



Matching Practices for Elementary Schools – Belgium (French-Speaking Region)

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Relevant country background

Education policies in Belgium are organized at the (language) community level. There are three language communities in Belgium: Dutch (Flemish Community), French and German. The Flemish Community and the French-speaking Community share responsibility for the delivery of education in the bilingual Brussels Capital Region and thus the two education systems overlap in Brussels (in addition to the European school system).

School education is compulsory and free from age 6 to age 18. Schools are all publically funded (as long as they respect the curriculum of one of the communities) and are not allowed to charge registration fees.² Elementary school covers age 6 to 12. Secondary school covers age from 12 to 18. Preschool for children aged 2.5 and above is also offered and publically funded, but it is not compulsory.

There is however differentiation among schools along religious lines (religious versus non confessional schools), pedagogy, and organizing body (municipalities, provinces, state, confessional or non-confessional not-for-profit organizations). Schools are organized in so-called networks (in French: *réseaux*; in Dutch: *netten*) which are supersets of organizing bodies and play an essential role for teachers' career development.

Since enrolment is part of education policy, school enrolment policy is defined at the level of Communities. Until recently, school enrolment was largely unregulated: parents could ask for admission for their children to whichever school they wanted and school admission policies were left to individual schools. This led some schools to select insidiously their pupils (by discouraging some from enrolling or by starting registrations long in advance and unaware from parents from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example). These concerns partly motivated the introduction of school choice regulation

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² There is a small fringe of private schools (mainly international schools) that do not follow the curriculum of any of the communities and are thus not publically funded. Unless mentioned explicitly, the rest of this text applies to the schools regulated by one of the language communities.

“Matching in Practice” is a research network that brings together the growing community of researchers in Europe working on the various aspects of assignment and matching in education and related labour markets.

These country profiles are part of a collective effort by network members to map matching practices across Europe

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in the Flemish Community starting in 2003 and in the French-speaking Community in 2007.

Summary box

Organization of education	Mostly publically funded schools; tiny fringe of private schools catering mainly to expatriates.
Stated objectives of enrolment policy	No enrolment policy as such, only guidelines to ensure neutrality of decisions.
Who's in charge?	Individual schools.
In place since	n/a
Available capacity	Left to decide by the organizing body.
Timing of enrolment	Left to decide by each individual school. Large heterogeneity.
Information available to parents prior to enrolment period	Decentralized: only the name of the organizing body and the network to which schools belong are available in a centralized manner on the web.
Restrictions on preference expression	None.
Matching procedure	Decentralized applications and admissions at the level of the schools.
Priorities and quotas	Left to decide by each individual school.
Tie-breaking	Left to decide by each individual school.

Description of current practices

Elementary school choice and admissions are largely unregulated in the French-speaking community of Belgium (a 1997 Decree, the so-called “Décret Missions” provides the legal framework for school admission policies, chapter IX).

Parents are free to ask for registration at any school they like and schools are, in principle, under the obligation to admit every pupil as long as his/her parents agree with the school's educational project and the pupil meets the conditions for attending elementary school. In practice, every school organizes its admissions freely within these guidelines. This includes: the start date for applications, the number of seats available (decided with organizing body), priorities for certain classes of pupils (e.g. siblings often have priorities through an early admission period) and, more generally, rationing criteria when demand exceeds supply.

A list of the school under the oversight of the French-speaking community (CFB) is available on the website www.enseignement.be. The information contained there is the name and location of the school, together with the name of the organizing body and the network to which the school belongs (confessional, non-confessional with the CFB being the organizing body, non-confession with a public

organizing body, non-confessional with a private organizing body). Most schools organize an open-day for prospective parents.

Performance

There is no official assessment of the existing “non regulation” of enrolment for elementary schools.

Recent policy change

A common standardized test at the end of elementary school has been introduced in 2007. Prior to this, individual schools evaluated the extent to which student had reached the required level to complete elementary school. Data on CEB success rates are not public but school directors do receive information on the performance of their own students as well as aggregate statistics for schools in their jurisdiction.

Perceived issues

Given the demographic growth in the Brussels Capital region, capacity is a growing issue. Janssens (2009) estimates that the average occupation rates for Dutch-speaking elementary schools in Brussels was around 85.8% in 2009 and Cantillon (2009) evaluates the number for French-speaking elementary schools in Brussels around 89% (based on a class size of 24). The population of children in age to attend elementary school in Brussels is supposed to grow by 50% between 2000 and 2020 (Belgian Federal Planning Bureau).

The regulation of enrolment for secondary schools is also likely to impact the demand for elementary schools as several indicators used to compute the tie-breaking for secondary school admission depend on characteristics of the elementary school attended.

Existing data

The most granular level of data on elementary school populations is at the level of the jurisdiction (20 jurisdictions for the French-speaking Community). The data provided by the statistical department of the French-speaking Community (ETNIC).

Legal texts

The Décret Missions, together with a summary targeted at parents, is available on the Education portal of the French-speaking Community (<http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24551&navi=27>).

Other resources and references

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Humblet, Perrine (2010), Accès pour tous à l'école maternelle dans la région de Bruxelles Capitale – effet de la croissance démographique sur l'entrée à l'école maternelle, *Rapport de l'Observatoire de Bruxelles Capitale*, 32.

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Janssens, R. (2009), Onderzoek naar de capaciteit van het Nederlandstalig basisonderwijs in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, BRIO research report, 204 p.

MiP Country Profiles downloadable from matching-in-practice.eu

MiP Country Profile 1. Cantillon, Estelle (2011), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).

MiP Country Profile 2. Kübler, Dorothea (2011), [University admission practices – Germany](#).

MiP Country Profile 3. Irving, Rob (2011), [Matching practices for entry-labor markets – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 4. Kiselgof, Sofya (2011), [Matching practices for universities – Ukraine](#).

MiP Country Profile 5. Biró, Péter (2011), [University admission practices – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 6. Biró, Péter (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 7. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – UK](#).

MiP Country Profile 8. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 9 Cantillon, Estelle and Koen Declercq (2012), [University admission practices – Belgium](#).

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MiP Country Profile 11. Chen, Li (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 12. Manlove, David (2012), [Matching practices for primary and secondary schools – Scotland](#).

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MiP Country Profile 16 Hiller, Victor and Olivier Tercieux (2013), [Matching practices in secondary schools – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 17 Calsamiglia, Caterina (2014), [Matching Practices for elementary and secondary Schools – Spain](#).

MiP Country Profile 18 Lauri, Triin, Kaire Põder, and André Veski (2014), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Estonia](#).

MiP Country Profile 19. Salonen, Mikko A.A. (2014), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Finland](#).

MiP Country Profile 20 Terrier, Camille (2014), [Matching practices for secondary public school teachers – France](#).

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MiP Country Profile 22 Cantillon, Estelle (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).