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Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth

INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

BELGIUM (FLANDERS)



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1. Youth participation in Belgium (Flanders)

Are there official national/regional recommendations (policies) establishing the right of young people to participate in society?

The 14 February 2003 Flemish Parliament Act on supporting and stimulating municipal, inter-municipal and provincial youth policy and youth work policy¹ as modified by the 23 December 2005 Flemish Parliament Act requires that each local authority recognizes or establishes one or more youth councils. One of the tasks of the youth council (possibly in co-operation with the local youth services, the youth counsellor, youth work, local government) consists of designing a three-year youth (work) policy plan. Key topics are: youth work support programs, volunteer training, greater access to youth work, participation in youth policy, infrastructure, integrated youth policy, space for youth, communication and information. We can consider it as a form of support to youth participation. In addition, there are funding opportunities for specific youth policy participation projects and associations as defined in the Flemish Parliament Act on Flemish Youth Policy (29 March 2002). Participation has also been given a significant position in the Flemish Youth Policy Plan 2010-2014². In 2004, the Flemish Parliament Act on Pupil Participation³ came into effect. The Act formally provides for participation at school. The set-up, composition and workings of the school council and the pupil council are strictly regulated. The participation act includes the set up, tasking, financing, supervision, evaluation and operation definition of an expertise centre for the encouragement of participation at school. Also, in several cities and municipalities in Flanders, local discussion platforms (LOPs) have been set up. The members of an LOP, including pupils from pupil councils, can work together for more equal opportunities for pupils from their own city or municipality. The Organisation of Flemish School Pupils supervises the pupils in the Local Discussion Platform. The LOPs have been since 1-01-2003 as anticipated in the GOK-I act about equal educational opportunities for all pupils. In the 'Parliament Act containing broad and stimulating measures that encourage societal participation in culture, youth work and sports' (18-01-2008)⁴.the starting principle is an approach that is target-group focused and which transgresses sectors. Het wil daarom de ontwikkelingen binnen het veld, gericht op verrijking, verbreding en vernieuwing/verdieping optimale kansen geven. Het participatiedecreet voorziet in categoriale acties, gericht op het omgaan en slechten van participatiedrempels bij kansengroepen. People facing poverty, people with ethnic or culturally diverse backgrounds, people who have been detained, disabled people and families with young children are invited more actively to take part in the wealth of cultural, sports and youth (work) that is available. The Parliament Act provides motivation at all levels. At last, the Flemish Government reports on the implementation of article 12 (concerning the right of freedom of speech and the right to be heard in procedures involving the child) from the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

If so: how is the concept of youth participation defined?

Children and young people should be able to participate fully in social life. Children do not become citizens gradually: they are born as citizens and are hence entitled to rights. The Flemish Government wishes to raise their participation in society both formally and informally and involve them in society from childhood onwards by creating contexts in which children and young people can help to shape citizenship. This serves a dual purpose: first, it is to empower them – that is, to equip them with the tools they will need to deal with relationships of authority in a healthy and critical way. Second, it is to influence adults' decision-making by examining the impact of their decisions on the lives of children and young people. Children and young people typically live their lives locally, so it is important that children and young people should be able participate at the local level as well. Participation should thus become an essential part of any youth policy: children and young people are not merely passive participants in what is offered to them, but they are also actively involved in a community. The concept of "youth participation" thus refers to both:

- "participating in": how many children and young people participate passively in what is offered?

- “being part of”: to what extent are children and young people part of a community and do they also help to shape it? The emphasis is on a political interpretation which considers children and young people as co-owners of a society (“a sense of ownership”) which they can influence if they engage themselves (“a sense of agency”)⁶.

*What are the measures envisaged to promote different forms of participation on local, regional and national level?*⁶

- 1) Collect, make accessible and disseminate knowledge and skills concerning the participation of children and young people in various structures, institutions and facilities.

Actions:

- Establish a network for policy participation for children and young people in Flanders and Brussels (Youth). By bringing together different actors in the participation domain, expertise and knowledge can be shared and made accessible. In a first stage, the network will explore youth participation at the different policy levels and within the various policy domains. Creating a knowledge interchange and launching a participation database will make knowledge of youth participation accessible and improve it.
 - Local policy participation barometer (Youth/Domestic Administration/Study Service of the Flemish Government). Repeated measurements are needed to support the new network in its targeted improvement of youth participation. A local participation barometer will be worked out by a partnership consisting of the Urban Policy Study Service of the Flemish Government, the Youth section, and partners from the youth-work sector such as the Flemish Youth Council and Karuur. By the end of 2012, the *Youth Stats Book* and the local participation barometer will have been linked to each other. We will also investigate the extent to which this barometer can be linked to the *City Monitor*.
 - Stimulate participation at school (Education, in collaboration with Youth). Research shows that participation can raise the quality of school policies. Indeed, participation implies that the opinions of all the actors are taken into consideration and that a shared responsibility for joint decisions is created. Among teachers, participation increases job satisfaction. Moreover, there is evidence that parent participation has a positive impact on children’s educational progress and learning improvement. The self-evaluation tool for schools assesses the cooperation, involvement and participation of the different actors (parents, students and teachers). It is also investigated what incentives can be given to enhance the participation climate.
 - International positioning (Youth etc.). At international forums, Flanders emphasises and defends the importance of young people’s participation.
- 2) Stimulate and support sustainable methods, experiments and labs for raising the quality of policy participation and reaching all children and young people.

Actions:

- Quality framework (Youth). In partnership with the Flemish youth participation network, the Flemish Government is developing a quality framework for youth participation (cf. the quality of dialogues, active listening, debates between public institutions and young people, reaching children and young people, etc.). It uses this quality framework itself and also disseminates it.
- The Decree on Participation in Education (Education). Together with the Flemish Pupil Umbrella Organisation (VSK) the Flemish Government has evaluated the participation decree. On the basis of this evaluation, a decree on the “legal position of students in education” is being worked out.

- The evaluation of the collaboration between the Flemish Youth Council and the Minorities Forum (Youth and Civic Integration). The Flemish Government expects the Flemish Youth Council to be a representative body representing all young people, including young people with an immigration background. Only thus can the Flemish Youth Council formulate an opinion on the diversity of policies as well as of the offer. The Flemish Youth Council is already consulting with the Minorities Forum and is trying to give young migrants a say. We are evaluating whether existing collaboration meets this criterion and whether it should be intensified.
- 3) Raise the competences of the policymakers and persons in charge, depending on a participative attitude, sustainable participation projects, and the implementation of the results in policy processes.

Actions:

- Learning to participate (Youth/Education/Welfare). The Flemish Government will raise the quality of participation via training and education, at different levels (Flemish, local, practice), in various sectors and in terms of knowledge, knowhow and awareness (increasing the level of support, acquaintance with the social world, basic attitude, etc.). Participation assumes that officials and the government have an attitude aimed at facilitating, stimulating and supporting spontaneous initiatives taken by children and young people. In this context, much depends on the competences of the “frontline workers” (youth workers, outreach workers, community police officers, teachers, etc.).
- Supporting various types of “learning to participate” from childhood onwards, through formal education and non-formal learning (cf. EU cooperation framework). Participation trajectories should also aim at teaching children and young people “to think socially”, at community development and at empowerment, so that they can assume a more active role in society. In this context, special attention should be paid to the most relevant level for children and young people, namely the local level.
- Awareness-raising in the youth sector. Youth organisations and youth councils play an important role in our democracy. This role will be charted and youth councils and youth organisations will be made aware of this.
- Awareness-raising in Europe. Participation is important at all levels where policies are framed. Flanders is an active partner in the efforts made at the international level (EU, Council of Europe, UN) in view of involving young people in their policies. Flanders thus keeps playing a pioneering role in implementing the structured dialogue between young people and the institutions of the European Union.
- The Flemish consultation code (Administrative Affairs). The (potential) development of a Flemish consultation code refers to specific target groups such as children and young people.

Do any of the above mentioned measures target specific groups? Yes

The primary goal of (Youth) Policy is to promote an integrated approach and inclusiveness. Nevertheless, some specific target groups get particular attention. This includes immigrants, gays, lesbians and bisexuals, disabled young people, ‘drop-outs’, young people in care and low-skilled young people. Via the Act of 18-01-2008 ‘containing broad and stimulating measures for encouraging participation in culture, youth work and sport’, people in poverty, people from ethnically/cultural diverse backgrounds, those in detention, disabled people and families with young children are more actively invited to take part in the rich range of culture, sports and youth work.⁵

The act on supporting and stimulating municipal, inter-municipal and provincial youth policy and youth work policy, the Flemish Parliament Act on Flemish Youth Policy and the Flemish Parliament Act on Pupil Participation are targeting exclusively youngsters.

2. Youth participation in representative democracy in Belgium (Flanders)

Is voting compulsory in your country? Yes

In Belgium there is compulsory attendance at elections. This implies that all citizens from the age of 18 years onwards are obliged to report at the polling station on the day of the elections. However, there is no compulsory voting. This means that every Belgian can abstain from voting.

What is the legal minimum age to vote in elections?

European: 18 National: 18 Regional: 18 local: 18

What are the legal requirements for voting in local, regional, national and European elections?

The European elections:

1. Possessing the Belgian nationality or being a resident of an EU member state.
2. Being 18 years of age.
3. Being registered in the population register of a Belgian municipality.
4. Not being disqualified or suspended from the right to vote for penal-law reasons.

Conditions 2 and 4 should be met on the day of the elections. Conditions 1 and 3 should be met when the electoral list is drawn up.⁷

The National and regional elections:

1. Possessing the Belgian nationality.
2. Being 18 years of age.
3. Being registered in the population register of a Belgian municipality.
4. Not being disqualified or suspended from the right to vote.

Conditions 2 and 4 should be met on the day of the elections. Conditions 1 and 3 should be met when the electoral list is drawn up.

What are the legal requirements for being a candidate in elections?

The European Parliament:

1. Possessing the Belgian nationality or being a national of another member state of the European Union. This condition should be met on the day of the elections. He/she should reside in Belgium or in another member state of the European Union.
2. Having reached the full age of 21 years.
3. Being Dutch-speaking for registration with the Dutch electoral committee, French-speaking for registration with the French electoral committee, and German-speaking for registration with the German electoral committee.

The National and regional parliaments⁸:

1. Possessing the Belgian nationality. The way in which the Belgian nationality has been obtained (birth, naturalization, marriage, option) is irrelevant.

2. Enjoying all civil and political rights.
3. Being 18 years of age on the day of the elections.
4. Residing in a municipality of the territory of their Region and accordingly be registered in the population registers of this municipality.
5. Not being disqualified or suspended from the right to vote.
6. The eligibility conditions should be met on the day of the elections, except for the residence and registration conditions, which should be met six months prior to the elections.

2.1. Participation in elections

Belgium applies compulsory attendance at elections. This means that all young people from the age of 18 are obliged to vote. No figures are available about the number of young people who have actually voted.

2.2. Young people elected into representative bodies

In the 2010 federal elections, 118 people were elected, of which 9 persons below 30. Four of them were men, five were women. In total, 88 men and 47 women were elected.⁹ The Flemish Parliament has 124 members, of which 73 are men and 51 women. Six members are younger than 30, four of them men, two women.¹⁰

3. Youth participation in civil society

3.1 Membership in NGOs

1.2% of the 14- to 30-year-old Flemish young people are affiliated to a movement or action group which champions the environment or wildlife. More specifically, 1.6% of the girls and 0.8% of the boys are affiliated to such a movement. 2.6% of Flemish young people are members of an association which helps other people. More specifically, 3.1% of the girls and 2.0% of the boys are members of such associations. 2.0% of the Flemish young people are members of a social movement championing human rights, peace, tolerance or the Third World. Here again, more girls (2.4%) participate than boys (1.6%). 0.8% of the Flemish young people are members of a political party or an association affiliated to such a party. More boys (1.1%) than girls (0.5%) fall in this category. Generally speaking, boys are more active in sports clubs, while girls are more active in social associations. 4.5% of the Flemish teenagers and young adults participate in a youth movement with a specific target group. More boys (5.3%) than girls (3.7%) fall in this category.¹¹

3.2 Youth participation structures on local, regional or national level

National structures

- 1) VZW Jeugd Parlement Jeunesse ABSL (Youth Parliament): a unique project in which about one hundred young people from Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia are given the opportunity to debate with each other on socially relevant topics, at the heart of Belgian democracy – Parliament. Website: <http://www.jeugdparlementjeunesse.be>

Regional structures

- 1) Vlaamse Jeugdraad (The Flemish Youth council): The key task of the Flemish Youth Council is to help ensure that the voice and views of children, young people, youth organisations and youth advisory bodies (youth councils and pupil councils) are effectively heard and integrated into policy-making.
Contact details: Arenbergstraat 1D, 1000 Brussel. Tel. 00322/551.13.80. Email: info@vlaamsejeugdraad.be. Website: <http://www.vlaamsejeugdraad.be>
- 2) The Organisation of Flemish School Pupils (VSK) is the association for pupil councils from secondary education. It is an association for and of pupils. VSK would like to support pupils and help them strengthen their effectiveness. They organize regional meetings, starting days for pupil councils, etc.
Contact details: <http://www.vsknet.be>
- 3) The Brussels Youth Council is an independent counselling body which gives advice to the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). The Youth Council mainly operates proactively; it prepares policies and reflects on what could be the right approach for a sound Brussels youth policy. In addition, the Youth Council provides advice on individual cases.
Contact details: Youth Service VGC; Leopold II-laan 178; 1080 Brussels. E-mail: jeugdendienst@vgc.be. Website: <http://www.kwajongradvantong.be>; Tel. 00322/413 04 30
- 4) The Brussels Youth Parliament for the Environment: this parliament allows young people to share experiences, advocate ideas, make their voices heard and achieve projects in the field of the environment. Website: <http://www.jongerenparlement.be>

Provincial structures

There are 5 provincial youth councils (West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg, Flemish Brabant). The Flemish Parliament Act of 14 February 2003, as modified by the Act of 23 December

2005, also governs the recognition and establishment of provincial youth councils. They have the same advisory powers as local youth councils but exercise them at the provincial level. The provincial youth council comprises the general assembly, the executive committee and various work groups. Members of the provincial youth council are primarily youth clubs but can also be local youth councils and even individuals

- 1) Provincial youth council Antwerp; Boomgaardstraat 22; 2600 Antwerpen. Tel.: 03 240 55 66. Email: jeugd@admin.provant.be
- 2) Provincial youth council Limburg; Universiteitslaan 1; 3500 Hasselt; Tel 011 23 72 70. Email: jeugd@limburg.be
- 3) Provincial youth council East-Flanders; Woodrow Wilsonplein 2; 9000 Gent. Tel.09 267 75 94; Email: nele.van.havere@oost-vlaanderen.be
- 4) Provincial youth council Flemish Brabant; Provincieplein 1; 3000 Leuven. Tel. 016-26 76 88; Email: jeugddienst@vlaamsbrabant.be
- 5) Provincial youth council West-Flanders; Koning Leopold III-laan 41; 8200 Brugge. Tel: 0032 5. 040.32.95

Local youth councils

Each local authority (including Brussels Capital) has a local youth council (an obligation under the Flemish Parliament Act of 14 February 2003, as modified by the Flemish Parliament Act of 23 December 2005). Representatives of local or inter-municipal youth work initiatives sit on this council and young people who are not members of youth organisations may also participate in the council's activities. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen is obliged to seek the youth council's advice on youth policy issues. Moreover, the local youth council may offer advice on its own initiative on issues affecting youth or youth work. In 2003-04, the number of activities carried out by municipal youth councils amounted to 1519. The majority of these activities (27%) involved partying and recreation. Youth councils, however, also organise many activities that fall under the headings of culture, information, training¹².

The 2 April 2004 Act on participation at school and the Flemish Education Council sets out two forms of participation: a pupil council and a school council. Schools are required to establish a pupil council unless school regulations already provide for some form of pupil participation or unless less than 10% of the pupils ask for such a council. The pupil council is elected every four years and can give advice and ask for/give information on various topics. In practice, almost all secondary schools and many primary schools have a pupil council. Some also have a children's parliament, a forum, work groups, sounding-board groups,... The school council is composed of parents, teachers, pupils and local representatives of social, economic and cultural environments. The school council offers advice, asks for/gives information and consults with the school board. The school council is reformed once every four years. Research into the existence and workings of pupil councils in secondary education has shown that 89% of the schools (which also organise a third stage) have a pupil council (VSK 2002). A survey of VSK shows that in community education 17% of pupil councils are represented in the school council, in privately run education 9% are represented in the participation council. There are some 900 pupil councils. The Flemish School Pupil Organisation defined a number of criteria which determine whether a pupil council has a "minimum set of tasks and responsibilities". A number of important issues on which pupil councils could give advice are meals, school regulations, homework, timetables, evaluation mode and pupil guidance. (VSK 2002)

In a number of cities and municipalities in Flanders, local discussion platforms¹³ (LOPs) have also been set up. The members of an LOP, including pupils from pupil councils, can work together for more equal opportunities for pupils from their own city or municipality. In Flanders there are 70 active LOPs. There are LOPs for primary education and LOPs for secondary education.

4. Learning to participate

4.1 The formal education system

Please describe existing mechanisms within the system of formal education aiming at developing and deepening learning to participate in your country.

1) The Participation Decree⁵

On 2 April 2004, the Flemish government ratified the decree on participation at school and the Flemish Education Council. This decree governs various aspects of participation in primary and secondary education. The regulations define the general principles of a school's participative governance and contain the rules for the pedagogical councils, student councils and parents' councils, the school councils (in subsidised education), the codetermination boards, and the mediation and dispute settlement rules.¹⁴

Besides local participation and the Flemish Education Council (VLOR), the Participation Decree also governs the expertise centre which is to support participation at school. The operational date of the expertise centre which schools can call on under the Decree in order to develop the participation culture at school, has been postponed to a later date to be determined by the government.

2) Participation of pupils in primary education

Pupils have a large say in many schools. In primary education, this typically involves informal participation: the school day starts with a discussion session, a suggestion box, etc. Some schools also have a pupil council, which is mandatory when 10% of the pupils from the 11 to 13 age bracket demand this. The way in which pupil councils in primary education are composed is laid down by the school regulations. These councils may be composed through elections, but this is not mandatory. Other methods are allowed, taking into account the capacities and the age of the children.¹⁵

3) Participation of pupils and students

Since 1997, citizenship education has been included in secondary school attainments targets and developmental objectives. Goals are set for the first (12 to 14 year-olds), second (14 to 16 year-olds) and third stages (16 to 18 year-olds). In the first stage, focus is on class and school level, family forms and personal living environment, media and democratic forms of governance. Goals for the second stage focus on human rights education, active citizenship and decision making. In the third stage, emphasis is placed on democratic councils and parliaments, social services and world citizenship.

In the participation act (2004) the creation of an 'elected' pupil council and school council is defined but pupils can also get involved with school policy in another way, for example via a pupil council with volunteers, working groups, sounding board groups, open forums, theme groups, suggestion boxes, school radios. Here, the school's own initiatives (launched by pupils, teachers, school management teams) are referred to as these initiatives are not legally defined.

The Flemish Pupil Umbrella Organisation (VSK) is an association for and by pupils which represents pupils' voice about education. The administration of the association is completely in the hands of pupils. The members of VSK are pupil councils from all over Flanders, 680 in total. All educational networks and all forms of education (general secondary education, vocational secondary education, secondary arts education, technical secondary education, special secondary education, part-time vocational secondary education) are represented, and the members are spread over the five Flemish provinces and Brussels. With its broad rank-and-file, VSK constitutes the voice of all the pupils in Flanders, and it is officially recognised by the minister. VSK organises events and informs and represents pupils, and it also organises trainings and discussions. One of its projects is the "participation mobile", a vehicle which travels all over Flanders with the aim of collecting opinions about education. What can be improved and what is good already? What do

pupils think about tomorrow's education? What themes should be placed high on the political agenda? Applying dedicated methods, VSK guarantees participation for all pupils from secondary education, irrespective of the form of education or their age.¹⁶ Contact details: Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel (VSK); Paleizenstraat 90; 1030 Brussels. Tel: 02 215 32 29. E-mail: info@vsknet.be. Website: <http://www.vsknet.be>

Flanders has 28 higher-education institutions. Each of these colleges or universities has a student council which can affiliate itself, at the Flemish level, to the Flemish Student Association (VVS). Depending on their size, student councils are given a proportionate number of votes in the General Assembly, which is to meet at least once a month during the academic year. The General Assembly elects the executive board, which in its turn is assisted by a number of staff workers. In addition, at least one congress is to be organised every year. This congress constitutes the highest body of the VVS; on the congress day(s), one specific theme is debated and a congress position is formulated.¹⁷ Contact details: Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten; Zavelput 20; 1000 Brussels. Tel: 02 502 01 22. E-mail: vvs@vvs.ac. Website: <http://www.vvs.ac>

VSK and VVS are also represented in the Flemish Education Council (VLOR). The VLOR is the strategic advisory body for the education and training policy domain. Representatives from the full education range meet in the VLOR to discuss education and training policies. On this basis, the VLOR gives advice to the Flemish minister for Education and Training, as well as to the Flemish Parliament. The composition of the VLOR is governed by a decree of the Flemish Government. Anyone involved in education has a voice in the VLOR. The educational organisations but also all stakeholders are represented. The VLOR can thus help to shape education policies from an educational, pedagogical and social perspective.¹⁸ Website: <http://www.vlor.be/>

4) *The trans-network project "Forum Leerlingenparticipatie" (Student Participation Forum)*

In the framework of youngsters' participation rights, Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen vzw (Provincial Education Flanders) organises a Student Participation Forum, which provides a network to schools wishing to commit themselves to an enhanced participative capacity with a primary focus on students. This fits in with the policy option of Provincial Education Flanders to focus on children's rights and student participation as its main theme. The forum is unique in that it brings together *school boards, teachers, students and other actors in order to exchange ideas*. The content of the forum meetings is defined jointly with the participating schools during the kick-off meeting. All secondary schools from the province can attend the forum with a *delegation of four to five representatives* from the various sections of the school. The aim is to organise *three meetings* per school year.¹⁹

Are there teacher trainings programmes at the national and/or regional level on this topic?

Teacher training

One of the basic competences which teacher-training graduates should possess in order to function fully as a novice teacher is that they should be able to simulate students' interest in participation. This basic competence is required in both nursery, primary and secondary education.²⁰

Educational material and tools²¹

The EDC Pack is a set of documents, strategies and tools collected by the Council of Europe with the aim of aligning citizenship policies and practices. The pack supports policymakers and all the parties involved in education in reflecting on and setting up activities at various levels of education. The pack includes:

1. Tool on Teacher Training for EDC and HRE

Target groups: teacher trainers, teachers, school boards, curriculum developers, NGOs, sociocultural associations

2. Tool on Quality Assurance and Self-Evaluation in EDC

Target groups: school boards, curriculum developers, teachers, teacher trainers. This tool is based on the results of the “Quality Assurance and School Development” project set up by the Centre for Education Policy Studies (CEPS) in collaboration with UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

The Power of your Voice is educational material developed by experts on behalf of the Flemish Education Council. The project, which constitutes the core of the educational actions of the Flemish Parliament, focuses on four themes: human rights and children’s rights, democracy and the constitutional state, elections and parties, governments and institutions. The lesson material helps to educate pupils, during school hours, about democracy and public responsibility and also offers support to teachers. Website: <http://www.dekrachtvanjestem.be>

Knooppunt Democratie (The Democratic Interchange) provides educational material about the operation of the democratic institutions, linked to thematic day programmes developed by the Bellevue Fund of the King Baudouin Foundation. The site offers a wide range of lesson suggestions, educational games and links to other websites offering additional information on politics, participation, rights and duties, etc. The Democratic Interchange organises free day activities and provides pedagogic tools and training on the subject of democracy and social responsibility for children and young people from the third grade of primary school to the third grade of secondary school (all types of education). The organisation also offers ready-made lesson material for teachers working on this theme. “De Wereld op je Bord” (The World on your Plate) is a project by the King Baudouin Foundation which comprises a free training programme and supportive material for teachers in secondary education. “Democracity” is a project for pupils. Website: <http://www.knooppuntdemocratie.be/>

4.2 Non formal education

Please describe five to ten existing examples of actions/programmes/activities at national or regional level, outside the formal education system, aiming at developing and deepening learning to participate in your country.

- 1) Involvement and the participation of young people in policy making is a key theme of Flemish youth policy. Youth work is expected to contribute significantly to child and youth participation or to teaching them to participate. In addition, associations and projects focussing on the participation or the development of participatory practices for children and young people are recognised and funded. As a key condition of recognition, projects and associations must concentrate on the involvement and participation of young people in the decision-making process².
- 2) The ‘What do you think’ project is a method of giving children and youngsters under the age of 18 a voice in children’s rights’ reporting. Website: <http://www.whatdoyouthink.be/>
- 3) ‘Weet ik veell! Kinder- en jongerenparticipatie’ (*How should I know? Child and Youth Participation*) is a book published by the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities. It offers officeholders, staff members, youth workers and local residents a guideline and a framework for creating specific participation trajectories for children and young people. In general, it discusses the development of actions and processes aimed at involving children and young people in policy decisions. In addition, the manual applies child and youth participation concretely to the following policy domains: space, mobility, youth policy and policy planning. It also discusses several participation techniques.²²

- 4) *Kom uit pas (Out of step)* is a project by district centre DeKring. This project allows people to meet and talk about obstacles to their participation in leisure activities. We share experiences, and we discuss how we can make *Kom Uit Pas* better known and how we can stimulate people to make more use of *Kom Uit Pas*. We also participate in consultations with policymakers. Everyone is welcome! Just drop in to share your experiences!²³ Website: http://www.wijkcentrumdekring.be/?page_id=34
- 5) *Globelink non-profit organisation* coordinates a number of projects including 'Globaleliers' and 'Remix'. The aim of Globaleliers is to make global issues accessible to everyone. Youngsters work on a short film, an animation film or radio programme in a creative workshop. Website: <http://www.globatelier.be/joomla/>
- 6) '*Remix*' is a youth forum about living together in the city in which youngsters provide advice within an interactive process. Website: <http://www.globelink.be/remix/index.htm>
- 7) *CJP* is a non-profit organisation and aims to bring young people and culture closer together and thus promote the participation of young people in culture. CJP was commissioned by the Youth and Sports Division of the Ministry of the Flemish Community to disseminate information, launch projects and lower financial thresholds by issuing a discount voucher. Website: www.cjp.be
- 8) *In Petto* (National Youth Service, recognised by The Youth Work Department of the Ministry of Flemish Community) encourages the participation of youngsters on the basis of specific methods including 'peer questioning', 'improvement groups' and the 'youth advisers' project. The method of peer questioning is a participative research method where the target group (under supervision) is involved in all stages of the investigation and even carries out the questioning. The improvement group is a group of youngsters and adults that creatively seek out the best solution to a problem. In the 'young advisers' projects youngsters between 15 and 19 are offered short training enabling them to inform, support and help their friends with problems and, if necessary, refer them to professional support services. Website: <http://www.inpetto-jeugdendienst.be/>

5. Youth information in Belgium (Flanders)

5.1 The structure of youth information

Do youth information points / centres exist? Yes

There is a *Youth Information Point (YIP)* in 64 Flemish municipalities. Youth information centres have a low threshold and constitute accessible facilities where children, teenagers and young people can seek an answer to their questions. At a YIP, young people can look up information themselves, but they're also welcome for a conversation. If need be, the youth information workers will help to find an answer to their questions or a solution to their problems. If further advice, support or counselling proves necessary, the youth workers will generally refer the young people through to a person or service that can help them. Intermediaries (teachers, staff of the Centres for Pupil Counselling, youth workers, etc.) are also welcome at the YIP, where they can find more information on the themes that may interest young people, as well as instructional formats or educational packs. The YIPs are embedded in the Youth Advice Centre (JAC – <http://www.jac.be>) or in the municipal youth service (Website: <http://www.vvj.be>).²⁴

Does youth information coordinated at the national level exist? Yes

In Petto is a national youth service recognised by the Flemish Community's Youth Work Section. The service specialises in youth information, youth participation, and prevention. It informs young people and organises training centres and research into the well-being of adolescents.²⁵ Contact details: In Petto; Diksmuidelaan 50; 2600 Berchem. Tel. 03 366 15 20. infor@inpetto-jeugdendienst.be. Website: <http://inpetto-jeugdendienst.be>

Does youth information coordinated at the regional level exist? Yes

The *Vlaams Informatiepunt Jeugd (VIP Jeugd – Flemish Information Point Youth)* coordinates youth information policies in Flanders. The VIP collects data on the information needs of children/young people, it develops, systematises and maintains a youth information network, organises trainings for youth information workers, and it provides incentives for developing strategic and general information products for children/young people. To this end, the organisation collaborates intensively with government institutions and private-sector actors.²⁴ Contact details: Vlaams Informatiepunt Jeugd ; Zuidlaan 25; 1000 Brussel. Tel. 0032 289 06 36. Website: <http://www.vipjeugd.be>

Is youth information in your country member of any European network (ERYICA, EYCA, Eurodesk)? Yes

Both the Flemish Information Point Youth and In Petto are part of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA). Through CJP, Belgium is part of the European Youth Card Association (EYCA). Belgium is also a member of European National Partners.

5.2. The youth information services

Please provide the percentage of municipalities with a youth information point/centre.

There is a youth information point in 64 Flemish municipalities and cities. This represents 20.7% of the total number of municipalities in the Flemish Region. A detailed listing of these YIPs can be found on the following website: <http://www.vipjeugd.be/netwerk-iips/1068-2/>.

Is there an online national youth information system? No

Are there any online regional youth information systems? Yes

1. Mid-January 2011, the Flemish Information Point Youth launched <http://www.jongerengids.be>. It is an online information portal tailored for children, teenagers and young people where they can obtain information on a wide range of topics: school and studies, society, body and mind, living, working, money, relationships, sex, rights, nature, etc.
2. The *Gender in the Blender* website (<http://www.genderindeblender.be>) informs young people, teachers and parents on gender diversity and transgender.
3. The <http://www.opeigenbenen.be> (Standing on one's own Feet) website provides young people useful information on financial issues and administrative issues, living on their own, healthy eating habits, etc.

Please describe existing national or regional (federal states) print publications for information of young people in your country (e.g. magazines, folders/brochures).

1. *Hip Hip Happy* is a magazine for and by young people which covers various themes relating to the world of young people: special friendships, happiness according to Buddhism, money and happiness, lucky and unlucky charms, suicidal thoughts, self-mutilation, bereavement and mourning, etc. Website: <http://www.inpetto-jeugdendienst.be/Onzethemas/Gelukkigzijn/HetmagazineHipHipHappy/tabid/5089/Default.aspx>
2. *Speciál Abnormál* is a magazine about diversity, being different, differences. The themes covered include bullying, culture, living with a handicap, music, tastes, exotic countries, prejudices, racism, etc. About weird habits, weird tastes and weird people. Website: <http://www.vipjeugd.be/productendb/home/?cat=159&folder=897>
3. *FAKE Magazine* deals with identity and image, self-image and personality. So *FAKE Magazine* in the first place focuses on young people themselves. Moreover, young people are members of the editorial staff of this magazine. Website: <http://fakemagazine.be/>
4. *VIP Jeugd* publishes information leaflets for young people. Topics include: living on your own, bachelor and master, basic education, becoming a Belgian, part-time learning and working, discrimination, drugs and the law, eating disorders, the central examination board, partying, money, low-cost travel, tenancy agreements, consultation and participation, working students, legal advice, subsistence level, age ladder, learning after school, abuse, ombudsman services, bullying, piercings and tattoos, police, psychological problems with parents, travel and insurance, driver's licence, divorce, dropouts, sex and the law, applying for a job, sports with or without a handicap, stepping and skating, student grants, choice of studies, subsidies and other forms of support, safe Internet, safe sex, elections, being shy, bereavement and mourning, exotic travels and health, volunteer work, self-mutilation.
5. *Magazine VriendAmi*: deals with friendship. The content is based on the ideas and suggestions formulated by a "friendship panel" consisting of 30-odd young people. Website: <http://www.inpetto-jeugdendienst.be/Webshop/tabid/6947/ProdID/20/Default.aspx>
6. *Gender in the Blender* is a folder dealing with gender diversity and transgender. Website: <http://www.genderindeblender.be/>
7. *Den Vrijen Courant* is the youth magazine published by the Youth Work Network. Among the many themes covered are relationships and sex, and safe sex. Website: <http://www.jeugdwerknet.be/nieuws/item/bestel-de-nieuwe-den-vrijen-courant-nu>

8. Wel jong niet hetero (Young but not Straight) also publishes various folders, such as “Jongen Jongen” (Boy Boy), a booklet for boys who fancy boys, and “Girl Girl”, a booklet for girls who fancy girls. Website: <http://www.weljongniethetero.be/zakboekjes.asp?manch=20>
9. H2O – Handleiding voor Houders van Parents (Manual for Owners of Parents). H2O lets young people speak freely about their relationship with their parents. The series of portraits sketches a picture of what happens in other families. Young people are given tips for bargaining with their parents about arrangements and rules. Serious problems such as divorce, child abuse and parents suffering from psychic problems may complicate the relationship between young people and their parents, so this manual also presents several support services which young people can turn to for these and other problems. Website: <http://www.inpetto-jeugddienst.be/Webshop/tabid/6947/ProdID/2/Default.aspx>
10. Maks is a free magazine for young people between 14 and 18 years of age and is published by the Flemish Education Department. Website: <http://www.maks.be>

5.3. Topics of youth information

In relation to the structures of youth information you mentioned above, what are the main contents of information delivered to young people?

Studies and scholarships (compulsory education, scholarships, information for graduates, etc.), jobs and training (driving license) general health matters, relationships and sexuality (safe sex), psychological problems (eating disorders, self harm, sadness, etc.), rights of young people (hiring, right to participate, etc.), European opportunities for young people, youth activities and exchanges, money, nature, living, career guidance, familial problems (divorced parents, parents with psychological problems, etc.), volunteering, bullying and other abuse, drug and alcohol, the life online, etc.²⁵

5.4. Young people’s involvement in youth information

How do young people participate in the national/regional system of youth information?

At the local level: this depends on the local circumstances. In some youth services or youth advice centres, young people contribute actively to the website or to information leaflets; in others services or centres, this is done exclusively by the youth counsellor.

At the national level: In Petto works in a participative way with young people and information. In Petto relies on youth counsellors, i.e. young people who are trained and coached to support and help other young people and if necessary guide them towards professional assistance. It is not a function but an “informal role”. Furthermore, In Petto uses peer surveys for its research. This is a participative research method in which young people – under supervision – are involved in all the stages of the research and in which they conduct the surveys themselves. Young people are also intensively involved in the publications and folders published by the In Petto youth service, such as the magazines VriendAmi, Den Vrijen Courant, FAKE or Spécial Abnormál. Hip Hip Happy is a magazine for and by young people who exchange information and give each other useful tips and advice.²⁵

6. Informal ways of young people's participation

Top down approach (e.g. online consultations): in which occasion?

The Flemish Youth Council represents young people in Flanders. In order to establish a dialogue with young people and to know their views and opinions, the Council organizes regular debate conferences and youth surveys called 'KLETS!'. Website: <http://www.klets.be/>

The Brussels Youth Council prepares recommendations on youth cases for the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). The online forum of the website <http://www.kwajonggradvantong.be> gives young locals the opportunity to give their opinions about issues that concern them.

Bottom up approach (e.g. organised actions through social networks and the internet): in which occasion?

Students' demonstrations:

- "SHAME no gouvernement for our country after 200 days" (<http://www.230111.be/>): some students at the VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) launched on the internet a call for a march in Brussels on January 23, 2011. They planned a march as a protest against the lack of a fully-fledged government since June 13, 2010. It was a peaceful movement to show the politic leaders that, from both side of Belgium, they are waiting for one thing: a government that listens to each political party no matter the language.²⁶
- "Niet in onze naam jong"/ "Pas en notre nom-jeunes" (<http://www.nietinonzenaam.be/>; <http://www.pasennotrenom.be/>): this platform is an initiative of 10 students from Ghent, Leuven and Antwerp, in response to the call of the SHAME-protest to continue the action.

Further, Belgium youngster are active users of social networks like facebook, netlog, myspace, twitter and blogs, etc. By blogging youngsters express their opinions on political and societal themes.

7. Sources of information

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