Inclusive Education in Belgium (Flanders)

**Definition:** Inclusive education is education where children with special educational needs participate in a mainstream school with adjustments and additional support. An educational need is a didactical or pedagogical need from the pupil that obstruct good learning processes for the child. An educational need is an educational translation of the psychological concept of learning obstacles. These are skills, that children lack, which create problems in their development.

**Policy and Implementation:** The policy in Flanders is evolving towards more inclusion. The new policy (since 2009) starts from the educational needs of the children and not from their disabilities. The M-decree approved by the Flemish Parliament on the 21st of March 2014, stands for ‘Measures for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)’. It arranges how the Flemish educational system deals with pupils who have difficulties attending general lessons in a mainstream school because of a handicap, a disorder or an impairment. It recommends investing in broad baseline care, implementing appropriate measures and reasonable adaptations. There are six policy objectives: first regular then special needs education, the right for reasonable adjustments, the right to enrol in a mainstream school, new types of schools for special education, new conditions of admission in schools for special education, support for mainstream education. Specific pedagogical and administrative measures foreseen by the M-decree include the ‘vision of care’ not as a safety net, but as a starting point. This vision has six principle ideas: a broad definition of care, a broader vision of care and differentiation, a preventive and remediating component (the Universal Design for Learning principles), a shared care policy led by the school team, with involvement of child and parents, a ‘care continuum’ and integrated care.

**Teacher Education:** Initial teacher training lasts 3 years is at Bachelor Level. Students can specialise in different topics in and after bachelor after bachelor training. In VIVES, during the 3 years of the bachelor they are introduced systematically to this care continuum model and experience inclusion during practice. The need of integration of care is most in the secondary teacher training. VIVES also offers a bachelor after bachelor ‘care and remedial teacher’ and a bachelor after bachelor ‘special educational needs’. Different organisations are offering in-service training related to this topic and especially on the implementation of the M-decree.

**Needs and Challenges:** As the M-decree is very new, the implementation involves informing schools and organising in service training. Many questions remain about the different levels of involved schools and organisations. The ministry has a limited budget and this makes the implementation of the M-decree challenging for the schools. Ways to integrate the care continuum without extra budget are not always evident. The M-decree wants to stimulate more inclusion, therefore we need to prepare new teachers and society in the ways they can cope with diversity. A mind shift is necessary.