

Gender relations in primary and secondary education in Flanders

The RoSa-factsheets aim to familiarise you with the scope of equal opportunities in Flanders. Each factsheet probes the situation in a specific area. Broad themes as well as specific ones are put into the spotlight, depending on the relevance and/or availability of information and numerical data. We do not intend to offer exhaustive information, our primary aim is to sketch the position of women in Flanders in a surveyable and accessible way.

Since its founding in 1978, RoSa is the place in Flanders to look for information and documentation about equal opportunities, emancipation policy and women's studies.

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Primary education

STRUCTURE

Primary education covers both nursery and primary schools. Nursery schools are open to children aged between 2 1/2 and 6 years old. Education is not compulsory under 6, but most children attend school. There are three main sections : children between 2 1/2 and 4, children aged 4 and 5, and children aged 5 and 6. Primary education, which is compulsory, concerns children between 6 and 12 years old, and is divided into six different levels.

STATISTICS

Since education is compulsory in Belgium for children between 6 and 18, the differences between boys and girls in the educational system reflect their general situation within the broader population. Thus, there are no specific remarks to be made, since all children are treated identically at primary education level (excluding special education). On the other hand, in secondary schools, where there are different sections, a more in-depth analysis does prove that there are in fact differences between boys and girls at this level.

Table 1 - School population in full-time education - boys and girls 1999-2000

Primary Education	Boys	Girls	Total
<i>Elementary Schools</i>			
Ordinary	122,049	116,838	238,887
Special	1,186	581	1,767
Total Elementary Schools	123,235	117,419	240,654
<i>Primary Schools</i>			
Ordinary	206,381	202,164	408,545
Special	16,172	9,555	25,727
Total Primary Schools	222,553	211,719	434,272
Total Primary Education	345,788	329,138	674,926

Source: Statistical survey of Education in Flanders, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Brussels 2000.

Secondary education

STRUCTURE

Secondary education is based on a unique structure, since the different educational systems that existed before as separate entities have been brought together. It is divided into three different levels.

The first level, covering two years, is conceived as a section for further orientation. The first year B gathers children showing learning difficulties, or who do not feel comfortable in a more theoretically oriented section. Thus, it can be considered as a transitory section between primary and secondary school. For their second year, these pupils can either choose to go to a technical school, or to return to the first year A.

At the second level, pupils can choose between four different sections. General secondary education (ASO), basically a theoretical education, thus preparing them for higher education. Technical secondary education (TSO) offers not only general courses, but also a technical-theoretical education and practical courses. After technical education pupils can go to high school, or exercise a profession.

Professional secondary education (BSO) offers practical schooling, aimed at preparing pupils for a specific job. Moreover, after the third degree, they can choose to enter another optional year. Finally, artistic secondary education (KSO) combines both theory and practice. On completion of the third degree, pupils can choose to follow higher education or to enter the job market.

Apart from this full-time education there are also a number of part-time educational programmes. These cover three basic options: part-time professional secondary education, part-time secondary education for fishermen's children, as well as schooling offered by smaller and medium-sized enterprises. The first type, which is professionally oriented, has been set up in 1983, education being compulsory for children under 18 since then. It combines professional education and professional experience. The schooling offered by smaller and medium-sized enterprises is organized by the SME Centre for professional education, and has been as such officially recognized by the government. It also offers a combination of education and professional experience.

STATISTICS

Table 2 - Full-time school population in secondary education - boys and girls 1999-2000

Secondary Education	Boys	Girls	Total
New foreign pupils	536	411	947
<i>1st degree</i>			
1st year A	29,949	29,055	59,004
1st year B	4,743	3,495	8,238
2nd year	27,780	27,306	55,086
2nd year "BVJ"	7,041	5,356	12,397
Total 1 degree	69,513	65,212	134,725
<i>2nd degree</i>			
General	25,994	31,868	57,862
Technical	25,196	17,631	42,827
Artistical	814	1,264	2,078

Professional	16,605	14,079	30,684
Total 2nd degree	68,609	64,842	133,451
<i>3rd degree</i>			
General	22,758	29,201	51,959
Technical	25,961	20,038	45,999
Artistical	1,155	1,583	2,738
Professional	21,465	19,980	41,445
Total 3rd degree	71,339	70,802	142,141
<i>4th degree</i>	458	3,531	3,989
Total 4th degree	458	3,531	3,989
Total ordinary secondary	210,455	204,798	415,253
Total special secondary	9,745	6,029	15,774
Total Secondary Education	220,200	210,827	431,027

Source : Statistical survey of Education in Flanders, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Brussels 2000.

There are more girls than boys in general secondary schools, but boys are outnumbering girls in technical and professional schools. The fact that there are fewer girls in manufacturing sections, offering usually a better position on the job market, is not new. A few examples demonstrate this phenomenon.

GENDER-BASED EDUCATIONAL CHOICES

Table 3 - First degree secondary education by option - boys and girls 1999-2000

Year and option	Boys	Girls	Total
<i>1st year</i>			
1st year A	29,949	29,055	59,004
1st year B	4,743	3,495	8,238
Total 1st year	34,692	32,550	67,242
<i>2nd year</i>			
Agriculture and bio	392	100	492
Arts	144	248	392
Ballet	3	17	20
Wood and construction	879	17	896
Artistical skills	15	211	226
Graphic design	165	39	204
Latin-greek	1,209	1,512	2,721
Commerce	1,797	2,957	4,754
Food-hotel school	419	160	579
Natural sciences	1,757	71	1,828
Latin	4,457	5,311	9,768
Maritime education	27	1	28
Mechanics	3,956	61	4,017
Modern sciences	11,409	12,847	24,256
Rudolf Steiner education	90	121	211
Social and technical education	610	3,116	3,726
Technical sciences	422	474	896
Textile	20	16	36
Yeshiva	9	27	36
Total 2nd year	27,780	27,306	55,086

Source : Statistical survey of Education in Flanders, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Brussels 2000.

Boys are definitely outnumbering girls in areas such as wood and construction, mechanics and electronics or industrial sciences, whereas girls tend to choose the 'soft' sectors such as social sciences and techniques. Up to now, little or no research has been done in Flanders on this subject.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

In 1992, an action plan, called 'Diversification of study options by girls in full-time BSO and TSO' has been launched in Belgium by the Flemish Education Council in a certain number of pilot schools, to find out what keeps girls from choosing a non-traditional career. Following the results of this survey, some initiatives have been taken in a series of test

schools, in order to define a global approach that would encourage girls to opt for industrial sections in technical and professional schools.

This project did not only want to enlarge girls' choices at school, but it also included a number of accompanying measures for those girls, in order to assist them in higher education or on the job market, as well as a support for those schools that participated in the project, for adopting these measures permanently and integrate them into their educational structures. The project was successful. The efforts made enabled schools to offer a wider choice to girls, and allowed to develop a certain number of educational measures to support the entire process.

The project ended in 1996. The minister in charge stated that too many girls coming out of the industrial sections had difficulties finding a job. Moreover, it was considered as being too one-sided to push girls into choosing sections dominated by boys. Therefore, reconsidering and restructuring typical female sections was necessary, and proclaiming of male study choices as the standard was denounced by the new political agenda. Recently, efforts have been made to support the selection process and to stimulate deliberate educational choices, based on the conviction of the pupils.

In Flanders, other initiatives have tried to go beyond and draw the attention to the traditional gender differences, such as an advertising campaign set up by the Secretary of State for Social Emancipation, encouraging girls to widen their choices, and developing a series of educational materials. An example is the Balans/Balance module that originated in the project diversification, although it is difficult to know whether it has already been used successfully. The integration of emancipation in the evaluation criteria has at least allowed to use these materials.

In 1989-1990, the project 'Integration of equal opportunities in education and refresher courses for teachers', part of the TENET (Teacher Education Network) programme of the European Communities, was followed in 14 pilot schools, and has shown that this kind of initiatives could really produce results, even though they need to be sustained in the long term.

The evaluation criteria

In 1998, emancipation has been added to the evaluation criteria and to the development objectives for primary education, as it had been in 1997 for the first two years of secondary education. Evaluation criteria refer to the minimal standards which the Flemish government considers necessary and realistic for a specific group of pupils. The development objectives also refer to certain minimal standards, but concern specifically the first year B and the professional preparatory year of the secondary level. Given the freedom of education in the country, schools are expected, regarding these criteria, to make efforts to follow these guidelines, but are not held responsible as far as their results are concerned.

The evaluation criteria test the different courses on their role-enforcing nature and besides, gender differentiation is being mentioned specifically among the final attainment criteria. The emancipatory objectives have been adopted for primary education, both for the evaluation criteria for courses such as gymnastics or french, and for the evaluation criteria for rather general courses such as social skills.

As far as the contents are concerned, the emancipatory objectives can be divided into a

socio-cultural and a socio-economical aspect. At the socio-economical level, pupils need to be encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards technology and techniques, thus allowing an enlargement of the traditional choices, at school as well as during their professional career.

At a socio-cultural level, pupils need to be able to evaluate and to go beyond the limits of traditional choices, notably in their professional life. To reply to the emancipatory criteria, they need to pay attention to all sorts of professional occupations, to family life, to social skills, and demonstrate their ability to resist sexual harassment. Moreover, a programme for the future is to be developed taking into account an improved relationship between career, care and social participation.

The differences in school results

Over the past few years, there have been lots of discussions concerning the differences in school results for girls and boys. At secondary level, these differences have become really significant. The writing on the wall is the slackening of school results. With this we indicate the difficulties suffered by some pupils compared to other pupils of the same age. Boys start secondary school with more difficulties than girls, and they only get worse as they move on towards later stages of secondary education. In the last year of secondary school, 44.7% of all boys suffer difficulties, compared to 30.6% of all girls. There has not been found any clear explanation for the difference between the two sexes as far as school results are concerned, although similar results have been obtained in other countries. Recently, a number of surveys ordered by the Flemish minister for education is being finalised. Their results are expected for 2002.

Data used in this analysis also include special education, where boys are outnumbering girls by a third, both at primary and secondary level. In special kindergartens, there are even twice as many boys than girls. This trend exists since many decades. Since no explanation has been found for this fact, it is hard to say whether it relates to the learning skills of boys and girls at a later stage.

Personnel

Over the past decades, a feminisation among teachers has taken place in Flanders, especially in primary schools.

Table 4 - Administrative personnel and teachers -full time equivalents - january 2000

	Men	Women	Total
General primary education			
Number	9,707	34,399	44.106
Percentage	22	78	100
General secondary education			
Number	25,032	28,492	53,524
Percentage	47	53	100

Source : Statistical survey of Education in Flanders, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Brussels, 2000.

Women are also sharing the majority of part-time as well as temporary jobs. In table 5, the percentage of men nominated in full-time positions is higher than the average number in table 4. Among temporary jobs, the situation is different. Here, women represent the majority.

Table 5 - Full-time administrative personnel and teachers

Number of full-time positions						
	Nominated			Temporary		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Primary schools	7.307	18.487	25.794	846	5.190	6.036
	28	72	100	14	86	100
Secondary schools	18.454	14.534	32.988	2.414	3.154	5.568
	56	34	100	43	57	100

Source : Statistical survey of Education in Flanders, Ministry of the Flemish Community, 2000.

Table 6, shows that more women work in part-time jobs, both among the permanently appointed and the temporary personnel. The number of men working part-time in a temporary situation is rather high, but is not significant in absolute numbers.

Table 6 - Part-time administrative personnel and teachers - by status

Number of part-time working people						
	Nominated			Temporary		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Primary	1,496	9,551	11,047	403	3,499	3,902
	14	86	100	10	90	100
Secondary	3,685	11,247	14,932	1,036	2,278	3,314
	25	75	100	31	69	100

Source : Statistical survey of Education in Flanders, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Brussels, 2000.

The number of women in managerial positions is rather low, as it is at decision-making level. For example, in the Flemish Educational Council, advising the Flemish Ministry of Education since 1991, it is only since 1996 that women attain 25% of participation in the councils and departments.

Table 7: Administrative personnel - January 2000

	Men	Women
Kindergarten	11	133
Primary schools	1437	656
Secondary schools	1722	474

Source : Ministry of the Flemish Community, Education Department, Budget and Statistical Section

Men do not play the same role as women in the Flemish educational system. In 1997, a leaflet has been published in order to encourage school boards and tutoring institutions to undertake positive action. But given the freedom that these tutoring institutions have as far as nominations are concerned, it is difficult to influence them to a large extent. Nonetheless, a decree of 1997 has imposed equal representation of men and women on the advisory committees. At least one in three members of these committees must be of a different sex. Each new nomination needs to take this into account.

Conclusion

Even though, in real terms, girls are equal to boys, a number of inequalities still exist, especially in secondary education. In Flanders, girls obtain better results at school than boys. In the end, the feminisation among teachers has not led to a better repartition of positions among executives.

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