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The Educational System in Luxembourg

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Florian Geyer

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The Includ-ED project seeks to identify education strategies that help overcome inequalities and promote social cohesion, and thus contribute to meeting the EU's Lisbon goals. The research also distinguishes practices that engender social exclusion, particularly of vulnerable and marginalised groups. The project focuses on the impact of education systems up to the compulsory level (including vocational and special education programmes), with a view to highlighting inclusive approaches for education and social policy.



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THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN LUXEMBOURG

CEPS SPECIAL REPORT / SEPTEMBER 2009

FLORIAN GEYER*

1. Introduction

As in every country, also and particularly in Luxembourg, the educational system reflects peculiarities and characteristics of the country and its society. In the case of Luxembourg such a characteristic is first and foremost its accentuated trilingualism. Unlike in the neighbouring – also multilingual – Belgium, Luxembourg is not divided into different language communities, in which each community learns, works and lives practically in one dominant language regime. Instead, Luxembourg in its entirety is officially – and in everyday life – trilingual: Luxembourgish (Lëtzeburesch, a Franconian/Moselle dialect), French and German.¹ The first is the national language and vernacular of the population. Legislation is drafted in French. Administrative and legal affairs are handled in all of the three languages.²

Consequently there is not *one* language of instruction in schools, but three; which one depends on the level of education. Luxembourgish is the basis in pre-primary and the first two years of primary school. In the first year of primary school German is hence introduced as the language of instruction (reading and writing), followed by oral teaching of French from the beginning of the second year and written French from the third year on.³ Luxembourgish continues to be used in parallel with German and French. Building on this, English is later taught as a ‘truly’ foreign language.

At the same time, Luxembourg is a country with exceptionally high numbers of non-nationals. The foreign population amounts to over 37% of the total population, mainly EU nationals (over 90% of the foreign population) with Portuguese and Italians being the most numerous groups. The number of nationals from former Yugoslavia, however, has increased.⁴

Taking these two peculiarities – a genuine multilingual country with a large proportion of migrant children – into consideration, it quickly becomes apparent which are the current challenges for the educational systems in Luxembourg. With three languages of instruction at school and another mother tongue spoken at home, many pupils of foreign background face considerable difficulties. These difficulties are illustrated in statistics: while around 40% of pupils in pre-primary and primary education are foreigners, only 15.4% make it to general

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¹ Cf. e.g. F. Fehlen (2002), Luxembourg, A multilingual society at the Romance/Germanic border, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 23, no. 1-2, pp. 80 – 97; K. Horner (2004), *Negotiating the Language-Identity Link: Media Discourse and Nation-Building in Luxembourg*, PhD Thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI.

² Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 1.4.

³ Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 1; Ministère de l'éducation nationale et de la formation professionnelle (MENFP), *L'éducation au Luxembourg*, 2007, p. 14.

⁴ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 3.

secondary education. The vast majority follows technical secondary education instead.⁵ The performance gap between immigrant and native pupils has consequently been highlighted in the ‘PISA 2003’ study.⁶ Three years earlier, the PISA 2000 study has ranked Luxembourg at the last European position and in 30th position worldwide, followed only by México and Brazil. Following these results, naturally, there has been extensive discussion among all educational stakeholders in the country.⁷ New surveys suggest that the reforms initiated in recent years are slowly starting to pay off.⁸

Among these reforms the following elements are worth mentioning: 1) introduction of optional early education for 3-year olds, 2) replacing the system of entrance exams for secondary education with more flexible orientation procedures, 3) granting more autonomy to secondary schools and 4) providing enhanced assistance and support measures for foreign pupils within mainstream education.⁹

A major reform, however, that aimed at providing the possibility to choose between tracks with altered roles of German and French as languages of instruction has been rejected by Parliament in 2000. The fear of undermining social unity and social cohesion by creating two distinct language communities has been the major motive to adhere to the traditional line.¹⁰

In this preliminary report we give an overview of the characteristics of the educational system in Luxembourg, in accordance with the structure specified in the Included terms of reference. Due to our disciplinary and professional background outside the field of education, we refrain from identifying every single characteristic as either inclusive or segregationist. In the concluding section, however, we provide a general trend based on our findings.

2. Sources used and analysed

Eurydice, Eurybase, national policy papers and national legislation.

3. Characteristics of the educational systems

3.1 Educational levels

Education is compulsory between the ages of 4 and 15 years, starting with pre-primary (age 4 to 6 years), primary (age 6 to 12 years) and secondary education (age 12 to 15 years). Secondary education is divided into general secondary and technical secondary (vocational). Technical

⁵ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 4.

⁶ The ‘PISA studies’ are reputed to be among the most authoritative assessments of educational systems throughout the world.

⁷ Association de soutien aux travailleurs immigrés (ASTI), Analytical Report on Education – National Focal Point for Luxembourg, 2004, p. 30; cf. also K. Horner & J.J. Weber (2005), “The representation of immigrant students within the classical humanist ethos of the Luxembourgish school-system: From *Pour une école d’intégration* to the PISA debates”, in A.J. Schuth, K. Horner & J.J. Weber (eds), *Life in Language: Studies in Honour of Wolfgang Kühlwein*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, pp. 241-258.

⁸ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 3 and 14.

⁹ Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, pp. 4-5; Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 9.

¹⁰ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 12.

secondary is further divided into vocational secondary education and lower secondary vocational training.¹¹ Post-compulsory general secondary education is organised in two stages: general upper secondary during the fourth and fifth years of secondary school (age 15 to 17 years) and the period of specialisation in the sixth and seventh year (age 17 to 19 years). Post-compulsory technical secondary education is sub-divided into an intermediate and upper stage.¹²

3.2 Tracking or differentiated groupings

In **pre-primary** education, children aged 4 and 5 years are gathered in the same class.¹³ **Primary** education lasts for six years and is divided in three grades: lower, intermediate and upper. It is largely undifferentiated, although there is a trend to improve differentiation and adapt to special needs, particularly for migrant children.¹⁴

Secondary education offers a choice that seeks to correspond to the abilities and interests of the individual pupil; it is divided into general secondary and technical secondary with further detailed specialisations within the streams. Until 1996, an entrance exam for secondary education had to be passed. This has since been abolished and replaced by guidance advice which pays respect to parental and class teacher opinion.¹⁵ Sound knowledge in German and French, however, is a decisive criterion for admission to general secondary education, which often amounts to an obstacle for migrant children (see 3.10. for more details).

It is said, that the educational system of Luxembourg is highly stratified and selection between tracks start at a young age (12 years).¹⁶ However, special tuition and *classes d'accueil* are offered in some schools to help and support those pupils who enter from another branch of education or change courses within secondary education.¹⁷ Furthermore, it should be noted that the material taught in the 'academic' and the 'technical vocational' tracks is at the same level of difficulty except for languages which are less demanding in the latter and that the upper stream of vocational education also gives access to higher and university education.¹⁸

The introduction of comprehensive schools has been in discussion in the 1970's but finally abandoned due to the linguistic complexity of the education system. A comprehensive pilot school without education tracks or streams, however, has opened in 2005.¹⁹

¹¹ Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 1; Ministère de l'éducation nationale et de la formation professionnelle (MENFP), L'éducation au Luxembourg, 2007, p. 11.

¹² Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, pp. 2-3.

¹³ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 3.9.

¹⁴ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 4.9., 4.17.

¹⁵ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 5.4.1.5.

¹⁶ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 18.

¹⁷ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 5.4.1.16.

¹⁸ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 18.

¹⁹ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 20.

3.3 Family/community participation

School-level bodies with parent representatives have consultative functions in the fields of a) school action plan and b) rules governing everyday school activity.²⁰ Parents are represented at national level in the *Conseil supérieure de l'éducation nationale*. Recent reforms of secondary school level,²¹ which granted more autonomy, also enhanced parental involvement. *Parents' Committees* have been created and parents are described as *school partners*. At primary level teachers and parents are represented in *school committees* with consultative capacity.²²

3.4 School autonomy

Due to the comparatively small number of pupils of compulsory education age,²³ the educational system in Luxembourg is traditionally highly centralised. The system furthermore leaves remarkably small margins of autonomy to the individual schools. Overall responsibility lies with the ministry of education. Responsibility for primary education is shared with the municipal authorities. At this level, there are no heads of school. In secondary education, the directors of school act as the instrument of the ministry.²⁴ In 2004, however, a law was passed that took a first step towards more autonomy at secondary schooling level.²⁵ Private institutions do not play a great role in the educational system of Luxembourg. 93% of pupils attend public schools, 7% private institutions. These private institutions are state subsidised up to 95% and 99%.²⁶

An overview provides the following levels of school autonomy:

- **Full autonomy** for Luxembourgish schools is granted solely for the allocation of the budget for ongoing operational resources in secondary education.
- **Limited autonomy** exists in the following fields: 1.) recruitment to replace absent teachers (in primary education), 2) salary adjustment for overtime work, 3) planning of in-service training, 4) textbooks (in secondary education), 5) methods, 6) content of teaching programmes (in secondary education), 7) subjects offered as options (in secondary education), 8) school rules, 9) expulsion and suspension criteria, 10) criteria for grouping pupils together and 11) criteria for selecting pupils at enrolment.
- **No autonomy** is allowed in the following areas: 1) Number of days per year, 2) number of hours per year, 3) number of hours per week, 4) number of hours per subject, 5) duration of a period, 6) start and end of lessons, 7) timetabling of subjects over the week, 8) textbooks (in primary education), 9) content of teaching programmes (in primary education), 10) subjects offered as options (in primary education), 11) continuous assessment of pupils, 12) decisions about whether pupils should redo a year, 13) allocation of the overall school

²⁰ European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 116.

²¹ Loi modifiée du 25 juin 2004 portant organisation des lycées et lycées techniques, Mémorial – Journal Officiel du Grand-duché de Luxembourg, No. 126, 16 juillet 2004, p. 1856.

²² Eurydice, Citizenship Education at School in Europe, Luxembourg, 2004/2005, p. 5.

²³ 67,831 in 2003, according to Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 1.

²⁴ Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 1.

²⁵ Loi modifiée du 25 juin 2004 portant organisation des lycées et lycées techniques, Mémorial – Journal Officiel du Grand-duché de Luxembourg, No. 126, 16 juillet 2004, p. 1856.

²⁶ Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 1.

budget, 14) allocation of the budget for ongoing operational resources (in primary education), 15) acquisition of teaching materials, 16) acquisition of computer equipment, 17) acquisition of immovables, 18) acquisition of movables, 19) ongoing maintenance, 20) appointment of school head, 21) definition of the number of teaching posts, 22) recruitment for teaching vacancies, 23) recruitment to replace absent teachers (in secondary education), 24) termination of teachers' employment, 25) number of teaching hours per week, 26) number of hours of teachers' presence at school per week, 27) seeking donations and sponsorship, 28) service provision and fund raising, 29) loans, 30) use of private funds to acquire operational goods and services, 31) use of private funds to acquire movables, 32) use of private funds to employ non-teaching staff, 33) use of private funds to acquire immovables and 34) use of private funds to employ teaching staff.²⁷

3.5 Individualised curricula

The curricula are drawn up by the Ministry of Education. Teachers are obliged to adhere to the curriculum in particular with regard to the contents, the sequence of units, the handbooks and the teaching language.²⁸ Apart from that, each teacher is relatively free to choose methods and tools that comply with the curricular requirements.²⁹

Special curricular measures addressed to children with disabilities and/or special needs are addressed under 3.11; migrant children under 3.10.

3.6 Vocational training

A full-time vocational stream within secondary education is offered; see above 3.1. & 3.2. As stated in the Introduction, the level of foreign pupils in vocational secondary education in comparison to general secondary education is significantly high: only 15.4% of foreign pupils attend the latter.³⁰

Links to the labour market are particularly strong in the intermediate stream of vocational education, where education mainly takes the form of apprenticeship under a contract combined with vocational classroom training.³¹ In addition there are several programmes to facilitate transition from school to work life, e.g. one that is called '*action locale pour jeunes*'.³²

3.7 Second-language

According to Annex 1, p. 98 of the Includ-ed project proposal, this topic refers to 'migrants' or minority's mother tongue' and is therefore addressed in this report under section 3.10. Immigrant Students. The term 'second-language' does furthermore not entirely fit to the trilingual system in Luxembourg, see Introduction.

²⁷ European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 105, 106.

²⁸ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 5.4.1.10.

²⁹ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 4.12.; Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 2.

³⁰ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 4.

³¹ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 5.4.2.15.

³² European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Luxembourg, July 2006, retrieved 26.2.2007 from: http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/luxembourg/9.html

3.8 Culturally sensitive curriculum

Citizenship education as an isolated lesson is only taught in higher secondary education (general and vocational alike). In earlier levels it is a cross-curricular subject incorporated into, e.g. religious and moral instruction, geography, history, languages and social education.³³ The broad aims of all educational efforts taken in this context are – inter alia – to promote tolerance and respect for the right of all people to equality. Schools are obliged to educate ‘responsible citizens’, i.e. citizens who are tolerant, supportive of others, respectful of human rights and opposed to all forms of discrimination.³⁴ In November 2000, Parliament adopted a motion requiring education authorities to ensure that schools are more responsive to interculturalism and that the curricula take account of cultural aspects both of Luxembourg and the countries of origin of migrants.³⁵

Concerning sensitivity towards **religion or belief**, it is worth mentioning that the organisation of daily life at school is geared to recognising the cultural and religious particularities of different children, e.g. with regard to the meals served in schools.³⁶

3.9 ICT

A new study has shown that Luxembourg ranks above average and in some categories even among the top when it comes to ICT (information and communications technology) use in schools.³⁷ A remarkable result has been that the ratio *pupil:PC* was generally low³⁸ and even lower in primary schools. 98.7% of primary schools are using ICT as tools in classrooms and not – as in other countries – mainly in specialised computer labs. Another notable feature is that there exists a single portal and learning platform for all schools, named *mySchool!*³⁹ This platform has developed gradually since 2001 and links all educational participants. For pupils there is access to indexed and validated reference materials, text books, images, on-line tests and exercises. Pupils can also contact education providers, teachers or other pupils. As there are possibilities to deliver conventional curricula via this platform, children with disabilities or chronically sick children are offered a good opportunity to participate. In addition, there are more specialised ICT projects that aim, e.g. at remedying regional discrepancies (project: *norTIC*) or providing help from online teachers for students with learning difficulties (*eRemediation – success for all!*).⁴⁰

³³ Eurydice, Citizenship Education at School in Europe, Luxembourg, 2004/2005, p. 3.

³⁴ Eurydice, Citizenship Education at School in Europe, Luxembourg, 2004/2005, p. 4.

³⁵ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 8.

³⁶ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 7.

³⁷ European Commission, DG Information Society and media, Information and communications technologies (ICTs) in schools – Luxembourg: Key findings, September 2006, retrieved at 27.2.2007 from http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc_id=175.

³⁸ A low *ratio* is positive: few pupils have to share one computer.

³⁹ See: www.myschool.lu.

⁴⁰ Cf. Conference Peer Learning Activity (PLA), Luxembourg, September 27-29, 2006, retrieved 27.2.2007 from <http://www2.myschool.lu/home/pla/documents.asp>.

3.10 Immigrant students

A constitutional right to free compulsory education for every child is enshrined in Art. 23 of the Constitution of Luxembourg.⁴¹ Access to compulsory schooling is granted no matter what the child's or the parents' legal status is. Also irregular migrants have access.⁴²

The peculiarities of the Luxembourgish educational system and its particular challenges for migrant children have already been illustrated in the Introduction. This chapter addresses therefore the measures that have been taken to remedy these extra challenges.

As regards the philosophy of integration, it seems as if Luxembourg has been traditionally following a model that has come to be known as the 'French' or 'assimilation' model.⁴³ politically committed to integrating measures that address *all pupils* and avoiding such measures that might lead to a polarisation of society by singling out individual groups. Nevertheless, the necessity is seen – and has been seen for some 20 years – to introduce appropriate measures to meet the special needs of migrant children.⁴⁴ Special priority in fact has been given to enhancing assistance and support within mainstream education for migrant children after Parliament in 2000 refused to replace the existing (monolithic) trilingual model with a model that would provide two modes: one francophone, the other Germanic.⁴⁵ This could have raised school performance of Portuguese and Italian migrant children as they easier grasp the French language and have always had particular difficulties with German and the Germanic Lëtzeburgesch.⁴⁶

Special attention has been given to migrant children at pre-primary level since 1990. A circular of that year, e.g. asks teachers to set aside time for short but regular teaching sessions in Lëtzeburgesch.⁴⁷ In addition optional pre-primary education has been extended to provide 3-year olds with the possibility to better learn Lëtzeburgesch.⁴⁸ Since 1999 special staff was employed by the Ministry of Education to help at the request of teachers, e.g. with translation or reception. Their role is that of a mediator. Initially designed for refugees from ex-Yugoslavia, Albania and Russia, this measure has been extended in 2004 to cover also Cape Verdian and Portuguese children.⁴⁹

A *règlement* of July 2003 eventually established **reception and integration classes** at primary and technical secondary classes.⁵⁰ There is no legal definition of 'newcomer' eligible for these classes as exists, e.g. in the three Belgian systems.⁵¹ The decisive criterion for the schooling

⁴¹ Constitution du Grand-duché de Luxembourg du 17 octobre 1868, last amended 19.11.2004.

⁴² Association de soutien aux travailleurs immigrés (ASTI), Analytical Report on Education – National Focal Point for Luxembourg, 2004, p. 19; Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe – Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 3.

⁴³ S. Carrera, A comparison of integration programmes in the EU – Trends and weaknesses, CHALLENGE Paper No. 1/March 2006, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 3 & p. 9.

⁴⁶ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 1.4.

⁴⁷ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 3.11.

⁴⁸ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Règlement grand-ducal du 10 juillet 2003 portant institution de classes d'accueil et de classes d'insertion dans le cycle inférieur et le régime préparatoire de l'enseignement secondaire technique, Mémorial – Journal Officiel du Grand-duché de Luxembourg, No. 98, 18 juillet 2003, p. 1974.

⁵¹ F. Geyer, The educational system in Belgium, Preliminary report, INCLUD-ED project, 2007, p. 15-18.

system in Luxembourg is less nationality or formal resident status than it is language. The general reference therefore is ‘child of foreign mother tongue’.⁵²

Accordingly, reception classes mainly focus on learning the instruction languages German and French. For children over the age of 10, it is considered difficult to reach sufficient levels of both instruction languages. Intensive tuition is therefore focused on French.⁵³ As general secondary school only accepts pupils with a sound knowledge of German and French, this concentration on French might have adverse effects in the long-run. Furthermore at general secondary level reception classes for newcomers are not foreseen. A system, however, has recently been established in some schools of general secondary education that provide special German tuition for children that are good in French and mathematics but somewhat weaker in German. German in these classes is treated as a foreign language. The aim is to enable pupils attending this so-called ‘Allet’ classes to join mainstream German-language lessons from the fourth year of secondary education.⁵⁴

At lower technical secondary level, newcomers receive intensive language teaching either in German or in French or in Lëtzeburgesch within the mainstream education.⁵⁵ The availability of French courses in technical secondary education has been increased and textbooks have been produced in bilingual (French and German).⁵⁶

Minority language tuition has been introduced into mainstream curricula of primary education since 1983-84 and enforced in 1992. Since then, two hours of teaching in the mother tongue addressing also the culture of the country of origin are included in the normal timetable each week. Teachers are recruited and paid by the embassies concerned. At pre-primary level, where Lëtzeburgesch is the language of tuition, the framework for early childhood education states that “it is impossible to overstate the importance of a positive approach as regards children and their culture of origin”.⁵⁷ It is furthermore worth mentioning that some of the teaching books written in German used in primary education have been translated into French or were even made available in Portuguese or Italian to help Romance-language migrants to better follow mainstream education.⁵⁸

3.11 Students with special needs

As far as immigrant children are concerned, we refer to 3.10. This section will therefore concentrate on children with disabilities and their special needs in education.

A 1973 law created centres and services of special education in Luxembourg. From the 1990s onwards, there has been a trend to promote the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream education as far as possible.⁵⁹ A law of school integration was passed in 1994 to

⁵² Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 3.

⁵³ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Carey, D. & Ernst, E., Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Cited after Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe - Luxembourg, 2003/2004, p. 6.

⁵⁸ D. Carey & E. Ernst, Improving education achievement and attainment in Luxembourg, OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 508, ECO/WKP(2006)36, 4 September 2006, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Eurybase, Luxembourg (2001/2002), 3.8., 10.2.; Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – Luxembourg, 2005, p. 4.

provide the rules necessary for this integration. It has been foreseen that every child of compulsory schooling age who cannot follow education because of his or her intellectual, emotional, sensory or motor difficulties is either educated in special education or is granted individual help and support by the services of special education that allow the child to attend mainstream education.⁶⁰ To decide which option is the best for the child, an examination is carried out by the ‘*Commission medio-psycho-pedagogique Nationale*’. After consulting with the parents, a proposal of orientation is subsequently handed down by the Commission but the decision lies – in principle – with the parents.⁶¹

Children with disabilities can either be fully integrated into mainstream schooling or partially, attending some classes in a centre for special needs education and some in ordinary schooling.⁶² Support services for children with disabilities are also granted in post-primary and post-secondary education.

The percentage of pupils with special needs in the total school population who are educated separately is comparatively low in relation to other EU member states: for the period 2002-2004, it was only 1.5%.⁶³

3.12 Cultural minorities

Aspects that could be mentioned under this heading have been addressed earlier. In order to avoid repetition we refer to sections 3.7., 3.8., 3.10.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Luxembourg is in a unique position. With a particularly high number of foreign residents and its trilingual tradition, its educational system is faced with tremendous challenges. Integrating migrant children into mainstream trilingual education is simply *the* main question.

The situation has been known for some time and steps had been taken early, but it seems as if it took the shockwaves caused by the PISA 2000 and PISA 2003 results – where Luxembourg found itself at the very bottom among its fellow Europeans and only two places from the end of all 32 participating countries worldwide to instigate major discussions and necessary reforms.

That Parliament in 2000 refused to follow recommendations by the OECD to introduce a two-track system with stronger differentiation between French and German is a decision that touches at the heart of Luxembourg’s national identity. Unlike Switzerland or Belgium, this small state in the centre of Europe has managed to prevent a linguistic division and fears of undermining its social unity and cohesion must be respected and not casually dismissed from an outside perspective.

The alternative path chosen, which aims at adhering to the traditional system while providing for those additional measures that are considered necessary to assure equity, appears to be a

⁶⁰ European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Luxembourg, July 2006, retrieved 26.2.2007 from: http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/luxembourg/9.html.

⁶¹ European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Luxembourg, July 2006, retrieved 26.2.2007 from: http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/luxembourg/9.html

⁶² European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Luxembourg, July 2006, retrieved 26.2.2007 from: http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/luxembourg/9.html

⁶³ European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 129-130.

legitimate and successful one: new OECD surveys see an improvement in Luxembourg's educational system.⁶⁴

Given the continued rather high level of tracking and inspired by the sources analysed, however, one still has the impression that general (academic) secondary education is a place where there is still room for further improvement. In addition, there is evidence that a growing number of migrant children have avoided the trilingual challenge by attending private international schools or inscribing in neighbouring French or Belgian schools across the border.⁶⁵ This aspect should be followed closely by educational authorities since the number of students taking up this informal 'exit-strategy' might serve as a performance benchmark for public efforts to improve the system.

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