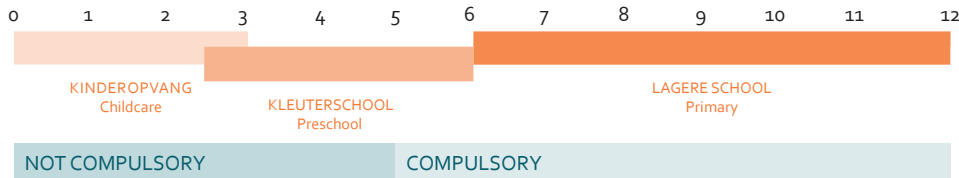


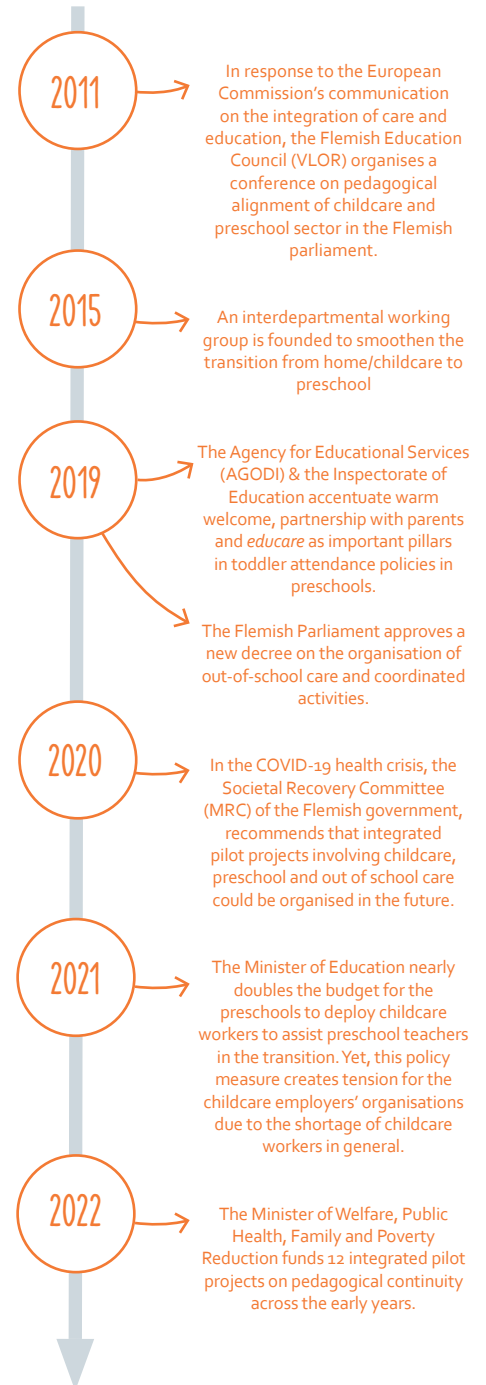
BELGIUM

FLEMISH COMMUNITY

STRUCTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY EDUCATION



TIMELINE OF RECENT POLICY MEASURES ON TRANSITIONS



CHILDCARE



ATTENDANCE

Childcare is attended by approximately 50% of children. Parental fees are means-tested in approximately 3/4 of childcare places. Places are unequally accessible: children with migration backgrounds, and children living in poverty are significantly underrepresented.



PROVISION

The Ministry of Welfare and the Upbringing Agency 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. Unqualified staff need to be fully qualified by 2024. In recent years, pedagogical coaches (bachelor in pedagogy of the young child, ISCED 6) have joined the childcare workforce for management, coaching, or to eventually work directly with children and families.

PRE-SCHOOL



ATTENDANCE

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



PROVISION

Preschool is an integral part of Basic education (*Basisonderwijs*) under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Three types of provision: (1) preschool settings run and fully financed by the Flemish 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) 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.



Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union



BELGIUM: 5 CURRENT ISSUES FACING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

FLEMISH COMMUNITY

1. ABRUPT AND UNEQUAL TRANSITIONS TO PRESCHOOL

MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN A 'CARING' CHILDCARE AND AN 'EDUCATIONAL' PRESCHOOL/'PLAYFUL' OUT OF SCHOOL CARE → START IN PRESCHOOL 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 'TODDLER PARTICIPATION POLICIES' (POLICIES TO INCREASE THE ENROLMENT & ATTENDANCE IN PRESCHOOL)

CURRENT EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICES: → 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 PILOT PROJECTS ON PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY FUNDED FOR THREE YEARS BY THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT. → CHILDCARE, PRESCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL CARE COLLABORATE TO ENABLE INTEGRATED ECEC FOR CHILDREN FROM 0-6 YEARS OLD
→ THE PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY (*DOORGAANDE LIJN*) IN DEVELOPMENT, CARE, EDUCATION, LEARNING AND PLAY OF CHILDREN IS AT THE CORE OF THE PILOT PROJECTS. COLLABORATION WITH THE HOME -AND NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT IS ESSENTIAL

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: → 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. QUALITY CRISIS IN CHILDCARE SECTOR

- CURRENT SUBJECT OF PUBLIC AND FLEMISH PARLIAMENT DEBATES, IGNITED BY THE DEATH OF A 10 MONTH OLD BABY IN A CHILDCARE CENTRE

- FLAWED QUALITY ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES, POOR WORKING CONDITIONS, LOW SOCIETAL APPRECIATION, HIGH ADULT-CHILD RATIO, GENERAL LOW LEVEL OF INITIAL QUALIFICATION AND OCCUPATION SHORTAGE OF CHILDCARE WORKERS BECAME MORE APPARENT IN THE PUBLIC AND POLITICAL EYE

KEY OBSTACLES: → MINISTER OF WELFARE PUBLIC HEALTH, FAMILY AND POVERTY REDUCTION REFERS TO HAVING LIMITED FINANCIAL POSSIBILITIES.

RISKS: → THIS CRISIS CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS WITH PRESCHOOLS/OUT OF SCHOOL CARE.

SUGGESTED PROPOSALS/ACTIONS: → CONSENSUS THAT NEW FUTURE VISION ON CHILDCARE NEEDS TO BE DEVELOPED WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS

→ FLEMISH GOVERNMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY NEEDS TO DISCUSS AND ASSESS THE CHILDCARE BUDGET ACCORDINGLY

→ REDO QUALITY MEASUREMENT STUDY (MEMOQ) AFTER THE ADULT-CHILD RATIO WAS INCREASED TO 1:8/9

4. NEW DECREE ON AFTER SCHOOL CARE

THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT AIMS TO HAVE AN INTEGRATED OFFER OF OUT OF SCHOOL CARE ACTIVITIES - ABBREVIATED 'BOA' - FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES → THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE IN CONTROL AND OUTLINE A LOCAL EXTRACURRICULAR POLICY TOGETHER WITH LOCAL PLAYERS, IRRESPECTIVE IF THEY ARE FUNDED BY EDUCATION, WELFARE, CULTURE OR YOUTH AND SPORT
→ THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES GIVE FINANCIAL PRIORITY TO OUT OF SCHOOL CARE CENTRES FOR TODDLERS (*KLEUTEROPVANG*) WITH A QUALITY LABEL

POTENTIAL BARRIER: → THERE IS STILL A FIVE YEAR TRANSITION PERIOD FOR THE CURRENT RECOGNISED AND SUBSIDISED OUT OF SCHOOL CARE CENTRES. HOWEVER, FUNDING IS NOT SPREAD EVENLY ACROSS THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM: WHETHER SOME REGIONS HAVE MADE SERIOUS INVESTMENTS IN OUT OF SCHOOL CARE, OTHERS LESS SO. IN THAT TRANSITION PERIOD THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT WILL EXAMINE HOW TO LEVEL THESE REGIONAL DIFFERENCES OUT. THIS IS A TRICKY ENDEAVOUR IF THE GENERAL BUDGET FOR OUT OF SCHOOL CARE WILL NOT INCREASE ACCORDINGLY.

5. SHORTAGE 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.

→ 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 ADULT-CHILD RATIO, MORE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND JOB MOBILITY...

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY: → 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.