intelligently and more rapidly. A Flanders that raises its ambitions and where entrepreneurs make strides. A Flanders that produces more winners.

In short, by 2031 VLAIO wants to make Flanders a dynamic ecosystem where innovation does not get stuck in projects and patents, but flows through to products, companies, public authorities and markets. An ecosystem where entrepreneurship within knowledge institutions is regarded as a fully-fledged career path for researchers. Where the impact of Flemish entrepreneurs reaches far beyond our borders and contributes more to a stronger and more competitive Europe. To achieve this, we are charting our strategic course across five areas of action.

Five ambitions

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Ambition 1

Courage and ambition as the norm

VLAIO wants to make courage and ambition the norm in Flanders. After all, courage and ambition determine who makes tomorrow's breakthroughs first and who is able to reshape existing markets.

For us, courage means embracing uncertainty and showing resilience in turbulent times. Ambition means raising the bar by seeking to make strides, learn more quickly and achieve consistent growth over a longer period.

VLAIO takes the lead here. We are building a culture that allows us to decide more quickly and support more 'high risk / high impact' trajectories.

If prospects are uncertain but promising, we give the benefit of the doubt and proceed, preferring one failure over ten missed opportunities. And if we have to say 'no', we do so swiftly and constructively. We explain why and help

the entrepreneur move forward by directing them to the right partner, guidance or financing.

We also take a leading role in strengthening the ecosystem, where better alignment between innovation and entrepreneurship is paramount.

In addition, we remain an agile organisation that can pivot quickly and adjust its offering when circumstances require it.

By making courage and ambition the norm, we build a strong and supportive ecosystem that produces more winners – an ecosystem where enterprises innovate faster and scale successfully, achieve higher productivity growth, remain resilient and can grow into disruptive global players..

Strategic priorities

1. **We foster a culture of courage and ambition among entrepreneurs, investors and within our own organisation. We evolve towards a culture where experimenting and learning are second nature. A culture enabling us to respond swiftly and effectively to unforeseen circumstances.**
2. **We encourage entrepreneurs to push boundaries and stimulate groundbreaking ideas.**
3. **We take on more risk ourselves. We support more innovative projects with a high degree of uncertainty because that is precisely where tomorrow's breakthroughs lie. At the same time, we continue to ensure sound and responsible resource management.**
4. **We assume more of a leading role on the themes of entrepreneurship and innovation in order to achieve a better aligned and more cohesive ecosystem.**
5. **We challenge our partners to innovate. We expect partners to work together more closely, revise their methodologies and bring more innovation into their offering.**

Ambition 2

Supporting transitions more effectively

VLAIO sees the major transitions in materials, energy, health, defence and digitalisation as opportunities to strengthen the productivity and competitiveness of the Flemish economy in a sustainable way.

We support the pioneers of tomorrow who are developing solutions for climate, energy, circular materials, health and security. Their returns are often uncertain and their impact on turnover and staffing becomes visible more slowly.

With new financing instruments such as blended finance (combining grants, financing and knowledge), we want to help pioneers bridge the 'valley of death'. We also avoid support that would slow down these transitions.

We take on a facilitating role in the major transitions by raising the key obstacles and regulations that hinder them and submitting these to the competent administrative authorities with a view to developing possible solutions.

Furthermore, we ensure that SMEs have a greater capacity to absorb and embrace these new technologies and innovations.

Productivity growth does not arise only among the pioneers of tomorrow, but especially when innovations spread into the broader economy. We do this not only by raising awareness, but also by strengthening the digital and sustainable skills of entrepreneurs and employees through targeted, high-quality training.

VLAIO will also continue to deploy its advisory and financing offering to increase the digital maturity of Flemish companies. After all, digitalisation is the backbone of productivity and growth. Companies that lead digitally

also attract capital and talent more quickly. They conquer new markets faster. In this way we build an ecosystem in which every enterprise grows digitally and becomes more competitive.

Finally, we reinforce productivity growth by supporting initiatives focused on optimising processes, sharing knowledge and strengthening the competitiveness of Flemish companies. To maintain our prosperity, enterprises must continue to invest in efficiency, talent development and technological renewal.

Strategic priorities

- 1. We explicitly view societal challenges as opportunities for economic growth, which is why we continue to support research and development projects that create innovative solutions and technologies to tackle them.**
- 2. We work with broad and targeted transition programmes for specific societal challenges and policy priorities. For these programmes, we deploy our full range of instruments – from awareness-raising, informing, advising and guiding to providing financial support. We do this in close cooperation with other policy areas and partners in our network, and allocate the necessary resources for this. Examples include our programmes on the circular economy and defence.**
- 3. We stimulate collaboration across sectors and value chains: between companies, between companies and knowledge institutions, and also between enterprises, public authorities and non-profit organisations.**
- 4. We promote training to valorise innovation and research among SMEs.**

5. We advocate for a strong STEM culture and for sufficient STEM profiles to support the transition.
6. Where necessary, we adapt our instruments to encourage companies to invest in projects that address societal challenges and policy priorities.
7. We develop new financing forms to encourage companies to innovate and invest in strategic transition areas.

Ambition 3

Space as a lever

VLAIO wants to make Flanders a region where space is used intelligently and strategically so that it becomes a strong lever for innovation and economic development. The way we organise our space today will determine how competitive our economy is in the future. Space must therefore be used with care so that every square metre creates more value in economic, ecological and societal terms.

We are striving for economic spaces that better correspond to the needs and growth potential of the new economy. Alongside traditional business parks, this also includes vibrant centres and technological hubs. This requires strong alignment between different policy areas, actors and levels of government. We are taking on a facilitating and supporting role in this.

In addition, we support the evolution of existing business parks into productive and sustainable working environments.

We are examining new development or management models that make collective sustainability and shared use possible so that space is used more intelligently and efficiently.

At the same time, we recognise that in some cases space designated for economic activity cannot be further developed, for example where the location makes this difficult due to water-related challenges or mobility issues. We therefore want to deploy our knowledge and network to develop both new and existing business parks in a future-proof and considered manner, with a view to innovation, economic development and local anchoring.

Strategic priorities

1. We stimulate intelligent land use with a focus on innovation, sustainability and economic development.
2. We develop technology hubs with shared infrastructure so that enterprises lacking their own infrastructure can experiment more and maximise their potential.
3. We transform existing business parks into future-oriented working environments through new management models and collective sustainability.
4. We invest in the strategic development of new economic space with attention to innovation, local anchoring and societal added value.

Excellent tailored services

VLAIO continues to build excellent services that are simpler, faster and better aligned with the needs of all enterprises. Our starting point is that not every enterprise needs the same things, nor the same level of guidance. For that reason, we tailor our approach and services to the needs of the client.

We remain the central point of contact for all entrepreneurs in Flanders. We guide them through the ecosystem with clear, transparent and accessible support that provides direction and confidence. To this end, we are also making more

digital tools available and investing in a supportive ecosystem where the proximity of our partners is an asset and their guidance pathways can make the difference.

Our own advisers are evolving into guides and brokers. With new digital tools and a strong network, they are becoming the connecting force that proactively brings ambitious entrepreneurs into contact with one another, with the right partners and the right investors.

We also address one of the main challenges of our ecosystem, namely the lack of knowledge valorisation. Whereas in the past innovations too often remained on the shelf, we now invest in valorisation earlier, in a more targeted and more ambitious manner.

We support strong consortia and strategic partnerships that offer excellent services to enterprises in domains where Flanders can make a difference. At the same time, we invest in digital infrastructure that connects ecosystems and partners, enables rapid monitoring and analyses and allows our services to evolve proactively along a clear pathway.

Finally, we want to be a knowledge-driven organisation with experts in the main themes. We take decisions on the basis of data, analyses and insights, and we deploy that knowledge to strengthen services across the Flemish ecosystem.

Strategic priorities

- 1. We provide the right service at the right time and in the right way. Every entrepreneur (whether a starter, start-up, spin-off, scale-up, SME or corporate) and foreign investor knows where to turn.**
- 2. Our own advisers are evolving into guides and brokers, connecting ambitious entrepreneurs with knowledge institutions and investors.**
- 3. We strengthen coherence within the ecosystem through strong consortia, specialised services and generic services for overarching aspects.**
- 4. We help more start-ups grow into scale-ups and we help more scale-ups become disruptive global players.**
- 5. We position VLAIO as a knowledge centre for entrepreneurship and innovation. We collect relevant data and translate it into useful insights, which we share with partners and policymakers.**

Ambition 5

We play an active role internationally

VLAIO wants to position Flanders as a top region in Europe for entrepreneurship and innovation – a region where Flemish companies break through on international markets and attract international capital and talent.

We strive for an ecosystem with strong connections to neighbouring regions and European innovation hotspots. For this we work closely with FIT, PMV, LRM, the Flemish ports and other partners to make Flanders internationally visible and strategically relevant for Europe.

VLAIO actively supports internationalisation, but not naïvely. We encourage companies to internationalise thoughtfully, recognising risks, avoiding critical dependencies and keeping decision-making processes in the region. At the same time, we want to equip Flemish enterprises with the knowledge, partnerships and innovation capacity needed to grow competitively but in an economically secure way within global value chains.

VLAIO opens the door to European programmes such as Horizon Europe, the ETS Innovation Fund and the European Defence Fund. We bring international networks and capital markets to Flanders so that Flemish entrepreneurs gain faster access to new markets, partners and international investors.

Strategic priorities

1. In support instruments, grants and assessment frameworks, VLAIO actively integrates the international component. When selecting and supporting projects, we take into account international ambition, cooperation potential and market opportunities.
2. Together with FIT, we aim above all to attract international investments that provide sustainable added value for Flanders in both economic and spatial terms.
3. We stimulate strategic alliances so that entrepreneurs, investors, knowledge institutions, research centres and clusters collaborate structurally across borders.
4. VLAIO helps enterprises to make use of European financing opportunities and supports them in participating in European programmes.
5. We focus our international cooperation on strategic value chains so that Flemish enterprises form part of European industrial and technological alliances.