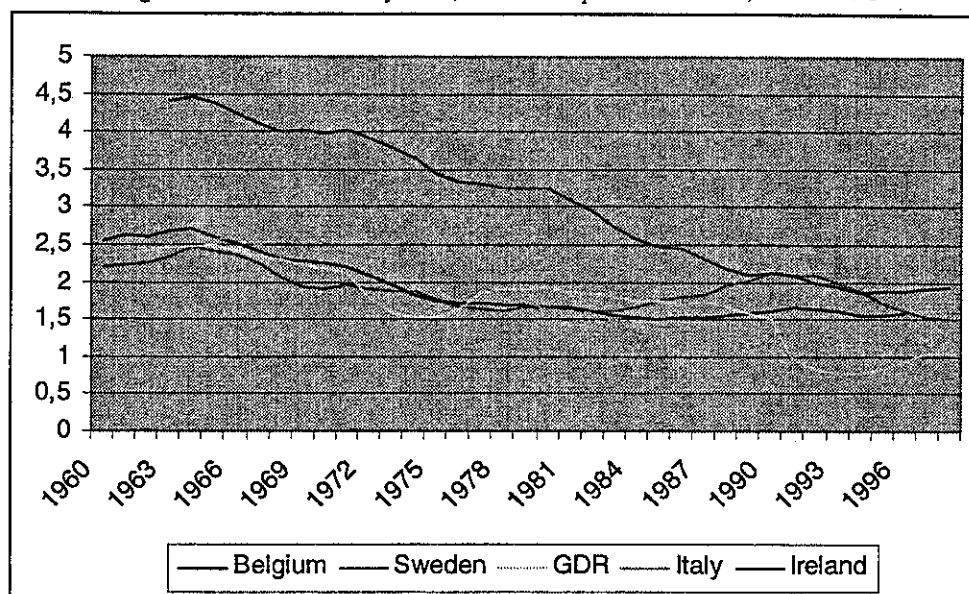


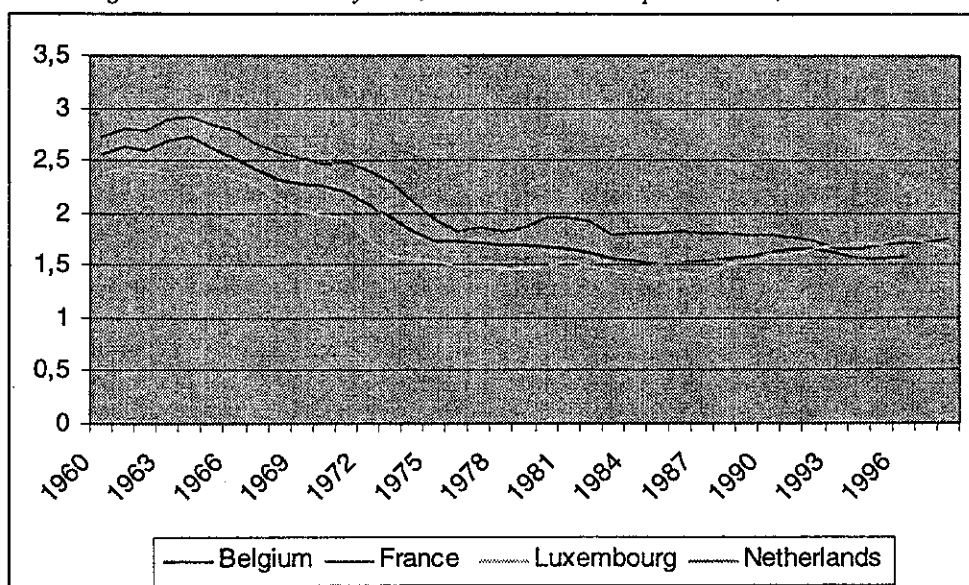
Current fertility in Belgium is well below replacement level, but the situation is not substantially different from that in other European countries.

Figure 1 — Total Fertility Rate, some European Countries, 1960-1998



Source: Conseil de l'Europe, 1999.

Figure 2 — Total Fertility Rate, some Western Europe countries, 1960-1998



Source: Conseil de l'Europe, 1999.

Differences between the three Regions are only open to analysis since 1978, because as mentioned above, it was after 1970 that Regional institutions were definitively established and, as a result, regionally differentiated data began to be collected.

If we examine the TFR by Regions, the data for the years 1960-1996 clearly indicate the existence of three different fertility 'regimes', one for each region (Figure 3). However, the importance of the differences is not the same between all regions. Studying the fertility trends of the three Regions from 1991 Census data, Schoenmaekers noted that for the period 1986-1990, "...the Flemish and the Walloon regions differ in that Wallonia has higher age-specific fertility rates at both younger and older ages than Flanders; consequently the fertility schedule in the Walloon Region corresponds to a higher (period) TFR of 1.66 children as compared to

1.45 children in the Flemish Region (a difference of +14%). In spite of their differences the Flemish and Walloon regions show quite similar fertility patterns when compared to the Brussels Region. Brussels has a (period) TFR of only 1.26 children. But more important, Brussels has much lower fertility rates at young ages than the two other regions and clearly has the highest rates at older ages (age 32 and above). The Brussels Region is clearly the region with a distinct 'old' fertility regime" (Schoenmaekers, 1997, p. 122).

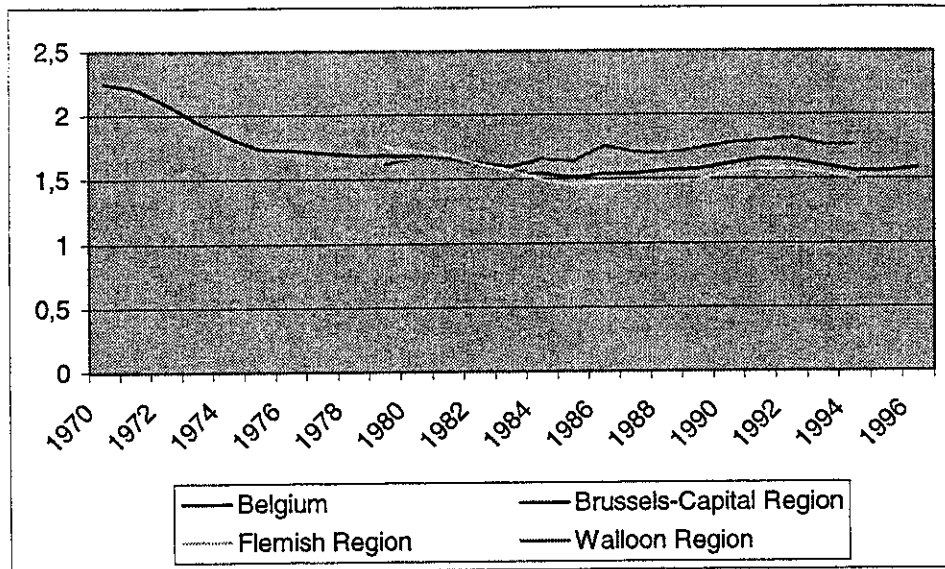
"Compared to the values that are observed at the national level, the Flemish provinces show low fertility figures at the two extremes of the fertility curve. As for the Walloon provinces the picture is just the opposite. But it is in the Brussels Region and in the surrounding "*arrondissements*" of the former province of Brabant that one finds the extremely low figures at young age and the extremely high figures at older ages. It is in the Brussels area that the postponement of the first child and also the 'recuperation' of fertility at older age are furthest advanced. The net result of the varying patterns in the fertility schedule is a slightly higher mean age at birth in Flanders than in Wallonia: 27.7 years vs. 27.5 years. But obviously the highest mean age is recorded in the Brussels Region: 28.8 years, 1.2 years higher than in Flanders and 1.4 years higher than in Wallonia" (Schoenmaekers, 1997, p. 123).

Schoenmaekers has shown that "... the effect of the presence of foreign-born residents on fertility appears negligible; it accounts for increase of only 3 percent at the national level. In both the Flemish and the Walloon Region the impact of the presence of foreigners on the level of fertility is smaller still. It is only in the Brussels Region that the impact can be said to be 'significant'. Here, taking into account the fertility of foreign residents increases the total level by as much as 17 percent, from a (period) TFR of 1.26 children to one of 1.47 children. Knowing that close to 40 percent of the 881 thousand foreign residents in the country live in Brussels and the surrounding "*arrondissements*" of the former Brabant, this should not come as a surprise. But one should also bear in mind that the observed effect is a function of both the fertility of the Belgian nationals and of the one of the foreign residents"(1997, p. 123).

The analysis of the changes in fertility in 1986-1990 with that of 10 years earlier, 1976-1980, undertaken from the census data by Schoenmaekers, shows that during this period, the overall level has decreased by 7 percent, from a (period) TFR of 1.62 children to one of 1.50 children. At the same time, the fertility schedule has shifted to the right, which is translated into an increase of the mean age at childbirth from 26.5 to 27.7 years (from 24.2 to 25.7 years at first childbirth; Schoenmaekers, 1997, p. 124).

"These changes in total fertility have been accompanied by (and most probably to a certain extent caused by) changes in the timing of fertility, more particularly in the postponement of the first birth. In all provinces - Flemish and Walloon the mean age at first birth has indeed risen between the years 1976-1980 and 1986- 1990. At national level, the increase corresponds to +6.3 percent, from a mean of 24.2 years in 1976-1980 to a mean of 25.7 years in 1986-1990. In the Flemish provinces, the increase is somewhat larger than in the Walloon provinces, on average 6.7 percent vs. 5.6 percent. The difference between Flanders and Wallonia becomes, however, more apparent when looking at the absolute numbers: + 1.61 years in Flanders vs. + 1.33 years in Wallonia (from 24.17 years to 25.78 years, and from 23.93 to 25.26 years, resp.). (...) Clearly, the changes in fertility are not just a matter of declining fertility, but also one of changes in the timing of fertility (Schoenmaekers, 1997, p. 124).

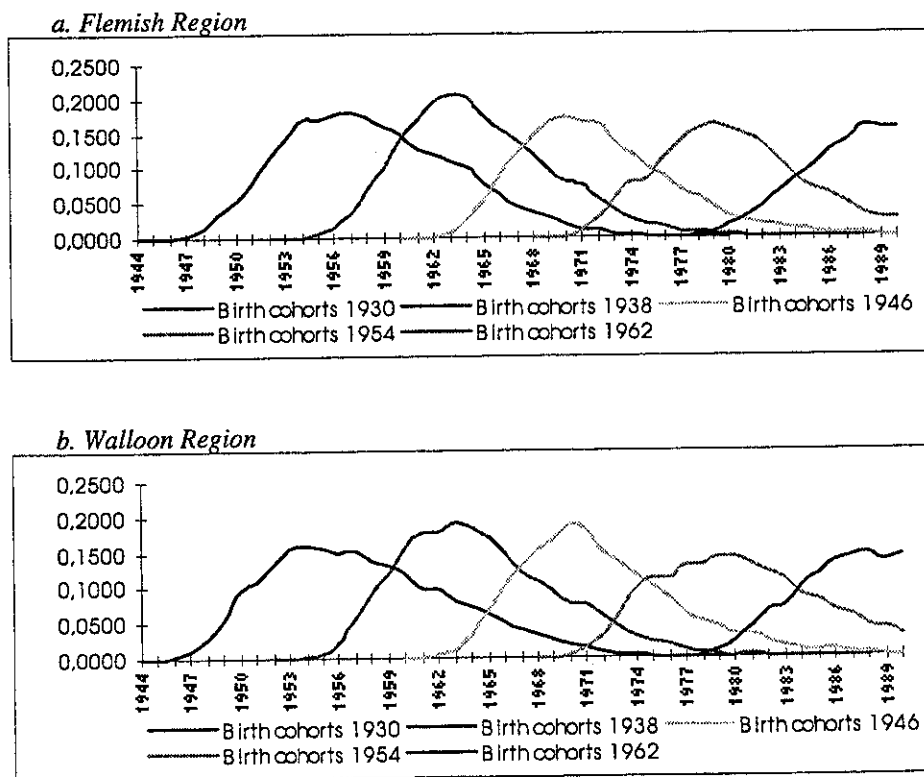
Figure 3 — Total Fertility Rate, Belgium and the three Regions, 1970-1996



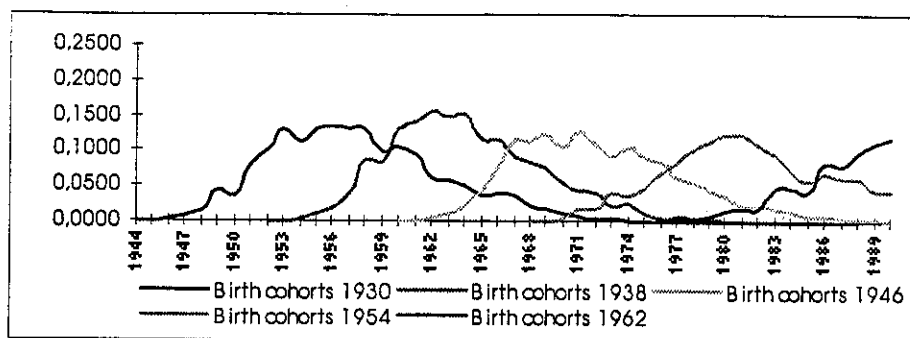
Source: Conseil de l'Europe, 1999.

As in all industrialised countries, the changes in fertility as observed in Belgium are to a great extent the consequence of changes in the timing of fertility, more particularly the postponement of first birth. Concurrently, only longitudinal data provide an unbiased description for demographic behaviour during the life course, and a truthful description of life course events is after all the essence of demographic analysis.

Figure 4 — Completed fertility, Belgian Regions, Birth cohorts 1930, 1938, 1946, 1954 and 1962



c. Brussels Region



Source: Schoenmaeckers and al., 1997, p. 50 and Table A.7.7.

For Belgium, “a series of figures (Figure 4) whereby the data are ordered by birth cohort and calendar year, and which additionally are sub-divided by region, reveal the following patterns:

- the increase of fertility at young age (ages 18 through 24), in the three regions, until the beginning of the sixties (what has contributed to the so-called , ‘Baby-boom’);
- the decline at older ages (age 28 and above), also in all three regions, until the mid-seventies, as the result of the increasing control of the total number of children, thanks to the availability of modern contraceptives;
- the decline of fertility at young age (ages 18 through 24) starting in the mid-sixties, again in all three regions, as the result of the postponement of the first birth, which no doubt is linked to the changing status of women and the generalised use of contraception for the timing of births;
- the increase of fertility after age 30 and about, since the end of the seventies, begin of the eighties, in all three regions, but definitely strongest in the Brussels Region and weakest in Flanders, as part of the ageing’ of the fertility schedule and the (partial) recuperation of fertility ‘lost’ at young age.

The differences in the changes in timing between the Flemish and the Walloon Region during the last decades — the more pronounced decline in fertility in Flanders at young age, the stronger ‘recuperation’ of fertility in Wallonia at older age — explain to a large extent the higher (period) TFR in 1986-1990 for Wallonia as compared to Flanders (1.66 vs. 1.45 children). The difference in the level of fertility between the two regions would, however, be much less than what is suggested by the TFR- values: a difference of 0.21 children. Cohort data suggest a difference of only 0.03 to 0.05 children (less than one fourth of the difference between TFR-values). The parity values at age 42 that can be observed for cohorts 1946-1948, suggest a total offspring of (slightly above) 1.84 in Flanders and 1.89 in Wallonia.

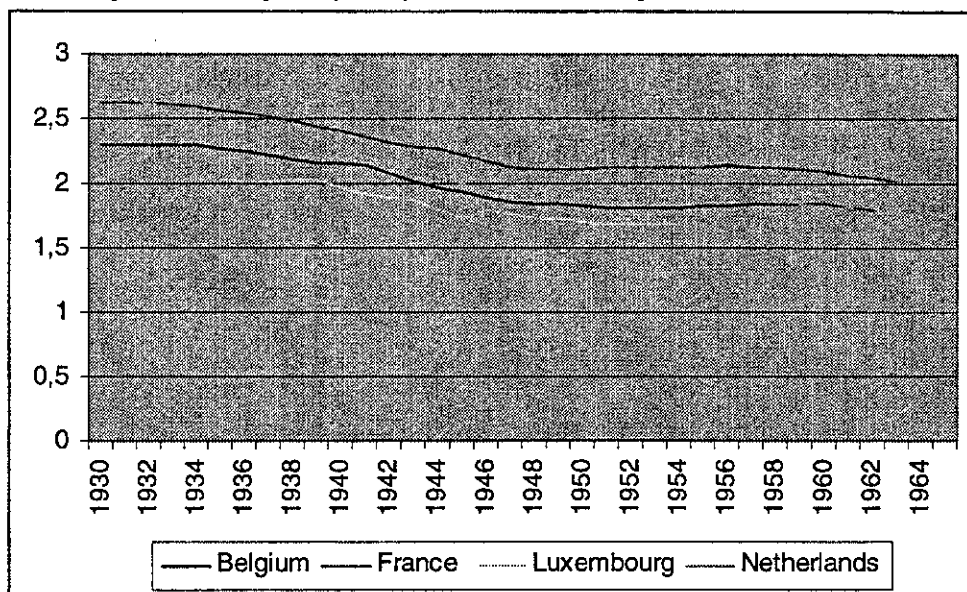
It can be hypothesised that the differences in fertility as currently observed between Flanders and Wallonia are mainly the result of a de-synchronisation in the changes in the timing of fertility between the two regions, rather than the result of a difference in the total number of offspring Flemish and Walloon women have. The same cannot be said about the Brussels Region. Here too, one can observe the patterns of postponement of first birth and of the recuperation of fertility at older age, and they actually appear to be stronger than in Flanders and Wallonia. However, the Brussels Region differentiates itself mainly by having a distinct lower level of fertility, of about 1.47 children -i.e., 25% less as compared to Flanders (1.84) and 29% less as compared to Wallonia (1.89).

The lower fertility at young age in the Flemish Region as compared to the Walloon Region must be the result of later marriage but also of postponing childbearing in the first years of marriage. Ultimately, however, in both regions married women will practically have the same number of offspring. The situation is quite different in the Brussels Region. Here, women marry less (which is by and large ‘translated’ in the high percentage of women that remain childless), but also within marriage women in the Brussels Region have somewhat less children than those in Flanders and Wallonia (about -7%)” (Schoenmaeckers, 1997, p. 124).

If we compare the completed fertility of Belgian women with those of the neighbouring countries (figure 5), it appears that Belgian pattern tend to be similar to the Dutch one. Even if the average number of children per women was higher than the Belgian one for 1930 Dutch cohort (2,69 vs. 2,28), it is similar from the 1950 cohort and onwards (1,8). In France, the average number per women has always been over 2 when in Luxembourg the

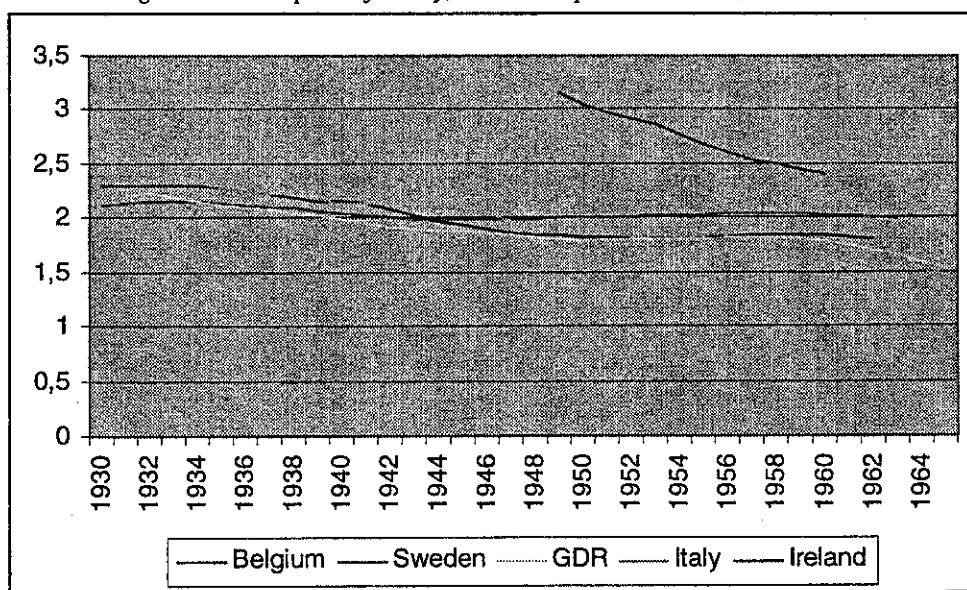
completed fertility is under 2 children per women since the 1940s cohort. The differences are greater for countries like Ireland or Italy (figure 6).

Figure 5 — Completed fertility, some Western Europe countries, 1930-1965



Source: Conseil de l'Europe, 1999.

Figure 6 — Completed fertility, some European Countries, 1930-1965



Source: Conseil de l'Europe, 1999.

Commenting fertility trends in the European Union, Begeot and Fernandez (1997, p. 32) underlined that the total fertility rate is the sum of fertility rates according to the mother's age for a given year and, then, this index reflects both changes in the intensity of the phenomenon and the changes in the timing of the births of the various generations of women, which reflects more the attractiveness of the situation in economic or other terms. These changes result in variations of the mean age of mothers at the births of their children, which can be calculated by cohorts or for a given year. They mentioned that "throughout the Member States, this average age of mothers at the birth of children first decreases, until around 1975 in the central and northern countries and around 1980 elsewhere, after which it rises throughout", as we observed in general for Belgium. They noted also that the changes in the timing of fertility allow the reasonable expectation that in none of the member States - Belgium

included –will women’s lifetime fertility reach the levels of the total fertility currently observable. The figures published by the Council of Europe (1999) “... show a gradual decline in the lifetime fertility of women born between 1930 and 1958. 1930 was a generation which exceeded the replacement level of 2,1 children everywhere except in Luxembourg; 1958 the generation which nowhere attained that level. Here again, a gap appears between the countries of southern Europe and the rest. In the Centre and North, a decline can be noted in the lifetime fertility of the women born between 1930 and about 1950, slowing down clearly in later generations and, in certain countries, beginning even to rise again slightly (see fig. 5 and 6). In Italy, Spain and Portugal, on the other hand, the decline continues at the same rate in the post-1950 generations. The very low fertility in the southern countries may be explained, on the one hand, by the still weak impact of the recovery attributable to delayed births, the decline having started later, and the effect of which may become more intense in the years ahead, and on the other hand, a stronger decline than elsewhere in the fertility of younger women, which may be connected to later marrying and to the low levels of births outside marriage in these countries” (Begeot, Fernandez, 1997, pp. 32-33).

4. The Belgian fertility decline: what remedy ?

In Belgium, since the beginning of the 20th century, the decline of fertility has been a preoccupation for the different Authorities (the State, the Church, the social partners, etc.). Newspaper articles, reports, studies, surveys, etc. tried to explain the causes and consequences of the process and to find remedies to that decline. In his study on the *Decline of Belgian Fertility*, Lesthaeghe (1977, pp. 132-138) wrote: “after World War I, when the demographic differences became fully apparent in the age compositions (*of the Flemish and the Walloons populations*), Walloon public opinion became sensitised by a flood of pessimistic reports and newspaper articles. The term “demographic suicide” appeared regularly in the 1930s. The qualification “old” was applied to the Walloon population and industry alike, and the lack of larger segment of younger people was held responsible for the stagnation of the traditional Walloon sectors of economic activity. The coal pits closed gradually, primarily because of the irregularity of the coal layers and because of competition from imported coal or, later on, other sources of energy; the string of industrial town in Hainaut suffered from severe decay as new chemical industry established itself elsewhere. At each step, part of the blame was laid on the demographic situation, even when only slightly economic factors were at work. The culminating point of this movement was the report of the french economist and demographer A. Sauvy in 1962 on the Walloon demographic situation”.

This report promoted pronatalist policy which had been reverberated by different institutions and organisations. During a one day seminar held by *l'Association des caisses d'allocations familiales belges* (June 1962), Charpentier, Walloon Economic Council director, presented a plan to reverse that fertility decline. After a brief description of the causes and consequences of the fertility decline, he draw an action plan to raise the population and especially, the active population. He suggested to undertake a immigration policy which encouraged the migrants’ integration and to promote women’ and older worker economic activity. As women’ activity could have a negative impact on fertility, he insisted on the promotion of measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family and direct and indirect aids addressed to families (children allowances, housing measures, tax reforms, etc.; Charpentier, pp. 32-45).

More then ten years later, the *Poliwa report* (1977) insisted again on the positive impact of measures such women’ activity to stop the population decline in Wallonia, but also underlined the positive effect of measures as: reducing infant mortality and male over-mortality, promoting immigrants’ integration, favouring family-friendly policies, developing elderly people policy and creating childcare facilities. For the report’s authors these policies had to be incorporated in a legal framework and accompanied by financial aids (direct or indirect). Actually, part of the recommendations contained in the *Poliwa report* have been implemented, but unfortunately their implementation was incomplete and therefore, Belgian family policies is far to be very coherent.

As encouraging women’ economical activity, reconciling between work and family, direct and indirect aids to families constituted the main aspects of the Belgian family policy, each of them will be treated separately.

5. Women enter labour force

In 1996, the employment rate of women in Belgium was a quarter higher than in 1970; the male employment rate on the other hand is 17% lower (Table 1). Even if there was a rapid increase of women activity rate during the last three decades, in 1995, only 45% of the female population was economically active against 60% for the male (Table 2).

*Table 1 — Employment Index, Belgium, 1970-1996
(1970=100)*

<i>Years</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
1970	100,0	100,0	100,0
1980	95,1	107,9	99,1
1985	88,2	110,5	95,3
1990	88,5	123,5	99,7
1995	83,2	124,2	96,3
1996	82,9	125,4	96,5

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et du Travail,
1998, Tableau 69

Table 2 — Activity rate, Belgium, 1960-1996

<i>Years</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
1960	75,8	29,9	52,1
1970	71,9	31,9	51,2
1980	67,4	37,2	51,8
1985	64,2	39,4	51,3
1990	61,9	41,2	51,2
1995	60,5	43,5	51,7
1996	60,1	43,7	51,6

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et du Travail,
1998, Tableau 70

If we examined the activity rate by sex, age and marital status, it appears that the activity rate of the married women aged 25 years old to 44 years old are around 20% less than the one of the male (Table 3). The discrepancies between the single's male and female rates varied between 8 and 10 points for all the age groups and marital status. It is above 45 years old that the differences between men and women activity rates are the highest.

Table 3 — Activity rate by sex, age and marital status, Belgium, 1997

Sex and Marital Status	Age groups						Total
	15-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65 years and over	
Men							
- Single	32,5	90,8	87,6	74,9	33,7	7,9	55,7
- Married	92,9	97,2	96,2	89,0	34,6	1,7	64,9
- Widow	-	100,0	83,6	77,9	20,0	0,8	14,5
- Divorced/ Separated	-	92,1	92,8	75,6	29,8	3,1	66,3
- Total	34,5	94,3	94,5	86,5	33,8	1,9	60,6
Women							
- Single	24,6	84,9	83,6	67,4	24,8	1,3	43,5
- Married	67,5	80,0	70,9	50,1	11,4	0,9	46,8
- Widow	100,0	67,5	43,8	37,6	10,9	0,4	5,1
- Divorced/ Separated	90,8	80,8	80,1	69,6	26,3	0,8	57,6
- Total	29,1	81,4	72,6	52,4	13,0	0,7	40,9

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et du Travail, 1998, Tableau 71

Table 4 — Employment status of women and men with child aged 0-9 years, 1985 and 1993.

	Employment Status									
	Mothers					Fathers				
	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Economically inactive	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Economically inactive
1985	51	37	14	15	34	92	92	1	5	2
1993	62	38	24	9	29	92	91	1	4	4
Change	+11	+1	+10	-6	-5	-	-1	+1	-2	+2

Source: European Commission Network on Childcare, 1995, p. 138.

Research evidence suggests that the division of labour in families in Belgium is still fairly traditional. Despite the increase in female labour market participation women still do most of the housework and other household tasks, and it is their patterns of work which is more flexible rather than men's. Table 4 shows that mothers with children aged 0-9 years are more often than men economically inactive (34% vs. 2% in 1993), part-time workers (24% vs. 1%) or unemployed (9% vs. 4%). For most men the traditional pattern of continuous, life-time, full-time employment still prevails. There is no evidence available about men's involvement as fathers, but there are few signs of change.

Using data from the Belgian household panel, Bawin-Legros observed for the three Regions at which frequency men and women are executing different tasks (table 5). More than 80% of the women are always doing the laundry, three quarter of them are always cooking and more than a half are always cleaning the house. Gardening is male tasks when shopping is sharing almost equally between men and women. The management of the day to day expenditures are more often a female activity when managing the bank accounts or the savings are a male tasks. The discrepancies between the answers are different from one Region to the other. In general, the results show that there is still a long way to go before that the household tasks will be shared equally between man and woman in the domestic sphere

Table 5 — Distribution of the household tasks (% , 1996)

		Brussels		Flanders		Wallonia	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Cleaning the house	*1	28,25	5,78	30,60	2,45	40,90	2,77
	2	33,18	8,89	43,53	7,25	33,55	6,72
	3	27,80	26,22	21,77	24,31	18,86	20,68
	4	10,76	59,11	4,09	65,99	6,69	69,83
Shopping	1	12,11	4,87	10,68	2,88	14,69	3,19
	2	22,87	15,04	30,74	8,84	26,97	8,84
	3	38,12	33,19	45,85	41,32	31,80	28,54
	4	26,91	46,90	12,73	46,96	26,54	59,42
Cooking	1	41,26	3,98	44,12	1,92	45,27	1,60
	2	27,80	6,19	29,77	7,68	32,09	4,58
	3	19,73	24,78	19,85	23,91	17,36	17,57
	4	11,21	65,04	6,26	66,49	5,27	76,25
Doing the laundry	1	69,82	5,31	78,45	1,92	83,28	3,73
	2	16,67	4,87	15,41	3,74	10,23	2,24
	3	10,81	13,72	4,53	10,04	4,18	7,25
	4	2,70	76,11	1,62	84,29	2,31	86,78
Gardening	1	15,38	38,64	7,58	27,12	9,58	35,62
	2	14,48	30,00	11,48	36,33	10,02	29,51
	3	29,86	23,64	32,83	25,72	24,78	23,50
	4	40,27	7,73	48,10	10,83	55,62	11,37
Management of administrative matters	1	10,81	23,01	15,52	19,02	19,76	28,54
	2	13,96	23,45	18,97	25,00	14,60	18,10
	3	34,23	28,76	25,54	28,42	18,44	17,89
	4	40,99	24,78	39,98	27,56	47,20	35,46
Management of the day to day expenditures	1	13,51	11,50	20,00	6,09	22,23	10,74
	2	13,06	15,49	30,16	13,35	19,72	8,72
	3	45,95	39,82	33,84	38,89	27,71	29,26
	4	27,48	33,19	16,00	41,67	30,34	51,28
Management of the bank account	1	13,90	20,80	17,04	16,01	18,51	23,43
	2	7,17	21,24	18,05	21,56	12,92	14,38
	3	36,77	29,65	29,56	32,87	23,88	24,60
	4	42,15	28,32	34,84	29,56	44,69	37,59
Management of the saving	1	13,96	18,58	16,68	13,30	18,70	21,37
	2	12,16	22,57	20,91	20,06	14,96	13,86
	3	32,43	33,19	34,89	37,77	24,09	27,60
	4	41,44	25,66	27,52	28,86	42,24	37,16

Source: Bawin-Legros, 1999, p. 14.

*: 1: Never; 2: Occasionally; 3: Frequently; 4: Always.

6. Family benefits

In terms of family policies, decisive paths were set already very early, since a comparatively high level of child allowances dates back to policies starting at the end of the 1920s, and the provision of extended childcare facilities, afterschool care and family-related services were developed early due to competition between socialist, liberal and catholic forces to attract clients to their "pillarized sector" of the welfare society and to struggles between the State and the Catholic church about influence in the educational sector. A third element is the social security system which distributes strongly towards low-income families with children and guarantees various minimum benefits since the 1960 which in other countries are characteristics for means-tested benefits outside the social insurance sector.

The Belgian familialist social policy has certain features in common with the French one. The historical starting point was a patronal family policy of employers at the end of the 1920s, influenced by the social-catholic idea of a "family wage". The social problems of the working class and of supporting the family have been closely interlinked since. Families are supported through child allowances supplementing wages, which were rapidly institutionalised as part of the social insurance system. The underlying family and gender model was that of the male wage earners family breadwinner (Delvaux, 1987, pp. 62-66). In the 1930s, the State ruled that employers were obliged to pay contributions to family benefits funds (this is still the mode of financing family allowances), and the system has been extended since to a complex set of differentiated benefits for children of employees, of self-employed, with higher benefit rates which are partly means-tested for needy children (orphans, disabled children, children of pensioners, of unemployed, of invalids,). The insurance-based main system was complemented by a residual system of universal child benefits in 1971. The institutions administrating cash benefits have become rather powerful actors managing considerable sums of money. The system is very much under discussion, but reform was blocked up to now, sometimes due to administrative obstacles or by lack of consensus among political parties: catholic and social forces did not find enough allies to build up a majority for their opposed views.

"Family allowances are paid for all children, but the amount of such allowances depends on the occupational status of the parents (viz. their social security regime). The main inequality, still in existence in the 1990, relates to the first child. An allowance of 2200 BF³ per month is made to wage earners as compared with 325 BF for the self-employed. Also, family allowances vary as a function of a child's characteristics: it increases with the child's age group, its rank and in the event of the child having the status of disabled or orphan. Finally, the amount varies as a function of the beneficiary (allowances increased for the children of unemployed or pensioners). Family allowances are not taxable, but a deduction of 375 BF, known as the solidarity contribution, is applied to the aggregate monthly family allowance, except on allowances granted for an only child. The monthly deduction is not made when the allottee or the child is entitled to increased allowances. The 375 BF reduction may be refunded if the allottee requests his fund, subject to the net professional income in 1988 being less than 355 000 BF. This contribution, instituted in 1982, invoking the « crisis », has up to now been maintained despite the surplus generated by this sector.

Until 1990, the family-allowance sector has been showing a major surplus over recent years. Family associations find it regrettable that the Government failed to use this money to increase allowances. For example, it would be possible to increase allowances by 450 BF for all children aged 12 years and over. The money has in fact been re-distributed to other social-security sectors.

There is a long-standing debate on the subject of family-allowance reform, making it possible to establish individualised child rights, tied to its person, in a spirit of equality among all children, there being no link with the socio-professional position of the parents.

From the micro-economic point of view, family allowances represent a substantial aid to families, even if such entitlements fail to cover - far from it - the costs involved in bringing up children. The only exception to this rule is the allowance paid monthly for the first child of a self-employed worker, where the amount involved is of a somewhat symbolic nature" (*Families and Policies*, 1991, pp. 78-79).

³ 1 Euro = 40,3399 BF

7. Maternity leave

"The protection of pregnant women in the job market was remarkably improved in the course of the year 1990. The dispositions of the so-called program laws of December 22, 1990 and the social provisions of the law of December 29, 1990, transformed the existing system of protection by extending the pre- and postnatal period and by the innovation of the maternity insurance.

The maternity leave was extended from 14 to 15 weeks, by adding one week to the prenatal leave. The interdiction to work starts the seventh day preceding the expected day of child birth and runs, as in the past, till the end of a period of eight weeks after the day of childbirth. The period of prenatal leave which has not been taken before child birth, can be taken up after childbirth.

In case of premature birth, however the latter period is reduced with the number of days the mother was working in the seven days' period preceding the birth. If the new-born is to stay in the hospital for a period of at least eight weeks after delivery, the period of extended postnatal leave can be postponed till the baby comes home, in order to secure a minimum adaptation period at home for mother and child. If the child dies in the year it is born, the employed mother keeps her rights to take advantage of this period of prolonged interruption of work. The conditions under which this leave can be transferred into a paternity leave, in case of hospitalisation or decease of the mother, have to be set by royal decree. In this case the father will be the beneficiary of the maternity allocation normally granted to the mother. The period of maternity leave can be prolonged by the provisions regulating the so-called career-interruption, which can be taken up either by the mother or the father.

This legislation creating a maternity-insurance is geared at stimulating female participation in the labour market" (*Families and Policies*, 1991, pp. 115-116).

8. Career Breaks

"On 22 January 1985, within the framework of a remedial law containing labour provisions, Belgian legislation implemented a novel mechanism to suspend performance of an employment contract entitled "*interruption of occupational career*". The purpose of this was to enable workers to suspend performance of their employment contract either totally or partially. During the period of temporary discontinuity of contract performance, workers are entitled to receive so-called "interruption" allocations payable by the unemployment insurance if such a worker is replaced by a fully-indemnified unemployed worker or equivalent. When the legislation was enacted, the reason for requesting the breaker reduction was not taken into account as the Act made no provision for workers having to justify their request. This measure proved to be a great success. However, it is mainly women who request application of this measure, owing to reasons relating to family needs. This tendency to use career-break schemes caused debate between the different social and political schools on the advantages and disadvantages of the schemes.

The measures introduced by the Minister of Labour in 1990 should be evaluated in the context of this controversy.

- Although the minimum career break is in principle 6 months, this is reduced to 12 weeks when the break is requested by a female worker *for the birth of her child while the male worker may also benefit from such provisions*, provided that direct line of descent is established (Royal Decree of 7 May 1990).

- When workers discontinue their careers for a minimum period of 36 consecutive months, the « interruption » allowance is increased by lump-sum of maximum 5 000 BF subject to the workers proving that they have agreed with their employers to take a 2-week minimum re-insertion programme course organised by their employers in the final month of the period of temporary discontinuance (Royal Decree of 13 August 1990).

Positive measures were adopted for "*re-entering persons*", i.e. those wishing to rejoin the market : "the category of job seekers who wish to return to the labour market after having stopped their occupational activities to devote themselves to : 1) either rearing their children, their spouse's children or the children of the person with whom they live; 2) or take care of their father and/or mother, those of their spouse or the person with whom they cohabit".

Career breaks have recently been subsumed into actual work periods in the unemployment regulations. The Royal Decree of 16 November 1990 on the granting of unemployment allowances in the event of agreed early retirement provides for the requester of early retirement having to give proof that he/she has worked for 25 years (or equivalent days) as a salaried worker. The Decree means that the following categories are to be counted as work day :

- occupational career breaks by virtue of the provisions of the Remedial Act of 22 January 1985;
- the periods during which the worker temporarily discontinued his/her wage-earning activities to raise a child under the age of 6 years" (*Families and Policies*, 1991, pp. 150-11).

9. Childcare

Childcare facilities and preschools for children above three years have also a long standing tradition and a high level of provision. As part of the Belgian "contract" between the Liberal Government and the Catholic Church at the end of the 19th century, the Government integrated the communal "Kindergarten" into the school system as preschools, while Catholics established a parallel system of catholic preschools. At the turn of the century, more than half of all children between three and five years frequented already preschools, which rose to two thirds in the 1930 and to 80% at the end of the 1940ies. It was the most developed preschool system in Europe, and its expansion was enhanced by competition between secular and catholic force (Delvaux, 1987, pp.). Also the centralized competences for these services in the education ministry (before 1970 at the national level, since 1970 at the Flemish, Wallonian and German communities) favoured a coordinated development. The expansion of services for children under three happened mainly from the 1970ies onwards and was linked to issues of rising female employment and labour market policies. The level is high in West European comparison, and special agencies bundle competences for different services (crèches, registered child minders etc..., holyday programs, mother and child health programs etc.) at the level of the three different communities in Belgium.

As we mentioned above Flemish, French and German Communities each have responsibility for services for young children what explain the complexity of the system that Humblet and Deven have described in an European report (European Commission, 1995, pp. 23-30).

"Compulsory schooling starts at the age of 6 years. There are two systems of publicly funded services for children under 6 years - welfare and education. These systems overlap for children aged 30-36 months. Within the welfare system, services are the responsibility at Community level of a Government Department in the German-speaking Community - *Dienst für Kind und Families (DKF)*; and of two public agencies in the French and Flemish Communities - *Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE)* and *Kind en Gezin (K&G)*. *ONE* and *K&G* are accountable to and funded by, respectively, the French Community Ministry of Culture and Social Affairs and the Flemish Community Ministry of Culture, Family and Welfare. Within the welfare system, which mainly provides for children under 36 months, there are several types of centre and organised family day care. These services are available on a full-day, all year basis⁴. Publicly-funded services within the welfare system may be managed by local authorities or private organisations; in the French Community, the balance is 60/40.

Within the education system, pre-primary schooling is provided for children from 2½ years until compulsory school age. The service is the responsibility of Education Ministries at the Community level. It is available during term-time and for the same hours as primary school.

Primary school hours are from 08.30 to 15.30, with schools closed on Wednesday afternoon. Supervision during the lunch break is usually provided, and lunch is provided in some schools.

Publicly funded services providing care and recreation for school-age children are provided in centres. In the French Community, these centres are usually school-based and may be managed by local authorities or, in the case of services in private subsidised schools, by the governing body for the school and independent of schools. In the Flemish Community, a large number of centres are independent of schools and are managed by local authorities. In the Flemish Community, provision can also be made for school children in organised family day care within the welfare system. In both Communities, there are schemes to provide care and recreation for children during the school holidays, particularly in the summer; these are usually organised by local authorities.

⁴ Full days, all year basis' means at least 8 hours a day and throughout the year with the possible exception of closure during a short period in the summer.

Private non-subsidised services are provided in centres and by family day carers. These services are indirectly subsidised through tax relief for parents' costs (see Costs and Funding below).

9.1. Objectives and key concepts

In the French community, services in the welfare system have long-established aims of social prevention and providing care for the children of employed parents. A law adopted in 1993 confirms these roles but adds others, in particular to "*foster the child's physical, psychological and social development in an appropriate environment and in accordance with pedagogical principles adapted to the age of the child*". The law also says that access to good quality services is the right of every child and that services must respect cultural diversity and pay attention to the needs of handicapped children.

Services in the welfare system in the Flemish Community also have a long-established objective of social protection for disadvantaged children, but in the 1980s they have increasingly assumed a role in employment policy. So in a decree adopted at the end of 1983, the Flemish Community Government defined the following priorities for publicly funded services: children with employed parents, children who need care outside the family for social or pedagogical reasons and parents with a low income.

The main aims of the services in the education system for children under compulsory school age are: to help the child develop as a person; to socialise the child; to foster the child's cognitive, emotional, psycho-motor and language development; and to prepare children for primary school. In the French Community, schools are free to organise their own programmes, but may adopt the official programme based on *l'accueil et l'écoute de l'enfant*, allowing children to develop at their own pace in a warm and cooperative atmosphere. There is no official programme for the Flemish Community.

During the 1990s, the main developments are the following for the Flemish and the French Communities:

French Community:

1. two new laws have been adopted by the French Community: the first (29/3/93) regulates publicly funded centres in the welfare system; the second (23/9/94) specifies the conditions that private centres and family day carers must meet. As well as regulating the organisation of services, the first law provides for improved funding to support children "*suffering serious psychological, medical or social problems*". It also introduces the need to ensure the continuing training of workers, but only in publicly funded services; however, so far there have been no guidelines or regulations to define what this training means. The second law introduces the possibility for staff from ONE to pay attention to the level and type of training of workers in private services when they inspect these services.

2. An initiative begun in Brussels to organise a network of *crèches* for children whose parents are unemployed or training has been extended to the Walloon Region where some decentralised projects are being set up.

3. The Minister in the French Community with responsibility for child welfare published a plan for a coordinated children's policy in 1994 - *The right to be a child for all children*. The plan is based on a consultation begun in 1990, and is very much in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of the first achievements of the plan has been the establishment of a Child Care Observatory, providing a source of information and support in decision-making for the French administration of the Brussels Region.

Flemish Community:

1. Considerable attention has been paid to services for school-age children. A report was made in July 1992 to the Minister of Family and Welfare by a Round Table Conference; while in the same year, the Community Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs began to support a programme for long-term unemployed women, to train them for work in services for school-age children. In 1994, the Flemish Government published a policy document on services for school-age children, which allocates coordination for these services to the Minister of Family and Welfare and makes K&G responsible for monitoring these services. Finally, a Commission on Quality in School-age Childcare (*Kwaliteitscommissie voor Buitenschoolse Opvang*) was established with the task of defining quality criteria; it presented its report in May 1995.

A pioneering role in the development of services for school-age children has been played by the Province of Limburg, which established a Provincial Commission for School-age Childcare in 1991 to develop services; and by the Resource and Training Centre for Childcare (*Vormingscentrum voor de Begeleiding van het Jonge Kind*), which has developed training, including programmes for unemployed women with low educational qualifications.

2. In 1992, the Flemish Government decided to increase publicly funded provision in the welfare system by 1,500 places, but made no extra resources available. This led to pressure to increase the workload of staff and parents' fees. For this and other reasons, the share of costs paid by parents has increased. At the same time, however, public funding from K&G increased by 92% between 1988 and 1994. K&G has also continued to develop its

support and monitoring role, shifting increasingly away from a focus on health and hygiene towards a more pedagogical perspective, culminating in the development of new assessment scales for use in monitoring quality.

3. Following a report in 1992, the Women's Working Group of the Flemish Parliament published another report in 1994 on services for young children in the welfare system. This report, based on a major hearing, emphasised the need for an integrated policy with different types of services under the same political control, the importance of monitoring quality and appropriate training for staff.

Federal level

A collective agreement was reached between employers and trades unions for 1993-1994 and 1995-96 to allocate a sum equivalent to 0.05% of the private sector wages bill to establish a fund for promoting services for young children. Originally limited to services providing care and recreation for school-age children (ie. between 2.5 and 12 years), since 1995 the money can be allocated to services for children from 0-3 years. Priority is to be given to children with parents who are employees (rather than self-employed). In 1994, BF 896,000,000 was raised nationally for the fund and projects for an amount of BF 575,000,000 were submitted (BF 164 millions in the Flemish Community, BF 410 millions in the French Community). The fund is not permanent and will need to be re-negotiated every 2 years.

9.2. Assessment of the current situation

French Community:

In 1992, ONE funded a survey in the French Community on the accessibility of publicly funded services in the welfare system. The survey showed that as a result of the shortage of places parents had to apply on average 12 weeks into pregnancy if they were to stand a chance of gaining a place for their child by the end of Maternity Leave. Centres were used overwhelmingly by employed parents - 92% of children had two employed parents - and were hardly ever used by the children of unemployed parents. The shortage of places was unevenly distributed geographically; for example, the provinces of Hainaut, Liege and Namur have 80-100 publicly funded places per 1,000 children under 3 in welfare system services, compared to 149 in Anvers and 185 in Brabant. The degree of choice between *crèches* and *services de gardiennes encadrées* is also uneven; generally, *crèches* are more numerous in urban areas as well as being more likely to cater for the children of low-income households.

A quarter of the workers in *crèches* had only precarious statutory employment rights and half were employed part-time. But there had been staff changes in only 20% of *crèches* in the previous year; by contrast, most *services de gardiennes encadrées* (85%) had staff changes in this period, with 10% of *gardiennes encadrées* leaving their job.

There are concerns about quality as well as the shortage of places. A few fairly simple indicators used in the survey suggested great discrepancies between services and generally speaking the issue of quality is still not the subject of public debate in the French Community. However, in 1995 some University researchers will be invited to consider different ways of improving quality. The problem needs to be addressed urgently; it is high time that measures were taken to support the management of publicly funded services so as to improve what appears to be the very uneven quality of services.

Flemish Community:

There are a number of positive features about the current situation and recent developments. The supply of services has increased, while at the same time more attention is paid to quality and the average quality of services has improved with a shift away from a few centres of excellence to a broader basis of good quality provision. Especially for services for school-age children, attempts are being made to develop a more coherent and integrated policy, particularly important given the number of agencies involved. There is also growing social and political interest from a number of sources including: Parliament; the Family League, a powerful lobby which has shown an increasing commitment to the cause of better provision; and at the federal level, social partners who have agreed to provide additional funds for new services.

To set against this, there is still unmet demand and a continued split between services in the welfare and education systems, as well as those services for young children, which come under other administrations (for example, playgrounds which provide for 175,000 children during the summer holidays and are the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture).

Allocating responsibility for regulating services to one government agency carries the risk of developing a uniform approach, which might inhibit innovative and experimental developments. The regulatory system also has one striking inconsistency - family day carers in organised schemes may take 4 children, while private family day carers are allowed to have 5.

Overall, services providing care and recreation for school-age children suffer at present from inadequate regulation and employment perspectives. The importance of regional coordinators - as facilitators, transmitters of experience and promoters of training - is underestimated, both at local and Community levels. Finally, as in many other parts of Europe, there are very few men (less than 3%) working in Flemish services for young children.

9.3. Costs and funding

The two systems of publicly funded services are funded differently. In the welfare system, public funding comes from a number of sources, the most important being ONE (which contributed, on average, 48% in 1987) and K&G (which in 1994 contributed 56% of total costs); other sources include local authorities, private non-profit organisations, regional governments and national funds for family allowances and employment promotion. Parents contribute to costs, on the basis of formulas produced by Community Governments, which take account of family income and numbers of children. In 1987, parents' contributions covered, on average, 17% of the total costs of services for children under 3 years in the French Community; the figure for 1994 in the Flemish Community was 30%.

In the education system, pre-primary schooling is funded by the Education Ministries of the respective Community Governments. Parents make no payments.

Funding of services providing care and recreation for school-aged children comes from the governing bodies of schools (local authorities in the case of publicly managed schools) and parents. There are no cost studies for this service, showing how the costs are allocated between these governing bodies and parents. A study in the Brussels Region found that the average parental contribution was BF 600 a month for a child using a *garderie* for 4 days a week.

Services in the welfare system for children from 0-12 years can also receive financial support from funds established as the result of a collective agreement between employers and trades unions (see Main developments since 1990, point 7).

Tax relief is available for children under 3 years to subsidise parents' payments for publicly funded services or for private services that are approved by ONE or K&G.

9.4. Levels of provision

Publicly funded services for children aged 0-3 years: in the French Community in 1993, there were 42,597 places (27% of the age group). More than half (23,211) were for 2 year olds in pre-primary schooling; the remainder were divided between centres (10,320) and organised family day care (9,066). Overall, the number of places in publicly funded services increased by 19% between 1988-93 - by 10% and 17% respectively in schools and centres, but by 56% in organised family day care.

In the Flemish Community in 1993, there were 70,277 places. More than half (39,650) were for 2 year olds in pre-primary schooling (*kleuterschool*). The remainder were in the welfare system; unlike the French Community, more places in these services were in organised family day care (19,134) than in centres (11,493). The number of places in welfare system services increased by 53% between 1988-93 by 23% in centres and 78% in organised family day care.

In the German-speaking Community in 1993, there were 375 places, all in organised family day care (13% of the age group).

Overall in Belgium in 1993, there were places for 30% of the age group.

Publicly funded services for children aged 3-compulsory school age (6 years): in the French Community in 1993, there were 140,761 children in this age group in pre-primary schooling, over 95% of the age group. The number of children in pre-primary schooling increased by 5% between 1988-1993. The Flemish Community has similar high levels of attendance at pre-primary schooling among this age group, approximately 97%.

Overall in Belgium in 1993, there were places for over 95% of the age group

Publicly funded services providing care and recreation for school-age children: there is no data on the number of children or places in publicly funded services providing for children below or over compulsory school age. However, it seems to be widespread in urban areas - for example in Brussels, 95% of pre-primary and primary schools provide *garderies* - and less common in rural areas.

Privately funded services: In the French Community, ONE statistics are not precise, as the term *maison d'enfants* is used to cover a wide range of private services for children and not just *crèches*. The number of places provided in services included under this broad label grew from 2,335 in 1988 to 4,555 in 1993 (an increase of 95%). In the same period, the number of self-employed family day carers fell from 1,613 to 899 (a decrease of 44%). In the

Flemish Community in 1993, the number of places at self-employed family day carers approved by K&G was 12,586.

10. Tax reforms

“The Belgian fiscal system was drastically reformed in late 1988, affecting the fiscal year 1989 (Law of December 7, 1988). This reform had two main objectives : a) Reduction of taxes on personal income and b) making the fiscal system, as it was characterised, « more family minded ». As far as the family dimension is concerned, four main features can be identified:

- 1) introduction of « decumulation » of income, i.e., from the fiscal year 1990 on (relating to earnings 1989) incomes of husband and wife are being taxed separately.
- 2) Introduction of « marriage quotient »; it means that 30% of the joint income is being attributed to the spouse who has no income or a low income, but with a ceiling of 270 000 BF.
- 3) The amount of income regarded as tax exempt is raised progressively, according to the number of dependent children. The rates are as follows: 30 000 BF for the first child, + 55 000 BF for the second child, + 112 500 BF for the third child, + 125 000 BF for the fourth and subsequent children. A novelty in the system is that these amounts are automatically linked to the index of costs of living.
- 4) The expenditure for costs of child care for children up to 3 years, becomes partially tax deductible (80% of documented costs) ceiled at a sum of 345 BF a child / a day.

The main impact of the fiscal reform is tax reduction for two-earner families. Due to the progressive nature of the tax system, the net benefit of the reform is substantial. Moreover the new system gives incentives for both spouses to enter the labour market, due to tax reduction for child care. Thirdly, these incentives are counterbalanced by the system of marriage quotient or partial splitting. It should be noticed that the middle income group is benefiting the most, i.e. the income group in the bracket 775 000 - 900 000 BF. This is due to the fact that formerly the splitting was already applied for incomes up to 775 000 BF and that the ceiling is now 900 000 BF (non indexed). In fact, it concerns a mere catch-up for inflation. Here one- earner families (read : husband employed, spouse not-employed) benefit the most. Next to marriage friendliness, relating to the abolition of discrimination between married and cohabiting couples, the reform is child friendly to the effect that the tax deductible amounts for children were raised considerably but, more important, are index linked, to the effect that their real value remains stable” (*Families and Policies*, 1991, p. 57).

11. Attitudes and preferences

Different Eurobarometer surveys concerning family issues have been conducted by the Commission of the European Communities. Belgium is one of the Member States which have been surveyed. Samples representative of the entire population aged 15 years and over have been asked question about attitudes towards children and family issues.

Attitudes and preferences concerning children

In the 1979 and 1989 surveys, the majority of the people interviewed answered that 2 children was the ideal number of children desired. It is important to notice that in 1989 almost one fifth of the sample declared that they desire just one child. The desire for three children or more decline between 1979 and 1989.

Table 6 — Ideal children's number desired

	0 child	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children or more	Average
	%	%	%	%	%	
1979	6	7	59	24	4	2,15
1989	5	18	52	21	3	2,01

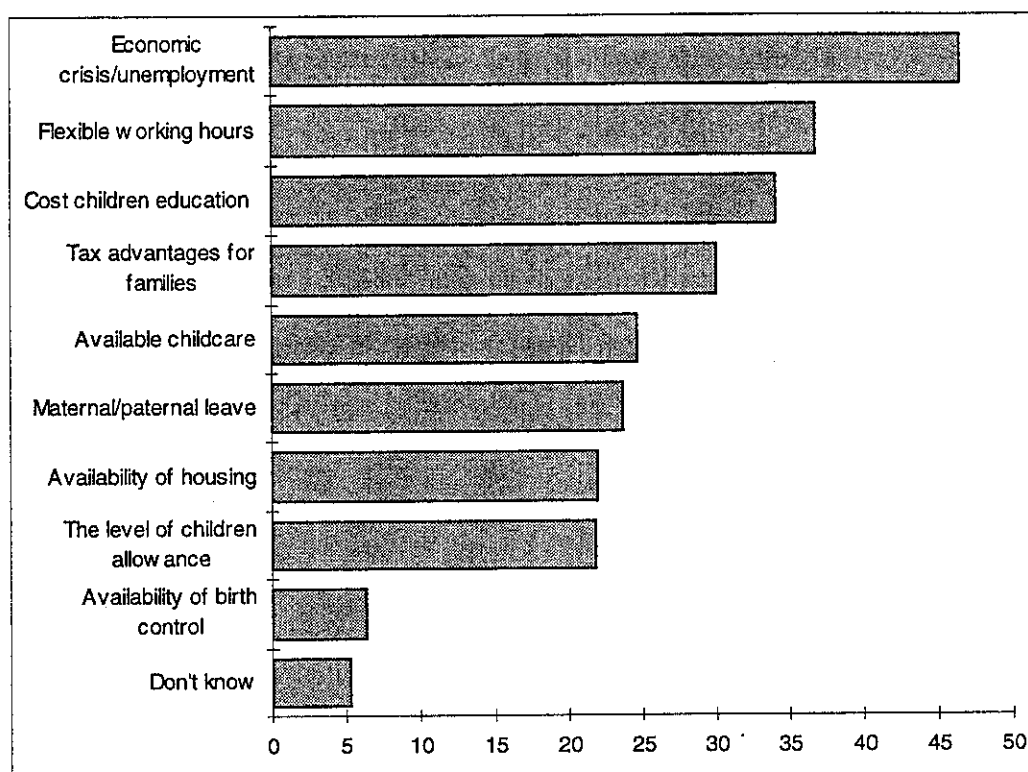
Source: Commission des Communautés européennes, 1990, p. 14.

Attitudes and preferences concerning family policies

As emphasised above, the family is closely bound up with social and economic change. It therefore seems appropriate not only to analyse the extent to which a whole series of external factors might or might not influence the number of children people wish to have, but also to determine what kind of actions government could take to make life easier for family.

Almost half of the Belgian questioned reply that the top priority for government action should be the attention paid to the uncertain economic prospects and unemployment (46,5%), followed by making working hours more flexible (36,7%). A third of respondents ask for government action to reduce the cost of educating children (34,1%) and to give tax advantages for families with children (30,3%). Slightly fewer than one quarter of the people questioned also ask for government action in the following fields: availability of childcare arrangements (24,6%), the level of time off work a mother or a father can take when having a baby (23,6%), the availability of housing (21,9%) and the level of children allowance (21,8%).

Figure 7 — Issues on which the government should act to make life easier for families, Belgium, EUR 39, Spring 1993



Source: Malpas, Lambert, 1993, p. 119. More than one answer (in this case three) can be given to the above question. As result, the sum of the response of frequencies may exceed 100%.

Question: *If the purpose is to improve life of families, which three of the followings things should the government make top-priority of action ?*

- *The amount of time off work, a mother or father can take, when having a baby*
- *Availability of childcare arrangements*
- *Flexibility of working hours*
- *Availability of suitable housing*
- *The level of child allowance*
- *The cost of educating children*
- *The tax advantages for families with children*
- *Uncertain economic prospects*
- *The availability of means of birth control*
- *Don't know*

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Appendix 1

CHILDREN			
Resources	Legal or other provision	Take up rate of provision / feminisation of users	Impact on women's employment / other
Time off work (Paid)	Maternity protection allowance - 15 weeks granted on the birth of a child	77,768 cases of maternity benefit paid (1993, employees' scheme)	Since the « pooling » of the risk in 1989, the employer no longer pays the allowance himself. This has the result of reducing discrimination on recruitment
	Brief periods of leave - 1-3 days granted in certain circumstances (death, communion, adoption, etc.)		Not relevant
	Paternity leave - example of « brief periods of leave »: 3 days granted to the father on the birth of a child		Not relevant
	Parental leave - opportunity for the father and mother to suspend their employment contract for a period of 3 months on account of the birth, adoption or disability of a child. Parental leave comes under the general heading of « career break », except that the employer's authorisation is not required; a low flat rate allowance is granted	n/a (measure too recent)	n/a (measure too recent). However, it is worthwhile noting that this measure was introduced with a view to implementing the European Directive on parental leave. It will be interesting to see whether this measure is also used by men. However, given the situation relating to career breaks, there is every reason to believe that this measure will be of primary concern to women
Time off work (Unpaid)	Parental leave - granted under CCT (collective agreement) N° 64. This is fairly similar to parental leave except that no provision for payment is made. In addition to the three-month suspension of the employment contract, the worker may opt for 6 months working half-time (other arrangements may also be agreed with the employer)	n/a (measure too recent)	n/a (measure too recent). However, it is worthwhile noting that this measure was introduced with a view to implementing the European Directive on parental leave. It will be interesting to see whether this measure is also used by men
Monetary allowances / benefits	Tax deduction - 80% of child care costs - granted to the parents of a young child	In 1992, a total of 67,687 taxpayers benefited from this measure	This measure has a positive impact on the employment of women as it enables child care expenses to be covered and therefore improves the reconciliation of work and family life
	Flat-rate supplement - ECUs 245.7 to the tax-free amount granted to families with a child aged under 3 who do not benefit from the deduction of child care costs	In 1992, a total of 58,946 taxpayers benefited from this measure	Unlike the preceding measure, this measure has a negative impact on the employment of women. Such a measure favours households where the woman stays at home to look after the children