# Migration and education in Flanders

## Migration policies

About one in ten of the population living in Flanders has a foreign background, i.e. is either having a foreign nationality at birth or having at least one parent with a foreign nationality at birth. Recent figures make us believe that this will rise up. Compared to other regions in Belgium, however, this is by far the lowest share. It has become clear that Belgium and its regions have become not only multi-lingual societies but also multi-cultural societies.

In order to help integrate this population, a number of policies have been decreed by the Flemish Government. To be mentioned are the integration decree (Inburgeringsdecreet), the decree on the Dutch teaching courses (Huizen van het Nederlands), the decree on employment services for foreigners (Inwerkingsdecreet) and the social housing code. Pivotal is the integration programme (Inburgeringsprogramma) that people integrating are either invited to follow or are compelled to follow. It consists of two trajectories. In the first trajectory, the adult migrant is offered an orientation in society, a basic course in Dutch (NT2 = Dutch second language) and some orientation in the labour market. The second trajectory is situated within the regular services in sectors such as employment and education, which are requested to adapt their general services to the people integrating in society.

In its new ‘Policy Agreement 2009-2014’ the Flemish Government opts for an ‘inovative, sustainable and warm society’. Integration of the ethnic-cultural minorities is perceived as a chance to realise a more cohesive and respectful society. In accordance with the so-called ‘Pact 2020’, a more inclusive society is strived for, which bans social deprivation and exclusion.

According to the MIPEX III, net migration, in Belgium, is below EU average. Most foreigners are EU citizens, the largest third country migrant numbers come from Morocco, Turkey and the USA. Newcomers still benefit from integration policies that are some of the best in Europe and getting better. Belgium is within the top ten countries with a MIPEX score of 67 points (the highest score is 83 pts, the lowest 31 pts). Job opportunities for migrants and their descendants remain however unequal, when less affected by the crisis than elsewhere.

Recent data in the VRIND report (Vlaamse Regionale Indicatoren) say that, in 2011, in Flanders, 6.8 % of the inhabitants are non-Belgian. Almost on third of this group has a Dutch passport. About 7 % are Maroccan, 5% are Italian, 5% Polish, 5% French and 5% Turkish. This is clearly visible in the map showing the distribution of non-Belgian inhabitants per municipality: the municipalities with the highest percentage of non-Belgian inhabitants are close to the border with the Netherlands. When we look at the graphs of percentages of Belgian inhabitants with a migrant background, numbers go in the same direction: the highest percentage comes from the Netherlands (18%), followed by Marocco (15%), Turkey (12%) and Italy (5%). They live in the cities, around Brussels and close to the Dutch border.

The graphs in ‘PACT 2020’ (measurement 2012) provide interesting information on recent trends in attitude towards migrants in Flanders. The attitude has barely changed from 2002 until 2011. Women are slightly more negative than men. And it is clear that intolerance towards migrants increases with the age. The results from the survey show that about half of Flemish people think that the presence of different cultures is an enrichment. At the same time, a quarter of Flemish think that migrants are not to be trusted, almost half of them think that migrants make abuse of social security. 4 out of 10 Flemish see Muslims as a treath for the Flemish culture.

## Migration and education

Only in **1991**, a coherent an all encompassing education policy for migrants or children with a foreign background, the so-called **OVB** (Onderwijsvoorrangsbeleid = educational priority policy), was conducted. Before 1990, only isolated initiatives tried to remediate the problems of migrant children in education. The report D’hondt, in 1989, from the Royal Commissariat for Migrant Policies, stated that Flanders was a multicultural society, and that problems related to the integration of migrants had to be dealt with in a choherent and systemic way. In 1991, with the raise of extreme right parties, the theme of migration became more prominent at the political agenda. The lacking behind of migrant children in education has been recognised, as well as the unefficiency of existing measures. That’s why the Flemish government put in place an education programme, the OVB, in which migration policy was seen as part of equal opportunities policy. In this vision, the problems of socially disadvantaged migrants where considered from the same point of view as the problems of socially disadavantaged natives, recognizing however that the migrants also have to deal with problems caused by ethnical/cultural differences. One of the central concepts was the difference between “achterstand” en “achterstelling”. The first concept is a objective fact : some pupils are facing a learning gap (leerachterstand). The second has to do with the perception and the behavoiur of teachers and school. “Achterstelling” originates from low expectations and teaching methods that are unadequate to deal with differences between pupils.

Another of the main pillars of this OVB is **OKAN** (= onthaalonderwijs voor anderstalige nieuwkomers), education for newcomers speaking another language: the objective is to welcome newcomers who speak another language and to help them get into regular education. Schools with migrant pupils or with newcomers speaking another language, receive extra support.

In 2001, there is need for reform, amongst other things because the effects of the OVB were too limited. Moreover, there was a tension between OVB and other socially disadvantaged groups. Families of migrant pupils often live in specific neighbourhoods, and prefer the school of that neighboorhoud. **The Equal Opportunities Decree (Gelijke Onderwijs Kansen = GOK ), 2002**, is an integrated support policy, that wants to give all children equal opportunities to learn and to develop. This decree wants to combat exclusion, social segregation and discrimination and has specific attention for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The decree foresees an integrated support for schools, based on a number of equal opportunities indicators, of which some are directly linked with migration (for instance: the language used in the family is not Dutch), and of which some are not linked with migration (for instance, the diploma of the mother). On the basis of these indicators, schools receive extra support. The set of indicators makes clear that this policy is not only aimed at equal opportunities for migrants, but at equal opportunities for all. Throughout the years, the GOK decree has been finetuned. We see that GOK has become more and more a concern of all schools, all teachers.

The last years, the GOK decree has been under pressure because of capacity problems, mainly in the big cities, where parents sometimes had to camp for days in front of the school in order to have their child registered in the school of their choice.

In November 2011, **a new ‘inschrijvingsdecreet’ (inscription decree)** has been voted in the Flemish Parliament. It will organize the inscriptions in primary and secondary education as from the school year 2013-2014. This means, in a way, the end of the GOK decree. The relevant parts of the former GOK decree will be integrated in the decree for primary education or in the codex for secondary education, in order to enhance coherence. The new decree insists on the objective of social mix and cohesion, and presents a set of priority criteria for specific group of pupils, of wich the former GOK criteria are still part.

According to the MIPEX III, Dutch speaking schools in Belgiuim give socially disadvantated pupils with migrant backgrounds extra support, specifically on language. They foresee translated information and migrant parent outreach (e.g. Minderhedenforum (= Forum of Minorities) projects), data on migrant pupils and school mixing projects.

Flanders obtains an overall score for education of 76 points, which is among the top results in MIPEX (cf. 66 points for Belgium). MIPEX also gives more detailed scores for access (71), for interculturalism (67), targeting needs (80) and opportunites (88).

The graphs in ‘PACT 2020’ (measurement 2012) provide interesting information on recent trends in the percentages of pupils whose home language is different from the instruction language. In 2020-2011, in primary education in the Flemish region, 14% of the pupils speak at home a different language than in their family. In the Brussels region, the percentages are considerably higher: 69%. As far as secondary education is concerned, 9% of the pupils in the Flemish region have a home language that is different from the instruction language (56 % in the Brussels region). This is a clear rise compared to the two previous years, in primary and in secondary education.

Sources

Vlaanderen in Actie, measurements of PACT 2020 (2012), <http://vlaandereninactie.be/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2012-06-21-pact2020-meting2012.pdf>

VRIND 2012 (Vlaamse Regionale Indicatoren)

Migrant Integration Policy Index III, Thomas Huddleston, Jan Niessen with Eadaoin Ni Chaoimh and Emilie White, 2011.

Jaarboek Integratie & Inburgering, Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie, 2011.

Oog voor meer gelijke onderwijskansen, Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, 2008.

Immigration and migrant integration policies in Flanders (Belgium), Edwin Pelfrene, Gerlinde Doyen, Inge Hellemans, October 2009.

Over de doelstellingen, het ontstaan, de inhoud en de praktische uitvoiring van de gemeenschappelijke verklaring inzake een non-discriminatiebeleid in het onderwijs, Patrice Caremans, Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid, 1996-1997, 2.

Beleidsnota’s Vlaamse Regering 2009-2014

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

Website [www.steunpuntgok.be](http://www.steunpuntgok.be)