



Report on the Case study on Antwerp, Belgium–Flanders, June 2014

Working Group on School Policy – Early School Leaving

1 Overview of the current situation with regards to early school leaving

As presented in the background paper distributed in advance of the case study visit, the 2012 rate for ESL in Belgium-Flanders is 8.7%, compared to an EU average of 12.7%). At the level of Belgium-Flanders, there are two ways to measure ESL: one indicator based on the Labour Force Survey (EAK) and one indicator provided by the Policy Research Centre for Educational and School Careers (SSL).

Data provided by the SSL provide a rate of 14% for ESL in Belgium-Flanders and a 28% ESL rate for Antwerp for the year 2010. Whilst these figures differ from the EAK data, they serve to demonstrate that there is a significantly high proportion of ESL in Antwerp. Early school leaving rates for Antwerp are reported to represent a large proportion of the overall ESL rate for Belgium-Flanders.

Early school leavers in Belgium-Flanders typically includes young people aged 17 who are non-native speakers of Dutch, pupils who fall behind and/or change school/form of education¹ and a high number of boys, where the 2010 rate of ESL amongst males was 13.6% compared to 8.6% for females².

Factors contributing to ESL include socio-economic deprivation, ethnicity, gender, truancy, exclusion, changing educational institution, as well as school fatigue. External factors including the 'pull' factor generated by the labour market and structural factors that include for instance: the quality of pupil guidance services, the importance of language support from primary education onwards, and the need for alternatives to grade repetition, supported by flexible learning pathways.

The timing of the case study in Antwerp, Belgium-Flanders is pertinent given that there are significant developments currently underway to tackle early school leaving (ESL) as part of the recently-launched Action Plan on Reducing Early School Leaving³ (September 2013). The Plan (adopted to achieve the targets set out in the Flemish overall strategy PACT 2020⁴) is based on the EU documents related to ESL and includes the implementation of a comprehensive system to collect, collate and disseminate data on ESL between schools, partners and stakeholders across the education and employment sectors.

This Plan includes some quick wins together with more long term effective action. The Action Plan is accompanied by some main policy implementations concerning specific themes as an action plan against truancy and anti-social behaviour, the introduction and expansion of work-based learning, a reform of the secondary education, a policy note on early childhood education, on languages, student guidance etc.

¹ See Lamote & Van Damme (2011) *Less successful pathways through secondary school. Studies on grade retention and early school leaving*. Doctoral dissertation available at:

<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/425181/1/Doctoraat+Carl+Lamote.pdf>

² See 'Measures to tackle early school leaving in Flanders', Flemish Education Council (VLOR)

http://www.eunec.eu/sites/www.eunec.eu/files/event/attachments/k._stassen_measures_to_tackle_esl_in_flanders.pdf

³ Action Plan to Tackle Early School Leaving, Government of Flanders, September 2013

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/secundair/Actieplan_Vroegtijdig_Schoolverlaten_def.pdf

⁴ <http://www.vlaandereninactie.be/en>

The actions together with details of organisations involved and timescales associated with the Plan are listed in the Annex to this Report.

2 The Antwerp approach to early school leaving

The Antwerp approach to ESL is based on a network approach. It is city wide and schools, together with key partners from a range of different fields (pupil guidance centres, welfare, social work, police, justice department) offering a range of different services – (physiological support, guidance) actively and positively participate in a structured yet collaborative approach to tackling ESL. A central role is played by the Pupil Guidance Centres (CLB, see below 2.1.1). There is a clear view that a collaborative approach to ESL, focusing on prevention and early detection of problems, is the most efficient and only way to tackle ESL across the city of Antwerp.

Within the City of Antwerp, the *General Education Policy Division* has been given responsibility for coordinating the approach. The Division is responsible for designing and managing cross-association activities and projects aimed at ensuring all youngsters in Antwerp leave education with a qualification that gives them access to higher education or to the labour market. The Division is organised around four key sections:

- *Continuous school careers* - responsible for early and active participation of young people in education from early child education and care, parents' participation, drop-out prevention and finding ways to ensure young people reengage in education.
- *Community schools* - in charge of identifying and creating ways for schools to link with city wide services that aim to support more vulnerable young people. A key focus here is ensuring that schools are a place where young people feel safe and where they can experience a range of activities, including extra-curricular activities.
- *Knowledge management* – responsible for providing, inter alia, an evidence base for developing and monitoring current approaches/activity.
- *Capacity* - in response to changing demographics (baby boom), this section is in charge of ensuring there is sufficient capacity to accommodate increased numbers/diversity of the student population in Antwerp.

As highlighted above, the statistics show that the ESL rates in Antwerp represents a significant proportion of the overall ESL rate for Belgium-Flanders. Among the different factors contributing to ESL, the city of Antwerp has given special attention to:

- *Grade repetition* that may occur in kindergarten, primary and secondary education. Latest figures show that grade repetition rates for 1st year of primary school is 6.3% in Flanders compared to 10.5% in Antwerp. In the 3rd year, the rate is 2.3% for Flanders compared to 4.8% in Antwerp, and rates are again much higher in secondary schools. As discussed in the background paper, efforts are currently underway to limit grade repetition though it was recognised that teachers also need to embrace this notion and in doing so, some may need additional support/training.
- *Truancy* which can be seen as a strong predictor of later drop-out. The City of Antwerp have investigated truancy and retention rates in relation to both primary and secondary education and highlighted the importance of exploring broader socio-economic factors that are potentially at the root cause of truancy (for some families, for example, the dynamics of the family structure may be one reason why certain children are unable to attend school – e.g. older children looking after younger children, or where single-parents struggle with child care arrangements for younger/sick children at home, making it difficult for them to bring older/other siblings to school). Nevertheless, a clear correlation between truancy and performance is evident. Understanding the root cause of what triggers truancy that then consequently impacts on performance or indeed the factors that impact on performance that then leads to truancy (chicken and egg scenario) was highlighted as an issue of key concern.

In Flanders schools are the first responsible actors and need to establish a preventive policy on truancy. According to legislation, if a student is absent for more

than 10 half days, the school must contact the relevant Pupil Guidance Centre (CLB).

- *Increasing expulsion rates* in secondary education – rising from 556 in school year 2010-2011 to 628 in school year 2012-2013. Different types and durations of expulsion exist, ranging from short periods to up to two years. Each type of expulsion is accompanied with its own set of procedures and interventions. In the future, the intention is stop the use of expulsion and look towards introducing alternative discipline strategies/approaches.

The high number of individuals who have low education levels as a result of early school leaving represents a key challenge for the social-economic stability/profile of Antwerp. It was reported that whilst there are high levels of employment opportunities there is a distinct mismatch between the lack of education and skills and labour market requirements. This equates to large numbers of unemployed people in a growing labour supply, where many enterprises struggle to fill open positions.

In light of the key challenges highlighted above, through a network approach, the main aim is to therefore support all education providers across the city address such challenges. As previously noted, there is a clear view that a network approach is the best and only way to tackle issues associated with ESL where there is a complementary approach between the networks, clear focus on prevention and early detention as well as on appropriate and timely reaction to support ESL. The network includes:

1. **Sectoral Networks and Houses of Talent** (*Sectorale netwerken* and *Talentshuizen*) - In Antwerp, several sectoral networks bring together educational providers and labour market actors, aiming at promoting smooth transitions from education to work. These sectoral networks are governed by the City of Antwerp (Department of Economy) and the Flemish Employment Office (VDAB), who have signed a collaboration agreement. These agreements do not only assign responsibility and divide tasks among the partners, but they also include goals and targets to be reached. A project manager is assigned to each sectoral network and experts are engaged. The financial means are provided by the City and by VDAB, and additional means are acquired through the European Social Fund. The networks are supported by sectoral organisations, sectoral training funds, social partners, educational providers, and regional technological centres. Each network establishes collaboration between stakeholders through a sectoral commission, a core group and thematic working groups. The aim is to develop action plans (for the short and the long term), starting from a thorough analysis of the local educational system and the labour market. A sectoral network can be converted to a Talent House when a sector is willing to invest in a partnership which requires a strong sectoral organisation, when the development of competences can be an answer to the recruitment problems. Four sectoral networks have been converted to 'Houses of Talent': 1) Construction; 2) Industry; 3) Harbour – Logistics; and 4) Education (source: OECD, 2014, forthcoming).
2. **Together to the finish** – this strand brings together good practices from primary, secondary education and together with universities and practitioners: undertakes research in relation to a number of different areas that include retention, new didactic approaches, managerial practices.
3. **Drop-out prevention** (inclusion) – this network provides support in two different tracks. The first track is through system support to pupils and schools; the *Central Help Desk* is one of the main elements of this strand. The second strand provides individual support to schools, for example through initiatives such as the 'Schools in the spotlight' (a school survey on school climate, as discussed in further detail below), or the 'Truancy officials' (helping schools with truancy problems reflect on their approach by comparing with other schools in similar situations). The focus of these actions is to support schools to be self-evaluating, reflective in their practice ('look in the mirror'). The way in which these individual networks operate and the services they provide is discussed in more detail below.

2.1. How does the network approach work in practice?

2.1.1 The Background: overview of the Pupil Guidance Centres across Flanders

Before providing detailed information on how the network operates in practice, it is helpful to point out that across Flanders there are 72 Pupil Guidance Centres (CLB) and every school cooperates with a CLB. The CLB guides pupils in their development into independent adults and monitors pupils' health and well-being, either systematically or in a demand-driven manner. Parents, teachers, school management teams, as well as the children or young people themselves may turn to the CLB for information, help and guidance. Various professionals work together within a CLB: doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists and educationalists. Together with the school, this team ensures that every child and young person can develop his/her knowledge, talents and skills to a maximum extent at school.

The Pupil Guidance Centre (CLB) operates in four guidance domains:

- learning and studying
- educational career
- psychological and social behaviour
- preventative health care

In each of these four guidance domains, the CLB can provide direct support to individual pupils, as well as support to schools.

The pupil-related provision comprises the demand-driven activities for pupils (at the request of the pupil, the parents or the school) and the obligatory pupil guidance (in case of truancy and for certain medical examinations).

Within the pupil-related provision, the school mainly acts as 'notifier'. It may notify the CLB that it is concerned about a pupil, and ask the CLB to start the process of providing guidance. In the first instance, the CLB will always ask for the parents' consent (for a pupil under the age of 12) or the consent of the pupil him/herself to start guidance (for a pupil aged 12 or older who is capable of deciding him/herself).

Guidance by a CLB cannot be made obligatory, except in 2 situations:

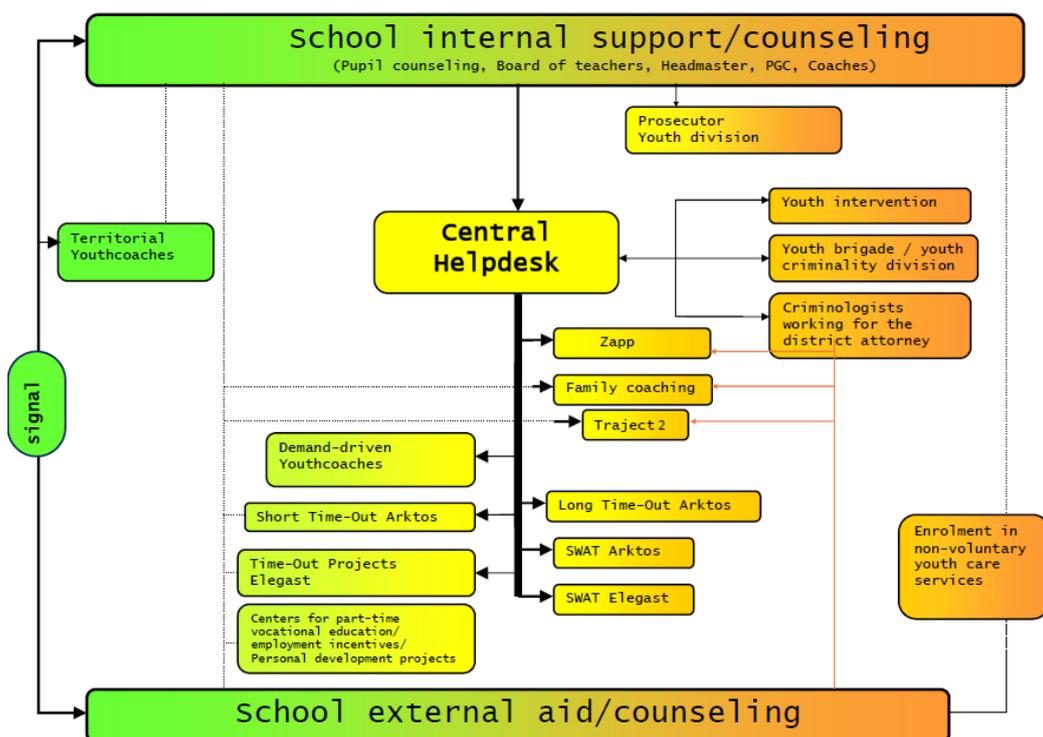
- in case of truancy (obligatory involvement of the CLB as from 10 half days of problematic absenteeism);
- in case of certain medical examinations.

2.1.2 The Antwerp context

Every school in Antwerp is linked to a CLB and each CLB is linked to the *Central Help Desk* of the *Drop-out prevention network*. The Help Desk works as an umbrella organisation of all the CLB's in Antwerp, which detach their employees to the umbrella unit. The first port of call for schools is the CLB, which can then look towards the Central Help Desk for support. In relation to truancy, the CLB is notified and the information is also provided to the Central Help Desk. The Central Help Desk intervenes on request of the CLB only for the most problematic cases. The Central Help Desk is equipped with a wide range of support staff and expertise and includes psychologists, criminologist, youth coaches, social workers etc to work together to support the CLB.

The Central Help Desk draws on the expertise and resources offered through the individual services and projects which take part in the *Drop-out prevention network*. The Central Help Desk does not deal directly with pupils: interviews and contacts with individual pupils are established by the CLB, which also collects and keeps all relevant data. When a case is referred to the Help Desk, the CLB shares its data with it. Following an analysis of the case, the Central Help Desk will then look towards the individual services/programmes belonging to the network, in order to offer the most appropriate 'proposition' of support to the individual in need. The offer is typically made within a one week timeframe (note on terminology - this is a proposition and is therefore non-compulsory). The Central Help Desk establishes an appropriate 'proposition' drawing on a suite of services and projects depending on the needs of the individual.

Figure 1. Structure of the Drop-out prevention network



The *Drop-out prevention network* provides a whole suite of services and expertise. Each project is unique, focused on specific target groups and attracts its own level of funding. A key emphasis is on prevention and re-integration (including young people in care or those who have recently come out of custodial care). Some projects provide the services of professional youth coaches or peer coaches as presented in the box below.

Youth coaches and peer coaches

In terms of the profile and professional development of youth coaches, they are linked to youth competence centres. All youth coaches are vetted and undertake competence based training. They provide intensive support and personal guidance to individuals and are trained to work in multi-disciplinary teams. Young people are also trained to be peer coaches – though are not permitted to provide therapeutic advice/counselling. Where these types of services are required, young people are then referred to the professional services of qualified coaches/personnel.

The scope of all available projects/services in terms of their capacity is regularly monitored through the Central Help Desk. For instance if more young people require the support from youth coaches but capacity is no longer available, this feedback will inform resource allocation in the future. If there was a case where no youth coaches were available, then alternative support options are always identified. One area where capacity is limited/difficult to access is in relation to psychiatric support for young people. This is more related to a systemic issue where the type of psychiatric support available to young people referred through the Central Help Desk is not always available.

Monitoring capacity of the individual projects is part of a wider quality assurance process that monitors the success of the project, the extent to which supply meets demand, thereby influencing the extent to which the network services need to be adapted in the future. As part of the quality assurance process, all providers are required to sign a written agreement with the Central Help Desk and have to report either 6 monthly or annually on their results and progress depending on individual project procurement agreements.

Other initiatives under the *Drop-out prevention network* include:

- the 'Schools in the spotlight', where school pupils are invited to provide feedback on how they experience the school. Schools can nominate themselves to be a 'school

in the spotlight' or where a major incident triggers the school to be identified as a 'school in the spotlight', school policies and practices will be scrutinised.

- protocol agreements between schools and the local police, particularly in support of a 'weapon free school' approach. Simply measures are applied, for example, plain-clothed officers in non-police marked cars visiting the school to meet school personnel.

A downside of the network approach is that there is a fear school may step back from their responsibility for the young person. As emphasised above, there is a clear view that the school must retain the overall responsibility for each individual child.

2.2. What makes the network approach work well and what impact does it have on reducing ESL?

There are a number of reasons why the network approach in Antwerp works well. One of the key reasons is that there is a long history of collaboration between stakeholders in Antwerp. The network is now over 10 years old and was established out of concern of being confronted with organized youth crime and youth violence as we saw later in the riots in Paris. A working group, comprising of all relevant stakeholders, worked for a year and a half in order to set up the network.

Based on extensive research and through working in close partnership with other public sector services (welfare, youth, education, justice), a structured collaborative approach (workshops, think tanks, consultation) enabled the network to develop mutual respect and understanding for each other over a period of time. Collectively, the network was established, partners worked through friction, differences in views, limitations in terms of what individual services/sectors could offer whilst at the same time not accepting any grey zone. To reinforce a previous point, there is now a very clear view that a network approach to dealing with ESL is the most efficient and only approach to adopt.

In terms of the extent to which the network has succeeded in reducing overall ESL rates, it was reported that it is difficult to see how individual/isolated projects contribute to reducing ESL. However, individual projects are successful. Furthermore, although Antwerp ESL rates are high, they are stable and without the measures in place, there is a likelihood that ESL rates would be higher.

2.3. Antwerp approach to working with parents

Educational development work and parental involvement in education has a long and established history in Antwerp. Initiatives first started in the 1990s; nowadays, a wide range of actions to involve parents and establish collaborative working arrangements between schools, education organisations, stakeholders and parents are offered in Antwerp, mainly through **De schoolbrug** organisation.

It is also worth noting that the City of Antwerp is a member of Eurocities (a network of middle and large cities in Europe aimed at promoting the exchange of experiences and peer learning among local administrations), and it is involved in a EU-funded project (PREVENT) regrouping ten European cities and aimed at finding ways to prevent ESL through better parental involvement. Under the PREVENT project, other initiatives have been launched, such as: the development of a local action plan; a more structured organisation of the schools' open doors days; the launch of a "Parents' day"; the publication of a brochure "Welcome at school" providing tips and advice to parents to encourage them to feel at ease at school.

De schoolbrug (School Bridge)

The forerunner of the School Bridge organisation started in the 1990s under the auspices of the City Mayor. Its main objective is to create links between schools, parents and pupils, with a special focus on socially vulnerable families. The School Bridge offers a wide range of actions for both primary and secondary schools, and currently employs 20 educational development workers.

The School Bridge model is built around a number of core principles: equality (teachers and parents as equal partners), trust (belief in parents and pupils capacities), connect, empowerment and customisation.

Within the School bridge model, a number of smaller, individual projects are proposed to schools. Some examples are provided below:

- The **Kaap project** aims at improving communication between parents and schools. It provides Dutch lessons to parents from non-Flemish origin and supports parents connect with the school, e.g. by supporting them in reading/understanding communications from the school, and engaging in school activities and their children's education.
- **Samen School Maken** project is focused on supporting schools to establish and organise a parents meeting group. Parents come together on a regular basis (meetings are 6-weekly or monthly) and the focus of the topic is at the discretion of the parents. This may include support in helping children with their homework for example. Volunteers offer babysitting services to enable parents attend meetings.
- Other projects include the **De Kleine Scholier** project – this project targets parents with children in the last year of kindergarten as well as schools. The objective is to raise awareness among parents about the importance of kindergarten, and provides tips and tools to support their children at home. As part of this project, schools are also sensitised to the importance of transition from kindergarten to primary, and to the importance of engaging parents.
- The **De Leer trein** project targets parents with children in the last year of kindergarten and future teachers. The objective is two-fold: on the one hand to raise awareness amongst parents about the importance of play and of a play-based approach and to demonstrate to parents different approaches to encourage learning at home: on the other hand, to help students in teachers training course understand and deal with children from vulnerable families, and to raise awareness about cultural diversity. Individual teacher trainees/interns visit pupils and parents at their home and encourage parents to support their children's education through various play activities. Incorporating these home visits into the training of prospective teachers is considered to be one of way of working towards changing the long term culture of teachers working with parents.
- The **Hogeschool Brug project** – this project provides support, information and guidance to young people from different social backgrounds when choosing their options at 12 years old. The **Step to higher education project** also provides information and advice to young people considering higher education options.

The importance of guidance provision to young people and their parents during primary and second education is the focus of a number of projects from the School Bridge model. Among these, the **Choose Well** project allows for a better understanding of different tracks available to young people when they enter lower-secondary education. The projects also provide advice and guidance on the different branches students may wish to explore in secondary education – e.g. general secondary route and the technical/artistic/vocational routes together with advice on the scope to move between the different routes. The projects also provide advice and guidance in relation to higher education opportunities and advice to individuals who return to education via the adult educational system or through 'second chance' education provision.

2.4. Workshops on parental involvement

The afternoon session consisted of two parallel workshops:

- Understanding teacher/parent perspectives
- Understanding the Belgium-Flanders education system

As part of the afternoon session, participants had the opportunity to take-part in the interactive workshops and explore in greater detail the Belgium-Flanders education system/approach and the individual projects enhance parental involvement and collaborative practices in school.

It was noted that the projects/strategies in place to support parents develop their links and involvement with schools and vis-a-versa were hugely beneficial. The following benefits were highlighted:

- The projects enable parents to understand the benefits of being actively involved in their children's education
- The projects introduce parents to different approaches that could be used at home such as reading and cooking to help enhance learning opportunities at home
- The projects also introduce parents to different approaches to become actively involved and/or participate with the school. Ideas include cultural days, sharing talents
- The projects support parents in their communication with the school. For example, parents are able to participate in relaxed, open, friendly workshops and learn about the different types of correspondence, such as letters, consent forms they may receive from school and how to respond to it.

An important outcome of these projects is that schools and parents alike develop a greater appreciation of the obstacles parents and teachers face in terms of engaging with each other and communicating. The projects have found that obstacles parents face in communicating with the school almost exclusively apply to teachers. Typically these include lack of time, lack of motivation/energy, lack of confidence etc. The projects serve to demonstrate that both parents and teachers face similar challenges and so there is a role for school principals and the structure to better support and facilitate a greater understanding together with an acknowledgement of the similarities and differences teachers/parents face.

It was recognised that creating a true schools/parents partnership takes time as it often requires a shift in cultural perceptions and approaches. It requires developing mutual trust and respect; one of the main challenges of the School Bridge model is to help teachers to overcome negative attitudes towards parents, but also to empower parents to become more actively involved in their children's education and help them overcome the feeling of fear or distrust towards the school.

Representatives of the School Bridge model also emphasised the importance of working with the entire school staff and not just with individual teachers: the whole school must buy into a project in order for it to be sustainable and effective. A further challenge highlighted relates to overcoming traditional teaching postures and styles: teachers often consider their mission is 'teaching' in a narrow sense and sometimes feel they have no time for 'extra' activities with parents. Parents are not seen as resource, but as an additional task to be dealt with. The fact that some parents do not have a regular physical presence at their children's school is often perceived as a lack of interest, while other reasons could explain this (language barriers, different socio-economic and/or cultural background, negative past experiences, work commitments etc.). In this respect, the importance of quality teacher training (initial and continuous) was highlighted: teachers should be trained to consider parents as partners and to cooperate with them. Some participants indicated that the non-teaching staff that often comes from the same communities as parents, can be seen as a resource to facilitate connections.

It was highlighted that a strong political commitment was essential for establishing the School Bridge model in the late 1980s. Since then it was also noted that changes in local government structures have not affected its activities. The School Bridge model has been working for more than 20 years and has gained a strong reputation throughout Antwerp; it is a core resource for schools wishing to improve their relationship with parents.

Sustaining such a model is a key issue. In some countries where limited resources/funding are available, the extent to which such projects/strategies could be replicated to the same extent may not be possible. Nevertheless it was recognised that whilst parent councils exist, strategies are needed to ensure parents feel supported and confident in their involvement with the school.

3 Case study conclusions

3.1 What were the key drivers and conditions for introducing collaborative practices to reduce ESL in the City of Antwerp?

- **Political commitment** at the top, with strong leadership and a 'policy window' (situation where there was political concern about the possibility of youth unrest and a drive to prevent the potential escalation of social problems in the city); **continuity in political support** (importance of showing results/demonstrate efficiency);
- **Clear focus** and guidelines from the political level (creation of a **visible policy**);
- **Shared vision and joint interest** of all stakeholders: understanding that involvement of all stakeholders is necessary to tackle such a complex problem (city authorities, schools, welfare, youth services, police, justice, various civil society organisations);
- **Clear evidence** (data collection mechanisms, research) on ESL (truancy, grade repetition, school drop-out etc.), demographic trends and related issues;
- **Financial resources** made available (City of Antwerp, Flanders, EU projects);
- **A clear structure**, with central coordination.

3.2 What were the stages and trajectories of developing collaborative practices?

- Identifying and involving all relevant key stakeholders;
- Common **commitment** and common understanding of the problem by all stakeholders (even if seen from different perspectives);
- **Clear responsibilities**, recognition and respect for each stakeholder, early involvement and efficient communication among all stakeholders (getting to know each other well, creating a sense of trust);
- **Changing mind-sets** of the whole team (to work together as a whole and not as independent organisations); at school level, changing mind-sets of the entire teaching staff;
- Establishing a **formal network** with clear roles and structure (contractual relations);
- Creating a **central coordination** point, monitoring and evaluation body, allowing for continuous feedback, adaptation and change (Central Help Desk);
- **Acceptance of frictions** among stakeholders – different viewpoints/perspectives of welfare / security stakeholders (leaving no 'grey zones', discussing problems collectively until reaching a common agreement/understanding);
- Exploring **good practices** (learning from research, analysis, data collection);
- Defining a **common strategy and action plan**;
- Accept that **change takes time**.

3.3 What were the key interventions/measures introduced at the policy and at the school level?

Policy level:

- **New legislation** (at regional level), not obliging, but allowing for new practices and actions at school level (more school autonomy?);
- Policy decisions **based on evidence** and experience (learning from practice);
- Encouraging **communication** and sharing of good and bad practice among all stakeholders (i.e. 'mirroring' the schools);

- **Support to schools** from city level (information services on health, cultural issues; teacher training and support; managerial empowerment for school principals etc.);
- **Central Help Desk** as a place of consultation and assistance for schools, as well as a central database with one dossier per pupil at all times (including all stakeholders information and all proposed measures) with follow-up after each measure/activity;
- **High reactivity** and short deadlines to respond to each case (one week to give an offer for each pupil's dossier) with a range of different measures (offers)
- Within the School Bridge model, there is a focus on the **sustainability** of projects (supporting and enabling schools to pursue alone once the project has been launched).

School level:

- 'School in the spotlight' action – **structural diagnosis and change management** leading to where schools volunteer themselves for 'school in the spotlight' or where schools are designated 'school in the spotlight' (following serious incidents for instance);
- Recognising the crucial role of parents and the importance of involving them; activities for **parental involvement** through participatory and dynamic methods (cooperation with civil society);
- Recognising the importance of involving **all teachers**; activities and **support for teachers** in involving parents and in introducing new teaching approaches; better communication with pupils;
- **Youth coaches** at secondary schools (territorial) and **peer coaching** for pupils at risk;
- **Financial responsibility** of schools for pupils in different proposed activities (whilst expelled from school).

3.4. What were/are the obstacles and solutions to overcome them?

Obstacles	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Differentiation of the school system (early tracking from 12 years of age) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Changes at the regional (Flanders) level (postponing the tracking; creating flexible pathways within the system)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of funds, resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pooling of resources (Flanders government, City of Antwerp, EU projects)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teacher resistance to involving parents in school life (lack of time, cultural differences) and to new teaching approaches (learner-centred), also due to pressure and expectations on teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training for teachers and principals (need to involve most of the teachers at school – critical mass for change); more time granted to teachers for extra tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distance between schools and parents (school and family cultures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NGO-run programs for parents (language courses, meetings); programs for student teachers to link with pupils' families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Different / changing priorities of stakeholders and policymakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bringing all stakeholders fully on board (continuous communication and joint work); evidence of positive effects of the scheme (ESL stable/ crime rates decreasing)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Incomplete and dispersed data collection systems ■ System not sufficiently child-focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Central database of files of all pupils at the risk of dropping out (Central Help Desk) with coordination of all the involved stakeholders and registered follow-up (measures taken)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of thorough evaluation 	

3.5. What are the ways of monitoring and evaluating the schools on developing collaborative approaches and reducing ESL?

- **Data collection** on national/regional/local/school level with developed key indicators (attendance, truancy, expulsion etc.) relevant for ESL; useful to have a limited number of simple key indicators.
- **Built-in procedures** for monitoring/evaluation from the start (Central Help Desk);
- Regular **follow-up** (reporting, evaluation) **of projects** at city and school level, including follow-up of project sustainability at schools, centralised collection of follow-up information;
- **Pupil surveys** (i.e. within the 'school in the spotlight' actions);
- **Involvement of universities** (academic research involving schools);
- Importance of an efficient **inspection** system with transparent data (results) by school;
- **Dedicated working group** of stakeholders.

3.6. What are the dos and don'ts to use in classroom, in schools and in linking with the community?

- **Involve all stakeholders** at regional, local and school level, and make the process valuable for all (through respect, responsibility, dialogue);
- **Multicultural participation** in teams, adapted to context (youth coaches, teachers, trainers);
- Schools must retain responsibility for pupils at all times (even when expelled);
- Promote **parental involvement** (keeping this high on the agenda!) and make teachers feel it's their own solution (workshops with teachers and principals);
- Allow **more time** for teacher-pupil-parent communication;
- **Change attitudes and language** ("I missed you" instead of "where have you been?"); avoid blaming each other (schools and parents), work on creating mutual understanding; work with victims of conflicts as well;
- Spreading **good practice** among schools (mirroring);
- Setting clear and short **time-limits** for intervention on pupil truancy and other problems;
- Community initiatives (city or NGO-run) implemented within schools (workshops, training, meetings with teachers, principals, parents);
- **Avoid grade repetition**, offer additional support to pupils;
- **Inspection** process should be linked to targets.

3.7. What are the possibilities of transfer of measures/practices to other national/cultural contexts?

- Collaboration and commitment to joint action by all stakeholders is difficult, but possible in every system; more difficult in centralised systems, easier in systems with high school autonomy;
- Methodology and process of building a common stakeholder network is transferrable, if starting from a set of agreed basic principles and on a smaller scale (depending on budget restrictions).

ANNEX: Flanders Action Plan on Reducing Early School Leaving - Actions

Action	Stakeholder involved	Timing
Identification, monitoring & coordination		
Action 1a: Scientific report with regional indicators regarding ESL	Policy Research Centre for “study and school careers”	Spring 2013
Action 1b: Reporting at the school level regarding ESL by way of the data collection at school level	Department of Education and training School inspection	2014
Action 2a: Support schools in reading the data collection at school level	Pedagogical counselling service Syntra Educational umbrella organisations	2014
Action 2b: Support heads of school and staff members by way of free priority in-service training initiated by the Flemish Government	Providers of priority in-service training	2014-2015 school year
Prevention		
Action 3: Supply information on ESL to the schools	Agency for educational communication (AOC) Department of Education and Training Schools/Syntra VDAB Educational umbrella organisations Pedagogical counselling service	2013-2014 school year
Action 4: By means of the information and figures supplied, the schools determine how they will fight ESL within their school and their school policy and they develop actions with regard to this.	Schools/Syntra Pedagogical counselling service Pupil Guidance Centre VDAB Educational umbrella organisations Local organisations/administrations	2013-2014 school year
Action 5: During the full inspection visit, the educational inspectorate examines the effectiveness of the actions aimed at the prevention of early school leaving. Transparent reporting regarding this matter in the full-inspection reports.	School inspection	Preparation as of 2014 Application as of 2014-2015
Action 6: Further optimize the 'Onderwijskiezer' website (www.onderwijskiezer.be) + add information for early school leavers	Onderwijskiezer.be Department of Education and Training/AOC	2013-2014 school year
Action 7: The VDAB and E&T Department examine the possibility to extend the existing school leavers study and include information regarding the nature of the jobs filled, the type of contract, the sectors in which students from specified branches of studies end up as well as the target group (up to 5 years after leaving the school)	VDAB Departement of Education and Training	As of 2014
Action 8a: Provide clear information regarding the existing regulation with respect to flexible	Department of Education and Training AOC Educational umbrella organisations	2013-2014 school year

learning pathways in secondary education	Pedagogical counselling service	
Action 8b: Collect and spread practice examples regarding the development and organization of flexible learning pathways in secondary education	Department of Education and Training Umbrella organisation of provincial education	As of 2013-2014 school year
Action 8c: Support schools in the development and organization of flexible learning pathways in secondary education	Department of Education and Training Educational umbrella organisations Pedagogical counselling services	As of 2013-2014 school year
Action 9: The evaluation of the decree of 10/07/2008 regarding the alternance training system	Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy	2014
Action 10: The strengthening of the working component within the current alternance training system (including ILW - industrial apprenticeship)	Department of Work and Social Economy Department of Education and Training Social partners Sectors VDAB Syntra	2014
Action 11: Gradual implementation of the compulsory internships in the third stage of VSE (first, second and third year) and the third stage of TSE (first and second year)	Department of Education and training Department of Work and Social Economy Social partners Sectors	As of 2013 - 2014
Action 12: Make use of labour market instruments within the school context in mutual consultation between education and the labour market.	VDAB Schools Pupil guidance centres Department of Education and Training	2013-2014
Action 13 a: Map out the pull factor 'labour market' to explain early school leaving, by way of a survey among school leavers.	Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy Social partners Syntra Educational umbrella organisations	2013-2014 school year
Action 13b: Make sectors and employers aware of the importance to help young people obtain their qualification by way of the model agreement for internships.	Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy Social Partners	2013-2014 school year
Action 14: Deployment of the Flemish Qualifications Framework	Agency for Quality in Education and Training (AKOV) Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy VDAB Syntra Social partners Educational umbrella organisations	2012-2015
Intervention		
Action 15: Collect and spread practice example of (peer) coaching	Department of Education and Training AOC Schools Teacher trainings Local authorities Umbrella organisation of provincial education	2013-2014 school year
Action 16: Further open transition pathways to students from special SE and,	GTB (counselling service) VDAB	2013-2014

where possible, extend to students from the alternance training system		
Compensation		
Action 17a: Further develop and facilitate qualifying profession-oriented pathways by way of cooperation, e.g. between formal adult education, VDAB, Examination Board, Syntra and companies/organisations	Department of Education and Training Schools Department of Work and Social Economy VDAB Syntra Company/organisations/sectors AKOV Social Partners	As of 2013-2014 school year
Action 17b: Make the possibility to follow these qualifying profession-oriented pathways publicly known	Department of Education and Training AOC Educational umbrella organisations Department of Work and Social Economy Syntra Sectors Pupil guidance centres VDAB Social partners AKOV	As of 2013-2014 school year
Action 17c: Promote RAC pathways and make them publicly known.	Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family Department of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media AKOV Social partners VDAB Syntra Educational umbrella organisations Sectors	As of 2013-2014
Umbrella action		
Action 18: Development of a script as a local basic agreement agreement for schools - Pupil Guidance Centres - VDAB and possibly other actors involved that can be used in fighting ESL (priority attention in this respect for the metropolitan context and Brussels).	Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy Schools Pupil guidance centres Pedagogical counselling services VDAB Local partners Local authorities Syntra Social partners	As of 2013-2014 school year
Action 19: Follow-up and adjustment of the action plan early school leaving	Department of Education and Training Department of Work and Social Economy Technical working group ESL Steering group ESL Platform of School inspection-pedagogical counselling services-department of Education and Training-department of Work and Social Economy	Continuously