

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN OSTBELGIEN

PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

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Preface

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Introduction

This is the first report that entirely focuses on the situation of youth and young adults in Ostbelgien (i.e. the region of the German-speaking community in Belgium). It has been prepared in response to the growing interest in the reality of life of young people and adults. It is intended to provide a broad perspective on this subject, following the trajectory of young people from the educational system to the labour market. By sketching the reality of life of young people and adults, the main objective of the report is to provide a sound basis for policy discussions on youth issues.

Youth has been defined by the United Nations (UN DESA) as follows:

“Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence. That’s why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment, because ‘youth’ is often referred to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education and finding their first job.”

For statistical purposes, the United Nations often defines persons aged between 15 and 24 as youth. However, it is not uncommon to expand this cohort to the age of 30 or even 32. In this report, we broadly refer to young people and adults aged between 15 and 30 years when describing and analyzing their reality of life in Ostbelgien. The descriptions and analyses are based on a mix of different kinds of data and methods, following a two-stage research process, which was carried out between September 2017 and August 2018.

In the first stage, existing data broadly relating to the youth in Ostbelgien were systematized and analyzed. When possible, we differentiated between gender, age, region (northern and southern part of Ostbelgien¹), nationality of ethnic background, and socio-economic background. We only included high-quality secondary data into our analyses, which means that only sufficiently valid and reliable data are used for this report. Therefore, we incorporate only sources where sufficient information about the methodology applied to collect the data were available, or data sources which are well-known to be reliable (e.g. population data from the Belgian Federal Government, PISA) and/or if there was sufficient evidence for the representativeness of the data. Furthermore, we only took recent studies from 2010 or later into account. On the one hand, this stage was important for sketching a first picture on the reality of life of the youth and young adults in Ostbelgien. On the other hand, this allowed us to identify gaps in the existing data, which was an essential input for the second stage of the research process.

In the subsequent second stage, we attempted to fill the gaps and give voice to young people and adults in Ostbelgien. Therefore, we organized ten focus group discussions with 6 to 11 participants each, lasting approximately 90 minutes in February and March 2018. In order to cover different sub-groups among the youth and the possible trajectories (and transitions), we carried out four focus groups with young people in the last year of school (of which two were carried out in Catholic and public schools, and in the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien), two focus groups with apprentices (in the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien), two focus groups with students (within

¹ The northern part relates to canton Eupen (including the municipalities Eupen, Kelmis, Raeren and Lonzen) whereas the southern part relates to canton St. Vith (including the municipalities St. Vith, Bütgenbach, Amel, Büllingen and Burg-Reuland) as illustrated in figure 1.1.

Ostbelgien, i.e. students of the Autonome Hochschule Eupen, and outside of Ostbelgien, studying in Belgium or abroad) and two focus groups with young employees (in the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien). These focus groups particularly covered three broad topics: the transitions from school to work or further education, or from further education to work; identities and visions of life; and Ostbelgien as home and cultural context. Overall, this combination of primary and secondary data as well as the sequential research approach enabled sketching a broad picture of reality of life of youth and young adults in Ostbelgien.

The report is broadly structured along the trajectory of young people and adults. The first part gives a general introduction of the investigated group in Ostbelgien, based on demographic data. Having shed light on these general characteristics, part two particularly examines youth enrolled in education. After a general overview of the educational system, the report focuses on competences, school well-being and learning as well as educational career ambitions and educational attainment. Part three deals with school-to-work transitions as well as young adults' labour market positions and career ambitions. Part four examines the cross-cutting topics well-being and socio-cultural activities of youth and young adults in Ostbelgien. The last part summarizes the main findings and develops recommendations, particularly linked to data and a possible monitoring of youth matters.

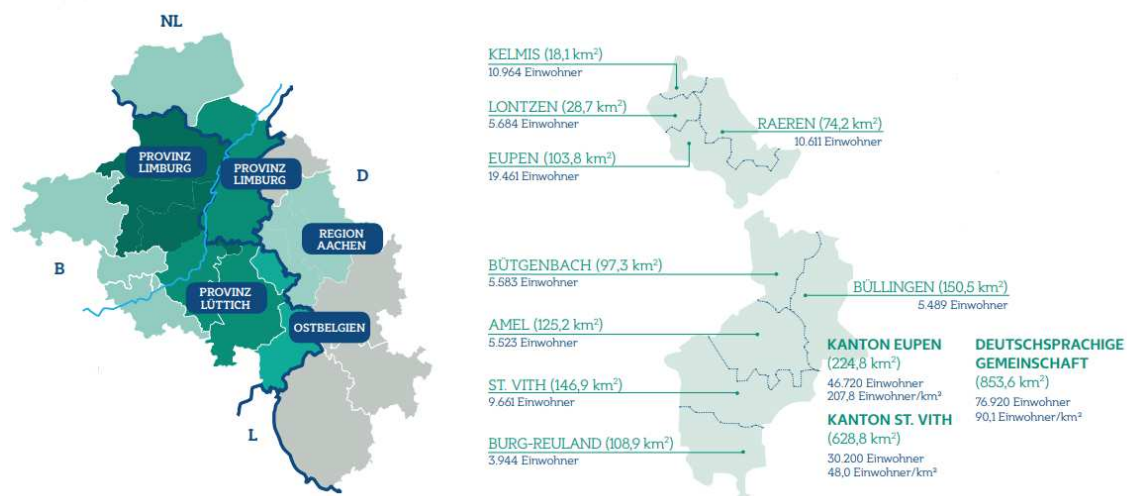
**- PART 1 ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG
ADULTS IN OSTBELGIEN -**

1 | Demographic data on adolescents and young adults in Ostbelgien

1.1 Introduction

Ostbelgien is one of the three language communities of Belgium, with its own government. It is surrounded in the eastern part of Belgium by three countries, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany. It consists of two different cantons: Eupen in the North and Sankt Vith in the South. Both are geographically separated by Wallonia. Canton Eupen has four municipalities, canton Sankt Vith five. In 2017, Ostbelgien had 76 920 inhabitants, of which 46 720 lived in the north and 30 200 in the south (see figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Geographic data regarding Ostbelgien



Source: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2017)

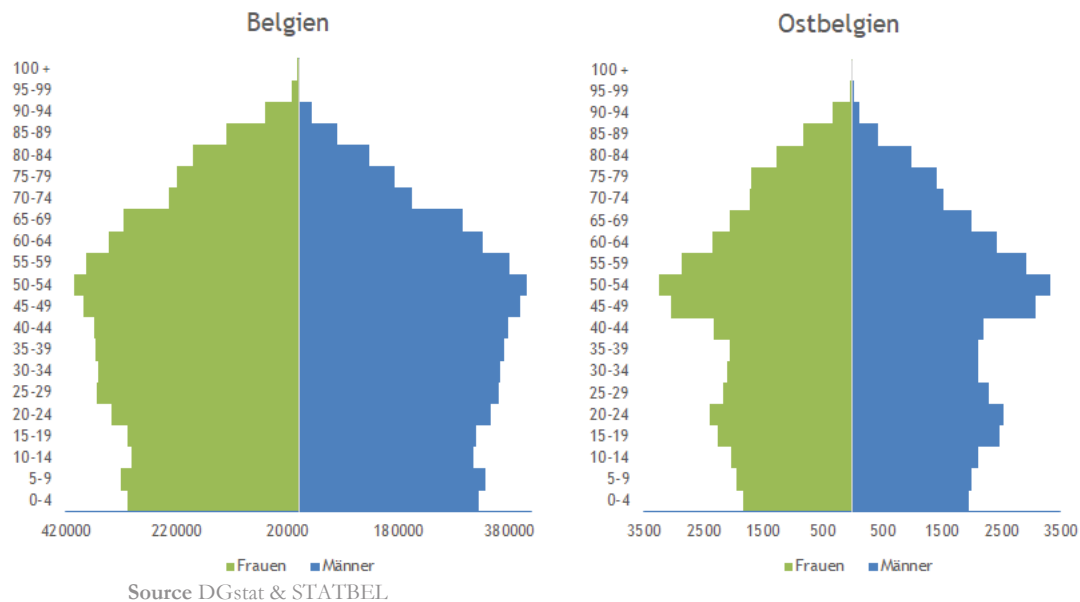
1.2 Demographic developments

1.2.1 The age pyramid of Ostbelgien

Figure 1.2 shows the age pyramid for Belgium and Ostbelgien. For both regions we notice that the age categories between 45 and 59 represent the largest number of persons. The structure of the Alterspyramide of both regions looks more or less the same above this age categories, but below 45 there is a striking difference. The number of adults decreases per age category between the age of 25

and 39 in Ostbelgien, whereas it slightly increases in the age pyramid of Belgium. A lower birth rate could be one of the explanations of the fact that there are relatively less people between the age of 25 and 39, but inward and outward migration flows might be a valid explanation as well (see next paragraph).

Figure 1.2 The age pyramids of Belgium and Ostbelgien compared (2016)



1.2.2 Migration inflows and outflows

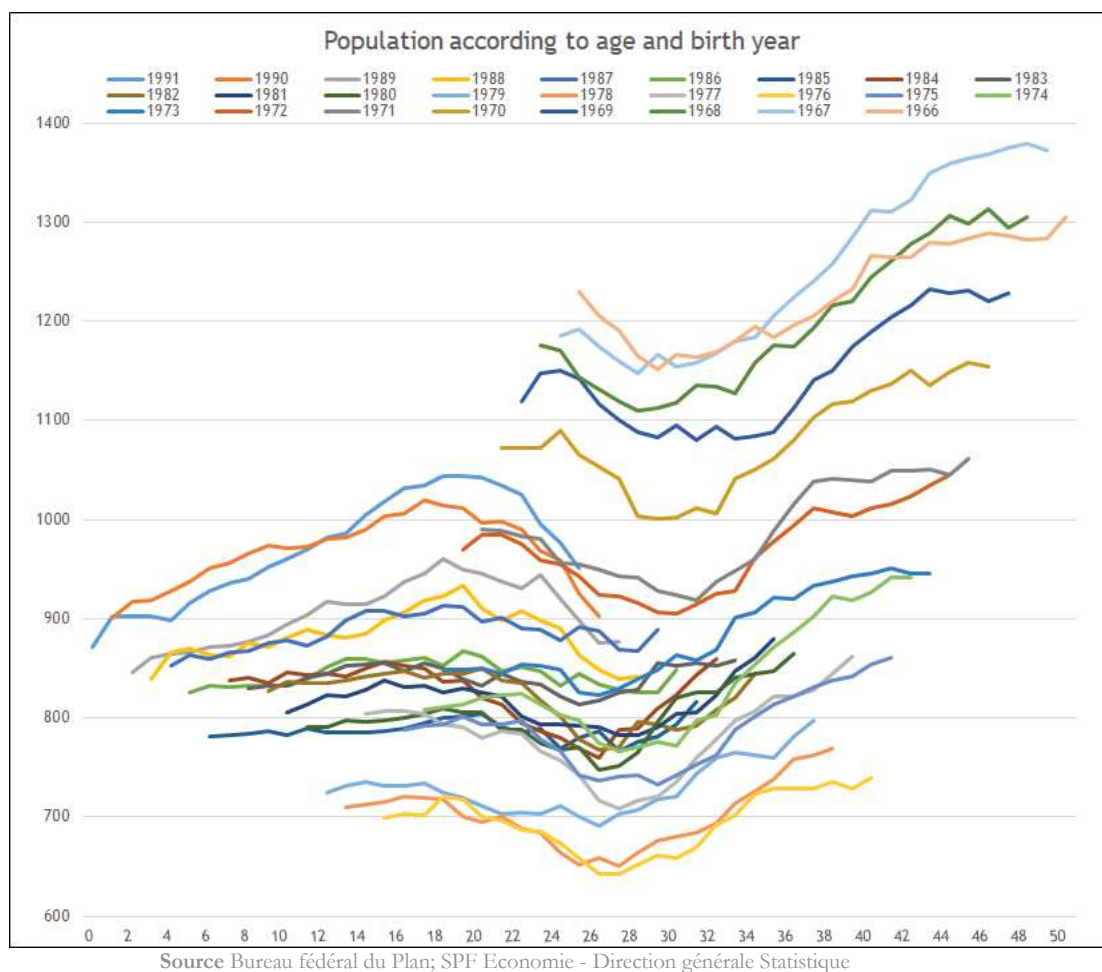
In figure 1.2 the number of persons who live in Ostbelgien according to age and birth cohort is presented. We see for example that at the age of 0 approximately 900 children, born in 1990, lived in Ostbelgien. We see that the number of children born in 1990 rises over the years in Ostbelgien, but that the number, at adult age, starts to decline. Accordingly, we see that at the age of 19 nearly 1000 persons, born in 1971, lived in Ostbelgien but that this number gradually decreases over the years. After the age of 30, the number of persons born in 1971, starts to increase over the years in Ostbelgien. Comparable trends can be observed for other birth cohorts as well. These trends suggest that overall (1) there has been an increase in the population in Ostbelgien; (2) there is a temporary decrease of the population in their twenties and an increase of the population in their thirties.

According to statistics of DGstat there has indeed been an increase of the population between 1990 and 2017: a 71% increase of inhabitants with a foreign nationality, a 9% increase of inhabitants with Belgian nationality and an overall 16% increase of inhabitants regardless of nationality. Despite the general increase in the population, we observe a temporary decrease for particular age groups. This might indicate that young adults decide to leave Ostbelgien temporarily to study or work elsewhere and that many start to come back again in their thirties.

This pattern of temporary emigration has also been observed during our focus group discussions among school leavers and young adults. Many of those attending the last year in secondary school were ready to leave Ostbelgien to continue their education at a university in other parts of the country or abroad. Especially in the southern part of Ostbelgien, a vast majority of participants was already certain to return after the studies in contrast to those of the northern part. The focus groups with young employees confirmed the pattern in the sense that many of them stated that the desire to return to Ostbelgien grew throughout their studies. While some of those returned directly after the studies,

others started working elsewhere but returned to Ostbelgien after having gathered their first work experiences.

Figure 1.3 The population of Ostbelgien according to age and year of birth

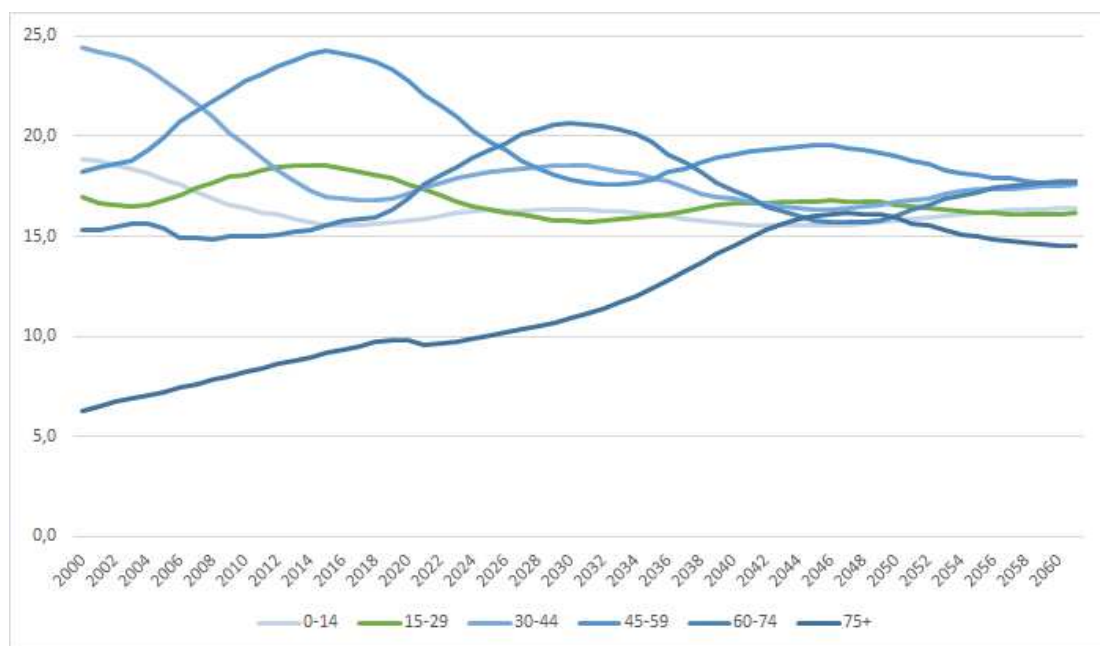


1.2.3 Population forecast according to age groups

Ageing of the population is considered to be a major challenge in modern economies. As this report focuses on youth, it is relevant to study how the percentage of youth in the population might evolve over time in Ostbelgien compared to other age categories. Will the percentage of adolescents and young adults decline over time due to the ageing of society?

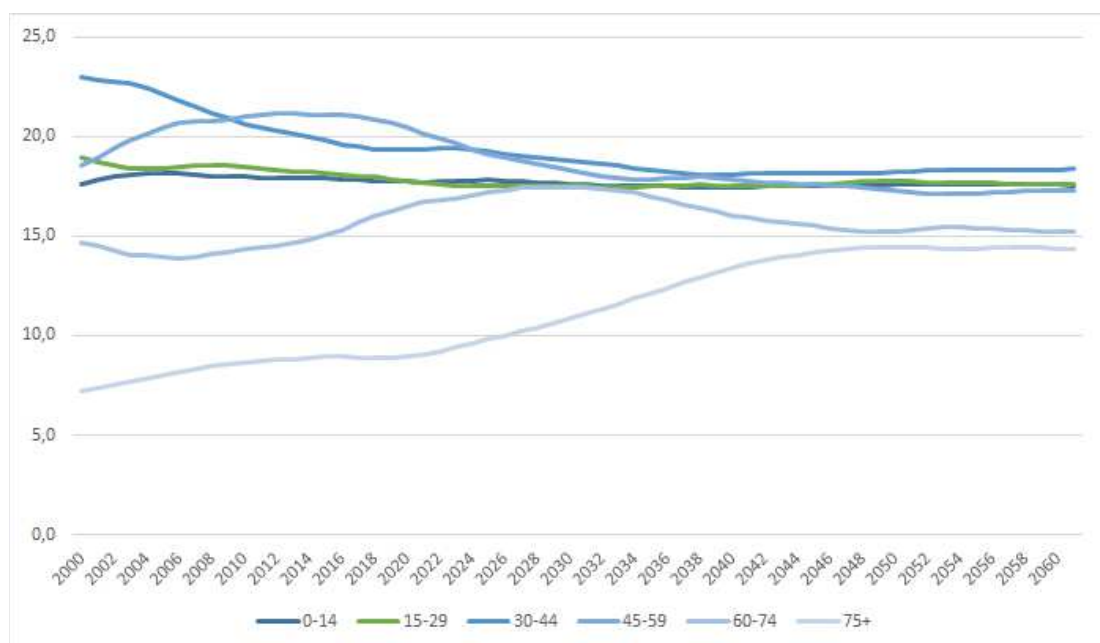
It is expected that the population will continue to grow between 2016 and 2061 with 7,7% in Ostbelgien. According to figure 1.4 the percentage of youth (15-29 years old) started to decrease around 2015 after an increase during a decade. In 2035, the percentage of youth will likely attain a level that is equal to the level attained at the turn of the century. In other words, despite an expected sharp increase of adults of the age of 75 or older, the percentage of youth might stabilize in Ostbelgien at around 16%. In Belgium we see similar patterns with an increase of the 75+ age cohort, and a more stable percentage of youth over time (figure 1.5). However, the sharp increase of older age cohorts will occur at the expense of other, mostly employed, age categories leading to a major challenge for social security not only in Ostbelgien but also in whole Belgium.

Figure 1.4 Population forecast for Ostbelgien



Source Bureau fédéral du Plan; SPF Economie - Direction générale Statistique

Figure 1.5 Population forecast for Belgium



Source Bureau fédéral du Plan; SPF Economie - Direction générale Statistique

1.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of adolescents and young adults

1.3.1 Gender and region

59% of the youth of Ostbelgien lives in its northern part, whereas the remaining 41% lives in the southern part as illustrated in table 1.1. Yet, the share of the youth relative to the total population is

slightly higher in the southern part (19%) compared to the northern part (18%). There are also slightly less female inhabitants between the age of 15 and 29 in Ostbelgien than male inhabitants, regardless of the region.

Table 1.1 Number of inhabitants according to region, age group and gender (2017)

	North				South			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
0-14	3797	16,5%	3603	15,2%	2369	15,5%	2264	15,2%
15-29	4216	18,3%	3976	16,8%	3014	19,7%	2766	18,5%
30-44	3854	16,8%	3976	16,8%	2595	17,0%	2493	16,7%
45-59	5607	24,4%	5692	24,0%	3711	24,3%	3453	23,1%
60-74	3753	16,3%	4028	17,0%	2273	14,9%	2193	14,7%
75+	1762	7,7%	2456	10,3%	1318	8,6%	1751	11,7%
Total	22989	100%	23731	100%	15280	100%	14920	100%

Source Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

1.3.2 Nationality and region

In Ostbelgien, 79% of the population has the Belgian nationality. This percentage is lower than the percentage for Belgium (88%; STATBEL). This is likely to be linked to Ostbelgien's specific location, surrounded by three countries, i.e. the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg. As a result, more than 70% of Ostbelgien's foreign population has the German nationality (table 1.3), in contrast with 3% of all foreigners in Belgium (STATBEL).

With regard to adolescents and young adults between the age of 15 and 29, 19% had a nationality different from the Belgian one. Most foreigners, regardless of their age, appear to live in the north (table 1.2), as 27% of 15-29 year olds has a foreign nationality in contrast with only 7% in the south.

Table 1.2 Population according to age group and nationality (2016)

	North						South					
	Belgian		Other nationalities		Total		Belgian		Other nationalities		Total	
0-14	5362	72,5%	2038	27,5%	7400	100%	4303	92,9%	330	7,1%	4633	100%
15-29	5991	73,1%	2201	26,9%	8192	100%	5383	93,1%	397	6,9%	5780	100%
30-44	5352	68,4%	2478	31,6%	7830	100%	4503	88,5%	585	11,5%	5088	100%
45-59	7403	65,5%	3896	34,5%	11299	100%	6574	91,8%	590	8,2%	7164	100%
60-74	5609	72,1%	2172	27,9%	7781	100%	4130	92,5%	336	7,5%	4466	100%
75+	3414	80,9%	804	19,1%	4218	100%	2971	96,8%	98	3,2%	3069	100%
Total	33131	70,9%	13589	29,1%	46720	100%	27864	92,3%	2336	7,7%	30200	100%

Source Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

Table 1.3 Foreign population according to home country (2016)

Nationality	Number of people	Share in the total foreign population
<i>EU – 28</i>		
Germany	11185	71,3%
The Netherlands	703	4,5%
Luxembourg	214	1,4%
France	215	1,4%
Poland	256	1,6%
Italy	151	1,0%
Romania	270	1,7%
Spain	209	1,3%
Portugal	45	0,3%
Austria	51	0,3%
Other	316	2,0%
<i>Total EU – 28</i>	<i>13615</i>	<i>86,8%</i>
Other European nationality	804	5,1%
Asia	614	3,9%
Africa	284	1,8%
America, Caribbean, Oceania	72	0,5%
Refugee	141	0,9%
Unknown	134	0,9%
Stateless	20	0,1%
Total	15684	100%

* The whole population regardless of age.

Source DGstat

1.3.3 Socio-economic profile

Based on tax declarations, Ostbelgien appears to have a slightly lower score on the prosperity index compared to whole Belgium (97 in contrast with 100 in whole Belgium) (table 1.4). Within Ostbelgien there appears to be a difference between the northern and southern part. The northern part's score is almost equal to the Belgian index, but the southern part has only a score of 92. However, the variance is larger in the north than in the south (see interquartile coefficient in table 1.4). This may be linked to the fact that most people receiving a so-called Eingliederungseinkommen (i.e. a sort of integration income or living wage) live in the north (Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens).

Sound data on wages or income for different age categories in Ostbelgien are not available. However, figure 1.6 gives an insight into the number of children growing up in less favorable economic conditions. Almost 11% of the children in north live in a household without work-related income, in contrast with only 4% of the children in the south of Ostbelgien. Both percentages appear to be lower than in Wallonia (figure 1.6). For comparison, in Flanders in 2013, 4% of the children lived in a household without work-related income and 7% of the children in a household where only a limited (<15,000 euros) gross taxable income from work and replacement income was available (Kind en Gezin, 2017). In Chapter 7, we discuss the standard and quality of life of young people and adults living in Ostbelgien more in detail.

Table 1.4 Share of tax-free incomes and tax burdens according to tax declaration and region (2015)

	Share of tax-free incomes	< 10.000 EUR	from 10.001 to 20.000 EUR	from 20.001 to 30.000 EUR	from 30.001 to 40.000 EUR	from 40.001 to 50.000 EUR	More than 50.001 EUR	Prosperity index	Interquartile coefficient τ^2
Belgium	8,6%	12,4%	25,0%	20,0%	12,0%	7,0%	15,1%	100,0	103
Ostbelgien	8,3%	12,5%	24,9%	21,6%	12,3%	7,4%	13,2%	97,0	97
North	8,6%	12,4%	25,0%	20,0%	12,0%	7,0%	15,1%	99,5	102,3
South	7,4%	12,1%	23,9%	21,7%	12,8%	8,2%	13,8%	92,2	89,4

* Average prosperity index and interquartile coefficient are calculated at municipal level.

Source STATBEL

Figure 1.6 Minors living in households without work-related income



Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2017)

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on Ostbelgien's population with a particular focus on youth. Nearly 60% of the youth of Ostbelgien lives in the Northern part, yet, when looking at the shares of young people relative to the total population, both parts of Ostbelgien feature slightly less than 20% of inhabitants aged between 15 and 29 years. It is expected that the percentage of youth might stabilize in Ostbelgien at around 16% in 2060. Compared to the rest of Belgium, two aspects about Ostbelgien and its youth are striking. On the one hand, the number of inhabitants with foreign nationalities (particularly the German nationality) is comparably high, which is related to Ostbelgien's location at the borders of Germany, France and the Netherlands. On the other hand, we observe a particular mobility pattern. Specifically, many young people leave Ostbelgien in their early twenties, but return to Ostbelgien in their late twenties or early thirties. This can probably be explained by the fact that young people leave Ostbelgien after their Abitur to earn a higher education degree. Some of those return right after their studies while others start working somewhere else and come back after having gained first work experiences.

² To compare the variance of multiple groups of which the median may strongly differ, the interquartile coefficient is an appropriate measure. The interquartile coefficient is the ratio between the interquartile difference and the median.

**- PART 2 ADOLESCENTS IN THE
EDUCATION SYSTEM IN OSTBELGIEN -**

2 | General overview

2.1 The education system

2.1.1 The structure of the education system in Ostbelgien

Belgium is divided into three language communities: the Dutch, the French and the German speaking Community. Each community has almost full authority for education, but only minor differences exist among the three educational systems within Belgium. In the German speaking Community, the Ministry of Education is responsible for all stages of education starting from pre-primary education. Childcare is a competence of the German-speaking Ministry of Family, Health Care and Social affairs (Eurydice).

Compulsory education starts at the age of 6 and ends at the age of 18. However, children can enter kindergarten already from the age of 3 (or when they become three in the year of entrance). At the age of 6, children go to primary school (or when they become six in the year of entrance). Generally, primary education lasts six years, and secondary education six to seven years (see also figure 2.1) (Eurydice).

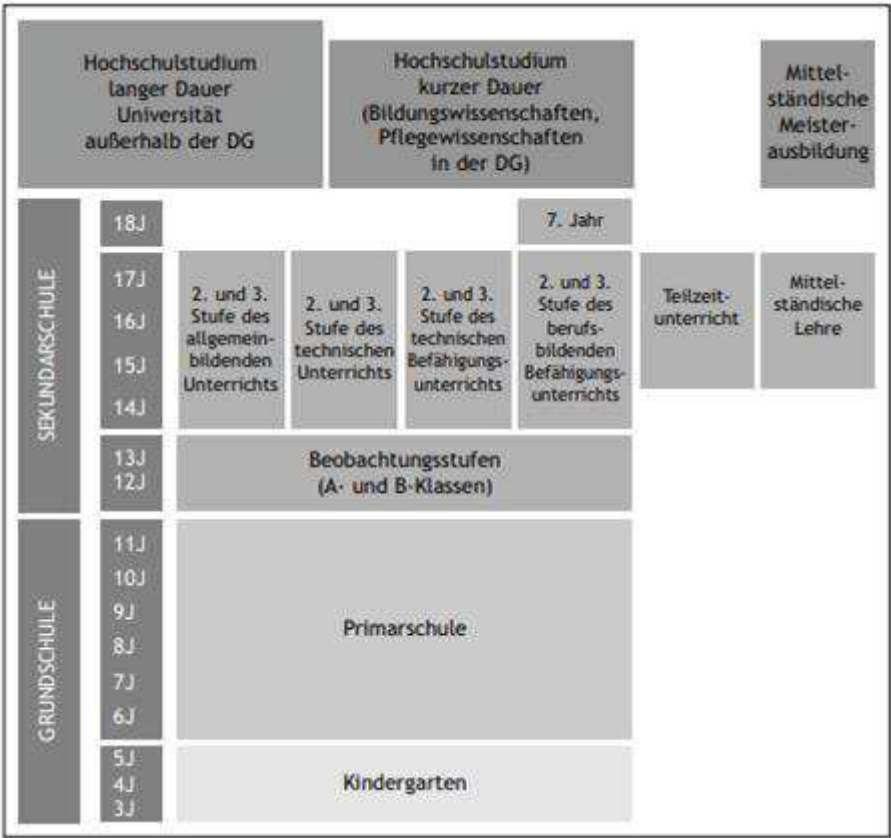
The first two years of secondary education (7th and 8th grade) are comprehensive and aim to ensure that all students have a broad basic education. From the 9th grade on, students can choose a study field within one of the four tracks: Allgemeinbildender Unterricht (i.e. general secondary education), Technischer Übergang (i.e. technical secondary education), Technische Befähigung (i.e. technical secondary education for practical training) und Berufsbildung (i.e. vocational secondary education). The so-called *Übergangsunterricht* is offered in the tracks allgemeinbildender Unterricht and the technische Unterrichtsformen (i.e. general secondary education and technical secondary education for preparation for higher education) and aims at preparing young people to higher education. The so-called *Befähigungsunterricht* is offered in the tracks technischen Unterrichtsformen (i.e. technical education) and berufsbildende Unterrichtsform (i.e. vocational education) and aims at preparing young people for their transition to working life (Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens). Aside full-time education, there is also the possibility of attending part-time education, which combines going to school with doing a kind of internship. Part-time education is offered by particular schools (i.e. Teilzeitunterrichtszentrum) or the Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand (IAWM) (Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens).

After secondary education, students who want to continue to study within Ostbelgien, can apply for the Autonome Hochschule (i.e. an autonomous higher education institution) or a vocational training course (Lehre and/or mittelständische Meisterausbildung at the IAWM). At the Autonome Hochschule one can study Gesundheits- und Krankenpflegewissenschaften (i.e. health and care science), Bildungswissenschaften Kindergarten und Primarschule (i.e. educational sciences for kindergarten and primary education) and Buchhaltungs- & Finanzwissenschaften (i.e. accounting and

finance). If students prefer to go to university, they have to go to one of the universities abroad or in the French or Flemish speaking community.

Finally, the so-called Förderunterricht (i.e. special education) comprises kindergarten as well the primary and secondary education. About 2 % of the students in Ostbelgien attend a Förderschule (UNIA, 2018).

Figure 2.1 Structure of the education system in Ostbelgien



Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2008)

2.1.2 The school network

There are three different school networks in Ostbelgien, namely free subsidized education (i.e. freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen FSUW), officially subsidized education (i.e. offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen OSUW) and the community network (i.e. Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen GUW). It is the parliament of Ostbelgien which defines the legal context for the three school networks. The setup of the Autonome Hochschule in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (AHS) is unique in Belgium. This is because the AHS was created after the merger of the former Hochschulen of the three school networks. The responsible body for the AHS is an autonomous administrative board (Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens).

2.1.3 Further education

There are several formal and non-formal lifelong learning opportunities for adolescents and adults provided by five adult education centers, four of them aligned with secondary schools, (evening schools), the Employment Service Center (Arbeitsamt), the school of music (Musikadademie), the two vocational training centers IAWM and other organizations (Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens).

2.2 Data regarding the school system

2.2.1 School

In the school year 2016-2017, regarding regular education, there were 55 schools offering kindergarten und primary education as well as one school exclusively offering primary education. Furthermore, there were nine schools only offering secondary education as well as one Hochschule. Regarding special education, there was one kindergarten and four schools offering primary and one offering secondary education (UNIA, 2018).

Table 2.1 Total number of schools in Ostbelgien

	Regular schools	Special schools
Kindergarten	55	1
Primary school	56	4
Secondary school	9	1
Hochschule	1	0

Source UNIA (2018)

2.2.2 The school staff

In 2018, a little more than 2000 persons worked in the education system in Ostbelgien. Three quarters of them are female, which is similar to the gender distribution in Flanders (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2017). However, in Flanders, 71% of the staff is in permanent employment (having the status of civil servant) in 2017, in contrast with only 49% in Ostbelgien in 2018 (Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens). The average of the staff in Ostbelgien is 42,5 years old and the distribution of age is very similar to the distribution found among the Flemish staff (see table 2.2).

Table 2.2 School staff according to age group

	Flemish community		Ostbelgien	
	Number	%	Number	%
60+	8514	4,6	89	4,2
50-59	48100	25,9	628	29,7
40-49	46674	25,2	524	24,8
30-39	54251	29,3	507	23,9
20-29	27934	15,1	369	17,4
Total	185473	100,0	2117	100,0

Source Das Bildungsportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens & Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2017)

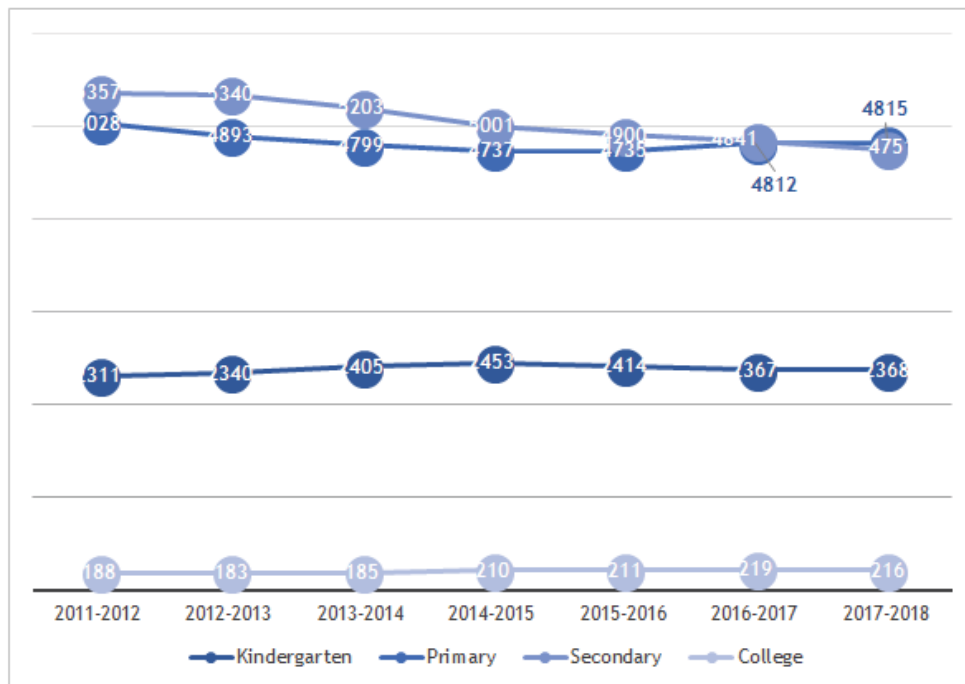
2.2.3 Students

2.2.3.1 General data on students in the education system

a) Development of student numbers

There were 9566 children or students in primary and secondary schools in 2017-2018. Half of them attended primary school, half of them secondary school. More than 2300 children attended kindergarten. Slightly more than 200 students were enrolled in the Autonome Hochschule Eupen (figure 2.2). In addition, there has been a striking increase of 15% of students in the Autonome Hochschule AHS since 2011-2012, whereas there was a decrease of 11% of students in secondary school. These changes might be caused by various factors, including demographic changes or an increase of popularity of the Autonome Hochschule. More research is necessary to analyse the causes of these changes.

Figure 2.2 Development of the student numbers according to educational level (2011-2018)

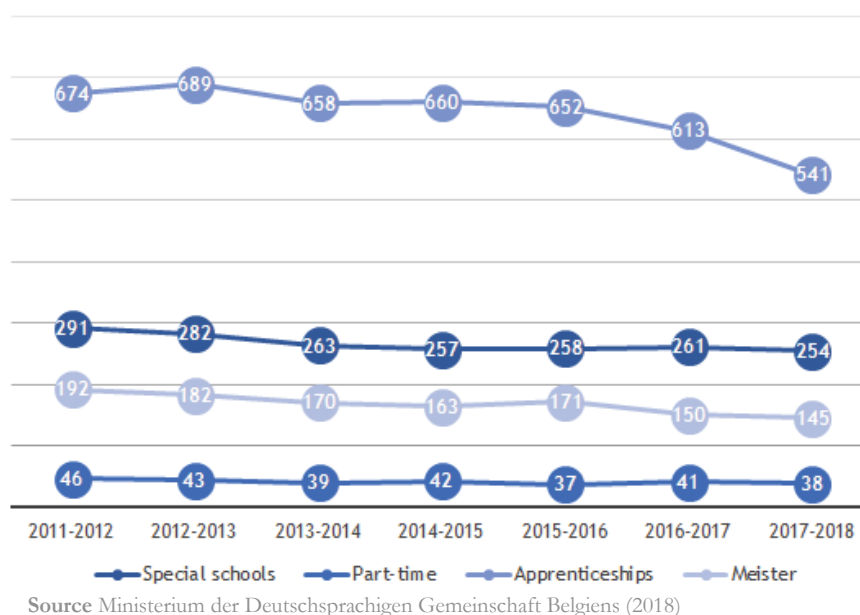


Source: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2018)

There is also a striking evolution in the number of students choosing for a vocational training or a so-called *Meisterausbildung* (i.e. master craftsmen training) (figure 2.3). The number of students has declined by 20% and 25% respectively since 2011-2012. In 2017-2018, there were 541 apprentices and 145 students enrolled in *Meisterausbildung*. In addition, the number of students in part-time education declined as well by 17%. These decreases were larger than the decline we mentioned previously for secondary education. This might indicate that vocational training is becoming less popular, but to answer this question and shed light on possible reasons, further research is required.

Finally, 254 children and students attended special education, which also experienced a decline, albeit smaller, of 13% between 2011-2012 and 2017-2018.

Figure 2.3 Development of student numbers for special schools, part-time education as well as apprentices (i.e. Lehrlinge) and Meister enrolled at IAWM (2011-2018)



Finally, there were 57 students in 2017-2018 who enjoyed home schooling, compared to only 29 students in 2011-2012. In addition, 1286 students were enrolled in one of the five evening schools and 1181 in the music academy in 2017 (Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2018).

b) Number of students according to school network and education level

As mentioned before, there are three different school networks in Ostbelgien, as in the other two language communities in Belgium. According to table 2.3, 26% of the children and students attend a school of the free subsidized education network, slightly more students can be found in the community network and the majority of students and children goes to a school of the officially subsidized network. This distribution is remarkably different from the distribution that can be found in Flanders, and to some extent from the distribution found in the French speaking community. In the French speaking community half of the children and in Flanders two thirds of the children attend a school of the free subsidized education network, which are mostly catholic schools. Schools of the officially subsidized network are a minority in Flanders.

Table 2.3 Share of students according to school network (without higher education)

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Free subsidized education network (FSUW)	25,5%	49,9%	65,8%
Community network (GUW)	30,0%	14,5%	17,2%
Officially subsidized network (OSUW)	44,5%	35,6%	17,0%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2018), Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2017) & Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (2017)

c) Number of students according to place of residence and place of school

Not all children and students who attend school in Ostbelgien also live in Ostbelgien. In addition, not all students living in Ostbelgien attend school in Ostbelgien. According to data of the Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 85% of those who are subject to compulsory education attend school in Ostbelgien and the other 15% in Germany, another country or in another part of Belgium (table 2.4). The outflow appears to be higher than the inflow. Table 2.5 presents the figures for inflow. Nearly 90% of students and children going to school in Ostbelgien also live there. Nine percent lives in Wallonia and nearly 3% abroad.

Table 2.4 Number of students in Ostbelgien according to place of school (2016)

School location	
Ostbelgien	8584
French community	890
Germany	518
City region of Aachen	493
Other places in Germany	25
Other countries	31
Unknown	84
Total	10107

Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

Table 2.5 Number of students in Ostbelgien according to place of residence (2016)

Place of residence	
Ostbelgien	8584
French community	822
Flanders	3
Germany	117
The Netherlands	1
Luxembourg	127
Unknown	1
Total	9655

Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

2.2.3.2 Secondary education

a) Number of students according to form of education

In secondary education, there are three different tracks from the 9th to the 12th or 13th grade: Allgemeinbildung, Technischer Übergang, Technische Befähigung und Berufsbildung. The majority of the students goes to Allgemeinbildung (55%), which is also in Flanders and in the French speaking community the most popular track (table 2.6). Fewer students are enrolled in Technische Bildung (27%) and Berufsbildung (18%) in Ostbelgien. There is no difference in enrollment between the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien (table 2.7).

Table 2.6 Distribution of students according to allgemeinbildenden, technischen and berufsbildenden Unterricht in Belgium

	Flemish community		French community		Ostbelgien	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Allgemeinbildung	114846	41,0	105514	46,2	1713	54,9
Technischer Übergang			17463	7,6	229	7,3
Technische Befähigung			54531	23,9	629	20,1
Technische & Kunstbildung	92969	33,2				
Berufsbildung	72352	25,8	50895	22,3	552	17,7
Total	280.167	100,0	228.403	100,0	3.123	100,0

Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2018), Departement Onderwijs en Vorming (2017) & Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (2017)

Table 2.7 Distribution of students according to allgemeinbildenden, technischen and berufsbildenden Unterricht in the north and south of Ostbelgien

	North		South	
	Number	%	Number	%
Allgemeinbildung	985	54,8	728	53,5
Technischer Übergang	140	7,8	89	6,5
Technische Befähigung	351	19,5	278	20,4
Berufsbildung	300	16,7	252	18,5
Teilzeit	23	1,3	15	1,1
Total	4774	100,0	1362	100,0

Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2018)

b) Nationality of students

Approximately 81% of the secondary school students has the Belgian nationality (table 2.8). This percentage is lower than in Flanders (93%) and in the French speaking community (88%). This is likely because Ostbelgien is surrounded by three different countries, i.e. the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg, and because nearly three percent of the school children lives outside Ostbelgien (see table 2.5). This might explain that 11% of the students has German nationality, almost 3% Luxembourgish nationality and almost 1% Dutch nationality. Four percent has another nationality.

Table 2.8 Nationality of students in Ostbelgien

Nationality	Number	%
Belgium	3819	81,3
Germany	511	10,9
Luxembourg	124	2,6
The Netherlands	35	0,7
Russia	19	0,4
Other	188	4,0
Total	4696	100,0

* Without nursing education, EAS and free students

Source Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (2018)

c) Indicators related to the diversity of students

To define diversity in the school population, various indicators besides nationality can be applied. UNIA used in their study three indicators to define diversity in the secondary school population of Ostbelgien, based on population data (UNIA, 2018). They used Migration background, gender and school allowance. Migration background is based on country of birth and nationality. Those who were not born in Germany or Belgium and do not have a Belgian or a German nationality were considered to have an immigration background. According to this, 13% had an immigration background in 2016-2017. In 2015-2016, 19% of the secondary school students got a school allowance (i.e. Studienbeihilfe or Schulzulage) (UNIA, 2018). In table 2.8, the percentage of students who are male and the percentage of students with a migration background and school allowance are shown for each education track. The percentage of students with a school allowance is highest in part-time education and the lowest in allgemeinbildender Unterricht. Male students and students with a migration background are underrepresented in the track Allgemeinbildung and overrepresented in part-time education. In Flanders and the French speaking community similar distributions can be found (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming, 2017 & Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2017)³.

Table 2.9 Percentage of recipients of the school allowance according to gender, migration background and education track in % (2015/2016)

	School allowance	Boys	Immigrant background
Allgemeinbildung	16,7	44,0	13,1
Technischer Übergang	21,7	49,0	12,4
Technische Befähigung	19,7	57,0	15,7
Berufsbildung	22,7	60,0	23,0
Teilzeit	25,7	77,0	34,9

Source UNIA (2018)

2.2.3.3 Apprenticeship contracts

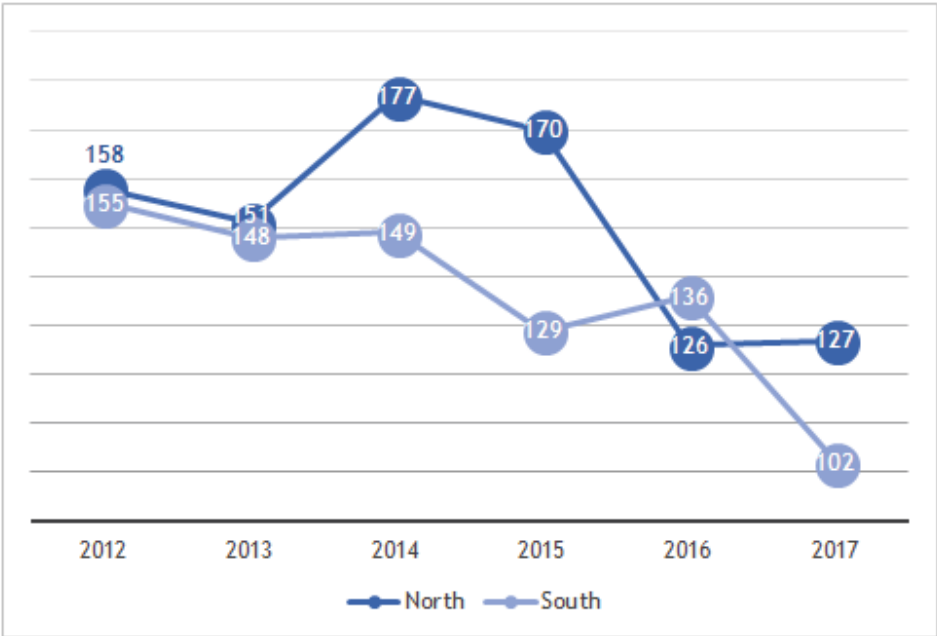
In 2017, 180 boys (79%) and 49 girls (21%) signed an apprenticeship contract (IAWM, 2017; see also figure 2.4 and figure 2.5). Especially in retail, hairdressing and accounting young women are widely represented (IAWM, 2017). Slightly more contracts were signed in the north compared to the south of Ostbelgien (figure 2.4). Overall, there appears to be a decline in the number of apprenticeship contracts, likely (in part) due to a decline in population of 15-19 year olds (IAWM, 2017). The average duration of the vocational training approximates 2,7 years (figure 2.6 and figure 2.7) and the average age at the start of the apprenticeship was 18,7 years (figure 2.7 and figure 2.8). Thirty five percent of those signing a contract have graduated from secondary school successfully. Pursuing an apprenticeship therefore appears to attract both students who left school early as well as secondary school graduates. However, this percentage (i.e. 35%) is in stark contrast to the numbers provided in Chapter 5. According to data of Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017) only 11% of school leavers said to choose vocational training after graduation (see figure 5.1 in chapter 5). This difference between 11% and 35% likely indicates that not everyone starts an apprenticeship immediately after graduation.

The IAWM-study also reports the motivation of adolescents and (young) adults to sign an apprenticeship contract. Interest in a particular profession or company is the most frequently cited reasons for signing an apprenticeship contract (IAWM, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). Good prospects on the job market are also a reason for starting an apprenticeship, as well as knowing a training company in its geographical or social proximity. In addition, the ‘Schnupperwochen’ (i.e. a short internship in a local company) of the IAWM, which are offered annually in the Easter holidays,

³ More detailed statistics of the French speaking community can be downloaded from: <http://enseignement.be/index.php>.

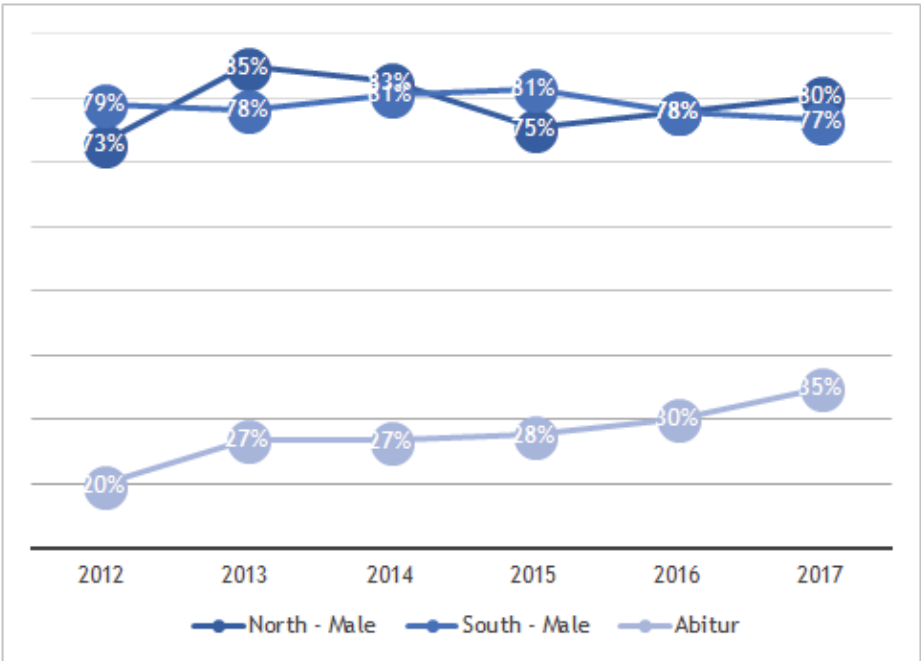
are also believed to be a useful instrument to obtain a first practical experience both at work and in a concrete training company. However, there is also a negative reason to choose for an apprenticeship: not being motivated to go to school or to study. 8% to 16% of the students (also) gave this reason (IAWM, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Figure 2.4 Development of the number of apprenticeship contracts signed in the north and south of Ostbelgien (2012-2017)



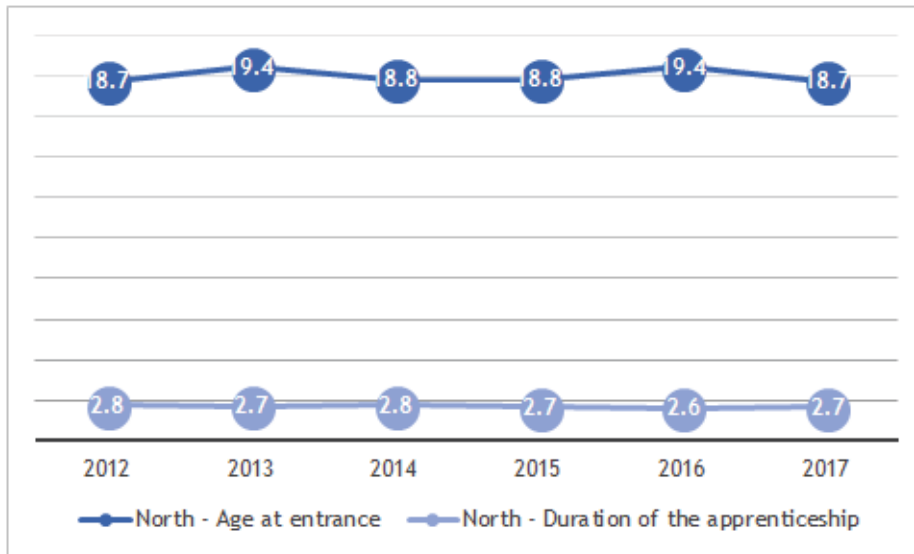
Source IAWM (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Figure 2.5 Number of male school leavers having signed apprenticeship contracts



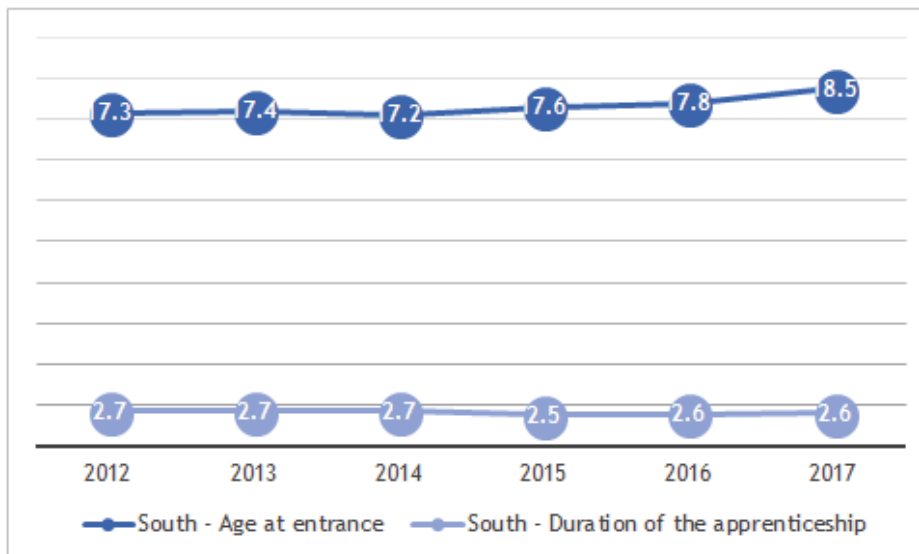
Source IAWM (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Figure 2.6 Average age at the start of the apprenticeship and average duration of it in the north of Ostbelgien



Source IAWM (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Figure 2.7 Average age at the start of the apprenticeship and average duration of it in the south of Ostbelgien



Source IAWM (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

2.2.3.4 Post-secondary education

After their apprenticeship, students can choose to enroll in a training to become a Meister (145 did so in 2017-2018; figure 2.3). School leavers can also go to the Autonome Hochschule (216 in 2017-2018; figure 2.2). In 2016-2017, 23% of the students in the Autonome Hochschule were men, and 8% had an migration background (UNIA, 2018). The low number of men can likely be explained by the study fields the Autonome Hochschule is offering, for example nursing and teacher training (see also table 2.10).

Table 2.10 Number of students at the Autonome Hochschule (AHS) according to field of study (2017-2018)

Studienfach	
BAC: Bachelor Nursing /3 years	19
BGKW: Bachelor Nursing/4 years	40
LK: Teacher training / (kindergarten)	39
LP: Teacher training (primary education)	58
BUCH: Bachelor Accounting	33
BPR: Brückenstudium teacher training primary education (i.e. teaching qualification for those who earned another degree already)	5
Independent students	2
Prepatory year	20
Krankenpflegesekundarabteilung EBS (i.e. secondary education in nursing)	35
Total	251

Source: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

3 | Competences

3.1 Introduction

In 2006, the European Union introduced eight generic or so-called key competences that should be acquired by all young people at the end of their compulsory education and training for a successful working life. These competences will also lay a foundation for further learning as adults need to develop and update their competences throughout their lives (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). Key competences include communication in the mother tongue and foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, social and civic competences, learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). Many of those competences have been measured by international assessment studies among primary school children and secondary school students. In this chapter we highlight recent results of secondary school students' mathematics, scientific and reading competences, collaborative problem-solving skills, self-perceived ICT related competences, but also citizenship or civic competences. We compare the results of students from the three Belgian communities and study the effect of socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity and region (for citizenship only). We use data from PISA 2015, DELF (Cohort 3 and Cohort 4; 2013 and 2015), SurveyLang (2011), FORSA (2010-2011) and the study about citizenship in Ostbelgien (2016) (for more information about the applied research methodology in these studies, see European Commission, 2012; Mazziotta, 2015; OECD, 2017d; Polis-sinus, 2011; Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend, 2016).

3.2 Competences in accordance with PISA 2015

3.2.1 Competence levels

3.2.1.1 Literacy and collaborative problem-solving skills

Thirty-five OECD countries participated in the PISA 2015 study. The main focus of PISA 2015 was scientific literacy, but also other competences have been measured in 2015 among 15-year-olds. Table 3.1 shows the results for mathematics literacy, scientific literacy, reading literacy and collaborative problem-solving skills. The collaborative problem-solving assessment was the first large-scale test of its kind. It was a computer-based assessment using scenarios with which 15-year-olds are likely to be familiar in order to measure their ability to collaborate with others (OECD, 2017a). According to the results, students in Ostbelgien performed significantly better than the OECD average for mathematics and scientific literacy, but less well than their Flemish counterparts. The performance level for reading and collaborative problem solving was also significantly lower in Ostbelgien than in Flanders. When we look at scientific literacy in more detail, we see that in particular

evaluation and design of scientific inquiry, interpretation of data and evidence, procedures, physics and earth science were more difficult for students in Ostbelgien, whereas living science, content knowledge and the ability to explain phenomena scientifically were easier. These findings could be explained to some extent by students' characteristics, instructional practices and other school learning environment characteristics (cf. OECD, 2017c). However, this needs more investigation.

Table 3.1 Literacy and collaborative problem solving skills of 15-year-olds in 2015 in the three language communities and OECD

	Ostbelgien (N 382)	French community (N 3594)	Flemish community (N 5675)	OECD (N 248641)
Mathematics	502,0 (5,1)	489,2 (4,4)	521,5 (2,5)	490,0 (0,4)
Science	505,1 (4,8)	485,4 (4,5)	515,4 (2,6)	493,0 (0,4)
• Evaluate and design scientific inquiry	504,3 (9,9)	490,5 (4,6)	520,6 (2,9)	493,0 (0,5)
• Explain phenomena scientifically	506,0 (7,0)	479,4 (4,7)	514,1 (2,6)	493,0 (0,5)
• Interpret data and evidence scientifically	499,1 (6,2)	489,4 (4,6)	515,0 (3,0)	493,0 (0,5)
• Content	508,0 (4,6)	481,4 (4,6)	511,3 (2,8)	493,0 (0,5)
• Procedural & epistemic	502,4 (5,6)	488,4 (4,6)	520,1 (2,7)	493,0 (0,5)
• Physical	499,8 (7,8)	481,5 (4,4)	513,5 (3,1)	493,0 (0,5)
• Living	511,1 (5,6)	488,8 (4,7)	514,7 (2,7)	492,0 (0,5)
• Earth science	499,1 (6,5)	484,1 (4,6)	519,2 (3,0)	494,0 (0,5)
Reading	500,9 (4,2)	483,5 (4,8)	510,7 (2,8)	493,0 (0,5)
Collaborative problem solving	492,5 (6,4)	479,0 (4,2)	518,8 (2,8)	500,0 (0,5)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$

Source PISA (2015)

3.2.1.2 Perceived ICT related competences and attitudes

Although students in Ostbelgien appear to perform less well than students in Flanders with regard to collaborative problem-solving skills (table 3.1), students in Ostbelgien do value collaboration and teamwork more than Flemish students (table 3.2; for more details see Appendix A). More than two thirds of Ostbelgien students prefer to work in a team and believe that teams can make better decisions (Appendix A, table a1.2). In addition, at least 80% enjoys collaboration. However, students from Ostbelgien do not differ with regard to enjoyment during collaboration from students in the other Belgian communities.

Students from Ostbelgien value teamwork more than others, but a part of them feels insecure with regard to ICT use and competences. Whereas most students feel comfortable with using the digital devices at home (88%) and can choose new applications themselves (76%), they feel less confident in case of devices they are less familiar with (42%; Appendix A, table a1.1). Their interest in ICT is high, but only one third will feel bad if internet connection is not possible (Appendix A, table a1.1). Nevertheless, Ostbelgien students' perceived competences and interest in ICT appears to be lower than the competences and interest in other regions, in particular the French speaking region (table 3.2).

They also have less confidence about a solution for various environmental issues (more than 53% believes most issues will get worse in the future, Appendix A, table a1.7), but are also less familiar with those issues (table a1.6). A lower level of awareness might explain a lower level of optimism, but might also be related to a lower level of interest. Although approximately half of the Ostbelgien students has science-related career expectations, interest in science topics and enjoys science (Appendix A, table a1.3, a1.4, a1.5), they appear to have less interest in science and are less likely to pursue a science-related career than students in other regions (see also chapter 5 for more information about career expectations).

Table 3.2 Perceived ICT competences and attitudes in the three language communities and OECD

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community	OECD
Students' perceived ICT competence	-0,21 (0,05)	0,14 (0,02)	-0,01 (0,01)	0,01 (0,00)
Students' perceived autonomy related to ICT use	0,03 (0,06)	0,15 (0,02)	-0,04 (0,01)	0,01 (0,00)
ICT interest	0,03 (0,06)	0,24 (0,02)	0,04 (0,01)	0,01 (0,00)
Environmental awareness	-0,24 (0,05)	-0,37 (0,03)	-0,07 (0,02)	0,07 (0,00)
Environmental optimism	-0,27 (0,06)	-0,30 (0,02)	-0,22 (0,02)	-0,03 (0,00)
Enjoyment of science	-0,18 (0,07)	0,12 (0,03)	-0,15 (0,02)	0,02 (0,00)
Interest in broad science topics	0,00 (0,05)	0,00 (0,03)	0,12 (0,02)	0,00 (0,00)
Instrumental motivation	-0,26 (0,06)	0,05 (0,03)	-0,05 (0,01)	0,14 (0,00)
Collaboration and teamwork: enjoyment	-0,02 (0,05)	-0,13 (0,02)	-0,01 (0,01)	0,01 (0,00)
Collaboration and teamwork: value	0,05 (0,06)	0,00 (0,03)	-0,20 (0,01)	0,01 (0,00)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

3.2.2 Socio-demographic differences in competences

To what extent do competences relate to socio-economic and other demographic characteristics of students? In Ostbelgien, the socio-economic background is positively related with most competences, except for ICT related competences (table 3.3). The higher the social, cultural and economic status of their parents, the higher students achieve on various tests and the higher they perceive their own competences. However, with regard to the cognitive competences (mathematics literacy, scientific literacy, reading literacy and collaborative problem-solving skills) the impact of the socio-economic background is in Ostbelgien relatively low compared to the other language communities. In general, the effect size is a half times smaller.

Gender is also significantly related to half of the measured competences in table 3.4. Whereas girls appear to achieve higher in terms of reading literacy, collaborative problem-solving skills and attitude towards collaboration, boys rate their ICT competences higher, are more interested in science and are more optimistic about environmental issues. These effects do not differ much from the effects found in the other two language communities. However, there is a larger gender gap in favour of boys in the Flemish and French speaking community in case of value added to collaboration and enjoyment of science.

With regard to ethnicity, hardly any significant effect sizes could be found for Ostbelgien. The index of immigrant background or ethnicity was calculated here as follows: (1) students who had at least one parent born in the country (non-immigrant status), (2) second-generation students or first-generation students. Students who have at least one parent born in Belgium, performed higher for mathematics literacy and reading literacy, but enjoy science less often (table 3.4). No effect was found for ethnicity on other science related competences, ICT and collaboration related competences. There are only two major differences with Flanders: whereas the impact of ethnicity is absent in Ostbelgien on scientific literacy and collaborative problem-solving skills, it is relatively large and significant in Flanders.

Table 3.3 The impact of socio-economic background presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Mathematics	0,23 (0,06)	0,45 (0,02)	0,40 (0,02)
Science	0,24 (0,05)	0,45 (0,02)	0,42 (0,02)
Reading	0,19 (0,05)	0,42 (0,02)	0,39 (0,02)
Collaborative problem solving	0,17 (0,06)	0,37 (0,02)	0,33 (0,02)
Students' perceived ICT competence	0,04 (0,06)	0,01 (0,02)	0,03 (0,02)
Students' perceived autonomy related to ICT use	0,01 (0,05)	0,06 (0,02)	0,04 (0,02)
ICT interest	0,05 (0,06)	-0,03 (0,02)	0,00 (0,02)
Environmental awareness	0,19 (0,04)	0,23 (0,02)	0,26 (0,01)
Environmental optimism	0,01 (0,06)	-0,07 (0,01)	-0,09 (0,01)
Enjoyment of science	0,19 (0,05)	0,16 (0,02)	0,20 (0,02)
Interest in broad science topics	0,18 (0,05)	0,18 (0,02)	0,23 (0,02)
Instrumental motivation	0,10 (0,05)	0,07 (0,02)	0,07 (0,01)
Collaboration and teamwork: enjoyment	0,11 (0,05)	0,09 (0,02)	0,08 (0,01)
Collaboration and teamwork: value	-0,02 (0,05)	-0,06 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 3.4 The impact of gender presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Mathematics	0,02 (0,05)	0,06 (0,03)	0,09 (0,02)
Science	0,01 (0,04)	0,06 (0,03)	0,06 (0,02)
Reading	-0,11 (0,05)	-0,08 (0,03)	-0,08 (0,02)
Collaborative problem solving	-0,16 (0,05)	-0,12 (0,02)	-0,13 (0,02)
Students' perceived ICT competence	0,26 (0,05)	0,16 (0,01)	0,20 (0,01)
Students' perceived autonomy related to ICT use	0,30 (0,05)	0,20 (0,02)	0,26 (0,01)
ICT interest	-0,04 (0,05)	0,05 (0,01)	0,07 (0,01)
Environmental awareness	0,06 (0,05)	0,10 (0,02)	0,08 (0,01)
Environmental optimism	0,16 (0,05)	0,07 (0,02)	0,09 (0,01)
Enjoyment of science	-0,05 (0,05)	0,09 (0,02)	0,10 (0,01)
Interest in broad science topics	0,14 (0,05)	0,09 (0,02)	0,10 (0,02)
Instrumental motivation	-0,01 (0,05)	0,02 (0,02)	0,04 (0,01)
Collaboration and teamwork: enjoyment	-0,19 (0,05)	-0,05 (0,02)	-0,14 (0,02)
Collaboration and teamwork: value	-0,09 (0,05)	0,08 (0,02)	0,06 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 3.5 The impact of ethnicity presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Mathematics	0,16 (0,06)	0,20 (0,03)	0,28 (0,02)
Science	0,11 (0,06)	0,20 (0,03)	0,28 (0,02)
Reading	0,13 (0,06)	0,18 (0,03)	0,26 (0,02)
Collaborative problem solving	0,06 (0,06)	0,19 (0,03)	0,23 (0,02)
Students' perceived ICT competence	0,00 (0,05)	-0,04 (0,02)	-0,02 (0,02)
Students' perceived autonomy related to ICT use	0,01 (0,05)	-0,03 (0,02)	-0,03 (0,02)
ICT interest	-0,01 (0,05)	0,00 (0,02)	0,00 (0,02)
Environmental awareness	0,00 (0,06)	0,05 (0,02)	0,07 (0,02)
Environmental optimism	-0,01 (0,04)	-0,09 (0,02)	-0,11 (0,02)
Enjoyment of science	-0,10 (0,05)	-0,05 (0,02)	0,00 (0,02)
Interest in broad science topics	-0,09 (0,05)	-0,02 (0,02)	0,04 (0,02)
Instrumental motivation	-0,06 (0,05)	-0,06 (0,02)	-0,02 (0,02)
Collaboration and teamwork: enjoyment	0,01 (0,05)	-0,07 (0,02)	0,03 (0,02)
Collaboration and teamwork: value	-0,01 (0,05)	-0,05 (0,02)	-0,03 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

3.3 Other studies

3.3.1 Foreign languages

Two interesting studies have been performed in the past to assess foreign language skills and one of them cross-nationally: DELF and SurveyLang. DELF measures French language skills longitudinally since 2008 among five different cohorts, whereas SurveyLang measured cross-nationally French, English and other foreign language skills among 8th graders (2nd grade in lower secondary school) in 2011. We discuss first the results of DELF and thereafter the results of SurveyLang.

Taking into account sample size, age of students and year of study, we focus here on the third cohort (9th grade) and the fourth cohort (12th grade) of the DELF study whose skills were measured in 2013 and 2015 respectively. As we can see from table 3.6, there is no large difference with regard to gender and region, but there is a difference in achievement level depending on education track and home language. If students speak French at home, their score is 50% higher. In addition, students in Allgemeinbildung have a higher score than students in Technische Bildung and Berufsbildung. However, the author of the DELF report did not present standard errors and therefore we do not have sufficient information to investigate the statistical significance of these differences.

Table 3.6 French language skills of 9th and 12th graders in Ostbelgien according to gender, home language, region and education track

	Cohort 3 (9 th grade) Number of students	Cohort 3 (9 th grade) Score	Cohort 4 (12 th grade) Number of students	Cohort 4 (12 th grade) Score
Allgemeinbildung	100	61,92	103	57,96
Technische Bildung	32	42,28	56	50,84
Berufsbildung	16	32,88	11	49,77
Boys	82	54,23	113	54,68
Girls	86	54,90	101	54,39
North	85	55,46	112	55,25
South	63	53,27	102	53,76
French at home	32	76,67	56	75,14
Other language at home	116	48,42	158	47,24

Source Mazziotto (2015)

DELf does not allow comparisons with other countries and the other language communities in Belgium. SurveyLang, conducted in 2011 among 8th graders, in contrast, provides data to make comparisons. SurveyLang measured English and French in the three language communities. In Ostbelgien, 1006 and 763 students for French and English respectively were tested (ESLC, 2012). Each language test combined three parts, each evaluated separately: reading, listening and writing. According to the SurveyLang report for Ostbelgien, students there appear to perform equally well as students in other European countries in case of French, but worse in case of English. However, students in Ostbelgien appear to perform better than Flemish students in case of French, and better than students in the French speaking community in case of English. However, no information has been provided to define statistically significant differences (ESLC, 2012).

According to SurveyLang, students in the north performed better in French than students in the south, whereas girls performed better in French than boys. These two observations appear to contrast observations based on DELf. More in line with the DELf study, students in the track Allgemeinbildung performed better in foreign language skills (English) than other students, whereas students in bilingual courses performed better in French than students who are taught only in German. However, no information has been provided to define statistically significant differences. Moreover, the results differ between SurveyLang and DELf and no valid inferences can be made with regard to differences in observations.

3.3.2 Citizenship

There are two interesting studies that highlight the civic competences of young adolescents: (1) a study performed in 2011 among a representative sample people from the age of 16 in Ostbelgien (FORSA-Umfrage); and (2) a study on citizenship among secondary school students in 2016 (Fit fürs Leben? Bürgerkunde in Schulischer und Beruflicher Bildung). Both give an indication of the interest of adolescents in politics and social issues, their self-rated civic knowledge and attitudes towards migrants.

3.3.2.1 The Forsa study (2010-2011)

a) Attitudes towards politics

The following tables give an impression of how much adolescents and young adults value politics and civic engagement, compared to older adults in Ostbelgien. Political interest appears to rise with age (table 3.7). Whereas 25% of adolescents and young adults until the age of 29 said that they are totally not interested, merely 16% or less of those who are 30 years old or older said so. Only one third of adolescents and young adults appears to be (very) interested. A very similar distribution can be seen in table 3.8. Moreover, interest in civic engagement too rises with age (table 3.9). The relationship between age and political interest is for all three measures statistically significant ($\alpha = .05$).

These figures date from 2010-2011, but are comparable to the results of the recent study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018). It was observed that 21% of those born in 1989 were totally not and 53% not very much interested in politics (27-28-year-olds). However, it appears, according to the same study, that today young adults born in 1999 (17-18-year-olds) were in 2016 slightly more interested in politics than their older counterparts. Forty percent of them are (strongly) interested in contrast with 26% of the 28-year-olds (cf. paragraph 3.3.2.2). However, there is no sufficient information to calculate the statistical significance of this generation gap.

Table 3.7 To what extent are you interested in politics (in %)? (N 993)

	16-29 year olds	30-44 year olds	45-59 year olds	≥60 year olds
Very much	7,0	15,0	13,0	18,0
Much	16,0	33,0	33,0	29,0
Not very much	52,0	37,0	40,0	37,0
Not at all	25,0	14,0	14,0	16,0
Don't know / no answer	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Polis-sinus (2011)

Table 3.8 To what extent are you interested in the political affairs in Ostbelgien (in %)? (N 993)

	16-29 year olds	30-44 year olds	45-59 year olds	≥60 year olds
Very much	6,0	13,0	14,0	19,0
Much	16,0	40,0	35,0	32,0
Not very much	58,0	36,0	40,0	38,0
Not at all	19,0	11,0	11,0	11,0
Don't know / no answer	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Polis-sinus (2011)

Table 3.9 To what extent does citizen participation play a role in your life (in %)? (N 993)

	16-29 year olds	30-44 year olds	45-59 year olds	≥60 year olds
Very much	16,0	13,0	18,0	20,0
Much	47,0	57,0	53,0	53,0
Not very much	31,0	28,0	25,0	20,0
Not at all	4,0	2,0	2,0	6,0
Don't know / no answer	1,0	0,0	1,0	1,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Polis-sinus (2011)

b) Attitudes towards migrants

People were also asked in the FORSA study about their attitude towards immigrants. Although age differences are not as large as the age differences for attitudes toward politics and civic engagement, young people do seem to be slightly more hesitant towards immigrants than older people (the relationship is statistically significant for table 3.10 and table 3.11; $\alpha = .05$). Whereas 34% of people who are 60 years old or older believed living together with immigrants does not cause problems at all, only 15% of adolescents and young adults believed so (table 3.10). Overall, one third of adolescents or young adults believed there might be (major) problems when living together and have certain reservations about immigrants (table 3.11). Nevertheless, two thirds believed there are too many immigrants living in their region (table 3.12). These results are comparable to the results found in a different study among 9th graders (secondary school) (Baier, 2011). Baier (2011) observed that 45% of 9th graders (highly) agreed with anti-immigrant statements. This percentage appears to be higher than the percentage in Germany. However, no comparisons can be made with other language communities.

Table 3.10 How would you evaluate the way in which natives and foreigners live together in Ostbelgien? To what extent are there any problems (in %)? (N 993)

	16-29 year olds	30-44 year olds	45-59 year olds	≥60 year olds
Very much	5,0	5,0	7,0	5,0
Much	27,0	26,0	25,0	21,0
Not very much	50,0	46,0	43,0	35,0
Not at all	15,0	18,0	23,0	34,0
Don't know / no answer	3,0	4,0	2,0	5,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Polis-sinus (2011)

Table 3.11 Are you open towards immigrants or do you have any reservations towards them (in %)? (N 993)

	16-29 year olds	30-44 year olds	45-59 year olds	≥60 year olds
Rather open-minded	65,0	69,0	70,0	70,0
I have certain reservations	31,0	29,0	28,0	28,0
Don't know / no answer	4,0	3,0	3,0	2,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Polis-sinus (2011)

Table 3.12 Do you think that Ostbelgien should accommodate more immigrants compared to the past or do you think that there are already too many immigrants living in the region (in %)? (N 993)

	16-29 year olds	30-44 year olds	45-59 year olds	≥60 year olds
Should accommodate more immigrants	20,0	25,0	23,0	21,0
Already too many immigrants in the region	69,0	65,0	67,0	63,0
Don't know / no answer	11,0	11,0	10,0	16,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Polis-sinus (2011)

3.3.2.2 Civic education in Ostbelgien

Five years after the FORSA-Umfrage, the Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend conducted a study on citizenship in Ostbelgien among 7th, 9th and 11th graders in seven secondary schools. In some schools, all students of the aforementioned grades participated in the study, whereas in others, some grades were randomly selected to take part in the study (Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend, 2016). In total, 1002 students, approximately 60% of the student population in the 7th, 9th and 11th grade, filled in the questionnaire. Although girls, particularly in the 11th grade, 7th graders and students from catholic schools are (slightly) overrepresented, the study provides interesting and relevant information about Ostbelgien students' civic competences.

According to table 3.13 more than two third of the students is confident when it comes to the knowledge or understanding of social relevant and economic issues such as human rights, interest, asylum, current events and nuclear power plants. Almost 70% believes they are sufficiently prepared for society, although only half of the students said they know what social security is. Moreover, less than half of the students feels confident when it comes to hard core politics: the structure of the federal government, the distinction between the parliament and the government, the political parties in Ostbelgien and the role of unions. Nevertheless, nearly 50% said to be interested in politics and other socially relevant issues and 61% believes it is important to learn about these issues at school (table 3.14). A direct comparison with results in the other language communities is not possible due to the lack of comparable data. However, according to a Flemish study on global education in secondary schools Flemish students, too, appeared to be eager to learn more about political and social issues, more than adults often expect (Van Ongevalle et al., 2015).

Table 3.13 Self-evaluation of civic knowledge (in %) (N 1002)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No answer
I am informed about the political structure of the Belgian state.	27,0	36,5	27,8	7,4	1,2
I know the difference between the parliament and the government.	22,7	33,6	27,1	16,0	0,6
I know what social security is.	16,4	25,7	33,5	23,4	1,0
I can list at least 4 political parties of the parliament in Ostbelgien.	41,3	32,2	14,3	10,6	1,6
I know what human rights are.	2,3	5,6	28,4	62,2	1,5
I know the role of labour unions.	31,0	35,8	16,8	14,7	1,7
I know what interest rates are..	7,8	11,8	28,7	50,4	1,3
I know what asylum means.	7,8	7,1	29,1	55,1	0,9
I am informed about the current events (wars, economy, local topics)	3,4	13,2	43,9	38,5	1,0
I know the problems of nuclear power plants.	7,9	19,2	35,1	37,3	0,5
I am prepared for life in society.	8,0	20,9	40,9	27,5	2,7

Source Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend (2016)

Table 3.14 Interest in politics (in %) (N 1002)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No answer
I am interested in politics, society, current affairs, economics.	18,5	31,0	34,1	14,4	2,0
I think it's important to get information about these topics at school.	9,1	17,9	41,7	29,4	1,9

Source Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend (2016)

In the following tables we present the impact of various student and learning environment characteristics on civic competences. We performed a linear regression analysis on two latent variables: self-rated knowledge (Cronbach's α .779), based on the items of table 3.7, and interest (Cronbach's α .993), based on the items of table 3.8. No weights were used, and no missing data were imputed.

According to table 3.15 the impact of socio-economic background is substantial. Students with at least one highly-qualified parent and students with at least one parent belonging to a political party or a union, feel significantly more confident about their civic knowledge than other students. This result is in line with the results of the ICCS 2016 study in Flanders where socio-economic status is significantly related with knowledge about politics (Schapermans et al., 2017). Age also seems to be important: the higher the grade, the higher the self-rated score for civic knowledge. Apparently, socio-demographic background does not appear to have an impact on one's political and social interest. Only grade and the region contribute significantly to the explanation of interest (table 3.16). Students in the south are more interested and eager to learn at school about political and social issues than students in the north. However, this time there is a negative relationship between age, measured by grade, and political interest. The older one gets, the less interested one is. This is comparable to the results of ICCS 2016 in Flanders. In Flanders, too, civic knowledge increases and interest decreases with age among young adolescents. Nevertheless, based on the FORSA-study we may hypothesize that interest might rise gradually again when adolescents leave school, enter the labour market and start a family.

Table 3.15 The impact of student and learning environment characteristics on self-evaluation of civic knowledge, presented by standard coefficients (N 779)

	Model 0	Model 1
Boy	-0,01	0,009
Political party or labour union (yes)		
• Political party or labour union (no)	-0,132 ***	-0,127 ***
• Political party or labour union (no answer)	-0,072*	-0,054
Parents' highest educational degree (Higher education)		
• Primary education or no diploma	-0,127 ***	-0,129 ***
• Mittlere Reife (i.e. German intermediate school degree)	-0,097 **	-0,107 **
• Abitur	-0,093 **	-0,091 *
• Geselle, Meister (i.e. master craftman or journeyman)	0,033	0,026
• I don't know	-0,272 ***	-0,222 ***
North	0,061	0,013
Grade (first grade)		
• Grade (third grade)		0,106 **
• Grade (fifth grade)		0,237 ***
Catholic school		-0,048
R ²	32,7%	38,9%

* * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Source Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend (2016)

Table 3.16 The impact of student and learning environment characteristics on political interest, presented by standard coefficients (N 929)

	Model 0	Model 1
Boy	0,061	0,037
Political party or labour union (yes)		
• Political party or labour union (no)	0,038	0,035
• Political party or labour union (no answer)	0,261	0,258
Parents' highest educational degree (Higher education)		
• Primary education or no diploma	-0,166	-0,229
• Mittlere Reife (i.e. German intermediate school degree)	-0,066	-0,114
• Abitur	-0,022	-0,06
• Geselle, Meister (i.e. master craftman or journeyman)	-0,133	-0,157
• I don't know	0,009	-0,098
North	-0,041	-0,167 *
Grade (first grade)		
• Grade (third grade)		-0,168 *
• Grade (fifth grade)		-0,242 **
Catholic school		-0,293
R ²	7,8%	16,2%

* * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Source Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend (2016)

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we provided an overview of the performance level of adolescents and young adults for various key competences: ICT related competences, mathematical and scientific competences, reading and foreign languages, and civic competences. These competences can all be considered important throughout (young) adults' life (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). We investigated, when possible, differences between the three language communities of Belgium and differences within Ostbelgien according to socio-demographic characteristics.

Overall, students in Ostbelgien appear to perform equally well or better than the average OECD student, but slightly less when they are compared to students from Flanders. However, students in Ostbelgien do perform better in terms of French language skills and attitude towards collaboration than Flanders. Moreover, socio-economic background and ethnicity have a weaker impact on students' competences. Also, few evidences were found for regional differences within Ostbelgien. In Ostbelgien, students in the south appear only to be more interested in politics than in the north. In addition, political interest seems to decline with age among young adolescents, regardless of the region they live in. Nevertheless, we may hypothesize, based on the FORSA-Umfrage and the study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018), that interest but also a positive attitude towards immigrants may gradually rise when adolescents leave school, enter the labour market and start a family. Moreover, there is an indication that the youngest generation who leaves school today, might be slightly more interested than previous generations (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018). However, this requires further investigation.

4 | School well-being and learning

4.1 Introduction

To achieve key competences or learning outcomes, school well-being is considered an important contributor (cf. Gutman & Forhaus, 2012). In this chapter we discuss how students feel at school, how motivated they are and to what extent they receive parental support. Furthermore, we present figures with regard to grade repetition, truancy, mobbing and early school leavers. When possible, we discuss the impact of socio-demographic characteristics. We used the PISA 2015 data and data from the European Labour Force Survey 2016. We also refer to the study on Baier's (2011) study on violence and media consumption of children and adolescents in Ostbelgien (i.e. Gewalterfahrungen und Medienkonsum von Kindern und Jugendlichen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens).

4.2 School well-being, motivation and parental support

At least 88% of students in Ostbelgien feels supported by their parents. Most parents show interest in their school activities, support educational efforts and encourage students to be confident (see Appendix A, table a1.8). Students in Ostbelgien spend on average 15 hours a week on studying outside school (table 4.1). Parental support and out-of-school study time do not appear to differ between the three different language communities. Although no significant difference could be found with regard to out-of-school study time among the three language communities, there is a clear difference in case of achievement motivation between Ostbelgien and the French speaking community, but not between Ostbelgien and Flanders. Three quarters of the Ostbelgien students wants top grades and more than 90% wants to be able to select from among the best opportunities when they graduate. Almost 60% sees themselves as an ambitious person (see Appendix A, table a1.9). However, French speaking students seem to be even more motivated.

Another notable and significant difference can be found for school well-being. Many more students in Ostbelgien feel comfortable at school than in the other language communities. Three quarters said they make friends easily and feel like they belong at school. Only 13% to 17% said they feel lonely at school or like an outsider (see Appendix A, table a1.10).

There are no significant differences between the language communities with regard to the impact of socio-demographic characteristics (table 4.2, table 4.3 and table 4.4). In Ostbelgien, there is a small positive effect of socio-economic status on achievement motivation and parental support and girls experience higher parental support than boys. No significant effect of ethnicity could be found in Ostbelgien.

Table 4.1 School well-being, motivation and parental support of 15-year-olds according to PISA

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Parental support	0,09 (0,05)	-0,01 (0,02)	-0,01 (0,02)
Achievement motivation	-0,56 (0,04)	-0,24 (0,02)	-0,62 (0,01)
School well-being	0,25 (0,06)	0,00 (0,02)	0,02 (0,01)
Out-of-school study time per week	14,85 (0,66)	16,57 (0,27)	14,27 (0,17)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not given here, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1 in chapter 3.

Source PISA 2015

Table 4.2 The impact of socio-economic background presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Emotional support by parents	0,13 (0,06)	0,14 (0,02)	0,15 (0,01)
Achievement motivation	0,11 (0,05)	0,01 (0,02)	0,05 (0,02)
School well-being	0,07 (0,05)	0,07 (0,02)	0,08 (0,02)
Out-of-school study time per week	0,03 (0,05)	-0,02 (0,02)	0,03 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 4.3 The impact of gender presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Emotional support by parents	-0,10 (0,05)	0,00 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,01)
Achievement motivation	0,09 (0,05)	0,01 (0,02)	0,09 (0,01)
School well-being	-0,05 (0,06)	0,05 (0,02)	0,05 (0,01)
Out-of-school study time per week	-0,03 (0,05)	0,03 (0,02)	-0,02 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 4.4 The impact of ethnicity presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Emotional support by parents	-0,03 (0,05)	-0,02 (0,02)	0,05 (0,02)
Achievement motivation	-0,08 (0,06)	-0,14 (0,02)	-0,16 (0,02)
School well-being	0,08 (0,06)	0,00 (0,02)	-0,01 (0,02)
Out-of-school study time per week	-0,03 (0,07)	-0,06 (0,02)	-0,02 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

4.3 Bullying

School violence can severely effect one's school well-being. According to the PISA 2015 data, 16% of the young people in Ostbelgien was regularly bullied within the last month. This number is slightly lower than the OECD-average of 18.7%. Moreover, 1,2% of the young people in Ostbelgien mentioned that they were regularly hit or pushed around by other students (table 4.5). Compared

with the other language communities this is, together with the frequency of being let out on purpose, significantly lower. Slightly more students said others made fun of them (9% in Ostbelgien) or spread nasty rumours (7% in Ostbelgien). In other words, mental abuse occurs more often than physical abuse. This has also been observed in the study of Baier (2011) among 9th graders in Ostbelgien with 7% of students having experienced mental bullying a few times a month in contrast with 2% reporting physical abuse (Baier, 2011). These figures appeared to be slightly lower than German figures (Baier, 2011). Furthermore, according to the PISA 2015 study, bullying occurs less often in schools in which the students and teachers enjoy a good relationship with each other (OECD, 2017d; Sereni).

Table 4.5 Regional differences in exposure to bullying at least a few times a month (%)

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Other students left me out on purpose	3,2 (0,8)	7,1 (0,5)	5,0 (0,3)
Other students made fun of me	9,1 (1,6)	12,5 (0,6)	10,0 (0,5)
I was threatened by other students	2,8 (0,9)	3,3 (0,4)	2,2 (0,2)
Other students looked away or destroyed my things	3,3 (0,9)	3,3 (0,3)	2,7 (0,3)
I got hit or pushed by other students	1,1(0,6)	2,9 (0,3)	3,2 (0,3)
Other students spread nasty rumours about me	7,0 (1,4)	7,8 (0,5)	9,6 (0,4)
Students who experienced any act of bullying	16,1	19,6	17,7

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not given here, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1 in chapter 3.

Source OECD (2017d)

4.4 Grade retention and early school leavers

4.4.1 Grade retention

When students feel less well at school, they might show a higher risk for truancy, grade retention and early school leaving (cf. Lamote, 2011). According to the PISA 2015 study, 16% of the students in Ostbelgien skipped some classes at least one or two times the last two weeks and 12% a whole day. Forty percent was at least one or two times late for class (see Appendix, table a1.11). For comparison, Baier (2011) observed that 41% of 9th graders at least once skipped a whole day during their last school year. Interestingly, students in Ostbelgien are significantly less often late for class than in the other three language communities, but appear to skip classes more often than Flemish students (table 4.6). In addition, more students have repeated a grade at least once during their school career than in Flanders. Thirty one percent repeated a grade in Ostbelgien, compared to 24% in Flanders and 46% in the French speaking community. Despite statistical significant differences among these communities, the percentage is rather high in all three compared to other OECD countries (OECD average is 12%; OECD, 2017d).

In particular grade repetition appears to be related to socio-demographic background (table 4.7, table 4.8 and table 4.9). Boys, students who have not at least one parent born in Belgium and socially disadvantaged students have a higher risk to repeat a grade. The gender impact is significantly larger in Ostbelgien than in Flanders. Boys are also more likely to come late, as well as immigrant students, or skip a class. These results differ from the results of the study of Baier (2011). He observed no impact of gender on truancy, but instead an impact of ethnicity. This could be due to a different measurement scale, as well due to a different sample size. In addition, there was no difference between north and south (Baier, 2011). The most important reasons found by Baier (2011) for truancy are: not feeling like going to school (75%), sleeping in (48%), others do the same (39%), skipping a test or an exam (34%) and not having finished their homework (31%).

Table 4.6 Grade retention by 15-year-olds according to PISA

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Grade repetition	0,31 (0,01)	0,46 (0,02)	0,24 (0,01)
Skip classes whole day the last two weeks	1,16 (0,03)	1,13 (0,01)	1,07 (0,01)
Skip some classes the last two weeks	1,19 (0,02)	1,24 (0,02)	1,10 (0,01)
Late for class the last two weeks	1,64 (0,04)	1,87 (0,03)	1,75 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not given here, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1 in chapter 3.

Source PISA 2015

Table 4.7 The impact of socio-economic background presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Grade repetition	-0,24 (0,05)	-0,35 (0,02)	-0,26 (0,02)
Skip classes whole day the last two weeks	-0,06 (0,08)	-0,09 (0,02)	-0,06 (0,02)
Skip some classes the last two weeks	-0,03 (0,07)	-0,07 (0,03)	-0,07 (0,02)
Late for class the last two weeks	0,04 (0,05)	-0,09 (0,02)	-0,08 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 4.8 The impact of gender presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Grade repetition	0,16 (0,03)	0,10 (0,02)	0,02 (0,02)
Skip classes whole day the last two weeks	0,10 (0,04)	0,03 (0,02)	0,02 (0,01)
Skip some classes the last two weeks	0,09 (0,05)	0,07 (0,02)	0,02 (0,01)
Late for class the last two weeks	0,08 (0,04)	0,07 (0,02)	0,05 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 4.9 The impact of ethnicity presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Grade repetition	-0,12 (0,05)	-0,11 (0,02)	-0,20 (0,02)
Skip classes whole day the last two weeks	-0,06 (0,06)	-0,10 (0,03)	-0,07 (0,02)
Skip some classes the last two weeks	-0,06 (0,05)	-0,11 (0,03)	-0,07 (0,02)
Late for class the last two weeks	-0,16 (0,05)	-0,11 (0,02)	-0,13 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

4.4.2 Early school leavers

Bullying, truancy and grade retention can increase the risk for early school leaving (cf. De Witte et al., 2014; Lamote, 2011). The Labour Force Survey (LFS) gives an estimation of the percentage of 18-24-year-olds who are early school leavers (table 4.10). Approximately 10% appears to be early school leavers. There are more male than female school leavers. For comparison: 8% of 15-year-olds

believes they will leave school early and attain at the most a lower secondary education degree, according to PISA 2015 (see Appendix A, table a1.12). The LFS estimation for Ostbelgien is higher than for the other regions. However, this is only an estimation based on a small sample. As a result, the confidence interval is large for Ostbelgien, and the actual estimation may lay between 7% and 14% (95% confidence interval). In addition, it is worthwhile to know that Flemish estimations based on population data have shown that numbers based on LFS are in general underestimated (Van Landeghem & Van Damme, 2004). This might also be true for the other language communities and countries.

Table 4.10 Early school leavers in 2016 (in %)

Place of residence		
Ostbelgien	Men	12,4
	Women	8,0
	Total	10,3
French community	Men	11,3
	Women	9,4
	Total	10,3
Flemish community	Men	8,5
	Women	5,1
	Total	6,8
Belgium	Men	10,2
	Women	7,4
	Total	8,8

* 95% confidence interval for the percentage of young adults who dropped out prematurely Ostbelgien: (6,6%; 13,9%)

Source LFS 2016

4.5 Conclusion

To achieve key competences or learning outcomes, school well-being is considered to be an important contributor (cf. Gutman & Forhaus, 2012). School well-being can be affected by bullying experiences, and low school well-being may, in addition to other factors, lead to truancy, grade retention and even early school leaving (cf. De Witte et al., 2014; Lamote, 2011). In this chapter we discussed these phenomena and observed that in general, students in Ostbelgien feel more comfortable at school than in the other language communities. In addition, less students are left out on purpose or hit or pushed by other students. They are less often late for classes, but position themselves between the Flemish students and students from the French speaking community with regard to grade repetition and skipping classes. In the end, Ostbelgien might experience more or less a similar percentage of early school leavers as other language communities. When we looked at the impact of socio-demographic background, we did not observe large differences between the communities. However, within the communities boys do show a higher risk for truancy, grade repetition and/or early school leaving (cf. De Witte et al., 2014; Lamote, 2011).

5 | Educational career ambitions and educational attainment

5.1 Introduction

After leaving secondary school, school leavers usually opt for higher education or vocational training. But how many students transfer precisely to higher education or vocational training in Ostbelgien? How many students transfer to the labour market immediately? In this chapter we highlight the educational career ambitions of those who have not left school yet, but also the actual level of educational attainment. We use various sources: quantitative data from the PISA 2015 study, the LFS 2016 study and the Kaleido Ostbelgien 2017 study. We compare these results with results from the study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018) and our qualitative data collected in focus group discussions.

5.2 Educational career ambitions

5.2.1 15-year-olds' educational career ambitions and choice of study field

5.2.1.1 15-year-olds' educational career ambitions

In the previous chapter we discussed 15-year-olds' achievement motivation. Although more than 90% of Ostbelgien students said they want to be able to select from among the best opportunities when they graduate, this ambition seems to be even significantly higher in the French speaking community but lower in Flanders (cf. table 4.1 in chapter 4). In contrast with this ambition, students in Flanders expect to attain a higher educational level than students in Ostbelgien. Students from Ostbelgien and from the French speaking community do not seem to differ in terms of expected level of educational attainment and expected occupational status, which also reflects in part the level of educational attainment. Students' expected occupational status was not measured in Flanders.

In line with the impact on students' competences, socio-economic background has a large impact on students' (educational) career ambitions (table 5.2). The impact is equally large in all three language communities. However, girls appear to have significantly lower ambitions, whereas students with no parents born in Belgium expect a lower future occupational status. Moreover, this gender gap for educational career ambitions appears to be larger in Ostbelgien than in Flanders.

Table 5.1 (Educational) career ambitions of 15-year-olds according to PISA

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Students' expected occupational status	55,70 (0,80)	57,87 (0,78)	
Expected level of educational attainment	4,21 (0,07)	4,38 (0,06)	4,65 (0,02)
Select among the best opportunities	3,32 (0,03)	3,45 (0,01)	3,24 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not given here, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1 in chapter 3.

Source PISA 2015

Table 5.2 The impact of socio-economic background presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Students' expected occupational status	0,37 (0,05)	0,27 (0,03)	
Expected level of educational attainment	0,33 (0,05)	0,34 (0,03)	0,35 (0,01)
Select among the best opportunities	0,13 (0,05)	0,11 (0,02)	0,10 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 5.3 The impact of gender presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Students' expected occupational status	-0,13 (0,05)	-0,07 (0,04)	
Expected level of educational attainment	-0,19 (0,04)	-0,08 (0,02)	-0,04 (0,02)
Select among the best opportunities	0,02 (0,05)	-0,06 (0,02)	0,01 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 5.4 The impact of ethnicity presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Students' expected occupational status	-0,16 (0,06)	-0,11 (0,03)	
Expected level of educational attainment	-0,02 (0,07)	0,00 (0,03)	0,05 (0,02)
Select among the best opportunities	-0,08 (0,05)	-0,02 (0,02)	-0,08 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

5.2.1.2 15-year-olds' educational choice of study field

Students were asked about what kind of job they expect to have at the age of 30. Whereas two out of ten does not know it yet, eight of ten already seems to have an idea (table 5.5). Two of ten mentioned they will have a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) job, and six of ten a profession not related to STEM. Interestingly, students in the French speaking community seem to have stronger ambitions to become a health professional than students in Ostbelgien.

Table 5.5 Students' expected occupation at the age of 30 (%)

	Ostbelgien	French community
Science and engineering professionals	8,6 (1,4)	8,6 (0,6)
Health professionals	8,1 (1,3)	12,5 (0,8)
Information and communication technology professionals	2,2 (0,8)	3,0 (0,3)
Science-related technicians and associate professionals	0,2 (0,2)	0,5 (0,1)
Other occupations	60,9 (2,2)	60,0 (1,4)
Vague career expectations or missings	19,9 (1,9)	15,5 (0,7)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

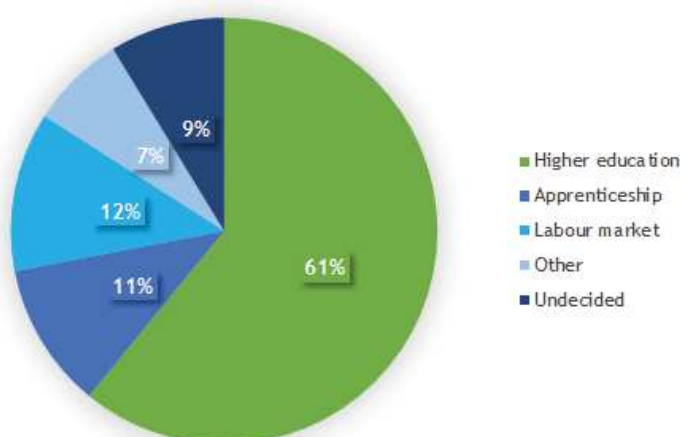
Source PISA (2017b)

5.2.2 Educational career ambitions of 12th graders

5.2.2.1 Desired trajectories and ambitions after the Abitur

a) Quantitative evidence

In May 2017, Kaleido Ostbelgien and Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft carried out a survey among secondary school leavers, focusing on their post-school trajectory (Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien, 2017). School leavers were asked what they want to do after finishing school (if already decided). They got 601 replies in total (58% allgemeinbildender Unterricht; 4% technischer Übergang, 23% technische Befähigung, 15% berufsbildender Unterricht). The vast majority of school leavers (89%) already knew what to do after having finished school (see figure 5.1). This is similar compared to the years before. Two thirds want to transfer to higher education and one out of ten students takes vocational training into consideration. Also one out of ten prefers going straight to the labour market.

Figure 5.1 Desired trajectories after the Abitur (May 2017)

Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017)

Educational career ambitions seem to differ according to the education track as illustrated in table 5.6. About three quarters of all school leavers from the allgemeinbildende Schule opt for studying, and only a minority aims at pursuing vocational training. Among this group, the number of school leavers who have not yet decided what to do after the Abitur is the lowest with about 5%. 63% of school leavers in the technische Übergang and 48% in the technische Befähigung plan to study, but

about one fifth in both groups wants to pursue vocational training. In the latter group, 17% plans to work right after having finished school. This figure is highest among school leavers from Berufsbildung, of which 42% plans to work after having finished school. In this group, about 18% plans to study, 15% wants to pursue vocational training and almost 18% had not decided what to do after school by May 2017. The relationship between choice and education track is statistically significant ($\alpha = .05$).

Table 5.6 Desired trajectories after the Abitur according to type of school (May 2017)

	Higher education	Apprenticeship	Labour market	Other	Undecided	Total
Allgemeinbildender Unterricht	77,1%	6,1%	2,6%	9,0%	5,2%	100,0%
Technischer Übergang	63,0%	18,5%	7,4%	3,7%	7,4%	100,0%
Technische Befähigung	47,8%	20,1%	17,2%	3,0%	11,9%	100,0%
Berufsbildung	17,8%	14,4%	42,2%	7,8%	17,8%	100,0%

Source: Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017)

b) Qualitative evidence

The four focus groups with school leavers particularly dealt with the transition from school to higher education and the corresponding aspirations and ambitions. Since the focus groups were carried out about half a year before leaving school, all participants had already taken decisions or were about to take decisions regarding the upcoming transition. Our findings based on these focus groups reflect our aforementioned findings based on quantitative data.

Nearly all school leavers want to continue their education at a university or Hochschule, which could be linked to the fact that most of the focus group participants were attending the allgemeinbildende Unterricht. Yet, nearly everybody pointed out the existence of an information asymmetry with regard to possible post-school trajectories. Specifically, schools seem to provide much more information about higher education than about the possibility of undertaking vocational training.

„Es geht immer Richtung Unis – wir bekommen kaum Informationen, welche Berufe man beispielsweise erlernen kann. Wir wissen beinahe nichts über Ausbildungsberufe.“
(Participant, focus group in a Catholic school)

Some school leavers even mentioned that schools and their social environments expect them to go to university, as a vocational training degree is broadly considered as inferior to a university degree.

School leavers are generally curious about the transition ahead of them, but they feel also some insecurity in this respect. Some doubt about their choice of a particular study subject, others fear that living on their own could be challenging, and many are worried about maintaining their friendships and social environments in Ostbelgien. However, particularly in the Ostbelgien's northern part, many school leavers are welcoming the upcoming transition in the sense that they will be able to (partially) leave Ostbelgien. This is different in the southern part, where most school leavers are already certain about returning home every weekend and after their studies.

„Es gibt nicht viel, was mich hier halten würde. Ich habe meine ganze Kindheit hier verbracht, da muss ich nicht auch noch hier zur Uni gehen. Das Studium ist der Schritt, wo man seinen eigenen Weg gehen muss.“ (Participant, focus group in a Catholic school)

„Ich fühle mich nicht gut vorbereitet auf den Wandel, aber das würde ich nicht negativ sehen. Ich wüsste nicht, wie man sich auf so einen Wandel gut vorbereiten kann, denn es erwartet uns jetzt ein kompletter Umbruch.“(Participant, focus group in a public school)

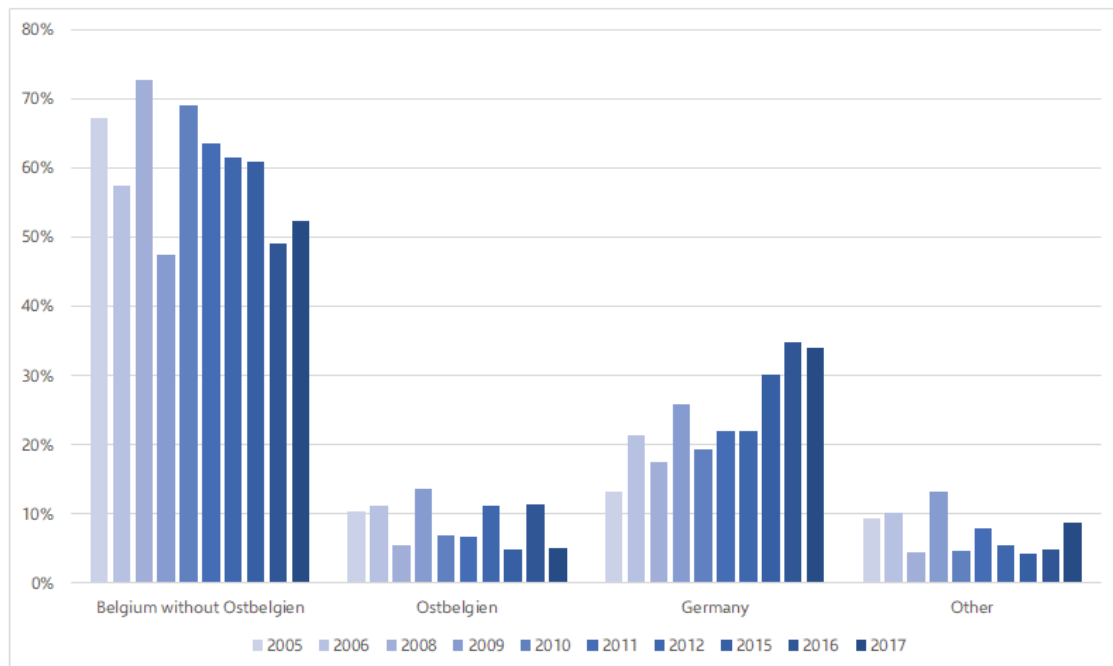
„Man wird stolpern, vielleicht auch hinfallen, aber das gehört dazu.“(Participant, focus group in a public school)

5.2.2.2 Preferred study locations

a) Quantitative evidence

As shown in figure 5.2, most school leavers would want to stay in Belgium for their studies (57%; cf. with the 61% of the birth cohort of 1999 in the study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018). Five percent would like to stay in Ostbelgien, whereas 52% in other parts of Belgium. The percentage of students wanted to stay in Belgium to study was highest in 2008 with nearly 80% (cf. with the birth cohort of 1989 in the study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018). Since then, a growing number of students have become interested in studying abroad. In 2017, 34% of the students wanted to study in Germany in contrast with 18% of the students in 2008. However, this current ambition appears to differ between the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien, where 50% and 11% respectively consider Germany as a study location (Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien, 2017). According to the study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018), 60% of those who want to pursue vocational training prefer Belgium, followed by 30% who prefer Germany. When school leavers are asked in which city they want to study, Liège appears to be the most popular city, followed by Aachen and Eupen. Other cities like Louvain-La-Neuve, Brussels and Maastricht are far less popular. Leuven was not mentioned in the study (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018).

Figure 5.2 Preferred study regions and/or countries (2005-2017)



Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017)

b) Qualitative evidence

The findings based on quantitative data were confirmed by our qualitative evidence based on focus group discussions. A vast majority of school leavers planned to stay in Belgium. In the northern part of Ostbelgien, studying in Liège was particularly popular, whereas in the southern part, Liège or Louvain-la-Neuve were the locations of choice. Therefore, studying in Belgium means studying in Wallonia – Flanders as possible study location is hardly considered by school leavers.

„Wir haben renommierte Unis in der Nähe – warum sollten wir dann nach Flandern gehen. Außerdem können wir z. B. in Liège in einer Sprache studieren, die uns näher liegt als Flämisch.“ (Participant, focus group Catholic school)

As illustrated in the quote, the main reason for choosing Wallonia is the language. School leavers want to study in French in order to improve and to perfect their language skills. Although many school leavers are slightly worried about studying entirely in French, they see the necessity to do so. This is linked to Ostbelgien's geographical location. Being partially surrounded by Wallonia explains the importance of French in Ostbelgien. Moreover, jobs in Ostbelgien (and around) would often require advanced French language skills. Therefore, the study time in Wallonia is considered the best way to work on one's language skills. Yet, it is remarkable that only two locations are seriously considered for studying in Wallonia, i.e. Liège and Louvain-la-Neuve. According to most school leavers, other university cities offering studies in French, such as Brussels or Mons, would simply be too far away from Ostbelgien.

As illustrated in figure 5.2, only a minority of school leavers considers studying in Ostbelgien. This has two reasons. On the one hand, the choice of subjects offered by the Autonome Hochschule Eupen is very limited. On the other hand, many school leavers consider the study period as the time to gain independence and to start living on his/her own. Therefore, they see the necessity of leaving their homes in Ostbelgien to gather the aforementioned experiences. These experiences could also be gathered in Flanders, yet, studying in this part of the countries is hardly an option for school leavers. This is primarily linked to language issues. School leavers do not want to study in Dutch because of two reasons. First, they consider the language not to be useful for their future career (in Ostbelgien or elsewhere). Second, those school leavers who learnt Dutch in school, evaluate their language skills rather negatively, i.e. they do not think that their Dutch skills suffice for studying in Flanders.

„Französisch ist viel weiter verbreitet - Niederländisch spricht man nur in Flandern und den Niederlanden. Niederländisch bringt einen nicht weiter.“ (Participant, focus group public school)

Especially in the northern part of Ostbelgien, a vast amount of school leavers considers studying in Germany (particularly in Aachen) because of several reasons. The two most important reasons are proximity and language. For those living in or around Eupen, the small distance to Aachen allows for commuting on a daily basis. Hence, studying in Aachen is a good choice for those who do not want to leave Ostbelgien. Furthermore, studying in Aachen or somewhere else in Germany is particularly attractive for those who feel insecure with regard to their foreign language skills. A number of school leavers pointed out that their lacking language skills (or lacking confidentiality in those skills) would not leave them any other choice than studying in their native language in Germany.

„Ich bin kein Sprachtalent. Ich habe mich hier 12 Jahre durch Französisch durchgebissen, aber zum Studieren reicht es nicht. Deshalb Aachen.“ (Participant, focus group Catholic school)

Yet, there are three more aspects that encourage school leavers to study in Germany. First, the good reputation of particular subjects, especially engineering subjects in Aachen. Second, the possibilities to combine subjects as major and minor subjects (i.e. Haupt- und Nebenfach). Third, the freedom which studies in Germany offer in the sense that students plan their courses and exams relatively autonomously and do not study based on a pre-defined schedule.

Studying in other countries besides Belgium and Germany is hardly desired. School leavers may look into the offer of other universities close by, particularly Luxembourg (southern part of Ostbelgien) and Maastricht (northern part of Ostbelgien), but if it is not for a very specific subject that is only taught there, most school leavers do not have a preference to go there.

Another important issue coming up in the focus groups was the ambition to go abroad – after having graduated from school or during the studies, for instance in the context of the Erasmus programme. For the majority of school leavers, going abroad is considered a waste of time. On the one hand, as a gap year or Erasmus semester may delay their studies and students evaluate this possible delay negatively. On the other hand, going abroad has the connotation of going on holiday and being lazy, thus, it is not linked at all to gaining intercultural competences or improving language skills.

„Jetzt ein Auslandsjahr wäre ein verlorenes Jahr für mich. Ein Jahr, in dem ich hätte studieren oder mir eben mein Haus finanzieren können.“ (Participant, focus group public school)

„Erasmus interessiert mich nicht – so lange hier wegzubleiben geht nicht für mich. Vielleicht mache ich ein Praktikum in Brüssel, das fühlt sich quasi wie Erasmus an.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

Only a very small group of school leavers considers going abroad for one year after the studies – this is the group without clear ideas about the future. These school leavers primarily want to go abroad to get more time to make decisions for the future – and in that way, the additional time is not considered as entirely lost due to probably improving language and intercultural skills. Furthermore, particularly school leavers in the southern part of Ostbelgien emphasized that going abroad – for instance in the context of the Erasmus programme – is not an option for them due to being away from home (and the corresponding social environment) for too long.

5.2.2.3 Studienfachwünsche

a) Quantitative evidence

Table 5.7 illustrates the preferred study fields of school leavers based on the aforementioned study of Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft and Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017). The most popular field is Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen (i.e. health-related and social services). Thirty percent of the school leavers would want to choose for this field. This compares to 27% of school leavers, born in 1999, who want to work in this field according to the study of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018). However, it is in sharp contrast with the 8% of students in table 5.5 according to PISA. In PISA 2015 students were asked about their expectations with regard to becoming a health professional (as a STEM profession), which likely includes mainly the study of medicine, whereas in table 5.7 Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen likely includes other professions as well such as becoming a nurse or social worker. Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen is followed by Sozialwissenschaften, Wirtschaft und Recht (i.e. social sciences, economics and law). Twenty two percent of school leavers who want to go to higher education, wants to pursue studies in this field. STEM fields (engineering and natural sciences) have been chosen by only 10% of the school leavers, which is comparable with

the 11% of 15-year-olds who indicated they might become STEM professionals (without the health professionals; table 5.7). Nevertheless, these figures are low compared to Flemish figures. In Flanders, nearly one of five students who transfer to higher education decides to study engineering or science (Departement Onderwijs & Vorming, 2018).

Table 5.7 Preferred study subjects (2017)

	%
Health and social work	30,0
Social sciences, economics and law	22,0
Services	12,0
Education/pedagogy	11,0
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	10,0
Natural sciences	6,0
Humanities and Arts	4,0
Agriculture	1,0
Unknown	4,0
Total	100,0

Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017)

b) Qualitative evidence

About half a year before the transitions, a majority of school leavers of the focus groups has chosen a study subject. In general, traditional and well-known study fields are often selected, such as engineering, business and economics, law, ICT or pedagogy to become a teacher. Only a small number of school leavers opted for vocational training as they wanted to join the police, and an apprenticeship is the typical way of entering this organisation. A few school leavers also mentioned a broad interest in subjects linked to health and social issues (like nursing, teacher training). The choice of traditional study fields can be linked to the young adults' general desire for stability (see also chapter 6 and chapter 7 in this report). This is because graduates of these fields can relatively easily find decent employment on contemporary labour markets.

5.2.2.4 (Educational) career guidance

a) Quantitative evidence

Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft and Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017) asked school leavers who they turn to get career guidance. For most students the first contact person appeared to be within their family, among friends or acquaintances (41%). Twenty seven percent of school leavers received help from professionals, students or by means of internship. Only 13% of respondents said that an information event helped them make their decision. Nine percent of the students took individual advice (table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Factors/persons facilitating/influencing career decisions of school leavers

	%
Family / friends	41,0
Internships / practical training / students	27,0
Information events	13,0
Miscellaneous (travel, hobbies ...)	10,0
Individual counseling	9,0

Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft & Kaleido Ostbelgien 2017

According to the study of Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018) two thirds of the school leavers (17-18-year-olds) in 2016 felt that they were well informed during their school days

about potential jobs and study fields. However, one third felt that they have not been informed. The percentages are less favorable when asking for information about entrepreneurship, career opportunities and employers. Two thirds believe they have not been well informed, whereas one third believes they were. This might be a result of the fact that 70% of these respondents was in the *allgemeinbildende Schule* (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018). This percentage is higher than the actual percentage of approximately 55% of students in *allgemeinbildende Schule* (see table 2.9 in chapter 2). Taking into account that one quarter of school leavers does not know yet what profession exactly interests them and that two out of ten believe they do not know well their own talents (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018), more career guidance might be desirable for school leavers.

b) Qualitative evidence

Our qualitative data confirm the aforementioned findings. Most school leavers from the focus groups report to have taken their study decision relatively independently. The biggest source of inspiration and information was the family and social environment of school leavers. Many school leavers used their social environments to gather information about study fields, universities, or employment opportunities linked to specific study fields. Other valued sources of information are open door days of universities and the internet. Initiatives initiated by Ostbelgien – such as the *Schnupperwochen* – were only known by a minority of school leavers. Moreover, only a minority of them took part in this offer. Those who knew about this event but did not participate, pointed out that the choice of placements was too limited to rather simple jobs which would not require higher education.

Many school leavers mentioned that they would appreciate more information about study fields and the upcoming transitions at school. A vast number of school leavers is not aware of sources of information, such as *Kaleido Ostbelgien*, which for instance offers an overview of open door days of universities in the region. Furthermore, hardly any school leaver has taken career guidance (i.e. *Berufsberatung*) as offered by the *Arbeitsamt*. Despite the broad offer, some school leavers still mentioned problems in deciding what to specifically do after finishing school. They feel challenged by the sheer amount of possibilities and thus struggle with taking decisions.

„Jeder fragt nach, jeder erwartet so viel von dir – aber wie soll ich, 17 Jahre, so eine Entscheidung treffen? Eine Entscheidung, die perfekt ist. Ich hätte es am liebsten, wenn mir jemand sagen könnte, du machst das. Fertig. Du machst das.“ (Participant, focus group catholic school)

5.3 Educational attainment of young adolescents

According to PISA 2015, 53% of 15-year-olds expect to attain a higher educational degree (Hochschule and universities included; see Appendix A, table a1.12). According to *Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* and *Kaleido Ostbelgien* (2017) eight percent more school leavers expressed their wish to study in higher education. The study of the *Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien* (2018) observed that 51% of its 27-28-year-old respondents in 2017 had a higher educational degree. However, there is a high probability that highly-educated respondents have been overrepresented in this study. As not everyone succeeds in realizing one's educational career ambitions, the actual attained educational level is expected to be lower.

The actual educational attainment level among 30-34-year-olds in 2016 (table 5.9) is indeed lower than the aforementioned percentages. According to LFS only one third of adults in Ostbelgien at the age of 30 to 34 has a higher education degree. We do not have figures for adults younger than the

age of 30. However, due to small LFS sample size in Ostbelgien, the actual percentage is estimated to be between 26% and 41%. Taking into account the study of Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018), PISA 2015 and the study of Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft and Kaleido Ostbelgien (2017), we may hypothesize that the actual percentage of adults of the age of 34 or younger with a higher educational degree in Ostbelgien will most likely be found near the upper bound of the confidence interval of LFS (41%) than the lower bound (26%). But this requires further investigation.

Table 5.9 Percentage of 30-34-year-olds with a higher education diploma (2016)

Place of residence		
Ostbelgien	Men	27,0
	Women	39,8
	Total	33,3
French community	Men	35,9
	Women	43,2
	Total	39,6
Flemish community	Men	40,6
	Women	54,0
	Total	47,3
Belgium	Men	40,4
	Women	50,7
	Total	45,6

* 95% confidence interval for the educational level of adults between the age of 30 and 34 in Ostbelgien:
(25,9%; 40,8%)
Source LFS 2016

5.4 Conclusion

Students in Ostbelgien are ambitious. More than 90% want to be able to select from among the best opportunities when they graduate. Although slightly less students in Ostbelgien expect to attain a high educational level than their counterparts in Flanders, the lack of a university in their own region and the challenge to have to study in a different language or in a different country does not seem to stop them from realizing those ambitions. Nearly two thirds expressed their wish to go to higher education and one of ten to takes vocational training (in Ostbelgien or elsewhere) into consideration. However, these ambitions are tempered when the student is female, has a lower socio-economic background and according to education track. The impact of gender is even larger in Ostbelgien than in Flanders.

An increasing number of students is prepared to go abroad to study (Germany), whereas others are mostly going to university in the French speaking part of Belgium. Particularly, in Ostbelgien's northern part, many school leavers are welcoming the upcoming transition in the sense that they will be able to (partially) leave Ostbelgien. However, school leavers' ambition to go abroad is much lower when it comes to short-term studies, for example in the context of the Erasmus programme. These programmes are being considered less favourable and a waste of time. In addition, Flanders and the Netherlands seem hardly attractive to school leavers for long-term studies, in spite of geographic accessibility and language similarities between Dutch and German.

School leavers in Ostbelgien appear to be appealed by traditional study fields in higher education (e.g. business, law, engineering, pedagogy), out of a general desire for stability, but only a small

minority of them is appealed by (traditional) STEM fields of study and STEM professions. One of ten adolescents believes they would like to study sciences or engineering in higher education and might become a STEM professional at the age of 30. The lack of interest in STEM has been considered a problem in many western countries (Knipprath et al., 2018), but appears to be even lower in Ostbelgien than in Flanders (Departement Onderwijs & Vorming, 2018).

Although most school leavers fairly know what they would like to study and become, a considerable number of students feel they have not been sufficiently informed about (educational) career possibilities during school time and are not fully aware of current sources of information that exist. Most students manage to inform themselves by talking with their family, friends, acquaintances or professionals. Internships, open door days and other initiatives can be helpful as well, but only 13% of respondents said that an information event helped them make their decision. Taking this into account and the fact that at least 20% of school leavers cannot describe what their talents and motives are, career guidance could be very useful. However, this problem is not specifically a problem in Ostbelgien, but has been observed previously among secondary school students in Flanders as well (Knipprath & Nicaise, 2016). According to Flemish and Dutch studies, career guidance occurs at best as early as possible, in various ways, on a regular basis, by means of traditional sources of information as well as by means of career dialogues (Knipprath & Nicaise, 2016).

- PART 3 THE TRANSITION FROM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM TO THE LABOUR MARKET

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6 | The transition to the labour market

6.1 Introduction

Young adults in Ostbelgien feel challenged by the two major transitions they face, i.e. from school to higher education and from school or higher education to the labour market (including vocational training). In this chapter, we particularly focus on the latter and distinguish between two groups, namely those transiting from school to vocational training and those from higher education to work. This is because of differences with regard to these groups' labour market trajectories. This sub-chapter is structured as follows. We first shed light on the transitions from school to vocational training, highlighting particular challenges as well as perspectives. Then, transitions from higher education to work are described, again focusing on challenges, also related to the young adults' current labour market positions as well as perspectives. These sub-chapters are entirely based on qualitative data, but the next two sub-chapters give an overview about transitions and the labour market position of young adults based on secondary quantitative data, mainly received from the Arbeitsamt. The conclusions then summarize the most important aspects related to labour market transitions.

6.2 The transition from school to vocational training

6.2.1 The transition towards vocation training and the labour market position of apprentices

Those transiting from school to vocational training mostly do not choose this trajectory out of interest, but rather out of necessity. For the majority of focus group participants, vocational training is considered as 'second best solution' as they faced problems at school (e.g. low grades, grade repetition).

„Die Schule war nicht mein Fall. Die Schule war zu schwer, ich bin sitzen geblieben. Die Lehre ist gut, weil ich kein Abi habe und einen Abschluss brauche.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Therefore, the intrinsic motivation to learn a particular profession in the context of vocational training was rather low for the majority of focus group participants. Vocational training is thus widely considered as an easier alternative compared to the Abitur. This may also explain why none of the focus group participants pursuing vocational training had Abitur (please note that as illustrated in Figure 2.5, there are also school leavers with Abitur pursuing vocational training; yet, in our focus groups, none of the participants had taken this trajectory).

„Lehre mit Abitur? Es ist Blödsinn, sich bis zum Abitur zu quälen wenn man dann doch nur eine Lehre macht.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

The low intrinsic motivation could also be the reason for the fact that most participants pointed out the difficulty of choosing a particular profession. On the one hand, the sheer extent of choices may overload the young adults. On the other hand, many of the possibilities are not very accessible for young people. In other words, while some professions are well-known and young adults may have a clear idea about them (e.g. Frisör/in, Bäcker/in, Koch/Köchin, Verkäufer/in), other jobs may only provoke vague associations (e.g. Bauschreiner/in, Speditionskaufmann/-frau). Therefore, choices for a particular profession are often influenced by personal contacts within the social environment and by available options close to one's home (see also chapter 2, paragraph 2.2.3.3). The latter aspect is particularly important for those who do not (yet) have a driving license, as not all employers can easily be reached by public transport. When pursuing vocational training, apprentices normally still live together with their parents. On the one hand, this is a practical choice for many of them, for instance because of short distances to work. On the other hand, moving out would be financially difficult, as the salary levels during vocational training are rather low, as stated by many apprentices.

„Keiner hat wirklich über Ausziehen nachgedacht – keiner hat Lust lange zu pendeln, aber Ausziehen ist auch finanziell schwierig wegen unseres niedrigen Gehalts in der Lehre.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

The start of the vocational training brought changes into the lives of the young adults. Most of them describe these changes as extensive, some even call it a radical change (“*Umbruch*”). This particularly relates to timing issues, i.e. balancing work and leisure time.

„Man muss lernen was es heißt, Arbeiten zu gehen. Man lebt ein Stück weit für den Job. Man sieht seine Freunde viel weniger als zuvor [...] Es ist schwer, eine Balance zwischen Privatleben und Arbeit zu finden.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

The majority of participants highlighted that they got used to the new timing of their life within the first months of their vocational training. Another change that was mentioned by the participants was the fact that pursuing vocational training requires working and going to school at the same time, which for instance means that doing homework is required in the evenings after having worked. The work and school experiences were rated quite differently by most of the participants. Regarding school, many participants pointed out that “*Man kann mehr von uns erwarten*” (i.e. one can expect more from us). This particularly refers to classes given in the context of *Allgemeinkunde* (i.e. general knowledge), which is not too appreciated by the apprentices. In contrast, they are interested in *Fachkunde* (i.e. specific knowledge), since this knowledge is important and “highly useful” for their work. Yet, due to low numbers of apprentices in some professions, they are put together in groups, which can lead to the fact that classes in *Fachkunde* get more general, or that some apprentices have to learn contents that are not necessarily needed for their profession. Furthermore, some apprentices based in Sankt Vith may have to travel to Eupen for their *Fachkunde* classes because the number of students in Sankt Vith is too low. The work experiences in the companies the apprentices work for are mostly rated positively.

Another aspect that makes the transition to the vocational training challenging for young adults is the reputation of it. Many apprentices emphasized that there is a general perception that vocational training is a trajectory for those who are not able to graduate from school with the Abitur. Thus, vocational training is considered as an inferior trajectory for those having problems in school or suffering from motivational deficits.

„Eine Lehre machen nur diejenigen, die zu dumm sind für die Schule. Das dachten die Leute früher und auch heute ist das nicht ganz aus den Köpfen verschwunden.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Some participants even pointed out that some of their teachers shared this perception. This was not only brought to the fore by contemptuous comments about vocational training, but also by hardly giving any information about the vocational training as possible trajectory and alternative to studying. Hence, a number of those focus group participants pursuing vocational training feel like being on an inferior trajectory compared to those who are on a higher education trajectory. This general perception may also explain the declining numbers of concluded apprenticeship contracts (see figures 2.3 and 2.5 as well as sub-chapter 2.3.3.3). Furthermore, a number of focus group participants even faces such prejudice and partially even accusations within their families and social environments.

„Ich habe zwei Geschwister die studieren, daher werde ich als ‚der kleine Dumme‘ beziehungsweise ‚das schwarze Schaf der Familie‘ wahrgenommen. Dabei ist eine Lehre nichts verwerfliches, wir müssen auch drei Jahre lernen.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Overall, there seem to be two interlinked perceptions in Ostbelgien that cause a challenge for apprentices. On the one hand, school leavers are expected to study. Stepping into a higher education trajectory seems to be the norm, and those not complying with it just do not fit the overall (societal) expectation. On the other hand, the reputation of vocational training as educational trajectory is inferior compared to higher education. Vocational training is only considered as second best option which is taken by those who have intellectual and/or motivational deficits. Yet, participants of the focus groups also mentioned that the general knowledge about vocational training was not too high. They had to regularly explain how the system works, what it requires and comprises, and which possibilities they had afterwards to their social environments. Probably, the reputational problem of the vocational training is also linked to the rather limited knowledge about what it actually is.

„Wir sind nicht weniger wert, weil wir kein Abi haben. Wir haben bald ein anderes Diplom in der Hand. Wenn wir das wollen, koennen wir auch so viel erreichen. Unsere Punkte sind gut, wir sind nicht mehr sitzen geblieben, der Klick ist gekommen, aber vielleicht etwas später als bei anderen.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

6.2.2 Perspectives of apprentices

The fact that the vocational training was a kind of second-best-option for the focus group participants is also reflected in the way how they see their (professional) future. Specifically, only a minority is convinced of continuing their trajectory in the profession that they have learnt. This is partially linked to the fact that for some apprentices, the motivation to learn the selected profession was weak right from the start, but there are also other important reasons for the desire for a (professional) change. Many apprentices point out that after having worked (in the context of the vocational training) in their profession for some time, they noticed that they actually did not like it very much. Others highlight problems with regard to the working hours – this was particularly mentioned by apprentices in service professions (such as Koch/Köchin, Bäcker/-in). Another group of apprentices indicated that the heavy physical work that their profession required would make them stop working in this profession. However, none of the apprentices even considers stopping without finishing the vocational training.

„Jetzt bin ich zwei Jahre in der Lehre und ich habe gesehen, wie das ist. Ich will das nicht langfristig machen. Aber ich mache die Lehre schon fertig. Ich muss einen Abschluss machen.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Only a minority of focus group participants is entirely satisfied and happy about his or her professional choice and thus, willing and motivated to continue the trajectory in the selected profession. Of this minority, some also consider continuing their education to become a Meister. Others think about going abroad for a short time period to gain professional experiences out of Belgium. Generally, those apprentices consider it an advantage to start their professional life early thanks to pursuing vocational training.

„Wir sind alle um die 20, im September sind wir fertig, und dann verdienen wir unser eigenes Geld. Wir sind dann relativ früh dran. Wir sind dadurch vielen einen Schritt voraus. Und wir haben die Absicherung, dass wir einen Beruf haben, in den wir – selbst wenn wir darin erst einmal nicht weiterarbeiten möchten – immer wieder zurückkehren können.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Among the others – i.e. those who do not want to continue the already started professional trajectory – many consider getting the Abitur. The main reason for this thought is the fact that the Abitur opens up a wide range of possible professional opportunities and trajectories. Those who do not seriously think about getting the Abitur often consider doing a second vocational training in another profession.

„Der Job ist ganz ok, aber viel zu stressig. Für immer will ich das nicht machen. Nicht diese Arbeit, nicht in diesem Betrieb. Vielleicht hole ich mein Abi nach, vielleicht mache ich noch eine Lehre. Aber jetzt mache ich das zu Ende, sodass ich etwas in der Hand habe.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Finally, what all apprentices – no matter if they want to remain in their profession or change it – desire for their future is security and stability. Many link the desired security to issues related to money, such as saving up some money to finance a home in the medium- to long-term. Furthermore, the vast majority of the focus group participants wants to stay in Ostbelgien in the future.

„Ich will erst einmal Geld scheffeln. Ich will mir Wünsche erfüllen, die ich mir bisher nicht erfüllen konnte, außerdem will ich anfangen, für ein Haus zu sparen. Ich sollte mir finanzielle Rücklagen schaffen, das gibt Sicherheit. Dann könnte ich mich beruflich vielleicht auch nochmal umorientieren.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

6.3 The transition from higher education to the labour market

6.3.1 The transition to the labour market and the labour market position of young employees

Many of the young employees participating in the focus groups mentioned that the transition from higher education to the labour market was more difficult than the transition from school to higher education. The reasons are similar to those mentioned by the apprentices. On the one hand, this is linked to the fact that the job search implies choices that are not that easy to be made (particularly

for those with a degree in rather broad subjects). On the other hand, the division of time in the lives of young adults changed, with work time outweighing leisure time.

Those young adults who left Ostbelgien for their educational trajectory also had to decide whether they would want to find work in Ostbelgien or somewhere else. In the two focus groups conducted with students within and out of Ostbelgien, this question was tackled. Those studying in Ostbelgien generally wanted to continue living there, but a couple of participants were open to working in Wallonia. This can partially be explained by the nature of focus group participants, who all studied Gesundheits- und Krankenpflegewissenschaften (i.e. nursing). Seen the fact that there are only two hospitals as potential employers in Ostbelgien, it makes sense to consider others employers (like hospitals in Wallonia), too. Of those currently studying somewhere else, the broad majority aimed at coming back to Ostbelgien. Yet, this largely depends on the possibility of finding suitable employment. Furthermore, a number of students considers starting to work somewhere else to gain experiences, and to just return to Ostbelgien after a couple of years.

„Ich würde gerne eine Zeit lang woanders arbeiten. Aber ich glaube, dass ich zurückkomme.“
(Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

„Natürlich ist es eine Option, erst mal nach Luxemburg zu gehen und in einem Bereich oder auf einer Stelle zu arbeiten, die einem gut gefällt. Mit der Zeit will man dann aber zurückkommen und wenn dann Familie ins Spiel kommt, überlegt man wieder anders. Man schraubt dann die Ansprüche an seinen Job vielleicht doch etwas nach unten, um hier etwas zu finden.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Living in Ostbelgien is generally desired by the majority of students, but this is of course related to the job opportunities there. Some students mentioned the rather limited employment opportunities in Ostbelgien considering their aspired degrees, so hybrid solutions including living in Ostbelgien but working somewhere else are an option.

„Vieles hängt von den eigenen Ambitionen ab. Wenn man fünf Jahre an der Universität in Liège studiert hat, kann man froh sein, hier einen Job zu finden der halbwegs zum Studium und seinen eigenen Interessen passt.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

The focus groups with young employees contained a large number of people who returned to Ostbelgien after having studied somewhere else as well as people who had stayed in Ostbelgien, for example to pursue vocational training. Although the transition from school to work is evaluated as difficult, many of the participating employees are satisfied with their current employment situation. A very specific difficulty mentioned by a number of participants relates to the acceptance of foreign degrees. On the one hand, the bureaucratic effort to get degrees accepted seems to be high. On the other hand, agreements made between students and those in charge of the acceptance of foreign degrees are not always stable.

„Die Bürokratie zur Anerkennung von Diplomen hier ist von einer anderen Welt. Es wird viel versprochen und sehr wenig gehalten. Teilweise ändern sich Absprachen innerhalb von zwei Wochen – das ist ein Problem, wenn man auf vier Jahre plant. Man kann sich darauf nicht verlassen. Das ist blöd, wenn man hier in der Region bleiben möchte.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

„Ich brauchte den Meister, das war oberste Priorität. Der Kurs wurde in Eupen nicht angeboten, also musste ich zwei Jahre nach Deutschland pendeln. Das schönste war, dass

mir die Anerkennung hier zuerst abgeschlagen wurde, obwohl diese eigentlich zugesagt war.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

„Die Anerkennung meines deutschen Lehrerdiplooms hat Monate gedauert, weshalb ich dann in der Wartezeit schlechter bezahlt wurde. Weitere Absprachen – einen zweiten, berufsbegleitenden Master, danach anerkannt sein als Lehrer – wurden dann im Endeffekt nicht eingehalten. Trotz zweitem Master wollte man mich danach noch zwei Jahre auf die Autonome Hochschule Eupen schicken, obwohl ich alle Diplome – sogar mehr Diplome als nötig – hatte.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Apart from this aspect, problems related to the Lehrbefähigung (i.e. teaching qualification) in Ostbelgien were mentioned. Specifically, those who had a master degree from a university outside of Ostbelgien (mostly Wallonia) and wanted to later qualify as a teacher could not do that in Ostbelgien. Instead, this had to be done in the region where the master diploma was achieved, e.g. in Wallonia and in French (including the internships) and therefore, not in the focus group participants' native language (i.e. German). This causes some frustration, as courses and internships in Wallonia and thus, in French are not the perfect preparation for a career as a teacher in Ostbelgien.

Despite such difficulty, about half of the focus group participants even stated that they found their dream job for the moment. Yet, they are aware of the fact that changes may be ahead in the future, as “the labour market expects us to be flexible” (participant, focus group employees). Therefore, there is general consensus on the importance of training possibilities, as the participating young employees strive for further career development (this is in line with other recent data, i.e. Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018: 30). Yet, the evaluation of such opportunities in Ostbelgien is rather negative.

„Ich habe oft den Eindruck, dass es viele Angebote gibt, die da sind, um auf einer Liste aufgeführt zu werden. Der Inhalt ist aber oftmals unterirdisch.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

„Ich denke, dass für Auszubildende und Handwerker hier vieles angeboten wird, auch Fachkurse. Aber darüber hinaus ist es unmöglich, etwas passendes zu finden. Was ich für meinen Job brauche, ist zu spezifisch – derartige Kurse finde ich meist nur in Brüssel.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Most participants share this opinion, but they also would not expect a broad offer of training opportunities in a region as small as Ostbelgien. They are aware of the fact that the training offer is rather general, and that for building up highly specific knowledge and skills, they have to go somewhere else. For some professions, a lot is offered within Belgium, but for others, Germany (or other countries) seems to be a good option. An important question related to the possibilities of further training and development is to what extent the additional knowledge and skills can be utilized in Ostbelgien. Young employees are not too optimistic about the added value of additional qualifications in the Ostbelgian labour market.

„Irgendwann kommt man an einen Punkt, an dem man eine Entscheidung treffen muss: Will ich Karriere machen oder in Ostbelgien leben?“ (Participant, focus group employees)

„Auf ganz lange Sicht weiß ich nicht, inwieweit hier in der Region noch Möglichkeiten zur Entfaltung bestehen, wenn man die Karriereleiter hochklettern möchte.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

According to these quotes, young employees may be forced one day to take a decision: would they want to stay in Ostbelgien at the expense of their career or vice versa? Hence, there seems to be a trade-off, as having a career in Ostbelgien and living there seem to be difficult to combine for some focus group participants. In a recent study by the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat (2018: 47), 40% of the surveyed young adults (born in 1989) doubt that they will be able to pursue a career at their current employer. One reason – as pointed out by a focus group participant – may be the region's economic structure. The fact that many companies are very small means that one can relatively quickly reach the highest hierarchical level in a company.

„Viele Unternehmen hier sind kleine Familienbetriebe – dort sind Aufstiegschancen sehr beschränkt. An einem gewissen Punkt muss man wechseln, wenn man sich selbst weiterentwickeln will. Ob es viel Sinn macht, in den Konkurrenzbetrieb nebenan zu wechseln, wo die gleiche Struktur vorherrscht, sei dahingestellt. Man muss eventuell weiter darüber hinausgehen. Außerdem kennen sich viele Unternehmer, Wechsel sind nicht immer möglich.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Three of the focus group participants were self-employed – for one of those, the motivation to take that step was linked to the situation described in the aforementioned quote. Although they are satisfied with their current status, especially those having employees mentioned the pressure emanating from their responsibilities.

Another possibility of tackling this issue may be working outside of Ostbelgien. Particularly in the focus group with young employees in the southern part of Ostbelgien, commuting to Luxembourg for work was a topic. While this is financially attractive (due to higher salary levels and possible tax advantages), those participants with experiences in working there never made a conscious choice for it. On the other hand, the young adults went there because of lacking job opportunities in their professions in Ostbelgien, which is also confirmed by the recent survey of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat (2018: 22).

„Ich war nie besonders motiviert, in Luxemburg zu arbeiten, aber meine möglichen Traumstellen sind in Ostbelgien leider sehr dünn gesät. Es wäre perfekt, wenn es meinen jetzigen Job in Ostbelgien gäbe.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

6.3.2 Perspectives of young employees

Asked about their future, a topic that is of importance for many focus group participants is combining work and private life. As many young adults think about family formation, the question how to combine possible family duties with their working life is essential.

„Die Herausforderung ist, alles unter einen Hut zu bekommen. Das Baby, das bald geboren wird, die Firma meines Mannes, mein eigener Job. Ich denke, langfristig kann ich nicht alles unter einen Hut bekommen, ich kann nicht immer 60 Stunden pro Woche arbeiten und nebenher Kinder großziehen. Das möchte ich auch nicht.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Another aspect mentioned by many young employees was security. For the employees, decent and stable salaries are the basis for settling and starting families. For the self-employed, this was particularly linked to the success and financial situation of their business and thus, themselves. Moreover, many young adults mentioned that they would want to further develop their career and be successful in their professional lives. Finally, another aspect mentioned was to simply be happy.

The young employees were also keen on discussing how to increase the attractiveness of Ostbelgien as a region in general. Those who are self-employed particularly pointed out that entrepreneurship and “verrückte Ideen” (i.e. crazy ideas) should be (financially) supported. According to them, taking away some risks from the self-employed could encourage more people to take the step to start an own business.

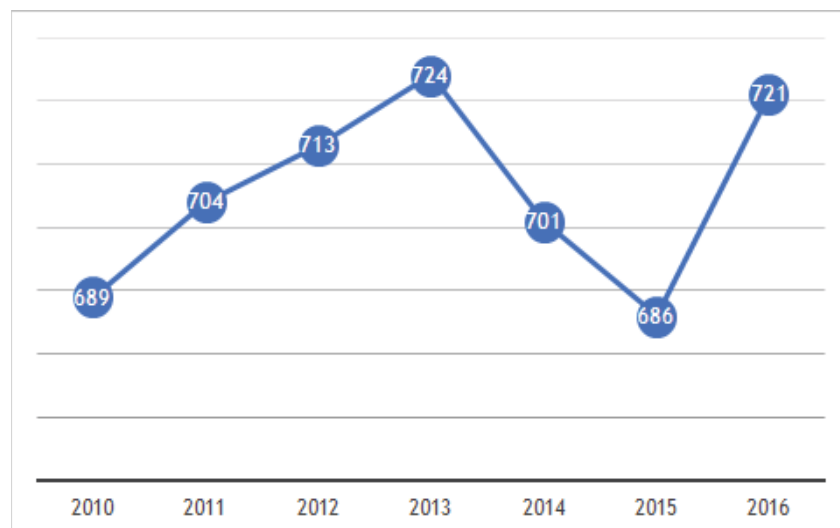
„Wenn man jetzt die Kleinunternehmer fördert, werden sie irgendwann groß. Es ist wichtig, dass wir einen gesunden Mix aus ganz kleinen bis ganz großen Betrieben erreichen. Und dann muss man natürlich sicherstellen, dass diese Betriebe auch hierbleiben.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Furthermore, young employees desire better supporting life in rural regions. Three aspects were highlighted. First, supporting families is essential, which particularly relates to offering childcare. Second, healthcare is important for all age groups. In this respect, especially the lack of German-speaking doctors in the two hospitals in Ostbelgien was pointed out. Third, mobility is crucial, which is linked to better bus connections and frequencies within Ostbelgien. This is confirmed by the results of the FORSA-study, in which mobility was chosen the most often by young respondents (16-29) as the most important issue to be dealt with in Ostbelgien (Polis-sinus, 2011).

6.4 Data on school-to-work transitions

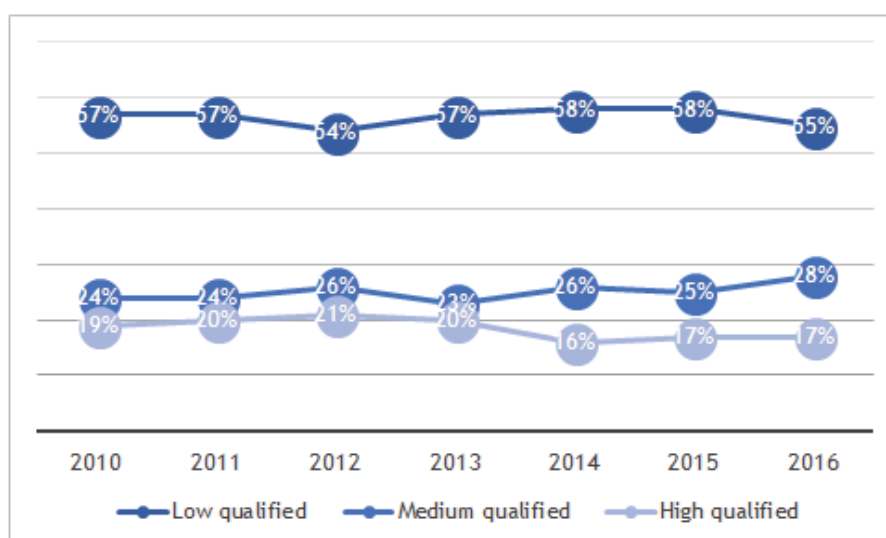
Young adults leaving or finishing school, vocational training or higher education can register themselves as ‘looking for work’ at the Arbeitsamt. The number of registrations for the years 2010 to 2016 are displayed in figure 6.1, and the composition of these numbers by education level are shown in figure 6.2.

Figure 6.1 School leavers registered at the Arbeitsamt, 2010-2016



Source: Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2017)

Figure 6.2 School leavers registered at the Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft based on qualification



Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2017)

The numbers of registered young adults are relatively stable in time with about 700 registrations per year. A little more than half of these registrations is done by lowly-qualified young adults, about 1/4 by medium-qualified ones and only about 1/6 by highly-qualified ones. Therefore, particularly lowly-educated young adults register themselves as looking for work at the Arbeitsamt.

The majority of the registered young adults finds work within the first year of their registration, as illustrated in table 6.1. Specifically, around 70% of registered young adults find work within one year, and about 1/5 starts pursuing vocational training. Less than 5% of the registered young adults are still unemployed one year after their registration. Overall and throughout the investigated years, slightly more than 90% of the registered young adults were integrated in the labour market in the first year after their registration.

Table 6.1 Situation of registered school leavers after one year

Situation T+1	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Working	71%	68%	68%	71%	70%
In education	20%	23%	23%	21%	21%
Unemployed	4%	4%	5%	2%	3%
Deleted	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Integrated	90%	91%	91%	92%	91%

Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2017)

Table 6.2 sheds light on the Vermittlungs- and Integrationsquote (i.e. placement and integration quota) in accordance with education level of the registered young adults in 2016. Generally, those having pursued vocational training or studied at a university or Hochschule tend to be the easiest ones to be placed and integrated in the labour market. The most difficult group in this respect are those young adults without a secondary school diploma. Their placement quota is only 52%, and their integration quota of 60% is also low compared to those with higher education levels. The placement quota of graduates of Allgemeinbildung und Technische Bildung is also rather low (35% - 52%), but their integration quota is relatively high with approximately 90%. This indicates that a

large group of them likely chooses to transfer to vocational training or higher education instead of the labour market.

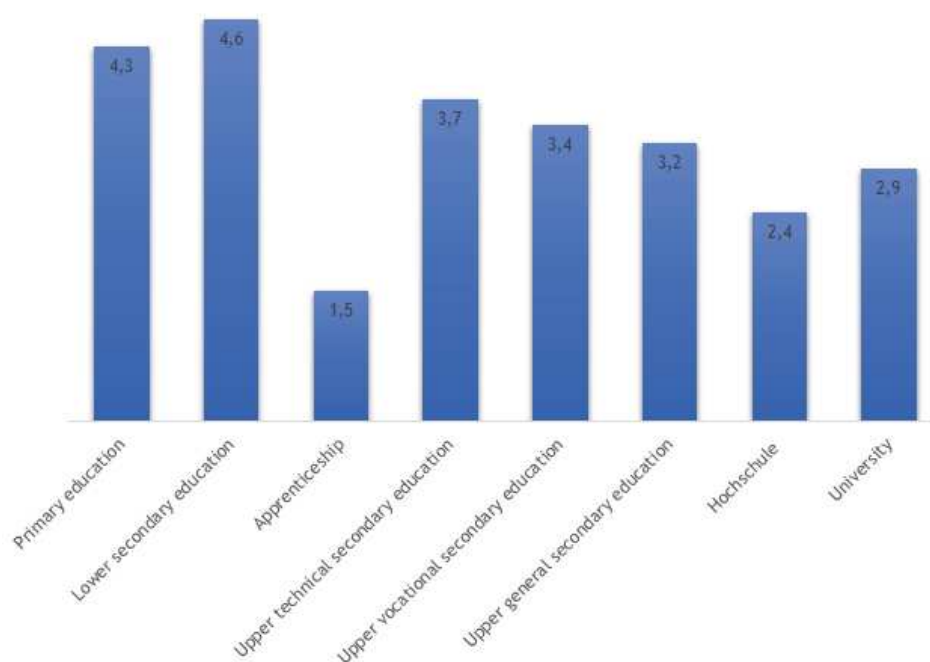
Table 6.2 Placement and integration quota according to education level (2016)

	Placement rate	Integration rate
Primary education	52%	60%
Lower secondary education	49%	75%
Vocational training	94%	96%
Technische Bildung	52%	87%
Berufsbildung	82%	98%
Allgemeinbildung	35%	90%
Hochschule	96%	98%
University	84%	87%
Total	70%	88%

Source: Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2017)

Figure 6.3 shows the average time it took to integrate the registered young adults into the labour market. Those having pursued vocational training can be integrated within 1.5 months; for those with degrees from a university or Hochschule, it takes a little less than 3 months. Those with low education levels (primary school and lower secondary education) are the most difficult young adults to integrate – this takes more than four months on average.

Figure 6.3 Duration (in months) it takes to be placed according to education level (average 2006-2016)



Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2016)

6.5 Data on the labour market position of young adults

Tables 6.3 and 6.4 show the Aktivitäts- und Beschäftigungsrate (i.e. activity and employment rate) of young adults in the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien by gender. These rates are generally lower for those aged below 25, which can easily be explained by the fact that many young adults are still in education and have not yet started being active on the labour market. Yet, there are remarkable differences between Ostbelgien's two geographical regions, as both rates are a lot higher in the southern part. Furthermore, the activity and employment rates of women are slightly lower compared to men, which is in line with the generally higher female proportion among students. A recent survey by the Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat confirms these numbers (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018: 17f). The activity rates for those aged between 25-49 are relatively similar in the northern and southern part whereas the employment rate is slightly higher in the southern part.

Table 6.3 Activity rate in % (2016)

	Women < 25	Women 25-49	Men < 25	Men 25-49
North	29,1	76,7	36,9	83,4
South	40,5	79,1	51,9	82,9

Source Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

Table 6.4 Employment rate in % (2016)

	Women < 25	Women 25-49	Men < 25	Men 25-49
North	23,4	69,4	30,5	75,3
South	36,5	76,3	48,3	80,1

Source Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

The unemployment rate in Ostbelgien has been decreasing in recent years, though there are differences between age cohorts as observed in many other European countries. Furthermore, there are stark differences between the northern and southern part of Ostbelgien (table 6.5). In the north, the unemployment rate of people younger than 25 was 17% for women and 15% for men compared to 8% (women) and 9% (men) of the age group 25-49. In the south, 5% of women and 5% of men aged below 25 were unemployed, compared to 3% (women) and 2% (men) in the 25-49 age cohort.

Table 6.5 Unemployment rate according to age groups, gender and region in % (2016)

	Women < 25	Women 25-49	Men < 25	Men 25-49
North	16,6	7,9	14,9	8,6
South	4,7	2,6	4,8	2,4

Source Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

The majority of young adults being active on the labour market can be found in paid dependent employment, as illustrated in table 6.6. Of those aged between 15-24, 97% of women and 95% of men are employees. These numbers also remain high for other age cohorts. Self-employment is not widespread among young adults and the respective numbers have declined between 2001-2014. However, the quota of self-employed seems to rise with age. Hence, self-employment is particularly realized by the more experienced labour market participants. As illustrated in table 6.7, young adults mostly work in the secondary (40%) and tertiary (59%) sectors. Therefore, the share of young adults working in the secondary sector is higher compared to other age groups.

Table 6.6 Distribution of the employed population by age and employment status in % (2014)

Age groups	Employees	Self-employed	Helpers	Total
Women				
15-24	96,6	3,2	0,2	100,0
25-49	89,5	8,7	1,8	100,0
50-64	82,5	12,6	4,9	100,0
Men				
15-24	95,7	3,6	0,7	100,0
25-49	83,1	15,6	1,3	100,0
50-64	74,4	24,6	1,0	100,0

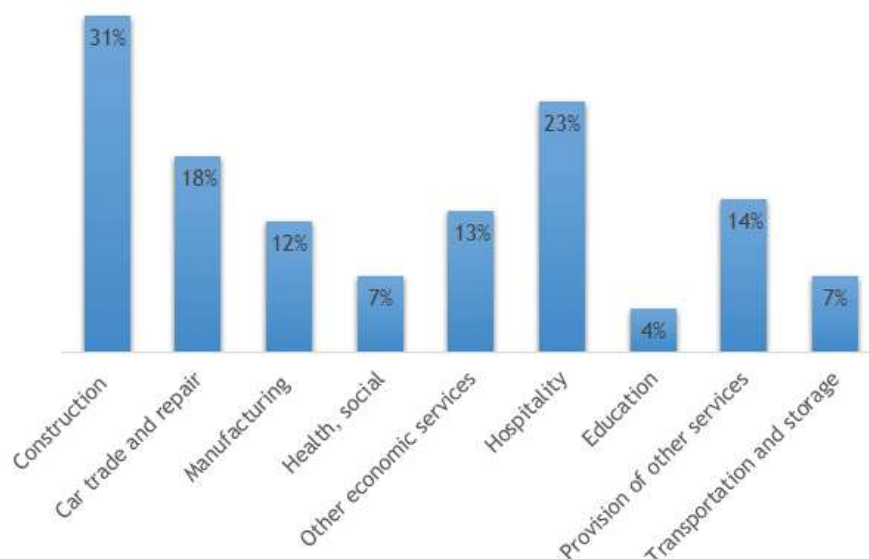
Source DGstat

Table 6.7 Distribution of the employed population by age and sector in % (2013)

Age groups	Primary sector	Secondary sector	Tertiary sector	Total
15-24	0,9	39,7	59,4	100,0
25-49	0,8	29,6	69,6	100,0
50-64	0,7	25,1	74,2	100,0

Source DGstat

The high share of young adults working in the secondary sector is also illustrated in figure 6.4, showing the work sectors in which those aged between 15 and 24 are working. Nearly 450 young adults work in construction, therefore, one third of the sector's workforce is made up by young adults. Furthermore, more than 400 work in the car trade and repair, and another more than 400 work in manufacturing. The fourth most popular sector among young adults is the health and social service sector, employing about 150 young adults.

Figure 6.4 Distribution of the employed population (15-24 years) by industry (2014)

Source Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (2016)

As mentioned before, some young adults also consider starting their career outside of Ostbelgien. There is a lack of reliable data in this respect, yet, a recent survey among 249 young adults born in 1989 provides some insights (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018: 55). Specifically, 58% started working in Ostbelgien, 14% elsewhere in Belgium, 10% in Germany (border region), 10% in Luxembourg, 0,4% in the Netherlands and 5% somewhere else abroad. Therefore, 42% of the surveyed young adults started their career outside of Ostbelgien. However, there is a likelihood that these percentages are slightly underestimated, taking into consideration that most respondents lived in Ostbelgien at the time of the survey and respondents living outside Ostbelgien (from the start of their career) were less likely to fill in the questionnaire (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018).

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter shed light on young adults' transitions from school to work as well as their labour market positions in Ostbelgien. We observed that transitions from school to vocational differ compared to those from higher education into the labour market. Specifically, apprentices often select vocational training as a second best option because of problems at school. This comes along with the fact that many of them learn a profession that they are not fully convinced of. Although all of them aspire finishing their vocational training to get a diploma, a high share of apprentices does not want to remain in their profession. This may also be linked to reputational problems of vocational training in Ostbelgien. Yet, these reputational problems also exist in Flanders. Specifically, half of the students in technical and vocational training in secondary schools in Flanders decide (after internships) that they do not want to remain in the profession they have been prepared for (Knipprath & Nicaise, 2016). Our observations based on qualitative data in Ostbelgien, however, contrast the information provided by IAWM (see chapter 2). One third of new apprentices appear to have *Arbitur* in 2017, suggesting that the choice of vocational training might have been a positive choice for them. The contradiction between this number and the observations based on qualitative data requires further investigation.

Those transiting from higher education to work do not only have to take a decision about the job they aspire, but also about its location. Many students from Ostbelgien would want to return home for work – some right after their studies, others a little later after having gathered work experiences elsewhere. Although some young adults (depending on their study field and degrees) report potential difficulties regarding finding work in Ostbelgien, the available statistics indicate a favorable labour market position of young adults in Ostbelgien. On the one hand, the unemployment rate is generally very low. On the other hand, if young people register at the *Arbeitsamt*, they get integrated in the labour market quickly, especially those who pursued vocational training or those holding a higher education diploma.

There are three topics which are of particular importance for most young adults that participated in the focus groups. First, work should grant security and stability, which many consider as an important requirement for settling and family foundation. To gain security, those still attending school opt for study fields that may guarantee this security in the long-run, those pursuing vocational training think about future career endeavors particularly granting them financial security, and those who are working – who have mostly already achieved some security – consider how their security can be ensured (also because family formation becomes an important topic) in the sense of lifelong learning initiatives. The former two groups aim at stable employment after their vocational training or studies as this is considered a precondition for the stable and secure life they strive for. The latter group – which has mostly achieved this stable and secure life – is rather interested in long-term career (development) possibilities. Therefore, young adults' career ambitions – which strongly focus on building up and achieving security – are rather down-to-earth. Stable employment – which enables saving up money to settle – is the main ambition. Other ambitions coming along with insecurity (like travelling the world) are not on the agenda of the vast majority of young adults in Ostbelgien. Second, and in line with the former point, lifelong learning opportunities were pointed out to be essential by many young employees who have already gathered work experience. They are aware of the need of lifelong learning to remain employable in the contemporary labour market, but they also consider it key to stimulate their own career development ambitions. Third, combining work and private (family) life is a topic of broad interest for young employees, as many consider family foundation in the coming years.

**- PART 4 WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL
PARTICIPATION -**

7 | Leisure time, social participation and well-being

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides insight of how youth and young adults spend their leisure time. The first sub-section sheds light on the hobbies of young people and adults as well as their engagement in clubs and other associations. The second sub-section focuses on aspects related to the quality of life for youth in Ostbelgien. The third sub-section particularly relates to health and happiness as well as their identity, which is shaped by Ostbelgien as the context in which they live. The last part will summarize how young people and adults in Ostbelgien see their future and what they aspire in this respect. This chapter is based on a mix of qualitative (i.e. focus group data) and quantitative data (i.e. PISA, Studie Bürgerkunde, FORSA Studie, Studie zu Gewalterfahrungen und Medienkonsum and OECD data).

7.2 Leisure time and engagement

In 2017, there were 258 registered sports clubs in Ostbelgien with more than 20000 members in total. About 40% of the members were 18 years old or younger (see table 7.1). There appear to be relatively more young participants in the south than in the north. When we divide the number of participants of sport clubs (18-year-olds or younger) by the size of the population of 0-19-year-olds, we observe that approximately 59% in the south and 43% in the north are member of a sports club. There are also many other socio-cultural associations in Ostbelgien. Children and adolescents can participate in youth movements, but there are also cultural associations, such as music clubs, theater groups, dance clubs or carnival associations. In 2017, there were 182 Amateurlustvereine (i.e. cultural associations) in Ostbelgien with more than 5600 members. It is remarkable that about 2/3 of these associations are registered in the southern part of Ostbelgien (Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens). There are no population data to calculate the proportion of youth engaging in cultural and other associations, but we do have sample data based on the PISA 2015 study and the study about citizenship in Ostbelgien (Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend, 2016). Below, we introduce these data with regard to leisure time and engagement of youth. Thereafter, we discuss our findings based on data collected through focus groups.

Table 7.1 Sport clubs and associations in Ostbelgien (2017)

	Sport clubs	Members (total)	Members (18 years or younger)	Share of members 18 years or younger
Amel	17	1761	729	41%
Büllingen	22	2017	711	35%
Bütgenbach	25	2674	837	31%
Burg-Reuland	7	465	219	47%
St. Vith	36	2952	1354	46%
Canton St. Vith (South)	107	9869	3854	39%
Eupen	53	5278	2225	42%
Kelmis	48	2398	905	38%
Lontzen	17	976	289	30%
Raeren	33	2122	893	42%
Canton Eupen (North)	151	10774	4312	40%
Ostbelgien	258	20643	8166	40%

Source Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens

7.2.1 Quantitative data

7.2.1.1 Leisure time of 15-year-olds (PISA)

In the PISA 2015 study, 15-year-olds were asked what they generally do before and after school. Students got a score of 0 when they said they do not do one of the mentioned activities before and after school, a score of 1 when they do the activity before or after and a score of 2 when they do the activity before and after school. Talking to parents appeared to be the activity most frequently done by a large majority of the students (89%, see Appendix A, table a1.13), closely followed by the use of internet, social networks or chatting (77%, see Appendix A, table a1.13). Half of the students performs household chores before and after school. In contrast, two thirds are not involved in paid work before nor after school and half of the students does not play video-games at all or does not read a book, newspaper or magazine. However, two thirds do watch TV or a DVD before or after school and approximately 40 % talks to friends before or after and 40% both before and after school (see Appendix A, table a1.13). In addition, half of the students exercises or practices sport before or after school and 32% both before and after school (see Appendix A, table a1.13). Apparently, 15-year-olds exercise or practice sports significantly less often in Ostbelgien than in Flanders (table 7.2). They also meet slightly less often with friends or talk to them and watch less often TV than their counterparts in Flanders and the French-speaking community. In contrast, 15-year-olds in Ostbelgien use the internet slightly more often, talk to their parents more often and are more likely to be involved in paid work.

To some extent activities during leisure time are affected by socio-demographic background factors in Ostbelgien, but not in a significantly different manner than in the other two language communities. Students with a higher social background are more inclined to read and less inclined to watch TV than students with a lower social background (table 7.3). Girls play less often video-games and exercise less often, but use more often the internet and social networks through the internet than boys (table 7.4). Students with at least one parent born in Belgium exercise more often, but also watch more often TV than other students. They also talk less often than their counterparts who are first-generation or second-generation immigrant students (table 7.4).

Table 7.2 Leisure time of 15-year olds in accordance with PISA

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Watch TV\<DVD>\Video	1,13 (0,03)	1,37 (0,01)	1,39 (0,01)
Read a book\newspaper\magazine	0,74 (0,04)	0,63 (0,02)	0,83 (0,02)
Internet\Chat\Social networks	1,73 (0,03)	1,64 (0,01)	1,77 (0,01)
Play video-games	0,66 (0,04)	0,71 (0,02)	0,76 (0,02)
Meet friends or talk to friends on the phone	1,20 (0,04)	1,37 (0,02)	1,35 (0,01)
Talk to your parents	1,85 (0,02)	1,75 (0,01)	1,81 (0,01)
Work in the household or take care	1,39 (0,04)	1,14 (0,01)	1,10 (0,01)
Work for pay	0,43 (0,03)	0,31 (0,02)	0,32 (0,01)
Exercise or practice a sport	1,11 (0,03)	1,05 (0,02)	1,21 (0,01)

* Blue fields indicate a statistically significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience, sample size is not given here, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1 in chapter 3.

Source PISA 2015

Table 7.3 Impact of socio-economic background on leisure time presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Watch TV\<DVD>\Video	-0,10 (0,05)	-0,12 (0,02)	-0,15 (0,02)
Read a book\newspaper\magazine	0,12 (0,05)	0,12 (0,02)	0,14 (0,02)
Internet\Chat\Social networks	0,01 (0,05)	-0,01 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,02)
Play video-games	-0,08 (0,06)	-0,06 (0,02)	-0,11 (0,02)
Meet friends or talk to friends on the phone	0,01 (0,06)	-0,05 (0,02)	-0,04 (0,02)
Talk to your parents	0,02 (0,06)	0,08 (0,02)	0,07 (0,02)
Work in the household or take care	0,03 (0,05)	0,02 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,02)
Work for pay	-0,06 (0,05)	-0,04 (0,02)	-0,06 (0,02)
Exercise or practice a sport	0,00 (0,06)	0,10 (0,02)	0,08 (0,01)

* Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 7.4 Impact of gender on leisure time presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Watch TV\<DVD>\Video	0,08 (0,06)	0,14 (0,02)	0,10 (0,01)
Read a book\newspaper\magazine	-0,01 (0,05)	-0,05 (0,02)	-0,08 (0,02)
Internet\Chat\Social networks	-0,11 (0,05)	-0,04 (0,02)	-0,04 (0,01)
Play video-games	0,58 (0,04)	0,47 (0,02)	0,49 (0,01)
Meet friends or talk to friends on the phone	-0,01 (0,05)	-0,08 (0,02)	-0,01 (0,02)
Talk to your parents	-0,07 (0,05)	-0,02 (0,02)	-0,02 (0,02)
Work in the household or take care	-0,06 (0,05)	-0,09 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,01)
Work for pay	0,06 (0,06)	0,16 (0,03)	0,08 (0,02)
Exercise or practice a sport	0,13 (0,05)	0,21 (0,02)	0,15 (0,02)

* Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

Table 7.5 Impact of ethnicity on leisure time presented by correlation coefficients and standard errors in brackets

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Watch TV\<DVD>\Video	0,12 (0,06)	0,03 (0,02)	0,04 (0,02)
Read a book\newspaper\magazine	0,04 (0,05)	0,03 (0,02)	0,01 (0,01)
Internet\Chat\Social networks	-0,04 (0,05)	-0,04 (0,02)	-0,01 (0,02)
Play video-games	0,06 (0,05)	0,01 (0,03)	0,04 (0,02)
Meet friends or talk to friends on the phone	-0,01 (0,05)	-0,01 (0,02)	0,01 (0,01)
Talk to your parents	-0,14 (0,06)	-0,02 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,02)
Work in the household or take care	0,05 (0,06)	0,03 (0,02)	0,06 (0,02)
Work for pay	-0,02 (0,05)	0,02 (0,02)	-0,05 (0,02)
Exercise or practice a sport	0,12 (0,05)	0,03 (0,03)	0,07 (0,02)

* Significant effect sizes within the language communities are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$). For convenience sample size is not shown, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample sizes generally approximate sample sizes given in table 3.1.

Source PISA 2015

7.2.1.2 Engagement in clubs or associations (of 7th, 9th and 11th graders)

The aforementioned PISA data do not give a total picture of leisure time during the week, as it has been asked only for those activities before and after school. It is very likely that adolescents also practice sports or participate in other associations during the weekends. The study of the Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend on citizenship in Ostbelgien among 7th, 9th and 11th graders provides us insight into the percentage of students participating in various associations during weekdays and the weekends (Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend, 2016). Most students appear to practice a sport (67%, table 7.6). Next to sports, the youth movements (i.e. Jugendgruppen) are popular among approximately one third of the adolescents. Only 14% participates in a music association and 10% does something else. When all associations are taken together, 85% of the students appear to be involved in at least one association.

In table 7.7 the results of logistic regression analyses are presented by means of odds ratio's. It appears that socio-demographic and school characteristics do not contribute much to the explanation of the likelihood to participate in the different associations (Nagelkerke R² is only 4% to 9%). Gender has a negative effect on participation in a music and other associations, meaning that boys are less likely to attend these associations. Students in the 7th grade are less likely to participate than their older counterparts in case of so-called Jugendgruppen and 'other associations', whereas students from catholic schools are almost three times more likely to participate in Jugendgruppen than students from other schools (odds ratio = 2,890). No significant effects could be found for the educational background of their parents, nor for the engagement of the parents themselves. Moreover, the region the students live in appeared to have no significant effect in contrast with information given in the introduction of paragraph 7.2 and the older study of Baier (2011) who found slightly higher participation rates for sports clubs, youth movements and music associations in the south than in the north.

Table 7.6 Participation in associations in % (N 1002)

	Youth movements (N 996)	Sport clubs (N 977)	Music associations (N 998)	Other (N 998)
Yes	29,4	66,8	13,5	10,4
No	70,6	33,2	86,5	89,6
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend (2016)

Table 7.7 Odds ratio's for the effects on participation in associations (N 897)

	Youth movements	Sport clubs	Music associations	Other
Constant	0,102 ***	1,673	0,053 **	0,201 *
Boy	0,798	0,885	0,537 **	0,597 *
Political party or labour union (yes)				
• Political party or labour union (no)	1,310	1,488	1,141	1,108
• Political party or labour union (no answer)	0,648	0,863	1,226	0,885
Parents' highest educational degree (Higher education)				
• Primary education or no diploma	2,093	0,829	4,391	0,234
• Mittlere Reife (i.e. German intermediate school degree)	1,240	1,323	2,254	0,485
• Abitur	1,618	1,867	4,517	0,418
• Geselle, Meister (i.e. master craftman or journeyman)	1,351	0,976	2,133	1,003
• I don't know	0,988	0,956	2,877	0,481
North	1,321	1,259	0,963	0,981
Grade (first grade)				
• Grade (third grade)	1,284	0,868	0,902	1,899 **
• Grade (fifth grade)	1,737 **	0,775	0,864	0,748
Catholic school	2,890 ***	0,888	1,317	1,271
Nagelkerke R ²	8,8%	4,3%	4,9%	5,4%

* Odds ratio's higher than 0 present a positive effect, odds ratio's lower than 0 present a negative effect.

Source Rat der deutschsprachigen Jugend 2016

7.2.2 Qualitative data

As indicated in the previous sections, there is a vast amount of clubs and associations in Ostbelgien in which the youth and young adults can spend their leisure time.

„Wir haben viele Vereine, jedes Hobby wird dadurch abgedeckt. Mir ist das wichtig, ich bin sehr aktiv in Vereinen.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers Catholic school)

The qualitative data indicates that more young people and adults in the southern part are members of clubs and associations compared to the north (this is in line with the study of Baier, 2011; see also the introduction of 7.2). In the southern part of Ostbelgien, almost every focus group participant was a member of at least one club or association, and some were even affiliated with more than one. Nearly everyone has joined a so-called Junggesellenverein, which is an association for young people who are not (yet) married. Junggesellenvereine (which exist in nearly every village in the south of Ostbelgien) regularly organize social gatherings to which also the members of other befriended Junggesellenvereine are invited. Such gatherings are organized every weekend. Therefore, Junggesellenvereine play an important role in the young people and adults' social life in the south of Ostbelgien. Furthermore, many young people are member of sports clubs as well as carnival associations. In the northern part of Ostbelgien, the most popular clubs or associations are the

scounts (i.e. Pfadfinder) as well as sports clubs. Yet, the level of engagement in clubs or associations is lower in the north of Ostbelgien in accordance with the focus group discussions.

Those who are members of clubs or associations evaluate their engagement positively; it is often reported to play an important role in the life of the young people. Three reasons were mentioned in the focus group discussions. First, activities in clubs and associations are essential from a social point of view. It enables broadening the social environment, facilitates making friends and building up real friendships and it is pleasant to spend time together.

„Engagement in Vereinen ist mir wichtig – man hat das Gefühl, dass man dazugehört, man hat immer Leute. Vereine halten das ganze Dorf zusammen – egal, welcher Verein das ist, man muss einfach mitmachen, dass das auch in Zukunft weitergeht.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

„Ich könnte nicht ohne meine Vereine sein. Ich freue mich immer so sehr auf unsere Aktivitäten. Jedes Wochenende ist etwas los.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

„Die Pfadfinder sind eine tolle Option, um soziale Kontakte zu knüpfen – vor allem langfristig. Hier lernt Freunde fürs Leben kennen, ganz unabhängig von der Schule. So kann man sein soziales Netzwerk außerhalb der Schule zu erweitern.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

Second, those being engaged in clubs or associations welcome the learning opportunities linked to it. By taking roles like being a trainer in a sports club, young people learn taking responsibilities within their club and towards other people. Third, many of those being members of clubs or associations mentioned that they need this engagement as a compensation or balance to cope with busy days at work, pressure at school, etc.

„Der Verein ist wichtig für mich, um den Alltag zu vergessen und um mich auszuholen. Ich bin auch Trainer – es macht mir Spaß, die Kinder zu trainieren und ich lerne Verantwortungsbewusstsein.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers Catholic school)

The engagement in clubs or associations also ties young people to their homes and Ostbelgien. Those studying outside of Ostbelgien mention that their membership in clubs or associations is one of the core motivations to regularly return home. Therefore, membership in clubs and associations can contribute to shaping local/regional identities.

„Es gehört einfach dazu, am Wochenende wieder nach Hause zu kommen. Die Pfadfinder sind der Hauptgrund, warum ich immer wieder zurückkomme. Ich sehe keinen Sinn darin, am Wochenende in [Studienort] zu bleiben, mich hält dort nichts. Ich komme zurück für Freunde, Familie und natürlich die Pfadfinder.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

Although engagement in clubs and associations is widely conceived as added value to the young adults' lives, those who have started working highlight the challenges related to finding the time for their engagement aside their busy working hours. In the focus groups carried out with apprentices, it became clear that strong intrinsic motivations to remain engaged are needed, otherwise, the young adults might quit their membership in clubs or associations.

„Wir sind die Zukunft und wir tragen auch dazu bei, unsere Vereine und Traditionen aufrecht zu erhalten.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

7.3 Quality of life in Ostbelgien

7.3.1 Home resources

In chapter 1 (paragraph 1.3.3) we already highlighted briefly some indicators (e.g. child poverty, prosperity index) regarding the socio-economic profil of Ostbelgien. It is difficult to find indicators that focus on youth, but the FORSA study of 2011 and PISA 2015 can give an indication of the standard of living of the youth. The FORSA study asked their respondents “Wie zufrieden sind Sie alles in allem mit Ihrem Lebensstandard?” (i.e. how satisfied are you with your standard of living). Almost all respondents between the age of 16 and 29 answered that they were rather satisfied (43%) or very satisfied (55%) about their living standard. Apparently, younger respondents were more inclined to answer ‘very satisfied’ and less inclined to answer ‘rather satisfied’ than older respondents.

In chapter 1 we observed that there are slightly more children living in a household without working parents in Ostbelgien than in Flanders but less than in the French speaking part. We also observed that Ostbelgien, especially in the south, has a lower score on the prosperity index, than in the rest of Belgium. When we look at home possessions of 15-year-olds, based on PISA 2015 data (table 7.8), we see that 15-year-olds in Ostbelgien reported significantly lower family wealth and have significantly less ICT and home educational resources than their counterparts in Flanders. In contrast, they reported significantly more cultural possessions than 15-year-olds in the other two language communities.

Table 7.8 Home possessions⁴

	Ostbelgien	French community	Flemish community
Family wealth	0,03 (0,04)	-0,06 (0,03)	0,27 (0,02)
Cultural possessions	-0,06 (0,05)	-0,38 (0,03)	-0,26 (0,02)
Home educational resources	0,01 (0,04)	-0,18 (0,02)	0,27 (0,02)
ICT resources	0,03 (0,04)	-0,06 (0,02)	0,40 (0,02)

* Blue fields indicate a statistical significant difference from Ostbelgien with $\alpha = .05$. For convenience sample size is not given here, as it differs according to the variables being measured. Sample size generally approximates sample size given in table 3.1 in chapter 3.

Source PISA 2015

7.3.2 Happiness and health

7.3.2.1 Happiness and health in general

According to the FORSA study of 2011, the large majority of the respondents between the age of 16 and 29 were rather satisfied (35%) or very satisfied (61%) about their health and well-being. Apparently, younger respondents were more inclined to answer ‘very satisfied’ and less inclined to

⁴ Family wealth was measured by: a room of your own, a link to the Internet, televisions, cars, rooms with a bath or shower, computers (desktop computer, portable laptop, or notebook), tablet computers, e-book readers. Cultural possessions were measured by: classic literature, books of poetry, works of art (e.g. paintings), books on art, music, or design, musical instruments (e.g. guitar, piano). Home educational resources were measured by: a desk to study at, a quiet place to study, a computer you can use for school work, educational software, books to help with your school work, technical reference books, and a dictionary. ICT resources were measured by: educational software, a link to the Internet, cell phones with Internet access (e.g. smartphones), computers (desktop computer, portable laptop, or notebook), tablet computers and e-book readers (OECD, 2017e).

answer ‘rather satisfied’ than older respondents. More recent data are available for 15-year-olds who were asked how satisfied they were with their life in general at the moment on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero refers to not being satisfied at all, whereas ten relates to the highest level of satisfaction possible. The mean in Ostbelgien is 7,36, which is slightly higher than the OECD average of 7,31 but slightly lower than the mean of the French community, which is 7,49 (table 7.9). Yet, the difference between Ostbelgien and the French community is not significant. In Ostbelgien, boys (mean of 7.56) seem to be more satisfied than girls (mean of 7.16). However, this gender difference, nor the difference according to socio-economic background are significant (Sereni; OECD, 2017d).

Table 7.9 Regional differences in life satisfaction

	Ostbelgien	French community
Average students’ life satisfaction	7,36 (0,10)	7,49 (0,05)
Socio-economic disparity in life satisfaction (top-bottom quarter of SES)	0,18 (0,26)	0,47 (0,10)
Girls	7,16 (0,15)	7,20 (0,06)
Boys	7,56 (0,14)	7,78 (0,05)

Source OECD (2017d)

7.3.2.2 Violence and drug consumption

Most adolescents and young adults appear to be happy and are satisfied with their life. However, a not insignificant part of these young people experience at least once or more often an act of violence, drink alcohol and/or experience drug use. In chapter 4 we saw that 16% of 15-year-olds experienced at least a few times a month any act of bullying at school (table 4.5 in chapter 4). There was no overall significant difference in this rate with the rate of the other two language communities. According to a slightly older study of Baier (2011), 30% of 9th graders had experienced at least once in their lifetime an act of violence, regardless of the place of occurrence, and 16% during the 12 months before the survey. Most of them experienced physical harm, and least of them experienced sexual harassment and theft (Baier, 2011). Adolescents in the north appeared to experience violence more often than adolescents in the south (Baier, 2011).

In table 7.10, we see that in 2011 17% to 20% of 9th graders reported to consume alcohol at least once a week, 12% to 20% smoke every day, 3 % to 8% to consume cannabis and less than 1% to consume hard drugs. The higher percentages were all found in the north and were significantly higher than the percentages in the south in case of smoking and cannabis. Boys also appear to consume alcohol, tobacco and cannabis more often than girls. In addition, nationality seemed to be related with tobacco and cannabis use with the highest percentages to be found among 9th graders with a German nationality (Baier, 2011). No more recent data about drug consumption are available for Ostbelgien, nor data to compare with other regions.

Table 7.10 Drug consumption in the past 12 months (in %)

	Alcohol consumption: at least once a week	Cigarette consumption: daily	Cannabis use: at least several times a month	Consumption of hard drugs: at least several times a month
North	19,8	19,6	7,5	0,7
South	17,0	12,2	3,0	0,5
Boys	25,9	19,9	8,6	1,1
Girls	9,8	10,7	1,9	0,4
Belgian	17,5	12,7	4,2	0,8
German	21,9	22,3	10,0	1,1
East European	12,8	21,3	2,1	0,0
Other	16,5	15,0	4,4	0,0

* Scores that are significantly different according to specific indicators are written in bold ($\alpha = .05$).

Source Baier (2011)

7.3.3 Home and identity

The perception of Ostbelgien and its two geographical parts as *Heimat* (i.e. their home) as well as local identities tied to it differed between young people and adults in the north and in the south. Specifically, local identities were already strongly formed and present in the southern part, whereas these identities were much weaker in the north. In the south, nearly everyone felt proud to be from Ostbelgien – apart from this regional identity, the young people had also strong local identities, often feeling tied to the village they came from. This was different in the north, where only about half of the focus group participants showed clear East Belgian identities.

These identities were strongly linked to the young people's perceptions of their quality of life in Ostbelgien. In the south, the young people were strongly attached to Ostbelgien because they consider the quality of life there exceptionally high. In the north, the quality of life is not perceived to be equally high. But what constitutes the quality of life for the young people and adults?

7.3.3.1 Home and identity in the south of Ostbelgien

In the south, three aspects which make the quality of life unique in Ostbelgien are mentioned by almost all focus group participants. First, the high levels of social cohesion in the villages and the whole region is emphasized. Most of the young people participating in the focus groups like the fact that everyone knows everybody and that people very regularly interact with each other.

„Man kennt jeden, man hat immer jemanden, mit dem man erzählen kann [...] es ist schön zu wissen, was in den Dörfern passiert. Es ist schön rauszugehen und jedem guten Tag sagen zu können, mit allen reden zu können, immer mit den anderen etwas trinken gehen zu können. Ich finde das einfach schön.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers catholic school)

„Ich könnte nirgendwo wohnen, wo alle Menschen mir fremd sind. Ich brauche das, dass ich an einem Ort bin, an dem Menschen mir hallo sagen, wir auf dem Gehsteig miteinander sprechen ... einfach diese Bekanntschaften. Ich könnte mir nicht vorstellen, in einem fremden Dorf ein Haus zu bauen, wo man wirklich nur seine Freunde kennt und das war's. Das würde mir nicht reichen.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

„Ich will immer in Ostbelgien bleiben. Hier sind die Leute irgendwie so gut – kann man das Kultur nennen? Mir gefällt das hier so gut ... einfach die Leute hier, wir sind so dörflich und nicht wie in der Stadt.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

Several aspects are particularly important for the high level of social cohesion, namely the existence of a vast amount of associations and clubs which ensures participation in social life as well as social integration. Furthermore, and linked to the former, local customs and traditions are preserved, which is considered essential by many focus group participants. Moreover, *Platt*, which is the dialect commonly spoken in the southern part of Ostbelgien, is part of the collective identity of those living in the region. Finally, and linked to all other aspects already mentioned, there seems to be a common set of values in Ostbelgien's southern part.

„Es sind die Traditionen wie das Burgfeuer oder die Mainacht, die mich hier halten. Ich bin stolz auf mein Dorf. Mir ist die Gemeinschaft hier wichtig.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

„Platt ist nicht nur eine Sprache, sondern eine Einstellung. Leute, mit denen man Platt redet, mit denen versteht man sich sofort viel besser. Platt ist familiär, mit Plattsprechern kann man besser reden.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers Catholic school)

„Wir haben alle dieselben Werte, wir haben noch viel Kontakt untereinander. Es ist nicht wie in der Stadt, wo man nicht einmal seine Nachbarn kennt. Der Zusammenhalt ist hier anders.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

Second, focus group participants from the south highly appreciate the beauty of the nature in Ostbelgien. They like that Ostbelgien is very green, that it is calm and that there is enough space for everyone.

„Die Ruhe hält mich hier. Wenn ich halli galli möchte, fahre ich in eine Stadt, aber ich komme immer wieder zurueck. Das Land ist ein guter Ort, um abzuschalten.“ (Participant, focus group students in Ostbelgien)

Third, Ostbelgien is characterized by high levels of safety and security in accordance with the focus group discussions. This particularly refers to low crime rates and the benefits related to this. These low crime rates are also linked to the high level of social cohesion and the fact that one knows another in the south of Ostbelgien.

„Was mich hier hält, ist die ländliche Sicherheit. Ich kann hier nachts durch die Straßen laufen und fühle mich sicher. Man kann hier mit jedem reden, auch mit Fremden.“ (Participant, focus group students within Ostbelgien)

„Vieles wird hier locker gesehen, beispielsweise betrunken nach Hause gehen oder eine kurze Strecke ohne Führerschein fahren. In der Stadt käme direkt die Polizei und wir würden als Verbrecher und Alkoholiker angesehen werden [...] Außerdem wird man nicht liegen gelassen, wenn man zu viel getrunken hat wie in der Stadt. Man wird von anderen mit nach Hause genommen.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

„Ich will mich in Ostbelgien niederlassen weil es hier einfach so schön ist. Der Zusammenhalt, das Zusammenleben zwischen Alt und Jung im Dorf – das passt einfach. Ich mag auch die Sicherheit, das heißt ich kann nachts durch die Straßen laufen, muss meine Haustür nicht immer abschließen, auch Kinder können einfach im Dorf herumlaufen und dadurch frei und unbeschwert aufwachsen – ganz ohne Angst.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers Catholic school)

Yet, some focus group participants mentioned that the high level of social cohesion come along with social control. This is not welcomed by everyone – particularly if the potential gossip concerns oneself or one's family. Linked to that, the focus group participants mentioned that particular lifestyles – which are not in accordance with predominant societal norms – are not accepted in the south of Ostbelgien. Specifically, the example non-heterosexuality was mentioned.

„Die Klatsch und Tratsch-Mentalität hier ist einerseits schön, aber andererseits auch etwas nervig. Wir haben eine Bauernmentalität – wir sind also etwas dickköpfig und manchmal auch engstirnig, denn nur die eine Lebensweise ist die Richtige, vor allem bei der älteren Generation.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers catholic school)

„Transgender oder so wollte ich hier nicht sein – es ist sehr selten, dass hier in der Gegend jemand aus der Reihe tanzt. Wir haben ein sehr konservatives Umfeld hier – die Frage ist immer, was denken die anderen, was denken die Nachbarn?“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

„Es gibt Leute, die verstecken Ihre Homosexualität hier. Die trauen sich nicht einmal, mit ihren Eltern darüber zu sprechen.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

A final aspect to be mentioned with regard to the focus groups regarding home and identity as a subject area which was a recurring topic in nearly all discussions was the negative perception of cities. As already indicated in some of the aforementioned quotes, young people associate cities with anonymity, criminality, noise, masses of people and isolation. Therefore, hardly anyone could imagine living in a city.

„In der Stadt sind so viele Autos, immer Polizei, die Sirenen, das nervt sicher mit der Zeit. Städte sind laut, man kann nicht schlafen. Außerdem gibt es keinen Platz, keinen Freiraum, man braucht die Metro, um sich fortzubewegen [...] Städte sind schrecklich laut, es gibt zu viele Menschen – ich bin dort nicht gerne.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers catholic school)

„Ich war im Sommer in London, es ist extrem, wie viele Menschen es dort gibt. Man kennt dort niemanden. Selbst in Liège müsste ich mich mit Menschen zum Rausgehen verabreden. Es gibt keine Chance, dort einfach so jemanden zu kennen.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

„Wenn man in der Stadt sterben würde, gäbe es dann überhaupt eine Messe? Auf dem Begräbnis wären vielleicht fünf Leute. Hier kommt das ganze Dorf, die Messe ist voll. In der Stadt kennt man sich gar nicht.“ (Participant, focus group apprentices)

Overall, the young people and adults in the south of Ostbelgien feel highly attached to their home, i.e. their village and Ostbelgien in general. They have strong local and regional identities which comes along with the fact that a vast majority of them would want to spend their entire life there.

7.3.3.2 Home and identity in the north of Ostbelgien

In the north of Ostbelgien, local and/or regional identities have not yet taken shape in an equally strong way as in the southern part. Yet, differences are observed based on the different age groups

taking part in the focus group discussions. Specifically, a majority of the school leavers were relatively critical with regard to their home region, not showing any strong local/regional identities yet. They actually look forward to leaving Ostbelgien for their studies. Those who left Ostbelgien for their studies have another view – once having left their homes, they start appreciating it much more. Therefore, local/regional identities take shape in this stage. Finally, those returning to Ostbelgien after their studies show high levels of identification with their home and local context.

As already mentioned, many school leavers in the northern part of Ostbelgien are quite critical about their home, which leads to the fact that a vast majority of focus group participants is happy to leave Ostbelgien for their studies. This happiness is not only linked to the fact that they finish school and start another stage of life, but also to leaving Ostbelgien after having lived there for about 18 years. The main reason for the perceived low attractiveness of Eupen and the surrounding region is the lack of leisure activities for this age group. Focus group participants mentioned that the possibilities go out are rather limited, that nightlife hardly exists, that most of the existing shops do not meet the needs of young people and that public transport is rather limited. Therefore, many focus group participants highlight that according to them, Eupen is a rather boring city which does not offer a lot of possibilities to young adults.

„Eupen ist langweilig und leblos. Die Stadt stirbt aus, Geschäfte schließen. Eupen ist bestenfalls enkeltauglich.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

Yet, it is remarkable that those focus group participants who are engaged in local clubs or associations are not as critical about Eupen as those without such engagement. According to them, Eupen offers many clubs and associations, which allow practicing nearly every possible hobby. Consequently, those who are engaged show higher levels of identification with the local context. A positive aspect regarding the north of Ostbelgien mentioned by almost all focus group participants is the very low crime rate there. There is a broad agreement regarding the fact that their home region offers a secure and safe environment to grow up and live in.

Overall, and in contrast to the south of Ostbelgien, school leavers in the north do not (yet) have strong local identities. However, the focus group carried out with the students outside Ostbelgien makes us hypothesize that local identities may develop a little later. The participants mentioned that when they finished school, they had similar feelings compared to those reported by the school leavers. They were generally happy to leave the north of Ostbelgien for their studies. Yet, being away from home has arguably changed their perception, as they have started appreciating their home much more.

„Im Abiturjahr wollte ich einfach nur weg hier – das habe ich aber schnell verworfen. Jetzt freue ich mich, jedes Wochenende hier zu sein.“ (Participant, focus group outside Ostbelgien)

„Erst wenn man weg ist, merkt man, wie wohl man sich hier eigentlich fühlt.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

„Als ich hier weggegangen bin dachte ich – endlich, jetzt lässt du das alles hinter dir. Aber tatsächlich bin ich noch immer voll integriert und gerne hier. Ich glaube, ich bin heimatverbunden.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

It needs to be mentioned that most of the participants in this focus group were highly engaged in local clubs and associations, which may lead to higher levels of local rootedness. This pattern – i.e. that attachment to the home region (*Heimatverbundenheit*) grows when being away from home – is also confirmed by the participants of the focus group with young employees in the north of Ostbelgien.

They widely confirmed that they got more attached to their home (region) during the time of their studies outside of Ostbelgien.

When asked about the constituents of the quality of life in Ostbelgien, the focus group participants mentioned the high levels of social cohesion (to which the high numbers of local clubs and associations arguably contributes to), the nature and green environment in Ostbelgien, its strategic location close by other cities, regions and countries as well as the low crime rates. Furthermore, and as a consequence of the aforementioned attributes, Eupen is considered a perfect place for family formation.

„Ich liebe dieses ‚jeder kennt jeden‘. Ich liebe es, wenn man durch die Straße geht und alle zehn Meter jemanden trifft, den man kennt und mit dem man reden kann. Ich freue mich schon darauf, nach meinem Studium wieder hierher zu kommen.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

Another topic that came up in the discussion with the students outside Ostbelgien was ageing. According to them, Ostbelgien is a perfect place for old people because of two interrelated reasons. On the one hand, many inhabitants engage in voluntary work (*„es gibt ein breite Ehrenamtsbasis“*), which results from the high levels of social cohesion. On the other hand, this engagement leads to a broad offer of activities for old people, which allows them to participate and remain highly integrated in society. Consequently, this allows for ageing in dignity.

„Als alter Mensch der Pflege braucht, gibt es keinen besseren Ort als Ostbelgien. Hier kann man in Würde altern. Es gibt keinen schöneren Ort zum Sterben.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

Similar to the data collected in the south of Ostbelgien, the focus group participants in the north mentioned that they sometimes struggle with particular attitudes towards controversial topics.

„Es ist schade, dass die Leute hier teilweise einen sehr begrenzten Horizont haben, vor allem bei kontroversen Themen wie Flüchtlingen. An der Uni lernt man, einen Schritt weiterzudenken, aber in Ostbelgien ist das teilweise schwierig.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

„Teilweise ist die Gesellschaft hier kleinkariert, zum Beispiel beim Thema Homosexualität. Aber das ist hoffentlich eine Generationenfrage.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

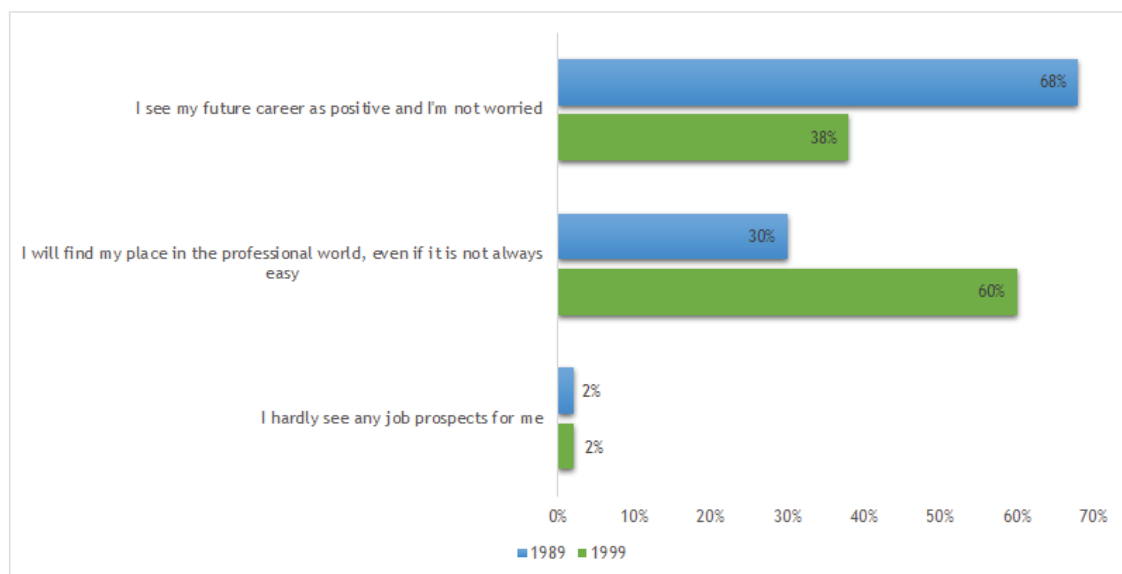
Overall, local identities in the north of Ostbelgien seem to develop later compared to the south. They mostly start developing once the school leavers left Ostbelgien for their studies. Being integrated in another context and comparing this other context to their home makes the school leavers appreciate their home and Ostbelgien much more. This process is crucial for identity formation and being away arguably contributes to accelerating this process, generating high(er) levels of attachment to Ostbelgien.

„Man wirft alle guten Dinge in einen Pot – et voilà, das ist Ostbelgien und unsere Mentalität.“ (Participant, focus group students outside Ostbelgien)

7.4 Perspectives for the future

The FORSA-study 2011 asked to respondents how they look at the future in general and the economic prospects in particular. One fifth of the respondent answered that they were very optimistic about the future, and nearly 70% fairly optimistic. With regard to economic prospects, 11% said they were *very optimistic* and 64% *rather optimistic*. Apparently, the younger generation was slightly more optimistic than the older generations (Polis-sinus, 2011). Also in 2016, with regard to their professional future, young adults (born in 1999) and to some extent adolescents (born in 1989) appear to be optimistic (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018). Those who have already some work experience (born in 1989), are even more optimistic than their younger counterparts (born in 1999), who did not enter the labour market yet (figure 7.1). Two thirds of the birth cohort of 1989 is not worried about their professional future in contrast with one third of the birth cohort of 1999. However, the birth cohort of 1999 is not pessimistic either and 60% of them believes they will in the end find their labour market positions, even when it not easy to find a job (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien, 2018).

Figure 7.1 Young adults' perceptions on their professional future (1989: N 256; 1999: N 187)



Source Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018)

Although adolescents and young adults are quite optimistic about their future, in particular when they have entered the labour market, they do strive for security and financial independence (see table 7.1). According to the study of Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018), the birth cohort of 1989 and the birth cohort of 1999 do not differ much in what they really think is important in life (table 7.11). More than 86% of youth think financial independence is the most important issue in life, followed by close relationships with the family and freedom of speech (>76%). For three quarters of youth having good friends is very important as well. At least two thirds believe security is very important.

Table 7.11 What youth finds most important in their life (2016): % of respondents who answered 'very important'

	1989		1999	
1	Financial independence	89%	Financial independence	86%
2	Close relationship with the family	83%	Freedom of speech	81%
3	Have good friends & freedom of speech	76%	Close relationship with the family	80%
4	Remain loyal to oneself	69%	Have good friends	78%
5	Security	67%	Security	75%

Source Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat der DG Belgien (2018)

These findings are largely in line with the qualitative data collected through focus groups, as already indicated earlier in this report. Throughout all focus groups, aspects linked to security – particularly job security and financial security – were mostly mentioned. In the discussions with school leavers and students, this security was associated with finding a stable and well-paid job, which enables financial independence of the parents. In the focus groups with apprentices, it was also the financial aspect of security which was most often mentioned.

„Ich wünsche mir einen festen Job in der Gegend, eine Partnerschaft, weiterhin ein tolles Vereinsleben, nicht zu viel Veränderung, nicht zu viele Verpflichtungen, nicht weit pendeln müssen und weiterhin einen guten familiären Zusammenhalt.“ (Participant, focus group school leavers public school)

In the discussions with young employees, security was a dominant aspect as well, but more in the sense of retaining the secure position that they already achieved in the future. Hence, they think about career development and training regarding their working life. This may be related to the fact that many think about settling and starting a family.

„Ich wünsche mir eine Familie, Kinder und ein eigenes Haus. Die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf ist mir wichtig – ein Aufstieg im Beruf muss trotz Kinder möglich sein und zwar auf eine Art und Weise, dass ich für meine Familie da sein kann.“ (Participant, focus group employees)

Another desire that was often mentioned was happiness. Young people and adults strive for happiness in their lives. They associate happiness with various other concepts, such as a love relationships and/or marriage, good ties with the whole family, retaining friendships as well as fulfilling jobs.

These two aspects – security as well as happiness – were the two dominant issues mentioned when asked about perspectives for the future. A couple of other issues that were mentioned are as follows. First, a number of focus group participants did not have any opinion on this question. They would just want to take things as they come. Second, some focus group participants mentioned that they would like to see other places in the world – through travelling or by working a limited time abroad. Third, a very limited number of focus group participants strive for starting their own business. Fourth, two participants dream of actively contributing to keeping local traditions. Finally, one participant aspired to engage in politics in the future.

7.5 Conclusion

Adolescents and youth are in general happy and optimistic about the future. Almost nine of ten adolescents participate in an association, most often a sports club and/or Jugendgruppe. Those who are engaged are generally more attached to Ostbelgien as their home region. Many of the young

people talk to their parents relatively often, conduct household chores, but also chat and meet friends. They are quite satisfied with their living standard, although there is an indication that this might be slightly lower in Ostbelgien than in the rest of Belgium, in particular Flanders. Socio-demographic characteristics also appear to affect the use of leisure time to a moderate extent, but no more than in other language communities. In spite of a high well-being and satisfaction with their standard of living, the youth in Ostbelgien likely experiences violence and drug consumption to a similar extent as youth in other regions. However, no recent data are available yet that would allow proper cross-national or cross-regional comparisons. Finally, adolescents and youth are attached to their region and *Heimat* is a very important concept for them – particularly in the south of Ostbelgien. With regard to perspectives towards their future, security in their life – also in terms of being financially independent – is very important. Moreover, young people strive for happiness, particularly related to love relationships, family and friends.

- PART 5 CONCLUSION: PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES -

- APPENDICES -

appendix 1 Competences, other school-related variables and leisure time measured by PISA in detail

a1.1 ICT related competences

Table a1.1 Students' interest in ICT, perceived competence and perceived autonomy related to ICT use

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<i>Students' perceived ICT competence</i>				
I feel comfortable using digital devices that I am less familiar with (N 362)	9,1	39,4	39,3	12,2
If my friends and relatives want to buy new digital devices or applications, I can give them advice (N 362)	12,5	34,8	35,3	17,5
I feel comfortable using my digital devices at home (N 357)	3,0	9,0	50,4	37,6
When I come across problems with digital devices, I think I can solve them (N 356)	8,8	21,4	48,6	21,3
If my friends and relatives have a problem with digital devices, I can help them (N 359)	10,4	28,6	43,1	17,8
<i>Students' perceived autonomy related to ICT use</i>				
If I need new software, I install it by myself (N 361)	19,5	22,8	31,7	26,1
I read information about digital devices to be independent (N 359)	18,6	37,4	32,0	12,0
I use digital devices as I want to use them (N 362)	4,7	15,9	48,9	30,5
If I have a problem with digital devices I start to solve it on my own (N 360)	5,2	12,7	47,9	34,2
If I need a new application, I choose it by myself (N 360)	7,3	16,8	44,4	31,5
<i>ICT interest</i>				
I forget about time when I'm using digital devices (N 363)	11,3	30,7	42,0	16,1
The Internet is a great resource for obtaining information I am interested in (e.g. news, sports, dictionary; N 366)	4,6	9,1	46,6	39,6
It is very useful to have social networks on the internet (N 362)	3,1	10,1	41,9	45,0
I am really excited discovering new digital devices or applications (N 359)	6,1	27,3	43,8	22,8
I really feel bad if no Internet connection is possible (N 366)	28,0	42,7	21,5	7,8
I like using digital devices (N 364)	3,0	9,1	42,2	45,8

Source PISA 2015

a1.2 Attitudes towards collaboration and teamwork

Table a1.2 Collaboration and teamwork

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<i>Enjoyment</i>				
I am a good listener (N 372)	0,8	16,7	59,4	22,6
I enjoy seeing my classmates be successful (N 370)	4,9	15,8	57,1	22,3
I take into account what others are interested in (N 373)	2,1	8,3	66,1	23,5
I enjoy considering different perspectives (N 371)	2,0	16,5	54,0	27,6
<i>Value of teamwork</i>				
I prefer working as part of a team to working alone (N 376)	11,0	21,4	40,2	27,5
I find that teams make better decisions than individuals (N 373)	4,0	20,0	41,9	34,2
I find that teamwork raises my own efficiency (N 371)	7,6	36,0	36,2	20,2
I enjoy cooperating with peers (N 372)	2,1	11,0	48,9	38,0

Source PISA 2015

a1.3 Attitudes towards science

Table a1.3 Interest in broad science topics

	Not interested	Hardly interested	Interested	Highly interested	I don't know what this is
Biosphere (e.g. ecosystem services, sustainability; N 356)	20,1	28,5	36,1	12,7	2,0
Motion and forces (e.g. velocity, friction, magnetic and gravi forces; N 358)	26,7	33,7	27,9	10,5	1,1
Energy and its transformation (e.g. conservation, chemical reactions; N 357)	20,3	28,3	31,4	18,4	1,7
The Universe and its history (N 354)	14,2	21,7	26,1	34,2	3,8
How science can help us prevent disease (N 358)	10,9	17,1	30,8	37,4	3,9

Source PISA 2015

Table a1.4 Enjoyment in science

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have fun when I am learning science (N 363)	18,4	23,4	36,4	21,8
I like reading about science topics (N 362)	26,5	32,7	30,2	10,6
I am happy working on science topics (N 361)	21,4	28,4	35,0	15,2
I enjoy acquiring new knowledge in science (N 361)	21,6	27,2	36,2	15,0
I am interested in learning about science (N 361)	19,6	23,8	38,0	18,6

Source PISA 2015

Table a1.5 Instrumental motivation

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Making an effort in my school science subject(s) is worth it because this will help me in the work I want to do later on (N 349)	22,2	30,2	27,5	20,1
What I learn in my school science subject(s) is important for me because I need this for what I want to do later on (N 346)	16,2	30,0	30,4	23,5
Studying my school science subject(s) is worthwhile for me because what I learn will improve my career prospects (N 345)	16,7	32,5	27,0	23,9
Many things I learn in my school science subject(s) will help me to get a job (N 344)	15,0	30,1	29,9	25,0

Source PISA 2015

a1.4 Environmental optimism and awareness**Table a1.6 Environmental awareness**

	I have never heard of this	I have heard about this but I would not be able to explain what it is really about	I know something about this and could explain the general issue	I am familiar with this and I would be able to explain this well
The increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (N 359)	16,4	23,5	39,7	20,4
The use of genetically modified organisms (N 357)	33,8	41,8	20,3	4,2
Nuclear waste (N 356)				
The consequences of clearing forests\other land use (N 356)	11,0	29,5	47,6	11,9
Air pollution (N 355)	4,5	14,0	55,2	26,3
Extinction of plants and animals (N 357)	5,1	24,5	54,2	16,3
Water shortage (N 357)	6,3	22,9	48,7	22,1

Source PISA 2015

Table a1.7 Environmental optimism

	Improve	Stay about the same	Get worse
Air pollution (N 363)	14,0	17,0	69,0
Extinction of plants and animals (N 361)	8,8	31,0	60,3
Clearing of forests for other land use (N 359)	5,0	19,3	75,7
Water shortages (N 361)	9,5	26,2	64,3
Nuclear waste (N 357)	19,2	28,0	52,8
The increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (N 353)	10,7	17,3	19,4
The use of genetically modified organisms (N 343)	10,9	42,9	26,3

Source PISA 2015

a1.5 Parental support

Table a1.8 Parental support

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My parents are interested in my school activities (N 376)	0,5	3,4	33,1	63,0
My parents support my educational efforts and achievements (N 373)	1,9	6,3	36,6	55,3
My parents support me when I am facing difficulties at school (N 376)	1,4	6,9	32,2	59,6
My parents encourage me to be confident (N 370)	2,4	9,6	35,2	52,8

Source PISA 2015

a1.6 Achievement motivation

Table a1.9 Achievement motivation

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I want top grades in most or all of my courses (N 374)	5,6	21,2	46,2	30,0
I want to be able to select from among the best opportunities available when I graduate (N 372)	0,8	7,5	50,8	40,9
I want to be the best, whatever I do (N 373)	23,3	44,1	24,4	8,2
I see myself as an ambitious person (N 370)	10,9	31,4	40,6	17,1
I want to be one of the best students in my class (N 372)	23,8	41,3	23,5	11,43

Source PISA 2015

a1.7 School well-being

Table a1.10 School well-being

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school (N 375)	5,1	11,6	21,6	61,6
I make friends easily at school (N 374)	23,1	50,0	20,3	6,6
I feel like I belong at school (N 373)	24,1	49,6	21,0	5,3
I feel awkward and out of place in my school (N 368)	8,7	11,3	27,6	52,5
Other students seem to like me (N 370)	24,3	55,7	16,3	3,6
I feel lonely at school (N 371)	8,8	4,5	18,7	68,1

Source PISA 2015

a1.8 School attendance

Table a1.11 School attendance

	None	One or two times	Three or four times	Five or more times
Skipp classes whole day the last two weeks (N 375)	87,7	10,2	0,6	1,6
Skipp some classes the last two weeks (N 374)	84,4	12,8	2,0	0,8
Arrive late at school the last two weeks (N 374)	59,5	24,3	8,5	7,7

Source PISA 2015

a1.9 Expected level of educational attainment

Table a1.12 Expected level of educational attainment (N 370)

Educational level	%
Lower secondary education	7,7
Vocational higher secondary education	13,1
General, technical or artistic higher secondary education	20,8
Post-secondary non-tertiary education	5,8
Non-university tertiary education (1-cycle tertiary education)	14,0
University level tertiary education (2-cycle tertiary Education)	38,7

Source PISA 2015

a1.10 Leisure time

Table a1.13 Leisure time of 15 year olds according to PISA

	Nor before, nor after school	Before or after school	Before and after school
Watch TV\<DVD>\Video	10,8	65,9	23,3
Read a book\newspaper\magazine	47,8	30,2	22,0
Internet\Chat\Social networks	3,4	20,0	76,6
Play video-games	50,0	34,3	15,6
Meet friends or talk to friends on the phone	20,0	40,5	39,5
Talk to your parents	3,4	7,9	88,7
Work in the household or take care	11,8	37,7	50,5
Work for pay	65,6	25,8	8,6
Exercise or practice a sport	20,7	47,2	32,1

Source PISA 2015

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