

A comparative mixed methods study of youngsters' educational trajectories in Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands

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Ethnic and social inequalities in education are persistent in Flanders (northern part of Belgium) and the Netherlands. However, this does not necessarily mean that (groups of) students navigate in similar ways through each educational system. Both systems are situated in similar educational, migration and social contexts but vary with regard to several institutional arrangements, such as the organisation of students in tracks/fields of study, the use of standardized tests and certificates to pass to the next year, the educational practices to orient students towards a particular educational programme or track, and the entrance procedures to higher education. We will focus in this study on the cross-country comparison of the educational routes young people have followed to gain a better understanding in the possible impacts of institutional arrangements on young people's educational trajectories and decision-making processes that lead to early school leaving. The careful consideration of such trajectories matter as changes of track, fields of study, educational programs or institutions are often accompanied with feelings of failure or loss of motivation and contain an additional risk for students to leave school early, often reproducing existing ethnic and social inequalities in education. Therefore, in the present study, based on the RESL.eu data, we explicitly select young people's educational trajectories that are at high risk of leaving school without educational qualification. More specific, we contrast the accounts of educational trajectories of young adults that are enrolled in- and outside mainstream education and that have left school without educational qualification with each other. This way, we have a better view on the differential positive and negative outcomes for particular groups of students. To conclude, the use of a comparative two-steps mixed-methods research design that examines the educational trajectories of students within the Flemish and Dutch educational system, will offer us the opportunity to study specific institutional arrangements and its outcomes more in-depth.

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