

# Youth policy in Belgium



Council of Europe youth policy reviews

Publishing  
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# **Youth policy in Belgium**

## **It's more complex than you think!**

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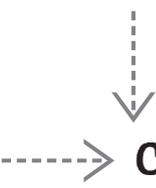
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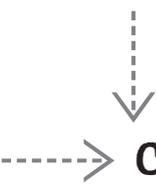
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beyond in arenas that affect young people, who contributed to the review and who contribute in their different ways to the lives of young people in Belgium.





# Chapter 1 – introduction

## Some background to the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy

*C'est plus compliqué que ça.* “It’s more complex than you think.” This was the recurrent response to attempts by the Council of Europe international review team to clarify and confirm their understanding of a range of core youth policy issues in Belgium. The team itself was a complex construction, in an attempt to respect and respond to the specific political, geographical, linguistic and cultural characteristics of Belgium. Routinely, an international review team comprises six or seven individuals: nominations by the statutory bodies of the Youth Department (part of the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation) of the Council of Europe – from the governmental committee and from youth organisations, a member of the Secretariat, two or three youth researchers or youth experts, and, in the past few years, the co-ordinator of the review process, who himself is active in youth research. The nominee from the inter-governmental steering group on youth (the CDEJ) is the designated chair of each review. But with Belgium it was different. The international team for the youth policy review of Belgium was composed of no less than 11 individuals – three from each of the statutory bodies (though one of the youth organisations’ nominees, regrettably, was not able to take part), three youth researchers, the representative of the secretariat, and the co-ordinator.

The rationale behind this constellation was that the international team would be able to divide its focus, engagement and, critically, understanding, between the three language communities (which are also formal administrative Communities) of Belgium. In a sense, this meant conducting three rather separate “mini-reviews”, though the smaller teams were not so rigid that its members had no opportunity to witness youth policy activity in other parts of Belgium. Indeed, arrangements explicitly sought to provide as many team members as possible with some opportunity to gain at least a “feel” for youth policy in contexts other than the one on which they were primarily focused. After all, a central tenet underlying the Council of Europe international reviews is that a team is interested in the lives of all young people within the boundaries of the country under review, not just those defined by administrative, cultural



or political borders. Given the experience in many of the countries previously reviewed (for example, Estonia, Romania, Slovakia, Cyprus and Moldova), this has been an important, principled stand.

### The international review of youth policy in Belgium

But of course Belgium is, arguably, both different from as well as more complicated than that! Though its political and linguistic communities do anchor the core of “youth policy” – at least in its sense of being cultural and educational practice – the international review team also had to take account of regional activity and responsibilities that affect the lives of young people and, indeed, policy and practice within the municipalities of Belgium. We attempt, with some anxiety and caution, to map this framework in our opening chapter, which seeks to capture those “youth policy” matters that remain at the federal level, while also delineating how other such responsibilities are divided between other administrative levels. These are addressed at different points in subsequent chapters. Whatever our efforts, we are humble enough to acknowledge that the situation is probably “plus compliqué que ça”!

The international review of national youth policy in Belgium is the 18th such review to be conducted by the Council of Europe. Each has contributed to the overall objectives of the review process and provided lessons that have shaped the evolution of the review process itself. The objectives are threefold:

- provide a constructively critical perspective on the country under review;
- learn from the country under review, through examples of good practice or specific youth policy challenges;
- develop a European framework – not a blueprint – for thinking about youth policy.

A Council of Europe international youth policy review now takes some 18 months, not counting the intention to have a follow-up two years later. The first review, of Finland in 1997, took six months. That review was a venture (or adventure) into the dark. There was no model to follow. Gradually a process model has been established, but it is not cast in stone and is, almost every time, subject to revision for a variety of professional and pragmatic reasons. Initially, the early reviews built up a body of knowledge and understanding of “youth policy”, though this was constructed on a somewhat ad hoc basis and disseminated solely through written (national and international) reports and through a presentation to the Joint Council of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe (the joint meeting of the European Steering Committee on Youth – the CDEJ – and the Advisory Council on Youth, representing youth organisations). There was no preliminary, preparatory visit. There was no identification of priority issues. There was no national hearing. There was no follow-up. After seven reviews, a clear framework for understanding and reviewing youth policy had emerged (see Williamson 2002):



- concepts of “youth” and “youth policy”;
- legislation and finance;
- structures for delivery;
- policy domains;
- cross-cutting issues;
- research, training and dissemination.

This was, broadly, the framework that informed the deliberations of the next seven international reviews and they added further substance to it. For example, the influence of faith or military issues on “youth policy” had merited little attention, and were perhaps not important in the early reviews (of countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden or Spain), but they were more than significant in the reviews of countries such as Malta, Cyprus, Armenia and Moldova. However, it became increasingly apparent that, in trying to cover everything, there was a risk of the international reviews interrogating nothing. The terrain for the reviews had become too broad, at the expense of depth. In order to address this, recent reviews have sought to focus on a small number of priority issues identified by the authorities in the host country and to highlight a small number of additional issues considered by the international team to merit in-depth commentary and reflection.

In the case of Belgium, the internal priorities identified were as follows.

#### **In the Flemish Community**

- The divide in the level of schooling which causes a political and socio-economic dichotomy
- The ideological and cultural divide which means that (still) some target groups are not reached: does multiculturalism work?
- The role of the government/public authorities: to what extent should it be steering; what is it the citizen can and/or should expect? The positioning of youth work in society?

#### **In the French Community**

- The Youth Policy Plan is currently under preparation in the French Community. The Cabinet of the Minister for Youth would like to get feedback, comments and suggestions on the methodology, content, process on the way.

#### **In the German-speaking Community**

- Development of flexible instruments and methods, enabling a comprehensive and quality youth policy, based on knowledge and information – therefore:
  - two main projects of the actual youth policy: a) reform of formation and training (in youth work) of young people, youth workers, youth



leaders and b) creation of a new framework for/of youth policy. Both should be reached by:

- the new funding decree for youth work. This decree started in 2012. It will allow a better transversal approach in order to respect in a more holistic way young people’s lives, enhance participation of young people and participation of the youth sector in the design and in the implementation of youth work, allow evaluation on the basis of quality and not only on the basis of quantity, and reinforce the participation of the municipalities in design and implementation of youth policy.

## Specificities of Belgium

Belgium was the first federal country to be subject to an international review. Thus, while “structures for delivery” had always exercised the minds of international review teams, the Belgian context produced different challenges. Previously, central decision making on youth matters had sometimes experienced difficulties in cascading to remote rural municipalities in the absence of effective regional structures (e.g. Sweden), had lacked the municipal capacity to make things happen (e.g. Lithuania), or had been at least partially blocked by autonomous regional structures (e.g. Spain). In Belgium, the international team encountered relatively autonomous authorities with different responsibilities for different youth issues that in turn were quite independent from, overlapping with or complementary to activity taking place at other autonomous levels. There were times when even Belgian colleagues, sitting alongside members of the international team at presentations, appeared bemused by this complexity. They might have previously taken it all for granted, but now seemed to realise how it might look through the eyes of outsiders. Paradoxically, perhaps, our presence compelled the Belgian authorities to make the seemingly familiar strange – to explain what hitherto had been apparently quite self-evident.

And it is that “stranger’s eye” that is brought to bear by the international review team on Belgium, as a whole and in relation to its maze of constituent parts: communities, regions, provinces, the federal government and the municipalities. The international review took place as Belgium “celebrated” well over a year without a federal government<sup>1</sup> while sustaining itself economically, politically, culturally and socially in difficult times. There is a stoicism, as well as humour, in the land of Magritte, as Pascale Delwit, professor of political science at the Free University of Brussels noted as a tentative coalition government was eventually formed:

Belgium is the capital of surrealism, and this long political crisis was typically surrealist, accompanied by a kind of general calm among citizens. When there was a hung parliament in 2010 in the UK, after six days people were saying “What’s

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1. A government was finally formed – after 535 days – at the end of November 2011.



happening?” Here it lasted more than 530 days, with no mass movement in the streets, a calm pragmatic population that accepted the surrealist elements.

It is not our business to engage with the politics of Belgium, but we would wish to note a number of things that do bear on the idea and practice of youth policy. First, across the borders and boundaries that separate Belgium in many different ways, a discernible and laudable commitment to young people – in employment, health, education and leisure – shines through. The opportunity structures for most young people in Belgium would almost certainly be the envy of many young people elsewhere. Second, even without a government, Belgium discharged its presidency of the European Union (shortly before the review, in the second half of 2010) with a sequence of outstanding events committed to young people: on youth work, children’s rights, youth employment and youth mobility. For these events, it included not just the 27 members of the European Union (EU) but also additional member states from the Council of Europe. Few outsiders would have guessed at the persisting, possibly even strengthening, divisions within Belgium itself. And this is the third point: Belgium lies at the heart of Europe, and Brussels is the headquarters of the EU. No one who knows anything about Belgium can escape the paradox that the unifying and integrating aspirations of Europe, through the EU, take place within a country that is itself “split” in a variety of ways. However controversial, it may take a “stranger’s eye” to highlight some of the inconsistencies, and perhaps inequalities, for young people that arise from living in one part of Belgium rather than another. That is a legitimate concern of an international review of national youth policy. We have always asked host countries to forgive our mistakes but to consider the issues that we raise. Here, perhaps, we should ask Belgium to temporarily fold up some of its traditional and established political umbrellas in order to view various professional and practical issues for young people through our lens, even if, for political necessity if not professional rationality, those umbrellas have then to be extended once again.

### Three different approaches to youth policy

In a somewhat narrow conceptualisation of “youth policy”, there are three distinct approaches in Belgium, developed under the auspices of the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities. So, as strangers, we repeatedly wondered if there is any sense in which young people, or indeed any people, have an identity of “being Belgian”:

More than ever, Belgium has become a place where people from the four corners of the world, with the most diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, meet ... [but] Few people in our country are really confronted with diversity. We are living parallel lives (Meys and Loopmans, no date).

These words, in some senses, capture the Belgian reality and the Belgian paradox, though they are of course not unique to Belgium and might indeed be applied equally to many other countries in Europe. As noted above, lying at the heart of Europe and centred by the European capital of Brussels, Belgium



clearly does attract a diversity of peoples and promotes – in a very particular sense – diversity through complex political and administrative arrangements that respect the language and culture of its constituent “communities” yet also cement a range of divisions:

The national culture of Belgium is a synthesis ... where one finds the genius of two races – the Romance and the Germanic – mingled, yet modified by the imprint of the distinctively Belgian. It is in that very receptivity – the fact that it has absorbed and unified the best elements of Latin and Teutonic civilization – that the originality of the Belgian national culture resides.

These distinctive marks of national culture, denoting the unity of a people, and serving, both in the Middle Ages and today, to distinguish the Belgian nation from the other nations of Europe, may be described as a common desire for independence and freedom, a jealous regard for those popular rights which serve as a guaranty of the continuance of independence and freedom, and a deeply religious spirit (Van der Essen 1916, p. 4).

Sometimes it is useful to step away from the specific context under discussion and to illustrate a point by reference to other circumstances. In his majestic book *Being Danish* (Jenkins 2011), the sociologist and anthropologist Richard Jenkins discusses the paradoxes of identity. Had he been writing about Belgium, he would have had to take on and consider a more formalised, as well as less formal, range of identities: being Belgian, being Flemish or Walloon, being from Brussels or German-speaking Belgium, being Moroccan, being from Ghent or Liège or Sankt Vith, being something else. As Jenkins notes in the context of Denmark, where the focal geographical and cultural point of his study was Skive in Jutland, there are many levels of “Danish” identity. The same goes for Belgium.

If you are a young person in contemporary Belgium, some levels of identity are, inevitably, going to be more important than others. What will certainly be significant, whether or not you know it, will be the fact that you are subject to policy attention and service delivery on matters that concern and affect you, from a complex range of sources and levels – European, Federal, Regional, Community and elsewhere. As an individual young person, you probably accept what you have, positively or grudgingly, and are largely unaware that young Belgians elsewhere in Belgium may have rather different “offers” directed towards them. But we, as an international team of outsiders looking in, are interested in both the existing offers available to young people and whether or not young people throughout Belgium have the same, or equivalent, access to support and opportunity. It does not take long to discover that structures, frameworks and institutional relationships are indeed complex but despite (and certainly not because of) the complexity, they usually appear to work. At least that is the repeated internal assertion – youth policy, in its different forms across the communities, is considered to be sensible, rational and unproblematic. Nevertheless, it is the role of an international review to raise questions, plant thoughts, and advance issues where it considers that youth policy is perhaps



not as robust and equitable as proclaimed – between and within different administrative contexts and political arrangements. During the international review, it became apparent that a great deal of policy, for young people and beyond, is currently subject to reflection, revision and reform. We hope that our observations, where relevant, contribute to those debates.

The final point here is about the international review process itself. Most of the international team arrive “cold”, relatively or completely unfamiliar with the country concerned. Some will have done a bit of homework on the Internet and perhaps through other media, and usually, though this was not the case for Belgium, they will have had the opportunity to read an internally produced National Report (instead Belgium provided a mountain of alternative paperwork throughout the review process). Members of international reviews cannot help but become permanently attached to countries under review, and that commitment and attachment, coupled with the review activities themselves, produces an impressive body of knowledge in a surprisingly short time. Subsequently, there can be disputes, even “battles”, between the freshly informed review team and those from the host country who defend themselves from attack on the grounds that the international review team does not really understand. Clearly, matters of factual error should be (and are) corrected as part of the process, but perceptions and perspectives do require debate, even if criticisms are ultimately abandoned, ignored or sidelined. The important point on which to conclude is that international reviews are never intended to undermine domestic youth policy in the country concerned. Both those inside the country and those in the international team share a common agenda and joint commitment. So while there is a moment in the process where they may have to agree to disagree, when it comes to presenting conclusions to an international audience, the position is one of joint endeavour. The late Peter Lauritzen, who co-ordinated the reviews in the early 2000s, described the relationship succinctly as one of “critical complicity”, the foundation of which lies in the mutual desire to improve the framework of opportunity and experience for young people both in the country hosting the review and in wider Europe.

## **The federal structure of Belgium**

“People who really understand the system are quite rare”, the international review team was told at an early point in its deliberations. Below we strive to penetrate the complexity of the constitutional structure of Belgium and cautiously attempt to provide a “simple” picture that may assist the outsider in making some sense of what everyone agrees is a complex system. Nonetheless, as another respondent observed, “It may be a complex system but it is still functioning” – even without a government! Indeed, it does work, according to the recent Better Life Index from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), on which Belgium performs exceptionally well (see box):



Belgium performs very well in many measures of well-being, as shown by the fact that it ranks among the top ten countries in several topics in the Better Life Index.

Money, while it cannot buy happiness, is an important means to achieving higher living standards. In Belgium, the average household earned 26 008 USD in 2008, more than the OECD average.

In terms of employment, nearly 62% of people aged 15 to 64 in Belgium have a paid job. People in Belgium work 1 550 hours a year, one of the lowest rates of the OECD. 63% of mothers are employed after their children begin school, suggesting that women are able to successfully balance family and career.

Having a good education is an important requisite to finding a job. In Belgium, 70% of adults aged 25 to 64 have earned the equivalent of a high-school diploma, around the OECD average. Belgium is a top-performing country in terms of the quality of its educational system. The average student scored 506 out of 600 in reading ability according to the latest PISA student-assessment programme, higher than the OECD average.

In terms of health, life expectancy at birth in Belgium is 79.8 years, half a year above the OECD average. The level of atmospheric PM10 – tiny air pollutant particles small enough to enter and cause damage to the lungs – is 21 micrograms per cubic meter, and is close to levels found in most OECD countries.

Concerning the public sphere, there is a strong sense of community and high levels of civic participation in Belgium. 93% of people believe that they know someone they could rely on in a time of need, just above the OECD average of 91%. Voter turnout, a measure of public trust in government and of citizens' participation in the political process, was 91% during recent elections; this figure is one of the highest in the OECD. In regards to crime, 7% of people reported falling victim to assault over the previous 12 months.

When asked, 76% of people in Belgium said they were satisfied with their life, much higher than the OECD average of 59%.

Nonetheless, there are still many complexities in Belgium that need to be unravelled and understood. Given the potential for multiple identities within Belgium, and the recurrent messages of division and separation around language, administrative “communities”, regions and, inevitably, politics, the international team – aware of recent well-publicised issues concerning Flemish separatism and student protests around political inertia – raised the matter of Belgian identity and citizenship. The response received was instructive:

Regarding citizenship, there were the protests largely orchestrated by young people, where the message was that they wanted to live in this country and felt that politicians were putting too many barriers between the communities. Political figures are being taken to task by young people. Young people have a stronger European awareness than older generations: they are travelling across borders much more easily than



before. The structures of Belgium can seem a bit feudal to them. Admittedly this is a particular category of young people: students from universities, not the vocational schools, or immigrant youth. So it may be just one particular perspective. We don't actually have an overview of what all kinds of young people in Belgium are thinking.

We had a far from consistent message on this front. Indeed, there were often countervailing views about the extent to which young Belgians were “travelling across borders”, particularly inside the country. But the observations above do point to the importance of not homogenising young people, a growing proportion of whom, coming as they do from immigrant backgrounds, may not have a natural affiliation to either of the two dominant language communities in the French Community and Flanders. As – if that is the case – they disperse from their current concentration in Brussels, existing separations may become more diluted, rather as has happened – albeit for rather different historical reasons – in the context of New Zealand, where the traditional tensions between Maori and Pakeha<sup>2</sup> are of little interest to immigrants from Greece, Vietnam or Indonesia.

It is clearly not the role of the international review team to comment evaluatively on the political, administrative and constitutional arrangements of Belgium, and we tread carefully in describing them below, except insofar as they enhance or limit the social conditions of young people's lives. Those conditions do vary across Belgium, according to the different priorities and policies established by the various levels of decision-making authority that prevail.

There have been various “rounds” of reform of the state of Belgium, a country that has a long history of foreign occupation and which is often described as forming the boundary, or the bridge, between northern and southern Europe, most sharply epitomised by a Dutch and French dichotomy. Indeed, differences in language, political orientation, civic arrangements and religion converge geographically on Belgium, a situation paradoxically compounded by the contemporary designation of Brussels (*de jure* just the city of Brussels municipality but *de facto* the Brussels Region) as not only the capital of the federal state of Belgium (and, indeed, the capital of Flanders and of the French Community) but also the centre of what is currently a European Union of 27 countries.

Belgium is a federal state composed of three Communities, three Regions and four language areas. Clearly defined competences are distributed among the three levels of governance, though the picture is rendered both more simple and more complex by some adaptations to this general rule. For example, since the geographical boundaries for the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region are co-terminus, responsibilities have been combined and unified. By contrast, there are specific French language “facilities” within the nine municipalities of

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2. These relate to the wording of the Treaty of Waitangi, 1840, which ceded Maori land to the United Kingdom – the Maori thought they were ceding “governance”; the English translation proclaimed the securing of “sovereignty”! This has been a bone of contention ever since.



the German-speaking Community and related language facilities for a number of specified municipalities adjacent to the boundaries between Flanders and the Walloon Region (Wallonia, or Wallonie). There are two French-speaking municipalities adjacent to the boundaries of the German-speaking Community which have German-language facilities, and between the French and German-speaking Communities of Wallonia. Figure 1 depicts the federal structure of Belgium.

**Figure 1: Federal structure of Belgium**



The Flemish Community (lighter), comprising five provinces and 308 municipalities with some six million inhabitants, lies to the north of the country. The French Community (darker, with five provinces, 262 municipalities and a population of around 3.5 million) lies to the south and the German-speaking Community (some 74 000 people living in nine municipalities) to the east. The Brussels Region (in the centre, a Dutch/French bilingual area comprising just over one million people, is positioned geographically within Flanders, surrounded by the Flemish Brabant province. It comprises 19 municipalities and is not a province. Alongside Wallonia (made up of the French and German-speaking Communities) and Flanders (co-terminus with the Flemish Community), it is one of the three Regions of Belgium. Within the Brussels Region, both the French and Flemish Communities have their own “intermediary” institutions for administrative purposes. These sit below the Community level but above the municipal institutions. We were told that Brussels has four administrations: French and Flemish, French only and Flemish only: there is the Brussels-Capital Region, with its parliament and government responsible for matters of regional competence, and then there are the three Community institutions, the French Community Commission (CocoF), the Flemish Community Commission (VGC), and the Common Community Commission (Cocom).

One respondent, when discussing Brussels, did acknowledge:

It is really difficult ... the administrative structure in Brussels is really complicated, even for us! And at the moment it could actually be a bit easier because the Minister for Youth in the French Community is also a member of the government of the Brussels Region. But the issues are different between Wallonia and Brussels, especially because of the young population in Brussels [where between one third and two fifths are under the age of 30].



The federal state has powers over matters such as foreign affairs, finance, justice, defence and social security. It also has “residuary powers” over matters that may be new challenges for the country, such as migration, refugees and asylum seekers. Beyond these overarching internal and outward-facing responsibilities, policy is the responsibility of Regions and Communities, while some implementation is carried out at provincial and municipal levels.

One helpful way to think about the responsibilities and competences of the three Regions and three Communities (despite the fact that, in Flanders, these are merged) is as follows. The Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Regions have competences related to land: e.g. housing and the environment. The Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities have competences relating to persons: e.g. culture, education, the use of language, youth policy and protection, and some aspects of welfare and public health. In the Brussels Region, as a bilingual (Dutch- and French-speaking) area, both the Flemish and French Communities make provision in these policy domains.

Neither Regions nor Communities are more important than the other. Legislative power, determined under the Belgian Constitution, is distributed across the different levels of competence. Although there are some exceptions, both specific “youth policy” and wider policies that relate to young people are largely the responsibility of the three Communities. It is therefore here that we will start, with some detailed analysis of the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities in turn, accommodating where necessary or relevant comparative commentary and reference to the Brussels Region (which has its own distinctive complexities, but within which both the French and Flemish Communities have specific competences, significantly in the youth field).

Readers may note some differences in style, structure and approach in these three substantive chapters. This is, in part, because they were drafted by different people, but it is also because youth policy derives, as anywhere else, from distinctive ideological, political, philosophical and cultural traditions, especially, as one colleague put it rather bluntly but illustratively, the contrast between Anglo-Nordic pragmatism and French/Latin abstraction! This is a point from which – especially in the context of Belgium – there is absolutely no escape. However, the focus and content of the three substantive chapters also differs on account of the questions to which each Community wanted the international review team to pay particular attention. The custom of the international review process is to seek three particular policy priorities, but in the context of the French Community only one was chosen – albeit an overarching scrutiny of the youth policy sector and its future, as embodied within the Youth Plan. The questions proposed by the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community were more detailed and related to more specific topics, contexts and levels of youth policy. This was a third, important, reason for the different approaches and reasoning advanced by the rapporteurs in their distinctive contributions.

Finally, it is important to register what the international review team did not manage to do, see or hear. In just two visits, especially on account of the

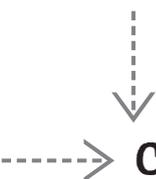


particularly complex policy structure of Belgium, it is clearly quite impossible to cover the whole field of youth policy with its diverse levels, competences and practices. In the very early planning for the review, various models for approaching it were discussed. These included quite separate reviews of the three Communities and a larger number of visits. For various reasons, other options were rejected as either inconsistent with the principles of country reviews or as impracticable given their financial and human resource implications. In the end, the international review team committed itself to a comprehensive agenda of visits and discussions with engaged authorities and practitioners (as well as with a few young people). Nevertheless, inevitably, there were gaps in these endeavours. Structurally, there was relatively little contact with the provinces and (with some exceptions) with municipalities. Substantively, the international review team sometimes gained the impression that group matters related to immigration and ethnic diversity were easily overlooked or considered too delicate to be discussed. There were other sub-groups with possible distinctive problems and challenges that seemed to be unobserved and almost “passed over” in the youth field; gender issues are one example. Certainly, no comprehensive information was provided on these matters. Other arguably important youth policy issues that were marginally presented to the international team included health; housing; substance misuse; sport, arts and media-related issues (including social media); and sustainable development and environment. It needs to be said, of course, that any broadening of the basis of inquiry, within the parameters available, inevitably reduces the depth to which such inquiry can go. Early international reviews of national youth policy by the Council of Europe did seek to traverse an ever-expanding menu of issues; more recent reviews have agreed on a focus with the host authorities which necessarily left some issues by the wayside.

One particular area of omission struck us as especially important to mention. No comprehensive information was provided on the issues related to youth cultural engagement outside recognised youth organisations and young people’s own spaces and activities. This was particularly true in the context of the French Community. However, the French Community has a strong tradition of connecting youth and cultural policy approaches and domains, which provides an excellent platform for conceptual and political innovations in terms of youth engagement. The French Community could, indeed, be in the forefront in the European debate when it comes to the quest to rethink the conception of (and philosophies behind) youth cultural participation.

With these necessary caveats and explanations, the international review team hopes that its observations will offer a platform for a productive debate around the paths required to further develop constructive and opportunity-focused youth policy throughout Belgium.





## Chapter 2 – Youth policy in the Flemish Community

Flanders spreads across 13 522 km<sup>2</sup> in the north of Belgium, and comprises 41.5% of its territory. Its five provinces Antwerpen, Limburg, Oost-Vlaanderen, Vlaams-Brabant and West-Vlaanderen are divided into 308 municipalities. Over six million inhabitants live in Flanders, about 58% of the total Belgian population. Of those who live in Flanders, 6% do not possess Belgian nationality. The Flemish capital Brussels is also the capital of Belgium. Antwerp, with more than 480 000 citizens, is the largest city in Flanders, followed by Ghent, Bruges and Leuven. The official language is Dutch.

The Flemish Community defines youth as the age group up to 30 years old, although different definitions are used in specific contexts. There are approximately 2.1 million young people in Flanders, representing 34% of the Flemish population in Belgium.

Unlike the French Community and the Walloon Region (which are separate administrative levels), the Flemish Region was officially merged with the Flemish Community in 1980, with one parliament and government, exercising both Regional and Community competences. Hence, in the Dutch-language area a single institutional body of parliament and government is wholly empowered except for federal and specific municipal matters. The Flemish Community exercises its powers over the territory of Flanders and in the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region (usually shortened to the Brussels Region).

The Flemish Parliament has 124 members from nine different parties and represents the highest legislative body responsible for passing acts of parliament. Since 2009, a coalition of three parties (Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams, Socialistische Partij – Anders and Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie) under the Minister-President Kris Peeters governs the Flemish Community. The Flemish Government consists of 13 ministries covering 13 policy areas, though it has only nine ministers at present. One of these policy areas is culture, youth, sport and media, the ministry for which is in charge of youth policy in the Flemish Community. The current Minister for Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities

and Brussels<sup>3</sup> is also in charge, from the Flemish Community side, for the co-ordination of policy towards the Brussels Region.

Each policy area is supported by a civil service department and autonomous agencies. The departments offer support and advice to the ministries on policy making, while the agencies provide services to citizens, companies and organisations, implementing policy. The Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults is directly responsible for developing and implementing youth policy. The Agency consists of a Division for Youth and a Division for Adult Education and Local Cultural Policy. Other important areas of youth policy, such as education, health and employment fall within the competences of other ministries: the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family, and the Ministry of Work and Social Economy.

When it comes to bilingual Brussels, the Flemish side is governed by the Flemish Community Commission, which consists of a legislative body, the Assembly, and an executive body, the Board. The Assembly consists of 17 Dutch-speaking members of the Brussels Region, while the Board consists of Dutch-speaking ministers and secretariats of state for the Brussels Region. The body responsible for youth is the Directorate General of Culture, Youth and Sports. Almost all the municipalities of Brussels have a youth alderman.

## Youth policy and legislation

The Flemish Government carries out several important tasks regarding youth work and youth policy, amongst which the most important are preparation, execution and evaluation of policy, and following legislation, the regulation and financing of youth work.

The government develops youth policy documents which present the overall vision for youth and children’s rights policy. An essential characteristic of Flemish youth policy is implementation through explicit measures such as acts or decrees. The government tends to regulate every specific field of youth policy, as defined by its Youth Policy Plan, with decrees, which creates a complex and closed structure of regulations, leaving unrecognised forms of youth work without support. Decrees define the instruments of youth and children’s rights policy and the funding of local and provincial authorities and youth organisations.

The Act on Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy defines instances of youth work and recognises institutions and organisations involved with young people and also children’s rights policy, defining at the same time the allocation of finances within the system. This decree, adopted in 2008, perceives the policy for youth and children’s rights as:

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3. The overlapping responsibilities sometimes vested in a single minister can assist “permeability” among the competences attached to different levels and locations of governance, and between Communities and Regions; the French Community Minister responsible for youth is also responsible, from the French-speaking side, for Brussels.



the integral and integrated vision of children and young people and the systematic planned measures of a government based thereon, aiming to produce an explicit effect on youth, with special attention to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The act also specifies instruments for the implementation of youth policy, wherein the Flemish Youth Policy Plan is the most important instrument.

The act defines the process of adopting the Flemish Youth Policy Plan, which operates on a four-year cycle. The Flemish Government has to present the plan to the Flemish Parliament no later than 18 months after the start of each term. The current Youth Policy Plan is valid for the period 2011-14 and includes 24 strategic goals and 76 operational goals with proposed accompanying actions. During its adoption, various stakeholders were consulted and involved, such as the Flemish Youth Council, experts on youth affairs, the associations mentioned in the act, as well as local and provincial authorities and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels. Eight working groups were formed to work on the different themes, steered by the planning team (with both governmental and non-governmental representatives) which was responsible for the quality of the plan.

The themes encompassed are:

- participation & information
- education (both formal, informal and non-formal)
- health & sport
- social inclusion
- employment
- creativity & entrepreneurship
- youth & the world
- volunteering.

The draft document was disseminated for public consultation, and to advisory councils, before its adoption. The EU Youth Strategy 2010-18<sup>4</sup> provided the framework and guided the specification of the strategic goals.

The post-consultation Youth Policy Plan represents a comprehensive document, encompassing a general vision on youth and children's rights, defined as follows:

The Flemish authorities start from the assumption that every child has talents and develops inclusive and holistic policies aimed at:

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4. The European Union Youth Strategy has eight “fields of action” within a strategic vision of promoting opportunity, access and solidarity with young people. It was approved through the European Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-2018).



- giving a voice to children and young people
- creating a physical, material, social and cultural context in which equal talents get equal opportunities
- sustainability and solidarity

The Youth Policy Plan also articulates four desired social effects and outcomes on children and young people within the policy period:

- all children and young people with the same talents get equal opportunities;
- opportunities for the development of children and young people increase;
- children and young people get (more) space to be non-adult;
- children and young people participate fully in society.

The document interprets youth policy as transversal policy<sup>5</sup> which includes not only the area of “culture, youth, sport and media” (where youth policy is included within the 13 policy areas of the Flemish Government), but also other policy areas such as social inclusion, employment, health and housing. It is envisaged that each ministry takes on its own responsibilities and defines tasks linked to the implementation of specific goals within the Youth Policy Plan, while the Minister for Youth is in charge of overseeing the process and reporting on the plan’s implementation to the government. Youth policy is based on the group policy approach, which permeates almost every other policy sector, focusing on youth as a specific group.

Besides the Flemish Youth Policy Plan, the Act on Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy envisages three more instruments of youth policy:

- impact study of new legislation on children and youth (JoKER): this specifies that any draft act affecting people under the age of 25 and submitted to the Flemish Parliament has to be accompanied by a report regarding its impact on children and youth;
- contact points for youth and children’s rights and a co-ordinating administration: all bodies of the Flemish Government have to appoint one staff member as a contact point for youth policy. These individuals should be involved in the monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Youth Policy Plan and are responsible for estimating the impact of the policy of their institution on young people;
- Youth Progress Report: a scientific report, to be produced every five years, describing the state of youth in the Flemish Community.

The Act on Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy also defines the conditions for the recognition and consequent subsidisation of youth organisations at

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5. Transversality is especially important for young people on the margins, who could benefit the most from such an approach. It was recognised at EU level in November 2007 as the desirable approach by the Council of Youth Ministers, who adopted conclusions on a transversal approach to youth policy, with a view to enabling young people to fulfil their potential and participate actively in society.



the Flemish Community level. Funding conditions at the local (municipal) and provincial level, as well as Brussels, are defined through the Act on Municipal, Inter-municipal and Provincial Youth and Youth Work Policy, adopted in 2003 and last revised in 2006. The main objective of the latter act is to stimulate local youth policy by prescribing the obligation of the local and provincial authorities to develop local/provincial youth policy plans. The act defines youth as those between 3 to 25 years old, unlike the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy. Local youth policy plans are developed for a period of three years (five for Brussels) and provincial plans for six years. During the youth policy plan definition process, local/provincial authorities are expected to include local youth work initiatives, youth policy experts, youth councils and children and young people.

The definition offered in the Act on Municipal, Inter-municipal and Provincial Youth and Youth Work Policy differentiates between "youth work policy", which is defined as the set of policy measures taken by local/provincial authorities with regard to local/inter-municipal/provincial youth work, and "youth policy", which is seen as the set of policy measures taken by local/provincial authorities with regard to all the living circumstances of children and young people. It is evident that youth work policy is perceived as a part of broader youth policy.

The Flemish Government sets the priorities of youth (work) policy for a certain period, usually two years. For the period 2008-10, the priority was "youth work infrastructure and youth information", while for 2011-13 it is "security youth work infrastructure and youth culture". Those priorities are to be taken into account by the local/provincial authorities when developing their youth policy plans. Local and provincial authorities receive funding based on the number of children and young people living in their areas. The government also allocates additional resources for the implementation of actions responding to priorities and for municipalities scoring high on specific socio-geographic indicators.

The Act on Youth Accommodation Centres is the second decree in the scope of Flemish youth policy which defines subsidy conditions for the so-called supporting structures of youth work, such as hostels and youth accommodation centres. Also, there is an Act on the Camping Equipment Lending Service which regulates lending of equipment to youth organisations. Finally, the Act on Participation is a cross-sectoral decree focusing on participation in culture, sport and youth activities by specific target groups. Initiatives related to the youth policy are youth laboratories, the goal of which is to stimulate and guide disadvantaged groups (mostly immigrants) towards inclusion in youth organisations.

These five acts, including the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy, represent the basis for the distribution of the youth budget, which amounted to €61.5 million in 2011. The major proportion of the funds (63%) was distributed in accordance with the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy, while 35% was intended for the implementation of the Act on Municipal, Inter-municipal and Provincial Youth and Youth Work Policy.



## Youth work in Flanders – development

Participation in youth work is more than simply taking part or having a say. Engagement in any form of youth work involves a process of conscious, critical self-reflection that can only be voluntary. Also, youth work engages with young people as they begin to explore boundaries and examine their self-perceptions and the perceptions of others. Youth work is a specific activity that focuses on young people because they are in the process of creating themselves and developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for lifelong reflection, learning and growth. This is especially the case in Flanders where traditional youth work, meant primarily as youth movement activities,<sup>6</sup> represents a “third pillar of socialisation”.

Flanders possesses a strong history and culture of youth work and youth movements. Youth movements were even declared as the most perfect form of youth organisation by the National Youth Council, the body established in the mid-1950s, which involved experts on youth and representatives of major youth organisations. From its inception, Flemish youth policy was built on the concept of youth organisations as the pillars of youth work. As Van Gaens (2010) reported to the workshop on the history of youth work in Europe, participation policies went only as far as “participation to the activities of youth organisations”, but not of the young people themselves in the Flemish Community.

However, with an increased rate of immigration, Flanders became home to a large number of young people from different backgrounds, and with different values and habits. This situation, together with an increase in grassroots youth groups and new social movements, demanded new forms of youth work and youth organisation, apart from traditional youth movements. Youth clubs and houses were formed during the 1950s, while in the 1970s a new category of youth work (i.e. advisory, information, training centres) materialised and received support from the government, often targeting particular groups perceived as deprived. These changes have slowly led to the professionalisation of youth work, which is presently perceived as another important characteristic of Flemish youth work.

However, youth work was not defined before the 1990s; it was little more than a collective name for different ways of working with young people and youth activity, concerning primarily member organisations (e.g. youth movements, youth branches of adult organisations and students or special youth movements which brought young people together for specific purposes such as music or the arts), youth services and umbrella youth organisations.

The 1990s saw the emergence of a focus on youth work by the local authorities, which received much more responsibility for subsidising local youth

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6. For example, the Scouts and the Chirojeugd Vlaanderen, or Chiro.



organisations, transferred from the Flemish Community. For the first time, in 1993, according to Van Gaens (2010), a definition of youth work was included in Flemish legislation, depicting youth work as:

Group oriented socio-cultural initiatives based on non-commercial objectives for or by young people, who participate voluntarily in this initiative, in their leisure time and under educational supervision; this work is being set up by private youth associations or by municipal public authorities.

Youth policy in this decade favoured group-oriented youth work and gave new momentum to traditional forms of youth organisation, after it had experienced a decline during the 1980s. However, youth work organisations had to split up their non-youth work activities (around education, welfare, and health) in order to get funding, which created great dissatisfaction among youth workers.

In spite of efforts to shift the scope and focus of youth (work) policy from youth organisations to broader youth activities, the international review team could clearly perceive a firm understanding of youth work as that comprised by traditional youth movements (such as the Scouts and the Chirojeugd Vlaanderen, or Chiro). Coussée (no date) also points this out when he speaks about media coverage of youth work, noting that “it is striking how these messages again and again establish the image that “youth work” is synonymous to “youth movement” (especially in Flanders) or structured leisure programmes”. He distinguishes so-called “general youth work” encompassing more traditional forms and “specific youth work”, which is more social work targeting young people. The general intention behind this distinction is to use specific youth work as the channel towards traditional youth work, meaning “real youth work”. Some of these distinctions are listed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Characteristics of general and specific youth work**

	<b>General</b>	<b>Specific</b>
Participants	Middle class	Vulnerable groups
Youth worker	Young people, volunteer	Young adults, professional
Frequency	Once a week, weekend	Each day, not always weekend
Radius of action	Leisure time, recreation	Adjusting and compensating for deficient experiences in family or school
Activities	Structured programme	Unstructured, open
Educational philosophy	Holistic	Specific
Position in community	Splendid isolation	Uncomfortable inclusion

Source: Coussée (no date).



These distinctions also point to the division among young people between middle class youth (Flemish origin, white, Christian) and working class youth (lower class and predominantly migrant youth). According to a report,<sup>7</sup> the “hereditary” character of youth organisation membership is increasing, since 80% of youth leaders have at least one parent who was a member of a youth movement. These youth movements represent some kind of “third pillar of socialisation”, contributing to the education of young people in addition to family and school. This feature of the youth movements may be less evident than it was in the past, but it remains relatively unchanged in the Flemish Community, where young people tend to follow parental patterns in engaging with youth movements. It was also noted that youth movements do not join the youth organisation networks, except for their umbrella organisations, though they do engage with the youth councils, which are often seen by others in the field as youth movement councils.

Smaller organisations usually performing specific youth work are able to reach a more diverse public. This is especially the case with organisations working with disadvantaged youth. But at the same time, they are confronted with insecurity regarding staff/leaders and funds.

“Neighbourhood” is another important concept in the scope of youth work, as perceived by the international review team during its two visits. Neighbourhood refers to the closest surroundings of young people and it is recognised as the key field for their inclusion in Flemish society. Practice shows that this kind of approach has its advantages, linked to the familiarity of youth workers with particular surroundings and their easier access not only to young people but also to their families and friends. This approach enables youth workers to get closer to young people and secure their confidence, which is one of the crucial factors in working with them. On the other hand, the international review team felt there were certain weaknesses in the neighbourhood approach, referring particularly to the (en)closure of the neighbourhood. Youth work in the neighbourhood that is focused on engaging young people and building connections inside the neighbourhood does carry the risk of preventing young people from “going out”, arguably producing certain kinds of parallel communities within Flemish society. Sociologists have identified the potential value of social capital – the networks that can sustain people in an era of individualisation – but the concept has been developed to suggest that while some social capital can be “bridging” (enlarging connections and broadening prospects and possibilities), other social capital can be “bonding”, almost trapping people within the comfort zones of the familiar and thereby limiting aspirations and potential opening up to new horizons. Youth work in certain contexts can almost collude with such entrapment within supportive but disadvantaged and enclosed neighbourhoods.

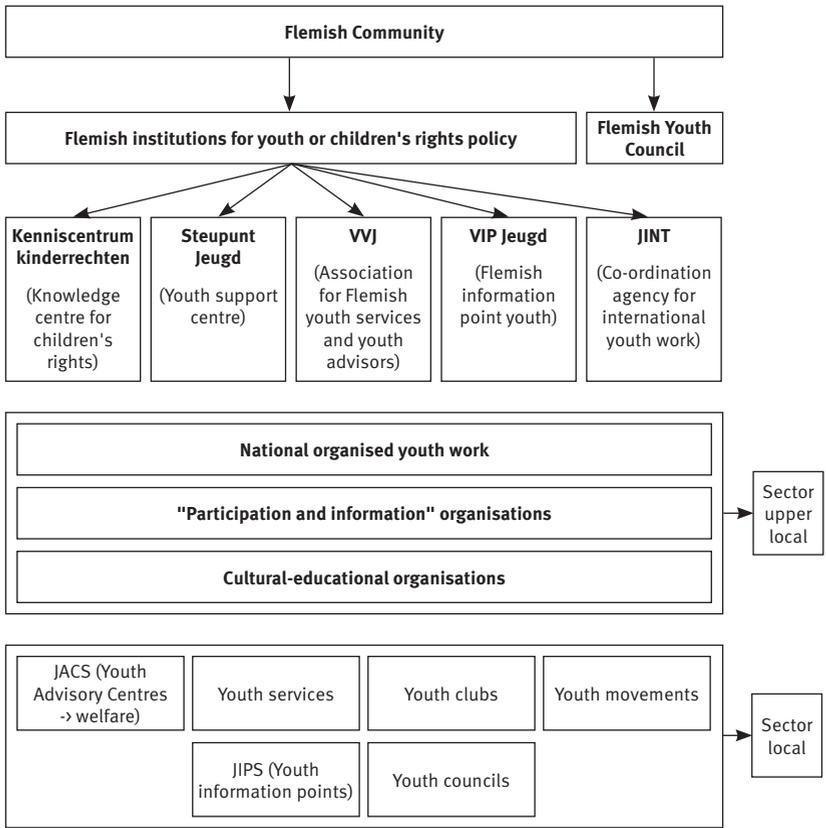
The structure of youth work in the Flemish Community today is illustrated in Figure 2.

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*7. Youth movements in Flanders: a survey of groups, leaders and members*, by the Flemish authorities. A synthesis of this report was provided to the international review team.



**Figure 2: Organisational structure of youth work/policy in the Flemish Community**



Source: Flemish Community authorities.<sup>8</sup>

The direct participation of young people in youth policy preparation and implementation is encouraged through the youth councils at Community, provincial and local level. The Flemish Youth Council represents young people and youth work at the level of the Flemish Community. Council members are elected every three years at a public congress, after a public call for applications. It has between 16 and 24 members, and at least one third has to be under 25 years of age. Members come from the youth organisations (50%) and young individuals who are interested in participating in the Youth Council’s work. The

8. In the response to the draft international report, the Flemish authorities noted that “a lot of other youth (work) varieties” were missing from this chart. The chart was, however, provided by the Flemish Community. The international review team has no other sources, since it only visited clubs at the local level.



Youth Council's task is to give policy advice on matters related to youth, on its own initiative or on request from the Flemish Government or Parliament.

The Flemish Youth Council has provided over 50% of its advice on its own initiative thus far, but does not follow up on its impact since it does not possess evidence on how much of its advice has been accepted. This perception raised some debate at the national hearing, and the point was clarified in a subsequent written note, stating that "the impact of the advices is monitored in a yearly report. In general, there is a proper impact on the policy of the minister of youth. On the broader fields of Youth Policy (50% of the advices), the impact is not always satisfactory". However, the international review team was not given any such information during either of its visits.

The funding of the Youth Council is defined through the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy, which prescribes that between 1% and 2.5% of the distributed youth work budget should be allocated to the Flemish Youth Council (this amounted to €632 000 in 2011, or 2.22% of the youth work budget).

Municipal youth councils are defined through the Act on Municipal, Inter-municipal and Provincial Youth and Youth Work Policy. Local authorities and provinces must have a youth council if they want their youth policy to be funded by the Flemish Government. In practice, however, the international review team did not manage to evaluate the role of the local youth councils or their impact, which seems to fall very much below these expectations. The team noted that there are no communication channels (at least not direct or formal) between the Flemish Youth Council and local/provincial councils, and it did not learn about any kind of initiative to empower these bodies from the Flemish Youth Council. After the national hearing, we received information that:

these tasks are left to a particular organisation "Karuur". This organisation is subsidised by the Flemish Government to support the local youth councils. Karuur takes part in the General Assembly of the Flemish Youth Council and has a close communication with the Flemish Youth Council.

When the issue of the rather "patchy" representation of young people at municipal level was raised by the international review team with the Flemish Youth Council, the response was brusque: "There is an official youth council in every municipality in Flanders", though it was then conceded that possibly "some are not very active"!

Flemish institutions involved with youth and children's rights policy represent a specific form of youth work. They cannot be classified as youth organisations in the traditional meaning of voluntary-based organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), since their boards sometimes include governmental representatives among others, even if only as observers (exceptions are VVJ and KeKi, described below). The question of the independence of their work was one of the main issues during the first visit of the international team to Flanders, when the international team had an opportunity to meet representatives of all these organisations. They, through their practice, represent services of the



government directed to youth workers and youth organisations, and they are recognised as such in the Act on Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy.

The Flemish Youth Support Centre (Steunpunt Jeugd – SPJ) is the knowledge and expertise centre for youth, youth work and youth policy in Flanders, working to contribute to the performance of youth work at all levels through the development of methodologies, training, research and support services for its members. The general assembly consists of 50 members, drawn from “national organised youth work” comprising 120 youth organisations. The Board of Administration comprises elected members from the general assembly, youth policy experts and observing members from the public administration. SPJ received €993 000 from the youth budget in 2011 to support its activities, as defined in the tri-annual policy note approved by the Minister of Youth.

The Association for Flemish Youth Services and youth advisers (Vereniging Vlaamse Jeugddiensten – VVJ) is the organisation that draws together Flemish municipal administrations as members through their youth service or youth officials. VVJ supports the preparation and execution of local youth policy, striving for more, better and broader local youth policy in Flanders. VVJ is financed by the cities, municipalities and provinces that pay an annual membership fee, and by the Flemish Government, which provided it with €352 000 in 2011.

The Flemish Youth Information Point (Vlaams Informatiepunt Jeugd – VIP Jeugd) was set up by the Flemish Government in 2006 as a network of youth information points aiming to offer complete and coherent information to young people on any possible issue as well as to improve the competences of youth information workers. The network includes 60 points, which are often embedded in the local youth service or advisory centre. The target group is young people between 12 and 25, divided into three age groups (children 8-11, teenagers 12-15 and young adults over 15). VIP Jeugd received €598 000 from the Flemish Government in 2011.

Finally, there is JINT (the Coordination Agency for International Youth Work). JINT is focused on international co-operation and supporting the international mobility of young people, as the knowledge and expertise centre for international mobility of young people and international youth policy. JINT is also the national agency for the Flemish Government for the EU Youth in Action programme and the Eurodesk national partner. JINT develops a policy plan every three years, which is the basis for the agreement with the government and ensuing subsidies (€872 000 in 2011).

Besides these organisations, there are two platforms formed by the government with the goal of providing evidence for policy and co-ordinating efforts in youth research in Flanders as support to youth policy. These are the Kenniscentrum Kinderrechten and Jeugdonderzoeksplatform.

The Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (Kenniscentrum Kinderrechten – KeKi) is an interdisciplinary centre, supported by an inter-university platform of researchers affiliated with five research institutions from Flanders. KeKi aims to



collect and disseminate knowledge on children’s rights, generated by national and international scientific research. It was established by the Act on Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy, operating from 2010.

The Youth Research Platform (Jeugdonderzoekplatform – JOP) is an interdisciplinary co-operation between three research groups, initiated by the Flemish Government in 2003, to stimulate systematic and interdisciplinary attention for youth research. JOP tends to systematise and analyse existing Flemish research on youth as well as conduct new research, creating a platform with information on children and young people that is accessible to all relevant and interested parties (JOP was not part of the youth work structure presented in the visual scheme of Figure 2).

The Act on Flemish Youth and Children’s Rights Policy provides criteria for the operation of and project subsidies for “nationally” organised youth associations, defined as:

a non-profit-making association which, according to its objectives – as formulated in its articles of association – and its activities, is active in youth work with participants from at least four provinces in the Dutch language area or at least three provinces in the Dutch language area and in the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region.

There were 66 “national” youth associations subsidised in 2011 through this act. These organisations receive basic structural grants (€55 000 per year) which take the form of an administrative grant. Additionally, and based on a predefined programme, organisations can also receive variable grants for particular activities.

Besides “national” associations, the act recognises 11 associations for cultural education whose field of work is the enhancement of cultural competences and stimulation of creativity. These organisations receive only variable grants, the same as 25 associations for participation and information, whose aim is the enhancement of youth participation and catering to informational needs. In order to qualify for the subsidies, organisations have to develop policy memoranda, which define their activities for a three-year period, and sign agreements with the Flemish Government on their implementation.

The act also defines project grants up to €50 000 per year for organisations which do not fall within the three previous categories subsidised through the act, aimed at supporting artistic projects, experimental youth work initiatives, projects stimulating youth participation and information and international initiatives.

At the local level, there are over 5 000 youth organisations and other youth initiatives. These are financed primarily by local or provincial authorities. The most numerous are, expectedly, youth movements, which make up almost 40% of all youth organisations. Political youth organisations, young people’s movements and youth houses/clubs each comprise slightly less than 10% of all organisations.



Evidently, the youth work system has been fully developed. The government tends to define and include various forms of youth work in the decrees that are outlined above. The international review team encountered a highly structured system in which every unit has predefined tasks and responsibilities. This situation led to an impression that grassroots movements and bottom-up initiatives are rare and hard to reach, despite attempts to do so. In such a predefined structured system, it was hard to perceive the individual young persons with their desires and expectations. Young people almost get lost in the articulation of regulation and structures, though these clearly have youth, and youth work provision at their heart. Nevertheless, the paths for those young people who want to become involved and active are provided and prescribed by the system itself, which makes it difficult to contemplate the place and position of a youth initiative that is not recognised within the specification of the decrees and the boundaries of the structures. However, the international team has noticed differences in approach among local communities. In Antwerp for example (also the European Youth Capital for 2011) the municipality played a role in organising and financing youth work, recognising the need for smaller groups. But there is a downside, or at least a point of concern, regarding the development of quality youth (work) provision so tightly bounded by formal regulation.

## **Other policy fields affecting young people**

### **Youth education**

Education serves as a means to gain knowledge and acquire technical competence, developing at the same time one's personality. Education should help youth develop values, decide what they want from their lives and careers, and achieve success in their fields of interest. It also plays a crucial role in socialising youth into mature individuals who are responsible citizens of society.

As Coussée et al. (2010) states, "youth work, being such a social practice, facilitates the negotiation between individual aspirations and societal expectations". This means that young people's leisure time can be used to give them the opportunity to develop creativity and exercise new responsibilities. During the international review visit, we often heard that youth work activities should complement formal education and serve as method of non-formal education or learning.

Education in Belgium is compulsory up to the age of 18 years, and it is free of charge. The act on Equal Opportunities in Education, adopted in 2002, defines the right to enrolment, whereby each pupil has the freedom to choose a school. It also envisages the establishment of local consultation platforms involving education stakeholders in order to ensure the right of enrolment and to co-operate in implementing a local policy on equal opportunities in education.



The act stipulates extra support for additional needs provision in schools with additional teaching periods or additional teaching hours per teacher.

Education plays an extremely important role in the Flemish Community; it is allocated 40% of the total budget. The financing system of the recognised schools is based on the social profile of the enrolled pupils. Schools get more funds if they have more pupils meeting one or more of four defined indicators predicting their performance. These indicators include the level of education of the parents, the home language, family income and the neighbourhood setting.

There are three educational networks in the Flemish Community:

- GO! education is publicly run neutral education organised by the public body called “het GO! Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap”, which is under the governance of the Flemish Community.
- Publicly funded and run education (OGO) includes municipal education organised by local/provincial authorities. This network is led by two umbrella organisations: the Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (OVSG) and the Flemish Provincial Education (POV).
- VGO schools are publicly funded, but privately run through individuals or private organisations. They are mainly Catholic schools. The Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education is the umbrella organisation for these schools. There are also Protestant, Jewish, Orthodox, and Islamic schools, as well as schools which adopt particular educational methods known as “method schools”.

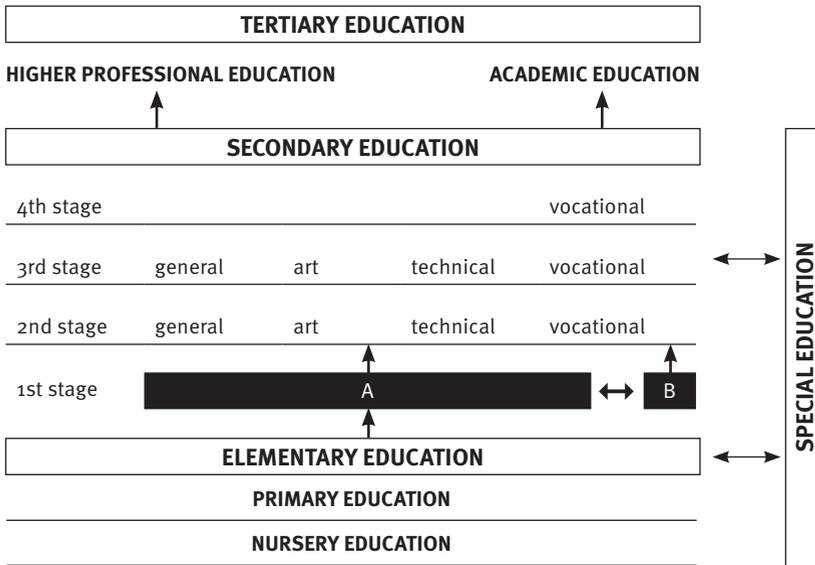
Dutch is the official language of education in Flemish Community. However, additional resources are allocated to the teaching of migrants who do not speak Dutch as a mother tongue, as part of the equal opportunities policy of the Ministry of Education and Training (Eurybase 2009/10). Officially however, there are no legally recognised minority languages in Flanders. As of 2004, the teaching of French as a second language has become compulsory from the fifth year of primary education in Flanders.

The international team had an opportunity to meet representatives of the educational system in Antwerp. During this meeting, experiences about migrants’ inclusion into the schooling system were discussed. In spite of the personal commitment of responsible persons, the team was left with the impression that the efforts in this area are limited to certain schools.

The educational system in Flanders is organised into several levels, as illustrated by Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Education system in the Flemish Community**



Source: [www.ond.vlaanderen.be/English](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/English)

The Flemish Government promotes participation in the field of education, which is operationalised through central participation structures involving relevant stakeholders (councils VLOR, VLIR, VLHORA, VOC) and several forms of local participation structures. In the first three levels of education, school councils are obligatory. Their duties are linked to the general right to information and these school councils exercise an advisory and consultative role. Besides school councils, the Act on Participation defines educational councils, pupil councils, parent councils and parents’ associations as possible forms of participation in decision making on education. For higher education, there are student councils operating in each university or college. The Act also envisages negotiating committees, academic councils and works councils as forms of staff participation in the workplace.

The structure of nursery, primary and secondary education recognises the difference between mainstream education and education for pupils who need special help. However, in spite of compulsory schooling, drop-outs still occur. Flanders copes much better with the school drop-out issue, which amounted to 8.5% in 2008, compared to 19.9% in Brussels and 15.2% in Wallonia. Flanders has also defined a new legislative framework which guarantees that all pupils, compared to 76% so far, are active full-time in order to prevent and diminish early school leaving.



Additionally, there are programmes designed to bridge the gap between early school leaving and the labour market. Regular secondary education offers full-time and part-time programmes, while the Vocational Education and Training programme (VET) is designed to provide second-chance opportunities in centres for adult education, the training centres of the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency (Vlaamse Dienst voor Beroepsopleiding en Arbeidsbemiddeling – VDAB) and the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (Syntra Vlaanderen). The international review team met with the network of six organisations offering so-called “personal development pathways” in the Integration Centre Foyer, which is part of the network. This alternative learning system was established by a decree in 2008. The network’s organisations work primarily with adolescents who are socially vulnerable and not yet able to work in the market economy. The organisations are funded by the government, based on the number of hours a young person is engaged. Funding is limited at the level of Flanders and distributed among cities. However, it was not clear how the criteria for the allocation of resources are defined and how they can be changed. The review team had the impression that youth work is not recognised as a tool which can contribute greatly to the formal educational system. This raises the question of whether the value and visibility of non-formal and informal learning for young people is recognised. This should be enhanced by recognising the achievements of young people and those active in youth work and youth organisations.

### **Youth employment**

Youth employment is one of the most important pillars of social inclusion of young people, and consequently, it is an extremely important aspect of youth policy. Joint recommendations from the Belgian Presidency EU Youth Conference on Youth Employment include the following:

Youth workers and career advisers should have a more important guidance role in informing and supporting young people on labour market issues through the use of non-formal education and with the help of new exciting tools, information and support structures.

The labour market in Belgium has faced additional challenges due to the world and European economic crisis, which initially affected employment in Flanders much more than in Brussels or Wallonia. However, employment rates in the Flemish labour market returned to previous levels in the first quarter of 2011. Compared to Brussels and Wallonia, Flemish provinces have significantly lower unemployment rates, ranging from 5% in Flemish Brabant to 7.8% in Antwerpen and Limburg. There is a public employment service, VDAB in Flanders, as well as ACTIRIS in the Brussels Region, the task of which is to implement active measures in the field of employment at the regional level. Their functioning is complex, since unemployment benefits are controlled by the National Employment Office,



creating in this way disparity between employment and unemployment policy (see Chapter 5).

Following general indicators, the youth unemployment rate in Flanders increased significantly between 2008 and 2009, from 10.5% to 15.7%. At the same time, however, the youth unemployment rate in Wallonia was 30.5% and in Brussels 31.7%, which shows the comparative advantage of living in Flanders. As might be anticipated, the unemployment rate among low-skilled youth (39.6%) is higher than among high-skilled youth (11.6%), according to labour force statistics in 2010.

Brussels has a significantly higher unemployment rate of 31.7% within the youth population, while the general unemployment rate is 20%. This situation can be partially explained by the fact that the job demand in Brussels relates to high-quality jobs, while many job-seekers there, especially young people, are under-qualified. The high unemployment rate in Brussels has more structural characteristics compared to Flanders, due to the high proportion of low-skilled individuals. Also, there is a significant requirement for bilingual employees (able to speak both French and Dutch), whereas 90% of low-skilled young people do not speak more than one of these languages in Brussels. The Brussels Region has set up a database bringing together data from all employment-related institutions, in order to develop and provide a better match between labour market demand and those in search of work.

Brussels attracts a significant number of workers coming from the other two Regions of Belgium, but there is relatively little movement between Flanders and Wallonia, and from Brussels to Flanders. Another concern is unemployment among young immigrant communities in Belgium, with a 28.1% unemployment rate, three times higher than for non-immigrant communities, with an even worse situation in Brussels.

Belgian legislation envisages special assistance for unemployed youth after schooling. They receive so-called “waiting allowances” which provide them with the means to live until they secure employment. The state also defines incentives for employers hiring young, lower educated people through the programmes ACTIVA and Win-Win. ACTIVA’s aim was to cut the cost of recruiting young workers under 26. Employers that engage a person younger than 26 with a maximum of secondary education are entitled to a monthly allowance between €1 000 or €1 100 for a period of 12 months. Job-seekers who find a job keep part of their unemployment benefits, which employers can deduct from their net wage. At the beginning of 2010, a new recruitment plan, Win-Win, was introduced to bolster the existing ACTIVA scheme. Table 2 depicts the schemes available for unemployed youth.



**Table 2: Schemes for unemployed youth in the Flemish Community**

Programme	Activa – aged under 25	Activa Start – aged under 26	Win-Win – aged under 26 (no higher secondary-education diploma or certificate)	Win-Win – aged under 26 (not in possession of any diploma or certificate above higher secondary-education level)
Period registered as a job-seeker	1 year	Within 21 months of completing full-time education	3 months	6 months
Allowance	€500	€350	€1 100	€1 000
Period for which the allowance is payable	Month of recruitment + 15 months	Month of recruitment + 5 months	24 months (in 2010) 12 months (in 2011)	24 months (in 2010) 12 months (in 2011)

Source: EEO Review (2010).

Flemish cities are developing and funding various programmes to combat youth unemployment and support transition from the education system to the labour market. The city of Antwerp subsidises Youth Competence Centres, where young people work with counsellors in order to build awareness about the competences acquired through free time and “spare” activities, thereby improving their educational and labour market position. Similar initiatives also exist in Brussels. However, questions remain as to the scope of these programmes and how many people they reach relative to the total population of vulnerable youth. Flemish municipalities also provide the most underprivileged young people from the age of 18 upwards social welfare benefits via the Public Social Welfare Centre (Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn – OCMW).

### Social inclusion

Social inclusion is defined at the EU level<sup>9</sup> as a process ensuring that persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion be given opportunities and means necessary for a full participation in economic, social and cultural life and achieving living standards and welfare considered normal in the society they live in. It ensures their enhanced participation in decision-making process which in turn affects their rights and exercise of basic rights.

9. Definitions from the European Commission and Council of the European Union’s 2004 *Joint Report on Social Inclusion*, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/final\\_joint\\_inclusion\\_report\\_2003\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/final_joint_inclusion_report_2003_en.pdf)



The social inclusion process should empower citizens to take an active approach to all aspects of social life. This includes access to education for children and adults alike, access to labour markets even without higher education or despite having some form of disability or belonging to a minority, and access to health care and social services.

Obstacles to social inclusion can exist at the institutional level (discrimination, lack of infrastructure, absence of services, etc.), community level (prejudice, marginalisation), or individual level (lack of education, withdrawal, rejection, fear). Therefore, it is important to identify groups at risk from exclusion, as well as the social, political, cultural and economic processes that may lead to (re) production of exclusion. Combating discrimination and poverty, usually caused by the lack of employment, are two important pillars of the process of social inclusion. According to the *Factsheet on Social Inclusion/Equal Opportunities in Belgium*<sup>10</sup> 80% of students over 20 years of age in Belgium believe that discrimination based on ethnic origin is widespread in their country, which is 11% above the EU average. A similar situation exists with regards to religious discrimination, as perceived by the Belgian population. Since Flanders includes several major cities with large migrant populations, combating social exclusion is very important.

In 2006, the Flemish Minister of Culture announced a new Flemish Plan of Action for Interculturalisation, covering the fields of culture, youth work and sport from 2006 to 2009. The plan calls for positive action to address the under-representation of people with diverse ethnic-cultural backgrounds in subsidised activities in the sectors mentioned above. The main aim is to provide for the participation of people with migrant backgrounds on the boards of cultural, youth and sports organisations and institutions, representing at least 10% of posts. These measures are meant to lead to a permanent and growing interculturalisation in all sectors. In the new Policy Agreement 2009-14, the Flemish Government advocates an “innovative, lasting and warm society”. Integration of the ethnic-cultural minorities is perceived as a chance to realise a more cohesive and respectful society.

At the Community level, the institution responsible for social services for young people is the Youth Welfare Agency (Jongerenwelzijn) within the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family. The agency’s mission is defined as follows:

Together with our partners we organise quality prevention and assistance to children and young people in problematic living conditions in order to maximize their chances of personal development.

The Youth Welfare Agency co-ordinates prevention policy and provides assistance to minors through committees for special youth care, social services, and legal assistance and arbitration committees. Furthermore, the agency

10. Youth Partnership, Council of Europe, <http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/Questionnaires/Inclusion/Belgium.pdf>





provides support to partners in the private sector to provide guidance to young people with problems. These services are recognised and subsidised by the agency which specially encourages innovative youth care projects. As well as the agency, there are several other institutions under the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family which young people can approach in case of need (for example, the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities, and Public Psychiatric Care Centres).

During the visits of the international review team in Flanders, we were informed about the existence of regional integration policies, but without specific measures directed towards young people. The international review team had an opportunity to meet representatives of the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, which is a public institution created by law, promoting equal opportunities and fighting any type of exclusion, restriction or preferential treatment. The centre oversees the upholding of the fundamental rights of migrants, analyses the nature and content of migration flows, and bolsters the fight against human trafficking. Co-operation with the Flemish Community is described as successful, since the centre is a member of the Commission on Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Education, the goal of which is to resolve conflicts relating to inequality, racism or discrimination, as well as the Commission on Pupils' Rights, which aims to resolve conflicts relating to enrolment at school. Also, together with the Flemish Government, the centre is working on promoting teacher diversity, taking up the educational aspect of intercultural diversity as a topic in teacher training courses and advocating inclusive education.

In the Flemish Community, considerable importance is placed on intercultural education, which emphasises students' ability to deal with other cultures in a respectful way, as well as to recognise and appreciate diversity. As additional support to social inclusion and education, the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training provides additional funds to schools catering for a higher number of disadvantaged youth, for three consecutive years. Through the Act on Equal Opportunities in Education, schools can receive subsidies which allow them to work on preventing and combating developmental and learning lags, and providing for language skills, intercultural education, social-emotional development and the participation of parents and pupils. In order to qualify for funds, schools have to cater for a minimum 10% of young people from disadvantaged groups at the elementary and first levels of secondary education, or at least 25% at other levels of secondary education. Schools can also use these resources to engage a special needs co-ordinator, who is responsible for policy co-ordination, guidance for pupils and teachers, as well as communication and co-operation with the bodies included in the system.

As the international review team learned during its visit to Antwerp, where we had the opportunity to meet representatives of the schooling system, one of the main indicators of disadvantage is linked to an immigrant background.



Integration Services, the first step for migrants to Belgium, directs parents and pupils to specific schools where social programmes for disadvantaged youth exist. However, the international review team was informed about the lack of capacity in schools with these programmes for minorities. The gap between the schools enrolling Flemish-origin young people and those involving migrants and lower-class pupils is documented and readily observed. Since parents have the freedom to choose schools for their children, they usually favour those schools enrolling pupils of similar status, thus creating “Flemish schools” on the one hand and predominantly “migrant schools” with various ethnic groups on the other. On account of this, Antwerp has developed a programme called “Schoolbridge” whose aim is to build bridges between schools and socially vulnerable young people and their parents.

About 10% of the population living in Flanders possessed foreign nationality at birth or at least one parent with foreign nationality, while 5.8% have foreign nationality. The migrant issue is especially characteristic of the bigger cities in Flanders (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent). Almost one third of the population of Brussels comes from abroad. These cities also have increasing numbers of young people. The two issues – migration and youth – are clearly interlinked; a significant proportion of the growing numbers of young people in urban settings come from minority groups. In 2008, 28% of Brussels’ inhabitants were of non-Belgian origin, with 15% in Antwerp and 9% in the third largest Flemish city, Ghent. Migrants from outside of the EU are mostly from Morocco and Turkey, but there is also increased migration of young people from eastern Europe and the new EU member states of Bulgaria and Romania. They are often in the risk category and can be considered vulnerable. Therefore, Brussels’ as well as Antwerp’s youth policy plan defines important “hot issues” for the youth population in the specific context of large cities, focusing on diversity and accessibility in Brussels and improved, accessible leisure activities in Antwerp.

There are many organisations and networks whose work is directed towards disadvantaged groups of young people. The international review team visited some of these organisations in Antwerp and Brussels.

JES stadslabo is a social profit organisation, operating in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, which aims to increase opportunities for young people so they can benefit more from creative leisure time activities, employment and training, participation in society and policy making. JES is recognised as a national youth organisation by the Flemish Community. Its main activities include training, labour-market counselling, outreach work, and cultural projects. It reaches approximately 70 000 young people every year. The organisation co-operates with other NGOs, including networks of youth centres, municipal departments for education and culture, and the Flemish employment service. JES is one of the few organisations we had a chance to meet which has diversified its sources of income; today it receives funding from 90 separate sources.

Besides JES, the international review team visited several youth clubs and centres developing various activities and programmes supporting the personal



development of young people, focusing predominantly on migrants in their neighbourhoods (e.g. Habbekrats, Zappa, Kras Noord in Antwerp, and Chicago in Brussels). These centres are active mostly in the poorer areas of the cities: in districts with higher population densities, larger numbers of poor people, the highest unemployment rates, and bad housing situations. They work on the integration of disadvantaged young people, involving them in activities in the neighbourhood. Such activities are important for young migrants as a first step towards integrating into Belgian society, where they can feel welcomed and appreciated. Usually, they combine work in the facilities situated in the neighbourhood and an outreach approach using youth street workers who establish contact with young disadvantaged persons on the spot, following their development and building closer relations. However, their work has limited scope when it comes to social inclusion in Belgian society. The international review team came to the conclusion that there remain very limited connections between young people of Flemish origin and migrant youth. Flemish youth is, as already pointed out, oriented to the traditional forms of youth organising (youth movements), while disadvantaged groups are directed towards professional/categorical youth work, which – at least in theory – should serve as a bridge to voluntary youth work.

The attitude of voluntary youth work within youth movements is not negative towards the inclusion of vulnerable young people (including those from migrant backgrounds) and those movements claim that they are open to disadvantaged groups (for example, Chiro in Antwerp). However, they are not actively recruiting these groups, confirming that the attitude towards diversity is rather passive (“we are open to it, but not actively seeking it”). This was especially visible in the visit to Kortrijk in western Flanders. The youth-related stakeholders are convinced that disadvantaged groups are more difficult to reach because of the lack of diversity in the area, financial restrictions, and the faith affiliations of different groups of young people.

### Challenges perceived

As part of the review process, as we have noted in the introduction, the host country has the opportunity to identify a number of issues which are of particular interest for youth policy in that country. The Flemish Community used this possibility to search for answers to three questions.

- What is the divide in the level of schooling which causes a political and socio-economic dichotomy?
- The ideological and cultural divide which makes that (still) some target groups are not reached: does multiculturalism work?
- The role of the government/public authorities: to what extent should it be steering; what is it the citizen can and/or should expect? What is the positioning of youth work in society?



During the two visits to Belgium, the international review team encountered a variety of activities implemented in the field of youth policy and a strong culture of youth work in Flanders. We learned that the Flemish Community is guided by the principles of good governance and sustainable civil society, the promotion of participation, active citizenship, and inclusion as the highest values and policy outcomes. The strong commitment to taking care of young people was observed and acknowledged. However, the international review team would also wish to raise some observations regarding youth policy, specifically youth work in the Flemish Community as meriting more robust debate:

- The international team had some difficulties with the term “youth organisation”. In Flanders, this term has two possible meanings: “youth movement” and “youth service organisation”. There is a clear distinction between voluntary/traditional youth work organised in the youth movements whose main aim is the organisation of youth leisure time and specific/categorical/professional youth work. The latter is mostly oriented to the servicing of youth work organisations on the one hand, especially at the Flemish Community level (e.g. VVJ, VIP Jeugd, Steupunt Jeugd) and to working with disadvantaged young people (e.g. youth services, clubs, centres) at the local level. This very well organised and established system leaves very limited space for new organisations which have to prove themselves first in order to get recognition and consequently financing, although there are opportunities at the local level through implementation of the municipal/provincial youth plans, which are focused primarily on leisure activities. It is expected and, to a degree, self-evident that middle class youth will voluntarily take part in the activities of the traditional youth movements, just as their parents did. Their activities, however, as well as those of lower-class youth and migrant youth who are reached through small-scale initiatives, very rarely venture beyond their own neighbourhoods. Moreover, these two sectors have almost no common points of reference or activities which would contribute to real social inclusion.
- Financing from the Flemish Government provides a stable and secure situation for organisations recognised by the authorities. This is a very important feature of Flemish youth work, which builds on the durable perception of youth work as an additional or third socialising agent for young people and (unlike many other countries, it should be noted) it therefore has a very strong position in society. However, this very formalised and visible system also has its weaknesses, since it brings into question the independence and autonomy of youth work. The international review team did not find many organisations that have diverse sources of funding, as they lean mostly on the government for sustenance. Organisations generally feel comfortable with the system as it is, even when they are not always satisfied with its functioning. This is a very sensitive issue



within youth policy, which always has to strike a balance between directing and moderating youth activities.

- There are differences between Community-level youth policy and local youth policies, as well as predictable gaps between local youth policies and their implementation. As Karen Evans (1998) astutely notes, there can be important differences in the ways in which policy is “espoused, enacted and experienced”. While the Flemish Youth Action Plan formulates a view of youth policy as transversal policy, envisaging responsibilities and tasks for each ministry and applying the group policy approach, this was not often perceived at the local level. Youth policy plans at the local level usually included objectives referring to youth work as a means for organising the leisure time of young people, leaving other important fields related to young people (e.g. employment, welfare, education) outside of the “youth policy” domain.

It seems that in spite of the promotion of participation, active citizenship and inclusion as the highest values, there are expectations that young people should have skills that are “assertive”, “self-aware” and “proactive” in asking for what they need, contributing to the idea of so-called “emancipator youth (work) policy”. However, the international team has perceived that there is local autonomy in the interpretation of what “emancipation” means and how this is translated into local youth action plans. Visits to Kortrijk and Antwerp, in particular, revealed the differences in the youth policy approach at the local level. While Antwerp nurtures proactive co-operation among different policy fields important for young people, this is not the case in Kortrijk, where we observed a strong division of duties and competences among the different policy sectors. However, even in Antwerp, the co-operation among sectors is rarely formalised, but depends on the personal initiative of the staff. We also noted the different approaches towards young people in these two cities. Kortrijk has developed various services and leisure-time activities for young people who “want to participate”, while Antwerp encourages a more active approach, which is probably the consequence of the traditionally high diversity in this city. Youth work is not recognised enough by those working in the areas of employment and health. It is evident that activities such as personal development training undertaken with young people, in order to create pathways to work or further education, are not considered to be youth work. “Social” work (such as drugs outreach) is considered employment/welfare policy and not “youth work” because it deals with all age groups. The team noted more separation of policy domains at the local level than at the Community level, which proclaims co-operation and co-ordination.



- High ethnic diversity in Belgian society, notably in the large cities, is a constant challenge for public policy, and especially youth policy. Belgium has carefully developed policies for migrants, beginning with their entry to the country, and developing various services for them. The Flemish Community supports several programmes for the inclusion and insertion of young people in the education system and labour market. However, there is a perceived divide in the level and quality of schooling experienced, which causes inequality of life chances among young people and segregation in lived realities. Migrant children often do not possess sufficient language skills to enable them to follow lessons without additional assistance, and hence they attend the schools which have developed special assistance programmes for disadvantaged pupils. Given the freedom to choose schools, parents of Flemish-background children have “natural” (and understandable) tendencies to enrol their children in schools with children of similar backgrounds, which create a kind of closed cycle of divide. More broadly, minorities are rarely included in the many decision-making processes that Flanders seeks to cultivate. The international review team encountered only one organisation of migrant youth (PAJ – Platform of Ethnic Youth Operations), only to discover that it is not recognised at the level of the Flemish Community, only in Antwerp province and the city. Also, it is indicative that not a single migrant organisation was present during the national hearing in Brussels.
  
- In reality, multiculturalism is reduced to communities living apart together. In this sense, the concept of interculturalism is perceived as a more apposite depiction of Belgian (or at least Flemish) society, acknowledging the existence of the host culture and the influence it has on migrant communities and vice versa.
  
- Co-operation between Communities in Belgium is very limited. This is a concern that has a particular resonance in relation to the Brussels Region, which is subordinated to both the Flemish Community and French Community administrations. Since Brussels has inordinately high levels of youth unemployment and a significant population of low-skilled youth mostly belonging to migrant communities, a comprehensive and joint policy is clearly necessary to understand and combat these issues. As a bilingual city, Brussels requires adjusted policies which will enable young people to enjoy equal opportunities when accessing any school, institution or organisation. At the moment, at least young people attending Flemish schools have the opportunity to learn both Dutch and French and combine lessons in their own language with Dutch, which enables them to enter the labour market as employment seekers with better chances of finding an appropriate job.



## Recommendations to the Flemish Community

### **Recommendation 1**

*The question of recognition of the value and visibility of non-formal and informal learning for young people should be raised. The international review team felt that youth work in Flanders is perceived as predominantly the engagement of youth movements. However, recognising the work and achievements of young people and those active in youth work and youth organisations would constitute an acknowledgement of youth work as an important socialisation tool and part of non-formal education/learning. Youth work activities should be complementary to formal education and serve as a method of non-formal education/learning, which can also contribute greatly to the social inclusion of young people.*

### **Recommendation 2**

*Recognition of youth work as a non-formal education/learning method requires establishing measures of the quality of youth (work) provision. Flanders possesses a developed support system for youth organisations and a strong field of youth work oriented towards disadvantaged youth, which guarantees the expertise necessary for defining quality measures of youth work.*

### **Recommendation 3**

*Common points of reference should be established among traditional and specific/professional youth work. The international review team observed that these two sectors have almost no links which would contribute to their real social inclusion of young people. Specific youth work should serve as a bridge to voluntary youth work, but the international review team struggled to observe this process in practice. The inclusion of vulnerable youth, especially young migrants, in traditional youth work is a challenge with potential in Flanders. This issue should be carefully elaborated, since the international review team felt that leaders of the traditional movements do not know how to approach the question, in spite of their readiness to do so.*

### **Recommendation 4**

*Youth policy should, besides setting up a framework for leisure-time activities, include other important fields relevant to the lives of young people, such as employment, welfare and education. Youth work organisations have had to limit their non-youth work activities (around education, welfare, and health) in order to get funding, which created great dissatisfaction among youth workers that was expressed vocally during the international review team visits.*



*Although youth policy at the Community level is defined as transversal, proclaiming co-operation and co-ordination, the international review team witnessed more separation of policy domains at the local level during field visits. Therefore, more attention should be dedicated to promoting a transversal approach to youth policy at municipal and provincial levels.*

#### **Recommendation 5**

*Young migrants should be more strongly included in decision-making processes concerning youth policy. Although the international review team witnessed strong dedication to the improvement of the position of young migrants in the field of specific youth work, migrants appear to be rarely included in the youth policy dialogue. Therefore, concerted efforts should be made to promote youth work among migrants and empower their organisations to play a more active part in the youth policy process.*

#### **Recommendation 6**

*Grassroots movements and bottom-up initiatives, as forms which nurture differences and creativity among young people, should be given more space. The international review team felt that such movements were rare and hard to reach, yet they are important youth initiatives, especially at the local level; they should be more strongly encouraged and more robustly supported.*

#### **Recommendation 7**

*NGOs, primarily voluntary membership-based organisations, should seek to maintain a more independent position vis-à-vis the government. The international review team had some concerns about the independence of the work of organisations in Flanders. Most organisations receive a high proportion of their finances through earmarked funds decided upon by the authorities, which means they could be too dependent. This contributes significantly to their stability, but at the same time limits the potential for independent activities and possible challenges to the directions of governmental policy. On the other hand, specifically focused youth service organisations should be supported by public money.*

#### **Recommendation 8**

*Youth policy plans should be revised more often at the municipal and provincial levels. At the moment, local youth policy plans encompass three years, while plans cover five years in Brussels and six years in the provinces. Since the Flemish Government sets the priorities of youth policy for a shorter period, it would seem advisable to do the same at the local level.*



**Recommendation 9**

*The Flemish Youth Council and local/provincial councils should establish closer links and co-operation. The international review team did not find communication channels between the Flemish Youth Council and local/provincial councils nor any kind of initiative on the part of the former to empower these bodies during its visits, although we received information on some initiatives after the national hearing. Nevertheless, the team believes that the Flemish Youth Council should claim a more active role and position itself as a contact point and resource centre for the local/provincial councils.*

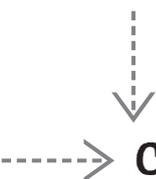
**Recommendation 10**

*The youth councils should set up a system to follow up on their impact on decision-making processes. The Flemish Youth Council has initiated more than half of the advice given to the government, but there seems to be no information relating to how much of its advice has been accepted. Such evidence would provide at least some picture of the extent to which the structured voice of young people is authentically respected.*

**Recommendation 11**

*Special attention should be paid to the Brussels Region. The high percentage of young people, migrants and low-skilled individuals, accompanied by high levels of unemployment, requires co-ordinated efforts together with the French Community. The international review team commends the efforts being made in the setting up of a database bringing together data from all employment-related institutions in Belgium. However, youth work has the potential to play a greater role in combating low educational participation and attainment, and unemployment, in order to support the re-engagement of many more disadvantaged young people with society.*





## Chapter 3 – Youth policy in the French Community

The French Community has specific competences within the Walloon Region, which is the predominantly French-speaking southern region of Belgium, and in the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region. The French Community covers an area of around 17 000 km<sup>2</sup>, and it has approximately 4 000 000 inhabitants. The Flemish Region has merged its institutions with the Flemish Community, whereas the Walloon Region and the French Community of Belgium remain rather separate. The Region of Walloon makes up more than half of the territory of Belgium, but only has a third of its population. Wallonia has 262 municipalities (nine German-speaking) whereas the Brussels-Capital Region has 19. Legislative power is exercised by a parliament and a government. Parliament consists of 94 members, including the 75 elected representatives of the Walloon Parliament and 19 French-speaking elected representatives of the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region. The parliament and the government of the Brussels-Capital Region were created during the State Reform of 1988-89, while the Walloon and Flemish Region have had theirs since 1980. There are six regional sub-entities in the French Community: five provinces (Walloon Brabant, Liège, Luxembourg, Hainaut, and Namur) and the Brussels-Capital Region. Each of these sub-entities has competences in the field of youth, but there is no systematic co-ordinating structure to guarantee consistency among these entities. The government of the French Community consists of a maximum of eight members, including the Minister-President. The government has seven ministers at the moment, one of them being the Minister of Youth and Youth Welfare. In 2008, 37% of the total population of the French Community was under 30 years old.

Until the middle of the 20th century, Wallonia was the more prosperous half of Belgium. Since the Second World War, however, the importance of heavy industry has greatly declined, and the Flemish Region has surpassed Wallonia in socio-economic terms. Wallonia has declined economically, and suffers from structural problems which are visible in high unemployment and a high percentage of low-skilled workers. Wallonia has a lower GDP per capita than Flanders.



After travelling across Belgium the international review team's impression comes close to Marco Martiniello's (2010) claim that we have entered "a process of diversification of European diversity", not only in ethnic or national terms but also in regional terms. The team witnessed a great variety of cultural wealth but also regional inequalities regarding opportunity structures for young people living in different parts of Belgium. This is true both in terms of living conditions, delivery of services and young people's daily lives. These differential possibilities and resources become visible particularly with regard to young people's access to education and the labour market, but also in terms of their societal engagement and inclusion. The education system in the French Community, according to PISA scores, does not lead to school results as good as those in Flanders. Unemployment rates in Wallonia are nearly twice as high as in Flanders. The current situation in the French Community – together with the world economic downturn, European challenges related to ageing societies and welfare regimes undergoing fundamental changes – form diverse parameters for young people living in this part of Belgium.

The need for a comprehensive policy view is evident in Belgium. Our interlocutors made repeated assertions about vertical and horizontal complexities resulting in, for example, a problematic gap between educational and employment systems (see Chapter 5). This observation seems to be particularly relevant in the Brussels Region where young people are affected by the consequences of an increasingly competitive educational and labour market as well as urban segregation. Furthermore, in former industrial settings such as Charleroi there is now a huge gulf between current labour market structures and the labour force. A shared concern in the field is how former industrial sites should face up to post-industrial conditions, and how this concern applies to the youth sector. As a consequence of recent structural changes, one third of young people under 25 years receive social benefits (integration income) in the Charleroi area. In the municipality of Couvin youth work professionals expressed anxiety about growing poverty and a decreasing number of jobs available for local young people. They were also seriously concerned about young people's simultaneous reluctance to move out of Couvin to study and work and their decreasing motivation to engage themselves in the community.

The insecure position of young people is not related simply to their vulnerable status in socio-economic terms. It may also imply a certain fragility of social networks and a loose sense of moral belonging to the community – the lack of legitimate citizenship in more symbolic terms. The latter dimension of instability is particularly challenging for the youth field, especially in the French Community, where the political and cultural approach has been strongly anchored within the tradition of citizenship education, as the concept of young people being educated to be Citizens who are Responsible, Active, Critical and Solidary (CRACS) reveals.



## Youth policy on the move: institutional context

There is an evident need for innovative policy measures to make sense of the current “social condition”<sup>11</sup> of young people’s lives. The French Community, having traditionally situated youth policy within the framework of socio-cultural policy spheres (as indeed has the Flemish Community), has taken current challenges facing young people very seriously. The government of the French Community has prepared a comprehensive reform plan for youth policy. The government’s Youth Plan is a welcome initiative to better recognise and deal with current key issues of youth policy. The Youth Plan has been the primary concern also for the international review team, as the Cabinet of the Minister for Youth wished to receive comments and suggestions on the content and the processes related to the reform.

A two-fold aim behind the preparation of the Youth Plan is, on the one hand, to strengthen the profile of youth policy as a significant policy sector, and, on the other, to integrate youth policy more effectively in other arenas of public policy. Furthermore, the aim is to combine universal and general approaches (youth service) with more specialised provision (youth welfare and youth aid/protection).

Currently, general youth policy is administered within the government of the French Community by its Minister for Youth and Youth Welfare (since 2009, youth policy and youth aid policy are the competences of the same minister), assisted by various civil service departments. The Youth Service (another English translation used is Youth Department) is in charge of the implementation of youth policy in the French Community. The Youth Service is concerned with multiple issues relating to young people, whether organised or not. However, it has a privileged relationship with the associations, notably the recognised associations: youth organisations, mainly composed of youth movements with young people up to 30 years and diverse youth service structures (altogether 92, subsidised by the French Community with approximately €13 700 000 in 2010) as well as youth centres, youth hostels and youth information structures (altogether 193, subsidised by the French Community with approximately €12 032 000 in 2010).

There are diverse decrees that concern youth policy implementation at the local level, such as a decree for youth associations and a decree for youth centres. Moreover, particular services have their own decree (such as homework schools). The Youth Service provides financial, institutional and training support for those implementing youth policy objectives at the local level. In addition to this, the Youth Service conducts regular dialogue and consultation with many official

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11. This was a term first used in youth policy thinking by Paul Willis in 1984. His “youth review” for the municipality of Wolverhampton in the industrial heartland of England maintained that there needed to be a paradigm shift in approaches to youth policy on account of the fracturing of youth transitions as a result of the industrial collapse and the resultant marginalisation of the many young people who hitherto, even without formal educational qualifications, would have found work in manual labour and on the factory floor. Willis P. et al. (1988), *The Youth review*, Aldershot, Gower.



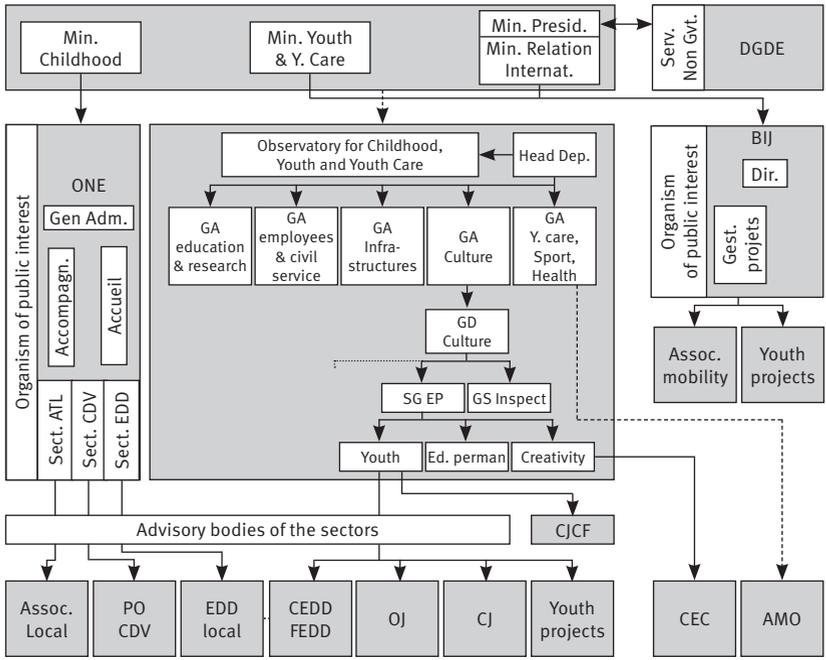
representative bodies of the sector: the Advisory Commission of the Youth Organisations (Commission Consultative des Organisations de Jeunesse – CCOJ), the Advisory Commission of the Youth Centres and Youth Facilities (la Commission Consultative des Maisons et Centres de Jeunes – CCMCJ) and the French Community’s Youth Council (le Conseil de la Jeunesse de la Communauté Française – CJCF).

When it comes to more specialised provision, welfare-related youth aid, youth care and the protection of young people and their families in the French Community derive from a combination of public services and associative, publicly funded initiatives, with their own decrees. These services are currently incorporated under one transversal youth policy umbrella, even if they may be partly administered by the Ministry of Childhood. The Directorate General for Youth Welfare (Direction Générale de l’Aide à la Jeunesse) manages the services relating to youth welfare and protection. Important public institutions in this respect are, among others, the Birth and Child Office (l’Office de la Naissance et de l’Enfance – ONE) and the General Delegate for Children’s Rights (le Délégué Général de la Communauté Française aux Droits de l’Enfant). The International Office for Youth (Bureau International Jeunesse – BIJ) is responsible for the management and implementation of international youth exchanges in the French Community, in terms of advice, information, training and financial support of the projects. The office is co-managed by the Directorate-General for Culture and by the Wallonie-Bruxelles International in order to guarantee meaningful consistency in administrative terms. It represents the French Community of Belgium in different international collaborative structures and is a national agency of the French Community for the European youth exchange programmes (currently Youth in Action). Figure 4 depicts the relationships between the organisations involved in youth policy and work in the French Community.

Rapid changes that characterise the field of youth policy – and Belgian society more generally – imply the need for a revised understanding of youth. There are many different conceptions of young people, partly due to the variety of sectors and decrees that bear on the youth policy field, and partly due to the diversity of professional cultures involved. The French Community seems to be rather liberal in terms of age definitions and, therefore, a unequivocal understanding of young people has never existed, at least not in any strict form. The international review team noted the variations within the French Community: for example, the youth centres that work primarily with young people between the ages of 12 and 26 years; the homework support contexts where the main focus is on 6 to 12-year-old children; and the person under 30 years old who is categorised as young within the framework of youth organisations. The government’s Youth Plan is designed to focus on young people between the age of 12 and 25 – thus incorporating young adults within the youth policy framework. One of the strengths of the French Community is its ability to also conceptualise youth policy matters in generational terms, thus promoting diverse intergenerational encounters, not only between adults (professionals) and young people but also between children and youth, or between young people and the elderly.



**Figure 4: Organisational structure of youth policy/work in the French Community**



Source: French Community authorities.

**Vertical and horizontal complexities: Community and local practices**

The federal structure of Belgian society provides both possibilities and challenges for the implementation of transversal youth policy at the Community level. Moreover, the federal model contributes easily to hard bureaucracy. Overlapping structures, contesting decrees, complex funding arrangements, multiple stakeholders and diversity of training rules produce a challenging framework for those working in the field. Fundamental agendas for the work done under the auspices of “youth policy” also vary. For instance, respondents at the local level mentioned a tension between economic necessities at the Federal level and the maintenance of a certain emancipatory spirit when working with young people at the Community or municipal/local level. A particular case in this respect is Brussels, where the administrative borders between the Brussels Region and the services of the French Community situated in Brussels are complicated from the perspective of young service users.

A careful assessment of the current youth policy structure is strategically useful since the French Community aims to enhance the co-ordination and consistency of services provided under the Youth Plan.



### **The ethos of subsidiarity: isolated or free municipalities?**

During visits to diverse local contexts in the youth field, it became evident that vertical complexities (Federal, Regional, Municipal) imply particular challenges when putting horizontal policy services into practice (cross-agency partnerships).

One particularity in the field of youth policy across all three Communities is its strong ethos of subsidiarity. In the French Community, this framework is based on the co-existence of three main stakeholders: the French Community's Government, its public authorities (the Youth Service in particular) and a highly diverse group of associations with their professionals and voluntary workers. Non-profit associations are the main service providers at the local level. The law subdivides the associations into five major categories: youth movements, thematic movements, service associations, federations of youth organisations and federations of youth centres. The principle of subsidiarity means that the public authorities at the Community level delegate operative responsibility for the most part to the associations. In addition to the youth organisations, there are youth centres (often run by associations), homework schools, and training courses, as well as individual projects.

The autonomous status of associations is indicative of their potential flexibility. The principle of autonomy is reflected in the innovativeness of associations, with their committed staff (both employed and voluntary workers). However, it may also imply a certain fragility connected with the potentially segmented character of the sector. Four particular challenges of subsidiarity observed by the international review team during two visits to the French Community are discussed below.

#### *Freedom or fragmentation?*

First, the sort of negotiated autonomy given to associations as the main service providers implies the richness of the local youth policy arrangements. It may also lead to unintended consequences in terms of the application of services. There is no official local youth policy structure in the French Community, and municipalities differ considerably when it comes to their investment in youth work. Moreover, municipalities may implement youth policy priorities in various ways.

This autonomy must be, without doubt, considered a strength as it allows responses to local specificities. However, the international review team found there was a potential paradox between autonomy and consistency of services. There is a risk of reinforcing a differentiated – and as such, unequal – structure of services available for young people depending on the local context.

To combat this risk, a process of overall harmonisation of youth policies is being undertaken. To give one example, an Associative Charter is being produced, aspiring to a more consistent deal between public authorities and the third sector. The harmonisation is a delicate matter, particularly in the youth sector,



which has traditionally been based on a strong voluntary ethos. In the French Community these reforms have also met with predictable concern amongst people working in the field at the local level: how to promote professionalism without falling into an unhelpful professionalisation of the youth field?<sup>12</sup>

All in all, the objective of improving coherence is certainly a relevant step in the development of transversality at the local level. This is particularly significant given the sector as a whole faces challenges of institutional complexity which are rooted in the particular administrative structures of Belgium. Many respondents were seriously concerned about the lack of awareness among local people about the kinds of services that are available; young people (and their parents) often do not know where to turn when they need advice or services.

### *Networking or isolation?*

The second challenge of subsidiarity, the autonomy of the municipalities, which is anchored in the principle of subsidiarity, is a critical matter if it is connected to a scattered service structure. The French Community has actively taken this challenge into account. The cabinet advisers of the Minister of Youth and Youth Welfare informed the international review team about the system of local co-ordination, implemented in many municipalities (219) in the French Community by the Minister in charge of Childhood, with a part-time co-ordinator who, with the assistance of the municipality, creates a committee with different representatives – from schools, free time organisers, associations and other relevant stakeholders. The Community funds the part-time work of the co-ordinator. However, the international review team also heard critical views from those directly involved in the work at the local level with respondents stating that “municipalities are living in a political vacuum”. By this they indicated a mismatch between the huge tasks expected of the youth sector and its scarce resources and weak networking. The international review team saw several local examples where a non-profit organisation runs a complex set of services, thus (partly) compensating for the local deficit of traditional welfare sectors (such as social, educational and employment services). There is a clear need for better dialogue both within and across municipalities. This can be seen as a particular challenge for diverse advisory committees working in the youth sector (such as CCOJ and CCMC).

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12. This is, of course, not just a tension within the French Community of Belgium. Throughout the European context, but particularly within the EU, as more attention is paid to youth policy and youth work (with an accompanying debate about recognition and quality standards), a core site of contention is the debate about the relationship between professionalism and professionalisation. Given that most youth work, broadly conceived, is clearly delivered by people working voluntarily, professionalisation is not the issue, but professionalism is. On the other hand, for the small proportion of youth workers in full-time paid employment, both professionalism and professionalisation are important platforms for debate, for the latter enhances pay and conditions, and “professional status”. See the Resolution on Youth Work produced following the first European Youth Work Convention, held in Ghent during Belgium’s Presidency of the EU, in July 2010.



The French Community emphasises the promotion of networking and partnerships, for example, in the Operational Plan 2009-13 for the youth aid sector. The quest for partnerships, however, seems to be mostly limited to an essentially local approach rather than a broader inter-municipal approach. As stated in the Operational Plan, networks may acquire an intrinsic value. Therefore a particular emphasis should be put on the qualitative methodology of collaboration: which kinds of network structures are needed in practice (formal versus informal; systematic versus ad hoc)? According to the plan, there is a particular need for a more comprehensive understanding of professionalism in the youth aid field. There is also continuous discussion about the risks related to the instrumentalisation of the field, especially that it may become too harnessed to wider societal agendas rather than focusing on the needs of the young individual.

*Project governance: big tasks, small-scale initiatives*

This leads us to the third challenge of subsidiarity, namely the project-based structure of youth services in the French Community. The international team witnessed highly creative ways of addressing young people’s living conditions at the local level. Small-scale projects are, indeed, responsible for complex matters related to school drop-outs, youth unemployment and other contemporary welfare-related challenges in young people’s lives. “Someday the tasks must be re-defined in order to be realistic”, was an observation made by a local practitioner. The prevailing project-based governance is, of course, by no means a feature of just the youth sector. It is part of a Europe-wide tendency towards deregulation, privatisation and competition, and it is increasingly embedded in the development of project-based welfare structures through commissioning and contracting.

Moreover, a common concern in the local field in the French Community, articulated particularly by those working in the Youth Service, is how to define, promote and assess the quality of the projects. There is a system of short-term assessment (yearly meetings with beneficiaries) and long-term assessment (beneficiaries are contacted one to two years after the project to assess long-term consequences). In addition to this internal assessment, research-based external assessment and support is clearly needed. This sort of dialogue between researchers and practitioners would offer relevant data for discussion about the better co-ordination between, for example, unemployment policy at the Federal level and local initiatives, which are at risk of existing in two distinct worlds (though see Chapter 5).

*What constitutes a “youth issue” at the local level? The intersection between youth, social and educational frameworks*

Fourth, the ethos of subsidiarity in the French Community implies autonomy in the sense that there is no clear inter-municipal coherence as to what constitutes a youth issue at the local level. Particular attention needs to be paid to marginal



zones in the youth field. This may imply associations which are not recognised youth associations (such as migrant associations) or marginal actors and issues in the youth field. One issue that was considered too marginal by our respondents concerned the participation of young people with disabilities, at least in the local contexts.

Having provided a somewhat abstract assessment of some challenges of youth policy within the French Community, we offer a short analysis of how these challenges concretely characterise youth services at the local level. Through this analysis we aim to highlight the diversity of successful multi-professional initiatives at the local level. Moreover, we want to acknowledge the impressive commitment of those engaged in the cross-sectoral youth field.

SAS Compas-Format (*le service d'accrochage scolaire*) represents an effective combination of the youth work service, youth aid service, the educational service and social services. It is a local service the aim of which is to take care of the re-integration of young people into the educational system. It characterises one of the strengths of the youth sector in the French Community, namely an innovative mixture of socio-culturally oriented community youth work (work with groups) and the fight against young people's exclusion (work with individuals). This framework was not only presented as a free choice of local authorities, it was also seen as an economic necessity: "We don't have resources to maintain the quality of services alone".

Homework schools (*écoles des devoirs*, in Liège) are a significant service structure which combines youth work approaches with education in line with the ethos of *l'éducation permanente*. This service is situated metaphorically "in the middle of community": at the intersection of school, child policy and child care, youth work and the family. The challenge of this sector is that it worked for a long time before being supported by a legal framework. Nevertheless, the sector engages a large number of stakeholders; currently there are 360 homework schools in the French Community. The service has traditionally been the responsibility of two ministers – for Childhood and for Youth – though it has been subsidised by the Birth and Child Office (ONE). Despite this arrangement, some of those working in the homework schools were concerned about their poor knowledge about youth issues. As one person put it, "We do not know anything about teenagers".

Public social assistance centres (*les centres public d'action sociale* – CPAS – in Charleroi) are a particular structure of social services with well-established contacts with other relevant welfare services such as the labour market sector, both public and private. Among others, there are social workers, psychologists, debt counsellors and medical personnel working in these centres. Here, again, the international review team found an innovative application of the socio-cultural approach to fight against the vulnerable position of people living in Charleroi. Diverse forms of community engagement are among the primary objectives of the work taking place in the Charleroi centre. As one of the social workers there stated: "Young people do not know much about local structures and structures



do not know much about young people”. Institutional complexities may hamper the creation of clear lines around principles of confidentiality with young people.

Open youth aid (*les services d'aide en milieu ouvert* – AMO – in Couvin) is also a significant structure combining the principles of prevention and correction. The first priority is to help young people thrive in their living environment and in their relationships with the social environment (among other things, at school, at home, and in their neighbourhood) by giving them individual assistance, supporting their projects, helping them to cope with their family and school, and helping them address administrative and legal difficulties. Regardless of its importance, and the number of AMOs in Wallonia and Brussels (about 60<sup>13</sup> in 2010, according to the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy's Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Belgium), the open youth service seems to maintain a certain ethos of voluntarism. This implies a particular desire to secure longer-term professional commitment from the authorities and greater acknowledgement of the service.

One additional example of the successful multi-professional community approach in the context of corrective work with troubled and troublesome young people was found in Saint Servais at the residential institution for youth aid and correction.

CEDAS (Le Centre de Développement et d'Animation Schaerbeekois, in Molenbeek, Brussels) is a youth centre in north Brussels, in a poor neighbourhood with a bad reputation due to a high youth unemployment rate (about 40% in 2009) and a high proportion of children and youth, among other factors (Rea et al. 2009; La Situation des Jeunes en Belgique Francophone 2010). CEDAS is strongly embedded in the values articulated by CRACS. This approach gives impetus to diverse approaches such as a particular commitment to receiving inhabitants, a strong emphasis on the identity work of the participants in the centre, action-based education for diversity (i.e. cohabitation of physical and moral education), and an enhanced understanding of the community.

The youth centre applies an intergenerational approach to its community work. The emphasis is on the social rather than biological or legal age, and the house is open to people from 6 to 81 years of age. There are different programmes and spaces available for separate groups (under 14, 14 to 18, and over 18 years of age). A life course perspective to the community work is advanced, and local people seem to continue to visit the house from early childhood onwards. There is a particular system of tutorship whereby young adults are encouraged to become tutors for younger people. This kind of intergenerational approach demands a particular engagement on the part of the people working in the centre. Indeed, the international review team was impressed by the strong and long-term commitment among the people working in CEDAS – the same kind of attitude was evident in many other institutional contexts in the French Community.

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13. In 2012, there were 81 AMOs, according to the French Community's own review.



These kinds of mixed-method approaches to promote transversal frameworks are courageous. They may also produce certain ambiguities around the professional identity of the people working in the field. Due to its current youth policy reform, a classic dilemma regarding how to conceptualise young people in the youth field – as individual clients of the services, as youth cultural groups or as community actors – seemed to be particularly pertinent in the context of the French Community. The local professionals talked about the tension between the political world, depicted as being overwhelmed by the individualised economic imperative, and the values of social integration and local democracy. Moreover, the current fragmentation of young people’s life courses demands particular resources when working with young adults who are easily situated on the margins of a variety of services. There is contention around the idea of casting young people out at the age of 18, when support services previously available for them as “children” are no longer provided.

## Other policy fields affecting young people

### Education

A successful education and a smooth transition from education to employment are among the most important issues in the current policy fields concerning youth. This is true also in the context of the French Community, where the youth sector has traditionally focused on the intersection between youth and cultural policy issues.

According to the federal structure, decisions about provision of education are made by the three Communities. In the French Community, education is compulsory from the age of 6 to 18. The educational structure is divided into four categories: kindergarten (2 to 5 years), primary education (6 to 12 years), secondary education (13 to 18 years), and higher education. Public schools are free of charge. There is also private education, but this is subsidised by the Communities, which set its conditions and standards.

Researchers have distinguished three main challenges that young people and young adults face in the French Community: lack of appropriate education, unemployment and diverse forms of discrimination on an everyday level (Martiniello 2010; Rea et al. 2009). One relevant context in this respect is the crossroads between the fields of education and youth policy. Rea et al. (2009) state that the education of young people is a selective process whereby social inequalities may translate into educational inequalities, which in turn reproduce the former.<sup>14</sup> In terms of education, there is a convergence of poor performance

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14. See also the report on poverty by the General Delegate of Children’s Rights: Délégué Général de la Communauté Française aux Droits de l’Enfant (2009), *Dans le Vif du Sujet. Rapport Relatif aux Incidences et aux Conséquences de la Pauvreté sur les Enfants, les Jeunes et leur Familles*, Communauté Française de Belgique, Brussels.



in education, a polarisation of schools into good and poor schools, and weak official recognition of diplomas acquired outside Belgium.

Evidence from a recent report (2011) on educational divergence between the Flemish Community and the French Community suggests that there is a significant educational attainment gap between the Flemish and French Communities. The dominant view is that poor economic conditions in several French-speaking areas contribute to a great extent to vulnerable educational performance. However, challenges do not lie only at the economic level but also in young people's local neighbourhoods, linked to the family, teaching staff and peer environments. One conclusion of this report is that adopting educational reforms without broader social reforms would simply punish educators for factors beyond their control.

The OECD's PISA surveys reveal that there are far more pupils with migrant status in the French-speaking schools than in the Flemish schools. Consequently, particular attention should be paid to the integration-related issues in the youth and educational field, with a commitment to go beyond institutional cleavages. Successful examples of the cross-sectoral collaboration between youth and educational and social services at the local level have been highlighted in the previous chapter. Moreover, the legal framework manifests the French Community's aim to promote not only young people's skills but also a social dimension of learning at school. To give one example, the decree related to positive discrimination at school is an important measure to enhance equality in the field of education. The decree provides the criteria for the allocation of resources to educational institutions (e.g. the proportion of unemployed persons with respect to the global population; the proportion of foreign nationals).

The conditions of cross-sectoral communication were widely discussed during the visits of the international review team. Some respondents referred to the Youth Plan, which they regarded as a strategic document, also in terms of strengthening collaboration between the education and the youth sectors. According to them, the relations between the formal and non-formal education sector are not always constructive. "Schools need to be more open to citizenship", stated one of the respondents. The same concern was expressed by the representatives of CRECCIDE (Carrefour Régional et Communautaire de la Citoyenneté et de la Démocratie), a non-profit federation which aims to promote equality and democracy in the context of education in Wallonia. The engagement with citizenship education of the French Community is reflected in the strong tradition of a type of lifelong learning, called *education permanente*.

### **Youth employment**

Alongside with education, youth employment has become a key youth political issue in the French Community, regardless of the fact that employment matters fall under the regional competences for the most part. Evidently, this emphasis reflects an economic crisis throughout Europe, including Belgium. It is also



connected to an increasingly comprehensive framework of youth policy, covering transversal areas of young people's lives.

The international review team became well aware of the ruptures between education and employment services. Even if there are increasing efforts to bridge the gaps, debate continues at all levels of society. As highlighted in this report (see Chapter 5), the youth sector may compensate for the deficit of employment services, both in the Brussels Region and in rural areas. In some parts of the French Community, local partnerships with employment and training services as well as with enterprises seem well structured and functioning. In other parts there seem to be overlaps or gaps as to the division of labour among different partners. The particular issue in this respect, raised during the visits of the international review team, is the complexity of the unemployment and social benefit systems in Belgium. This complexity is attributed to the fact that responsibilities are shared by different actors. At the regional levels of Wallonia and Brussels, there are public employment services such as Forem for Wallonia (le Service Public Wallon de l'Emploi et de la Formation) and ACTIRIS, which may be considered an important nexus of different networks and partnerships.

Moreover, the international team witnessed a certain tension between increasingly fragmented labour market structures and local projects in terms of balancing demand and supply. The risk of preparing young people for jobs that do not exist is, by no means, a particular problem of the French Community. At its heart is the essential question as to whether the structural problems related to the labour market position of young people can ever be solved solely by promoting the skills of the individuals concerned. The team was made aware of several examples of young people holding multiple certificates who were still unemployed.

The unemployment rate of young people in Wallonia is more than twice that in Flanders. It increased between 2008 and 2009 from 27.5% to 30.5%. The youth unemployment rate is highest in the Brussels Region but the change is slightly smaller than in Flanders and Wallonia. The same imbalance characterises the early school leavers' rate by region: 8.5% in Flanders in 2008 and 19.9% and 15.2% respectively in Brussels and Wallonia in 2009. A central concern continues to be high unemployment rates among young immigrants in Belgium (EEO Review 2010). Moreover, in terms of job security, young workers are over-represented in the area of temporary work: nearly 65% of temporary workers are aged under 30. The EEO Review has noted that young people may find it extremely hard to escape from this trend.

### **Key issues for youth policy**

In this section, four current challenges of youth policy in the French Community will be addressed (neighbourhood policy, multiculturalism, youth engagement and evidence-based policy making). The international review team believes that all these issues should be seen as political cornerstones of youth policy.



### Neighbourhood policy: an engine or restraint to mobility and openness?

The strong neighbourhood commitment of the French Community has already been described. Here, some critical points related to this spirit are taken up, in order to encourage the French Community to develop further their rich tradition, linked with the neighbourhood and mobility frameworks. Even if mobility inside Belgium has increased among young people – in particular, Walloons working in Flanders – there are still rural areas with strictly defined local “comfort zones”. The areas where people feel safe can be geographically very limited and, developmentally, very limiting. This issue has been clearly pointed out also by the General Delegate for Children’s Rights (2009) in the report on poverty of children, young people and their families.

Those whom the international review team met at the local level seemed to take considerable pride in their community philosophy. In some rural communities the idea of promoting young people’s possibilities for international exchange seemed remote for the people working with young people, and concrete examples of inter-municipal community work were scarce.<sup>15</sup> It was evident for the respondents in the rural contexts that new measures and methods are needed to encourage young people’s sense of citizenship in broad terms. However, new methods, such as social media as one potentially significant resource for “enlarged community work” in the virtual spheres, did not seem to be actively applied.

The question of mobility does not concern only young people. Some local professionals interviewed were concerned about an overly strong territorialisation of the project structure, leading to a localised conception of professionalism in the youth field. One debate going on right now concerns the correct level of harmonisation of the competences of the youth sector (the question of training and qualifications): to what extent should training be harmonised in the context of recognised youth services? In the current situation, there is a common framework only for the training of those working in the most responsible position (the head or co-ordinator) in the youth centres. Otherwise the level and quality of training is mostly a decentralised matter which is determined at the level of each youth association.

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15. Neighbourhood comfort zones really do sustain comfort in uncomfortable times. In the original “status zero studies” (Istance Rees and Williamson 1994, Istance and Williamson 1996), there were dramatic qualitative differences between the young people living outside of education, training or employment in the city (studied in 1993) and those in similar circumstances in the “traditional” communities of the Welsh valleys (studied in 1995). The former group were isolated, unsupported and often engaged in “survival offending”, yet they were optimistic about the future, for they lived in a relatively buoyant economic environment. The latter group was supported both materially and emotionally by members of their extended families and was not currently experiencing significant hardship, but they were deeply pessimistic about the future in an environment of industrial decay and high unemployment. They knew that, to stand any chance of a “future”, they needed to move away, yet to move away or explore opportunities further afield risked losing the comfort zone that was currently supporting them.



The international review team discerned a sort of tension in terms of how internal and international mobility was discussed and prioritised among respondents. A 19-year-old girl's statement represents one end of the continuum: "We must first work in our own community and after that we can look at international exchange". At the other end of the continuum we had a Youth Council representative who claimed that "it is easier to have internal mobility once young people have experienced international mobility". This inconsistent picture has to do with the "thickness" of the international relations of Belgian society but also to a certain "thinness" of Belgian citizenship. International mobility is depicted as a priority aim for youth policy. Still, only weak links between local youth work and international programmes were presented to the international team, in the rural areas. In these contexts the impression was that it is up to young people how mobile (and multilingual) they want to be. This challenge was recognised by those responsible for international mobility at the Community level. Each year around 3 000 young people take part in these processes, thanks to well-designed and committed co-ordination work done within the framework of the BIJ at the Community level. Around half of the mobility programmes and projects are realised outside European exchange structures. This reveals the commitment of the French Community (notably BIJ) to engage young people with international mobility. However, a significant question is also whether European exchange structures are fully able to meet existing challenges related to local circumstances in the French Community of Belgium, at least in the remote areas.

### **Multiculturalism: policy frameworks, grey zones**

Belgium is a unique country not only for the Belgians but also for its immigrants. These people encounter three different socio-economic circumstances, institutional arrangements and service structures depending on the Community in which they arrive. What is more – and even more importantly – they face dissimilar cultural understandings as to the cornerstones of living together in a society (citizenship, equality, diversity, discrimination). Martiniello (2010) states that, in the French Community, the official system approximates the French republican model, where everyone is supposed to be primarily an equal citizen, and the differences between individuals according to ethnic origin, religion, or other factors do not count, at least in political discourse. In actual fact, in the French Community, there has been a progressive opening towards more of an intercultural society that acknowledges the need to take diverse group-based attachments, rights and responsibilities into account.

The challenge that the French Community is facing right now is how to find a sensible balance between social cohesion and unity, on the one hand, and on the other, respect for diversity and awareness of discrimination at all levels of society. Many Belgian researchers state that there is no cross-sectoral vision about what should be done with newcomers. Previous waves of immigrants seem to be successfully integrated and therefore, the problems of current immigration are not seen as a key political concern in the French Community. Moreover, due to the federal structure of the country, the question of immigration is very



delicate, revealing many complexities such as the challenge of multilingualism that immigrants face, together with many institutional and cultural challenges in both vertical and horizontal terms.

These questions can also be asked of the youth field. Immigration and multiculturalism serve as an excellent example of how complex political arrangements at the Federal level may lead to scattered policies and segmented practices at the Regional, Community and Municipal/local level. To give one concrete example, a school-age young person moving to Brussels from the Region of Wallonia is required to speak the Flemish language – an official requirement which does not concern the French Community outside the Brussels Region. Therefore it may be difficult for this person to “fit in” in the multilingual capital. The multilingualism was not only presented as an asset to the international review team. In spite of being a multilingual society, language was several times mentioned as a barrier both for internal and external mobility. Indeed, in spite of the bilingual character of the Brussels Region in statistical terms, there is a shortage of structured arrangements that would enable real multilingual encounters in the youth field.

The international review team visited various local contexts which functioned according to an “open door philosophy”. This principle implies that services are open for all young people, regardless of their background. This is seen as a fundamental prerequisite for also fulfilling the quest for equality in political terms. As one youth professional stated, “For us, a young person is a young person. If we give priority, it is for those more at risk.” This kind of understanding of equality in terms of an open door philosophy has much potential but it also has possible drawbacks. The policy frames emphasising equal opportunities may lead to unequal outcomes and differentiated opportunity structures if there is not sufficient awareness in terms of the overall stratification of society, together with the political will for targeted practices and positive action.

Integration policy is, for the most part, a Community responsibility (immigration is, of course, a federal duty). From the information furnished to the international review team, it is clear there is no systematic co-ordination between youth and integration sectors. This poses particular challenges for the youth policy sector, if it is to make sense of diverse integration-related issues affecting young people in meaningful terms.

The international review team felt that respondents in the youth field seemed rather unaware of the anti-discrimination law implemented in 2007, or this particular legislation was not seen as imposing on the Community in any direct manner. However, according to the Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, a human rights body of the Council of Europe (ECRI 2009), the persistence of direct and indirect racial discrimination in access to housing and public services continues to be a problem affecting primarily non-citizens and people of immigrant background. These matters are to be seen as a Community competence, as well.



Regardless of these policy challenges, the international review team visited many youth houses or projects where the integration of young people from different backgrounds was highly successful. Many times this achievement was due to the particular commitment of the local staff, together with a particular investment in local partnerships. These kinds of practices should represent an institutionalised, and as such mandatory, structure.

All in all, a clear policy framework is an important precondition for the youth sector to prevent and combat everyday discrimination by and against young people. This seems to be the case both at the level of training of youth workers, awareness-raising among workers and young people, or the development of concrete targeted measures. The special case is Brussels where those who are foreign-born and of immigrant origin constitute close to 50% of the population. Brussels is a particular case also in institutional terms because it represents a crossroads between the Flemish Community view and the French Community view of how integration should be governed. Moreover, the disputes around the co-existence of the French and Dutch languages imply particular challenges in terms of the integration of foreign inhabitants into the capital.

### **Youth engagement**

Successful integration does not concern only welfare-related policy issues such as integration of young people into education and the labour market. It implies also an inclusive idea of democracy and the engagement of young people from different backgrounds, at every level of society. This, in turn, is related to a more fundamental question of how public space is understood in the French Community. As far as public space is concerned, special attention should be given to the engagement of “ordinary young people”, youth groups and neighbourhoods, contributing also to a broad sense of moral belonging to the community, regardless of the individual’s formal status as immigrant, unemployed, or something else. The international review team did not have the opportunity to meet young people outside service structures. Nor, within the French Community and in its contact with French-speaking Brussels, did it meet any informal youth groups, acting outside registered associations (i.e. local youth cultural groups and non-registered organisations working, for example, against discrimination).

Young people are engaged in their local environments at many levels: as political actors in different decision-making spheres, as beneficiaries of services, and as citizens in numerous formal and informal (youth cultural) milieus, both public and semi-public. The challenges related to contemporary democracy, from local to federal, have been taken actively into account in the Belgian youth policy context, where a lot of attention has been directed towards the creation of representative advisory committees and councils at the Community level. Without wishing to underestimate the strong commitment of the people in these committees and councils, and the significance of the work they are doing, there are certain challenges in terms of the consistency of these bodies which should



be further analysed. One relevant question is how to promote meaningful modes of engagement among those already inside organised consultation structures as well as those outside. Migrant youth organisations seem to traditionally be weakly represented in the French Community Youth Council, and matters related to migration and integration – to the surprise of the international review team – do not seem to inform in any significant way the agenda of the Youth Council.

The French Community addresses many requests to the Youth Council, which is seen as a key representative body for young people. In the Youth Council of the French Community, 60% of the members come from diverse youth organisations or youth movements, 30% come from youth aid and student groups, and 10% come from elsewhere. The relatively high proportion of representatives of associations has declined since the reforms of 2009, but it remains quite high. The crucial question is how the current structure of the Youth Council (in the French Community and elsewhere), combining the idea of associative and non-associative representation, is able to successfully recognise problems and possibilities that are relevant to all young people living in Belgium, inside and across Communities. Moreover, one must also consider the extent to which the Youth Council – while depending financially on public authorities – is able to take up political issues that are declared “too sensitive” at the public level. The Youth Council gets government support, and as such has to meet a range of expectations. Nevertheless, it has a potentially powerful proactive role in elevating significant issues to the youth policy agenda at the Community level.

Youth Council representatives complained about the difficulties in getting in touch with more “ordinary” young people within the French Community, even as the international review team heard statements from young people such as “people of my age (19) don’t have a place in the society” and “there is a lack of trust and support”. A classic gap between aspirational active citizenship and lived citizenship (see Hall and Williamson 1999) is telling in this context. One young person described her collective attachment in the following way: “We are firstly Belgian. To be Walloon is about politics.” This kind of statement reflects a particular desire for the current joint actions, and perhaps more, of the youth councils in different Communities (e.g. the informal J-Club arrangements that deal with federal, European and international issues).

In addition to the Youth Council, there are local youth and children’s councils. These are potentially open to young people from different backgrounds. However, the structure of local youth councils is informal by nature. The same challenge concerns young people’s participation possibilities and resources at school. In the context of local youth work, the French Community decree on youth centres presupposes young people’s engagement in the planning and implementation of activities. In other words, one condition for public subsidy of a youth centre is that young people are included in the official working group and/or administrative committee with a certain percentage of all members. The international review team did not have the opportunity to talk with young people involved in this kind of administration.



When it comes to the Regional level, there are only scarce possibilities for youth consultation and participation in relation to the political issues. This is a major challenge in the Brussels Region, particularly if one takes into account the serious problems that young people face in terms of integration there.

### **Knowledge in evidence-based youth policy**

The federal structure poses great challenges for the collection of adequate data on the Belgian population. The representatives of the Observatory of Childhood and Youth state that there is a serious shortage of comprehensive data in more general terms.<sup>16</sup> This concerns also particular topics such as immigration and integration. According to the 2009 report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the lack of centralised, comprehensive data is a major problem both at Community and Federal level. The lack of comprehensive data is in contradiction with the aim of promoting evidence-based policy making. However, new instruments are about to be implemented to obtain a better picture of integration and migration-related topics (i.e. the diversity barometer, and the record of racist crimes maintained by the federal police). The Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism plays a leading role in this context. Data-gathering instruments are not, however, sufficient without political will among politicians, authorities and researchers to recognise and analyse parallel processes of the stratification and multiculturalisation of society. The international review team sensed a particular fear among respondents of stigmatising young people. “We should not stigmatise immigrant youth as problem youth,” was the answer of one respondent to the question of whether or not the data available are sensitive enough to recognise discrimination based on ethnicity and nationality.

The issue of sufficient evidence does not, however, concern institutional arrangements only. The more semantic question of what counts as “evidence” is as important here. At the level of the partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe in the youth field, the importance of youth work has been recognised, more than in past discourses of European youth policy. Youth work is now embedded within the European Youth Strategy, though there are still debates about quite what it means and what its primary purpose is. There is now a Resolution on Youth Work in Europe, signed off by European youth ministers in November 2010. In the French Community, as everywhere in Europe, the youth sector is characterised by a particular dispute between “top-down” evidence and “bottom-up” experience (see, for example, Williamson 2006). According to a report assessing practices for using indicators in the youth sector (Ecorys 2011), a challenge for Belgium (and the French Community) is the overemphasis on administrative indicators, which focus on outputs of the actions undertaken, compared to wider indicators which would describe the situation of young

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16. The Observatory of Childhood and Youth is a department of the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium. It conducts and commissions research on all issues relating to children and young people as targets of policies implemented by the French Community.



people as targets of youth policies. The representatives of the Observatory of Childhood and Youth acknowledged the need to develop the methodological processes of data gathering. Without a broad understanding of knowledge it is surely difficult to keep the transversal dynamics of the youth sector alive.

## The Youth Plan

### Background

The office of the Minister of Youth and Youth Welfare started drawing up the Youth Plan at the end of 2010, in co-operation with different agencies and officials, with the desire to establish a co-ordinated plan for youth. The combination of two competences with somewhat different policy frameworks – general youth policy and special youth welfare policy (youth aid/protection) – was seen by the French Community Government as an important political step. There have been numerous initiatives to develop greater consistency and co-ordination within the youth field over the past 20 years, so the current initiative is, in some respects, by no means new. The current Minister of Youth and Youth Welfare is seeking to provide a new transversal dynamic to overcome existing tensions, particularly in terms of gaps and overlaps in vertical and horizontal arrangements. The objectives are ambitious and manifold, ranging from practical improvements of the youth sector to the overall promotion of the youth sector's and young people's position in the society, both in material and symbolic terms.

The international review team had the opportunity to meet the Minister and members of her cabinet as well as other relevant partners involved in the Youth Plan in April 2011. At the time, the ministerial conference on the Youth Plan was to be organised, and another participatory survey was planned for the summer. Consultations with the youth sector had been completed by the time of the meeting in April, and the Minister reported on various opinions received from the relevant stakeholders, both positive and negative. The evaluation of the process is scheduled to take place during 2013-14. A decree is being considered for the middle of 2014 in order to provide a methodological framework for the regular development and implementation of future youth plans.

According to the procedure of the Council of Europe's youth policy review, the national partners in the review process had an opportunity to articulate key issues on which they would like the international review team to focus. The French Community decided to choose the Youth Plan as its key issue. Therefore, the international review team has endeavoured to make sense of the preparatory process of the Youth Plan in procedural and substantive terms. The central concern is how the Youth Plan is able to recognise and respond to contemporary challenges related to young people's lives. To what extent is such an ambitious objective even realistic? The international review team was not provided with a complete draft version of the Youth Plan itself. This is unfortunate, and it clearly limits the specificity of some of the analysis.



## The conceptual framework

The Youth Plan does not manifest only the administrative development of the youth policy field in the French Community. The overall conception of youth policy is also undergoing significant reform.

Howard Williamson's (2002) formulation of the expectations around "extending entitlement", ensuring that the "reach" of youth policy engages with those who are most in need of it, captures well the overall philosophy in the French Community. There is a strong priority given to preventative intervention with the objective of maintaining children and young people in their ordinary living environments. In addition, the Minister herself emphasised the urgent need for going beyond Community competences to cover regional matters such as employment and environment. With regard to employment, the multilayered employment policy in Belgium means that both the Federal Government and the Regional or Community authorities are responsible for specific elements of policy linked to the labour market (such as vocational training, career guidance, job seeking, and social security – see also Chapter 5). According to the EEO Review (2010), the present situation is characterised by a growing demand from the Regions to enlarge their remit.

With the whole policy context on the move, the horizons are open to multiple possibilities. Openness, however, may in turn produce ambiguities.

As stated before, the French Community has a strong tradition of collectivist values (CRACS). Youth political actors everywhere, but arguably particularly in the French Community, face a tension between the contemporary demands of individualism and personal competences, and simultaneous concerns and commitments related to collectivism and communality. A crucial question in this context is whether the main policy driver is related to the promotion of young people's identities, social belonging and collective engagement with society, or if the primary policy concern is to invest efficiently in individual young people's competences and qualifications, particularly in education and the labour market. This tension has to do with the essence of youth sector activity itself: is it supporting young people on their path to adulthood or is it helping young people to be young (Williamson 2002)? Different conceptions are, of course, interrelated in practice. As a considerable body of research shows, material conditions may impoverish young people's possibilities and motives for taking an active public role in society. Still, in this strategic phase of youth policy reform, it is important for the French Community to rethink the overall framework: whether the youth sector aims to guide young individuals into decent adulthood (youth sector as a transit zone), or whether it rather strives to make a social forum available for young people in order to offer them collective tools to improve their daily life and living conditions (youth sector as a social forum) (Coussée et al., 2010).



## The preparatory process

The first visit of the international review team to the French Community took place in April 2011. In the course of this visit, the team aimed at making sense of procedural and substantive aspects of the Youth Plan. This was done by hearing the opinions, assessments and expectations of various respondents, who were asked specifically about the Youth Plan. Nearly everyone consulted was ready to discuss the matter at length – including those prospectively affected by it but who had not been involved in the preparation process in any direct way. The impression gained is that the youth field broadly shares a view that the reform implies great potential for the sector. The overall significance attached to the thorough preparatory process is certainly one reason that explains the great expectations attached to the planning phase, and the disputes it evoked.

First, due to the enlarged scope of the youth policy field, there is an increasing number of stakeholders who may be regarded as relevant partners in the process. The contested youth field, with its vague borders and the consequent dispute of who is “in” and who is “out”, is clearly associated with the ambiguous character of the policy field, which may be considered a positive aspect, or simply puzzling. This in turn certainly confirms that beyond those involved, there are also interest groups which consider themselves excluded from the process.

The political spirit of transversality does not automatically lead to a holistic approach. Nor does it mean any easily shared responsibilities and dialogue. A transversal spirit may turn, in an unforeseeable manner, into the rivalry and segmentation of different interest groups if special attention is not paid to the broad engagement of diverse groups of people. The concept of holism (originally a Greek word meaning “all”, “entire”, “total”) refers to a simple idea that all the properties of a given issue cannot be determined, understood or explained by its component parts alone. This was exactly one of the challenges mentioned by some respondents. However, there was an equal conviction that the transversal Youth Plan should not gloss over sectorally articulated parameters which may be in conflict with each other. On the contrary, there was broad consensus that different frameworks should be discussed in a transparent manner.

Moreover, with regard to an enlarged vision of the competences and responsibilities involved, it was particularly important that all relevant ministries be actively involved in the preparation process, as much as for the sake of the future legitimacy of the Youth Plan. Attention should be paid especially to the involvement in the process of the experts from the youth aid sector. Furthermore, one significant dimension is the Regional level with its competences relating to, for example, employment and environment. From this perspective the international review team was surprised to hear that Regional agencies, such as those responsible for employment policies, had not been formally consulted, nor had the ministers outside the Ministry of Youth and Youth Welfare.

Second, the international team observed some ambivalence among respondents regarding the consultation and the execution of power: how should the interplay between competences and responsibilities be divided and shared? Public



authorities – such as the Youth Service, as a key actor within the youth sector at the Community level – were consulted, but they did not have any decisive mandate in the preparation process. When discussing the Youth Plan with youth associations and the Youth Council, as well as diverse federations and advisory committees, the international review team observed a classical tension between consultative and binding opinion. An overall European declaration that young people must be heard in the policy matters that concern them is a controversial statement if there is no clear vision of whose voice and knowledge count in this context, how the matters that concern young people are defined, and whether their consultative role produces any legitimacy regarding how the opinions are put into practice. Later in 2011, several working groups were established, composed of the representatives of public authorities from different ministries and the youth sector as well as people from the associations. One of the key tasks of these working groups was to go systematically through substantive matters included in the Youth Plan and in this way prepare for its implementation.

### **The content**

Seven key issues have been distinguished in the course of the preparation of the Youth Plan.<sup>17</sup> These issues illustrate how the principle of transversality is meant to be applied in the youth policy field. The list reveals also how the Youth Plan may potentially resolve current concerns in the policy areas on youth, mentioned also in this report.

#### *Supporting young people's capacity for action and joint commitment*

This aim is a crystallisation of a traditional driver in the French Community, namely the values related to CRACS. This, in turn, promotes a democracy-oriented view of youth policy. According to this principle, the youth sector represents a social forum for youth, and young people are seen as responsible and engaged members of society.

#### *Recognising and developing the diversity of skills of young people*

This aim calls for a better interplay between formal and non-formal learning (*education permanente*), in terms of, for example, methods, forums, and the professionalism involved. The vision is to help young people realise their multiple potentials.

#### *Reducing social and economic inequalities by supporting action against their underlying causes and combating poverty*

This objective can be seen as a reaction to policy tendencies which are inclined to tackle structural problems of inequality in individual terms. In this context, the

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17. See “Le Plan Jeunesse est sur les rails”, Cr@cs No. 1, January 2011, <http://evelyne.huytebroeck.be/spip.php?article879>



youth sector may represent a particular safety net for precariously located young people. There is a debate as to how one can agree on and establish a shared vocabulary for both general youth policy and youth aid policy frameworks. The international review team captured various semantic ambiguities among the people interviewed: should one talk about voluntarism or compulsion as a primary driver of the sector? Do the concepts of “adviser” and “measure” imply something other than “judge” and “sentence” when the dialogue of youth rather than youth justice policy is at stake?

*Assisting young people in their choices of educational and occupational direction*

This aim can be seen as a response to the efficiency expectation to which the field of youth policy (also) has to respond. Young people are seen as an investment for the future, and the framework of employability is highly valued here.

*Promoting and securing the transition of young people to adulthood*

This aim is a reaction to a strong expectation characterising youth policies everywhere in Europe. The challenge in this context is how to respond to the increasing fragmentation of young people’s life courses. Is there a mismatch between the disintegration of traditional social pathways to adulthood, on the one hand, and a vision for a more coherent and integrated policy sphere, on the other? The youth sector is seen here as providing both a transit zone and a safety net for young people.

*Giving a place to youth policies within the ambitions of sustainable development*

This aim insists on a revised conception of global solidarity, going beyond national borders.

*Taking into consideration the specificities of young people’s home environments and mobilising those involved at the most appropriate territorial level*

This aim seeks to tackle a tension between young people’s local commitment and mobility.

One additional key issue emerged from the consultation with the advisory bodies in the field of youth: “Value the image of youth and their citizen actions”. The international review team also noticed during the visits a particular concern about young people’s negative position in Belgian society. According to the respondents, young people risk stigmatisation in public debate. The statement “we have nothing to lose” and related discourses echo, too, in the minds of some professionals, at least when marginalised young people are in focus, particularly those in rural areas.



These key issues were confirmed by the permanent Inter-ministerial Conference about Youth policies (Conférence Interministérielle Permanente Jeunesse) on 19 July 2011.

The list is, indeed, an impressive political response to the principle of transversality. It illustrates how the Youth Plan is considered to provide a response to the inconsistencies of the youth sector. In the discussions with the responsible stakeholders of the Youth Plan, the transversal vision was presented as a solution to the overall problems in the youth sector. Yet, arguably, the call for transversality may also be seen as a part of the dispute itself.

A cursory glance at the list reveals the diversity in the policy aims and frameworks embedded in the Youth Plan. This rich, and potentially contested, nature of the youth policy field was often raised in discussions with the international review team. Many respondents applauded the government's commitment to youth matters, and reflected on the process related to the Youth Plan. Several respondents were concerned about the future of the Youth Plan. They did not seem to have any clear information about the financial and other relevant resources available for the sensible and effective implementation of the Youth Plan. According to the Youth Policy Review (2011), the French Community's budget for the sector of youth policy increased around 5% from the year 2010 to 2011, and it is 14% more than in 2009. The overall need to strengthen the recognition of the youth sector was generally shared. However, at the same time, a number of respondents, particularly those working at the local level, revealed their worries about everything becoming uniform and subject to certification. The international review team could sense an atmosphere that was characterised by a wish of "more politics and less policies". This particular concern illustrates well the current challenges of a multifaceted youth sector, discussed throughout this report.

## **Recommendations to the French Community**

### **Recommendations concerning youth policy co-ordination at the local level**

#### *Recommendation 1*

The international review shares the concerns expressed by the French Community authorities and practitioners with regard to the challenges of local youth policy co-ordination. The international review team encourages the authorities and civil society representatives to jointly improve coherence in terms of how local youth policy is structured and organised, in theory and in practice.

#### *Recommendation 2*

The international review team discerned a particular need for better inter-municipal co-ordination to prevent overlapping, differentiated and/or isolated services and related inequality among different municipalities, not only in terms of service delivery but also young people's overall living conditions. A



more consistent structure for partnerships in the field of youth policy does not concern only municipalities. There seems to be a demand for strengthened inter-Community dialogue as well.

#### *Recommendation 3*

The international team observed many local contexts where institutional complexities may hamper the creation of user-friendly youth services or, more profoundly, young people's awareness of services. Additionally, the debate about the grounds for confidentiality and the case for broader information-sharing is hardly restricted to the French Community, but it is something that requires clarity of thought and resolution.

### **Recommendation concerning the crossroads of the education, employment and youth sectors**

#### *Recommendation 4*

There is an evident need for transversal policy measures to deal with the challenges that young people face in terms of education and employment. Besides the arenas of formal education, diverse out-of-school contexts should also be seen as important prerequisites for the successful education and social integration of young people.

### **Recommendation concerning mobility**

#### *Recommendation 5*

The international review team observed diverse prerequisites for young people's mobility and the inequity of resources available. The economic, social, linguistic and cultural obstacles to young people's mobility should be carefully analysed and unravelled. This should be a key focus of attention within current youth policy development.

### **Recommendations concerning multiculturalism**

#### *Recommendation 6*

The international review team discerned many examples of parallel processes that increase ethnic diversity and indeed ethnic stratification of society. There is a great need for a thorough analysis on how the youth services are able to fulfil the aims related to the principle of equal opportunities within the current youth policy framework of the French Community. The team advises the stakeholders both at Community and local level to detect critical points linked to the dynamics and possible gaps between equal opportunities and equal outcomes, in terms of immigration. The intersection between youth policy, educational policy and employment policy is of particular importance here.



### *Recommendation 7*

The international review team discerned a need for better awareness of the problem of inequality among young people (and their families), also in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race and religion. The impression is that youth authorities and practitioners at Community and local level should be more aware of the legislation (such as the anti-discrimination act) and measures (such as positive action) already available to combat discrimination, and more committed to revise and apply them in the youth field. This kind of commitment cannot be a choice or responsibility of individual local workers only. Rather, it should be a mandatory procedure within the whole youth administration.

### *Recommendation 8*

In the future, it is advisable to consider the possibility of strengthening the link between youth and integration policies and related sectors, to make better sense of diverse integration-related challenges affecting young people.

## **Recommendation concerning youth engagement**

### *Recommendation 9*

The international review team encourages those responsible for youth policy in the French Community to assess the current structures of local democracy, particularly from the perspective of youth engagement. The international team got the impression that there are many consultative bodies and other possibilities for youth participation (i.e. in the youth centres). These structures may need clarification and assessment. There seems to be a need to improve the manifold opportunities for engagement also for those young people who remain outside diverse consultative bodies and organised and/or recognised associative structures. To improve the participation resources of immigrant youth and migrant associations is of particular importance. Special attention should also be given to the Brussels Region.

## **Recommendation concerning the development of evidence-based policy**

### *Recommendation 10*

The federal structure poses great challenges for the collection of adequate data on the Belgian population. The international review team strongly encourages the French Community to develop reliable data collection mechanisms and more lively dialogue with the research field, particularly concerning topical issues such as immigration, integration and discrimination, in order to be able to pursue its youth policy in a sensible, comprehensive and proactive way.







## Chapter 4 – Youth policy in the German-speaking Community

The German-speaking Community (Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft – DG) is the smallest of the three Communities of Belgium, covering only 854 km<sup>2</sup> and with a mostly rural population of 75 300. It is situated in the east of Belgium, bordering Luxembourg and Germany. Eupen, the main city of the Community, has approximately 18 700 inhabitants, and the second- and the third-largest towns are also located in this northern Canton. In the south, the city of Sankt Vith is the biggest municipality in the corresponding Canton with approximately 9 300 inhabitants.

Approximately 20% of the population in the German-speaking Community have non-Belgian citizenship. The highest concentration of migrants can be found in Raeren and Kelmis, bordering Germany, where almost half of the inhabitants are non-Belgian. By far the largest group of migrants in the German-speaking Community are Germans, who live in Belgium but often still work in Germany.

The DG is part of the “Großregion Saar-Lor-Lux – Rheinland-Pfalz – Wallonie – Französische und Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens” (in brief, “Großregion”), which is the aggregation of Saarland, Rheinland-Pfalz (Germany), Luxembourg, Lorraine (France), the Walloon Region, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. This “big region” is located between the rivers Rhine, Moselle, Saar and Maas. The countries and institutions of this region co-operate in many respects to facilitate mobility for their inhabitants. Also the structure of the Euregio Maas-Rhine enables co-operation and exchange in the border region of Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Euregio Maas-Rhine is a public-law foundation comprising the areas of the province Limburg in Flanders, the Walloon province of Liège, the areas of the German-speaking Community, the Regio Aachen in Germany and the southern part of province Limburg in the Netherlands.

Moreover, the German-speaking Community Government is a co-signer of the Benelux-Treaty and active partner in this co-operation.



The German-speaking Community consists of nine municipalities – Amel, Büllingen, Bütgenbach, Burg-Reuland, Eupen, Kelmis, Lontzen, Raeren and Sankt Vith. Together with the two municipalities of the French Community in Walloon – Malmedy and Weismes – they constitute the geographical region of East Belgium. The German-speaking Community is not in fact one geographically unified territory but is divided into a northern and a southern part (called Kanton), which are geographically separated. To go from the Kanton Eupen in the north of the DG to the Kanton Sankt Vith in the south one has to pass through the territory of the French Community.

The government of the German-speaking Community has four ministers; its parliament is composed of 25 members from six political parties. Since 2009 a coalition between the SP, Pro DG and PFF,<sup>18</sup> under Minister-President Lambertz, has governed the German-speaking Community.

The German-speaking Community took over some competences from the Walloon Region – for broad-based youth policy, this has been an important development, especially regarding the competence in the labour market. So the DG is now responsible not only for the administration of unemployment benefits and training concepts but also for monitoring job-seeking activities.

The Minister for Culture, Media and Tourism is responsible for youth policy in the DG. Minister Isabelle Weykmans' responsibilities, besides youth policy, are in the fields of culture, tourism, media, sport, adult education, preservation orders, sustainable development, and community centres. Youth policy in the DG deals with education out of school for organised and non-organised youth and with youth participation. A definition of youth policy in the DG is as follows:

Youth policy does not refer to teaching, but to the education of the organised and non-organised youth, but excludes youth protection legislation (penal legislation, social legislation and civil law). It includes the definition of provisions, which enable funding to be awarded for the socio-cultural education of young people, together with funding for their social development (Blanpain 1988, p.146)

The Council of Europe, however, sees “youth policy” in broader conceptual, and less administrative, terms: it incorporates all areas of policy that affect young people. However articulated, all countries have a youth policy – by design, default or neglect (Williamson 2002). Therefore other important youth policy topics, such as school education and employment, fall under the portfolios of other ministers, in this case the Minister for Education, Vocational Training and Employment, whereas issues like youth aid and rights of the child fall under the duties of the Minister for Family, Health and Social Affairs.

Although competences in the political fields that have a lot of influence on young people's lives are allocated between two different ministers (belonging

<sup>18</sup>. The SP is the Social Democratic Party, the PFF is the Party for Freedom and Progress, a liberal party, and Pro DG stands for the movement Pro German-speaking Community.



to different political parties), the youth policy approach in the DG is transversal, even if the connection with culture is definitely closer than with other fields of policy for youth.

## Youth in the German-speaking Community

For the German-speaking Community, youth is defined as between 12 to 26 years of age, but the target group of youth work is not restricted to this age bracket, with children and young adults taking up offers provided by youth work organisations. Therefore the unofficial but broadly accepted enlarged target group for youth policy in the DG is from 5 years up to 29.

The 22 308 young people aged 5 to 29 represent 29.66% of the population in the DG;<sup>19</sup> this percentage is higher than the corresponding proportion for Belgium overall. Reflecting the distribution of the adult population we find the biggest youth population in Eupen – every fourth young person in the DG lives here. The highest percentage of young people in the age group 10 to 30 as compared to the total population can be found in the municipality of Sankt Vith, followed by Bütgenbach and Burg-Reuland, with the lowest in Raeren.

In 2009/10, approximately 13 500 pupils and students attended formal education institutions in the German-speaking Community, from kindergarten to tertiary level.

As in other rural areas in Europe the everyday lives of young people are strongly affected by the traditions and organisations in the villages. However, due to the size of the region and the geographical location of the German-speaking Community, young people in the DG are exposed to influences from many sides. The whole Walloon Region, Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg offer different experiences and opportunities for young people in the areas of entertainment, sports and shopping, for example, and young people are making considerable use of this provision, since big cities like Namur, Liège, Maastricht or Aachen are relatively easy to reach by train or car. As a result, young people in the German-speaking Community experience a combination of different – seemingly oppositional – influences, in that they reflect globalisation and localisation at the same time. Yet the lack of a network of regular public transport makes individual mobility one of the biggest obstacles in young people's lives.

The international review team asked on various occasions what was perceived as the biggest challenge for young people, and most commonly it was said that alcohol abuse – especially in combination with driving – is a major problem. A lack of information on various issues – from the labour market to the Internet – was also mentioned, as were the socio-economic problems facing some groups of young people.

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19. Data from 1 January 2010.



## Youth work in the German-speaking Community

In the relevant draft of the decree youth work is described as follows:<sup>20</sup>

Youth work takes place out of school and during certain leisure activities. It is based on the processes of non-formal and informal learning and voluntary participation. These activities and processes are organised as individual initiatives, with the consultation of young people or under the educational guidance of youth workers or voluntary youth leaders.

By providing appropriate opportunities, it promotes the individual, social and cultural development of young people, while taking account of their interests and needs. It also helps teach young people to support each other and live independently and sustainably. Furthermore, it aims to enable them to be responsible for themselves, take part in family and social life, contribute to democracy, resolve conflicts amicably and show tolerance towards different opinions, cultures and ways of life. It contributes to the physical and emotional welfare of young people and enables them to gain self-efficacy experiences and learn participatory skills.<sup>21</sup>

Youth work is the main agent of youth policy in the German-speaking Community and also plays an important role in the plans for future youth policy, especially the re-organisation of the funding scheme and the conceptualisation of participation in decision making, which are of high importance in new developments in the youth policy field. Funding and grants are now available for the staffing costs of professional youth workers, for the maintenance of infrastructure, for equipment, and for the training of youth workers and voluntary youth leaders. There are also functional grants for recognised youth organisations, youth services and youth centres, and additional subsidies for certain activities, innovative projects, international projects or projects with the other two Belgian Communities. Additionally, subsidies may be provided under the performance management framework; the Youth Office has a target agreement with the government and the relevant municipalities. This new organisation of the funding system for youth work, designed to improve quality and produce agreed outcomes, is one of the main pillars of the future youth policy.

Out-of-school youth work takes place in youth centres and in youth organisations. Similar to the Flemish Community, youth organisations such as the Scouts, Patro and Chiro are important stakeholders in youth work. Seven youth organisations are acknowledged in the DG – beside Patro (St. Raphael and St. Niclas), Chiro, the Scouts and the Girl Guides, there are the Catholic Rural Youth (Katholische Landjugend) and Young People and Health (Jugend und Gesundheit). Youth centres exist in 19 villages (spread over eight municipalities), and there are two youth information centres, in Sankt Vith and in Eupen.

20. The version of the decree finally adopted by the Parliament of the DG can be found here: [www.dglive.be/Desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-111/418\\_read-38242](http://www.dglive.be/Desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-111/418_read-38242).

21. Youth Policy in the German-speaking Community, p.3.



Youth work carried out through youth organisations reaches approximately 3 300 young people and according to youth workers the youth centres and clubs reach some 1 100 young people. The summer camps arranged by youth organisations are very popular, with more than 1 500 young people participating in them in 2010. There is no accurate information on the contacts of the youth information centres with young people. In the nine municipalities of the DG, more than 150 youth groups are active.

Nineteen full-time work places are financed across the youth field; 12 in youth clubs, two in the youth information centres, 2.5 in the youth organisations and 4.5 in the Youth Office. More than 650 voluntary leaders work in the youth organisations and youth centres. For 2011 the budget for youth policy was €1 680 000, which is 0.61% of the annual budget of the German-speaking Community. In addition to this amount there are the subsidies from the EU programme Youth in Action (€190 000), provincial funding (a maximum of €9 000) and municipality funding.

In the Regional Development Concept (Regionales Entwicklungskonzept der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft), an overview of the reach and scope of youth work in the DG is provided. Table 3 below illustrates how many youth groups (organised by one of the recognised youth organisations) exist in the municipalities and how many people are working in open youth work.

**Table 3: Involvement in youth work in the German-speaking Community**

	Population	Youth < 26 years	Number of youth groups	Number of full-time open youth workers
Amel	5 345	1 713	18	0
Büllingen	5 471	1 778	21	1
Burg-Reuland	3 948	1 275	1	0
Bütgenbach	5 610	1 799	15	1
Sankt Vith	9 242	2 852	17	1
Kanton Sankt Vith	29 616	9 417	72	3
Eupen	18 408	5 500	42	4
Kelmis	10 566	3 003	11	1.75
Lontzen	5 267	1 688	9	1.25
Raeren	10 312	3 002	19	1.5
Kanton Eupen	44 553	13 193	81	8.5
<b>DG</b>	<b>74 169</b>	<b>22 610</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>11.5</b>

Source: Regionales Entwicklungskonzept, Band 1, Seite 30, data from 2007

Youth organisations and youth centres are technically supported by the Youth Office of the German-speaking Community (Jugendbüro der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft) in relation to methods, materials and logistics. The support covers information technology, media, financial management, rental of materials and insurance for voluntary youth leaders and visitors to youth clubs.



Six of the 12 youth workers in the youth centres are employed directly by the Youth Office. The youth workers have regular meetings. Therefore the Youth Office both delivers centre-based youth work and co-ordinates and develops open and mobile youth work and street work.

Furthermore the Youth Office supports mobility of young people and experts in the socio-cultural field and it promotes national and international co-operation in the youth sector. Consequently the Youth Office serves as the national agency for the EU Youth in Action programme and as the agency for the national Programme Bel'J. The Youth Office is also responsible for the management of the European Youth Card in the German-speaking Community, the Eurojuka.

Young people's access to information is provided and fostered by the two youth information points: the youth information centre (JIZ) in Sankt Vith which also serves as Eurodesk in the DG and the Infotreff in Eupen. The latter is also a member of the ERYICA network, and both work according to the European Youth Information Charter. Both structures are independent non-profits under Belgian law. The Infotreff Eupen covers the north of the Community, while JIZ Sankt Vith is in charge of the south. Both follow an outreach approach since young people's personal mobility is a major issue, especially in the south. Therefore youth information workers visit schools and try to co-operate with youth organisations, open youth work and the Youth Office. The youth information points offer a newsletter which now has 1 100 subscribers, and they also send and host organisations for the European Voluntary Service (EVS).

In both information points, access to the Internet is provided for young people as well as individual information and consultation. The international review team learned that young people are especially interested in information on international experiences abroad, on studying and on social legislation.

The Sankt Vith Youth Information Centre is situated in the house of service of the German-speaking Community (Dienstleistungszentrum der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft). This includes, for example, the Employment Office, so it is easy to find and is known to adults as well.

The team for youth information does not create all information material afresh, but co-operates with youth information in Germany and in the French Community. Although information material in French is provided, the youth information centres translate or create a lot of information material in German. Information material provided by youth information in Germany that is also valid for Belgium is also used. This approach is both cost and resource effective. Since some of the information in the German leaflets point to other countries' institutions, the youth information centres in the DG adapt the information material to Belgian legislation and institutions. Additional material from outside is used for example when providing information on general topics like health. The dilemma of this approach is that the opportunity for a clearly targeted information style specially designed for the youth in the DG might be lost.



Members of the international review team had the opportunity to visit a local youth club in Rocherath, a village in the municipality of Büllingen. This club is located in an old fire brigade house next to the church. The renovated premises were allocated by the village and the municipality; the human resources were allocated by the Youth Office. The youth worker is responsible not only for the youth club in Rocherath but for the open youth work in the municipality Büllingen as a whole (where there are two other youth clubs – one in Manderfeld and one in Büllingen). The youth club is run according to the ideals of open youth work; therefore it is open to all those interested. Most of the young people who attend – and who sometimes manage their own time at the centre – are at the same time members of other NGOs and/or youth organisations.

The majority of those who make use of the youth centres are male, though some girls do attend. But open youth work in the DG and in Büllingen has girls and young women as a particular target group and there are specific initiatives designed to engage the interest of female youth.

When the international review team visited some of the youth club members in Rocherath were participating in training to become volunteer workers at the youth club. This would enable them to prolong the opening hours of the youth club. The club is open three days a week and offers opportunities for the young people of the village to meet, listen to music and play games. Indeed some of the games equipment available, such as tabletop football or pool table, is rotated or exchanged among youth clubs and youth centres. This is a good example of the opportunities for co-operation created if youth workers are in charge of more than one centre or club, and also work for the same institution – they can exchange not only equipment but also ideas and understanding about the “mood” and interests of different groups of young people.

Some of the young people at the youth centre in Rocherath had been participants in a Youth in Action exchange project with a youth project in Turkey and had been significantly affected by the experience. It provided them with the opportunity to meet with young people of a similar age but a different cultural background, thereby helping them overcome prejudices that they may have developed on the basis of scant personal interactions with and rumours about migrants in Belgium. This kind of exchange – even with a successful working EU youth programme – is not a usual experience for young people in a rural area, coming from a village with less than 500 inhabitants. This exchange and other international activities – like a soccer cup in Austria and a girls’ week with international participants in Belgium – are symbols of the approach to open youth work in the German-speaking Community, designed to enable and support young people developing life perspectives and goals by extending to them a variety of opportunities.<sup>22</sup>

A main task of youth policy is to enable young people’s participation in policy making. The Council of the German-speaking Youth (Rat der deutschsprachigen

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22. This description of the aim of open youth work is also provided on the homepage of open youth work Büllingen (<http://obj.jimdo.com/>).



Jugend) is the body representing youth in the DG. It is organised as a platform of individual young people, youth centres, local youth councils, youth NGOs, and youth services, as well as youth political parties (which normally are the youth sections of the political parties). The Youth Office supports the Council of the German-speaking Youth with a secretariat and expert monitoring.

The DG's Youth Council was established in 1976, but the legal basis for its current structure lies in a Royal Enactment from 1983. Originally the Youth Council was a kind of umbrella organisation for the formal youth organisations and institutions, but since 2005 it has been open to non-organised young people. The general assembly of the Council has 25 members drawn from organisations and institutions and six individual members. There are no real elections for the general assembly, but the organisations and institutions nominate their representatives, and individuals can apply. All members of the Council have to be confirmed by the government of the German-speaking Community. This procedure carries with it the possibility of the government's political influence – even though all involved parties assured the international review team that this has never happened. Nevertheless this potential influence on the composition of the advisory and consultative body of youth representatives will be mitigated in the future,<sup>23</sup> and the Youth Council will also open up to more individual participation of young people.

The main goals of the Youth Council are strengthening political awareness of young people and supporting young people and their organisations. Its primary task is the representation of the interests of German-speaking youth in Belgium. In this regard the Youth Council is quite active in providing expertise and advice on laws concerning young people and it has also been involved in the development of future youth policy in the DG.

### The future of youth policy in the German-speaking Community

In the years 2005 and 2006 a series of consultations in the framework of the P.R.I.M.A. process<sup>24</sup> involved experts from the DG, Belgian and international experts, and young people from the German-speaking Community in order to elaborate recommendations for youth policy. The process was moderated by a group from Luxembourg.

23. As a “national” youth council, it does not currently comply with the criteria set out by Youth Forum Jeunesse (the European Youth Forum).

24. The P.R.I.M.A. process was initiated to redefine youth policy and youth work and develop a youth concept in the DG in 2005 through workshops and consultations moderated by people from outside of the German-speaking Community. P.R.I.M.A. stands for Partizipation (participation), GestaltungsRäume (scope for creativity), Information, Miteinander (together) and Anerkennung (recognition) – these are also the main fields where recommendations for youth policy were formulated.



The P.R.I.M.A. process led to different recommendations for youth policy in the fields of participation (with the inclusion of the municipalities), mobility, information, cultural diversity, networking and training.

The Regional Development Concept (Regionales Entwicklungskonzept der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft – REK) was developed in 2008 with the involvement of stakeholder groups and individuals. It is designed to provide a possible picture of and realistic perspectives for the DG in the year 2025. Youth and youth work play important roles in these deliberations. A detailed description of the process and its results were published in April 2011.

Based on the results of these projects, the decision was taken to work on the development of a comprehensive and high-quality youth policy based on knowledge and information. This is also the basis for the specific task of the international review team in the German-speaking Community, as the authorities asked the team to focus on it as one of its priorities.

In the Regional Development Concept it was highlighted that youth policy should be understood as a cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary task including – besides youth work – themes such as employment, voluntarism and the media.

The newly integrated youth decree, which will be enforced by 2012, takes account of the prominence of youth work in the German-speaking Community as well as of young people themselves and the people involved in youth work. Therefore main themes in the new decree are the quality of youth work, initial and further training of youth workers and voluntary youth leaders, and the participation of young people. The involvement of municipalities in the implementation of youth policy will also be reflected in the new decree.

Currently the subsidies for youth NGOs are strongly linked to the number of members in youth work organisations and the number of participants in youth work projects. However, this approach to funding creates the problem of evaluating quality, if that becomes the paramount funding criterion.

The new approach will therefore focus on quality-based evaluation anchored within a commonly developed approach and performance guidelines agreed on between youth work and the DG and between youth work and municipalities.

The youth decree will state that every five years a strategy plan has to be developed by the government, which should be the basis for the evaluation of the performance in youth policy. The involvement of young people, youth organisations and youth services in strategy planning at both local and Community level is foreseen. Since the strategy plans should be developed for periods of five years it is important that they be flexible enough to react to ongoing developments without incurring financial sanctions. All bodies working with young people – youth organisations, open youth work and youth information centres – have to develop a five-year concept on how to work within the framework of the strategy. These concepts will be the basis for an evaluation at the end of the five-year period. Youth NGOs will have an annual dialogue



with representatives of the government on their activities and the efficiency of their work in order to, if necessary, revise their goals. For open youth work and youth information centres, the concepts will also be assessed by a supervisory committee – including members of the institutions and government – and after acceptance by the government, performance contracts will be concluded between the youth work institutions and government and municipalities.

The Youth Office, as the support structure for these developments, will also have a five-year management contract based on the strategy.

A youth strategy allows the government to prioritise certain topics within an overall approach to youth policy. Participatory youth involvement ensures that the needs and wishes of young people are reflected in policy development and evolution, as well as the priorities and concerns of policy makers.

A period of five years is, for institutions like the Youth Office and the youth information centres, a good time span that allows them to concentrate on the work to be done rather than expending effort on securing or prolonging service contracts. For some youth organisations, however, this time span might be too long bearing in mind that these organisations are run by young people who might find it harder to foresee if their interests will stay the same, or if they will still be involved in youth work at all. In such cases a five-year time frame might be seen as an obstacle to attracting new volunteers to take up responsibility in organisations. Furthermore a strategy for five years might be too strict and not flexible enough to fit the working habits of youth organisations.

One critical point might be that the evaluation of performance of different youth work activities will very likely need to be different. It is advisable, therefore, not only to define, within the starting contract, the aims and practices that will be reviewed but also the evaluation methods that most probably will be used.

The new youth decree aims at the improvement of youth work quality by defining the needs for basic and further training of voluntary youth leaders supported by the German-speaking Community. This step will lead to increased professionalism and a more coherent approach in youth work. This in return means more secure, adequate and relevant contemporary provision for participants. The content of this two-stage training – consisting of a theoretical and a practical module – will be clearly defined in the new decree. Moreover it is anticipated that fully employed youth workers – who are already required to have an education in socio-pedagogy – will have to undergo further training, which will be subsidised by the Community. This training will consist of 90 hours in three years, though the content of the training is not described in the new decree.

With these developments in the training of youth workers, an improvement in the consistency and quality of youth work can be achieved, but this then presents a greater obstacle for those individuals and some young people wishing to



become voluntarily involved in youth work. Some may not have sufficient time to undertake the training, because of the demands of their jobs or their family responsibilities. This could, arguably, apply more to young workers and perhaps to migrants.

## **Evidence-based youth policy**

The future youth policy seeks to be evidence and knowledge based. Knowledge of youth workers and practitioners should be included in the strategy plans via their direct participation and especially in the concepts for the delivery of the youth policy. With the development of DGstat in 2010, the statistical work in the German-speaking Community should be systematised, collected and made available. Data on population, education, employment, culture and other areas will be collected here.

Pure statistical data is one source of evidence for policy making, and a second key source will be research. In the past few years various studies have been conducted in the DG to provide information on a range of topics such as drugs and addiction, social problems, the media and violence. The DG also participated in international research such as the PISA study of achievement in formal education (where it scored lower than the Flemish Community but higher than the French Community).

In general it is positive that data for the DG are collected and systematised, as it is important that research on prominent policy concerns is carried out. But for the establishment of an evidence-based policy development it is not sufficient to react to more or less random research issues. To guarantee the proactive development of evidence-based youth policy, strategies for evidence production have to be included in the policy. Here a regular youth report – maybe in combination with the five-year evaluation of the operational youth policy concepts – might improve the quality of youth policy development and implementation over five-year periods.

## **Other policy fields affecting young people**

Beside the areas that fall directly in the competences of youth policy makers, other fields of policy have a strong influence on young people's lives. Young people are often a special target group for policy measures coming from departments in the government or administrations other than the youth field.

Even if youth policy has no direct access to these wider policy arenas it is important to engage with them if the aspiration for future youth policy to establish a cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach is to be achieved.

### **Education**

School clearly plays a key role in young people's lives. Not only does the amount of time spent in schools make it a centre of young people's development,



schooling is an essential, if not the key basis for life chances and choices. Even with increased recognition of non-formal learning, substitutes for certificates of formal education are hard to find. Degrees and certificates “proving” knowledge are a prerequisite for success in the labour market. The fact that these degrees are at the same time not sufficient anymore to guarantee smooth entry into the working life leads to even more pressure on pupils to be successful. Thus more young people stay longer in the formal education system and those leaving the system earlier are either not willing (or able) to face the pressures any longer or not able (or willing) to succeed. The changing labour market means that young people with less education are more at risk of failing in making the transition from school to work. Recent EU youth policy has highlighted education and training as important issues, as elaborated in the EU 2020 Strategy and in the European “Investing and Empowering” Youth Strategy. Together with international student assessments and the growing opportunities for studying abroad, common standards of education levels are increasingly under focus.

Therefore it seems at first glance rather surprising that the Belgian Communities so robustly defend their right to set up their own education systems independently. The education system in the German-speaking Community bears a resemblance to the model in Germany or Austria: the concept of a dual vocational education and training system for apprentices, the “dual system”, is particularly similar – and this is quite different from the Flemish or French Community approaches.

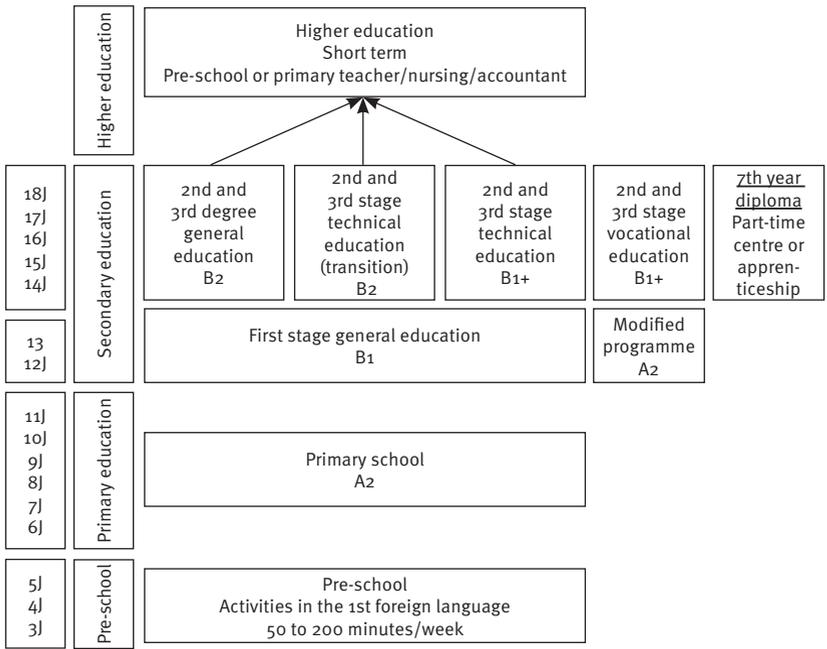
With the second state reform the three language Communities secured the right to decide on their education system and on schooling. Therefore since 1983 a law is in place that declares that education is compulsory from the age of 6 to 18, with full-time school compulsory until the age of 15 or 16 and part-time schooling compulsory up to the age of 18. Part-time schooling is an opportunity for young people with various problems in schools to stay in the education system; this should not be confused with vocational training in enterprises and schools. At the time when the international review team visited the Arbeitsamt der DG in Sankt Vith, 35 pupils were attending the part-time school. The strength of this system is that it enables teachers and social workers to provide young people at risk with tailor-made approaches.

Within the German-speaking Community, some 45% of pupils attend schools that are provided by the Community, about one quarter attends schools that are exclusively provided by private institutions (Catholic schools), and the rest attend private schools that are subsidised by the municipalities.

Figure 5 illustrates the education system from kindergarten to tertiary level, as existing in the German-speaking Community. After a common primary education, secondary-education provision starts to separate, with further separations across general, technical and vocational education after two years of observation in the so-called modified programme.



**Figure 5: Education system in the German-speaking Community**



Source: Presentation by Dr. Verena Greten: Educational and vocational training system in the German-speaking Community (GSC) of Belgium.

The non-obligatory kindergarten which functions as a pre-school for three to six-year-olds is regularly attended by 98% of the respective age group. Even in kindergarten, tutoring in a first foreign language besides German starts in a playful way, while involving up to 200 minutes of learning a week. Pre-school education is concerned with the development of the child’s intellectual skills and creativity, focusing on both mental and physical development. Pre-school should foster children’s initial independence and familiarise them with society. But since pre-schools have to have a minimum size of six children, the decreasing birth rate in the DG makes it more challenging to offer pre-schools close to where the child lives. There are already cases where people from the neighbouring villages bring their children to a certain kindergarten in order to help keeping the pre-school running.

Primary schools are compulsory for children between 6 and 12 years of age and provide a basic general education. In 2010/11 in the German-speaking Community, its 60 primary schools, offering kindergarten classes and primary education, were attended by 5 123 pupils.

After the common school for all, a first separation directs children who did not successfully finish primary school into a modified programme which



theoretically can enable them to catch up with their cohort, though in fact it usually leads those pupils into the dual apprenticeship-training in enterprises or the vocational field in schools.

The other pupils proceed through the first two years of common secondary education. In this phase of observation young people are guided into the different specified routes of secondary education – general academic education, technical education and an in-between hybrid form called technical education (transition) and vocational education. Parallel to these solely school-based forms of education there is vocational education and learning both in companies and in training centres (*Zentren für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleineren und mittleren Unternehmen*). Here the theoretical elements of the vocational learning are provided in the centres and the practical training in the companies. Usually the teachers in school who deliver this dual education are also practitioners in their respective disciplines. This education ends with examinations on general knowledge and theory and a practical examination.

For those young people who have successfully completed an apprenticeship, the possibility is provided of a voluntary additional seventh year that enables them to attend university. This is organised in evening courses so those attending can continue to remain in employment. It is a main concern, indeed almost a grievance, of the German-speaking Community that the dual system of vocational training is understood elsewhere in Belgium as no more than basic secondary education, and people successfully finishing their training in this way are seen – or even statistically counted – as early school leavers, since they are trained in companies as well as having attended school. If the aim of education is understood primarily as preparation for the labour market (and, of course, some maintain that it is not, though others assert that it now has to be, more than ever), one has to respect the considerable success of this form of training: 95% of the approximately 750 young people that undertake such an education find a job directly after finishing their apprenticeship.

Further professional training is offered in master classes for the various professions and, in co-operation with the Autonomous College (Autonome Hochschule in der DG) for higher education, a three-year training in accountancy has been set up, which confers on successful students a Meisterbrief (master craftsman's diploma) and a Bachelor's degree.

Cross-border co-operation with Germany for the mutual recognition of training and education but also for common training in master classes (to achieve the Meisterbrief) fosters the mobility of graduates. The cross-border master classes are established for butchery, bakery and confectionery in Eupen as well as for interior design in Cologne for students from both Germany and Belgium.

Officially the secondary-education system in the DG offers the possibility of changing between the different routes, but in fact changing after the phase of observation, after the first two years of secondary schooling, seldom occurs; as a result, young people at the age of 14 or even sometimes at the age of 12 are already directed into one trajectory of education and training that will influence



the rest of their life. The new approach of the optional seventh year of secondary education after the apprenticeship helps to increase, and restore, equality of educational opportunity for all young people. Nevertheless, despite the success of the dual system for achieving labour market insertion from groups of young people who elsewhere are often considered to be “at risk”, the critique concerning the early separation of vocational training and education in schools is also recurrently levelled at the very similar system that prevails in both Austria and Germany.

Opportunities for tertiary education exist in the German-speaking Community at the Autonome Hochschule in der DG, which was founded in 2005. Here three Bachelor-level courses are offered, two in educational science and one in health and care science.

Tertiary education in all other sciences has to be followed outside the DG, but since people are accustomed or encouraged to be mobile throughout the Großregion and in the Euregio Maas-Rhine, it is also normal to leave the German-speaking Community in order to study.

A support structure for the education system is provided through the three psycho-medico-social centres, or PMS-Centres. Here young people can get support from trained staff such as medical doctors, nurses, social workers and psychologists. They are contact persons for parents, pupils and teachers, providing consultations from pre-school to tertiary levels of education. They offer pupils support in their mental, physical, psychological and social development. The services of the psycho-medico-social centres cover testing for school maturity, health care and health education, occupational orientation and mediation.

### **Labour market**

In times of economic crisis, entry into the labour market is, arguably, the main issue in most young people’s lives and consequently also a central issue in youth policy. Enhancing the chances of young people making a smooth transition from education to the labour market is a key concern of youth policy makers. Employment has found its way into the European youth agenda as one of the eight fields of action in the EU youth strategy “Investing and Empowering”, and it is also part of “Youth on the move”, a flagship element of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Though strictly part of other EU structures, it initially started to connect with evolving EU youth policy through the 2004 European Youth Pact, which plugged gaps in the 2001 Youth White Paper and addressed the three issues of education, employment and work/life balance.

Youth unemployment throughout Europe is no longer a phenomenon affecting only young people without any school degrees or a poor education, though they may be hardest hit. It affects all groups of young people. Unemployment rates of up to 40% (and, in some EU countries, even more) of young people under 25 are a source of political concern for reasons that span commitments to moral



responsibility, to moral panic about youthful unrest. Youth unemployment is already perceived as one of the main threats to social stability in Europe and so for both economic and social reasons, addressing youth unemployment has become a major issue in European politics.

In the German-speaking Community, it is demographics on the one hand and the labour market competition with Germany and Luxembourg, which offer good working conditions, on the other hand rather than social (in)stability that are the main political drivers of attention to youth in the labour market. For the year 2015 it is estimated that there will be fewer people (young people) entering the labour market than leaving it. This trend is already detectable, despite the fact that the employment rate for 15 to 24-year-olds in the DG is the highest in the whole of Belgium, with 35.8% of youth employed. And while the percentage for employed young women in this age group, at approximately 31%, is similar to Flanders, the 40%+ employment rate for male youth of the same age is far above the Belgian average. These facts might conceivably be connected to the system of dual vocational education, which both leads to a high percentage of young people getting work immediately and attracts more young men than women. It is also important to note that, as elsewhere in Belgium and in line with EU trends, the employment rate for young people under 25 in the DG has been decreasing in recent years. So there is no room for either celebration or complacency.

In 2010 an average of 547 people younger than 25 were registered as unemployed, so they were immediately employable and searching for a job. The unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 24 was in the year 2010 quite low at 13.8%, slightly lower than the rate in Flanders, but less than half the comparable rates in Wallonia and in the Brussels Region (the youth unemployment rate in Belgium that year was 22.4%).<sup>25</sup> Compared to the general unemployment rate of 8.2%, youth unemployment is still significantly higher.

The biggest group of unemployed youth has in fact completed secondary education. For the first time people with secondary education were the biggest group of unemployed in the German-speaking Community. This is interpreted as resulting from the changing patterns in education, where growing numbers of people finish secondary level education and fewer people choose vocational training. But one quarter of all unemployed under 24 years of age have finished only the observation phase of secondary education and about one fifth have only finished primary education. Both levels of educational (under) achievement have disproportionately high representations amongst the young unemployed.

Overall, however, youth unemployment is not perceived as a major problem in the labour market policy of the German-speaking Community. Compared to other Regions of Belgium or other European countries it is relatively unproblematic, though it is still evident that for some groups of young people successful entry into the labour market is characterised by significant difficulties. People who did

25. Eurostat data, downloaded from [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search\\_database](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database), accessed 26 November 2011.



not finish any secondary education – school or vocational training – are more likely to face unemployment than others.

### *Transition to the labour market*

Due to the Belgian labour market policy, young people finishing school or universities can register at the employment centre and have the right to be supported – with both an allowance and advice – in their search for a job. This holds also for the Employment Office (Arbeitsamt) in the DG. Around 80% of young people under the age of 30 are supported proactively to integrate them into the labour market. More than half of all people supported by the Arbeitsamt are younger than 30.

The support for unemployed young people – as well as for other adults who are unemployed – is structured into three main steps: a first interactive day helps inform participants about the modalities of further steps and on job seeking, the second step is a profiling, followed by a contract where future measures and tasks are defined. These future interventions might be direct integration in the first labour market, further education or training, the promotion of social competences, or support for the employer. Unemployed young people are more often directed towards additional qualification and training than other age groups.

In the year 2010 approximately 270 young people under the age of 25 completed one of the different measures for integration in the labour market. The absolute number has remained quite stable since 2005, but the percentage of youth in relation to all participants in such measures decreased over this time from over 40% to under 35%. That would suggest that more people overall are involved in this kind of intervention now than only five years previously.

The opportunities for such training are manifold. Mostly the additional qualification is organised as individual job training in an enterprise (Individuelle Berufsausbildung im Unternehmen – IBU) or as an integration measure in special projects. In an IBU the job-seeker receives a further qualification tailor-made for a particular job in a particular enterprise. The qualification lasts between 4 and 26 weeks, during which time the trainee receives – if applicable – unemployment benefits from the Employment Office and additionally a “productivity bonus” that is different from the official wage from the employer. After the qualification is completed the trainee has to be employed for at least the same time as the duration of the training. This measure has turned out to be quite successful in getting unemployed young people into the labour market.

The other models with a disproportionate ratio of young people are integration measures. Here the qualification focuses on the social skills of the young people in order to prepare them for further measures. These integration measures are carried out by partner organisations of the Employment Office and are attended by more young unemployed than older people who have lost their jobs.



The opportunity for internships allows unemployed young people to experience the work conditions in, potentially, a new area of work. Two different models of internships allow young people to learn about the occupational field and also experience working conditions directly through the enterprise.

For some occupational fields, training is offered in special training institutions such as the Berufsbildungszentren of the Employment Office rather than in enterprises. Unlike individual job training, this is a general course.

Overall, since all interventions are open for all unemployed it remains questionable if the measures are too generalised for young people. On the other hand any more or less open form of financial support to employ a special group of unemployed provides this group with better chances of securing employment – not only in comparison with their chances before the implementation of the measure but also compared to other (unemployed) people in the labour market. It might even lead to the odd situation whereby (young) people fulfilling the needs for the IBU have better chances of a longer lasting job than ordinary youth, since they are cheaper for the enterprises. Labour market measures that target young people in particular often – if not always – have the effect of disadvantaging older unemployed and thus have to be balanced by special measures for this group as well.

#### *Occupational information*

One key obstacle to a smooth transition from education to the labour market is considered to be the lack of information about young people. Information on jobs, further education and studying are needed to help young people to decide on and develop their orientation towards their future professions.

Therefore information on the labour market and opportunities is a main element of education, starting perhaps in kindergarten. The information is targeted to different age groups and according to their level of education. Parents are also perceived as an important target group for job information which may be useful and relevant for their children.

There are various providers of information on education and the labour market: schools, psycho-medical-social centres, youth information centres, the Employment Office, professional associations and more. A working group involving different stakeholders develops concepts and guidelines for job information. The aim of the information is to enable young people searching for educational and job-related opportunities to do so “progressively, autonomously and actively”.

This kind of information can be accessed in different forms and media and at various locations. The job information cells, called BIZ (Berufsinformationszellen), provide a wide range of multimedia information on occupational areas and the labour market. The BIZ, which are part of the German BIZ-network, are, alongside others, located at the youth information centres, the employment centres and the media libraries in secondary schools.



In co-operation with the DG's employment service, a mobile job information centre provides information during a job information week. Various information evenings are also organised for young people and their parents and a wide range of online information on job profiles is available on the homepage of the employment service. In a monthly information exchange, interested people can learn about opportunities in tertiary education.

Once a year a so-called "taster week" (*Schnupperwoche*) is organised to offer young people in the first and second years of secondary education and in the modified programme the opportunity to experience different professional fields in different companies that offer contracts for apprenticeship.

Obviously such information is helpful, structured and accessible for those who actively decide to start an apprenticeship. But for people finishing secondary education the information already provided during the later years of their school time appears to be less structured and organised – at least the international review team did not learn of special offers for this target group. Here organised information in the school curriculum seems to be worth pursuing too, especially for those young people who are insecure about their professional future and not independent enough to find their own way to the information needed. In this way young people can learn more about different fields of professional life and the opportunities available, so they can make informed decisions in time rather than reacting only after finishing a certain level of education.

## Youth and culture

Youth and culture are situated in the same department within the ministry that Isabelle Weykmans heads, the Ministry for Culture, Media and Tourism.

Cultural policy focuses on language issues and on arts and cultural heritage, but the media is also a concern of youth policy. The main features of the current cultural policy are promotion of amateur arts, folklore activities, and the protection and conservation of cultural heritage, as well as training of young talents and artists.

Youth and culture meet in the field of amateur art, art education and youth culture. Amateur art is seen as an active, low-threshold way for young people to access and engage in cultural activities and as a mechanism for the promotion of creativity. Art education, which is provided out of school in a special academy, aims to generate interest in art and to "ease the access to culture by learning different techniques and by conveying different art movements"<sup>26</sup> the review team was informed during the visit.

Youth culture is understood as culture performed by young people. It is a new area of activity for youth policy, and its primary aim is to support creativity and development; access to culture is a secondary consideration. This is especially the case in open youth work where young people already have contact with

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26. Presentation on cultural policy of the German-speaking Community in Belgium.



youth culture in the sense of everyday culture, so young people do not have to “perform” themselves. Within the new youth policy, the “cultural” projects of young people should be supported and the project selection juries should be composed of young people themselves. Projects should be supported but not led by adults. Such a methodology, notwithstanding any substantive distinctions, establishes the difference between youth cultural activity and amateur art.

Sometimes expressions of youth culture become matters for policing and sometimes matters for street youth work. There is to date no established link and dialogue between cultural policy, youth policy and social policy. The international review team hopes that new measures may promote fresh thinking in these relationships and their responses to young people.

In the more rural areas in the south, cultural activity is very traditional. But access to cultural activities such as cinema is difficult because public transport does not cover the whole area and is infrequent late in the day. Events organised in more urbanised areas do attract young people but carry the risk of drinking and driving, so innovative approaches to the use of taxi services have been tried across Europe.<sup>27</sup>

The media landscape in the German-speaking Community is strongly influenced by its size and geographical situation. German, Dutch, and French Belgian media have a strong impact. In addition to a daily German-language newspaper – the *Grenz-Echo* also has a monthly magazine for youth – there are two public German-language radio stations and one public TV station in the DG. A couple of private radio stations also exist, as well as an open channel, which allows interested people to highlight various issues, albeit to quite a small, selective audience, given the time and knowledge required to become involved in this format.

Members of the international review team had the chance to visit the media centre in Eupen that serves as a library, a *ludothek* for renting games, an Internet access point, and a site for equipment rental. The rentals available are of particular interest for young people and youth work. Here youth can rent items such as tents for camps and audiovisual equipment, and even a whole stage. For smaller items, delivery is available, which is very convenient for young people.

Furthermore, the media centre provides media training through courses for filming, audio, the Internet and video-editing. It also offers a processing laboratory for videos. It offers information evenings about new developments in the cyber-world and the opportunities and risks that derive from them. A survey on the use of the Internet by young people showed that many of them are not aware – or do not care – about the dangers inherent in the World Wide Web, especially data protection issues connected to social networking sites.

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27. For example in Trondheim in Norway, there is a fixed taxi fare for young people returning home. The difference in cost is subsidised by the municipality. Such innovations are a feature of youth policy, in the interest of more inclusive participation in social activities and leisure opportunities as well as in the interest of the personal safety of young people.



The media centre has around 2 200 regular individual visitors; children up to the age of 12 are regular visitors as are those above the age of 20, but teenagers are hard to reach – they do make use of the centre for CDs, games or videos, but little more. Migrants use the media centre for educational books and migrant youth also for Internet access, but mostly the media centre has only indirect contact with migrants via migrant organisations.

## Health and prevention

The international review team did not receive particular information on health issues, but as noted earlier, young people and professionals working with youth consider abuse of alcohol the biggest youth problem in the German-speaking Community. This perception is supported by recent research on addiction and drugs as well as on health issues. A national Belgian study on health<sup>28</sup> showed that young people from the German-speaking Community have a higher consumption of alcohol than people of the same age in the other Communities. Forty-one percent of 15 to 24-year-olds said that they drink more than six glasses of alcohol at least once a week, whereas 12% is the national average for this level of consumption. A similar tendency can be seen regarding tobacco consumption. More than 30% of German-speaking 15 to 24-year-olds smoke daily. The average for the whole country is just 19%. Other significant results of the research show that a higher percentage of young people are affected by mental health problems than people over 65.

Health education in schools is provided in co-operation with the psycho-medico-social centres. Here the focus is on different health promotion and prevention fields from dental-care training in kindergarten and primary school to sex education and HIV prevention in secondary schools. These centres also provide regular health and dental checks for schoolchildren.

HIV and AIDS prevention are also important topics, alongside a broader range of health issues such as nutrition, obesity and alcohol abuse, in the preventive work undertaken in at least some youth work.

Regarding alcohol abuse among young people, a clear and specific policy concerning interventions is required. Whether these focus on preventing young people from drinking at all, trying to minimise binge drinking, or promoting a culture of abstinence or low-level consumption, the multi-disciplinary co-operation of experts and a cross-sectoral policy are needed. In the development of a common approach, experts, practitioners and policy makers from such diverse areas as youth work and policy, schools, the police, the health sector, driving schools, (public) transport, and the media need to be involved. Policy is not enough; implementation has to take place – be it through health

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28. Demarest S, Drieskens S, Gisle L, Van der Heyden J, Tafforeau J. Enquête de santé, 2008, Rapport VII – Communauté Germanophone, Direction Opérationnelle Santé publique et surveillance, 2010, Bruxelles, Institut Scientifique de Santé Publique.



education in schools, prevention in co-operation with youth work or sport clubs, or co-operation in the fields of transport, gastronomy and youth culture.

A similar cross-sectoral approach is needed regarding abuse of tobacco, drug use, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, nutrition and violence.

### **Migration**

The topic of migration came up on different occasions during the visit of the international review team to the DG. Since Germans are the biggest group of migrants in the German-speaking Community, problems concerning language are not a significant issue. More problematic seems to be the concentration of other migrants in the municipality of Eupen. Here youth workers report that youth centres are used mainly by migrants; they identify the need for more robust intercultural knowledge and understanding. Youth organisations do not report having many members with migration backgrounds other than German, but nevertheless the Council of German-speaking Youth has in a commendable effort produced information leaflets in seven different languages. The Youth Council's membership is furthermore not restricted to citizenship, so anybody interested can volunteer to become a member, as long as they are living in the German-speaking Community.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The German-speaking Community has presented its youth policy as clearly acknowledging youth work as a key delivery mechanism. But there is the expectation that it will contribute, more than in the past, to the tackling of a broader range of issues and challenging themes.

Youth policy can focus on, and promote, youth work and youth work development because the size of the DG and its population allows direct contact between all institutions with a strong influence on young people's lives. Since some Regional competences were transferred to the DG the exchange between the German-speaking Community institutions on most issues affecting youth has strengthened.

These short pathways – between the institutions and between the involved people – enable fast and efficient exchange leading to a resolution of problems.

The shortcomings of this system lie in what often remains an informal structure. This makes it vulnerable and strongly influenced by personal relationships or even party-political opinions.

### **Youth policy development**

It is clear that youth policy makers are eager to face the challenges and are interested in correcting obvious weaknesses and improving provision in the main fields of youth policy. The new structure of the Council of German-speaking Youth will help, in particular, to establish an independent advisory



and consulting body representing young people. Also, the targeted approach to delivery of youth policy via youth work and youth agencies has very positive elements. As long as the relevant actors are involved in concept development and not reduced to servants implementing a strategy this approach can also be successful.

The long time span, not of the strategy but of the concepts designed for matching delivery, could prove problematic. A period of five years enables youth services to focus on their work instead of on the development of concepts, but new developments in society – be it economic crises, environmental challenges or technological developments – might demand adjustments to youth policy and strategy. Youth policy should be open to sudden changes while retaining an overall direction.

Training for voluntary youth workers is comprehensively described in the new decree; the practical part of this training is of high importance for the quality of youth work. On the other hand provision of further training is only envisioned for professional youth workers, and not for volunteers.

## **Education**

The education system is also, again due to the size of the population, well structured, with relevant opportunities seemingly offered to all groups of young people. The part-time schools, as a measure to retain and motivate young people who are at risk of dropping out of the school system, is a good example: a small group of pupils can easily receive individual assistance and training.

What is problematic, however, is the early separation between the types of secondary schools; it is critical that the possibility of changing tracks – for those young people who may have been allocated to, or accidentally chosen, the wrong path – should be made much easier at different points on those journeys.<sup>29</sup>

## **Labour market**

Even though the unemployment rate in the group of 15 to 24-year-olds is at approximately 14% quite low, combined with a relatively high employment rate of over 35%, unemployed young people are a problem for the German-speaking Community.

Those with lower levels of education, in particular, are at risk of failing in the labour market, but those with a degree at secondary school level are not unaffected by unemployment.

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29. This problem has already been dealt with in the Regionales Entwicklungskonzept as a project for the future. Within this project a reform of the school system is foreseen to counteract the effects described in the text.



Measures to get young people into jobs have been relatively successful, but that group which is most at risk of failing often needs integration measures (which do not commonly lead directly back to the labour market).

## **Health**

The worrying results of research on alcohol consumption by young people show the need for intervention. Health education in schools concentrates now on sex education and HIV prevention, and here broader approaches seem to be needed.

## **Recommendations to the German-speaking Community**

### **Youth policy and youth work**

#### *Recommendation 1*

Youth policy in the DG is a transversal topic but the international review team got the impression that most links between the different policy fields concerning young people are based rather on personal contacts than on established connections – this good co-operation is due to the size of the DG, where “everybody knows everybody”. Nevertheless the international review team finds it advisable to establish links between the different departments in the ministries as well to other relevant institutions concerning youth issues.

#### *Recommendation 2*

Following on from the first recommendation, a broader and more transversal approach to youth policy will be institutionalised in this way. The international review team encourages the department for youth in the relevant ministry of the DG to initialise this co-operation and establish a network on youth in the DG involving, besides representatives from the youth sector, those from the formal education system, employment, culture, health, media and sport.

#### *Recommendation 3*

The structure of the youth forum in the DG contradicts the principles of the European Youth Forum, therefore it will be newly structured. The international review team welcomes this development and invites the government of the DG to involve the youth forum in decision-making processes, not only in youth policy but also in other areas.

#### *Recommendation 4*

The provision of a clear frame for youth policy development by working according to a five-year strategy is welcomed by the international review team. But keeping in mind the fast-changing challenges of youth work, such a medium-



term strategy has to be very open. Short-term programmes and projects might even change the overall direction of the strategy. This should be possible so youth work is not obstructed, stays up to date, and fulfils its tasks in reaching as many young people as possible. Possible changes should be reflected also in the evaluation of the youth policy and the assessments of youth NGOs, youth offices and youth information centres.

#### *Recommendation 5*

As evaluation should not be limited to being an instrument for quality measurement as a basis for further funding, but also be a means for the improvement of approaches and methods of work, evaluation results (rendered anonymous) should be made available to other youth NGOs as well. Preferably such evaluation results should not just be provided every five years, since the effects of feedback are higher the closer they are to the end of the evaluative period. The international review team encourages the youth commission to use the yearly assessments not only for adjusting the work programmes of youth NGOs but also for providing feedback for the work in NGOs.

#### *Recommendation 6*

Initial training of voluntary youth workers and further training of professional youth workers is defined by the new decree rather comprehensively. The international review team finds it advisable to also foster further training of voluntary youth workers.

#### *Recommendation 7*

The content of further training of professional youth workers should be described in more detail, preferably not in terms of set topics but by connecting the training to the themes of the five-year strategies and the short-term programmes of youth work development.

### **Education and employment**

#### *Recommendation 8*

The sound structure of the education system in the DG allows young people to receive training and education in all fields. Secondary schools focus either on general or on technical education, and the vocational training in the dual system in enterprises and in school allows an early entry to the labour market. Also, the opportunity to attend tertiary education after the end of vocational training via a voluntary seventh year in secondary school makes this career path interesting for young people. On the other hand, the rather early separation into academic and vocational paths might lead to the “wrong” decision for some youth. The international review team suggests the development of bridges between the different educational paths to allow youth to switch paths if they wish to.





Therefore the international review team welcomes the development already mentioned in the REK's (Regionales Entwicklungskonzept) "Gerechter Zugang zur Bildung", whereby a reform of the secondary school system is planned to allow permeability of the school systems and enable more equitable access to the different branches of education.

*Recommendation 9*

Extra-curricular youth work and the education system lack established links and co-operation. Since youth work also provides non-formal education, co-operation between these areas is advisable.

*Recommendation 10*

Labour market information is well developed in the DG, beginning from kindergarten and offering contact with enterprises in the first two grades of secondary schools via Schnupperwochen. But the international review team did not learn of opportunities to access special information on the labour market and/or further training and education later in secondary school. If this is not provided, special (school) information on options following graduation should be developed.

*Recommendation 11*

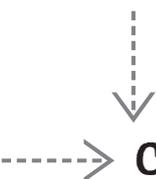
Concerning training for unemployed people, no special training measures for youth as a target group have been developed (even integration measures and the IBU are more likely to be used by young people). Since IBU is a more or less open financial incentive for training and employing young people who are registered as unemployed, those not registered as unemployed and older unemployed people might be disadvantaged. Here, other interventions will be needed.

**Health and prevention**

*Recommendation 12*

Since alcohol misuse by young people is seen as a major problem in the DG, preventive measures and health interventions should be encouraged. The international review team suggests multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral co-operation for the development of a common preventive approach that might be delivered in the formal and non-formal education system, through the sectors of youth work, health, the labour market, and gastronomy, among others. A similar common approach should also be developed for the prevention of tobacco use.





## Chapter 5 – A case study – dealing with youth unemployment

### Making sense of employment policy – from national to local level

*“It may be complicated, but sometimes it is more simple: there is a way out of the labyrinth.”*

So we were told by one respondent! Though it took some time to absorb the details, the international review team gradually came to understand how the different parts of what might broadly be called “employment policy” for young people linked together. There may be questions as to whether even greater synchronicity would produce better results, and there are the ubiquitous questions about issues such as qualification inflation, sanctions, and the efficacy of measures such as job subsidies, but there appeared to be general consensus – with which the international team would largely concur – that the Federal and Regional levels, and indeed the Community level, all play a complementary part within a purposefully overlapping framework (though this has not stopped the German-speaking Community seeking and securing more integrated control over youth training and employment initiatives). Nonetheless, on account of the layers of governance, there are acknowledged difficulties in embracing and engaging institutional collaboration with formal education (which might provide more consistent pre-vocational orientation, for example) and with community-based organisations and other NGOs (which might offer “first-step” contact and support for those most distant and excluded from qualifications and the labour market).

Employment policy in Belgium spans all levels of governance. The federal administration is responsible for social security and unemployment insurance, labour law, and taxation and fiscal policy. Regional administrations<sup>30</sup> are

30. As one respondent put it, there are in fact four regional public employment services, because beyond the three Regions (Flanders, Brussels, Wallonia), the German-speaking Community has, since the early 1990s, “received” the Regional competences from the Walloon Region. Another respondent noted that there were five employment services: federal, Flemish, Brussels, Walloon and the GC.



responsible for job placement services (matching and guidance) and vocational training. And although it was asserted that “Communities intervene far less in employment matters”, it was clear that many activities and initiatives that are the responsibility of the Communities do touch explicitly or implicitly on matters of vocational orientation, employability and employment. Indeed, it was accepted that there were actors and stakeholders at three levels:

- Federal: through ONEM/RVA, the national employment offices;
- Regional: ACTIRIS (in Brussels), VDAB (Flemish Region), FOREM (Wallonia), ADG (German-speaking Community);
- Local: non-profit associations, *missions locales* (usually subsidised by the Region and/or by the Community).

Relationships between these levels and the procedures within and between them – especially with regard to apparently different approaches across the Regions – has been a “significant factor” in the inability of Belgium to form a federal government throughout the review period. There has been debate and dissent around “who pays?” and “who controls?” because, though the Federal level controls and assesses job-seeking behaviour and eligibility for social security payments, the Regions are in charge of placement services, yet they are not getting any return on their success.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in 2004, there was apparently a “fight” between Wallonia and Flanders about the differential application of sanctions and the basis upon which this was decided: there were allegations that Wallonia was not strict enough and that Flanders was perhaps too strict in assessing job-seeking behaviour and applying sanctions. The debate would have been a complex one, invoking wider taxation and economic questions, because ultimately the resultant social security payments would still have been made by the central (federal) administration, and that remains a somewhat sacrosanct position, however much some might wish to argue that job-seeking guidance and placement, and sanctions (or payments), should be harmonised. As one respondent put it, “social security is a central pillar of the state, and if you shake it, there are a lot of after-shocks”. The approach to social security in Belgium is distinctive and unusual. It is governed by the social partners, employers and the trade unions, with the government as an observer. The unions actually pay the allowances to the unemployed (those who are not members of a trade union can go to the “neutral” government office).

The “fight” mentioned above no doubt derived, in part at least, from the differential economic performance of the Regions. Flanders was, and remains

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31. This is always an issue for structural separation within the same policy area. In England and Wales, its classic illustration is within the youth justice system, where community penalties have to be resourced by municipalities whereas custodial sentences are financed by the state. There are currently measures to look at how municipalities that reduce the numbers of their young people entering custody (below estimated expected levels) can be rewarded for that achievement. The parallel with Belgium would be that additional job placement success, saving federal social security payments, would reward the Regions in some way.



the most prosperous Region – all Flemish provinces have lower unemployment rates than all provinces in the Walloon Region. Youth unemployment is disproportionately higher throughout Belgium, though so far Belgium has managed the current European economic crisis more successfully than most neighbouring countries, with the exception of Germany. There are, predictably, prospective challenges beyond the immediate ones, especially demographic change, wherein Flanders has an ageing population and Brussels a strikingly youthful one. The employment rate in Belgium is “excellent” for those aged 30 to 54 and for highly qualified people. Current and future concerns relate to young people, older workers and non-EU citizens (a proxy for “migrants”, about whom it is in fact rather difficult to have a conversation – see below). A major tension concerns the balance to be struck between attention to older workers (many of whom “retreat” from the labour market at an average age of 59, even though the pensionable age is 65) and measures directed towards young people.

The broad characteristics of the unemployment regime in Belgium are that allowances are unlimited in time (though they do decline over time) and individuals become eligible for full benefits once they have worked full-time for over a year. There are, however, “controls” that relate to an evaluation of the efforts being made to find a job, such as job applications, job search, CV construction and contact with services. Evaluations take place over three stages and, after the third stage, benefits can be withdrawn. Allowances are based on previous job and on the duration of unemployment. And, as one expert informed us, “Rather than a single, and simple, cut-off point, we believe it is more fair, even if it is more complicated, to have controls that can distinguish between those who are making an effort to find work and those who may not be.” Sanctions are sparingly applied, largely only when there is outright refusal to engage in what is considered to be a generous and fair-minded process, one that was described as “pretty humane”. Even if individuals are not in receipt of unemployment benefit or social assistance, they can still be helped by the Employment Service.

Young people who have had no previous job can access “waiting allowances”, a special allowance available whenever someone decides they have finished their studies. Differential allowances are payable, depending on age and family conditions, and young people become eligible for them nine months after leaving their studies. The rationale behind this system was explained:

The advantage of this system, which is very particular to Belgium, is that they [young people] are immediately registered with the regional employment service. If there was no allowance, they could easily become lost to the system.<sup>32</sup> Young people

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32. This is exactly what happened in the UK when social security entitlement was withdrawn from 16 and 17 year olds in 1988. Many young people simply vanished, seeing no purpose in turning up to the Careers Service or Job Centre if there was no money to be had for doing so. It took another six years before the phenomenon of what is now referred to as the “NEETs” (young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training) was “discovered”, researched, and politically acknowledged (see Istance et al. 1994). Two



register straight away, so that they can get the waiting allowance at the earliest opportunity, and so there can be engagement with them right from the start.

Throughout Europe, there are debates about processes and practices for labour-market insertion, developing “employability”, creating jobs and stimulating employment demand for young people. The European and national rhetoric concerning “knowledge-based economies” rings rather hollow for well-educated young people who are struggling to get a first foothold in the labour market. There is a contemporary debate about “qualification inflation”, young people taking work that is not commensurate with their qualifications, and particular concerns about young people being expected or compelled to take such work. Though it may be subjected to critique, there appeared to be some clarity of perspective around the position and procedure adopted in Belgium:

If you don’t accept the offer of a suitable job, then benefits can be stopped, for different periods – four weeks, eight weeks, or even more. Employment law defines what counts as “suitable”: level of salary, distance from home, employment conditions. There are discussions about philosophical and religious refusals, and in such cases there is arbitration by a judge.

It is difficult to describe any more what are “normal” paths into the labour market. There are many different routes. Some young people are already inserted into the labour market, before ending their studies. Others are not. After one year, qualifications and experience become almost irrelevant, so then, theoretically at least, cleaning can become a “suitable” job even for somebody with a university degree. This may not be applied, but it can be a tool to force, or incentivise, people to look beyond their original aspirations. And it is important for people’s thinking and effort to find work that they know they will be evaluated in due course. So these are important signals.

There are always trade-offs<sup>33</sup> between getting a job quite fast that may not be the ideal, and holding out for a job closer to the ideal. And holding out can produce new disadvantages, such as the decreasing relevance of skills, the attitudes of employers to those who have been out of the labour market for a year.

The point was made that there are relatively few temporary or casual jobs in Belgium, nor are there so many people (compared to elsewhere) working at levels below their qualifications (see the OECD “PISA” studies). There are also supported opportunities, both “passive” and “active”, for young people to consider self-employment and entrepreneurship. “Passively”, they can

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decades on, the UK and many other countries are still grappling with policy measures for young people who are NEET, though the definition of this phenomenon has now stretched to include school drop-outs, those excluded from school and young adults aged 18 to 24. This may be technically accurate, but it muddies the water and confuses the policy debate.

33. This was a point made long ago, though from the position and perspective of unemployed young people. They, like most of us, engage in “trade-offs”: the big question is on what criteria they do so and whether or not we are aware of, let alone understand, those criteria. These may be very different from our own. See Williamson H. (1982).



always try and, if they fail, they can simply re-engage with the unemployment process as a “worker” and claim unemployment benefits. More actively, subject to an acceptable business plan, an individual can receive an advance of unemployment benefits and, if the business subsequently fails, calculations are made regarding the balance between what has been received and what the individual would have received had he or she remained unemployed.

The issue in Belgium is not in fact about young people within the labour market, whose situation is rarely precarious (unlike elsewhere); the issue is about enabling young people’s orientation and access to appropriate positions within the labour market. One respondent observed: “We would probably have a better labour market if we had the “flexicurity” model of the Euro, but a lot of people have to be persuaded of this”. Belgium does, however, have one of the highest minimum salaries in Europe, which clearly confers considerable security and protection for those “already in”, but this may act as a deterrent to employers to take recruitment risks in precarious times. This is the reason for what is proclaimed by the National Employment Office to be a “win-win” ACTIVA programme to incentivise employers to hire unemployed people. The programme includes financial incentives to recruit young people who have been receiving unemployment allowances for more than a specified period.

Though employment policy, even for young people, may not specifically be a Community responsibility, it became apparent to the international review team that, especially in declining industrial areas and more isolated rural areas, both sites of significant youth unemployment, a variety of community and cultural projects do touch on employment issues. They sometimes attempt to correct or supplement what they see as “bad choices in school orientation”, often made not by students but by the school or their parents; they try to boost young people’s motivation in circumstances where growing poverty, a decreasing number of jobs, and a few small companies that produce very limited job openings for young people damage their hopes and aspirations; and they sometimes get closely involved in the provision of training and accreditation, because, according to a respondent, “we know not all will get jobs, but we have to try to get them closer to the labour market”. The international review team also heard that:

This area has a lot of unemployment, a lot of failure – people think that they are doomed. We want to develop self-esteem, belief that people can change things for the better from the inside. We have to help people to be more realistic ... Otherwise, we leave them on the side of the road. We want to offer support, but not produce dependency. [One of our projects] is about trying to re-ignite hope and belief in young people who may appear to have given up.

This particular public centre for social assistance in the French Community provided an impressively wide-ranging set of opportunities, activities and experiences, supporting schooling, family life, parents, culture, health and employment. It has, through myriad funding sources, established “multiple approaches and a range of partnerships”, enabling around 200 young people



aged 18 to 30 to participate in a range of its social inclusion, training and skills programmes, even though as respondents said: “We do not have a specifically targeted policy towards this age group”. This is “first-step” community development and vocational orientation activity but a critical component of overall policy regarding training and the labour market.

There were some aspects of the relationship between employment policy and social security policy that somewhat perplexed the international review team, including the apparently unequal opportunity structures for young people depending on whether or not they held Belgian nationality. Non-Belgians have the right to waiting allowances but they are not entitled to the integration contract (e.g. in Charleroi): the question remains as to what the logic is behind this measure in terms of sensitive integration. Secondly, even Brussels, with its distinctive demographic profile in terms of the balance between native youth and immigrant young people, lacks targeted unemployment measures for immigrants, despite their disproportionate presence in the Brussels-Capital Region and their relatively high unemployment rate.

Despite what may appear, reasonably, as a comprehensive and considered system linking labour markets and unemployment, Belgium clearly faces a number of challenges on this front, some of which are linked to the federal structure, others of which address relevance and sustainability.

First, economists are always preoccupied with three questions around labour market insertion strategies: deadweight (it would have happened anyway), substitution (one group of unemployed workers makes way for another) and displacement (one type of, for example, young person is displaced by another). It was cautiously acknowledged that one or more of these was probably widespread, and that they needed to be more robustly explored. In the case of deadweight, it was accepted that an important question was whether or not, in the context of the ACTIVA programme, employers were now waiting to take on people in categories they routinely recruited from only after they reached the eligibility period, so that they can benefit from the subsidies.

Secondly (and this does not just relate to employment) there is a significant question about mobility inside Belgium. In part, this relates to language questions, though language barriers to employment transcend mobility questions. In the Brussels Region, for example, some inhabitants (immigrants) do not speak either of the main languages. However, there are different employment issues for French-speaking people working in Flanders; it is, of course, easier for them to work in the Brussels Region. And others, nevertheless, do work in Flanders. But time and again, the international review team heard that Belgium people are “born with a brick in their stomach”, that is, they do not want to move. During a visit to a rural municipality, we were told:

We are in the middle of nowhere here, and they [young people] don't think of possibilities further afield ... Children are not open to the outside world. Some are, of course. And more are beginning to be. But here in the little villages, they are really stuck here – even though we are on the border, just 10 kilometres away.



The question of internal mobility arose in discussions elsewhere during the visits of the international review team. A range of factors do, indeed, conspire to produce that brick in the stomach. We did not detect a great deal of motivation to address this, although it does affect labour market and employment mobility, even if, technically, “the definition of a “suitable” job does not stop at any regional borders ... the definition is 12 hours, including travelling time, within a radius of 25 kilometres”. One respondent, working as a cultural leader, felt that more mobility – even within the same linguistic region – would help to open minds and horizons:

I think if we could build connections – even though there are many already, our young people do not make use of it, and even Namur is too far away. People don’t take these opportunities, so opening horizons and getting these young people to meet other young people facing similar realities ...

Our young people are not particularly attracted to the idea of European exchange; they are afraid, frightened, and this place is also their comfort zone, where they feel “at home”, which of course they are. But meeting other people would be something really interesting. One of our youth centres really should be doing something like this.

Third, the observation that “some inhabitants don’t speak either of the main languages” causes some concern, not per se but because of the apparent political and perhaps cultural reluctance to face up to the issue. As one respondent noted: “We don’t have a target group measure for immigrants, because it is too difficult and delicate.” The international review team learned that there was a “massive difference” between labour market participation of EU citizens and that of immigrants, and there was barely veiled acknowledgement that there was “clear discrimination against immigrants”. The openness of Belgian society had welcomed a significant flow of immigration and immigrants now comprised some 12% of the population, but there had been a failure to address the “second step”, which “is about the integration of immigrants into Belgian society”. It was suggested that the French Community in particular needed to do more on the question of integration (see Chapter 3).

The international review team would also like to comment, in relation to young people and self-employment, on the question of the “fourth side of the triangle”.<sup>34</sup> There has been a prolonged debate as to whether all but a tiny minority of young people are appropriately equipped and motivated to engage successfully, over time, in entrepreneurship (see MacDonald and Coffield 1991). Business plans, the necessary business start-up finance, and appropriate business mentoring and support (the usual triangle of entrepreneurial development) need to be supplemented by a gritty resilience to cope with the ups and downs of enterprise activity. Some have argued that young people do

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34. This was a phrase coined by H. Williamson during an evaluation of the enterprise initiatives within the PETRA programme: see Williamson H. et al. (1993), *Training for Enterprise*, Commission of the European Communities, Luxembourg.



not have the requisite life experience for such resilience. There is certainly some evidence that potentially successful youth-initiated businesses collapse at the very point when success is imminent – either because of demoralisation that it will never happen (when it is just around the corner) or because the first wave of success produces overspending and bankruptcy. None of these issues were discussed in relation to the technical presentation of structures for enterprise support; perhaps they need more serious consideration.

The biggest issue in relation to employment policy, however, was the ubiquitous issue of the separation of responsibilities across levels, regions and language communities. While there may be some fortuitous or even more planned complementarity between social security distribution, labour-market insertion measures and vocational orientation activities, a number of commentators observed that it remained problematic to establish sustained connections: “The institutional context in Belgium makes it difficult to work with all actors.” This critique becomes more evident and more pronounced as soon as one looks at what might be called “adjacent” policy areas. Schools were routinely criticised for failure to provide quality vocational guidance and pre-vocational education. There was a perceived “rupture” between education and work. Local associations and specialist bodies working with particular groups of people (such as offenders) were perceived not to make the contribution they could, through their lack of involvement in institutional partnerships (though we did witness them making a more individualised contribution to the employment agenda).

Moreover, the perceived and alleged rupture was not only at an institutional and administrative level. It prevailed, perhaps significantly as a consequence of this but also for entrenched cultural reasons, in the life course of individual young people, on account of the fact that in Belgium there is no tradition of combining educational studies and work.<sup>35</sup> As a result, young people finish their studies without any work experience, making the transition to the labour market – irrespective of other policies and structures – all the more difficult.

All in all, the prevailing view expressed by a number of respondents was that the current framework for employment policy was unsustainable, inefficient, overgenerous, and disadvantageous to young people – who have been excluded from labour-market participation because of the protection afforded to older workers still able to take a range of generously supported career breaks. The argument was that there needed to be more coherence between education (schooling), vocational training and employment. The international review team

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35. The exception is within the German-speaking Community, which has developed the “dual system” of education and training that prevails in Germany and Austria (see Chapter 4). But far from this being celebrated as bringing the world of work closer to learning, and promoting access and opportunity for young people less focused or interested in academic pathways, it seems to be depicted in wider Belgium as removing young people from learning prematurely – hence the DG’s apparently disproportionate number of “early school leavers”, many of whom are in fact doing apprenticeships.



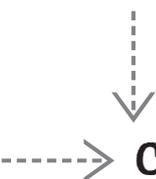
might suggest that the German-speaking Community has harnessed and linked these responsibilities rather more effectively than elsewhere in Belgium, despite the negative perceptions of “apprenticeships” in some quarters, which quite evidently irritates the DG and is a central plank of its youth employment strategy. There was, indeed, a prevailing view that, in difficult economic times, Belgium needs to look hard at its current arrangements and improve the integration and connection of education, training and employment for young people. Though general education should arguably retain some autonomy and independence from the labour market, schooling nevertheless needs to take on some activity relevant to the labour market, such as career advice and information and the possibility, increasingly, of work experience and “job-tasting”. Attention also needs to be given to vocational guidance and training, with more value attached to the latter, and to the structures and practices around social security payments. That such competences are embedded in different levels of governance means that this important debate is unhelpfully meshed with wider political discussion, but as one expert in the employment field put it:

There are simply not enough links. The complexity of education as a Community responsibility, guidance as a Regional responsibility, and benefits as a Federal responsibility makes it difficult to establish the necessary integration.

Everyone we spoke to seemed to be aware of this and we were told that there is a current debate about the development, recognition and transfer of competences, including the relationship and responsibilities shared between the Federal level and the Regions of Belgium. For the growing population of young people already on the margins of the labour market or at risk of becoming so, greater coherence cannot come soon enough.







## Chapter 6 – Conclusions and recommendations

### Some concluding challenges for the country as a whole

One of the more recent procedural innovations in the Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy has been to provide immediate and initial feedback to representatives of the governmental authorities. This is always tentative, provisional and has the possibility of being revoked. Nevertheless, it provides an opportunity to test initial ideas with those “inside” the policy framework and gauge their reactions. The international review team does not necessarily, at this point, speak with one voice: concerns and issues are expressed by different members and all the team does is agree on what constitutes the priority issues to be shared with governmental officials in the time available. Further debate often does, however, consolidate a consensus on the significance of the issues raised, even though the arguments within them may be subject to some refinement.

In Belgium, of course, the preliminary feedback had to relate to the three Communities. The team endeavoured to produce thoughts that had resonance across the three Communities, albeit perhaps in different ways. More specific issues for just one of the Communities were left to the deliberations of the individual rapporteurs for those Communities. These are attended to in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Seven issues – speculatively labelled as “for Belgium as a whole” – were raised and discussed. By and large, the points were accepted, though not universally agreed on. Some clarification of our concerns was promised and provided, and some revision and development has been attempted. There was a similar response when these issues were raised during the national hearing, held in February 2012. From a youth policy perspective, a number of these themes are fairly closely connected; they have been separated for conceptual clarity. The most contentious, by far, has been our analysis of and commentary on “mobility”, but few have disputed that the following issues, including mobility, merit further discussion within the context of Belgium’s mosaic of policy and politics.



## 1. The (in)coherence of transition routes to the labour market

The international review team remained perplexed at the apparent lack of connection between, for example, economic awareness in formal education, vocational preparation, vocational training, labour-market insertion programmes, and unemployment benefits and social security policy. To put it in the vernacular, things seemed to be (with some exceptions, such as in the German-speaking Community) “all over the place”.

After some discussion, the international review team conceded that it had still not fully grasped the complexities of the administrative arrangements for young people at different stages. It was noted that the international review team had not had the opportunity to engage with regional (indeed Regional) employment policy and, as a result, its perspectives were based on incomplete information (this is always a risk for the international review process). The policy challenge, those from Belgium maintained, was not to force greater collaboration but to ensure appropriate coherence, through the reinforcement of the roles and responsibilities of each “segment”, having confidence that each knows its boundaries and limits. The international review team was not wholly convinced (hence Chapter 5): while, on receipt of further information, it could see greater coherence between vocational education/training, labour-market programmes and social security policy, it remained unsure whether such vertical links (between Community, Regional and Federal activity) provided sufficient effort to engage horizontally with other policy sectors (including youth work) which could have, and arguably should make, a key contribution to reaching young people not in education and employment and supporting what might be called “first step” vocational orientation.

## 2. Values and the drivers of “youth policy”

The French Community is absolutely clear about its value-base for youth policy: it is one that aims to support the emergence of Citizens with Responsible, Active, Critical and Solidary attributes and capacities (CRACS). Elsewhere, it seems rather more difficult to understand, let alone interpret, the essential philosophical base for youth policy. The rhetoric of emancipation often clashed with the drive for efficiency. The language of empowerment sometimes disguised an interest in regulation and control.

There are, of course, inevitable tensions here. No one would argue against aspirations for “good democratic governance” or something called “sustainable civil society”. To those ends, there will be the predictable use of terms such as participation, citizenship and social inclusion. And as soon as there is any attempt to rein things in, whether individuals or organisations, there will always be accusations of hypocrisy and tokenism. The democratic impulse does not like restrictive conditionality.

On the other hand, in times of huge challenges in young people’s lives and the societies in which they live, ideas such as creating platforms for young people



to develop on their own terms, or indeed for youth work to develop on its own terms are, in the words of one member of the international review team, “large freedoms”. During the national hearing there was, indeed, a robust defence from within the Flemish Community of its commitment to “emancipatory” youth work and the desire to stimulate the active participation of young people: in times of austerity, youth policy should try to “resist tightening the belts of young people”. This is absolutely a laudable position to take and one which, in some respects, the international review team commends wholeheartedly. Yet it was once noted in a study of delinquency that “freedom, to the adolescent, can look suspiciously like neglect”. There are debates to be had about where youth work and youth policy sit on the continuum between individualisation and instrumentalisation – a discussion in which Filip Coussée, himself from Flanders, has been at the forefront through the Council of Europe’s studies of the histories of youth work in Europe.

There is, certainly, a difficult balance to strike. As Julius Nyerere, the first black President of Tanzania, observed in his inaugural speech: “Freedom without discipline is anarchy, discipline without freedom is tyranny, and you have to find a path between the two.” In a different vein, it has often been noted that “freedom for the pike means death for the minnow”.<sup>36</sup>

All this is simply to argue that there should not be a problem with conditionality, for young people, for youth organisations or for other “independent” bodies. Everything hinges on the conditions that are attached and, like our colleagues in Belgium, we would deplore moves that take youth work in the direction of only being supported if it promotes the elusive goal of “employability”. However, what were perceived as the “large freedoms” sometimes given or claimed would appear to us to be luxuries and indulgences in austere times. Just as the German-speaking Community is eager to adapt its youth work to the primary task of encouraging and helping young people to stay, so the international review team believes that there should be a more explicit articulation of the potential wider objectives of youth (work) provision; if it is not simply about young people’s personal development, then what, more honestly, are those wider objectives – citizenship, inclusion, integration, welfare, crime prevention, employability, or something else?

### 3. Missing links

The international review team believes that it secured a strong understanding of youth policy as it is formulated and delivered through the three Communities. Building on this foundation, it garnered a reasonable knowledge of Regional and Federal activity that, in various ways, affects the lives of young people. But, in support of the assertion “c’est plus compliqué que ça”, the international review

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36. For a recent illustration of the application of this idea to contemporary (higher education) policy in the UK, see Simon Szreter’s lecture on “The Idea of a University” (2011). Szreter is Professor of History and Public Policy at the University of Cambridge.



team remained bemused by the role of both municipalities and provinces: what do, or should, they do? In particular, there was puzzlement about the role of municipalities in the Brussels Region (which is not a province) and curiosity about the role of the province in the context of Antwerp, a focal point of the international review team’s deliberations and the European Youth Capital of 2011.

Seemingly, our Belgian colleagues concurred with our perplexity. It was emphasised how much of a challenge it was to co-ordinate all of these levels of administration, especially where there was “not even a decree” to frame development. Once more, however, it was suggested that perhaps the international review team, looking as it did from the outside, had not properly absorbed the “reality”. Despite assertions in other debates that there were clear boundaries of responsibility, here it was argued that where there were weaknesses in provision at one level, other more active policy levels were able to “plug the gap”. In other words, weaknesses were compensated by strengths elsewhere. Moreover, there was a cautionary note about not wishing to impose too formally (and legalistically, through decree) on local policy: it was important to respect the autonomy and independence of local structures. What needed to be done was to persuade them of a vision that needed to be implemented, not to control or subordinate them. And there were umbrella (youth) organisations in the provinces, whose role was to support the development and execution of local youth work and local youth services.

The international review team was not wholly convinced, not least if such arrangements are largely voluntary and permissive. In tough economic times, without statutory requirement, they are very likely to retreat. And where the international review team is completely unable to comment is Brussels (though see below); as one of our colleagues from Belgium remarked, “it is completely different there, Brussels is another world”.

#### **4. Differentiated access and variable approaches**

The international review team was struck by the apparently quite separate forms of youth provision not on the basis of language but on the basis of ethnicity – and therefore presumably on the basis of migration and integration. This was perhaps less evident in French Community cities such as Charleroi than in Flemish Community cities such as Antwerp, but it was still evident. And it was very evident in Brussels, where young people from migration backgrounds represent a very significant proportion of the youth population. Given the specificities of Belgium, the international review team concluded that integration should be a fundamental aspect of youth policy and youth practice (largely, it is not at present) and that youth policy should be carefully aligned to integration policy.

There seemed to be reasonable support for this analysis and recommended direction amongst our Belgian colleagues, though there was doubt as to how it might be effectively addressed. Immigration was a “very complex issue” with, at the Federal level, four different ministries responsible for different elements



of migration: immigration, citizenship, asylum, refugees and so on. It was also accepted that models for youth policy that command a considerable consensus within the French and Flemish Communities do not fit or sit well in the context of Brussels, yet those are the sources of youth policy making in Brussels. There was a concession that there was a “big gap” in relation to Brussels that was often conveniently overlooked yet demanded rather urgent attention. Sometimes it took “strangers in a strange land” (such as the international review team) to remind those living there of this issue. Indeed, during the national hearing, the validity of such observations was acknowledged, though it was asserted that there were already some “steps forward”, not least the political announcement at the national hearing that there was to be a common platform between the French and Flemish Communities to give attention to these issues and for the development of youth policy in Brussels.

## 5. Youth councils

The international review team has noted that neither the Youth Council of the French Community nor the Youth Council of the German-speaking Community are constituted in ways that meet the criteria for national youth councils as formulated by the European Youth Forum. Yet all three youth councils in Belgium are represented within the Youth Forum. The Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, promoted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, does, however, talk of building structures for youth participation that are responsive to local and regional circumstances.

Without wishing to step on the toes of established perspectives and formulations in relation to youth councils, the international review team had mixed views concerning all the youth councils in Belgium. There are conceptual and constitutional issues but there are also pragmatic and operational ones. In the French Community, the Youth Council might be criticised for being too closely harnessed to youth policy development and implementation, but it is certainly and commendably involved by the authorities in those processes. In contrast, the councils of both the German-speaking Community and the Flemish Community said they routinely proffered advice and were often consulted (this is a legal requirement on any matters to do with young people in the Flemish Community), yet the impact is not satisfactory in every domain. Young people in the German-speaking Community were eager to point out that they were all volunteers on the Youth Council; their commitment is, therefore, all the more impressive. The more structured and independent Flemish Youth Council organises working groups, youth panels, inquiries and conventions on a number of contemporary topics, besides their central General Assembly. Though clearly representing young people in an active and committed way, the international review team was somewhat taken by surprise when one member of the Flemish Youth Council depicted himself as being there to serve the Flemish government and its policies towards youth, rather than questioning and challenging, on behalf of young people, its development and implementation. At a local level,



at least officially, there is a youth council in every municipality in Flanders, though the international review team learned that many are hardly visible or active. And – whatever efforts have been and are being made to stimulate youth participation – the youth councils are sometimes regarded as “a network of often the same people” that arguably has not done enough to engage with a more diverse constituency of young people.<sup>37</sup>

The J-Club, the unofficial forum for co-operation between the three Community youth councils, has existed since 2006 and deals with “everything that is federal, European and international”. It also shares views on their respective Community issues, and seeks to establish “as broad a co-operation as possible”. Yet, despite the international review team hearing from “ordinary” young people that they find many of the current structural features of Belgium both absurd and surreal, and would welcome more fluidity and contact across linguistic and cultural borders within the country, those speaking for the J-Club were extremely cautious about addressing anything that smacked of internal politics: “We work with the realities in which we are located”. This may be realistic but it is also resting within a comfort zone that does not reflect the changing perspectives of at least some young people in Belgium.

The international review team therefore saw both strengths and weaknesses in the constitutional and operational arrangements for the three different “national” youth councils in Belgium (and, indeed, their unofficial composite). Whatever their strengths, there is a case for interrogating the value and validity of some of their weaknesses. Currently there is some attention to some of these; perhaps there should be more.

## 6. Mobility

It is perhaps the question of internal mobility and migration in Belgium that throws many broader issues into relief. When the international review team raised the matter, it clearly hit a nerve. We approached it gently, but it was definitely very sensitive territory. Mention was made immediately of the Bel’J programme that promotes internal mobility. The international review team did not fully pick up the role of Belgium’s three National Agencies (which are responsible for the Youth in Action programme) in promoting it. What had been made clear to the international review team was that working across those NAs in order to set up groups of young people from the three Communities so that they could participate in an international exchange elsewhere, was not part of the task of the three NAs. The international review team was quite amazed to hear that “what is being proposed goes beyond the role that a national agency should fulfil”. The point was re-stated at the national hearing. But this then begs the question of who could or should be acting more proactively on this

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37. During the national hearing officials did concede that, despite the value of youth councils in the co-production of youth policy, there could be “too many conversations, discussion and meetings” and that there were other ways of setting up consultative practices with young people, especially in order to hear the voices of minorities.



front. It was asserted, certainly in the case of Brussels, that a “mixed group” (not defined, but presumably including both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking young people, and perhaps others) could approach either JINT or BIJ, and the Flemish and French Community National Agencies, who would react supportively to their inquiry and interest. After all, the point was made that “everybody accepts the reality of Brussels”. But apparently there is no role to stimulate such mixed engagement.

This is certainly, otherwise, as one individual put it, “a turbulent issue”. It is also an issue that confirms, to an extent, the paradox of Belgium: despite the complexity, much is made to work very well indeed, certainly on an international front. Young people in Belgium do get the opportunity to join youth exchanges, do European Voluntary Service, and so on; disadvantaged and marginalised young people, if they are made aware of these opportunities, are given excellent support to take up youth initiatives. But two factors are often missing. The first is information and it was suggested by some respondents that “youth information networks are not so strong”. The second is internal mobility and the promotion of greater cultural and linguistic knowledge and understanding between young people from the different Communities.<sup>38</sup> It was argued that this is much easier to achieve once young people have been elsewhere and had international experiences, but the international review team found this perspective rather disingenuous. Once more, and writ large, the international review team witnessed impressive vertical expertise and professionalism in parallel with what might be almost cruelly depicted as horizontal myopia, denial and inaction.

## 7. The training of youth workers

For well over a decade, there have been European-level debates about the concept and contribution of “non-formal education/learning” (i.e. youth work) and the methods and mechanisms for advancing its recognition in the youth field. At the time of writing, the participants at a symposium held in November 2011 produced a statement entitled “Getting There...”.<sup>39</sup> But is it? The international review team raised the question of recognition and reciprocity around training and qualifications in the youth field between the Communities of Belgium. We were told that there has been a “long, ongoing discussion”.

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38. Various Belgian public authorities disagreed strongly with these assertions, maintaining that “There’s a lot of exchange in the formal education and the non-formal education/learning systems, e.g. Bel’J, Prince Philippe, Fondation Roi Baudouin, classes d’immersion entre les communautés...”

39. Getting There... working together to “establish a common ground for a medium and long-term co-ordinated strategy toward recognition of youth work and non-formal learning in Europe with the involvement of actors and stakeholders from the various sectors of policy concerned”. Statement by participants of the Symposium ‘Recognition of Youth Work and Non-Formal Learning/Education in the Youth Field’, 14 to 16 November 2011, European Youth Centre Strasbourg.



After all, without formal recognition and certification throughout Belgium, qualifications conferred in one Community may have no value, credibility or currency in any other.

The last five years have, however, seen the allocation of support and finance for the development of instruments for qualification and recognition in the field of non-formal education/learning in the youth sector (social cultural work, e.g. [www.oscaronline.be](http://www.oscaronline.be), [www.c-sticks.be](http://www.c-sticks.be)) and for setting up tools for co-operation with formal education partners and employment actors.

There are, of course, European-level initiatives around qualifications in the field of both formal and non-formal education (e.g. the European Qualifications Framework, the Portfolio for the Training of Youth Workers and Youth Leaders). But their translation into the Belgium context is, predictably, “very complicated” (although it has to be acknowledged that this “translation” is likely to be challenging in any context). Very recently, the French Community did give recognition to qualifications achieved within the German-speaking Community. The prevailing view is that, ultimately, it is employers (and not exclusively the administrations, though of course it includes them) that define the profile of professionals that they need. Therefore, only if there is some form of equivalence between structural arrangements and operational procedures and practice can there be “transferability” of qualifications and the practitioners who hold them.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the external, significantly political and administrative, tensions on this front, there is also an internal professional anxiety about moves to validate and “professionalise” the youth work field. The concern here is that more independent NGOs would lose control of their own approaches to training, qualification and practice, and the argument is that diversity in the youth work field is its richness and strength. And there are legitimate arguments both ways. In the middle is the position whereby quality standards are specified and delivery is tested against them. In every Community, training quality standards for (voluntary) youth workers have been developed (by the sector together with the administration) and are used in practice, but some more formally than others (for example *kadervorming* in the Flemish Community, or *basisopleiding* in the German-speaking Community) – and they look quite similar.

Here the qualifications that lie behind the practice are technically irrelevant. Furthermore, there is nothing formal to prevent a municipality within one Community from recruiting practitioners from other Communities; that, largely,

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40. This is an important point. It is pertinent, from the other direction, to the UK. Many qualifications in the learning field (teacher training, youth work, career guidance) have a formal currency across the UK, yet these are usually devolved functions and so there is increasing divergence in what is expected from practitioners in these fields between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There is ongoing debate about what the essentials of training in the field are and what “top-up” training and qualification is needed that equips practitioners for working in distinctive policy environments.



they do not is the consequence of many factors, some more explicit (such as language competence) than others.

All seven of these issues were debated robustly during the national hearing and, despite specific criticisms, concerns and corrections, there was general acknowledgement that they merited more protracted consideration and debate among relevant parties within Belgium itself. Should that take place, and a review of decisions and development is conducted in two years' time (part of the follow-up process to the international review, to which the Belgian authorities have already made a commitment), then the “critical complicity” in which the international review is engaged has already served a useful purpose. Never have the reviews sought simply to provide some “cosy confirmation” of what is already going on. Nonetheless, by way of a final conclusion, it should be said that, wherever you may be in Belgium, there remains a strong political will to serve young people well and there is a range of constructive and opportunity-focused youth provision. It is certainly diverse, and so does raise questions about the equity of service in different places, but – certainly if contrasted with the lives of young people elsewhere in Europe – any part of Belgium, if you are young, remains a good place to be.







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