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NESET Country Report: Belgium

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NESET Country Report: Belgium

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Introduction: Belgian education systems

An important feature of the Belgian context is that, since 1989, education has been within the competence of the three language-based communities. These communities (French-, Flemish- and German-speaking) manage similar but completely independent education systems. Therefore, a truly in-depth analysis would result in three independent NESET reports: one for each of the three education systems. However, these systems have a common history and face similar equity-related challenges. In this report, we will focus on what they have in common, although some differences, primarily between the Flemish Community (Flanders) and the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB), will be discussed.

In Belgium, schooling is compulsory and free of charge between the ages of 6 and 18. Preschool (3 years from the age of 2.5 years) is optional, and is referred to, together with primary education (6 years), as ‘fundamental education’. Secondary education (6 years) is made up of three ‘tiers’, the first comprising (theoretically at least) a common structure for all pupils. Starting in the second tier, secondary education is divided into curricula (general, technical and vocational) with different objectives and opportunities. Higher education is organized by ‘universities’, ‘hautes écoles / hogescholen’ and ‘arts colleges’, and divided into three cycles: Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate. Except for a few specific programmes for which an entrance examination is required (engineering, medicine), access to higher education, whatever the institution, is only conditioned by the acquisition of a secondary education diploma.

Freedom of education is proclaimed in the Belgian Constitution of 1831 and remains at the core of educational policy in Belgium. It means:

- Freedom provided to pupils and their families to choose the educational institution that suits them. This, combined with the public funding of schools according to the number of pupils they enrol, leads to a school quasi-market.
- Freedom to organise schools. This leads to the organisation of the education system into various networks (public, public grant-aided and private grant-aided; see annex 4). The schools receive public funding on the same per-capita basis whatever their network.

Section 1. Main equity-related policy challenges

To structure the discussion of the main equity-related policy challenges in Belgium, we use the conceptions of equity adapted by Demeuse et al (2001) from Grisay (1984). According to these authors, there can be several levels of equity, depending on which type of equality is pursued: equality of access; equality of treatment; equality of achievement; equality of realization.

1.1. Equality of access

Equality of access regarding compulsory education can be considered as realized in Belgium, with a gross participation rate of nearly 100% between the ages of 3 and 17 (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles & ETNIC, 2012). The main equity challenges regarding compulsory education occur rather at the related dimensions of equality of treatment and equality of results.

Not unexpectedly, equality of access is more of a problem in higher education. Access rates to higher education have undergone a constant increase since the end of the 1980s, with approximately 75% of holders of a secondary education diploma accessing higher education in FWB in 2008 (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles & ETNIC, 2012). However, studies show that access to higher education in Belgium is still unequal (OCDE, 2012) and linked with various variables (Demeuse et al., 2013) such as socio-economic status, handicap and the type of curriculum attended in secondary education.

1.2. Equality of treatment

At least since the idea of school vouchers was first introduced by the Catholic minister Schollaert as early as 1911 (Desmed, 1986), the dominant idea regarding compulsory education funding in Belgium can be expressed by the formula ‘1 child = 1 child’. With this idea as their point of departure, the Catholic school network argued for the equality of treatment for the children attending their schools. The ‘school pact’ and the ensuing law in 1959 (Belgique, 1959) ratified this idea, leading to the school quasi-market.

Studies have shown that the quasi-market functioning of the education systems in Belgium fosters several types of segregation between schools, resulting in the creation of ‘ghetto’ schools and ‘sanctuary’ schools (see Demeuse & Friant, 2010 for a synthesis). With Delvaux (2005), we define segregation as the expression of social differences in space, appearing as soon as individuals classified by society into distinct social categories are separated in space and thus do not mix with each other. Hence, segregation can be characterized by two factors: the social categories and the type of spatial separation. We identified three possible social categories (socioeconomic, academic and ethnic), and three possible types of separation (between schools, between curricula and within schools) resulting in 9 types of segregation, about which we have varying amounts of information (Demeuse & Friant, 2010). In the FWB, a major part of the research and political attention is focused on socioeconomic segregation between schools in secondary education, that is to say the separation of pupils between schools according to their socioeconomic status. We generally refer to this type of separation when we use the term “segregation” in the context of the FWB. There is a lack of data about ethnic segregation in the FWB as a consequence of the philosophical position of the government that ethnic and immigration categorization is not desirable (Friant et al., 2008; Jacobs et al., 2009b). On the other hand, Flanders is more prone to use “ethnic” categorization, with the widespread use of the term “allochtone” to refer to immigrant inhabitants (Jacobs et al., 2009b). As a consequence, there is in Flanders much more research and political attention regarding ethnic segregation between schools than in the FWB (see e.g. Sierens et al., 2010; Agirdag et al., 2012; Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012). When using the term “segregation” in Flanders, we generally refer to socio-economic and ethnic separation between schools.

There are great socio-economic disparities between schools related to the type of curriculum they offer (see annex 1). Technical/vocational schools are more often chosen by families from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, the ‘waterfall system’ adds its effect to this: pupils from the academic curricula with non-satisfactory school results tend to switch to technical or vocational curricula, and these pupils are more often those with lower socioeconomic status (Friant et al, 2008). Thus a certain hierarchy of curricula is established according to a social status linked to school success for some and school failure for others. As each school does not offer all curricula, such a mechanism creates segregation between schools. Technical/vocational schools draw pupils with a lower socioeconomic status that have in this way been pushed out of general education (Friant et al, 2008). In addition, schools are in competition with each other to attract pupils, as the pupils have not only a financial value, because their numbers determine the subsidies awarded to each institution, but also a peda-

gical value based on their more or less desirable personal traits (Delvaux & Joseph, 2006). This competition results in increased socioeconomic and academic segregation between schools.

1.3. Equality of results

Studies (e.g. Dupriez & Dumay, 2006; Monseur & Crahay, 2008) have shown that social and academic segregation in education systems generally results in significant inequalities in school results. Indeed, peers play an important role in a pupil's learning, be it by influencing the process of learning in the class or by the fact that teachers adapt the demands of the curriculum and the evaluation to the composition of the group (see e.g. Thrupp et al, 2002). Such a school composition effect is suspected to play a great role in Belgian education systems. However, recent studies in Flanders using longitudinal data (e.g. Vandecandelaere et al., 2011) did not show any significant effect of school composition on pupils' progress, raising debates about the extent to which segregation plays a role in school inequalities in Flanders.

PISA assessments from OECD assessing 15-year-old pupils' competencies show quite different results between language communities; Flanders often shows some of the best results of the OECD countries, while the FWB is below average overall. However, both communities have in common a strong score discrepancy between low-SES and high-SES pupils (Baye et al., 2009; Jacobs et al, 2009; Vlaamse Overheid & Universiteit Gent, 2010). These assessments also underline the importance of the average socioeconomic level of the schools themselves on differences in pupil performance. This situation is problematic in terms of equity: depending on the children's SES and on the composition of the school they attend, their results can differ significantly (Jacobs et al., 2009a). However, studies in Flanders show that while pupils' results vary according to school composition, there is no significant effect of school composition on pupils' progress (e.g. Vandecandelaere et al., 2011). Some studies using PISA data (Jacobs, Rea, & Hanquinet, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2009a) also show that the immigrant origin, strongly linked to socio-economic status, can play a role in the observed difference of pupil performance in Flanders and the FWB.

Studies in Flanders monitoring pupils' course of study have shown that a significant proportion (around 14% in 2010) of pupils still leave school without obtaining any qualification (Van Landeghem, De Fraine, Gielen, & Van Damme, 2012, 2013). These early dropout rates are linked with variables such as the parents' level of education, language spoken in the home and gender. Some geographical disparities are also observed (Van Landeghem et al., 2013).

Using other statistics (the EU labour force survey), Chenu and Blondin (n.d.) have shown that early school leaving rates were higher in 2011 in the FWB (14,7% in Wallonia and 18,9% in according to their statistics) than in Flanders (9,6% according to their statistics). Moreover, the trend towards a decrease of early school leaving rates is stronger in Flanders than in the FWB. The situation of Brussels is the most preoccupying. Some discrepancies are also observed between curricula; early leaving rates being notably higher in vocational curricula than in general ones (Chenu and Blondin, n.d.).

At the higher education level, studies show an effect of several variables on achievement, adding their effect to the fact that some groups have a reduced access rate to higher education. Socio-cultural variables such as the parents' level of education (OCDE, 2012) or income (Demeuse et al., 2013) play an important role in student achievement. Other influential variables are related to the previous course of study, but also to the school attended while in secondary education.

Section 2. Main relevant policy initiatives, reforms, measures; assessment

While carrying out sociological studies in the 1960s and 1970s, researchers and stakeholders in Belgium came to the conclusion that access to schooling opens to the masses, but that not all children are equal when it comes to schooling: some children need more attention to obtain the same results as others. In this sense, there are still no equal opportunities of school success and social realization.

Acknowledging these inequalities, targeted compensatory policies have emerged since the end of the 1980s. These policies, inspired by the French and English area-based policies that emerged since the 1970s, were based upon the simple assertion ‘to give more to those who have less’. The idea, which replaces strict equality of treatment, consists in re-establishing a balance by giving pupils from underprivileged backgrounds supplementary means, not only on an individual basis, which until then was the rule with the attribution of individual grants, but on a collective basis, by enhancing the funding given to schools enrolling those pupils. See (Friant et al, 2012) for an extended review of these compensatory policies.

More recently, another line of action has been implemented, which is to reduce school segregation. There are still debates in the public opinion, especially in Flanders, about the real effects of school segregation on inequalities of results and the reasons why there should be desegregation (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012). However, there is a consensus that segregation results at least in inequalities of treatment and that desegregation could be an instrument of social cohesion. Reducing school segregation in Belgium involves regulating the enrolment process, whether making such regulation a part of the compensatory policy, as in Flanders, or separate from it, as in the FWB.

2.1. Compensatory policies

2.1.1. In the FWB

Considering the characteristics of our education systems, which emphasize freedom of choice regardless of the distance travelled by pupils, basing an educational priority policy on zones is not a good idea.

In the FWB, a compensatory policy was set up in 1998 under the term ‘positive discrimination’ (it has since 2009 undergone some modification and is now called ‘encadrement différencié’ - ED¹). This educational priority policy was also the occasion for setting a new goal for the education system as a whole: to ensure equality of social realization. In the education system of the FWB, ‘positive discrimination’ means a ‘distinction drawn to the advantage of primary or secondary schools on the basis of social, economic, cultural or pedagogical criteria’ (Gouvernement de la Communauté française, 1998).

The mechanism of positive discrimination or ED consists in a modulated allocation of means to schools according to the socioeconomic origin of the pupils attending them. This allocation of extra means to those schools targeted as enrolling an underprivileged population is done mechanically by ranking schools according to an objective criterion, the socioeconomic index (SEI), and by allocating extra funds to the less privileged schools according to this criterion.

The targeting operates on the basis of the SEI of each pupil according to the characteristics of the area in which he lives (unemployment rate, average revenue, comfort of the houses, etc.). The SEIs of all

¹ There is no adequate English translation of this expression ED. It approximately means ‘differentiated funding’, although it has a broader meaning, including pedagogical aspects.

pupils are averaged at the school level. Schools are targeted on the basis of their population and not on the basis of the area in which they are located because of the free choice of school: pupils do not automatically attend the school of their area and school populations can change from year to year.

Identification on the basis of the actual school population has thus been chosen because it allows taking these constraints into account and adapting to changes in the schools' population, thus avoiding a definitive labelling of schools (Demeuse, 2002). Moreover, such a method (calculating a SEI on the basis of the pupils' area of residence and targeting schools according to their population, not their area of implantation) is supported by results of prior scientific studies in Belgium and other countries (Demeuse, 2002; Ross, 1983) showing that an indirect indicator of socioeconomic status predicts educational attainment as accurately as variables directly collected from families.

Schools benefitting from ED consist of approximately 25% of all pupils in the FWB, for each level of studies. The targeted schools benefit from additional means amounting to 62 million euros, or 1.35% of the education budget. These targeted schools are split into five classes according to their average SEI, each class being given a weighting index for the allocation of extra means, in such a way that the more their public is socioeconomically underprivileged, the more extra means a school receives.

These extra resources are of three types (Gouvernement de la Communauté française de Belgique, 2009):

- Extra teachers;
- Financial means allowing to purchase equipment, to organize cultural and sports activities, or to convert rooms;
- Other human resources (non-teaching staff) such as educators, social workers, childcare workers, etc.

How these extra resources are used is not determined a priori. Currently, identification of potentially targeted schools is automatic, but schools only receive extra resources if they introduce an action project, and if this project is accepted. Every five years, schools must introduce a project describing pedagogical actions to be taken to 'ensure all pupils equal opportunities of social emancipation' (differentiated pedagogy, smaller groups, school dropout prevention, etc.). It must present concrete actions foreseen over a five-year duration and must include the allocation and distribution of the extra means. These pedagogical actions are to be frequently evaluated. A 'phasing-out' procedure is also foreseen, with a progressive reduction of the extra means allocated.

In addition to these extra means arising from positive discrimination are extra means arising from 'positive differentiation', i.e. extra financial means with the aim of improving the material conditions of schools, consisting in a reallocation of extra funds obtained by the FWB. These means are allocated according to a progressive formula linked to the schools' average SEI.

An evaluation of the effectiveness or efficiency of compensatory policies in the FWB is still lacking. The evaluation of other dimensions (Bouchard & Plante, 2002) of these policies is, however, better documented. One of these dimensions is targeting. While the FWB has not taken the same options as Flanders in targeting, both have strong arguments to support their choices.

The FWB targets schools according to a SEI characterizing the pupils' district of residence. This SEI takes into account no variables referring to nationality, ethnicity, language or migrant origin. From a scientific point of view, these other variables have been set aside by the inter-university team in charge of calculating the index because they add no additional information than targeting by socioec-

onomic status alone (Demeuse, 2002). Moreover, these variables were deliberately ruled out by the legislators to avoid stigmatization of populations of immigrant origin. Some more recent research results (Jacobs et al., 2007; Jacobs et al., 2009a), however, would support a compensatory policy which took into account such variables in targeting, but current political thinking apparently does not agree.

Other criticisms of ED targeting concern the somewhat artificial divide between ‘classes’ of schools and determining how many extra means they will receive. ED schools, or schools of the same class, do not form a homogeneous whole by their population or context, and do not take in pupils that are clearly more underprivileged than do other schools with a nearly equal SEI (Bouchat et al, 2005). Moreover, an in-depth study of the situation of some schools at the limit of targeting (Demeuse et al, 2006) shows that the schools’ population possibly comes from non-homogeneous districts and does not disperse randomly throughout the districts. These criticisms of current ED targeting would support an addition of pedagogical criteria to the targeting (e.g.: late enrolments, high absenteeism, high rates of pupils lagging behind). This should, however, be examined cautiously, given the risk of fostering a logic of offloading by selective schools of pupils with difficulties towards schools that would be rewarded to treat these difficulties. Indeed, such reasoning is supported neither by the government nor by a scientific agreement on its effectiveness.

2.1.2. In Flanders

Many similarities still persist between the education systems of Flanders and the FWB. Some major differences can be noted concerning the issue of equity in education in Flanders, compared to the FWB:

- A history of integrating variables such as a command of the Dutch language and immigrant background (the latter often referred to with the widespread term ‘allochtone’) in the targeting of compensatory policies.
- A direct collection of disadvantage indicators by a registration system.
- A tradition of scientifically evaluating the measures to a much greater extent than in the FWB.
- A progressive mainstream integration into regular educational legislation and funding of compensatory policies and measures aimed at creating equal opportunities.

The first compensatory policies to have been implemented in Flanders targeted pupils from immigrant background and pupils who had a poor command of the Dutch language (Friant et al., 2012). They were followed by an ‘extended care’ policy similar to the positive discrimination policy of the FWB, mainly targeting schools enrolling pupils from underprivileged background. These policies were merged in 2002 into a single, more ambitious framework, which is still operational at the time of writing: the Equal Education Opportunity Act (referred to as GOK, from its Dutch name ‘Gelijke Onderwijskansen’).

Like ED in the FWB, GOK is an indirect policy: the final target-group of these policies are the underprivileged pupils, but governmental actions are directed towards schools (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012). Extra means are given to schools according to the concentration of underprivileged pupils they enrol (see annex 2). The resource targeting is based on objective, measurable criteria indicating the socioeconomic background of the pupils: poorly educated mothers, jobless households, travelling households, children placed in institutional or foster care and non-Dutch-speaking households. These indicators are collected using an extensive registration and control system at the pupil

level including questionnaires for parents. The total amount of extra funding allocated this way approaches 4% in basic education (Friant et al., 2012).

In contrast with the FWB, where evaluation is lacking, there is an evaluation of many dimensions of the GOK policy in Flanders (see Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012 for a comprehensive synthesis). At the level of targeting, an a priori evaluation (Bollens et al., 1998) showed that an individual registration system, even if it is rather complex, is more accurate in targeting resources than the use of geographical or approximate indicators. This way of targeting is, however, not perfect, as social background questionnaires can be perceived as intrusive by parents, schools can complain about the burden of paperwork, and a risk of fraud exists. An a posteriori evaluation of the accuracy of targeting by Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise (2010) showed that the GOK criteria can correctly identify pupils at risk of failure, but miss approximately 15% of underprivileged pupils who are socio-emotionally at risk.

There are several evaluations of the effectiveness of the GOK policy in Flanders, although evaluating such a policy is methodologically extremely difficult. Keeping in mind that the main goal of the GOK policy is to improve the quality of schooling in such a way that the results of pupils of the target group approach the average, an overall conclusion of these evaluations is prudently positive (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012). For example, a research by Ooghe (2011) showed a positive effect of the GOK funding on the cognitive results of targeted pupils. However, pupils with learning disabilities at the beginning of their school career are helped little, if at all, by the GOK funding. Another goal of the GOK policy is to act upon the school career of underprivileged pupils: with the GOK policy, the government hopes to reduce grade repetition, the 'waterfall system' and orientation towards specialized education. These effects have not yet been studied as such. However, monitoring indicators show an increase in reorientation towards specialized education (Van Landeghem & Van Damme, 2001; see annex 3), a result which could be interpreted as a failure of the GOK policy to reduce these negative effects (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012).

2.1.3. Regulation of enrolment procedures

Compensatory policies alone do not seem to solve the problem of the important inequalities that persist in Belgian education systems, as well in the FWB as in Flanders, where partially similar measures are taken. Indeed, studies on segregation in Belgium show just how much each of these two education systems is segregated, and encourage taking seriously the differences that can exist between schools, both concerning the inequalities of results and the socioeconomic composition (Agirdag et al., 2012; Baye, Demeuse, Monseur, & Goffin, 2006).

School segregation is considered, by the scientific community as well as by the government, as a major problem that has to be tackled. From a philosophical point of view, it is not desirable to have an education system that separates children according to social group, be it socioeconomically or ethnically defined. What would be the attitude of these children towards life in society when they have completed schooling? From a pedagogical point of view, there is scientific consensus on the negative effects of segregation. Numerous studies have shown that peers play an important role in a pupil's learning, concentrating children with difficulties thus has an aggravating effect (Thrupp et al., 2002). In Flanders, however, some studies show mixed results on the effects of segregation, possibly because segregated schools are also those receiving extra means from the GOK policy, which possibly improves their performance (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012).

Assuming that free school choice is one of the parameters contributing to segregation, it should be possible to regulate this free school choice by altering school enrolment policy. The regulation of

school enrolment procedures has consequently been applied, in different ways, in both the FWB and in Flanders.

In the FWB, acknowledging the extensive socioeconomic segregation existing in the education system, the Government set out to encourage social mixing within secondary schools, in particular through the 'Contrat pour l'Ecole' (Gouvernement de la Communauté française de Belgique, 2005). The motivation was to ensure that all parents receive truly identical treatment (setting up an enrolment record in all schools, managing enrolment according to common and identical rules avoiding favouritism) not assured before.

The regulation of enrolment procedures began in 2007. It was followed by a 3-year period of turmoil with the promulgation of a new decree each year. This was the consequence of the bad reception by a part of public opinion of any measure they interpreted as an unacceptable reduction of their freedom of choice. The first idea was to apply a 'first-come, first-served' principle. The secondary schools had to keep a register of available spots and requests for enrolment, keeping track of each request in order of arrival, starting from a date known to everyone. This 'enrolment law', produced spectacular effects in the media, analysed in depth by Delvaux & Maroy (2009). A 'social mixing decree' was applied the following year, introducing, in the few highly popular schools in which demand exceeded offer, some priority rules according to SEI and distance travelled, plus a random draw for the extra demand. This idea of random drawing fuelled a feeling of injustice for some parents. Moreover, strategies of multiple registrations caused major problems and dramatically reduced the chances of satisfying parents' preferences. The enrolment procedure that is in application at the time of writing was set up in 2010. In order to correct the problems of the previous version, random drawing was abandoned. Parents' preferences are maximised by asking them to rank several schools, and enrolment management is centralized by a commission to avoid multiple registrations. These procedures are still contested by some parents, but its application since the start of the school year 2010-2011 has been carried out without major problems.

Unfortunately, as seems too often the case in the FWB, there is an obvious lack of evaluation of the effects of these measures on desegregation. It can be argued that it is too soon to evaluate these effects. However, given the modest scope of these measures, one should not expect a spectacular desegregation effect to be observed.

The application of a regulation of enrolment in Flanders is interlocked with the GOK policy. As in the FWB, it has undergone a certain number of modifications since its implementation. Beginning in 2002, there were only two categories of pupils with a priority at registration: siblings and Dutch-speaking pupils in Brussels. In 2005, a priority period of registration for indicator-pupils was implemented. Finally, a new decree regarding enrolment procedures was promulgated in 2012. Schools from the same area must work together in a 'local consultation platform' (LOP), which regulates school enrolment in order to achieve desegregation. To do so, a system of 'double quota' is implemented: according to their status (indicator-pupil or not), pupils are registered in two different contingents. In each school, a certain number of spaces are reserved to each contingent of pupil so as to achieve a more even repartition of privileged and underprivileged pupils among schools in the same LOP (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2012). For example, if an area is constituted of 30% underprivileged pupils and 70% privileged pupils then each school of this area should reserve 30% of their available spaces for underprivileged pupils and 70% of their available spaces for privileged pupils.

It is difficult to evaluate the exact effect of the GOK policy on school desegregation, because it has undergone a certain number of changes since its beginning. However, a monitoring of segregation in

Flanders over a period of 10 years (2001-2002 to 2011-2012) (Wouters & Groenez, 2013) shows an increase in segregation of indicator-pupils between schools rather than a decrease. This could be interpreted as a failure of the GOK-policy to reduce segregation up until now. An examination of the evolution of segregation in areas where a central registration procedure resembling the 2012 rules was implemented also showed mixed results in terms of desegregation (Wouters & Groenez, 2013). A re-examination of the evolution of segregation in the future should show how much the new registration rules have had an effect on desegregation.

2.1.4. Promoting access to higher education

There is a strong political will in Belgium to promote access to higher education to all categories of the population. In this regard, financial assistance is available to individual students according to their (or their parents') income. Moreover, if the registration fee in 2013 for a year of study at the university in the FWB is a maximum of 835 euros for mainstream students, it is free for students from low-income families fulfilling the conditions to obtain financial aid. The latter category of students is far from insignificant, ranging between 11% and 25% at the university level according to the institution (Demeuse et al., 2013). These students also receive the mandatory course hand-outs for free.

These measures, however, are not sufficient to reduce the association between access to higher education and variables such as socioeconomic status, handicap and the type of curriculum followed in secondary education (Demeuse et al., 2013; OCDE, 2012). Inequality of results also adds its effects to this inequality of access, academic success being linked with these latter variables (Demeuse et al., 2013).

2.1.5. Adult education

In Flanders and in the FWB, adult education falls under the competence of various institutional levels (federal state, community or region) and several ministries (education, work, agriculture). The institutions are quite heterogeneous, giving formal adult education, non-formal adult education and prison education (Vermeersche & Vandenbroucke, 2009). All these policy initiatives aim at answering the needs of employers but also giving adults better chances of social and professional inclusion and promoting personal accomplishment.

Formal adult education falls within the competence of the ministry of education of each community. Its main component is "social advancement education" (now called "continuing education" in Flanders). Vermeersche and Vandenbroucke (2009) give a good description of this type of adult education

"This is a broad and varied type of education for all interested adults. It aims at imparting knowledge, improving skills and attitudes. Most of the issues covered by this form of education are oriented towards people's profession (business related courses, vocational courses), although a lot of them are also leisure-related or focused on functioning in society, or are both (like language courses). Social advancement education is the largest sector within the Flemish adult education sector (De Meyer, 2006). There are over 250 000 course participants each year. Before they can enrol, they must have finished full-time compulsory education." (p.11)

"Second chance education" is a part of social advancement education enabling adults to obtain a diploma of secondary education they missed out by leaving compulsory education (Vermeersche & Vandenbroucke, 2009, p.12).

Moreover, there exist in Flanders a number of centres for adult basic education focusing on semi- or unskilled adults missing the competences taught in primary or secondary education. All courses are

free of charge. They are mostly followed by low-educated immigrants learning Dutch as a second language, but other courses are also offered (Vermeersche & Vandenbroucke, 2009, p.12).

Section 3. Proposals for reforms and specific measures

Flanders and the FWB being two distinct education systems, it is difficult to propose reforms and specific measures that could apply to both. Both try to promote more equity by applying reforms that are sometimes similar, but not always with the same timing.

Flanders is now at the beginning of a new period with the integration of the former GOK policy into the mainstream educational legislation. This means that, beginning in the school year 2013-2014, the redistribution of resources is automatically integrated into the general funding of education. The pupil registration rules have also changed with the introduction of the ‘double quota’ procedure for the school year 2013-2014. Moreover, an extensive reform of secondary education has been debated during the last few years. From an equity point of view, this reform proposes measures solving the problem of the ‘waterfall system’ at the core of many equity issues. For that problem, the reform proposes a comprehensive first-level school qualification, with the first choice of course of study delayed until the age of 14. In addition, it is proposed to break down the dividing walls between general, technical and vocational curricula by the introduction, starting in the second stage, of five cross-domains of study (science and technology; language and culture; economics and organisation; art and creation; welfare and society). Each school would have to propose, for at least one domain, curricula that until now belong to general, technical and vocational education. This would be an important measure to reduce academic as well as socio-economic segregation between schools.

The negotiations for the reform of secondary education in Flanders ended in June 2013 with the production of a ‘master plan’ (Vlaams Parlement, 2013) paving the way for the reform. This ‘master plan’, however, does not seem to be as ambitious as the first propositions were. The comprehensive first degree until the age of 14 is, in fact, challenged by the choice of a basic option at 13 and the logic of ‘domains’ breaking down dividing walls between curricula has not been totally adopted, leaving to the schools the freedom to be more ‘technical-vocational’ or more ‘general’.

This reform of secondary education should improve equity in the Flemish system, although we think the reforms first proposed by the Flemish minister of education Pascal Smet (2010) were more promising in this regard. Future reform proposals in the FWB education system could take inspiration from the Flemish example, with the relative advantage (for the implementation of reforms) that, while the education system of the FWB is known to be under-performing, there is a more widespread consensus that it must be improved. For example, an application of the ‘double quota’ registration system could also be considered for the FWB, especially since a reflection on school catchment areas was carried out some years ago with, until now, no political follow-up (Delvaux et al., 2005).

Especially in the FWB, we have found a lack of evaluation of the effects of the measures taken to enhance equity of the education system. At the moment of writing, there is no evaluation of the effectiveness of the compensatory policies implemented in the FWB, nor is there any assessment of the desegregation effects of the regulation of enrolment procedures. There is also a great need to better understand ‘what works’ in terms of pedagogical actions that could be implemented in ED-schools. Setting up scientific evaluations of these policies would, in this respect, be an important measure in itself.

Finally, measures improving access to and success in higher education should also be implemented. In this respect, a change in the funding of higher education institutions in the FWB according to the so-

socioeconomic status of their students has been examined (Demeuse et al., 2013). However, these measures are dependent on what happens at the level of secondary education, as it is known that, depending on the curriculum followed and the school attended, access and success in higher education can vary greatly (Demeuse et al., 2013).

Section 4. Conclusions

Belgian education systems have a common history and many common traits. They face partially similar challenges to which they give partially similar solutions. Equity issues in compulsory education are mainly treated by compensatory policies modulating the allocation of resources to schools according to their socioeconomic composition and by the regulation of enrolment procedures aimed at reducing socioeconomic segregation between schools. However, few measures have until now addressed the ‘waterfall system’ in place in secondary education, which is at the core of the creation of equity issues in both systems. The future reform of secondary education in Flanders will head in this direction, although not as much as was first foreseen.

Other future challenges include the consideration of equity issues in higher education. Access to higher education has widely opened since the last decades, but still remains unequal. Moreover, as success in higher education is strongly linked to socioeconomic variables, a resource reallocation on the model of the compensatory policies taking place in secondary education could be foreseen.

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Annex 1.

Friant, Derobertmeasure and Demeuse (2008) showed the following repartition of schools in FWB (Table 1).

Table 1 – Average SES according to the type of school in FWB (2005-2006)

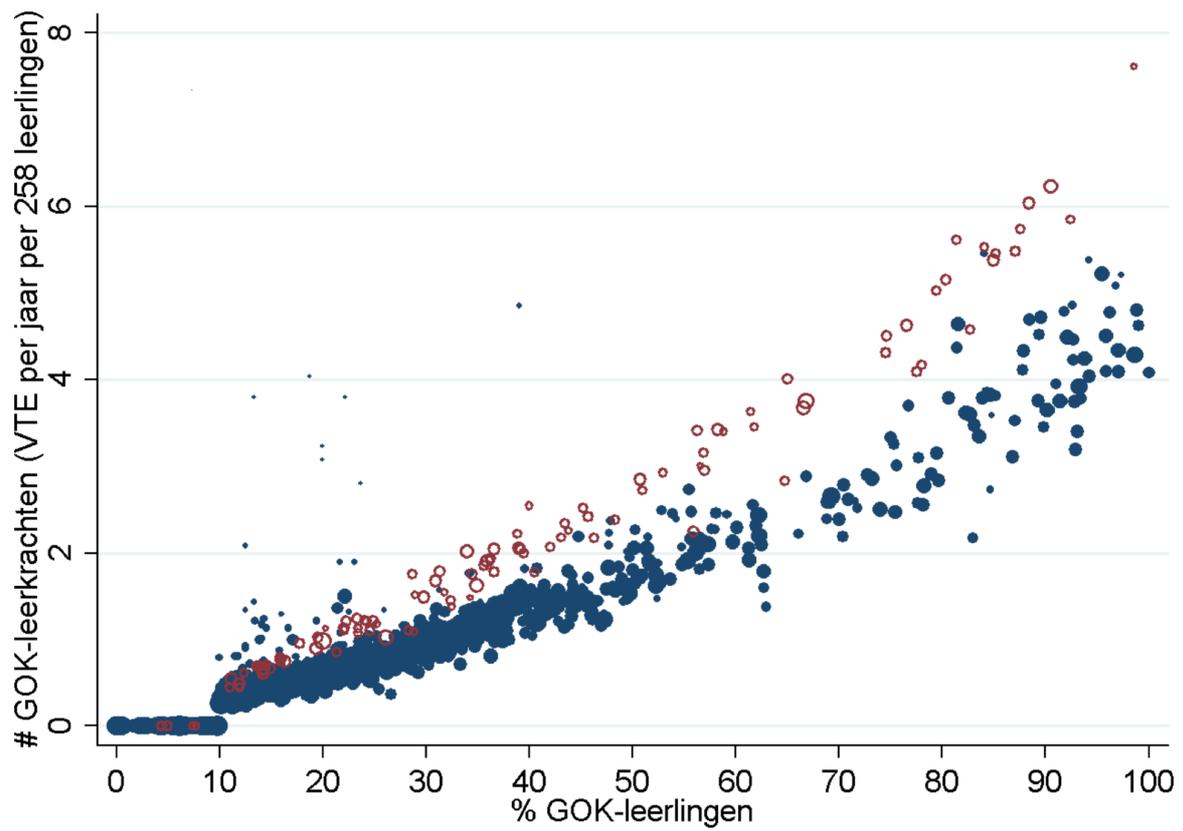
	Academic	Mixed	Technical/vocational
Percentage of pupils	27,3%	60,1%	12,6%
SEI	0,38	-0,04	-0,23

The first row of table 1 shows the proportion of pupils concerned. The second row shows the average socioeconomic index (SEI) of each type of school.

The socioeconomic index is based on the student's district of origin (the notion of district is a statistical division of the territory (Demeuse, 2002, p. 219). A synthetic socioeconomic index score is assigned to each district in Belgium, on the basis of 11 variables within the framework of six domains (income per inhabitant, level of the certificates, unemployment rate, employment rate and proportion of people receiving welfare, professions, comfort of housing). Thus, each student is assigned the socioeconomic index score of the district where he lives and somehow brings this index score to the level of the institution. From a statistical point of view, this is a normal distribution metric variable that varies between 3.5 and 3.5. It is recalculated every 3 years on the basis of the latest statistics available.

Annex 2.

Number of extra GOK-teachers per school according to the proportion of GOK-pupils in the school during the first GOK-cycle (2002-2005) in fundamental education (Ooghe, 2011, p.2)



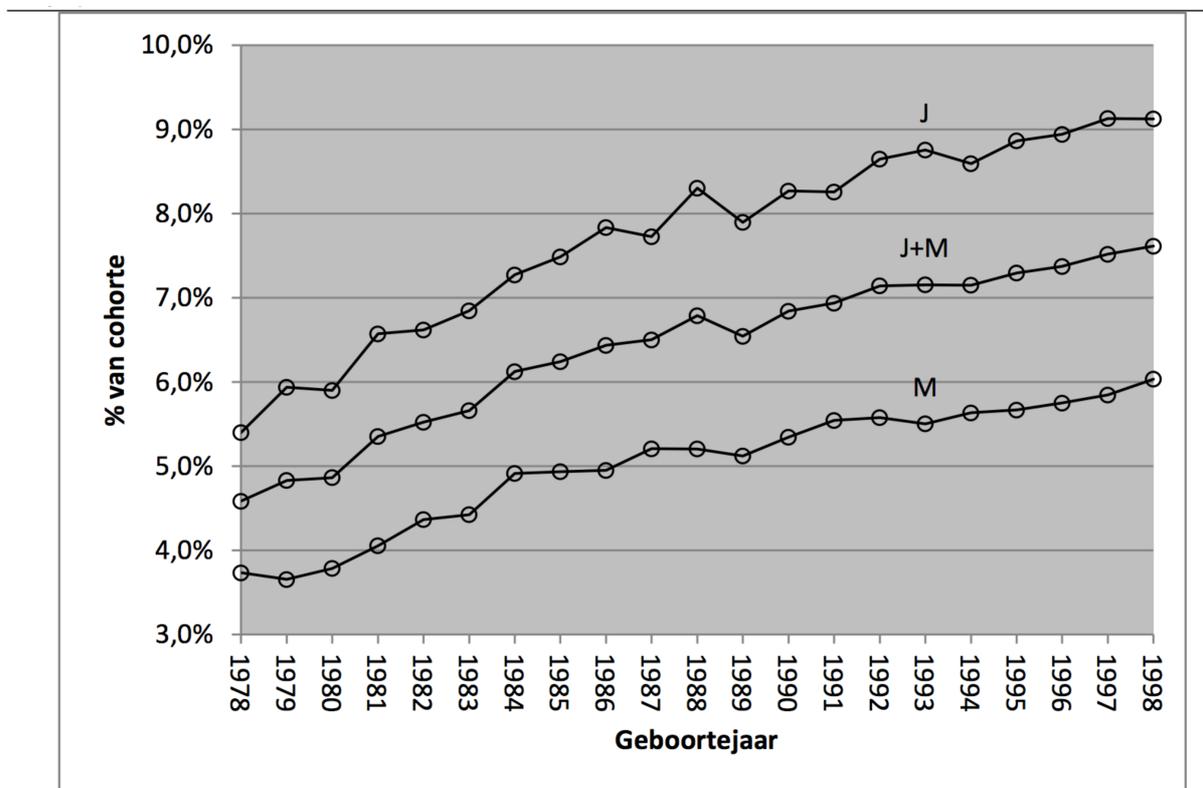
Annex 3.

Percentage of pupils of age 11 attending special education in Flanders according to the year of birth (Van Landeghem & Van Damme, p. 3).

J = percentage of the boys' cohort

M = percentage of the girls' cohort

J+M = percentage of the total cohort



J: % van jongenscohort; M: % van meisjescohort; J+M: % van geboortecohort.

Annex 4. Distribution of pupils across networks in the FWB and in Flanders

Distribution of pupils across networks in Flanders and FWB (adapted from Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2013 pp. 12 & 18 and Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles & ETNIC, 2012, p.77)

