

## Belgium, Flemish Community

### Good practices and success stories on mainstreaming gender equality in education and/or ESD

1. Name of country

Belgium, Flemish Community

2. Name of organization/project/programme

Department of Education & Training

3. Good practice (title)

*Note: The situation of education in Flanders is to be understood within the specific policy context, whereby schools/higher education institutions etc have a large autonomy. The government finances the wages of school personnel and subsidizes all schools on the same basis. Also, it sets developmental objectives and attainment targets. It is not part of the Ministry's competence to determine pedagogy/didactics, school materials etc. Due to the large autonomy of schools, e.g. pre-service training programmes and in-service training programmes exist and are organized by pedagogical guidance services (related to the school networks), by not-for-profit as well as commercial training organisations...*

**The existing policy instruments the Flemish Ministry of Education has in place are:**

**Developmental objectives (primary education) and (particularly cross-curricular) attainment targets (secondary education)** require teachers to work with pupils on a variety of competencies, some of which are related to sexuality and gender, including sexual orientation. In primary education the focus is on the variety of family types and of relationships.

As noted above, all professionals within schools and Pupil Guidance Centres (PGCs) can rely on the pedagogical guidance teams (related to their educational network) for **professional development and coaching**. These have built up expertise on e.g. antisocial behaviour, violence, including bullying (which may be gender-based). There are protocols, manuals, suggestions for phrasings in the school regulation...

**Trainings on gender policy in education** are also available, particularly by NGOs, some of which are subsidized by the Minister of Education. NGOs like çavaria, ella, merhaba, Sensoa have developed good instruments focusing on gender/sexual identity/sexuality education/healthy relationships... Examples: in March 2014 a **Framework 'Sexuality & Policy in Education'** was launched, which gives expert guidelines as to how schools can develop sound school policies. We also pay for train the trainer courses for Pedagogical Guidance Services, who in turn support teachers and teams in Pupil Guidance Centres. The framework is now being tailored to special needs schools and the sports sector (including physical education teachers).

Another important tool that was developed and implemented is Sensoa's **Flagship System** (a set of guidelines to evaluate attitudes and behavior between teachers and pupils/students, between adults, between youngsters...) More information on: <http://www.sensoa.be/flag-system-pedagogical-and-ethical-intervention>

More examples: see below

Also relevant to gender policy from a broader perspective are the Consultation Platform **Bullying** (since 29 June 2015, members: the minister for Education, the school networks and their pedagogical guidance services, student and pupil unions' umbrella organisations), the Flemish Network Against Bullying (20 expert organisations/NGOs, who organize a yearly campaign Week against Bullying (prizes for good practices, working together with e.g. children's programmes on tv...), the Steering Group Sexual Integrity...

Teachers, school heads, pupil counselors are the first in line to **support pupils** on a day-to-day basis and therefore also whenever problems/incidents (threaten to) occur, and to follow up on how things evolve. People guidance centres (PGC or so-called CLB) are there to provide (demand-driven) support for social and emotional development, preventive healthcare, learning difficulties... So support services for pupils are provided within schools and/or through referral mechanisms: students/pupils are urged to confide in teachers, and Pupil Guidance Centres, which will refer them to appropriate welfare services, expert organisations...

**Studies** on wellbeing, attitudes regarding gender and other issues are conducted on a regular basis, like JOP (Flemish Youth Research Platform = consortium of several universities' research groups), International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), and the international HBSC...

### **Other research**

The Ministry regularly orders policy-oriented studies and actively participates in international comparative research. Attention to gender within the scope of these studies is in fact generic (PISA, PIAAC...). Studies on wellbeing, attitudes regarding gender and other (gender-sensitive) issues are conducted on a regular basis by the Flemish government, by academic institutions, international organisations. Examples: the FRA study on Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the EU Member States: Part II - The Social Situation ([http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-lgbt-survey-results-at-a-glance\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-lgbt-survey-results-at-a-glance_en.pdf))

This autumn, a large-scale education study on the basis of 4 years' work, will be made public: the **Procrustes research** (see <http://www.procrustes.be>) It focuses on the mechanisms underlying girls' and boys' demotivation, underachievement and dropout in education in Flanders and on ways to improve the ways girls and boys benefit from education.

Also this autumn a study is finalized on the gender segregation in technical and vocational secondary education, on the basis of surveys probing factors at play when pupils opt for gender-stereotypical or gender-atypical studies: **In 'vakken' gestopt** (UHasselt, 'put in subjects'): <https://www.uhasselt.be/UH/SEIN/Arbeid-en-organisatie/In-vakken-gestopt-Gegenderde-studiekeuzes-in-het-technisch-en-beroepssecundair-onderwijs-in-Vlaanderen.html>

A study by the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (<http://www.diversiteit.be/>) is underway, which is called the **Diversity Barometer Education**. The study will develop a scientific monitor and apply the instrument on diversity and discrimination in education on the basis of some of the criteria that are protected by antidiscrimination laws (i.e. origin, handicap, sexual preference - lgbt) in education. This monitor will be implemented and will take place every 6 years, providing: an analytical review of existing research, of diversity policies and practices with regard to tackling diversity in schools, an innovative analysis of pupils' study orientation in schools.

#### **Campaigns, policy documents with links to gender:**

- In addition to various laws and acts in relation to gender discrimination, sexism, balanced representation of men and women in decision-making bodies, etc. there is an Interfederal **Action Plan** Against Homophobic and Transphobic Violence and the Plan gender-related violence.
- The **STEM-action plan** (science, technology, engineering & mathematics – in partnership with the ministers for Work & Social Economy, Economy, Science & Innovation) aims to increase the number of women (and students with a migration background) in STEM-education and sectors: [www.ond.vlaanderen.be/stem/beleidsdocumenten/default.htm](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/stem/beleidsdocumenten/default.htm)<sup>1</sup>
- The Minister of education and training (and each Flemish Minister) is currently preparing **Action plans related to gender, sexual diversity, gender identity, handicap and accessibility (2016-2019)**. This usually encompasses a number of the above education initiatives.

#### **Provisions in relation to discrimination on the basis of gender and gender diversity/gender identity/gender expression:**

*As to complaints about discrimination on the basis of gender/gender identity/gender expression, particularly if they fail to be solved locally, pupils/personnel/parents can turn to the Flemish Ombuds service, the Children's Rights Commissioner and - in the case of lgb-related issues - the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities and Discrimination... They register the complaints/incidents that are reported and offer mediation (and if necessary start a legal suit). These reportings give valuable indications about the prevalence and nature, but the resulting overall picture is necessarily fragmented and, we can assume, part of incidents remains underreported/dark number.*

In addition to various federal laws and Flemish acts/decrees in relation to gender discrimination, sexism etc. , the Ministry engaged itself within **an Interfederal Action Plan Against Homophobic and Transphobic Violence** and the **Plan gender-related violence**.

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All the above instruments allow for a comprehensive and ambitious gender policy at all levels within education. However, the theme is not always high on the agenda in compulsory, higher or adult education field. That is why the Flemish Ministry of Education **regularly promotes gender-conscious and lgbt-friendly policies** in various ways:

- by bringing together all key actors in the field of education to develop and sign the Common Declaration for a gender sensitive and LGBT friendly policy in schools (2012). All organizations committed to set up a structural approach (pedagogical and policy wise) to raise awareness about gender and sexual diversity and to create an environment of openness and tolerance for all students, teachers and other educational personnel. In the same year a Common Declaration on the Protection of Sexual Integrity of Minors in Education, too, was signed. The actions/measures in this respect are coordinated by a separate the Steering Group Sexual Integrity
- by providing free consultancy by gender experts (see above)
- by providing tips and tricks, or disseminating the education materials that are developed by expert NGOs.

Examples are:

the brochure *Eerste Lijn Meisjes/Jongens* , <http://www.genderklikvoorjongens.be/>, etc.).

*Gender in de blender* (<http://www.genderindeblender.be/>) is a website and educational tool about gender, gender identity and gender expression for secondary schools. It has recently been translated into English, as it has received praise internationally as innovative:

<http://mm.vlaamsbrabant.be/811/system/newsletter.asp?id=3831310D3633380D313138320D333933360D353438380D300D41334436313844360D310D0D300D3531340D372E352E342E31323430390D31>

Primary teacher's manual on gender and sexual diversity: *Er was eens een regenboog. Diversiteit in de klas* (There once was.. a rainbow. Diversity in the classroom): online available, see <https://cavaria.be/mediatheek/educatieve-map-er-was-eens-een-regenboog>

Teacher's manual for secondary education: *Een bank vooruit* ('a school bench ahead'), online available, see: <https://cavaria.be/mediatheek/educatieve-map-bank-vooruit>

The teachers' manual '*Gender click in pre-school*' ([www.genderatwork.be/wp-content/uploads/GENDERKLIVoorWEB2.pdf](http://www.genderatwork.be/wp-content/uploads/GENDERKLIVoorWEB2.pdf)) is the result of action-based research by Genderatwork funded by Equal Opportunities in Flanders. Via visits to pre-schools, discussions with teacher and school management, comparison of experiences, individual surveys and in-depth interviews, this practical guide was elaborated. It provides examples and tips and tricks to work on gender in class and in school (visual aids, gender neutral teaching materials, non-conforming role play, play corner, library, father groups, etc.)

Website/educational tool *GENDER CLICK FOR BOYS 1.0*: The project developed a flexible learning trajectory in cooperation with schools. Through interactive learning processes with groups of boys and girls in secondary school, the project searches for how and in what terms youngsters regard masculinity. These processes are the basis to create a website accompanied by educational tools to provide youth with insights on how gender stereotypes about men influence their lives. Ultimately,

the project wants to render the impact of stereotypes about masculinity recognizable and debatable and help young people to make “gender- click”. See:

<http://www.genderklikvoorjongens.be/>

4. Target group
5. Brief description of good practice
6. Useful links  
See above
7. Useful contacts

Nathalie De Bleeckere, Transversal Policy, Education & Training Department, Koning Albert II-laan 15, 1210 Brussels

[nathalie.debleeckere@ond.vlaanderen.be](mailto:nathalie.debleeckere@ond.vlaanderen.be)

#### 8. Comments

It will be clear from the above, that the Flemish Education Ministry approaches gender as intertwined with sexual identity, gender expression and gender identity. This is perhaps quite innovative from an international perspective and based on scientific insights about the nature of gender stereotyping/sexism and how these link to social processes and structures. Also, the Ministry aims to fight gender mechanisms that lead to exclusions and thereby wishes to take into account how gender interacts in complex ways with ethnicity, social class, handicap, etc.