



Out-of-school care for children living in disadvantaged areas

Belgium

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This report is available in electronic format only.

Introduction and policy context

Belgium, a federal state, and areas of competence for out of school care

In 1993, Belgium became a federal state made up of Communities and Regions (article 1 of the Constitution).

There are three linguistic Communities, the Flemish, French and German. These have responsibility for cultural matters, teaching and the so-called 'customised' matters, which include child care policy (incl. out of school care).

The three Regions are divided up on a territorial basis into Flanders in the North, the Walloon Region in the South and the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital in the centre of the country. These are responsible for the economy and development of the territory.

As a result of the above, the bilingual Brussels Region shares the area of responsibility of both the Flemish and French Communitiesⁱ. In other words, two out of school child care policies coexist in the Brussels-Capital Region.

As a rule, the areas of competence of the Communities and Regions are exclusive and based on attribution. This means that they are attributed by means of a legal text to a body which then has exclusive competence for taking decisions and acting in the areas concerned, with no other bodies allowed to intervene. The responsibilities which are not attributed, known as residual, are exercised at federal level.

In its ruling no. 104/2004, this was confirmed by the Court of Arbitrationⁱⁱ: "the Communities have sole responsibility for carrying out policy on the child care structures, including subsidies and price setting"ⁱⁱⁱ. However, the Court stated that the interventions of other bodies may be compatible with the regulations for the division of responsibilities, especially with regard to the interventions of the Federal Social Security Body in child care expenses. Interventions of this kind exist within the context of the Collective Equipment and Services Fund (FESC) of ONAFTS^{iv}.

While the main institutional responsibility for out of school care concerns personalised matters, and is therefore the responsibility of the Communities, the other bodies do have a real impact on this area of public action. This is the case at federal level, with the FESC, but also involves the tax deductible nature of care expenses and labour legislation, and the policies of the Regions, mainly in terms of the non-profit-making sector and the reduction of unemployment.

Demographic and socioeconomic data

Flanders is the Region with the largest population, with 6,078,600 inhabitants^v, including 297,289 foreign nationals (4.89%). The Walloon Region has a population of 3,413,978, 308,362 of whom are foreign nationals (9%). Finally, the Brussels-Capital Region has 1,018,804 inhabitants, including 265,211 foreign nationals (26%).

Belgium therefore has a population of just over 10.5 million inhabitants. The birth rate is at its most dynamic in the Brussels Region, where it has been growing for several years.

The differences in wealth between the three Regions are mainly due to the economic activities and employment levels, and are measured by the various statistics available. For the purposes of this document, we will use the indicators on children. Flanders is the wealthiest region, with more than 82% of children receiving family allowances on the basis of their parents' employment, in comparison with 67.5% in the Walloon region and 60% in Brussels. In the Brussels Region, 30% of children receiving family allowances do so at the various supplementary rates (due to the medium or long term unemployment of their parents, for example). The families with children in the Brussels region are therefore frequently poorer or in a less stable economic situation than their counterparts in Flanders and the Walloon Region. In

the Walloon Region, it is the situation of the large towns and their suburbs that gives greatest cause for concern. The Liege area, for example, is in a situation similar to that of the Brussels Region, with only 62% of children receiving family allowances on the basis of their parents' employment^{vi}.

The underprivileged zones

Within each Region, Flanders included, we can identify a number of underprivileged zones.

At *federal level*, fifteen towns and municipalities (out of a total of 589) benefit from 'town contracts' managed by the Federal Public Social Integration Service^{vii}:

- the four cities with more than 150,000 inhabitants (Antwerp, Gent, Liege and Charleroi),
- the seven municipalities in the Brussels Region which benefit from the European Objective 2 programme,
- four municipalities which satisfy the appropriate socioeconomic criteria (Mons, La Louvière, Seraing and Ostend).

The large towns policy shows that the zones which qualify are mostly urban, and that the initiative tends to be coordinated with the European criteria and programmes.

It is easier to understand this urban perception if we consider that around 30% of the population of the country live in twenty five municipalities.

Hainaut, the most densely populated of the five Walloon provinces, is a European Union Objective 1 zone. Here, we find three of the five towns which benefit from town contracts in the Walloon Region (Charleroi, Mons and La Louvière)^{viii}. The priority initiative zones (ZIP) are the regeneration zones with deprived housing conditions and a fragile population in socioeconomic terms. The fundamental objective for the ZIP districts subject to the initiative is the creation of a plan for the district, drawn up with the participation of the population, which clearly shows the local potential and the vulnerable areas^{ix}.

The district contracts are revitalisation programmes set up by the *Brussels-Capital Region*. They apply to the various underprivileged districts in partnership with the local authorities concerned^x. The EU Objective 2 programme involves a zone with a population of 146,000 covering parts of the local authority areas of Anderlecht, Brussels City, Forest, Molenbeek, Saint-Gilles, Saint-Josse and Schaerbeek. The various urban renewal programmes have led to the creation of 12 services for young children and out of school care facilities^{xi}.

In *Flanders*, 'Thuis in de stad' is an administrative programme geared towards improving the quality of life in the towns and districts, combating the two-tier approach and improving the quality of democratic management^{xii}. At the moment, the period covered is 2003-2007, but the 2008-2013 phase has already been launched. The programme partially covers the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region, as well as the thirteen largest towns in Flanders (Antwerp, Gent, Aalst, Bruges, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselaere, Sint-Niklaas and Turnhout).

Out-of-school care in Belgium

A. In the Flemish Community:

The out of school care initiatives in Flanders (Initiatieven voor buitenschoolse opvang – IBOs)

In the Flemish Community, an out of school care policy^{xiii} allows the *Initiatieven voor Buitenschoolse Opvang* (IBOs) to be created. The IBOs are able to cater for children at the fundamental stage in their education (from 2.5 to 12 years old), and provide a quality response to their need for supervision, especially in the case of the younger children. Indeed, during the school holidays the care of children aged up to 6 years old is a priority.

The IBOs form part of a local authority policy guided by *local consultation*. Local consultation is set up on the initiative of the local authority or, should this fail, by Kind en Gezin^{xiv} (K&G), and includes all those involved in out of school care within a local authority area, who get together to draw up a *local policy guideline plan* for out of school care. At the moment, there are IBOs in 225 out of the 308 municipalities in Flanders (73%), and in 4 out of the 19 municipalities in the Brussels Region (21%), accounting for 23,575 care places, with more than 47,000 children enrolled. Consequently, the IBOs are not present in every municipality, as their existence depends on policy and dynamism at local level. It has been envisaged that K&G would make up for these shortcomings where necessary, but in reality Kind en Gezin has never taken this initiative. The Kind en Gezin website for parents^{xv} mentions 187 out of school facilities (the majority of which are IBOs) in the 13 large towns covered by 'Thuis in de stad', out of a total of 1052 in the Flemish Region as a whole.

The minimum intake per IBO is 21 places, which can be divided up among a number of facilities with a minimum of 8 places. The IBOs organise pre-school care (from 7am at the latest), and provide facilities after school (until 6pm at least), on Wednesday afternoons (lessons end at midday on Wednesdays) and in the holidays. Where possible, the care facilities are organised in premises outside the school buildings. The infrastructure has to be in line with the health, safety and space regulations (number of rooms, m² per child, the obligation to provide an outside area, etc). The area has to be equipped in an appropriate manner.

The supervision level laid down is at least one carer for every 14 children.

The financial contribution of the parents is compulsory and subject to regulations. The half hourly rate for before- and after-school care is 0.67 euros, for example. A period of care of more than 6 hours during the holidays costs from 7.37 to 12.50 euros. There is also an assisted rate, with a reduction of 50% on the normal charges. Free care is possible in exceptional cases. The organising body of the IBO takes the decision on the granting of assisted rates or free care on the basis of an administrative file which can be consulted by K&G. A reduction (which may exist alongside the assisted rate) is granted when a number of children from the same household are taken in on the same day^{xvi}.

Alongside the IBOs, Flanders also has another type of care structure for children aged 0 to 12 years old, the *buurt- en nabijdiensten* (BND), which are financially supported by Kind en Gezin on an experimental basis, from the end of 2004 to the end of 2007. The main features of these structures are extended accessibility (free of charge for parents), a participation-based operating method, with the involvement of parents, children and the local operators, and availability to the underprivileged public and supervision involving this public.

The Child Reception Centre (Centrum voor Kinderopvang – CKO)

The basic principles of the new strategic objectives for the care of young children in the Flemish Community (Kind en Gezin)^{xvii} include the need to satisfy the three fundamental child care functions: economic, social and educational. One of the proposed methods for the achievement of these objectives is based on increased cooperation between the various child care structures at local level, mainly by means of a new concept known as the CKO, or *Centrum voor Kinderopvang*. The CKO promotes a social and educational care project which involves the widest possible range of

child care facilities at the local or regional level, with a view to offering the most effective response to the needs of all the families concerned and performing the three fundamental functions referred to above. It also has to contribute to the local care or care-related initiatives (out of school care, essential education, prevention and family support services and community centres). The project also operates within the context of the local child care policy objectives (*Lokaal bestuur* or *Lokale Overleg Kinderopvang*), with a view to achieving greater cohesion, accessibility and diversity.

B. In the French Community:

The ATL system (Accueil Temps Libre, Care for Free Time) in the French Community

The absence of coordination noted in the out of school care sector, in which a huge array of operators are involved, led to the adoption of the Care for Free Time decree, dated 3rd July 2003. The objective is to encourage the setting up of 'local coordination programmes for childhood' in the French Community. The programmes have to focus on identifying needs and coming out with appropriate responses to the need for supervision, care and the setting up of activities for children aged from 2.5 to 12. The decree was implemented in January 2004 in the municipalities of the Walloon and Brussels regions.

The decree lays down subsidies for the care operators that agree to take part in the local childhood coordination programme (known as the CLE programme), geared towards children aged from two and a half to twelve and offering care throughout the week within at least the 3.30 to 5.30 pm time band. A maximum financial contribution from the parents is specified, and the operators cannot charge more than 4 euros for each 3 hour care session. Each approved operator receives a daily sum of 0.20 euros per child per day of attendance, from the French Community. This base amount is multiplied by a coefficient calculated on the basis of the number of project operators covered by the decree (In the year 2005, the daily sum amounted to 2 euros). For economically deprived families, the decree guarantees positive discrimination, with a double subsidy (daily sum per child) paid to the operators to reduce the costs for children of low income parents. This benefit is obtained by a simple sworn declaration by the care operators.

At the present time, 183 French speaking Walloon municipalities out of 253 (72%) and 16 in the Brussels region out of 19 (84%) have agreed to take part in the ATL decree system on a voluntary basis. The coordination action is based on an analysis of the existing services at local level and an analysis of the effective needs, with enquiries carried out on the care operators (associations, schools,...) premises and within the families: the local coordinator is responsible for this analysis. Obviously, the projects are set up right from the start in such a way as to ensure that they are strictly linked to the actual family situation and the care facilities existing at local level.

The child supervision levels laid down in the decree depend on the duration of the period of care and the ages and number of the children.

The Birth and Childhood Office (ONE) is the body which decides on the approval of the CLE programmes. ONE also controls and directly subsidises the operators involved in the programmes.

The Local Authority Care Commissions^{xviii} (CCAs) are the key players in the local care policies set up at local authority level, within the framework covered by the decree. The decisions regarding these commissions are taken by the local councils.

2. The other programmes taking part in out of school care in the French Community

Two other types of care facility form part of the out of school care policy of the French Community:

- the “écoles de devoirs” (homework schools), which are social and cultural structures at district level;
- holiday centres.

C. At federal level:

The Joint Equipment and Services Fund (FESC)

Following the ruling by the Court of Arbitration mentioned earlier in this report, the operating methods of the FESC (Joint Equipment and Services Fund) are to be transformed in order to concentrate on child care costs. Up to the present time, the FESC issues subsidies to:

- 183 of the 497 out of school care structures in the Flemish Community, which guarantee 3,585,000 child attendance days^{xix};
- 97 of the 471 out of school care structures in the French Community, which guarantee 1,574,100 child attendance days;
- 1 out of 9 out of school care structures in the German-speaking Community, which guarantee 38,060 child attendance days.

In the Flemish Community, a large number of the Flemish projects receiving subsidies from the FESC are also IBOs. We can therefore see policy coordination which extends to the various sources of subsidy for out of school care, especially when we consider that the IBOs benefit from a Flemish Region subsidised employment programme (the *weerwerk-gesco*) within the context of a plan for the reduction of unemployment.

In the French Community, the FESC fully subsidises the wages of personnel and a part of the operating costs. The result is full-fledged FESC projects, even when these benefit from the ATL systems in the local authority areas concerned and from employment projects subsidised by the Walloon and Brussels regions. There are in fact 90 municipalities which benefit from both the ATL system and FESC projects.

Out-of-school care in disadvantaged areas

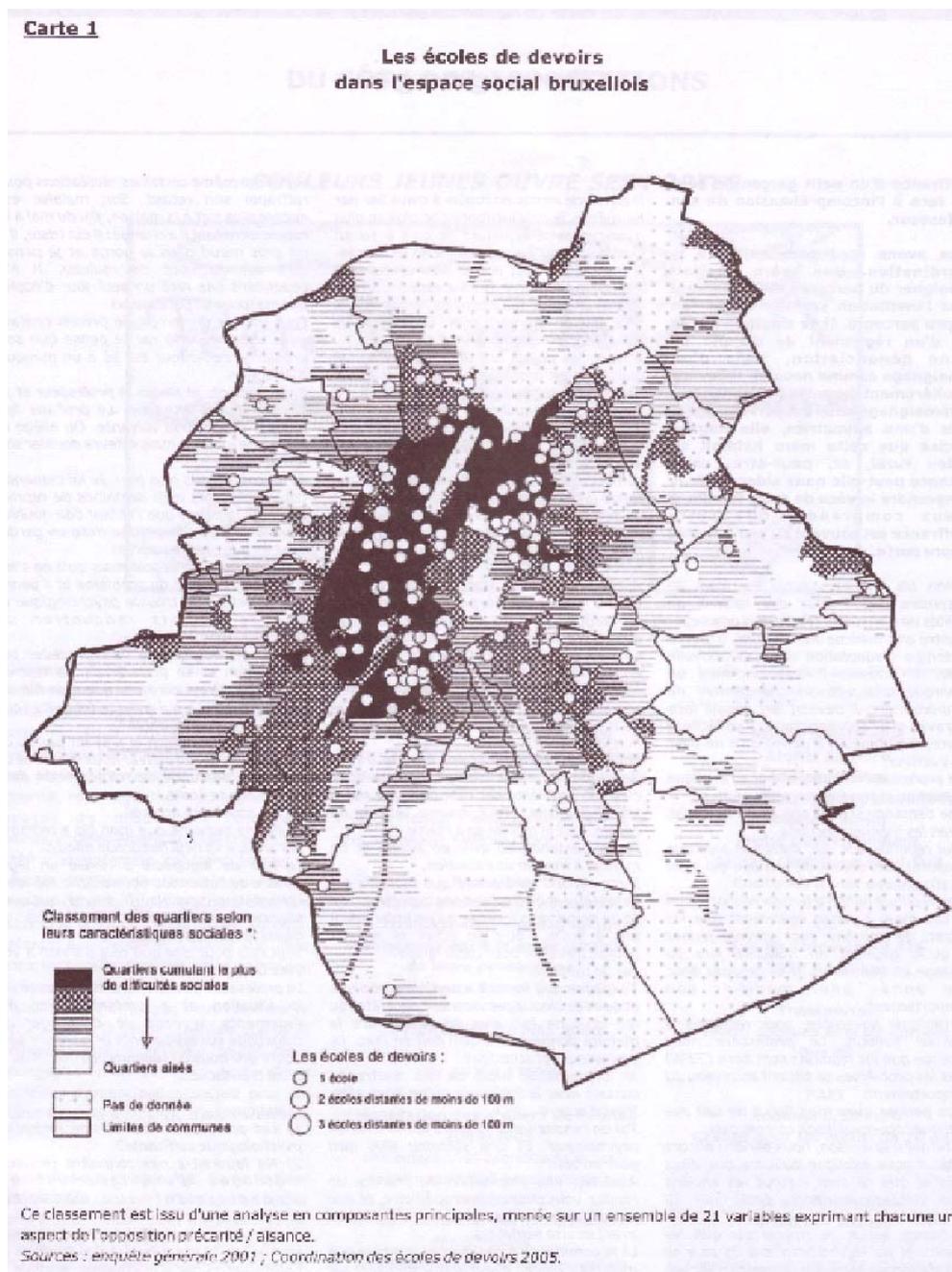
General remarks

The 'ATL' system does not form part of any specific anti-poverty programme. It specifies that care during free time has to be geared towards the overall development of the children and social cohesion, while at the same time acknowledging social diversity and the consolidation of family life, with particular reference to the reconciliation of family and work commitments. The care is provided in centres for supervised independent activities and organised educational, cultural and sporting events. A large number of ATL services are care initiatives organised outside school hours, but the activities can also be organised by non-profit-making associations or commercial private service structures, provided these satisfy the approval conditions.

All the local authorities are entitled to benefit from this system. The ATL services concerned have to apply a universal approach to access for all the children in the same geographical zone.

With regard to children from socially and economically underprivileged areas, the free time care policy is based on two levels, the geographical and the individual.

- At geographical level, care services are organised in most schools and are therefore generally accessible. In many deprived districts, we can also note a greater concentration of non-profit-making centres which are involved in educational, cultural or sports projects, whose access policy is based on financial, cultural and geographical factors. This is particularly the case in Brussels, and is the consequence of the opportunities offered by a number of social programmes which focus on these districts. This map shows how the "écoles de devoirs" (associations for out of school childcare) are particularly active in the districts with the greatest number of social problems:



- At individual level, the decree lays down that the centres have to apply charge rates that will guarantee financial accessibility for children from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, either by means of reductions to the entrance charges or by granting the centres subsidies based on positive discrimination, in accordance with the number of children concerned (see below).

A survey was carried out in the Brussels region in 2000 and 2003, before voting on the ATL decree took place. Carried out with a representative sample of families with children aged under 12, the survey indicated that the structures that would be covered by the ATL decree took in 50% of all the children aged between 6 and 12 on Wednesday afternoons and 62% on the other days of the week. This care cost less than 40 euros a month per child in 60% of cases. Lack of quality care, in terms of care personnel and the activities organised, were sources of dissatisfaction among the parents.

The main factor which determined the use of these services was the mother's job^{xx}.

Local policies for the implementation of out of school care facilities in the underprivileged zones or geared towards priority population groups

The ATL system in the Brussels-Capital Region

Sixteen municipalities in the Brussels Region are covered by the terms of the ATL decree.

During the inspection of premises and the analysis of needs, shortcomings were noted throughout the Brussels Region in terms of care for younger (from two and a half to six years old) and disabled children. It was also noted in a number of municipalities that there were underprivileged groups which needed special attention, such as children from newly arrived families and socially and economically deprived groups (unemployment, bad housing,...).

The strategic guidelines on care for underprivileged groups are based on local authority policy decisions. In some areas, local policy focuses on a specific district or on inequality between children, while in others actions are geared towards specific time periods when not all the children have the same leisure opportunities:

- in Brussels-City, the CCA decided to focus its coordination priorities on two underprivileged districts, and argued that it was better to deal with one zone with real needs in depth than to pay more superficial attention to the details of implementation across the entire area;
- Molenbeek-Saint-Jean decided to set up a care centre which organised play, cultural and sporting events in a particularly deprived area;
- Schaerbeek placed the emphasis on deprived groups within a centre that was open to all, but which specifically focused on underprivileged children who were unable to leave their district during the holidays;
- An "Ecole de devoir" facility was set up in the relatively well-off municipality of Uccle, designed for children who received no assistance with their homework within the family.

The mobilisation of the operators in the deprived zones

Projects subsidised by the FESC in the Walloon Region

In the Walloon region, the following outstanding examples bear witness to the mobilisation of operators in the deprived zones of the Region which have received FESC subsidies:

- a significant number of projects are located within the Province of Hainaut, especially in the towns covered by town contracts (large town policy at federal level): La Louvière, Charleroi, Mons and a number of neighbouring communities, such as Carnières, Chatelineau, etc;
- the involvement of trade union organisations in setting up the projects, especially as an aid to creating new types of employment to replace jobs lost in industry or in the health sector. For example, the Coordinated Childhood Centre in Charleroi has organised 6 permanent activity centres and more than 20 decentralised departments, including some in the surrounding municipalities;
- cooperation between the associations and the local authorities: for example, the Pirouline-Pause cartable Association, organised by the women's section of the Christian Workers' Movement (MOC), takes part in out of school care in the municipality of Seneffe.

The involvement of the private sector and integrated care for children aged 0 to 12

In Flanders

Alongside the IBO, there are a number of private initiatives in Flanders and/or organisations contributing to the integrated care of children aged under 12, both pre-school infants and schoolchildren, outside school hours. These include the mini-nurseries, establishments with 8 to 22 places which take in children aged up to 12, in which the financial contribution of the parents is variable.

The free pricing policy does not necessarily mean that access is restricted. Kinderwerking Fabota, for example, an independent care facility in Leuven (in the Flemish province of Brabant, which surrounds the Brussels Capital Region) offers 80 places which are financially accessible to the underprivileged children of the town.

This movement for the creation of private facilities for children offering accessible social and cultural care also exists in the Brussels Region for children under 3^{xxi}. In such cases, it is the care project - and the information offered to the target groups – which is the sensitive point as far as social accessibility is concerned.

In theory, integrated care for children aged from 0 to 12 is also possible in the French Community, in the local authority child care centres (MCAE) and through the home carers supervised by a service. However, both the MCAE and the supervised carers have to operate in line with the scale of parental contributions laid down by the French Community (ONE).

Proposed case studies

De Buiteling, an IBO in a deprived district of the Brussels-Capital Region, with 160 children, assisted charge rates, in accordance with the Kind en Gezin quality standards.

Again in the Flemish Community, Kinderwerking Fabota in Leuven, a medium-sized town in the Region, involved in the Thuis in de stad programme. This is the private initiative mentioned in this report, which also forms part of the Kind en Gezin experimental programme (buurt en nabijheidsdiensten).

In Schaerbeek in the Brussels Region, la Tanière des petits ours, one of the 12 care centres created as part of the district revitalisation programmes, which combines a “care stop”, which takes in children under 3 years of age on a part-time basis, an out of school care centre and a parent and child care centre, and which forms part of the local authority ATL scheme.

In the Walloon Region, Pirouline-Pause cartable, a care project subsidised by the FESC, backed up by the trade unions and operating in partnership with the local authority, especially in the zones targeted by the regional ZIP scheme.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. In both the French and Flemish communities, out of school care forms part of a general policy geared towards all school-age children, and is backed up by assisted accessibility measures, mainly regarding the financial contributions from parents. However, checks still have to be carried out to establish whether access really is available in all zones, deprived or otherwise. The need to act on this recommendation is confirmed by a number of statistics for the Brussels Region, which show that nursery school attendances are lower in the towns and districts in which there are fewer care facilities for infants aged under 3. As out of school care is linked to school attendance by children, we have to take specific action geared towards the youngest children in the deprived districts, such as care centres for infants and those that provide care outside school hours and term-time.
2. Initiatives of this kind do exist, but in the French areas they are often situated on the margins of traditionally approved centres which are subsidised by the Birth and Childhood Office. In the Brussels Region, most of these initiatives are local, involving associations acting alone or in partnership with the local authorities, which have been able to benefit from such regional programmes as the district contracts and the European schemes (such as Objective 2 and Urban). In the Walloon Region, the projects created as a result of the FESC interventions take the form of 'integrated projects' which perform a number of functions, including not only out of school care, but also emergency care for infants under 3 whose parents are signed up to a social inclusion or employment scheme. Flanders appears to be better prepared to deal with problems of this kind, especially within the context of the CKO (Centrum voor Kinderopvang).
3. Flanders also appears to be better prepared for the transformation of the funding from the FESC (Joint Equipment and Services Fund), employment and operating funding which will become interventions in child care costs. The care facilities which will benefit – essentially the IBOs – also include the services at the heart of the out of school care schemes. The matter is very sensitive for the Walloon care centres, especially in the Province of Hainaut.
4. The transformation of FESC funding leads to another question, concerning the Belgian federal state as a whole. Two systems of intervention in parent contributions will soon coexist and compete with each other - interventions in child care costs (a kind of complement to family allowances within the context of the social security system) by the FESC, and tax deductions on supervision costs, which were recently increased to 11.2 euros a day per child. Given the almost universal nature of family allowances in Belgium, the interventions in care expenses are preferable to tax deductions, which will offer no advantage to taxpayers with low incomes. However, the current budget of the FESC, financed by the contributions of all wage earners, is insufficient to meet the objectives of quality out of school care open to all school-age children. It will be useful, however, to extend the contributions to freelance workers, for the sake of fairness and administrative simplification for the care centres.
5. In slightly different ways, the Flemish and French communities place the emphasis on the local element in the implementation of out of school care structures, and do so successfully, as $\frac{3}{4}$ of the local authorities have set up both IBOs and CLEs (Free Time Care) programmes. What are the motivations and the restraints for the local authority areas not involved? Operations of the type promoted by the COCOF Child Observatory in the Brussels-Capital Region will probably be required in each Walloon and Flemish province. The collection of data, setting up of indicators, analysis of local situations and specific requirements, exchanges of views, and support for the local authorities and organising powers in the creation of services for childhood are also necessary for the creation of accessible, quality care which will also be efficient and will take the social and cultural diversity of parents into account.

6. In the underprivileged zones, two positive factors emerge from this report:

- the opportunities offered by the social programmes which target the priority districts and towns;
- the mobilisation of social units, such as associations, trade unions, permanent adult education movements and re-training groups, but also the public social action centres (CPAS), the local communities, partnerships and cultural projects.
- To reinforce these positive factors, we recommend that the place of children aged under 12 years of age be taken into account in the regional programmes and community policies, in favour of the non-profit-making sector and public domain, the associations and social and cultural initiatives.

Case Study 1: Pirouline – Pause cartable

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Project description

The not-for-profit organisation Pirouline-Pause Cartable was originally a “registered childminder” type service, i.e. care designed for children up to the age of three, provided in the childminder’s own home. The service is accredited and subsidised by the ONE (Office de la Naissance et de l’Enfance), the Belgian agency that provides support for pregnant women, infants and children, and asks for contributions calculated on a sliding scale based on parents’ income.

The organisation’s childminders undergo initial and ongoing training and are supervised and supported by a social worker. The 45 childminders provide care for over 100 children in the Centre Region (municipalities of La Louvière, Le Roeulx, Manage, Morlanwelz, Seneffe and Binche).

The organisation grew out of the women’s arm of the MOC (Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien), the Christian Workers’ Movement, which brings together a trade union organisation (the CSC, Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens), a mutual insurance company and a number of continuing education movements and services for adults (such as Equipes populaires and Vie féminine) and young people (JOC – Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne). Childcare and the Vie féminine children’s consultation services are provided under a broader umbrella organisation, the SMI (Services maternels et infantiles – Mothers’ and children’s services). Vie féminine’s initiatives are based on a principle of equality between men and women.

The out-of-school care service grew out of the childminding service and initially worked on the same basis, i.e. of care provided in the childminder’s home: parents dropped their children off at the childminder’s in the morning and came to pick them up in the evening. The childminders were responsible for ensuring the children got to and from school. This way of working has been abandoned, largely as a result of the costs and travel time associated with the large number of different schools the children attend.^{xxiv}

In practice, there are two very different types of out-of-school care in existence, one in Seneffe and one in La Louvière.

Pause cartable in Seneffe

Pause cartable works in the Seneffe administrative district, which covers the area between the towns of Nivelles and La Louvière, and comprises five municipalities: Seneffe itself, Feluy, Arquennes, Petit-Roeulx and Familleureux. All the schools in the area are part of a local partnership for out-of-school care organised in eight different locations (two in Seneffe, two in Feluy, Arquennes, Petit-Roeulx, Familleureux and the hamlet of La Marlette). Three of these areas are considered relatively underprivileged: the centre of Seneffe (home to a social housing estate), Familleureux and Arquennes. In overall terms, the Seneffe administrative district is relatively wealthy, largely as a result of its industrial area, which includes the oil firm Petrofina.

Out-of-school care is therefore geographically accessible to all children in the district; it is also accessible in social terms, given that the district has set maximum levels for parental contributions (1 euro per day per child; 2 euros per family).

In concrete terms, out-of-school care is provided in the various school premises on weekdays. On Wednesday afternoons (when there are no lessons) and during the school holidays, outside activities are organised by Pause cartable (including trips to the seaside, and so on) and/or in partnership with other organisations, notably the district's Young People's Services team (for example, sports courses and cultural activities). Six hundred children are involved, with around one hundred attending on Wednesday afternoons: eleven people are employed under contract to supervise the children (not including outside facilitators for activities organised as part of a partnership and occasional staff recruited from the local Employment Agency).

The Seneffe district has chosen not to participate in the system set out in the French Community's so-called "ATL (Accueil Temps Libre) decree" on care for children during their free time and before and after school, but has adopted it in spirit, through local consultation, and by recruiting a district coordinator to work with the organisation's local manager (Ms D. Fortini). There is adherence to the decree's four main principles: proximity, plurality, quality and fairness. In 1999, the Seneffe district was selected as a pilot project for out-of-school care by the Walloon government.

A survey carried out amongst parents demonstrated a very high level of parental satisfaction (over 90% expressed positive opinions). The organisation's local representative demonstrates the emphasis placed on the quality of the activities on offer, for example by keeping a log book of activities. Again according to the survey, three quarters of the children talk about their activities at home.

Pause cartable in La Louvière

The out-of-school care service based in La Louvière serves several administrative districts: La Louvière, Manage, Binche and Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont. Three of these districts, of which La Louvière is very clearly one, can be classed as underprivileged. These are former mining and industrial districts, with some rural settlements.

Within these settlements, Pause cartable provides out-of-school care for independent schools only, having had difficulties in establishing partnerships with the various administrative authorities, despite the French Community's so-called "free time care" or ATL decree, which provides for local consultation. In Binche, Pause cartable has found itself in competition with an organisation run by the district. Unlike in Seneffe, there are a number of opposing influences at work here: voluntary sector/local authority, Christian/Socialist, independent/municipal schooling.

Pause cartable works with around ten schools, providing services to 826 registered children (as at January 2006), with an average of 160 children present in the mornings and on Wednesday afternoons and over 200 children in after-school care. Twenty female and one male facilitator supervise the activities (a slightly better ratio of supervisors to children than in Seneffe), along with two coordinators (one FTE (full-time equivalent) and the other a half FTE).

The project benefits from grants from the FESC (Fonds d'Equipements et Services collectifs – Collective Amenities and Services Fund) within the Belgian social security system. The key advantages of the FESC grants are the level of skills of the staff involved, and the ratio of supervisors to children. The disadvantages are the standards which, according to the project's managers, have led to a settlement in Bois-du-Luc, a former colliery area where Vie féminine had opened a homework club, and which in social terms should have been a priority area, being abandoned. FESC standards are also threatening a rural site in Gottignies, where a facilitator cares for an average of five children: until now, the small scale of the project has made it possible to compensate for the site's lack of earnings.

There is a strong element of selection: children whose parents work are given priority for care. The project's strong points are quality and proximity; plurality and fairness are less prominent, for the reasons cited above (FESC regulations and difficulties in the relationship between the organisation and the administrative districts with regard to the ATL decree).

Remarks

Organising out-of-school care in school premises is a way of ensuring that the activities are **close to users** and **geographically accessible**, in spite of the tangible and physical difficulties this raises, such as access to premises and equipment, problems with heating, difficulties with space and so forth.

Cooperation between all the players concerned, local authorities and voluntary organisations, is a way of ensuring **plurality**. The factors that explain the advanced nature of the Seneffe project can be found in the resources made available to the voluntary sector: it has been possible to establish a partnership, and this has been strengthened by the jobs that the voluntary sector is able to add to the district's resources. The voluntary sector project manager's presence in the district's own offices facilitates the relationship, helps to simplify the administrative procedures and multiplies the opportunities for contact and cooperation with other departments, such as Young People's Services.

Fairness (social and financial accessibility) currently depends on the local authorities adopting a voluntarist policy, which is itself determined by their own resources: there is no redistribution fund or mechanism, either between parental contributions, or between the incomes of households with children. The new provisions relating to the allocation of FESC grants are an opportunity to tackle these questions.

The quality of the projects is plain to see. The factors that appear to improve quality are:

1. the coordination of the facilitators, which comprises organising team meetings and providing ongoing staff training, and even the design and/or production of facilitation tools;
2. ongoing training itself, particularly in cultural and creative areas;
3. defining a care project, which gives the activities real substance, over and above simply minding children whose parents work.

Alain Dubois, Acting administrator at the CERE

Case Study 2: Kinderwerking Fabota

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Organisation

Kinderwerking Fabota is an out-of-school care organisation that forms part of a neighbourhood association called “buurtwerk ‘t Lampeke”, which also brings together four other neighbourhood organisations (a day-care centre, “de Wurpskes”, a youth centre, “den Tube”, a theatre company, “Cie Tartaren”, and a community centre, “t Lampeke”).

Originally, Kinderwerking Fabota was a youth organisation, created in the early 1980s and subsidised as such, as well as for its activities geared towards an underprivileged section of the population. From 2004 onwards, when the 2004-2007 “buurt- en nabijdiensten” (“local and neighbourhood services”) trial programme was set up by Kind en Gezin, the organisation responsible for child care services in Flanders, the association applied for official accreditation, which it was granted in November 2004.

Its services are aimed at children in the district aged two and a half to twelve, and their families. They can accommodate 80 children during the school term and when schools are closed, except in the summer holidays, when more children can be catered for as part of the play areas run by the association in partnership with the town of Leuven.

The venue is accessible every day of the week throughout the year (Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 3.30 pm to 6.00 pm; Wednesdays from 12.00 noon to 6.00 pm; school holidays, every day from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. There is access to an internal space consisting of several rooms that allow children to form into groups for fun activities, homework or a chat, and outside areas, including a large porch, a big playground with a sandpit and a play area which is open to all, and therefore not reserved only for the children cared for by Fabota.

The care offered by Fabota focuses on two main areas, schoolwork and play. The first involves educational support, similar to a homework club, after school; the second offers games, entertainment and free play space and time.

The basic principles of the service are that Fabota cares for a large number of children, and that each child is unique, with a personal, family and cultural history that is specific to him or her, and their own personality. The aim is to care for children and, moreover, those accompanying them, in such a way as to respect each individual and support diversity, an aspect which is positively encouraged. Diversity is not only defined in its cultural or social aspects, but also in its mental and physical dimensions. Specific needs such as physical and learning disabilities are taken into account as part of respect for the group and in seeking to improve the quality of care in overall terms.

Location

The association is based in north-west Leuven, which is the 11th largest town in terms of population in Belgium, and the 3rd largest in Flanders, after Antwerp and Gand. Its population as at 1 January 2005 was 90,706 (source: INS, 1/1/2005). This part of the town has long been a working-class area, inhabited by a mostly poor population, whose housing has deteriorated badly over the years, leaving many homes in a very run-down condition. There are currently a number of schools in the area, and a network of medical/welfare organisations with various areas of focus, such as family support, help in finding work, support for children at school, and medical centres. Several social housing organisations have been set up in the district; new social housing developments have been built and the town of Leuven has committed financial resources to regenerating the area.

The district has a highly diversified population, made up of working-class families, migrant families from a wide range of different backgrounds, which changes regularly in line with the world political situation (currently, for example, there is a large proportion of Nepalese and Chinese), and students, who have moved away from the traditional university district due to a shortage of money, to find cheaper accommodation.

The association is well established in the district, in part as a result of its presence here over the years, and in part because of its links both with the social services and the schools in the area, and particularly with head teachers and nursery and primary school teachers, and with pupil support centres (the “Centra voor leerlingen begeleiding”, or CLB).

Good practice

Good practice here is based on comprehensive, multi-faceted thinking on the care of the child in a spirit of respect for diversity, which is reflected in the general structure of the organisation and the quality of the support offered to children.

These are based on principles of accessibility and participation.

In order to guarantee that child care is **accessible**, it was decided not to use a waiting-list system. This system presupposes a level of stability, which is not particularly characteristic of the district’s population. They have therefore opted for widespread dissemination of information in the district, particularly through schools and other neighbourhood services in this part of the town. Children are cared for from the moment they arrive at the site, and then the registration process is set in train. Activities are free of charge for parents of children in the district who use the site. Families are asked for a contribution for outings (e.g. swimming: 0.5 euro; day trips: 1.5 euro; meals: 1 euro).

Accessibility is also about ensuring access for all the children in the district. There is therefore a mix of children from poor families, affluent families, families who have been settled in the district for varying periods of time, and migrant families from all over the world, some of whom are familiar with Dutch and others who are not. Accessibility is not simply about cultural or social background, but also touches on the specific needs (such as disability, hyperactivity or autism) of certain children in so far as supervising these children provides an opportunity to remain attentive to the whole of the group and to ensure high-quality care.

Participation is found at all levels: in the support offered to children and any follow-up required, in the welcome offered to parents and in supervision.

In light of the vulnerabilities encountered, whether these are social, economic, cultural, physical or mental, displayed by the children cared for here, the primary concern is to offer care that provides structure and continuity, which is no easy task given that the pattern of attendance fluctuates significantly. Much of the work carried out by the staff here involves putting in place a framework that guarantees permanence, stability and consistency. In concrete terms, this translates, for example, into setting up three age groups, each managed by a team of professionals, organising discussions in small groups (to get to know each other, share feelings, talk about the day’s activities, and so on) establishing precise customs and routines, and establishing groups for school work.

As far as activities and entertainment are concerned, the starting point is enjoyment, both what the children enjoy together and what they enjoy with the facilitators, which then makes it possible to achieve other objectives such as learning to play together and to make choices, overcoming frustration, and so on. Activities are organised so that they recur on a regular basis and vary based on age, the skills of the facilitators, and the time of year, with themed activities particularly for children aged two and a half to six, and free play time.

Involving children in preparing activities is not always easy, given staff shift patterns and the sometimes limited abilities of the children, but takes the form of a ritual discussion time that gives the children the opportunity to share their feelings, ask questions, express their wishes, talk about their activities, learn to listen to other people, have their say whilst listening to others, and so on.

The principle of participation can also be seen in the suggestions offered to the parents of the children cared for here, through the organisation of monthly meetings aimed at their particular needs. The objective of these meetings is to meet with them and for them to meet each other, to communicate information they need to know, to educate them on a variety of themes (such as “punishment and reward”, teaching, diet, play and so on), and to invite them to express their views.

The principle of participation as far as supervision is concerned is another element that forms an integral part of the project, and is translated into concrete terms by welcoming people from vulnerable groups, people who have undergone psychiatric treatment, or those who are serving a community sentence as volunteers or interns to help with supervising the children. They, and the rest of the staff, are offered training, in the form of looking at diversity and becoming aware of prejudices against people from other countries, and the poor. Training sessions are run by a member of the team.

Project impact

The impact of the care on offer translates through a variety of learning opportunities into a spirit of participation, an openness to other people, structure, encouragement to learn more, and a better command of the language.

The difficulties encountered and what has been learned from them:

The main difficulties arise from having to confront the vulnerabilities that the children cared for here often present with, but these also lie at the very heart of the work being done with them.

For the team coordinator, problems currently centre in particular on the relationship with parents. The team is experiencing difficulties in encouraging them to participate in their children’s care, and this question remains unresolved.

Remarks on the difficulties or opportunities for transposing this initiative to other places:

This initiative, based on the methodology that has been developed, seems to us to be highly suitable for transposing to other places, in so far as it is based on principles that are centred on both the staff and the children.

Association website: <http://www.fabota.be>

Catherine Gillet, CERE project manager

Case Study 3: La Tanière des petits ours

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La Tanière des Petits Ours, which forms part of the *Liens de Quartier Petite enfance* not-for-profit organisation, celebrated five years of operation in Schaerbeek on 18 February 2007. The organisation, which cares for children from birth to six years of age, combines a playgroup aimed at babies and young children up to the age of three, with out-of-school care aimed at children aged two and a half to six years. Parents are also part of the target audience: the organisation offers a place where parents and children can meet as well as a social centre and community events.

La Tanière des Petits Ours was set up in the district based on the idea of being open to listening to the care needs of local people, and of offering solutions in terms of opening hours, activities and events in line with the needs expressed by those who would use the service. This presupposes a certain degree of flexibility, the ability to incorporate change on an ongoing basis and a constant willingness to undergo training, to acquire knowledge and to help the educational project develop. The team tries to develop appropriate responses with the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.

The objective of forging a link between the families and the district is also apparent in all the services offered by the organisation, which provides care as a priority to all families in the district who express their need for it. The district^{XXVI} is made up primarily of underprivileged families; there are many newly-arrived immigrants^{XXVII}, and Belgian and immigrant families in a precarious social and financial situation with a high rate of unemployment, numerous single-parent families, families in urgent need of psychological, medical and welfare support, and so on.

La Tanière des Petits Ours can care for 15 children at its premises. As the objective is to cater to as many local families as possible, the various care options on offer are staggered over the course of the day:

- the playgroup cares for children from birth to three years on Monday to Friday mornings, from 08.15 am to 1.00 pm^{XXVIII};
- the meeting place for parents and children is open two afternoons a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm) for accompanied children from birth to six years^{XXIX};
- free time care is offered to children aged three to five on Wednesday afternoons^{XXX}; other out-of-school activities are offered by *La Tanière* away from its own site: 15 children from a school in a vulnerable district are cared for on Monday and Friday afternoons from 3.30 pm to 5.45 pm. Courses are offered to children aged three to six years during the school holidays (one week in the winter, one in the spring and three in the summer). Two further half-week courses are also organised for children accompanied by their parents.

In one year, *La Tanière des Petits Ours* is able to reach around 250 families. The aim is to favour both local employment and the local approach, and personalised support for families in difficulty. Thanks to the different services it is able to offer to both children and parents, the organisation has been following some families for many years: some of the mothers arrive during their pregnancies and their children then participate in the activities on offer right up to the age of six years. It is also becoming common for a family to remain a “client” of *La Tanière* for all its children.

The core team is made up of six people. One of the special characteristics of the team is that it is made up of a wide range of professionals. The staff comprises an occupational therapist and psychomotor specialist, a psychologist, two psychology assistants, a facilitator and two people currently working within the framework of plans to help people to integrate back into the workplace, as well as a number of *ad hoc* service providers.

Focus on good practice

A member of the *La Tanière* team is the point of reference for each area of activity (the playgroup, the parent/child meeting place, Wednesday recreation afternoons and Monday and Friday afternoons at school). Each member of the team participates in a range of activities, and so gets the chance to follow certain families from a number of different points of view.

The organisation is careful not to deviate from its original objectives:

- always favouring factors that create a link between the parent and the child through a simultaneous response that incorporates the social needs of the adults (support for their parenting) and those of the children (development of the child and socialisation both during their early years and once they have reached school age);
- favouring anything that creates links to help anchor the community and, amongst other things, links between families.
- providing favourable conditions for listening to people's individual situations and supporting each family, remaining open to dynamic, community-based social cohesion;
- promoting education for citizenship with all families (through a psycho-social, community-based approach);
- remaining accessible to all families by keeping prices moderate and taking account of the financial realities specific to each family situation.

La Tanière is careful to respond to the needs of children from the local area:

- by working in accordance with the results of the review and analysis of the district's needs^{xxxI}, which determine the need to develop care for children aged three to six as a priority;
- by offering these young children a mix of entertainment, relaxation and calm or even time for a nap;
- out-of-school care is always built around listening to the needs of the child, and one of its specific characteristics is to offer children living in very cramped housing a chance to explore what their bodies can do in a place that offers a mix of indoor and outdoor activities. In addition, the programme of activities includes a chance to explore other districts, by visiting museums and exhibitions but also simply by “playing in a park in another part of the town”;
- the out-of-school care offered in a school located in an underprivileged district takes account of the linguistic difficulties and problems in feeling anchored in the community encountered by many newly-arrived families (e.g. through storytelling sessions and songs).

La Tanière tries to ensure that it operates within a framework of social coordination in the district:

- At the instigation of the Schaerbeek Social Coordination team and the Schaerbeek Public Centre for Social Assistance, a group of professionals specialising in the care of young children meets on a quarterly basis to share their thoughts and examples of good practice around the theme of children. Their sessions focus on concrete situations as described by the 15 participants.

Focus on sponsors and subsidy arrangements

La Tanière des Petits Ours was set up within the framework of district contracts (through a regional subsidy from the Brussels region). It has a number of posts created and subsidised by the public authorities as part of the fight against

unemployment^{xxxii}. Urban regeneration is also one of the aspects of work in the district (subsidy from the French Community Commission, or COCOF, in the context of its social cohesion programme – the five-year decree – and in the context of its health programme for the meeting places for parents and children). The ONE also subsidises the meeting places for parents and children.

To date the playgroup has not received any subsidy specific to the provision of care outside of its social cohesion objectives (COCOF).

The Schaerbeek administrative district is investing more and more heavily and the office of the deputy burgomaster for young children subsidises the out-of-school care, which also receives a grant from the ONE.

The ONE plays a primary role in out-of-school care in so far as it is the organisation that accredits and subsidises local coordination for children (or CLE) programmes in the area. Free time care (Accueil Temps Libres) activities are subsidised as part of the ATL programme (as well as by the COCOF).

Anne Nasielski, CERE project manager

References

- i The Brussels-Capital Region is also subject to a specific institutional mechanism consisting of three additional bodies: Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie (VGC), the French Community Commission (COCOF) and the Common Community Commission (COCOM).
- ii The Constitutional Court, which guarantees the rules on the distribution of areas of competence. Ruling 104/2004 was pronounced following a request from the Flemish Government in relation to the fact that a Social Security Fund intervened in an area of competence which was attributed to the Communities.
- iii 2004 report by the Court of Arbitration, page 17
- iv National Family Allowance Office for wage-earning workers
- v The population figures in this report are those published by the National Statistical Institute (INS) on 1st January 2006.
- vi Johan VERSTRAETEN, *Répartition géographique des familles et des enfants bénéficiaires 1990-2000*, in *Revue belge de sécurité sociale*, no. 1, 2003, pages 257 to 275
- vii <http://www.grootstedenbeleid.be/subsites/politiquesdesgrandesvilles>
- viii Liège and Seraing belong to the Province of Liège.
- ix These zones can be found on the website of the Walloon Region: <http://carto6.wallonie.be/WebGIS/>
- x <http://www.quartiers.irisnet.be/contenu/content.asp?ref=%20178>
- xi Regional Urban Development Office (SRDU), study report on the management of neighbourhood infrastructures, drawn up as part of the urban renewal programmes, updated on 1st July 2006
- xii <http://www.thuisindestad.be/html/steden/index.html>
- xiii Subject to the rulings of the Flemish Government. Among others: the Flemish Government ruling of 24th June 1997 on the general conditions for the organisation of out of school care.
- xiv A public interest body in the Flemish Community, whose mission is to approve and provide subsidies for the care of children under 12 and guarantee protection of the mother and child.
- xv <http://www.kindengezin.be/KG/Themas/Kinderopvang/Opvangadressen/default.jsp>
- xvi <http://www.kindengezin.be/KG/Professioneel/Kinderopvang/Initiatiefbuitenschoolseopvangstarten/>
- xvii As set out in the publication entitled *Vernieuwing van de Vlaamse kinderopvang. Een conceptueel kader*, Kind en Gezin, 28th November 2006
- xviii The CCA is the local authority body which decides on the implementation of the Free Time Care policy at local level. The Commission consists of representatives from five areas: 1) the local communities; 2) the educational establishments organised or subsidised by the French Community, which offer nursery or primary teaching within the local authority territory; 3) the people who entrust the children to the care structures; 4) the care operators in the local authority territory who have declared their presence to the ONE ; 5) the services, associations or institutions approved or acknowledged by or affiliated to an organisation or federation in turn approved or acknowledged by or in accordance with the decrees or regulations of the French Community other than the decree that led to the creation of the ONE.
- In addition to these five bodies with voting powers, the following also form part of the CCA on a consultancy basis: 1) the care coordinator; 2) a representative of the province to which the local authority or the French Community Commission (in the Brussels Region) belongs; 3) a coordinator of the care structures designated by the director general of the ONE.
- xix Figures taken from the following report: Joëlle Mottint and Anne-Françoise Dusart (with Alain Dubois and Perrine Humblet), Preparatory analyses prior to deciding on modifications to the FESC out of school care subsidies. The special situation in the French Community, Université Libre de Bruxelles, School of Public Health, Child Policy and Services Unit, June 2006.

- ^{xx} Perrine C. Humblet, *L'accueil extrascolaire en semaine: l'offre, l'utilisation et les priorités*, in *Grandir à Bruxelles – Les cahiers de l'Observatoire de l'Enfant (COCOF)*, no. 6, 2000, pages 4 to 6; *L'accueil des enfants à Bruxelles: quels sont les souhaits des familles ?*, in *Grandir à Bruxelles – Les cahiers de l'Observatoire de l'Enfant (COCOF)*, no. 13, 2004, pages 3 to 12.
- ^{xxi} *Grandir à Bruxelles – Les cahiers de l'Observatoire de l'Enfant*, nos. 17-18, autumn-winter 2006, special edition (Guide to Child Care in Brussels)
- ^{xxii} The contribution is set at 0.05% of the gross wages of employees and public sector workers.
- ^{xxiii} Exchanges of views are defined here as the creation of occasions for exchanges of viewpoints and reflections among local coordinators, with a view to deciding on action strategies and setting up both local and regional projects. See *Attention, temps libres : vers une coordination de qualité*, ULB, School of Public Health, 2006, pamphlet edited by Perrine Humblet of the COCOF Child Observatory.
- ^{xxiv} None of the three Communities in Belgium practises the “school catchment area” system: the right to choose a school is a fundamental liberty for parents, guaranteed by the Constitution (article 24, §1). In the French Community, fundamental education (nursery and primary school) is provided by schools that are *organised* by the Community (approximately 9% of the total roll), official, largely municipal schools, which are *subsidised* by the Community, and independent, mainly Catholic, schools, which are also subsidised by the Community. The numbers of children on the roll in municipal and independent schools are roughly equivalent, with slightly more in municipal schools, a figure which is on the rise.
- ^{xxv} The organisation is moving in April and will be partially based at 42 et 61, Avenue Princesse Elisabeth.
- ^{xxvi} *La Tanière des petits Ours* works with families from two small districts: the *Cage aux ours* and *Jérusalem* districts, as well as neighbouring areas.
- ^{xxvii} 30 to 40 nationalities are represented amongst the families to which the organisation provides care.
- ^{xxviii} The playgroup offers *ad hoc* child care open to all families in the district. It offers children the chance to discover a place where they can play and meet other children, gives parents the opportunity to take some time for themselves (to look for a job or have some free time), and allows local families to get to know each other.
- ^{xxix} Children accompanied by adults have the chance to explore a place where they can socialise. Here, children have the chance to discover somewhere they can play and meet other children, parents can meet other parents and other children, and the district gains a space where people can interact, meet each other and share their ideas about early childhood.
- ^{xxx} Recreation afternoons are run in such a way as to suit each child's pace and what he or she enjoys (running, jumping, cooking, exploring adventure playgrounds and nature areas with direct, safe access, listening to stories and inventing their own, listening to music and relaxing, and so on).
- ^{xxxi} The review and analysis of needs expressed by operators and families in the district was carried out by the Schaerbeek out-of-school care coordination team within the framework of the ATL (free time care) decree of 3 July 2003.
- ^{xxxii} ACS posts: Agents Contractuels Subventionnés (subsidised agents under contract).

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