

Master thesis : "How to overcome the shortage of places in childcare facilities in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation ? An economic analysis."

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**How to overcome the shortage of places in childcare
facilities in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation?
An economic analysis**

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A. Abstract

Guided by the intension to discover and describe the reasons behind the possible shortage of places in childcare structures within the Wallonia-Brussels federation, this thesis investigates the way the childhood policies are being implemented by governmental agencies within the profound transformation of the childhood sector. Establishing the particular context of accessibility to quality childcare services of our region considering the fast growing and continuously evolving society throughout the last centuries in regards to individuals and collective childcare needs. Analysing the childcare situation of the Wallonia and Brussels regions in terms of capacity, coverage rates and structures particularities and these are impacted by the latest reforms. Measuring the effectiveness of current provision and requirements to evaluate the needs of the childhood sector. Furthermore, this research dives into the different functions of nurseries often limited to the duty of day care to enable people to work, and finally underestimating the most meaningful functions of the childcare services and their benefits for children and society.

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D. List of Abbreviations

ONE	The Office of Birth and Childhood
IWEPS	The Walloon Institute of Evaluation, Forecast and Statistics
MILAC	Childcare reform voted in 2019
FeMAPE	Federation of Early Childhood Facilities
UVCW	Union of Towns and Municipalities of Wallonia
WBF	Wallonia-Brussels Federation
COCOF	French Community Commission
BRUCALIS	Association of Towns and Municipalities of Brussels
FILE	Federation of Local Initiatives for Children
CPAS	The Public Center for Social Action
RUCHE	Research Unit for a Life Course Perspective on Health and Education

I. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

February the fourth 2022, 03:05 post meridiem, my wife and I are in an elegant and comfortable room on the first floor of the brand new MontLegia hospital in liege. After thirty hours of work, pain, and anxiety she is finally here, our Amber is born and our lives are about to change permanently bringing us joy, tears, and its unexpected share of administration headache and bureaucracy maze. This administration marathon however, started months prior Amber's arrival into our world and not exactly at post-arrival period as most of us would expect when inexperienced, but rather at the pre-registration period when you are arduously trying to secure a place in a nursery. When going through these new responsibilities, my partner and I were facing just like any other future parent in Belgium, the delicate mission of registering our future newborn to a public nursery or equivalent private childcare facility or any official babysitter recognized by the Office of Birth and Childhood.

Under Belgian law the duration of the maternity leave is 15 weeks, which obliges parents to find a rapid solution to keep their children during daytime since mothers are required to return to work right after their 60th day of maternity. What makes this challenge even more complex and hazardous is the registration policy in place in Belgium, as seats could only be considered and pre-reserved starting from the third month of pregnancy once confirmed by a gynecologist. When doing our preliminary research after a few weeks of pregnancy, as recommended, and advised by the officials, we quickly discovered that most of public and private institutions were already fully booked, making from this expedition a dreadful experience. We then realized that being successful in this quest would only work by seeking help throughout our network or by a twist of fate!

To find out whether this was a specific problem within our local municipality or rather a common dilemma across the region, I decided to interview some of our friends and relatives from our macro-environment to investigate further whether they experienced similar issues when trying to register a place for their children in a childcare structure. Surprisingly, the result was almost perpetually the same "massive shortage of places in nurseries", "good luck with it" or "mission impossible". Therefore, I have decided to conduct a proper primary data quantitative survey on our social environment composed of 50 persons to have a more accurate idea of the problem (Appendix A). As a result, 78 % of our ecosystem struggled to find a solution to that phenomenon regardless of the region or municipality within the French community of Belgium and 80% of the sample believe we are facing some kind of shortage of in Belgium. These astonishing results made me want to dive deeper into the issue and at a larger

scale, perhaps at a regional or national level to find out how many of us are facing identical obstacles when trying to register their newborn and why. How come a first-world country such as Belgium, known as a developed and advanced high-income economy, recognized for having a high standard of living with a very high human development index could fail on having enough places in nurseries? What solutions are then available for new parents nowadays, in a modern society, where both mothers and fathers are for a majority cumulating career and family lives? Since we do not always have definitive and accurate figures for the year 2021, except for some specific statistics such as the once provided by the official Belgian statistical office, Statbel, who published on March 10, 2022, that 118,142 births were registered in Belgium for 2021, therefore this research focuses on 2020 mainly. The key questions I am raising here are: “how many births did we have for the Wallonia-Brussels federation in 2020 and how have they evolved over the past ten years?”, “how many places were available in nurseries and different childcare structures in the Wallonia-Brussels federation for 2020?”, “What is the coverage rate for the Wallonia-Brussels federation”, “Was it enough to cover the demand in the region?”, “How to determine whether we are facing a shortage of childcare structures and nurseries (market failure) and if so, how to overcome it?”, “What is the situation in Europe and to our peer group?”, and “What are the barriers to the economic development of the sector?”.

I have always been passionate about topics related to the development and the functioning of human societies. Especially its evolution throughout history, performing comparisons, correlations, and analogies of social dilemmas at different stages of time - this has always sparked my interest. When I was informed by my employer, I won't be authorized to research on a topic associated to my professional environment, I immediately thought of analyzing and identifying a socio-economic problem in relation to my environment. My main motivation is to discover the rational explanation behind the phenomena, if any, to build and design a tailored solution that would be beneficial to our community. As far as I remember, I have always heard people struggling to find nurseries or equivalent childcare facilities for their children until the age of three. I was never immediately concerned as none of my relatives nor friends had young children in my environment until recently - and this is how it all started. My sister-in-law first got pregnant at the end of 2020, and I witnessed the hassle and the stress they experienced looking for a childcare facility in the region of Liege. It took them almost 12 months of full-time investigation to finally secure a seat in a nursery thirty kilometers from their home. This was an absolute problem as they are both entrepreneurs and business owners within the food and beverage sector, and it was essential for the sustainability of their business and to enable business continuity. This stressful situation observed within my close family guided my

interest to interview and conduct a short primary data survey to measure the deepness of the matter at a larger scale. The appealing result of 39 parents out of 50 having a hard time registering their respective children into nurseries across the Walloon-Brussels region made me realize something was perhaps not working as it should be. My hypothesis is that we are facing a market failure resulting in a shortage of places in childcare facilities due to a lack of qualified labour, which is potentially an issue that requires a deeper analysis. My personal situation has obviously influenced my decision of undertaking this thesis as I am a father today and directly concerned by the research question.

A. Research Questions

The Walloon Institute of Evaluation, Forecast and Statistics (IWEPS), is a public scientific institute whose mission is to contribute to the improvement of knowledge useful for decision making in Wallonia. They released a study that calculated the coverage rate for childcare places in Wallonia for 2020 and the outcome was that we had 38 places per 100 children and 34,731 seats on the 31st of December 2020 for the region. There are however disparities between different provinces with the highest rate in the province of Walloon Brabant with 53.5% in 2020 and the lowest rate for the province of Hainaut 32.8% of coverage rate within the same year for Wallonia's region. The situation in Brussels is almost the same with a regional average of 38,1 places per 100 children. Nevertheless, out of the 19 different municipalities that make Brussels, the seventh most popular are in a critical situation such as Koekelberg with 18.8%, Anderlecht with 19.7%, or Molenbeek with 21.5%. How will these numbers be impacted by the project of the minister in charge of early childhood in the Walloon-Brussels Federation, Bénédicte Linard (Ecolo), that announced her intention to reform the childcare sector?

The research questions are:

- Could we grant that an average of 38 places per 100 children in Wallonia is considered as satisfying? Or could we state that this blatant shortage?
- What are the reasons behind the shortage of supply, if any?
- If so, how to overcome the shortage of childcare places in Wallonia-Brussels federation?

- What is the strategy of the government on the long term with the MILAC reform and how will it be beneficial for the sector? Will this have a positive or negative impact on the shortage?
- To what extent should the government be required to provide childcare places to every parent who asks for it and on what grounds can this be justified?

B. Research Objective

The objective of this research is to analyze and identify whether there is a problem of available places in childcare facilities and nurseries in the Wallonia-Brussels federation, for both public institutions and private establishments for children between three months and two and half years of age. Performing an external environment analysis and studying the economic model of this niche market should provide us with the factors and indicators that influence the supply and demand of childcare facilities in the different provinces and municipalities of the federation. Diving into the government policies and regulations of the industry will help me identify whether an entrepreneurial solution could be designed to answer the high demand and support the low supply of childcare facilities within the Walloon-Brussels region in accordance with the current policies and regulations.

C. Methodology

It has already been stated earlier that the main objective of this research is to address the causes of a possible shortage of childcare facilities and nurseries within the francophone community of Belgium with respect to its external and internal environment. Therefore, in the second chapter I review the history of nurseries in the modern age and industrial era in Belgium including its role in the society throughout the 19th century until today. I outline how the government's role has evolved and responded to different crisis with time during the last two hundred years, ending with the creation of the actual Birth and Childhood Office (ONE). Furthermore, I dive into the Birth and Childhood Office mission and vision to fully understand their role in Belgium. Their contribution is quite significant as they are the reference organization to the federation of Walloon-Brussels for all questions related to Childhood, Childhood policies, protection of mothers and children as well as the medical and social support of the future mothers and children.

The third chapter is devoted to the description of the childcare and nurseries situation in Wallonia-Brussels federation to identify whether they face a shortage of any kind for both subsidized and non-subsidized structures. This includes a detailed breakdown of the Wallonia sub-regions and Brussels municipalities to identify potential tensions and difficulties for some specific geographical locations within the federation. Therefore, some key demographics figures and values are required to understand the growth and evolution of the Belgian population over the 21st century. This chapter includes the different types of childcare facilities available in the Wallonia-Brussels federation in a pre-reform context to perceive the complexity of the childhood ecosystem. Simultaneously, what capacity in terms of places are available in Wallonia-Brussels federation as well as the meaning of coverage rates from a European perspective to determine and measure whether we are facing any kind of shortage in the region.

Chapter fourth describes the policies and rules in place to have an accurate and Meta view on the latest regulations such as the MILAC reform from 2019, which entered in force on January 1st, 2020, with a transition period of 5 years for certain measures. This reform implies major changes in the sector as it has been designed to anchor childcare in the non-market sector by requiring all private childcare facilities to become non-profit organizations or cooperatives with social purpose by 2025. However, after having consulted many actors of the childcare scene including the UVCW, the Government of the French Community has taken a decree aiming at setting up a period of consultation prior to the implementation of some provisions of the reform. Understanding the evolution of the regulations and reforms within the industry will be crucial to establish the causes of the possible shortage and market failure. How will this affect the current situation?

The fifth chapter focuses on analyzing the data taken directly from the field by visiting different key actors of the industry, at various levels by performing an empirical research analysis. The choice of the empirical survey analysis was most appropriate choice for this research as it gives the opportunity to interview a large audience group sample, which enabled me to observe and measure the phenomena and obtain knowledge from their actual experiences and personal opinions rather than restraining them into a theoretical framework. The purpose here was to meet in person, distinct stakeholders from the industry including Alderman from different mainstream political parties (left, right & center), that have the attribution of family and childhood policy for 0-3 years in their respective municipalities. Do they support the minister in charge of the early childhood in the Walloon-Brussels Federation, Bénédicte Linard (Ecolo), who announced her intention to reform the childcare sector with the MILAC reform? It is critical to visit childcare structures and collect testimonials from the subsidized and non-

subsidized organizations and meet childcare workers to hear what they have to say on the topic as they are on the front line on daily bases. How they feel and how they are affected by the new policies and regularization in place throughout their carrier.

Meeting a representative of the FeMAPE, a non-profit association born out of a citizen's movement in reaction to the "MILAC" reform who aims to become a federation representing all childcare facilities, whether subsidized or not, nurseries and childminders. Their fight is to preserve and improve the quality of childcare in Belgium, to contribute to the increasing professionalization of the sector while respecting the individual freedoms of professionals and families. They actively advocate against the MILAC reforms that aims to restrict the access and development of private nurseries (non-subsidized) in the region. As well as meeting their opposition, the NGO "la FILE", who is lobbying against the economic development of private institutions in the childcare sector as they believe the childhood must be a public competence where profit could potentially decrease the quality of the service and directly impact the well-being of children, likewise the senior sector is suffering nowadays since the profit massively invested in the sector ten years ago.

After what I interview an academic, a PhD professor from the University of Liege, from the Faculty of Psychology, Logopedics and Educational Sciences who has published many scientific articulates and researches in the domain of childhood at national and international level, as well as a teacher from the Institute Saint-Therese d'Avila which is a well-known and respected nursery school in the region. Engaging with all these different actors, with diverse backgrounds, expertise and experiences have provided me with a wild range of insights which helped me identify whether this sector is healthy or under a considerable pressure which is leading to a possible shortage. I have also attended two events organized by the actual Birth and Childhood Office (ONE) which will be described in this chapter.

In the sixth chapter, I discuss the results and conclusions in relation to the research questions and the contribution interviews brought to the research literature and findings. I summarize the findings of the research to identify areas for further study and discuss possibilities for the improvement of the sector and services in place in Belgium.

D. Limitations

A main limitation of this research is the small sample size with a limited number of 50 persons regarding the quantitative survey applied at the very beginning of the research to measure the phenomenon within my macro-environment. This provided me with an indicator and confirmed my assumption of potential shortage of childcare infrastructures in the region, nevertheless, the sample size is too small and there is a bias related to the fact that my relatives and macro-environment have been solicited, and some of them are better informed than others about the problems of places in childcare facilities in the Wallonia-Brussels federation.

Focusing solely on the childhood sector of the French community of Belgium is another limitation. Flanders and other Western European countries could potentially provide different services and have therefore build different policies and regulations to overcome the shortage of places in childcare structures. Furthermore, a detailed research and strong benchmark analysis of different countries within Europe may have provided interesting insights on the research question.

Finally, the number of interviews collected for subsidized and non-subsidized childcare places are rather limited and would require a more diversified sample to acknowledge the difficulties faced on the ground by these two types of structures.

II. CHAPTER TWO: NURSERIES THROUGH TIME

A. Role and meaning of nurseries in the modern age

Until the beginning of the 19th century, Europe was essentially active in the agricultural field. At that time, about 75% of the European working population earned their living from working the land, compared to less than 5% today (Piketty, 2014). Production in the workshops was slow and expensive; machines were driven by a mill while most of the production was done by hand. The Industrial Revolution was the transition from a predominantly agricultural and craft society to a commercial and industrial society. Production was then organized around the increasingly intensive use of machines and this transformation profoundly changed the economy, politics, society, and global environment in Western Europe. The Industrial Revolution in Belgium began in Verviers with mechanized textile machines, and towards the years 1820-1830, it developed in the mines and steel industry driven by several factors such as the increase in population led to an increase in demand for products. This led to the mass production of consumer goods by craftsmen and entrepreneurs. Certain inventions changed the world of technology; technical progress led to the mechanization of work and allowed the development of industries. These inventions followed one another in rapid succession with one of the most important innovation of this period, the steam engine. The growth of factories in industrial cities requires a large workforce especially in industrial cities which attracted the poor population from the countryside who migrated to where there was plenty of work known as the rural exodus (Kittell, 1967). This exodus led to an increase of the urban population where most workers lived in misery and suffer from difficult working conditions: working hours are long and wages are low. To improve their lot, the workers had to fight hard.

In this context of fast-growing industrialization and mass migration and poverty a French philanthropist and lawyer Jean Firmin Marbeau (1798-1875), founded the first nursery so called “crèches” in Paris in November 1844. The aim was to provide both health-related (combat infant mortality) and social (safeguard the social order) in the French capital. The 'Marbeau' model spread into many European countries such as: Belgium, Germany, England, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Poland. In France, nurseries (crèches) were recognized as a public utility in 1862 and the law of the 20 December 1897 specified their opening conditions (authorization by the prefect, number of children admitted) and access for children (vaccination with a certificate of immunization, absence of illness, etc.), the premises, hygiene standards, staff, the presence of a doctor, the ban on feeding tubes, the keeping of a

register and rules on inspection. Marbeau had found that there was a gap between the maternal charity society, which assisted the mothers at the time of childbirth, and the asylum, which looked after the child when it was at least two years old and sufficiently advanced to no longer need constant care. During the intervening period, the worker could not find any institution that would help her to feed and bring up her child herself; she was obliged either to give up her work and live on alms, or to separate herself from the child to continue earning a living. She either sent the child away to a wet nurse or left it at home alone or under the care of an older child who could no longer go to school. Or she entrusted it, at a very costly price to some caretaker who was almost always too poor and less knowledgeable to provide it with all the necessary care. Some even less fortunate mothers freed themselves by abandonment or infanticide, from a burden too heavy for them to uphold (Bouve, 2019). It was a remedy to this painful situation that the first official nursery in Western Europe was founded, a perfected day-care center where, for a modest fee, the center offered the child a healthy room, knowledgeable care, and a beginning to education.

In Belgium, the first nursery childcare provider according to the Marbeau model was established in Brussels one year later in 1845. In the following fifty years another fifty of these places were created, the phenomenon was essentially present in the large industrial cities such as Brussels, Antwerp, Charleroi, Liège, or Ghent. In Belgium however, it was principally due to the result of private initiatives, donations, and subscriptions mainly; they may also receive partial funding from the local authorities. Certain local characteristics mark the history of the Belgian nurseries, such as in Brussels where they developed the first childcare structure or Ghent which integrated the structure into a larger complex that also includes socio-sanitary works. In Liege, the access to the communal childcare facilities was free of charge and integrated under the article 2 of the communal policy for childcare. Nursery services were available at larger scale as of 1879, to respond to the problem of childcare for working mothers, these facilities also accepted poor children whose mothers as housewives could not look after them for social or medical reasons. Nevertheless, infant mortality remained very high in Western European countries from 1850 to 1900 with an average of 150 to 200 deaths per thousand births. In Belgium, as elsewhere, 1900 seemed to mark the end of this period: the first years of the 20th century saw a long downward trend, despite the First World War, and a peak of major influenza epidemic during 1911. The awareness of the importance of this infant mortality is rather late in Belgium; the provincial medical mission mentioned it since 1881 onwards and highlighted a higher rate of mortality among children in care. The medical committees attribute this frightening mortality to defective artificial feeding; demographers will

add other environmental causes to this such as the lack of drinking water quality. In France, to deal with the excess mortality of children in care, the Roussel law (23 December 1874) established the supervision by the public authorities of any child under the age of two placed in a child-minding facility in return for payment. This law inspired articles 12 and 13 of the Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE) created on the 5th of September 1919. Generally speaking, Belgium was behind in terms of social legislation, and it was not until the establishment of a government of national unity after the First World War that significant progress was made in this area. Compared to France, it faced difficulties in promoting breastfeeding mothers, as nurseries were considered as an obstacle to breastfeeding for the conservative mainstream opposition. Unlike in France, this was due mainly because there was no federation of nurseries in Belgium at the time to advocate and lobby for the wellbeing and benefits of nurseries.

During the First World War, in 1915, the "aid and protection of children's works" section of the National Relief and Food Committee ancestor of the Office of Birth and Childhood, focused on feeding of the children at first. It was during the war period that the key regulations and policies for nurseries were drawn up by the Committee. These regulations reinforced collective hygiene measures and the health organization director who had to be qualified with a minimum of a nurse education or equivalent background. This modified the internal organization of the premises by specialization of the areas reserved for childcare such as isolation rooms, disinfection, and ventilation of locations on daily bases as well as mandatory bathrooms. After the war, in order to perpetuate the exceptional actions undertaken during these extremely challenging times, the section of the National Relief and Food Committee led to the creation of the Office of Birth and Childhood. Its principal goal remained to provide support to families with food aid and to fight against infant mortality, and it should be noted that the law itself does not mention nurseries yet except in the organic regulations of the Office of Birth and Childhood. We had to wait until the year 1919 for it to recognize the two main pillars which were the medical consultations and the home care supervision. The nurseries were considered a "necessary evil", and the rules were strictly social and hygienic: it was a matter of looking after children whose mothers were morally and/or materially incapable of looking after them themselves. At the time, the fifty nurseries mentioned earlier with a total capacity of 3,500 children were the only ones available in Belgium and only partially subsidized throughout consultation. It was not until 1938 that the idea of all nursery staff should be qualified began to emerge, even though training for nursery sections was not highly valued, as the dominant discourse continued to place the mother at the center of the educational process of the young child, with nurseries still considered to be palliative. It was finally not until after the Second

World War that nurseries moved from a role of safeguarding children to a role of caring for children whose mothers were working.

From 1950 to 1970, there was still a mistrust of the nurseries which were considered a place where mothers were at risk of deficiencies. In fact, during these years, the reference in terms of raising and educating young children was the mother, so that working mothers and nursery staff were seen as "maternal substitutes". The "crèches" remains a closed place where the fear of disease and contagion is strong and inspires many practices. Therefore, the Office of Birth and Childhood then set up a medical inspection service. However, in the early 1950s, the ONE acknowledged that "nurseries no longer increased the infant mortality rate". At the same time, and paradoxically, the general population and no longer just poor parents, were becoming more interested in pre-schooling (children aged 18 months to 3 years). This is probably because there is more confidence in the school, to which the pre-guardianship is closely linked, because the child is older and because mothers are increasingly working in a flourishing economy. This societal evolution will subsequently lead to an improvement of childcare facilities.

From 1970 to 2000, there was a gradual shift from childcare for the poor to the notion of childcare as a universal service and principle of openness to all children. Access to childcare services such as nurseries was contained in the law of 13 February 1970. Financial resources were allocated to the sector so that nurseries could multiply, and new sections of the population could attend them. Subsidies were introduced to pay for a sufficient number of qualified staff. The concepts of quality, accessibility, equity, and equal opportunities were the subject of numerous studies and action research, and were incorporated into legal and regulatory texts, sometimes under the impetus and influence of networks developing at European level. It is also important to mention that from 1970 onwards, the need for childcare places increased, as new sections of the population (middle classes) began to use childcare facilities, particularly nurseries. This increase in demand was due to the (massive) arrival of women on the labor market, women who were also demanding their right to work.

B. How did the government's role evolve with time?

It all started with the creation of the International Union for Early Childhood Care. Three International Milk Drops Congresses were organized in 1905 in Paris, in 1907 in Brussels and in 1911 in Berlin. The first congress aimed to present the systems Infant Consultations and Milk Drops that had been set up in various countries (about ten at the time of the first congress) to combat infant mortality. It was during the Brussels Congress that the statutes of the International Union for Early Childhood Care were adopted, and the aim of the Union was to facilitate contacts and exchange between professional workers within the health protection of young children field. The framework was rapidly extended to all questions related to hygiene and protection of early childhood. The Berlin Colloquium in which several delegations decided to participate in view of the context of international tensions included four main sections: education and teaching, public and private child protection organizations, legislation, and statistics.

After the labour inspector Elisabeth Plasky (1864 -1944) played an important role carrying out the first comprehensive survey of nurseries in Belgium (Plasky E. *La protection et l'éducation de l'enfant du peuple en Belgique. 1- Pour les tout-petits*. Brussels: Société Belge de Librairie, 1909), where she listed the fifty established nurseries in Belgium mentioned earlier. Her survey shows the stability of the organizational model (Marbeau model), and the main values since their foundation. Mrs. Plasky was the first woman to be appointed as a labour inspector in Belgium in 1901 and worked vigorously for the rights of women workers. Affected by the situation of working-class women and endowed with a strong personality, Elizabeth Plasky campaigned both for the development of nurseries for the children of working-class women and for their control by the public authorities. Based on her survey Camille Huysman (1871-1968), a socialist deputy who also became later the 34th Prime minister of Belgium from 1946 to 1947 has asked the Parliament on 17 July 1911 to link nurseries to public education. During that same year the Minister of the Interior, Paul Berryer (1897-1978), tabled his health bill intending to reorganize and modernize the various initiatives taken in the health field. It proposed a wide range of public health measures: compulsory vaccination, compulsory declaration of certain transmissible diseases, protection of springs and supervision of water supplies, sanitary housing, compulsory schooling, but also the protection of children, as well as the granting of subsidies to infant clinics and other public or private works for the protection of early childhood. This vast project, which was considered too state-run by its fervent opponents, and was not adopted, but it inspired numerous pieces of legislation, including the organic law

of the ONE in 1919. The Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE) was finally founded that same year on 5th of September 1919, with the aim of fighting infant mortality and helping families with food aid. It intends to continue the actions implemented by the National Relief and Food Committee (CNSA) during the First World War.

C. The Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE)

The Office of Birth and Childhood is a public interest organization with a legal personality under the supervision of the Government of the French Community whose main role is to develop birth and childhood policies. It is an independent organism under the Ministry for Childhood of the Wallonia and Brussels for which Mrs. Violaine Herbaux is the Chairman of the Board of Directors, and Mr. Benoît Parmentier is the General Director of the Executive Board. With the constitutional changes that transformed unitary Belgium into a federal state, the initially national institution was divided into three distinct and autonomous wings for each of the country's Communities:

- *The Office of Birth and Childhood* created by a first decree of the French Community on 30 March 1983, for the French-speaking part of the country, including the Brussels Region.
- *Kind en Gezin* for the Dutch-speaking part of the country and the Brussels-Capital Region (in partnership with the French-speaking ONE for this Region).
- *Kaleido-DG* was created for the German-speaking Community.

In July 2001, a Reform and Recovery Plan was drawn up to radically redefine the structure of the Office of Birth and Childhood, by reducing the number of members of the Board of Directors, creating new advisory bodies, and changing the qualification of certain functions. This led to the decree on the Reform of the Office of Birth and Childhood, which constitutes the reference framework for the Office. Since its creation and throughout its various developments, it has been able to fulfil its fundamental role: to serve families and their children in the best possible way by adapting to the needs of the present day, to new customs and mentalities, to growing demographics, in short to the constant evolution of our society.

Management bodies (Board of Directors)

The Office of Birth and Childhood is managed by a Board of Directors composed of six members appointed by the Government for the duration of a legislature. The members are

appointed based on their complementary skills and competences in the fields of children policy and public management. The Board of Directors is the main management body of the organization and is responsible for defining the Office's policy, approving the management contract, the budget, the annual accounts and approving the opinions submitted to the Government. The Board of Directors is composed of a maximum two thirds of members from the same gender, a maximum of one third of members from the reception or support institutions, a maximum one third of political representatives. The Chairman of the Advisory Council, the Chairman of the Scientific Council and the Coordinator of the Observatory for Children, Youth and Youth Care are also invited to the meetings of the Board of Directors for consultancy.

Administrative bodies (Director General)

The administrative services of the Office of Birth and Childhood are directed, under the authority of the Board of Directors and a Director General appointed by the Government after advice from the Advisory Council and the Board of Directors. The Administrator General therefore ensures the overall management and control of the institution. This function is currently performed by Mr. Benoît Parmentier. The Chief Executive participates in an advisory capacity in the meetings of the Board of Directors and represents the Office in judicial and extra-judicial proceedings. He also exercises a large number of powers delegated to him by the Board of Directors in the areas of personnel, public contracts, accreditation, subsidies, finance and trade union consultation.

Central Administration

The organization of the central administration is based on the reception and accompaniment departments, which clearly correspond to the two categories of corresponding missions. These departments are supported by several support services (Studies and Strategies Department, Human Resources Development Department, Finance Department, Legal Department, External and International Relations Department, etc.), some of which are also responsible for cross-cutting missions.

Sub-regional administrations

The Office is decentralized into six sub-regional administrations whose territorial competence extends to the Provinces of Walloon Brabant, Hainaut, Liège, Luxembourg,

Namur, and the Brussels Capital Region. Within each sub-regional administration, a sub-regional coordinator ensures the proper coordination of ONE's actions and services and develops partnerships with local early childhood actors.

Advisory Council

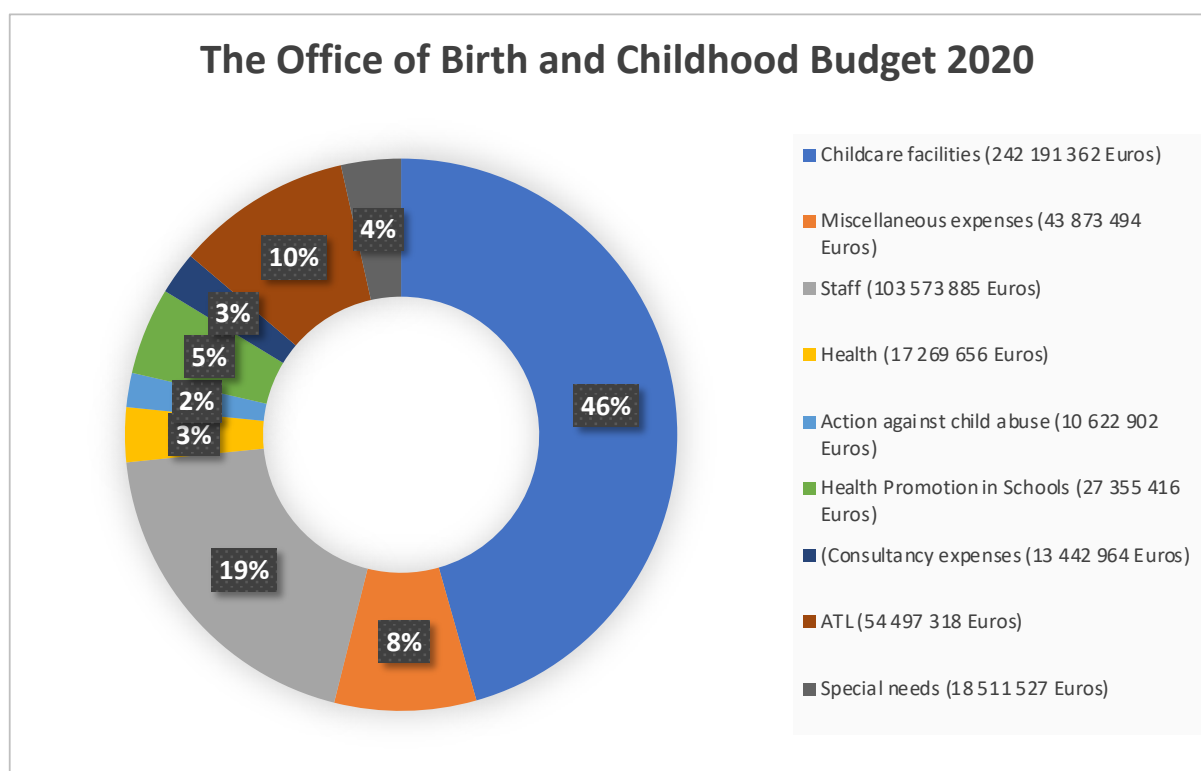
Bringing together various actors in the field of childhood, the Advisory Council supports the Office of Birth and Childhood governing body through its reflections and questioning. The Advisory Council organizes its debates and carries out its work on any issue related to the ONE's missions. Its voluntary members are representatives of civil society from different sectors, actors or users of the Office's services and actions. The Minister of Childhood, Health, Culture, Media, and Women's Rights in the Walloon-Brussels Federation, and the ONE Board of Directors, are the recipients of the opinions issued by the Advisory Council in response to their specific request or initiative. The Advisory Council is made up of 33 full members and 33 substitute members appointed for a period of 5 years by the Government of the French Community in accordance with the decree of 27 March 2003 of the Government of the French Community on the composition of the Advisory Council created by article 22 of the decree of 17 July 2002 on the reform of the NEO.

The Office of Birth and Childhood support three main missions:

1. **Operational Missions Reception:** responsible for authorizing, approving, subsidizing, supporting, monitoring, and evaluating childcare for children aged 0 to 12+ outside the family environment, in compliance with the legislation in force such as holiday centers, homework schools or authorized and non-subsidized childcare facilities.
2. **Operational Missions Accompaniment:** for which its mission is to support children in relation to their family and social environment. It also has the task of carrying out actions to support parenthood and promote health. This mission is mainly carried out through the structures like the adoption service, school health promotion services and the organization of home visits.
3. **Cross-cutting missions:** in addition to the basic tasks of supporting children in their family environment and caring for young children, the Office of Birth and Childhood is developing cross-cutting tasks common to its two main sectors.

These missions include the support for parenthood and information for parents, promotion of health and health education, promotion of continuing education for those involved in childcare policies, research, evaluation of needs and innovative experiences. These missions are carried out in accordance with the guidelines and procedures defined by the Decree on the reform of the ONE of 17 July 2002 and by the Management Contract 2021-2025 concluded between the ONE Board of Directors and the Government. The Office of Birth and Childhood employs in total 1 797 staff members including 1600 full time contracts for which 870 of them (48,4%) are “Partners Children Parents Officer”. Their role is to accompany families in their plans of having children and prepare them in this new adventure, this service is free of charge and offered by the ONE for the wellbeing of families and children. The total budget of The Office of Birth and Childhood for 2020 was 531 338 525 Euros, almost half of the budget was spent on childcare infrastructure with 46% of its overall budget. The second biggest expense is consecrated to the wages of the 1797 staff members with 19% of the budget. The total budget in 2011 was only of 257 028 823, which doubled in 9 years and clearly illustrates an urgent need of financing the childhood sector.

Graphic 1



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

III. CHAPTER THREE: THE SITUATION IN THE WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION

A. Demographics

Ahead of discussing the key figures associating to activities of subsidized and non-subsidized childcare facilities in the region of Brussels and Wallonia, we must briefly examine and consider some key demographic figures such as population, international migration, national birth rates or fertility. These statistics are crucial and essential to understand the trends and the nature of the current situation of the childcare industry within the French speaking community of Belgium. To have the most accurate figures concerning the balance of births, deaths, and migrations, which do not always correspond to the observed population growth. Therefore, 2020 data has been exploited as a reference year taking into consideration statistics adjustments to correct these measures for accuracy purposes as already explained in the introduction.

On the 1st of January 2021, the Belgian population has reached the number of 11,521,238 inhabitants according to the Belgian statistical office - Statbel. The population of Belgium has therefore grown by 0.25% with a total of 28,597 additional individuals in comparison to the previous year which recorded 11,492,641 Belgians. For the first time since the second World War, the natural balance in Belgium is negative caused by a severe COVID-19 pandemic responsible of an exceptional high number of deaths which increased by 16.6% with 126,850 losses compared to 2019. In addition to an extraordinary death rate in 2020, an unusual decreasing number of newborns has been recorded with a negative -2.6% for the entire country with 113,739 births in 2020, quite significant in comparison to the -0.6% of 2019 with 117,103 newborns. The international migration remained positive in Belgium with 41,756 people in 2020. Nevertheless, a quite significant decrease compared to the previous year with a balance 55,031 for 2019. Immigration has also decreased -14.3% with 119,560 in 2019 to 102,413 in 2020 most likely due to the pandemic, which also restricted people movements across borders.

The birth rate, (not to be confused with the fertility rate which will be described later), is the ratio between the number of births per 1000 inhabitants and the number of births registered in a year per 1000 inhabitants. In Belgium, 113.739 births were officially reported for 2020 in comparison to 117,103 for 2019, making from 2020 the lowest birth rate year since 2011. The number of newborns in Belgium has been decreasing continuously for the past ten years and reducing its total number of newborns by 13,916 units (-11.45%). The region of Brussels-Capital has seen its number decreased by 2,454 of newborns (-14.1%) over the past

ten years, which is the most affected of the three regions. Its only positive figure over the past 10 years was for the period of 2012 with of 1,45% increase while its worst result was for 2020 with a record of -6% births. Walloon region for its part, is second with a total decreasing number of 6492 newborns over the past ten years (-13,1%). Their only positive year over the past ten years was in 2019 with and additional 1,22% newborns in contrast to 2020 which was the most unfavourable with -3,9% over last decade.

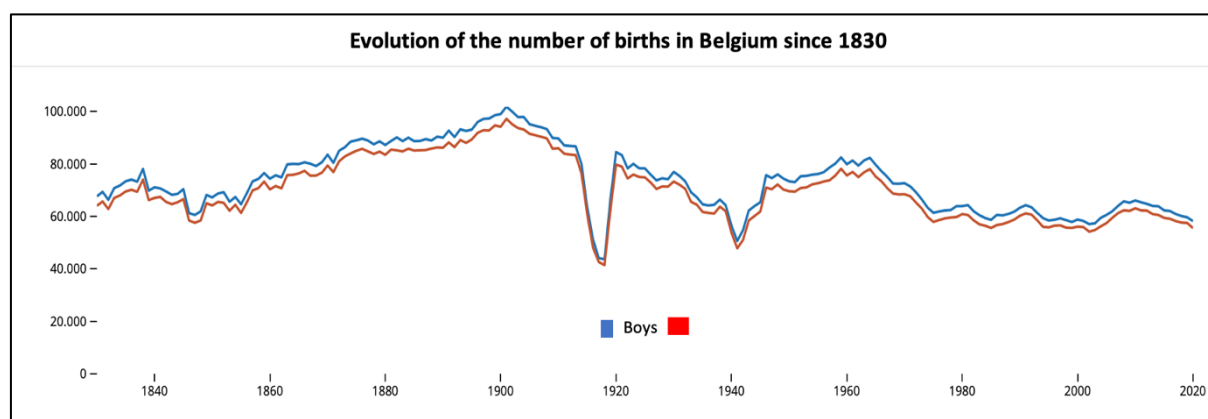
Table 1

Evolution of births in the Belgian regions from 2011 to 2020											
Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Brussels-Capital Region	18 301	18 562	18 307	18 514	18 214	17 923	17 709	17 377	16 854	15 847	-2 454
%		1,43%	-1,37%	1,13%	-1,62%	-1,60%	-1,19%	-1,87%	-3,01%	-5,97%	-14,09%
Walloon Region	40 064	39 882	39 064	38 690	37 893	37 546	36 892	36 087	36 528	35 094	-4 970
%		-0,45%	-2,05%	-0,96%	-2,06%	-0,92%	-1,74%	-2,18%	1,22%	-3,93%	-13,07%
Flemish Region	69 290	68 549	67 491	67 211	65 606	65 992	64 501	64 336	63 721	62 798	-6 492
%		-1,07%	-1,54%	-0,41%	-2,39%	0,59%	-2,26%	-0,26%	-0,96%	-1,45%	-9,75%
Belgium	127 655	126 993	124 862	124 415	121 713	121 161	119 102	117 800	117 103	113 739	-13 916
%		-0,52%	-1,68%	-0,36%	-2,17%	-0,45%	-1,70%	-1,09%	-0,59%	-2,87%	-11,44%

Source: Stable, data subject to change for 2020

The graphic 2 clearly shows the pick of newborns in Belgium around the industrial revolution when the economy was flourishing. The two lowest period correspond naturally to the first World War (1914 -1918), and the second World War (1940-1945). We observe a constant growth as from the end of WWII and for the following 25 years which corresponds to the “the Glorious Thirty”, so called for the first time by the French demographer Jean Fourastie.

Graphic 2



Source: Stable, data subject to change for 2020

This period of economic prosperity in the region combines a high productivity and a high consumption increasing the standard of living and purchasing power of citizens which has

a positive impact on the evolution of births. Since 1965, the births rate has been continuously decreasing reaching one of the lowest levels over the past 200 years in times of peace.

Regarding the fertility rate, which is the number of births per 1000 woman at reproduction age, considered from 15 to 49 years old. This index should not be confused with the birth rate as they are two different ways to measure the growth of a population. The birth rate is the total number of births in a year per 1000 individuals in a specific population while the fertility rate is the total number of births per 1000 woman in the reproductive age. The number of births in Belgium have continued to drop in 2020, while in the meantime the population has still grown timidly by 0.25%. As for the total fertility rate, it tumbles since 2010 reaching an average of 1.6 children per woman following closely the national birth rate.

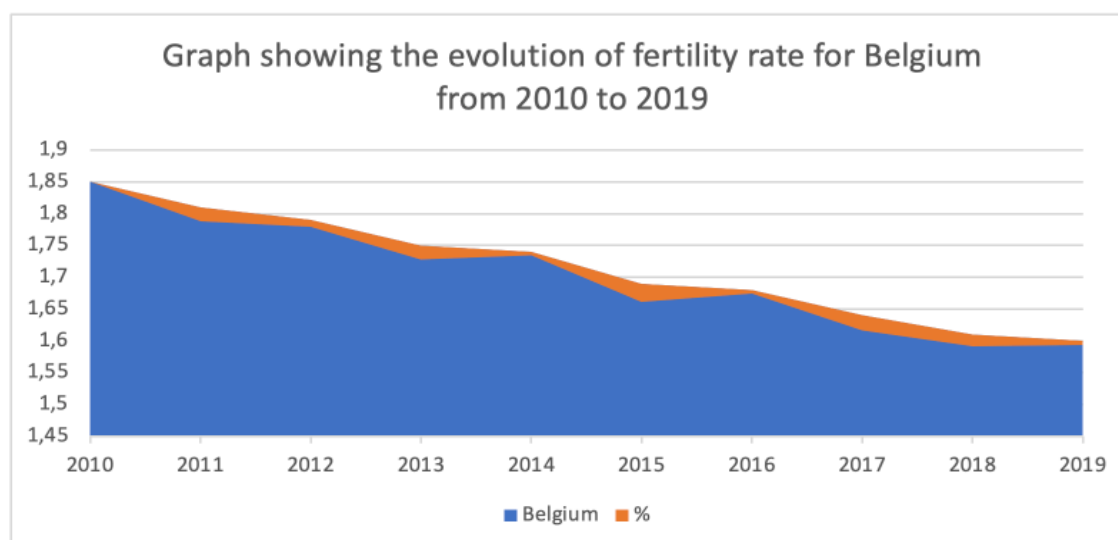
Table 2

Evolution of the fertility rate in the Belgian regions from 2010 to 2019											
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
Brussels-Capital Region	2,03	1,96	1,94	1,9	1,9	1,85	1,82	1,8	1,75	1,7	-0,33
%		-3,45%	-1,02%	-2,06%	0,00%	-2,63%	-1,62%	-1,10%	-2,78%	-2,86%	-17,52%
Walloon Region	1,85	1,83	1,81	1,76	1,74	1,69	1,66	1,63	1,59	1,61	-0,24
%		-1,08%	-1,09%	-2,76%	-1,14%	-2,87%	-1,78%	-1,81%	-2,45%	1,26%	-13,72%
Flamish Region	1,81	1,78	1,75	1,72	1,71	1,66	1,66	1,62	1,59	1,57	-0,24
%		-1,66%	-1,69%	-1,71%	-0,58%	-2,92%	0,00%	-2,41%	-1,85%	-1,26%	-14,08%
Belgium	1,85	1,81	1,79	1,75	1,74	1,69	1,68	1,64	1,61	1,6	-0,25
%		-2,16%	-1,10%	-2,23%	-0,57%	-2,87%	-0,59%	-2,38%	-1,83%	-0,62%	-14,37%

Source: Stable, data subject to change for 2019

The Graphic 3 illustrates the trend and clearly shows how the fertility rate in Belgium has been considerably declining since 2010 losing up to 14%. One of the causes is the average age of parents which has been increased over time and by two years since 2000. The average age for mothers in 2020 is 31 years old and 34.2 for the fathers.

Graphic 3



Source: Stable, data subject to change for 2019

B. Different types of childcare structures

Childcare facilities are essentially taking care of children from 0 to 3 years of age, after that, they are authorized to go to kindergarten school and frequently referred to as 'pre-school education'. It is important to specify that all childcare facilities of any kind in Belgium, whether subsidized or non-subsidized requires a license before they could operate, delivered by the ONE and approved by the Ministry of Education. This enables the Office of Birth and Childhood to ensure minimum requirements in terms of health and safety, security of the premises and staff qualification from the moment it opens. Looking after young children requires professional skills and diligence and cannot be improvised, which is the reason why childcare facilities must obtain an authorization before it could open to the public. ONE is therefore responsible for authorizing, subsidizing, and monitoring childcare facilities in the French community of Belgium. However, the Office of Birth and Childhood do not manage nor supervise childcare facilities themselves as this is the role of the organizing authorities such as public authorities in each municipality, self-employed persons, non-profit organizations, or even private companies. Nevertheless, they highly contribute to the creation of new childcare facilities in the region by providing support and fundamental information to parents or individuals, essential for the development of the sector. Neither the childcare structure nor childcare center may therefore see the light of day without the authorization issued by the Office of Birth and Childhood in the Walloon-Brussels Federation, except in the Brussels-Capital Region, where the Flemish Community body equivalent to the Office of Birth and Childhood childcare (Kind & Gezin), may also handout authorizations.

Two main types of childcare facilities are available in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation including two categories for each type. Either within a small community named ***certified family-type care*** managed by contracted persons, employees, or self-employed care givers which could be subsidized or non-subsidized by the ONE. Or in a medium or large community called ***certified collective-type care*** composed of nurseries (crèches), pre-guardianship (prégardiennats), community childcare centers (Maisons Communales d'Accueil de l'Enfance or MCAE), parental nurseries (crèche parentale), children's homes (maisons d'enfants) or halts centers (haltes-accueil) which could also be subsidized or non-subsidized and in some occasions non-certified but authorized by the Office of Birth and Childhood childcare. The new regulations and policies in force since the 1st of January 2020 aims to the simplification of these types of childcare facilities in order to facilitate the transformation and standardization of the sector and its offerings. The Office of Birth and Childhood grants subsidies according to the

conditions set by the regulations allocated by the government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the main three conditions for being subsidized are the following: they must be open for a minimum of ten hours a day, they must be compliant with the progressive pricing policy according to parents' income and lastly, it must be registered as a public authority or non-profit organization.

Consequently, four options were available for parents in the Wallonia-Brussels region pre-reform:

- Subsidized and certified family type
- Non-subsidized but certified family type
- Subsidized and certified collective type
- Non-subsidized but certified collective type

The subsidized and *certified family-type childcare* SAEC (*service d'accueillants d'enfants conventionnés*), are qualified individuals managing children from 0-6 years of age with a great majority who are between 0-3 years. These are Subsidized and certified caregivers which are carrying their activities mainly from home by adjusting their premises on the bases of the Office of Birth specifications. Therefore, a cooperation agreement is signed between the ONE and the caregiver, who supports the child caregivers' operations for the wellbeing of the children and to guide the subsidized and certified caregivers into their mission. It happens, rarely, that two caregivers carry out their activity jointly in the same adapted structure, either in one of their homes or in a neutral location provided by public authorities. This type of childcare has gradually increased and is well appreciated by parents, especially in Walloon provinces. According to prospects, the enforcement of the MILAC reform and the government's goal of upgrading caregivers' status into home-based employees will bring security and stability into the SAEC type of childcare category. The reform clearly aims at providing additional protection to caregivers which will most probably increase the supply of subsidized and certified caregivers within the family type childcare.

The second category of family type childcare is the *non-subsidized but certified*, which are managed by self-employed child caregivers who provide home-based childcare for children from 0 to 6 years old including mostly children from 0 to 3 years likewise the subsidized type. In contrast with the subsidized type of service they are in a suitable accommodation out of their personal premises and their legal status are different since self-employed. They are advised and

assisted by counsellors of the Office of Birth and Childhood childcare who are responsible of carrying out inspections and surveys to check the feasibility of their services and enable the development and measure the performance of their project. This type of childcare facility remains quite stable, and their capacity is very limited.

Now, the second type *subsidized, and certified collective-type* childcare places represent a vast majority of the total offerings with 53,1% including a wide range of services. The most common of them is the traditional nursery “*crèche*”, founded by the French philanthropist and lawyer Jean Firmin Marbeau (1798-1875) in Paris in November 1844 and exported to Belgium a year later in 1845 known as the “Marbeau Model Creches”. This is an approved childcare facility subsidized by the ONE which provides day care for children aged 0-3 years in premises designed for their needs, including qualified personnel in accordance with regulations and policies set by the ONE. The capacity of these childcare facilities could defer from 18 to 48 places. In addition to a qualified childcare work force, the creches must include medical staff (pediatricians, nursery employees and childcare assistants), social workers and logistic personnel including kitchen personnel and handymen.

A second subsidized and well-known certified collective-type childcare places is the *pre-guardianship*. It exists also for a very long time in Belgium and provides daily childcare for children between 18 months and 3 years old. Similarly, to the “*crèche*”, these childcare facilities are managed by qualified personnel in accordance with the ONE regulations and standards with a very similar capacity, however slightly less demanding due to the minimum age requirement of 18 months for this collective-type childcare. It was developed to answer a high demand in densely populated areas in the early decades and is gradually being replaced by crèches or community childcare center.

The community childcare center (Maisons Communales d’Accueil de l’Enfance) or MCAE is a third subsidized and certified collective-type of childcare place available for parents in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation which was founded in the 1990. In comparison with the two previous subsidized and certified collective types, this one has a smaller capacity as it may handle 24 children maximum for which only twelve places are subsidized for the Office of Birth and Childhood, the children from 0-3 years old only. The community childcare center welcomes children from 0-6 years old with a majority of 0-3 years, essentially due to subsidies provided for them. The additional seats are being financed by the organizing authorities, municipalities, or other public authorities in charge for the region or a non-profit organization that has a cooperation agreement with the municipality. Policies and regulations on staff qualification and premises are identical to the crèches and pre-guardianship. This type of facilities was created

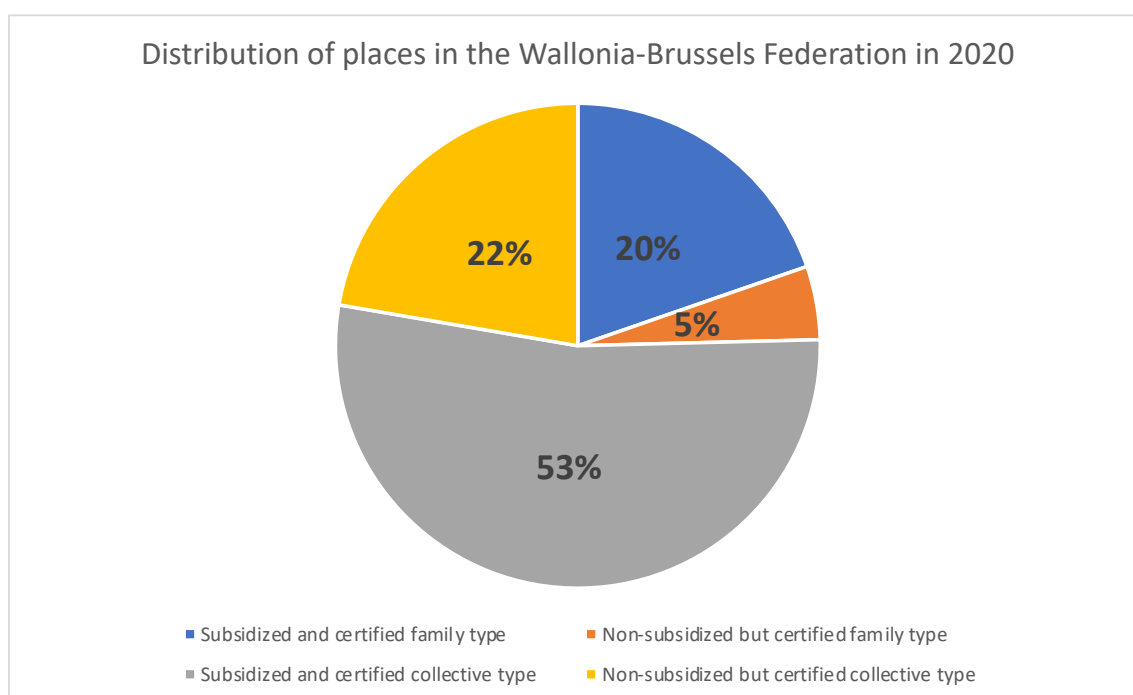
to support small municipalities located in rural areas which could not finance the construction of their own nurseries (crèches).

The parental nursery (crèche parentale) is the fourth category of subsidized and certified collective type designed to provide daily childcare for children aged 0 to 3 years with a limited size capacity of 14 places. Created in the year 2000, it is characterized by its hybrid system partly staffed by qualified medical and social personnel and partly represented by the parents whose financial contribution is reduced according to their inputs. For health and safety reasons, parents are always accompanied or supervised by professionals. Nevertheless, this category of childcare environment was unsuccessful and only two of these structures are still operating for a total of 28 places, both located in Walloon Brabant.

Finally, two non-subsidized but certified collective-type childcare facilities remain with a particularity as for some of them they have the label of authorized instead of certified. This could be considered as a fifth option meaning non-subsidized and certified or non-subsidized, non-certified, but authorized collective type of childcare facility. The first one is the *Children's homes* (maisons d'enfants), these collective types of childcare facilities have the capacity of 9 to 24 places for children from 0 to 6 years which is in reality mainly crowded by children from 0 to 3 years old likewise the greater part of childcare facilities. Children's homes are for a majority authorized but non-certified and non-subsidized by the Office of Birth and Childhood and run by self-employed individuals or on some occasions by non-profit organizations. In this category of childcare facilities, the financial contribution of parents is not calculated on basis of their incomes but under a scale proportional scheme contrary to subsidized facilities set by the Office of Birth and Childhood. These private institutions are in full control of the pricing of their services in accordance with social-economic context or financial capacities of their targeted parents. It could vary from one place to another, some opting for fixed fee formulas and other according to the volume of attendance or even scale in line with parents' income. This category of private childcare facilities has fluctuated over the past years facing a period of recession due to strict requirements enforced by the ONE in terms of personnel qualification and infrastructure regulations on health and safety standards imposing economic barriers to the development of entrepreneurship with childcare sector. In addition, mostly impacted by the MILAC reform as it aims to transform childcare facilities into non-profit organization or cooperatives with social purpose by 2025 converting the childcare and nursery industry into non-market sector.

The second one is the *haltles centers* (haltes-accueil), quite recent as the first one opened in 1995 and is an authorized, sometimes certified, however non-subsidized childcare facility (except in some exceptional cases and subject to compliance with strict and distinct criteria of the ONE). These places were created in order to support parents in difficult social situations providing a save location for their children when required, whether for a few days or a few hours a week depending on their needs. This type of childcare facility is the result of a massive shortage of available places in traditional childcare structures and answering a specific social need increasing over the past years. Haltles centers are managed by non-profit organizations and charge parents a fee based on the official scale scheme provided by the Office of Birth and Childhood according to their incomes. The societal conversion toward a greater precariousness society has largely contributed to the expansion of this category of childcare facilities all around the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Graphic 4



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

The distribution of childcare places in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is largely dominated by subsidized and certified collective types of structures encompassing more than half of the total capacity of childcare places with 53%. Non-subsidized but certified collective type (22%), and Subsidized and certified family type (20%) share most of the remaining market share while non-subsidized but certified family type only has 5% of the global offering. We therefore may conclude that collective types are by far preferred in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation with 75% of the childcare capacity.

C. What capacity in terms of places?

The offer of childcare places within the different types and categories of structures within the Wallonia-Brussels Federation reached 46,863 places on the 31st of December 2020, representing a decrease of 0.2% (-112 places) in comparison to 2019. This represents 34,141 subsidized places by the Office of Birth and Childhood in contrast to only 12,722 non-subsidized places. A great difference of proportion of childcare structures within the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is also observed due to important difference of size of population between the two regions. In 2020, the Federation had total population of 4,852,774 persons, for which 75% of them located Wallonia region (3,641,748) and 25% in the Brussels-Capital region (1,211,026).

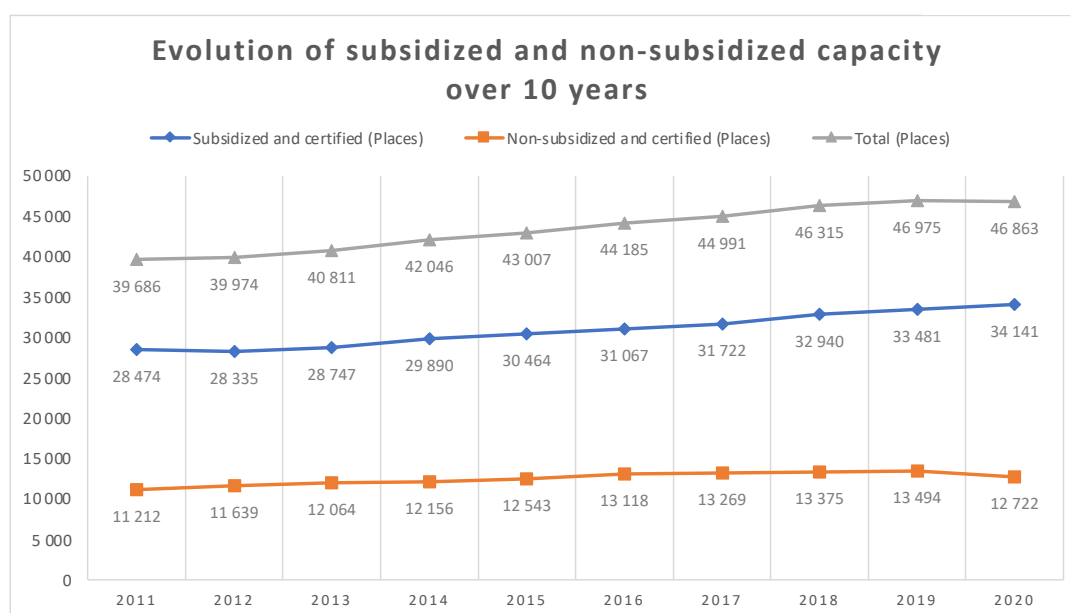
Table 3

Number of places in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation								
Y2020	Collective type				Family type			
	Subsidized and certified	%	Non-subsidized and certified	%	Subsidized and certified	%	Non-subsidized and certified	%
Brussels-Capital Region	8 331	33%	4 315	41%	272	3%	120	5%
Walloon Region	16 582	67%	6 133	59%	8 956	97%	2 154	95%
Wallonia-Brussels federation	24 913	100%	10 448	100%	9 228	100%	2 274	100%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Over the past 10 years, the offer for childcare places in all the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has increased in 18% with an additional 7,177 places created for all childcare types and categories structures combined, going from a capacity of 39,686 in 2011 to 46,863 places in 2020.

Graphic 5



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

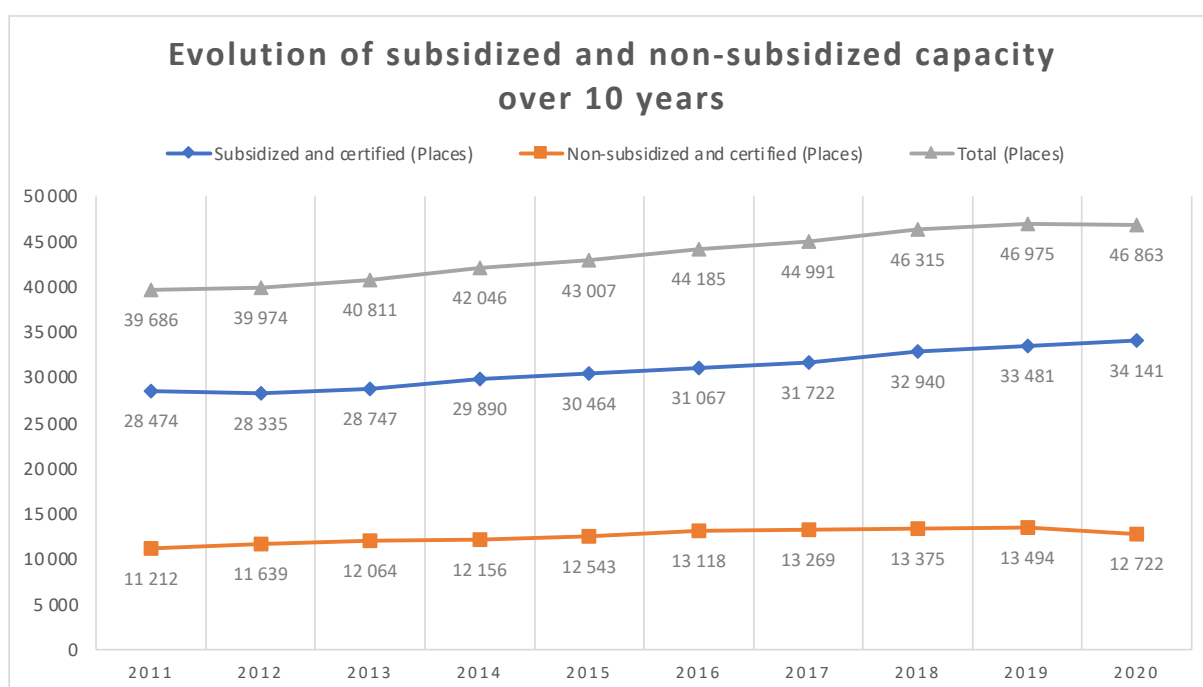
The number of places in subsidized structures has been stable with a linear progression over the past 10 years which enabled the creation of an additional 5667 places in 2020 in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. On the other hand, the offer for non-subsidized facilities has been slowly decreasing since 2016 facing a serious decline in 2020 for the first time over the past 10 years. This record of -5,7% (-722 places) for 2020 is partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as by the MILAC reform of 2019, which entered into force on January 1st, 2020, with a transition period of 5 years for certain measures. The reform implies major changes in the sector and aims to transform the childcare industry by requiring all private childcare structures, and non-subsidized complexes to become non-profit organization by 2025. If all measures of the MILAC reform are being enforced by the government as initially planned, this will have a huge impact on the proportion of both categories of childcare facilities within Wallonia-Brussels Federation for the coming years.

Table 4

Subsidized and non-subsidized childcare places from 2011 to 2020											
Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Subsidized and certified (Places)	28 474	28 335	28 747	29 890	30 464	31 067	31 722	32 940	33 481	34 141	5 667
%		-0,49%	1,45%	3,98%	1,92%	1,98%	2,11%	3,84%	1,64%	1,97%	18,40%
Non-subsidized and certified (Places)	11 212	11 639	12 064	12 156	12 543	13 118	13 269	13 375	13 494	12 722	1 510
%		3,81%	3,65%	0,76%	3,18%	4,58%	1,15%	0,80%	0,89%	-5,72%	13,11%
Total (Places)	39 686	39 974	40 811	42 046	43 007	44 185	44 991	46 315	46 975	46 863	7 177
%		0,73%	2,09%	3,03%	2,29%	2,74%	1,82%	2,94%	1,43%	-0,24%	16,82%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Graphic 6



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

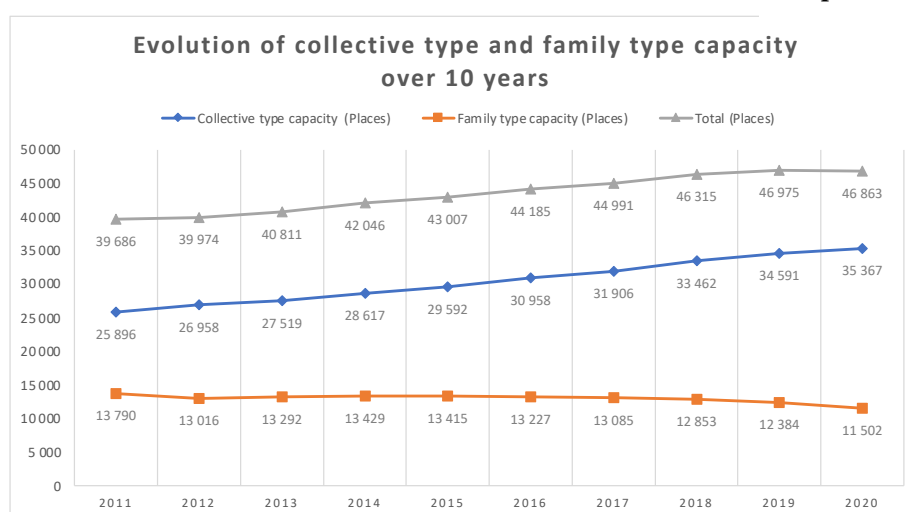
The evolution of number of places in collective and family types is clearly taking two opposite directions too as illustrated in the line graph below. Collective types of structures are continuously increasing with a total capacity in 2020 of 35,367 places which is 9,471 supplementary places in comparison to 2011 with a progression of 31,75%. In contrary, the capacity of places in family types of facilities is vastly decreasing since 2015 reaching a record of -7,12% in 2020, and an overall loss of 2288 places (-17,6%) since 2011.

Table 5

Family type and collective type capacity over 10 years											
Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Collective type capacity (Places)	25 896	26 958	27 519	28 617	29 592	30 958	31 906	33 462	34 591	35 367	9 471
%		4,10%	2,08%	3,99%	3,41%	4,62%	3,06%	4,88%	3,37%	2,24%	31,75%
Family type capacity (Places)	13 790	13 016	13 292	13 429	13 415	13 227	13 085	12 853	12 384	11 502	-2 288
%		-5,61%	2,12%	1,03%	-0,10%	-1,40%	-1,07%	-1,77%	-3,65%	-7,12%	-17,58%
Total (Places)	39 686	39 974	40 811	42 046	43 007	44 185	44 991	46 315	46 975	46 863	7 177
%		0,73%	2,09%	3,03%	2,29%	2,74%	1,82%	2,94%	1,43%	-0,24%	16,82%

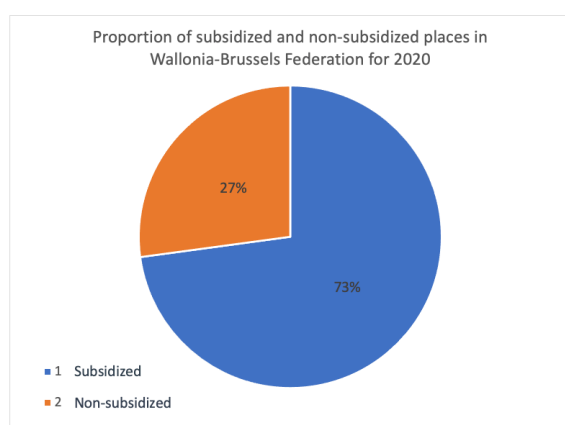
Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Graphic 7



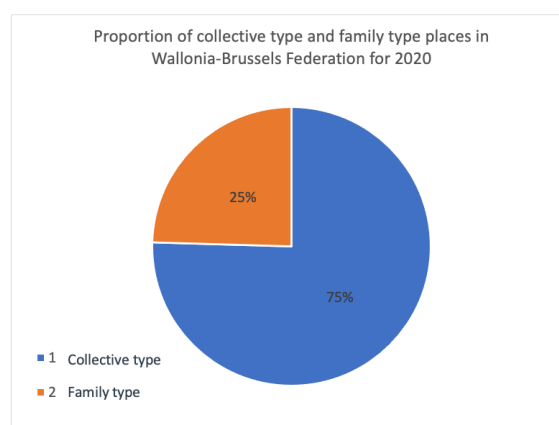
Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Graphic 8



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Graphic 9



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

D. What coverage rate for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation?

The coverage rate is calculated and used for European and international comparisons principally. It considers all children aged from 0 to 3 years of age who attend a childcare structure or pre-school in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, in relation to the total number of children of the same age group residing into the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. In 2020, the coverage rate reached 48.4% for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation which represents a small progression of 0.4% in comparison to the 48% coverage of 2019.

This coverage rate remains extremely positive regarding the “Barcelona targets” set by the European Council in 2002 of 33% at the Barcelona Summit, which goal is to enable equal opportunities between women and men on the European employment market. Only five member states have exceeded the 33% coverage rates which are: Denmark, Netherland, Sweden, Belgium, and Estonia. There remains an immense imbalance among parents in the sharing of family duties and domestic responsibilities leaving women generally to opt for a more flexible professional arrangement for the wellbeing of the family instead of the man. Approximately one woman out of three has adapted their work balance resulting in a part-time job, compared to one out of ten for men. The availability of childcare structures has a direct link with the engagement of parents in paid employment, as they allow parents to retain their professional activities and maintain their quality of life. Six million women around the European Union said they were compelled into decreasing their working hours resulting in part-time work or no work at all because of family responsibilities, due to a lack of childcare structures or the cost of such a place for a quarter of them.

The European Commission has no direct power and competences in the domain of childcare, however, as objective it must regularly monitor the strategy for growth and employment as well as accompany and support Member States with specific recommendations. Through programs exchange of good practice and equal opportunities the European Union promotes the exchange of national expertise and experiences related to childcare facilities encourages Member States to improve equality between women and men in the European Union.

The coverage rate throughout the Wallonia Region is excellent especially in comparison to the 33% target of Barcelona Summit. The highest coverage rate for Wallonia is attributed to the province of Walloon Brabant (62.1%), which is almost twice as high as the European Commission target. The lowest coverage rate however goes to the province of Hainaut with

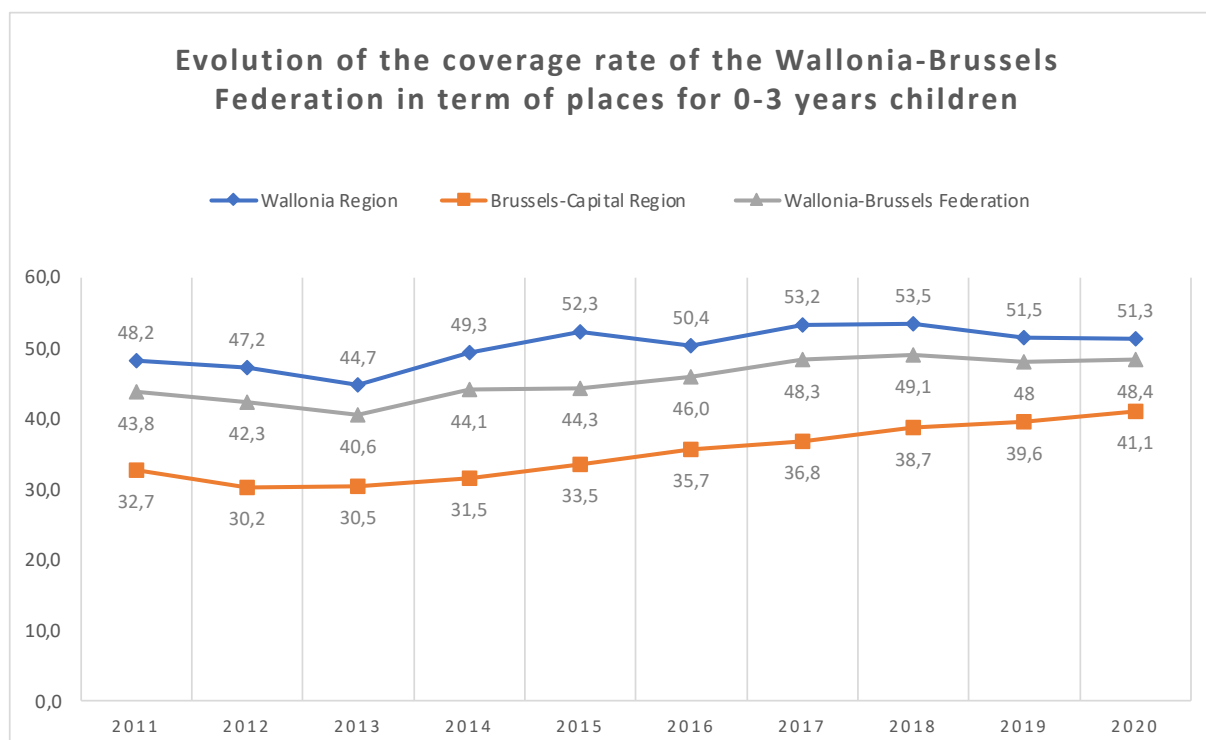
47.7%, which is, nonetheless, a decent rate compared to Brussels-Capital which has the lowest rating of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Table 6

Coverage rate in terms of number of children registered in the Region of Wallonia (0-3 years)						
Y2020	Number of children 0-3 years	Number of children registered in subsidized structures	Number of children registered in non-subsidized structures	Number of children of 2.5 to 3 years registered in pre-school	Total number of children identified	Coverage rate (%)
Walloon Brabant	11 489	2 861	2 669	1 601	7 131	62,1%
Hainaut	40 361	11 821	1 918	5 405	19 144	47,4%
Liege	31 461	7 781	3 144	4 211	15 136	48,1%
Luxemburg	9 062	3 094	823	1 257	5 174	57,1%
Namur	14 588	4 486	1 896	1 895	8 277	56,7%
Wallonia Region	106 961	30 043	10 449	14 369	54 861	51,3%
Brussels-Capital Region	43 100	7 882	5 588	4 227	17 697	41,1%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	150 061	37 925	16 037	18 596	72 558	48,4%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Graphic 10



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

It is important however to specify that the coverage rate calculated in the table 6 “Coverage rate in terms of number of children registered in the Region of Wallonia (0-3 years)” as well as the graphic 10 “Evolution of the coverage rate of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

in term of places for 0-3 years children” include children between 2.5 to 3 years old who are already registered in pre-schools in order to meet European norms and to comply to European statistics principles. Pre-schools are only accessible from 2.5 years old and do not concern this research, therefore we must remove the category “*Number of children of 2.5 to 3 years registered in pre-school*” from our coverage rate for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation to have a more precise and accurate rating in terms of available places covering childcare structures for 2020. The table 7 presents a more realistic coverage rate for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation excluding children registered in pre-schools, for the 5 provinces of the Wallonia Region and the 19 municipalities of Brussels-Capital Region.

Table 7

Coverage rate in terms of number of places in the Wallonia Region (excluding pre-school from 2.5 to 3 years)						
Y2020	Number of places subsidized by ONE	%	Number of places non-subsidized by ONE	%	TOTAL (Places)	Coverage rate (%)
Wallonia Region	25 538	76%	8 287	24%	33 825	38,1%
Province of Wallonia Brabant	2 964	58%	2 118	42%	5 082	53,5%
Province of Hainaut	9 470	86%	1 522	14%	10 992	32,8%
Province of Liege	6 727	73%	2 489	27%	9 216	35,3%
Province of Luxembourg	2 582	80%	653	20%	3 235	42,6%
Province of Namur	3 795	72%	1 505	28%	5 300	43,7%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	34 141	73%	12 722	27%	46 863	37,6%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

The coverage rate for childcare facilities in the region of Wallonia decreased of almost 10% once the pre-school registrations removed from the calculation. The lowest coverage rate stays the province of Hainaut with 32,8% coverage or 32.8 available places for 100 children in childcare facilities. The province of Walloon-Brabant remains the most performed among the province of Wallonia region in terms of number of places available in childcare structures with 53,5%. The overall Wallonia region seems quite stable in proportion to childcare places and coverage rates as figures remain approximately well balanced and homogeneous.

When looking deeper into the Brussels-Capital region and its 19 municipalities, coverage rates are much more volatile, and an inequality may be observed. Out of the 19 different communes, half of them have less than 30% coverage rate including some incredible low figures such as Koekelberg (16,9%), Molenbeek-Saint-Jean (18,8%), and Anderlecht (16,4%) with the lowest coverage rate for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. On the contrary,

some other municipalities are doing very well and outperforming the Wallonia-Brussels Federation rate such as Woluwe-Saint-Pierre (50,1%), Ixelles (54,4%), Uccle (57,1%), Woluwe-Saint-Pierre (57,1%), and its champion Etterbeek with 66,7% covering rate.

Table 8

Coverage rate in terms of number of places in the Brussels-Capital Region (excluding pre-school from 2.5 to 3 years)						
Y2020	Number of places subsidized by ONE	%	Number of places non-subsidized by ONE	%	TOTAL (Places)	Coverage rate (%)
Brussels-Capital Region	8 603	66%	4 435	34%	13 038	36,4%
Anderlecht	542	79%	146	21%	688	16,4%
Auderghem	245	60%	163	40%	408	47,5%
Berchem-Sainte-Agathe	136	75%	45	25%	181	22,9%
Bruxelles-Center	1 959	72%	748	28%	2 707	48,7%
Etterbeek	391	46%	464	54%	855	66,7%
Evere	220	59%	154	41%	374	28,6%
Forest	348	60%	233	40%	581	33,3%
Ganshoren	108	57%	82	43%	190	23,4%
Ixelles	699	61%	451	39%	1 150	54,4%
Jette	262	72%	100	28%	362	21,7%
Koekelberg	122	88%	17	12%	139	16,9%
Molenbeek-Saint-Jean	493	74%	169	26%	662	18,8%
Saint-Gilles	346	60%	229	40%	575	44,5%
Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode	325	79%	86	21%	411	47,8%
Schaerbeek	804	65%	429	35%	1 233	28,6%
Uccle	528	50%	535	50%	1 063	57,1%
Watermael-Boitsfort	169	74%	58	26%	227	46,0%
Woluwe-Saint-Lambert	614	79%	168	21%	782	57,1%
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	292	65%	158	35%	450	50,1%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	34 141	73%	12 722	27%	46 863	37,6%

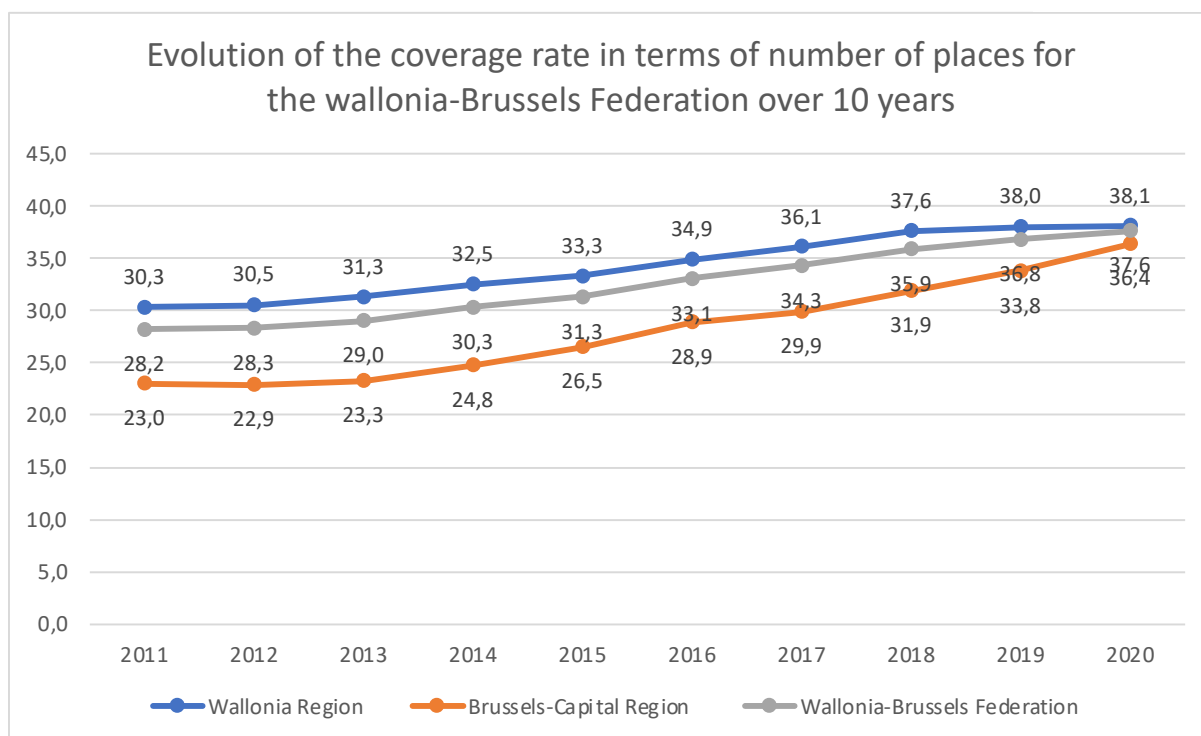
Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

The lowest coverage rate in terms of subsidized places by the Office of Birth and Childhood for the region of Brussels-Capital is observed in Etterbeek commune with 46% which is way less than the average 66% of the region. The highest for Brussels-Capital region is Koekelberg with 88% of its total places subsidized. In The region of Wallonia, the province of Walloon Brabant has the lowest coverage rate in terms of subsidized places by the ONE with 58% and the highest coverage rate is observed in the province of Hainaut with 86% of its places

being subsidized. The lowest coverage rate in terms of non-subsidized places by the Office of Birth and Childhood for the region of Brussels-Capital is observed in Koekelberg commune with 12% of its offering only. The highest rate is observed Etterbeek commune with 54% due to a well-balanced offering between subsidized and non-subsidized. In the region of Wallonia, the smallest covering rate for non-subsidized places is in the province of Hainaut with 14% logically due to its unbalanced rate. On the other hand, the province of Walloon Brabant is observed as the highest covering rate 42% because of its well-balanced proportion.

The coverage rate measured here is the ratio between the total amount of places and an estimate of the number of children aged 0 to 2.5 years domiciled in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and registered in childcare structure. This method of calculation takes into consideration that children under 3 months old are not yet allowed to integrate childcare facilities and that those between 2.5 and 3 years old have often join the pre-school and are therefore not accounted for as mentioned earlier. The coverage rate for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is 37,6% in 2020 which is 1,2% better than last year (36,8% in 2019). Although the coverage rate excluding the 2.5 -3 years old are reaching 37,6%, significant disparities are observed between provinces and municipalities of the Brussels-Capital region.

Graphic 11



Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

IV. CHAPTER FOUR: GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

A. Market failure - is there a shortage?

For several years, the lack of childcare places in both subsidized and non-subsidized structures have been a problem for many families in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. To overcome this shortage, the Office of Birth and Childhood launched the "Cigogne" Plans in the early 2000s, with the main objective to create new places and increase the global supply of childcare places in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The intention with the implementation of the "Cigogne" plans was to achieve, and if possible, exceed the objective set by Europe in Barcelona in 2002 of 33% coverage rate for children from 0 to 3 years old for subsidized structures. The Cigogne plan (I, II& III) are concrete actions plans and task forces through government agreements between the Regions and the French Community, of cross-cutting policies enabling synergies between policies for the creation of new childcare places, childcare infrastructures, and promote the employment of the early childhood sector. Initially, the objective of the Cigogne I and II plans was to create more than 10,000 places in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation over 10 years, all childcare types and categories combined. In addition to dedicated budgets to enable the creation of subsidized childcare infrastructures, the Office of Birth and Childhood also facilitated the development of non-subsidized childcare facilities by permitting the partnership with companies in the form of a synergy between childcare facilities and companies (SEMA). The 10,000 supplementary places were effectively achieved within a few years, given the complexity of the task, the time constraint to implement such a project from both infrastructure and staffing point of view. From the start of the Cigogne I plan in 2003 to the end of the Cigogne II plan in 2013, the number of childcare places raised from 30,000 to 40,800 in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, creating an additional 10,800 places over 10 years.

Table 9

Coverage rate in terms of number of places in the Wallonia Region (Children from 0 to 2.5 years old)						
Y2013	Number of places subsidized by ONE	%	Number of places non-subsidized by ONE	%	TOTAL (Places)	Coverage rate (%)
Province of Wallonia Brabant	2 714	56%	2 126	44%	4 840	47,8%
Province of Hainaut	8 039	82%	1 761	18%	9 800	25,8%
Province of Liege	5 660	68%	2 646	32%	8 306	28,2%
Province of Luxemburg	2 194	67%	1 063	33%	3 257	38,6%
Province of Namur	3 394	66%	1 742	34%	5 136	37,2%
Brussels-Capital Region	6 746	71%	2 726	29%	9 472	23,3%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	28 747	70%	12 064	30%	40 811	29%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

Nevertheless, some sub-regions in Wallonia likewise most municipalities in Brussels-Capital region still have a coverage rate below 33% at the end of the Cigogne II plan in 2013 and are therefore considered as facing shortages in regard to the “Barcelona targets” of 2002.

This is the case for the province of Hainaut (25,8%) and the province of liege (28,2) who both have not yet reached 33% coverage rate target recommended by the European Union. On the other hand, the Province of Brabant (47,8 %) is doing very well as they are the only sub-region exceeding 40% coverage. The global Wallonia-Brussels Federation coverage rate was still in the red in 2013 with 29%, due to the very poor 23,3% of the Brussels-Capital region.

Table 10

Coverage rate in terms of number of places in the Brussels-Capital Region (Children from 0 to 2.5 years old)						
Y2013	Number of places subsidized by ONE	%	Number of places non-subsidized by ONE	%	TOTAL (Places)	Coverage rate (%)
Anderlecht	400	74%	139	26%	539	11,9%
Auderghem	180	57%	134	43%	314	34,3%
Berchem-Sainte-Agathe	99	69%	45	31%	144	18,8%
Bruxelles-Center	1 383	76%	436	24%	1 819	29,5%
Etterbeek	303	56%	239	44%	542	37,5%
Evere	252	69%	113	31%	365	28,1%
Forest	279	66%	145	34%	424	20,6%
Ganshoren	125	70%	54	30%	179	21,2%
Ixelles	652	80%	159	20%	811	33,7%
Jette	181	71%	74	29%	255	13,8%
Koekelberg	66	76%	21	24%	87	9,5%
Molenbeek-Saint-Jean	286	72%	112	28%	398	9,3%
Saint-Gilles	242	68%	116	32%	358	20,4%
Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode	219	87%	34	13%	253	22,5%
Schaerbeek	640	73%	236	27%	876	15,9%
Uccle	527	60%	349	40%	876	45,5%
Watermael-Boitsfort	120	75%	41	25%	161	32,4%
Woluwe-Saint-Lambert	516	74%	185	26%	701	47,9%
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	276	75%	94	25%	370	37%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	28 747	70%	12 064	30%	40 811	29%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

With 26% of the municipalities in Brussels-capital reaching the 33% coverage rate, this has a huge impact on the global Wallonia-Brussels Federation performance. The alarming situation of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean (9,3%), and Koekelberg (9,5%) municipalities still requires

an urgent action from the Office of Birth and Childhood and public authorities as they are underperforming by 2/3 the European coverage rate. Therefore, we can observe that 13 municipalities out of 19 were facing a shortage of places in childcare infrastructure for Brussels-Capital Region (74%) based on the European Commission objective at the end of The Cigogne plan I& II.

The Cigogne III plan was adopted in July 2013 by the government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and was integrated in the ONE management contract of 2013-2018. It aims to create an additional 14,849 places between 2014 and 2022 of subsidized childcare facilities. The Cigogne III plan is composed of three phases:

- Phase 1: projects taking place in 2014 and has the objective to create 2 049 places.
- Phase 2: projects taking place between 2015 and 2018, aiming to 6,400 places.
- Phase 3: projects taking place between 2019 and 2022, aiming to 6,400 places.

The Cigogne III plan aims to balance the coverage rates between different sub-regions and municipalities to widen the gap considering their individual situation and demographic forecasts. Therefore, the Office of Birth and Childhood publishes calls for projects to maintain and support the growth of collective and family types of subsidized childcare structures. In the Phase 1 of the Cigogne III plan calls of projects, launched in December 2013, 104 projects have been selected for a total of 1239 subsidized places. The 104 subsidized childcare infrastructures have been open since 2014 and are fully operational. The Phase 2 of the Cigogne III plan calls of projects, launched in May 2014, have been closed for collective types of structures however still open for contracted caregivers. In total 246 projects have been selected for a total of 5159 subsidized childcare places. The third and last phase of the Cigogne III plan calls of project covering 2019 to 2022 is still ongoing and results must be published by the end of the year.

Table 11

Results of Cigogne III - phase 1 call of projects		
Y2014	Number of projects	Number of places
Province of Wallonia Brabant	9	95
Province of Hainaut	34	428
Province of Liege	12	117
Province of Luxembourg	9	94
Province of Namur	12	117
Brussels-Capital Region	28	388
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	104	1239

Source: ONE, Plan cigogne

Table 12

Results of Cigogne III - phase 2 call of projects		
Y2015 -Y2018	Number of projects	Number of places
Province of Wallonia Brabant	18	350
Province of Hainaut	54	927
Province of Liege	45	872
Province of Luxembourg	31	473
Province of Namur	19	362
Brussels-Capital Region	79	2175
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	246	5159

Source: ONE, Plan cigogne

As result, the Cigogne plans (I, II & III) launched in the early 2000s by the Office of Birth and Childhood to overcome the shortage of childcare places in Wallonia-Brussels Federation have successfully increased the global supply of childcare places. In 2020, the province of Hainaut was the only one under the 33% coverage rate with 32,8% which should not be facing any shortage anymore by 2022 with the Cigogne plan III – phase 3 completed. The provinces in yellow in the table 13 are the once that were under shortage prior the Cigogne plan III action plan, and not considered as shortage anymore if we follow the performance indicator set by the EU. We also observe that the Wallonia-Brussels Federation coverage rate is finally above the 33% for the first time due to the successfully launch of the Cigogne plan III.

Table 13

Coverage rate in terms of number of places in the Wallonia Region (Children from 0 to 2.5 years old)				
Sub-region/regions	TOTAL Places in 2013	TOTAL Places in 2020	Coverage rate 2013 (%)	Coverage rate 2020 (%)
Province of Wallonia	4 840	5 082	47,8%	53,5%
Brabant				
Province of Hainaut	9 800	10 992	25,8%	32,8%
Province of Liege	8 306	9 216	28,2%	35,3%
Province of Luxemburg	3 257	3 235	38,6%	42,7%
Province of Namur	5 136	5 300	37,2%	43,7%
Brussels-Capital Region	9 472	13 038	23,3%	36,4%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	40 811	46 863	29%	37,6%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

In the region of Brussels-Capital we may also observe a positive evolution of places since the implementation of the Cigogne plans even though their progression is not as profound as in the Wallonia region and its rural environment. Its improvement is however not negligible since 58% of municipalities in Brussels have reached or exceeded the 33% coverage rate, compared to 26% in 2013 before the launch of the Cigogne plans III action plan and calls for projects. In 2013, 13 municipalities out of 19 were facing a shortage of childcare places against 8 today. For a few municipalities the situation is still critical such as for Molenbeek-Saint-Jean who is still under the 20% coverage rate with (18,8%), Koekelberg (16,9%), or Anderlecht (16,4). Nevertheless, 5 municipalities were under 33% coverage rate prior to the Cigogne plans III in 2013 and are since 2020 in the green area, this is the case for Brussels-Center that passed from 29,9% in 2013 to 48,7% in 2020 and Forest municipality who made a progression of

12.7% with 33,3% in 2020 against 20,6% in 2013. Etterbeek commune on the other hand breaks all records for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation by taking 29,2% in 7 years reaching 66,7% in 2020 against 37,5% in 2013.

Table 14

Coverage rate in terms of number of places in the Brussels-Capital Region (Children from 0 to 2.5 years old)				
Sub-region/regions	TOTAL Places in 2013	TOTAL Places in 2020	Coverage rate 2013 (%)	Coverage rate 2020 (%)
Anderlecht	539	688	11,9%	16,4%
Auderghem	314	408	34,3%	47,5%
Berchem-Sainte-Agathe	144	181	18,8%	22,9%
Bruxelles-Center	1 819	2 707	29,5%	48,7%
Etterbeek	542	855	37,5%	66,7%
Evere	365	374	28,1%	28,6%
Forest	424	581	20,6%	33,3%
Ganshoren	179	190	21,2%	23,4%
Ixelles	811	1 150	33,7%	54,4%
Jette	255	362	13,8%	21,7%
Koekelberg	87	139	9,5%	16,9%
Molenbeek-Saint-Jean	398	662	9,3%	18,8%
Saint-Gilles	358	575	20,4%	44,5%
Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode	253	411	22,5%	47,8%
Schaerbeek	876	1 233	15,9%	28,6%
Uccle	876	1 063	45,5%	57,1%
Watermael-Boitsfort	161	227	32,4%	46,0%
Woluwe-Saint-Lambert	701	782	47,9%	57,1%
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	370	450	37%	50,1%
Wallonia-Brussels Federation	40 811	46 863	29%	37,6%

Source: ONE, Rapport d'activités 2020

As conclusion and regarding the European Targets announced in 2002, we may state that half of the municipalities in Brussels-Capital region are still facing a shortage of childcare

places including one province of the Wallonia region. Nevertheless, we must wait for the results of the Cigogne plans III phase before making any conclusions for 2022.

B. The MILAC reform

The reform was passed by the parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in 2019 at the end of the previous legislature and scheduled to come into force on the 1st of January 2020 including a transition period of five years for certain measures. The decree of the 21 February 2019 provides an interesting definition of the childcare sector: *'the professional care of children, from the end of maternity leave until they go to school, outside their living environment and the presence of their parents, aiming to respond adequately to the daily and educational needs of each child, to contribute jointly with their parents to their overall development while allowing them to reconcile their parental and professional responsibilities and their social commitments'* (art. 2)¹, unless under exceptional circumstances, the age of children is understood in a broader sense as from the period of end of maternity (16 weeks) leave until pre-school entrance (2,5 years). The MILAC reform aims at contributing and redesigning the childcare sector by offering the best possible services for young children from 16 weeks until 2.5 to 3 years of age. The vision of the MILAC reform consists in supporting the sector in terms of health, education, socialization, and individual development by fighting social inequalities and supporting professionals and parenthood likewise the ancestor of the Office of Birth and Childhood, the National Relief and Food Committee (CNSA).

The mains goals and objectives of the reforms are:

- to promote the best interests for children, in a spirit of good treatment
- to draw on social, scientific, and legal recommendation in the domain of children's rights
- to simplify and clarify administrative procedures for both professionals and families
- to reinforce the diversity of childcare provision, by ensuring the sustainability of services and childcare facilities including subsidized and non-subsidized infrastructures
- to improve the quality of childcare services across the Brussels-Wallonia Federation
- to avoid the commercialization and privatization of the childcare sector
- to improve management and evaluation to have a better control of processes in place
- to promote partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation between different key actors
- to recognize the diversity of children's necessities and promote accessibility and inclusion, with childcare seen as a universal service provide by the public authorities

¹ Decree of the 01/08/2019 aiming at reinforcing the quality and accessibility of early childcare in the French Community (Docu 46276).

The MILAC reform's first intention is to simplify and decrease the number of the different types and categories of childcare infrastructures available in the Brussels-Wallonia Federation. Prior the MILAC reform, parents had the choice between four different types and four categories of childcare structures for a total of 8 facilities certified by the Office of Birth and Childhood for their children:

- Subsidized and certified family type:
 - *Subsidized and certified caregiver or SAEC (up to 4-5 children)*
- Non-subsidized but certified family type:
 - *Subsidized and certified caregiver (up to 4-5 children)*
- Subsidized and certified collective type:
 - *Nurseries or “crèches” (up to 48 children)*
 - *Pre-guardianship*
 - *The community childcare center (up to 24 children)*
 - *The parental nursery (up to 14 children)*
- Non-subsidized but certified collective type:
 - *Children's homes (up to 24 children)*
 - *halîles centers*

Once the transition period over (2020-2025) and the MILAC reform implemented, only three types of childcare facilities will remain in the Brussels-Wallonia Federation:

1. **Independent childminders:** up to 4-5 children or up to 8-10 children if co-hosted with another childminder.
2. **Nurseries (Crèches):** with 14 places or more (multiples of 7), require 1 childminder per 7 children. A part-time management role is required under 70 places and a full-time role for any structure above 70 places. They can be registered as non-profit organization or public authorities with no possibility of privation².
3. **Childminder services:** with 36 places or more (multiples of 36), require 9 childminders per 36 children including a part-time management role. A full-time management role is mandatory as from 72 places including a full-time social worker.

² The FeMAPE has filed an appeal to the Council of State on 09/12/2019 to have this measure cancelled. We are still awaiting a decision from the Council of state at this moment.

The personnel employed in the crèches and childminders' services will be on a salaried/public employment contract or on a traineeship agreement. The new childminders in the childminder services will be hired under a salaried contract. The transition of the contractual status will be progressive for the current contracted childminders.

The MILAC reform aims secondly, to simplify the subsidizes applications processes and amounts delivered to subsidized childcare structures. Therefore, four levels with specific conditions will be required for obtaining findings and subsidies. Childcare facilities that open after the first of January 2022 will have to apply through the new scheme, for all others existing childcare facilities, the transition period runs until 2025.

1. **Level 0:** *no subsidy*

- **Conditions:** The structures require to be authorized by the Office of Birth and Childhood before it could officially open to public.

2. **Level 1:** *Basic subsidy*

- **Conditions:** The structures require to be authorized by the Office of Birth and Childhood and to be open 10 hours a day from Monday to Friday, 220 days a year.
- **For independent childminders:** 250Euros/place + ONE health reference.
- **For nurseries (Creches):** Funding of the management role + doctor's subsidy as from 21 places.
- **For childminder services:** Funding of the management role + ONE health reference.

3. **Level 2:** *Accessibility subsidy*

- **Conditions:** 1st level conditions + open 11h30 per day + welcome children with special needs + grant 20% to 50% to social emergencies.
- **For nurseries (Creches):** Basic subsidies + funding of PMS social worker supervisor (part-time for 21 children and full-time as from 42 children) + funding of childminder (1.5 full-time childminder / 7 children/ 11.5 hours).

- **For childminder services:** Basic subsidies + funding of PMS social worker supervisor + funding of one childminder + 10% of operational cost.

4. **Level 3:** *Reinforced accessibility subsidy*

- **Conditions:** level 1 conditions + level 2 conditions + grant 60% to 80% to social emergencies + special projects.
- **For nurseries (Creches):** Basic subsidies + accessibility subsidy + reinforced accessibility subsidy + (1.5 full-time childminder / 7 children/ 11.5 hours) + (1 part-time PMS social worker/35 children) + additional subsidies if the structure opens additional 15 hours/week.
- **For childminder services:** Basic subsidies + accessibility subsidy + funding of an additional childminder (part-time/ 36 children)

The third objective of the reforms aims at improving the quality of the workforce in the sector by reenforcing the quality of qualification for the childcare industry and applying performance reviews at different levels of the structure. Therefore, all personnel working in the childcare field post reform will need to be qualified as follows:

- **Childminders:** All future childminders and child caregivers will be required to have their CESS certificate (secondary high school qualification) + one of the following five certifications to be qualified as official childminder; Nursery certification, Early childhood assistant certification, Educator certification, Educator agent certification or childminder certification.
- **PMS Social worker (Psycho-Medical-Social):** All future PMS social workers will be required to be qualified as one of the 6 following certifications; bachelor's degree in psychology, bachelor's degree in social affairs, Bachelor's degree in nursery, Master's degree in science and psychology, Master's degree in social science or Master's degree in public health.
- **Management position:** All future directors of nurseries and childminder services will be required to be qualified within a psychology, social or health degree + a two-year certification

recognized by ONE including social, health, pedagogy, and management classes.

The fourth and last strategic objective of the MILAC reform aims at digital transformation of the sector by centralizing all applications and registrations throughout the ONE platform and gateway “Premier pas” for both professionals and parents. The digitalization of the childcare sector will enable an effective communication and management for all key actors within the ecosystem. As from 2022, all parents looking for a place in a childcare structure in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation will need to use the government gateway whether to apply or to request information. As from 2025, all professionals from the sector will need to apply for their subsidies and all official communications will be handled by the Office of Birth and Childhood via the “Premier pas” platform.

C. Costs and benefits of nurseries

This cost-benefits analysis of childcare facilities and nurseries extrapolates the benefits in terms of children development and maternal employment in the Wallonia-Brussels federation. Today, a minority of children (37,6%) in the WBF only have access to a childcare structure before entering primary school accessible as from 2.5 years old due to a lack of places in nurseries. The government and the Office of Birth and Childhood have extended public funding and investments over the past decades to increase the offering and decrease inequalities in the federation’s territory by implementing the “Cigogne plans I, II & III” and “MILAC” reform. These public investments have been justified, firstly on the bases that high quality nurseries increase children’s performance in school on the long run and enhance the overall well-being and labor market outcome during adulthood (Duncan and Magnuson, 2013). In addition, the social and educational benefits of childcare structures provided to children with their three first years of life have been scientifically proven (Pirard, 2015). Secondly, by increasing parental employment since affordable and accessible childcare structures allow parents to return to their professional activities more rapidly after a period of parental leave. After the children and parents, the public authorities (taxpayers) and society could be the third distinguish group of beneficiaries of this cost and benefits analysis as additional taxes on earnings will decrease public expenditure on education as well as their social backbone.

The cost of a place in a childcare structure or in a nursery for parents could vary according to the type of structure. Subsidized nurseries must follow the ONE income-related price policy which calculates costs depending on the financial situation of each family and could vary from 2,58 Euros to 36,49 Euros per day (2020 rates). This amount includes all costs to avoid financial discrimination and to allow every family to have access to public childcare services. Non-subsidized nurseries on the other hand, are not obliged to follow the ONE income-related price policy and are free to charge the price they want.

Benefits for parents are distinguished on the short-term employment effect as having access to childcare services enables the employment of mothers rapidly after maternity leave and decreases the mother's career interruption. And on the long-term as it has a positive economic effect of the families having access again to 100% of their wages and maintains their quality of living as the decrease of wages after a career interruption could result in a negative effect on the employee's well-being and their families (Christy Spivey, 2005).

Benefits for children are notable at different levels as the early childhood is a key time of life for children and their development. It is a stage during which the young children acquire language skills, develops physically, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Research demonstrates that children interacting between themselves and with others at early stages of their lives have a positive and lasting impact on children and promotes equal opportunities on the long run. It is evident that children are the main beneficiaries of having access to a nursery because they can improve their cognitive skills levels which is critical for their self-development and will have a positive impact for the rest of their lives.

Benefits for public authorities and society is relatively high (J. Heckman 2016), has it estimated the return on investment of early childhood education programmes in the United States. Mr. Heckman concludes that early childhood policy pays off for society and even more than other educational policies. Other researchers have concluded that \$1 invested in the early childhood sector would return between \$2 and \$12 to the society (Chauffaut Delphine and Boyer Danielle, 2010). In addition to the positive economic aspect, society benefits from socialized and well-integrated future citizens through the well-being of its children at early stage.

D. To what extent should the state guarantee a childcare place for every child?

As stated in the previous section under the children benefits, the early childhood is a central period during which the young child develops cognitively, psychologically, and socially. Numerous studies show the positive and lasting impact of early childhood on children's personal development, but also how it avoids school drop-out and exclusion from the labour market (Terra Nova, 2017). Recognizing the benefits of the childhood policy on children in Belgium started with the ratification of The International Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1989. It stipulates in its article 18 that states have the obligation to support parents in the exercise of their parental responsibilities by providing childcare facilities and welfare services to children to a certain extent. Unfortunately, for many children from the Wallonia-Brussels federation, access to childcare is still an obstacle due to a lack of available places in the current childcare infrastructures, either financially because subsidised nurseries are full or geographically because some sub-regions or municipalities are not well served. As illustrated in the chapter three, section four, the WBF is facing a huge disparity between its different localities, especially in the Brussels region where Anderlecht municipality is struggling with a un underprivileged coverage rate of 16,4% in comparison to Etterbeek municipality who reached 66,7% coverage rate in 2020. What should have been an equal opportunity service becomes inaccessible to several children, and therefore amplifying social inequalities within regions. The political leaders in the Wallonia-Brussels federation do not always seem to acknowledge the emergency of investing in the childcare sector and remain cantered on the care function of childcare with the aim of enabling parents to work despite all the scientific studies that highlight the benefits of childcare services for children at early stage, parents, and society. This was clearly stated in the country report of the “Belgium ECEC Workforce Profile” published by Pr. Jan Peeters from Ghent University and Pr. Florence Pirard who is a pioneer in the childcare research in Belgium from the University of Liege, Faculty of Psychology, Logopedics and Educational Sciences who I have had the chance to interview (Appendix 10). Although Belgium ratified The International Convention on the Rights of the Child, no enforceable right legally oblige the local authorities to provide a childcare place for each child in the country.

The notion of enforceable right legally means that a right is recognized and may be "opposed" to authorities. Public authorities are then obligated to allow the right to be enforced effectively. For the early childhood care sector, applying the notion of enforceable right would

mean that a childcare place must be granted to all children within a given geographical location or according to an established criterion. The advantage of the enforceable right for parents is that public policies and authorities have an obligation to achieve results and not only to provide the means.

In France, consideration was given to the introduction of a possible enforceable right to early childhood care to make it more accessible to parents and accommodate their professional and family lives. Michèle Tabarot, a Member of Parliament at that moment, was assigned to write a report in 2008 to measure the feasibility of supplying childcare facilities while controlling expenditure for the French people. This report revealed a severe shortage of places in the hexagon and suggested certain measures for the implementation of an enforceable right to childcare from 2012. The report conceived that between 2009 and 2012, innovative childcare arrangements for children of 2-3 years of age (nurseries) would be created to free up childcare places for the youngest children. Nevertheless, the challenge was too ambitious, and the new plan was to open the enforceable right as from 2015 to all children, depending on the number of available places in childcare facilities, by setting up a unique telephone number and a website to guide parents into their search for an available place in an existing structure. Simultaneously, the report proposed to reform the parental leave scheme so that parents could take care of their children full-time for up to 6 or 12 months with a benefit of 67% of their gross salaries capped at €1,800/month, similarly to the Swedish model. This report intended for an enforceable right of childcare in distinct phases but did not meet with unanimous approval within the government of the day. It would have been too expensive have reported the politicians. The notion of an enforceable right of childcare has then been transformed into a right of parents to information on existing childcare facilities unfortunately and France abandoned this project. They concluded that further progress should be made by systematically identifying needs in the sector and by providing an individualized information and guidance service for families.

In the Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, parental leave lasts for one year and is paid around 80% of their salaries, meanwhile accessible for both parents equally. At the end of this leave, public authorities are obliged to provide a childcare place for the child as the notion of an enforceable right of childcare has been recognized. Moreover, in these Nordic countries, early childhood education and care services have merged into a single ministry who deals with children from 0-6 years old. According to Pr. Florence Pirard from the University of Liege, an integrated system that offers more coherence competences between childcare facilities and the education system is key for the well-being of the children and the overall sector. Pr. Florence Pirard has been advocating for decades the

benefits of such an integrated system for Belgium, which has not yet been heard until today. There are small variations between the Scandinavian countries, but overall, they have been guaranteeing a childcare place for all children aged 0-6 since the 1990s. Laws oblige municipalities to offer a childcare place for all children living in their territory.

In Germany, the enforceable right of childcare has been recognized since the 1st of August 2013 and local authorities have the legal obligation to provide a childcare place for all children aged between 1 and 3 years old to parents that are working or training (Kinderförderungsgesetz). This ambitious plan has enabled the constructions of nearly 400 000 childcare places between 2005 and 2018 and have proactively revitalized the childcare sector. Families who do not have a childcare place within 30 minutes of their home can file a complaint to the local authorities. It has been reported that 242 parents have filled complaints against municipalities from 2013 to 2014, 242 for every 2 million children under 3 years of age registered. Most childcare facilities are collective types also called nurseries (Krippen), which take care of children aged 0-2 before they enter nursery school (Kindergarten), but also Day care center with children of all ages (Kitas - Kindertageseinrichtung mit Kindern aller Altersgruppen), which take care of children aged 0-6, or mixed structures combining nurseries and Kitas. Individual childcare providers such as (Kindertagespfleger), the equivalent of childminders, has developed rapidly over the last ten years - the coverage rate for children under 3 years of age tripled between 2006 and 2009 in major parts thanks to the enforceable right adopted in 2013.

While the enforceable right has irrefutable advantage of recognizing the right of every child to benefit from a childcare place and enabling him or her to take advantage of the benefits of early childhood care, it also faces some constitutional limits. To be successful in the transformation of the childcare sector into an enforceable right, the right to a childcare place should be treated at the highest level of the hierarchy of rights. It would therefore have to be registered in the Constitution to become a real obligation and allow citizens to demand compensations if their right is not respected. Defining these legal issues and provisions will be an essential step towards building a legal framework. Legal procedures are known to be long and access to justice implies a cost that could lead some parents to simply give up their rights. In addition, given the current shortage of childcare places, a judge who ruled in favour of a citizen when there is not enough childcare available obliging the State to pay penalties without automatically leading to a solution for the concerned families.

The right to a childcare place does not necessarily imply a right to a quality childcare place that is geographically or financially accessible. This argument was often raised during my discussions and interviews with public personalities such as Alderwoman Anaïs Camus (Appendix C), alderwoman of the early childhood of the Ixelles municipality in Brussels who was concerned about growing number of the non-subsidized childcare structures in her commune, for which the quality of services seemed to have decreased for profitable reasons according to her. The enforceable right alone does not settle the question of defining what type of structure the child is entitled to, where and at what price. It is therefore questionable whether parents are allowed to refuse a childcare place assigned to them if it is geographically convenient, financially affordable, or if the pedagogical project suits their needs. The question of quality of childcare structures is strategic and fundamental for the well-being of children, parents, and society. All children should have access to a childcare place, however it should be of good quality so that the tasks and benefits of childcare are fully met. One might question the relevance of the right to a childcare place for all children. Since some do not wish to benefit from a childcare place and others who have the chance to find alternatives to childcare such as family members or relatives. Nevertheless, there are still several parents who are struggling to find a financially accessible childcare place, therefore the “Cigogne plans I, II & III” and the “MILAC” reform was the answer from the WBF and ONE to develop the subsidized infrastructure to promote equal opportunities and combating social inequalities in the federation. Still, we are far from the concept of enforceable rights. The application of an enforceable right to early childhood care sector is a real choice of society that commits much more than forcing the state to provide childcare service. In countries where childcare is an enforceable right, parental leaves last longer than in Belgium, coverage rates are higher and local authorities are key players in the decision making of the childhood policies.

V. CHAPTER FIVE: EMPIRICAL SURVEY ANALYSIS

A. Data collection

I chose several key actors to be interviewed for this study taken from distinct fields and backgrounds. People with different roles were approached to collect information from those who are decision makers, involved in provision of childcare services as well as those on field applying these measures on daily bases as mentioned in the methodology section of the first chapter. Interviews were held at times and locations chosen by the interviewees and usually at their offices and some others were held online via Microsoft Team or Zoom application. I conducted interviews from February to May 2022 and interviews lasted approximately one hour each with the shortest lasting half an hour and the longest about one hour and half. All interviews were performed in French to avoid language barriers and translated in English. To ensure accuracy of our discussions, all interviews were recorded with a dictaphone and transcribed afterwards. The interview process was conducted and guided by a set of specific questions sent to the interviewees one week prior our meeting. Before each interview started, I reviewed the purpose of the study and provided them with the opportunity to withdraw their participation at any time, if required. In addition to the interviews, I attended two events organized by the Office of Birth and Childhood. The first event was organized in liege and was an information session for professional of the sector regarding the last phase of the “plan Cigogne III” call for project. The second was an international study day organized by the same organization ONE in Brussels gathering all professionals including three scientific interventions. All along the project, the following persons were interviewed and took part to the study:

- 1- Alderman Guy Wilmart from Anderlecht municipality – Politician (Appendix B)
- 2- Alderwoman Anaïs Camus from Ixelles municipality – Politician (Appendix C)
- 3- Alderman Daniel Hublet from Uccle municipality – Politician (Appendix D)
- 4- Mrs. Isabelle Dettilleux from Institute-Sainte-Thérèse - Teacher (Appendix E)
- 5- Pr. Florence Pirard, PhD from University of Liege – Professor (Appendix F)
- 6- Mrs. Sabine Lejeune from ARC NGO – Director of childcare facilities (Appendix G)
- 7- Mrs. Mara Grooms from LMDP private nursery – Director (Appendix H)
- 8- Mrs. Cécile Van Housté from la FILE federation – Director (Appendix I)
- 9- Mr. Alan Keepen from FeMAPE federation – Public relations (Appendix J)

B. Evaluation of interviews

Politics & municipalities:

I initially contacted all aldermen of the 19 municipalities, responsible of childhood policies and public nurseries from Brussels region and some others from Wallonia by email and requested an interview for the benefits of this research project. Surprisingly, 80 % of the politician I contacted answered favourably to my interview request, and I decided to filter down these sample to three strategic municipalities and political parties for which some interviews were processed online via MS Teams, and some other by visiting their cabinets in their respective townhalls. For the first interview (Appendix B), I chose to question the Alderman of Anderlecht municipality which is the sub-region from Brussels region suffering the most of an obvious shortage of places with 16,4%. This coverage rate is the lowest among the Wallonia-Brussels federation and therefore, meeting its representatives made sense to understand the difficulties there are facing and the reason behind such a low rating. Alderman Guy Wilmart and his director of childcare services and public nurseries (11) for Anderlecht. They reported that the two main factors influencing the shortage of places is the challenging social-economic environment, unfavorable to attract private nurseries and the fast-growing population. Anderlecht is in the south-west part of Brussels which is one of the most precarious districts of the region with a high density of 6672 habitant per kilometer square and the third largest amount unemployment rate for Brussels with 18,1%. Its population has doubled since 1930s and in consequence the demand of childcare services has exposed in the last decades resulting in a waiting list of 1000 families for a capacity of 400 places only. Not attractive enough for the development of the private sector, Anderlecht is dependent of public funding's and projects to increase its capacity. Therefore, they welcome the new MILAC reform and the "Cigogne plans", for which they benefited since the very beginning in 2013.

The second political interview was done online with the Alderwoman Anaïs Camus (Appendix C), from Ixelles commune. Ixelles is in the south-east part of Brussels region and considered as an affluent area of the city and very well appreciated by the expat community due to its proximity to the European institutions. Ixelles municipality has a good coverage rate of 54 % and faces the opposite phenomenon says Alderwoman Anaïs Camus, having reached the 33% public coverage it becomes difficult to increase their public capacity and therefore they are submerged of inquiries coming from the private sector attracted by the strong social-economic environment of Ixelles and interested in developing their activities. She says facing a shortage in her district, however, aware of the challenging situation faced by other

municipalities such as Anderlecht and recognizes that these communes must be the priority, as decreed by the last phase of the “Cigogne plan III”. Alderwoman Anaïs Camus was somehow septic and shared some apprehension regarding the growth of non-subsidized nurseries (private sector) in her municipality, she says that private nurseries require to cut costs to increase profit, and this often impacts the service delivered to children or families.

The third and last interview to political representatives was conducted in Uccle with Alderman Daniel Hublet (Appendix D). Uccle is Brussel’s largest and southernmost municipality and the richest district of the region of Brussels composed of large residential areas. Although Uccle has the second highest rating in terms of coverage for the region of Brussels (57,1%), Alderman Daniel Hublet highlighted the fact that they are facing a massive shortage of places in his municipality since only one request out of eight could be met. In his view, focusing on coverage rates is a mistake as these do not reflect the reality. Despite Uccle’s strong coverage rate, they are still missing seven places out of eight which are not reflected in the figures provided by the Wallonia-Brussels federation. In consequence, all three municipality officials confirm facing a shortage of places in their respective communes and oeuvre to increase their capacity, whether being part of the lowest rating or highest. The MILAC reform is very well appreciated and the cooperation with the ONE seems to be effective towards their common goal for the well-being of their citizens. One major takeaway from these interviews is that indeed a massive shortage is undeniable and identified by local townhall officials with the objective to reach 33% coverage rate set by the European Council in 2002.

Higher Education & Research:

After meeting with some political representatives from distinct political parties and divers social-economic ecosystems, essentially decision makers involved in provision of childcare services. It seemed imperative to interview a schoolteacher from a nursing school, whose role is to prepare and trains future child nurses in context of sector transformation as well as an academic and researcher involved in scientific studies within the childhood field. I therefore first approached the Institute Saint-Therese d’Avila in liege, respected and well-known nursery school in the region since 1840. I was kindly directed to Mrs. Isabelle Dettilleux (appendix E), who accepted to receive me in her office at the Institute to answer my questions and share her expertise of the childcare sector. Mrs. Dettilleux has more than 20 years of practice in teaching and supervising internships and took part to the metamorphosis of the sector throughout her carrier, witnessing the societal evolution of needs concerning childcare services. She explicitly recalls that when she started working in this school 20 years ago, the outcome of

this training was unemployment for 80% of my students due to lack of work. Today, they are trained to write a curriculum vitae and to present themselves in front of a nursery director because for most of them, they are recruited during their internships. Nevertheless, only 50% to 70% of students end up working in the sector she says, because working conditions are hard with a salary of 1200-1300 euros maximum, when starting of the day at 6am and finishing around 7pm or 8pm. Therefore, she welcomes the MILAC reform regarding the working conditions and well-being of future child nurses as well as for the whole sector. The redesigning of the training courses of all childcare programs is a major achievement, the current programs do not reflect the job description anymore and there was an urgent need for childcare curriculum courses to be updated. Mrs. Dettilleux fears however that small institutions will be in difficulty with the MILAC reform which might potentially increase the shortage of childcare structures in the region, parent are already obliged to take what is left, and rarely get to choose the pedagogy that suits their education preference. Visiting a nurse school and interviewing one of their most experienced teachers has confirmed that the sector has radically changed over the past 20 years and despite the gaps, the education body is adjusting their system to adapt to the specific needs to the sector. These profonde changes in public education systems require time and are currently on the move towards a more suitable scheme.

My second interview was dedicated to PhD professor from the University of Liege, from the Faculty of Psychology, Logopedics and Educational Sciences who has published a large number of scientific articulates and researches in the domain of childhood at national and international level. Pr. Florence Pirard, from the department of educational sciences didactics specific to psycho-pedagogical disciplines and part of the Research Unit for a Life Course Perspective on Health and Education (RUCHE) accepted to meet me online via Zoom to share her expertise and vision of the problem. We have had a very interesting discussion (Appendix F), and she thoughtfully directed me into the most relevant scientific research for my project. She also invited me to an event in Brussels organized by the Office of Birth and Childhood gathering all the most important actors of the sector. I have had the chance to listen and discuss with some of the cabinet office of the Minister of Childhood Bénédicté LINARD as well as the most eminent scientific personalities of the Childhood field such as Prof. Michel Vandebroek (UGent), Prof. Martin Wagener (UCL) and Mrs. Catherine Bouve (Sorbonne Paris Nord University). For Pr. Florence Pirard, the main challenge of the Wallonia-Brussels federation is the structure of provision and the divided arrangement of our education system. A completely different policy is implemented for the ministry of education (3-12 years) and the ministry of childhood (0-3 years) where staff is less qualified, with unequal working conditions, lower

budgets, and uneven policies. Best practice countries such as Sweden and all the Nordic block, have an integrated system that treats professionals and children equally with a common vision and regulations acknowledging the three main functions of childcare facilities which are economic, social, and educational functions. In the WBF, politicians are not yet convinced of the social and educational function of nurseries and look at it more as a day care center to enable parents to work, neglecting the social and cognitive role of nurseries on children dispute the scientific research is a mistake. All along my research, different key actors from the childhood sector have highlighted this misunderstanding of our society and political representatives regarding the social function and education function of childhood.

Subsidized childcare structures:

When interviewing Mrs. Isabelle Dettilleux, the teacher from the Institute Saint-Therese d'Avila she highly recommended me to contact Mrs. Sabine Lejeune from "ARC services" in Blegny who is responsible of 8 subsidized childcare facilities and very active in the field. I therefore contacted Mrs. Sabine Lejeune by email, and she immediately accepted to receive me at the headquarters of the non-for-profit organization. I have spent a very interesting time there with her, discussing about childhood policies, MILAC reform and how subsidized structure function and are funded (Appendix G). "ARC services" has been operating for more than 30 years in the region with the purpose to combat social inequalities through three main activities which are: support to seniors, cultural activities, and childcare services. They have around thirty child nurses for 200 children, including collective structures and family type childminders, giving them a 360-degree overview on the childhood sector. When discussing finance and cost structure she quoted: "we are under deficit on the childcare services, and thanks to the other activities we may keep the childcare structures open, mainly through senior services which balance our budget. What allows us to function in budgetary terms are the economies of scale through the number of structures that we have in the NGO". When questioning her on the shortage she confirmed that we have a problem of capacity and coverage in Wallonia-Brussels, however the greatest issue to her is the financing and the current structure of the sector. This point was already raised by the Pr. Florence Pirard and her colleagues during the study day at the ONE event in Brussels. The cost structure of subsidized facilities is not funded enough which impacts the quality of existing structures and leads us into a massive shortage of places. She highlights that she is against making hard profit on childcare services, she personally believes it should be under the umbrella of public authorities a 100% to avoid any abuse and guarantees the well-being of children. So overall, they are currently financed at 65% to 70%,

depending on the size of the structure, by the Wallonia-Brussels federation. The remaining 30% must be funded by the parents themselves, i.e., the funding is calculated according to their income. Parents' incomes are not controlled, and therefore they have an overall average of 17€ per day, which could decrease to 13€ or 14€ per day depending on the geographical and socio-economic situation of the nursery, incomes are not the same everywhere she says. After all, there is a need for nurseries, even more in precarious areas which is the reason why NGOs like ARC continue to battle and lobby for additional funds to the local political representatives and the ONE. When I questioned Mrs. Dettilleux regarding the MILAC reform she said being very enthusiastic when the previous minister managed to have this reform voted and accepted by the parliament before her departure in 2019. Three years later however, she is disappointed and frustrated by the direction and means provided by the cabinet to implement new MILAC reform, going backwards on strategic questions such as the refinancing of the childcare staff which has been delayed to 2025. Finally, she denounces a lack of common vision in the childhood sector. The associations that represent the sector among themselves are political associations that are listened to but are not united. She declares: *“So, we are already a fragmented sector and through our fragmentation the people who represent us are not united and do not know how to campaign together because they do not represent the same interests”*. Three main associations represent the whole childhood sector in Wallonia-Brussels federation which is the NSA representing the voluntary sector such as “ARC Services”, the FILE represents the public organizing authorities mainly and the FeMAPE who represents the private sector and non-subsidized nurseries.

Non-subsidized childcare structures:

After visiting subsidized structures to understand the complexity behind their partly funded model, it was essential to knock at the door of non-subsidized structures and hear what they have to say. Regrettably, this was probably the hardest challenge throughout my interview process as none of them answered favorably to my inquiries without any explanation. Despite the twenty-five requests sent by email, none accepted to contribute to my research leaving me with no other choice from using my network to finally have the testimony from a non-subsidized structure. The director of the private nursery from the locality of Rocourt, finally agreed to meet me at the condition to stay anonymous. Therefore, she will be given the name of Mrs. Mara Grooms from the LMDP structure (Appendix H) in this study. At the end of the interview, she admitted that she would have not accepted the interview if I did not pass by a common friend, due to a lack of time and respect of the privacy rights she affirms. Interestingly

enough, the private sector is the only niche of childcare providers who did not see any benefits in sharing their experience and points of views regarding the shortage, when they are actually the most impacted by the MILAC reform and the transformation of the sector. A major take away from the interview of Mrs. Grooms, director of a non-subsidized structure is that there seems to have considerable miscommunication between the field actors and the childhood administration. This was also reported by Mrs. Sabine Lejeune from ARC services and her eight subsidized structures as well as by Mrs. Isabelle Dettilleux, the teacher from the Institute Saint-Therese d'Avila. They have all received very limited amount of information regarding the reform MILAC, resulting in growing lack of confidence in the institutions by almost all parties consulted. Mrs. Grooms confesses being lost in the implementation of the new provisions and reforms since 2019, looking for information principally on internet. Similarly, and pointed out by ARC services too, Mrs. Grooms explains having been left alone during the Covid crisis without many instructions which brought additional pressure on their shoulders. Nevertheless, the whole sector whether subsidized or non-subsidized continued to operate and function despite the stress and the lack of directions. When questioning her about the capacity and occupancy rate she testifies: *"We are already fully booked for 2022. We have many inquiries especially now due to the closing down of non-subsidized structures due to the reform. I have had to refuse 10 children last month because of a lack of capacity. Since the beginning of my carrier, I have always been operating at 100% capacity, and we have always had as much demand and inquiries as today. The problem is the supply mainly, the demand is there, and is even increasing thanks to the reform"*. Mrs. Grooms is strongly against the part of the MILAC reforms that tries to force her to change the status of her structure into an associative or non-for-profit organization. She deplores that the new management position created and subsidized by the ONE, if she transfers her structure into an NGO as requested by the reform, she won't be authorized to take care of children anymore. She will be stuck with administration responsibilities only without being able to help her staff with the children when required. She adds: *"And if we decide to work with the children instead, then we won't be authorized to manage the structure, and all our investments, personnel investment's will be transferred to the NGO. The building here is mine, I bought it myself and there is no way someone else comes into my structure as head of associative and gives me instructions while I become an employee of the NGO"*. She concluded by affirming that there is an extensive cost for them hidden behind the transfer of status such as accounting expense which is the reason why so many non-subsidized structures decide to close down.

Non-governmental associations:

As mentioned earlier three associations represent the whole childhood sector in Wallonia-Brussels federation which are the NSA representing the voluntary sector such as “ARC Services”, the FILE association who represents the public organizing authorities mostly and the FeMAPE association who represents the private sector and non-subsidized nurseries. As part of this study, I met with a “la FILE” first, who is lobbying against the economic development of private institutions in the childcare sector as they believe the childhood must be a public competence where profit could potentially decrease the quality of the service. And so, impacting the well-being of children, likewise the senior sector is suffering nowadays since the profit massively invested in the sector ten years ago. And their main antagonist after, the FeMAPE, a non-profit association born out of a citizen's movement in reaction to the "MILAC" reform who aims to become a federation representing all childcare facilities, whether subsidized or not, nurseries and childminders. Their fight is to preserve and improve the quality of childcare in Belgium, to contribute to the increasing professionalization of the sector while respecting the individual freedoms of professionals and families. They actively advocate against the MILAC reforms that aims to restrict the access and development of private nurseries and non-subsidized facilities in the region. I first met with Mrs. Cécile Van Housté (Appendix I), Director from « La F.I.L.E. »: Federation of Local Initiatives for Children who represents 700 childcare facilities from the childhood sector (0-3 years). They have been pioneers in many projects, such as the status of childminders, where they successfully obtaining the status of home-based employee for childminders who had no legal status, or very little before. They have been fighting for this right to be recognized for the past 30-year and they finally won in 2018. Mrs. Van Housté and her team are passionate individuals, dedicated to the cause of social and childcare services. Her personal view of the problem is a lack political vision on childhood, she says: *“we have not yet understood in the French community the importance of the childhood. And that we must invest in childhood, it is an investment and not an expense. So as long as we haven't put childhood as a priority, we'll be plugging the gaps. There is no global policy for children in the Wallonia-Brussels federation and it's a pity because in terms of pedagogy the ONE does a very good job. Unfortunately, on the field it's complicated with the few means and tools they are given”*. La FILE greatest challenge is to deconstruct fears and reassure the child nurses on fields who do not always perceive all the subtleties of the reforms and legislations. *“The new decree came out like that in the sector, without support, without clear information, and most nurseries felt uncomfortable at the time without clear instructions and vision.*

Although the ONE has given some information sessions, it is not always easy for child nurses to attend these sessions in the middle of the day” she denounces. The Director of la FILE also mentioned that some preparatory workshop/ trainings are required before to open a non-subsidized nursery today. And she noticed that many participants drop out before the end of the program probably because they realize that the financial model does not allow them to make much profit. The second association I visited was the FeMAPE who represents the interests of private sector and non-subsidized nurseries mainly (Appendix J). It was fascinating to interview Mr. Keepen and to have his opinion on the childcare sector of the Wallonia-Brussels federation as well as the MILAC reform. He has been advising associations for the past 20 years, and he has been specializing on the parenting and early childhood issues since 5 to 6 years now, accumulating an impressive expertise on the matter. When FeMAPE association was created following the reform of childhood sector, he kindly offered his services to first create the statute, quickly became spokesperson for a little while to finally ending up as an administrator of the FeMAPE. For him the childhood sector is extremely rigid and excessively complicated institutionally. However, he believes that we are lucky in Belgium to have a high-quality childcare service, and even the people who work with fragile structures on the institutional level are people who are passionate whether subsidized or non-subsidized. He confirms that there is no room for the profit motives, it is not possible to make margins, and this must also be a factor of suspicion, and that if groups promise margins or dividends to shareholders, or growth in returns and so on, then mathematically we must ask ourselves where the problem lies. Mr. Keepen finds it extremely reductive to reduce the debate on the issue of subsidized and non-subsidized childcare settings to a trade-off against the valiant workers of the public service, which is almost intellectually dishonest he says. There can be just as much tension at work or quality issues in publicly funded childcare as in privately funded childcare, and he would even tend to believe that in terms of working environment, it can be just as fulfilling, if not more, to work in a small structure with only independents. We are faced with structures that, on the one hand, are completely dependent on public funds and administrative rules of any kind that prevent freedom and autonomy of management, and on the other hand, structures that have 100% of their own income and must deal with the real cost, and therefore practice a true cost that will become unaffordable for the parents "because" of the reform. He believes we must stop thinking that only the public sector can offer these innovative childcare services and we must therefore stop bashing the non-subsidized sector and break down the barriers so that the non-subsidized sector is able to offer social services or to make itself accessible to more parents than it is today to erase the negative effects of the reform. The FeMAPE strongly advocates for

the entrepreneurial freedom no matter the sector and the freedom of choice in terms of management autonomy and legal form for structures for which the FeMAPE has taken legal actions to the Council of State on 09/12/2019 to have this measure cancelled. As of today, we are still awaiting a decision from the Council of state at present. Regarding the 33% coverage rate recommended by the EU he said *“Even if we increase it to 60%, there is no guarantee that we will be able to produce the desired social effect. There is therefore something to be reinvented in this context to encourage greater equity with a principle of progressive universalism which would make it possible, at a given moment, to support those who need it most. So for me, this 33% standard is not enough, we should be able to reach 60-70%, so that all people who want a place can have one, but also to create a new demand (to make socio-economically weakened populations aware of the fact that it is useful for the child's future to be able to socialize in a day nursery), which is impossible at the moment as long as there are not enough places. 100% would not be necessary, because it would be a waste, paying for structures with public funds for a resource that would be underused. Obligation is not beneficial too, there are families who culturally want to continue to raise their children in the family sphere and that should be respected. On the other hand, having other forms of non-compulsory childcare, less restrictive and respectful of family values, as advocated by parents, makes sense, for example with pop-up childcare for 2 or 3 half-days a week, activities, etc., but all this has disappeared with the current reform”*. The FeMAPE has forecasted that the childhood sector will lose up to 8000 places by the end of 2025 mostly due to the impact of the reform MILAC which will reenforce the shortage of places within the sector. The association is active and continuously negotiating common agreements with the ONE and the WBF such as the phenomenon of unfair competition between private and public nurseries which there are currently debating about. This unfair competition comes from a difference in tariffs, and therefore up to a certain income level it is cheaper to go to a public nursery. As a result, many children are put on a waiting list and leave their private nurseries overnight as soon as a place becomes available. Private childcare facilities must therefore be protected from this dumping and unfair price competition says Mr. Keepen. This is one of the clauses for which they are going to take legal actions as they have introduced this appeal to the Council of State and the minister has reopened the reform process. The MILAC reform is therefore far from reaching to an end as ongoing negotiating between all key actors of the sector and the administration cabinet are still reflecting on what could be improved in the future framework of this reform.

VI. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the way our political representative and de facto the Government of the French Community organizes through the government agency ONE, the childhood policies and combat the shortage of childcare places within the Wallonia-Brussels federation. The ONE agency is a central piece of the childhood picture as it regulates all actors of the childcare sector including all subsidized and non-subsidized facilities. It is important to establish that the question of accessibility to quality childcare services is much more complex than it seems and is gradually taking an influent and international dimension. Complex because societies are continuously evolving throughout time for individuals and collective needs and no universal solution has been found. Having said that, some countries seem to have more effective provision systems than others, probably more efficient because it reflects their own requirements and ecosystem.

The first question I raised in this study was whether the WBF is facing a shortage of places in childcare structures, and the answer is yes, unquestionably. It is the reality on the ground and testified by all actors I came across who confirms that their capacity is insufficient to answer de demand, whether subsidized or nonsubsidized structures. This has also been firmly established by the ONE and the Government of the French Community who responded to this shortage by implementing its “Cigogne Campaigns” an intention to reform the childhood sector. Nevertheless, there are two mains prism (international and local) to look at this issue which provide distinctive outcomes to the initial question. When looking at the international coverage rates and exclusively the one across the European Union and their 33% target set at the “European summit of Barcelona in 2002”, we may observe that the WBF is outperforming this number and therefore potentially seen as a country doing very well in terms of accessibility to childcare places. As explained by the Pr. Florence Pirard the difficulty of these scale targets is to establish a common objective that does not diminish the scope of actions of those who are more committed, and to pull up those who are more behind. The consequences of such a large European objective can been witnessed on the ground as municipalities have as objectives these 33% coverage rate, no matter their local circumstances. Furthermore, when visiting the association « La F.I.L.E. » based in Brabant Walloon, who has the best coverage rate for the region of Wallonia (53,5%) for 2020, they denounced a massive shortage of places. I have had similar testimony from the Alderman from Uccle (57,1%), who alerted me regarding the way we interpret numbers and statistics, because there are enormous gaps between the ground and

figures provided by public institutions. Therefore, when looking from a local point of view, even though coverage rates seem excellent, the reality of the field is completely deferent, and targets must be reflecting the needs and specificity of localities individually. The ONE has recently discovered the bias and have adapted their new strategy accordingly, by identifying tension areas per districts to prioritize the needs for childcare services, which has been corrected in the last phase of the “Cigogne plan III”.

Beside the coverage rate, we have a more fundamental and philosophical problem regarding childcare management which is the *profonde* role of childhood within our society. We all agree and understand the economic function of nurseries allowing people to work, and still ignoring and underestimating the two other functions of the childhood which is the social and educational function. These 3 functions are continuously in tension, and these are not the liability of one institution by itself, but rather of a competent system, be it individual, institutional or at governance level. As long as we have not acknowledged the importance of childhood and the benefits it will bring to our society, we won't have the necessary infatuation to profoundly invest and transform this sector. Without a strong political will and a long-term vision, it will be difficult and laborious to solve the childcare problem and fix the second major obstacle of the sector which is the funding. The Government of the French Community and the Birth and Childhood Office are reforming the sector by restricting the access and growth of non-subsidized childcare structures (Private), to enable accessibility and equality of services to all. The consequence of this strategic change of direction is that non-subsidized structures are closing faster than new subsidized places are being created which is reinforcing the shortage and produce the opposite effect.

Moreover, when visiting subsidized childcare structures, I have heard their distress claiming that their structures are barely surviving because the funding is not enough to cover their expenses which may potentially impact the quality of the infrastructure and services. Therefore, this sector requires proper financing and long-term investment plan, which is a matter of public policy, similarly to Nordic countries such as Sweden for example, where they understood the importance of childhood and the long turn benefits this may imply on society and individuals. Including an integrated education system (no longer separating 0–3-year-olds from 3–6-year-olds) with a similar quality of care and harmonized education system without disparity with a global vision for children, which is not yet the case in the WBF.

Nevertheless, we need to keep optimistic and appreciate all the efforts and strong decisions that have been taken over the past 50 years. We need to keep in mind that the WBF and Belgium in its globality is ranked within the 5 strongest countries of the European Union

when it comes to accessibility and quality of childcare, which is not negligible. To the question on how to overcome the shortage and whether an entrepreneurial solution could design to enable the creation of places the answer is yes, as long as it has a social purpose. Furthermore, the contribution of this study opens the door in need for further research in the design of a solution considering all the barriers and the description of the problem including a strong benchmark analysis within advanced social-economic countries.

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VIII. APPENDICES

A. Appendix A: Quantitative survey

Availability of places in childcare facilities in Belgium

What was your experience while registering your child in a childcare structure in Belgium?

1 Where do you live?



74% (37)
Wallonia region

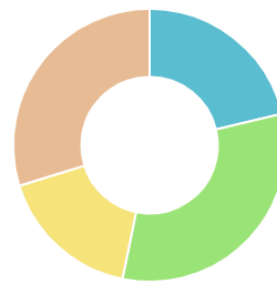
26% (13)
Brussels region

0% (0)
Flanders region

15.33
Standard Deviation

50
Responses

2 In what period was your child born?



21% (10)
Before 2014

32% (15)
Between 2014 and 2015

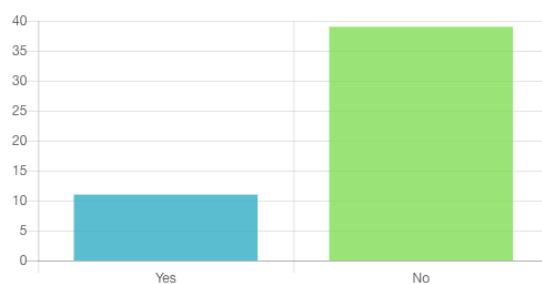
17% (8)
Between 2016 and 2018

30% (14)
Between 2019 and today

2.86
Standard Deviation

47
Responses

3 Did you find an available place in your preferred childcare facility when it was time to pre-register (three months pregnant)?



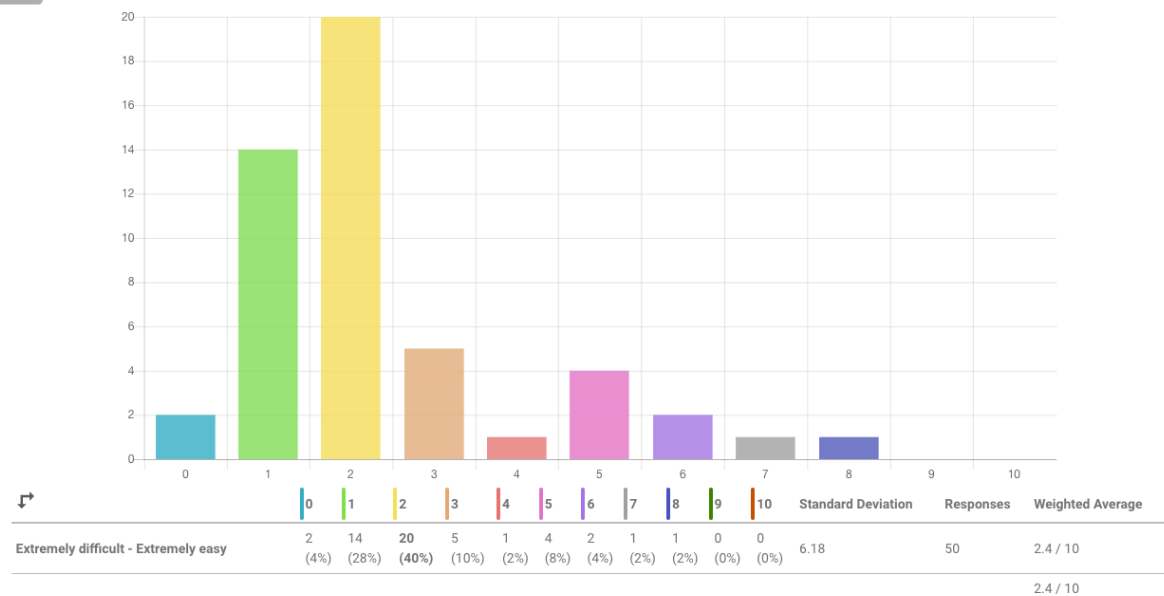
22% (11)
Yes

78% (39)
No

50
Responses

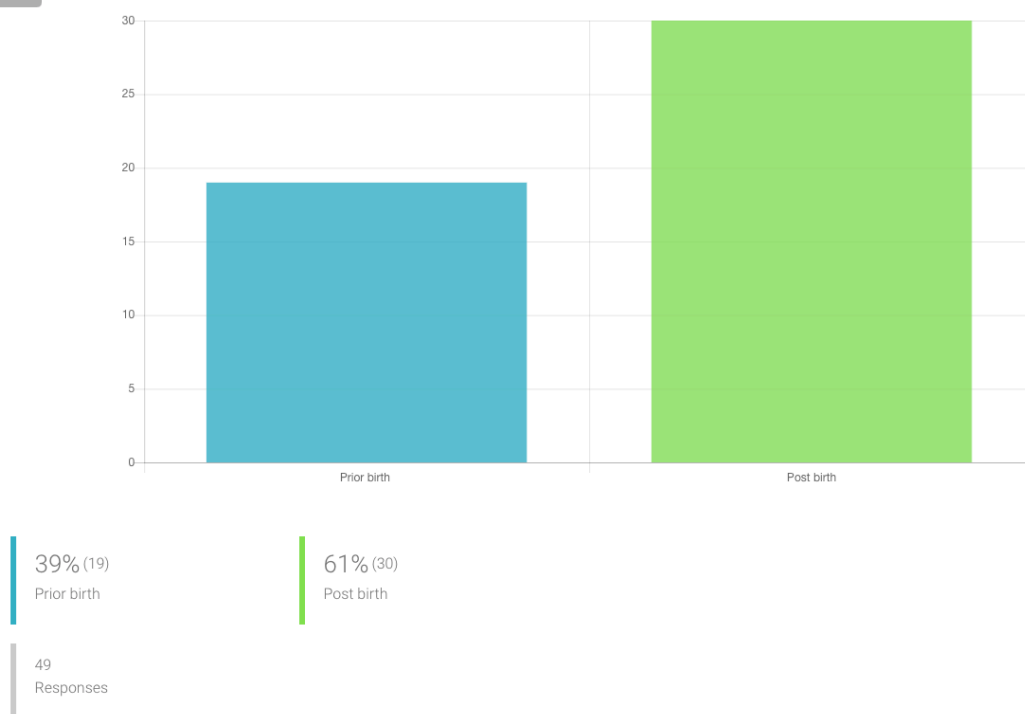
4

How difficult was it to find a place? 0 being the hardest and 10 the easiest



5

When did you secure a place for your child?

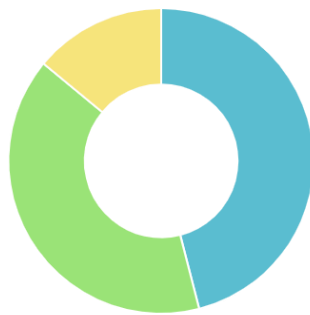


6

What was your preferred option?



7 Why?



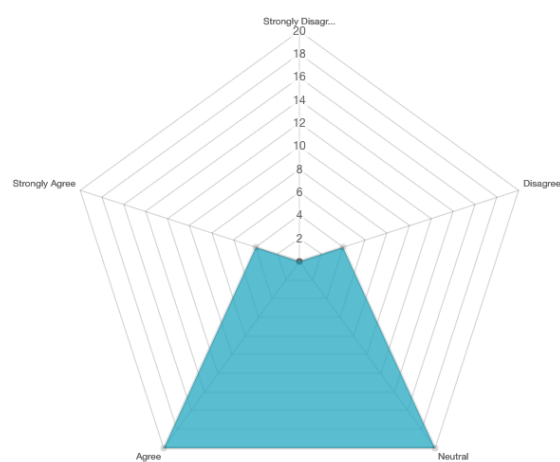
46% (23)	40% (20)
Finance (Price)	Pedagogy
14% (7)	0% (0)
Quality of services and structure	
0% (0)	0% (0)
9.42	50
Standard Deviation	Responses

8 Did you manage to get a place in your preferred option?



48% (24)	52% (26)
Yes	No
1	50
Standard Deviation	Responses

9 Were you satisfied of the overall service?



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Standard Deviation	Responses	Weighted Average
	0 (0%)	4 (8%)	20 (42%)	20 (42%)	4 (8%)	8.62	48	3.5 / 5
	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	0	0 / 5
								3.5 / 5

10

Do you think we face a shortage of childcare places and structures in Belgium?



86% (43)
Yes
18
Standard Deviation

14% (7)
No
50
Responses

B. Appendix B: Interview I

Qualitative Survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Alderman Guy Wilmart et Mrs. Rachel PEREIRA

Role: 6th Alderman (PS) - Competencies: Early childhood, French-language communal education, school health and events for Anderlecht municipality and the director of the municipal day childcare service

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

My name is Rachelle Pereira, I am the director of the public French-speaking childcare services and nurseries for Anderlecht. The aim is to have a specific public childcare service within the municipality which looks after all childcare facilities. It is not yet the case in all municipalities around Brussels, however similar childcare sections are emerging which are dedicated to nurseries in order to improve the quality of our infrastructures and the services offered to families. We currently have 11 nurseries, soon to be 12, and we coordinate them with my team of 8 persons, both in terms of personnel and logistics. We also have 4 Dutch-speaking nurseries that are managed by our Dutch-speaking colleagues.

I am Guy Wilmart, alderman for the French-speaking communal education and the French-speaking communal nurseries, school health and events for Anderlecht.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to register their child in a childcare structure or nursery?

Look, more than 1,000 people are on the waiting list here and today we only have a capacity of 400 places in nurseries. It is impossible to meet the demand of our citizens. We try to give priority to the children of Anderlecht municipality, however it is a real nightmare for parents to find a place in a public childcare structure. There are not many private nurseries in the municipality either, and since the reform, all registrations are done through the online registration platform managed by the ONE which limit our access to data. Nevertheless, we are a municipality with citizens coming mainly from the working class and private nurseries are not always accessible to our citizens which explains perhaps the reason why we do not have enough of thesis non-subsidized structures on our commune.

Q3: What are your objectives in the short (2022) and medium term (2025) in the early childhood policy for Anderlecht? And for the communal nurseries in your municipality?

Our medium- and long-term objective is to reach 33%, however it is very difficult due to the rapid increase in the number of persons registered in the municipality of Anderlecht. To give you an example, at the 2000-year elections there were 89,000 inhabitants and we are now 120,000. 22 years later we have more than 23,000 more individuals living and registered in our municipality. The objective of this legislature is to double the capacity of nursery places within the next 6 years. There is a real will within this political majority because it is a real necessity for our citizens. We have a very good relationship with the ONE and they are aware of the day-to-day difficulties, but to give you an approximate date of when this 33% will be reached, we have no idea. We are looking forward to the last phase of the "Cigogne plan" which should be out in June this year. There are some projects awaiting on our side, ready to be implemented and to apply for the next phase of the "Cigogne plan". We already benefited from the first two phases which have been a real success for our community and have allowed us to increase our childcare capacity.

Q4: What do you think of Minister Bénédicte Linard's intention to reform the early childhood sector? Do you support the "MILAC" reform and why?

For us it was very good news, and we believe it is a good thing for the sector as well. The sector needed to be reformed urgently and the arrival of the MILAC reform was very much appreciated in our municipality. You know, for communes like ours where there is a real social-economic need, and a certain amount of the population living in a precarious context, it is extremely difficult to see new projects see the light of day. Having said so, the reform MILAC recognizes actions that we had already put in place that were not mandatory yet and we are proud to have been precursors in the domain. It was a good thing to improve certain things even though we were already clearly in the dynamic, but we know that this was not the case for the private sector. However, following a strong political will, our communal nurseries are already open 11:30 a day as required by the new reform to have access to level 2 of subsidies. We welcomed this reform without fear as we were already working on effective ways to improve our childcare capacities for our citizens.

Q5: Are there any discussions within the local college about the reform and how does this impact on your objectives?

There is a real political will on the part of the burgomaster and me in the early childhood sector to get things moving and to maneuver forward as quickly as possible towards this reform. We decided to double our capacity, and this was voted and accepted by the majority. It is important to know that this has a certain impact on the municipal budget. The ONE subsidizes one childminder for every seven and we subsidize one for every three, because we want to have more quality places for our municipality. We have more than 30 municipal schools in Anderlecht and the faster the children are taken care of from their childhood, the better we can guide and accompany them throughout their youth to offer them the best possible public service.

Q6: As an alderman, what freedom of action do you have at this level? Can you show initiative?

We do as much as we can at our level of action. For example, we decided in 2019 to open all the nurseries 15 minutes earlier and 15 minutes later every day for parents. A second action we did was to increase the number of registrations per nursery by 10%, as there is always a certain percentage of absences which allows us to absorb and increase our offer in terms of places. These are initiatives that we took internally to combat the problem of spaces and to welcome a maximum number of children in a quality environment.

Q7: Is there any collaboration between you (political representatives) and the ONE? If so, how often? Do you have common strategic objectives?

We have a close collaboration with ONE and more particularly with the coordinator in charge of Anderlecht. We have a fixed face-to-face meeting every two months, and our teams are in regular contact by email and on the phone on weekly bases. They often come to visit our premises to improve our service and there are regular health and hygiene inspections. It is reassuring to see them because we are all working for the same cause, the safety and happiness of our children.

C. Appendix C: Interview II

Qualitative Survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Alderwoman Anaïs Camus (Online)

Role: 6th Alderwoman (Ecolo) - Competencies: Early Childhood, Municipal Properties, Housing, Transport for the commune of Ixelles.

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

My name is Anaïs Camus, I have been an alderwoman, among others, for early childhood in Ixelles since 2018.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to register their child in a childcare structure or nursery?

For me, it was difficult to find a place in a nursery for my two daughters. I had to find a private childcare structure for a while for the youngest of the two, and finally managed to get a place for each of them in a subsidized nursery. When I couldn't find a place in a nursery, I even hesitated to extend my maternity leave. Therefore, I agree that something isn't working well in the current system, and I am working hard to change things among my municipality.

Q3: What are your objectives in the short (2022) and medium term (2025) in the early childhood policy for Anderlecht? And for the communal nurseries in your municipality?

In Ixelles, we are currently in the process of opening 72 Dutch-speaking places. And soon, with the "Cigogne plan", we plan to open +/- 75 places on the French-speaking side of the municipality by 2025. All of this with the aim of achieving the 33% rate of subsidized places. Once this rate is reached, we will no longer have priority in terms of subsidies to open other places. The idea is that all the communes should reach this 33% rate before they can do more.

Q4: According to the key figures of the Wallonia-Brussels federation, the coverage rate of pre-school care in Ixelles is 54%. What do you think of this?

With the "Cigogne plan", we aim for 33%. The difference in percentage represents places in the private sector, and therefore not subsidized. I am aware that this is not enough. However, compared to other municipalities, we still have a good coverage rate.

Q5: What do you think of Minister Bénédicte Linard's intention to reform the early childhood sector? Do you support the "MILAC" reform and why?

I think that this reform was necessary and much awaited by the sector. Until now, it was very complicated to make the different structures cohabit, with different regulations. This could not guarantee the same quality of care in all of them. This reform also brings better funding.

When the reform was negotiated, not everyone was happy with the result.

A final pool of negotiations with stakeholders took place recently. The increase in training requirements for supervisory staff has led to problems in some facilities, as staff who were previously considered sufficiently qualified are no longer so after this reform. At least that is how it has been perceived by many. Many promises have been made, but there is a lack of funds to implement them. So, it will take longer than expected.

The current difficulty is that we are torn between the need to have qualified supervisory staff and at the same time to keep this profession accessible. Many young girls who have dropped out of school are attracted to this profession, which allows them to obtain training.

The trick is to find the best solution between the two.

Q6: Are there any discussions within the local college about the reform and how does this impact on your objectives?

Despite the reform, it is important to know that this sector is very complex. So not every detail is discussed at the college, but the main directions are. I can't decide anything without the college's approval.

Q7: Is there any collaboration between you (political representatives) and the ONE? If so, how often? Do you have common strategic objectives?

We are obliged to collaborate with the ONE at various levels, whether it is for the opening of a nursery in general or in increasing the number of places. We are in regular contact with them.

At the moment, the reform requires us to work in multiples of 7 in terms of reception in the nurseries. And in this context, ONE came to visit all our facilities to assess the possibility of meeting this requirement and to do what was necessary to implement it. We were therefore able to open 14 new places thanks to this.

D. Appendix D: Interview III

Qualitative Survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Alderman Daniel Hublet

Role: Alderman (CDH) - Competencies: Cults, Families, Nurseries, Health, People with Disabilities.

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

Daniel Hublet, alderman in charge of early childhood and in charge of several nurseries in the commune of Uccle. The public nurseries are known as communal childcare facilities and not private nurseries. Even though, the mayor and I do have a certain view of private nurseries as a SIAMU agreement is required to open a nursery and is delivered by the municipality, whether it is subsidised or unsubsidised.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to register their child in a childcare structure or nursery?

There is a lack of places everywhere in early childhood sector, in Brussels as much as in the entire Wallonia-Brussels federation that is a fact. Open any newspaper writing about the early childhood and you will see that this is a real problem in Brussels. Here in Uccle, we have one place for every eight parents, so there is a growing shortage of places and that is a sad reality.

Q3: According to the key figures of the Wallonia-Brussels federation, the coverage rate of pre-school care in Uccle is 57%. What do you think of this?

The rate of coverage should not be based on that, I think it is a mistake to base ourselves solely on the rate of coverage. We have an obvious lack of places throughout Brussels and even if our rate may seem good, we are far from being able to meet the demand with 7 places out of 8 not being met. The inhabitants of Uccle have priority in the municipal nurseries as well as the municipal workers, which can distort the coverage rate. Therefore, I don't like to base myself on the figures you mention, as they are variable and therefore not always correct.

Q4: What are your objectives in the short (2022) and medium term (2025) in the early childhood policy for Anderlecht? And for the communal nurseries in your municipality?

We can only have the objective of increasing the number of places and these are distributed according to the subsidies too. Subsidies from the ONE requires a decision from the Wallonia-Brussels government as well, to grant a subsidy of X additional places. You know that there is a new reform coming, a new programme which announces several places reserved for the Brussels agglomeration and we hope to be able to benefit from it, at least partly. There are conditions of course and we are looking forward to these places. We have 302 places in Uccle, you know that all the structures are going to be registered as nurseries soon, since the MILAC reform and so we have 8 communal nurseries today. Several of them are being renovated to increase the number of places by multiples of 7, as required by the reform. We are working hard to expand our current structures.

Q5: What do you think of Minister Bénédicte Linard's intention to reform the early childhood sector? Do you support the "MILAC" reform and why?

I agree with the MILAC reform that a special attention should be made to children and the early childhood sector in general. The reform is based on increasing the number of places for the municipalities and we therefore can only agree with this need. I have just received an email from BRULOCALIS (Association of Towns and Municipalities of Brussels), which reminded us that in the context of the reform we need to be ready to implement the new policies. We met with all the aldermen of Brussels recently and we asked the minister for several clarifications regarding the MILAC reform. The minister agreed that a better flexibility for childcare is required, because we are all subject to extremely strict regulations which does not help improving the shortage of nurseries in Brussels.

Q6: Are there any discussions within the local college about the reform and how does this impact on your objectives?

We have internal meetings as well as external meetings with all aldermen of Brussels in a broader sense, but this is still not enough. We exchange information quite frequently, especially during the COVID period. We are in contact mainly on the digitalisation of the sector because since the reform all registrations go through the ONE website and therefore some of the other websites became obsolete. The ONE is dependent on ministerial decisions and therefore decisions can take quite a long time before they reach the field and operations.

Q7: Is there any collaboration between you (political representatives) and the ONE? If so, how often? Do you have common strategic objectives?

I am regularly in contact with the ONE coordinator for the municipality of Uccle, yesterday for instance we have had an online meeting where we exchanged views on the case of different nurseries in Uccle where we collaborate to improve our services. We have a good relationship with them, at all levels of power. The ONE is a large structure, and so we are referred to the different department according to the projects in progress. You have the childcare structure of the municipality, which is in relation with the political part of BRULOCALIS, the centre that will make the union with the different municipalities. On the other hand, we have a strong relationship with the ONE coordinator and headquarters, which provides subsidies and together with the regional committee. The French Community Commission (COCOF) also intervenes for the subsidies, and we therefore meet them occasionally too in order to prepare the applications forms required to apply for extra subsidies.

E. Appendix E: Interview IV

Qualitative Survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Isabelle Dettilleux

Role: Childcare teacher and internship supervisor at institute-Sainte-Thérèse-d'Avila

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

I'm a social nurse and I worked in medical school in Seraing and Ougrée first, I was part of what was called at the time the school medical inspection (medical visits, hygiene, cases of abuse, etc.). I worked at the nursing school for a year and then I came here, and I've been at institute-Sainte-Thérèse-d'Avila for 20 years now.

My role is to manage the internship placements for students, we have a total of 450 students who go on internship (childcare nurse, aspiring nurse, education officer, family assistant, care assistant and medical-social worker) and they each do 3 to 5 internships, depending on the section.

In childcare, we have over 200 students:

- 4 classes de 20 students (5th grade)
- 3 classes de 20 students (6th grade)
- 3 classes de 20 students (7th grade)
-

And so, the 5th, the 6th, and the 7th childcare nurse grade (puericulture) as well as the 5th and the 6th aspiring nurse (aspirant nursing), who leave without any qualification, and who either go on to the higher education, or do a 7th year from which they will graduate as childcare nurse.

Q1.1: What is the difference between both childcare nurse and aspiring nurse?

- Aspiring nurse = qualification level, so a lot of general courses and a lot of science to facilitate access to higher educational or scientific studies
- Childcare nurse = professional level, will be qualified as childcare nurse at the end of the 7th year and will have their CESS

We also have education officers, who also go to nurseries and have been recognized as childcare workers.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to register their children into childcare facilities?

The fact of finding a place already limits the parents' expectations. The ONE does a lot of work on the establishment's project, the rules, the partnership with the parents. There are different pedagogies in the nurseries (Montessori, Loczy, etc.), and therefore many different visions of the childhood, and if, like the ONE, we want to pretend that the parent can choose the place according to his affinities or his "educational principles". The reality is quite different, as the parent is rather obliged to take what is left, and rarely get to choose due to shortage of places.

Q3: Out of the total number of your students on these courses, do you have any idea how many of them will work in the sector permanently? Or is there a tendency to move on to another field after graduation? Q4: What is the guarantee of getting a job in the sector after graduation?

In the case of childcare workers (90% girls - less than 10% boys). Boys have 100% of jobs when they leave because all institutions such as nurseries etc. dream of having a boy to have a father figure in their team, and in the nurseries too. In terms of job offers, Liège has a shortage of childcare workers. The city of Liège no longer has a waiting list of childcare workers available for replacements, etc. They are therefore 100% employed if they can find a job. So, they are 100% hired if they wanted to be, but I have between 50% and 70% of students who go to work in the nurseries, and 30% who go on to other options. Some go on to study to be teachers, others choose not to work because the working conditions are too hard (salary of 1200-1300 maximum, start of the day at 6am and end at 7pm or 8pm). The continuity of studying to be a teacher is attractive to them because the salary is better, and the hours are more suitable for family life.

Q5: What observations can you draw from the last 20 years in terms of access to the profession and job opportunities?

When I started working in this school 20 years ago, the outcome of this training was unemployment for 80% of my students due to lack of space.

Today, we train them to be able to write a curriculum vitae and to present themselves in front of a nursery director to prepare them for the reality of looking for a job. We also notice that these directors who have accepted to appear as a jury are also the ones who are grading and who end up calling them and offer them a place in their establishment. It's the same thing with

the home helps. We work with the private sector as well as the public sector, but the private sector is more present (via the staff or the management itself).

Q6: What do you think of Minister Bénédicte Linard's intention to reform the early childhood sector? Do you support the "MILAC" reform and why?

As for the small institutions, I believe they will be in difficulty. For some bigger institutions I know of such as Les Piou Piou in Dolembreux, a former children's homes, which has about sixty children, and in which each childcare nurse has her own company car, their salary is quite decent, and their midday meals are delivered by a high-quality catering service. Some of the wealthier families put in the effort to ensure that their children are well looked after. My students are very well looked after there, and it's a good place to be for them.

If we take as an example another type of nurseries, and which is not necessarily less expensive, there are those applying the Montessori pedagogy. The children select their own food with their fingers, the children are changed on the floor, etc. It is a completely different approach. There are, on the other hand, other subsidized and more popular childcare structures that work as best they can, whose parents pay less, and there are many of them.

To come back to the question, we have been informed of this reform, but we are rather monitoring the evolution of the profession, i.e. our students will go through the common core until they are 15 years old and then there will be the possibility of going into an early childhood sector where all the current sections will be merged. It will then be necessary to start a bachelor's degree to obtain a position in the childcare facility etc., as is already the case in Flanders.

The study carried out for the ONE by Florence Pirard (head of the psycho-pedagogy section at University of Liege) shows that it will be difficult to pay staff once such a diploma has been awarded. This would require huge financial reinvestments or another internal organization such as a bachelor in each department with a less qualified assistant in support. This seems very difficult to achieve in Wallonia. The "study pack" is ready but has never been released in Wallonia so far. With the MILAC reform, small centers are in danger of closing. Many of them are run by self-employed childcare workers with a very precarious status, which is not exactly what they aspired to when they started their childcare studies. The reform is good for the graduating students, but for the existing institutions that will not survive this, it will make the number of available places even worse.

I have noticed that some institutions sometimes use our students as full members of staff, which is not the purpose. Our students are there to be trained in the trade first and foremost. You should contact Sabine Lejeune ARC Services in Blegny, she actively participates in all the legal reflections and debates on the evolution of the profession. We have bodies above us such as the SFMQ which redesigns all the framework section of the childcare classes. And so, we've already had the redesign of the family assistant, etc., and we're waiting, within 2 to 3 years at most, for the structure into which we're going to have to fit for childcare nursery, or the profession that's going to come out of all the current training courses at the end of which it's possible to work in the childcare sector.

Q7: Was the teaching body consulted in the reform? Did you have to provide figures?

No. Twenty-five years ago, when we redesigned the childcare profession, we were involved in planning and organizing and programming, not in designing the profession. But there are undoubtedly people in the field who are part of the SFMQ that I was telling you about. The question is what room for maneuver they have, because the financial aspect must be a huge brake at the moment. There are currently 12 professions for early childhood care (0-12 years), which is not very profitable financially/economically. This redesign will then be handed over to the politicians. Subsidized institutions are less and less present.

The ONE is a rather special institution. It is there at the beginning to authorize the opening of a childcare centers. And then they come regularly, more in some than others, and point out things that are wrong (sometimes only because they don't correspond to a so-called "politically correct" education that some parents want). And often, the ONE, and others, try to make us fit into a straitjacket that they have drawn and consider certain practices as violence. To come back to the first question, it is therefore regrettable that parents cannot choose the institution in which their child will be able to evolve, with the educational project that corresponds to them.

F. Appendix F: Interview V

Qualitative survey

Interviewer: Mr Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Pr. Florence Pirard, PhD

Role: Professor at University of Liege, Faculty of Psychology, Logopedics and Educational Sciences

Q1: Please introduce yourself briefly?

I am currently professor at the University of Liege, Faculty of Psychology, Logopedics and Educational Sciences and part of the Research Unit for a Life Course Perspective on Health and Education (RUCHE). I worked for 10 years as a pedagogical advisor at ONE. At the time, I was asked to accompany the Belgian European presidency, and that's how I saw the negotiations on the targets, which was very instructive because I was following the note I had written, and I could see how everything was negotiated. I also participated as an expert for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in the OECD work. I am currently working on a survey which is carried out every five years by Germans, the SEEPRO survey. It concerns the challenges of professionalization, and we compare each country. This year Norway and Switzerland will be added. This allows us to take a step back, put things into perspective. All the 2017 reports are online.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to enroll their child in a nursery or other childcare setting?

The references to Anglo-Saxon countries are not the interesting reference because it is a liberal approach. There are first questions of accessibility but also of quality, and therefore in the Wallonia-Brussels federation, when we talk about accessibility, there is financial accessibility, but if it is to have a paying place and that this one is not of quality, as parents, that poses a problem. There are different structures of provision, and we are in a divided system of provision. We know that the nursery school is structured quite differently, and it is free with much better trained staff, whereas in the early childhood sector things are quite different. A completely different policy is implemented, the service is paid for, the people who work there are less well trained, the working conditions are much worse, which would not be the case, for example, in the Nordic countries. Increasingly, education policies are moving towards integrated systems where the same types of professionals are involved and

ideally, towards a system that is free and accessible to all. All this poses terrible challenges because if we develop private logic, it is often not of good quality.

How to reconcile the 3 missions? There are 3 functions that could be attributed to childhood:

- An economic function = because it allows people to work, to reintegrate into the workplace
- A social function = which is far too underdeveloped, we see that there is a whole series of people who do not have access to it, whereas if the structure is of good quality, we know that they are the ones who will need it the most in disadvantaged environments, immigrant environments, people with disabilities, etc., and therefore a whole public that we do not see enough of in these structures, whereas historically, it is to these people that these structures were primarily addressed. In Wallonia, we still have a lot of work to do on this aspect.
- An educational function

These 3 functions are in tension, and these are not the responsibility of an institution alone, but rather of a competent system, be it at the individual, institutional or governance level.

Typically, these accessibility issues are not only the responsibility of a person who welcomes people or not, and who makes choices according to rules that are supposed to be applied but which are in any case unfair. This implies regulation policies, and the “Cigogne plan” is a good example of this, since there are priorities for Liège and Hainaut, which are less well covered, and to try, at the level of the Wallonia-Brussels federation, to have policies which try to make things more accessible and more equitable.

There have been several “Cigogne plan”. Initially, this approach was based on the observation that the coverage rates varied greatly from one region to another, what they call sub-regions or provinces, and given that Brussels is a region in its own right, but also according to the districts. Studies done by Pr. Michel Vandebroek have shown, for example, that in Brussels there is a great disparity between the communes. The richest communes have the most subsidized structures, while the poorest communes have a greater number of private structures. We therefore have a disparity according to the Regions, but also more locally, and the subsidized structures which make things more accessible, and which have better means to be able to fulfil their missions are established in the municipalities which ultimately need them the least, and therefore the “Cigogne plan” was set up with the aim of compensating for this.

The ONE coordinator can be an important interlocutor who ensures that we are not centralized solely in Brussels. One of the strengths of the Wallonia-Brussels federation is that it has a centralizing body, but at the same time it has decentralized branches that can support all this.

Q3: What do you think of the 33% coverage rate recommended by the EU at the Barcelona summit in 2002? Is it enough in your opinion?

This shows that there are still many others who are not in the 33%. And so, the problem, when we are on this scale, is to find something that can be a common objective but that does not diminish the scope of the actions of those who are more committed, and that pulls up those who are more behind. It is not easy, 33% for many is already a hell of a lot and then there are the problems of how to count. For example, in our country, do we count the children who are 2 ½ - 3 years old and who are in school? This distorts all the calculations, and it is a whole debate because it makes the statistics go up. You must be aware of that bias. Now, even including them, compared to other countries, we are not so bad off. On the other hand, if we compare ourselves to the Nordic countries, we still have a long way to go.

Compared to Flanders, we have a lot of subsidized structures because the choice was made, at the time, to favour private structures to create places with unqualified personnel. In the Wallonia-Brussels federation, the choice was rather to keep a form of regulation and to create places but with means, the Cigogne plans being a typical example. Creating places at all costs with unqualified people is of little interest because qualification is the primary variable in the quality of care, so it is not enough to create places, they must also be of good quality, bearing in mind that in our country, the training of a supervisor is well below all current European standards (a professional level leading to a qualification in our country, whereas a university level is required in the Nordic countries). It is really necessary to harmonise all this upwards.

Q4: What do you think of Minister Bénédicte Linard's intention to reform the early childhood sector with the MILAC reform?

I have been lobbying for 10 years saying that we need to harmonize upwards and bring everyone up to a common level of qualification and orientation. The schools have all mobilized to create this bachelor's degree in 'childcare/education of young children' which, if all goes well, will be possible from 2023 onwards as a complement to existing training courses that will not be abolished. The problem at that point will be paying people.

The schools are aware of the need felt in the field and have been creating what has existed for many years (this bachelor's degree has existed in France for a long time, but it is an innovation in our country), but we will not have the finances to pay them in the childcare industry. These new graduates will therefore probably be in management positions such as social workers and nurses to have people who have a vision and are trained for this type of position.

Now, we have either child nurses who work with children but who are trained, at best, to professional level, and the teachers do what they can. When we see all the development of knowledge in this sector, I often tell my students that children's education does not begin at school level, because at the University of Liège we are the only university where, in the sciences of education, we train from early childhood onwards (I was asked in 2010 to create this). We ask a lot of these professionals; a nursery is not just a day care center. There is a possible pedagogy and a lot of work that exists on the international scene. They all work with parents (support for parenthood, co-education). Inclusion issues do not only arise at school either, but the inclusive approach is also done from early childhood, and it is even more complicated because often the diagnosis is not made. When there is a problem with a child, sometimes the parents have questions, and it is very difficult to see clearly during the first 3 years (except for certain disabilities such as Down's syndrome etc.).

Very often, these first years of life are more of a "spotting" period when we don't know very well yet, and these professionals play an important role. There is all this teamwork, all this networking. We ask a lot to them, and we don't equip them at all. They are not even given recognized time for the opening hours, there are no budgets for that at the moment. The nurseries open for 10 hours a day, with a staffing ratio of 1:7 for all ages (unlike in other countries), but the opening hours must be considered. Moreover, they are asked to set up an educational project without being given any recognized consultation time. If you are a kindergarten teacher, you have a recognized consultation time. Training time is not recognized either. There is a whole system of in-service training available, but there is no provision for time to replace the person who goes on training, and all this is the responsibility of the organizing authorities. So, once again, if you are a rich municipality or a rich organizing authority, maybe you can do it, but this is not the case for everyone, and those who do it are not always aware of the challenges.

This reform is therefore long overdue. Now there are means to put it in place. And my question is, what means are we putting in place? How do we recognize the time spent by professionals in consultation (team meetings etc.)? I hope that the reform is going in the right direction, but the problem remains the means that go with it, and I am not reassured when I see the current and future situation.

For me, a big challenge is not to dissociate the educational issues of the school from what happens before. And despite the fact that we are in a system of divided supply, we need to have a coherent policy, and not be in a situation where we professionalize the schoolteachers much more and leave the others, who play an important role, out in the cold.

I think that everyone is aware of the challenges, the problem is to see how to develop the means and have the means integrated in the policies.

We are in a different ministry from Education. The integrated system is a long-term perspective that I think would be really optimal. There are more and more countries, like Italy, that are moving towards it, but I don't think I'll live long enough to see it. The question now is how to make as many bridges as possible and have as much coherence as possible. Even in schools, the problem of places is beginning to be felt in certain areas of Brussels, but overall, the problem is not at all the same as that of early childhood. This is a major political choice which is not at all obvious. We are so much in a separate logic, there is a big lack of sufficient knowledge of what is happening on the international scene.

Q5: At European level, which early childhood model do you think can be considered as « best practice »?

There are several countries that are really on the right track. In Italy, you don't find many publications on this, but this country is an interesting case. It is both very centralized and decentralized at the same time. As in many countries, there are national orientations and then there are local orientations and decision-making by public authorities, and historically, there are regions in the center-north, which are very developed, very pioneering, and which are a reference even in the United States. People from all over the world go there because they have a policy of accessibility and quality structures, and this is one of the most interesting things I have seen.

On the other hand, historically, there are places next to that where there is nothing at all (in Puglia for example). So that's a problem in terms of public policy. And they are in the process of making very important political decisions, both integrated (no longer separating 0–3-year-

olds from 3–6-year-olds) and moving towards a similar quality of care everywhere to have harmonization throughout the country, and no longer have this disparity.

The problems are there, and it remains complicated because each time these are choices that are part of a socio-cultural context. At first sight, it may seem easy, it would be enough to give more means to the private sector to develop, but behind that it is much more complex. I believe that the problem would have been solved much more quickly if this had not been the case. You have to be aware of the issues and the tensions.

G. Appendix G: Interview VI

Qualitative survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Mrs. Sabine Lejeune

Role: Director of « ARC Services »: Nonprofit organization managing 8 subsidized structures

Open discussion with Mrs. Sabine Lejeune:

The NGO has three main areas of activities, and it is important to set the context to better understand the pros and cons of one sector in relation to the other. There is a home help sector, which includes everything that is help for families and people, including central service vouchers, home shopping and home meals. The second major area of activity is the Barchon fort, which is a site that we acquired somewhat by accident, it was for sale and the NGO did not want to let it go, because it has both a cultural and sports purpose in the village, and we organize extracurricular activities, team building for companies, and birthday parties. The fort is rented out almost every weekend, which allows the NGO to generate some income. And the third major area of activity is childcare facilities, and here we have 8 facilities that have become crèches due to the MILAC reform. So, there are at least thirty childminders for 200 children, including collective structures also several family childminders, which really gives us 360-degree overview of the early childhood sector. What allows us to function in budgetary terms are the economies of scale through the number of structures that we have in the NGO. It should be noted that we have a deficit on the childcare services, and it is thanks to the other activities that we can keep the childcare structures open, mainly home help, which gives us a balanced budget. We opened the one in Saive at almost the same time as the one in Saint-Denis with 18 beds, and at the time we asked ourselves whether it would be better to continue to develop small local structures close to the schools or whether it would be better to centralize in a large infrastructure in Barchon. There was a lot of discussion at the time because the approach was not the same and finally the Board opted to keep the small local structures.

Were you in favour of this measure?

Yes, I was in favour, even though it complicates from a logistic point of view for the structures. We are in a decentralized management, and it would have been much simpler to have one or two large structures than to have eight different ones in several places of Liege. But it's a choice we made for the good of the families, we feel, when families come to us, big structures are scary, small nurseries allow them to feel confident.

How many children are in the nursery here in Saive?

Before the reform, there were 24 places here and 15 in the children's home opposite the road. With different statuses, different operating standards, different initial training requirements, although in the end the service provided was the same, although the funding was not the same. And with the reform, we could either transform the children's home into a nursery and make two nurseries, and we chose to group the two structures together to make one here on the site, which seemed more coherent.

May I ask what your initial training was?

I am a social nurse, I did home care for 10 years and now I have been in the NGO for 30 years.

What do you think of the cover in terms of space?

I agree that there is a problem of space, but I also agree that there is a big problem of financing. We really have a structural problem, I think that the political power does not take the adequate measures soon, we are heading to big problems in the future. Despite the reform, private structures are already starting to close, and it is already difficult for us to find the means to pay back our investments, so for those who have small structures it must be difficult to survive. And for the political authorities in the municipalities, they don't want any more because they have other priorities unfortunately. So overall, we are currently financed at 65% to 70%, depending on the size of the structure, by the Wallonia-Brussels federation. The remaining 30% must be found by the parents themselves, i.e., the funding is calculated according to their income. Parents' incomes are not controlled, we have an overall average of more or less 17€ per day but if we take the nursery in Sclessin, we are at 13€ or 14€ per day depending on the geographical and socio-economic situation of the nursery, incomes are not the same everywhere. It is also important to know that ONE receives a percentage per day from 14€ onwards to help and show solidarity nurseries that have a low financial participation. We have not yet made the calculations for all our structures since we are transforming them into the new system this year, but for the two that already exist in our structure, the financial participation was equivalent to 30,000€ per structure. You can imagine the cost for all the structures that will be transformed into nurseries, that means more than 8 structures where we will have to retrocede. I think that within the ONE, they know that we have a problem of financing, but I don't know why nothing is done.

At the beginning the reform was announced with the refinancing of a management position, at the level of the management of the children we have a financing of one childminder for seven, and within the framework of the announced reform they had announced one and a half childminder for seven, and they went backwards. The minister clearly took the easy way out under the reform, which was cheaper. Additional management time (it's true that managers don't necessarily have the time to do what they must do, and we demanded it at the time), and a 10% revision of the salary scale for managers, but this was not the priority. The refinancing of the childcare staff was more important and urgent. They created a management position that didn't exist, which was already an aberration because they had to designate a director, but which was neither recognized in terms of time nor in terms of salary scales, there was nothing. So now they've created a management function which is in fact calculated according to the capacity of the structure with a little bit of extra working time, so it's a little breath of fresh air, we agree, but it wasn't the priority for the whole sector. I think that the minister gave in to union pressure, there was the revision of the status of the contracted home childminder, which is a rather particular status because it was neither independent nor employed, it was a semi-status, a precarious status where she did not have paid holidays, nor an end-of-year bonus. The unions really put pressure on these people who were in a precarious status to have more security, and we agree that this had to change, but a large part of the reform budget was devoted to this single status, leaving aside other priorities. The other part of the reform budget went into the digitalization of the ONE, which had also been a demand of the sector for several years.

What is your relationship with the ONE?

Listen, she's a big lady who shouldn't be rushed, she's a big, extremely rigid bureaucratic machine who sends coordinators from time to time to come and check what's being done in the field, even though they don't necessarily have experience. There are people who come to give you lessons, they draw up theories which are completely out of touch with reality. There are one or two people who are aware of the complexity, but who don't share enough within the team and who have kept a lot of things to themselves and that has done us a disservice. The ONE is in a state of flux, we don't know exactly where we're going with the management contract that was established between the ONE and the French community, but there are many questions of governance. We will have to do a lot of thinking and reorganization. And one of the big problems of the ONE is that they don't have any transversality, so each service has its own specificities, and each service works alongside the others without consulting each other.

And each department has its own requirements without considering the requirements of the other. This means that we find ourselves in the field with the accounting department asking us to transform such and such a thing, the pedagogical department asking us to participate in a lot of training on different themes, and the coordination department asking us for something else, and we are in the middle, without any real synergy, without any coherence. As it's our subsidizing power, we find ourselves obliged to respond to several things that we don't always understand, and we don't manage. A good example is that in the middle of the crisis, we were not recognized much and yet we responded, we remained open, we remained essential, and we remained open under detestable conditions because we received no information from the ONE. The only service that worked well was a health service that they had set up, a health reference service, for all questions related to COVID, and this service worked very well. We were told that the staff would be maintained and that the funding would follow, only to be told that this was not going to be the case due to a lack of budget. They didn't respect the announcements they had made; they had announced at the beginning financial compensations linked to the exceptional opening of the nurseries and the financial losses linked to this, because of the occupancy rate which collapsed. As a result, we received peanuts. What I don't understand is that in the homes for elders, the means are released, while most of them belong to the private sector. I think that the economic value of the early childhood sector has never been studied, and I think that we should be able to study what the implementation of childcare brings to enable parents to go to work and to enter the economic circuit. I think that the real strength of the sector is that we have staff who are very committed to their work and who don't complain.

What do you see as the short- and medium-term solution for the sector?

A political awareness. We must hit hard, but I don't know how. We are affiliated to a federation called NSA and this also distorts the sector. The associations that represent the sector among themselves are political associations that are listened to but are not united. So, we are already a fragmented sector and through our fragmentation the people who represent us are not united and do not know how to campaign together because they do not represent the same interests. The NSA represents the voluntary sector, the FILE represents the public sector and the FeMAPE represents the private sector or non-subsidized nurseries. And it must be said that ONE has done an about-face and they have not respected their commitments.

What commitments have not been met?

We were told that by the end of 2025 we would have funding for one and a half places for seven children and we were told that we would have an annual subsidy of €250 per place to move towards one and a half for seven. And now the €250 that has been announced is going to be allocated to the nursery management scales and cannot be used for the child nurses as originally planned. This means that we will have to announce that we have received funds but that we will not be able to spend it as planned in the accompaniment because it will be spent on the nursery management.

What do you think of the new courses and the bachelor's degree that will be introduced?

There are different opinions on the question, I have nothing at all against baccalaureate holders for child nurses and if we can raise the level, it is better for everyone. However, in my opinion, the ideal would have been to bring everyone up to standard and not to accept more sub-training from different backgrounds, and to increase the quality of the training little by little. But I don't think you should integrate a bachelor into a team that is already in place, as this will create tensions in the teams because, in the end, they have the same function, with different qualifications and different incomes. Or you must plan for this in the context of career development because they don't have any development perspectives, they start out as child nurses and end up at the same position, provided that their health keeps up. Or they go on long-term sickness for back problems because at 60 being on the ground with babies is complicated, it could have been something that would have allowed them to evolve and reach something more administrative at the end of their career. I think we should all move forward together little by little rather than recreating inequalities and difficulties. Or we could abolish the professional training of child nurses and keep only the bachelor's degree.

H. Appendix H: Interview VII

Qualitative survey

Interviewer: Mr. Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Mrs. Mara Grooms (Anonymous)

Role: Director of a non-subsidized childcare structure

Q1: Can you briefly introduce yourself and describe your position and your professional background in the early childhood sector?

I have been doing that for the past 10 years, since I graduated from the management training in childcare services which is going to disappear by the way and won't be recognized anymore. I started in another building before. I had two different facilities, one of a capacity of 9 children and another one of 14 children. I recently constructed this new place with my husband three years ago, which has a capacity of 15 children prior reform and 14 post reform.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to enroll their child in a nursery or other childcare setting?

We clearly have a problem of shortage, this is undeniable. How to fix it? I have no idea but certainly not the way they deal with it now. Places are closing (non-subsidized) due to all these new policies and regulations!

Q3: What is the occupancy rate of your structure at present? Do you see an evolution since you opened?

We are already fully booked for 2022. We have many inquiries especially now due to the closing of structures due to the reform. I have had to refuse 10 children last month because of a lack of capacity. Since the beginning of my career, I have always been operating at 100% capacity, and we have always had as much demand and inquiries as today. The problem is the supply mainly, the demand is there, and is even increasing thanks to the reform.

Q4: Why did you choose a non-subsidized structure?

All the actors of the childhood sector, or at least the ones working on the fields would tell you that subsidized facilities are not profitable. There is no way your structure can survive with the low subsidies they currently receive from the authorities, and this is a fact. What I also don't like about subsidized structures is that you need to ask for the pay slips to parents, because the price

varies depending on their income and this is very intrusive in my opinion. I am not comfortable with this, and to me this is unfair and discriminates other parents. I prefer to have one fixed price, and there is not discrimination at all. The price is stipulated on the contract and there are surprises.

Q5: What do you think of Minister Bénédicte Linard's intention to reform the early childhood sector? Do you support the 2019 'MILAC' reform and why?

Well, we have not received much information regarding the MILAC reform unless a few emails on our professional account on the ONE gateway. To be honest, there is a huge communication problem regarding the reform, and colleagues and I are completely lost. You need to find your way by yourself without any directions. We mainly look for information via internet. We were invited to a conference call once to explain us how the change of status will affect us if we decided to become an NGO. We were promised a tool that will help us calculate our new revenue model which we never received.

Q6: How is your structure affected by the reform? What are the consequences for your teams daily and for your future projects?

The reform wants us to transform our current structure into associative structure (NGO), which means that we won't be able to take care of children anymore and that someone in my position, will be stuck with administration responsibilities only without being authorized to help our staff with the children. And if we decide to work with the children instead, then we won't be authorized to manage the structure, and all our investments, personnel investment's will be transferred to the NGO. The building here is mine, I bought it and there is no way someone else comes into my structure as head of associative and gives me instructions while I am become an employee of the NGO. There is also a huge increase in accounting expenses when switching into the associative model. I currently pay my accountant 600 euros per year for my balance sheet because I have a small structure under the regime of "physical person", which is a simplified balance sheet especially made for small structures. Once into the associative model, this will no longer be a simplified balance sheet but a proper balance sheet which cost 300 euros per months. When you make the addition of all these elements, it is not worth anymore. Therefore, so many non-subsidized places are closing lately. I know that the FeMAPE has introduced legal remedy against the obligation to change our status and become an NGO.

Since the reform and their multiple of 7, I have had to reduce my headcount of 1 child. I used to have 15 children before the reform and now that they introduced the multiple of 7, I needed

to make additional transformation to accommodate 21 children, to keep the headcount of 15. I am planning into doing the necessary transformation to be able to reach 21 in the future in I find the necessary funds to do so.

Q7: How much is the daily fee charged to parents? Is it a fixed amount?

Yes, we have a fix rate of 31 Euros per day.

I. Appendix I: Interview VIII

Qualitative survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Mrs. Cécile Van Housté

Role: Director of « La F.I.L.E. »: Federation of Local Initiatives for Children

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself, and your organization briefly?

My name is Céline, and I am the director of la FILE, I am a sociologist. Concerning the FILE, it is a federation of childcare services and childcare facilities, and we are only two like us to be recognized by the ONE. There is us who are a secular federation of public power and the other one is called the UNESA which is a rather catholic federation. We are the two historical federations recognized as employers' federations and we are partly subsidized by the ONE. We, such as some other federations, act as a relay between the childcare sector, public authorities, nurseries and the ONE. In concrete terms, we accompany childcare structures on the field, and we pass on information to make sure they are aware of the latest policies. For example, now that new places are being created, the ONE gives us the information and we help our federation to reach their goals regarding the new regulations. We have a legal department, a pedagogical department and they come to help on the field whenever there is a problem. We are involved in many projects to increase the quality and accessibility of childcare infrastructures and different. As an employers' federation we cooperate with the trade unions or sometimes against the trade unions depending on the projects, at federal level. We represent 700 childcare facilities from the childhood sector (0-3 years), for both subsidized and non-subsidized. We have been pioneers in many projects, such as the status of childminders, and we have succeeded in obtaining the status of home-based employee for childminders who had no legal status, or very little before. It has been 30-year we battle for this right and we won in 2018, nowadays it provides a better security to people who work from home and look after children as professionals. They are entitled to social security now which was not the case before, they finally may take leaves and maternity leaves. We represent public authorities such as CPAS, or even municipalities likewise in Liège which own 35 nurseries and even some NGO's. We have a board of directors of 20 very committed persons, which are volunteering, and 5 whom sit in several committees throughout the federation. You know when we look at how the sector is performing abroad, we must admit that we are not very good in the French community. One childminder for seven children is too many, any parent will confirm that managing one, or even two or three children is already challenging so imagine seven!

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to register their child in a nursery or other childcare facility?

Maybe it's a political view but for me, we have not yet understood in the French community the importance of the childhood. And that we must invest in childhood, it is an investment and not an expense. So as long as we haven't put childhood as a priority, we'll be plugging the gaps. There is no global policy for children in the Wallonia-Brussels federation. And it's a pity because in terms of pedagogy and other things the ONE does a very good job, unfortunately on the field it's complicated to manage with the few means and tools they are given. As far as the problem of places in the early childhood sector is concerned, it really depends on one place to another because some places are under tension while in others there is not enough demand. We are still looking at nurseries as a day care center to allow parents to work when no, it has educational and social values for the child above all.

Q3: What are your objectives in the short (2025) and medium term (20235) to promote the creation of childcare places in the early childhood sector for the Wallonia-Brussels federation?

On the short term I would say training, we have been involved in working groups for three years now and we are fighting to improve access to training and the overall quality of training. Secondary the core competences of the actual training are going to be improved. We used to have a very hygienic vision of the childcare professionals focusing mainly on changing nappies, and now we slowly understand that there is an important psychological development around childhood and that communication skills are necessary to facilitate the relationship with parents too. This training is rather short term because it is for 2025. There is a bachelor's degree that will also be set up, a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. In the long term for me it's the question of financing. With the MILAC reform, we are moving towards the right direction with 1.5 persons for every seven children, as opposed to one for every seven before the reform. It is probably the employer's federation cap speaking now but there is the question of pay scales, it is a profession where recruitment is difficult and if we were to review the pay conditions this would help to revive the sector.

Q4: What do you think of the 33% coverage rate recommended by the EU at the Barcelona Summit in 2002?

Indeed, Europe has just released funds for the relaunch of post covid activities. Given that Belgium already has a good global coverage rate, they did not want to give additional funds for Belgium unless it targeted the most precarious municipalities. So, there are 39 communes that have been targeted in the French-speaking region that are the most precarious and the Walloon region has aligned itself and has also released funds to launch the creation of 5,000 places in the Wallonia-Brussels federation as part of the latest "Cigogne plan". Nevertheless, there are always the non-subsidized places which have no limit because they do not come from public funds. On the subsidized side, it should be mentioned that funds are only used to cover employment expenses and therefore it is necessary to have the necessary funds to pay the rent, the energy and all the other variable costs linked to the activity of the nursery.

Q5: According to the key figures of the Wallonia-Brussels federation¹, the coverage rate of pre-school care is 37.6%² for the federation (excluding nursery schools - 48.4%). What is your opinion on that?

For coverage rates there are two main ways for looking at them, the subsidized and the non-subsidized coverage rates. So, for the subsidized ones, it is according to the pay slips of parents, and it may vary from 5 euros for a low income up to 600 euros for the highest salaries. The non-subsidized ones, which used to be called private, but which are now recognized under the non-subsidized category, do not have to respect the scale imposed by the ONE and places may charge the price they want. You must be careful when reading coverage figures because in some cases, like here in Brabant Walloon, the demand explodes in terms of places so there are not enough places for everyone even though they are rated as the best coverage rate from the Wallonia-Brussels federation. Therefore, when the French community and the ONE is going to announce the creation of new places such as they currently do with the additional 5000 places under the "Cigogne plan", Brabant Walloon will not be able to apply because they already have a very fine rate of subsidized places despite the shortage.

¹ <https://statistiques.cfwb.be/transversal-et-intersectoriel/one/accueil-et-suivi-des-enfants/missions-daccueil-des-0-3-ans-taux-de-couverture/>

² Representant 37,6 places pour 100 enfants

Q6: As coordinator recognized by ONE in the mission of accompanying childcare place regarding the MILAC reform, what is your biggest challenge so far?

Deconstruct fears and reassure the nurseries in the field who do not always understand all the subtleties of the laws. We have had a lot of fake news recently which does not help. We have had laws voted at the end of the previous legislature, and the challenge for the next cabinet was to continue the work despite the budget cuts. The law came out like that in the sector, without support, without clear information, and most nurseries felt uncomfortable at the time without clear instructions and vision. Even if the ONE has given some information sessions, it is not always easy for staff nurseries to attend these sessions in the middle of the day.

Q8: As federation, what freedom of action do you have at this level? Can you show initiative?

We have the advantage of being subsidized by several places and therefore, as long as we remain within the values of the ONE, we have great freedom of action. We still must respect conventions to preserve our subsidies. Nevertheless, we are multi-subsidized federation, therefore some actions are carried out in the framework of other subsidies.

Q9: In the three post-reform childcare destination models; 'Crèches', 'Childminder Service' and 'Independent Childminder', will all three be accessible under subsidized and non-subsidized (Subsidy Level 0) schemes?

Yes, they are all available under the non-subsidized scheme, however it will be difficult for the "childminder service" to be under the non-subsidized scheme as they are obliged to have at least 9 childminders for 36 children and therefore the costs are likely to be high for the private sector without subsidies.

Q10: What will happen to private structures? Are they destined to disappear? Is there a risk that the coverage rate will fall in the short term as a result?

I don't think so. However, today there is a preparatory workshop/ training process when you want to open a non-subsidized nursery. There are a lot of people who go through this preparatory process and drop out. This has not yet been really evaluated, so we don't know yet whether we lose them along the way because the training is too heavy or because they realize that it is a financial model that does not allow them to make profit.

Q11: Concerning the improvement of the quality of the level of training required by the reform. What will happen to childcare workers and other actors in the sector who do not have a CESS?

All existing staff are deemed to have the required qualifications and so are those currently in training. There will be a transitional period so no existing professionals in the early childhood sector will see their careers at risk. Once the training ready and in place, anyone who starts the training will have to take the required training or bachelor's degree to be able work in the sector.

Qualitative survey

Interviewer: Quentin Vangramberen

Interviewee: Mr. Alan Keepen

Role: volunteer and administrator of the FeMAPE

Q1: Can you briefly introduce yourself? What is your background and your function within FeMAPE?

I am responsible for the administration and finances of an association, a young non-profit organization, which supports single-parent families in Brussels. So, we offer psycho-legal-social consultations, we do activities for single parents. It's a small team of 10 people who have doubled in size since I arrived, and everything has to be done, we're in full development.

I have also been a volunteer since the creation of FeMAPE. I have been advising associations for 20 years, I specialized in parenting / early childhood issues 5-6 years ago, and when FeMAPE was created following the reform of childhood sector, I offered my services to first create the statute, and then to become an improvised spokesperson while they organized themselves, to finally become the administrator of this structure. I am very regularly at the negotiating table with all the sectoral federations, trade unions, local authority organizations, cabinets, the ONE, etc.

Q2: What is your personal view of the early childhood sector and the difficulties faced by parents wishing to enroll their child in a childcare structure?

It's a sector that is extremely rigid, super-standardized, extremely complicated institutionally, which was built around social innovation but with the authorities who, for quite legitimate reasons of quality of care, safety, the fight against uncontrolled childcare services. In particular to protect children and parents, and they really had to react sometimes to social innovations that were going quite fast, to finally obtain unreadable texts with all the norms, all the exceptions that were nevertheless not sufficient, and so derogations to the exceptions were created to finally be unreadable in institutional terms. So today, it is true that we are moving towards a better situation. I think that we are lucky in Belgium to have a high-quality early childhood sector, and even the people who work with fragile structures on the institutional level are people who, generally speaking, have a passion. There is no room for the profit motives, it is not possible to make margins. This must also be a factor of suspicion, i.e., if

groups promise margins or dividends to shareholders, or growth in returns and so on, I think that mathematically we must ask ourselves where the problem lies. It's exactly like buying a piece of clothing for €2.5 in China, there are slaves behind it, and so it's extremely reductive to reduce the debate on the issue of subsidized and non-subsidized childcare settings to a trade-off against the valiant workers of the public service, which is almost intellectually dishonest. There can be just as much tension at work or quality issues in publicly funded childcare as in privately funded childcare, and I would even tend to believe that in terms of working environment, it can be just as fulfilling, if not more so, to work in a small structure with only independents. When you want to go out because the weather is nice, you go out. When you want to buy a slide because it would be nice, you buy it, you don't need to make a request in four copies to the department, which will itself have to make a request to the College, and then go to the Local Council, and then finally the slide will be delivered for the following summer or the next one, because it may be necessary to place a public contract. So, there are obviously good things in both sectors, and I think they should continue to coexist.

Now we are in an all or nothing logic, which will get a little better with the reform, as long as it takes, because it's a big drawback in relation to that. Previously, the crèches were completely subsidized or not at all. This is a real problem because we are faced with structures that, on the one hand, are completely dependent on public funds and administrative rules of any kind that prevent freedom and autonomy of management, and on the other hand, structures that have 100% of their own income and must deal with the real cost, and therefore practice a true cost that will become absolutely unaffordable for the parents "because" of the reform.

I'm not against better qualifications, certainly not. It has been proven that it's between 0 and 6 years that we prepare human brains, that we format them like hard disks, i.e., it's not at this time that we really teach them things, but it's at this time that we create the support that will allow us to record all the data that will be accumulated throughout life. And so, it obviously makes sense to reinforce the quality, the qualification, to ensure that there is a maximum of benevolence, active pedagogy, creative awakening, and even why not an awareness of ecology. It's really at this point that reflex can be created or pre-created, so no worries about that, but on the other hand, the drift of saying that it's a public service mission and therefore it must be exclusively for the public is a disaster.

It should in fact be possible to allow formerly non-subsidized childcare centers to be able, for example, to finance or co-finance certain places with social aid for the purpose of social diversity, so that children from more modest backgrounds can, for example, enter a socially mixed environment with not only children of parents who pay €1000/month, and this is currently very compartmentalized, and for me it is problematic. The fact that it's a bit too "public service" means that in terms of access to hours in particular, I don't know how municipalities with very powerful unions, with very rigid working frameworks, are going to do it, for example by opening crèches with shifted hours on Saturdays, etc., and so for me there is a demand that, as things stand at the moment, only the so-called private or non-subsidized sector can meet for reasons of organizational flexibility and managerial independence.

For questions of reconciling private and professional life, the issue of employer participation in the costs of the childcare structure is the integration of a parenthood policy for workers who become parents of young children, and I think that there is a real issue here too. With working methods that are increasingly demanding, increasingly flexible with the widespread use of teleworking, there is something to be completely rethought in terms of a company nurseries 2.0 or even 3.0. So, there is really something to be done, with new forms of care with a certain flexibility, with adjustments even at the level of careers to encourage, for example, taking 1/5 parental leave combined with priority in a care environment close to the worker's home. So, in fact we really need to rethink the philosophy of the employer relationship in the context of the crèche.

Q3: What are FeMAPE's objectives in the short (2025) and medium term (2030)? What are the federation's demands?

Above all, it is recognition of the quality of what exists, because I think that in 95 to 98% of cases, the non-subsidized private sector really does offer quality childcare. The quality of childcare is good everywhere, it is sufficiently controlled, we must stop imagining that only the public sector can offer this innovative childcare. We must stop thinking that only the public sector can offer this innovative childcare. We must therefore stop bashing the non-subsidized sector and break down the barriers so that the non-subsidized sector is able to offer social services or to make itself accessible to more parents than it is today, and to erase the negative effects of the reform.

The true cost of a nursery is now 1000€, this was attested in response to a parliamentary question. If we apply the MILAC reform, the ONE has calculated what a not-for-profit crèche must ask parents to pay, without making a profit and just to balance its budget, to be profitable. For a crèche with 21 places, it is 900€ per parent, per full time, that is unpayable!

We therefore want to be able to erase the negative effects of this reform, and this will involve authorising the use of self-employed workers again, which is essential because of the risk linked to social costs, which are too heavy for small structures. It should also be possible to freely choose the legal form of the organising authority, i.e., it should still be possible for nurseries to be set up and managed by self-employed individuals. The idea of the reform is that it should only be possible to have childcare facilities organised by a non-profit organisation, a cooperative society approved as a social enterprise, or a public authority. An appeal is currently underway in this regard.

A real problem is that the tax system, which is quite favourable for self-employed people and natural persons, since there is a tax allowance per day and per child, means that the taxable income of these people is reduced to very little, which means that since there is no taxation no proportional social security contributions on the residual income of these self-employed persons, which becomes taxable income, this makes it possible to avoid 50% on the salary of the person who is the linchpin of the structure and who sometimes makes up half of the staff, and therefore makes it possible to have a structure that is payable by the parents.

So, to summarize:

- absolute entrepreneurial freedom
- freedom of choice in terms of management autonomy and legal form
- Impossibility of rendering a diploma null and void (removing access to the profession for certain diplomas): there are people who have a life project, who have started/resumed their studies in a sandwich course to open their own crèche. There is no question of them being unable to undertake and continue their projects.

Q4 What do you think of the 33% coverage rate recommended by the EU at the Barcelona summit in 2002? And the coverage rate of childcare is 37.6% for the whole federation?

This is far too little. If you take out the children in the pre-schools, we are at much less than that. I'm not even sure we'll reach the Barcelona targets by keeping children from 0 to 2.5 years old.

This rate is an average rate, i.e. there are areas where the coverage rate is extremely good and other areas where it is catastrophic, sometimes less than 10% in certain neighborhoods, and these are generally areas where the socio-economic level is the lowest, and it's often correlated with a female unemployment rate (long-term female unemployment) and so typically we find ourselves in families where culturally the mother doesn't work, where there are a lot of children at home, and where they don't go to school until they're compulsory. All this creates inequalities from the start of life in terms of socialization, language acquisition, early learning, etc. There is therefore a need to break this vicious circle with the difficulty of being in a place where demand is not expressed.

There is no supply, but there is no demand either. This is what is known as the "Matthew effect", i.e., it is the most informed and qualified people, and therefore those with the highest socio-economic level, who will ultimately benefit. It will therefore not be possible to break this vicious circle. It is extremely complicated to exploit or make this 33% standard, and to be able to judge it as a sufficient fact. Even if we increase it to 60%, there is no guarantee that we will be able to produce the desired social effect. There is therefore something to be reinvented in this context to encourage greater equity with a principle of progressive universalism which would make it possible, at a given moment, to support those who need it most. So for me, this 33% standard is not enough, we should be able to reach 60-70%, so that all people who want a place can have one, but also to create a new demand (to make socio-economically weakened populations aware of the fact that it is useful for the child's future to be able to socialize him or her in a day nursery), which is impossible at the moment as long as there are not enough places. 100% would not be necessary, because it would be a waste, paying for structures with public funds for a resource that would be underused. Obligation is not beneficial, there are families who culturally want to continue to raise their children in the family sphere and that is respected. On the other hand, having other forms of non-compulsory childcare, less restrictive and respectful of family values, as advocated by parents, makes sense, for example with pop-up childcare for 2 or 3 half-days a week, activities, etc., but all this has disappeared with the current

reform. We advocate hyper-regular contractual relations with at least 3/5ths of the time with a child who attends the crèche systematically. In this context, it will be difficult for some families.

Q5: Have you put a figure on the impact of the reform on the sector?

A little. The loss of 8,000 places within five years was predicted, the certain disappearance of 1,000 places within two years, and we are almost there. Many facilities are closing, but this is not always linked to the reform. There is still a big risk of breakage.

Q6: Who are you negotiating with? What is your relationship with the ONE?

We have relations with ONE and the WB federation on certain aspects and we try to negotiate common agreements. To give an example: the reception contract, which is a standardized contract that must be accepted by ONE and that we must make the parents sign. There was a model that was provided by the ONE and that was not at all suitable in the independent sector because it put the foster care environment at risk.

So, we negotiated, to a certain extent, adjustments to this contract, and made it prevail. All the people who use this "second" model cannot be refused by the ONE regional agencies. We were not able to complete these negotiations, there are still two clauses for which we will have to go to court because they are still too dangerous. There is a phenomenon of unfair competition between private and public nurseries because there is a difference in tariffs, and therefore up to a certain income level it is cheaper to go to a public nursery. As a result, many children are put on a waiting list and leave their private nurseries overnight as soon as a place becomes available. Private childcare facilities must therefore be protected from this dumping and unfair price competition. This is one of the clauses for which we are going to take legal action. As we have introduced this appeal to the Council of State, the minister has reopened the reform process, and it is not just us who are negotiating with the administration in the cabinet, but all the actors in the sector who are meeting at 30-40 to reflect on what could be improved in the framework of this reform.

It's a game that is extremely biased because we end up with the public sector in front of us, and around us federations and unions that defend the public sector. We therefore end up with 2 votes against 30 or 40, and when we must pass changes by playing the democratic game, it is very difficult to pass changes that are considered unbearable for the others (for example, the use of independent staff).

MERCREDI
11|05
2022

Journée d'études ACCESSIBILITÉ ONE



DE 9H À 16H

K. Appendix K: ONE event

L'ACCESSIBILITÉ : UNE DÉMARCHE PLURIELLE DE QUALITÉ

PROGRAMME

La modération de la journée est assurée par Madame Sylvie Anzalone, Porte-parole de l'ONE. L'évènement sera retransmis en direct sous format streaming et certains passages de la journée seront filmés pour la réalisation ultérieure d'un DVD d'accompagnement.

9.00 • 9.30 | Accueil des participants

Projection du film :

« Ubuntu à Tierlantuin : éduquer dans une société inclusive et démocratique » (VBJK, Gand)

9.30 • 10.10 | Début de la journée et interventions officielles

Mot de bienvenue par Mme Violaine Herbaux, Présidente du Conseil d'Administration de l'ONE

Intervenants

Mme Bénédicte LINARD, Ministre de l'Enfance

M. Eddy GILSON, Coordinateur réforme Petite enfance

10.10 • 10.55 | 1^{ère} intervention scientifique

Objectif :

Retracer l'émergence de la notion d'accessibilité, son évolution, les contextes dans lesquels cette évolution s'est produite : du réseau européen des modes de garde en passant par le réseau DECET à nos jours.

- D'où vient la notion d'accessibilité ? Comment a-t-elle évolué au fil du temps dans le champ de l'enfance ?
- Quelles propositions pour approcher aujourd'hui la notion d'accessibilité ?
- Quels éclairages apporter sur base de recherches et d'implications dans des réseaux de collaboration (DECET, ...) ?

Intervenant

Prof. Michel Vandenbroeck (UGent)

10.55 • 11.15 | Temps de mise en discussion, les questions que cela soulève

Prise en charge

par Mme Caroline Tilkin et M. François Maréchal, tous les deux conseillers TF accessibilité

11.15 • 11.45 | **PAUSE**

11.45 • 12.30 | 2^{ème} intervention scientifique

Objectif :

Éclairer la notion d'accessibilité sur base des recherches effectuées par M. Wagener, notamment autour des familles monoparentales.

- Comment réfléchir la singularité pour que la réflexion et les pistes dégagées puissent inspirer les pratiques de tous les milieux d'accueil ?
- En quoi les actions mises en place pour répondre aux besoins des familles ayant une particularité permettent d'être articulées aux actions à mettre en place pour toutes les familles ?
- Quelles conditions pour une articulation effective « accessibilité – qualité » (formation des professionnels, temps de concertation et travail en équipe, ...)
- Passer d'une lecture collective des actions à mener au bénéfice de tous à une lecture de plus en plus individualisante : quels risques ?

Intervenant

Prof. Martin Wagener (UCL)

12.30 • 12.50 | Temps de mise en discussion, les questions que cela soulève

Prise en charge

par Mme Caroline Tilkin et M. François Maréchal, *tous les deux conseillers TF accessibilité*

12.50 • 14.00 | REPAS

Projection du film :

« *Ubuntu à Tierlantuin : éduquer dans une société inclusive et démocratique* » (VBJK, Gand)

14.00 • 14.45 | 3^{ème} intervention scientifique

Objectif :

Partager les résultats d'une recherche dans une ville du département Seine-Saint-Denis (France) : Comment comprendre la « non demande » des familles pour une place en milieu d'accueil ? Ces résultats permettent d'appréhender la manière dont les autorités locales organisent l'offre et peuvent apporter des pistes à quelques questions centrales.

Parmi elles :

- Répondre à une « non demande » : un paradoxe ?
- Quelles démarches offrir aux familles en situation de vulnérabilités qui n'ont pas nécessairement la capacité d'anticiper l'inscription de leur enfant dans un milieu d'accueil ?
- Quelles actions mettre en place à destination des familles ? Avec quels effets ?
- Comment permettre à tous les milieux d'accueil d'exercer leur fonction sociale ?
- Comment articuler, au niveau local, approche universelle et prise en compte des besoins et des demandes des familles ?

Intervenante

Mme Catherine Bouve, *Maîtresse de conférence - Département Sciences de l'Éducation et de la Formation - Laboratoire Experice - Université Sorbonne Paris Nord*

14.45 • 15.00 | Temps de mise en discussion , les questions que cela soulève

Prise en charge

par Mme Caroline Tilkin et M. François Maréchal, *tous les deux conseillers TF accessibilité*

15.00 • 15.30 | Synthèse des interventions

Intervenante

Mme Pascale Camus, *coordinatrice TF accessibilité*

15.30 • 16.00 | Conclusions : comment allons-nous poursuivre ?

Intervenant

M. Benoît Parmentier, *Administrateur général de l'ONE*