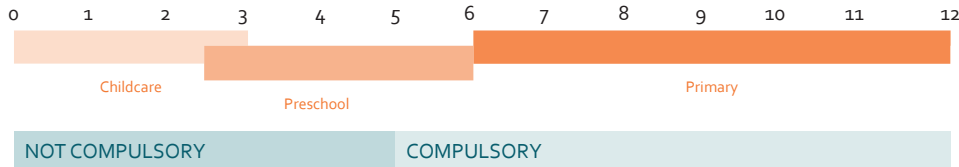
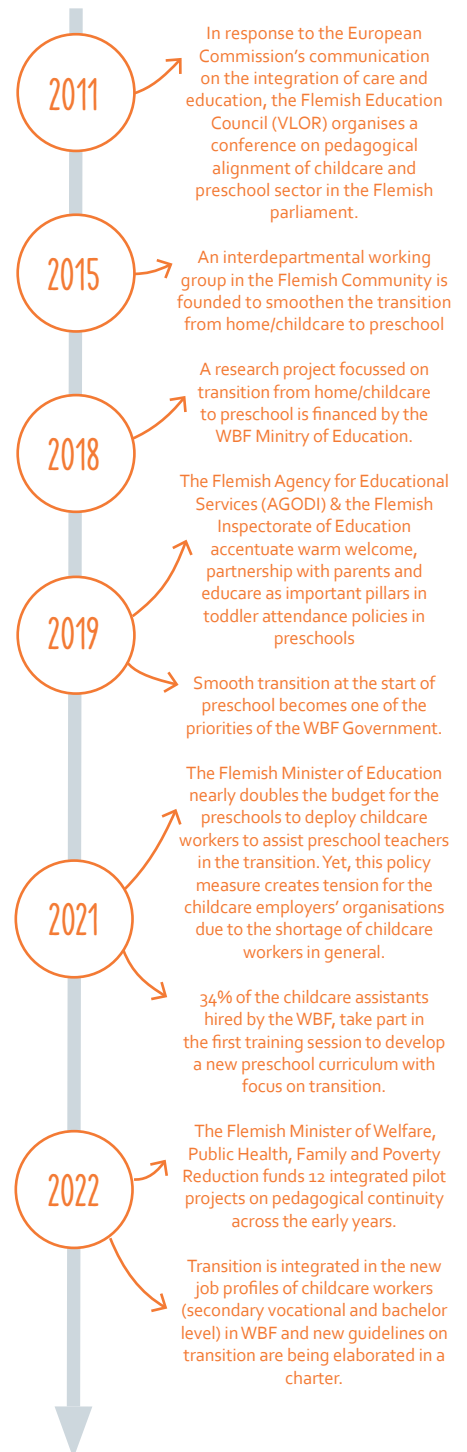


BELGIUM

STRUCTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY EDUCATION



TIMELINE OF RECENT POLICY MEASURES ON TRANSITIONS



CHILDCARE



ATTENDANCE

Childcare is attended by approximately 50% of children. Places are unequally accessible: children with migration backgrounds, and children living in poverty are significantly underrepresented.



PROVISION

The Ministry of Welfare/Upbringing Agency in the Flemish Community and the Ministry of Childhood, Health, Culture, Media and Women's Rights in Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French Community/WBF) are responsible for regulations, allocation of places, funding, quality standards and management. The day-to-day running of childcare and out of school care centres is the responsibility of local authorities, non-profit organisations, and also some private for-profit providers.



PERSONNEL

One childcare worker (secondary vocational degree, ISCED 3B) is responsible for 8/9 children in the Flemish Community and 7 in WBF. Whereas in WBF only fully qualified staff can work, in the Flemish community unqualified staff needs to be fully qualified by 2024. In recent years, pedagogical coaches (bachelor in pedagogy of the young child, ISCED 6) in the Flemish Community have joined the childcare workforce for management, coaching, or to eventually work directly with children and families. In WBF, a new bachelor's degree in childcare and education should be set up in September 2023.

PRESCHOOL



ATTENDANCE

The Belgian preschool system is internationally known for its high enrolment numbers. The Belgian preschool system is internationally known for its high enrolment numbers. In the Flemish Community for example, 99 % for 3-5 years old / 82% for 2,5 years old and approximately 97% of enrolled children attend preschool frequently. The probability of non-attendance in both communities increases when children have no Belgian nationality, have a low educated mother, receive a school allowance and/or speak a language other than Dutch/French at home.



PROVISION

Preschool is an integral part of Basic education under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Three types of provision: (1) preschool settings run and fully financed by the Flemish/French Community; (2) subsidised public settings organised by local authorities; and (3) subsidised private settings – mostly Catholic. Accordingly, umbrella networks are responsible for curriculum, teaching methods and pedagogy. Mostly schools foresee their own before and after school care because subsidised out of school care are not everywhere available.



PERSONNEL

The school director is responsible for the preschool and primary school staff. Although no strict regulations, on average 1 preschool teacher (bachelor in preschool education, ISCED 6; master degree, ISCED 7) for 20-25 children during educational times (excluding lunch and other breaks) with sometimes help of a childcare worker (secondary vocational degree, ISCED 3B). Staff members or volunteers without a specific educational qualification can be responsible for the supervision of a numerous group of children during lunch, before and after school.



BELGIUM: 3 CURRENT ISSUES FACING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

1. ABRUPT AND UNEQUAL TRANSITIONS TO PRESCHOOL

MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN A 'CARING' CHILDCARE AND AN 'EDUCATIONAL' PRESCHOOL/'PLAYFUL' OUT OF SCHOOL CARE → START IN PRESCHOOL HARD FOR ALL CHILDREN BUT ESPECIALLY HARD FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE NOT ATTENDED CHILDCARE (HIGHER CHANGE OF BEING IN A SOCIETALLY VULNERABLE POSITION)

MILESTONE: → WARM TRANSITIONS AS QUALITY CRITERION IN FLEMISH 'TODDLER PARTICIPATION POLICIES' (POLICIES TO INCREASE THE ENROLMENT & ATTENDANCE IN PRESCHOOL) & AS PRIORITY OF THE WBF GOVERNMENT (PACT FOR A TEACHING OF EXCELLENCE.)

CURRENT EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICES: → WORK ON WARM AND INCLUSIVE TRANSITIONS WITHIN THE EXISTING DOUBLE SPLIT SYSTEM. BRIDGING PRACTICES BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT ECEC ENVIRONMENTS
→ WORK ON WARM AND INCLUSIVE TRANSITIONS AND MORE EDUCARE WITHIN THE EXISTING DOUBLE SPLIT SYSTEM. BRIDGING PRACTICES AND EXCHANGE ON VISION/PRACTICE IN INTERINSTITUTIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES.
→ WORK ON INTEGRATED PROJECTS CHALLENGING THE DOUBLE SPLIT SYSTEM. FROM A MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND HOLISTIC APPROACH, A DAY OF A CHILD IS RE-CONSTRUCTED

2. PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY AS A POLICY INTEREST

12 INTEGRATED PILOT PROJECTS ON PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY FUNDED FOR THREE YEARS BY THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT, AND 3 RESEARCH PROJECTS ARE FUNDED BY THE WBF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION.

RISKS: → SCHOOLIFICATION OF CHILDCARE AND PRESCHOOL (SOLELY PREPARATORY FUNCTION FOR WHAT COMES NEXT) WHICH RESULTS OFTEN IN FIXED (PRE)SCHOOL READINESS CONCEPTS, IS OFTEN DETRIMENTAL FROM AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PERSPECTIVE

OPPORTUNITIES: → IN THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS AND HINDRANCES IN REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS OF CHILDCARE, OUT OF SCHOOL CARE AND PRESCHOOL WILL BE EXAMINED. THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT WILL THEN DECIDE ON TEMPORARY FLEXIBILITY IN THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS IN ORDER FOR THE PILOT PROJECTS TO SUCCEED.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS: → LACK OF PEDAGOGICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTINUITY DURING (LUNCH) BREAKS IN PRESCHOOL (DIFFERENT POLICY LEVELS INVOLVED, BREAKS ARE NOT CONSIDERED AS 'EDUCATIONAL TIME', THUS LACKING SUFFICIENT TEACHING OR CARE STAFF) LIMITED COMMON CHILD-FREE HOURS TO REFLECT IN INTERPROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

3. SHORTAGES OF ECEC STAFF

- ECEC STAFF BELONG TO THE BOTTLENECK PROFESSIONS. MANY ECEC CENTRES HAVE OPEN VACANCIES FOR TEACHERS AND CHILDCARE WORKERS, INTENSIFIED IN THE COVID19 HEALTH CRISIS. E.G. 96% OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES ORGANISING CHILDCARE IN THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY, STATE HAVING PROBLEMS FILLING VACANCIES OF CHILDCARE WORKERS.
- IN PRE- AND PRIMARY SCHOOL, A QUARTER OF STARTER TEACHERS STOP THEIR PROFESSION WITHIN FIVE YEARS. INITIAL TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS ARE ATTRACTING FEWER AND FEWER PEOPLE. A SMALL MINORITY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS IN CHILDCARE WANT TO CONTINUE TO WORK IN ECEC.
- NEVER BEFORE WAS THE IMPACT OF THE SHORTAGE OF ECEC STAFF SO PROBLEMATIC IN TERMS OF AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF ECEC.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS/ACTIONS: → HIGHER SOCIETAL APPRECIATION OF THE JOB AS TEACHER AND JOB AS CHILDCARE WORKER, STIMULATE MORE LATERAL ENTRANTS, BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS INCLUDING LOWER ADULT-CHILD RATIO, MORE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND JOB MOBILITY.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY: → BESIDES THE USUAL SOLUTIONS, HOW CAN THE EXPANSION OF INNOVATIVE ECEC PROJECTS ATTRACT MORE POTENTIAL STUDENTS OR LATERAL ENTRANTS TO WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES? TO CHANGE THE IMAGE OF THE JOB, THE IMAGE OF THE ECEC CENTRES ITSELF HAS TO CHANGE.