

As the Flemish Youth Council we would like to give you some inside information on the Belgian and more specific Flemish situation concerning youth rights. As a high developed region the standards for young people are rather good, with different ways young people can participate in society. Nevertheless there are a multitude of societal problems having their effects on the development of young people and the implementation of youth rights in general.

### **1° Child poverty**

The average poverty rate for the entire population in Belgium is 15.3%. While the poverty rate for young people under 25 is almost 19% (with strong regional differences: one in ten in Flanders, one in four in Wallonia, and four in ten in Brussels).<sup>1</sup> The poverty is notably related to a growing divide between groups in society whereby low-skilled people, single parent households, persons living in very low work intensity households as well as persons with a migration background run the risk of falling behind. Poverty in early childhood and adolescence has especially devastating effects, often distorting children's physical, cognitive and social development so with 21% of households at risk of poverty or social exclusion, further attention is needed.<sup>2</sup>

### **2° Underage migrants /unaccompanied minors**

In 2015 the Belgian foreign Affairs service registered 35 476 applies for asylum, in 2016, 18 710. Mostly from areas dominated by conflict like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The last two years there are strikingly more unaccompanied minor refugees. In 2015 there were 3919 applies for asylum from this particular group.<sup>3</sup>

These young refugees are extremely vulnerable. They bare traumas, have difficult access to trustworthy information and often live in great uncertainty about their future and about their family. They often lack the needed security and safety. Even when they enter school they face difficulties to accustom because of the big cultural differences.

### **3° Inclusive education**

While the level and the quality in education in Belgium is good, international figures demonstrate that our education system is not inclusive enough.<sup>4</sup> Education outcomes are still associated with the social status of parents and there is a big gap between the performance of advantaged and disadvantaged students. Migrant students also perform poorly compared to their native peers.

### **4° Depression and wellbeing**

Belgium in general has a relatively high depression rate. The figures concerning suicide are decreasing, but remain high, this is the same for young people. According to a survey we launched with 1200 respondents, one in three young people reports to have psychological problems. Young people identify this as a major challenge for policymakers. Societal pressure and school-related anxiety are reported reasons for this unwellbeing. The taboo on

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.armoedebestrijding.be/cijfers\\_aantal\\_armen.htm](http://www.armoedebestrijding.be/cijfers_aantal_armen.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/handleiding-oog-voor-armoede> and [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15721Belgium\\_Rev.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15721Belgium_Rev.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> [www.cgvs.be/nl/cijfers](http://www.cgvs.be/nl/cijfers)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/belgium/pisa-2015-belgium.htm>

this problem is still very heavy and the mental health care does not always fits young people's needs.<sup>5</sup>

### **5° Online privacy for young people**

For youth in particular the internet is a highly accessible, used and influential tool. They learn, play, give opinions and make contacts via the internet. Indeed, usage of the internet provides youth with a plethora of advantages. Unfortunately however, many young individuals in Belgium are unaware of their rights, rendering them particularly vulnerable concerning their online privacy and safety.. Within this context young individuals have become victims of violence, have access to unwanted information, are regarded as a consumer and have issues concerning the protection of their own data.<sup>6</sup> the Council of Europe developed a campaign for human rights online , to reduce the levels of acceptance of hate speech and develop online youth participation and citizenship, including in Internet governance processes. The Flemish government is one of the partners in this campaign.<sup>7</sup>

### **6° Young people and the environment**

The open space is disappearing in Flanders (daily 6 hectares). The loss of forests, grassland and meadow has negative consequences for the health and playspace for children. In addition, the use of public space is too regulated. Young people are often seen as troublemakers and they risk getting administrative sanctions.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover the air quality in the Flemish cities stays bad and the recommended values for fine particles of the world health organization are not met. This has a pernicious effect on children as they are extra vulnerable to air pollution.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore climate change is one of the major challenges of our time and is of extreme importance to our generation. Until now the government has not taken all the necessary steps to reach the goals set in the Paris agreement on time.

### **7° Discrimination of youth on the housing market**

Young people encounter difficulties finding housing.

Since last year regulation changed in Flanders concerning rental agreements. To rent a house it is mandatory now to pay a bail of three months rent, instead of two months as it used to be. For young people this is a problem, since they might not have earned enough or have enough savings to pay this amount of money. In addition, lots of young people are facing discrimination on the rental market based on a ethnic or cultural ground.

On the housing market we see a comparable problem. Less and less young people are able to buy their own house because banks are not willing to loan the hole amount of money, since the national bank changed guidelines on this topic. From 2007 to 2016, the average age for buying a house increased from 31.1 years old to 36.9 years old.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/advies/1706-advies-psychisch-welzijn>

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, Children's Rights in the Digital Age (2014), p. 6:  
[http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Childrens\\_Rights\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Age\\_A\\_Download\\_from\\_Children\\_Around\\_the\\_World\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Childrens_Rights_in_the_Digital_Age_A_Download_from_Children_Around_the_World_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nohatespeechmovement.org/>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20130124\\_055](http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20130124_055); <http://derefactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/politiek/1.1586648>; <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/top-100-van-de-absurdste-gas-boetes-een-klucht-zonder-weerga/article-opinion-120656.html>,

<sup>9</sup> [https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/sites/default/files/advies/1701\\_advies\\_witboek\\_beleidsplan\\_ruimte\\_vlaanderen.pdf](https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/sites/default/files/advies/1701_advies_witboek_beleidsplan_ruimte_vlaanderen.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Numbers from the consultancy firm Immotheker-Finotheker published in The newspaper De Standaard on the 8th of January.

## **8° Youth unemployment and NEET**

According to the public employment service of Flanders, the youth unemployment rate in 2016 was 16,6%. However, in Brussels the youth unemployment rate was of 24,9%.

Many of the early school-leavers are in danger to find themselves disengaged from both education and the labour market and become NEET. Parameters having a severe effect on employment of young people are education level, socio economic background, ethnic cultural background and language skills.<sup>11</sup> Discrimination based on ethnic or cultural background is an important problem leading to less people with a migrant background on the labour market. The federal government recently launched different solutions to tackle this problem, as for example the legal ground to do mystery calling.

### **The Flemish Youth Council: Youth-led structure involved in developing implementing monitoring and evaluating policies and programs on youth.**

The Flemish Youth Council is the official advisory body of the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people. This means that all Flemish Ministers have to ask the Flemish Youth Council for advice whenever they want to make a decision that will have consequences for children and young people. It also means that the Flemish Youth Council may give advice of its own accord, if policy makers forget to ask for advice or when we deem it necessary.

---

<sup>11</sup> [https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/sites/default/files/nieuws/1702\\_-\\_advies\\_toegang\\_tot\\_werk.pdf](https://vlaamsejeugdraad.be/sites/default/files/nieuws/1702_-_advies_toegang_tot_werk.pdf)