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## The Educational System in Belgium

*CEPS Special Report/September 2009*

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 BELGIUM

CEPS SPECIAL REPORT / SEPTEMBER 2009

FLORIAN GEYER\*

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## 1. Introduction

Freedom of education is and has always been one of the major topics in the Belgian educational system. Freedom of education as guaranteed by article 24 of the Belgian constitution not only comprises freedom of choice, but also so-called pedagogical freedom, namely the right to autonomously establish schools. Consequently there exists a large number of private schooling establishments in Belgium. These private institutions are subsidised by the state on the condition that they fulfil certain criteria. The majority of pupils do not in fact attend public schools, but private grant-aided schools instead. There also exists a non grant-aided sector of private schooling, but this is very small (see for more details 3.4.).<sup>1</sup>

Another feature that has to be taken into account is that there exists not *one* Belgian educational system but in fact three separate systems with distinct characteristics. These three systems reflect the division of the country in three Communities: the Flemish in the north, the French in the south and the small German-speaking Community in the very east. Article 127 sec. 1(2) and article 130 sec. 1(3) of the Belgian Constitution confers responsibility for the educational system on these Communities. The three systems may differ significantly, as can be seen by the diverging levels of school autonomy (see below 3.4.), to name just one example. However, in order to guarantee a certain degree of coherence between the systems, it is stipulated by the Constitution that the Communities may not decide on the determination of beginning and end of compulsory school attendance, neither on minimum standards for granting diplomas.

Main trends and recent reforms in the three Communities may be summarised as follows:

A reorganisation of the **Flemish** education system was established by a decree of 1998.<sup>2</sup> It aimed at addressing certain problems of the education system, mainly the high number of pupils in special education, the large number of school ‘failures’ and a system of elimination in secondary school, to name just some of the problems. One main issue of this reorganisation has been to concentrate more on the individual pupil and to provide each one with the education that corresponds best to his or her capacities or interests.<sup>3</sup> Another important reform has been the adoption of a broad ‘**equal educational opportunities policy**’ in 2002,<sup>4</sup> described as an ‘historic year for the principle of freedom of school choice’<sup>5</sup> as the Decree established a

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<sup>1</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 2.3.2. and 2.1; Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – French Community of Belgium, September 2006, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Decreet van 14 juli 1998 houdende diverse maatregelen met betrekking tot het secundair onderwijs en tot wijziging van het decreet van 25 februari 1997 betreffende het basisonderwijs.

<sup>3</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.1.

<sup>4</sup> Decreet van 28 juni 2002 betreffende gelijke onderwijskansen-I.

<sup>5</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 3.6.

fundamental right of admission to the school selected by the parents. This policy will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.10.1. Another recent initiative instigated by the ministry but realised by the independent King Baudoin Foundation, is the ‘Accent on talent.’ This initiative aims to bridge education and professional life through a strong involvement of business and industry partners. It is not considered an educational reform but undertakes a project driven, bottom-up approach to reduce the number of early school leavers and raise the level of technically and technologically educated students. This bottom-up, deregulated and largely autonomous initiative is not viewed without criticism by some educational professionals, however.<sup>6</sup>

Recent reforms and priorities in the **French**-speaking educational system are formulated in the ‘**Missions Decree**’<sup>7</sup> of 1997 and have been further developed in the following years: schools are obliged to develop the skills of pupils and certify that they are adequately mastered at key points throughout education. This shall provide that all pupils acquire the same essential skills irrespective of the school they attend. The overall aim is to diminish inequality. The level of control exercised by the highest educational authority has been labelled ‘revolutionary’<sup>8</sup> for the Belgian system that strongly adheres to freedom of education. It fits into this line that in 1998 the French-speaking Community adopted another decree that aims at insuring equality of chances by establishing a system of **positive discrimination**<sup>9</sup> (see below 3.10.2). Furthermore a ‘Contrat pour l’Ecole’ has recently been agreed upon. It shall serve as a guide for the actions of the government and other educational stakeholders until 2013. Six priority objectives are set in this contract: 1) increase the educational level of the school population, 2) improve performance, 3) increase the number of pupils ‘on-time’, 4) favour social mixity in every school and in every stream, 5) put the various educational streams on the same footing, so that the choice of stream is a positive choice and 6) fight against all banishment mechanisms which exist at the level of individual schools.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the **German**-speaking Community, one must take into account that distinct to the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking Communities, the ‘Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft’ has not been able to rely on traditional existing legal structures when the Belgian state reform of 1989 gave full responsibility for the education systems to the Communities. The establishment of the German-speaking educational system is therefore still in process. While a general legal framework was passed in 1998, followed by a law on pre-primary and primary education in 1999, further acts on secondary and special needs education are still in the making and under discussion.<sup>11</sup> The general legal framework of 1998 called ‘**Foundation Decree**’<sup>12</sup> nevertheless

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. International Schooling for Tomorrow Forum, June 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2004, Toronto, Canada, Additional Country Papers: Flemish Community Belgium.

<sup>7</sup> Décret définissant les missions prioritaires de l’enseignement fondamental et de l’enseignement secondaire et organisant les structures propres à les atteindre, 24.7.1997 (lois 21557), last amended 20.7.2006.

<sup>8</sup> Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – French Community of Belgium, September 2006, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Décret visant à assurer à tous les élèves des chances égales d’émancipation sociale, notamment par la mise en œuvre de discrimination positives, 30.6.1998, last amended 23.8.2006.

<sup>10</sup> Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – French Community of Belgium, September 2006, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 2.2; Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – German speaking Community of Belgium, September 2006, p. 6.

provides the major guidelines and is of imminent importance, similar to the ‘Missions Decree’ of the French-speaking Community. One must furthermore take into account that the German-speaking Community with some 70.000 inhabitants is rather small and needs to provide education facilities for some 14,000 pupils only.<sup>13</sup>

In this preliminary report we give an overview of the characteristics of each of the three existing educational systems in Belgium. In doing so, we follow the structure that has been provided for by the project leader of Project 1. Due to our disciplinary and professional background as non-educationalists, we refrain from identifying every single characteristic as either inclusive or segregationist. In the concluding chapter, 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

The **Flemish** education systems includes nursery and primary education (age 2.5 to 12 years), secondary education (age 12 to 18 years) and tertiary education. Full-time secondary education consists of three consecutive stages of two years each. After the second year (first stage) pupils have to choose between four different types of specialisation: general, technical, artistic or vocational secondary education.<sup>14</sup>

In the **French** community the education systems includes nursery school (age 2.5 to 6 years), primary education (age 6 to 12 years), secondary education (age 12 to 18 years and over) and tertiary education. Secondary education according to type I or ‘reformed’ education consists of three consecutive stages of two years each: observation (first stage), orientation (second) and determination (third). Apart from this there is also the possibility for a type II secondary education, which consists of six years split into two stages of three years each. Only 2% of the pupils are enrolled in the latter system.<sup>15</sup>

In the **German**-speaking community the education systems include nursery school (age 3 to 5 or 6 years), primary education (age 6 to 11 years), secondary education (age 12 to 18 years and over) and tertiary education. Secondary education consists of three consecutive stages of two years each: observation (first stage), orientation (second) and determination (third). In the second and third stage education forms offered comprise: general, technical and vocational education.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2 Tracking or differentiated groupings

In the **Flemish** speaking Community: Grouping of children in **pre-primary** education mainly follows the school model, i.e. according to age. Educational institutions, however, are free to

<sup>12</sup> Dekret vom 31. August 1998 über den Auftrag an die Schulträger und das Schulpersonal sowie über die allgemeinen pädagogischen und organisatorischen Bestimmungen über die Regelschulen, Moniteur belge/Belgisch Staatsblad of 24.11.1998.

<sup>13</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 2.9.

<sup>14</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 2.4.

<sup>15</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 2.4. and 5.

<sup>16</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 2.4.1.

follow the family model, i.e. mixed age grouping.<sup>17</sup> **Primary** education lasts for six years and is divided in three stages. It is largely undifferentiated, although there is a trend among schools to improve differentiation, e.g. special periods for children with learning difficulties, working in corners, etc.<sup>18</sup> **Secondary** education in the Flemish-speaking community offers a choice that seeks to correspond to the abilities and interests of the individual pupil. This choice has to be made after the second year of secondary education (around age 14). Accordingly the first two years of secondary education are, in principle, common to all pupils. There exists, however, a differentiated first year for those pupils that cannot proceed at the same level as the others. These children are offered a more individualised education, lasting one year. At the end of this year they may either be able to join the common first year or enter into pre-vocational year for professional training.<sup>19</sup> Four different streams are offered: 1) *General secondary education* is mainly theoretical and intends to prepare for higher education. 2) *Technical secondary education* concentrates on the practical application of theoretical knowledge and aims to prepare for a vocation and/or higher education. 3) *Artistic secondary education* shall prepare for higher artistic education but allows also for studies in non-artistic higher education or non-artistic professions. 4) *Full-time vocational secondary education* prepares for a specific profession. It combines general education with specific training for a specific profession. It is aimed not only at pupils with practical talents but also at those who have encountered learning difficulties earlier on.

In the **French**-speaking Community: Grouping in **pre-primary and primary** education mainly follows the school model according to age. In areas where not enough pupils attend, grouping can also follow the family model.<sup>20</sup> Pre-primary education and the first eight years of compulsory education – comprising the first two years of **secondary** education – are considered a ‘continuum pédagogique’ structured in three stages. The aim of this continuum is to provide all pupils with the necessary competencies for social integration and the continuation of their education.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the first two years of secondary education are, in principle, common to all pupils. There exists, however, a differentiated first year for those pupils who cannot proceed at the same level as the others. These children are offered a more individualised education, lasting one year. At the end of this year they may either be able to join the common first year or enter into the second year of professional training.<sup>22</sup> Secondary education after the first two years offers the choice between four different types of full-time education: general, technical, vocational training and artistic.<sup>23</sup> It is organised in two streams: 1) transition stream (primarily aimed at preparing for higher education, but also for a profession), 2) qualification stream (primarily aimed at preparing for a profession, but also allowing for higher education). There exists also alternative secondary education (preparing for a profession).<sup>24</sup> As stated above, 3.2., the French Community still offers the possibility to follow a so-called traditional type of secondary education (type II). In this type tracking takes place from the first year of secondary

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<sup>17</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 3.8.; European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.8.

<sup>19</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.5.

<sup>20</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 3.8.1., 4.8.

<sup>21</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.8.

<sup>22</sup> Ministère de la Communauté française, Guide de l’enseignement obligatoire en Communauté française, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ministère de la Communauté française, Guide de l’enseignement obligatoire en Communauté française, p. 14.

education, dividing the general, technical and vocational schools. The choice at the end of primary school, in effect, determines the scholastic track, however, possibilities to switch are provided for.<sup>25</sup>

In the **German-speaking Community**: Grouping in **pre-primary and primary** education mainly follows the school model according to age. However, family models are applied more and more also in bigger establishments. The **German-speaking Community**, in fact, promotes the family model as it supposedly has pedagogical advantages, helps to reduce school failure and encourages interactive and common learning.<sup>26</sup> **Secondary** education is composed of three stages and organised in three education forms: general, technical, vocational. The first year of secondary education is in principle common to all pupils. As in the other Belgian educational systems, there also exists the possibility to attend a differentiated first stage for those with learning difficulties. In the German speaking Community this differentiated stage, however, lasts two years and is aimed to allow the pupil to enter mainstream secondary education directly at the second stage in one of the sections of vocational education<sup>27</sup> and not – as in the French part – in the second year of the first stage. The three education forms are organised in two streams: 1) transition stream (primarily aimed at preparing for higher education, but also for a profession), 2) qualification stream (primarily aimed at preparing for a profession, but also allowing for higher education). There also exists alternative secondary education (preparing for a profession).<sup>28</sup>

### 3.3 Family/community participation

Parents and families necessarily play an important role at various levels of the educational track starting from the very beginning with the choice of the specific educational institution. Family ‘participation’ in education may take numerous forms. In this chapter we provide an overview of formalised participation in school-level bodies with parent representatives as an indicator for the openness of professional educationalists towards lay participation.

School-level bodies with parent representatives **decide** in the **Flemish** educational system on the recruitment of teachers and the termination of their employment (exception: no powers in the private grant-aided sector). They have **consultative** functions in the following fields: a) school action plan, b) rules governing everyday school activity, c) provision of optional lessons d) acquisition of textbooks, educational software, etc. They have neither decision-making power nor consultative function in the fields of: a) expulsion and suspension of a pupil and b) decisions regarding teaching content.<sup>29</sup>

School-level bodies with parent representatives **decide** in the **French-speaking** educational system merely on the school action plan. They have **consultative** functions in the following fields: a) rules governing everyday school activity and b) acquisition of textbooks, educational software, etc. They have neither decision-making power nor consultative function in the fields of: a) expulsion and suspension of a pupil, b) decisions regarding teaching content, c) provision of optional lessons and d) recruitment of teachers and e) termination of teachers’ employment.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 5.20.

<sup>26</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 3.8., 4.8.

<sup>27</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.4.1., 5.11.

<sup>28</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.4.2.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 116.

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 116.

School-level bodies with parent representatives in the **German-speaking** educational system have no **decision** making power. They have **consultative** functions in the following fields: a) school action plan, b) rules governing everyday school activity, c) expulsion and suspension of a pupil, d) provision of optional lessons in secondary education and e) acquisition of textbooks, educational software, etc. They have neither decision-making power nor consultative function in the fields of: a) decisions regarding teaching content, b) provision of optional lessons in primary education, c) recruitment of teachers and d) termination of teachers' employment.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.4 School autonomy

As stated in the introduction, freedom of education is one of the most important aspects in the Belgian educational system. Schools are mainly in private hands, subsidised by the state and a majority of pupils attend these grant-aided schools. The grant-aided schools, however, are not considered private in the strict sense due to financing and inspection links with the state.<sup>32</sup> They are in principle subject to the same rules as public schools. Grant-aided private schools, for example, cannot refuse the enrolment of a pupil based on social, sexual or racial discrimination, provided the parents/pupil agree to the educational plan/project of the school.<sup>33</sup> There exists, however, a small sector of completely independent schools. These truly private schools enjoy wide autonomy. In fact, private education in this sense is not even legally organised in any of the three communities.<sup>34</sup> As a consequence, it seems quite likely that enrolment decisions might be discriminatory. On the other hand, diplomas and certificates issued by these institutions are not legally recognised<sup>35</sup> and as a result attendance level is very low.<sup>36</sup>

Concerning **public** and – except for a few characteristics (mainly teaching of religion in denominational schools) – also grant-aided schools<sup>37</sup> the following statements apply:<sup>38</sup>

Schools in the **Flemish-speaking** community enjoy **full autonomy** in the following fields: 1) Numbers of hours per subject 2) timetabling of subjects over the week, 3) textbooks, 4) methods, 5) content of teaching programmes, 6) subjects offered as options, 7) compulsory subjects in addition to minimum curriculum, 8) continuous assessment of pupils, 9) decisions about whether pupils should redo a year, 10) content of certifying examinations, 11) school rules (in primary education), 12) expulsion and suspension criteria (in primary education), 13) criteria for grouping pupils together (in primary education) 14) allocation of the 'overall' school budget (in primary education), 15) allocation of the budget for ongoing operational resources, 16) acquisition of teaching materials, 17) acquisition of computer equipment, 18) acquisition of movables, 19) ongoing maintenance, major repairs, 20) appointment of school head, 21)

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<sup>31</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 116.

<sup>32</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.16.

<sup>33</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 5; Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.6.2.; Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.6.

<sup>34</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.16., 5.19.; Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.16.; Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.16.

<sup>35</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.19.

<sup>36</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 2.3.2. and 2.1; Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – French Community of Belgium, September 2006, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.16.

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 105 and 106.



recruitment for teaching vacancies, 22) recruitment to replace absent teachers, 23) termination of teachers' employment, 24) numbers of hours of teachers' presence at school per week, 25) planning of in-service training, 26) seeking donations and sponsorship, 27) service provision and fund raising, 28) loans, 29) use of private funds to acquire operational goods and services, 30) use of private funds to acquire movables, 31) use of private funds to employ non-teaching staff, 32) use of private funds to acquire immovables and 33) use of private funds to employ teaching staff.

Schools in the **Flemish**-speaking community enjoy **limited autonomy** in the following fields: 1) Number of hours per year, 2) number of hours per week, 3) start and end of lessons, 4) school rules (in secondary education), 5) expulsion and suspension criteria (in secondary education), 6) criteria for grouping pupils together (in secondary education), 7) salary adjustments for overtime work and 8) number of teaching hours per week.

Schools in the **Flemish**-speaking community have **no autonomy** in the following fields: 1) Number of days per year, 2) duration of a period, 3) criteria for selecting pupils at enrolment (in primary education), 4) allocation of the overall school budget (in secondary education), 5) acquisition of immovables and 6) definition of the number of teaching posts.

Schools in the **French**-speaking community enjoy **full autonomy** in the following fields: 1) timetabling of subjects over the week, 2) textbooks, 3) methods, 4) continuous assessment of pupils, 5) decisions about whether pupils should redo a year, 6) content of certifying examinations, 7) school rules 8) criteria for grouping pupils together, 9) allocation of the budget for ongoing operational resources, 10) acquisition of teaching materials, 11) acquisition of movables, 12) seeking donations and sponsorship, 13) service provision and fund raising, use of private funds to acquire operational goods and services, 14) use of private funds to acquire movables and 15) use of private funds to employ non-teaching staff.

Schools in the **French**-speaking community enjoy **limited autonomy** in the following fields: 1) Number of hours per subject (in primary education), 2) start and end of lessons, 3) content of teaching programmes, 4) subjects offered as options (in secondary education), 5) compulsory subjects in addition to minimum curriculum (in secondary education) 6) expulsion and suspension criteria, 7) acquisition of computer equipment, 8) ongoing maintenance, 9) recruitment to replace absent teachers, 10) termination of teachers' employment and 11) planning of in-service training.

Schools in the **French**-speaking community have **no autonomy** in the following fields: 1) Number of days per year, 2) number of hours per year, 3) number of hours per week, 4) number of hours per subject (in secondary education), 5) duration of a period, 6) criteria for selecting pupils at enrolment, 7) allocation of the overall school budget, 8) acquisition of immovables, 9) appointment of school head, 10) definition of the number of teaching posts, 11) recruitment for teaching vacancies, 12) salary adjustment for overtime work, 13) number of teaching hours per week, 14) number of hours of teachers' presence at school per week, 15) loans, 16) use of private funds to acquire immovables and 17) use of private funds to employ teaching staff.

Schools in the **German**-speaking community enjoy **full autonomy** in the following fields: 1) timetabling of subjects over the week, 2) textbooks, 3) methods, 4) continuous assessment of pupils, 5) decisions about whether pupils should redo a year, 6) content of certifying examinations, 7) school rules 8) criteria for grouping pupils together, 9) allocation of the budget for ongoing operational resources, 10) acquisition of teaching materials, 11) acquisition of movables, 12) ongoing maintenance, major repairs, 13) seeking donations and sponsorship, 14) service provision and fund raising, use of private funds to acquire operational goods and services, 15) use of private funds to acquire movables and 16) use of private funds to employ non-teaching staff.

Schools in the **German**-speaking community enjoy **limited** autonomy in the following fields: 1) start and end of lessons, 2) content of teaching programmes, 3) subjects offered as options (in secondary education), 4) compulsory subjects in addition to minimum curriculum (in secondary education) 5) expulsion and suspension criteria, 6) acquisition of computer equipment and 7) planning of in-service training.

Schools in the **German**-speaking community have **no** autonomy in the following fields: 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) criteria for selecting pupils at enrolment, 7) allocation of the overall school budget, 8) acquisition of immovables, 9) appointment of school head, 10) definition of the number of teaching posts, 11) recruitment for teaching vacancies, 12) recruitment to replace absent teachers, 13) termination of teachers' employment, 14) salary adjustment for overtime work, 15) number of teaching hours per week, 16) number of hours of teachers' presence at school per week, 16) loans, 17) use of private funds to acquire immovables and 18) use of private funds to employ teaching staff.

### 3.5 Individualised curriculum

The **Flemish** education system does not impose a curriculum, but sets out final attainment targets and developmental objectives. These are minimum goals (knowledge, skills or attitudes) which the majority of pupils should strive towards (developmental objectives) or need to reach (final attainment targets). Accordingly, schools are entirely free in their approach as to how to reach these targets and objectives. In practice, however, the school curricula are developed by the governing body or the educational umbrella organisation (e.g. catholic education). The curricula need the approval of the government.<sup>39</sup> Although teaching is subject-orientated and schools have the theoretical freedom to develop individual curricula, it seems unlikely that this possibility is used in practice. Children with disabilities and/or special needs are addressed under 3.11.

The 'Missions Decree' of **French**-speaking Community (see above I) defines the curriculum as the 'reference as regards compulsory and optional learning situations, course contents, and methodological orientations, which an organised body defines in order to attain the competencies laid down by the Government for a particular year, degree or cycle'.<sup>40</sup> The 'Mission Decree' furthermore foresees, that certain 'socles de compétence' shall serve as guarantors of school democratisation, learning guides and assessment watchdogs. The 'socles de compétence' are a formal system of reference that sets out, in a structured way, which competencies must be exercised until the end of the first eight years of compulsory education, and those for which proficiency must be attained at the end of each stage, because they are considered necessary for social insertion and the pursuit of studies'.<sup>41</sup> The curricula are drawn up by the organising bodies of the educational institutions but need the approval of the government. However, as regards the pedagogic methods, each organising body is free to choose the one that is considered best for the pupils. In addition: to take the individual pupil into account is not only a freedom, but an obligation foreseen by Article 15 of the 'Missions Decree': Each pupil must be allowed to progress according to his or her own pace of learning and schools must implement differentiated teaching methods and formative assessment to this end.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.13.

<sup>40</sup> Translation according to Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 3.10.1.

<sup>41</sup> Translation according to Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.4.

<sup>42</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – French speaking Community (2003/2004), 4.11.

The legal reference for education in the **German**-speaking Community is the 'Foundation Decree'.<sup>43</sup> This decree contains a number of competencies (subject-specific and subject-independent) and developmental aims (for pre-primary education). The curricula are drawn up by the organising bodies of the educational institutions and must reflect those competencies and aims. They need the approval of the government. However, as regards the pedagogic methods, each organising body is free to choose which ones it deems best. Recommendations to use real differentiated pedagogics ensuring the best possible development of each pupil by respecting his own pace of learning and by objectives tailored to the individual exist.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.6 Vocational training

In **all three** Communities there exists the possibility from the age of 15 or 16 to continue part-time education and 'training on the job', for example by following a training programme which is recognised as satisfying the requirements of compulsory education or entering into an apprenticeship.<sup>45</sup> This option is seen as an alternative possibility for pupils who have difficulties in mainstream compulsory education and are tired of school.<sup>46</sup> Apart from that a full-time vocational stream within secondary education is also offered in all three Communities, see above 3.2. Statistics show that Belgium together with five other EU countries has an exceptionally high participation rate in vocational secondary education.<sup>47</sup>

### 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 topic 3.10. *immigrant students*.

### 3.8 Culturally sensitive curriculum

As stated above, 3.5., the **Flemish** education system does not impose a curriculum.<sup>48</sup> Sensibility and awareness of others as well as rejecting exclusion or discrimination on the basis of ethnical, religious or cultural background is taught, inter alia, at primary and secondary level in the context of citizenship education,<sup>49</sup> but also in some other of the attainment targets and developmental objectives, like social skills, learning to learn, etc.<sup>50</sup> Concerning sensitivity towards **religion or belief** it is worth mentioning that in 2003 legislation has been passed to allow absences from school due to the celebration of festivals constituting an inherent element of a pupil's philosophical beliefs provided this belief is recognised by the constitution.

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<sup>43</sup> Dekret vom 31. August 1998 über den Auftrag and die Schulträger und das Schulpersonal sowie über die allgemeinen pädagogischen und organisatorischen Bestimmungen über die Regelschulen, Moniteur belge/Belgisch Staatsblad of 24.11.1998.

<sup>44</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.14.

<sup>45</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.13.3.2.6.; Eurydice, National summary sheets on educational systems in Europe and ongoing reforms – French Community of Belgium, September 2006, p. 2; Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.20.2.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. for example Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 5.13.3.2.6.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Eurydice, Citizenship Education at School in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2004/2005, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 9.

Recognised beliefs are Anglicanism, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.<sup>51</sup>

Articles 6 and 9 ‘Missions Decree’ of the **French**-speaking Community stipulate the aim to prepare children for life in a pluralistic society open to other cultures. This mission finds itself formulated in various classes of the curricula, e.g. modern languages, history, geography, ethics, arts, crafts, etc.<sup>52</sup> Concerning sensitivity towards **religion or belief**, there exist no special regulations in the French-speaking education system. In practice, however, some schools do adapt to a certain extent to the requirements of their pupils.<sup>53</sup>

Several provisions of the ‘Foundation Decree’ in the **German**-speaking Community provide for educational contents that are intended to raise intercultural awareness and respect for others and their religious and ideological beliefs.<sup>54</sup> Citizenship education as a single subject is only taught in primary education. In secondary education a ‘moral education curriculum’ is scattered among the various subjects. The moral education curriculum is based on three objectives: 1) to train the children to see their place in society, 2) to guide them to become morally independent and 3) to encourage them to become committed members of society.<sup>55</sup> Concerning sensitivity towards **religion or belief**, there exist no special regulations in the German-speaking education system. The issue does not seem to be of great relevance.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.9 ICT

Several policies developed by the education department of the **Flemish** Community aim, inter alia, to provide ICT-competencies for all. In particular the ‘Digital Inclusion Policy’ strives to close the digital gap in compulsory education. A project, called ‘WAI-NOT’ has found the support of Flemish government. This project aims at promoting ICT as a development and training tool for children with mental disability.<sup>57</sup> As stated above (3.8.), the Flemish education system does not impose curricula. ICT literacy forms part of several cross-curricular and subject specific final objectives.<sup>58</sup> Basic ICT-competencies have been drafted in 2004 to provide a frame of reference for the educational outcomes. Those competencies are divided into a) competencies focussing on the learning process, b) operating skills and c) social and ethical competencies.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – French Community, 2003/2004, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – French Community, 2003/2004, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – German speaking Community, 2003/2004, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Eurydice, Citizenship Education at School in Europe, Belgium – German Community, 2004/2005, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – German speaking Community, 2003/2004, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> European Schoolnet, National ICT Policies for Education – Belgium (Flanders), October 2005, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> European Schoolnet, National ICT Policies for Education – Belgium (Flanders), October 2005, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> European Schoolnet, National ICT Policies for Education – Belgium (Flanders), October 2005, pp. 12-13.

In the **French** Community ICT in education has been put on the top of the priority list by the 'Charte d'avenir' of 2001.<sup>60</sup> A strategy to implement this charter has been adopted on 11 July 2002. The objective is to integrate ICT into daily communication, learning and innovation at school. Each pupil shall be enabled to access ICT in order to give equal opportunities for all and provide for digital inclusion.<sup>61</sup> In May 2006 a project called 'Passeport TIC' has been presented to the public. This project's objective is to specify a set of essential skills in the field of ICT and to test their acquisition during the first level of secondary education. Basic ICT skills are divided into a) Basic use of computer, b) creating and using documents, c) using digital information sources, d) communicate using email software and e) develop citizenship skills.<sup>62</sup>

ICT skills in the educational system of the **German**-speaking Community are mentioned in the 'Foundation decree' of 1998 (see above 3.5.) and several initiatives have been accomplished.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.10 Immigrant students

The Belgian constitution guarantees in article 24(3) a right to education for everyone. This includes every child resident – legally or illegally – in Belgium and is respected in all three educational systems. The Communities consider the fundamental right to education higher than the residence status of the child.<sup>64</sup>

#### 3.10.1 Flemish-speaking community

**Reception classes** for non-Dutch speaking '*newcomers*' have been offered in the Flemish education system since 1991. The pupils attending receive an intensive instruction in Dutch in order to enable them to follow mainstream teaching. The reception period in principle lasts one year and is organised within mainstream education.<sup>65</sup> In pre-primary and primary education, schools are required to organise the reception courses in a way that does not separate the pupils from their mainstream class for more than 12 periods per week. In secondary education newcomers are grouped in separate reception classes that concentrate nearly entirely on learning Dutch.<sup>66</sup>

Pupils are considered *newcomers* if they meet the following criteria: a) aged under 18, b) not of Belgian or Dutch nationality, c) not born in Belgium or the Netherlands, d) not have Dutch as their mother tongue, e) not have sufficiently mastered the class language to be able to follow lessons easily, and f) have not yet completed a full academic year in education at a school with Dutch as their mother tongue.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Charte d'avenir pour la Communauté Wallonie-Bruxelles adoptée par le Gouvernement de la Communauté française en séance du 26 septembre 2001.

<sup>61</sup> INSIGHT – observatory for new technologies and education – Country Report Belgium (French Community), August 2003, retrieved 21.2.2007 from [http://insight.eun.org/ww/en/pub/insight/misc/country\\_report.cfm](http://insight.eun.org/ww/en/pub/insight/misc/country_report.cfm).

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.enseignement.be/pass/>, retrieved 21.2.2007.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Eurydice, ICT@Europe.edu – Belgium – German speaking Community (2000/2001), pp. 40-41.

<sup>64</sup> Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOOR), Analytical Report on Education – National Focal Point for Belgium, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.7.2.

<sup>66</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 3.

Also, since 1991 there exists an **‘educational priority policy’** that aims at fostering integration of deprived ethnic minority pupils. In 1993 a non-discrimination declaration was signed by the Flemish minister of education and the education umbrella organisations in order to tackle segregation and avoid disproportionate numbers of pupils from ethnic minorities in schools.<sup>68</sup> Under European influence in 2002 it was made part of an **‘equal educational opportunities policy’**.<sup>69</sup> This policy is broader in scope and does address disadvantaged pupils at large. Immigrant students are an important target group, but indicators are based on underprivileged education as a criterion and not ethno-cultural characteristics. This aims at avoiding stigmatisation based on an ethno-cultural background.<sup>70</sup>

This policy established a principal right of pupils and parents to be enrolled in the school of their choice, irrespective of descent, origin, religion, sex, nationality, ethnicity or colour of skin provided that the general admission requirements are met. This aspect aimed at implementing the EU anti-discrimination directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 in the field of education.<sup>71</sup> Legality of residence is no admission criterion and enrolment cannot be refused on the grounds that the pupil or parents are found to be irregular residents.<sup>72</sup>

To offer additional support to their pupils, schools with a large number of disadvantaged pupils are, under this policy, also eligible for additional means for a period of three consecutive school years. The schools are free to allocate these extra teaching periods according to their specific situation but within the following schemes: a) prevention and remedying of development and learning advantages, b) language skills education, c) intercultural education, d) progression and orientation, e) socio-emotional development and f) pupil and parent participation. Schools may also choose between three clusters: a) remedying of developmental and learning disadvantages and realisation of learning gains, b) enhancing pupils language skills and c) enhancing a positive self-image and social competence among pupils.<sup>73</sup>

The ‘equal educational opportunities policy’ allows for organising **minority language teaching**. Two possibilities exist: 20% of available lessons are used for teaching in another language (supportive model) or up to 50% of available lessons are used for teaching in another language (bi-cultural model). Parents’ consultation and written consent of the pupil to attend these courses are required, however.<sup>74</sup> Teachers are recruited by the embassies of the respective states and also paid by them.<sup>75</sup>

All that has been written above applies to mainstream education. In addition there exists an **‘educational priority policy in special education’**, aiming at migrant children who have learning and development difficulties or risk becoming educationally disadvantaged because of their ethnic origin and their social, cultural and economic circumstances. In addition the

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<sup>68</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.15.

<sup>69</sup> Decreet van 28 juni 2002 betreffende gelijke onderwijskansen.

<sup>70</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.15.

<sup>74</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOOR), Analytical Report on Education – National Focal Point for Belgium, 2004, p. 14.

following criteria are laid down by law: a) the maternal grandmother has not been born in Belgium and does not have Belgian or Dutch nationality and b) the mother has at most attended school till the end of the school year in which she turned 18 years of age.<sup>76</sup> Extra teaching periods are allocated to the schools to meet the demand of the children. These can be used for a) intercultural education, b) Dutch language teaching, c) specific prevention and remedying learning and development problems and/or d) parent participation.

It is furthermore worth mentioning that in 1996 the Flemish government approved a **Strategic Plan on Minority Policy** that aimed at creating the conditions enabling legally resident ethnic and/or cultural minorities to participate in Flemish society as full citizens; education and training being part of the general objective.<sup>77</sup> A second step was taken in 1998 with the adoption of the **Minorities Decree**<sup>78</sup> which provides the strategic plan of 1996 with a legal basis and regulates the co-ordination and organisation of the Flemish minorities' policy.

### 3.10.2 French-speaking community

In the educational systems of the French-speaking community, special support measures are granted to so called: '*primo-arrivants*'.<sup>79</sup> *Primo-arrivants* are children aged between 2.5 and 18 who are new to the education system and meet the following conditions: a) seeking or being granted asylum or refugee protection, or b) seeking or being granted the status of a stateless person, or c) native of a developing country, or d) native of a country in transition which is officially supported by the OECD Development Assistance Committee and who have been resident on Belgian territory for less than a year.<sup>80</sup>

*Primo-arrivants* receive special supervision in **transitional classes** within mainstream education that last between one week and six months depending on the needs of the pupil. In exceptional cases teaching in transitional class may be extended to a maximum of one year. On the other hand, pupils are not required to attend these classes; they may also complete all or part of their timetable in mainstream class. Transitional classes may be organised at every schooling level. Intensive French-language tuition is one part of teaching, the overall aim, however, is to enable the pupils to adjust to the socio-cultural and educational system.<sup>81</sup>

Schools need permission to establish transitional classes. Together with the permission, schools are allocated an additional amount of teaching time that they might use to hire additional staff. To give guidance to *primo-arrivants* a special class council called 'Conseil d'intégration' is established.

Concerning **minority language teaching** a 'Charter for Partnership' was signed and entered into force on January 2001 between the French Community and representatives of countries with a relatively large immigrant population: Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Turkey. Classes of the language and the culture of these countries are organised according to this

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<sup>76</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.7.1.

<sup>77</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – Flemish Community, 2003/2004, p. 3; see also Ministry of the Flemish Community, Interdepartmental Committee on Ethno-Cultural Minorities, Het Vlaamse beleid naar etnisch-culturele minderheden, Jaarrapport 2002-2003.

<sup>78</sup> Minderhedendecreet, 28 April 1998.

<sup>79</sup> Décret visant à l'insertion des élèves primo-arrivants dans l'enseignement organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française, 14.6.2001 (Lois 25914), last amended 21.4.2006.

<sup>80</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – French Community, 2003/2004, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – French Community, 2003/2004, p. 5.

Charter. Introductory tuition forms part of the mainstream education, more intensive tuition is provided for in additional two weekly periods. The teachers are recruited by the partner states.<sup>82</sup>

It is furthermore necessary to mention that the French-speaking Community has adopted a decree establishing a system of **positive discrimination**. It aims at ensuring equality of chances and social emancipation in education.<sup>83</sup> Under this system extra funds are allocated to schools that welcome pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds due to social, economical, cultural or pedagogical reasons.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.10.3 German-speaking community

The ‘*primo-arrivants*’ in the French Community, are called ‘*neuankommende Schüler*’ in the German-speaking Community. Only these immigrant pupils are subject to special support measures.<sup>85</sup> The requirements to be considered a *neuankommender Schüler* are the same as in the French-speaking system. To avoid repetition please see above 3.10.2.

Due to a comparatively low number of immigrant pupils in the German-speaking Community it was not until 2001 that special legislation was passed: the Decree of 17 December 2001.<sup>86</sup> This decree foresees that *neuankommende Schüler* should receive special support from an additional teacher. German-language teaching and practical help in day-to-day life is the teacher’s responsibility. The special support may be provided in **transitional classes** within mainstream education that last between one week and one year. While in transitional class the immigrant pupils may spend all or some of their time in mainstream education of their school or of other schools.

Schools need permission to establish transitional classes. Together with the permission, schools are allocated an additional amount of teaching time that they might use to hire additional staff. To give guidance to *neuankommende Schüler* a special class integration council is established.

**Minority language teaching** is not provided in the education system of the German-speaking community.<sup>87</sup> It needs to be taken into account, however, that the percentage of immigrants in the German-speaking Community has never been more than 1%. Due to the socio-economical structure in the German-speaking area, immigrants often move further and don’t stay for long. Given this fact, there is a discussion on whether the efforts taken to provide reception classes and intensive German teaching are in vain, as knowledge of German will not help immigrants to integrate into the two other Belgian language communities.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – French Community, 2003/2004, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Décret visant à assurer à tous les élèves des chances égales d’émancipation sociale, notamment par la mise en œuvre de discrimination positives, 30.6.1998, last amended 23.8.2006.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOR), Analytical Report on Legislation – RAXEN National Focal Point Belgium, 2004, p. 18; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Belgium – French Community, September 2006, retrieved 22.2.2007 from: [http://www.european-agency.org/nat\\_ovs/belgium\\_french/9.html](http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/belgium_french/9.html).

<sup>85</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.7.

<sup>86</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – German speaking Community, 2003/2004, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – German speaking Community, 2003/2004, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Eurydice, Integrating immigrant children into school in Europe, Belgium – German speaking Community, 2003/2004, p. 8.



### 3.11 Students with special needs

As far as immigrant children are concerned, we refer to 3.10. We would furthermore like to draw the attention to chapter 3.2. in which we described the possibility for pupils that are lagging behind to attend differentiated courses in the first year or stage of secondary education. This chapter will therefore concentrate on children with disabilities and their special needs in education.

For chronically sick children there exist in the **Flemish** education system the possibilities of hospital schools, temporary or permanent home education and education within youth psychiatric services.<sup>89</sup> Children with **disabilities** are to a certain degree, educated within mainstream education according to a system of integrated education or an inclusive education project. Others are educated separate from mainstream education in a system of special education. The percentage of pupils with special needs in the total school population who are educated separately seems to be rather high in relation to other EU member states: for the period 2002-2004 it was 4.9% while in the majority of EU member states the rate is between 1% and 3%.<sup>90</sup> There are, however, policy plans underway that intend to place more students with disabilities into mainstream education. A decree is scheduled for September 2008.<sup>91</sup>

**Integrated education** can be organised on all educational levels. It aims at children with a) *minor* mental disabilities, b) serious emotional and/or behavioural problems, c) physical disabilities, d) visual disabilities, e) auditory disabilities or d) serious learning disabilities. Children with a *moderate* or *severe* mental disability are not covered, but may be eligible for the inclusive education project (see below). Integrated education comprises attendance in mainstream education classes mixed with additional teaching periods and/or additional resources provided by a school for special education. Mainstream education under this scheme may be complete (all classes and activities) or partial (a minimum of 2 half days a week). There are around 6,000 pupils following integrated education in 2006 (compared to 46,000 in special education).<sup>92</sup> The project of **inclusive education** aims at a guided integration into mainstream education of children with a moderate or severe mental disability. The number of places is restricted by law to 50, all of them currently occupied.<sup>93</sup>

**Special education** is defined as a ‘type of education that on the basis of a pedagogical project delivers teaching, education, care and therapy suited to the capacity of the pupils of whom the development of the total personality is not or is insufficiently assured by the mainstream education, temporary or permanently’.<sup>94</sup> In special education there exists no common programme of learning, but individualised curricula adjusted to the needs and capacities of every pupil instead.<sup>95</sup>

Special education does also exist in the **French** Community. As in the Flemish-speaking Community, the percentage of pupils attending special education schools in the French Community is rather high: 4.2% in the period 2002-04.<sup>96</sup> A recent decree organising special education seeks to promote social adjustment and educational outcomes of children with special

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<sup>89</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 4.17.

<sup>90</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, pp. 129-130.

<sup>91</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.2.

<sup>92</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.5.1.

<sup>93</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.5.2.

<sup>94</sup> Translation by Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.6.2.

<sup>95</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – Flemish speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.6.7.

<sup>96</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, pp. 129-130.

needs by allowing for temporary or permanent inclusion in mainstream education.<sup>97</sup> Children with the following disabilities are eligible for integration: a) physical disabilities, b) visual disabilities and c) auditory disabilities. They may follow mainstream classes and receive additional support from school for education (**full time permanent inclusion**). There exists also the possibility of **partial permanent inclusion** and temporary inclusion. Partial permanent inclusion is a mix of certain courses attended on the one hand within mainstream education, on the other within the school for special education. In contrast, temporary inclusion may be either full time or partial with regard to the courses attended, but only takes place for a certain number of weeks during the school year.<sup>98</sup>

**Special education** is organised on the basis and the importance of the educational needs and the pedagogical possibilities of the pupils and to guarantee the development of their intellectual, psycho-motor functions, emotional and social abilities in order to ensure:

- integration into a social environment or in an adapted work structure
- professional possibilities in spite of their disabilities and to make integration possible in their everyday environment and working life.
- The pursuit of studies through to the end of the secondary superior level, offering at the same time the possibility of leading an active life.<sup>99</sup>

The percentage of pupils in the **German**-speaking community is considerably lower than in the other two Belgian Communities: 1.8% in the period from 2002-04.<sup>100</sup> Discussions on how to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools are still ongoing as a single decree covering special needs education has not been adopted yet (see above 1). This is why special education in the German-speaking Community to a certain extent still follows a former Belgian law and a Royal decree dating back to 1970 and 1978<sup>101</sup>, respectively. However, the 'Foundations Decree' (see above 1) contains some provisions regarding support projects for children with special needs within a mainstream school. The support consists mainly of appointing another teacher to those mainstream schools that are attended by one or more children with special needs.<sup>102</sup>

**Special education** schools in the German-speaking Community do not provide educational services for all types of disabilities. Hospitalised children and children with visual or auditory disabilities attend special schools in Germany instead.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.12 Cultural minorities

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

Worth mentioning, however, is the fact that Belgium has signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on 31 July 2001. Ratification is still pending.

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<sup>97</sup> Décret organisant l'enseignement spécialisé, 3.3.2004 (lois 28737), last amended 20.7.2006.

<sup>98</sup> European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Belgium – French Community, September 2006, retrieved 22.2.2007 from [http://www.european-agency.org/nat\\_ovs/belgium\\_french/9.html](http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/belgium_french/9.html).

<sup>99</sup> European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, National Overview, Belgium – French Community, September 2006, retrieved 22.2.2007 from [http://www.european-agency.org/nat\\_ovs/belgium\\_french/9.html](http://www.european-agency.org/nat_ovs/belgium_french/9.html).

<sup>100</sup> European Commission, Key Data on Education in Europe 2005, pp. 129-130.

<sup>101</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.6.1.

<sup>102</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.5.3.

<sup>103</sup> Eurybase, Belgium – German speaking Community (2005/2006), 10.6.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The overview has shown that in fact all educational systems that exist in the Belgian state strive to provide equal opportunities, combat discrimination and prevent school failure. The overview has also shown that European policies, namely its anti-discrimination policy, have had an influence on recent educational reforms.<sup>104</sup> A clear trend towards inclusion is palpable in all documents analysed. The tools applied, however, are different in all three of them, as are the effects.

The differences in the approach have differing reasons. They seem to be, on the one hand, of a pragmatic nature, like in the German speaking Community, where due to a small demand not too many measures have been taken, although will and capabilities to provide the necessary educational facilities appear to exist. On the other hand, reasons for differing approaches might be of a more conceptual nature. It has been said that the French and Flemish Communities traditionally have different approaches towards integration. While the French Community seems to follow a model known from France and labelled 'assimilative', not officially recognising the existence of different ethnic groups, the Flemish Community seems to follow a model closer to the Netherlands or the U.K. recognising the specificity of an immigrant's population and addressing specific measures towards it.<sup>105</sup> As S. Carrera has pointed out, these traditional models of integration no longer exist<sup>106</sup> and also J. Jamin concedes that the differences in the Belgian integration policies are decreasing.<sup>107</sup>

The analyses of educational policies supports this view: while the Flemish speaking Community in 2002 extended the scope of its equal educational opportunities policy from deprived ethnic minorities towards disadvantaged pupils at large, the French Community complemented its general positive discrimination policy from 1998 with specific measures aiming at migrant children in 2001 (Charter for Partnership) and 2006 (reception classes for *primo-arrivants*).

However, certain characteristics suggest that in spite of recent developments, the old integration model still has an influence on integration policies in the two Communities. This is illustrated by a comparison of the pupils eligible for reception classes in the French and the Flemish Communities. The notion of *primo-arrivants* in the French Community is in fact rather limited<sup>108</sup> and based on rather legalistic elements: asylum-seekers, stateless persons, native of developing country, etc. (see above 3.10.2). In contrast, the Flemish concept of *newcomer* is mainly based on nationality and language (see above 3.10.1). As a consequence: a child of Canadian nationality, for example, who speaks neither French nor Dutch and whose parents are newly arrived in Belgium in order to work, would only be able to benefit from reception classes in the Flemish schooling system, although the need would be the same.

To state which of the possible approaches contribute better to overcome inequalities and to promote social cohesion is the overall aim of INCLUD-ED's five years research and cannot and shall not be assessed at this stage of progress.

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. S. Carrera & F. Geyer, EU policy on education: the impact on the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, State of the Art, Preliminary report, INCLUD-ED project, 2007, pp. 2-7.

<sup>105</sup> J. Jamin, Migrants and ethnic minorities in Belgium, Centre d'études de l'ethnicité et des migrations – CEDEM, Université de Liège, 2003, p. 10.

<sup>106</sup> S. Carrera, A comparison of integration programmes in the EU – trends and weaknesses, CHALLENGE Papers No. 1/March 2006, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> J. Jamin, Migrants and ethnic minorities in Belgium, Centre d'études de l'ethnicité et des migrations – CEDEM, Université de Liège, 2003, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. also Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOOR), Analytical Report on Education – National Focal Point for Belgium, 2004, p. 26.

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