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CHILDCARE IN BELGIUM

Danièle MEULDERS
Sîle O’DORCHAI
Abstract:
Motherhood affects mothers’ professional career in different ways: it can cause them to quit their job, it can encourage them to scale down their working time, it can lead them to change occupations or industries and it can hold them back in terms of career and wage progression. These effects are observed to different degrees across European countries. Public childcare provision appears to be the most effective means to guarantee women’s access to employment; public supply in quantitative and qualitative terms is thus of crucial importance. This paper discusses the supply of childcare in Belgium.

Keywords: Childcare, parenthood, women’s employment, public policies

JEL codes: J13, J21, J22

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Introduction

Childcare provision appears to be the key factor allowing mothers to stay on the labour market. The lack of adequate structures induces them to quit the market or to take on part-time work and as such suffer all negative effects on their life-cycle income associated with such reduced hours.

In 2006, about 30% of 0-2 year olds were covered by formal child care provisions (34.2% in the Flemish Community and 23.4% in the French Community). Formal child care is insufficient to meet demand and one third of children are cared for in the informal sector where no guarantees exist concerning quality. Huge difference exists between the French and Flemish Communities. There is a more than 10 percentage point gap in coverage rates. In both Communities, an important degree of sub-regional inequality exists.

An important element regarding the quality of childcare services is the flexibility in opening hours and days. This is particularly important for parents who both work full-time. Limited opening hours force parents to use extra informal care early in the morning, in the evening, during the weekend, and so forth.

In Belgium, child care supply appears as a fragmented body, with a lot of different types of structures presenting different degrees of quality measured by means of the qualification and remuneration of the staff employed, child/staff ratios etc. Types of care also differ between Communities.

Formal childcare is mainly financed by State subsidies and by parents’ contributions, new forms of financing appear through employment policies that consist in subsidising employment for the unemployed.

Almost all 2.5-3/6 year olds are enrolled in education, for this group the main problem for working parents is after school care given the limited opening hours and opening days. For children aged 3-6, the use of after-school or pre-school provision amounted to 55%, principally in after school care.

Political discourse announces the creation of extra places in formal childcare. However, the constraints on public expenditure that go out from the fact that Belgium needs to respect the stability pact criteria regarding public deficits make this very difficult, especially in the French Community.
1. The Challenge: motherhood and employment

Motherhood is likely to affect mothers’ professional career in different ways: it can cause them to quit their job (permanently or temporarily), it can encourage them to scale down their working time, it can lead them to change occupations or industries and/or it can hold them back in terms of career and wage progression. These effects are observed to different degree across European countries thus witnessing of the negative effects of motherhood on women’s careers. Contrary to this phenomenon that is observed throughout Europe, fatherhood has a positive impact on men’s employment: fathers work more and in better conditions than men without children.

a. Impact of motherhood on employment patterns

Table 1: Employment rates of women aged 25 to 49 years and gender gap in the presence of children under 15, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>no children</th>
<th>one child</th>
<th>two children</th>
<th>3+ children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cyprus       | 80.4        | 8.4       | 69.2         | 25.7        | 73.4        | 22.7        | 54.5         | 42.2         |
| Estonia      | 86.0        | -4.8      | 71.7         | 20.5        | 58.5        | 34.9        | na           | na           |
| Hungary      | 77.9        | 2.8       | 65.9         | 21.7        | 53.2        | 35.7        | 19.8         | 54.3         |
| Latvia       | 78.7        | 0.7       | 73.8         | 12.2        | 67.7        | 20.3        | 38.4         | 58.4         |
| Lithuania    | 80.0        | 3.2       | 79.6         | 10.2        | 75.7        | 12.0        | 59.3         | 34.3         |
| Malta        | 56.7        | 30.3      | 32.5         | 56.5        | 21.9        | 71.9        | 22.5         | 61.9         |
| Poland       | 68.2        | 4.8       | 68.9         | 17.0        | 61.5        | 26.5        | 50.0         | 35.3         |
| Czech Republic | 84.2     | 4.7       | 68.9         | 25.3        | 57.8        | 37.4        | 31.4         | 54.0         |
| Slovak Republic | 73.6   | 6.1       | 69.7         | 20.6        | 59.1        | 30.6        | 32.7         | 39.4         |
| Slovenia     | 82.5        | 3.0       | 86.5         | 6.6         | 86.7        | 6.5         | 76.2         | 16.5         |

na: data not available or not reliable
Source: EUROSTAT, Labour Force Survey

In all countries, the presence of a child below the age of 15 negatively affects mothers’ headcount employment rate, with the exception of several countries where motherhood seems to have a slightly positive effect on employment: Slovenia (+4.0), Portugal (+3.7), Belgium (+2.4) and Poland (+0.7). These positive effects weaken as the number of children rises and disappear altogether once there are three children in the household. The negative impact of the presence of a young child is most pronounced in Malta (-24), followed in decreasing order by the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Hungary and Cyprus.
where the headcount employment gap is between 11 and 15 percentage points. The employment impact of motherhood is weakest in France and Greece where the gap is below 4 percentage points.

The presence of three children substantially widens the employment gap. Indeed, the difference between mothers of such large families and non-mothers reaches 58 percentage points in Hungary, it is above 40 percentage points in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Latvia and Germany but it is smaller in Belgium, Greece, Portugal and Poland where the gap varies between 12.4 and 18.2 percentage points. In Slovenia the difference is a small as 6 percentage points.

Gender gaps in employment increase with the number of children (table 1), the maximum gap being observed in Malta where it raises from 30.3 percentage points in the absence of children to 56.5 percentage points in the case of one child and to 61.9 percentage points even in the case of two or more children under 15 years of age. The same trend is observed in all EU member states.

Mothers thus are far less likely than fathers to be employed and the gap widens with the number of children. Huge disparities are observed according to level of education: at the EU-25 level, the average employment rate of highly educated working women with one or even two children is 80%. This rate drops to 64% and 43% respectively for women with medium and low educational attainments.

The employment rates presented in table 1 are headcount rates that do not account for an employed person’s working hours. A weakly negative or positive impact of motherhood on headcount employment may simply mask the fact that mothers move from full-time to part-time employment.

Table 2 : Part-time work by age groups and parenthood - Belgium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Fathers</td>
<td>Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24 ans</td>
<td>11,74%</td>
<td>5,41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49 ans</td>
<td>5,15%</td>
<td>4,38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64 ans</td>
<td>8,88%</td>
<td>9,49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64 ans</td>
<td>6,93%</td>
<td>4,66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Labour Force Survey 2005

Part-time work has always been and still is a women’s affair: men work full-time. Even in the Netherlands where 7% of single men work part-time no significant extension of this form of work has occurred towards the whole population of male workers. More so than a women’s affair, part-time employment concerns mainly mothers. For men, part-time employment rates are low and contrary to what is observed for women, the presence of children reduces these rates.

Table 3 : Part-time work and number of children (Belgium 25-49 old)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 child</th>
<th>1 child</th>
<th>2 children</th>
<th>3 children&amp;+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hommes</td>
<td>5,24%</td>
<td>5,06%</td>
<td>3,94%</td>
<td>3,70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femmes</td>
<td>25,92%</td>
<td>34,81%</td>
<td>38,63%</td>
<td>49,11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Labour Force Survey 2005
Net employment effects of motherhood have been estimated using a multinomial logit model and EU-SILC 2004 data. (Maron, L. and D. Meulders (2007)) These results are in general similar to those of De Henau, Meulders and O’Dorchai (2007). Both studies find a strong effect of infants and pre-schoolers in Austria, Luxembourg and Ireland in terms of inactivity and part-time; the effect of a youngest child aged between 0 and 2 years is weaker in terms of inactivity in France, Italy and Spain and irrelevant in Belgium, Portugal and Greece. In both studies, an irrelevant impact of a youngest child aged between 3 and 5 years is found in terms of inactivity in Denmark and Greece and in terms of part-time in Finland and Portugal.

The level of education is significant and having a post-secondary degree decreases the probability of working part-time in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Italy and Spain while it significantly reduces the probability of inactivity in the majority of the countries.

b. Parenthood and the gender pay gap

An analysis by O’Dorchai (2008) has identified the impact of parenthood on wages using EU-SILC data for 2005 (O’Dorchai 2008). This paper analyses the variety in women’s pay across 25 European countries using harmonised and comparable EU-SILC 2005 data. In a first step, the gender pay gap is documented upon. Next, the impact of working hours and parenthood status is analysed. Wage gap measurement and analysis is not confined to a pure human capital model but instead wages are regressed on a large number of independent variables (occupational status, industrial affiliation, firm size, and so forth). Once computed, raw wage gaps are decomposed using the Oaxaca (1973) and Blinder (1973) method in a gap that is explained by differences in observable characteristics and a gap that is due to different returns to identical characteristics or to unobserved heterogeneity. A first finding is that women suffer a wage disadvantage compared with men all over Europe, with the exception of Poland. The 25 countries studied nevertheless show great variety in the size of the price effect without there being any correlation with the size of the raw gender wage gap.

Motherhood usually reinforces the gender wage gap but most discrimination is sex-related so that it concerns all women as potential mothers. Not only is the motherhood gap smaller in size, it is even negative in a number of countries (EE, LU, UK, NL, IT, HU, EL, PL and DK). Again the price effect turns out very large. The author then computed the wage gap between mothers and fathers to show that motherhood status generally worsens women’s wages whereas being a father tends to have a positive impact on men’s wages. This analysis allowed to divide the 25 countries into three groups: those where parenthood worsens the gender wage gap (UK, SK, HU, CY, FI, AT, FR, IS, PT, SI, BE), those where it improves the gap (PL, EL, IT, LT, IE, EE, LU) and those where it does hardly change it (the remaining countries). In sum, despite the fact that EU member states share the well-known acquis communautaire which in terms of employment yields a wide set of rules and objectives to achieve professional equality between men and women, a high level of wage inequality persists, especially when studied along gender lines.

c. Parenthood and segregation
The difference in segregation between mothers and non-mothers shows that mothers are proportionally better represented in the health sector and in education. Vertical and horizontal segregation are higher for mothers than for non-mothers (Maron, 2007).

d. Employment gaps and public policies

De Henau et al. (2007) study the correlation between motherhood net employment gaps and different policy indicators reflecting the quality of public policies targeted at working parents are computed. More precisely, the impact of public policies on employment gaps between mothers and non-mothers was modelled to measure the effectiveness of different policies.

For children aged 0-2, the best childcare indicator was found to be the equivalent rate of free coverage or the proportion of children aged 0-2 having a place free of charge in childcare centres or family day care. By adding to this variable other components of public policies that are likely to explain the ranking of countries, it was found that the duration of parental leave available to mothers has a statistically significant but weakly negative effect, increasing the gap.

For children in the older age bracket (3-5 years of age), childcare slots (or places in pre-school arrangements) are more readily available. Opening hours of facilities appear to be the main explanatory factor of the net FTE employment gaps across countries. However, country rankings seem to be determined primarily by the same index that played the most important role for mothers of infants, i.e. the equivalent rate of free coverage of infants. Inclusion of parental leave indicators does not change this result.

This finding leads them to conclude that the lack of childcare facilities for children of the youngest age influences female labour force participation or their working hours even beyond the relevant period (that is, after the child’s third birthday). This underscores the magnitude of the impact of non-supportive or non-existent policies for dual-earner parents, not only in the short-run but also in the medium- and long-run.

Table 4 shows that the index of parental leave attractiveness, that captures information related to factors such as flexibility in take-up, degree of job protection and level of wage replacement, all of which are assumed to facilitate finding a balance between work and family life, has no significant effect on the gap, be it for mothers of a 0-2 year-old or of a 3-5 year-old. This suggests that, irrespective of the level of generosity of parental leave schemes, if they do not come along with a widely spread public childcare system, they will be inadequate to eliminate existing employment gaps. Indeed, we find attractive parental leaves to be in place in those countries where public childcare facilities are relatively more developed.
Table 4: Results of the regression of the child gap on other child policy elements, for two age categories of children (youngest child aged 0-2 and 3-5, respectively)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dep. var: net gap (0-2)</th>
<th>Dep. var: net gap (3-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free equiv. coverage rate (0-2)</td>
<td>0.879** 0.860*** 0.811*** 0.981***</td>
<td>1.104** 1.056*** 1.027*** 1.097***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err.</td>
<td>0.386 0.249 0.247 0.257</td>
<td>0.390 0.277 0.276 0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>index of par. leave attractiv(*100)</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err.</td>
<td>0.216</td>
<td>0.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>years of leave for mother</td>
<td>-0.057* 0.066**</td>
<td>-0.021 0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err.</td>
<td>0.028 0.028</td>
<td>0.031 0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exp.(years of leave for moth.)</td>
<td>-0.008*</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err.</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of maternity leave (*100)</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err.</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.348*** -0.329*** -0.337*** -0.502***</td>
<td>-0.375*** -0.381*** -0.392*** -0.439**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err.</td>
<td>0.096 0.054 0.052 0.140</td>
<td>0.094 0.060 0.059 0.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj-R²</td>
<td>28% 45% 45% 49%</td>
<td>46% 47% 46% 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob&gt;F</td>
<td>0.0052 0.0105 0.0116 0.0153</td>
<td>0.01 0.0085 0.01 0.0261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regression coefficients, *** significant at 1% level, ** at 5% level and * at 10% level

Notes:
1. There are fifteen observations in each of the eight different model specifications.
2. The scores of the fifteen countries on the different childcare indicators are presented in Appendix Table A.5

Public childcare provision appears as the most effective means to guarantee parents’ access to employment.

Moreover, the study finds that there is a higher degree of responsiveness of low-educated mothers’ labour market situation to public policies. Given the more fragile labour market position of the low-educated, they depend more heavily on well-organised maternity leaves and, especially, on affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare than do their more highly educated colleagues.

e. Articulation of work and family life

A survey carried out by the Foundation Work-University (Vendramin 2007) shows that the major determinants for waged workers to declare that they cannot easily combine work and private life are sex, working hours and sectoral affiliation (trade) rather than sex, age, marital status, the presence of young children and commuting time. This is illustrated by the following tables.

Table 5: It is possible to combine work and private life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Agree entirely/more or less</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Do not agree (at all)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social work</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for firms</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Vendramin (2007)
Table 6: Working time organisation and the possibility to combine work and private life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Sub-sample of waged workers who think it is not possible to combine work and private life</th>
<th>Entire sample of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed hours</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible hours</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night work (often + always)</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on Saturdays (often + always)</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on Sundays (often + always)</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work early in the morning (before 6 a.m.) (often + always)</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work late in the evening (after 6 p.m.) (often + always)</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime (often + very regularly)</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime not known in advance</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Vendramin (2007)

Finally, this study shows that the organisation of one’s professional life has a very important impact on three factors: (i) the professional situation of one's partner (36.3% of men and 29.2% of women declare this to be the case); (ii) the number of children one intends to have (roughly 28% of men and 39% of women declare this to be the case); (iii) the moment chosen to have children (roughly 26% of men and 30% of women say this is the case). The response to this question was quite different according to whether the respondent had fixed or variable working hours. Respondents with fixed hours declared a much bigger impact of their professional life on that of their partner’s and also on the number and timing of children.

2. Childcare provision in Belgium

2.1 Introduction

In Belgium the responsibility for childcare falls under the auspices of the Communities (division of the State according to cultural and personal matters): French, Flemish and German. The Federal Government intervenes with regard to minimum requirements for diplomas, beginning and end of compulsory education, pensions, tax benefits for child care costs, parental leave and career breaks. Employment policy falls under the competence of the regions (division of the country on a territorial base).

Like in most countries, a distinction is made between care and early childhood education, care concerning children from birth until entry into the system of early education (from 2,5 years of age) and early education, children from 2.5 or 3 years of age until the age at which compulsory education begins, 6 years of age.

1 The German community is very small and we will only consider French and Flemish Communities in this report
In the Flemish Community, child care and out of school provision falls under the responsibility of Kind en Gezin, a Flemish government agency, reporting to the Flemish Minister of Social affairs. For children in the educational system (from 2.5-3 years and above), the competence is at the level of the Flemish Ministry of Education.

In the French Community, care and out of school provision falls under the auspices of ONE (Birth and Children Office), a public department reporting to the Ministry of Childhood that is also responsible for basic education (Ecole maternelle and primary education).

Concerning children 0-2 years old, as in most countries, a distinction needs to be made between formal and informal child care. Informal child care is care provided by family but also by the black labour market. Informal care is not subject to any quality control even though it concerns about one third of care. It can be guessed fairly that this proportion will increase given the lack of formal child care arrangements. Day care can take many different forms that can be grouped into two broad categories: collective and individual child care. Collective provisions include mostly day care centres of different kinds recognised and subsidised by an overarching authority at the Community level (Kind en Gezin for Flanders and O.N.E. for the French Community). Individual care is mostly provided by professional childminders. This fragmentation of day care forms implies differences in statuses, different degrees of control and guidance by the Community office in charge, different childcare ratios, different opening hours, and so forth.

For children 2.5-3 years till 6, access to school is free during the opening hours and during school days, the problem for this age category is access to care outside school hours and school days. A set of initiatives has been developed in both communities to face this problem but they remain insufficient both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Moreover, flexicurity policies aimed at developing a more flexible work organisation and time tables are a big problem given that opening hours and opening days of schools are rigid.

Finally, care arrangements tailored towards households with very specific needs are being developed. Indeed, care facilities should play a role that goes far beyond providing a place where children can stay during the working day to include educational and family-supportive tasks. However, given the limited number of places available, especially in the French Community, the possibilities for the child care system to play such a role are limited even though policy-makers tend to make ambitious declarations (cfr. National Action Plan for Inclusion 2006-2008).

2.2 Availability.

Table 7: Use of childcare in the Flemish Community in 2004 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of the child</th>
<th>Regular use</th>
<th>Limited use</th>
<th>No use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 months</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 months</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year to 1 year 6 months</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year 6 months to 2 years</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years to 2 years 6 months</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months to 2 years 6 months</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months to 3 years</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we compare the use of childcare for children aged “3 months to 3 years” and “3 months to 2.5 years”, the table shows that it drops from 58.2 to 55.7 because children can enter nursery school as of the age of 2.5. Most parents make use of this possibility given that preschool is free of charge as opposed to childcare arrangements for 0-3 year olds outside the school system (focused on care and not education). Of these 55.7%, 64.1% are in formal arrangements, 34.5% are cared for informally (31% by grandparents). We thus obtain that 35.7% of children aged 3 months to 3 years regularly use formal child care. These data only concern the Flemish Community but given that childcare provision is lower in the French Community, the proportion of 35.7% of children regularly using formal arrangements also overestimates actual use at the national level (closer to 30%). Indeed, the supply care ratio is at 34.24 in Flanders in 2006 but only at 23.4 in the French Community (see below).

The rate at which informal arrangements are used is one third. The Kind & Gezin survey puts forth 34.5% of all children using care are in informal arrangements This signals a real problem given the little quality controls that exist in the informal care sector.

In 2004, 55.7% of the children aged 3 months to 3 years made regular use of childcare, 71% were enrolled part-time.

The survey also questions about the arrangements made when children are sick, for 47% of the children the care system stays the same, for the others grandparents play a central role in 47% of the cases and also parents who have to stay at home (50%). However, the survey does not allow to identify the respective time implications for fathers and mothers.

a. Supply of places available in the two Communities in the care system (children 0-2.5/3 year old)

Table 8: Evolution of the number of places in the French and the Flemish Communities since 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French community</td>
<td>27213</td>
<td>27959</td>
<td>28558</td>
<td>29805</td>
<td>31303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish Community</td>
<td>85893</td>
<td>87552</td>
<td>92557</td>
<td>95531</td>
<td>99377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The number of places has known an average annual growth rate of 3.57% over the period 2002-2006 in the French Community and of 3.72% in the Flemish Community.

The different types of care structures are described separately for the French and the Flemish Communities in Appendix 1. This appendix shows that supply of care services is highly fragmented and types of care differ greatly between Communities. This fragmentation entails multiple differences as regards the aspects treated below (staff qualifications, work status, and so forth). However, in the French Community services are mainly crèches, in the Flemish Community mainly family day care (OECD p.80). Quality controls and minimal quality requirements are all the more important as structures are managed/subsidised by Kind & Gezin (Flemish Community)/ ONE (French Community) and as capacities are large.
Table 9: Number of places in formal child care by type of structure and Community in 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of care</th>
<th>French Community</th>
<th>Flemish Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. collective care subsidised by ONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crèches</td>
<td>10253</td>
<td>16197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pré-gardienat</td>
<td>867</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAE</td>
<td>2384</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parental crèche</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>401</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. collective care subsidised by K&amp;G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kinderdagverblijven</td>
<td>24430</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initiatives for care out of school hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neighbourhood and proximity services</td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. family care subsidised by ONE</td>
<td>2. family care subsidised by K&amp;G</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>service d'accueillant(e)</td>
<td>9106</td>
<td>30812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventionné(e) (autonome ou organisé by une crèche/MCAE)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accueillant(e) ou co-accueillant(e) avec un service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23025</td>
<td>71657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. collective care not subsidised by ONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maison d'enfants</td>
<td>8278</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other care services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. family care not subsidised by ONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous childminder</td>
<td>341.9</td>
<td>344.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent childminders</td>
<td>7021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8278</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jaarverslag Kind & Gezin 2006, rapports annuels ONE

c. Childcare ratio

The child care ratio depends on the evolution of places but also on the number of children as they intervene in the ratio’s denominator, a negative evolution could be caused be an increase in births, a positive one by a decrease in births. For these reasons the ratio have to interpreted considering the evolutions described in part b.

Figure 1: Evolution of the number of child care places for children aged 0-2 in the Flemish Community per thousand children

![Graph showing the evolution of child care places from 2006 to 2006.]

Source: Jaarverslag Kind & Gezin 2006

The coverage rate in the French Community has increased from 21.6% in 2004 to 23.0% in 2005 and 23.4% in 2006 (annual reports ONE, 2004, 2005, 2006).
What has to be underlined at this stage is the huge difference between the French and Flemish Communities. There is a more than 10 percentage points gap in coverage rates. In both communities, an important degree of subregional disparity exists. Service provision is very weak in certain subregions (French Community: Hainaut: 20.7 and Brabant-Wallon: 37.6; Flemish Community: variation between 40.3 in West-Vlaanderen and 28.1 in Limburg).

d. Children aged 3 to compulsory school

For pre-school aged children (2.5-6 years) access to publicly provided educational day care is universal and free, almost 100% of the children are enrolled at 3 year (90% at 2.5 year). Thus, the EU-SILC 2005 figure of 98% (idem for 2006) of children aged 3-compulsory school using formal care arrangements roughly corresponds to the figure generally stated for Belgium.

The problem for this group are the limited opening hours (8.30 a.m. until 3.30 p.m.), the fact that arrangements close on Wednesday afternoons and during the holidays (Christmas: 2 weeks, Easter: 2 weeks, February: 1 week, November: 1 week, July and August).

In the survey carried out by Kind & Gezin for the year 2004, 55% of children aged 3-6 and 40% of children aged 6-12 are cared for by persons or facilities other than the parents. This means that during a normal week they are at least once cared for in such an arrangement before or after school hours or on Wednesday afternoon. Especially after school hours, such care is frequently turned to.

Table 10: Distribution of children according to after-school care type used in the Flemish Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children aged 3-6 years</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal care</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal care within the framework of Kind &amp; Gezin</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care at and by school</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two preceding care types used to the same degree</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jaarverslag Kind & Gezin 2006

The data in this table are difficult to compare with the EU-SILC data provided by the coordinating team. However, they underline the difficulty working parents of children in this age group have to deal with as well as the necessity to provide care outside usual school hours.

In the French Community a state of the art of childcare provision out of school hours was set up for 2002 (Delvaux et Vandekerckeere 2004). A new evaluation study will be carried out in 2009 conform with the Decree of July 3, 2002.
Three types of out of school care are identified in this study. First, care outside school hours offered on the school’s premises. This form of care is used the most. 20.3 per cent of children aged 3-12 years of age regularly make use of out of school care on the school premises during the week. Secondly, there is what is called extra-school care, used by 5% of children. Third, the so-called “écoles des devoirs” exist mainly in urban areas.

This study has shown, first, that there is great disparity in policies between local authorities and, second, that access to out of school care is highly unequal (during the week and during school holidays). Four out of five children do not benefit from a satisfactory supply in terms of diversity, hours, staff qualification, infrastructure, and so forth.

This study has led policymakers to redefine and conceptualise new policy initiatives in the field of out of school childcare, e.g. the CLE programmes (“Coordination Locale pour l’Enfance”, programmes local authorities are required to set up to coordinate the supply of care services out of school hours).

To conclude, it appears that the main problem for parents with children attending school is the supply of out of school care. This supply appears to be heterogeneous and fragmented.

2.3 Quality

Informal care has developed given the lack of formal child care provision. However, quality recommendations (child/staff ratio, childminders’ training and qualifications, etc.) do not concern informal care even though it concerns roughly one third of all care arrangements used for children aged 0-2.

a. Qualification requirements

As we quoted in the introduction, qualification requirements depend on the type of care structure.

As regards qualifications, we can distinguish between collective childcare arrangements subsidised by ONE, where the following three educational degrees can be observed: “puéricultrices”, nurses and social assistants. Their presence depends on the number of children. The minimal requirements are: 1 “puéricultrice” by 7-9 children and one nurse for 48 children. Half a nurse specialised in Community Health or half a social assistant are called upon by range of 48 children.

Besides collective care, family care arrangements exist. Regardless of whether the arrangement is public or private, no requirements regarding carers’ qualifications and the child/staff ratio exist although a nurse tours between 20 day care families and thus drops in once in a while.

In non-subsidised child care, only for Maisons d’enfants is there a minimal requirement regarding staff qualifications: for every 9 children, two persons with a psycho-medical-social degree.
As regards the Flemish Community, in certified “kinderdagverblijven”, a degree/certificate in vocational secondary education (specialisation childcare guide or nurse), a degree in technical secondary education, a bachelor or master degree or a certificate of higher education in social promotion or an certificate of the course “responsible childcare” organised in the Flemish Community for independent workers.

For social-pedagogical and paramedical functions, a bachelor or master degree or an end certificate of higher education in social promotion is required. For a nursing job, a degree of professional secondary education or a bachelor degree in nursing is required.

In short, depending on the Community and form of care arrangement considered, the minimally required staff qualifications differ to a great extent. Also many different professionals are active in the care sector, nurses, teachers, and so forth.

However, in the school system, children are always supervised by qualified teachers. A qualification problem still exists at the level of out of school care for which absolutely no qualifications are formally required.

The OECD has pointed to some weaknesses of the Flemish Community in this respect (OECD 2006 “Starting Strong II”, Peeters 2007). Part of childcare staff are lowly qualified, poorly paid and lack a normal employment status. These are almost exclusively women. The OECD’s country report gives a lot of attention to training and education in Flanders: “The training situation is a matter of concern in Flanders”, “Trainees do not receive strong theoretical base for the future work”. However, the report is very positive as regards the guidance that is available for professional childminders and carers providing extracurricular care. Another strong point of qualification policy is that in the subsidised sector carers are granted the opportunity to follow additional training during work hours. Unfortunately this is not possible for the unqualified of the private care sector for whom there are no qualification requirements either.

b. Child/staff ratio and group size

In Flanders, in regulated family day care the child-staff ration is 4:1. Maximum group size is 8. In crèches, the ratio is 6:5:1. In accredited out-of-school care14:1, but a specified group size is not obligatory for either group. In nursery schools government investment to increase staff for the younger children has reduced the child-staff ratio to 18:1 (1997-1998) but numbers can be greater or lesser depending on the time of the year (OECD 2006 Annexe E, Starting Strong II p293)

In the French Community, ratios are as follows: in centre-based day care (crèche) 1 children’s nurse (puéricultrice) for 7 children; in family day care, 1 adult for 4 children. Crèches (18-48 places) must also employ a medical nurse and trained social worker, one of whom is generally the manager. In the école maternelle, the maximal child-staff ratio is 19 to 1, but in most cases, it is much less. Puéricultrices are often employed to assist teachers with the younger children (OECD 2006 Annexe E, Starting Strong II p286).
c. Relative earnings of personnel

The care sector is almost entirely feminised. In the whole of Flanders just 193 men work in childcare which corresponds to 1.16% of the jobs (3% of staff in care out of school hours, just 0.5% in day care centers). It is nevertheless socially important that more men be attracted into the care sector given the high number of unmet job offers. In the Flemish Community, legislative efforts are made to this respect. Since 2001, terminological changes have increased apparent gender neutrality as regards care professionals. Within this same perspective, wages of care professionals were increased by roughly 30% by the Ministry for Welfare and Equal Opportunities. Moreover, to attract more men to the care sector a communicative campaign was launched in 2003 entitled “Sta je mannetje in de kinderopvang”.

Work status in the care sector entirely depends on the type of care structure. The “best” work status is offered by collective subsidised care facilities. Even in those facilities, wages are low.

To improve the quality and professionalism of childcare, trained childminders enjoy social protection since 2003. They are entitled to family allowances and more broadly to social security coverage identical to that of other workers, (although they are not entitled to an unemployment benefit).

In the school system teachers’ work status cannot be called precarious. Indeed, they are state employees and their work status guarantees all relevant social rights. However, the fact that this profession remains undervalued is illustrated by their relatively low wages.

2.4 Opening Times

The main problem for working parents is the opening hours of facilities. Concerning children aged 0-2, subsidised care in the Flemish Community is minimally open for 220 days a year, 11 hours a day between 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. In the French Community most day care arrangements operate only 10 hours a day2 (also for 220 days a year). This is more or less compatible with a full-time working day, assuming that commuting time is not too high. However, parents working at atypical hours (evenings, weekends, and so forth) can not turn to these care types. In the 2004 Survey by Kind & Gezin, in the Flemish Community, 35.6% of regular users of child care also use atypical care (before 7 a.m., after 6 p.m., night and weekend).

For pre-school aged children, the situation is worse given that nursery schools open for just 7 hours a day. Even if after-school care exists, it is often not free of charge and care is often not provided by professionals. Note that nursery schools accept children from the age of 2.5.

2 De Henau et al. (2007)
Figure 2: Opening hours of care services out-of-school hours but on the school premises in 2002 (French Community)

Source for figures 2 and 3: Delvaux and Vandekeere 2004

Note: avant 7h30 = before 7.30 a.m.
Après 17h30 = after 5.30 p.m.
Mercredi 13h à 17h30 = Wednesday 1 p.m. – 5.30 p.m.
Sam & dim matin = Saturday and Sunday morning
It appears that only half of the out-of-school hours care services on the school premises and 60% of extra-school out of school hours care services are open on Wednesday afternoons. During school holidays, 1/10 care services on the school premises is open and 4/10 of extra-school care services are open but this form of supply covers just 5% of all children aged 3-12.

2.5 Affordability

For children aged 0-2, in the Flemish Community, parents on average pay 12.39 euros for a full day’s care in subsidised collective child care in 2006 (12.89 euros in a day care centre and 12.10 euros at a professional childminder’s service).

Parental fees are income-related. In exceptional cases reduced fees or attendance free of charge is possible. Childcare costs are tax deductible until the child reaches 12 years of age.

In the French Community, parents on average pay 13.07 euros per day and per child. This parent fee is computed on the basis of the parents’ net monthly income, taking into account reductions to which they may be entitled (up to 70% if 3+ children or if 2 children in an accredited care structure) and also effective frequentation (complete and incomplete days). The minimal fee is 1.99 euros and the maximum 28.04 euros per day per child.

Figure 4: Evolution of the average parental fee (in euros) in the Flemish community for a full day’s care in day care centres (light line) and professional childminding services (dark line), 2000-2006

Source: Jaarverslag Kind & Gezin 2006
Obviously, prices are very variable in non-subsidised child care provisions. On average public funds cover 83% of the cost of a place for a 0-3 year old in public child care whereas nursery schools are 100% free.

Concerning pre-school children, care is free during school hours and on school days. However, the price of care out of school hours is highly variable depending on the type of care structure used. The cost of this form of care is never income-related but some minimal and maximal amounts are legally fixed, at least for formal care arrangements. On average, per (began) hour 0.68 euros is charged in before and after school care. On school-free days and during holiday periods the minimal parental fee is fixed at 7.51 euros and the maximum at 12.28 for a full day. For a half day the respective amounts are 3.78 euros and 6.15 euros. Finally, for a stay of less than three hours, the minimum and maximum are 2.51 euros and 4.08 euros respectively.

On Wednesdays, out-of-school care services are free to choose which of the above two payment systems they apply.

For the French Community, the Delvaux and Vandekerbecke (2004) study for 2002 shows that for children aged 3-6, 3 out of 10 day care centres are free. Payment is by the hour or by the day. Parental fees per day (three hours) varied between 0.75 and 3 euros while the median was at 1.5 euros in 2001. These figures mask a considerable degree of inter-regional and inter-structural disparity in prices.

Extra-school care outside school hours is not free of charge and no regulations exist regarding minimal and maximal amounts for parental participation. In this form of care, parent fees vary between 0.9 euros and 4.47 euros a day. The median in associative extra-school services was at 1.5 euros and in communal extra-school care at 3 euros in 2001.

2.6 Social inclusion

According to a 2004 survey carried out by Kind & Gezin concerning the Flemish Community, the use of childcare on a regular base is lower for ethnic minority children (23.7%), for children living in poverty risk households (21.7%) and for children in lone parents families (48%).

Table 11: Use of child care by sub-groups in Flanders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002 regular use</th>
<th>2004 regular use</th>
<th>limited use</th>
<th>no use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ethnic minority children</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children in underprivileged families</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children in underprivileged ethnic minority families</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children in underprivileged Belgian families</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children of a lone parent</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all children</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Het Kind in Vlaanderen 2006

Use of care out of school hours is also very different across sub-groups. This is put forward in a 2006 study by Vandenbroeck (2006). Brussels aside, just 7% of children of not-working

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3 De Henau et al. (2007)
parent make use of care out of school hours. In a number of out of school care initiatives ethnic minority children are underrepresented but this cannot be said for all such facilities. A positive point is that lone parent families are well represented amongst the users of care out of school hours (as opposed to their weak presence amongst users of child care for 0-2 year olds).

According to a random effects probit analysis to estimate the probability of making use of child care for more than 4 hours (Casman and Mortelmans 2005, Bonsang et al. 2004), it appears that a number of variables increase this probability such as the mother’s professional situation. Note that this study is based on BPSH data. According to the authors, a child whose mother works is 24.2% more likely to be in formal care than a child whose mother does not work. On the contrary, the father’s professional situation has no significant impact on the use of child care. The mother’s level of education, region, and the year considered also play a role. Income has an effect in the sense that the higher the income the higher the chances that outside child care will be used. For each supplementary euro earned, the probability that the child be put ion outside child care increases by 0.015%.

According to the “families” survey (2005), a data collection by the Etats généraux des familles (an initiative by the Secretary of State for families and handicapped persons) that is not representative, 68.7% of respondents believe that despite the lack of places in childcare child care provision should also be open to non-working parents. Child care facilities play a role that goes beyond that of receiving children during work hours to include children’s socialisation. Moreover, it can be of great help for parents to be able to leave their child at a child care facility to have more time for administrative matters associated with job search.

2.8 Conclusion

To conclude on this part we would like to stress several points that summarise the Belgian situation. Lack of formal child care structures for 0-2 year olds, particularly in the French Community and existence of considerable sub-regional inequalities

- Lack of services offering care out of school hours for 3-5 year olds
- Lack of flexibility in opening hours and days
- Under-valorisation of care work, multiplicity of work statuses
- Lack of quality guarantee for existing care structures

These elements are also put forth by the “Families” Survey (2005), a data collection by the Etats généraux des familles (an initiative by the Secretary of State for families and handicapped persons) that is not representative.

In Belgium, the demand for care is not met by supply, there are long waiting lists and parents have to work out provisional solutions when mothers re-enter the labour market after having taken maternity leave. We can say that the lack of child care supply enforces women to take parental leave or to work part-time and that both decisions are sure to have negative effects on their life cycle income. On the contrary, fathers’ employment conditions appear to be better than non-fathers’ (Maron, 2008).
3. Policy issues

3.1 Introduction

The Belgian NAP Inclusion puts forth two directions. Firstly, policies should encourage all children’s social participation from the youngest age on. Early participation in society, notably through early childhood reception facilities and nursery schools, increases a child’s chances to experience a successful ulterior educational career. Secondly, policies should eliminate obstacles that hinder parents’ labour market access. These two objectives have led Communities and Regions to increase the number of places in formal care facilities.

The French Community faces a specific challenge to catch up with the Flemish Community and meet the Barcelona child care targets in that it has to cope with particularly tight budgetary constraints.

Equality between women and men on the labour market is at the core of care policies in Belgium. Supply of care services appears as the best policy to guarantee mothers’ employment continuity. Different studies (De Henau et al. 2007, Maron 2008, O’Dorchai 2008) have shown the negative impact of maternity on mothers’ employment conditions.

The lack of childcare provisions forces mothers to quit the labour market, to take parental leave and to work part-time but all of these solutions have negative effects on women’s life cycle income, especially if they are low-qualified.

As far as child care provisions are insufficient to meet working parents’ demand, it appears to be inefficient to fix other objectives to child care supply, namely in the field of social inclusion and demography. Targeting multiple objectives with one instrument that does not even succeed in achieving the primary one appears as an economic inefficiency.

3.2 Policies with regard to availability

In the NAP Inclusion the Flemish Community announces that it intends to increase the supply of care out of school hours as well as that of flexible care arrangements. Within this framework the Flemish Ministers for Welfare and Employment have presented in March 2006 an action plan to develop flexible and occasional child care by the permanent recruitment of additional staff and by increasing staff’s flexibility (pooling, service titles, and so forth). The pools recruit long-term unemployed people and priority is given to jobseekers above 50 years of age. It is believed that this action plan will create 750 full-time jobs and allow flexible or occasional care for more than 49000 children per year (for a total of 7440000 hours). It has been put into practice in 2007.

The French Community puts into practice the so-called Plan Cigogne II which is supposed to create 8000 additional child care places for 0-2 year olds by 2009. The major policy orientation defined in this plan are the following:

1. The financing by the French Community of collective subsidised child care facilities

To create additional child care places, the ordinary workings of the ONE will be strengthened. ONE uses the subsidies it receives to finance projects and guarantee that the cost of care be income-related. Between 2006 and 2009, 2670 extra places will be created in “crèches”, “pré-gardiennats” and “maisons communales d’accueil”.

20
2. The reform of the SEMA plan (an initiative that builds on synergies between care structures and employers)

- A decrease in the gross financial contribution of employers from 6000 euros to 3000 euros or from 4000 to 2000 euros net;
- Flexibilisation of the system: two instead of three employers are necessary to create a SEMA care structure and instead of one third between 3/10 and 4/10 of the offered places need to be publicly accessible;
- It will be possible for employers’ associations to mutualise the cost of these child care places.

3. The development of a new type of care structure: “co-accueillant(e)s”

Besides increasing supply, the aim is to diversify the offer of child care. “Co-accueillant(e)s” refers to a situation where two childminders work together on the same premises. The aim is to create a small collectivity of children in a familial atmosphere (max 8 places and 10 children present simultaneously).

4. The promotion of the care profession

To pursue this objective communication tools will be applied in order to attract potential candidates for a job in the care sector.

Moreover, in the Walloon Region, recently adopted measures to encourage access to training focus on giving children of individuals following training courses and children of unemployed job-seekers access to 'Children's Homes' (Maisons d'enfants), i.e. childcare facilities at Employment and Training Centres (Carrefours Emploi Formation) and Job Centres (Maisons de l’Emploi).

Concerning Brussels, the French Community Commission has announced that 2600 extra places in “crèches” will be created. The Flemish Community Commission will focus on flexible and occasional care in Brussels as it does in the Flemish Community. It will also make efforts to increase the number of places reserved for children of first-generation immigrants. Moreover, training programmes will be developed for the staff of day care centres with special attention for the accessibility of care. Finally, child care solutions for jobseekers will be extended.

Concerning the financing of care, formal care services for 0-2 year olds have two main income sources, namely public subsidies and parental fees. For some care structures, there is a third source of income in the employment subsidies they receive in case they hire certain categories of workers for certain tasks.

The OECD’s Social Expenditure database estimates public expenditure on child care and early education services in 2003 in Belgium at 0.2% of GDP (childcare) and 0.6% of GDP (pre-primary education) respectively. Expenditure per child amounted to 4663 US$ (PPP converted) on pre-primary education and 1900 US$ (PPP converted) on childcare support.
Parents pay fees according to their income level: on average, in the subsidised care sector in the Flemish Community, parental fees amount to 26% of the actual cost of care and to 60% of the cost in family day care. In the French Community, parent fees account for between 17-25% of the cost of a place in formal child care. Parents pay the full cost in informal care. The cost of care in formal arrangements is tax deductible.

In the education sector, care for 3-5 years is free. It is completely financed by the Communities’ governments. OECD’s Education at a Glance, 2004, provides an average figure of 0.6% public investment in the infant school for both Communities in Belgium.

Care out of school hours is also at the expense of parents and the public sector but according to the care structure under auspices the division of the cost of care between parental fees and public funds is greatly different.

In some exceptional cases childcare can be paid for with “service titles” in the Flemish Community. Indeed, lone parents with a child under for years of age can use these titles to cover the cost of child care. The system of “service titles” was introduced on the 1st of January 2004 as an incentive towards a more active job search. This voucher system aims at fighting undeclared work, financing the social security system, and responding to the demand for reasonably priced household services (like housecleaning, washing and ironing, sewing, errands, preparing meals and in exceptional cases child care). The net price of a voucher equals the market price in the underground economy for an hour’s work. The remainder is subsidised.

The inclusion of childcare into the “service title” system has been subject to a wide debate. Opponents have fiercely protested against this proposal advancing the argument that childcare should not be commercialised in the same way as other household tasks at risk of jeopardising its quality. Moreover, some believe that service titles for individual childcare would cost the state too much. Indeed, although one cannot clean four houses at the same time, one can look after four children at the same time and thus there are economies of scale which cannot be ignored.

Finally, it is not sure whether the use of service vouchers would enhance the flexibility of childcare provisions.

Given the highly feminised nature of the childcare profession, an extension of the service title system to include childcare risks harming the professional status of many childminders as well as the value of their education and degree.

3.3 Policies with regard to quality

   d. Enforcement of quality rules

Quality is often an important point on the policy agenda in both Communities. However, it remains to be seen whether such ample political attention translates into an effective improvement of quality or not.

In Flanders a new participative quality system was introduced in 2004. In the new approach, quality is seen as an ongoing construction, jointly determined by parents, the child care workers, the children and the management board of centers (Peeters 2005). In addition, processes of local consultation designed to stimulate the quality of care are underway, focusing on out-of-school care, care outside office hours, emergency care and sick care. As
policy is moving in the direction of deregulation, ways are being sought to integrate consultation into policy development in order to achieve more strategic and integrated local care policies. Much effort is being invested in professional development, especially to promote management that is more effective. An additional subsidy is given to centers for management work and logistics, based on per capita enrolments. Between 2003 and 2005, Kind & Gezin participated in a pilot study concerning skill recognition resulting in a clear methodology. In 2005, a standard skill profile was established for childminders. Since 2004, a self-assessment instrument for approval and participation has been offered to 600 services. This study has underlined the need for training and education to increase the professionalism of coordinators and managers in the care sector (OECD, Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care 2006).

Finally, important strategic objectives of the regional child care office Kind en Gezin in Flanders are to enhance food safety, nutritional hygiene and the prevention of infections.

By French Community Decree of 27 March 2002 an Advisory Committee for the French Community education system was created. In the child care sector, from 2004, the regular care of any child under 12 years must be reported to ONE and the provision receiving the child must be subject to the Quality Code. In this context, ONE has developed a new professional profile “child care co-ordinators” whose main function is the inspection of norms and support to pedagogical practice in child care services. Child care providers must also formulate a child care project in conformity with the Quality Code. It has also launched the publication of a great amount of leaflets on quality aspects in different care structures. The successful examination of these projects by ONE agents leads to the delivery of a certificate of quality. The evaluation is a condition for certification and for the payment of subsidies to the provider. A Decree of July 3, 2002 covers out-of-school provision, in particular, the quality of the out-of-school project, the role of personnel, the reception and taking in charge of children, and the development of pedagogical practices (OECD, Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care 2006).

3.4 Conclusions

The major obstacle towards improving child care provision is financial: public deficits have to be avoided in order to respect the stability pact and this means that all public expenditures are strictly limited in Belgium. Consequently, all possible ways to promote the creation of additional care slots are being developed; even employment policies targeting the unemployed are turned to in order to enhance child care provision. Efforts have been made in order to promote quality in both Communities. However, given the tight financial constraints, no profound reorganisation and in depth reforms have thus far been possible.
4. Summary and conclusions

Even if Belgium is usually considered as a good pupil according to European criteria, there is a real lack of provision of adequate childcare services.

In 2006, about 30% of 0-2 year olds were covered by formal child care provisions (34.2 % in the Flemish Community and 23.4% in the French Community). Formal child care is insufficient to meet demand and one third of the children are cared for in the informal sector where no guarantees exist concerning quality. A huge difference exists between the French and Flemish Communities. There is a more than 10 percentage point gap in coverage rates. In both communities, an important degree of sub-regional inequality exists. In some regions, children are put on waiting lists and cannot enter formal care at the end of their mothers’ maternity leave. As far as mean coverage rates hide a very high degree of inter-regional disparity – and this is undoubtedly even more pronounced in countries that are bigger in size – we would like to suggest that the picture given by mean coverage rates should be completed by a systematic computation of an index capturing regional inequality. Taking into account regional disparity also allows for a better evaluation of the efficiency of childcare supply and policies.

The rigidity in opening hours and days is another problem encountered by working parents that is in sharp contrast with the promotion of flexible working time policies. Currently, the spread of opening hours and days is limited and forces parents to complement formal childcare with informal solutions if they have to work late, during the week end or if they work at night.

Child care supply appears as a fragmented body, with a lot of different types of structures presenting different degrees of quality measured through the qualification and remuneration of the staff employed, child/staff ratios etc….. Types of care differ also between Communities. Attempts have been made in both Communities to guarantee quality in the formal system.

The growth of informal care as it is illustrated by the EU-SILC 2006 data as compared with the 2005 data appears as a very important problem. Informal care develops in response to the lack of formal care and this raises an important issue when it comes to respecting quality rules and also in terms of the costs borne by parents.

Formal childcare is mainly financed by State subsidies and parental fees. However, budgetary restrictions encourage the development of new methods of financing. For example, a new form of financing is found in employment policies that exist to subsidise employment for the unemployed. This have become a crucial source of income for a number of care structures (Lhuillier and Petrella 2005)

Almost all 2.5-3/6 year olds are enrolled in education, access to school is free during opening hours and on school days, the problem for this age category is access to care outside school hours and on days schools are closed. For children aged 3-6, the use of after-school or pre-school care services amounted to 55%, principally in after school care. After school care developed in an anarchical way in Belgium (not controlled by anyone and not submitted to any central regulations). No guarantees concerning staff qualification and parental fees exist. However, a set of initiatives has been developed in both Communities to face this problem but they remain insufficient both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Political discourse announces the creation of extra places in formal childcare. However, the constraints on public expenditure that go out from the stability pact criteria as regards public
finance make this very difficult especially in the French Community. The main argument to develop childcare is the promotion of female employment, childcare provision appears to be the key factor allowing mothers to stay on the labour market. The lack of adequate structures forces them to quit the market or to take on part-time work and they thus suffer all the negative impacts on their life-cycle income that are associated with such retreats.

More recently, in the 2006-2008 NAP inclusion, children’s early participation in care and early education facilities is presented as a way to promote future success at school. Fertility is not a matter of concern to policy makers in Belgium.

The lack of childcare facilities for children of the youngest age influences female labour force participation or their working hours even beyond the relevant period (that is, after the child’s third birthday). This underscores the magnitude of the impact of non-supportive or non-existent policies for dual-earner parents, not only in the short-run but also in the medium- and long-run.

Motherhood affects mothers’ professional career in different ways: it can cause them to quit their job, it can encourage them to scale down their working time, it can lead them to change occupations or industries and/or it can hold them back in terms of their career and wage progression. These effects can be observed to different degrees across European countries, also in Belgium, and as such illustrate the negative effects of motherhood on women’s careers. Contrary to this negative phenomenon that is observed on maternal employment throughout Europe, fatherhood has a positive impact on men’s employment: fathers work more and in better conditions than men without children. Data on part-time work for parents and non-parents by age group confirm the long-run effect of motherhood. Even when children have grown up and have left the household, mothers continue to work part-time. The opposite effect appears clearly for fathers: part-time is only used by men above 50 years of age as a way to retire progressively.

Public childcare provision is the most effective means to guarantee parents’ access to employment, public supply should thus be extended to match demand and coverage rates should be higher than the targets fixed at the Barcelona European Council of March 2002. Moreover, a place in formal childcare should be guaranteed at the end of maternity leave. Opening hours of childcare facilities should cover a full day’s work and the quality of childcare infrastructures should be guaranteed through a higher degree of professionalism and a better child/staff ratio. Finally, childcare provision should be affordable or free of charge even for families at the lowest income level: the cost of care should not be a disincentive to work. Moreover, if education at least partly protects against the negative employment effects of motherhood, in a number of countries, the employment gap remains wide even amongst the most highly educated. What is more, De Henau et al. (2007) find there to be a higher degree of responsiveness of low-educated mothers’ labour market situation to public policies. Given the more fragile labour market position of the low-educated, they depend more on affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare than do their more highly educated colleagues.
References


Peeters Jan (2007), “De OESO lichtte de Vlaamse kinderopvangs door… en zag dat het goed was”, TVW, 31e jg, nr 284, juni, 34-38.


APPENDIX 1 : TYPES OF CARE STRUCTURES

FLEMISH COMMUNITY

In the Flemish Community, in formal care, six types of care provision may be distinguished that are recognised and/or controlled by Kind & Gezin.

1. Day care centres (kinderdagverblijven)
This is a form of collective care (in groups). A distinction needs to be made between crèches (minimal capacity: 23 places) open to children that do not yet attend nursery school or only at a part-time rate and a limited number of kindergartens (minimal capacity: 20 places) for children from 18 months until they go to nursery school.
Day care centers need to be open for a minimum of 220 days a year and for 11 hours a day between 6h30 and 18h30 but they are allowed to offer wider opening hours in the morning/evening, during the week-end, at night, occasional care, care in urgent matters and care for children with special care needs. Some day care centers organise an additional supply of care outside school hours in the same (children aged 3-5) or in separate rooms (children aged 3-12).
Day care centers are registered by Kind & Gezin. Such registration implies regular controls by a special agency.
Day care centers need to meet a set of quality requirements in the field of education, guidance, parental participation, staff, security, and so forth. Their mission, vision and values need to be formulated as well as the strategy that will be adopted and the means that will be used to realise objectives. Operational processes need to be evaluated and improvements made.
Parental fees are income-related. In exceptional cases reduced fees or attendance free of charge is possible. Childcare costs are tax deductible (with a ceiling) until the child reaches 12 years of age.
The amount of subsidies day care centers receive from Kind & Gezin is proportional to the amount of income they get from parental fees.

2. Professional childminders
This is a form of care organised by a central service but provided in a family context to children that do not yet attend nursery school or only on a part-time basis. Each service has a minimal capacity of 50 places. Minimal requirements are imposed on childminders.
This form of care needs to be open for a minimum of 220 days a year and for 11 hours a day between 6h30 and 18h30 but wider opening hours are allowed in the morning/evening, during the week-end, at night, occasional care, care in urgent matters and care for children with special care needs. Some professional childminders organise an additional supply of care outside school hours for children aged 6-12.
Professional childminders are registered by Kind & Gezin. Such registration implies regular controls by a special agency.
Professional childminders need to meet a set of quality requirements in the field of education, guidance, parental participation, staff, security, and so forth. Their mission, vision and values need to be formulated as well as the strategy that will be adopted and the means that will be used to realise objectives. Operational processes need to be evaluated and improvements made.
Parental fees are income-related. In exceptional cases reduced fees or attendance free of charge is possible. Childcare costs are tax deductible (with a ceiling) until the child reaches 12 years of age. The amount of subsidies professional childminders receive from Kind & Gezin is proportional to the amount of income they get from parental fees. Registered childminders receive a tax free compensation of professional charges and enjoy limited social rights.

3. Mini-crèches and independent day care centers
Both forms provide care in group context. The difference between both is in terms of capacity, mini-crèches offer between 8 and 22 places and independent day care centers minimally offer 23 places. Mini-crèches and independent day care centers are free to decide on opening hours. They primarily provide care for children not yet in school but a wider offer is possible, e.g. in the morning/evening, during the week-end, at night, occasional care, care in urgent matters and care for children with special care needs. Some organise an additional supply of care outside school hours for children aged 6-12 attending primary school. Legally these independent services only need to report their reception capacity to Kind & Gezin but most prefer to receive a control certificate from Kind & Gezin by satisfying a number of requirements regarding contact with children and parents, security and health and infrastructure. This certificate also implies regular controls by a special agency. These services are free to decide on parental fees. If the service has a control certificate then care costs are tax deductible (with a ceiling) until the child reaches the age of 12. The primary source of income of these facilities are the parent fees. However by meeting a number of requirements, they can apply for financial support by Kind & Gezin.

4. Independent childminders
Independent childminders provide care in family context. They are free to decide on opening hours. They primarily provide care for children not yet in school but a wider offer is possible, e.g. in the morning/evening, during the week-end, at night, occasional care, care in urgent matters and care for children with special care needs. Some organise an additional supply of care outside school hours for children aged 6-12 attending primary school. Legally these independent childminders only need to report their reception capacity to Kind & Gezin but most prefer to receive a control certificate from Kind & Gezin by satisfying a number of requirements regarding contact with children and parents, security and health and infrastructure. This certificate also implies regular controls by a special agency. Independent childminders are free to decide on parental fees. If the childminder has a control certificate then care costs are tax deductible (with a ceiling) until the child reaches the age of 12. The primary source of income of these facilities are the parent fees. Independent childminders are not subsidised by Kind & Gezin. Only a limited number of forms of financial support exist, e.g. to start up such a service.

5. Initiatives for care out of school hours
This is care in group context specifically and exclusively out of school hours for children attending primary school (before and after school, Wednesday afternoon, school-free days, and during school holidays). These services have a minimum capacity of 21 places but can operate on different premises, each with a minimum capacity of 8 places.
Such an initiative needs to open at 7 o’clock in the morning and closes at the earliest at 6 p.m. in the evening. Wednesday noon, the initiative opens when school ends. A wider offer is possible, e.g. in the morning/evening, during the week-end, at night, occasional care, care in urgent matters and care for children with special care needs.

Initiatives for care out of school hours are registered by Kind & Gezin. Such registration implies regular controls by a special agency.

Initiatives for care out of school hours need to meet a set of quality requirements in the field of education, guidance, parental participation, staff, security, and so forth. Their mission, vision and values need to be formulated as well as the strategy that will be adopted and the means that will be used to realise objectives. Operational processes need to be evaluated and improvements made.

Parental fees are not income-related but minimum and maximum amounts are legally determined. Childcare costs are tax deductible (with a ceiling) until the child reaches 12 years of age.

Initiatives for care out of school hours receive subsidies from various institutions and can freely dispose of the income they get from parent fees.

6. Neighbourhood and proximity services
This experiment was launched in 2004. These service offer small-scale neighbourhood-oriented child care and are easily accessible. They primarily target children that for various reasons have no place in regular care forms. They are also characterised by the fact that they employ target group workers, persons who find it difficult to find a regular job. Neighbourhood and proximity services offer a training trajectory to such non-qualified workers.

Parental fees are income-related
Neighbourhood and proximity services receive subsidies from various institutions and can freely dispose of the (limited) income they get from parent fees.
For the moment 14 such neighbourhood and proximity services exist. In total, they offer 218 places (136 places in pre-school care and 82 places in care out of school hours).

FRENCH COMMUNITY

In the French Community, there are 4 types of collective care that are subsidised by ONE, 2 types of collective care that are not subsidised by ONE, 2 types of family care that are subsidised and 1 type of family care that is not.

COLLECTIVE CARE SUBSIDISED BY ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY CARE CENTERS (CRECHE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal opening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal staff requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PREGARDIENNAT / PRE-NURSERY SCHOOL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Child age | 18 months-3 years  
| Capacity | 18-48 places  
| Parent fees | Household income-related (between 1.99 and 28.04 euros per day)  
Tax deductible  
| Minimal opening | 10 hours a day (Monday-Friday), 220 days a year  
| Organising authority | Public or non-profit organisation  
| Minimal staff requirements | 1 “puéricultrice” for 9 places  
1 nurse for 48 places  
½ nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or ½ social assistant for 48 places  
| Subsidies ONE | To cover staff wages and the cost of consultancies organised in the crèche.  

| **MAISON COMMUNALE D’ACCUEIL DE L’ENFANCE (MCAE) / LOCAL COMMUNITY CHILD RECEPTION FACILITY** |  
| Child age | 0-6  
| Capacity | 12-24 (but only 12 places maximum are subsidised)  
| Parent fees | Household income-related (between 1.99 and 28.04 euros per day)  
Tax deductible  
| Minimal opening | 10 hours a day (Monday-Friday), 220 days a year  
| Organising authority | Public or non-profit organisation  
| Minimal staff requirements | 2.5 “puéricultrices” (or equivalent qualifications) for 12 places  
¼ nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or ¼ social assistant for 12 children  
| Subsidies ONE (limited to 12 places and to children aged 0-3) | To cover wages of ¼ nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or ¼ social assistant  
To cover operational expenses to the amount of 1.98 euros per day and per child  
To cover the difference between 19.22 euros per day and the parental fees received  

| **CRECHE PARENTALE / PARENTAL CRECHE** |  
| Child age | 0-3 |
Capacity: 14 places

Parent fees: Household income-related (between 1.99 and 28.04 euros per day)
Tax deductible

Minimal opening: 10 hours a day (Monday-Friday), 220 days a year

Organising authority: Public or non-profit organisation

Minimal staff requirements: Minimum staff requirements: 3.5 full-time equivalent workers among whom at least 1.75 FTE “puéricultrice” (or equivalent qualifications)
0.25 FTE nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or 0.25 FTE social assistant
And maximum 1.5 FTE worker financed by parent fees

Subsidies ONE: To cover wages of minimal staff required and the cost of consultancies organised in the crèche

**FAMILY CARE SUBSIDISED BY ONE**

**SERVICE D’ACCUEILLANT(E) CONVENTIONNE(E) (AUTONOME OU ORGANISE PAR UNE CRECHE/MCAE) / SERVICE OF REGISTERED CHILDMINDERS (AUTONOMOUS OR ORGANISED BY A CRECHE/MCAE)**

Organising authority: Public or non-profit organisation

Minimal staff requirements: 1 nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or 1 social assistant for 20 childminders

Subsidies ONE: To cover wages of 1 nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or 1 social assistant
To cover administrative expenses up to 0.99 euros per day and per child
To cover the difference between 15.78 euros per day and the parental fees received
To cover transportation expenses of 1 nurse specialised in social matters or Community health or 1 social assistant up to 58.98 euros per month

**ACCUEILLANT(E) OU CO-ACCUEILLANT(E) CONVENTIONNE(E) AVEC UN SERVICE / CHILDMINDER OR CO-CHILDMINDER REGISTERED WITH A SERVICE**

Child age: 0-6

Capacity by childminder: 1-4 places

Parent fees: Household income-related (between 1.99 and 28.04 euros per day)
Tax deductible

Opening hours: variable
## COLLECTIVE CARE NOT SUBSIDISED BY ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAISON D'ENFANTS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child age</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>9-24 places (exceptions are sometimes authorised by ONE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent fees</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tax deductible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal opening</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising authority</td>
<td>Public, private limited liability company, private person or non-profit organisation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal staff requirements</td>
<td>¼ director for 12 places 2 persons with a psycho-medico-social degree aged between 18 and 65 years for 9 children + a half-time for every 3 children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER CARE SERVICES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child age</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Depends on authorisation by ONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent fees</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tax deductible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal opening</td>
<td>Variable, sometimes only a few hours a day or on given days only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising authority</td>
<td>Public, private limited liability company, private person or non-profit organisation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal staff requirements</td>
<td>Depends on the type of service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## FAMILY CARE NOT SUBSIDISED BY ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTONOMOUS CHILDMINDER</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child age</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>1-4 FTE children, maximum 5 children present simultaneously 2 childminders may work together at the same place and receive a maximum of 10 children simultaneously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent fees</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tax deductible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal opening</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising authority</td>
<td>private person or association of private persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal staff requirements</td>
<td>1 adult (aged 18-65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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