

## Policy Note 2019-2024

## Promotion of Multilingualism



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# 1 INTRODUCTION: A FEW OPENING REMARKS

## 1.1 *A world full of languages - point of no return*

In around 200 countries across the world, people are speaking more than 7,000 languages, 23% of them by around half of the world's population, and 40% of them by fewer than 1,000 people. If we look only at speakers of their mother tongue, Mandarin is most commonly spoken native language, but English takes over as the world's second or third language. French, with 280 million speakers, takes fourth place, while Dutch, with around 25 million speakers, sits in 60<sup>th</sup> place<sup>1</sup>.

The Brussels Capital Region occupies an unusual place within this global context. On 1 January 2019, Brussels<sup>2</sup>, with a relatively small area of 162.4 square kilometres, counted 1,208,542 inhabitants<sup>3</sup> of around 180 nationalities, speaking more than 100 different languages. That makes Brussels one of the more cosmopolitan regions in today's world, a laboratory and a pioneer in the field of multilingualism.

The debate over multilingualism is well under way, and on that score we have already reached a “point of no return”. Language diversity has gained an important place within the European integration process. In the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) the subject is dealt with specifically in Article 22. Also, the action plan of the EU Commission of 2004 aims explicitly to strive to achieve trilingual status for its inhabitants. Today we can see that it is mainly bilingualism (English + 1) which is rapidly spreading in Europe, but that trilingualism is a fact of life in virtually no European region. However this ideal is in fact a more realistic goal in Brussels, the capital of Europe, than in many other European regions. With the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking language areas being so close, combined with the mainly English-speaking international community, trilingualism would seem to be a realistic goal for the people of Brussels.

Among the population of Brussels, moreover, there is growing support for bi- and multilingualism, and that is an important factor for the creation of a policy on multilingualism. A majority of the people of Brussels supports one or another form of multilingual education. Most people would also agree that multilingual abilities are essential for finding a job. In addition, a majority can also be found for the idea that such language competence is an essential aspect of the very identity of the Brussels people<sup>4</sup>.

This social approval has had a visible impact on the various government accords agreed at in the recent past. And it is an important factor in trying to create the political will for a policy on multilingualism. The latest government accord for the Brussels Capital Region government is very clear:

*“The government shall work out a global policy that encourages multilingualism among the people of Brussels, and promotes the Brussels identity and a Brussels citizenship, while strengthening social promotion and social cohesion within the Region. This approach will not be limited to education, but will extend out over various sectors, such as job training, employment and culture. The cooperation of the community commissions, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the Flemish Community will in this field be intensified. With the aim of improving bilingualism and multilingualism in Brussels, the government will invite the communities and the federal government to reach a cooperation agreement with a view to strengthening the*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.ethnologue.com>.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of legibility, we will use the term “Brussels” to refer to the region with its 19 municipalities.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [www.bisa.brussels](http://www.bisa.brussels).

<sup>4</sup> Rudi Janssens, *Meertaligheid als opdracht. Een analyse van de Brusselse taalsituatie op basis van taalbarometer 4*, VUBPRESS, Brussel, 2018. (Multilingualism as a challenge. An analysis of the language situation in Brussels based on the fourth Language Barometer).

*provision of education in French and/or Dutch as well as other languages, within the framework of existing competences.”*

The Flemish Community Commission (VGC) has stated its unequivocal support, together with the Brussels Education Centre (OCB) and in cooperation with the higher education establishments and their governing bodies, as well as the proponents of new initiatives, for the introduction of such multilingual education. The VGC sees multilingualism as a benefit by which the respect for Dutch-language service provision for everyone in Brussels can be guaranteed. The Commission of the French Community (Cocof) points in its own governing accord to the importance of a knowledge of Dutch and English in the jobs market, and promises to work harder on language teaching.

The various entities of the Brussels region, then, see the urgent need to learn more languages. It is also our task to make the Brussels resident, job-seeker, employee and employer, just as much as the governmental instances, aware of this urgent need. It is at the same time our job to support the people of Brussels in acquiring and utilising their languages. An insistent support for multilingualism in Brussels strengthens the social and economic position of the people of Brussels, and makes the idea of diversity realistic and achievable.

The people of Brussels see multilingualism as the raw material that will ensure their future, on many levels. The knowledge of more than one language is not only good for people's experience of living together but also for their chances in life – on the jobs market, in education, economically, socially, in sport and in culture. Multilingualism in Brussels has to become something that speaks for itself. It is the guarantor of social and economic mobility, and as such a major asset. Or as former minister Jos Chabert once said, “One more language means more bread on the table.”

Of course, our policy on multilingualism must not ignore the reality that not everyone has the capacities and/or opportunities of learning new languages at the same rate. Research has shown that children from higher socio-economic groups demonstrate better language development than children from less fortunate groups. It is vital for us to continue to ensure the evolution of our policies takes as much account as necessary to reach the widest public possible.

## *1.2 Legal bilingualism and a policy on multilingualism – language policy and language politics*

It is important on the level of policy-making to mark a clear difference between language laws (language politics) and a policy on multilingualism (language policy). The point of departure here is Article 30 of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of use of the spoken language<sup>5</sup>.

Language in Belgium is not a neutral matter, and in our country has always been tied to identity. This is the context in which a language policy came into being, codified in language laws which govern the use (and the protection) of the language between government and citizen. Belgium is thus a country with a high level of language consciousness, where language and politics are tightly knitted together. Language laws were passed which protected the rights of language groups, including for example French-speakers in the Flemish communes with facilities, German speakers in Belgium as a whole and Dutch-speakers in Brussels. Language policy is concerned with the representation of the interests of language groups having the same language but also culture and history. So the bilingual area of Brussels-City was extended to cover the entire Brussels Capital Region. The legal framework was agreed by the federal government. The municipalities (responsible for implementation), the deputy governor of the administrative area of Brussels-Capital (for oversight) and the region and Joint Community Commission (GGC – for enforcement) are the other entities concerned in this context.

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<sup>5</sup> The entire article in the Constitution reads: “the use of the languages spoken in Belgium is free and can only be regulated by the law and then only for matters of public policymaking and in legal cases”.

Any policy on multilingualism, meanwhile, takes as its point of departure the current language situation and existing political structures<sup>6</sup>. An essential first premise is that the focus should stay on the actual language use of all residents. Language policy needs to be directed at the needs of the population in an area with a high level of language diversity and evolving language relationships, and needs to be looked at with the aim of improving the living conditions of the people. In this case we are concerned with three languages – French and Dutch, the two official languages of Brussels for which a legal framework already exists, and English, which as a world language has an important role to play within the economic and cultural sectors. Knowledge of (a combination of) these languages is essential to be able to take part fully in Brussels society. At the same time, we fully recognise the value of learning and passing along the rich variety of native languages that exists in our cosmopolitan capital (see below).

It is therefore clear that language politics and policy have different start and end points, with each having its own dynamic within the debate going on in society. It is of essential importance, then, to make a clear distinction between the two at the level of policy-making.

### *1.3 A minister responsible for the “Promotion of Multilingualism” – a collective mission*

The government of the Brussels-Capital Region has for the first time created a ministry for the promotion of multilingualism – a first, not only for Brussels and Belgium, but also for Europe<sup>7</sup>. That responsibility has now been passed to the Brussels government, while a major section of the Brussels governing accords is devoted to multilingualism, with a minister to take on the responsibility for a coordinating role in creating a policy on multilingualism. Brussels is now home to a number of initiatives and expertise on multilingual policy, ranging from youth and cultural organisations who work daily with a linguistically diverse public, to Visit Brussels, which recently began communicating the city's cultural calendar in three languages. At an academic level, the Marnix Plan is being implemented and disseminated, the Brussels Studies Institute and our Brussels universities (VUB and ULB) have for years now been carrying out scientific research on language diversity in the capital. The field is extraordinarily rich, and here is a great deal of expertise present. We have had interesting contacts in the most recent past with organisations and institutions, and it is also the intention to help create relationships and partnerships of cooperation which will help lift their efforts towards multilingualism to a higher level. Their supporting role in the development of changing language relations and language diversity, together with the associated social needs, is of crucial importance.

More promotion and the dissemination of more information would increase everyone's understanding of what multilingualism in Brussels is and would counter any negative perceptions. Multilingual Brussels role models could help carry the message. A good example would be the campaign by Actiris, in which footballer Vincent Kompany and comedian Abdel en vrai set out to convince the people of Brussels that a knowledge of Dutch is important in finding a job.

The portfolio “Promotion of Multilingualism” is a transversal responsibility – one that crosses the responsibilities of colleague ministers at several points. Language diversity spreads out over different sectors of society. Education is an obvious one, but other areas are involved, including culture, integration, employment, job training, youth and welfare – all have an important connection with multilingualism. Close cooperation is therefore indispensable if results are to be achieved, all the while respecting the competences of other departments. Above all there is a political readiness to build bridges between the communities. It is the responsibility of all governments and organisations within the region to put that readiness into practice now.

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<sup>6</sup> Rudi Janssens, op cit.

<sup>7</sup> In the past a commissioner in charge of multilingualism had been assigned within the European Commission.

Finally, this note should not be seen as a conventional policy proposal. Because we are dealing here with a newly-created responsibility, this document should be seen as inspirational discussion document, at the beginning of a new process. For that reason, a major part of the note is dedicated to the necessary consideration, insight and clarifications on multilingualism itself, while a lesser part concerns the policy to be followed as a result. Hopefully by proceeding in this way, reflection and policy can grow out of each other to give form to the promotion of multilingualism. The Brussels Capital Region's government intends to take further steps in the coming five years, taking this step as laying the basis for a policy on multilingualism, and acting as a driving force at the same time.

## 2 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

### 2.1 *From a monolingual to a multilingual city*

The language situation in Brussels today is the outcome of social developments and policy choices from the past. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the people of Brussels spoke mainly a local language, a Brabant variant of Dutch. Through the link with France at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a policy of “Frenchification” was introduced via the education system. Following Belgian independence in 1830 that policy was continued, and the outcome was that Brussels became a bilingual city.

The recent language history of Brussels begins with the language law of 1963, by which the capital became officially a bilingual city, but that bilingual Brussels has changed a great deal over the years – especially under the influence of labour immigration resulting from the demand for cheap labour from the Mediterranean area after the Second World War, and the resulting family reunification, which concerned in particular largely uneducated populations.

At the same time Brussels saw an influx of more educated migrants due to the presence of international institutions such as NATO and the European Union (EU), which helped spread the use of English as a *lingua franca*. The presence of these international and European institutions in Brussels is a major factor when it comes to multilingualism. According to figures from the Brussels government's Commissioner for Europe and the International Organisations<sup>8</sup>, the Brussels region counts no fewer than 29 international schools, including four European schools, with a total of more than 22,000 students. Tuition in those schools often takes place in English or other non-national languages.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the expansion of the EU with the free movement of people, migration increased considerably, and the result was that Brussels became the second most cosmopolitan city in the world, after Dubai.

Nowadays it is also instructive to consider the 352,500 commuters<sup>9</sup> from Flanders and Wallonia who come to the capital daily. They have also had an effect on the language map of Brussels.

In the academic literature, a distinction is made between two types of multilingual society. On the one hand, a traditional regional multilingualism where in a particular city or region, two or more language communities historically live together. On the other hand, an urban multilingualism, where migration lies at the basis of the multilingual nature of the society. With its two traditional language communities and as a city of migrants, Brussels fits both definitions. Moreover, given the city's ambition to be seen as the Capital of Europe, Brussels has chosen to be a *de facto* multilingual city.

The various migration streams have seen to it that Brussels experienced a strong increase in population over a relatively short period. On 1 January 2000 Brussels had 959,318 inhabitants. On 1 January 2019 there were

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<sup>8</sup> *Brussel in cijfers, 2016*, a publication of the Commissioner for Europe and the International Organisations. [www.commissioner.brussels](http://www.commissioner.brussels).

<sup>9</sup> 2018 figure, source: [http://bisa.brussels/bestanden/publicaties/minibru/mini-bru\\_2019\\_nl](http://bisa.brussels/bestanden/publicaties/minibru/mini-bru_2019_nl).

1,208,542, or almost 25% more. Brussels is a city where, in addition to a natural net increase, population has grown especially, thanks to the impact of external migration. In other words, there are more people coming into Brussels from abroad than there are Brussels natives who leave the city to go and live elsewhere. And, in addition to the net immigration balance from other countries, Brussels has also seen a negative net balance of internal migration: there are annually more Brussels residents who leave for other Belgian municipalities than move in the opposite direction. This suburbanisation that started in the 1960s is continuing, while the “Frenchification” of the Flemish periphery of the early days has now given way to the “internationalisation” of both Flemish and Walloon Brabant provinces. It goes without saying that both tendencies have had a major impact on the language situation in the Brussels region, although there is little data available on this matter.

According to the fourth BRIO Language Barometer it is clear that these social developments are reflected in the language knowledge and the use of language in the city itself. The people of Brussels speak around 100 native languages at home. French is the best-known language, although the knowledge of French has dropped off significantly since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from 95.5% of the population who had a good or excellent command of the language to 87.1%. Dutch has undergone an even steeper decline, from 33.3% to 16.3%. English is the only language holding its own, and has become the second language of Brussels, with 34.4% reporting a good command of the language. The evolving levels of knowledge have not however led to a matching decline in the use of these languages: what has changed is the manner in which people adapt to such a multilingual urban environment.

Communicating in standard language is no longer the norm for everyone, although of course it remains essential to be able to do so. This is illustrated by the use of language on the Brussels jobs market, where 75% of those employed in Brussels spoke French only at work. Nowadays that is the case for only one-third, with the other two-thirds speaking more than one language at work. The same shift towards multilingual communication can also be seen in other areas, such as local relations, shopping, in bars and restaurants etc.

People in Brussels function not only within their own local community, they are also members of a virtual community, with links for example to their homeland or region, the homes of their parents and grandparents, and at the same time members of a network related to their jobs, religion, hobbies and so on. This all has its own impact on language knowledge. Languages which would seem at first glance to barely be current in Brussels are nevertheless regularly used within these personal networks and are often passed on to the next generation. Language diversity is more extensive than any local language function.

Below, we will provide not only some of the important elements from the fourth Language Barometer's research regarding the language situation in the Brussels of today:

- Knowledge of Dutch is decreasing in all age categories, but most strongly among older people in Brussels. The first Barometer had shown a correlation between age and knowledge of Dutch, where Dutch was mainly spoken by the older generation and where Dutch speakers in the main had grown up in a monolingual Dutch-speaking family.
- It is notable that the drop in the knowledge of Dutch is most noticeable among Belgians. Among Belgians born in Brussels, surveys show a significant retreat of the knowledge of Dutch.
- The number of Brussels residents who see themselves as monolingual has fallen significantly, in favour of those who see themselves as speaking more than one language. And among those who describe themselves as monolingual, around 90% come from a monolingual French-speaking family. The difference from those who describe themselves as bilingual are few, although the description “bilingual” no longer necessarily means that they speak both official languages.
- In the households of Brussels, the use of English remains limited. There has been a slight increase of the group who speak English at home, with the increase mainly accounted for by the number of families where English is combined at home with another language.



- French spoken at home in Brussels is on the increase, with Dutch in retreat, although there was a slight increase in the latest Barometer. The combination of French-Dutch is on the wane, as are the combination of French with another language, and the combination of two languages other than French and Dutch. French remains the dominant language, and the most obvious second language spoken in the family, rather than Dutch or English.
- The most important migration language in Brussels is Arabic, originating in migration to the city, and mainly spoken by those who bring the language from the home environment. Almost all of the people in Brussels who speak Arabic grew up in a household where the language was spoken with the parents. However the number of those who combine Arabic with French at home is increasing.
- Some 14% of non-Belgians speak none of the three contact languages. The limited number who speak neither French, Dutch nor English mainly consists of people with a non-EU origin who have become naturalised.
- The group which speaks none of the three languages has grown since 2000 for all age groups. However the younger the person, the less likely they are to belong to this group.

Finally, it is important to point out that only adults were interviewed for the Language Barometer's survey, meaning one-quarter of the population of Brussels was not considered in the results. In addition, only people who were registered with the municipality where they reside were in line to be questioned. People working for embassies, or were in the asylum procedure, as well as those without papers, were not included in the survey. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that the true extent of language diversity is likely to be higher than the final results of the research show.

### 3 MULTILINGUALISM: ONE FLAG, SEVERAL MEANINGS

#### 3.1 *An attempt at definition*

In the traditional scientific literature, multilingualism is seen on the one hand from the side of the individual, and on the other hand from the side of society. A person may be multilingual as an individual if they, at whatever level, speak two or more languages. Most of these people speak their various languages at different levels of ability. One may write a language better than they speak; someone else may speak their mother tongue in daily conversation in preference to a school or work language. Multilingualism takes many forms, which may change according to the time and the setting. Looking at the question on the level of the community, we come quickly up against the law on official languages. That may allow for one language, two languages or even more. And this official language legislation does not necessarily tell us a great deal about the ways different languages are used.

Different definitions are used when talking about multilingualism. Some researchers employ a rather narrow definition which proposes that only those who command two or more languages at a similar level to the level of their mother tongue can be considered multilingual. Others define the term more broadly, and allow for someone who may only command a few words in another language to be considered as multilingual.

The definition may also differ depending on the area in which multilingualism is situated. An example is the definition used in the education field:

*“Individuals may be described as multilingual if they are competent enough to understand and produce a language (which may occur at various levels, so that not all languages need be mastered to the same level) or if they regularly make use of a number of languages.”<sup>10</sup>*

In the field of education, above all, a distinction is made between simultaneous multilingualism, or the learning of more than one language at the same time, and successive or sequential multilingualism, whereby different languages are learned at different stages of the subject's life. In the first instance, a child may learn more than one language from birth, for example where the two parents have different mother tongues. In the second instance, multilingualism might come about as a result of migration, or indeed education itself.

On a policy level, we employ an inclusive and functional view of individual multilingualism. A person by this definition is multilingual if they command more than one language to at least the level of being able to hold a simple conversation<sup>11</sup>. In the context of Brussels, such a command of French, Dutch and English is considered a minimum requirement to be considered multilingual. Knowledge of at least one of these languages (or of course a combination) is essential to a full participation in Brussels society. We do not, it goes without saying, ignore the importance of a knowledge of other languages than those three, and their value to the cultural, emotional and social aspects of the Brussels identity. The recognition and valuing of these varied language abilities is one of the pillars upon which the successful development of multilingualism among all of Brussels' people rests.

### *3.2 Language diversity and multilingualism*

Language diversity and multilingualism are two terms which are often used interchangeably, although they mean different things. The Brussels Capital Region is officially bilingual, but its people speak many other languages. There are many different languages and language variants present – and that is what language diversity is. Multilingualism points to the degree to which people are able to communicate with each other in various languages. Brussels is language-diverse, but whether it is a fully-formed multilingual community depends on the manner in which the people of Brussels are truly multilingual. A multilingual society functions on the basis of the combination of languages which allows people within different social networks to function together<sup>12</sup>.

The majority of people in Brussels are able to communicate in more than one language, but given the wide range of language diversity, a great number of permutations is possible. As indicated above, part of the Brussels population need not necessarily speak both official languages, and in fact that percentage is even dropping.

### *3.3 Translanguaging*

Translanguaging is a term that was originally didactic, but is now used more widely. The concept refers to multilingual speakers who use their entire language knowledge as a complete system, without regarding the languages as separate systems from each other. The various languages are deployed together on the basis of strategic choices. It is a typically Brussels phenomenon which anyone can encounter on the tram or in the metro. Young people speak different languages mixed together, and switch from one to the other depending on the subject under discussion. If talking about school, they use the language of school, Dutch or French; on private matters, they speak the language of home. In international company, English makes an appearance. Various researchers have stressed that this type of using languages together helps develop creativity and critical thinking, and demonstrates anything but a defective knowledge of language.

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<sup>10</sup> Kris and Machteld Van Den Branden, *Naar een volwaardig talenbeleid. Omgaan met meertaligheid in het Vlaams onderwijs, Tijdschrift voor de Vereniging van het Onderwijs in het Nederlands*, jg. 40, nr.4. (Towards a complete language policy. Dealing with multilingualism in Flemish education; Journal of the Association for Education in Dutch, year 40, number 4).

<sup>11</sup> Here, we make no distinction between the various languages in determining whether someone is multilingual.

<sup>12</sup> Rudi Janssens, op cit.

### 3.4 *Maximin language*

In a context of multilingualism, language usage is adapted to the language situation, in order to allow communication to pass as easily as possible. This brings us to the concept of “Maximin Language” as described by Professor Philippe Van Parijs<sup>13</sup>.

When multilingual individuals speak with each other, they automatically select their maximin language. The example is a familiar one: A Dutch speaker and a French speaker meet. The French of the Dutch speakers often better than the Dutch of the French speaker. And although the French speaker may try their best, albeit in broken Dutch, after a few phrases the Dutch speaker switches over to French to ease the discussion. Should a Swedish person then join the discussion, then the chance is high that the conversation will continue in English, as the new maximin language of the conversation. People systematically make use of the language which is the least exclusive. The conversation partner who knows that language least well still knows it better than their discussion partners know the other languages available. In other words, the language which is least well understood compared to the other languages available to the group: the minimum knowledge is maximised, and thereby is the exclusion minimised. This mechanism explains the choice of French and the switch to English in the example given above, and is of fundamental importance in understanding the language dynamic in Brussels and elsewhere and in dealing with the challenges presented.

## 4 WHY HAVE A MULTILINGUAL POLICY ?

In the introduction we suggested there is a clear demand from the people of Brussels for a policy on multilingualism. The vast majority of people in Brussels see the multilingual context as a major benefit. Aside from the economic potential offered by the international status of Brussels, the rich cultural life of the capital is also a major attraction for many people to install themselves in the region.

In continuing, we shall go deeper into two elements which are essential to our policy: multilingualism in the service of social cohesion, and multilingualism in the service of social mobility.

### 4.1 *Multilingualism and social cohesion*

#### 4.1.1 Mission impossible?

At first glance, the concepts “multilingualism” and “social cohesion” might seem difficult, and even paradoxical, to bring together. The growth of the modern state, with its democratic institutions, its rights and liberties, came into being in the 19<sup>th</sup> century most often in the form of the nation state. The population and the nation formed an institution with one language and one culture within a clearly delineated territory. It was taken for granted that within the ideal nation state, the language would coincide with the people (“the language is all of the people”). Within that view, knowledge of the single language and culture are essential to make up a valid part of the community, and to function within it. In the context, one single language and culture are the basic elements of strong social cohesion. Language diversity and multilingualism, by contrast, are seen as a threat to national unity.

One might state, as the corollary, that the more languages present in a given territory, the more difficult it will be to arrive at a strong social cohesion. The combination of globalisation and migration forces us in our time, however, to accept language diversity as a central and unavoidable fact of communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a multilingual context, knowledge of a language takes on a different meaning. It could be assumed that the first language a person speaks is bonded to their culture and way of life. That is not necessarily the case for any second, third or fourth language. People learn languages principally as a means of

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<sup>13</sup> Philippe Van Parijs, *Taal en rechtvaardigheid - In Europa en de wereld*, 2015 (Language and justice in the world).

communication and not as a cultural vehicle. In such a multilingual context, language is no longer by definition an extension of culture. As the fourth Language Barometer suggests, someone from Brussels is not directly identifiable by the language they are speaking (see below).

Multilingualism, the widespread learning of various languages by members of a community, is therefore the glue – the unifying means by which language diversity is turned from a handicap into a benefit. If there exists enough familiarity with the languages shared in a particular place, then the lasting presence of people with a large number of different mother tongues in a city like Brussels offers not only enticing chances for the recognition and appreciation of a wide variety of cultures, but also enormous value in terms of economically fulfilling relationships with numerous other parts of the world. The shared knowledge of French, Dutch and English in Brussels, besides the opportunity to nurture and maintain as many other languages as possible within the community, also brings our city huge benefits, and illustrates how important it is to promote multilingualism<sup>14</sup>.

On a political level, we need to take hold of this fact in order to design a policy for multilingualism that plays on the benefits, with the goal of making a positive and reinforcing impact on social cohesion within the Brussels community.

#### 4.1.2 Multilingualism, social cohesion and shared citizenship

In our environmental analysis we pointed to the impact of a number of migration streams and mobility (movements of changing residence) on the demographic make-up of Brussels. This mobility has to be recognised as impressive. Since 2008, 1,315,806 people moved into or out of Brussels. 733,953 people moved to Brussels from elsewhere (external and internal migration) while 581,853 people moved from Brussels to another place (also internal and external migration)<sup>15</sup>. The fact that Brussels is growing as a result of external migration does not mean that a growing number of foreigners is coming into a stable Brussels population, but rather that they come into a population characterised by the coming and going of its own residents. Over the years, around half of the residents of Brussels were born in the region itself, the rest come from elsewhere. Diversity in Brussels is framed by an evolution of the broader society. Now that more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and that number will only increase<sup>16</sup>, as cities are becoming more and more the crossroads for people from different backgrounds, cultures, ideas etc. This has a major impact on ways of living, working and communicating with each other, and at the same time gives shape to the challenge on the level of social cohesion, such as Brussels is currently experiencing.

Policy-wise, the challenge lies in creating a balance between this mobility on the one side and striving for social inclusion on the other. At first sight these are two apparently opposing evolutions. Social inclusion in a multilingual context goes further than the integration policy, which concentrates on newcomers, and points to the fact that everyone living locally needs to be able to take a full part in the social, political, economic and cultural life. It is not a question of addressing one community speaking a particular language and belonging to a particular culture. Such inclusion is successful if a person is given the feeling they belong. That counts just as much for the local population as for those moving in, whether they are coming from the same country or from abroad. Language policy is an essential element of this process.

Language can either bring people together or keep them apart. Through language, people can take part in forms of formal solidarity (for example via the community institutions in Brussels). Among members of a language community this can lead to a sort of informal solidarity (identification with the community concerned) and possibly lead to the strengthening of the political base of the community. In a multilingual urban environment, languages do not stand alone, as a knowledge of a combination of languages is essential.

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<sup>14</sup> Source: Marnixplan, <http://www.marnixplan.org>.

<sup>15</sup> Figures based on BISA data.

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>.

A multilingual society functions not only on the basis of a *lingua franca*; it is a combination of languages that enables people within various social networks to function.

Closely linked to this discussion is the principle of “shared citizenship”. That term is used to explain how citizens form part of society, and is often used in the debate on integration. So an integration programme is designed to lead to the “citizenship” of the newcomer. In this case the reference is to non-EU nationals, who can be obliged to follow an integration programme.

In a multilingual context, citizenship is greater than this approximation. As well as access to citizenship, it is also of prime importance that everyone in Brussels is enabled to participate fully in the society. A lack of multilingualism results in higher barriers to the jobs market (see below), to social isolation and more. The complexity of urban diversity demands a new approach to citizenship, where policy is created with the aim of reinforcing social cohesion via multilingualism.

#### 4.1.3 Multilingualism and identity

Identity is a concept that comes up in all kinds of social discussions. By definition, identity is a rather vague, changeable and multi-layered concept. We speak of the identity of a person, a group, a city, a country and so on. In this context, language usually refers to a quality one shares with others: an historical past, a culture, values, a religion or a language.

Language is one element which allows people to identify with a particular group. Language can be a necessary condition, but is by itself not usually sufficient. It is not because someone speaks a language that a group is going to recognise them as a member. There may always be additional qualities which someone does not fulfil – cultural, religious, political and so on. Each element that defines the identity of a group can also be an element that excludes others from membership of the group. The advantage of language or languages is that most people are able to learn them. But the identity of the group is normally not limited to knowledge of the group language.

Typical in the case of Brussels is that (political) discussions in this context are for historical reasons often reduced to “being Flemish” or “being French-speaking”. Anyone not seen as a Fleming is quickly classed as a French-speaker, even if that person does not speak French. In the same way, some would classify someone as Flemish if they speak Dutch. Others would say that anyone who did not speak Dutch at home growing up can never be Flemish. Yet others include the term “Flemish” to mean someone who lives in Flanders, regardless of what language they speak.

So what exactly is the situation with language and identity in a multilingual context such as we know in Brussels? In order to answer this question as fully as possible, in terms of social cohesion and inclusion, it is useful to take as our point of departure the individual themselves (referred to in the jargon of the field as the “avowed identification”). How do the people of Brussels see themselves? Do they regard themselves as Fleming/Dutch-speaking or as French-speaking?

Standing out in the fourth Language Barometer's research is that the residents of Brussels see themselves first as from Brussels, then Belgian, then European and only later as French-speaking, Dutch-speaking or belonging to some other language group. The concepts by which they identify themselves in the first instance have nothing to do with a specific language or language group. In addition, a majority in Brussels see being bilingual as an essential component of the Brussels identity. These revelations point to how the Brussels person identifies as a resident of an environment in which being bilingual, or even multilingual, is the norm.

#### 4.1.4 Multilingualism and the language of the home

Recent research by the ULB has shown that half of Brussels children grow up in a family where only French is spoken<sup>17</sup>. In 46% of families, at least one other language is spoken, and in 3% at least two other languages. This trend towards increasing language diversity within families will only increase in the future, with the further internationalisation of the region. We may therefore conclude that multilingualism is on its way to becoming the norm.

Anyone looking for a description of multilingualism, then, cannot overlook the fact of “home language” – the original language spoken in the family environment and with family members. And the home language is different from the language used in environments outside the home, such as school or the workplace<sup>18</sup>. The development, stimulation and maximising of multilingualism can only take place when we do not consider the home language of the child as an abstraction. We recognise the importance of the language of the home for a variety of reasons:

- The development process of the child: academic Jim Cummins showed in his research that insights gained in the process of learning one language help in learning and understanding principles in the learning of another language. The home language thereby acts as a foundation for the learning of other languages. Languages reinforce each other, and a weak understanding of the mother tongue is a disadvantage in learning another language<sup>19</sup>;
- The social-emotional and identity development of the child: expert Marinella Orioni cited in recent research the importance of the emotional aspect of the home language<sup>20</sup>. Children who grow up in more than one language need these languages in order to express themselves emotionally. It is therefore important that they get the impression that their home language is respected;
- The development of language sensibility: the future of Brussels will be multilingual, that much is clear. Whenever efforts are made to inform children of the presence of many other languages, and the advantages of some are made clear to them, they will have a more positive stance regarding those languages. It is not so much the intention to have children learn any specific languages, but instead to develop an open attitude towards different languages and cultures.

In addition, it appears from the research that whenever students are competent in two or more languages, they achieve better results in school. The better their command of their mother tongue, the better their performance appears to be<sup>21</sup>.

## 4.2 Multilingualism and social mobility

### 4.2.1 Language skills as a springboard

The relationship between language and social mobility is the thread that runs through the historical linguistic shifts Brussels went through in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a country where French was the sole official administrative language, knowledge of the language became the motor for social mobility. In particular in the capital Brussels, where both languages were spoken, the prestige afforded to French led to a generalised Frenchification. In the context of today's Brussels, a knowledge of Dutch, in combination with French and

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<sup>17</sup> This research was carried out by ULB sociologist Perrine Humblet on a commission from the *Observatoire de l'enfant (Observatory of the Child)*.

<sup>18</sup> Rudi Janssens, op cit.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Cummins, *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Marinella Orioni, *Het Meertalig Kind, een eerste kennismaking*, 2017 (The multilingual child: a first encounter)

<sup>21</sup> Fernandez, R. M., & Nielsen, F, *Bilingualism and Hispanic scholastic achievements: Some baseline results. Social Science Research*, 15(1), 43–70, 1986.

English – which offers better job prospects – has brought many people in Brussels a stronger power of attraction. The success of Dutch-speaking education is in large part due to this movement.

It is on the jobs market that the link between language and social mobility is seen most clearly. The Brussels labour market is mainly one for the more educated job-seeker. That makes a degree and language proficiency the most important keys to market access. According to Actiris, the Brussels regional service for labour agency, 53% of the job offers the agency obtains make explicit language demands. In 80% of the vacancies, knowledge of both national languages is required, and in around 40% of cases a knowledge of English is required, usually in combination with French and Dutch. The demand for other languages is, on the other hand, relatively limited<sup>22</sup>.

From the same figures from Actiris it can be seen that 78% of job-seekers express no knowledge of the second national language, while 7% claim a “good” command of the second language. Above all, some 16% of job-seekers speak neither French nor Dutch. Only 37% claim an average command of English, and 18% a good command. Finally, some two-thirds of this group, leaving aside French and Dutch, speak another language.

The fourth Language Barometer's research shows that there are hardly any trilingual unemployed (French, Dutch and English). Even traditionally bilingual job-seekers are scarce<sup>23</sup>.

Multilingualism and the knowledge of foreign languages seem also to bring economic advantages. In a number of countries and regions, strong correlations have been found between the level of multilingualism and salaries. An American study showed that American employees who spoke Spanish as well as English earn an average of \$7,000 a year more than those who speak only English. According to a Canadian study<sup>24</sup>, bilingual male employees earn 3.6% more than their monolingual counterparts. Bilingual female employees earn 6.6% more than monolingual women, and trilingual Canadian employees earn another 1.8% more than bilingual colleagues. What is remarkable is that these advantages also apply to multilingual employees who do not need to speak their second or third languages as part of their professional responsibilities. Companies, it seems, give preference to multilingual candidates from the moment of recruiting, even where the job or function requires no multilingual activities or abilities. Companies appear to interpret multilingualism as a sign of advanced general cognitive powers, researchers have speculated.

#### 4.2.2 Multilingualism and the economy

A growing body of research suggests that multilingualism also has an economic impact. The digital society and the globalisation of the economy have thoroughly changed European economic activity. Employees and employers work in and with different languages. Multilingualism can no longer be regarded as simply an additional advantage. It is of prime importance in the business world. Digital communications make national and regional frontiers – but also linguistic borders – more and more vague. English is frequently used as a practical means of communication, but this does not of course mean that other languages are being replaced by English. The reason for this is clear: Companies operate not only on an international level, but are also active on local and Belgian markets. They have employees who come from all across the country, from Europe and even further, they have contacts with different governments and so forth. The number of occasions on which different languages are spoken is very varied. Multilingualism is therefore a *sine qua non* for efficient management. Language abilities in the commercial sector are an absolute must.

The impact of multilingualism on the business world would be difficult to overestimate. It is a simple fact that companies with not enough multilingual employees lose market share and are less competitive. In 2006 the ELAN study by the EU Commission made clear the negative consequences of a lack of language capability on a company's fortunes. Of a test group of 2,000 companies, 11% said they had lost a contract because of a

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<sup>22</sup> Source: *Brussels Observatorium voor de Werkgelegenheid*, 2017 (Observatory of employment).

<sup>23</sup> By “traditional biligual” we mean people who speak French and Dutch equally well.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Swidinsky, *The Economic Returns to the Knowledge and Use of a Second Official Language: English in Quebec and French in the Rest-of-Canada*, 2010.

lack of language capabilities within their company, while half of all respondents said they would be requiring new language abilities in the years to come.

In the daily internal workings and organisation it is clear that monolingualism is not the *modus operandi* of the majority of Brussels companies. French and Dutch are the most often-applied languages for both internal and external purposes, often in combination with English. And because of the proximity of external markets, the importance of German must not be underestimated. Within these multilingual competences, communicative and (inter-)cultural skills play a particular role, at the time of recruitment and later, in the effective communication with colleagues and clients. Multilingual co-workers are therefore a priority for Brussels businesses<sup>25</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 The position of English

English is the only “winner” if we look at the evolution of the most important languages in Brussels. Although the growth in the use of English is evident in all areas, the language has the particularity that the knowledge of English has remained virtually steady since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

From the latest Language Barometer research we see that the use of English as a home language is limited to less than 10% of those who speak the language well or very well. The slight growth in English as a home language is mainly attributable to the number of bilingual families where English is combined with another language.

But while the knowledge of English is inversely proportional to the age of the Brussels resident, the relationship in an international Brussels context needs to be viewed with nuance. It is mainly English's position in the wider world that has determined its place as the second best-known language in Brussels. As far as the knowledge level of graduates of Brussels secondary schools is concerned, there has in fact been a drop in knowledge noted. That does not, however, prevent young people from using the language frequently.

The use of English is increasing in the public space, in the first place in the workplace. Whereas in 2001 some 10% of workers in Brussels used English in their work situation, that number has recently grown to around half. And English is also scaling new heights in higher education in Brussels. A knowledge of English is considered more and more to be self-evident in both public and private spheres, partly as a result of the Europeanisation and internationalisation of Brussels, with the resulting growth in the number of expats. It is understandable that this phenomenon could be considered threatening to other languages, in Belgium's case to French and Dutch. But it need not be so. English is now, once and for all, a world language which can be used to communicate with the rest of the world. In the specific case of Brussels it is important to take account of the presence of the international community. The use of English as a maximin language (see above) in many contexts plays an important role. This is why it is so important that English have a place in our policy vision of the multilingualism of Brussels.

## 5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

### 5.1 *Strategic Objective 1: make an inventory of existing multilingual initiatives*

Nowadays there exist a number of organisations and projects working on multilingualism in Brussels. From a policy point of view, it is important to get the measure of these initiatives on the ground. For that reason, we intend to map out the existing initiatives and projects in the various sectors of society working on multilingualism. The point being not so much to gain an exhaustive oversight, but rather an indication of

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<sup>25</sup> Laurence Mettewie & Luk Van Mensel, *De Economische (meer)waarde van meertaligheid: vreemde talen in het Brusselse bedrijfsleven*, In *n/f*, vol.8, 101-124, 2008 (The economic value of multilingualism: Foreign languages in the business life of Brussels).



what sort of different initiatives exist for the moment in Brussels. In a later phase, their successes and sticking points can be analysed, together with possible side benefits. By this means we aim to provide policy connections where possible. The main aim of the project is to obtain an indication of the initiatives and projects which can offer some direction for the development of a successful policy on multilingualism for the future.

## 5.2 *Strategic Objective 2: we aim for every Brussels child to become trilingual*

Our goal is for all Brussels children to master at least French, Dutch and English to a certain level by the age of 18. In order to develop this type of multilingualism it is vital for all of the partners who play a role in the raising and development of the child know how best to stimulate this multilingualism. Those within the education sector are the most obvious partners in the first instance.

### 5.2.1 Operational Objective (OO) 2.1: we reinforce existing initiatives/cooperation on multilingualism in schools

There exist already a good number of initiatives and cooperative projects on multilingualism in the field of education. These are organised by a variety of entities, with differing levels of intensity, focus points, degrees of scale and duration. To get an overview of who is doing what and which needs the field is not getting a response to, it is important to bring existing initiatives closer to each other. The aim would therefore be to bring all relevant partners to the table together to develop a clear plan of action. For this purpose a "Multilingualism Council" will be created. It goes without saying that schools and other educational establishments would be involved, since only an approach that is backed by the field itself can hope for any success.

We continue to strive for the promotion of bilingualism within the teaching profession. Multilingualism can only be stimulated when teachers themselves have sufficient knowledge of and competence in the target languages. We will therefore be looking at how the existing bilingual teacher training can be further extended, within the commitments made in the framework of the governing accord of the Brussels-Capital Region.

Going further, it is important for the existing expertise on forms of multilingual education to be increasingly exchanged. We think here of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) education, immersion education and STIMOB (Stimulation of Multilingual Education in Brussels). Under CLIL teaching, language and subject aims are combined in one teaching moment<sup>26</sup>. A CLIL subject is mainly taught in the target language, and students are encouraged to use that language as much as possible. In immersion education, students are immersed in a foreign language. Here, too, the aim is to have both student and teacher use the target language.

### 5.2.2 Operational Objective 2.2: to facilitate new partnerships between schools who wish to work around multilingualism

Many schools are themselves active in looking for partners to work out a multilingual programme. Such partners could be other schools, but could also involve cooperation with teacher training, companies and so on. Since this can only be to the benefit of students, it is not acceptable for practical objections to stand in the way of such cooperation. We will therefore take action to remove such practical and legal objections, wherever necessary in cooperation with the various policy levels concerned. In this context we support the ambition of both the Flemish Community and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (and ultimately the Brussels municipalities) to promote exchanges of teachers between both communities.

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<sup>26</sup> A maximum of 20% of the total teaching time can be devoted to learning by the CLIL method. In Wallonia the figure is 70-75%.

In addition, a user-friendly website will be established on which potential partners can make themselves known, and where they can look for the type of cooperation they have in mind. We hope this will make it easier for individuals, schools and organisations to come into contact with each other.

#### 5.2.3 Operational Objective 2.3: Recognition of the child's home language

The recognition of home languages in education is important in encouraging the process of content learning and the general well-being of the child. It is also important for teachers, supports staff and school policymakers to be conscious of that fact, and to understand how they might be able to introduce home languages without themselves being able to speak all of the languages concerned. We advise that schools involved in this process receive all of the knowledge, expertise, tools and support they require. In the first instance we will look to the Multilingualism Commission, as well as to the exchange of expertise among schools and other partners.

#### 5.2.4 Operational Objective 2.4: we facilitate the adoption of a cooperation agreement on education between the federal government and the communities

We recall hereunder the passage in the governmental accord of the Brussels government:

*“With an eye to the improvement of bilingualism and multilingualism in Brussels, the government will invite the communities and the federal government to approve a cooperation agreement whose aim is the improvement of education in French and/or Dutch and other languages within the framework of existing competences. They will also advance the training of bilingual teachers, through cooperation between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking university colleges, within the framework of a common curriculum and the granting of dual diplomas.”*

### 5.3 Strategic Objective 3: we encourage companies and the business world to add to the effort of extending the language knowledge of staff

#### 5.3.1 Operational Objective 3.1: we offer language support to companies and organisations looking to obtain the right language profile

Previously we showed that an extensive knowledge of languages improved opportunities on the labour market. Most Brussels employers require two or more languages from staff. But those employers often struggle to find applicants with the right language profile – what is desired and what is obtainable? The better to match the demand to the reality and to help Brussels job-seekers into work faster, Brussels companies and organisation need better language support. The situation of the organisation should determine the approach needed for the development of a language policy. Brussels has urgent need of continuous customisation at the level of language policy.

Brussels possesses a rich variety of professional language education on offer, which has all the competences that businesses and organisations may need as quality support. We are thinking of various centres for business and language training (Cité des langues, Huis van het Nederlands Brussel, centres for adult education, Actiris, VDAB, Bruxelles Formation) who are able to lay their hands on an enormous expertise in this area. The university language centres in Brussels also have years of experience in providing sector-specific courses. The Academic Centre for Language Education of the VUB for example offers lectures on juridical, economic and medical language usage in Dutch, French and English. At the ULB, the ULB-Langues initiative brings together the university-level language expertise of the entire institution. Besides those, there is a large number of private initiatives and language schools who could become involved. With these participants we would strive towards partnerships with the business world, with the stress on a targetted and efficient language training for their staff. Language lessons should be accessible and unintimidating, so that any Brussels resident is able to take steps to take part. Both those of lower and higher education should be able to find a way towards multilingualism. Old and young alike have to get the opportunity to work on

their language abilities. We have to speak more directly to these target groups, with new structures and methods of teaching.

In such a context, we support the ambition of the government to set up a “Language Point” – a cooperative effort involving Actiris, Bruxelles Formation, Het Huis van het Nederlands Brussel and VDAB Brussel. By this means we aim to extend and reinforce the variety of language tuition aimed at job-seekers, and to undertake actions to support the language competences of the people of Brussels.

Finally, we will investigate the possibility to create a “multilingual label” to be awarded to companies and organisations who participate actively to encourage the increase in language knowledge of their staff.

#### 5.3.2 Operational Objective 3.2: we investigate the impact of multilingualism on the economic life of Brussels

As we stated already, there exist a number of international studies which conform the positive relationship between multilingualism and the economy. Such studies are however more usually concentrated on a particular region. To extrapolate the result to the Brussels-Capital Region is not appropriate, given how specific in the context – both linguistically and economically – of Brussels.

In other words, there is a need for action, and for more up-to-date scientific research that looks at the interaction between multilingualism and economic activity at various levels in Brussels. We are now initiating a research study aimed at doing just that, in concertation with all relevant actors in the field, and in accordance with established procedures. The results of these actions will help determine the needs of language and economic factors, leading to more targeted language and economic policies.

#### 5.4 *Strategic Objective 4: we set out to strengthen social cohesion in Brussels*

##### 5.4.1 Strategic Objective 4.1: we start to offer a system that overarches the language communities in culture, youth and sport

The Brussels-Capital Region has the youngest population in the country. A lot of Brussels young people want to learn and use new languages. At the same time, a large number of organisations offer leisure activities for young people, although these tend to be limited to one language group. Leisure networks therefore have to open themselves up to young people from other language groups. Organisations dealing with sport, youth and cultural activities should offer these without being limited by community frontiers. We will, in discussion with the relevant authorities, look into the possibility of cooperative initiatives coming from both communities.

##### 5.4.2 Strategic Objective 4.2 we strive for an accessible care system (welfare and care)

Being able to make oneself understood is a fundamental pillar of accessible care and support. An insufficient knowledge of Dutch or French is not an acceptable reason for refusing people in need access to professional care and help.

The effort towards multilingualism must take account of the fact that not everyone has the abilities or the possibility to learn a new language. Being able to speak your own language gives a feeling of confidence and belonging, and thus has an irreplaceable place in the care system, whether it be a Brazilian woman with a disability, an asylum-seeker with psychiatric problems or an elderly Dutch-speaking man in a home-care situation. Together with the institutions concerned we will look into how we might remove these language barriers, for example by encouraging the use of simple language, or by using multilingual communication to make our care and welfare options better known. For this we will call upon the existing expertise of among others the Huis van het Nederlands.

## 5.5 *Strategic Objective 5: we put the Brussels-Capital Region on the international map as a multilingual region*

### 5.5.1 Operational Objective 5.1: we look into the possibility of setting up an international centre of expertise on multilingualism

Brussels has the ambition of standing at the level of other multilingual international cities, as far as scientific knowledge of multilingualism is concerned. Cities like Montreal and Barcelona already host international centres on multilingualism. With the number of specialists we have in a number of different disciplines, Brussels already possesses all the necessary brains and know-how to set up a comparable international centre of expertise on multilingualism.

Together with the actors in the field we will investigate how we can give form to this idea, with the clear intention of making sure that the interdisciplinary centre become the leading and trail-blazing force on fundamental and applied scientific research on multilingualism.

### 5.5.2 Operational Objective 5.2 we take on the role as ambassador for multilingualism both at home and abroad

The creation of the portfolio “promotion of multilingualism” gives Brussels a unique opportunity to present itself as the ambassador for everything to do with multilingualism. Both at home and abroad, numerous activities will be organised with the theme of multilingualism at their centre. For example, an annual European Day of Multilingualism, or the Day of European Languages, organised by the European Union and the Council of Europe. UNESCO turns its attention every year to a sensitive treatment of languages with its International Day of Home Languages. As far as possible, we will try to take part in these events, as well as undertaking to organise our own. We are looking into the possibility of organising a Brussels variant of the Day of Multilingualism, in cooperation with the Brussels regional parliament.

## 5.6 *Strategic Objective 6: the thread of multilingualism running through the activities of organisations in Brussels*

As mentioned previously, it is important that the business world actively implement the multilingual policy of the Brussels government. To that end, we are investigating the possibility of creating a sort of running thread on multilingualism, that would serve as a continuous link between the daily workings of organisations active in Brussels. For example, it might be the encouragement of communication in the three most important contact languages (French, Dutch, English) whenever possible, dependent on the context. The policy might also set out the general principles concerning knowledge of or getting along with a multilingual public and/or staff. We would do all of this in line with the existing language legislation, and of course in cooperation with ministerial colleagues and other levels of government.

## 6 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BISA: Brussels Institute for Statistical Analysis

BRIO: Brussels Centre for Information, Documentation and Research

CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning

Cocof: The Commission for the French Community

CVO: Centres for Adult Education

EU: European Union

GGC: Joint Community Committee

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OCB: Brussels Education Centre  
STIMOB: Stimulation of Multilingual Education in Brussels  
ULB: Free University of Brussels (French-speaking)  
VDAB: Flemish Service for Employment and Job Training  
VGC: Flemish Community Commission  
VUB: Free University of Brussels (Dutch-speaking)