

Special educational needs analysis in Italy and Belgium

Report (part 1) by Martina Giuliano

My first task consisted in carrying out an analysis of the different special education needs in the countries taking part to the project.

After a general overview of the education system I focused on special education at secondary school.

I started with Italy and Flanders as they represent the two opposite extremes: full inclusion in Italy – a parallel system for special education needs in Flanders.

Secondary Education in Italy

Secondary education in Italy lasts 8 years. It is open to everyone and it is divided in two grades:

- **First grade**, known as “**Scuola Media**” lasts three years and it is attended by pupils aged 11-13. It provides a more in-depth education on the subjects already studied at primary school, with the addition of computer science and at least one foreign language, usually English, Spanish, French or German. The curriculum is the same for all institutions and decided at ministerial level. At the end of the third school year, pupils must sit an examination. Only if they pass it they can go on studying at secondary school second grade, otherwise they must repeat the school year.
- **Second grade**, known as “**Scuola Superiore**” lasts 5 years and it is attended by pupils aged 14-18. Schools are divided into three main groups: Grammar Schools, Technical Schools, and Vocational Schools. Each group is subdivided into different study fields. All secondary schools share a common core curriculum, while other subjects belong only to specific fields of study such as ancient Greek at Grammar Schools focusing on humanities, economics at Technical Schools and so on. At the end of each course of studies pupils must sit an examination.

Special Education at secondary school

In Italy there are no health, social or educational boards, nor an administrative office to decide whether a pupil may or may not attend a school, or whether he/she should be addressed to a special school or to mainstream education.

Any state or non-state (private, municipal or regional) school in Italy that obtains official recognition (L. 62/2000) is obliged to accept any pupils with disabilities, even if severe.

The rejection of pupils with disabilities is punished criminally.

The educational integration of pupils with disabilities started about 40 years ago.

In 1971 law number 118 established that also disabled students have the right to fulfil the obligation of compulsory education in mainstream schools, except for the most severe cases.

In 1977 law number 517 established the principle that all disabled pupils of the primary and first grade of secondary school from the age of 6 to 14 years have the right to be included in mainstream education. All the teachers of the class are obliged to prepare an educational plan supported by a SEN teacher. Also the State, the Local Authorities, and the Local Health Units have to make out an administrative and financial plan.

In 1987 the Constitutional Court sentence n. 215 recognised the full unconditional right of all disabled pupils, even in situations of severity, to attend secondary school. The sentence imposed all the authorities involved (school administration, local authorities, health units) to provide the services of their competence to support school inclusion.

Phases of the Italian way to Inclusion

- Before the sixties: from exclusion to medicalisation
- Sixties – mid-seventies: from medicalisation to insertion
- Mid-seventies - nineties: from insertion to integration
- After nineties: from integration to inclusion

How many pupils with disabilities attend public school

According to the data given by the Ministry of Education the percentage of pupils with disabilities who attend public schools in the 2009/2010 school year is 2,24%.

Around 20,152 go to pre-school, around 73,965 to primary school, around 59,345 to secondary school 1st grade (between 11 and 14 years old) and around 47,000 to secondary school 2nd grade, about 7000 at University.

2% of them has got a visual handicap,

7% has got a hearing handicap

15% has got a physical handicap

76% has got an intellectual handicap.

The percentage of pupils with disabilities at school is growing each year.

Composition of the classes

The law doesn't say exactly how many pupils with disabilities can be in each class. At the beginning of the school year the headmaster together with a team of teachers agrees the criteria according to which it's decided the number of special needs pupils are admitted per class.

Anyway there's a law which says that in the classes where there are pupils with disabilities the number of all the pupils can't be more than 20.

How inclusive education is accomplished

Educational inclusion takes place according to a number of institutional procedures defined by Law 104, issued in 1992

- **A handicap certificate** written by a specialist;
- **A functional diagnose** written by a team of doctors including specialists, neurologists, psychologists. It's a diagnose which describes not only the disease, but also the consequence of that disease concerning the cognitive, behavioural, relational and emotional level;
- **A dynamic functional profile** written by specialists and by teachers. It enhances the functional diagnose and envisages possible levels of development;
- **Individualized educational plan** written by the SEN teacher and by the other teachers of the class. It's based on the DFP and it's the plan document of the special educational needs activities. There are two types of IEP:
 1. a “differentiated” IEP which contains some links to the mainstream education plan, but it's different and extremely simplified. Pupils with this IEP do not achieve the legal qualification, but a “certificate” describing the activities they took part in and the competences they achieved.
 2. a “common minimum objectives” IEP. It's the minimum a pupil with or without disabilities needs to know and to do in order to pass.

The **IEP** and the didactic plan must be supported by personnel and tools - also technological - that should be adequate to the kind of disability and its severity. Special education needs is supported by:

- **Free transportation** to and from school provided by the social service
- **Specific didactic material**
- **SEN teachers**
- **Assistant/educator for mobility** and personal hygiene at school. Educator assists disabled children with severe disability at school and sometimes at home. The **social educator** works for the social inclusion particularly in community services (day care centres, group homes, etc). They are hired by non-profit organisations.
- **Therapies** at the local health units.

What levels a SEN teacher works on:

The SEN teacher works at different levels such as:

- Cognitive level;
- Self-esteem level;
- Affective-relational level;

- Linguistic level;
- Sensory level: sight and hearing;
- Motor skills;
- Neuropsychological level: memory, concentration, attention;
- Special-temporal organization level;
- Personal and social autonomy level.

Being a Sen-teacher involves roles such as:

- Lesson planning
- Marking and assessing work
- Using special equipment
- Liaising closely with parents and guardians
- Behaviour management

To be a SEN teacher it is necessary to have:

- A master degree
- A teaching qualification
- Specialization in special educational need teaching

Inclusion working groups

The headmaster of each school must appoint a working group (GLH) consisting of teachers, social servants, representatives of local authorities and of the local health units, pupils and parents aiming at supporting inclusion.

GLH has the task of:

- analysing the overall situation (number of pupils with special needs, type of disability, classes involved);
- managing the human resources (assigning a certain amount of hours of SEN teaching to each pupil with a disability; finding specialists and external consultants);
- managing the material resources of the school (aids, assistive technology, specialized libraries and / or documentation centres);
- preparing a periodic assessment of the integration initiatives carried out by the school;
- formulating proposals for training and refreshment courses;
- formulating of plans for the continuity between the different school levels and grades;
- preparing projects to support handicap;
- proposing training and refreshment courses for the school staff.

TERRITORIAL CENTRES for SUPPORT to HANDICAP (CTSH)

In order to cope with the different situations of disability in the whole Country, the Ministry of Education identifies school that work as TERRITORIAL CENTRES for SUPPORT to HANDICAP (CTSH).

This network, distributed uniformly throughout the Italian territory, offers advice and training to teachers, parents and pupils on the theme of technologies applied in favour of disabled students.

In the whole country there are about 92 Territorial Centres for Support.

The objectives of such centres are:

- Making a permanent territorial network that allows to accumulate, preserve and disseminate knowledge (good practices, training) and resources (hardware and software) for the school integration of disabled people through the use of New Technologies. The network should be able to provide practical support for the schools in the purchase and in the efficient use of new technologies aimed at the school integration.
- Activating on the territory training sessions for teachers and other school staff, parents and disabled pupils themselves on the proper use of technologies.

The schools identified as CTSH manage economic resources to be used for training activities for teaching staff and for the purchase of teaching aids for disability.

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http://www.istruzione.it/urp/ordinamento_scolastico.shtml

http://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/eurydice///sintesi_sistema_educativo_italiano.pdf

http://www.governo.it/Presidenza/USRI/confessioni/norme/legge_62_2000.pdf

<http://www.handylex.org/stato/l300371.shtml>

<http://www.handylex.org/stato/l050292.shtml>

<http://www.orizzontescuola.it/news/integrazione-scolastica-e-centri-territoriali-supporto-allhandicap-cts>

<http://www.aslbrescia.it/bin/index.php?id=1126>

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Secondary Education in Flanders

In Flanders Secondary Education is attended by pupils aged 12-18.

Secondary Education is divided into 3 main sections:

1- Full-time secondary education:

- Mainstream secondary education (GSO)
- Special needs secondary education (BuSO)

2- Part-time secondary education:

- Part-time learning systems.

Each school in Flanders works with **CLB** which stands for **Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding** (Student Counselling Centre). In each school there is a CLB employee who supports pupils, teachers, headmasters and parents by giving the right information and by helping to find solutions to problems. CLB is specialized in four fields:

- The choice of the study fields
- Stress, fear to fail, skipping lessons, bad behaviour, bullying
- Learning disorders
- Preventive health care

At this centre doctors, psychologists, educators, nurses, social workers work together with schools so that each pupil can develop the right way their knowledge, abilities and competences.

CLB has got an important role also as regards special education. If a pupil needs a special support or if he/she wants enrol in a special school an attestation written by CLB is necessary. Here they also tests pupils if they start to have learning problems and do diagnoses (apart from pupils with autism and ADHD).

At CLB all the employees have the same tasks.

There is a director and 3 coordinators: 1 for primary school, 1 for secondary school and 1 for special schools. Each coordinator coordinates their teams of CLB employees who work at different schools. Moreover there is a team of doctors who work with the team of employees.

Mainstream full-time Secondary Education

It lasts 6 years divided into 3 grades, 2 years per grade.

On the second grade pupils can choose among four types of education:

- General secondary education (ASO)
- Artistic secondary education (KSO)
- Technical secondary education (TSO)
- Vocational secondary education (BSO)

Special Secondary Education

Special secondary education is open to pupils with a certified disability. It consists of eight different types of education for different types of disabilities: visual, motor, light-mental, hearing impairments, and so on. There are several forms of special education, either aimed at the pupils' integration into the regular world of work or focused on protected forms of living and working.

Part-time learning systems

In the part-time learning system work and learning are combined.

OKAN

OKAN (reception classes for foreigner newcomers) was founded in 1995 to help foreign learners to adapt to Flemish secondary education.

To be admitted to OKAN students must:

- Be newcomers and stay in Belgium up to one year without interruption;
- Be aged 12 – 18;
- not have Dutch as mother tongue;
- have insufficient knowledge of Dutch to successfully be able to attend classes at mainstream schools.

OKAN is therefore usually populated by a very heterogeneous group: different ages, nationalities, religions and languages, differences in learning skills (some are illiterate while others have studied Latin several years in their homeland).

For this reason OKAN developed its own curriculum which gives a lot of importance to differentiation.

At OKAN pupils stay 1 or 2 years to learn Dutch, then they enrol in the mainstream schools.

So the main goal is to teach Dutch, here they don't teach “subjects”. But they use subjects to teach Dutch (CLIL principle). The content of the lessons are divided into fields:

- communication
- vocabulary
- world orientation (a mix of science, geography, history, biology)
- mathematics
- physical education

If a pupil has a good level of Dutch and is good at a subject he/she can follow some lessons at mainstream schools.

OKAN does not automatically entitle pupils to enrol at ASO (grammar school) and access to education is determined according to:

- age
- the school attended in the country of origin
- the level of Dutch.

At the end of the school year OKAN usually make an agreement with schools, CLB and pupils (and their parents / guardians) on the choice of a suitable training program.

In 2008-2009, there were about 40 OKAN secondary schools in Flanders for a 1675 youngsters.

The schools receive 10 teaching hours each four students they have.

Special Education: BuSo (special secondary education), GON-begeleiding (Integrated Education Counselling) and ION-begeleiding (Inclusive Education Counselling)

BuSo

Besides the mainstream secondary education in Flanders there is also a parallel special education open to pupils aged 13-21 with disabilities, with learning or behavioural problems.

To enrol in the special education schools pupils need an enrolment report which states:

- That special education is to be preferred for the pupil;
- Which type of education is most suitable for the pupil.

Anyway, the recommendation to go to a special school is not binding. Parents can still decide to choose the mainstream education for their child.

There are seven types of disability:

- Type 1: children with mild mental retardation
- Type 2: children with moderate or severe mental retardation
- Type 3: children with serious emotional or behavioural problems
- Type 4: children with physical disabilities
- Type 5: children who are hospitalized
- Type 6: children with visual impairments
- Type 7: children with a hearing disability
- Type 8: children with learning disorders (only at primary school)

From September 1, 2015 a new type (type 9) will be introduced for students with autism. These pupils don't have learning disorders and yet they can't attend the mainstream education. In a BuSO school there is always paramedical staff (speech therapists, physiotherapists, nurses and nannies) besides the teachers and a director. Normally pupils are put into groups according to their disability. Then there is a common education plan for the group, but also an individualized education plan based on the individual abilities and possibilities. Teaching can involve areas such as:

- General and social education
- Attitude formation
- Motor skills
- Communication

Generally a BuSO school offers to external mainstream schools GON/ION counselling.

There are also different types of special education:

Education type 1: social adjustment

This form of education gives a social training with the purpose to integrate the pupil in a protected social environment. The class council defines a curriculum together with the CLB and, if possible, together with the pupil's parents and the pupils themselves. At the end of compulsory education each student is entitled to a certificate.

Education type 2: social adjustment and skills for work

This form of education provides a general education and the necessary social skills for work with the purpose to integrate the pupil in a protected social and work environment. If pupils complete the second phase, they get a certificate.

Education type 3: Vocational Education

This form of education gives social training and vocational training with the purpose to integrate pupils with disabilities in a common living and working environment.

Education type 4: general, vocational, artistic and technical education

This type of education gives the right preparation to go on studying at a higher level outside University and focuses on integration to active life. The study fields correspond to the study fields of the mainstream full-time secondary education and at the end of the course of study pupils receive a diploma which is as valid as a diploma taken in the mainstream secondary education.

Overview of the education types combined with the types of disabilities

	Education type 1: social adjustment	Education type 2: social adjustment and skills for work	Education type 3: Vocational education	Education type 4: general, vocational, artistic and technical education
Type1			√	
Type2	√	√		
Type3	√	√	√	√
Type4	√	√	√	√
Type5				√
Type6	√	√	√	√
Type7	√	√	√	√

GON-counselling

GON-counselling is a partnership between the mainstream and the special education. GON-counsellors work for a special school which allows them to work for a mainstream one. They support teachers, pupils and / or parents in mainstream education.

GON-counselling can be organized at different levels: nursery, primary, secondary and higher education, with the exception of university education.

What pupils are eligible for GON-counselling?

Pupils who want the GON-counselling must meet the eligibility conditions in the mainstream education and they need their disability to be certified. They also need an enrolment certificate released by the CLB or by the Centre for Developmental and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Certified types 1, 3 or 8 must first attend a special education school for 9 months before GON-counselling is organized for them in the mainstream education.

GON-counselling can also be requested for pupils with:

- Physical disability (Type 4)
- Visual impairment (Type 6)
- Hearing disability (Type 7)
- Autism spectrum disorders (Type 9 from 1 September).

It is necessary to write an integration plan for pupils who are going to attend mainstream education with the support of a GON-counsellor.

The integration plan is a basic document, an action-oriented statement containing essential information on the counselling, general information concerning the pupil, level of education and school where he/she is integrated.

Integration can be full or partial; permanent or temporary. A full integration wants the pupil to follow all the classes and activities in the mainstream school. A partial integration wants the pupil to follow only a certain number of hours or subjects and activities in the mainstream school. Integration can be considered permanent when the pupil follow at least from 1 October to 30 June classes in the mainstream school, differently integration is considered temporary.

An integration team must agree on the integration plan.

The integration team consists of:

- The pupils and/or their parents
- The director and the class head-teacher of the mainstream school where the student follows lessons and activities
- The director of the CLB that assists the pupil in the mainstream school or his representative
- The director of the school for special education

In case of full and permanent integration the CLB employee who works in the mainstream school has got the responsibility of a multidisciplinary dossier about the pupil.

In the file there is a description of

- The problem
- The help needed by the pupil, the parents and the school team
- The rehabilitation centre
- The home-help service
- The therapists
- Volunteers and everybody who is involved in the integrated education plan
- The proposal for additional assistance
- Education plan: disciplines involved, location, adapted material, material support (special learning tools).

What the GON-counsellor does.

The GON-counselling can be provided by teaching, paramedic, social, psychological or medical personnel.

Counselling works on three levels:

1- The pupil's level

- Educational
- Pedagogical
- Speech therapy
- Social-emotional

2- The teacher's level:

- Additional support for the team of teachers: advice regarding how to approach the student, assistance in developing / adapting teaching materials.

3- The school level:

- Exchange of information: regular meetings, class councils.

What the duration of GON-counselling is.

A student is entitled to 2 years of GON-counselling per school career (nursery, primary and secondary education). This counselling consists of two units per week. One for teaching and one for paramedical staff. 1 unit lasts 50 minutes.

The request to start GON-counselling can be done via the CLB, via the mainstream education or parents themselves can ask for it.

First there is a start meeting with the integration team where the pupil's needs are discussed and an integration plan is drafted.

At the beginning of September the GON-counsellor observes the GON pupil, afterwards, intensive supervision starts.

In December / January the integration team of the mainstream education school does a mid-term evaluation.

In May the integration team does the final evaluation.

ION-begeleiding: Inclusive Education Counselling

Inclusive education counselling allows children with special needs to attend classes in the mainstream school. There they can follow the appropriate course, they receive extra help and they are helped to feel accepted thanks to some work on social inclusion.

Pupils without disabilities are helped to realize that all people are different and to accept diversity. The emphasis is thus on the acceptance of diversity.

Inclusive education means that the child can grow up in a normal environment characterized by respectful social interaction, helpfulness and tolerance.

Basically inclusive education can be applied to every pupil with special educational needs if they agree that the mainstream goals won't be achieved. In Flanders inclusive education is addressed particularly to children with intellectual disabilities who received a type 2 education certificate.

Every child with a type 2 certificate who goes to the mainstream school can receive 5,5 hours of support per week by a type 2 special needs teacher.

A CLB employee should support this process. Children with high care needs sometimes have a personal assistance budget managed by the parents. The personal assistant can take of tasks at school, transport and physical support in the classroom. Also therapists can be involved during or after school. There are also many schools that rely on some extra hours of support in the classroom by a student coming from a college and university.

GON, BuSO or ION?

What is the difference between special education (BuSO) integrated education (GON) and inclusive education (ION)?

The special education consists of special schools where only children with special needs attend classes. The team responsible for the student in this school is often very specialized in certain problems (visual or hearing impairment). In the special schools the pupils follow a personal learning program, tailored to their needs.

The GON pupils follow the mainstream curriculum while the ION pupils have a differentiated curriculum, they get their own objectives and education plan in the mainstream school.

M-decree

What the M- decree is about

From 1 September 2015 the M-decree will be implemented. It is a decree about measures for pupils with special education needs and their right to attend a mainstream school. It is the first step towards inclusion.

Every pupil will have the right to enrol in the mainstream school and to have a “reasonable” or a “proportional” adjustment of the regular curriculum.

What will change for mainstream schools?

Schools will adapt the mainstream curriculum depending on the educational needs of the pupil with disabilities and on the context. The reasonable accommodation will be based on the Sticordi measures: stimulation, differentiation, remediation, compensation, dispensation.

There are different levels of adjustment. The lowest level is the differentiating action, the highest is the dispensing action. The criteria to adapt and individualize the curriculum are decided by the Ministry of Education and written in a protocol.

If pupils do not reach the common minimum objectives at the end of the course of studies they will not receive a valid diploma, but a certificate.

If a school refuses to provide a reasonable adjustment it will be considered discrimination.

But if the school, after a consultation with the CLB employee, the school commission board and the pupil's parents, realizes that the adjustment would be disproportionate, the procedures for the enrolment can be interrupted.

In this case parents can ask CLB to help them to find another school which is more suitable.

What about special schools?

Special schools will keep on existing, but pupils will have to try first to attend mainstream schools. If that is not possible then they can enrol in the special schools. Anyway to enrol in the special school it will still be necessary and attestation written by a CLB employee.

What changes with definition of the types?

With the introduction of the M-decree there will be a change in the types of disabilities.

- Instead of type 1 and 8 there will be: type of basic education offer (basisaanbod). this type is not associated with a particular diagnosis
- Type 2: learning disabilities
- Type 3: emotional or behavioural disorder
- Type 4: Motor handicap
- Type 5: pupils staying at the hospital or at a rehab centre
- Type 6: visual impairment
- Type 7: hearing impairment or speech or language disorder
- Type 9: autism Spectrum Disorder

A student can be registered in the type of basic education offer schools only if the adaptations of the curriculum in the mainstream education are inadequate and disproportionate. After 2 years if the assessment shows that the pupil can follow a reasonably adapted mainstream curriculum he/she can be orientated again towards the mainstream education, otherwise he/she will still have to study at the basic education offer school. The special education assessment lasts 2 years, it means that pupils are assessed every two years.

List of sources:

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- <file:///C:/Users/Dirk/Downloads/standpuntnota%20grip%202014.1%20commentaar%20m-decreet.pdf>

Besides reading written information I interviewed some people working in/for the education system who helped me to have a clearer idea of the Flemish system.

The people I interviewed are:

- Greet Cauwenberghs: vice headmaster at Miniemeninstituut in Leuven and in charge of didactics;
- Gaby Moyaerts: teacher at Miniemeninstituut in Leuven;
- Ellen Laureys: special needs assistant at Miniemeninstituut in Leuven;
- Johan Spelmans: CLB employee who works at Miniemeninstituut in Leuven;
- Anke Troch: CLB employee in charge of diagnoses for pupils with disabilities;
- Jan De Ceulaer: headmaster of BUSO school Ter Bank;
- Leen Tiesters: SEN teacher at BUSO school Ter Bank;
- Roel Moyers teachers' coordinator at OKAN;
- Griet Tweepennickx and Sofie Verhaegen GON-counsellors' coordinator at the special school “Windekind”.